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Lessons Learned: The experiences of teachers in Ireland during the 2020 pandemic.

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Executive Summary

This report presents data from 404 participants who completed a survey in October 2020. The majority of participants were teachers in post-primary schools (53%), followed by primary schools (39%), primary and secondary special schools (5%) and teachers on secondment in management organisations (3%). We see this report as telling a story from the perspective of these 404 participants as they lived through a pandemic and educated from a distance, planned for getting back to face-to-face and then experienced teaching in a new socially distanced, mask-wearing classroom context. We allow their voices through quotes to tell the story of what it was like to teach during a pandemic and what impact it had on their mental health. The objective of this research was to identify lessons learned from teachers living through and working during the pandemic.

The first lockdown

- The positive aspects of the lockdown mentioned were increased collaboration, creativity and competence development. Most respondents mentioned how they either started or enhanced their use of online platforms and have continued to use these platforms when schools re-opened. Teachers reported that they would be more prepared for distance teaching in the future and developed many skills to use in the online space.
- Like the rest of the population teachers reported that they experienced heightened anxiety around health for themselves, their families, students and communities during the first lockdown. Many felt thankful as they were safe in their homes and did not have job insecurities during the first school closures.
- Despite teachers and schools getting such short notice they invested considerable personal and professional energy into getting set up for distance learning. This entailed in many cases the need for school leaders, teachers and students to upskill in the use of technology. It meant a change to pedagogical practices as the need to connect with learners was a central theme in many responses. Students connected in different ways and some lost connection with school. Some subjects were more difficult to teach online such as practical subjects, for example, Construction studies, Engineering and Home Economics and so on. Most reported that distance learning, while not ideal, worked for the majority of their students.

- Many respondents reported that they found it very stressful juggling home schooling, care responsibilities and distance teaching. Many mention how isolating the first lockdown was for them.
- Teachers reported that they worried about some of their students who did not have the technology, broadband or support in order to engage with distance education. They reported heightened anxiety among their students.
- Many respondents talked about how the uncertainty around how the calculated grades impacted on their own and their students stress levels.
- Many respondents referred to how negative commentary on their work in media had an impact on their stress levels.

Schools re-opening in September

- Teachers reported in October that they are very happy to be back in school and that students are very happy to be in school with their friends. Many mentioned how important this social aspect of education is to students.
- Since returning to school in September, the use of technology is more embedded in practice with many using it on a daily basis in their classes.
- There were mixed views on how safe schools are, with many respondents stressed about COVID as they are living with vulnerable people.
- Curriculum time is being lost on policing mask wearing, social distancing, cleaning regimes, movement of students in the school and additional record keeping.
- Teaching has changed with the use of social distancing, wearing masks and reduced breaks. Many report that students are not as talkative and do not contribute as spontaneously in class. They all miss collaborative learning groups. The impact on students' learning requires further exploration.
- Teachers are concerned for their students especially the current LC group who have lost so much time in school. Full curriculum coverage is not possible.
- They report that they miss face-to-face staff meetings, coffee breaks, lunch breaks and so on. The social aspect of their work is gone for now. This is necessary and they understand the need for it, but it takes away from the collaborative aspects of their work.

- Providing for face-to-face teaching and streaming classes for students isolating at home due to COVID-19 has been one of the most challenging aspect of their work since returning to school although technology was enabling this to happen.
- In October teachers were calling for a Plan B in case of another lockdown. They were particularly concerned for vulnerable groups in light of experience during the first lockdown.

Levels of stress

- 7 out of 10 teachers reported they felt more stressed compared to the same time the previous year.
- The factors that contributed to teachers' stress included issues with students who found it difficult to settle back into the face-to-face teaching, and a perception that remote teaching impacts their work-life balance. The factors that did not impact teachers' stress were their self-belief in having the skills to do their job and re-establishing classroom norms and routines.
- 6 out of 10 teachers reported their wellbeing as worse during the pandemic compared to the same time the previous year.
- Teachers who reported the most significant decline, that is, experienced more stress felt there was a greater need for school to focus on their wellbeing. Also, they reported that they spent more time re-establishing classroom norms and behaviours after the first lockdown.
- Teachers' satisfaction with the guidance document from the Department of Education and their school's Covid-19 response did not seem to contribute to teachers' higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing. However, in qualitative data many spoke of their frustration with DES Friday circulars. Other commented on how the physical structure of old buildings made social distancing impossible.
- Only 2 out of 10 teachers were satisfied with their work-life balance during the pandemic, and 7 out of 10 reported that teaching remotely has impacted their work-life balance.

Psychological growth

- Despite higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing, 4 out of 5 participants experienced psychological growth in at least one of the five domains: (relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual growth, and appreciation for life) and 1 in 10 reported experienced all of them.
- The most prevalent domain in which teachers' growth occurred was their appreciation for life, followed by relating to others and realising their personal strength.
- 4 out of 10 participants felt more confident in face-to-face teaching post-Covid
- A third of teachers said they would work more closely with students' parents post-Covid -19. Parents have taken a more active role in their children's education and this is welcomed by teachers.
- 6 out of 10 teachers reported that following on from their Covid-19 experiences, they would use online and blended-teaching more in the future.
- The need for more open communication on educational issues was a central theme running throughout the data. We suggest the setting up of a citizen forum to discuss the impact of the pandemic on education, to discuss the positive changes we can build on and how to address the gaps in individual's education in years to come.

The four lessons learnt from the current research were:

- Curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment have changed significantly – new measures are required to support education during- and post-pandemic.
- The pandemic took a toll on teachers' mental health – active supports are necessary to alleviate their stress.
- Despite high levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing, most teachers made their challenges meaningful and kept going.
- In the world of silos caused by social distancing rules and a myriad of restrictions, teachers ask for more open communication between all parties involved in education.

Recommendations:

Following on from this study, we recommend the following actions:

- Setting up a committee, a citizens' assembly where all the bodies involved in education including DES, policy makers, management bodies, unions, parents, teachers, and students would meet with an aim to focus on resolving emerging issues in education. There is a need to build on the lessons learned in this time of change such as the use of technology to support learning, the enhanced role of parents in education, the competences developed by young people around independent learning. We need to look at how to address the losses experienced by many in education.
- Enhanced funding for psychological services for teachers and planning for targeted supports for teacher wellbeing.
- Enhanced funding to address the digital divide for schools.
- Further research on the impact of the pandemic on education and school communities.

Introduction

Ireland is in another lockdown in response to the COVID-19 third wave. Prior to Christmas 2020 Ireland was enjoying being one of the best in the world for managing COVID-19 numbers, and then in early January 2021, the headlines reported that “Ireland had the world’s highest COVID-19 infection rate last week” (O’Riordan, 2021). Furthermore, the disease spread faster in Ireland than in any other country in the world, whereby in the seven days preceding the 10th January, a total of 1,323 cases per million people were recorded. This rapid deterioration in the management of the virus had a significant impact on education in Ireland.

On the 6th January 2021 it was announced, by the Minister for Education, that all schools would provide distance education from the 11th January to the end of the month, due to increased levels of infection within the community (DES, 2020a). The move to distance learning has impacted on society and the economy. In Ireland, there are almost 1 million students attending school in the primary and post primary sectors, across approximately 4,000 schools, in which close to 100,000 staff are employed. Meanwhile, school leaders and teachers are reliant on guidance about COVID-19 rules, levels, responses, processes, procedures, and protocols from above and these can change, almost overnight, depending on how the virus develops, making the education sector particularly precarious.

This report explores teachers’ experiences over the first six months since the March 2020 lockdown. It examines the challenges they reported as well as the impact on their mental health. Finally, it explores the prevalence of positive transformation that some teachers experienced following on from the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the report is to inform policy and practice about the lessons learnt from teachers’ experiences of the first six months of the pandemic in Ireland.

The current research explores:

1. The challenges teachers faced during the first six months of the pandemic.
2. The impact of the challenges on teachers’ mental health.
3. The prevalence of teachers’ positive transformation following on from their pandemic experiences.

1. Background

COVID-19 caused a global public health crisis. The resulting closure of education caused disruption of schooling for over 1.6 billion learners across nearly 200 countries worldwide (UN, 2020). Zhao (2020) contends that this acted as a catalyst for educational change while Harris and Jones (2020) describe it as creating undeniable chaos. Learning environments had to adapt overnight and this varied across the world from drones delivering USB keys to education packs being mailed out to homes (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020). In Ireland, our pre-schools, schools and further and higher education institutions closed from March 12, 2020, at the direction of the Irish government to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus. On the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) the initial proposed two-week closure extended to the summer break. Schools and teachers supported their students through distance learning. Schools were asked to “continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide online resources for students or online lessons where schools are quipped to do so” and schools were asked to prioritise supporting exam classes (DES, 2020b). This move to online distance education with no notice caused major stress for school leaders, teachers, support staff and families across the education spectrum. The DES provided guidance for schools in the form of statements (DES 2020b; there were 22 between March and July, <https://www.education.ie/covid19>) and circulars (16 listed on the DES supporting webpage <https://www.education.ie/covid19>) and some guidance documents (14 listed on the DES webpage <https://www.education.ie/covid19>). There was criticism of the timing of these documents with some coming as late as May and many being released on Friday evenings (see Burke and Dempsey 2020 and Dempsey and Burke 2020), for leaders views on support from the DES). This was understandable to some degree as the landscape kept shifting and it was difficult to plan for all eventualities. The landscape is still shifting with on-going discussion this month on provision of face-to-face teaching for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and exam classes.

1.1 Move to distance learning

The concept of distance learning is not new but has not been part of everyday parlance in schools prior to March 12th in Ireland. While many schools had embraced technology through the introduction of learning platforms such as MS Teams, Schoology, SeeSaw and others these tended to be used for information storage and sharing rather than learning, teaching and assessment. Several schools introduced devices such as iPad or surface pros, the

functionality in many cases was around sharing information rather than independent learning. The move to using technology was seen as a blessing and a curse with some parents resisting the move (McGuire, 2019). The potential for technology to support learning especially for young people with Special Educational Needs was widely accepted (Marcus-Quinn, Hourigan and McCoy, 2019). However, at the time of the pandemic school closures, there were still concerns about how technology was being integrated into education (McGarr and Johnston, 2019).

The definition of distance learning used by UNESCO (2020) provides a good elaboration of the real complexity of the process for the teacher and the student.

“The teacher-learner separation by space or time, or both, and the use of media and technology to enable communication and exchange during the learning process despite this separation. This may be achieved through print-based learning materials, or one-way massive broadcasting (TV and radio programmes), or through web-based exchange using social media channels or learning platforms. Distance learning tends to require a high level of self-directed learning on the part of the learner, and study skills, which must be supported through new teaching, learning and guidance strategies” (p.2).

Here we see the need for a different set of skills for the teacher using new teaching, learning and guidance strategies and for the student a move to more self-directed learning. This was a significant move for many students who to date had no experience of this new kind of learning. The move to distance learning was not smooth and presented many challenges for all involved. However, the evidence from research to date would indicate that teachers adapted well and upskilled to meet the needs of their students (Burke and Dempsey, 2020; Dempsey and Burke, 2020; Mohan et al., 2020; Darmondy et al., 2020). However, the uptake and engagement was not uniform across schools or students with early evidence pointing to a risk of learning regression among disadvantaged students (Darmondy et al, 2020), students with Special Educational Needs (Burke and Dempsey, 2020; Dempsey and Burke, 2020) and students from DEIS schools where there were issues with access to devices or good broadband (Mohan, 2020).

Our dependence of externally assessed state examinations added to the complexity as teachers were not prepared to assess students for entry into third level. There was a palpable nervousness around changing this well-established examination, however, with

students missing out on key learning from March 12th and health and safety concerns, it was clear that change was needed. The uncertainty around how this change might happen added to leaders', teachers', students' and parents' stress (Mohan et al, 2020). Guidelines on assessment and reporting on students' learning at junior cycle came at the end of April, where it was advised that "school-based assessments should be devised and marked by the class teacher" (DES 2020c, p.3). This represented a big change to the process for teachers where to date examinations were developed and marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

1.2 Living with uncertainty around the Leaving Certificate

To appreciate the degree of uncertainty at this time for teachers and students, a short timeline of decisions is presented here. It is difficult to catalogue or to ascertain the impact of all the media attention this topic was afforded with numerous interviews on television and radio shows and daily articles in the newspapers. The then Minister, Mr. Joe McHugh T.D., announced on the 10th April 2020 that the examinations could not proceed in June 2020 and that they would take place in late July/August 2020. Conscious that there was a risk that it would not prove possible to hold the Leaving Certificate examinations as planned, the Minister also asked that a Technical Working Group be established, involving experts from the State Examinations Commission (SEC), the Educational Research Centre (ERC), the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and independent statistical and psychometric expertise, to examine the feasibility of establishing a system of Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate students (See Appendix A for reports). At the end of April, that group reported to him advising that a system of Calculated Grades could be put in place as an alternative to running the conventional examinations. The Minister considered that advice alongside the advice of senior officials of his own department and of the Department of Health when forming his views for the postponement of Leaving Certificate Examinations 2020 (including the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied) and the introduction of an optional system of Calculated Grades, which led to a Government decision to that effect on May 12th, 2020 (DES, 2020d).

The decision to move to a calculated grade was not an easy one to make but in light of advice from NPHE and pressure from interested parties it was seen as the most desirable outcome. It was no easy task to develop and operate a complex model that would combine estimated

marks and class rankings for students, provided by teachers on the basis of their professional judgement with a national standardisation process. The process needed to calculate fair and accurate calculated grades for approximately 61,000 Leaving Certificate students across more than 440,000 individual grades. These calculated grades needed to have equal status with previous and future Leaving Certificate grades for the individual candidates (DES, 2020e). The students taking subjects out of school and extra subjects presented further complications that needed to be considered. The process of Calculated Grades is the subject of an on-going court case, the result of which could have implications for the decisions made for the class of 2021 (O’Faolain, 2020). Students were also offered the option to sit the conventional written examination in November 2020¹.

In a statement from the Minister for Education Norma Foley on the 30th September 2020, the Department of Education announced that errors were found in the Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades process. As a result, incorrect grades were issued to around 6,500 students. The Department contacted students and let them know if they had got a higher grade. No student had their grade reduced. The Department sent the corrected results to the CAO. Any student who was entitled to a different CAO offer, got this offer or a deferred offer as soon as possible after the updating of results (DES, 2020f).

There was a lot of time and investment put into changing how the Leaving Certificate (LC) grades were arrived at. On the 21st May A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate students 2020 (DES, 2020e) was published by the DES with a supporting 38 page circular (DES, 2020g). This involved four main steps:

- The teacher’s estimation of student marks and rankings
- School alignment of marks for a subject through a subject alignment group comprising teachers who are teaching the subject to Leaving Certificate students this year
- Oversight of the alignment process by the school principal
- Transmission of the marks and rankings for national standardisation.

¹ A total of 2,820 students applied to sit the postponed 2020 Leaving Cert exams, although just over 2,000 turned up for the exams. The results will be available on Tuesday 2nd February.

This estimation and ranking of students presented many challenges for schools and teachers. The complexity of the task is evident in the documents outlined in Appendix A where LC predictive grades related details are provided.

1.3 Schools re-opening in September 2020

A roadmap for the full return to schools was published on July 27th (DES, 2020h). The Department of Education provided grants to support schools re-opening.

The range of additional supports available to Primary Schools were:

- An enhanced Minor Works Grant to support full implementation of COVID-19 response plans;
- Employing an aide to help with the school re-opening logistics;
- Increased management support to schools;
- Extending the current pilot supply panel for substitute teachers on a nationwide basis; and
- Additional financial supports to provide for additional cleaning, hand hygiene and PPE costs under the COVID-19 Response Plans (DES, 2020h).

The range of additional supports available to post primary schools were:

- A new Minor Works Grant to post primary schools to support full implementation of COVID-19 response plans;
- Employing an aide to help with the school re-opening logistics;
- 1,080 additional teaching posts including 120 guidance posts;
- Enhanced supervision supports; and
- Additional financial supports to schools to cover additional cleaning, hand hygiene and PPE costs under COVID-19 Response Plans (DES, 2020h).

Schools and teachers were charged with the following:

1. Minimising the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the school community
2. Managing the risk of spread if introduced through:
 - Regular hand hygiene;
 - Maintaining physical distancing;
 - Application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette; and
 - Environmental hygiene.

In addition, there was €40M paid to schools in November 2020 as part of the Digital Strategy for Schools and an additional €10M COVID grant to purchase ICT infrastructure. Details of the grants to individual schools can be found here <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-11-30.html> .

The logistics of getting schools to re-open fell to school leaders and for many it meant they did not get a summer break (Dempsey and Burke, 2020), they were the pinch point in the system communicating with the DES, parents, staff and their Boards of Management (Harris and Jones, 2020). Teachers had to clear away teaching materials and set up classrooms that met the requirements for physical distancing and environmental hygiene. The re-opening of schools meant a new way of working for all in schools, there were new rules around breaks, wearing masks at all time and no books or handouts allowed in many schools. The online platforms set up for distance learning were an invaluable resource for schools when re-opening as work could be shared in electronic form without any risk of infection.

1.4 Wellbeing

The constant changes associated with the pandemic took a toll on teachers in Ireland. Many of whom reported higher levels of stress, and lower levels of self-efficacy, which is a belief that they are capable of performing their jobs well (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Devitt, Bray, Banks, & Ni Chorcora, 2020). At the same time, school leaders', parents' and students' wellbeing also suffered during the pandemic (Dempsey & Burke, 2020; Devitt, Ross, Bray, & Banks, 2020; Quinn, McGilloway, & Burke, 2020). Given the contagious nature of wellbeing in schools (Burke, 2021; Harding et al., 2019), a school community's mental state has the potential to impact teachers' wellbeing. The current research aims to explore retrospectively the difference in the stress and wellbeing of teachers during the pandemic compared to the same time the previous year. While there are limitations to retrospective assessments of wellbeing (Kahnemann & Riis, 2005), it offers a unique perspective on the self-reported impact of the pandemic on teachers.

1.5 Positive transformation

Trauma is perceived as a sudden adverse event that has a clear "before" and "after" (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). It incorporates either a once-off episode, or a series of negative

experiences over a period of time. Many school communities and individuals have viewed the experience of Covid-19 as traumatic (Bryant, Oo, & Damien, 2020; Gross, 2020; Montauk & Kuhl, 2020). The current research aims to explore the prevalence of Post-traumatic Growth, otherwise known as a Positive Transformation experienced by teachers following on from living and working during a pandemic.

While traumatic events may lead to severely negative long-term consequences, the majority of people faced with trauma also report high levels of resilience and growth, which may occur simultaneously with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other pathologies (Joseph, 2011). Therefore, a teacher may be grieving and able to experience growth at the same time. Past research indicates that such growth is possible even during the pandemic (Cheng et al., 2006). Identifying instances of positive transformation is useful, as it serves as a springboard for coping more effectively with adversity, as it allows individuals to find meaning in the trauma they experienced (Burke & Arslan, 2020). Therefore, an awareness of Post-Covid Growth may help teachers experience ultimately higher levels of wellbeing.

There are five domains in which Post-traumatic Growth occurs, (1) relating to others, (2) new possibilities, (3) personal strength, (4) spiritual change, and (5) appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). "Relating to others" means that individuals who experience adversity develop a greater sense of closeness to specific people in their lives and begin to appreciate their family and/or friends more. Furthermore, they may also start to see new opportunities unfolding before them, whereby they may change direction in their lives, such as pursue education, a new job, or establish another new path. For some, growth comes as realising their "personal strength" therefore, they start to believe that they are mentally or physically stronger than they had ever thought, or perceive themselves as more equipped to handle life challenges. For others, their growth is associated with having a stronger religious belief. Finally, many people who experience post-traumatic growth talk about the newly-found "appreciation of life" that prompts significant changes in the way they prioritise what is important in life. The current research aims to explore the prevalence of Post-Covid Growth among teachers in Ireland.

2. Methodology

This is a mixed-design once-off research, carried out via an online, anonymous survey that was sent out in October 2020 to primary and post-primary school teachers via social networks, with the help of the Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST). All school teachers residing in the Republic of Ireland were eligible to participate.

2.1 Participants

A total of 404² participants completed the survey, the vast majority of whom were female (83%) aged 30-50 (69%). Most of the participants were from Leinster (62%), followed by Munster (20%), Connaught (11%) and Ulster (7%). The majority of participants were teachers in post-primary schools (53%), followed by primary schools (39%), primary and secondary special schools (5%) and teachers on secondment in management organisations (3%). Figures 1 and 2 provide additional information about participants.

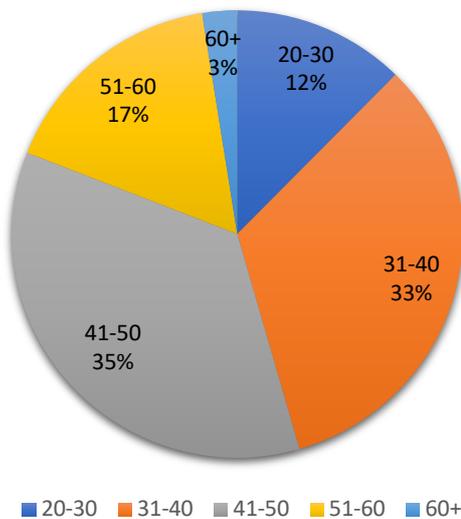


Figure 2. Participants' age.

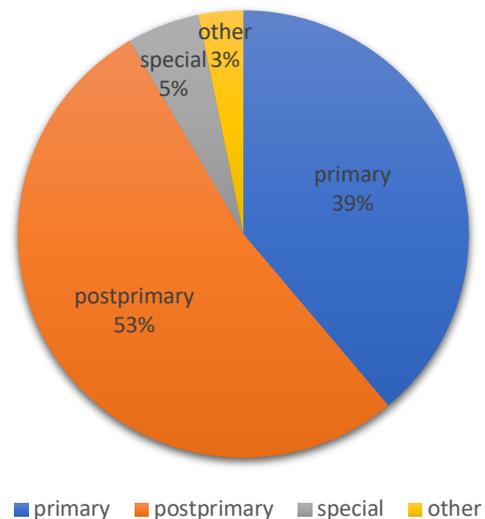


Figure 3. Participants' school type.

² Please note that questions about work-life balance and guidelines were not forced, meaning that the number of respondents was at 198+ participants.

2.2 Measures

The survey comprised a range of questions about participants' experiences of working during the pandemic and one psychological measure briefly described below.

2.2.1 Post-traumatic Growth (PTG)

This 10-item scale assessed the extent to which participants experienced positive transformation following on from the Covid-19 pandemic. They were measured on a six-item Likert scale ranging from "I did not experience this change as a result of the event I described below" to "I changed to a very great degree as a result of the event I described above". The event that the scale referred to was specific to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, subsequent school closures, school re-opening, and living with the virus.

2.3 Data analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using a range of descriptive and inferential statistics, such as the one way between-groups ANOVA, multiple linear regression, and Chi-square test for independence, conducted via SPSS version 26 (2019). The qualitative data were analysed using MAXQDA version 20 (2020). The study received ethical approval from the Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

3. Findings

Understandably, participants reported experiencing many challenges during the first lockdown, when preparing for the school opening and after the schools re-opened. Below are some of their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. We divided the research findings and discussion into five parts: (1) First lockdown challenges; (2) School re-opening challenges; (3) The impact of challenges on mental health; (4) Positive transformation; and (5) Lessons learnt. Figure 3 offers a pictorial representation of the forthcoming presentation.



Figure 4. The map of the research findings.

It is important when reading these data that we cast our minds back to the 12th of March and how schools and teachers received only a few hours' notice that schools were closing. This was unprecedented for schools. Teachers took all this anxiety of living through a pandemic and helping their students learn from a distance on board and in most cases, this impacted on their own stress levels and work-life balance. For many it meant they learned new ways to work and to communicate with their subjects and students. There was increased sharing of resources, for example, on Twitter and elsewhere, teachers and publishers shared lessons and artefacts to support teaching and learning. However, many teachers spoke of how time-consuming moderating all this material was. In addition, no matter how creative they tried to be they worried about the students who did not log on and did not engage. Some teachers talked about how difficult it was for young people to attend a lesson on their mobile phones due to lack of devices in the home. Other students just did not have the broadband available to them to engage.

The positive aspects of the lockdown mentioned were increased collaboration, creativity and competence development. There are also many references to how adversity can unite communities.

I notice how adaptive and responsive students are to changes. I honestly think that the majority of students have been extremely accepting and compliant with restrictive measures and I find the smaller groups have elicited positive responses from some students.

My students were so grateful to be getting taught during the lockdown, my colleagues were so supportive sharing materials and ways of doing things different. I got to really think about how I teach biology and how to make it better for my classes. It made me change how I think about teaching.

The following quote captures the complexity of living and working from home for some participants.

Stress; loss of contact with family and friends; change to the way I teach, the relationships I have with students and colleagues; guilt at having holidays and not losing pay when so many are struggling (not that I'm suggesting we lose pay!); frustration at lack of leadership. There was no end to the working day. Home situation not ideal to set up working from home. Caring for people cocooning and working from home was challenging while overseeing home schooling of my own children.

The following two long quotes, presented here in full, from teaching principals in primary schools capture their complex, multi-faceted role.

No work-life balance, never ending work calls, all day and night, Zoom, Zoom, Zoom...no weekends off, an entire summer of work with no annual leave, trying to juggle being a mom and working, feeling like I could do neither one well. Lack of sleep, lying awake at night worrying about staff members and the stress they were under. Not able to sleep thinking about our children, were they safe? Are they being fed? Is anyone reading to them? Do Tusla still check in on them during a pandemic? How can I keep them safe and my own family safe? Worry that numbers of cases keep going up, worry that our wonderful students are missing out on so much,

communion, end of year show, tour, sports days. Worrying about our students with SEN and their families. How are they coping? Worry about our children in foster care, are they ok, are they still allowed to visit their biological families? Are the foster carers doing ok? Do they get any help? Any respite at all? What else can we do to help? Food packages, great! Can't ask staff to put themselves in danger, what about the local priest? What about parents and SNAs that live locally? Can we extend this for families under pressure? What about the contents of the packs? Is it healthy? Will the children eat the food in the packs? Do young children like Shredded Wheat? Can we change the contents? Great we can do it for the summer. Ok building is open can we let people in? Is it safe? I spent so much time trying to stay calm but overwhelmed and so annoyed at the lack of support from the DES. However, the support from our local area, families, teachers, SNAs, local priest, local clubs shows how adversity can unite us too.

Teaching from home was an extremely stressful experience.... Having 4 children at home that also needed my help, I felt constant guilt as I had to support my 6th class students... All 33 of them.. The initial lockdown was not too bad as we focused on project based work for our students but as we increased the workload and moved towards teaching all curriculum areas, the planning and delivering of the material became a chore and extremely stressful. I felt as though I was permanently attached to my laptop. If I wasn't preparing work, converting power points or slideshows I was correcting the work that had been submitted to me by the students. Our students and their parents had been advised to upload work by 1pm each day to allow us teachers time to correct it by 3pm.....this rarely happened with work being submitted at all hours of the day and night!!! It left me feeling obligated to correct it even though it was outside my working hours and constantly checking my laptop or phone.... There was no switching off or down time.. The stress didn't end when the summer holidays came though.... We went into overdrive with trying to order everything we needed for re-opening and planning how we were going to open, what procedures, routines and new plans had to be put into place etc.... The paper trail of planning and preparation quickly became a mountain and just keeps on climbing every time the department send us out new guidelines at 4pm on a Friday evening!!!! The public and the department have huge expectations of teachers and it now appears as though we will

be double jobbing it!! Classroom teaching and home-schooling those who are isolating at home!! It's no wonder so many are walking away from the profession....

This quote captures the energy required to lead a school through a lockdown and through a re-opening while trying to meet everyone's expectations. The need to teach the class in school while catering for the needs of students self-isolating added considerably to the stress and workload of teachers.

The following quote captures many of the concerns teachers in Post Primary felt after schools closed. It shows how the issues around assessment and in particular the Leaving Certificate impacted on teachers and students. Curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment are inextricably linked for teachers, and when they talk about distance education in these data all four are mentioned, are linked and are important.

I am physically and emotionally drained as a result of Covid-19. I have 21 years post primary teaching experience. I love(d) teaching. I don't think I can take the lack of support and media bashing much longer. When the schools closed in March, I very quickly switched to online classes. I was lucky that my school used MS Teams and I was IT literate. As a parent of a LC student, I fully understood and empathised with my LCHL maths class. A fabulous bunch of students, I had encouraged these students to work collaboratively and I stressed the importance of them not being in competition with each other. Our safe space was demolished the day the Dept decided that teachers would assign a ranking to these students. I felt further betrayed when the Dept subsequently shared the rankings with the students. Throughout the closure, I worked long days, setting and assigning work, teaching online and contacting parents and students in my Year Head group.

The line "I love(d) teaching" captures the feeling of this respondent who clearly exhibits an ethic of care for her students and feels let down by the Calculated Grades process. The sharing of the rankings after the process was devastating for many respondents who were assured that this would not happen.



3.1 The First Lockdown Challenges

Teachers experienced many personal and professional challenges during the first lockdown between March and June 2020. Personal challenges included having the space to grow, juggling of different roles, loneliness and isolation, as well as the negative impact of school closures on personal life. Professional challenges included familiarisation with technology, work-life balance, coping with uncertainties, and the impact of negative media about the profession. Figure 4 illustrates the details of teachers' challenges during the first lockdown.



Figure 5. Teachers' challenges during the first lockdown.

3.11 Personal challenges

3.111 Making the most of school closure – space to grow

While the majority of respondents talked about the challenges involved in distance teaching some were more positive or neutral about the schools closing. This was linked to feeling safe and in control of their environment, gaining time due to not commuting and attending meetings, being available for their families and getting to enjoy the outdoors more. These feelings were echoed by many in society at this time.

Not too difficult initially. Live in countryside so could get out and about. Not panicky about this kind of thing but still wouldn't like to get it. Had a routine around work/schoolwork at home. Tiring online all day. Sore eyes.

Was able to keep going with work online during lockdown. Found hours longer and lack of engagement with children hard. Way prefer being in the classroom. Nice to have extra time with my toddler.

Luckily it has not affected me badly, financially or from a health perspective.

The school closures were positive for me at home. I got a lot of time with the children and they learned how to play in a more simple way. I found no longer running to meetings trainings and school and school events was a nice break.

It was a lovely family time. I enjoyed every minute on a personal level.

Personally, at home it was positive my kids benefited from the time together. We did not have employment or health worries.

In addition to these personal impacts there were impacts at a professional level with increased collaboration, increased communication with parents and time to learn new skills.

Positive impact: - stronger school community, increased links and enhanced relationships between home and school - Online school platform very successful - enhanced staff comradery.

I enjoyed working from home at my own pace. Students responded well to online learning & we were all forced to upskill.

Really enjoyed working from home. Felt more a facilitator of learning than spoon feeding students.

I had time to become more organized in relation to work as there were less extra-curricular activities and duties to be considered.

I am more competent with technology. It had a positive effect on me personally as I could manage work around family life and other commitments.

The adaptation for distance learning has resulted in changes to how teachers teach but also to how students learn. It appears to be as steep a learning curve for our young people as our teachers. This is not surprising as it was all new to many of us in education. While for some the technology was familiar, using it five days a week for teaching, learning and assessment was new to all.

School closures have had an impact on the way I work. It has restricted and condensed the programme in so many ways. On a positive note I have diversified the programme to offer a range of teaching and learning experiences to students and I also have upskilled to adapt in changes in teaching methodologies.

The school closure forced me to look at new ways of teaching and delivering content. It also gave me a new appreciation for teaching within a school setting and the importance of the personal interaction with staff and students. I also really found the slower pace of life gave me time to prioritise and even restore the work-life balance.

My principal is very proactive and I felt incredibly supported during lockdown. We had already established g-suite in our school and had made inroads into the many features. Thus, I felt confident in interacting with my students using Google Classroom, email & Google Meet. I established daily online classes pretty much

immediately upon school closure in March and I was very proud of how my students reacted so positively.

At first, when schools first closed, it was quite daunting. Everything was very uncertain. However, a few weeks into online teaching, I realised that it was a fantastic opportunity to explore different ways of teaching. It definitely brought problems such as difficulties in student engagement and being able to assist students who needed extra help. Although I prefer a classroom setting to an online setting a million times over, the experience has allowed me to develop skills and resources that can be applied to classroom teaching too and has allowed me to become a better and more versatile teacher.

The skills developed were seen as very useful especially looking to an uncertain future.

It has been a stressful time with a huge amount of uncertainty in terms of what is expected from pupils, parents, management etc. Yet it has made me become more comfortable, in a strange way, when it comes to dealing with change and unpredictability!

I then really appreciated how as a society we can work together to come through a crisis. I hope that we can do it again as it looks like we are going to have to...

3.112 Family life and school life – the juggling of different roles

At times during this pandemic it is evident that teachers felt they had to make choices between home schooling their own children and the 30 plus children relying on them for classes. Like all citizens during this time they were adapting to life at home being both home and a workspace. The concept of having multiple balls in the air was mentioned many times and the guilt associated with trying to meet the demands of multiple roles.

It was impossible to compartmentalise work from home. This meant that you never switched off. The guilt of a teacher and a mother was never greater.

Trying to teach online, with two small children 3 and 1 years old. While husband also worked from home. No consideration given to teachers who are parents, parenting and teaching and not doing either very well.

My mental wellbeing suffered greatly during lockdown and being at home trying to home school my own children look after a toddler and run online class and attend to management matters I have an AP1 post so with that the responsibility of a year group which only added to the stress.

It has been very frightening, nerve wracking, like a tidal wave is coming and you are just waiting for it to hit, powerless against it. The lockdown was almost impossible at times. Everyone at home, five children and me trying to access school online. Pushed to breaking point a few times.

Very hard to zoom. Students found it hard to engage or didn't bother. That's difficult for a teacher as you still have to cover the course. I had 2 at home from college, one in TY. One doing his finals. 5 adults in the house had its moments- internet - finding everyone their own space - enough laptops and iPad.

Many respondents reported that they found it very stressful juggling all the home schooling, care responsibilities and distance teaching. Many mention how isolating the first lockdown was for them especially without family back up.

At home with a 4 and 5year old and trying to teach online was a nightmare. Also family in a different county so could not visit which was really hard and we had no support for helping out with our children.

It caused huge stress to be out of classroom and teaching online while also minding my own children. It caused great anxiety to be separated from my own family and friends and worried about their health and wellbeing.

Struggled with home schooling my 5 year old & 8 year old while teaching remotely my own timetable ! Missed the contact time, the physical room & space to work in ! (I'm an art teacher) Missed chats with colleagues.

From data the challenge of teaching young people with special educational needs was highlighted by many.

Initially I was quite excited about getting an extended St. Patricks / Easter holiday but as the reality of lockdown set in I found teaching special needs class remotely extremely difficult. Zoom sessions exhausted me and I just felt I was ticking a box rather than constructively helping/teaching the children. Also the live sessions put adults under pressure to supervise their child and often it all felt strained. I am a mother too and I felt I was neglecting my own child while I was teaching (trying to teach) remotely which led to me feeling guilty and inadequate most of the time.

Teachers who had additional leadership roles struggled to meet the demands of the multiple roles.

While working from home, I found it extremely challenging to give my best to both work-life and home life. As a teacher and member of the in-school management team I see myself as a proactive member of staff, focusing on leading change, fostering positive attitudes and overcoming hurdles. In order to achieve this in the context of a lockdown it was a very time consuming, challenging task. I struggled with the fact that neither home or work were getting what I felt they deserved.

3.113 Loneliness and isolation

Many teachers felt disconnected from their students and colleagues. This disconnection is felt at a deep level for many and very alien to the collaborative nature of learning prior to the pandemic. This theme re-emerges during the re-opening of schools as social contact has been reduced for us all during the pandemic and this has an impact both in work and in our communities.

I felt isolated and lonely, missed friends and family. Under stress from workload, online teaching and emails as well as zoom meetings. Felt it hard to switch off from work with no routine and structure. My husband got very sick and I needed to take care of him and my children while working.

Loneliness. Feeling disconnected from colleagues as a result of working from home. It's difficult to put into words. Life-changing, demotivating and socially detached would be three words to describe it.

Feeling isolated from friends and family. Feeling of hopelessness at not being able to help my students.

I felt isolated while working from home during school closures. I felt that there could have been more communication.

Seeing friends on screens not the same as in person. Missing students and staff and interaction.

3.114 Negative impact of school closures – personal life

The school closures added to teachers' stress levels and anxiety. Some of the comments tell a story of how many in society feel living with the fear associated with a pandemic. The social isolation caused by living within a 5Km and then a 2Km distance was acute for some.

I found a lot of my social outlets were reduced and I was spending a lot more time at home watching TV and not exercising as regularly as I'd like.

Worry about the health and safety of family, friends, students and colleagues as well as my own. Fear that other people are minimising the risks/not taking them seriously enough. This has affected my sleep and my wellbeing, which has a knock-on effect on productivity.

Found the initial lockdown easy to cope with as very compliant person . Found online teaching extremely time consuming and worked from 8 am to 7 pm most days and prepared work at weekend too . Was upset at lack of engagement .

More work. Longer hours Very intense interaction with staff and learners

It was disruptive and challenging. The uncertainty was the most challenging, that and not seeing family and friends. Adjusting to a completely different way of teaching was also incredibly challenging and stressful.

Over half the comments mention heightened anxiety and stress. Many talk about the impact on their mental health.

Very stressful time. Trying to fulfil your role at home but also complete your work to the same standard. Worried about your students, their engagement and the impact this was having on their lives both financially and emotionally.

Anxiety has increased drastically, now on anxiety medication. Found it difficult being the only person in my family not high risk I was scared to bring the virus back to them and would not let any of them go to the shop or high risk situations.

I found teaching during lockdown incredibly stressful and I find talk over the possibility of it happening again fills me with panic. I also feel almost claustrophobic now in a class full of children. I'm constantly worrying about catching the virus and spreading it to my family.

Huge impact - anxiety, trauma, brain fog, cognitive impairment, pressure of working at home with own children out of school, sadness, leading anger around loss of freedoms, and refusal of authorities to allow debate/narrative that goes against their view even from people as eminently qualified as they are themselves.

I have never really experienced anxiety before, although COVID-19 did not directly affect me, and I was in a secure job working from home, it was the first time ever I experienced heart palpitations and panic attacks and needed a heart monitor for 2 days. I still don't know what it was about this pandemic that affected me in this way but somehow it did.

Increased anxiety increased anxiety for my family - children increased worry for my mother increased worry for our income steep learning curve to go online very little support around this teacher welfare bottom of list feeling of isolation at work school

is now a 'grim' place. Camaraderie and 'craic' is gone background worry all the time that someone may get sick

Some respondents reported that they themselves had been sick during the lockdown. Others talk about the grief they have experienced after the loss of a loved one and how the restrictions on funerals have heightened this loss [comments not included due to personal nature]. Teachers also commented on how so many of the families of their students have suffered losses.

School closed on March 12th and on the 15th I had the first symptoms of Covid-19 which then went on to be confirmed by test. The months of March and April were a kind of blur as I battled the virus while trying to teach remotely, not letting my students know that I was ill. My recovery was slow and now 6 months later I am still quite unwell. I have taken reduced hours but I still am exhausted and breathless.

Teaching principals in particular who responded highlighted the need for more funding for education and the impact on their health from not getting a break ahead of the schools re-opening.

Glaring historic under investment in Irish Education was highlighted during pandemic yet no significant improvements made e.g. reduction in class sizes. We were failed by our union and the Department - The initial appreciation of teachers at the beginning of lockdown was palpable but quickly replaced by the usual teacher bashing as the closures were prolonged. Affected my mental health. - As a school leader, I've had no break since Midterm in February. Last week GP indicated that I'm suffering from exhaustion & my immune system is compromised.

3.12 Professional challenges

3.121 Technology – the need to connect

There was considerable time and energy put in to upskilling to use technology and to get students to engage. All involved in education know that it is the pedagogy that matters, it is the relationship between the teacher and their subject with their students in very specific contexts that makes the difference. That said, when distance education is your only option,

technology takes on new significance. If we cannot connect we cannot learn (Harris and Jones, 2020). The technological solutions ranged from high-tech such as, synchronous and asynchronous lessons to low-tech where work is posted out to families. The important factor was the connection between the teacher and the learner. The lack of good infrastructure in some areas proved to be a big challenge for some of the teachers in this research, both for them and their students. Teachers had to upskill in the use of technology. Good supports were provided by agencies like the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST, 2021) and Scoilnet (2021) among others, see for example resources <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning> and Scoilnet <https://www.scoilnet.ie/distancelearning/> However, teachers felt pressure to cover the curriculum and especially in examination classes to prepare students for terminal assessments. This was difficult without technological supports for all learners.

Very stressful at start trying to self-educate on technology. How to teach effectively online whilst aware of my own limitations and keeping students ability to engage in mind. Hard not knowing an overall picture and how they were getting on. Delighted to get positive feedback from my students.

After 25 years teaching I felt unprepared for this new reality of distance teaching. I trained to be a teacher of students in a classroom but from 12th March I was expected to be an online educator! I didn't know where to start.

Some subjects were more difficult to teach online such as practical subjects, metal work, Art, PE and so on. Most reported that distance learning, while not ideal, worked for the majority of their students.

Teaching a practical subject has changed massively. I struggled to link in with technology and new forums. The worst part was the lack of connection with the students. Students were invited to Teams and Notebook and while classwork was presented and their personal drawings were catalogued from sketchbooks, there was still a huge divide and lack of direct interaction. Although the work was available online, the students lacked devices to learn online.

Transition to online learning was very sudden and I had a significant amount of upskilling to do. Lack of IT support an issue and access to technology as it had to be shared with others in the house. Juggling young children and the demands of work without access to childcare or wider family supports was a challenge.

One primary respondent reported that they:

Lost contact with 13 out of 28 pupils. Online was largely positive for the other pupils more isolation, less social contact, being online so much was a challenge, missing face to face interactions.

Many respondents mentioned how some students were attending class on mobile phones, how they had trouble sending in assignments due to technology and broadband issues. Throughout comments there are references to how lack of technological support increased inequalities for some learners. Schools purchased computers or sent school computers to some homes.

The lack of engagement was due to a number of factors but mostly lack of access to a device that was not a phone.

I have just entered my third year of teaching, and all I can say is I hope I NEVER have to live another year teaching like I did last year for those 3 months! It was extremely difficult to run classes, record PowerPoint voiceovers, correct and connect with students. I was so lucky that my school was an iPad school... and that some of my students engaged really well. However I was very worried and still am, about those students who didn't have internet access at home.

3.122 Work-life balance – hours spent planning and implementing classes

The majority of respondents report that planning and implementing distance teaching is more time consuming and this impacts on work-life balance.

Lack of a school plan re remote learning meant that I went over and above, my colleagues and I were working minimum 12 hours a day, 7 days a week (creating content, assigning, communicating with families and correcting). This also helped avoid what was going on in the outside world too!

Relentless work. Very difficult juggling children, family and school with almost no downtime at weekends or evenings.

Lack of social interaction with colleagues. Long days on screen working from home. Sense of never finishing work as hard to create boundaries between work and home when working from home. Few opportunities to really get away and switch off.

School closures were difficult as resources had to be adapted. We had to deal with poor internet connection and lack of student engagement!

In teaching, learning and assessment feedback plays a crucial role in moving learning forward. The need to ensure students were getting work marked and feedback took considerable time. Many respondents reported that they worked up to ten hours per day during the first lockdown. Communication with students often extended into the evening and into weekends. The extra time involved in downloading student materials and marking and uploading it is mentioned many times in data. There is a need to look at how this might be streamlined in the online environment as it is a considerable additional workload with the class numbers in Ireland.

I have good IT skills so the move to online teaching wasn't as testing as it was for some of my colleagues but I was overwhelmed with corrections and marking at the start as I would often have used peer correction and other whole class strategies to manage. Whereas with online learning I was having to mark each individuals work. This entailed a lot of extra work.

The complexity and time needed for differentiating learning for home schooling was highlighted by primary teachers in particular.

Sourcing and sharing appropriate work daily with the children was a time consuming task. I engaged with the children during the school day hours, giving feedback on their work. At night, after my children went to bed I began planning and sourcing work for the next day. While I was working with lovely children and very appreciative parents I soon realised there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to home learning. I struggled with this as I wanted to make the home learning accessible to all - taking SEN, technology and home environments into consideration.

3.123 Living with uncertainty – need for better communication

The theme of living with uncertainty came up in many respondents' comments and probably echoes what most of society is feeling. However, there are clear indications that more open communication to schools could alleviate some of this uncertainty.

You add in the existential element of it all for us, as well as the constant flip flopping and chronic uncertainty delivered by the DES, and it was hell. Not knowing what would happen if blended or hybrid learning kicked in was a gnawing worry. Where would my kids be while I would return to fulltime work? How would I afford childcare? What stimulation would they get? By May we should have had clear plans going forward, primary kids should have been back in June even on a part time basis. Instead we were left to guess what our jobs would look like.

The feeling of uncertainty was overwhelming.

The 'not knowing' and the unknown are having a huge impact on my happiness.

The pandemic has made me and many others go to a dark place mentally. The inability to communicate and "catch-up" with friends efficiently has affected my mental health. There is a constant fear and unpredictability has made school and normal life so unnatural.

I am furious and completely disillusioned with government, Dept of Education, Teaching Council and Unions. I'm sick of decisions being made without consultations of those it affects and the motivations seemingly being budgetary and political rather

than logic or efficacy for all concerned. I love teaching and can't imagine doing anything else but I want to leave my job.

A time of enormous stress and mental anguish. School closed 12th of March and I was expected to be a technological whizz without even a laptop the following morning. My own children neglected whilst I worked 14 hour days to prepare and correct work whilst working to my timetable. Added to this trying to finish course with LC2s and as for the stress created by calculated grades. Teachers have been treated horrendously.

3.124 Curriculum concerns – supporting different groups

From data it is clear that many teachers realise that school is about much more than academics and that they play a crucial role in supporting young people in their lives in school and outside of school. However, the expectation that this was still possible while working from home added to stress.

I have just started the role of HSCL shared between two schools. I expected to see levels of disadvantage in the role but the ramifications of COVID has been devastating for DEIS families. Homelessness, separation amongst parents, drugs and alcohol abuse, anti-social behaviour during lockdowns and restrictions are just some of the issues I am seeing. I feel I am not in a position to help parents because of the restrictions of the pandemic.

School closures stressed trying to make sure kids were learning something but almost impossible to support them properly from a distance.

Teaching online through the pandemic was difficult. It took so much longer to plan and conduct lessons. Missing the social aspect with the students was horrible as well! One student, who has ASD, in the class did not cope well during the lockdown and that was hard seeing her regress so much.

Even though I was in regular contact with students I hated to see how isolated they were. I thought their mental health deteriorated and indeed physical health in one case. I missed the daily face to face contact and felt I was merely communicating than actually 'teaching' each day.

There were children in my class who never engaged at all, who didn't take phone calls, didn't reply to posted packs, didn't connect on ClassDojo etc who I felt were at risk but Tusla didn't agree. This left me even more stressed.

Work was hard as many students were isolated and did not engage, others became the bread winners in their family while still trying to do schoolwork I was very concerned about them.

Learning how to deliver lessons online in an engaging manner. Not being able to connect 1:1 with pupils (as a Guidance Counsellor).

Covid19 school closures incurred a great increase in my workload as teacher and Year Head. My school moved to online teaching and learning within a week of the school closure and this involved a steep learning curve. At first I was nervous and anxious about teaching online as we had received minimal training and we had never engaged in MS Teams before. I found that it took longer to plan lessons and correcting student work online was onerous at times, particularly as many of them had difficulties in uploading their work. As Year Head, I was also involved in trying to keep track of and support those students who were struggling academically, socially and personally due to the pandemic and school closure. This, again, was exhausting and never-ending. Working from home to support these students felt like a 24 hour job as I would be contacted at irregular times by students and parents vis email and our school app. I also used my personal phone to talk to parents and students so again the boundary between work and home life became very blurred.

Teachers felt responsibility towards their students sitting the Leaving Certificate in 2020. The time line of changes to plans, outlined in the literature review, impacted on teachers' and students' mental health.

The constant flip flopping around the LC really stressed my students and me.

Thinking back on teaching from home it was an extremely stressful and anxious time learning how to use various online resources. I found the lack of student engagement from 5th and 6th years extremely stressful as I was so anxious as to how this was going to affect their Leaving Cert.

I was 6th Yr. Head, so I was in phone contact with students to motivate them and offer guidance every week. Several students had IT difficulties which needed to be solved. I also loaned several school laptops to 6th Yrs. who were struggling with devices, to help them submit their work.

The calculated grades process was horrendous for us all, but at least we had Christmas and summer house exams and the mocks to go on. We will have so little to go on for next year's group. They have missed so much.

Supporting TY students, some respondents referred to particular issues around keeping TY students engaged during the school closures.

I'm TY co-ordinator so COVID meant the trips all got cancelled. Students very disappointed. Money was lost due to cancelled hotels and flights. Online teaching was extremely difficult as students didn't have access to broadband or devices. Everything took a long time to sort out online...colleagues were very stressed. Families also stressed with everybody trying to work on 1 device at home. Mental health a major concern...at times I felt like I wasn't coping well. Felt pointless.

Concerned about the running of the TY programme. What can they do? What is available to them?

3.125 Impact of negative media about the profession

There were a number references to the impact of negative media on teachers wellbeing.

The anxiety that the rumour mill and leaked information by the government to the Independent since the beginning of March has been beyond stressful. They stated after the leak to papers about possible school closures that this was not happening and closed the schools the following day. They have continued in this vein since March 12th and it has caused a great deal of stress, uncertainty, mistrust and confusion over the past number of months. This very same practice continues today, 7 months later and I am so stressed out over it.

I was frustrated with some of the public saying we were on holidays, when I have never worked so hard. I've no regrets but hope not to go back online. Since returning to school, the children have been fantastic. The way the Media wrote/spoke about teachers as if they were doing nothing when working from home was a horrendous and soul destroying experience.

Mental health issues. I found online teaching extremely difficult with little or no thanks. This public perception that we had 'six months full pay for no work' was very damaging

The media hammering of teachers had a huge, negative impact on my mental health and sense of wellbeing in my work and the value attributed by society to our job.

The main impact was stress. The main reason for this is having make decisions over the months repeatedly without guidance or help. All support and guidance came later when things were up and running. No one can live and work with constant pressure. There is always the undertone that you are not doing enough either by Department, media and society.

The constant backlash the teaching profession was subjected to despite the best efforts that were being put in was and continues to be very difficult to take. Fed up of the lack of support, lack of compliance by students and mixed media messages.



3.2 The School Re-Opening Challenges

Teachers have experienced significant challenges in the process of school re-opening. These challenges were different during the preparation for re-opening and after it occurred. Figure 5 illustrates teachers' main challenges during school re-opening.



Figure 6. Challenges experienced by teachers in relation to school re-opening.

3.21 Preparation for re-opening

Teaching principals had a long difficult summer of getting schools ready for classes. Many teachers commented that they helped out during the summer to set up classes with desks 1m apart. Other helped with putting technology in place to ensure paperless teaching. Many of the comments mention how they were nervous over the summer in anticipation of going back but really excited to see their students and to be back face-to-face.

I worked closely with my school during the summer prepping the school to go paperless and with the potential to go entirely online at a moment's notice. Again it gave me purpose.

School re-opening was not as bad as I had imagined but it is anything but ideal. To stand wearing a mask, for the first time in front of a class that are also wearing masks, is something that I as a teacher will never forget.

The eventual re-opening of school was very intense, managing staff, parents and children's understandable anxiety regarding COVID while trying to maintain a positive working atmosphere. But seeing the students made it all worthwhile.

3.22 After re-opening

The challenges faced by schools on re-opening were around safety, teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum. Making schools a safe place to teach came at a price in terms of teaching, learning and curriculum. Implementing the social distancing, mask wearing, cleaning regimes and movement around schools required a whole new plan for schools (DES, 2020h). Concerns around safety became paramount in the minds of the school community. There were protocols to be followed and new rules to obey. Despite this almost all respondents, while having reservations around safety, all reported that being back teaching face-to-face was much more desirable than distance teaching. However, schools' environment has changed with COVID-19 restrictions. The following comment encompasses many of the respondents' thinking around schools re-opening.

I also am a Year head and the pastoral side of the job was also made more difficult, knowing the home circumstances of some of my students was a real worry as those kids were often the ones who didn't engage with online learning or answered emails and no one answered the phone, I see a lot of regression in those vulnerable students both socially and academically since schools have re-opened. The atmosphere in the school is so different now and really subdued as one described it recently "school is zero craic now" The teenagers are generally being really cooperative and haven't been given enough credit for how well they are coping. Many are really stressed and

anxious and finding it all overwhelming particularly the ASD students. I have found it good to be back but it is also a lot of pressure having so much blended learning, kids in class in front of you and some learning from home and others in an overflow area because there's not enough room in the classroom now for a full class. The WIFI in the schools is also abysmal making live streaming of classes often impossible. It is still preferable to be in school than working from home though.

Blended learning is mentioned on many occasions by teachers when talking about classrooms after schools re-opened. What is referred to as blended learning is when the teachers have to teach some students face-to-face and in other cases students in an overflow classroom or students online at home due to being a close contact or absent for other reasons.

3.221 Implementing the return to school plan

School communities did everything to ensure the safety of staff and students. The Department of Education provided grants for schools to meet enhanced sanitisation, supervision and space requirements (DES, 2020h). However, it was the professionalism of the people in schools that really made the difference in getting schools open. Many comments highlight this positive attitude to being back and to the positive effect it has on student wellbeing.

It has to be said that I love being back in school and teaching while it is challenging, you can't beat the physical interaction with pupils. It's amazing.

Back at school I find the new rules and routines can be very tiring and teaching time is being lost but I'm so happy to see the students joy at being in school again.

I am glad to be back in the classroom, I feel our school has robust measures in place to protect me and the children and most of the staff adhere strictly to guidelines.

The comments around schools re-opening were overwhelmingly positive with some reservations around safety.

I couldn't wait for the schools to re-open however had my reservations about how all the precautions and new regimes would impact my teaching and most importantly the children in my class. Thankfully I feel as a school we have done remarkably well given our school demographics to avoid any Covid case to date.

Whilst school re-opening was something I was worried about, I couldn't be happier to be back. My school has done a fantastic job as regards layouts and health and safety procedures. I feel very safe and we are yet to have a school related case of COVID.

Changes made to routines are positive - staggered drop off and collection times mean a calmer start and end to the day. Staggered breaks mean more space for children to play. The only downside is there is much less interaction between colleagues so I miss the chats!

I'm happy to power on and do what we have to do. Hopefully we'll have a vaccine soon.

I am buoyed however, by the general efforts made by staff and students to comply to the regulations and keep us all safe.

Re-opening was scary as the initial plan was laughable (no masks???) but actually being back in the classroom has been fantastic, despite the limitations. My school is very on top of virus control measures but I do still feel like teachers are being placed at greater risk than other professions. Despite this, I prefer being in school than not.

The majority of respondents were very happy to be back in school seeing students and many mentioned how adaptive and resilient students have been.

Today hearing that schools may close again has me very stressed. I am glad to be back at work. The children in my class are glad to be back. We have not had any cases in our school.

Parents have been amazing. I'm really astonished at the children's resilience since Sept- far better than the adults.

3.222 Worried about safety and the spread of COVID-19

Understandably, there were many comments from teachers voicing worries about their own safety and that of their loved ones. In particular many mentioned being in an at-risk category and this added to their stress.

Suffer from anxiety and this has really kicked back in since return to school. Despite best efforts of school don't feel safe especially at idea of staying open at level 4 and 5. Live with person in very high risk category. Have decided to resign.

I felt less stressed and safer working online from home during the lockdown, than I do now since being back in school. I no longer feel safe because I teach senior cycle students aged 16-18 who do not socially distance outside of school or during mask breaks and lunch time. Nor am I happy about being in a classroom where students are only one metre apart. In addition, I have to constantly remind them to wear their masks properly. I am also worried about having to share a staffroom with younger colleagues who think it is okay to remove their masks whilst in this room. As a result, I eat my lunch in my car every day and avoid the staff room as much as possible during free periods on my timetable.

I don't feel protected at school, we have been provided with all relevant PPE equipment at school which is reassuring but I am in a classroom with 28 children that go home to different households and it makes it a lot of close contacts for us. Our school has experienced a school closure due to a student having covid-19. All students who were in the classroom for the last two days that the child who contracted covid19 was present, were sent for testing. There were 3 students who were not close contacts (They were out for those 2 days) and they were allowed to come to school, which is fair enough. However the teacher was not sent for testing and was not deemed a close contact as she was wearing a mask. That caused a huge scare in our school as it is widely known that masks can only prevent you spreading the virus, it doesn't protect you from contracting it. It was clearly stated on the phone to the principal by the COVID-19 HSE doctor that the class teacher was not a close contact

because she was wearing a mask. While having to cope with the scare of this case in the classroom, the teacher was left with 3 children to teach in the classroom as well as provide work for the children at home.

It has created a lot of fear and stress for my home and work-life. I have a high risk partner receiving treatment at present but still have to work. We depend on my income. I wear a mask all day at work and return home and also have to wear a mask. The whole thing is v scary but I love my job and my class and am delighted to see them back and eager to learn.

3.223 Changed work environment – changed pedagogical practices

Teachers talked about how the new rules have impacted on the environment for learning in classrooms as teaching is a very relational activity and it is very difficult to do this from behind a mask at 1m. The lack of collaborative and peer work is having a negative impact and students are less inclined to talk in class. The need for teachers to teach face-to-face with some students while streaming to other students who may be at home or in over-spill areas is very challenging. A lot of the spontaneity of learning is lost.

We had 70 children out as confirmed close contacts of a positive case. The pressure to both teach in the classroom and online was unreal. No work/life balance. Very little interaction with colleagues - schools are a lonely place.

I am far more sensitive now in class, I would go as far as to say that I am on edge due to a lack of social distancing and not always adhering to the wearing of masks by students. I feel that the students feel that they have been gagged by the wearing of the masks and the reluctance to speak, it is truly depressing.

They report that they miss face-to-face staff meetings, coffee breaks, lunch breaks and so on. The social aspect of their work is gone for now. This is necessary and they understand the need for it, but it takes away from the collaborative aspects of their work.

I feel that the staff have become more isolated since our school re-opened. Before Covid-19 our staffroom was a great place to unwind, get things off our chest and relax

during lunch and free periods. All that is gone. Everyone is now looking at each other and the students as a potential source of infection. The constant hand washing, hand sanitising, and sanitising of desks and equipment and remembering to stay within your two metre zone at the top of the class is a nightmare. Having to wear a mask for up to 7 hours a day is not healthy, nor is it easy to communicate in the classroom.

Teachers talk about how teaching is not as student centred as before the pandemic. This is especially having an impact on students who need extra support in their learning.

Covid has caused many changes to the work environment. There is less one-to-one interaction between students and teachers, which I feel is having an impact on student learning, in particular with weaker students. Also I feel it has caused teacher to return to teacher centre teaching unfortunately, rather than allowing us to move forward with the development of student-centred learning. Additionally it has impacted teacher-teacher relationships as there is not as much interaction in the staffroom etc.

In school I am a Maths and Learning Support teacher it's difficult to help weaker kids when you can't give a pen, paper, sit beside for a chat etc. etc.

The lockdown resulted in weaker/students on the fringe falling further behind. It is SOOOOooooo evident in 3rd year this year where students who haven't engaged since last March are struggling to keep up/get into routine now. Added to this concern for my students is stress/ fatigue/ periods of low morale/ pressure upskilling in new areas of IT/ high number of emails at all times and days/ marking LC exams/unable to break away from routine to visit family and friends/ grave concern for elderly parents living in another part of the country.

This change to the teaching environment is having an impact on students as they struggle to adapt to the new class routines.

It has made teaching a very different practice, at least for the time being. Where we would usually do group work, we have reverted back to talk-and-chalk and it has made making lessons fun and engaging a far more difficult thing to do. Students seem deflated, it is a very unusual and uncomfortable school environment for all.

Some teachers see the change while necessary has made them think more about how to teach without the usual group work, practical work or other paper resources available to them this has made them re-consider their pedagogical practices.

It has affected my work negatively as I can't really do experiments or get close to students to help with anything. Everything just requires more effort. On the positive side it has brought me closer to my fellow teachers, made me more organised with my resources and knocked me out of my routine so I am actively thinking about every class instead of being on autopilot.

The changes to pedagogical practices may have lasting impact on education, some positive and some might not be so positive.

I do fear that the lack of pair work and group work and the prohibition of certain methodologies due to the lockdown will pose challenges for some teachers going forward who found it incredibly difficult to switch from a Junior Certificate to a Junior Cycle style of teaching. When it is time to switch back, I wonder how quickly the reversal will take to happen again.

Living with Covid in schools has meant there are no extracurricular activities allowed at school, this means that all fun events, such as trips and sporting activities are cancelled. As an educator, I believe that without these activities we are failing to provide a full and rounded education to our students.

As a teacher returning to school having to think every minute about where you stand what you touch and constant sanitisation is exhausting. The children appear to be happy in school except for the constant reminders of social distancing and arguments between children and staff as a result. The environment is different more stressful. It's human nature not to social distance. It's going against natural responses and everything they were reared in. It's difficult and it causes a huge strain between staff and students.

It has affected school life in so many ways. Children can't walk in with another class [due to new movement regulations], they are constantly hand sanitising, they can't even go over to another table in their classroom. I wonder the effect on them. But I try to make it fun and not say anything about it that might cause worry.

Teaching has changed with the use of social distancing, wearing masks and reduced breaks. Curriculum time is being lost on policing mask wearing, social distancing, cleaning regimes, movement of students in the school and additional record keeping. Many report that students are not as talkative and do not contribute as spontaneously in class. They all miss collaborative learning groups.

Although necessary for safety, masks are impacting teaching and learning. Students are not as confident to speak. Plus the struggle to be heard can impact their learning. Again, desks are separated which impacts on the style of lessons that can take place.

3.224 Increased stress and workload since September

The quantitative data tells us that 7 out of 10 teachers said that remote teaching affects their wellbeing and 7 out of 10 are more stressed at the time of the survey than a year ago before the pandemic. These levels of stress are also evident in the qualitative data. A lot of this stress is associated with changed work environment and change to work practices. The lack of clear arrangements for time lost for examination classes in Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate is causing stress for teachers and students. The present LC class have missed out in face-to-face teaching from March to June and need time to catch up on lost learning. This second lockdown in January 2021 is coming at a time when these students would be preparing for mock examinations.

Academic time has been lost, there is no denying this. This cannot be made up, what could/would you sacrifice? The SEC need to urgently provide samples of changed exam structure to schools. This will reduce the stress for exam classes and their teachers.

Anxiety re exams and targets. The increase in points a stressor. No clarity for students in terms of mocks, exams, grading!! Last year we had two Christmas exams, a

summer exam and mocks to go on for predictive grades. This group have only a Christmas exam so now we are doing more class tests. How can we catch up and finish the course, it is just not possible.

In my 25year teaching career, I have never known a more stressful time as this.

When school re-opened, it was chaos. We have lost our rooms, a lot of our facilities and students don't have books with them. One year group is in a large gym, with plywood partitions dividing five classes. They can't hear us and we can't hear them. I taste blood in my throat most evenings from trying to be heard through a mask, over the noise of blow heaters, rain on the roof and four other classes making noise. I feel utterly defeated after those classes. My heart goes out to my students who have to stay there all day. At night I don't sleep anymore. The anxiety that keeps me awake is due to trying to limp through the day teaching in corridors and in rooms with no desks to allow for social distancing. I have been to my GP and am on antidepressants since October 6th. I hoped the anxiety would ease with time, but my every waking moment is consumed by how little I achieve each day. Correcting is laborious. We correct online. Students submit work at all hours but it's also a far slower process. School is consuming my life, so I have resorted to medication to try to survive the coming year.

I am a Home School Community Liaison coordinator in a DEIS band 1 school. Since school re-opening I have had to help parents with anxiety, their child's anxiety, the suicide of a mother of a child in the school who I worked a lot with, parents who have separated, who have been reported to Tusla. I have had to ring the INTO counselling service as it was all very overwhelming. I also have three kids under ten. My colleagues are stressed and anxious.

It has been great to come back and see the students again. I'm delighted to be back teaching in a school environment but it is also exhausting. So many lessons require so much thought process about what resources you can use, can you keep the students apart during the activity etc. Teaching with a mask on is quite difficult, particularly if you are trying to teach about phonological awareness. At the moment I'm finding it very hard to switch off after work. There are no plans to look forward to and I'm preparing schoolwork for the next day until 10 every night. It's draining!

3.225 Living with uncertainty

Like the rest of the country and the world, the uncertainty around COVID has impacted on teachers' stress levels. However, they have the added uncertainty around constant news about cases and protocols to be followed for close contacts. The need to cover courses is also causing stress.

Heightened sense of anxiety in the school environment. Also, a sense that work requirements may change at a moment's notice as we constantly wait for confirmation of positive cases in class and must adapt to the situation immediately.

It is difficult to live with the uncertainty of Covid. Workload since returning to school has been pressurizing in the extreme. Many demands are unreasonable and supports inadequate. Constant worry of contracting the illness and bringing it back home to my partner with underlying health conditions. Also stress of not being able to finish my LC and JC courses with students.

On return, some students were very shaken, others seem to have disengaged even in person we don't know what their experience was and we try to support them. Some students in Leaving Cert very stressed, and we can't reassure them about what will happen or what to expect because we don't know.

Work practices have totally changed with distance learning, blended learning and limitations on activities in school. The work environment is lonely and isolated now. Heightened sense of anxiety in the school environment. Also, a sense that work requirements may change at a moment's notice as we constantly wait for confirmation of positive cases in class and must adapt to the situation immediately.

From these data in this chapter one can appreciate the complexity of teaching during this pandemic both from a distance and face-to-face. Many of the comments here reflect the anxiety felt in society at large about this illness and the concern we feel for our families, colleagues and communities. The professionalism of teachers is evident and their duty of care

for their students. The relational nature of teaching is not conducive to mask wearing, social distancing and isolation from colleagues.



3.3 The Impact of Challenges on Mental Health

3.31 Stress

All the challenges that teachers experienced during the pandemic took a toll on their mental health, as 7 out of 10 teachers reported that they felt more stressed compared to the same time the previous year. Figure 10 provides further detail teachers' mental health.

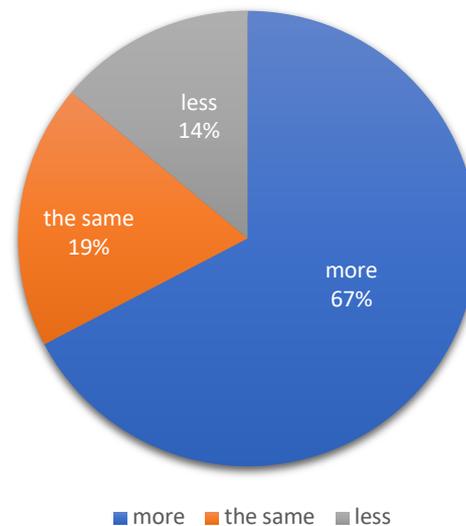
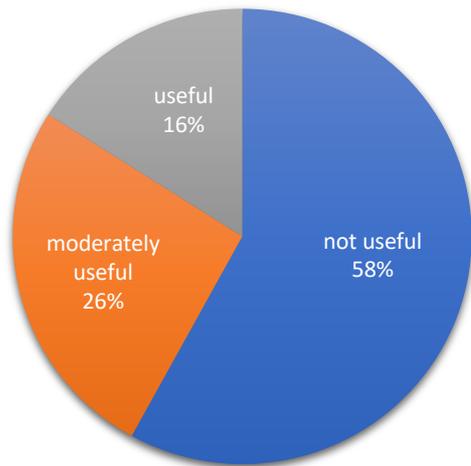


Figure 7. Comparison of teachers' stress levels during the pandemic and the same time previous year.

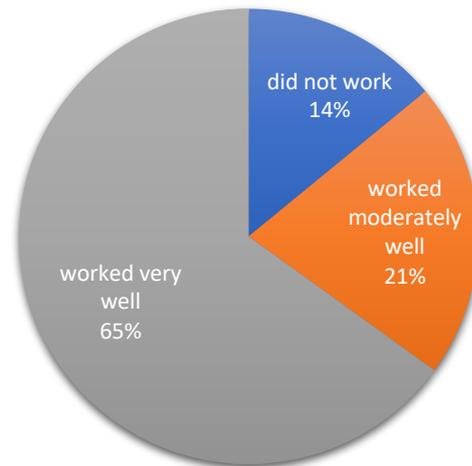
3.312 Satisfaction with Guidance

Teachers have received guidance from the Department of Education and their school in the form of a Covid-19 School Response Plan, all of which aimed to help them work during the pandemic. Their responses showed that 6 out of 10 teachers did not find the Department of Education guidelines useful; whereas 6 out of 10 reported that their Covid-19 school response plan worked effectively to support the needs of their school community. Figures 6 and 7 provide further detail.



■ not useful ■ moderately useful ■ useful

Figure 8 . The usefulness of the Covid-19 guidance documents from the Department of Education.



■ did not work ■ worked moderately well ■ worked very well

Figure 9. The effectiveness of the Covid-19 school response plan.

To identify the impact of the guidance documents on teachers stress levels, a regression model was created, which showed that teachers’ satisfaction with the documents did not predict their stress levels. Therefore, other factors must have been at play that impacted teachers’ higher stress levels.

3.312 Students’ behaviour

After the school re-opening, 6 out of 10 students went back into face-to-face teaching without any issues. At the same time, 6 out 10 teachers spent a lot of class-time re-establishing the behaviour norms and routines after the school re-opened. Figures 8 and 9 provide further detail of teachers managing students’ behaviour.

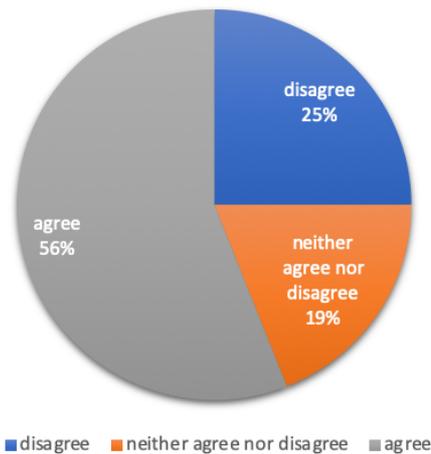


Figure 10. The percentage of students settling back into face-to-face teaching.

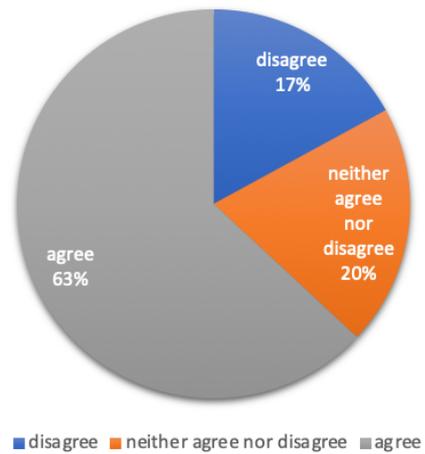


Figure 11. The percentage of teachers spending time to re-establish the behaviour norms and routines after school re-opening.

Given that the students' externalising behaviour can result in a cycle of negative interactions with teachers, which affects their mental health (Doumen et al., 2008), students' behaviour may have been one of the factors as to why teachers' stress levels have increased. To test this supposition, further analysis was carried out to identify how much of the variance in teachers' higher levels of stress can be explained by students' settling back and teachers spending extra time to re-establish students' behaviour. The results showed that only 3% of teachers' higher levels of stress were explained by this model and only students' issues with settling back into face-to-face teaching affected teachers stress ($\beta = -12$), whereas spending time re-establishing students' behaviour norms and routines did not play a role in teachers increased stress levels [$F(2,396) = 5.83, p < .05$].

3.313 Teacher's self-belief

Given that previous research identified that remote teaching has impacted on teachers' work-life balance and their self-belief, and confidence in their professional skills (Devitt et al., 2020), we tried to identify how much of the variance in teachers' stress levels could be explained by their work-life balance and self-belief. The results showed that 4% of teachers' higher levels of stress were predicted by the model. Specifically, only their belief that

teaching remotely affected their work-life balance explained the variance in their stress (beta=-.21), whereas their self-belief had little impact on their stress [$F(2, 193)=4.22, p<.05$].

Taking all the examined factors into consideration, the usefulness of the guidance documents, the extra time that teachers spent re-establishing norms and behaviours, and teachers' belief in their skills had little impact on their higher stress levels. The only two factors that predicted teachers stress were having students who found it challenging to settle back in school after the lockdown, and teachers perception that teaching remotely affected their work-life balance.

Despite the vast majority of participants reporting that they feel more stressed, a third of them (33%) recounted experiencing the same or less stress during the pandemic. The following quotes give a flavour of their attitude:

I don't feel any greater stress. I've accepted that we cannot teach as before. I'm definitely more exhausted after work.

Work still has to be done whether the virus is here or not so I feel the same amount of stress as last year.

No fear of inspections. More support from parents. More support to schools from government.

Better balance in life since lockdown.

I was heavily involved in extracurricular. As this has stopped, I leave school at finishing time so life is easier.

I deal with stress very well. I have a great family and love my job. I really have realised that I can be easily replaced at work but never replaced at home! I realise how capable I am and am confident dealing with difficult situations.

This pandemic has shown teachers to be adaptive, agile and person-centred in their response to impacts on their profession.

3.32 Teachers' Sources of Stress

Among the teachers who experienced stress, there was a variety of stressors that affected them. Some are apparent in the previous section on schools re-opening. Their sources of stress ranged from personal, such as the stress around family health, bereavement, and lack of support for childcare while teaching, through to intrapersonal, such as coping with the uncertainty, social isolation; and relating to changed practices, such as wearing masks, added record keeping and the demands of blended learning. Figure 11 provides a summary of the themes emerging from participants' responses.

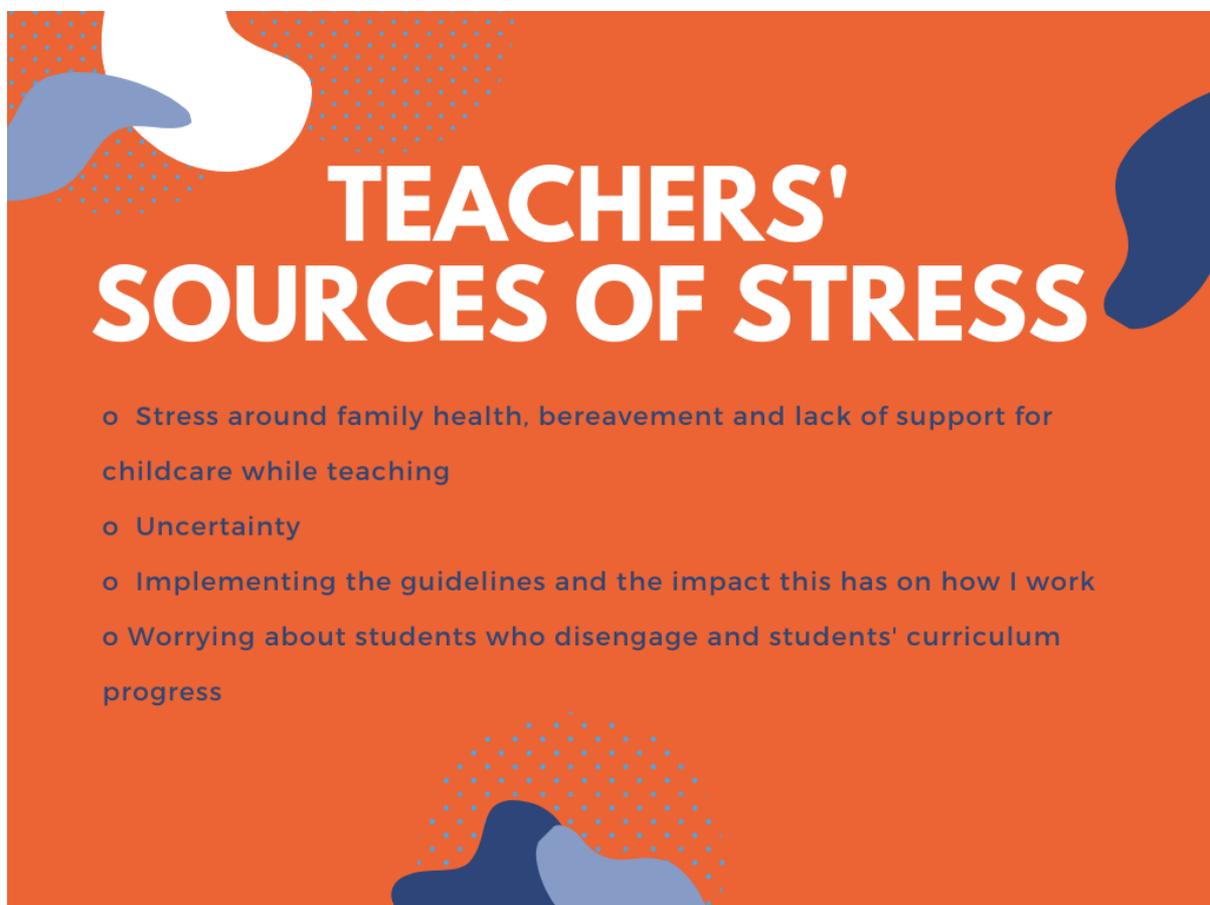


Figure 12. Teachers' sources of stress.

3.321 Stress around family health, bereavement and lack of support for childcare while teaching

This stress is a continuation of the stress felt during the first lockdown. It is around safety and family. Teachers are stressed that they will be the source of infection in their family.

We have had a Covid outbreak in our school. I worry every day that I will bring the virus home to my elderly mother.

Hugely concerned about my and colleagues safety and the impact of my interacting with so many people every day will have on two high risk and one extremely vulnerable person in my household. Fear of this grips me day and night.

I find school stressful. Lack of support and consideration for teachers from government. It seems like there are different rules for schools as a workplace. I am feeling this increasingly so as I am pregnant.

Although all year groups have been divided into zones in the school. The corridors are a disaster for students. I see the large groups, not distancing and worry for their wellbeing. I am lucky my room is spacious, all students have been issued packs of materials and surfaces are cleaned every class. Unfortunately, I see many members of staff working in small classrooms with larger groups and I am concerned for all.

3.322 Uncertainty

As discussed above, uncertainty causes stress. Some of this uncertainty is caused by lack of communication or unclear communication.

The uncertainty was difficult. Seeing people panic buying because we didn't know if we would be in a lockdown as serious as in Spain or Italy. Going back to school was difficult, we don't have adequate protection, our class sizes are way too big.

Stress caused by having to police mask wearing, social distancing and movement through corridors in tandem with covering the curriculum.

School is always stressful but working in a mask all day long is extremely tiring and leading to headaches and sore throats. Also, trying to ensure social distancing among teenagers who don't see the problem with huddling around in groups is worrying.

Returning to work has been difficult, trying to reimagine ways to teach a practical subject, supplies, demonstrations, blended learning. A lot of practical considerations.

Preparing students for exams is really difficult. Making sure that desks and chairs are kept clean and that all surfaces are clean!

In the following quote it is clear that the uncertainty around further closures and the fear of that which we have little control over, that is, the health and safety of colleagues and students is a source of stress.

High risk students and colleagues, their health and safety. Students who are very high risk at risk of falling behind. Lack of clear guidance from Department of Education in a timely manner. Burnout of school leaders due to relentless pace of change in the past six months. Safety of vulnerable members of my family.

One respondent questions the impact of the measures on students and if it is too big a price to pay for safety.

Life always involved risk, so no safety concerns greater than pre-Covid. Huge concerns about the lack of critical thinking/questioning around the current measures for colleagues and students. Acceptance of enormous infringements on human interactions and freedoms with little evidence. Allocation of "conspiracy theorist" status to those who dare question the NPHET narrative. Students masked up all day, not allowed to mix, play football and engage normally and no sign of this easing up in the long term. This is not living, but existing and it is not healthy.

3.323 Implementing the guidelines and the impact this has on how I work

There were many comments on the added record keeping and policing of masks, movement, sanitising and cleaning before, during and after classes. Teachers welcome these measures and in no way oppose them but they do feel it is a change to how they work, it impacts on student-teacher relationships and can eat into curriculum time.

Starting back to school in Sept was the most stressed I have ever been in my 32 yrs. of teaching. New systems, no base room, no social contact with colleagues, using a mask and looking at students with masks, not being able to hear student responses.

Social isolation has increased due to the implementation of guidelines around eating in shared spaces. The constant need to read new guidelines can also add to stress.

The extra guidelines in school make the job much harder and lonelier. I eat lunch alone at my desk and rarely chat with other staff anymore.

I worry that students are disengaged and falling behind, especially ones who don't have digital access. I worry that school will never be the same again. I hardly see my colleagues as we're split into different staffrooms. I have no clue how much teaching and learning is taking place as I can't take up copies. I can barely hear my students behind masks.

I'm extremely concerned for my staff , everyone is stressed and they feel isolated and abandoned by the dept . There are only more guidelines and rules and little compassion or understanding.

Providing for face to face teaching and streaming classes for students isolating at home due to COVID-19 has been one of the most challenging aspect of their work since returning to school.

The blended learning, expectation, to provide for students isolating while teaching in school, and planning for “possible” lockdowns- adds huge stress. Plus all the paperwork and seating plans.

3.324 Worrying about students who disengage and students' curriculum progress

Many comments talk about how teachers have concern for specific groups in their schools. In particular the students who dis-engaged during the first lockdown and students who have additional needs in education. The concerns for students who have the Leaving Certificate in June is mentioned when talking about stress and concerns in data.

The possibility of another lockdown and the effects of same on the standard of teaching and learning and the impact of this on students who need school for social and 'escape' from home reasons. The inequitable access to IT resources and skills.

I am very concerned about current 5th year students whose education has been very negatively impacted to date and I worry that they may already be completely detached from education and reluctant to participate fully in it.

Student engagement is a huge worry. Worries for colleagues who live in their own. Concerned some students will struggle to re-engage with learning and won't receive the support from home if they are out or we go back to a lockdown. I'm concerned about colleagues being traumatised by the Covid restrictions and that they will burn themselves out.

The students are struggling and finding this year difficult. It is extremely hard to get them to interact in classes and when they do it's very hard to hear them from behind the mask. School is very isolating for everyone this year as we are all separate and don't get the chance to interact like in previous years. Wipes are constantly running out so time is spent having to replace them. We are catching up on gaps from last year and that is stressful on top of trying to complete the curriculum for this year.

3.33 Work-life balance

The additional demands placed upon teachers during the pandemic impacted some of the participants' work-life balance, as only 2 out of 10 were fully satisfied with it. Furthermore, 7 out of 10 teachers reported that teaching remotely affected their work-life balance during the pandemic. Figures 12 and 13 provide additional detail relating to participants' responses.

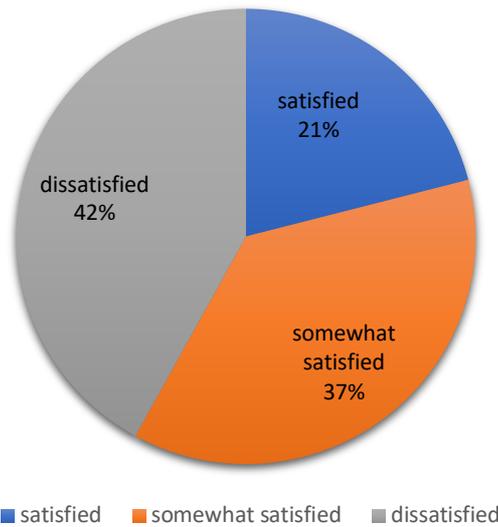


Figure 13. Teachers' satisfaction with work-life balance.

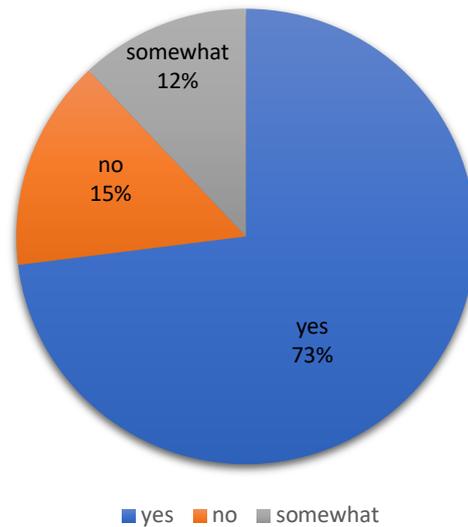


Figure 14. The effect of teaching remotely on teachers' work-life balance.

Here are some of the comments that teachers made about the impact of remote teaching on their work-life balance:

Longer hours and less structure at times can be very difficult to manage, lot of time preparing work to send.

Trying to manage a young family and work from home is stressful.

Remote teaching is easier now as I taught myself how to do it and then helped others who needed it.

School becomes a full day and night job. Classes taught all day on line and then students work corrected and emails answered at all hours.

I didn't feel I was achieving as much when working remotely. I did not feel as valued as a teacher as I was not able to interact with the children. I missed that contact.

It is much more difficult to 'switch off' when working remotely. Many of my students emailed outside of 'established times' & I felt a moral and ethical duty to help allay their fears.

Everything is more time consuming - preparation of resources, researching examples, providing feedback, responding to emails, phone conversations that should be a 5 minute check in turning into a 20 min chat. Everything was trickier and more demanding, yet I always had the feeling that I could be doing more for my class

You spend so much time upskilling, and trying to figure out how to teach every subject remotely, having to make activities for those with and without resources (digital and otherwise). You spend outrageous hours in front of a screen and suffer from decision fatigue, and regular old exhaustion. I was spending 10-12 hours working.

This level of working and engagement is not sustainable over long periods of time and can lead to burn out. The feeling of living at work has health and wellbeing implications if it is long term.

3.331 Advantages and disadvantages of remote teaching affecting work-life balance

Despite the personal impact that remote teaching had on participants, they were balanced in their view in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of remote teaching. The advantages included personal safety, improved relationships with students and tapping into teachers' less used skills. The disadvantages included reduced teacher-student and peer interaction, technology inequalities and the missing social aspect of schools. Figure 14 provides further detail of advantages and disadvantages.

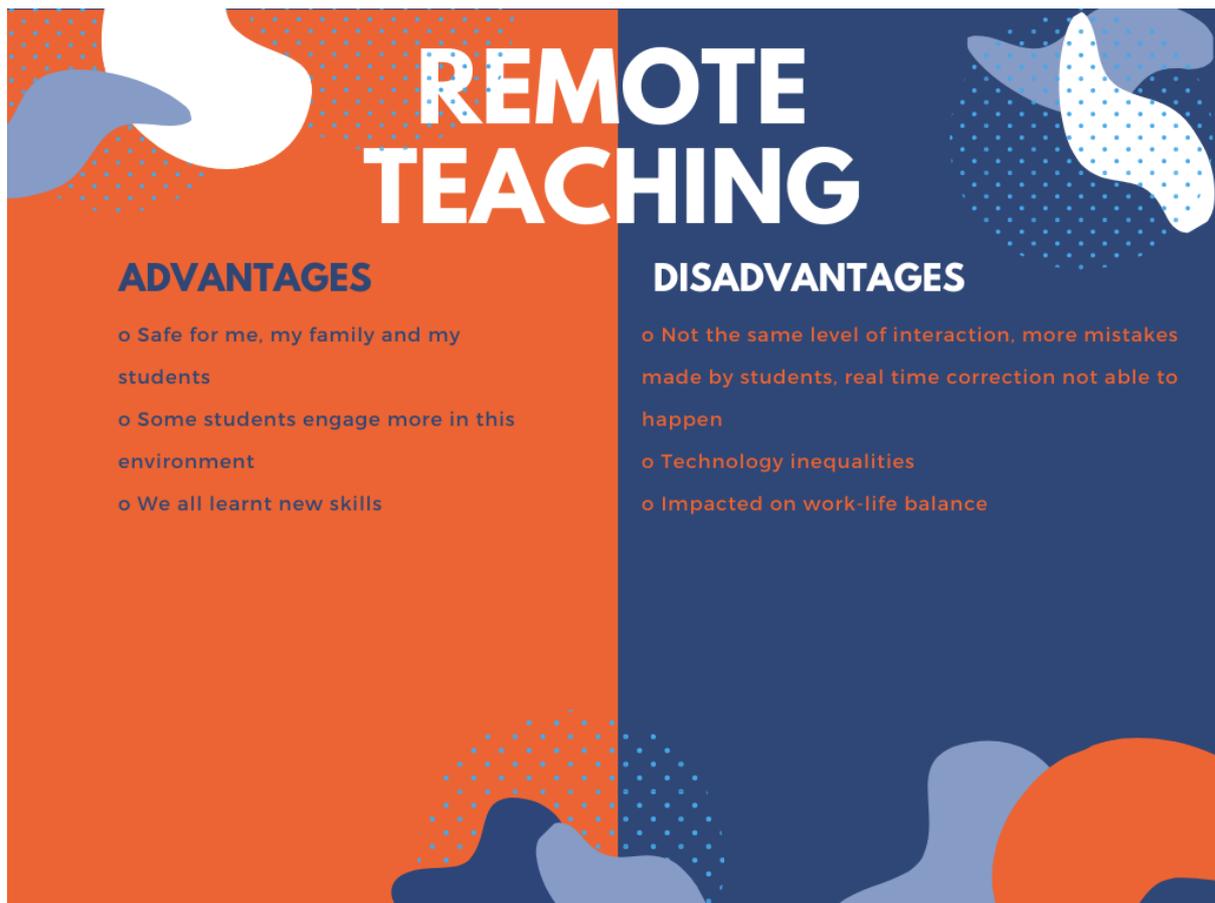


Figure 15. Advantages and disadvantages of remote teaching.

3.3311 Advantages

3.3111 Safe for me, my family and my students

Distance education keeps everyone safe and prevents the spread of the virus. This is the main advantage listed by teachers.

Advantages are that it's safe and much can be done online, but no substitute for face to face contact and relationship with students.

The advantage is that it's safer in terms of not getting the virus, however it's exhausting as there is no end to answering emails, contacting students and teaching remotely.

Advantage is no commute, safe place at home. Teaching remote gives me greater ownership of what I teach. Children learn at their own pace.

The advantage for me was being able to spend more time with my family and being in less of a rush regarding day to day responsibilities like cooking and cleaning. For the school community I think the only advantage was keeping students and their families safe from COVID. Although many learning opportunities were being provided it is not the same experience as being in the classroom. Maths in particular was really difficult to teach remotely.

3.3112 Some students engage more in this environment

A number of teachers talked about how they got to know students better in the online space. Some students who might be reluctant to speak up in class were more likely to engage online. Most respondents mentioned how they either started or enhanced their use of online platforms such as Teams, Google classroom, SeeSaw and so on. They have continued to use these platforms when schools re-opened as books were not allowed in some schools.

Felt like I was doing something to help my class and their families at home, got to know kids better as individuals...

Advantages: more time to focus in on those who want to learn. More tuition time; no writing notes, discipling kids for not having homework done. No interruptions of the revolving door of kids going to the toilet to check their phones...

No conflict amongst students. There is no bullying and in some cases anxious students that might not come in to school attended online. Students not using cameras was an issue in some instances.

Keeping a connection with students was a big advantage to distance education.

Keeps a connection. very important to pupils with SEN

Teaching remotely has huge advantages but I think setting boundaries and time availability limits is important. Some parents feel that emails at 7 am and 11 pm are appropriate and should be replied to immediately.

Not many advantages but the kids got to see me and their class mates.

Some advantages are that I bonded better with some students compared to when I would be teaching them in class. No behavioural issues teaching remotely.

Can focus on those students who do complete tasks, ...

More flexibility for staff and students. Providing additional resources to students can support their needs and facilitate self-directed learning.

3.3113 We all learned new skills

Despite teachers and schools getting such short notice they invested considerable personal and professional energy into getting set up for distance learning. This entailed in many cases the need for school leaders, teachers and students to upskill in the use of technology. It meant a change to pedagogical practices as the need to connect with learners was a central theme in many responses. Many teachers talked about how this move to distance teaching forced them to be more creative. It also meant students had to learn skills around using technology to record learning and upload videos, artefacts and so on.

The level of digital skills being developed in the nation is astounding. Both amongst students and teachers. If schools facilitated a proper remote learning response, many of their students would have developed skills that could not be accomplished within a traditional class setting. i.e. computational thinking, working independently, time management, creativity, and others. The pre-covid digital plan that schools were attempting (often unsuccessfully) has been obliterated. The level of compulsory independent upskilling that took place amongst the teaching body is off the charts. I feel that where there was much discomfort felt in the teaching body, this was the seismic change that was needed within the teaching profession.

ICT skills have improved and there are more opportunities to think outside the box.

Good for teaching languages in some ways. Timid students will record themselves. You don't have to strain to hear or speak.

The advantages are the record that is kept virtually of the interactions. It helps when planning and feeding back to students.

Advantages - flexible - consolidation of pupils digital skills - up skilling staff - pupils take ownership of learning - eye opener in terms of outdoor learning and importance of life skills.

Some skills developed in distance education are now being used in classes after re-opening. These mean that students will have access to materials even if they miss a class. As one teacher said “we will never have a snow day again”. Learning will not stop when face-to-face is not possible. Distance education is now part of Irish education.

The only advantage I see for remote learning was no commuting. There were some online/e- learning tools that have made in person learning better. For example I am now saving everything to the cloud so students who have missed a day have better opportunities to catch up.

I am now still using the school teams to mark homework and think I will use it from now on as the record of progress is great for me and the student.

When students engage, it allows us to continue regardless of lockdown/illness. Languages can be practised by sending oral recordings. It cuts out paper. However, there is no end to the times that students will ask questions and everything is slower.

However, many say any benefit is far outweighed by the disadvantages.

Teachers and children learn new I.T. skills which is great and when the schools were shut, the children continued to learn as best they could. However, the amount of screen time, children not having adequate internet speed, parents not willing to engage with remote learning and the amount of time spent preparing for the classes outweighs the benefits.

Difficult to promote collaborative work online. Teachers thinking outside the box to engage students but there is the challenge of not having enough time to cover course. Too much teacher talk at times. Good opportunity to learn by co teaching with colleagues

Blended learning would be best for our large urban school. As a 1to1 iPad school remote learning works well for us. Managing parent expectations is the challenge. Some have unrealistic demands as parents with regard to how teachers can support their children.

There were more disadvantages listed than advantages.

3.312 Disadvantages

The disadvantages are to do with availability of technology, engaging with students, loss of social contact and concerns for SEN students. The following is a typical response on the disadvantages of distance education.

Not same level of engagement and interaction with pupils and colleagues. Vulnerable pupils no longer have your daily support in the same way as they would if school building is open. Particularly where parents don't engage with online learning tasks. Concerns grow for these children and their wellbeing. At infant level, much of the learning is 'hands on' and experiential. This cannot be achieved to the same level by parents at home and through teaching remotely. While parents may have been doing their best, they are not qualified teachers and cannot replace classroom learning. Social skills, friendships and relationships of the pupils are affected in a negative way. Regression of special needs children not attending school every day.

There was considerable agreement on the following comment that disadvantaged children become more disadvantaged. For this reason the following comments are very relevant.

I can't see any advantages apart from developing staff ICT proficiency and communication. Disadvantages are too many to mention. We need to keep our schools open during this pandemic. The alternative will do immense damage. The stark reality of this teacher's experience of the disparity of funding for schools is very evident in this comment.

Negative – home environments in many households in Urban DEIS Band 1 not conducive to remote learning. – Disparity of support given by schools and teachers within schools not acceptable – lack of IT funding in schools clearly evident but unlikely to change.

Students and teachers miss one another personally and educationally. Some topics are better explained in a classroom situation. Overall it increases teachers workload. Some students do not have access to necessary internet connection or devices, so this hinders their educational progression. Some students also had to mind siblings as their parents were working remotely.

It is good for pupils in terms of building independence. It is a poor substitute generally speaking for face-to-face teaching I feel.

Absolutely hated being confined to the house, on duty 24/7 it felt like, depressed feeling guilty and useless – should have been supporting my students more effectively – media and tabloid press putting out the idea that teachers were getting paid to sit at home – very bad for my morale and wellbeing. For students; social isolation, lack of interaction with friends, boredom, loss of routine, reduction in exercise – disadvantaged through loss of the right to attend school.

It is regretful that the evident advantages available for children who miss days of school being able to see class material, maybe zoom in to a class and so on is not possible for many due to lack of technology. Clearly, following this lockdown technology is more integrated into teaching and learning and therefore needs to be available to all students.

3.3121 Not the same level of interaction, more mistakes made by students, real time correction not able to happen.

The online environment is not able to meet all the needs of the students. It is at a distance and therefore lacks that crucial relational aspect of face-to-face teaching. The student is not always on camera so facial expressions are lost, the real time responses crucial in teaching are lost. Opportunities for individualised feedback in the moment can be lost. However, it must be noted that respondents did say that feedback on work ,while time consuming, was possible through the use of uploaded work on various platforms. See comments above also about language education.

It is not satisfactory as you lose the enormous social capital generated within the school community. Many families have IT related issues limiting their ability to engage. It is much more difficult to motivate students and monitor their level of engagement.

Not the same level of interaction, more mistakes made by students, real time corrects not able to happen.

Disadvantages no interaction, collaboration and peer learning. Poor opportunities for creativity, poetry, drama, dance, music.

Students needed support in non-academic areas which was difficult to provide. SEN students have needs that cannot be met from a distance.

Students needed much support in non-academic areas which was harder to provide. Very difficult to maintain engagement with the more at risk students, students had no safe place to escape to every day. Please be aware I am not in a disadvantaged area, there are difficulties in even the most affluent schools.

Kids with SEN do not engage. At all! It's not fair on them and it's not fair on parents. They need respite. They don't need extra work and teach their kids.

It puts parents under pressure. Pupils with SEN are affected. Pupils lose interest in their improvement. Behaviour of some has gotten worse. Literacy and numeracy skills suffered.

3.3122 Technology inequalities

Technological inequalities are experienced by many families and while this is the case for individuals and families, distance education is adding to inequality.

Some students don't engage. Difficult to correct on an iPad. Sitting in front of a screen all day is very tiring. Prefer to be with the students in a classroom.

The kids with devices and internet access continue to work and learn those without resources lose out more, and are further disadvantaged.

Not all students have access to devices, connections are not always reliable.

I don't see any advantages for DEIS school, families or the community. Many were trying to do work from their mobile phones with no WIFI. Mobile data bills were too expensive for families and no solution to this has been reached.

Disadvantage is number of students with technical issues that are expecting me to solve the problems. Also length of time it takes to read and correct work online.

It is not satisfactory as you lose the enormous social capital generated within the school community. Many families have IT related issues limiting their ability to engage. It is much more difficult to motivate students and monitor their level of engagement.

3.3123 Impacted on work-life balance

As we have seen throughout the data, distance education had a negative impact for most teachers in terms of work-life balance.

Some families didn't engage, I was working and thinking of school 24/7 and I really missed our classroom and school life!

Disadvantages: a lack of community/ camaraderie among staff. Some teachers doing the bare minimum. Huge worries around broadcasting live classes; we had issues with students recording teachers and superimposing their heads onto other bodies and then that's there on the Internet forever.

Teaching remotely has the advantages of spending more time at home with family but allows too much access to teachers by parents and students resulting in the work home life barrier being merged... Teaching remotely requires a lot of time with preparation and correcting.... Most of it spent in front of a computer or laptop... This is not teaching.... All of the planning and preparation for none of the interaction or fun..

3.34 Wellbeing

Given the amount of additional stress that teachers have experienced, and continue to experience during the pandemic, along with the impact that remote teaching has on their work-life balance, it is not surprising that 6 out of 10 teachers reported their wellbeing as worse than the same time the previous year. Figure 15 provides further detail. This finding highlights the urgent need for prioritising teachers' wellbeing over the coming months and years, to ensure that the pandemic does not leave lasting effects on their mental health.

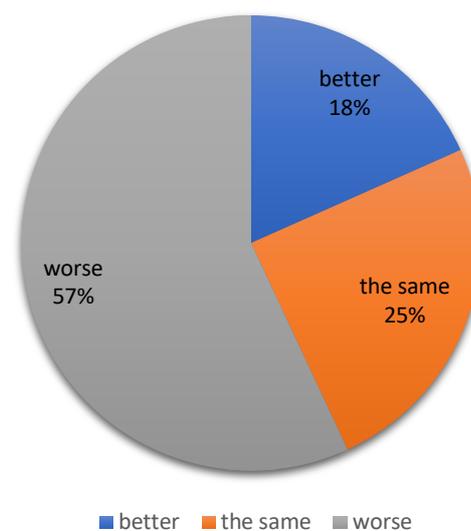


Figure 16. Comparison of teachers' wellbeing levels during the pandemic and the same time previous year

When the teachers whose wellbeing worsened during the pandemic were compared with those who reported their wellbeing as remaining the same or improving, there were statistically significant differences in their responses. Those who felt worse, experienced more stress ($M=2.87$, $SD=.40$) compared with those who felt the same ($M=2.33$, $SD=.67$) or reported their wellbeing to be better ($M=1.76$, $SD=.87$) [$F(2, 401)=110.35$, $p<.001$]. Also,

they expressed greater need for their school to focus on their wellbeing ($M=4.33$, $SD=.88$) than those whose wellbeing was the same ($M=3.85$, $SD=1.06$) as a year before [$F(2, 399)=9.05$, $p<.001$]. This finding illustrates that teachers who are struggling demonstrate self-awareness about their mental health issues and explicitly ask their schools, management bodies, and potentially the Department of Education for help.

Furthermore, when the groups of teachers whose wellbeing (1) worsened, (2) remained the same, or (3) improved were compared with each other, statistically significant differences were found in how much class-time they spent establishing behavioural norms and routines after the school re-opened [$F(2, 398)=3.06$, $p<.05$]. Teachers who felt worse ($M=3.79$, $SD=1.15$) spent more time helping students to re-establish their routines than teachers who felt better ($M=3.52$, $SD=1.3$), or the same ($M=3.47$, $SD=1.14$) than they had the previous year. This highlights the impact that students have on teachers' wellbeing and the interconnected relationship of the school community living in the educational ecosystem. This is why teachers' wellbeing needs to be actively addressed in the post-pandemic educational system.

Moreover, no statistically significant differences were found among teachers whose wellbeing was affected by the pandemic, in relation to how useful they found the guidance documents from the Department of Education, nor how well their school's Covid-19 response plan worked. This means that the guidance from DES and individual schools don't have a direct impact on teachers' perception of wellbeing. The personal response to the pandemic, changes in professional practice, and school-related social domain play a greater role in their wellbeing than policies and guidelines.

Taking all into consideration, the majority of teachers reported that their mental health was negatively affected by the pandemic. Many have experienced more stress, lower levels of wellbeing, and an imbalance in a way they manage their work and personal lives. Some of the factors that affected their wellbeing related to the changes in teachers' practice during the pandemic, the impact of Covid-19 on their personal lives, and worries about their students. Other factors include teachers' increased engagement with remote learning, and associated with it social isolation, as well as changes they observed in students' behaviour which directly impacted their wellbeing. Given that the guidelines provided by DES and school planning had little impact on teachers' perceived wellbeing, more effort is required by

supporting organisations and departments to address the decline is teachers' wellbeing. However, further research is required to identify the impact of each one of these measures on teachers' wellbeing.



3.4 Positive Transformation

Despite the numerous challenges that teachers experienced, in the current study, many also reported psychological growth from all the suffering they experienced and witnessed in the first six months of the pandemic. A total of 4 out of 5 participants experienced at least one indicator of Post-Covid Growth (83%), with a third of teachers (29%) reporting 4 or 5 indicators of growth. Table 2 provides the details of teachers' growth experience.

Number of Post-Covid Growth Symptoms	Number of Teachers	Percentage of Teachers
0	70	17%
1	66	16%
2	81	20%
3	72	18%
4	73	18%
5	42	11%

Table 1. The prevalence of Post-Covid Growth among teachers.

Of the five possible indicators of growth, the most prevailing was teachers' appreciation for life ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.32$), followed by relating to others ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.48$). The least experienced growth-indicator occurred in the domain of spiritual change ($M=2.14$, $SD=1.29$). Further detail can be found in table 3.

Post-Covid Growth Domain	M	SD
Relating to others	3.41	1.48
New possibilities	2.74	1.38
Personal strength	3.21	1.54
Spiritual change	2.14	1.29
Appreciation for life	4.12	1.32

Table 2. The prevalence of Post-COVID Growth domains.

3.41 Stress and Growth

Experiencing stress is often unwelcomed, yet moderate amounts of stress are associated with feeling more satisfied in life and psychological growth. Among the teachers that have experienced psychological growth, most reported to be more stressed than they had been the previous year. Specifically, many appreciated their lives more (chi-square=16.83, $p<.001$), saw new possibilities in their lives (chi-square=23.13, $p<.001$), and their relationships with others have improved (chi-square=6.20, $p<.05$) during the pandemic. At the same time, no differences were found between teachers' perception of stress and their realisation of personal strength, or spiritual changes. Figure 16 provides further detail.

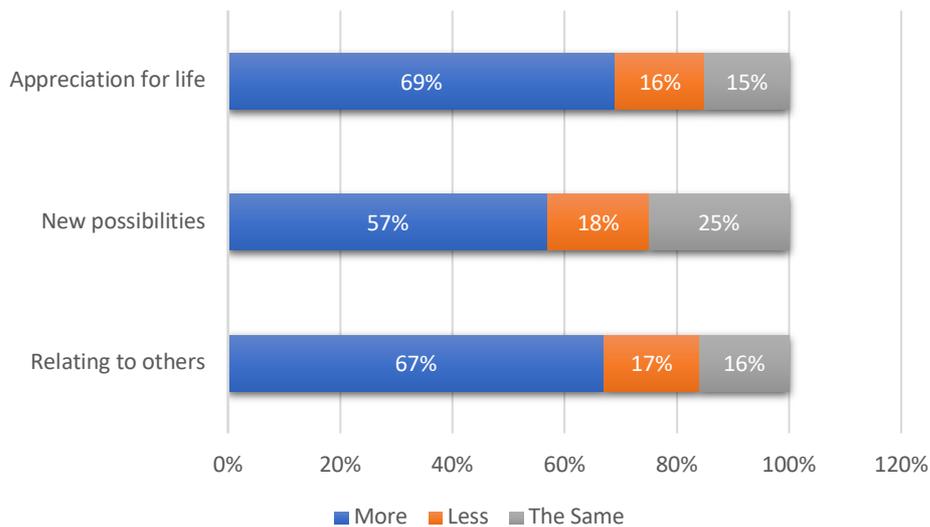


Figure 17. Statistically significant differences between teachers experiencing various levels of stress and their psychological growth.

3.42 Examples of professional growth

Apart from the personal growth, changes have occurred in teachers' professional growth. For example, a third of the teachers (37%) felt their confidence in face-to-face teaching has grown post-COVID. Two thirds of the teachers (63%) said that as a result of the COVID-related changes to their practice, they intend to use online and blended learning much more post-pandemic. Furthermore, a third of teachers (35%) said that they will involve the students' parents much more in their learning than they had pre-pandemic. Please see Figures 17, 18 and 19 for further detail. Therefore, apart from the additional stress that Covid-19 caused teachers in schools in Ireland, it has also resulted in positive changes. This balanced approach to viewing the impact of the pandemic is important to understand it fully.

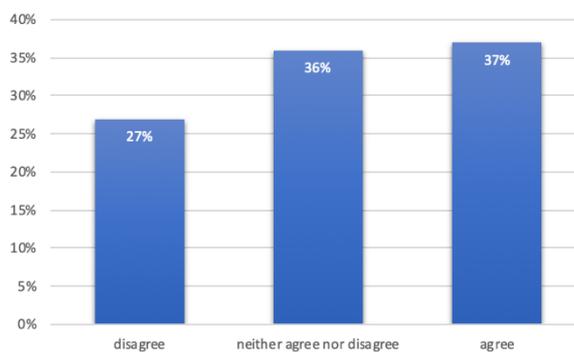


Figure 18. The percentage of teachers' confidence growth in face-to-face teaching post-Covid.

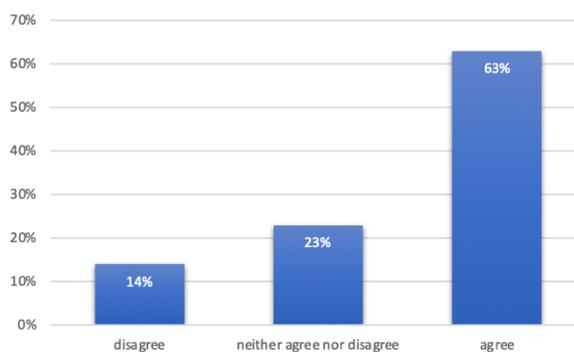


Figure 19. The percentage of teachers who intend to use more online and blended learning post-Covid..

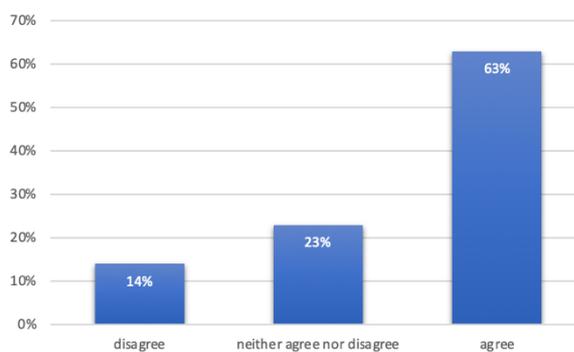


Figure 20. The percentage of teachers who will involve their students' parents more in their learning post-Covid.

3.5 Teachers' Concerns and Required Supports

3.51 Concerns for colleagues, students and self

In this section there were many long contributions and considerable agreement among many participants on the main concerns for them. After analysis the following key concerns were most evident. A small number of participants did not have any concerns and felt that they were just getting on with life amid this pandemic. The majority, over 70% of quotes mentioned concerns for mental and /or physical health of their colleagues, students or themselves. Teachers report that they are pragmatic and are getting on with education albeit in a very different way. Linked to the supports needed as discussed below they talk about the need for continued and focused assistance for schools.

The following themes are discussed in this section.

- Concerned around the lack of clear communication
- Concerned for students learning and progression
- Concerned there will be another lockdown
- Concerned for society and life after the pandemic – the long term effects on wellbeing
- Concerns around dealing with on-going implementation of COVID requirements
- Concerns around the change to teaching, learning and assessment.

3.511 Concerned around the lack of clear communication

Many of the comments around safety and issues around curriculum are to do with lack of communication or unclear communication. This an issue that needs to be reflected on by all involved in education.

Both staff and students are burning out swiftly. We don't have enough resources to sustain schools being open safely, there is seemingly no plan for what to do next meaning there will be more labour for us all in creating a system that suits our school context and making it work. More than that though the indecision and not knowing is toxic. If you know what a situation will be you can plan for it, prepare the children and act accordingly. We have been in a stressed limbo for nearly 8 months.

Children unable to access essential services e.g. CAMHS, school age team, Speech & Language, counselling, psychotherapy, what are the plans in place to deal with this? Also, walls had to be demolished at last minute to allow for physical distancing. Concern we won't receive funding to complete necessary construction. - Irreparable damage done to relationship with DES & union.

lack of engagement of students online, drop off in motivation, classrooms now are very restrictive and not much active teaching and learning going on, everything keeps changing, lack of clarity at times from DES.

Most of my concerns are about the students, I will be fine, I am a strong minded person and I will always come out strong from any situation but the pressure is mounting, it has reduced me to tears a few times this year which never happened before, it feels like we are totally alone. Life has changed for everyone but expectations based on an absence of guidelines and training have morphed into a mountain of worry and uncertainty.

As outlined in the literature review in this report, the DES published many documents since March 12th. From reading the thousands of comments here it is clear that some communications are not reaching teachers or are too late or are not clear in focus. This last comment mentions the absence of guidelines and training. This lack of training may allude to distance education.

3.512 Concerned for students learning and progression

The concerns for students come up under three main areas, the lack of technology to engage, the change to the school environment and their mental health and wellbeing.

I am very concerned about students anxiety levels and I have concern about blended learning and their ability to access online classes/work.

Concern for marginalised students around mental health and issues around digital divide and the routine and positive influences that students lose when not in school

Concerns about airborne nature of Covid and transmission in schools, about not being able to facilitate the same rich learning experience as other years, about not being able to properly or meaningfully support students having difficulties.

I have to work very closely with special needs children so social distancing isn't an option. I worry about both mine and their safety.

The loss of progress for key groups of students is highlighted by many in the data. Teachers are concerned that this lack of progress, or regression in some cases, may lead to drop out.

The regression evident in all pupils over lockdown particularly those without supports at home. Some of my colleagues are very worried and stressed about working when the numbers are rising.

Many children have fallen behind in their learning and it is uncertain if they will remain in school long enough for us to compensate for the loss.

Students in homes that are not positive/supportive. Kids becoming isolated/depressed. Kids with SEN losing gains.

SEN children have regressed hugely, children with little family support really miss school

From these concerns it is very obvious that teachers know their students and know what supports individuals need. There needs to be a more concerted effort to collaborate with teachers on focusing supports where needed.

3.513 Concerned there will be another lockdown

This section is very telling in that the concerns mentioned here have come to pass as we are in another lockdown.

Blended/digital/online, I don't know if I will be able to do what is expected if I am at home with my own 3 kids too.

Reopening has been a huge success. Children, staff and parents are much happier. We cannot allow further restrictions result in school closures.

The safety of students at home if another lockdown happens.

Low levels concerns about all our safety. However, I believe that the risks associated with school closures are greater than working within them at this time.

From the data it is obvious that teachers have concerns around another lockdown for a very specific cohort of their school population.

Mental health and wellbeing, their home lives especially if we go into lockdown again and they don't have school as an outlet. I work with some people who are at high risk and I worry and I feel for them.

Not all children thrive at home. For some school is the best place to be for various reasons.

I hope students wellbeing will be unharmed as we move forward. I worry that students, in particular students with educational needs, will have gone backwards in their progression throughout the time they were out of school over the lockdown.

3.514 Concerned for society and life after the pandemic – the long term effects on wellbeing

While there were not many comments on this theme it was mentioned in different parts of the questionnaire responses. What this highlights is the need to plan to deal with the long-term effects of the pandemic on the social and emotional wellbeing of students and teachers.

I worry about what effect this will have in the long term on the emotional and social growth of people, are we creating a society which will fail to connect with each other from fear. I see my colleagues trying their best but always feeling as if they are falling short of the mark, that we are all being expected to be everything to everyone and as a result we are not doing anything to our very best but doing lots of things half way.

Some of my colleagues are at breaking point; the children are on high alert re rising numbers of COVID-19 cases, but are enjoying the social aspect of school. I worry about the impact if the curtailment on sports, and the rigidity of pods, social distancing, etc on the children.

Students mental health and social wellbeing. No other concerns really. The environment in school is as safe as it can be.

Lack of appreciation about what we do. Everyone thinks they're a teacher simply because they have been through the Education System. Wellbeing is at an all-time low.

There are many reports and guidelines that have come out since the start of this pandemic that point to issues around mental health and wellbeing (see for example O'Connor et al., 2020; Duffield, & O'Hare, 2020; DES, 2020), these data would suggest that a school level plan needs to be put in place to deal with the on-going issues in this area.

3.515 Concerns around dealing with on-going implementation of COVID requirements

There are on-going concerns around health and safety as schools re-opened after September 2020. These same concerns will be in schools for the next re-opening.

Concerned some students will struggle to re-engage with learning and won't receive the support from home if they are out or we go back to a lockdown. I'm concerned about colleagues being traumatised by the Covid restrictions that they will burn themselves out. I wonder if I am providing the right support and learning environment for students and staff. I'm concerned about management burnout from ever more demands and Friday evening circulars. I know we are doing as much as we can but is it enough. I worry the lack of social distancing will bring more Covid through our doors.

I'm concerned for students, colleagues and families health. We want to make sure everyone stays healthy within our school community. Classrooms are crowded, it is hard to enforce even 1m between pupils in some classrooms and kids, by their nature, are sociable. They can't help turning around for a chat to another pod. I hope we don't have an outbreak because we are all doing the best we can. I worry about the health of a colleague who has high anxiety around the whole Covid situation. Burn-out is a real danger due to the exhaustion of being on high alert at all times.

School have done a very good job of making school safe and helping staff with concerns but I feel the issue of the virus being airborne and therefore ventilation and hours that students / teachers spending in schools not being addressed. Students do not understand what 2 metres is . They do not understand the need for ventilation and neither do many staff.

Lack of social distancing, lack of testing availability, lack of quick turnaround for contact tracing when cases present. Dept of Ed's haphazard approach to things - e.g. last minute note about opening windows for ventilation, 3 hour's notice of school closure, telling principals that teachers have their own masks and should wear them (rather than them be supplied), etc, etc. The DES need to be more proactive and less reactive.

The tension around policing the regulations has come up at various times and how this is having a negative impact on teacher-student relationships.

The tension and arguments being created between staff and students about social distancing. It appears to be a never ending battle at breaks and lunches.

The restrictions have had a negative impact on the collaborative and social aspects of working with colleagues and this has caused isolation and impacted on mental health.

Comradery between staff has disappeared. No quiet chat over coffee, no staffroom.

I would be very concerned about staff who live alone, who are far from their home counties and families and may not see loved ones for a very long time. Work - We are

unable to meet as a full staff and I am finding that hard. I don't like the small groups that we have to now stay in.

I worry for people's mental health most - I think this is a very tough time for families, pupils and colleagues in general.

3.516 Concerns around the change to teaching, learning and assessment.

Of all the areas talked about in these data, the change to learning and teaching since March 12th is the most concerning. It is very obvious from comments that schools re-opening in September is seen as a very good move for teachers and students, however, it is school not as it had been but in a new changed environment.

I worry that students are disengaged and falling behind, especially ones who don't have digital access. I worry that school will never be the same again. I hardly see my colleagues as we're split into different staffrooms. I have no clue how much teaching and learning is taking place as I can't take up copies. I can barely hear my students behind masks.

I have concerns about the quality of my online teaching. Concerns for students going to overflow centres from my class and their ability to learn from there isolated from the rest of the class.

I am concerned that students are being denied the full experience of being a teenager in a secondary school setting, particularly in TY, when so many experiences are no longer possible.

Isolation, no socialising in school. Students much quieter because of masks. Difficult to get all the work done.

Many of the primary school teachers voiced concerns for the progress of their students who may come from homes where due to economic challenges they lack key infrastructure including space to work or study at home, good broadband connection, and essential technology to support teaching and learning.

Concerned that students are not getting an education. Not all parents can be the teachers that their children need, that's why we have school. I have personally seen much regression in pupils in primary school.

I am concerned about teaching in an effective manner, trying to bridge any gaps created as a result of the long-term school closure while also trying to be consistent with cleaning routines, social distancing etc

The nuances of communication are gone and in that the subtle communication of feelings is lost.

In particular, teachers voice concern for the Leaving Certificate students who will sit their examination in 2021.

No clarity for students in terms of mocks, exams, grading!! They are driving themselves mad wondering and deliberating, guessing what might happen.

I am very concerned about current 5th year students whose education has been very negatively impacted to date and I worry that they may already be completely detached from education and reluctant to participate fully in it.

I can't meet the demands of the perfect teacher, I was meant to go on a Geography field study today and I had to cancel it. Will I get a date again? Can we go again? If we can't go and need to buy equipment, can the school do that? What happens nationwide with the 20% for the project if restrictions keep preventing these things. I emailed the SEC about this and have no guidance, the Politics and society project is based on working with others and the project is proving so hard as a result. I have not received training yet for the same project in Politics and Society?

I worry about the effect that the Leaving Certificate estimated grades system will have on students futures, motivation and if next year the exam results will be incorrect due to the estimation of grades. I hope students get the points that they deserve and do their very best to achieve.

In conclusion, while the concerns voiced here are not really different to concerns voiced in other parts of this report, what they do tell us is that teachers need to be consulted and communicated with around the progress of students, students wellbeing, and how to plan for post-pandemic teaching. These concerns also highlight the personal, emotional and physical toll working during a pandemic has had on our teachers. Many mention that they are at breaking point.

3.52 Supports needed for education

Despite large numbers of teachers experiencing growth during COVID, they recognise that more support is needed to assist them with their own and their students' development. Half of them (50%) believe that more action needs to be taken to improve students' wellbeing post-pandemic, whereas the majority (77%) believe that the Department of Education, Management Bodies and school leaders should put more effort into improving teachers' wellbeing. One teacher mentioned that "support for staff wellbeing is crucial for sustainability".

From the qualitative data teachers mentioned a number of supports they feel would enhance their ability to provide for learning during the pandemic. The following were the most often mentioned supports.

3.521 Smaller classes

Space was mentioned many times and the need for smaller groups while in school. This is also linked with the need for one-to-one feedback for students.

Less numbers in class or more space.

More time for pupils with SEN. In order to cater for students' learning needs we need smaller classes as feedback is now more important than ever.

I teach in a class of 32 pupils, I can't social distance indoors and I feel I'm in an unsafe work environment .

3.522 Need for forward planning

Need for a Plan B if we need to move to distance education again. This plan B would mean planning for how to get the students who did not engage to engage. In some cases, this is about access to technology and broadband.

We know SEN students and our exam students missed out on so much during the lockdown. Hence why a plan B must be produced and must be produced as soon as possible.

Laptops for staff. Technology resources working well in school. Ensuring that all students have what they need to engage with online learning.

DES directive to allow teachers to take time to cater for wellbeing of pupils, to find where our pupils are at academically and socially, and to have some understanding of the changed educational landscape. Support for staff wellbeing is crucial for sustainability.

3.523 Targeted professional development

Explicit training in how to differentiate learning and assessment when distance teaching

We need some training on how to meet the needs of individual students from a distance through a screen. We have now got online but we need to make the experience more beneficial for all students and we need support to do this.

Less contact hours, more planning hours given we are now teaching in unusual and strange circumstances. Ways to assess students!!! I have no idea how some are performing due to lack of facial expressions and summative assessment. The formative feedback is also fairly limited at the moment.

3.524 Open communication

Teachers asked for enhanced communication between all involved in education. The lack of open communication is leading to enhanced anxiety and stress.

There needs to be better communication between all, we cannot be reading about decisions on Twitter or the newspaper. Our Principals need to communicate better with us around key decisions.

The lack of communication, what feels like cases been hidden purposely this creates fear and anxiety, they can be communicated without GDPR issues very easily. It feels like we are political pawns for the economy at all costs and risks. This is not good enough.

3.525 Additional supports are needed for Transition Year classes and practical subjects

Support for students in TY and those studying practical subjects is mentioned in many comments. This issue is linked with the need for more focused professional development.

Teaching practical subjects online is not really possible. Also, we need to come up with more imaginative solutions to work experience and trips and so on for our TY kids.

3.526 Special Educational Needs students require additional supports

Support for students with Special Educational Needs has to be evaluated at school and policy level in light of the pandemic. There are some teachers reporting that students have regressed. There needs to be targeted supports for these students.

More SEN teachers, reduced attendance of pupils. 100% attendance every day is untenable. 50% would allow for better teaching and learning, distancing and hygiene.



4. Lessons Learnt from Teachers' Experiences

A week after the first, COVID-related school closure approximately 50% of school leaders predicted that it will have a negative impact on teachers, and the remaining 50% were either undecided or believed that it may have a positive effect on them (Burke & Dempsey, 2020). As one of the school leaders put it, the impact of COVID would be “both positive and negative; Positive (...) opportunity for us to upskill in IT (...); negative is the uncertainty, not knowing how best to support the children, picking up afterwards in terms of the kids' psychological and academic positions” (p.62). Six months later, current research demonstrated that indeed, leaders' predictions were confirmed. Teachers continue to find it challenging to work during the pandemic, however, their struggle has resulted in their psychological growth and opened an array of opportunities for a changed education of tomorrow. As we reflect upon the changes that have occurred in teachers and their profession, here are the four main lessons learnt from their meaningful experience:

- Curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment have changed significantly – new measures are required to bridge the education during- and post-pandemic.
- The pandemic took a toll on teachers' mental health – active supports are necessary to alleviate their stress.
- Despite high levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing, most teachers made their challenges meaningful and kept going.
- In the world of silos caused by social distancing rules and a myriad of restrictions, teachers ask for more open communication between all parties involved.

Let us delve deeper into each one of these lessons learnt.

4.1 Curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment.

The school environment has changed and this has impacted on curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers have reported that some students have not progressed in their learning and that they need to catch up. They talk about how technology availability (both hardware and broadband) has increased inequality in education. Addressing the digital divide between DEIS and non-DEIS schools identified by Mohan and colleagues (2020) is now more important than ever. We know that economic disadvantage may mean a lack of key infrastructure including space to study at home and essential technology to support teaching and learning. We have the evidence that this is a reality, therefore we need focused funding and plans put in place to help address this inequality. Teachers talk about individual students who they know have not progressed, or regressed and teachers are best placed to know and advise how best to address this going forward.

Technology can support teaching and learning but appears to lack efficacy in areas of curriculum such as practical subjects and in assessment practices. Professional development needs to focus on how to upskill teachers in these areas. While distance education was not desirable for most respondents, many did say that they will use technology more now in their teaching. Over a third of teachers reported they felt more confident in their teaching after the experience of distance education. Two thirds of the teachers (63%) said that as a result of the COVID-related changes to their practice, they intend to use online and blended learning much more post-pandemic. Furthermore, a third of teachers (35%) said that they will involve the students' parents much more in their learning than they had pre-pandemic. These findings are significant for education as we come out of the pandemic. These gains need to be built on and enhanced. In data reported here many of the respondents alluded to how lack of access to technology and good broadband impacted on how students engaged. If teachers are now using technology more in their teaching then this digital divide needs to be addressed.

Transition Year (TY) was mentioned as a concern for some of the teachers. Jeffers (2020) provides some useful suggestions for adapting TY during the pandemic. He talks about schools where outdoor activities that allow social distancing have been used such as local studies, gardening, photography, orienteering, community clean-ups, and other environmental

pursuits. These and other changes need to be introduced into the curriculum to ensure the effective continuation of teaching and learning during and post-pandemic.

The other year group of particular concern is the current LC class of 2021. These students have missed out on four months of face-to-face teaching and are now back having distance education for the month of January. Learning is still happening but not for all students as some students do not engage in the online space. Critical decisions around curriculum choices and coverage needs to be made for this group, if not, there is a risk of just learning off information for an examination without experiencing the curriculum as it was meant to be. Teachers report that teaching under COVID restrictions has changed the environment of the classroom where collaborative work is not happening, students are reluctant to talk and many teachers report returning to lecture style teaching. One teacher said they felt the students had lost their voice. This will impact on learning for these groups and this impact will need to be considered for the subsequent years of education. Therefore, focused action needs to be taken to address this.

Additional research on how distance education is impacting on students and teachers during this lockdown would be very beneficial as it would tell us if the investment in educational technology has targeted the groups most affected in the first lockdown and it would provide evidence of the skills developed and enhanced since March 12th 20220 for all involved.

4.2 Mental health

The pandemic took a toll on teachers' mental health. Our research demonstrated that teachers have experienced an array of personal and professional challenges that impacted their mental health. Also, they mentioned a lot of concerns that remain unresolved. Overall, teachers in the current study felt more stressed and reported their wellbeing as being lower during the pandemic than a year before. This finding is in line with the international research showing that teachers' stress has increased exponentially during the pandemic (Kim et al., 2020; Urcos et al., 2020) and the impact of it has yet to subside.

To date, DES and schools have provided a lot of public-health guidance about navigating the school community through the pandemic. However, little assistance has been given in relation to supporting teachers' personal wellbeing. The current study provides the evidence

that whilst teachers find the guidance useful, it has little effect on their personal wellbeing. Therefore, a more targeted approach is required from DES, management bodies, and school management to help teachers cope with the additional pressures associated with teaching during the pandemic. According to our findings, this may include easing their workload, decreasing their class-size, decreasing their contact-hours, which would allow them the time to plan, providing them with a medium and long-term plan that would reduce their anxiety associated with the uncertainty, as well as assisting them with technological support. All these changes would have a more direct impact on improving teachers' personal wellbeing than less targeted approaches. This is in line with past research indicating that teachers' perception that the management cares, along with an explicit provision of support structures predicts their personal wellbeing more than setting up policies about it, or organising wellbeing events for them (Doran, Burke & Healy, forthcoming). After all, it is the action that matters, not an intention to act. Therefore, actions need to be taken to help teachers enhance their personal wellbeing to cope more effectively during the pandemic.

A particularly worrisome finding from the current research highlights the impact of Covid restrictions on the student-teacher relationship. Physical barriers that exasperate the negative impact on this relationship include the social distancing rules, mask-wearing, and remote teaching. Given that student-teacher relationship is one of the strongest predictors of both students' and teachers' wellbeing (Burke, 2021), provisions should be put in place to create pathways for rebuilding a quality connection among school community during, and post pandemic. We suggest that a group is created comprised of the representatives from the partners in education, for example, the DES, management bodies, students, parents, and most importantly teachers, the aim of which is to find the best way forward to address it.

4.3 Post-COVID growth

Despite high levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing experienced by teachers during the pandemic, our research demonstrated that they were able to make their challenges meaningful. Their responses highlighted the passion they have for their work, an extraordinary dedication they exhibit towards their students, as well as an overwhelming resilience they displayed when trying to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. Their resilience goes beyond an adaptation to the changed circumstances, and moves into the realm of growth. Their most prominent psychological growth occurred in respect of their newly

found appreciation for life, followed by relating to others, and realising their personal strength. Their experiences are consistent with the experiences of the general public during the previous SARS-pandemic whereby individuals affected by it displayed similar growth (Cheng, Wai-Man, & Tsang, 2006). This study, however, provides a unique evidence of growth experiences among teachers. Further studies should be carried out with larger samples to ensure the consistency of findings among educators.

One of the main reasons for the need to identify the growth among teachers is to help them increase their resilience, adapt to changed circumstances, and cope more effectively with the negative impact of the pandemic on their work and personal lives (Burke & Arslan, 2020, Walsh, 2020). Previous research showed that growth happens naturally, however, it can be facilitated by taking actions, such as a reflection on how the adversity impacted our life appreciation, changing a direction in our lives, realising personal strengths, relating to others, spiritual transformation, emotional regulation, education, and disclosure (Joseph, 2011; Tedeschi, 2020). Therefore, organisations that support teachers are encouraged to create a platform for such reflections and personally meaningful changes to help teachers cope more effectively with the pandemic.

4.4 Need for more open communication.

The majority of teachers in this research report that they are happy to be back teaching face-to-face albeit in a very different environment. They have been dealing with a changed environment and a changed role as educators and COVID rules enforcers. Students have been really good at adhering to rules while in school with few exceptions. The positive stories from schools need to be highlighted and learned from. Too many respondents in this study feel vilified in the media. It might be time to celebrate the work of teachers during this pandemic and how they have grown personally and professionally and adapted in a very short time to teaching in a very different environment.

Many of the causes of stress and concerns teachers report here could be alleviated by more open communication between all bodies involved in education. It is accepted that in a pandemic very little is definite and that the sands are always shifting, however, releasing guidelines on Friday evening is not desirable at such a stressful time. Teachers need time to

digest circulars and guidance. The DES and other bodies have provided numerous publications since March 12th aimed at schools and teachers. The messages can be sometimes lost in translation or not accessed at all. It would be good to set up systems for more open focused communication. Perhaps working with unions and management bodies in the circulation of key documents could be considered.

Teachers feel that the rules around close contacts is different in schools than in other work places. There are many mentions of HSE contact tracing and testing. Clear guidance is needed to address this conception ahead of the next school re-opening.

4.5 Recommendations

Following on from this study, we recommend the following actions:

- Setting up a committee, a citizens' assembly where all the bodies involved in education including DES, policy makers, management bodies, unions, parents, teachers, and students would meet with an aim to focus on resolving emerging issues in education. There is a need to build on the lessons learned in this time of change such as the use of technology to support learning, the enhanced role of parents in education, the competences developed by young people around independent learning. We need to look at how to address the losses experienced by many in education.
- Enhanced funding for psychological services for teachers and planning for targeted supports for teacher wellbeing.
- Enhanced funding to address the digital divide for schools.
- Further research on the impact of the pandemic on education and school communities.

Relationships are at the heart of education. These include teacher-student, teacher-teacher, teacher-parent and a relationship between teachers and the education community, such as DES, unions, and the management bodies. During adversity, such as the pandemic, relationships are often tested, which results in parties trusting each other more, or less thereafter. Our research demonstrated teachers' great dedication towards building relationships with their students. We hope that the findings from our study will help the educational community to display similar dedication to helping teachers reduce their levels of stress and enhance their personal wellbeing. After all, in the times when the teachers need

support the most, it is the action of the education community, rather than an intention of action that matters.

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Appendix A

Date published	Report	Comments
6 th September 2020	Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate 2020 Report from the National Standardisation Group to the Independent Steering Committee and the Programme Board	The primary purpose of this report is to set out clearly to the Independent Steering Committee and the Programme Board for the Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades process the actions taken by the National Standardisation Group to ensure that the national standardisation process was carried out properly in accordance with its stated purposes.
5 th September 2020	Final Report on LC2020 Data Verification	This report provides a summary of the Educational Research Centre's (ERC's) data verification and quality assurance activities on the 2020 Leaving Certificate (LC2020) data, covering the period July early September.
2 nd September 2020	Letter of Opinion regarding the Calculated Grades System	Letter from the Independent Steering Committee (established in June 2020) on Calculated Grades to oversee the process of implementation of calculated grades from the perspective of quality assurance and integrity.

20 th July 2020	Calculated Grades 2020 External Reviewer Statement Statement in Advance of the Issue of Results September 2nd, 2020	Statement from an independent expert, Dr Janet Brown, unconnected with the design of the calculated grades model appointed to provide overall validation on the model, including the operation of the appeals system.
24 th April 2020	Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate 2020 Discussion paper for SEC-DES Technical Working Group on Calculated Results	This report was prepared as part of contingency planning for the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2020.
On-going during the process	https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8920c-leaving-cert-2020/	Page on gov.ie dedicated to LC 2020 with ten documents on calculated grades and appeals.

Table 3. Review of publications from DES on Calculated Grades in LC 2020