



## BRIEFING PAPER

Number 08915, 23 February 2021

# Coronavirus and schools: FAQs

By Nerys Roberts  
Shadi Danechi

### Contents:

1. Background on school closures and re-openings
2. School operations (England)
3. School attendance statistics (England)
4. What evidence do we have about differences in home learning?
5. Annexe: school attendance statistics, March to July 2020 (England)



# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Background on school closures and re-openings</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 March 2021 reopening plans (England)	5
1.2 History of school attendance restrictions since beginning of pandemic	6
Schooling during the early pandemic	6
The new school year – August/ September 2020	6
1.3 Spring 2021 school term in other parts of UK	9
<b>2. School operations (England)</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Rules on attendance prior to 8 March 2021	12
Vulnerable pupils	12
Critical workers or key workers (England)	12
2.2 Testing of school students and staff	15
Testing from 8 March 2021	15
Regular asymptomatic testing for pupils is voluntary	15
2.3 Remote education requirements for schools in England	15
Legal basis for requirements on remote education	15
DfE expectations on remote education during national lockdown	16
Remote education requirements from 8 March 2021	16
2.4 Digital devices	16
Electronic devices and routers delivery data	17
Local data on electronic devices and routers	17
2.5 Infection rates (England)	17
2.6 Funding for schools	18
Free school meals during the spring 2021 lockdown (England)	19
<b>3. School attendance statistics (England)</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 School attendance rates since the 2021 national closures	20
3.2 School absence and attendance rates in the autumn 2020 term	22
Further breakdown on reasons for absence	23
Students self-isolating because of close contact with COVID-19 at school	23
Size of groups sent home	24
Regional and local authority-level data	24
3.3 Expansion of data publication content	25
<b>4. What evidence do we have about differences in home learning?</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1 Ofcom Technology Tracker	26
4.2 UCL Institute of Education survey	26
4.3 Teacher Tapp survey	26
4.4 Institute for Fiscal Studies survey	29
4.5 National Foundation for Educational Research study	31
4.6 Further reading	31
<b>5. Annexe: school attendance statistics, March to July 2020 (England)</b>	<b>33</b>
5.1 School attendance rates during the partial reopening	33

### 3 Commons Library Briefing, 23 February 2021

5.2	School attendance rates prior to 1 June 2020	34
5.3	Infection and outbreak data - evidence from second half of summer term 2020 (England)	37

# Summary

## Coverage of this briefing

This briefing paper looks at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and pupils. It largely focuses on England. It provides information on the spring 2021 school attendance restrictions (for most children), 8 March wider re-opening, attendance rates, and remote education. Secondary exams including GCSEs, A Levels and equivalents are covered in a separate briefing paper, [Coronavirus: exams in 2021](#).

This is a fast-moving issue and this briefing should be read as correct at the time of publication.

## Timeline of recent announcements (England)

**30 December 2020:** further delay announced to return to face-to-face teaching for most secondary pupils in England. Most primary pupils to return to school at start of term as planned, except for some areas of London and the South East.

**1 January 2021:** Additional London boroughs were added to the primary closure (for most pupils) list.

**4 January 2021:** Announcement that mainstream primary and secondary schools, and colleges, will move to remote learning for most pupils from the following day, and confirmation that it would not be “possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal”.

**27 January 2021:** Prime Minister announces that schools won’t return (for most pupils in England) until 8 March 2021 at the earliest.

**22 February 2021:** Announcement that all pupils in England can return to school from 8 March 2021.

## Impact on education, development and wellbeing

Survey evidence indicates wide disparities in young people’s home learning experiences during school closures and periods of self-isolation; there have been particular concerns about the impacts on disadvantaged children. The DfE has appointed Sir Kevan Collins as Education Recovery Commissioner for England.

## School funding and additional costs relating to the pandemic

The Department for Education (DfE) has made some additional funding available for free school meals, exceptional cleaning costs, catch-up funding and tutoring, laptops and digital devices, and supply staff costs. However, concerns remain that some schools will struggle to meet pandemic-related costs.

# 1. Background on school closures and re-openings

## 1.1 March 2021 reopening plans (England)

On 22 February 2021, the Prime Minister announced that all pupils at schools in England could return from 8 March 2021:

- All primary pupils would return on Monday 8 March.
- Secondary pupils could also return from this date, but schools would “have discretion on how to test students over [the week commencing 8 March] to enable their return to the classroom”.
- Secondary pupils, college students, and staff were being advised to wear face coverings in classrooms and in communal areas, where social distancing could not be maintained. This would be a temporary extra measure in place until Easter.
- Secondary pupils, college students, and school and college staff across all phases, would take twice-weekly asymptomatic lateral flow tests – more on which in section 2.2 below.<sup>1</sup>

Further details are set out in the Government’s [roadmap out of the current lockdown](#) in England, and in [separate guidance for mainstream schools](#) and [specialist settings](#).

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said that while it shared the Government’s aim of returning children to classrooms as soon as possible, it was “concerned that its decision to press ahead with a full return on 8 March may prove counterproductive and lead to more disruption.” The union pointed to differences in the approach being taken in other UK nations, risks to staff, and the logistical challenges of implementing mass testing for secondary pupils.<sup>2</sup>

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) called on the Government to protect and support schools, including by providing full funding for safety measures, and prioritising school staff for vaccination.<sup>3</sup>

The National Education Union (NEU) raised concerns about the decision to fully re-open schools to all pupils at once:

Time and again in this pandemic the Government have not followed the science, closing schools too late and then opening them too early.

“The Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments are reopening their schools in a phased way as SAGE have recommended. This is the sensible way forward for England, too.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education/ Department for Health and Social Care press release, ‘[Mass testing for secondary pupils as all schools and colleges fully reopen from 8 March](#)’, 22 February 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Association of School and College Leaders, ‘[ASCL responds to PM’s statement on full reopening of schools](#)’, 22 February 2021.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of Head Teachers, ‘[Government must do ‘everything in its power’ to support and protect schools](#)’, 22 February 2021.

We all want to see schools and colleges open, but it must be done sustainably.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 History of school attendance restrictions since beginning of pandemic

### Schooling during the early pandemic

Schools in all parts of the UK were closed to most children by the start of the week commencing Monday 23 March 2020. In England, schools remained open where necessary for the children of critical workers, and vulnerable children including: those with a social worker; looked-after children; and those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan because they have complex special educational needs. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also put similar arrangements in place for the children of critical workers, and vulnerable pupils.

In England, some other pupils in a limited number of priority year groups were encouraged to return later in the summer term.

Information on attendance rates in England during this period can be found in the annexe to this briefing paper.

### The new school year – August/ September 2020

Schools remained closed to most pupils until the beginning of the autumn 2020 term – September in England and Wales, and August in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Schools in all four nations opened with the expectation of full attendance for the new 2020/21 school year.

### Concerns before Christmas break about schools remaining open until the end of term

The Government's stated position in December was that schools in England should stay open as planned until the end of term. However, there were concerns about case numbers within schools and their local communities, and pupil and staff absence rates in many areas.

### Direction to Royal Borough of Greenwich

On 14 December 2020, the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, issued a [temporary continuity direction](#) to the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG), exercising powers in the *Coronavirus Act 2020*. On Sunday 13 December, RBG had written to head teachers to ask them to close their premises for face-to-face provision for most pupils, from Tuesday 15 December. Williamson's direction required RBG to withdraw the letters it sent to head teachers, parents, carers and families, and send a 'Schools Opening Requirement' letter to head teachers.

On 15 December 2020, RBG published [a notice](#) about its response to the direction. Council leader, Danny Thorpe, stated:

I cannot agree that this is the correct choice for our schools. However, I also cannot justify the use of public funds to fight the decision in the courts. Consequently, I have no choice but to ask

---

<sup>4</sup> National Education Union, '[The Government are still not following the science](#)', 23 February 2021.

our schools to keep their doors open to all students rather than just continuing with online learning.<sup>5</sup>

RBG also [published](#) a further letter to parents, and one to Mr. Williamson.

### **Re-opening after the Christmas break**

Earlier in December 2020, the Government had said it intended all primary pupils in England to return as normal in January 2021, and for secondary non-exam year groups to have one week of online schooling before returning to onsite provision from 11 January 2021.

However, on 30 December 2020, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced a further delay to the return to onsite learning for most secondary pupils across England.<sup>6</sup> Most secondary year groups would not return to face-to-face teaching until the week commencing 18 January, subject to review, regardless of tier. However, exam year pupils would return from 11 January, and vulnerable and critical worker pupils from the start of term.

On 30 December 2020, Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, announced changes for primaries in some areas of the South East and London “where the infection rates are highest”.<sup>7</sup> In these areas, the starting date was to be delayed to the week commencing 18 January for most children, excluding vulnerable and critical worker children, subject to review. All other children would be provided with remote education. These areas would be subject to the DfE’s [contingency framework](#), which sets out additional restrictions for education providers (excluding universities).

On 1 January 2021, following representations by teaching and leadership unions, some London councils, and the Mayor of London, the Government [announced](#) that all London boroughs would be subject to the delayed return arrangements for primary schools.<sup>8</sup>

In response to the question of how the original areas of London and the South East were selected, a DfE blog article of 31 December 2020 said:

We work closely with PHE, the NHS, with DHSC and across government to monitor the number of new infections, positivity rates, and pressures on the NHS. The contingency framework has been applied to address local areas with high rates of infection and with significant increases in 7-day case rates, and pressure on the NHS.<sup>9</sup>

### **Position of teaching and leadership unions on January reopening**

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) announced on 2 January 2021 that they had jointly commenced “preliminary steps in

---

<sup>5</sup> Royal Borough of Greenwich, [‘Response to the Government regarding schools’](#), 15 December 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Education Secretary Gavin Williamson Statement to Parliament, [‘Education Secretary sets out school contingency plans for England’](#), 30 December 2020

<sup>7</sup> As above.

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, [‘Contingency framework implemented across London boroughs’](#), 1 January 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, [‘Delayed return to school and contingency framework: Your questions answered’](#), 31 December 2020

legal proceedings” against the Department for Education, together with the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). The NAHT said:

The legal process we have instigated covers a wide range of issues from the scientific advice the government is drawing on, right through to the proposed arrangements for covid testing in schools.

Alongside this, the NAHT called for the Government to revisit its list of ‘high risk’ areas – i.e., those where primary schools’ physical re-opening was being delayed.<sup>10</sup> It also advocated an urgent review of the approach to special schools, alternative provision, and maintained nursery schools.

On Saturday 2 January 2021, the National Education Union (NEU) [advised primary and special school, and early years members](#) that it was “unsafe” for them to return to work. It has also previously urged a move to remote education for the first two weeks of January.<sup>11</sup> The NEU encouraged members to send [a letter](#) to employers on the issue of safety, declaring that they are “exercising [their] contractual right not to attend an unsafe place of work”.<sup>12</sup> The template letter cited sections of the *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974*, as amended, and related secondary legislation. ‘Section 44’, in the template letter title was a reference to [section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996](#), which protects employees from suffering a detriment if they refuse to attend the workplace because they reasonably believe that there is a serious and imminent danger to themselves or to others. For more information on the 1996 Act, see Section 3 of our briefing paper, [Coronavirus: Returning to work](#).

The GMB Union expressed concern about the planned return to the classroom for primary schools and early years in most areas, and said it would continue to support “those local authorities who have taken the decision to close schools to children (other than for key workers or vulnerable groups) against the Secretary of State’s position”. However, on the issue of Section 44 template letters, it said:

GMB will not run the risk of our members being disciplined or dismissed from their employment for not attending work without an authorised reason such as sickness or holiday. You may have been advised that other Unions are suggesting that Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act Model letter gives members the right to leave their workplace in the face of a serious and imminent risk of danger but whilst this legislation may give protection against any action being taken by employers, the reality is what Section 44 means hasn’t been tested in the context of Covid –19.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), [‘Update sent to members regarding start of term’](#), 2 January 2021.

<sup>11</sup> National Education Union, [‘NEU advises primary members it is unsafe to return to work’](#), 2 January 2021.

<sup>12</sup> National Education Union, [‘Section 44 letter download’](#), accessed 3 January 2021.

<sup>13</sup> GMB Union, [‘GMB Guidance: Re-opening of Primary Schools & Early Years \(England\)’](#), 3 January 2021.



### **Prime Minister urges pupils to attend school**

On Sunday 3 January 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson told the Andrew Marr show that parents of primary-aged children in areas where schools are open should “absolutely” send their children to school at the start of the new term. He said there was “no doubt” in his mind that schools were safe. He also referred to the action previously taken, saying that “if you think about the history of the pandemic, we’ve kept schools going for a long, long time in areas where the pandemic has really been at really high levels.”<sup>14</sup>

On 4 January 2021, the main education workforce unions issued a [joint statement](#), calling for a pause in the re-opening of schools for anyone other than vulnerable and critical worker children.<sup>15</sup>

### **Mainstream schools in England close to most pupils until after February half term 2021**

During an [address to the nation](#) on 4 January 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that primary schools, secondary schools, and colleges in England would move to remote learning for most pupils, until after February half-term, subject to review. Vulnerable pupils and critical workers’ children could continue to attend face-to-face provision, and the DfE subsequently indicated that special schools and alternative provision would remain open.<sup>16</sup> The DfE subsequently published [updated guidance](#) on accessing school places,<sup>17</sup> and [for special schools and specialist settings](#).<sup>18</sup>

Mr Johnson also said that the Government recognised that it was “not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal”.<sup>19</sup> It was subsequently reported in the press that vocational/ technical exams (such as BTECs) planned for the next few weeks could still go ahead.<sup>20</sup>

On 27 January, Mr Johnson made a further statement in the Commons, in which he said that it wouldn’t be possible to start re-opening schools to more pupils straight after the February half term, but that the Government hoped this could happen from 8 March.<sup>21</sup>

## **1.3 Spring 2021 school term in other parts of UK**

### **Scotland**

Before Christmas, the Scottish Government announced that schools would not offer on-site provision to most pupils until at least 18 January

---

<sup>14</sup> BBC News online, [‘Primary schools: Send children to school on Monday, says PM’](#), 3 January 2021.

<sup>15</sup> National Association of Head Teachers, [‘Education unions’ joint statement on the safe reopening of schools’](#), 4 January 2021.

<sup>16</sup> [Department for Education Twitter post](#), 4 January 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Department for Education, [‘Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings’](#), 8 January 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, [Guidance for special schools, specialist post-16 providers and alternative provision during the national lockdown](#), 14 January 2021.

<sup>19</sup> [Prime Minister’s address to the nation: 4 January 2021](#)

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., [‘BTEC and other vocational exams to go ahead this week despite national lockdown, DfE confirms’](#), in *Schools Week*, 4 January 2021.

<sup>21</sup> [HC Deb 27 January 2021](#), Vol. 688, c386.

2021. Schools would be open to vulnerable and key worker children from the beginning of term, and would provide online learning for other pupils from 11 January.<sup>22</sup>

On Monday 4 January 2021, whilst outlining further lockdown measures for Scotland, First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said that Scotland's schools would stay closed to most pupils until 1 February 2021, with a review on 18 January. The change would apply to all pupils, except vulnerable children, and children of key workers, and to "nursery schools, as well as primary and secondary schools". These school measures would also apply across Scotland, and not just to Scotland's Level 4 (mainland) areas.<sup>23</sup>

On Tuesday 16 February, the Scottish Government announced that more pupils would be able to attend full-time from 22 February, including those in early years settings, and primary year groups 1-3. Small numbers of secondary pupils in years S4 to S6 and who needed to complete practical work in order to receive Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) certificates would also return. She said that, all being well, more announcements would follow on 2 March, but that she didn't envisage "any further return to school before 15 March".<sup>24</sup>

### Wales

Welsh Government guidance was updated on 11 January 2021. This explained:

Following a formal review of the current restrictions the First Minister announced on 8<sup>th</sup> January that we will bring decision-making on schools and colleges into line with the Welsh Government's three-week review timetable of 29 January. This means that students will continue to learn remotely and vulnerable children and children of critical workers will have access to on-site provision along with learners undertaking essential exams and assessments, until then.

At that point, unless the rates of community transmission in Wales reduce significantly by 29 January, most students in schools and colleges will continue working remotely until the February half term.<sup>25</sup>

The Welsh Government announced in early February that the phased return would begin as planned from 22 February. Children in the foundation phase (aged around 3 to 7) would return first. Small numbers of vocational students would also return to colleges.<sup>26</sup>

On Sunday 21 February, the press quoted Ms Williams as saying that she was "confident" that more pupils would be able to return from 15 March 2021, if case numbers continued to fall. However, she also

---

<sup>22</sup> Statement by First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, '[COVID-19 update: First Minister's Speech](#)', 19 December 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Statement by First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) update: First Minister's statement - Monday 4 January 2021](#)', 4 January 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government news story, '[Remote learning to continue for majority](#)', 16 February 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Welsh Government, 'Schools: coronavirus guidance', 11 January 2021; see also [Cabinet Statement, Written Statement: Review of the Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restriction\) \(No.5\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#), 8 January 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Welsh Government, '[Schools: Coronavirus guidance](#)', 19 February 2021.

reportedly said that returning secondary pupils was more complicated; the Government intended to use “whatever headroom we have” to allow older secondary age groups some face-to-face provision.<sup>27</sup>

### **Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, most primary and secondary school pupils have been taught remotely since the start of the January term. Additionally, transfer tests (for admission to Northern Ireland’s selective grammar schools) did not go ahead.<sup>28</sup>

Pupils in pre-school, nursery and primary years 1 to 3 are expected to return to school on 8 March 2021, until 22 March when they will return to remote learning. At that point, older secondary pupils in years 12 to 14 will return to schools until the beginning of the Easter school holidays. After the Easter holidays, all of these year groups would return to face-to-face lessons full-time.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> BBC News, [‘Covid: Minister confident about pupils’ school return’](#), 21 February 2021.

<sup>28</sup> [‘Covid-19: Post-primary transfer tests cancelled in Northern Ireland’](#), BBC News, 5 January 2021; [‘Covid-19: February AQE transfer test has been cancelled’](#),

<sup>29</sup> Department of Education, [‘Phased return of pupils to start in March’](#). 18 February 2021.

## 2. School operations (England)

### 2.1 Rules on attendance prior to 8 March 2021

#### Vulnerable pupils

Vulnerable children have been able to attend school during all lockdown phases. Currently, they are defined by the DfE as those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance, this might include:
  - children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services
  - adopted children or children on a special guardianship order
  - those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training')
  - those living in temporary accommodation
  - those who are young carers
  - those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
- care leavers
- others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health.<sup>30</sup>

#### Critical workers or key workers (England)

The 8 January DfE guidance defines critical workers as follows, but states that parents should keep children at home if they can:

##### **Critical workers**

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined in the following sections. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school or college if required, but parents and carers should keep their children at home if they can.

##### **Health and social care**

---

<sup>30</sup> Department for Education, '[Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings](#)', 5 January 2021.

This includes, but is not limited to, doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

#### **Education and childcare**

This includes:

childcare

support and teaching staff

social workers

specialist education professionals who must remain active during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response to deliver this approach

#### **Key public services**

This includes:

those essential to the running of the justice system

religious staff

charities and workers delivering key frontline services

those responsible for the management of the deceased

journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting

#### **Local and national government**

This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of:

the coronavirus (COVID-19) response, and the delivery of and response to EU transition

essential public services, such as the payment of benefits and the certification or checking of goods for import and export (including animal products, animals, plants and food), including in government agencies and arms length bodies

#### **Food and other necessary goods**

This includes those involved in food:

production

processing

distribution

sale and delivery

as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines)

#### **Public safety and national security**

This includes:

police and support staff

Ministry of Defence civilians

contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential

to the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and EU transition)

fire and rescue service employees (including support staff)

National Crime Agency staff

those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas

### **Transport and border**

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response and EU transition, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass and those constructing or supporting the operation of critical transport and border infrastructure through which supply chains pass.

### **Utilities, communication and financial services**

This includes:

staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure)

the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)

information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the coronavirus (COVID-19) response

key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services)

postal services and delivery

payments providers

waste disposal sectors.<sup>31</sup>

The DfE has published [more detailed guidance for schools](#) on operations during the period of restricted attendance during the national lockdown.<sup>32</sup> On allocating places to critical workers' children, this says:

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors. Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school if required. This includes parents who may be working from home.

Schools should speak to parents and carers to identify who needs to go to school. If it proves necessary, schools can ask for simple evidence that the parent in question is a critical worker, such as their work ID badge or pay slip. Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can.

We know that every school will have a different number of children of critical workers who need to attend. It is important that on-site provision is provided for these pupils, and there is no

---

<sup>31</sup> Department for Education, '[Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings](#)', 8 January 2021

<sup>32</sup> Department for Education, '[Restricting attendance during the national lockdown: schools](#)', 5 February 2021, p28.

limit to numbers of these pupils who may attend and schools should not limit attendance of these groups. This is because we are reducing overall social contact across areas and the country rather than individually by each institution.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2 Testing of school students and staff

### Testing from 8 March 2021

In his [Statement](#) to the Commons on 22 February 2021, the Prime Minister said full school re-opening would be supported by twice-weekly lateral flow testing for pupils of secondary school age, and continued twice-weekly testing of school staff.

Further information on the plans for testing secondary pupils and school staff in the context of wider reopening can be found in a [DfE press release](#) of 22 February 2021,<sup>34</sup> and in the [main DfE guidance for schools](#) that will apply from 8 March 2021 onward. There is [additional DfE guidance](#) for testing in special schools and other specialist settings.

Prior to Christmas, the intention had been to use daily (serial) testing of close contacts as a means of limiting the need for pupils to self-isolate.<sup>35</sup> However, this approach was paused.<sup>36</sup> The current DfE guidance for schools on asymptomatic testing states that those with positive LFD tests will need to self-isolate, and they also need to isolate if they've tested negative, but have been advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace or Public Health professionals – for example, because they are a close contact of a confirmed case.<sup>37</sup>

### Regular asymptomatic testing for pupils is voluntary

The DfE guidance to schools is clear that participation in asymptomatic testing is voluntary for secondary pupils.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.3 Remote education requirements for schools in England

### Legal basis for requirements on remote education

The Education Secretary has issued a [temporary continuity direction](#) under the *Coronavirus Act 2020*, as amended. This concerns remote education where pupils are unable to attend school for specified reasons connected to the pandemic. The direction applies to schools and other settings in England that educate state-funded pupils of (and in some cases, below) compulsory school age.

---

<sup>33</sup> As above, p25.

<sup>34</sup> Department for Education/ Department of Health and Social Care press release, '[Mass testing for secondary pupils as all schools and colleges fully reopen from 8 March](#)', 22 February 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Department for Education/ Department of Health and Social Care press release, '[Secondary schools and colleges to get weekly coronavirus testing](#)', 15 December 2020.

<sup>36</sup> See: Department for Education website article, '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#)', 2 February 2021, accessed 22 February 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Department for Education, '[Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance \(applies from 8 March\)](#)', 22 February 2021.

<sup>38</sup> As above, p30.

An [explanatory note](#) to the direction clarifies that:

Qualifying schools and settings are expected to provide immediate remote education where a pupil or group of pupils cannot attend for specified reasons.

The direction came into force on 22 October 2020.

## DfE expectations on remote education during national lockdown

The DfE's expectations on remote education are covered at p52 onward of the [guidance to schools](#) for the current lockdown.

Remote education should be equivalent in length to the core teaching pupils would receive if in school, and as a minimum, at key stages 3 and 4 (ages approx. 11 to 16) should equate to 5 hours a day.

It should include either live or recorded direct teaching time, and time for pupils to complete work independently.

Provision should also take into account pupils' special educational needs.

In terms of actual content, schools should teach a "planned and well-sequenced curriculum". They should also:

- Select and use an appropriate digital platform
- Distribute school-owned laptops to overcome digital barriers
- Provide printed resources
- Allow vulnerable and critical worker pupils to attend in person, where appropriate.
- Have systems to check whether pupils are engaging
- Identify a senior leader with responsibility for remote education

## Remote education requirements from 8 March 2021

State-funded schools will still be expected to provide remote education to pupils not able to attend school from 8 March 2021 onward, where the absence is for specified reasons relating to the pandemic.

Information on the DfE's expectations, and the form the remote education should take, can be found on p45 onward of the DfE's [operational guidance to schools for this period](#).

## 2.4 Digital devices

Since the early part of the pandemic, the DfE has provided laptops, tablets, 4G routers, and other technological support for disadvantaged children without access to hardware or a broadband connection.

Following the announcement of a renewed national lockdown at the start of 2021, the Education Secretary [announced](#) further support would be provided:

The government has committed to providing over one million devices to help schools and colleges throughout the pandemic – with over 560,000 of these delivered through 2020. The scale of deliveries has now been increased, with a further 50,000 devices



sent to schools across the country on Monday alone. The government will deliver well over 100,000 devices over the course of this week.

The government is working with the UK's leading mobile network operators to provide access to educational sites. Schools can already request free mobile data uplifts for disadvantaged families, via the Department for Education's website.

The level of additional data for families will vary by provider, but for example Three customers will receive unlimited data and EE customers will receive an extra 20 gigabytes per month. Other providers supporting the offer include Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodafone and O2.<sup>39</sup>

On 12 January 2021, the DfE announced a further 300,000 laptops and tablets would be delivered.<sup>40</sup>

Further information can be found on the DfE's [Get help with technology during coronavirus](#) web page.

## Electronic devices and routers delivery data

The Department for Education has published several ad hoc [data releases](#) about the progress in delivering and dispatching electronic devices (laptops and tablets) and 4G routers to local authorities and academy trusts.

The most recent national progress data for devices and routers is as of [14 February 2021](#) when:

- Around 1,055,700 devices were delivered or dispatched in total since the start of the scheme (May 2020).
- Of these around 493,300 devices were delivered or dispatched since 4 January 2021.
- Around 67,600 routers were delivered or dispatched in total since the start of the scheme (May 2020).
- Of these around 12,800 routers were delivered or dispatched since 4 January 2021.

## Local data on electronic devices and routers

Data broken down by devices delivered or dispatched to each local authority and local authority maintained schools (combined) and academy trusts (listed separately) since 10 September 2020 are [also published](#). It is not possible to aggregate these figures to produce local authority totals because academy trusts can include schools across different local authorities.

## 2.5 Infection rates (England)

The latest interim report from Imperial College's Department of Health and Social Care-commissioned REACT-1 coronavirus study for England was published on 18 February 2021. This reports data relating to swabs collected between 4 February and 13 February 2021 inclusive. The

---

<sup>39</sup> Department for Education, [Education Secretary outlines plans to support young people](#), 6 January 2021

<sup>40</sup> Department for Education, ['Hundreds of thousands more laptops to support disadvantaged pupils learn at home'](#), 12 January 2021.

report's authors concluded that between the latest period (round 9a) and the previous round, round 8, overall weighted prevalence had fallen significantly, by more than two-thirds.<sup>41</sup> In terms of age groups, prevalence was highest among those aged 18 to 24 and 5 to 12.

On 22 February 2021, the DfE published a [summary of evidence](#) on children, young people and education settings. This states that:

- The “overwhelming evidence” is that the risks to children and young people from coronavirus are low, but that the risks to children and young people of being out of school and college were high, “and increase the longer restrictions on education are in force”.
- Transmission can occur in educational settings but there was “no strong evidence” that these settings were driving largescale community transmission.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.6 Funding for schools

The DfE has introduced a number of additional funding streams for schools and pupils, specifically related to the pandemic. Schools also continue to receive their regular recurrent funding. Additional funding includes:

[Exceptional costs funding](#) for certain additional costs incurred during the period March to July 2020:

- additional cleaning associated with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases;
- support for free school meals for where this was not covered by the national voucher scheme;
- Some increased premises related costs.

A second claims period closed on 22 December 2020. The DfE published [guidance on how to make a claim](#).

- A [universal catch-up premium](#) and the [National Tutoring Programme](#) – in recognition of lost face-to-face teaching for schools. On 23 February 2021, DfE officials reportedly told the Education Committee that further announcements on the additional £300 million catch-up funding announced in January, would follow soon.<sup>43</sup>
- [Funding for digital devices and 4G routers](#), for disadvantaged children unable to attend school because of closures or self-isolation requirements.
- Home to school transport: In August 2020, Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, [announced](#) an additional £40

---

<sup>41</sup> Riley, Steven *et. al.*, '[REACT-1 round 9 interim report: downward trend of SARS-CoV-2 in England in February 2021 but still at high prevalence](#)', (Pre-print), 18 February 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Department for Education, '[Evidence summary: COVID-19 - children, young people and education settings](#)', 22 February 2021, p3.

<sup>43</sup> '[School funding chiefs at education committee: 9 things we learned](#)', in School Week, 23 February 2021.

million funding for local authorities to support school transport provision in the autumn term during the pandemic.<sup>44</sup>

- Additional funding for free school meals during the initial lockdown, and during the Easter, May half term, and summer holidays. A COVID Winter Grant Scheme, to be run by councils in England, was subsequently announced to provide support from December 2020 to March 2021. Further details on funding for school meals and holiday activities can be found in another Library briefing paper, [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#)
- Further funding for free school meals, and digital devices, during the spring 2021 lockdown.<sup>45</sup>
- The DfE has [also confirmed](#) it is providing additional high need funding of £730 million in 2021-22, and says this will take the overall SEND budget to “more than £8 billion” in 2021-22.
- A [COVID workforce fund](#), to cover the second half of the autumn 2020 term. This funding would be available to schools and colleges “facing the greatest combined staffing and funding pressures”. In order to be eligible, institutions need to meet financial and teacher/ lecturer absence thresholds.<sup>46</sup>

### Free school meals during the spring 2021 lockdown (England)

Further information on free school meals funding schemes during the January 2021 lockdown, and during previous periods of restricted school opening, can be found in another Library briefing paper:

- [School meals and nutritional standards \(England\)](#)

---

<sup>44</sup> Department for Education press release, '[Multi-million-pound funding package for school transport](#)', 8 August 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Speech by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, '[Prime Minister's address to the nation: 4 January 2021](#)'

<sup>46</sup> Department for Education press release, '[New funding to support schools and colleges during Covid pandemic](#)', 27 November 2020.

## 3. School attendance statistics (England)

The DfE has published estimates for the number of pupils in priority groups attending school since 23 March. This has been based figures that [schools have provided](#) to them through a daily survey. Absence data for Covid-19 related reasons is available on a weekly snapshot basis from 12 October until the end of the autumn term.

The published figures are **estimates** because they have been adjusted for non-responses using certain assumptions. Lower response rates from schools can make these estimates less accurate. There have been changes to the information schools have been asked to return, and also changes to how the resulting data has been reported, over time, which mean that care must be taken when looking at trends.

Further detail about Covid-19 infections can be found within the [coronavirus in the UK dashboard](#), [national COVID-19 surveillance reports](#) and [coronavirus infection survey pilot statistics](#).

### 3.1 School attendance rates since the 2021 national closures

Since 5 January 2021 schools closed except to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

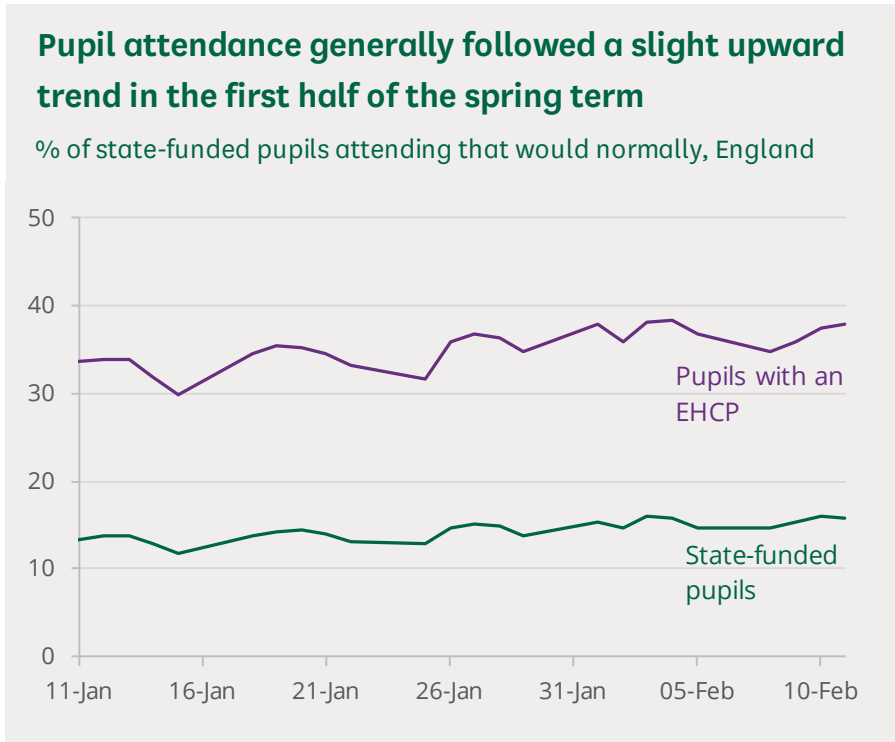
Figures are not available between 5 January and 8 January because the daily attendance survey was being updated. The most recent data available at the time of writing is as at 11 February 2021.

The chart below shows the percentage of pupils reported as attending state-funded schools during the first half of the spring term for which data is available.

Average state-funded pupils' attendance increased slightly between the start of the spring term and February half term. Fluctuations were relatively small over the period with attendance rates reaching a high of 15.9% and a low of 11.7%.

Unsurprisingly, the attendance of pupils with EHC plans was much higher than the average but followed a similar directional trend over the first half of the spring 2021 term. Attendance fluctuated within a larger range (between 29.8% and 37.9% over the period).

The DfE also publishes data on the percentage of pupils with a social worker who are attending (not shown in the chart below) – rates for this group have very closely tracked the rate for pupils with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. Rates of attendance of the children of critical workers have not been published consistently over the period.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP. Attendance rates were affected by poor weather conditions in some areas between 8-11 February.

Source: Department for Education, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 11 February 2020](#)

As at 11 February 2021:

- Around 16% of pupils attended state-funded schools that they would normally attend. This compares to around 1% on 29 May 2020 (the last date which recorded this information before the partial school reopening on 1 June 2020).
- The proportion of pupils with an EHC plan attending school was around 38%.
- The proportion of pupils with a social worker attending school was around 44%.<sup>47</sup>
- The proportion of children of critical workers attending school was around 69%.
- Attendance was highest in special schools (35% of pupils that would normally attend), followed by alternative provision (27%), primary schools (24%) and lowest attendance was recorded by far in secondary schools (5%).
- An estimated 38% of teachers and school leaders, and 54% of teaching assistants and other staff worked in open state-funded schools in person.

<sup>47</sup> Some pupils may have a social worker and an EHCP, this means they are counted in both sets of figures.

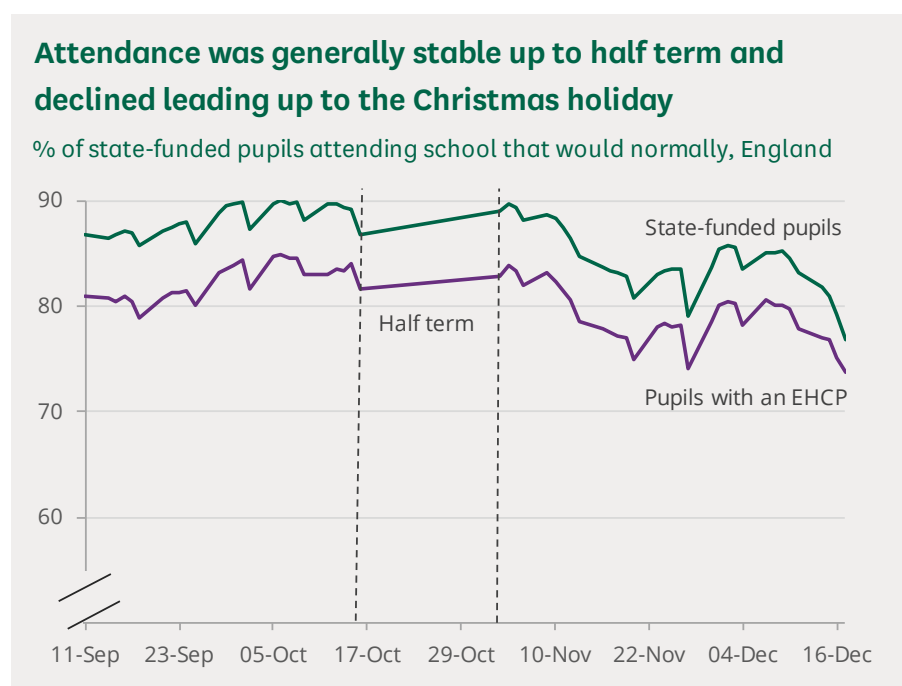
## 3.2 School absence and attendance rates in the autumn 2020 term

The chart below shows the percentage of pupils reported as attending state-funded schools since the beginning of the autumn 2020 term.

Average state-funded pupils' attendance was relatively stable between the start of the autumn term and October half term, reaching a high of 90.1% and a low of 86.0%. Attendance rates fluctuated more widely after October half term and generally followed a downward trend, particularly in the last two weeks of term. Between half term and the end of term, attendance reached a high of 89.6% and a low of 76.9%.

The attendance of pupils with EHC plans was consistently lower than the average and followed a similar directional trend over the autumn 2020 term. Attendance ranged between 78.9% and 84.9% before half term and 73.7% and 83.9% after half term.

The DfE also publishes data on the percentage of pupils with a social worker who are attending (not shown in the chart below) – rates for this group have very closely tracked the rate for pupils with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP.

Source: Department for Education, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 13 January 2020](#)

During the autumn term the average attendance rates masked some differences between typical attendance levels in different types of schools. For the majority of the period attendance in state-funded primary schools was higher than in state-funded secondary schools, which in turn was higher than state-funded special schools and state-funded alternative provision.

As at 16 December 2020 attendance at state-funded primaries was around 86%. For secondaries it was 72%, whilst for special schools it was 73% (an example of a minority of dates when attendance was higher than in secondary schools), and for alternative provision it was 50%.

### Further breakdown on reasons for absence

The information collected from schools by the DfE has changed over time; from 12 October 2020, it began collecting more detailed information on reasons for absence. Not all absence from school will be due to COVID-19-related reasons.

As at 16 December 2020, the DfE estimated that around **9-11% of state-funded school pupils did not attend for COVID-19-related reasons**. This included:

- **0.2% of pupils with a confirmed case** of coronavirus – similar to the previous week's rate, and **0.5% of pupils with a suspected case** of coronavirus – up slightly from the previous week.
- **7.1-8.3% of pupils self-isolating due to potential contact** with a case of coronavirus, up slightly from the previous week.
- **1.7% of pupils in schools closed** for COVID-19 related reasons – up from 0.6% the previous week.<sup>48</sup>

### Students self-isolating because of close contact with COVID-19 at school

The chart below shows the proportion of schools reporting one or more pupils self-isolating because of contact with a COVID-19 case within the school.

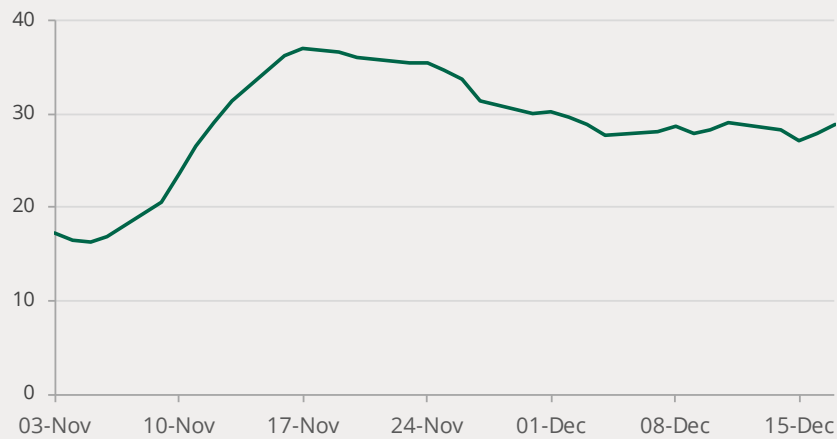
3 November 2020 was the first recorded data after October half term when 17.3% of schools had 1+ pupil self-isolating due to exposure within the school community. This rate then increased sharply reaching a peak of 37.0% on 17 November. Subsequently the rate generally followed a downward trend but did not return to the levels recorded in early November.

---

<sup>48</sup> Department for Education, [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#), 15 December 2020

### % of schools with 1+ pupil self-isolating increased sharply after half term, then generally declined from mid-Nov

England, state-funded schools



Note: Figures relate to pupils self-isolating because of contact with a confirmed case within the school community. No comparable data exists for the period prior to half-term.

Source: Department for Education, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 13 January 2020](#)

### Size of groups sent home

There are differences in the typical size of groups sent home to self-isolate, for primary and secondary schools.

As at 16 December 2020, the median group size for primary schools was around 14-15% of pupils on roll, whilst at secondary schools it was around 7-8% of pupils on roll.

The DfE reports that, on average, these proportions equate to the size of a year group in primary schools and just under half a year group in secondary schools.

As at 16 December 2020, the median number of pupils isolating per confirmed case **was 23 for secondary schools, and 29 for primary schools.**

Schools not reporting any pupils with a confirmed case of Covid-19 were excluded from this analysis.<sup>49</sup>

### Regional and local authority-level data

Part-way through the Autumn term the DfE published backdated data on COVID-19-related absence and attendance at the regional and local authority level for the first time.

Data at the LA level is not adjusted for non-responses from schools and so may not be representative. Given considerable differences in response rates between LA areas (from 27% to 100%) and variation in

<sup>49</sup> Source: Department for Education, [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak, 15 December 2020](#).



the number of schools in particular areas, this means we should be cautious about 'ranking' local authorities by attendance.

At the regional level:

- All regions showed attendance increasing or remaining relatively stable until the October half term. Afterwards, attendance decreased in all regions, before recovering (albeit not fully) in late November and December, and then falling again in the last week of term.
- The South West, South East and East of England had the highest attendance throughout most of the autumn term, but in December attendance fell in the SE, East of England and London (falling particularly sharply in the last week of term).
- From mid-September until October half term, the North West had the lowest attendance, switching to the North East, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber in the weeks directly after half term.
- By early December, London and the South East had the lowest rates of attendance.

### **3.3 Expansion of data publication content**

The DfE has said that from 19 January 2020 it will publish backdated workforce absence data for the autumn term which will be updated on a weekly basis along with the pupil absence data.

## 4. What evidence do we have about differences in home learning?

### 4.1 Ofcom Technology Tracker

In early 2020, [Ofcom's Technology Tracker](#) estimated that between 1.14 million and 1.78 million children under the age of 18 lived in households without access to a laptop, desktop or tablet in the UK.

Ofcom estimated that between 227,000 and 559,000 lived in households with no access to the internet at home, while a further 473,000 to 913,000 lived in households whose only access to the internet was via mobile.

These estimates are expressed as ranges because they are based on a survey. Estimates broken down by local area or school year group are not published.

### 4.2 UCL Institute of Education survey

The [UCL Institute of Education](#) analysed survey data about home schooling from a sample of UK households which included 4,559 children. The survey was carried out in the last two weeks of April. The results were then adjusted to provide UK wide **estimates**.

The survey found the average amount of schoolwork that pupils were doing in a day was low (two and a half hours).

The survey also found large differences between pupils' home learning experiences when broken down by free school meal (FSM) status.

For example, an estimated 25% of pupils eligible for FSM spent no time or less than one hour on schoolwork in a day compared to 18% of pupils not eligible. In addition, an estimated 11% of pupils eligible for FSM spent four hours or more on schoolwork in a day compared to 19% of pupils not eligible.<sup>50</sup>

The survey also found an estimated 20% of FSM pupils had no access to a computer at home. This compares to 7% for other children.<sup>51</sup>

### 4.3 Teacher Tapp survey

[Teacher Tapp](#) have asked a range of survey questions to a sample of around 7,000 teachers several times per week during the school closures. The results are then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

---

<sup>50</sup> UCL Institute of Education, [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#), p19

<sup>51</sup> UCL Institute of Education, [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#), p10

The survey found very large differences between teachers' perceptions of state and private sector pupils' home learning environments, and also the average amount of online learning time.<sup>52</sup>

For example, 5% of private school teachers thought that more than 20% of the children in their class did not have access to an electronic device for learning (as of 25 March). In contrast, 15% of state-funded teachers thought the same.

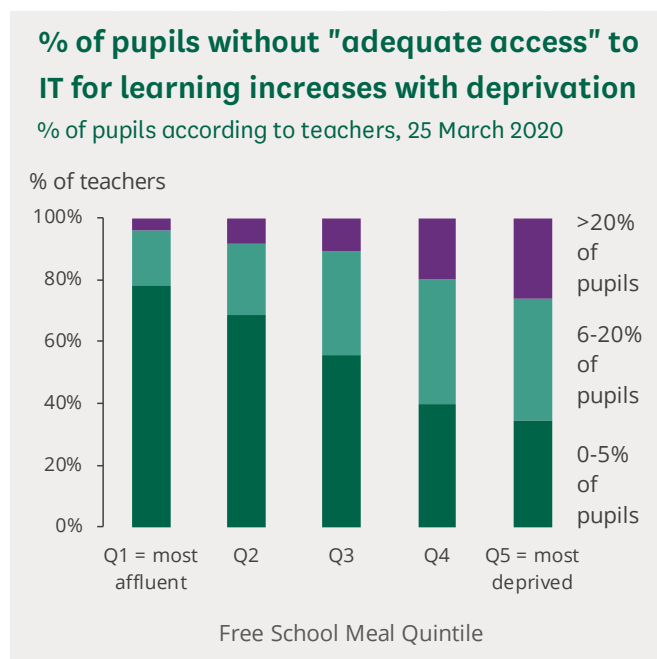
In addition, 13% of private school teachers thought that pupils were learning less than one hour per day (as of 27 March). In contrast, 42% of state-funded school teachers thought the same.

The following charts show that there were also large differences in responses within the state-funded sector when schools are broken down by deprivation.<sup>53</sup>

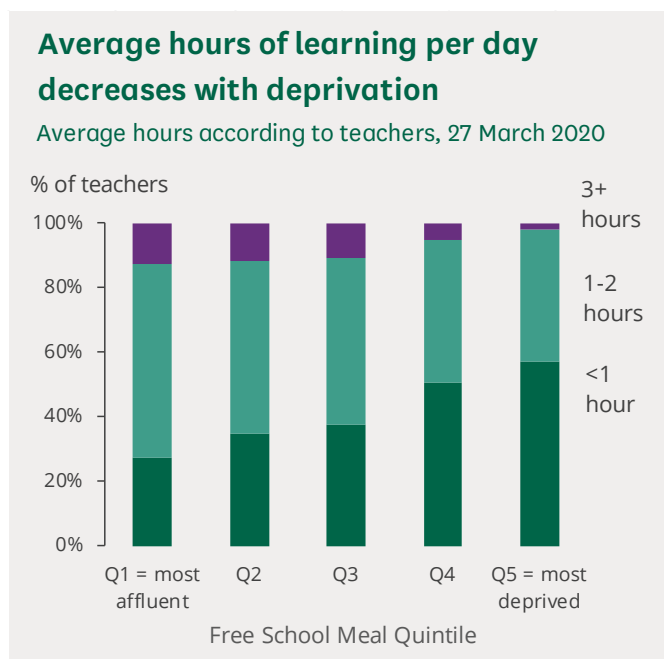
For example, in the least deprived state-funded schools 4% of teachers thought that more than 20% of the children in their class did not have access to an electronic device (as of 25 March). In contrast, 26% of teachers in the most deprived schools thought the same.

In addition, in the least deprived state-funded schools 27% of teachers thought that pupils were learning less than one hour per day (as of 27 March). In contrast, 57% of teachers in the most deprived schools thought the same.

Some disadvantaged pupils without digital devices or internet access are eligible for Government support. Further details about this scheme are available [here](#).



Notes: All figures are estimates  
 6,877 teachers responded to this survey question  
 NA responses have been excluded (3-5% of sample)  
 Source: [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Q3144 25 March, Teacher Tapp \(Google doc\)](#)



Notes: All figures are estimates  
 2,068 teachers responded to this survey question  
 NA responses have been excluded (4-7% of sample)  
 Source: [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Q3143 27 March, Teacher Tapp \(Google doc\)](#)

<sup>52</sup> NA responses have been excluded

<sup>53</sup> As above.



## 4.4 Institute for Fiscal Studies survey

Between 29 April and 12 May, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) surveyed around 4,000 parents with children aged 4-15 about their home learning activities and resources. The results were then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

The IFS survey found large differences between state and private school parents' responses about the provision of online learning resources from schools. The results also showed large differences within the state sector when broken down by family deprivation levels.<sup>54</sup>

For example, the proportion of parents that report their child's primary school has provided online classes<sup>55</sup> (regardless of whether or not the child has attended them) is 51% for children attending private schools, 43% for the most affluent in state-funded schools and 33% for the most deprived in state-funded schools.

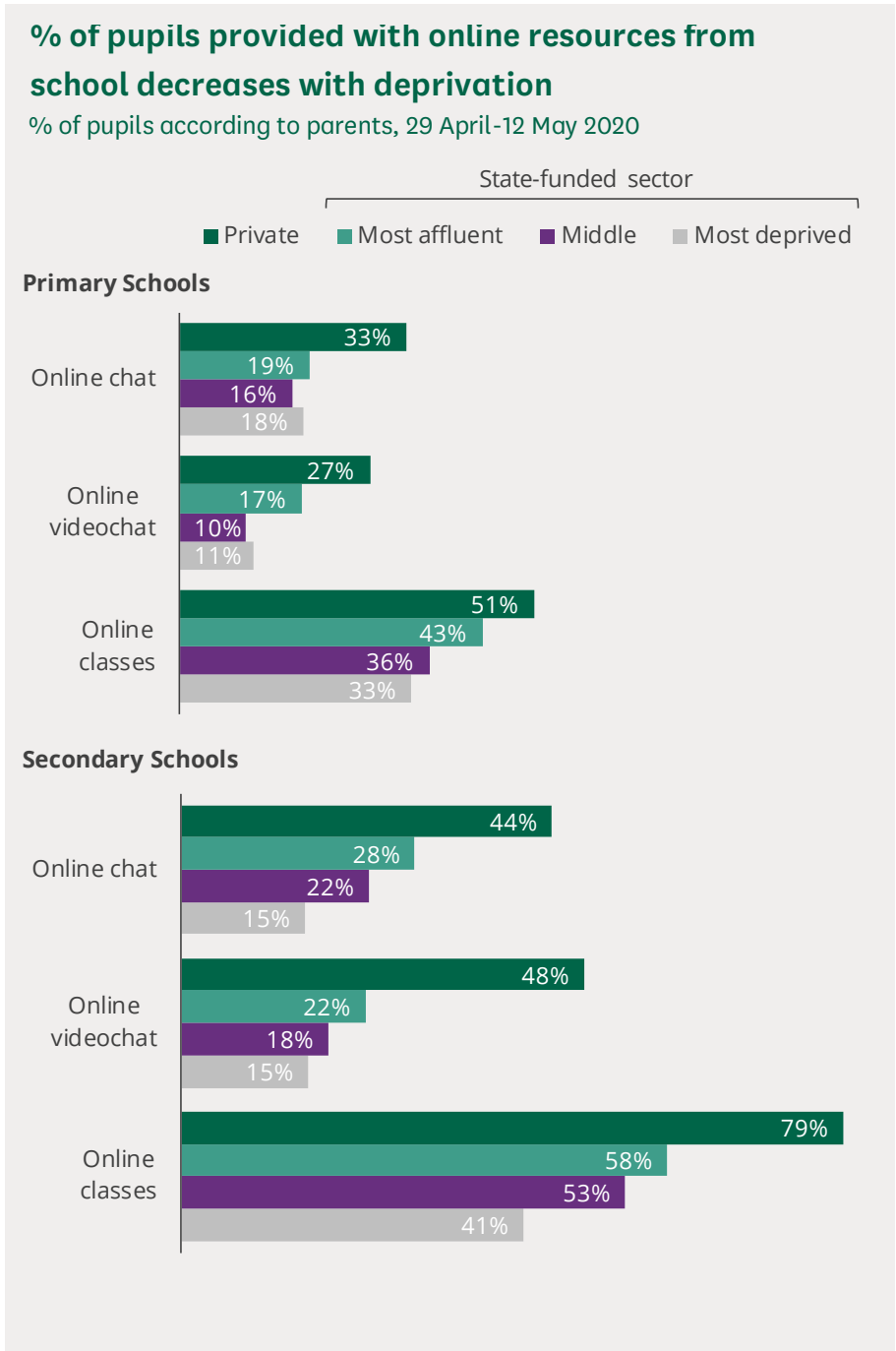
The differences were more pronounced in secondary schools. For example, the proportion of parents that report their child's school has provided online classes is 79% for children attending private schools, 58% for the most affluent in state-funded schools and 41% for the most deprived in state-funded schools.

The IFS concluded from the survey results findings overall that "school closures are almost certain to increase educational inequalities".<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> There may be differences in the way parents from different groups interpret what is meant by 'online classes'. Some schools are offering short online catch-ups while others are running full lessons.

<sup>56</sup> IFS, [Learning during the lockdown](#), 18 May 2020, p3



Notes: All figures are estimates based on a survey sample of 3,091 primary parents and 1,554 secondary school parents. Parents were asked, 'Which of the following activities has [child]'s school provided while schools are closed? Please tick all that apply.'

Deprivation quintiles are based on equivalised pre-pandemic family earnings, only most affluent, middle, and most deprived quintiles are shown here.

Source: [Learning during the lockdown](#): 18 May 2020, IFS ("Underlying data", Fig4)

## 4.5 National Foundation for Educational Research study

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) surveyed a sample of around 3,000 teachers and school leaders in July 2020. Writing about these results in the context of school re-opening in September 2020, they noted:

- Estimates suggested that pupils were, on average, three months behind in their learning.
- Teachers in the most deprived schools were over three times more likely to report that their learners were four or more months behind.
- Teachers estimated that 44 per cent of pupils were in need of intensive catch-up support.<sup>57</sup>

## 4.6 Further reading

- Sutton Trust, [Covid-19 impacts: school shutdown](#), 20 April 2020
- Centre for Economic Performance, [Covid-19 school shutdowns: What will they do to our children's education?](#), May 2020
- Education Endowment Foundation, [Impact of school closures on the attainment gap](#), June 2020
- Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, [Home schooling during lockdown: inequalities in inputs and perceptions](#), 5 June 2020
- YouGov, [How are parents coping with home schooling?](#), 8 June 2020
- UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, [Parental involvement in home schooling and developmental play during lockdown](#), July 2020
- IFS, [Primary school closures created substantial inequality in time spent learning between pupils from poorer and better-off families](#), 17 August 2020
- POST, [Covid-19 and the disadvantage gap](#), 1 September 2020
- Education Policy Institute, [Education policy responses across the UK to the pandemic](#), 9 October 2020.
- National Foundation for Educational Research, [How prepared were primary teachers and pupils in England for the shift to online learning? Insights from TIMSS 2019](#), 8 December 2020
- Sutton Trust, [Learning in lockdown](#), 21 January 2021

---

<sup>57</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research, ['Schools' responses to Covid-19 The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020](#), 1 September 2020.





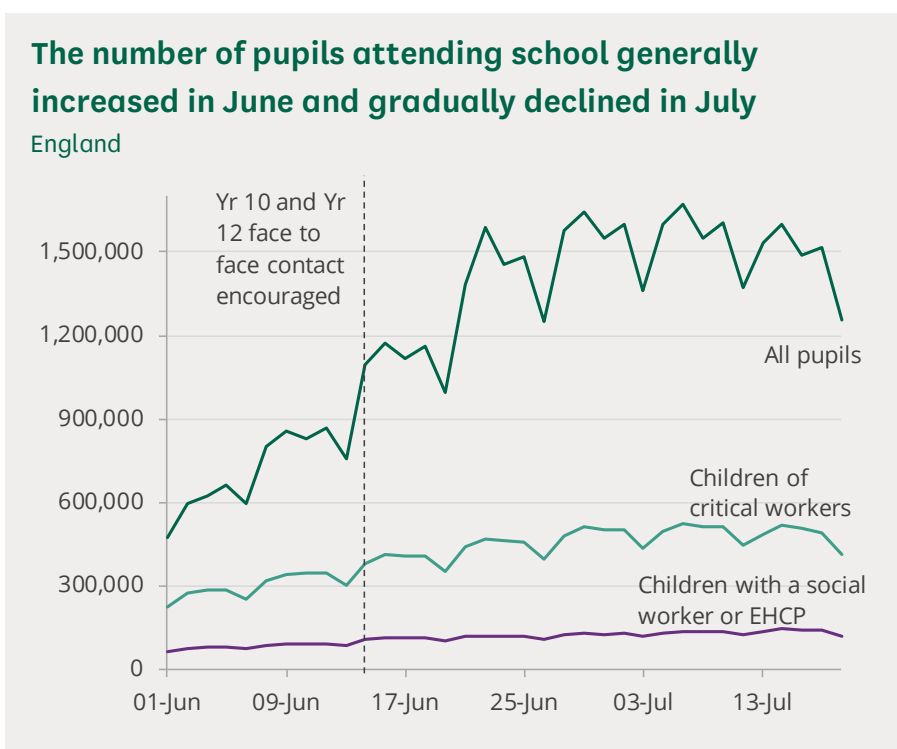
## 5. Annexe: school attendance statistics, March to July 2020 (England)

### 5.1 School attendance rates during the partial reopening

Government guidance as of 1 June encouraged nursery, reception, year 1, and year 6 pupils to attend school in person, in England. From 15 June schools were encouraged to provide some face to face contact time for year 10 and year 12 pupils.

Between 1 June and 17 July, the response rate of schools to the DfE's request for daily attendance data has varied between 55% and 77% of establishments.

After 17 July the survey which collects attendance data was closed for the Summer holidays.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. From 1 June the year groups encouraged to attend school were reception, year 1, and year 6. From 15 June schools have been encouraged to provide some face-to-face contact time in school for those in year 10 and year 12. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 17 July 2020, DfE](#)

## Summary Statistics

As of Friday 17 July 2020 (the last data available before the Summer holiday period): <sup>58</sup>

- Around 1,253,000 pupils attended schools in England. This was an estimated 13.1% of pupils that would normally attend. This was a decrease from an estimated 14.4% the previous week.
- Around 14,300 schools were open to nursery, reception, year 1 **or** year 6 (an estimated 71% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was a decrease from 77% for the previous week.
- Around 3,200 schools were open to year 10 **or** year 12 (an estimated 55% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was a decrease from 65% the previous week.
- Around 20,500 schools in total were open (an estimated 83% of schools that are normally open). This was a decrease from 89% the previous week.

## 5.2 School attendance rates prior to 1 June 2020

From Monday 23 March, the Department for Education (DfE) [asked schools to report](#) daily attendance figures for vulnerable children, and the children of critical workers. Due to the reasons outlined above it is not appropriate to compare attendance data from before and after 1 June.

Over this comparable period (27 March to 29 May), the response rate of schools varied between 12% and 74% (the low response rate was on 25 May, a bank holiday during what is usually half term).

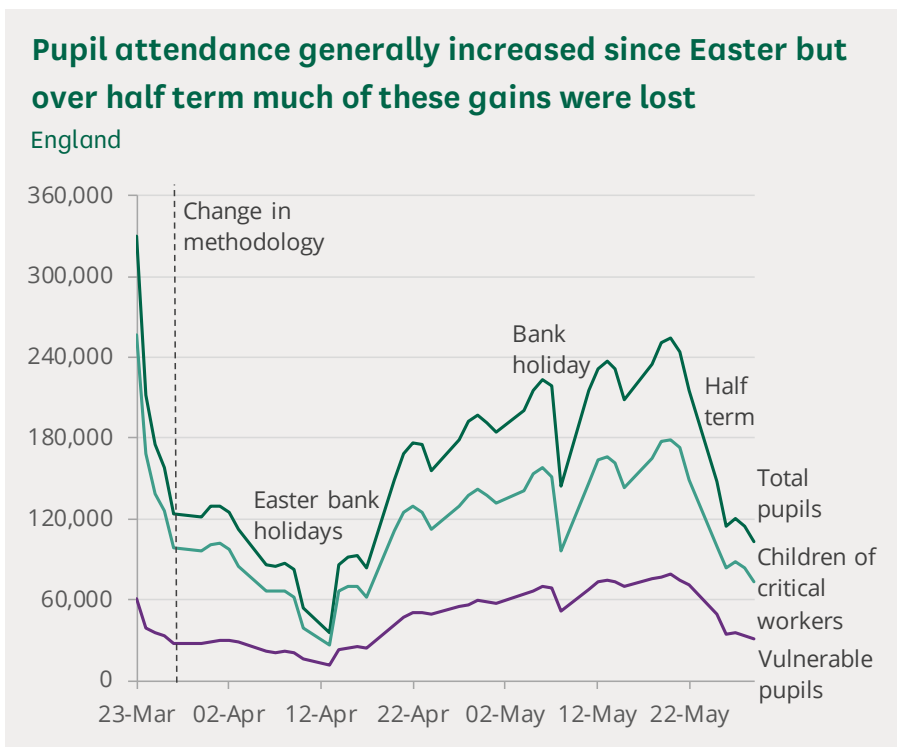
### Summary Statistics

As illustrated in the following chart, in the first two weeks of the comparable period (27 March to 29 May), the number of pupils attending school in person followed a downward trend in general, but this reversed rapidly after the Easter bank holidays among both children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils. Attendance increased (excluding the dip on the Early May Bank holiday) and peaked at around 254,000 pupils on 20 May. The following week was what is usually half term. During this week attendance levels declined and erased much of the increases in attendance since Easter.

In addition to these trends, attendance levels also tend to fluctuate within the week. In general, the highest numbers of pupils attended in the middle of each week.

---

<sup>58</sup> [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 17 July 2020, DfE](#)  
(p5-6)



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. The methodology for the adjustment changed from Friday 27 March, this means like for like comparisons before this time cannot be made. Caution should be taken for the results of 1 May, 13 May, 15 May. Due to technical issues with the DfE sign-in, lower rates of establishments were able to record attendance. The response rates were also lower on the bank and school holidays. The DfE cautions that vulnerable children attendance figures are underestimates.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

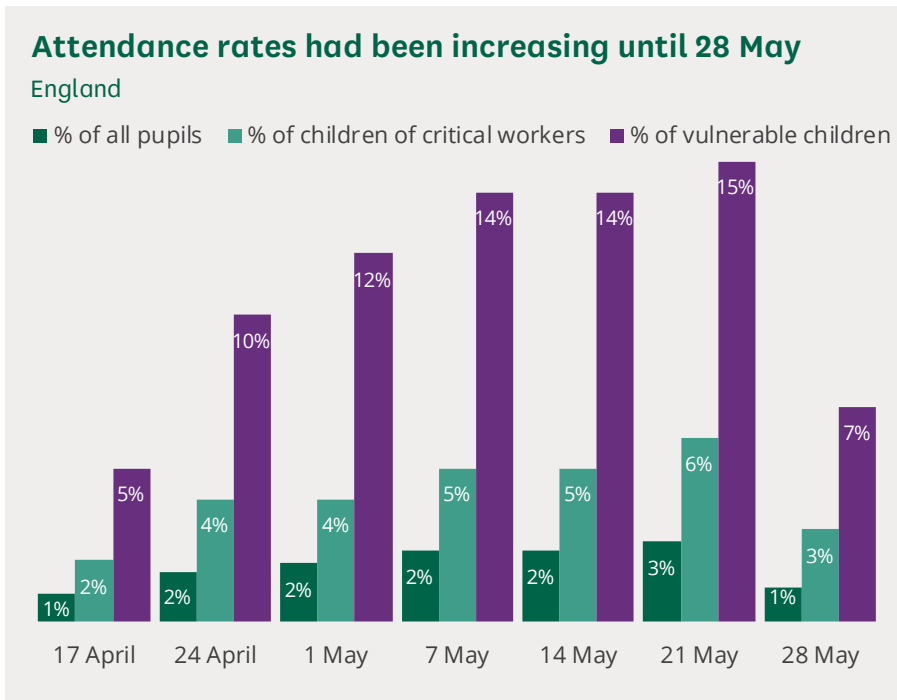
The number of pupils attending school in person expressed as a proportion of the children that would normally attend followed similar trends as above. Overall it remained consistently low. During the comparable period (27 March to 28 May) this proportion ranged between 0.4% and 2.7%.

The DfE also estimated the number of pupils attending school expressed as a proportion of those that are eligible to attend on a weekly snapshot basis since Friday 17 April. The most recent snapshot within the comparable period was as of 28 May, which recorded lower rates of attendance from the previous week.

As shown in the following chart, between Friday 17 April and Thursday 28 May, the proportion of both vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers attending school had been increasing gradually, until 28 May (which would usually have been half term).

Tom Hunt MP stated in an Education Select Committee [oral evidence session](#) that the uptake of school places among children of critical

workers and vulnerable pupils was lower than the Government’s initial expectations of “around 20%”.<sup>59</sup>



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Due to technical issues with the DfE sign-in, on 1 May only 14% of establishments were able to record attendance. The DfE cautions that attendance rates of vulnerable children are underestimates.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

A breakdown was also published by setting type on a weekly snapshot basis since 30 April, the most recent snapshot within the comparable period was 28 May. Unsurprisingly, pupil attendance rates were highest in non-mainstream settings and lowest in mainstream settings for older pupils. The attendance rate varied between less than 0.5% in further education and secondary school settings, and 20% in special post 16 institutions.

<sup>59</sup> Education Select Committee, [The impact of covid19 on education and children’s services](#), 22 April 2020. (Q16)

## Pupil attendance was highest in non-mainstream settings

28 May 2020, England

	Establishment Response rate	% of open establishments	% of pupils attending
Special post 16 institution	21%	49%	20%
Alternative provision	17%	40%	2-4%
Special	25%	48%	3%
State-funded nursery	21%	41%	3%
State-funded primary	36%	53%	2%
Independent school	10%	40%	1%
State-funded secondary	40%	60%	<0.5%
Further Education	15%	28%	<0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Figures are ranked in the table by % of pupils attending. The DfE estimated a range of pupil attendance for alternative provision to communicate the uncertainty involved. This is due to pupils at these settings often being enrolled in other settings as well.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

### 5.3 Infection and outbreak data - evidence from second half of summer term 2020 (England)

Public Health England (PHE) calculated Coronavirus infection rates for staff and students attending all education settings in England between 1 June and 31 July. PHE highlighted that because their findings were from a period when schools were only partially reopened (with stringent infection control measures and while attendance was not mandatory) they may not be generalisable to the conditions when schools fully reopen. In addition, the small sample of open secondary schools meant their findings were “not likely to be generalisable to secondary schools”.<sup>60</sup>

During the 1 June – 31 July period, there were a total of 198 confirmed cases (70 students and 128 in staff members) across all educational settings in England.<sup>61</sup>

PHE also published both infections and attendance data for certain settings (early years, primary and secondary schools). This means that the estimated proportion of pupils infected can be calculated for these types of settings.

<sup>60</sup> Same as above (page 12)

<sup>61</sup> Public Health England, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), 23 August 2020 (page 3)

During the period there were a total of 174 confirmed cases (67 students and 107 in staff members) in early years, primary and secondary schools. The vast majority of cases occurred in early years and primary schools (65 students) and a minority in secondary schools (2 students).<sup>62</sup>

The number of confirmed cases expressed as a proportion of the average number of students attending these settings was less than 0.01%, and for teachers it was around 0.02%.<sup>63</sup>

The proportion of these settings with at least one infection was around 0.17%. However, this does not take into account the possibility that during the period subsequent infections occurred at the same setting.<sup>64</sup>

These findings suggested that overall infections and outbreaks were “uncommon” across all educational settings, especially compared to other institutions such as hospitals, care homes, prisons and certain workplace settings. This is in line with findings from other countries.<sup>65</sup>

The study also found there was a “strong correlation” between the number of outbreaks and regional COVID-19 incidence which “emphasises the importance of controlling community transmission to protect educational settings”.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Public Health England, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), 23 August 2020 (Table 1)

<sup>63</sup> Same as above (Table 1)

<sup>64</sup> Same as above (Table 1)

<sup>65</sup> Same as above (page 10)

<sup>66</sup> Same as above (page 2)

### About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

### Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).