

# Primary Perspectives

Edition 10. Autumn 2020.

Covid-19 edition 2.

*This short newsletter is published once a term bringing you recent policy news, reports, research updates and the latest developments in Primary education.*

*This is a second special Covid-19 edition. I hope you enjoy it. Wishing you all a great Xmas!*

## School closures

Schools will be allowed to use inset days on Friday 18 December, to ensure staff can enjoy a “proper break”, said minister Nick Gibb. Schools are to schedule an inset training day on the last Friday of term instead of classes. There may be one less scheduled inset day in 2021 if schools do decide to close early. The Government wants there to be a “clear six days” ahead of Christmas Eve so teachers and heads do not have to “engage with track and trace issues” throughout the festive break. Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT school leaders’ union, warned that schools could see a “steep drop” in pupil attendance as parents seek to prioritise family safety ahead of Christmas.

In higher education, students will have staggered starting dates on their return to universities after the festive period, with some not expected back until as late as 7<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Students on placements or practical courses with a need for in-person teaching in England should return to university between January 4 and January 18. Other subjects will be taught online at the start of term, with students back between January 25 and February 7. Coronavirus tests should be offered to all students when they return to campus in the new year to help isolate those who are asymptomatic. Many universities are rolling out mass asymptomatic coronavirus testing in a bid to get students home safely ahead of the festive break. All universities will be offered testing facilities to give students two rapid lateral flow tests, three days apart, to control the spread of the virus.

## Lessons from Covid-19

### Schools need power to turn away pupils over Covid

Unions say schools need power to refuse to admit pupils who are sent back before self-isolation period finishes. Schools need more powers to turn away pupils who are sent home because of Covid-19 symptoms but then are sent back prematurely. The NASUWT teaching union says that it is increasingly concerned that this situation could put school staff and other pupils at risk of

contracting Covid-19. It is calling on the Department for Education to ensure schools can refuse to readmit a pupil who went off with Covid symptoms until either a 10-day isolation period has passed or proof of a negative coronavirus test can be provided. Government guidance states that: "[Schools should not request evidence of negative test results or other medical evidence before admitting children or welcoming them back after a period of self-isolation](#)".

### **DfE remote learning advice 'unhelpful', say teachers**

Eight in 10 teachers are dissatisfied with the way the DfE listens to feedback on its Covid-19 response, according to a poll by the Chartered College of Teaching. Two-thirds of teachers found government guidance on remote learning during the first national lockdown "unhelpful", new research shows.

More than 80 per cent of teachers are dissatisfied with how the Department for Education listened to feedback on its Covid-19 response between February and July.

The Chartered College said the department needs to work on greater consultation and timely guidance. In their comments, teachers called on the DfE to "listen to frontline staff", "give schools more notice" and "show support and understanding".

## **Inspection news**

Ofsted: 'Precautions' mean January inspections are safe

The watchdog said it had taken advice from Public Health England about how to undertake its inspections safely during the Covid-19 pandemic and says it will be able to carry out most school inspection activity during its monitoring inspections next term. Gradings will remain suspended until the summer term, but the inspectorate is set to start monitoring inspections of schools rated "inadequate" or "requires improvement" from January. Ofsted will continue to have the power to inspect a school if it has serious concerns, including safeguarding or remote education.

## **Early Years**

### **International Early Learning and Child Well-Being Study (IELS): National Report for England**

A DfE report published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) identifies the most significant factors affecting the development of five-year-old children across England. The report looked at factors affecting the development of five-year-old children in England. Analysis shows there are development gaps and identifies which groups of children may need additional support.

It shows that five-year-old children in England achieved similar development to their peers in Estonia – the highest-performing OECD country in the PISA study at age 15 – and greater development than children in the USA. IELS measured development in emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, self-regulation and social-emotional development. In England, a teacher-assessed module on physical development was added. Contextual information on the children, including background characteristics, their home learning environment and experience of early childhood education and

care was also collected through parent and teacher questionnaires. In total a nationally representative sample of 2,517 children from 191 schools took part in England.

#### Key Findings:

- Low birthweight was associated with lower physical and cognitive development, but not social and emotional development
- Children whose parents had reported them as having low birthweight had statistically significantly lower levels of emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, working memory and physical development at age 5 compared to their peers. The largest development gap was found in physical development – equivalent to approximately nine months, while these children were also three months' behind in emergent literacy, and four months' behind in emergent numeracy and working memory.
- Low birthweight was not significantly related to development in any of the social-emotional measures in IELS such as trust or emotion identification.
- Children's physical development is significantly related to deprivation and gender. Children who were eligible for free school meals were on average eight months' behind their more affluent peers for physical development. Five-year-old girls were on average nine months' ahead of boys.
- Children's development across different outcomes at five-years-old is highly interrelated. Five-year-old children with greater development in early literacy (including listening comprehension, phonological awareness and vocabulary) are more likely to have similarly strong development in early numeracy. There were also strong correlations between high development in mental flexibility and working memory, while physical development was strongly correlated with prosocial behaviour and Trust.
- Children with English as an additional language can be at risk in certain aspects of their development. Children with English as an additional language were approximately eight months' behind their peers for emergent literacy and three months' behind their peers for emergent numeracy.
- Persistence is associated with early development. Children whose teachers rated them as often or always' persistent at the age of five were more than 12 months' ahead of their peers rated as 'rarely or never' persistent for physical development. These children were also approximately 11 months' ahead of their peers in emergent literacy, and 8 months' ahead in emergent numeracy.

View this report at

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/939718/IELS\\_national\\_report\\_Dec\\_2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939718/IELS_national_report_Dec_2020.pdf)

## Diversity & Inclusion

### BERA Blogs

There are a series of BERA Blogs addressing the Black Lives Matter movement that raise important questions of racial justice in the UK. See <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/editorial-education-blacklivesmatter-and-racial-justice-in-the-uk-and-beyond>

I highlight two in particular.

### **Anti-racist mathematics teacher education** by Manjinder Jagdev.

The university teacher and the student have a role to play in decolonising the space of the classroom. We need to create spaces where students can speak openly in order to develop critical perspectives. We need to consider our teaching pedagogy in the classroom in terms of incorporating diverse perspectives. As both a lecturer and facilitator, we need to bring our students' voices into the classroom, to make teaching a mutual learning process. We can all take simple steps by including pictures of authors in our material presented to students, using quotes and citations from those with Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

We need to pay attention to colonial domination and the western Global North. What are the non-Anglophone views? Linked to these themes of equality and equity, we need to re-balance women in discussion. We can include narratives from indigenous and disadvantaged groups for inclusive and diverse education.

We need to challenge Euro-centricity, tackle microaggressions and consider the degree awarding gap for students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Amos, 2019). Black History month should not be reserved only for October – we can celebrate contributions from people all over the world, with students and staff learning from each other, throughout the year.

Read her blog at <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/anti-racist-mathematics-teacher-education>

### **Supporting quiet, shy or anxious Black, Asian and minority ethnic children with English as an additional language in the early years** by Susan Davis

My research on how quiet, shy or anxious children cope in the early years classroom was based on a targeted programme entitled Special Me Time (Davis, 2012) aimed at supporting quiet children in vocalising their feelings; accessing classroom opportunities; and communication and developing friendships. Evaluation of the programme was conducted in early years classrooms. I found that this intervention especially benefitted BAME children with English as an additional language (EAL). These children worked very effectively in a smaller group dynamic with more support.

It is essential to allow young children with EAL longer thinking and processing time in relation to oracy, especially when responding to teacher questions. Quiet children with EAL need additional time to formulate replies, in a busy mainstream classroom. It is pertinent that teachers are aware of the needs of all BAME learners and support them accordingly. Brentnall (2017) suggests that we need to train teachers in diversity awareness and equip them with strategies for supporting and raising attainment across the board. BAME children with English as an additional language need to be in classrooms where the practitioner is aware of their specific needs, in order for them to thrive. In a nurturing classroom, with a high level of support, and with an intuitive and emotionally literate practitioner, this research study suggests that the child can flourish and as a result their life chances and educational trajectory will be significantly enhanced.

The full blog is at:

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/supporting-quiet-shy-or-anxious-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-children-with-english-as-an-additional-language-in-the-early-years>

## **The £643m black hole in SEND funding**

Almost 90 per cent of councils in England overspent on their budgets for teaching children with special educational needs and disabilities last year, with the total funding gap amounting to £643 million. Campaigners warn that specialist teaching is being cut and any additional government funding is having 'little impact'

A Department for Education spokesperson defended the government's record on funding for education across the country: "We've announced the biggest increase in school funding in a decade and are increasing high-needs funding for local authorities by £780 million this year and £730 million next year."

Despite this, last month a review of the SEND system was launched after the Department for Education annual report concluded that the future sustainability of the system in England "remains fragile". The report showed a rise of 200,000 in the number of pupils with SEND, from 1.1 million to 1.3 million.

## **Educational Needs in The Early Years**

Research undertaken between November 2019 – March 2020 by NASEN shows educational gaps between children with SEND and children without SEND are already very wide by the time children start school. It suggests that if staff are trained and know what signs to look for, they could identify potential issues and put suitable support in place at an earlier age. The study made the following recommendations:

- There should be more targeted guidance relevant to the different early years' settings
- There should be fair representation of all early years' settings in local and national policy reviews to ensure that issues, and good practice, can be identified and taken into account for all future policy making decisions
- There should be guidance on the time allocated to the early years SENCO role in different settings
- There should be a job description, specific for the early years SENCO role
- There should be more work undertaken to develop understanding of the early years SENCO role across the education, health and care sectors
- The sector needs to share good practice developed by early years SENCOs, particularly in relation to developing family relationships
- The sector needs to share good practice demonstrated by early years SENCOs, in relation to developing inclusive environments
- Agencies should share information from the progress check at aged two between the child's providers as standard practice

You can read the full report at: <https://nasen.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/0551e3f4-7dce-4a47-a7424e1900ed1666.pdf>

## School improvement

The NAHT has published findings from its School Improvement Commission. The report draws together research evidence and testimony from a number of expert witnesses and organisations, including the NFER. Schools have had to provide a safe environment for both staff and pupils, while teaching and learning is disrupted to a level never seen before. The report makes it clear that sustainable school improvement is an ongoing, long-term activity. The report highlights a number of salient messages and actions, many of which accord with our own research evidence, as discussed below.

- **Schools are only as good as the people that work in them.** Teacher quality is the driving force of school improvement, so if we want every pupil in the country to be taught by an expert teacher, we need schools to have access to high-quality CPD for all teachers, as well as a ready supply of expert staff. In addition to ensuring teachers have the time and freedom to engage in professional development, we need to reduce unnecessary workload wherever possible. Recent months have also seen a surge in applications for initial teacher training – an encouraging sign for schools’ short-term supply needs – but we need to ensure these new teachers stay in the profession.
- **School leaders need to create the conditions in which teachers can flourish and pupils can succeed.** This risks becoming lost as additional responsibilities are loaded onto the role, and accountability pressures drive activity that has more to do with being Ofsted-ready than improving teaching and learning.
- **School improvement should be a collaborative endeavour.** There are real benefits to working in partnership with others, but the current system too often places schools in competition instead. For example, there is considerable evidence that school-to-school partnership working can be effective in supporting and accelerating improvements in participating schools, particularly where schools exhibit certain characteristics, such as shared goals and ambitions for development.

Too often, schools mark their improvement through the Ofsted grading lens. Indeed, fixating on Ofsted can lead to a short-term focus, and a ‘scatter-gun’ approach to improvement, with a range of initiatives launched with limited assessment of what actually works. NFER’s research, in support of

the commission's work, explored senior leaders' and classroom teachers' views on the effectiveness with which schools identify, prioritise and take action on school improvement priorities.

Read the full report at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/news-events/nfer-blogs/school-improvement-moving-beyond-covid-to-a-stronger-education-system/>

## Teacher retention

The retention of teachers is one of the key challenges currently facing schools today. The imperative to bring more teachers into the profession and keep them there has never been more urgent. With Government interventions in England mainly concentrated on the recruitment of teachers into the state sector, little consideration has been given to the scale of teachers leaving or their reasons for doing so. National data masks significant local variations and the overall extent of the attrition problem. Impact from the Retention and Recruitment strategy as a strategic Government driver has yet to be determined. The teacher supply crisis cannot be solved by recruitment drives alone. Reducing teacher attrition could well be the key lever to overcoming the acute recruitment shortage now faced in England. By examining a number of school-related factors, this paper argues that reducing attrition is vital for the sustainability of the teacher workforce, pupil performance and school improvement and the paper concludes by making recommendations for policy makers.

Published in the Teacher Education Advancement Journal. [A systematic review of literature on teacher attrition and school-related factors that affect it](#) by Jonathan Doherty

**I hope you and your family remain safe and well in these unprecedented times and a sincere thanks to all teachers, parents and carers.**

**May I take this opportunity to wish the Committee and all our NaPTEC friends a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year!**



**Jonathan Doherty  
(Chair of NaPTEC).**