



Learning in Lockdown



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KEY FINDINGS

Attendance at school

- In the first week of the January 2021 lockdown, more than a quarter (27%) of primary school age children were reported to be at least partially attending school in person, compared to just 8% of secondary age children.
- Of those children attending school in person, less than half (47%) of them had been attending school during the first lockdown last March. Almost half of parents cited work-related reasons for this, including their status as a key/critical worker (26%), a change in working status (14%), or a less flexible employer (8%).
- As a result, 37% of teachers in primary schools report they now have 1 in 5 or more of their usual pupils in attendance, compared to just 1% last March.

Devices

- At the beginning of the shutdown, just 5% of teachers in state schools reported that all their students have access to an appropriate device for remote learning, compared to 54% at private schools. Looking at pupils with adequate internet access, the figures are 5% and 51% respectively.
- 19% of parents overall report their children do not have access to a sufficient number of devices suitable for their online learning, however this is 35% for households with the lowest incomes, and 11% in households with the highest.
- Two thirds (66%) of senior leaders in state schools reported needing to source IT equipment for disadvantaged pupils themselves while waiting for government support.

Remote learning

- School provision for online learning has changed radically since the beginning of the first lockdown. Over half (54%) of teachers are now using online live lessons, compared to just 4% in March 2020. The use of offline methods to provide work has fallen, with just 15% now using physical workbooks, compared to 34% in March.
- However, disparities remain. 86% of private schools are using online live lessons, compared to 50% in state schools, a gap which has widened since the first lockdown.
- Parents also confirm a clear increase in intensity of online learning. The proportion of primary pupils doing more than 5 hours of learning a day has risen from 11%

to 23%, and for secondary students it has increased from 19% to 45%.

- However, 40% of children in middle class homes are reported to be doing over 5 hours a day, compared to 26% of those in working class households.

Support for home learning

- 41% of parents with children learning at home report that they have not very much time or no time at all to help their children with online learning, with parents of secondary age children having less time.
- Parents were split in their experience of learning from the home this time around. Many reported that they found it easier than the spring 2020 lockdown, with others reporting that they were finding it more difficult. 28% of those on low incomes were finding it more difficult, compared to 15% of those on the highest incomes.
- 31% of those with the lowest incomes had not been able to spend anything on their child's learning from home since September 2020, while 29% of those on the highest incomes had spent more than £100.
- 10% of parents reported paying for private tutoring in the current school year, a mix of online and in person. Middle class households were almost twice as likely to have done so compared to working class parents (13% v 7%).

The attainment gap

- The impact of the pandemic on learning continues to be unevenly felt, with over half (55%) of teachers at the least affluent state schools reporting a lower than normal standard of work returned by pupils since the shutdown, compared to 41% at the most affluent state schools and 30% at private schools.
- Most teachers (84%) thought the COVID-19 lockdown and associated disruption would increase the attainment gap, with a third (33%) saying it would increase substantially. This is up from 28% in November.
- Teachers in the least advantaged schools were much more likely to say there would be a substantial increase in the gap. About half (49%) said so, compared to just 25% in the most affluent and 8% in private secondary schools.
- A majority of teachers (52%) cited a faster rollout of laptops as the single most helpful intervention to help disadvantaged pupils during the period of closure, with 20% of headteachers citing online tutoring.

INTRODUCTION

For the second time in less than a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools to again close for most children. Since the beginning of the crisis, pupils, school staff and parents have faced unprecedented challenges, from school closures, to cancelled exams, a disrupted autumn term, and now back full circle to another full national lockdown, with most children now once again learning remotely. At every stage, the education and life chances of the poorest young people have been hardest hit, with a risk that years of work to reduce the attainment gap and tackle social mobility could be undone in just a few months.

The conditions children experience, and resources they have available when learning at home differ considerably. Before the pandemic, Ofcom estimated that up to 1.78 million children in the UK had no home access to a laptop, desktop or tablet,¹ figures which do not even take into account the many thousands more who would have to share limited devices with siblings and parents. As well as issues with devices, up to 559,000 children lived in households with no access to the internet, and up to 913,000 only able to access the internet through a mobile network.² 1.6 million children in the UK also live in overcrowded homes,³ where they are likely to struggle to find space to work, and additional concerns have now been raised that some low-income households may struggle to pay for heating when children are learning at home during

the winter.⁴

During the first lockdown, research from the Sutton Trust found that children's experiences of remote learning differed varied substantially across different socio-economic backgrounds. Teachers in schools with the most deprived intakes were much more likely to report substantial numbers of their pupils lacked access to appropriate devices and internet access for remote learning. Technological barriers, as well as significant differences in the amount of support pupils received for learning at home, resulted in a highly unequal experience of learning during this time. Research from London Economics also showed that lost learning could lead to long term impacts on young people's career and future earnings.⁵ The Education Endowment Foundation have also warned that this could reverse progress made in narrowing the attainment gap on the last decade,⁶ an outcome which would be disastrous for the prospects of so many pupils across the country.

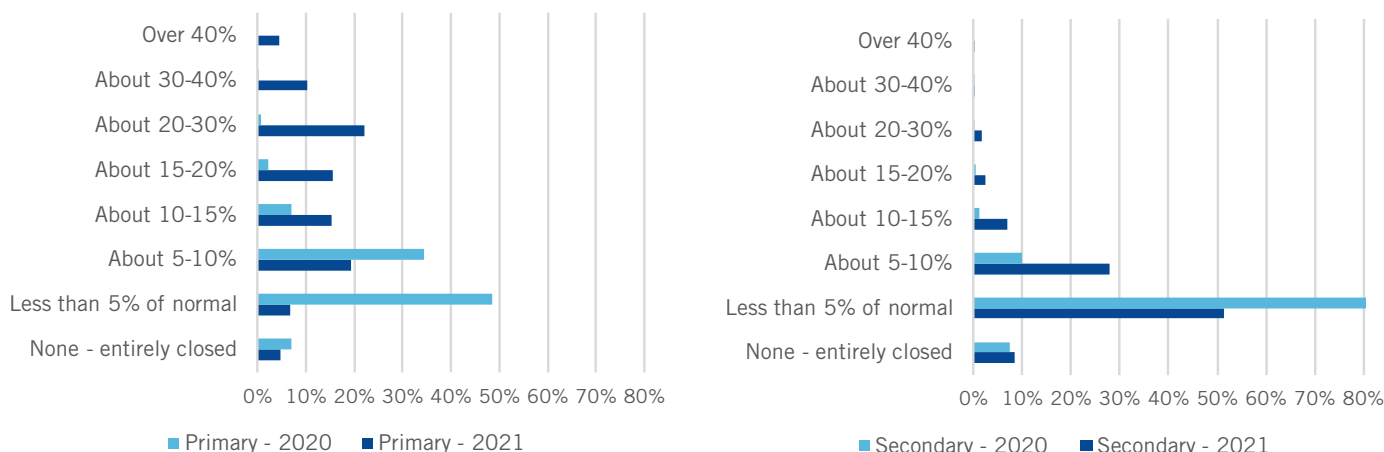
Thankfully, schools were able to re-open during the autumn term, with catch-up funding announced by government. This included funding for the National Tutoring Programme, a scheme designed to help disadvantaged students whose education had been most affected by school closures, reaching 62,000 pupils in its first term of operation.⁷ However, even with schools mostly open, there was still considerable disruption, with many pupils,

'bubbles' and whole year groups needing to self-isolate, for weeks at a time. Furthermore, once again the impact was felt unequally: some of the poorest areas in the country were also the most heavily impacted by absences and partial closures, with all 10 local authorities with the highest number of lost learning days since September having an above average proportion of FSM eligible pupils.⁸ For many children, this will have further worsened gaps in their learning from the first lockdown.

Now, as the country enters a second round of school closures, this pattern looks set to continue, with all young people suffering further from disruption, but some suffering much greater than others. While the government made efforts in the spring and summer of 2020 to get devices and internet access to young people, this roll-out stalled during the autumn, with polling carried out for Teach First in November finding that 84% of schools with the poorest children still did not have enough devices or internet access for all self-isolating pupils to continue learning.⁹

Nonetheless, schools are much better prepared this time around, with most teachers now familiar with the software and skills needed to teach pupils remotely. Expectations are also higher, with the government now legally requiring schools to provide between 3 and 5 hours of remote education a day.¹⁰ However, even with the best efforts of staff, many schools may struggle to deliver this level of provision, given ongoing technological barriers for some students, along with initial reports of

Figure 1: Proportion of normal student body attending school during lockdown 2021 and 2020



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 23rd 2020 and January 6th 2021

school resources stretched by many more pupils attending in person than in the first lockdown.¹¹

This research brief looks at the situation for pupils during the latest round of school closures, with survey data from Teacher Tapp on teachers¹² and YouGov on parents¹³ giving an up to date picture on how teaching is now being delivered remotely, access to resources, and barriers faced while learning at home, while also looking at how the impacts of the pandemic on education and social mobility can be minimised.

ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS

While schools have once again been closed for most children, there remain exceptions for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. The definition of vulnerable children has also been expanded since the first school closures, now including pupils without adequate equipment or study space to learn at home.

At the beginning of this lockdown, 11% of parents reported their child was attending school full time, with a further 8% attending school for some of the week. This has however been much higher in primary schools, with more than a quarter (27%) of primary school age children reported to be at least partially attending, compared to just 8% of secondary age children. 20% of children in middle class households were reportedly attending school, compared to 16% of those in working class homes.

This is significantly different from spring 2020. Of those children currently attending school in person, less than half (47%) of them had been attending school during the first lockdown. This is reflected in the figures reported by schools. 37% of teachers in primary schools report they now have 1 in 5 or more of their usual school body in attendance, compared to just 1% with that level of attendance last March (Figure 1). 56% of primaries had 5% or lower attendance in March, compared to just 11% in January 2021. Attendance at secondary school is lower on average, with 60% of teachers reporting attendance

less than 5%. However this is still an increase from last year, when the figure was 88%.

For parents whose child is now attending school in person but hadn't last spring, there were a variety of explanations. Almost half cited work-related reasons, including their status as a key/critical worker (26%), a change in working status (14%), or a less flexible employer (8%). 13% cited that they had been struggling to combine support for home learning with other responsibilities. While the guidance in both lockdowns was that if one parent was a key worker their child could attend school, many such families did not avail of this, and kept their children home during the first lockdown. In response to the significant numbers attending school this term, the government has advised that pupils with one non-key worker parent should stay at home 'if at all possible'.¹⁴ But this may be difficult for many, with more workplaces open this time around, putting more pressure on parents than last spring.

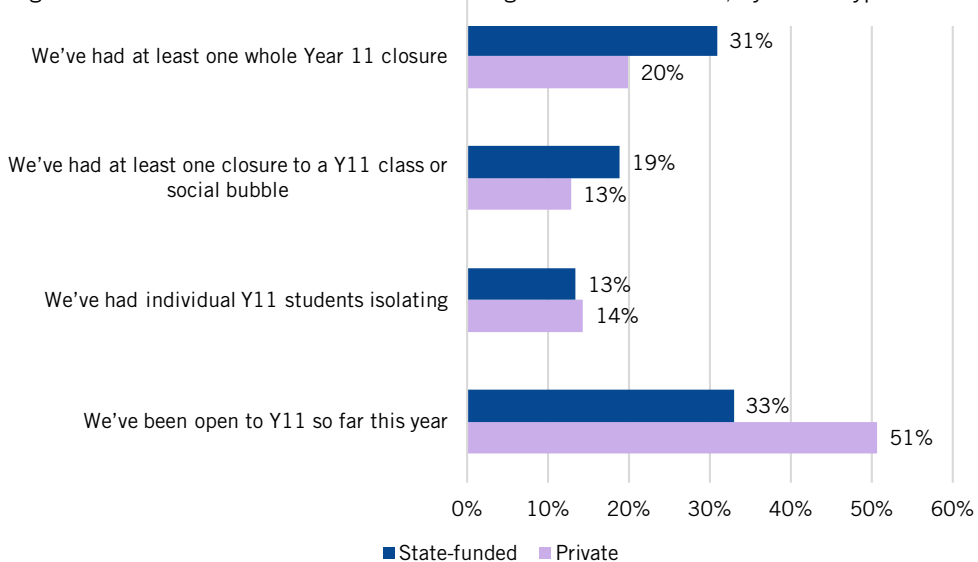
This term's closures are coming on the back of an autumn term when schools were open, but disruption and periods of remote learning were nonetheless common. Research by the Children's Commissioner in December showed that on average, primary school children lost 3.5 days of school in the first term due to the pandemic, and secondary school children lost more than 6.3 days.¹⁵ However behind the overall figures are huge geographic and

social differences, with secondary pupils in some local authorities losing up to 13 days of school across term. On average, areas with greater deprivation were more likely to have suffered greater Covid absences, further exacerbating gaps that opened up during the first lockdown.

School-level survey data from Teacher Tapp reinforces this picture (Figure 2). Looking at Year 11s in secondary school due to take their GCSEs this year, by mid-November, 29% of teachers reported at least one whole year group closure for this year, 18% had to close a class or bubble, and 13% had individual Year 11 students isolating. Just 36% had been fully open to this group all term. This is also likely to have worsened at the end of term, with analysis from the Education Policy Institute finding a big drop in attendance in the last week.¹⁶

Year 11 students in state schools suffered much more disruption up to November than those in private schools. While just over half (51%) of private school teachers report being fully open to Year 11 during the autumn term, this was just 33% for state schools, and 28% for schools with the highest levels of deprivation. 50% of state schools had a whole year or bubble closure in Year 11, (57% at the most disadvantaged schools), compared to just 33% of private schools. This will have significant consequences for assessment in 2021, as discussed below.

Figure 2: Attendance of Year 11 students during autumn term 2020, by school type



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, 18th November 2020

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Nonetheless, with the new lockdown at the beginning of January, the vast majority (85%) of parents report that their child is learning at home some or all of the time. This poses significant challenges for teaching and learning, but the most basic one is access to the equipment required for online learning: a laptop or tablet, and a reliable internet connection with an adequate data allowance.

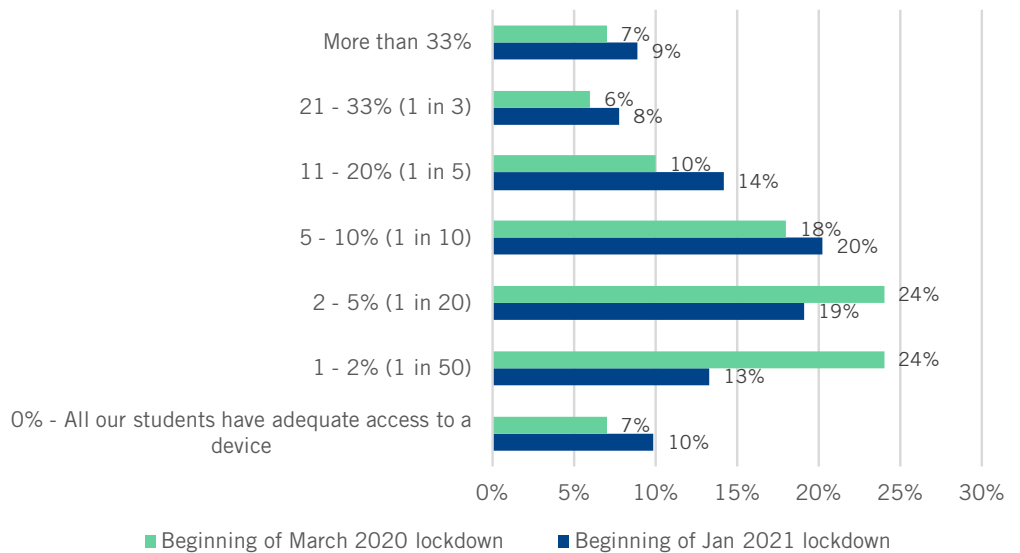
77% of parents overall report having a sufficient number of internet-enabled devices suitable for online learning, with 17% reporting that they have some, but not enough for all their children, and 2% reporting no such devices. Estimating the number of families without any equipment or internet connections is difficult, as they are a group who are, by definition, hard to reach. Nonetheless, our survey of parents indicates the issues felt by some families, even though it is likely to underestimate the full scale of the issue. Unsurprisingly, there were big differences by affluence: 35% of households in the lowest income quintile reported not having sufficient devices in their house, compared to 11% of those on in the highest quintile of income.

The scale of the problem can perhaps be seen in more detail by teachers, who are on the frontline of this digital divide. Just 10% of teachers overall report that all their students have adequate access to a device for remote learning (Figure 3), while 17% report that more than 1 in 5 of their students lack access. This problem is much steeper in schools in more disadvantaged areas, with 32% of teachers in the most deprived schools report more than 1 in 5 lacking devices, compared to just 5% at the most affluent state schools and even lower, 3%, at private schools (Figure 4). The picture in the state and private sector is drastically different. While just 5% of teachers

in state schools report that all their students have a device, this is 54% at private schools. This gap has actually widened since the 2020 lockdown, with full access at private schools increasing by 12 percentage points, outpacing the 1 percentage point growth at state schools. At the other end of the spectrum, the number in the state system reporting more than 1 in 5 lack a device has, perhaps surprisingly, risen from 13% to 18%.

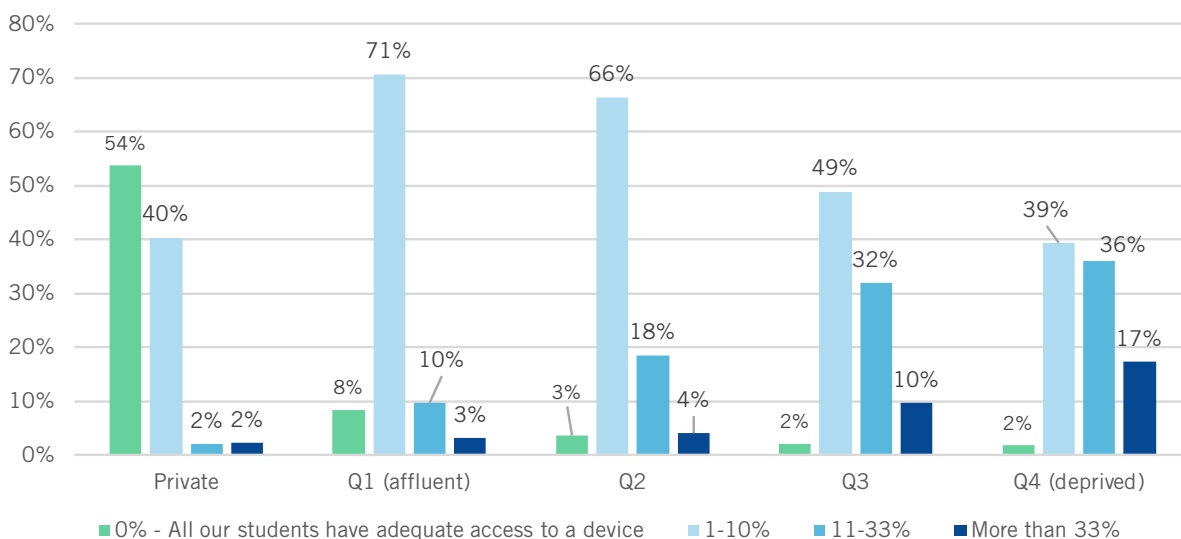
While the government has embarked on a major programme of laptop distribution during this time, expectations of the degree of remote learning have risen in the current

Figure 3. Proportion of a teacher's class who lack access to an internet enabled device for learning, 2020 and 2021 lockdowns



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 25th 2020 and January 9th 2021

Figure 4. Proportion of a teacher's class who lack a device for learning Jan 2021, by deprivation level of school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, January 7th 2021

lockdown (explored in the next section), and schools are likely to have better information on home circumstances. This may mean that, despite the increased number of devices available to pupils, this is still not adequate, when they are expected to complete 3-5 hours of online learning each day. For example, sharing a device with a sibling or parent may no longer be sufficient. Nonetheless, this data shows how steep the challenge remains, particularly for the most deprived pupils.

lack internet, compared to 3% in the most affluent state schools, and just 1% at private schools.

Despite the government distribution schemes, at the beginning of the January lockdown, 47% of state school senior leaders report their school has only been able to supply half of their pupils or fewer with the laptops they have needed. This is 56% at the most deprived schools, and 39% at the most affluent. Two thirds (66%) of senior leaders in state

schools reported needing to source IT equipment for disadvantaged pupils themselves while waiting for government support, with the figure rising to 72% at secondary schools.

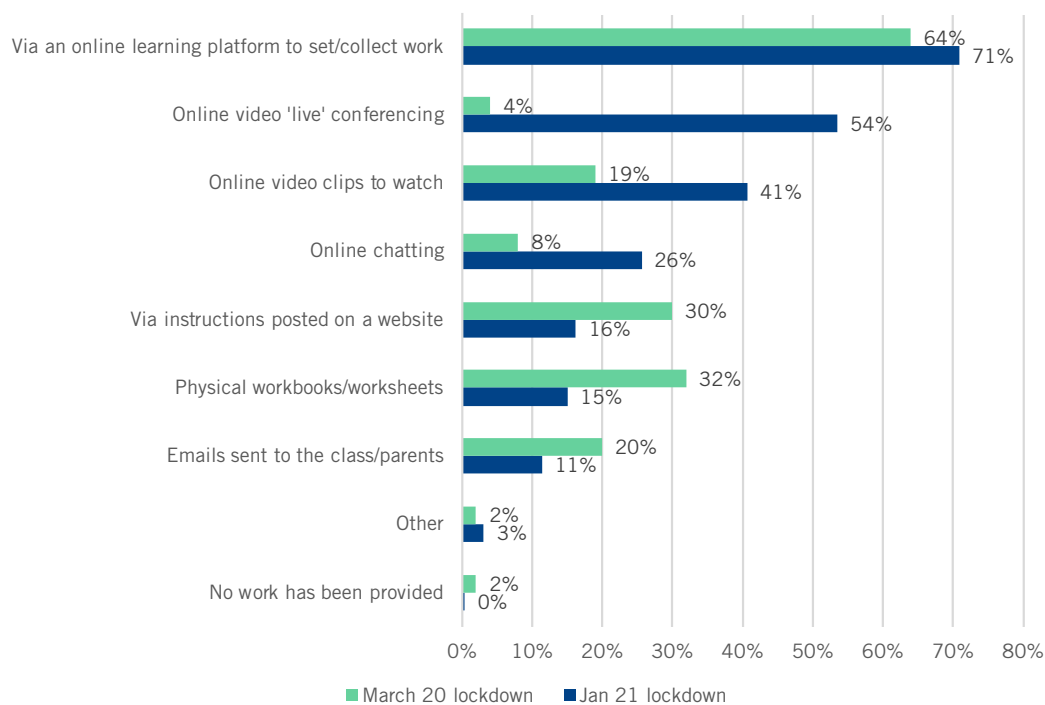
LEARNING AT HOME

When the Trust looked at remote learning in March 2020, schools had just been plunged into a very new and challenging situation, with generally only the most well-resourced schools capable of pivoting quickly to

Access to the internet itself poses a similar challenge, with government also providing internet dongles to some students over the last year, and more recently working with mobile phone companies to give disadvantaged students free increases to their mobile data allowance.¹⁷

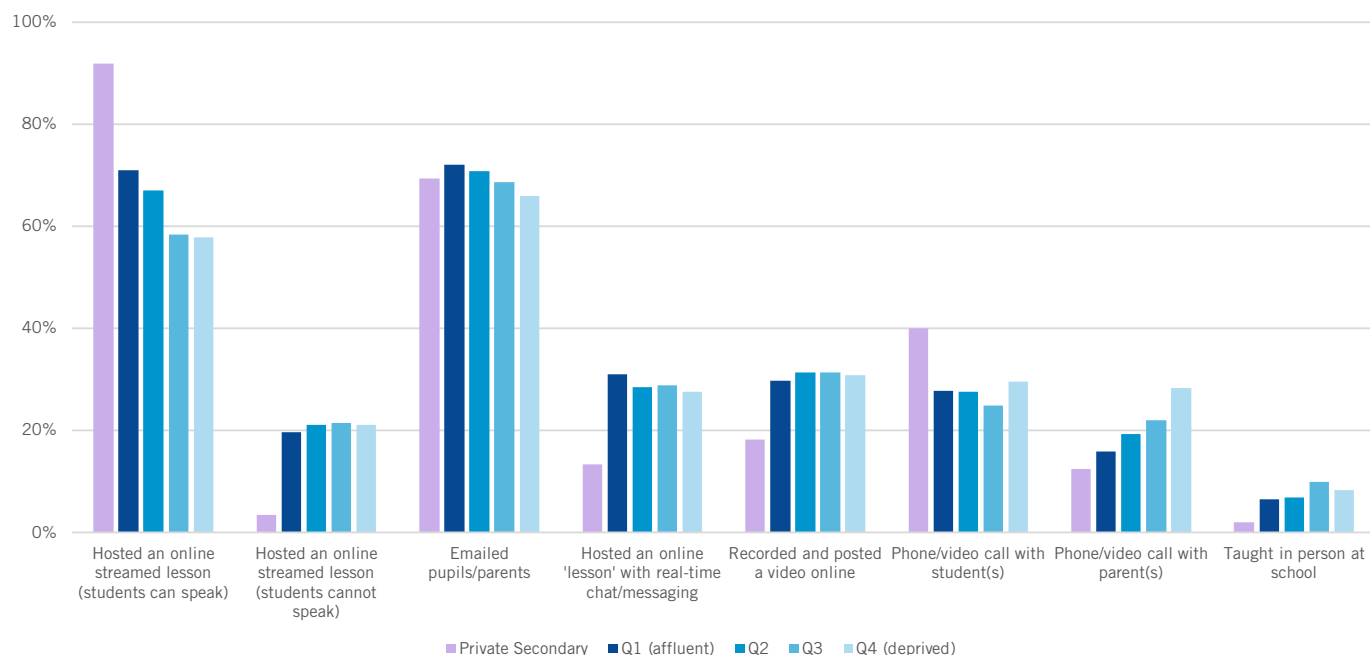
However, just 5% of state school teachers reported all of their students have access to the internet, compared to 51% in the private sector. Again, this gap has actually grown since March 2020, when the figures were 6% and 38% respectively. 21% of those in the most deprived schools report more than 1 in 5 pupils

Figure 5. How teachers were providing work for their classes, 2020 and 2021 lockdowns



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 23rd 2020 and January 11th 2021

Figure 6. Activities undertaken by secondary school teachers during their work day, by level of deprivation in school



Zoom lessons and intensive online learning. With the experience of the first lockdown, plus an autumn term where many pupils spent periods learning from home, the picture in terms of provision of home learning has changed substantially, with a much greater use of online platforms and a move towards greater live online interaction with pupils. While live lessons do not automatically equate to more effective teaching,¹⁸ it is telling that schools with fewer limitations on their resources have increased their use of these methods.

While just 4% of teachers were using online video conferencing in the first weeks of March's lockdown, allowing them to both speak to and sometimes see students, this is now much higher, at 54% (Figure 5). Similarly, only 4% of teachers were using online chat in March, which has now increased to 26%. The use of other online methods has also risen, with 41% now using online video clips for students to watch, compared to only 19% in March. Conversely, the use of offline methods to provide work has fallen, with just 15% now using physical workbooks, compared to 34% in March.

Since March, some gaps in types of provision being used between the state and private sector have reduced, while others have widened. While there is now no difference between state and private schools in the use of online learning platforms to set and collect work (71% and 70% respectively, compared to 63% in state schools and 77% in private

school in March), the gap in the use of online 'live' video conferencing has actually widened since March, with 86% of private schools now using this method, compared to 50% of state schools, a gap of 36 percentage points. In March, these figures were 28% for private schools and 2% for state schools. While provision in the state sector has changed substantially, it has been outpaced by the private sector, a perennial challenge for educational equity. Differences in provision also remain between different state schools, with the most affluent secondary schools also more likely to be using live video conferencing (74% vs 65% in the most deprived).

These changes in learning delivery have also changed the activities teachers have been completing during their working day. 91% of teachers in private secondary schools had hosted an online streamed lesson, compared to 79% in the most affluent state secondaries and 68% in the least affluent (Figure 6). Almost all such sessions were interactive (allowed students to speak) at private schools, with non-interactive lessons more common at state schools, as well as lessons conducted through real-time chat/messaging.

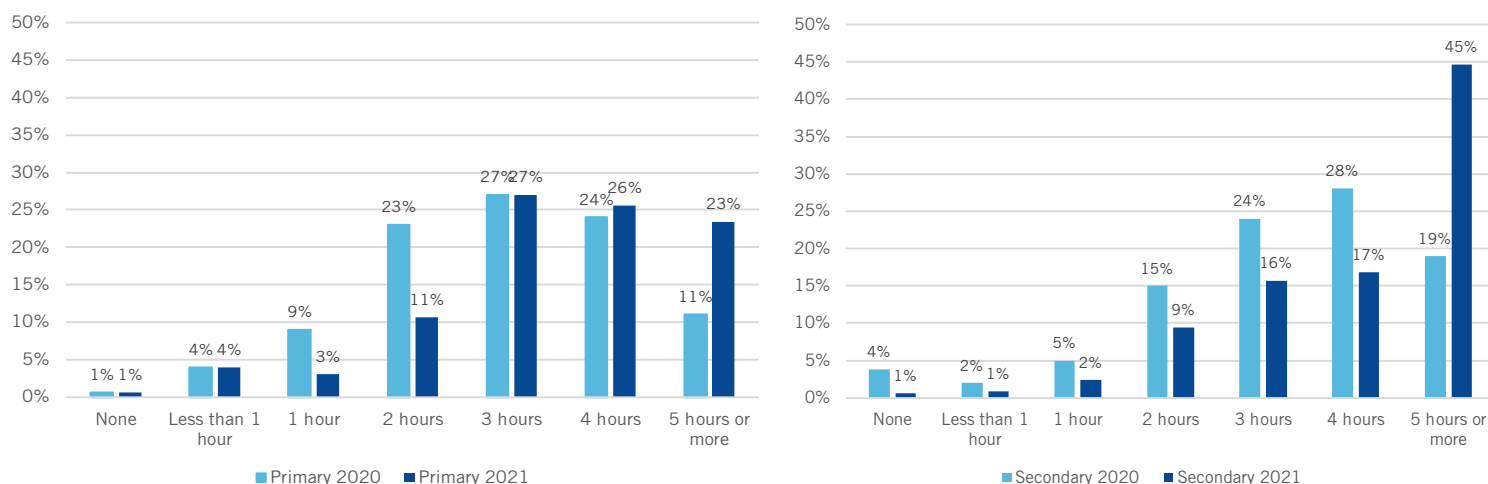
Teachers in private schools were more likely to speak on the phone or video call directly to students. Teachers in the least advantaged schools were more likely to have phoned parents (28% in the most deprived schools vs just 16% in the most affluent, and 12% in private secondaries),

perhaps reflecting a greater need for disciplinary measures or welfare concerns. While evidence is limited on the effectiveness of live online lessons (synchronous learning), in comparison to recorded lessons (asynchronous learning) or other online techniques,¹⁹ in many cases where schools are not delivering live lessons it is likely this is because they have encountered barriers, including resources, and their pupils' access to appropriate technology. As in a normal school environment however, effectiveness is most often down to the quality of the teaching rather than the medium or method used.

These changes are reflected in the data from parents, who report that 17% of primary pupils and 47% of secondary pupils are taking part in at least 3 hours of live or recorded lessons each day. While two thirds of children in the first weeks of last spring's lockdown were receiving no live or recorded lessons, now just 10% of children are reported to receive no such learning.

As well as changes in method, there has also been an increase in the intensity of online learning from the beginning of the first lockdown. Parents report that the volume of work completed by children has increased substantially, with the proportion of primary pupils doing more than 5 hours a day of learning rising from 11% to 23%, and for secondary students from 19% to 45% (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Hours spent learning per day by children, 2020 and 2021 lockdowns



Source: YouGov survey of parents, January 13th-14th 2021, Sutton Trust/Public First survey of parents, April 1st-3rd 2020

Socioeconomic gaps remain however, with 40% of children in middle class homes doing over 5 hours a day, compared to 26% of those in working class households. There were also differences between the state and private sector (Figure 8). While 76% of teachers in state secondary schools said their average Year 8 students were spending 3 or more hours a day learning, this is 90% in private schools. Teachers in private schools were also twice as likely to say their average student was studying for more than 5 hours a day (64%) compared to the state sector (30%).

private school teachers reporting a lack of parental support for learning (65% vs 25% in private schools) and access to suitable technology (44% vs 14%). Teachers in the most deprived state schools were much more likely to cite a lack of suitable technology (55% in the least affluent secondaries, vs 37% in the most well off and just 10% in private secondaries) and were more likely to say there was a lack of engagement from parents (57% vs 47%).

For many parents, trying to support their children's remote education has been difficult, with many trying to do so alongside doing their own job remotely and other responsibilities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 41% of parents with children learning at home report that they have not had very much time or no time at all to help their children with online learning. Only 19% of parents report that they have a lot of time to support their children with online learning, with 34% saying they have a 'fair' amount of time. Parents of secondary age children are more likely to say

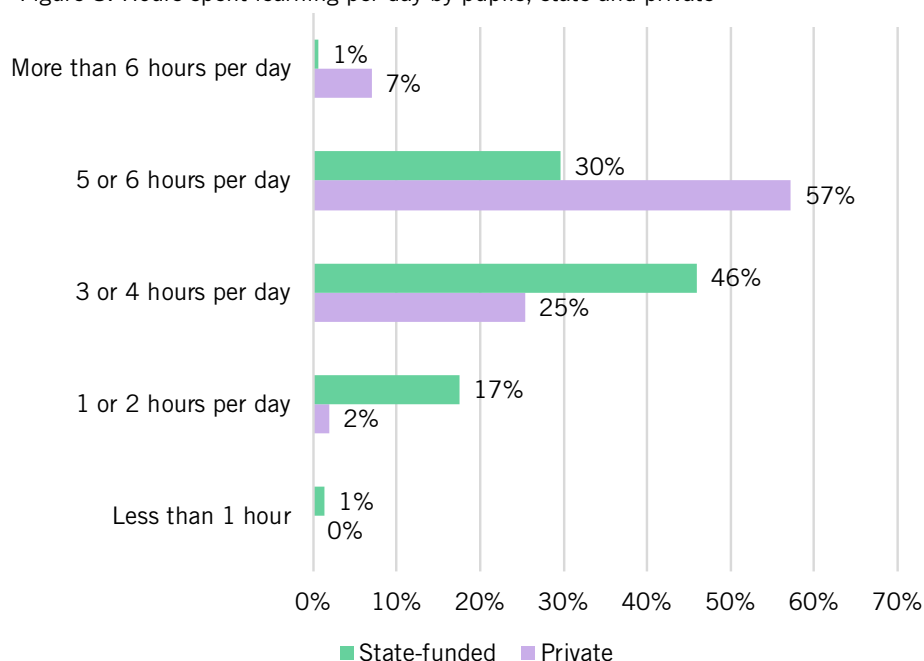
SUPPORT IN THE HOME

To be able to learn successfully at home, children need not just the resources to take part in online provision, but also the skills and motivation necessary to work remotely, as well as help and support from their parents.

As figure 9 shows, the most common reasons given by teachers for their pupils not engaging in online learning were limited or no parental support (60%), a general, long-standing poor attitude to school work (56%), lack of independent study skills (46%), and a lack of access to suitable technology (42%).

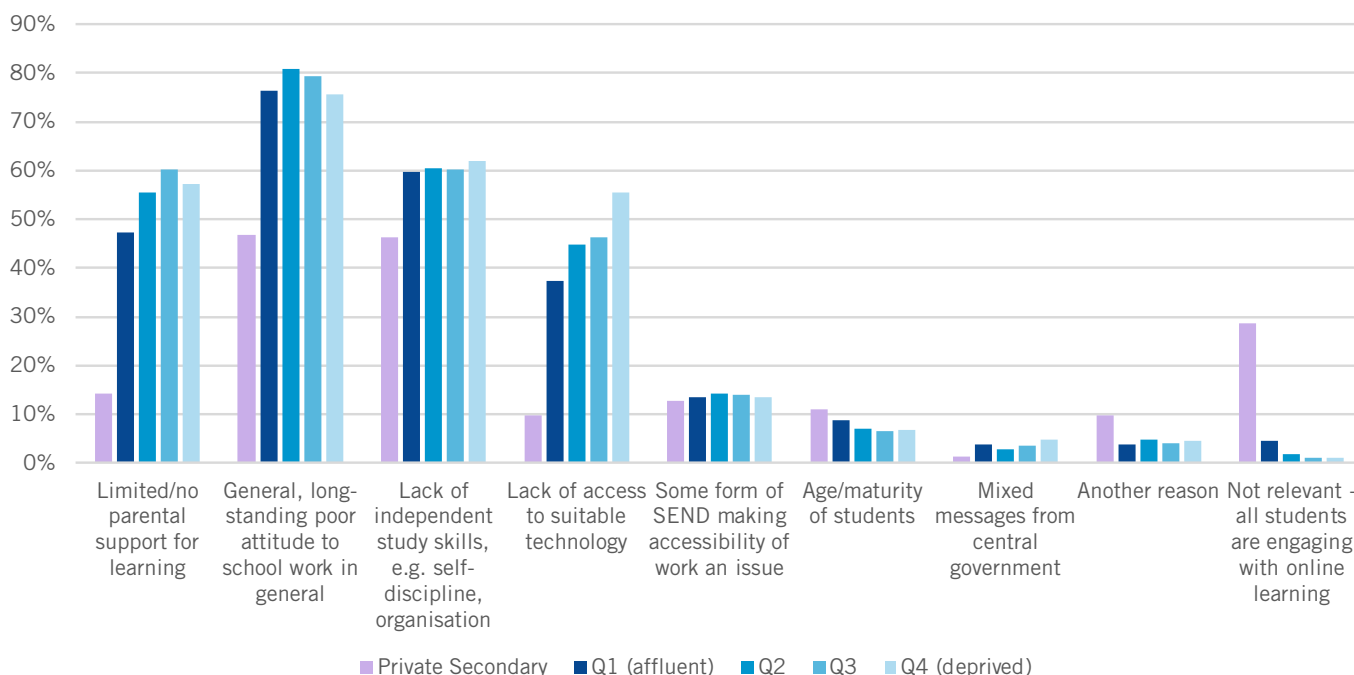
Several of these issues are faced more commonly in schools with less affluent intakes. There were significant gaps between state and

Figure 8. Hours spent learning per day by pupils, state and private



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, 12th January 2021

Figure 9. Reasons for not engaging with online learning (secondary school teachers), by deprivation level of school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of school teachers in England, 13th January 2021

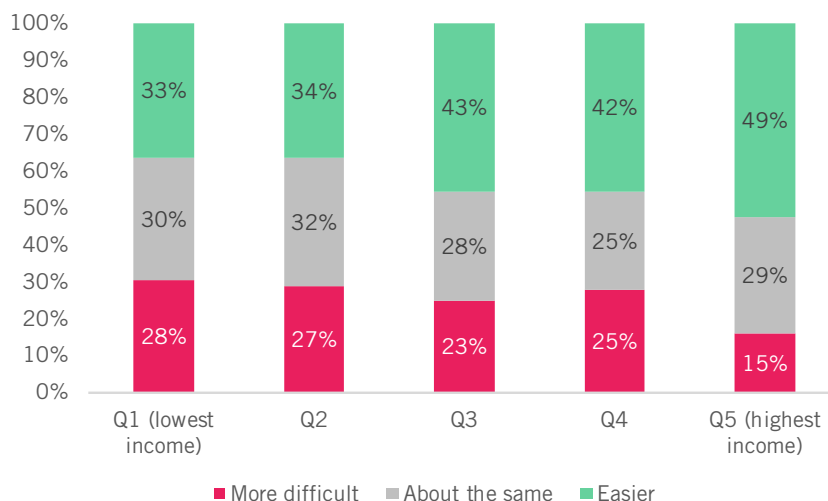
they have not very much or no time at all to support with learning (61%) compared to primary age (23%).

During this round of school closures, while parents have more experience of home learning, which could help with their confidence in supporting their child, they have also had to go through a longer period of trying to juggle different priorities, with perhaps less leniency from their employers. Parents may also feel increased pressure to help their children, given the longer periods of schooling pupils have now missed, making doing so adequately feel more difficult.

Parents were split on their experience of learning from the home in this current lockdown. 39% reported that they found it easier than the spring 2020 lockdown, with 24% reporting that they were finding it more difficult. While 28% of those on low incomes were finding it more difficult, this compared to just 15% of those on the highest incomes, indicative of the differing challenges felt by different households (Figure 10).

Many parents have used their financial resources to support their children during the pandemic, with extra costs often incurred by learning at home, including equipment and other learning materials. 26% of parents reported having spent over £100 on their child's learning from home since September 2020, with 15% reporting having spent more than £200. There are significant gaps between the top and bottom of the income spectrum, with 31% of those with the lowest incomes had not been able to spend anything, while 29% of those on the highest incomes had spent more than £100, and 19% spending more than £200. Parents of secondary school children were more likely to have spent more. These increased costs are occurring in a context of increased economic inequalities due to the pandemic,²⁰ with those in some occupations able to continue their job from home with minimal disruption, often increasing their savings due to lower expenditures, while others in more precarious jobs have suffered from lower incomes and unemployment.²¹

Figure 10. Whether parents were finding the 2021 school shutdown easier or more difficult than 2020, by household income



Source: YouGov survey of parents, January 13th-14th 2021

Private tutoring is another way that those with financial means can boost the educational prospects of their children. 10% of parents reported paying for private tutoring in the current school year, a mix of online and in person tutoring. This is at a comparable level to a similar survey in 2018.²² Middle class households were almost twice as likely to have done so compared to working class parents (13% v 7%).

As well as tuition provided privately and paid for by parents, some children from disadvantaged backgrounds will have received tutoring during the crisis through their school. Since autumn 2020, the National Tutoring Programme has been set up to provide small group tutoring to pupils who otherwise could not afford it with schools able to access highly subsidised, high quality tuition from an approved list of providers. The programme has so far supported 62,000 children in the first term of delivery.²³

IMPACT, ASSESSMENT AND THE ATTAINMENT GAP

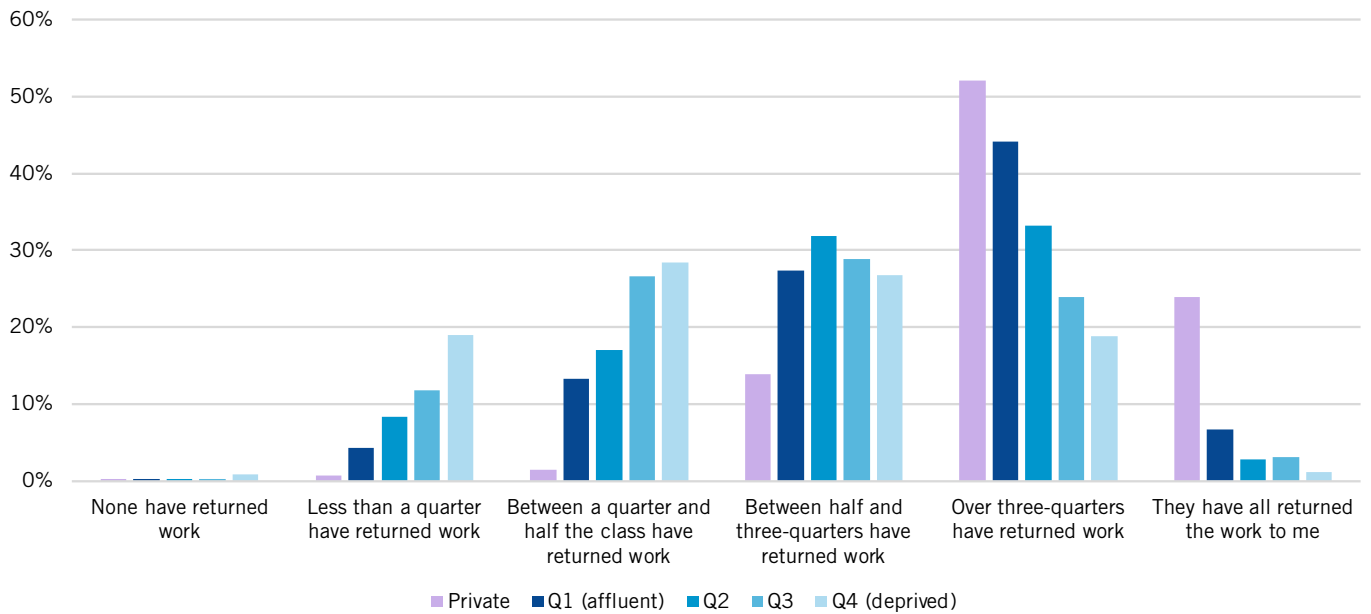
Students are also much more likely to be returning work set during this round of school closures than in March last year. While last March, only 21% of secondary teachers said over three quarters had returned work, this is now 40%. Similarly, last March almost a quarter (26%) of teachers said they were having less than a quarter or no work returned, a figure which has now reduced to just 9%.

There are still however large differences between state and private schools. While 24% of teachers in private schools said all their students have returned work set, this is just 4% in state schools. This is a larger gap than in March, when 11% of teachers in private schools reported this, compared to just 2% in state schools. Teachers in the most deprived schools also continue to be much less likely to say they're receiving most work back from their classes (Figure 11). While in the most advantaged state schools, 51% said they were getting at least three quarters of work back, this was just 20% in the most deprived schools.

Unequal experiences of remote learning also continue to have impacts on the quality of work being produced by young people. Overall, while 42% of secondary teachers say that work so far this term is of a similar standard to what they would expect from their students, 33% say it's of a slightly lower standard and 12% say it's much lower. Just 7% say work is of a higher standard than normal, as one might expect. This is a very similar picture compared to last April, though could reflect higher expectations on the part of teachers this time around.

Socio-economic gaps persist however, with 64% of teachers in private schools reporting work to be of a similar or higher standard, compared to 56% at the most affluent state schools, and 37% at the least

Figure 11. How many students have returned the work that was expected to be submitted back to you, secondary school teachers, by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of school teachers in England, 14th January 2021

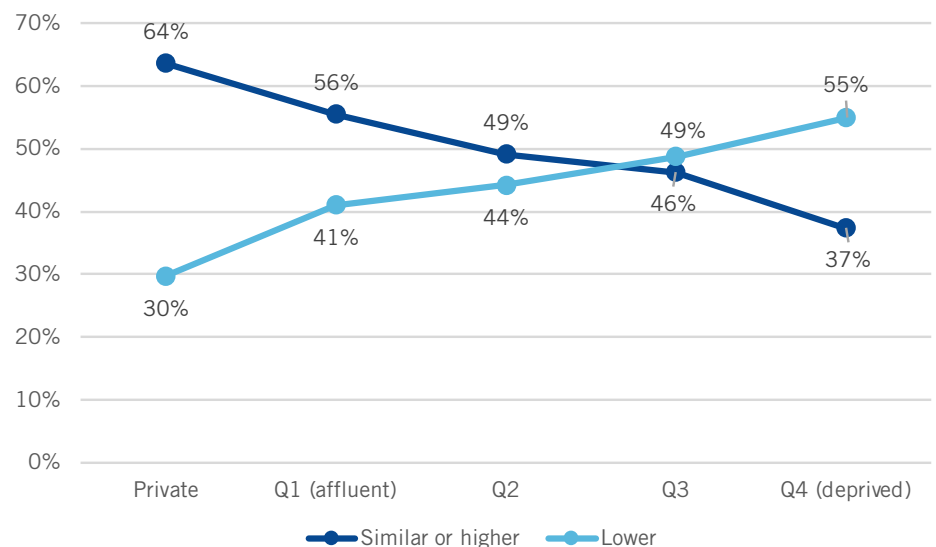
affluent (Figure 12). Over half (55%) of teachers at the least affluent state schools report a lower standard of work than normal, compared to 30% at private schools.

With what they have seen since the beginning of the pandemic, most teachers (84%) thought the COVID-19 lockdown and associated disruption would increase the attainment gap between pupils in their school, with one third (33%) saying it would increase the attainment gap substantially, a further third saying it would increase modestly (34%), and 18% saying there would be a small increase. This has increased since November, when 28% felt it would increase the attainment gap substantially.

As Figure 13 shows, teachers in the most deprived schools were much more likely to think there would be a substantial increase in the attainment gap in their school (49% in the least advantaged secondaries vs just 25% in the most affluent state secondary schools and 8% in private secondary schools, with a similar pattern also seen in primary schools).

In the short term, teachers were asked what would help most over the next 6-8 weeks to help disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils and prevent attainment gaps opening wider (Figure 14). The majority of teachers

Figure 12. Whether work received was at a higher or lower standard compared to what a teacher would normally expect from their class, secondary teachers, by level of deprivation in school

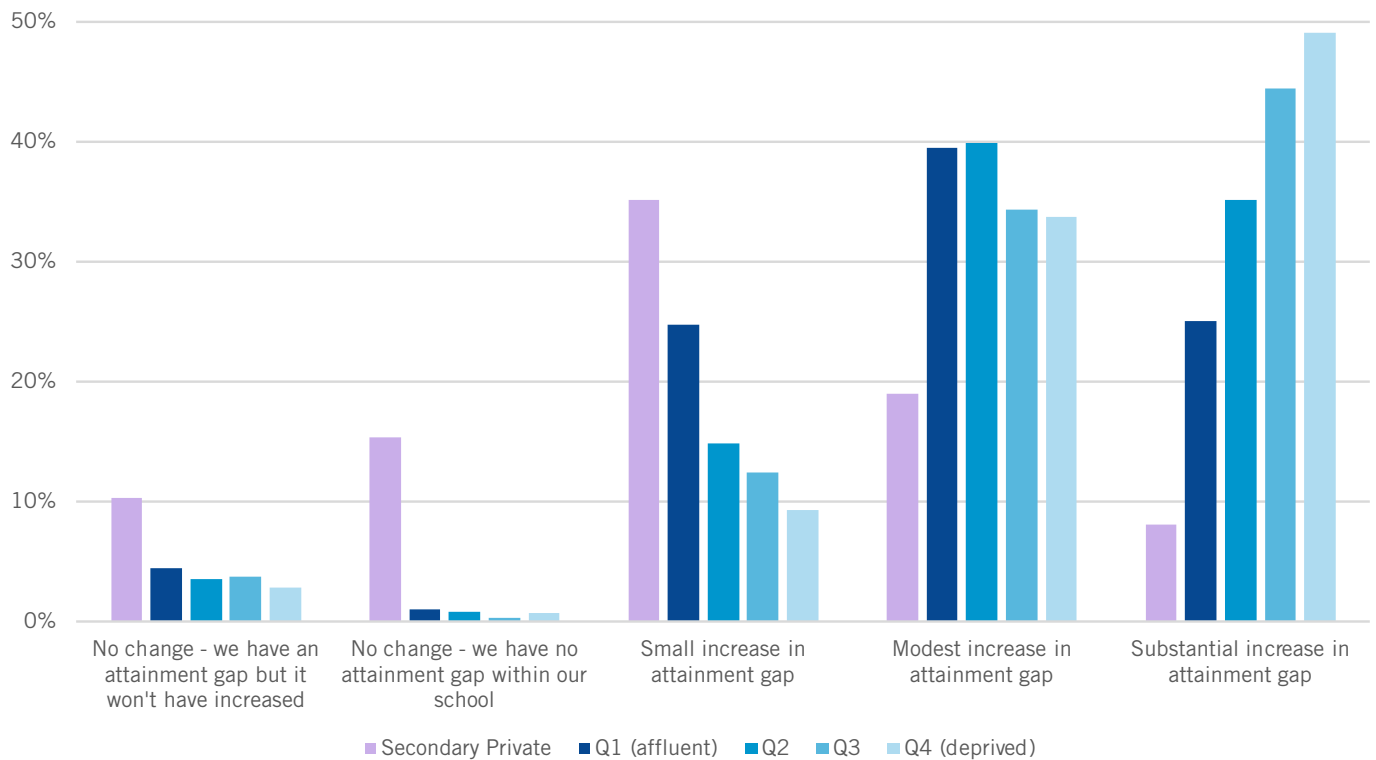


Source: Teacher Tapp survey of school teachers in England, 14th January 2021

cited more laptops and tablets as the most urgent measure needed, underlining the importance of the government scheme, as well as the various charity donation schemes set up by the BBC and others, including XTX Markets who have donated laptops to participants in Sutton Trust programmes.²⁴ 24% cited measures related to internet access, including the distribution of internet dongles with free mobile access, and the 'zero rating' of educational websites by telecommunications companies. The Oak National Academy has

been leading a project to secure the exclusion of online learning from mobile data allowances, which could potentially have a significant impact on those currently reliant on mobile internet for learning.²⁵ 12% of teachers cited targeting online tutoring to help those most in need, with headteachers particularly supportive (20%). Since the closures, the National Tutoring Programme has moved much of its provision online where possible,²⁶ but this is unlikely to address the full scale of need.

Figure 13. What impact will the COVID-19 lockdown and associated disruption have on the attainment gap at your school? Secondary teachers, by deprivation level of school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of school teachers in England, 11th January 2021

For year 11 and year 13s, the most prominent worry is how they will be assessed for their GCSE, A Level and other qualifications, and in particular, what impact this will have on their progression. The cancellation of this year's exams was announced at the same time as the new closures, and this decision is backed by 70% of teachers, with only 13% disagreeing. Nonetheless, this raises the significant question of what happens next, and how assessment will be conducted this year, particularly in light of the controversy around teacher assessed grades and 'the algorithm' in 2020. Ofqual have launched a consultation on this year's assessment plans,²⁷ with initial indications that grades will again be based on teacher assessment, but with a bulked-up range of evidence available to teachers in assigning those grades, coupled with some external oversight.²⁸ It is likely that there will be some level of testing, set externally by exam boards, but taken in school and likely marked by teachers themselves. Grades are also likely to be announced in July, giving time for appeals before universities make their final decisions on admissions. Given the established issues around bias and predicted grades, it is welcome there will be

some external quality assurance, and a robust appeals process, as well as training and guidance available to reduce potential bias. However, evidence suggests that 'non-blind' internal marking by teachers is less likely to be unbiased than if the tests were marked externally.²⁹ It has been argued that a greater level of external marking (or at least moderation) of such tests would both ease the burden on teachers, as well as improve the fairness of the grading process.³⁰

As the 2020 process demonstrated, with exams cancelled, it is virtually impossible to devise a system of grading that will be robust and generate credible grades for use by universities and employers, while also ensuring fairness and consistency across pupil characteristics and schools, and also take into account the huge inequalities in the impact of the pandemic on learning. This latter point will be particularly acute in the context of the in-school assessments taken over the next few months, in the context of the disparities seen throughout this report, where it will be highly challenging to 'fairly' recognise unequal learning disruption in the marking. It will be vital that universities and employers making

decisions on the basis of these grades take this into account. The emphasis, for all those in the sector, should be on facilitating progression, whether it be to sixth form, university, apprenticeships and training, or employment.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a level of disruption to young people's educations at a scale previously unimaginable in modern times. And at every stage of this crisis, young people from the poorest backgrounds have been hit the hardest. Without urgent action significant enough to meet the extraordinary challenges posed by the pandemic, there is a real risk that prospects for social mobility will be irreversibly damaged for a generation of young people.

While schools remain closed, everything that can be done should be done to mitigate the impact of closures and to prevent any further widening of the gap. Providing more devices for those who need them is currently the top priority for teachers to prevent disadvantaged students from falling further behind. As a matter of urgency, devices and

internet access should be provided to all of those who need them. While it is welcome the government have announced an additional 300,000 laptops for students, taking the total up to 1.3 million,³¹ many of these have still not been delivered to students. Every day students do not have the equipment they need is another day of preventable lost learning.

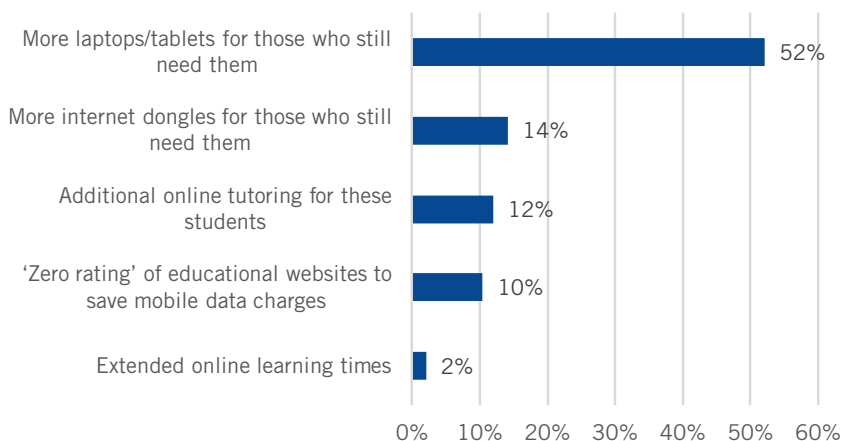
Internet access also continues to be a barrier. The government and many mobile phone networks have been working together to increase data allowances for students,³² but schools need to apply for students to be able to access it, and concerns have been raised that administrative barriers mean many could miss out.³³ The work being done by Oak National Academy to encourage providers to 'zero rate' educational websites is welcome, and progress has already been made by some providers on some sites, for example, several now zero rate content by BBC Bitesize.³⁴ However, more needs to be done to ensure all students can access all the sites they need to learn from home, and providers should continue to work to overcome any technical obstacles to zero-rating all such sites.

But even if everything possible is done to mitigate the impacts of this set of school closures, learning remotely is not an adequate substitute for time in the classroom. Schools need to be re-opened as soon as it is safe to do so, with government working in collaboration with parents and staff on plans for re-opening.

Work is ongoing to estimate the pandemic has had on students, and the Education Endowment Foundation will shortly publish interim findings on the extent of learning loss in the first period of closures, with the study one of the first to provide robust insights into the impact of school closures on attainment. However, the scale of the long-term impact on the attainment gap still remains to be seen, with much relying on actions taken in the coming year.

A huge national effort of catch up is needed, with a focus on those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have suffered most. While existing efforts, including the National

Figure 14. What intervention is most important to prevent disadvantaged pupils from falling behind during this lockdown?



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of school teachers in England, 15th January 2021

Tutoring Programme, are welcome, this new set of school closures, compounding the previous 9 months of disrupted learning, makes further investment essential. As part of a new package of support, the government should provide a one off 'boost' to the pupil premium to be used by schools to fund catch up. £400 per pupil (at an estimated total cost of £750m), could for example, be used to fund 30 minutes of paired tuition, five times a week for 12 weeks, which the EEF estimates can result in an additional 4 months of progress for students, or a week long summer school, potentially resulting in 2 months additional progress.³⁵ However, teachers should be empowered to choose how exactly this money is spent, taking into account [existing guidance](#). Existing reporting mechanisms for the pupil premium could be used to monitor the use of this funding and maintain accountability. It should also be regarded as separate to funding needed for other parts of the pandemic response, for example to cover staff shortages or cleaning supplies.

While additional funding for catch up will be expensive at a time costs to government are already high, failure to act will be far more expensive in the long term, as young people who go into the labour market with fewer skills will be less able to contribute productively to the economy. Research earlier this year commissioned by the Sutton Trust estimated, that the total net economic loss of the first round

of school closures would be at least £1.59 billion for just one year group.³⁶ After this further period of closure, the economic impact will only have increased.

Responding to this unique challenge will also be needed beyond the next academic year. At the very least, the government should extend its current commitment to maintain per pupil rates for the pupil premium beyond 2021, to protect funding for this group into the long term. Due to the economic impact of the pandemic, there are likely to be increased numbers of eligible pupils, and it is important that pupil premium rates are not diluted as a consequence, given the significant needs of this group following this year's disruption. It will be also vital to monitor and publish data on lost learning and the impact of the pandemic on the attainment gap in the longer term, to help inform further support where necessary.

Students facing exams in the next few years are a particularly vulnerable group, with the least amount of time available to catch up lost learning, and should be prioritised in any support. This year's Year 11 and Year 12 students have had two school years of disrupted learning, compounded by the cancellation of their GCSEs, as they transition to post-16 education. Pupil premium funding however does not continue after age 16. While money has been made available to provide tutoring for 16-19 year olds,³⁷ it is crucial that next year sees a greater investment in those in post-16 education, including

extending the remit of the National Tutoring Programme . Additional funding, targeted at those who have been hit hardest by the pandemic, will also be needed, to help schools and colleges afford tutoring through the NTP, as well as to support broader catch up plans. It is vital that this group get back on track for their A

Levels, T Levels and BTECs, as well as those re-taking GCSEs in Post-16 provision, to secure the passes they need to progress to their next destination.

As we move through this second year of the pandemic, if we are to secure the future prospects of a generation of young people, the twin goals of

the education sector as a whole should be to minimise the long term lost learning for those in the school system, and to enable young people to progress to the next stage of their education, training and employment, despite the unparalleled disruption they have faced.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. As a matter of urgency, every pupil should have access to a device and internet access for remote learning.

Laptops, internet dongles and other learning devices should continue to be rolled out at speed through the government programme. Every day that goes by with pupils lacking access to the tools for online learning widens gaps and harms the long term prospects of young people.

2. Educational websites and online learning services should be ‘zero rated’ by internet data providers. While there are technical obstacles to this, telecoms companies should continue to work with the sector to find solutions to excluding online learning from mobile data allowances, removing this cost barrier to online learning.

3. Schools should receive a £750m ‘boost’ for their disadvantaged pupils via the pupil premium, as part of a new package of catch up funding. The cumulative impact of the new school closures on top of 9 months of disrupted schooling on learning and the attainment gap is likely to be of an unprecedented scale. It is vital that schools are resourced to help those who have suffered the most ‘bounce back’ once schools are open again. A £750m one-off pupil premium boost would give schools £400 additional per pupil to spend on catch up as they see fit, which could pay for a block of high quality paired tutoring, and other effective interventions. Funding to cover staff shortages, enhanced cleaning, and other pandemic impacts should be separate from any such ‘catch up’ fund, to ensure its effectiveness.

4. The pupil premium should, at the very least, be protected in per head terms from 2022/23. While it is welcome that the Pupil Premium has been protected for 2021/22, the impact of the pandemic will continue to be felt beyond the next school year. With increased numbers of eligible pupils likely over the current year, it is important that pupil premium rates are not diluted as a consequence.

5. Funding for the National Tutoring Programme should be extended in the next Comprehensive Spending Review, to establish it as a long term contributor to narrowing the attainment gap. Tutoring will play a vital role in helping education recover from the pandemic, but given the scale of the challenge, it will not be sufficient on its own, and must be accompanied by a wider investment in catch up.

6. There needs to be a renewed focus on 16-19 year olds, with eligibility for the National Tutoring Programme extended to students in post-16 education, alongside targeted funding support. Pupils beginning post-16 courses this autumn are at a critical stage in their education, and will have faced huge disruption to their learning, including the cancellation of their GCSEs. In order to help get those hardest hit back on track for A Levels, T Levels, BTECs, and for those who need GCSE passes to progress, it is vital that these students are included in targeted funding support, including a consideration of the extension of the Pupil Premium to FE.

7. Assessment for A Levels and GCSEs and other qualifications in 2021 must be as robust, respected and equitable as possible in the circumstances, with a focus on facilitating progression. While no perfect solution is possible in a context of disruption that has been significant, and unequally experienced, it is crucial that this year’s assessment system should minimise bias or unfairness across pupil characteristics (such as socio-economic background) and across schools. It should also be as robust as possible so as to give this years’ cohorts genuine ‘currency’ as they move to the next level. Externally set tests and robust external moderation of centre assessed grades is vital.

8. There should be a collaborative approach to the re-opening of schools, when it is safe to do so, that commands the confidence of school leaders, teachers and parents. Despite the huge efforts by schools and teachers, it is clear that nothing can replace face to face teaching and learning. If partial reopenings are considered, vulnerable and disadvantaged learners should be prioritised.

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