

# Primary Perspectives

Edition 9. Summer 2020.

Covid-19 edition

*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 special Covid-19 edition. I hope you enjoy it.*

## Supporting children and families in Covid-19

Whilst Covid-19 appears to pose a lower risk of infection to children and young people, its social toll could be devastating. Coronavirus has intensified the challenges many children and young people face and there are widespread concerns about lost learning, domestic abuse, poverty, and the impact of social distancing on mental health and wellbeing. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) has published a discussion paper 'Building a Country that Works for all Children Post Covid-19', which articulates the virus' impact on childhoods and attempts to put children's experiences centre stage. The ability to support children and families when they need it most is being compromised by significantly underfunded children's services and local government. The result is a further widening attainment gap and more families plunged into poverty. In children's services, an estimated £3.1bn is needed by 2025 just to maintain pre-coronavirus levels of service.

Read the full report at

[https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS\\_Building\\_a\\_country\\_that\\_works\\_for\\_all\\_children\\_post\\_Covid-19.pdf](https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_Building_a_country_that_works_for_all_children_post_Covid-19.pdf)

## Exclusive: Covid-19 widens achievement gap to a gulf

79% of teachers believe attainment gap suffered by poorer pupils has worsened under lockdown and 31% say it is becoming a 'gulf'. Nearly four-fifths of teachers and school support staff say the attainment gap between poorer pupils and their peers is widening as a result of lockdown partial school closures. Just under a third believe it is becoming "a gulf", a TES survey of more than 16,000 school staff across the UK revealed.

Respondents gave reasons such as cramped living conditions, lack of parental support or lack of online learning equipment resources as reasons why disadvantaged pupils were slipping further behind. The Government has committed over £100 million to support children to learn at home, and pupil premium funding continues to be paid at the highest ever rate per pupil while schools are closed to help them support their disadvantaged pupils.

## Government's Covid-19 catch up fund largely ineffective

The Government's Covid-19 catch-up fund for pupils in England is "badly targeted" and unlikely to prevent a further widening of the attainment gap between children from poor backgrounds and their wealthier peers. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) said that even before the pandemic disadvantaged pupils' learning lagged 18 months behind by the time they sit their GCSEs, and surveys had shown they were much more likely to have suffered serious learning loss during lockdown.

Instead of targeting the £650m extra funding where it was most needed, the EPI said the Government had allocated the same amount of catch-up funding to schools in affluent areas as to schools in the poorest parts of the country, serving the most disadvantaged pupils. At a time when social mobility was already in danger of stalling, and with Covid significantly worsening the learning outlook for poor children, today's decision could prove to be a costly mistake. The Government's £1bn catch-up package to support pupils who have spent months out of school as a result of the pandemic, is made up of £650m to be shared across state primary and secondary schools across England in the next academic year, as well as £350m for a tutoring scheme which will be targeted at disadvantaged pupils.

## Covid-19's effect on children in society

The charity Save the Children has warned that almost 10 million children may never return to school following the coronavirus pandemic due to funding cuts and rising poverty. A "hidden education emergency" is facing the world's poorest children as a result of Covid-19, after an estimated 1.6 billion students were out of school by early April.

In a separate development the UK government has pledged more than £5.3m in aid to protect the education of refugee children. The money will enable the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, to make direct payments to teachers in 10 countries that host refugees. Angelina Jolie, special envoy for the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, said: "For millions of children and youth, schools are a lifeline of opportunity as well as a shield. Classrooms offer protection — or at least a reprieve — from violence, exploitation and other difficult circumstances."

Analysis conducted by Save the Children examined which countries are most at risk of stalling on progress towards reaching Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in 2030 - quality education for every child - or reversing previous achievements due to the impact of the pandemic.

## Impact on children's vocabulary

The disruption to education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic will have an adverse effect on children's vocabulary development and widen existing differences. An Oxford University Press survey, carried out with the Educational Research Forum, gauged teachers' views on the impact that school closures and remote learning will have on pupils' education and vocabulary development.

Almost three-quarters of teachers (73 per cent) said the impact on students' vocabulary development will be significant, while 68 per cent said that those under 7 will be more affected, followed by those in the 7 to 11, 11 to 14 and 14 to 16 age groups. The issue is already a significant and widespread challenge for UK schools and can have a profound impact on academic achievement, self-esteem and life and career prospects.

### Early Years

Support for children during the first years of their lives is "disjointed", and many from disadvantaged backgrounds are academically behind peers by the time they start school. Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, has published a report looking at the provision of early years services for one to five-year-olds across the country. Last year, 29 per cent of five-year-olds in England were not at the expected level of development by the time they started school, including 45 per cent of children receiving free school meals. The Commissioner's office analysed data on all children in England who had not met the expected level on half of their early learning goals at the age of five and tracked them through to the end of primary school. The report highlighted that children were five times as likely to end up being excluded by age 10, twice as likely to have had contact with children's social care, three times more likely to be struggling with reading, and four times more likely to find difficulties with writing by age 11. They are also more likely to leave school with no GCSEs, to suffer some form of mental ill health and to be obese.

The Children's Commissioner has called for an emergency rescue package to prevent thousands of nurseries from closing as a result of Covid-19.

Read the full report at <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/best-beginnings/>

### Home schooling experiences. Parents' views

Many parents have felt "overwhelmed, very stressed, exhausted and burnt out" by the experience of home schooling, according to a study carried out by Stranmillis University College. The study was based on a survey of more than 2,000 parents and carers. The vast majority of pupils have not been able to attend schools since March and the report said "a minority of families" had thrived, but many others had struggled. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) previously said a significant number of pupils had not taken part in remote learning. Key workers and parents who were working from home said they had faced particular difficulties in home schooling their children.

See [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/home-learning-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-understanding-society-longitudinal-study/?dm\\_i=4R3K,D4E2,10I06Y,1HPPJ,1](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/home-learning-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-understanding-society-longitudinal-study/?dm_i=4R3K,D4E2,10I06Y,1HPPJ,1)

## Ofsted's SEND inspections put on hold owing to Covid-19

Ofsted has said SEND area inspections will not take place in the autumn because the disruption to education, health and care services during the coronavirus pandemic makes it impossible to reach valid judgements. However, the watchdog is planning to carry out visits next term to better understand the experiences of pupils with SEND during lockdown. In the interim period, it will conduct visits with the Care Quality Commission to understand what children and young people with SEND have experienced during the lockdown and what has worked well for them. Ofsted will visit schools in September in a bid to help convince parents to send their children back to school in the autumn. The checks by the education watchdog will not be the same as normal inspections and will check how schools are making plans towards creating a safe environment for children.

## Remote learning for disadvantaged pupils

New funded research by the NFER surveying 1,233 school leaders and 1,821 teachers in England has raised concerns about the impact of school closures on the learning of children from schools serving the most deprived pupils. It has found significant difference in pupils' level of engagement with remote learning. Key findings include:

- ✓ Pupil engagement is lower in schools with the highest levels of deprivation
- ✓ Teachers report that, on average, just over half (55%) of their pupils' parents are engaged with their children's home learning
- ✓ When the survey was conducted in May, teachers reported being in regular contact with, on average, 60% of their pupils. However, on average, less than half of pupils (42%) returned their last piece of set work
- ✓ Limited pupil access to IT at home is a significant challenge, particularly for schools with the highest levels of deprivation
- ✓ Schools delivering learning content to pupils through online conversations (as part of a range of measures), have higher general pupil engagement levels (five percentage points) and an increased probability of having highly engaged disadvantaged pupils (eight percentage points)
- ✓ Despite high levels of leadership guidance and teachers' readiness to provide remote learning support, there is currently a substantial deficit in curriculum coverage across schools

Read the report in full at <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/disadvantaged-pupils-less-engaged-in-remote-learning>

## Research report NFER

On 20 March 2020, the UK Government mandated that all schools close to pupils, except vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers (such as those working in public health, transport and supplying food). National examinations were also cancelled. As a result,

schools have been unable to carry out their normal activities in supporting pupils' learning and well-being, or in preparing them for transition to the next phase of their education. This unprecedented disruption to the education of children and young people, has raised concerns about their education and welfare and the ability of schools to provide effective learning approaches for pupils at home.

NFER has undertaken an independent investigation into the impact of the pandemic on schools in England and their pupils, in order to document the main issues and identify insights for policy and practice. The first wave of this study consisted of four reports with each a specific issue related to the impact of Covid-19 on schools and pupils.

1. Returning pupils to school
2. Pupil engagement in remote learning
3. Support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers
4. Job satisfaction and workload of teachers and senior leaders.

Read the full Wave 1 report at:

[https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4097/schools\\_responses\\_to\\_covid\\_19\\_key\\_findings\\_from\\_the\\_wave\\_1\\_survey.pdf?dm\\_i=4R3K,D3YV,10I06Y,1HNPD,1](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4097/schools_responses_to_covid_19_key_findings_from_the_wave_1_survey.pdf?dm_i=4R3K,D3YV,10I06Y,1HNPD,1)

### **School Reopening plans. September "critical" to the UK's national recovery**

The Education Secretary set out the Government's plans to get all pupils back into the classroom including the formation of year or class "bubbles" with the potential for a school to close if there are two or more cases in a two-week period. Groups of pupils will be kept apart and schools will introduce staggered start, finish and break times. Any child who displays coronavirus symptoms will be sent home immediately and staff will be required to wear protective equipment when dealing with them. Schools will be provided with "a small number" of home testing kits for those suspected of having contracted the virus.

Guidance published by the Department for Education said the approach aims to minimise points of contact that could allow infections to spread, while not relying entirely on social distancing." Education recovery is critical for this generation of school children. Returning to normal educational routines as quickly as possible is critical to our national recovery too," he said. Parents who fail to send their children back to the classroom "without good reason" will face fines as the Government returns to a "mandatory education" position.

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

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