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The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of **Education, Children's Services and Skills 2020/21**

HC 867

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The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2020/21

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7 December 2021

The Rt Hon. Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2020/21

I have pleasure in presenting my Annual Report to Parliament, as required by the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

This report addresses the full range of our inspection and regulation both in education and care. It is underpinned by evidence from our inspections of, and visits to, schools, colleges and providers of social care, early years and further education and skills. I also draw on findings from our research, evaluation, data and analysis this year.

Our aim is to be a force for improvement in education and social care. As Chief Inspector, it is my priority to not only report on individual providers but to offer the national picture of education and care from Ofsted's unique, independent view. This is in order, unwaveringly, to support improvement and raise standards for all children and learners in England. It has been a difficult year. In this report, I describe the impact that the pandemic had had on children and learners, and I recognise the hard work of teachers, leaders and social workers in responding to the challenges. I also highlight those areas where more can be done for the benefit of children and learners.

I trust that this report will provide useful evidence to inform policies aimed at securing the very best futures for our children and learners.

Copies of this report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Spielman

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

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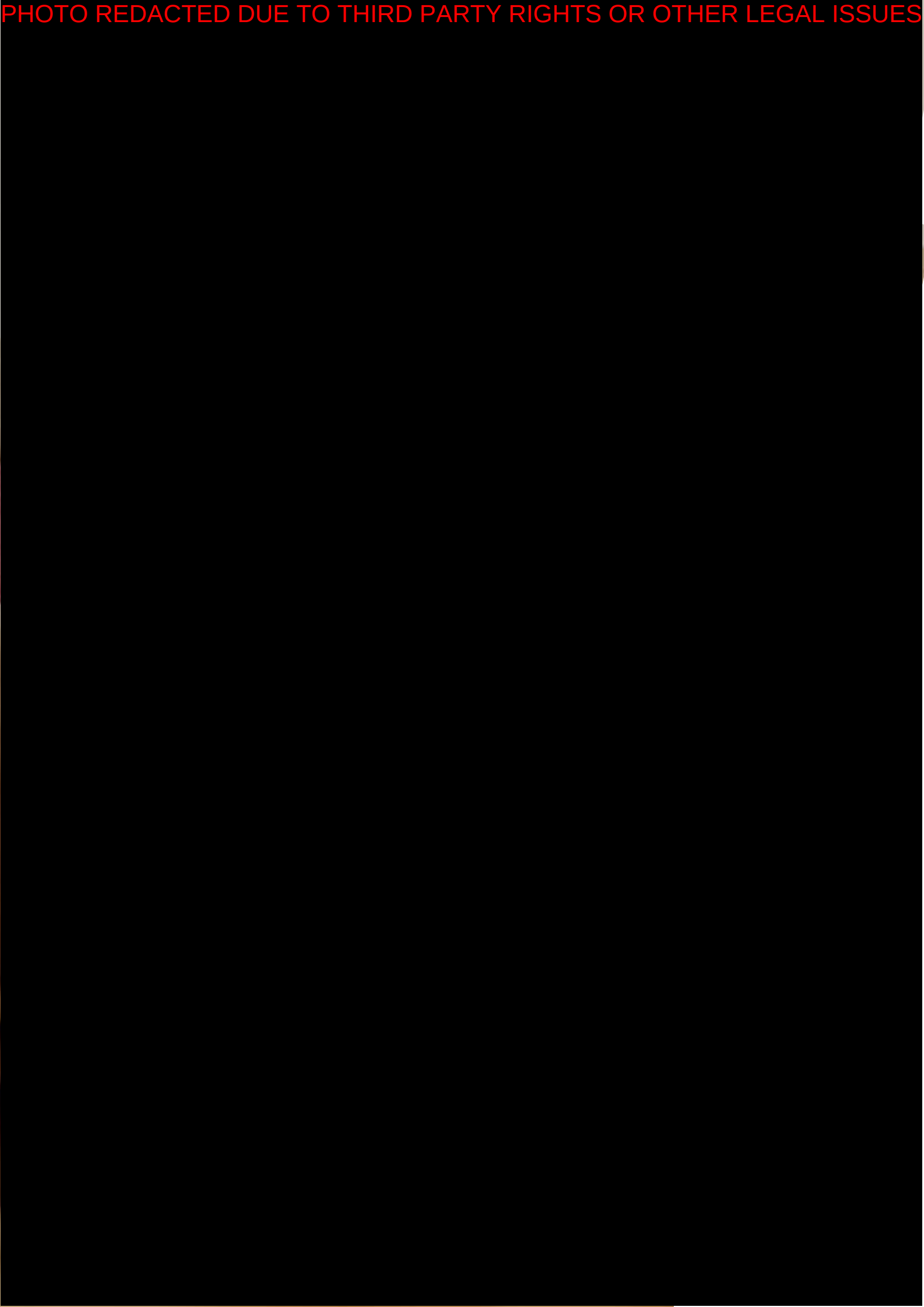
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HMCI commentary

A wholly different year

This was a difficult year to be young, and a challenging time to be learning. In all phases of education in 2020/21, most children and young people have learned less than they normally would have done. For many, the loss of education, disrupted routine and lack of physical and other activities led to physical and mental health problems. Loneliness, boredom and misery became endemic among the young.

In a typical year, my Annual Report summarises the achievements and the challenges in education and social care. This year was not typical. The challenges were vast. And for too many, the achievements were disappointingly small, despite the tremendous effort and commitment of many thousands of parents, teachers, social workers and carers, and of course the hard work of children and learners doing their best in extraordinary circumstances.

It would be wrong to present this as some sort of collective failure of individuals or of institutions. The education and social care sectors have been under tremendous strain, and their staff have generally worked tirelessly in children's interests. The pandemic presented brand new challenges for parents, teachers, social workers and carers. Their efforts deserve praise and there was plenty of excellent work to be found in the responses of schools, colleges, nurseries, children's homes and local authorities. In every institution, leaders worked exceptionally hard, making rapid but difficult decisions and implementing them at speed.

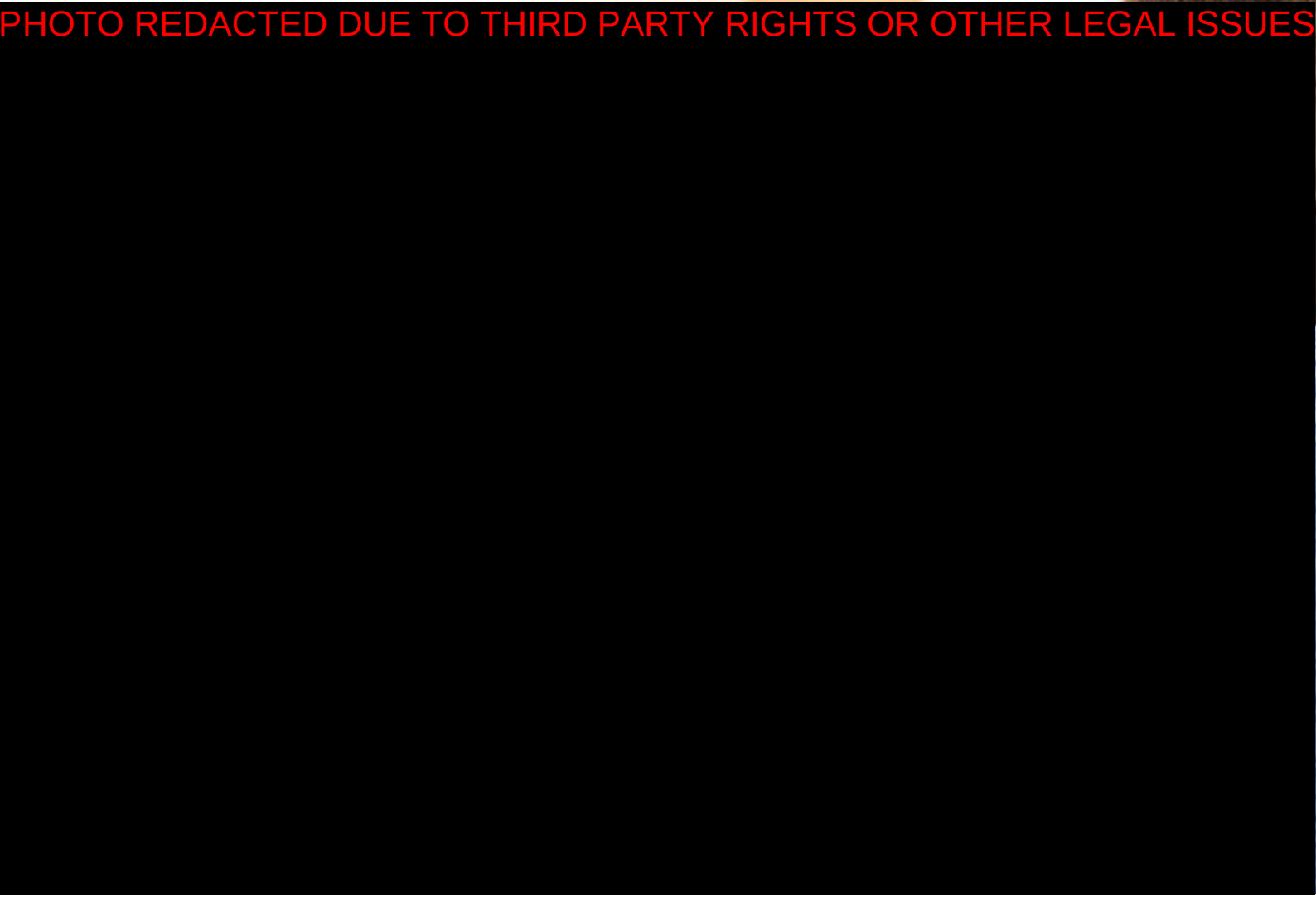
Almost all children felt the impact of COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions to some extent. Many of the youngest children had their development and progress hampered, with some even regressing. Given the vital importance to children of a good start in life and the learning potential of the youngest children, this must not be overlooked.

In primary and secondary schools, children struggled with a hokey-cokey education: in the classroom, at home, separated in bubbles, isolating alone. Further education (FE) students and apprentices saw their classroom doors closed, their placements curtailed and their job prospects limited. And prisoners seeking a second chance through education were unable to leave their cells to learn.

Some children had additional barriers to overcome. Many of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were not able to access the support they rely on. Family circumstances too often dictated how well children could learn from home. Sometimes this was about access to technology, but often it was about space, peace and quiet, or the availability of parents to supervise and help their children with schoolwork. Many vulnerable children disappeared from teachers' line of sight. And children in care or in secure accommodation had their day-to-day challenges heightened by additional restrictions on their movements and contacts.

But the impact of COVID has not aligned neatly with patterns of vulnerability or deprivation. Nearly all children have been affected to some degree. Even many of the highest achievers struggled with motivation away from the discipline and structure of school. And even the best teachers found it hard to translate classroom instruction and inspiration into lessons with the same impact at the kitchen table.

We do not yet know the long-term effects of school closures. But it is very clear that in the understandable rush to protect us all, in the first lockdown the education of many of our children was to all intents and purposes put on ice.



Normally, my Annual Report would be based on statistical evidence from our inspections. But for much of this year, the work we are best known for was suspended. We did not stop visiting, though when we had to, we worked virtually. And our work took another shape, one that allowed us to see first-hand how schools, colleges, nurseries and social care providers were reacting to the shifting situation. We produced reports on how each sector was responding to COVID; we also reported on remote education, and on the impact of restrictions on children with SEND.

As restrictions eased, we gradually rebalanced our work programme back towards inspection, alongside continuing our regulatory work. At all times, we prioritised children's safety. Towards the end of the school year, this aim was brought into sharp focus when we were asked to review the issue of sexual abuse and harassment in schools – perhaps the single most impactful study we have ever published.[1] It revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and abuse are for children and young people, particularly girls. We made changes to the way we inspect as a result, and the government accepted all our recommendations – for schools and colleges and for government itself.

1. 'Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges', Ofsted, June 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges.

A slow start

When schools returned in September 2020, teachers and pupils alike had to pick up the pieces after many months away from the classroom. Although many schools tried hard to provide remote education in the 2020 summer term, they were operating without clear expectations from government. This meant that the extent and the quality of remote education were patchy even before access to technology, ability to study and basic motivation were taken into account. I drew the Select Committee's attention to this absence of clear expectations at a hearing in April 2020, having already advised the Secretary of State that these were urgently needed.

By the autumn term, schools were under a clear obligation to provide remote education where necessary, with the hope being that further school closures could be avoided. Coming back to school was motivating for most children. School leaders reported that pupils were happy to be back and eager to learn. However, there was understandably a good deal of concern expressed about some children's mental health on their return. Schools also reported unwanted physical side effects of lockdowns, including a general lack of stamina and fitness.

Our autumn visits to schools, early years settings and FE and skills providers highlighted learning gaps for older children and delays for the youngest. Our reports from these visits record that some young children had fallen behind in language skills, had struggled with the skills necessary to interact well with their peers socially and had lost physical dexterity and confidence through a lack of practice while confined to their homes.

Much post-16 education has a large practical component, which exacerbated the problems of remote education for these students. It is possible, if not ideal, to teach theory remotely. But it is extremely difficult and often impossible to provide practical tuition and experience away from college or the workplace.

There was much concern at the start of the school year about children at risk of harm or neglect, who had been away from the watchful eyes of their teachers. Children with known vulnerabilities had been encouraged by government to attend school throughout the 'closure' period, but relatively few of them did. Meanwhile, for the children who were not permitted to attend, there was often no way to spot signs that something was going wrong at home. This was concerning, given the context of rising demand for domestic abuse victim support services.

In the autumn term, the expected spike in referrals to social care did not materialise immediately. But numbers began to creep up, and more of the children being referred had significant or acute needs.

Children with SEND had a particularly difficult time both during lockdowns and on the general reopening of schools. Local services were often hard to come by. Although some children had benefited from remote education giving them the opportunity to study at their own pace, many others were undoubtedly falling further behind their peers without specialist support.

Stuttering progress and heightened challenges

The hope that further school closures could be avoided proved futile, with another period of closure to most pupils after Christmas. Teachers have in any case had to wrestle with hybrid schooling throughout the school year, with some children in school while others were isolating or ill. The introduction of 'bubbles' as a containment measure (and the inconsistency of those groupings) often resulted in large numbers of pupils isolating at any one time. This made the challenge of remote education even more acute, with lessons needing to be pitched and paced for pupils in and out of school. Maintaining the flow and structure of a curriculum in these circumstances proved particularly difficult.

As well as this different form of attendance, there was a notable increase in the number of parents choosing to keep children at home.[2] I remain concerned about the number of children apparently withdrawn from school to be home educated. While there has always been an energetic and enthusiastic home education community embracing parent-led schooling, the reality remains that the energy, time commitment and expertise needed to do the job well is beyond most parents' capacity.

It is notable that parents of children with SEND were the most likely to keep their children out of school, because of concerns either about the virus or – justified or not – that the school was unable to meet their child's needs.

Patterns of attendance at nurseries and other childcare providers have remained inconsistent. Some nurseries closed, often as a result of staffing shortages. Some parents, furloughed or working from home, made less use of childcare.

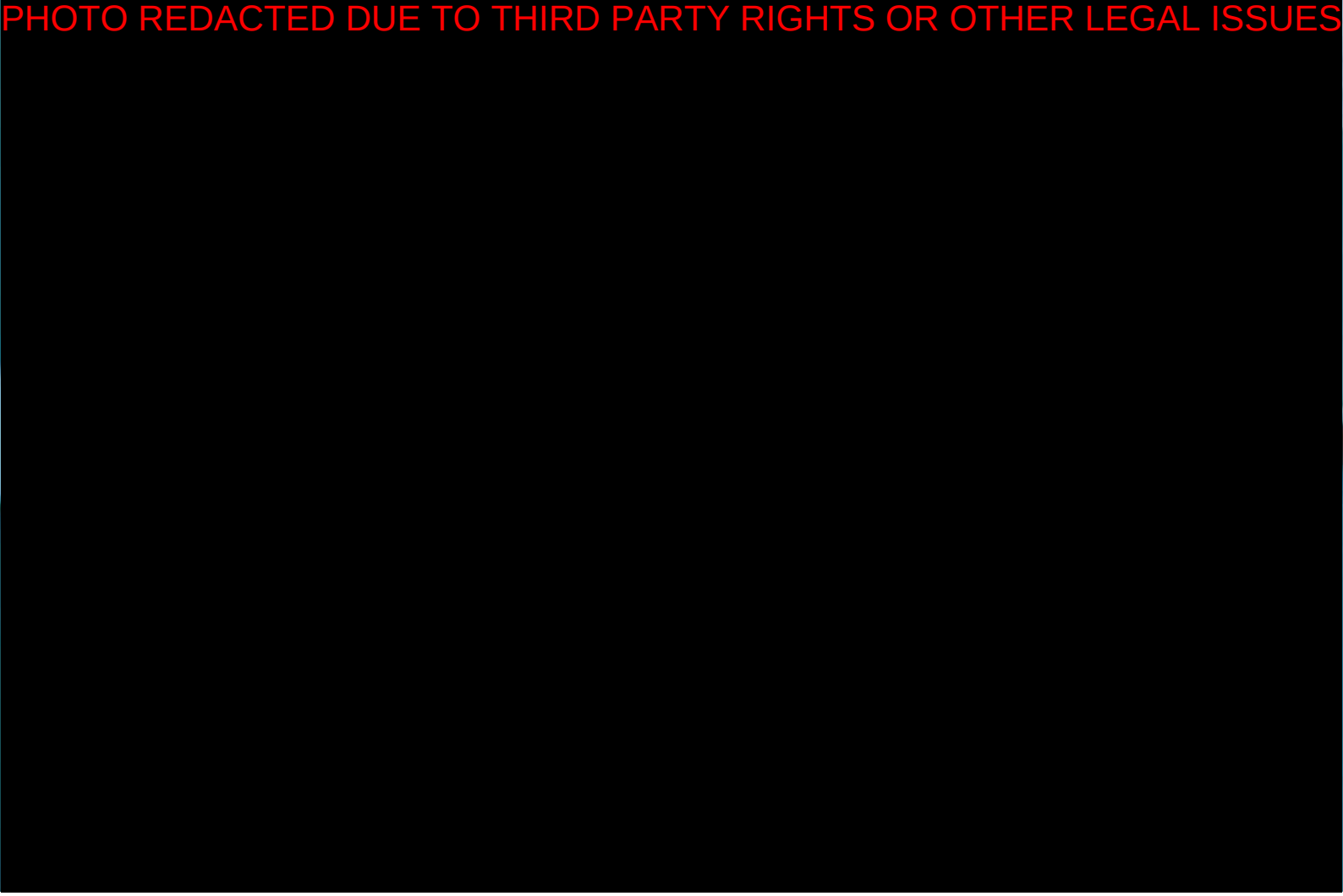
Given the practical and work-based skills elements of apprenticeships, it is unsurprising that this sector has been hit particularly hard during the pandemic. Many apprentices found themselves furloughed, or out of work altogether. The route back to work experience and practical training is proving slow.

Restrictions on movement were also highly disruptive for the social care sector, though we noted good work in children's homes under COVID restrictions. Staff made good use of technology to help children remain in touch with families and other key people in their lives. However, in common with other sectors, staff shortages have been a problem at times.

In children's homes, much good work is founded on strong and consistent relationships between staff and children. The need for staff to isolate meant that homes had to rely more on short-term replacements, where available. This undermined work with children, who were already frustrated by lockdown rules. In some cases, children were less safe as a result. In the worst cases, increased levels of anxiety led to self-harm or destructive behaviour.

Of all the areas we inspect and regulate, the worst practices and outcomes have long been found in prisons and secure provision for children and young people. Year after year, we have highlighted the deficiencies in prison education and the knock-on effect this has on the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. COVID restrictions in the secure estate – which includes young offender institutions and secure training centres (STCs) – have made a bad situation much worse.

2. 'Elective home education survey 2020', Association of Directors of Children's Services, November 2020; https://adcs.org.uk/education/article/elective-home-education-survey-2020. The ADCS estimated that 75,700 children and young people were being electively home educated in October 2020, a 38% increase from October 2019.



The pandemic forced prisons to institute very significant restrictions on prisoners' movement. Prisoners largely remained in their cells for as many as 23 hours a day. And even when it was theoretically possible to allow prisoners to attend lessons or training, staff shortages meant that they were not escorted to education rooms and facilities. Prisons provided packs for learning in cells, but these were a very poor substitute for in-person teaching and structured lessons. Prisoners lost motivation and floundered, especially those with learning difficulties, low levels of education or limited English.

Future prospects

This report looks back over the academic year to the summer of 2021. We have since moved into a new phase in what we all hope will be the national recovery from COVID and a resumption of normality. We all hope that children and learners will have a more normal experience in the current academic year – something that has been denied to them for so long. However, at the time of writing, the continuing high level of infections – symptomatic and asymptomatic – is still keeping many children out of school.

Through 2020, I repeatedly drew public attention to the harm lockdowns were causing children and the importance of children being able to go to school in person. This message needs repeating now. Although many children are necessarily out of school because of COVID or other illness, it is important that they attend every day that they possibly can. Attendance is rightly a long-standing focus of inspection and we are using our autumn 2021 inspections to look in greater depth at the patterns of absence from September onwards.

Much has been said and written about the need for academic catch-up, and it is clear that, overall, children have fallen behind. From our inspections, we're beginning to see that schools that already had a well-planned and implemented curriculum have been best placed to assess and adjust their teaching to get children to where they need to be. There has also been significant additional funding for catch-up and tutoring programmes, although it is too early to assess their impact.

But for children to really regain a sense of normality in their lives and their education, we should not focus solely on bridging gaps in learning. Schools must once again become places where children can enjoy a rounded experience: a rich and broad curriculum, sport and physical activity, and extra-curricular opportunities that broaden their horizons.

We must continue with improvements that were in progress before the pandemic, and also see other reforms, such as of the SEND and children's social care systems, taken forward. We have outlined some of these systemic improvements needed below.

There is a need to improve the quality and consistency of teacher education to make sure that the new generation of teachers is set up for success in the classroom.

There is also a need to reform alternative provision (AP), removing the loopholes that allow so much of it to avoid regulation and oversight. We need to go deeper into the reasons why so many children sent to AP never return to mainstream schools. We need a better understanding of what happens to the children who are removed from school. And we need to find and close illegal schools, which are operating under the radar and out of sight of authorities.

We need support for the most vulnerable children to return to pre-COVID levels, and from there to improve rapidly. For that to happen, we need the partnerships working across local areas to do better for the children who rely on them.

There are longer-term problems to be tackled too in the care system. Many of the concerns we highlight in this report are set to continue over the next 12 months, and there is no silver bullet for the long-standing sufficiency issues the sector faces. In the short to medium term, these problems may even be exacerbated by the ban on children under the age of 16 being placed in unregulated accommodation, which came into force in September 2021.

In the children's homes market, we have seen conglomerates grow larger. We have also seen an imbalance in the number of homes across different regions in England – with very few children's homes in the South West and East of England and many in the North West, for example. We hope the current Care Review will consider how best to address this imbalance of demand and supply.

Welcome initiatives such as Staying Put and Staying Close are still underdeveloped and not available to all care leavers. Outcomes and continuing support for care leavers also remain variable, although standards are being developed for semi-independent living for care leavers. In normal times, this is a huge challenge for vulnerable young people; in the current climate, the isolation of many care leavers needs to be addressed even more urgently. There is an urgent need to modernise the legislative frameworks for regulation while maintaining a strong focus on essential safeguards for children.

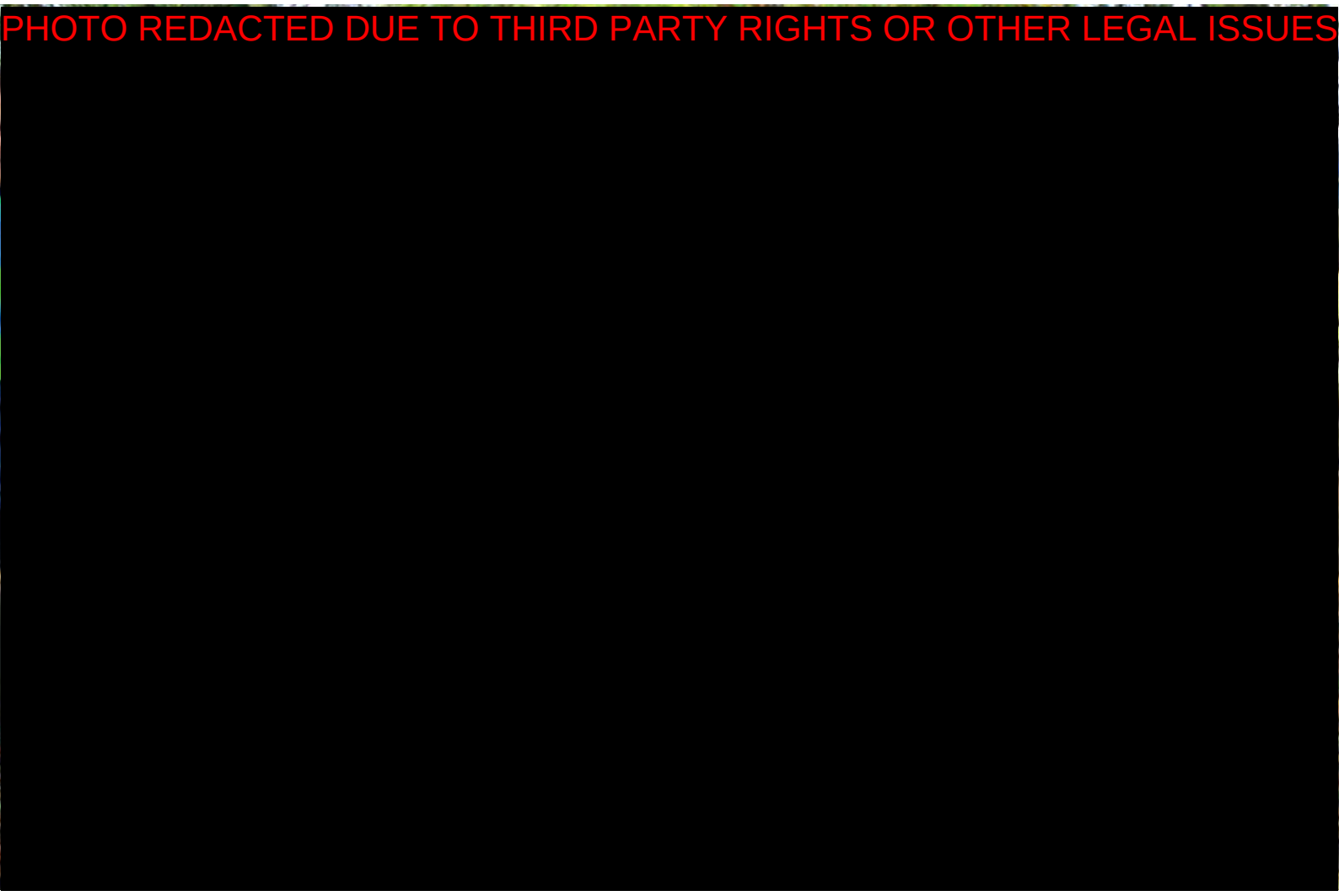
The restrictions we have all had to live under, necessary as they may have been, nevertheless brought hardships to many. Children and learners faced more than their fair share.

In order to protect older generations, we asked the youngest generation to put their lives and education on hold. As we look forward with more optimism to the year ahead, we must strive to redress the balance.

In our favour is the resilience of children. Good, well-structured, face-to-face education will help most children catch up and close learning gaps. Daily routines, and the return of sport and extra-curricular activities, will help most children improve their mental and physical health. Where some children need a little extra help, they should get it. And children who need specialist care and support must not be left wanting.

Every generation gets one chance to enjoy its childhood and fulfil its potential. We must do all we can to make sure this generation is not denied its opportunity.

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

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Registered early years and childcare providers

The years between birth and starting school are important for lots of reasons. Children's brains develop quickly, and they learn more rapidly between birth and five than at any other stage. The experiences children have at this time really count, whether at home, with a childminder or in a nursery.

This year, early years providers closed for part of the year except to vulnerable and key workers' children, and demand for places remained low throughout the year. This means that many children missed out on the benefits of good-quality early education and care.

What we did this year

We did fewer inspections this year because routine inspection was suspended for much of it.[3] However, our regulatory and enforcement activity, including registration of new providers, continued.

In the autumn, we inspected providers on the Childcare Register.[4] These inspections resulted in a compliance judgement as to whether the provider had met the legal requirements for registration rather than a graded judgement of quality.

We also visited childminders and nurseries to make sure that standards were being maintained and that there was safe and effective childcare.[5] Similarly, these visits did not have an inspection grade, but we took regulatory action if needed. We published outcome summaries after each visit to reassure parents of the safety of their children while routine inspections were suspended.

We also carried out a programme of research interviews with a selection of early years providers and published three briefing notes to share our findings.[6]

We resumed on-site inspections under the education inspection framework (EIF) for registered early years providers in May. We prioritised providers:

- judged less than good at their last inspection (including those that received an interim visit in the autumn term)
- registered recently and that had not been previously inspected
- whose first inspection was overdue
- that were not inspected in the last inspection cycle due to the pause in routine inspection.

3. The Secretary of State wrote to HMCI on 25 March 2020 to pause routine inspection.
4. The Childcare Register is one of two registers introduced through the Childcare Act 2006. The Act sets out requirements that registered providers must meet. Ofsted is responsible for regulating and inspecting all those that are registered on the Childcare Register. The Childcare Register has two parts: compulsory, for those caring for children aged five to eight years old, including childminders, childcare on domestic premises and childcare on non-domestic premises; and voluntary, for those caring for children aged over eight years old, including childminders, childcare on domestic premises, childcare on non-domestic premises and home childcarers. For further details, see 'Childminders and childcare providers: register with Ofsted', Ofsted, October 2018; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted/the-ofsted-registers.
5. 'Data on COVID-19 visits: registered early years providers', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-on-covid-19-visits-registered-early-years-providers.
6. 'Ofsted COVID-19 series', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-covid-19-series.

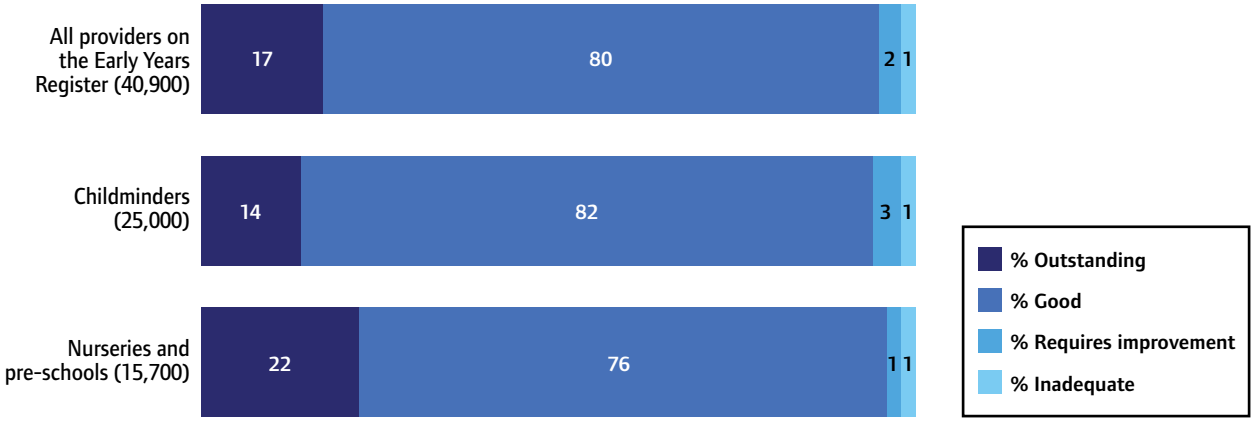
State of the nation

There are around 71,000 early years and childcare providers registered with Ofsted.[7] Of these, around 55,700 are registered on the Early Years Register and provide care and education for children aged between birth and five years old.

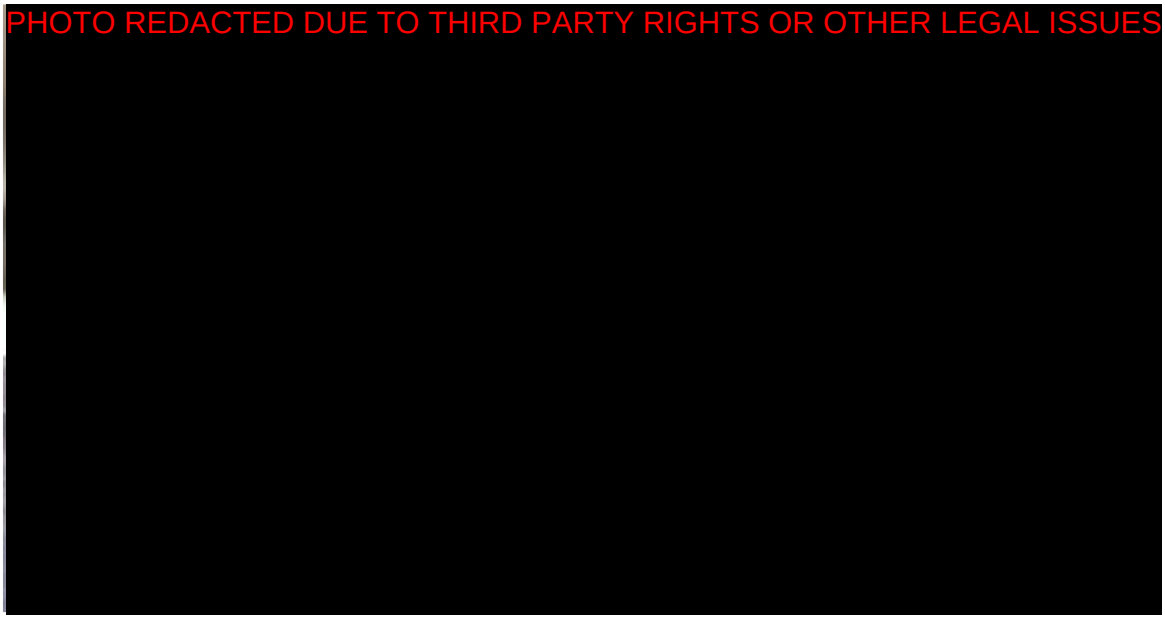
Ninety-seven per cent of all early years providers were judged either good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. This overall proportion of good or outstanding providers (97%) remains relatively unchanged since last year, which is to be expected as graded inspections were paused for most of the year due to COVID-19.

Figure 1: Overall effectiveness of early years providers: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



1. Includes inspections carried out by 31 August 2021 with a report published by 30 September 2021.
2. Childcare on domestic premises are not included because there are only a small number of providers.
3. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

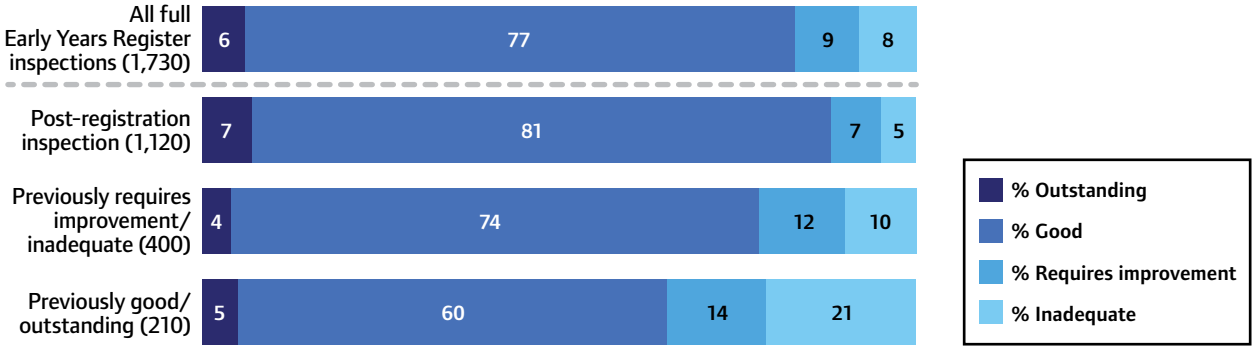


7. 'Childcare providers and inspections as at 31 August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-august-2021.

Inspections this year

Figure 2: Overall effectiveness of early years providers at EIF inspections between May 2021 and August 2021, by previous inspection grade

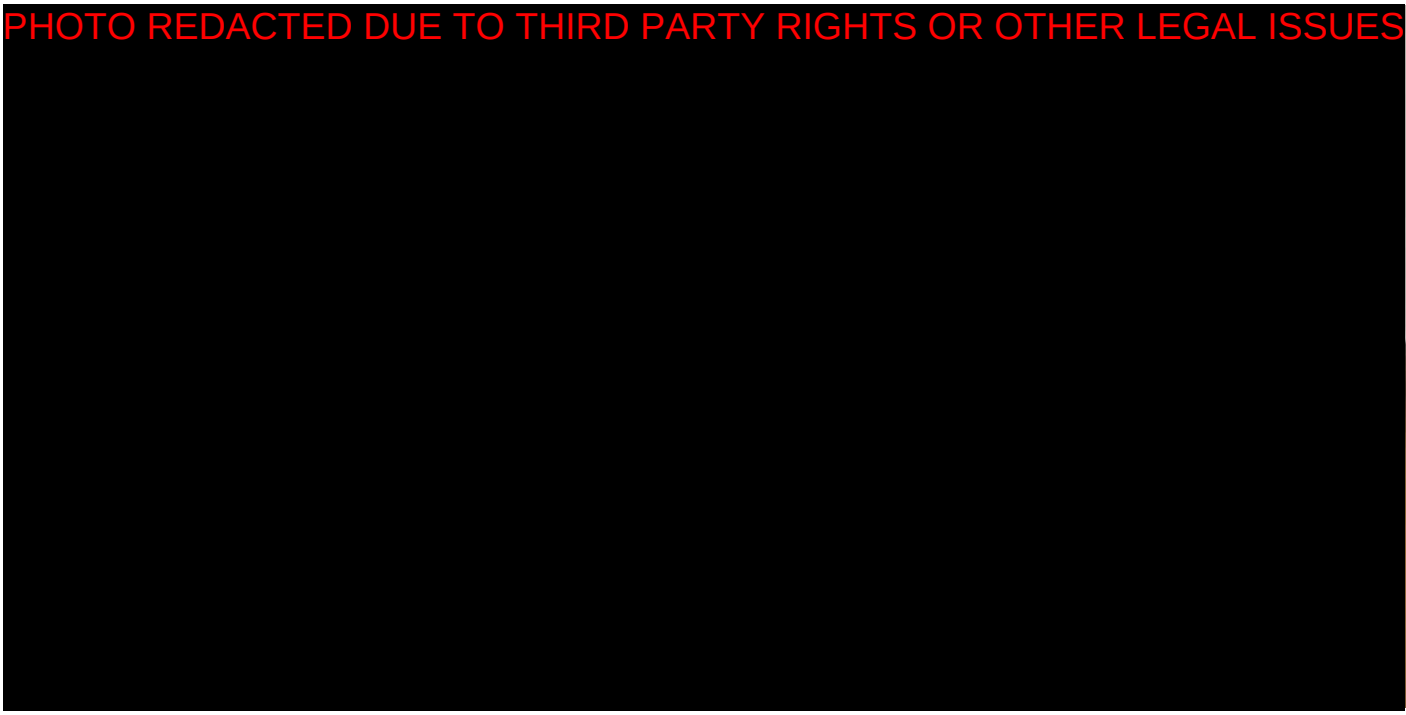
Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



1. Includes inspections carried out by 31 August 2021 with a report published by 30 September 2021.
2. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

Of the 1,730 full inspections we carried out this reporting year, a large majority (65%) were 'post-registration' inspections of providers whose first inspection was overdue, or that had recently registered. We found that 88% of providers were good or outstanding at their first inspections.

Of the Childcare Register inspections we did in 2020/21, 83% of providers met the requirements of registration. A higher proportion of childminders that were inspected did not meet the requirements (25%) compared with nurseries and pre-schools (11%).[8]



8. The term 'nurseries and pre-schools' is used throughout this report to describe childcare on non-domestic premises.

Challenges of returning to early years education post-lockdown

Many providers commented on how resilient and adaptable most children were; however, children who had experienced particularly challenging family circumstances found it harder to readjust.

Although some children had mastered new skills during the first national lockdown, we found many had fallen behind in key areas of learning. For example, 44% of providers interviewed for our research found that children's personal, social and emotional development had fallen behind.[9] As a result, many providers put more emphasis than usual on care practices and personal development. That said, some children actually returned happier, having spent more time with their parents.

There were also differences in children's physical development. While some children had positive experiences at home during the first lockdown and were able to access outdoor space, for example, others did not. Many children who had less access to outdoor space had lost their physical confidence. For example, some were more hesitant about jumping off play equipment. As such, many providers took to using outdoor areas more frequently, promoting physical skills and stimulating more imaginative play during this period.

Most providers adapted their daily routines to give more time to emotional well-being, health and self-care. For example, many spent time teaching children about personal hygiene and independent self-care. Some adapted their curriculum in response to changes in children's needs, refocusing the curriculum on areas in which children had fallen behind, for example mathematics and communication.

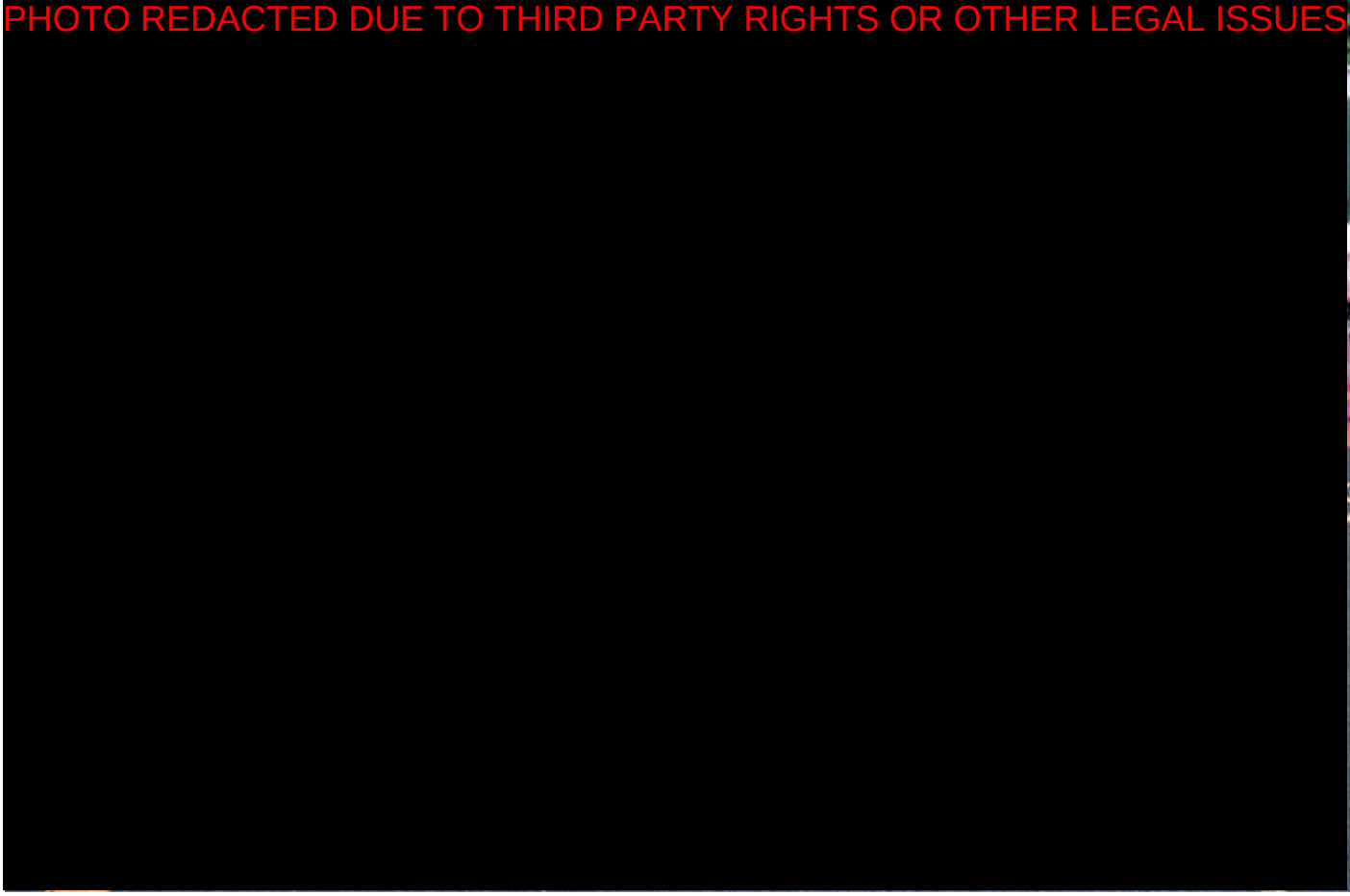
Though providers told us they were not able to offer all the usual activities and experiences because of COVID-19 restrictions, some said this had made them think more carefully about what they wanted the children to learn.

Children's behaviour

Unsurprisingly, the first national lockdown disrupted routines, and some children were struggling to eat, play and learn to a fixed timetable. In addition to a disrupted routine, many children also needed to relearn social skills such as sharing and playing with each other nicely. However, some providers told us that some children with siblings at home to play with had actually improved their social skills.

Providers reported that some children were angry, some had shorter attention spans and were more difficult to engage, and some were less inquisitive. However, behaviour improved during the autumn term and most children were able to adapt to a learning pattern and more easily engage with activities.

9. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on early years, November 2020', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-early-years-november-2020.



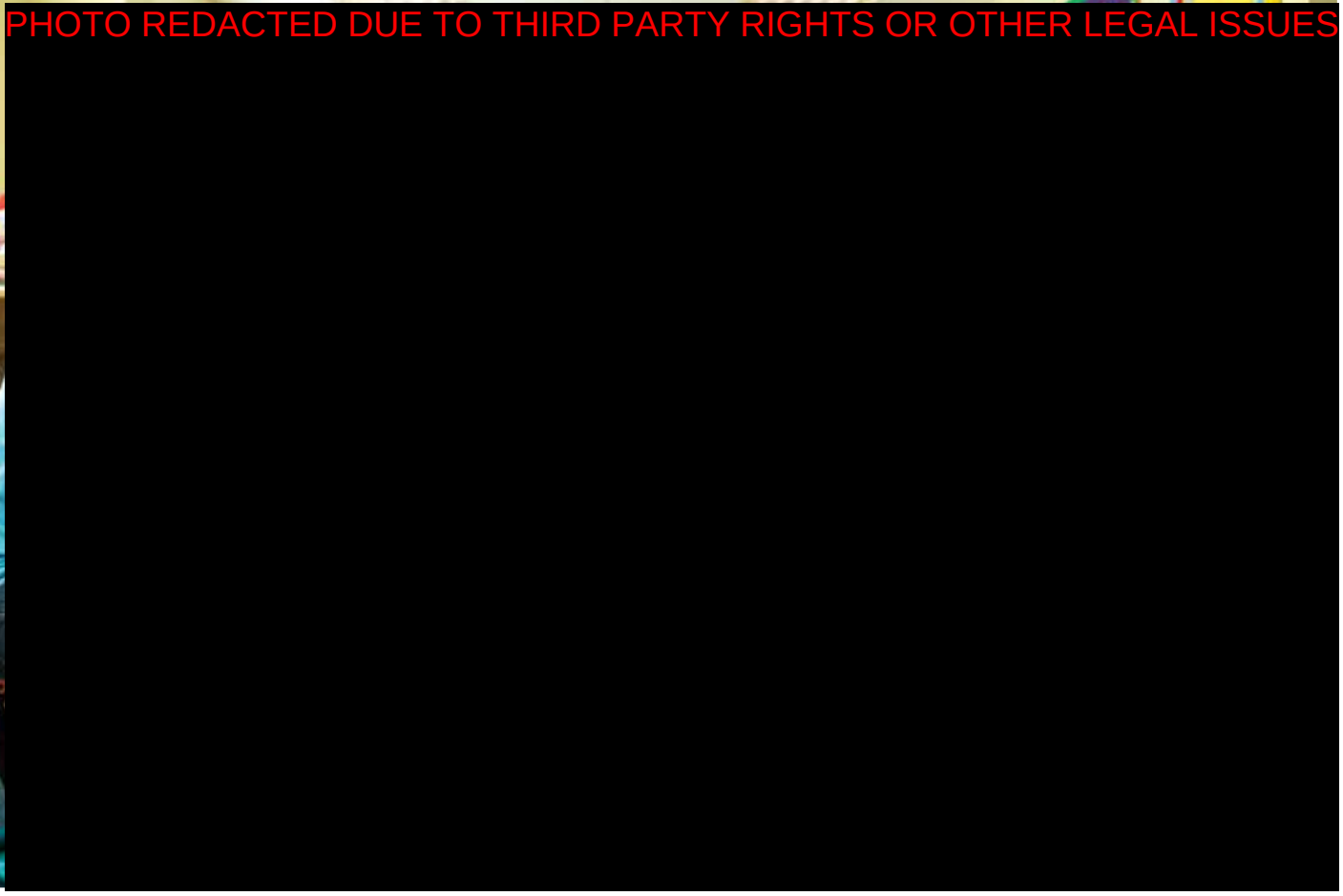
Staff resilience and knowledge

Providers worked hard to prepare their staff to best support children as they returned. Some providers had trained their staff on areas such as speech and language, special educational needs and mental health, and others had provided training in conflict resolution and in how to keep two-year-olds engaged. Restrictions such as the introduction of 'bubbles' meant staff were able to get to know their children really well, but also meant they were not able to give their children the same levels of freedom as before.

Early years staff were more stressed and felt their work was more difficult than before the pandemic. Despite this, there was an increased appreciation of the importance of early years and many felt honoured to be working to support children during this time.

However, during inspections we noted that many staff in inadequate providers did not have the skills and training they needed. They also lacked high expectations for children's learning.

In these providers, staffing levels and arrangements did not ensure that children were supervised effectively at all times. We saw children left to cry or not being adequately settled in the setting. There were several examples where this led to children's safety being compromised.



Demand and attendance in early years

In the autumn term, providers operated with fewer children on roll. Providers in the most deprived areas, as well as those in London and the West Midlands, reported the lowest take-up of places.

Factors such as changes to parents' employment patterns – including unemployment, furlough and working from home – are likely to have contributed to this reduction in demand for childcare. In addition to employment patterns, providers told us that some parents, particularly those with health concerns, were anxious about sending their children back to nursery.

Although providers adapted to these changes, many were concerned about the financial implications for their businesses as they face a longer-term fall in demand. Almost half of providers we spoke to in the autumn term rated financial difficulties among the top three challenges they faced, having absorbed additional costs (such as for personal protective equipment) alongside reduced income. Some said that government funding was an issue, including funding for increased numbers of children with SEND, and a few were worried about having to repay their government loan.

Looking ahead, we are concerned by some reports that disadvantaged children and those with SEND are less likely to be attending early years provision than before the pandemic.

There are also increasing numbers of summer-born children whose entry to Reception is deferred.[10] We will watch to see whether this pattern continues.

10. 'Delayed school admissions for summer born pupils (2020)', Department for Education, May 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delayed-school-admissions-for-summer-born-pupils-2020.

Early years regulation

Our regulatory and enforcement activity, including registration of new providers, did not stop during the pandemic. In 2020/21, we carried out around 3,070 registration visits, 4% more than in 2019/20. Around two thirds of the visits in 2020/21 were to prospective childminders.

Joiners and leavers in the childcare sector

The number of active providers on our registers has been falling steadily since 2015.

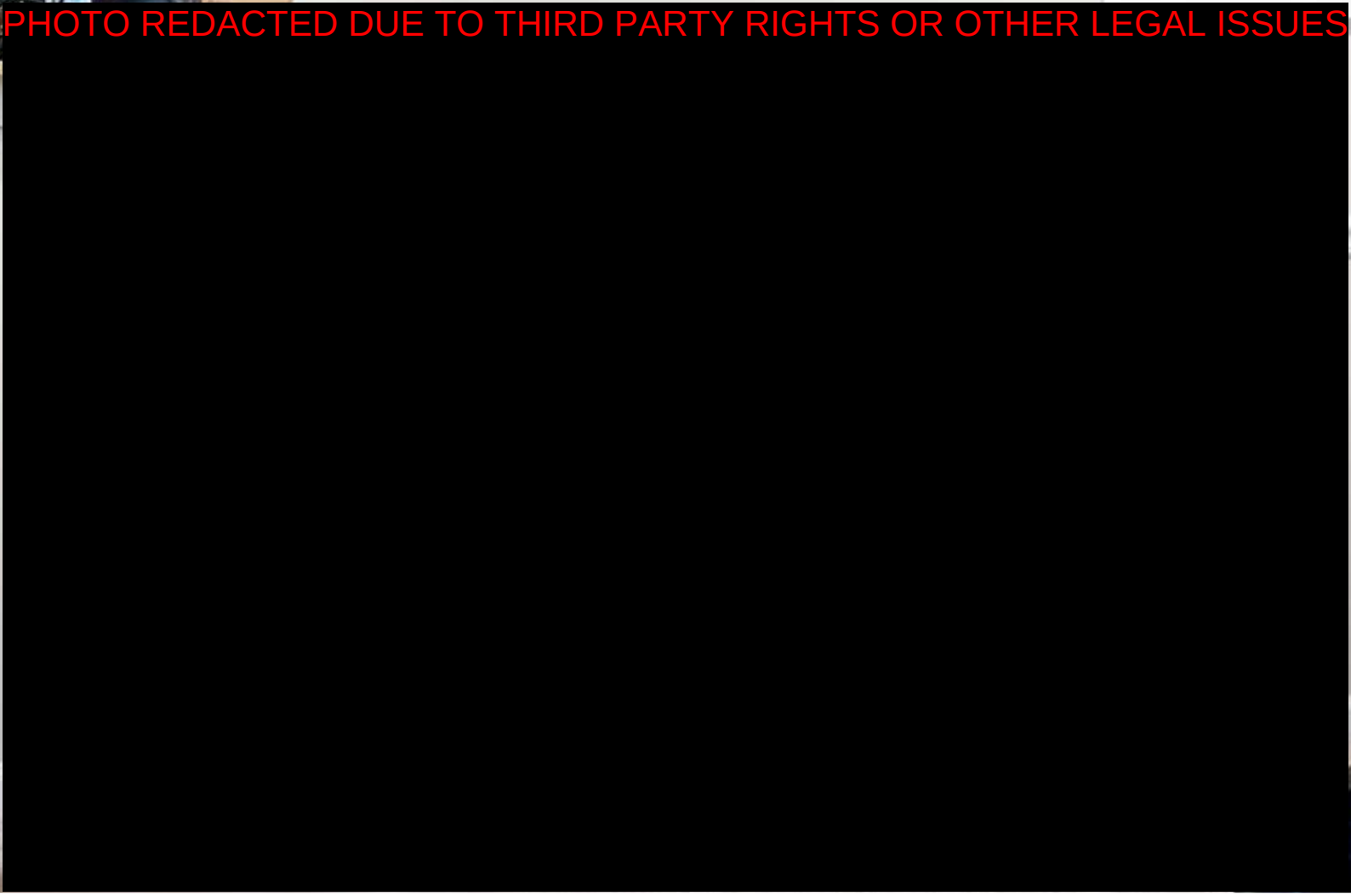
Figure 3: Joiners and leavers in the childcare sector, 2015/16 to 2020/21

1. Most leavers are provider resignations and most joiners are new provider registrations, but some will be providers moving between the Early Years Register and the Childcare Register.
2. Each estimate is built up from multiple reporting periods (between three and seven months long) for each year.

Between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021, there was a net decrease of around 4,360 providers. This was higher than the average across the last six years.

Most of this overall decrease is due to a substantial fall in the number of childminders. Childminders make up nearly half of all registered providers but numbers have decreased by 8% in the last year, compared with 5% in 2019/20. Meanwhile, numbers of nurseries and pre-schools have remained fairly stable.

Despite decreasing numbers of childminders, the number of childcare places has remained broadly stable since 2015. This is due to the increasing proportion of places offered by nurseries and pre-schools. However, in this reporting year the number of childcare places marginally decreased by around 9,920 (1%). On 31 August 2021, 1.3 million childcare places were offered by providers on the Early Years Register.



Childminder agencies

Childminders can also choose to register with childminder agencies (CMAs) rather than registering directly with us. CMAs are organisations that register childminders and provide them with training, advice and other types of support.

CMAs vary in size, with the largest having hundreds of childminders registered. Their numbers have been growing steadily since they were introduced in 2014. At the time of writing, and according to the information that CMAs have provided, around 760 childminders are registered with CMAs.

Complaints and notifications

In 2020/21, we received slightly more complaints about providers than last year (6,980 compared with 6,640), despite the fact that fewer providers were operating. Around a third of complaints were about safeguarding or people's suitability to care. We also received a substantially higher number of notifications from providers: 49,500 compared with 7,040 last year. Around three quarters of these were because providers were required to notify us of any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in their settings. But even allowing for this, notifications were much higher than the previous year. The remaining notifications were most often about changes that providers must notify us of (24%), or accidents and injuries (20%). Most risk assessments (80%) were made as a result of complaints or notifications related to nurseries and pre-schools.

Regulatory visits

When we receive information from complaints or notifications, we make a risk assessment and decide whether we need to bring forward an inspection, make a regulatory visit or take other action.

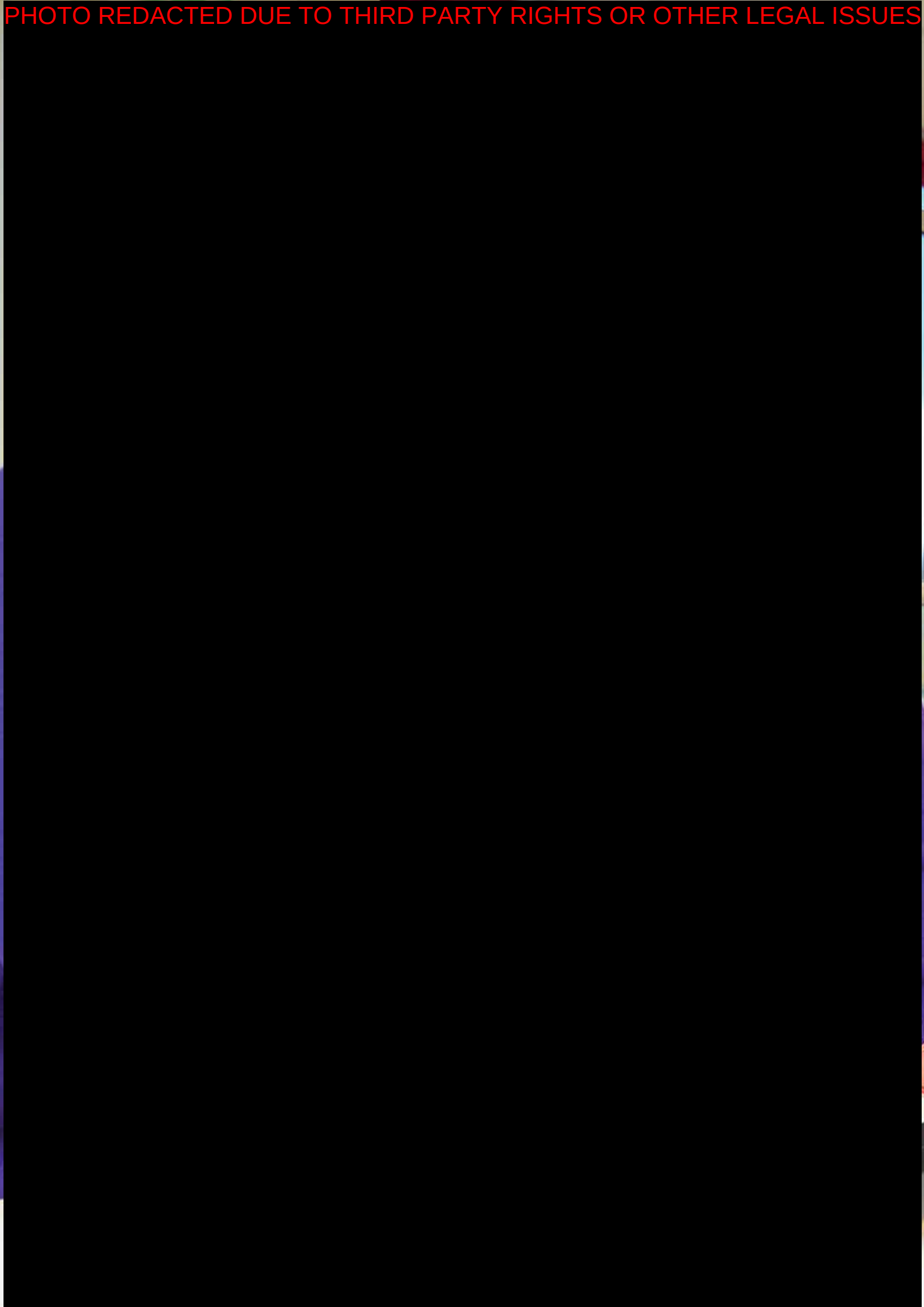
We carried out around 8,070 regulatory visits over the last year compared with 4,740 visits in 2019/20. We did more regulatory visits this year because in some cases we made a regulatory visit when we would normally have made a full routine inspection in response to concerns. Of the 6,590 risk assessments handled by our regional regulatory teams, 16% resulted in enforcement action, down from 19% in 2019/20.

Cancellations and suspensions

We may suspend a provider's registration when we reasonably believe that the continued provision of childcare may expose a child to a risk of harm. The suspension period allows for further investigation and/or the provider to take steps to reduce or remove any risk to children. There were 290 suspensions of childcare providers in 2020/21 compared with 200 in 2019/20. Of the 290 suspensions in the last year, one third resigned from our registers or were cancelled before the end of August 2021.

Most suspensions related to alleged abuse by someone living or working on childminder premises, and other serious concerns such as providers not taking the right action to notify relevant agencies of concerns about children, and unsuitable people having access to children.

Overall, around 3,920 childcare providers had their registration cancelled in 2020/21. Of these, 62 cancellations were about serious issues such as unsuitable people, consistent failure to meet learning, development, safeguarding and/or welfare requirements, causing physical harm to children or leaving children unattended for significant periods of time. Other cancellations (98%) related to unpaid fees.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Schools

The pandemic has unquestionably had an enormous impact on school children, their parents and those working in schools this year. Schools faced challenges with attendance, remote learning, curriculum planning, behaviour, pupils' social, emotional and physical health, and of course having to close to most pupils during lockdowns. We found many examples of schools working hard to overcome these challenges, but they had a significant impact on children nonetheless.

State-funded schools

What we did this year

In autumn 2020, we carried out nearly 1,300 interim visits to schools to discuss their experiences since the first national lockdown and plans to manage their schools through the pandemic.[11] These visits reassured and informed parents, government and the public about how schools managed the return to full education for all pupils. School leaders also told us that they found these visits supportive, saying that the discussion with Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) helped them reflect on their priorities during this difficult time. During the autumn term, we published monthly briefing notes summarising our findings.[12]

Although routine inspections were suspended, we carried out emergency visits when serious concerns were raised.[13]

Building on this work, from January 2021, we returned to inspection gradually with additional monitoring inspections of schools judged requires improvement or inadequate, most of which were carried out remotely.[14] These were different from our normal monitoring inspections, as they focused on how schools were managing the impact of the pandemic in a period when most pupils were learning remotely.

In the summer term, after a 12-month gap, we resumed full graded inspections, section 8 visits to good and outstanding schools, and in-person monitoring inspections of schools graded requires improvement or inadequate. In 2020/21 as a whole, the pandemic had a significant impact on both the type and number of inspections we carried out. We did 1,310 inspections, compared with 5,560 in 2018/19, the last full year's data available before the pandemic.

State of the nation

There are nearly 22,000 state-funded schools. Eighty-six per cent of these were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection.[15] This figure has not changed this year, which is to be expected because we did very few graded inspections. However, even before the pandemic, the picture had been stable, with 86% good or outstanding since August 2019.

11. 'Data on COVID-19 visits: schools', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-on-covid-19-visits-schools.
12. 'Ofsted COVID-19 series', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-covid-19-series.
13. Across the 2020/21 year, we carried out 37 'no formal designation' visits under section 8 powers, including 10 in the autumn term. Nine out of 37 converted to full section 5 inspections, but none of these were in the autumn term.
14. 'State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 March 2021', Ofsted, June 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-march-2021.
15. 'State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2021.

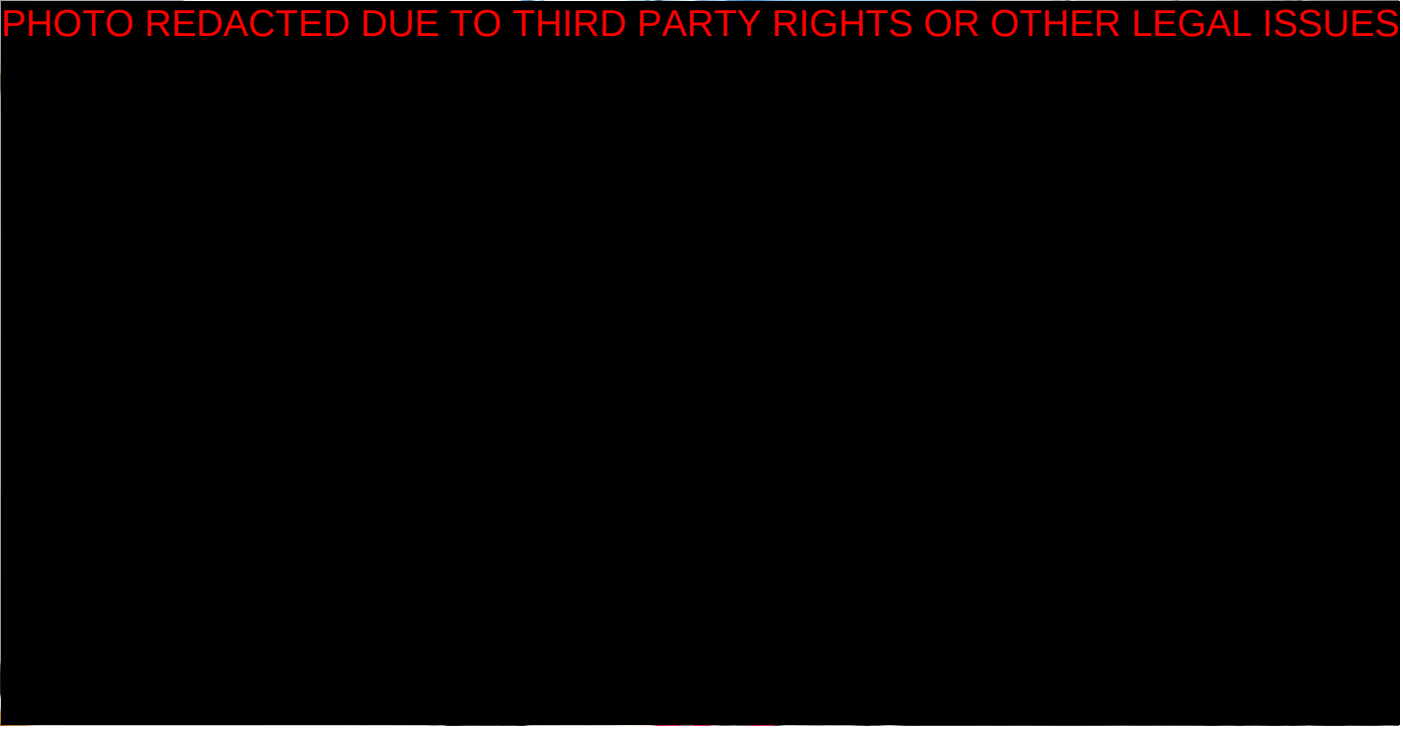
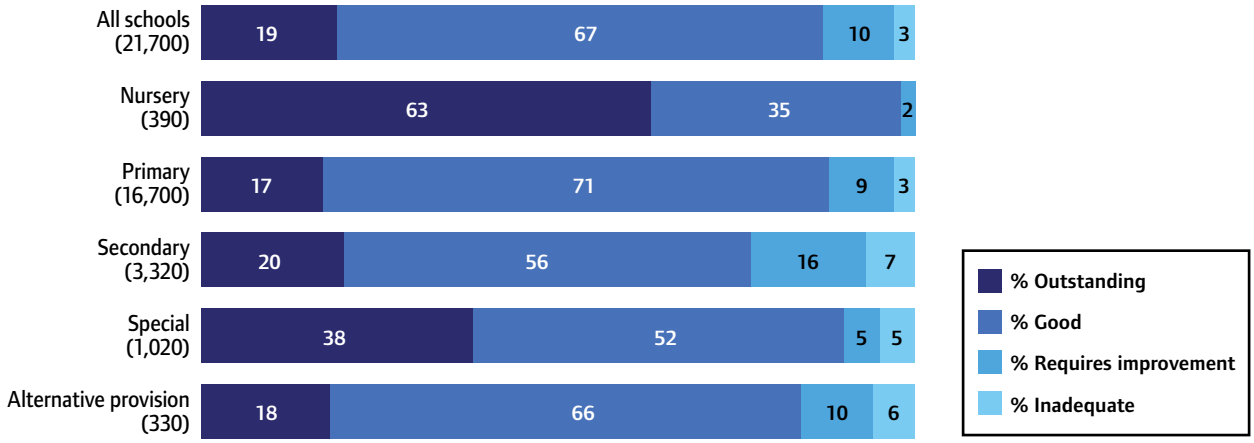


Figure 4: Overall effectiveness of state-funded schools: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



1. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.
2. Data includes the most recent judgements for predecessor schools that have not yet been inspected in their current form.
3. AP includes pupil referral units, academy AP and free school AP.

Attendance

For nearly all children this year, face-to-face attendance at school was affected by the pandemic. For most of the spring term, schools were closed to all but vulnerable children and children of key workers. In addition to lockdown, periods of self-isolation also limited many children's progress. This was not spread evenly across different regions or phases. For example, in the autumn term, COVID-related absences were 4.4% in the South West compared with 8.8% in the North West.

In autumn 2020, children lost a lot of school time to COVID. COVID-related absence averaged 7%, on top of non-COVID-related absence of 4.7% (which was similar to 4.9% the previous year).[16] This is 33 million days of lost schooling, an average of one week per pupil during the term. Sixty per cent of pupils lost face-to-face teaching time to COVID-related isolation.

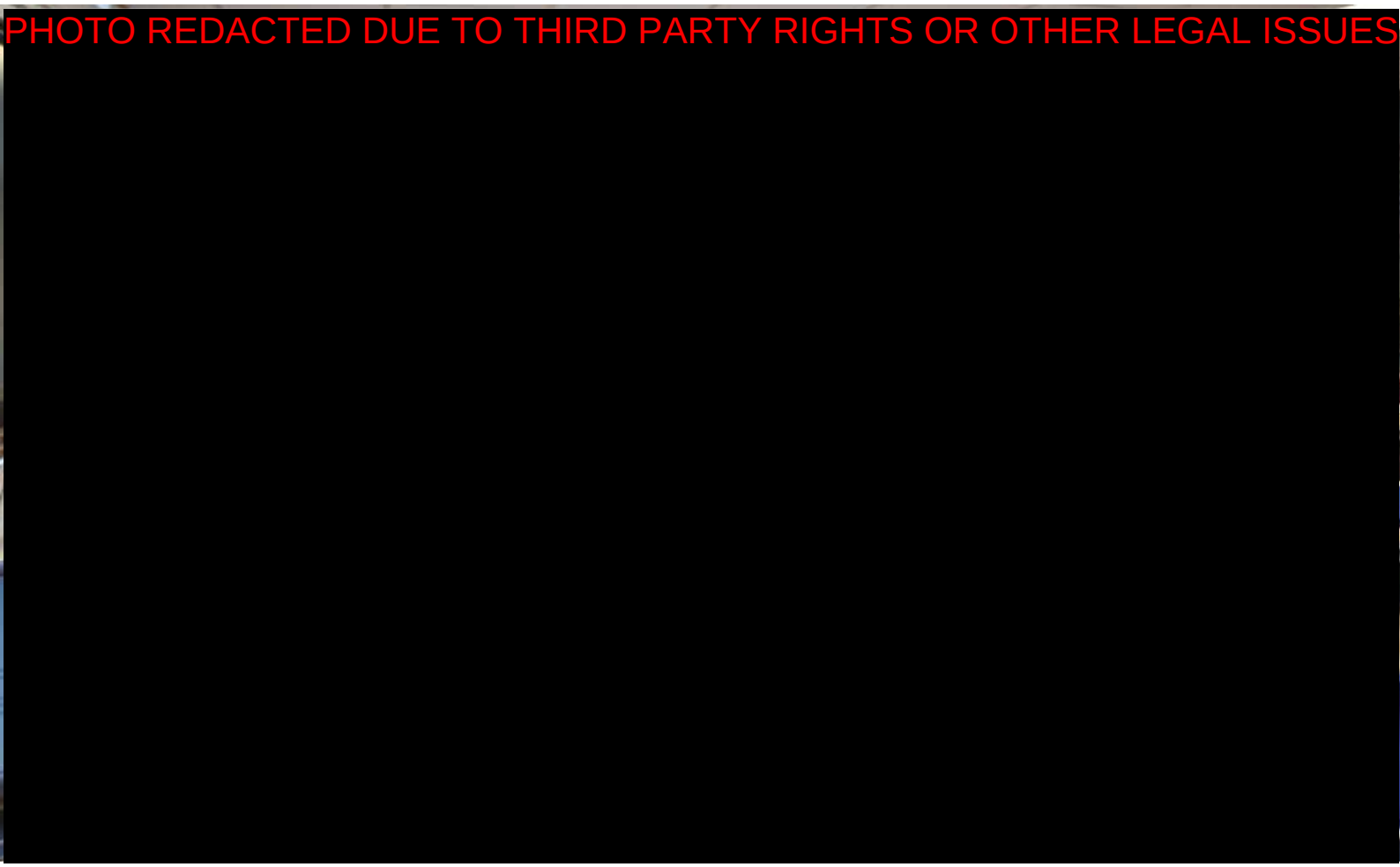
16. 'Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term', Department for Education, May 2021; https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term. The standard absence rate (which is broadly comparable with earlier years) includes sickness (including COVID) and general absences, but excludes isolation as a result of a suspected case of COVID or contact with someone with COVID.

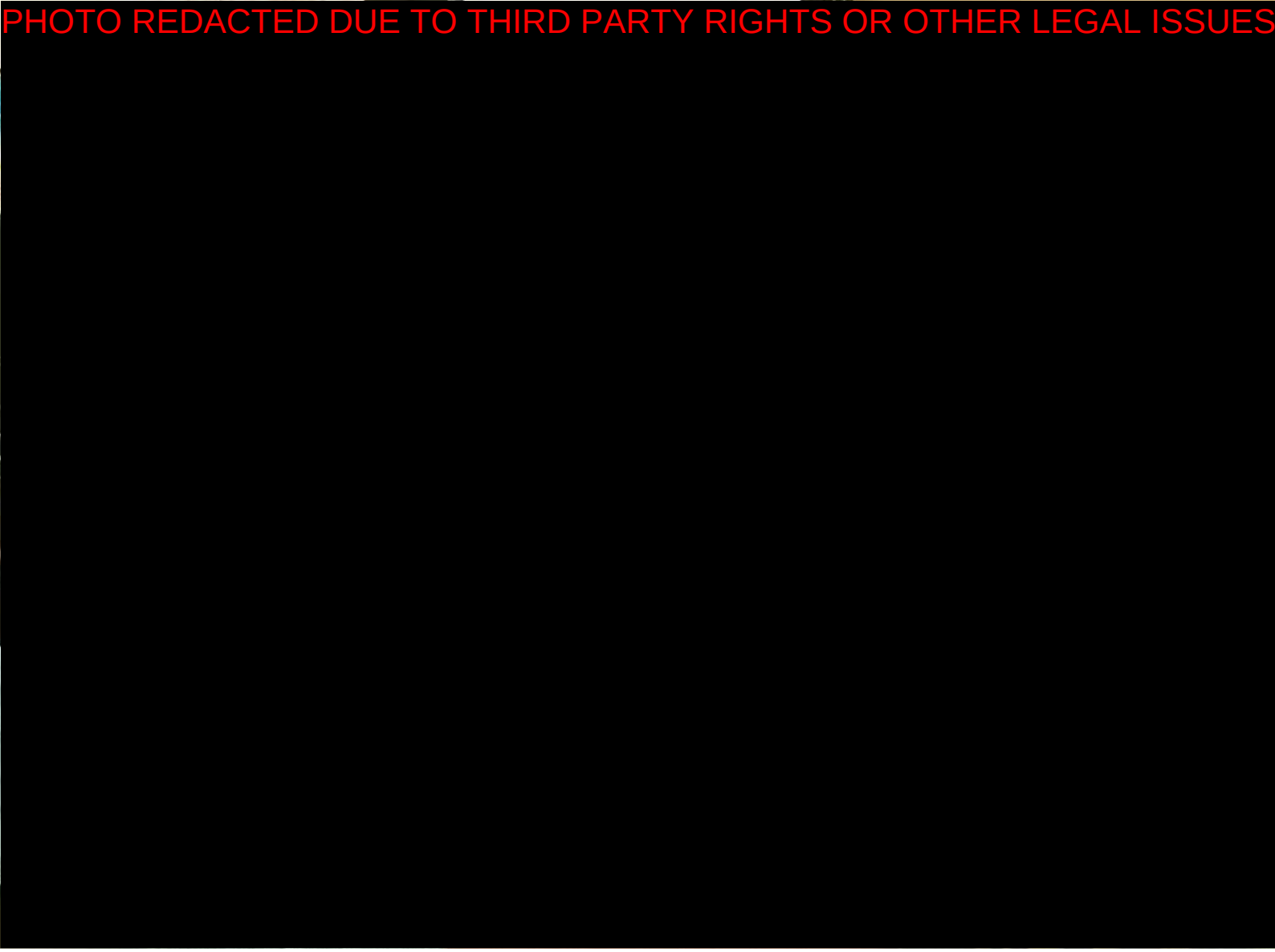
Table 1: COVID-related absences in state-funded schools, autumn term 2020

Region	COVID-related absences (%)
North West	8.8
West Midlands	8.4
Yorkshire and the Humber	8.3
North East	7.9
Outer London	7.3
Inner London	6.9
East Midlands	6.7
South East	6.0
East of England	5.2
South West	4.4
England	**7.0**

1. Data shows COVID-related absences only. This includes pupils self-isolating and shielding, including when a class or bubble has been required to stay at home. Where a pupil was not attending in these circumstances, schools were expected to provide immediate access to remote education.
2. Pupils who tested positive for COVID-19 are not included above. They are included in the Department for Education's main absence figure instead, alongside other types of illness.
3. See https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term.

Source: Department for Education





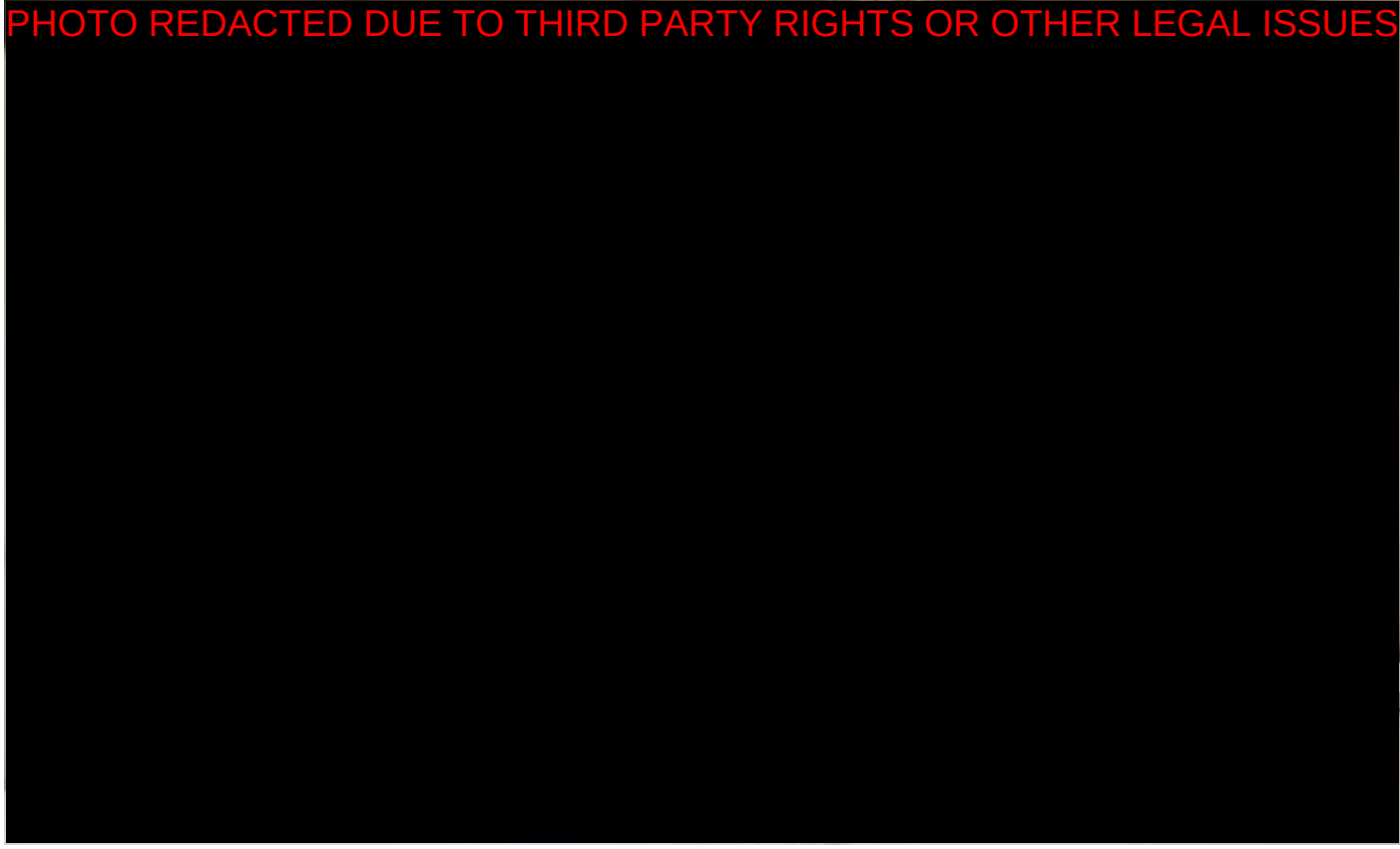
Remote education

Remote education was a significant part of schooling in 2020/21. School staff worked hard on their remote offer, often drawing on external programmes such as Oak National Academy and BBC Bitesize.

However, a number of studies, both from home and abroad, have shown that children did not learn as much when learning remotely. One paper, on the Dutch primary school system, highlighted that pupils had made little or no progress while learning from home, despite the Netherlands supposedly having a high degree of technological preparedness.[17] An Ofqual study found that, when assessed during autumn term 2020, primary school pupils were generally a month or two behind expectations.[18]

Keeping motivated while learning remotely was a struggle for many children. Thirty-nine per cent of parents who responded to a YouGov questionnaire said their child was not very engaged in remote learning.

17. P Engzell, A Frey and M Verhagen, 'Learning inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic', Center for Open Science, working paper, 2020; https://ideas.repec.org/p/osf/socarx/ve4z7.html.
18. 'Learning during the pandemic', Ofqual, July 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic.



Understanding what good remote education looks like was a priority during the pandemic. We published a short guide on what was working well in remote education based on our findings from interim visits of nearly 800 schools, in-depth interviews with school leaders from 25 schools, a survey of just over 1,000 teachers and just over 2,000 parents, and a wider literature review.[19,20] This guide set out some evidence-based tips and challenged some unhelpful myths about remote education.

Many dynamics of classroom teaching – such as pupils' interactions, relationship-building, providing feedback, delivery of practical components of a lesson and other experiences – are not directly replicable in a remote environment. Schools had to make adaptations that were unlikely to be as effective for all children as face-to-face teaching.

Many schools viewed their remote approach as a work in progress and were improving as they went along. Assessment was a particular area that schools said they needed to think more about. It is more difficult to pick up on children's misconceptions remotely as so much relies on expressions and body language. And giving quality feedback depends on the same mechanisms: the ability of a teacher to see pupils' learning processes, understand their needs and suggest ways to improve in both daily activities as well as in summative assessments. Some school leaders and experts also talked about the difficulty of teaching to a class with some pupils physically present and some isolating, raising questions about curriculum equity.[21]

Our monitoring visits to requires improvement and inadequate schools found that many pupils still struggled with remote education, particularly those with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language. Many children struggled to stay motivated during the third lockdown, and this became progressively more difficult for them. Not all children had access to essential technology or quiet space at home. This, coupled with the ongoing challenges of remote teaching, contributed to widespread learning shortfalls.

19. 'What's working well in remote education', Ofsted, January 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-education. The interim visits we made during the autumn term 2020 included questions for leaders on the remote education that each school was providing. In total, we analysed the evidence from 798 of these visits.
20. 'Remote education research', Ofsted, January 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-research.
21. 'What's working well in remote education', Ofsted, January 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whats-working-well-in-remote-education.

Lost schooling and the breadth of the curriculum

The loss of in-person schooling affected children differently depending on their age and circumstances, and on the level of support they received at home and from school.

While many schools worked exceptionally hard to improve their remote learning over the year, we saw that even the most well-thought-out offer could not replicate classroom learning.

In primary schools, there was a widespread view that most pupils made little to no real progress over the summer of 2020, and that reading and mathematics were of particular concern.[22] By November, most primary school leaders we spoke to in our interim visits had restructured their timetables to give extra time to English and mathematics. The extra time was being used to teach components that had not been taught during the first national lockdown and to revisit aspects that had not been well learned. Most primary schools had continued the teaching of phonics remotely and in person. However, they found it difficult to teach phonics or reading effectively when teaching remotely, especially for those who struggled the most.[23]

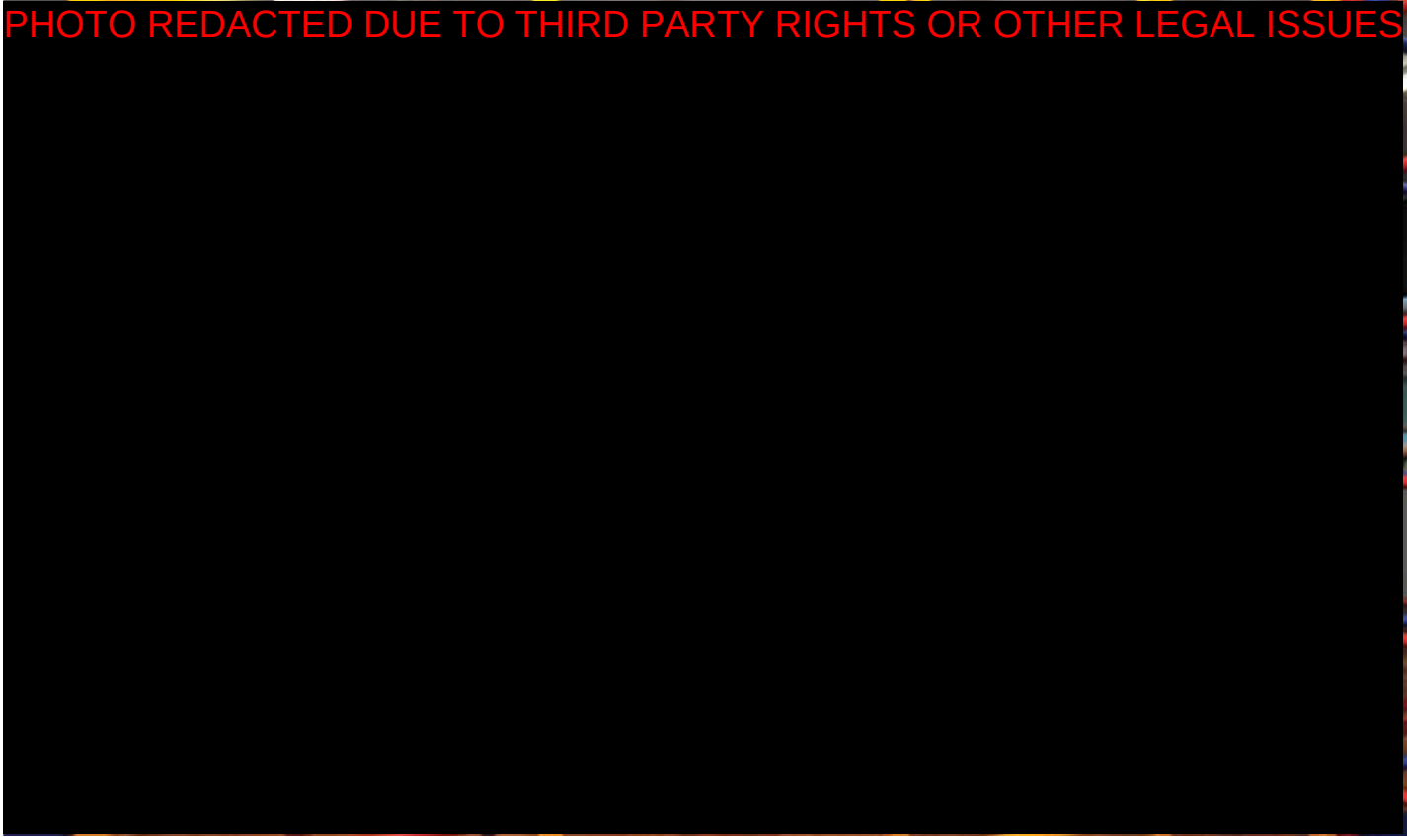
Secondary leaders noted greater variability in successful learning, which they attributed to pupils' different experiences at home during the first national lockdown. There were particular concerns expressed about Year 7, who were coming into secondary education without a proper transition, and Year 11, who were preparing for exams. In almost all secondary schools we visited, pupils were studying the usual subjects but there were significant restrictions on what could be achieved in some subjects, such as music and physical education (PE). Almost all pupils on qualification courses were continuing with these, but again it was not always possible to teach the full range of content.

Primary and secondary school leaders said that it was difficult to arrange some specialist support for pupils with SEND, usually because they did not feel able to move staff around the school's bubbles. The pandemic limited the ability of specialists, such as educational psychologists, to assess or work directly with pupils.

Our summer term inspections showed that having well-developed curriculum thinking served schools well during the return to school after lockdown, enabling them to flexibly address missed content due to COVID-19 disruptions. Strong leaders identified gaps caused by the pandemic and prioritised the knowledge that would be most important for pupils as they moved up the school.

However, weaker schools struggled to make changes to their curriculum effectively. The pandemic slowed the implementation of curriculum plans and improvements. In these schools, some teachers did not successfully identify the knowledge that pupils needed to learn and did not pick up on pupils' lack of understanding. Teachers did not always have the subject knowledge required to maximise pupils' learning post-lockdown.

22. 'HMCI commentary: findings from visits in November', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmci-commentary-findings-from-visits-in-november.
23. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on schools, November 2020', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-schools-november-2020. Based on 297 visits to schools.



Pupils' physical and mental health

Some pupils had gained weight or become unfit during lockdown. As a result, many schools made PE a priority in the autumn term, for example by extending PE lessons or encouraging pupils to jog a 'daily mile'. Nearly half of the respondents to our annual parent survey were concerned about their child's physical health.[24]

NHS Digital data indicates that rates of probable mental health disorders in children aged five to 16 have increased from one in nine in 2017 to one in six in 2020.[25] Pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 were particularly worried about the uncertainty of exams, a finding also supported by Teacher Tapp data, which showed 67% of teachers somewhat or strongly agreeing that their Year 11 and 13 classes appeared to be more anxious and stressed than previous classes for this time of year.[26]

Elective home education

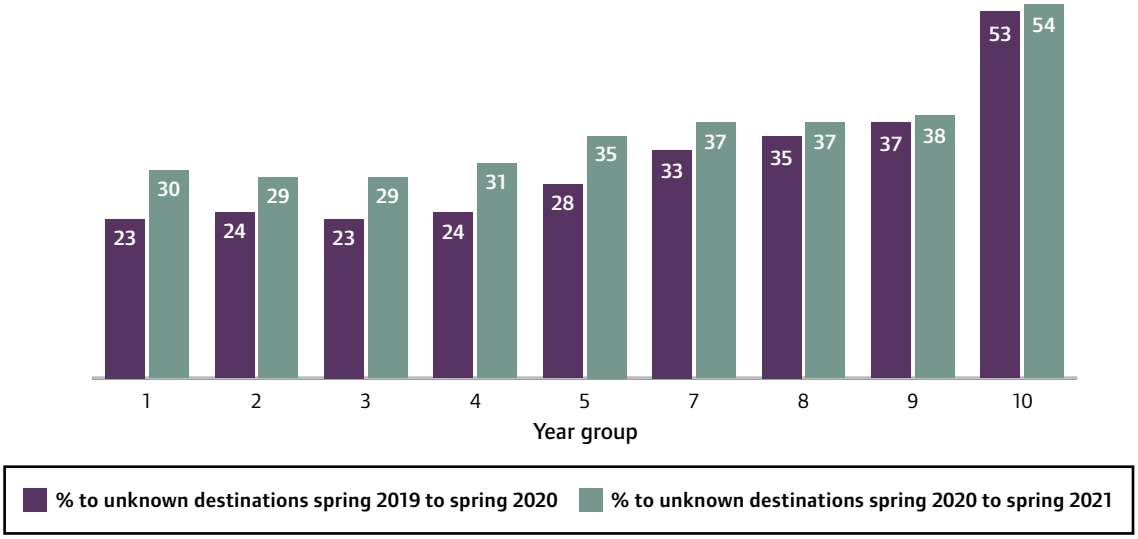
This year, school and local authority leaders told us about a significant increase in pupils being removed from school to be home educated. This finding is in line with the annual elective home education survey carried out by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), which reported an annual increase of 38% in the number of children being home educated.[27]

Almost three fifths of school leaders we spoke to in the autumn term had at least some parents who wanted to home educate temporarily due to the pandemic.

24. 'Ofsted parents annual survey 2021: parents' awareness and perceptions of Ofsted', Ofsted, May 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-parents-survey.
25. 'Mental health of children and young people in England, 2020', NHS Digital, October 2020; https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up.
26. 'Is behaviour worse after a lockdown? And other findings from this week's results…', Teacher Tapp, March 2021; https://teachertapp.co.uk/behaviour-after-lockdown-self-care-water-diet-sleep-exercise/.
27. 'Elective home education survey 2020', Association of Directors of Children's Services, November 2020; https://adcs.org.uk/education/article/elective-home-education-survey-2020. The ADCS estimated that 75,700 children and young people were being electively home educated in October 2020, a 38% increase from October 2019.

We have seen an increase in the proportion of pupils who moved out of the state-funded sector to other destinations. This can include moves into independent schools, unregistered schools and home education, but they cannot be tracked through the data we hold. Thirty-three per cent of pupils who left their school between January 2020 and January 2021 moved to one of these 'unknown' destinations, compared with 29% the year before. This may be a sign of an increase in home schooling but also moving overseas. The increase in the proportion moving to unknown destinations is greater for primary-age pupils than secondary-age pupils.

Figure 5: Percentage of pupil movements to unknown destinations



1. This chart compares consecutive years in the Department for Education's January school census data in order to ascertain if a pupil has moved to an unknown destination.
2. A pupil is categorised as moving to an unknown destination if they do not appear in the following year's census data, meaning that they have moved to somewhere other than a state-funded school. The destination is therefore unknown to Ofsted, from the data held centrally. This does not mean the destination is not known by the school.
3. Year group refers to the school year that pupils were in at the start of the period in question, for example year group 1 counts pupils who were in Year 1 in the first census, but did not appear in Year 2 in the following census.

Source: Department for Education

Experience of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools

We know from our research visits in the autumn term 2020[28] and spring term 2021[29] that pupils with SEND have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans were expected to attend school during the lockdowns, where possible, whereas those on a lower level of special educational needs support were not. However, those categorised as vulnerable because of the impact that being out of school would have on their learning or mental health/well-being were eligible to attend. Of those who did attend, some flourished in smaller class sizes. Those who did not attend had varied experiences. Some pupils enjoyed working at home or found it calming. However, some parents we spoke to in our visits to local areas reported that their children had regressed in their learning and communication as a result of being out of school.

28. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on local areas' SEND provision, November 2020', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-local-areas-send-provision-november-2020.
29. 'SEND: old issues, new issues, next steps', Ofsted, June 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-old-issues-new-issues-next-steps/send-old-issues-new-issues-next-steps.

Some pupils with SEND were classed as clinically extremely vulnerable and were therefore less likely than others to return to schools when they reopened fully. There were also some additional barriers to attendance for some children, such as problems accessing transport and anxiety about the pandemic on the part of parents, carers or pupils themselves.

On 8 March, schools reopened for all pupils, except for a very small number who had individual medical advice not to attend. However, attendance levels differed greatly between schools, and were still especially low for pupils with SEND.[30] Despite the best efforts of leaders, some parents remained worried about sending their children in. The return to education worked best where education, health and social care practitioners stayed in touch with families, helping them to access support even when schools were partly closed. Provision of this support was uneven, and there were families we spoke to in all local areas who reported receiving little or even no contact from practitioners.[31]

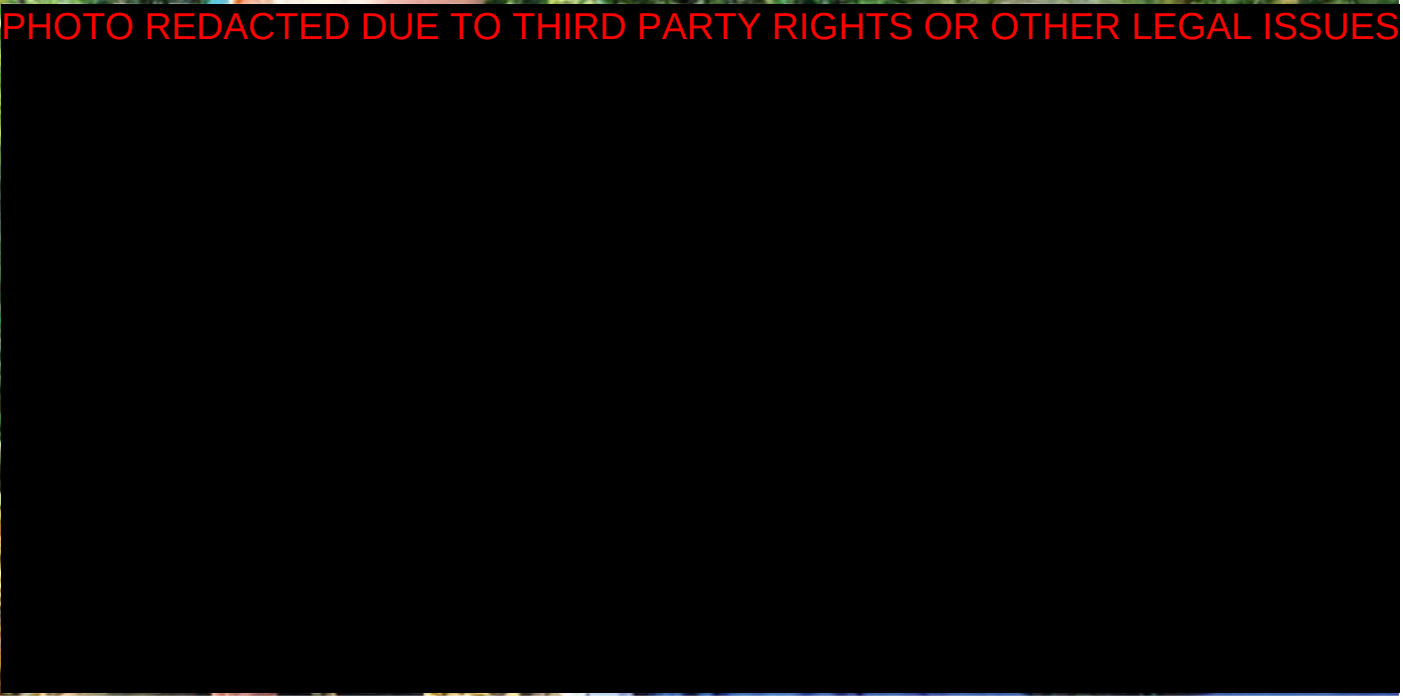
There was a similar pattern of reduced attendance by children with SEND in short-break provision. Even where these services reopened, not all children were using them as much as before the pandemic. Barriers to attendance included providers reducing capacity and anxiety on the part of parents, carers and children.[32]

In our remote education work, we found that 59% of parents of a pupil with SEND said that their child had disengaged from remote education (20 percentage points more than those without SEND).[33] Furthermore, fewer than half (46%) of the teachers surveyed stated that their school offered additional remote learning arrangements for pupils with SEND. The most effective solutions for pupils with SEND took into account each child's specific needs and circumstances.

However, for some children, there were benefits to remote education, including being able to:

- work more at their own pace
- take breaks when they needed to rather than at prescribed times
- work in a space that met their sensory needs and did not overstimulate them.

30. This is based on a daily collection from schools (rather than the mandatory school census), and is an estimate as not all schools provided data each day. Data was only collected for children with EHC plans rather than all pupils with SEND (so excludes SEND support). See 'Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic', Department for Education, July 2021; https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2021-week-29.
31. 'SEND: old issues, new issues, next steps', Ofsted, June 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-old-issues-new-issues-next-steps/send-old-issues-new-issues-next-steps.
32. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on local areas' SEND provision, November 2020', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-local-areas-send-provision-november-2020.
33. 'Remote education research', Ofsted, February 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-research/remote-education-research.



Special schools (state and independent)

We inspect around 1,650 special schools. Of these, 1,010 are state-funded, 580 are non-association independent and 57 are non-maintained schools.[34]

Managing through the early period of the pandemic and the lockdowns was particularly challenging for special schools. Unlike mainstream schools, special schools were expected to remain fully open for all their pupils. Clinically extremely vulnerable children were advised to shield and therefore needed access to remote education. Access to specialist services was restricted for many children with SEND and maintaining the right levels of appropriate staff was difficult.

State of the nation

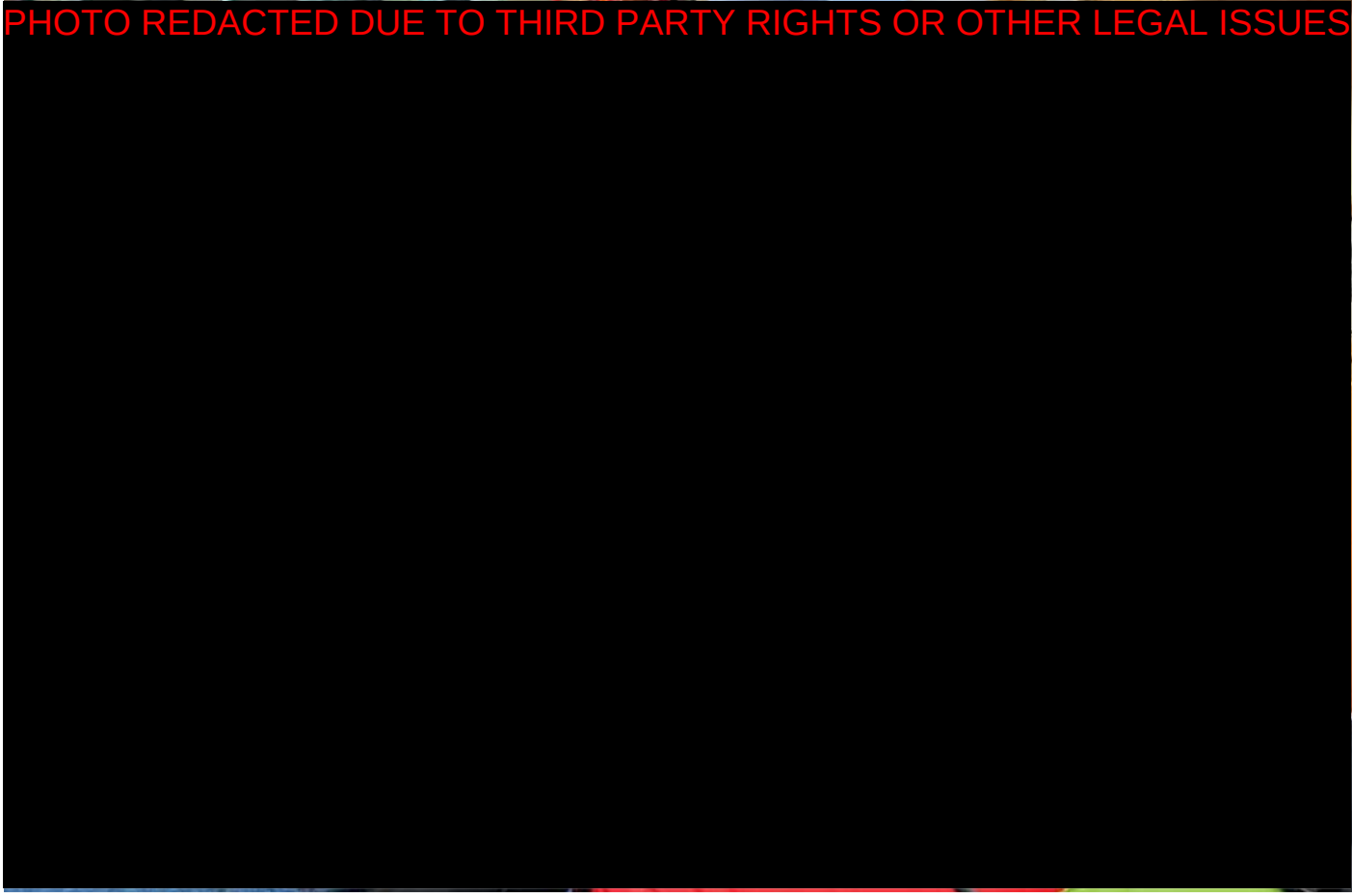
At 31 August 2021, a higher proportion of state-funded and non-maintained special schools (90%) were judged good or outstanding compared with independent special schools (84%). These figures remain similar to previous years, which is to be expected as graded inspections were paused for most of the year due to COVID-19.

Attendance

Pupils often join special schools having had very poor attendance at school previously. This can be as a result of their health, anxiety or long-term disengagement from school. Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that, in autumn 2020, special school leaders reported a mixed picture in terms of attendance. Additional concerns during the pandemic included practical considerations, such as medical support needed at school, and worries that parents and pupils had about returning.

Our summer inspections found that, in strong special schools, leaders set high expectations for pupils' attendance. Pupils and families often need additional logistical support such as taxis, chaperones and personal assistants, so it was heartening to see these schools' commitment to overcoming logistical complications. In these schools, staff worked closely with families and parents, actively encouraged pupils' engagement and focused on building confidence and trust. Strategies to re-engage pupils were tailored to the needs of the child. Schools with good attendance often engaged and worked closely with families and parents. Leaders had robust processes for monitoring attendance, and procedures were also in place to engage external agencies (for example, local authorities) where attendance was a concern.

34. Non-maintained special schools are not-for-profit schools for children with SEND that the Secretary of State for Education has approved under section 342 of the Education Act 1996. Although not under local authority control, many placements in these schools are funded by local authorities. They are inspected under the same legislation as state-funded schools (sections 5 and 8 of the Education Act 2005). They are therefore included in the state-funded figures in most instances in this report, and in our official statistics: 'State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2021.



Expectations of attendance varied considerably in special schools. For example, in one special school, attendance targets were set at 90%. However, in another, over half of pupils were still on a part-time timetable in June 2021. Some special schools reported in the summer term that attendance was back to pre-pandemic levels, but this was not the case for all.

Shortfalls in learning and breadth of curriculum

The areas of learning in which special school pupils were affected most depended largely on their different needs, but also on their experience during the first national lockdown.

In our autumn visits, nearly all special school leaders said that pupils were studying their usual subjects, including courses leading to qualifications where relevant. Leaders were also determined to provide a rich range of experiences, including practical and creative activities where possible. However, as with mainstream schools, they were making some adaptations to the curriculum. Many schools were focusing more strongly than usual on core subjects, with community-based learning (such as shopping and travel training), volunteering, work experience and outdoor activities not taking place.

Our summer inspections found that the curriculum in good and outstanding independent special schools was broad. The curriculum was mapped out clearly, well sequenced and guided by assessment. In most special schools, the curriculum was bespoke and factored in a pupil's health, well-being and learning needs. One school we visited tailored its curriculum to its pupils' significant mental health needs, including working around strict risk assessments. Personal development was often an even more important aspect of the curriculum post-lockdown.

Even by the summer term, extra-curricular activities continued to be affected by the pandemic. For example, schools were unable to accommodate visits from the emergency services, pupils' work experience was cancelled and opportunities for independent travel had been curtailed. Many leaders were aware of the impact on pupils' personal development and spoke about reintroducing these experiences as soon as restrictions were lifted.

Alternative provision

AP is for pupils who have been excluded or otherwise fallen out of mainstream school, or who are dual registered at both a mainstream school and in AP.[35] Most AP schools invest time helping pupils build positive relationships with teachers and re-engage with education, offering a curriculum with sufficient breadth, with a blend of academic and vocational subjects.

Impact of the pandemic

Our visits to AP in the autumn term found that, as with other types of schools, AP leaders were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on pupils. But in addition to the concerns heard from mainstream school leaders, AP leaders talked about some children becoming more involved in criminal exploitation, including gang violence, and child sexual exploitation.[36] This is in line with reports from frontline health professionals, who reported an increase in injuries related to gang violence.[37]

As with special schools, reports of attendance were mixed, and the lack of school transport was mentioned as an issue. AP leaders reported that the work they had done during the first lockdown to support families had had a positive impact on their relationships with families, and on pupils' attendance.

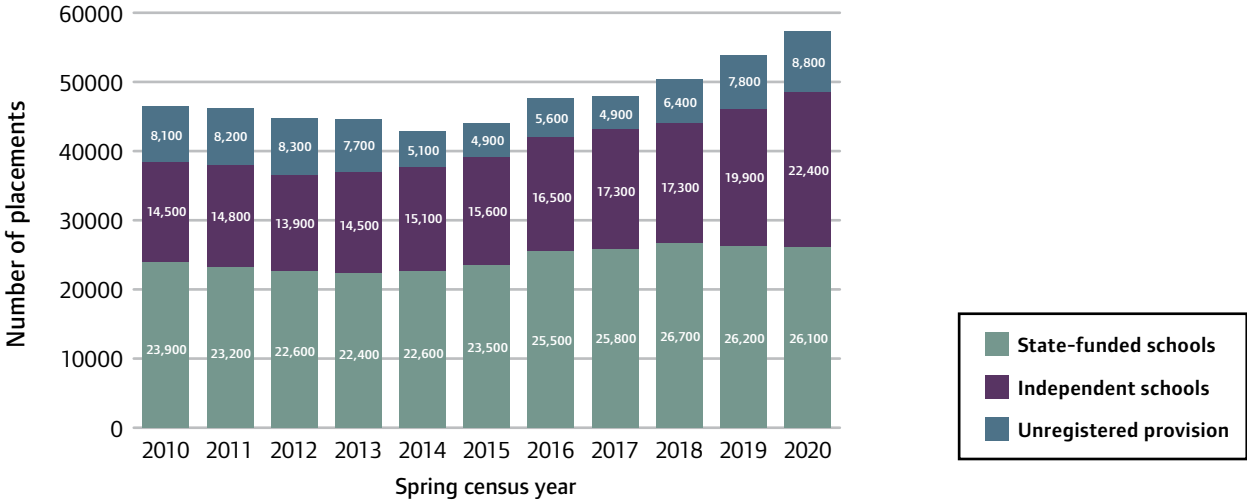
Characteristics of the AP sector

There are different types of AP placements, such as in state-funded schools, independent schools, non-maintained special schools and unregistered provision. Some provide part-time education, while others offer full time, and pupils can be registered at more than one provider. This means it can be difficult to get an overview of the AP sector as a whole, so the following is based on our analysis of pupil-level data from both the Department for Education (DfE)'s school census and its AP census.

The number of placements in independent schools, including independent special schools, that have been commissioned and paid for by local authorities at an average annual cost of £40,000, has increased by 78% over the last 10 years.[38] The overall number of AP placements across all sectors increased from 46,000 to 57,000 between 2010 and 2020. While places in the state sector increased slightly, 8,000 of these extra 11,000 places were provided by independent schools, including independent special schools.[39] These placements are often what the school agreed and listed on the child's EHC plan, so the DfE considers these to be special rather than AP placements (though they are recorded and published as part of the AP census).

35. This can also include pupils who left mainstream schools due to illness.
36. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on schools, October 2020', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-schools-october-2020. The AP providers visited were state-funded, not independent or unregistered.
37. 'Rise in violence and sexual exploitation against children and young people "linked to county lines"', University of Nottingham, June 2021; https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/rise-violence-and-sexual-exploitation-children-young-people-county-lines.
38. This is based on data from the DfE on lowest and highest fees charged by each independent school, including independent special schools, and data from the DfE's AP census. The census shows the independent schools and independent special schools that local authorities send children to for AP. The calculation takes the median value of the lowest and highest day fees for each school and calculates a weighted average for all such schools based on the numbers of pupils sent there by local authorities. The median value of the annual fees charged for independent special schools is £49,000 compared with just £10,000 for other independent schools. 'School-level annual school census', Department for Education, January 2020.
39. For more information on the AP census, see 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, July 2020; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census; 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020', Department for Education, June 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020. However, the analysis was produced by Ofsted using pupil-level data provided by the DfE.

Figure 6: Numbers of AP placements in state-funded schools, independent schools and unregistered providers over time



1. This chart was produced by Ofsted using pupil-level census data provided by the DfE.
2. Unregistered provision includes any provision not registered as a school in England, such as FE providers, providers in Wales, prisons, secure units, one-on-one tuition, work-based placements and other unregistered providers. This includes pupils that are attending the provision because it is the placement named in their EHC plan.
3. Independent schools includes both independent special schools, other independent schools and non-maintained special schools. These schools are not registered as AP providers, but are receiving pupils sent there for AP places funded by the local authority.
4. Based on actual rather than planned places. Some children may have multiple part-time places at different providers. Note that the overall population of school-age children has grown during the period.
5. The number of AP placements in independent schools, excluding non-maintained special schools, in 2010 and 2020 were 11,000 and 19,000 respectively.

Source: Department for Education

AP is a form of special education and so disproportionately educates children with SEND, especially those with social, emotional and mental health issues. The AP population is also skewed towards children from poorer families and older children.

More than half of children with SEND who are in AP have social, emotional and mental health issues as a primary need.[40] It is understandable that schools supporting children at risk of exclusion use this category on the SEND register. However, there is a risk that these children's other needs, especially relating to speech, language and communication, are not on the radar and are not addressed.

There are now over 8,000 AP places for primary-age pupils.[41] The number of placements for primary-age children in AP has increased by 55% since 2010.[42]

40. 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, July 2020; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census; 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020', Department for Education, June 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020.
41. Includes part-time and full-time AP placements for pupils recorded in the school census or AP census in January 2020. When a pupil attends more than one AP, each placement has been counted. 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, July 2020; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census; 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020', Department for Education, June 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020.
42. 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, January 2014 to 2020; 'PRU census', Department for Education, January 2010 to 2013; 'School census', Department for Education, January 2010 to 2020.

Three quarters of pupils in AP have not been excluded: they either continue to be registered with a mainstream school or attend full time at a pupil referral unit (PRU), academy AP or free school AP.[43] The statutory powers that enable schools to educate children off site in AP include requirements on mainstream schools to keep those placements under constant review and to reintegrate the pupils back into mainstream school as soon as possible.

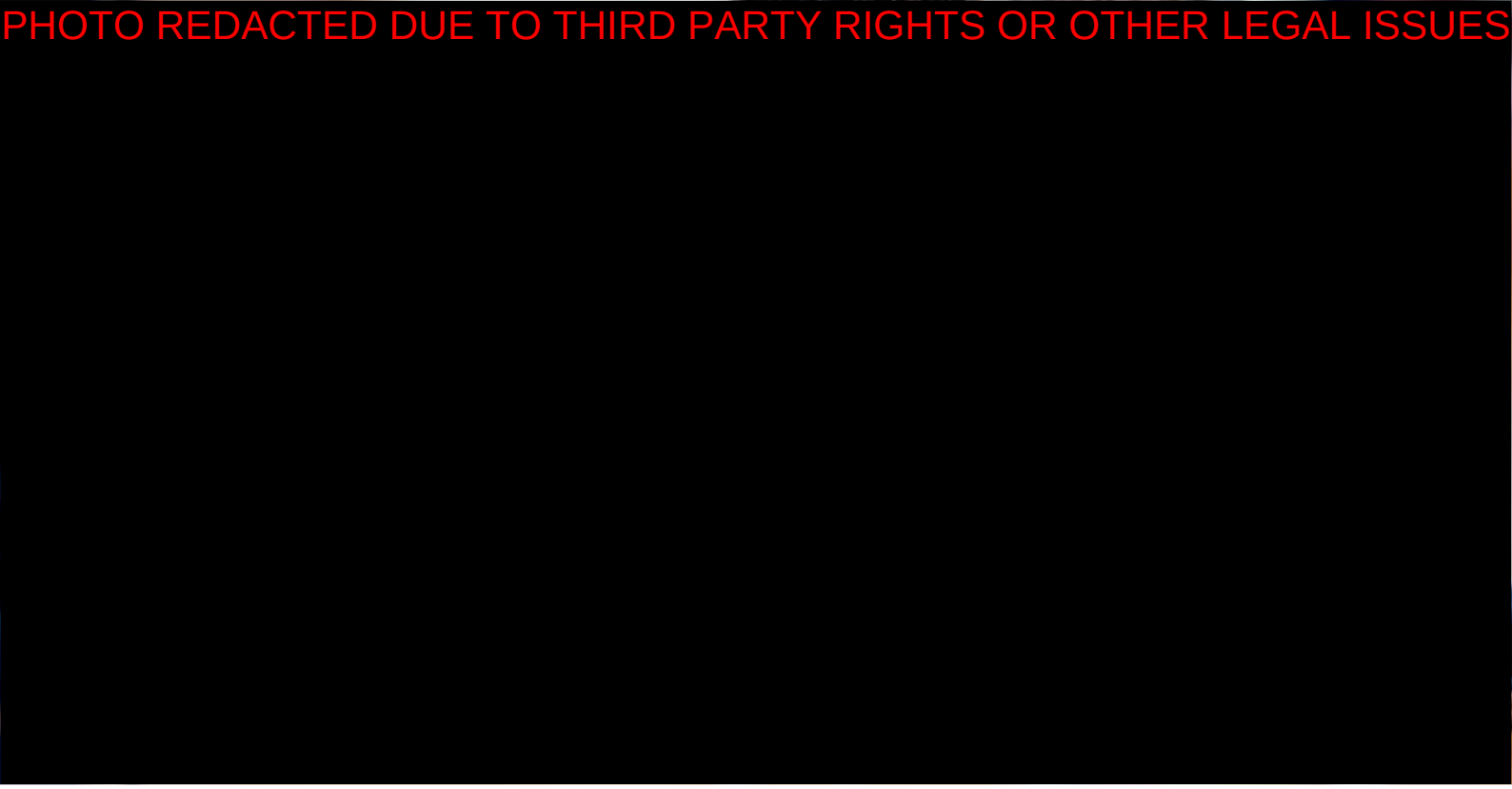
However, this aim does not translate into reality. Thirty-eight per cent of children stay in PRUs, academy AP or free school AP for more than a year.[44] In fact, children who move to state-funded AP as teenagers rarely return to their mainstream secondary schools. For instance, 58% of those who join in Year 9 and 78% who join in Year 10 are still there in the January of Year 11.[45] Only 60% of pupils in AP went to a sustained destination at age 16, compared with 94% from state-funded mainstream schools.[46]

Ofsted inspects all registered AP but unregistered provision is not directly monitored. The number of placements in unregistered provision, which is commissioned by local authorities, has been rising over the last three years, meaning more children are in settings that are not Ofsted-inspected.[47]

Our unregistered schools investigations have found that a number of APs are operating illegally, taking on more than five pupils on a full-time basis (and so meeting the legal definition of a school) without registering, and schools and local authorities are not always checking providers' registration status.[48] Since our unregistered schools team was established in 2016, the proportion of warning notices issued to APs we believe to be operating illegally has increased.

Alarmingly, the children with the highest needs are particularly likely to end up in unregistered providers: 60% of children placed in unregistered AP have an EHC plan. We cannot inspect unregulated AP, and so providers that cater for children with particularly complex needs are not systematically monitored. This is a big gap in our oversight and one that should be filled.

43. 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, July 2020; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census; 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020', Department for Education, June 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020.
44. 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020', Department for Education, June 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2020.
45. 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, January 2014 to 2020; 'PRU census', Department for Education, January 2010 to 2013; 'School census', Department for Education, January 2010 to 2020.
46. 'Key stage 4 destination measures, academic year 2019/20', Department for Education, October 2021; https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-destination-measures.
47. Unregistered provision refers to any provision not registered as a school in England. This includes FE providers, providers in Wales, prisons, secure units, one-on-one tuition, work-based placements and other unregistered providers. Pupils who attend the provision include those who have it as the placement named in their EHC plan. 'Alternative provision census', Department for Education, July 2020; https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census. Schools may also commission placements in unregistered providers, but these are not included in the figures.
48. 'Alternative school provision: findings of a three-year survey', Ofsted, July 2014; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-school-provision-findings-of-a-three-year-survey.



Independent schools

There are around 2,420 independent schools in England. Of these, we inspect just over 1,160 non-association independent schools.[49] Independent special schools account for half of these. The outcomes for independent special schools are discussed in more detail in the earlier 'special schools' section of this report. The following section includes insights from all non-association independent schools.

Our routine inspection of independent schools was paused for four terms during the pandemic. However, throughout the pandemic, we continued inspecting where children were most at risk, or where we could do so remotely. From the start of the autumn term 2020 until the end of the summer term 2021, we carried out around 350 additional inspections at the request of the DfE. Of these, 77 were progress monitoring inspections (PMIs) to schools that had previously not met the government's independent school standards, which independent schools are expected to comply with. In these PMIs, 51% of schools continued to not meet all the standards checked. We also made 52 emergency inspections, in which 44% of schools did not meet all the standards checked.[50] In the summer term 2021, we also did 95 standard inspections.[51]

During our standard inspections, as well as inspecting against the EIF, we check whether independent schools meet the standards. As at 31 August 2021, 14% of schools did not meet all the standards at their most recent standard inspection. For these 141 schools, we have looked at their 10-year history of standard, progress monitoring and emergency inspections. From this, we found:

- 27% of these schools only failed to meet the standards once
- 52% did not meet the standards on two to four inspections
- 21% did not meet the standards on five or more inspections.

49. The remaining independent schools are members of an association and are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).
50. 'Non-association independent schools inspections and outcomes in England: August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/non-association-independent-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-in-england-august-2021.
51. 'Management information - non-association independent schools - as at 31 July 2021', Ofsted, September 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/non-association-independent-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-management-information.

Although most of the sector performs well, there is clearly too much persistent poor performance. We continue supporting the DfE to improve these schools or to take effective enforcement action against them.

It is also clear that independent faith schools have relatively poor inspection outcomes compared with either faith schools in the state sector or with other independent schools.[52] Of the independent faith schools we inspect, 34% are judged less than good, including 17% judged inadequate. The underlying reports and evidence show three distinct strands that contribute to these disappointing outcomes.

First, independent faith schools are often small and poorly resourced, and as a consequence find it hard to keep up with good practice in many aspects of education and safeguarding.

Second, some of these schools limit the curriculum in areas that are seen to conflict directly with their religion. The curriculum may be limited in science, humanities and other subjects where national curriculum or exam specification content is considered to conflict directly with religious teaching. Some aspects of relationships, sex and health education are also seen to conflict with religious principles. However, these issues are almost never found in state-funded faith schools.

Third, some schools serve communities that want children's education only to prepare them for life within that community, which means knowledge about the wider world is restricted. For example, some schools give very limited time to the secular curriculum. Some do not teach about fundamental British values, particularly around mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Again, these issues are almost never found in state-funded faith schools.

Inspection can contribute to helping these schools do better in relation to the first strand, and the modest improvements seen in inspection outcomes for these schools in recent years may reflect this. Many inspection reports show schools making real progress in improving the education they offer.

However, in relation to the second and third strands, inspection can only draw attention to the real tension that exists in the most conservative faith communities between education and equalities law, regulations and guidance on the one hand, and religious conviction on the other.

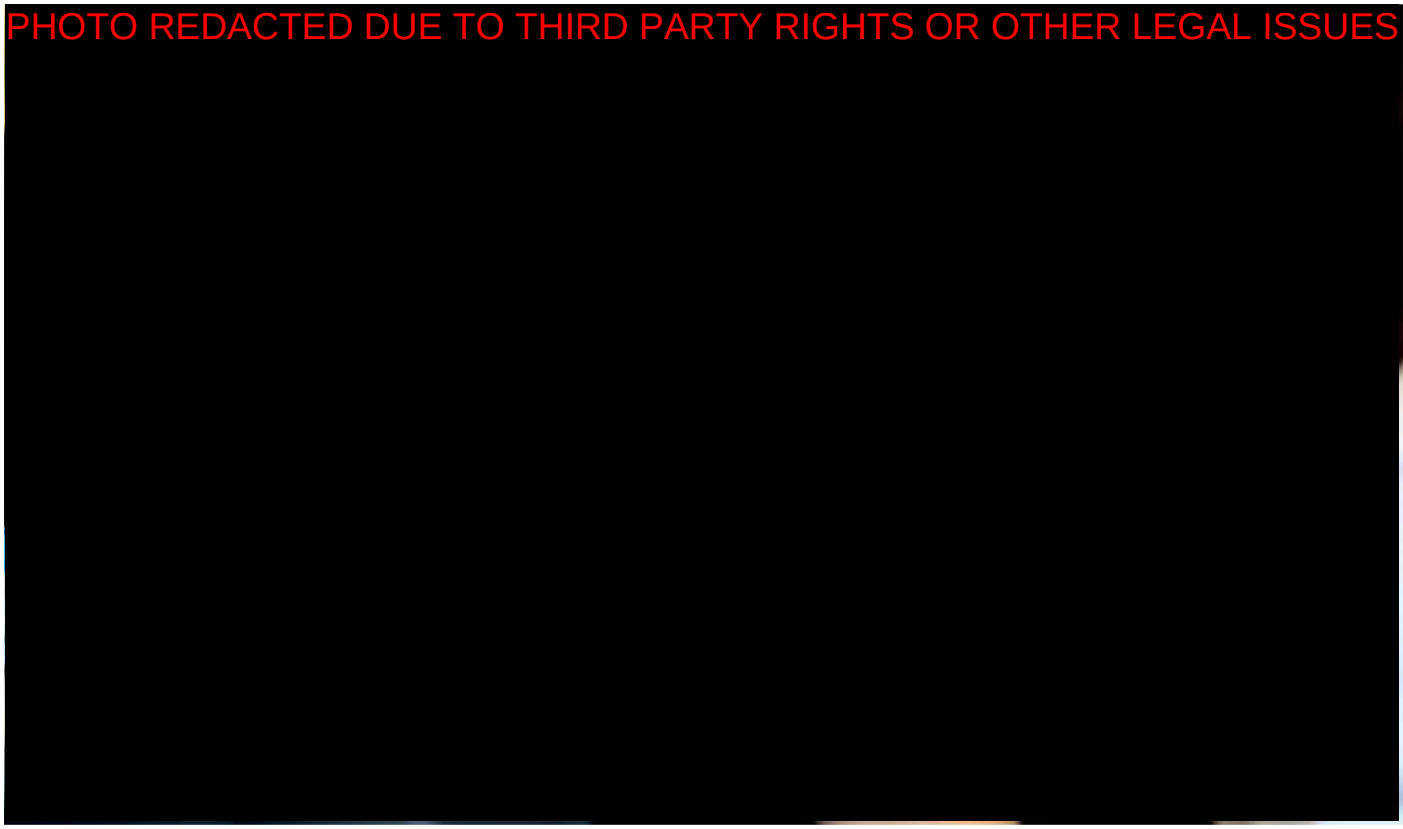
52. The faith of a school is defined by whether the school has declared a religious character or ethos on the DfE's Get Information About Schools site; https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk. If the school does not declare a religious character or ethos, it is categorised in our statistics as 'non-faith', although it is possible that some of these schools also operate as faith schools.

Unregistered schools

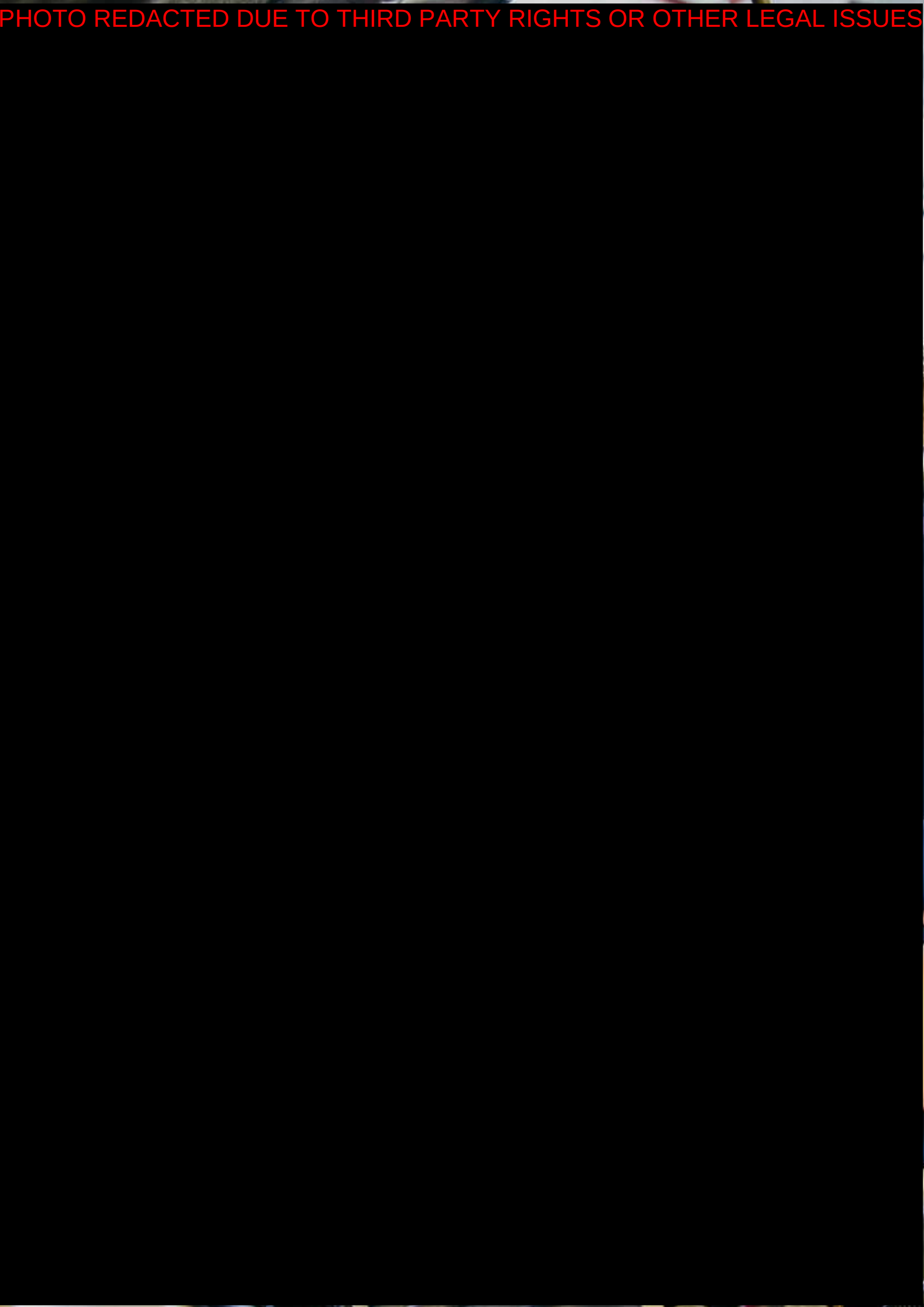
This year, we continued our enforcement activity against unregistered schools. During all the lockdowns, we carried out investigative work and on-site inspections where risk assessment determined they should go ahead. Some unregistered schools stayed open in contravention of COVID-19 legislation, and we have worked with local authorities and the police to close them.

In 2020/21, we carried out just over 100 inspections and issued 24 warning notices.[53] We have also continued to support the Crown Prosecution Service with three cases that are before the criminal courts. This included the prosecution of the individuals responsible for an unregistered facility called Ambassadors Home School. The defendants were sentenced in October 2021, having changed their pleas to guilty. Since 2018, we have submitted five investigations to the Crown Prosecution Service, all of which have resulted in successful prosecutions, with 16 defendants being sentenced. Ambassadors Home School is the second Ofsted investigation to result in the imposition of a suspended prison sentence.

As we said last year, although we have made significant progress in tackling unregistered schools, there is no room for complacency or inaction. Thousands of children in unregistered schools are still out of reach because of weaknesses in legislation and in our investigative powers. We welcome the commitments made by government to strengthen the legislation in this area, but they have been slow to arrive.



53. 'Unregistered schools management information - 1 January 2016 to 31 August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/unregistered-schools-management-information.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Further education and skills

The FE and skills sector is mainly made up of colleges, independent learning providers (which include employer providers), adult community education providers and independent specialist colleges (ISCs). In total, the sector provides education, training and apprenticeships for around 2.9 million learners aged 16 and over every year.[54]

The sector offers a broad range of courses relating to employment, social integration, community support, and improved health and well-being, as well as qualifications that give access to further study. The type and quality of the provision are important, both in meeting the needs of individuals and in meeting the needs of society and supporting the economy.

The experience of FE and skills learners varied considerably this year. Some were able to continue with much of their studies. But many (particularly apprentices and those studying courses with a practical element) were not taught the practical skills and knowledge required to progress or succeed at the next stage.

What we did this year

With routine inspection suspended for much of the year, we carried out 250 interim visits and 140 progress monitoring visits (PMVs) to a sample of providers. These visits were to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers were meeting the needs of students and apprentices during this period, including learners with high needs and SEND. The interim visits did not result in a grade, and we published briefing notes summarising our findings.[55]

We also carried out 44 full inspections and nearly 280 other monitoring visits, which included almost 230 new provider monitoring visits (NPMVs) to providers that deliver apprenticeships. These covered a broad range of providers that collectively teach and train tens of thousands of learners across England.

54. 'Further education and skills data: FE and skills learner participation by provider, local authority, funding stream, learner and learning characteristics: 2018 to 2019', Department for Education and Education and Skills Funding Agency, November 2019; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-further-education-and-skills.
55. 'Ofsted COVID-19 series', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-covid-19-series.

State of the nation

On 31 August 2021, there were just over 2,000 FE and skills providers publicly funded and providing education, training and/or apprenticeships.

Figure 7: FE and skills providers, inspections and monitoring visits in 2020/21

1. The number of providers funded and delivering education, training and/or apprenticeships on 31 August 2021.
2. The number of inspections and monitoring visits for 2020/21 includes those providers that had ceased to be funded or were closed by 31 August 2021.
3. Other monitoring visits include: progress monitoring visits, visits to providers previously judged requires improvement or inadequate, monitoring visits to newly merged colleges and return safeguarding visits to new providers initially judged to be making insufficient progress towards safeguarding their learners at their new provider monitoring visit.
4. Independent learning providers include employer providers.
5. We judge higher education institutions on their FE and apprenticeship provision to Level 7. We do not judge the provider as a whole.
6. Numbers over 100 are rounded.

There are 180 more FE and skills providers than on 31 August 2020: 310 new providers joined the market and 130 merged, ceased to be funded or stopped providing training.

The proportion of FE and skills providers judged good or outstanding on 31 August 2021 was 83%, an increase of two percentage points compared with last year. This increase was mainly a result of providers judged requires improvement or inadequate no longer being in scope for inspection, as they either lost their funding to deliver public education, training and/or apprenticeships or closed.

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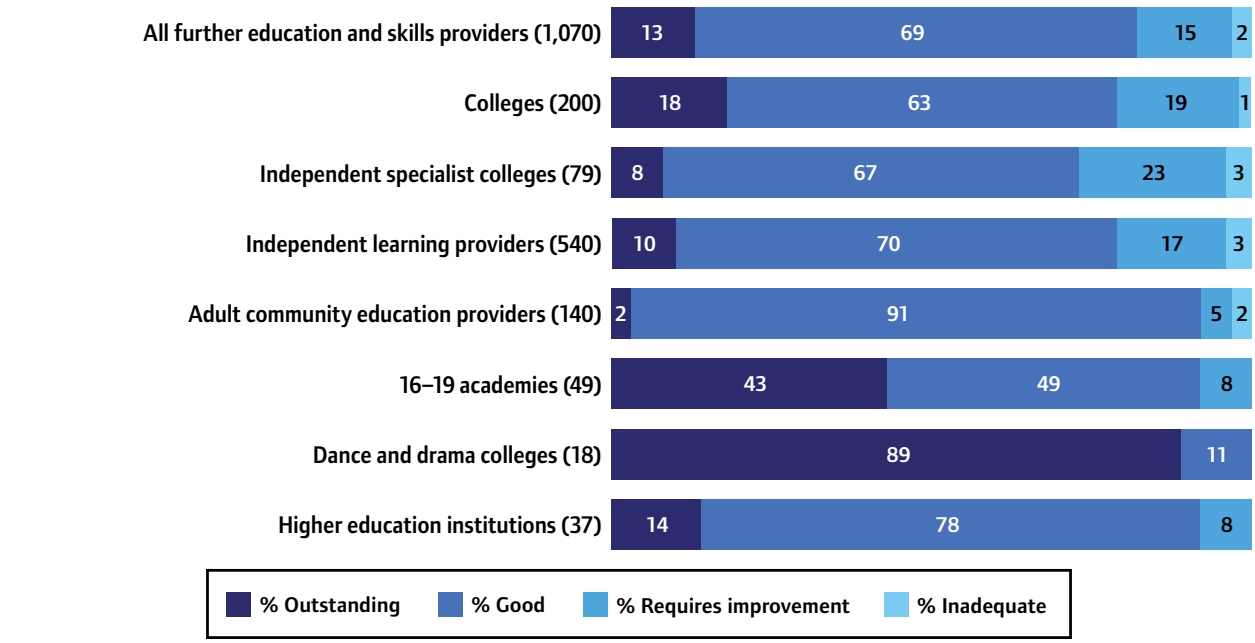
Figure 8: Overall effectiveness of FE and skills providers: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



1. Independent learning providers include employer providers.
2. We judge higher education institutions on their FE and apprenticeship provision to Level 7. We do not judge the provider as a whole.
3. Based on inspections carried out by 31 August 2021 and with the report published by 30 September 2021.
4. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100. Some percentages are based on small numbers, and should be treated with caution.

Apprenticeships

As at 31 August 2021, there were almost 1,600 FE and skills providers delivering apprenticeships.

Table 2: Number of providers delivering apprenticeships by provider group: 31 August 2021

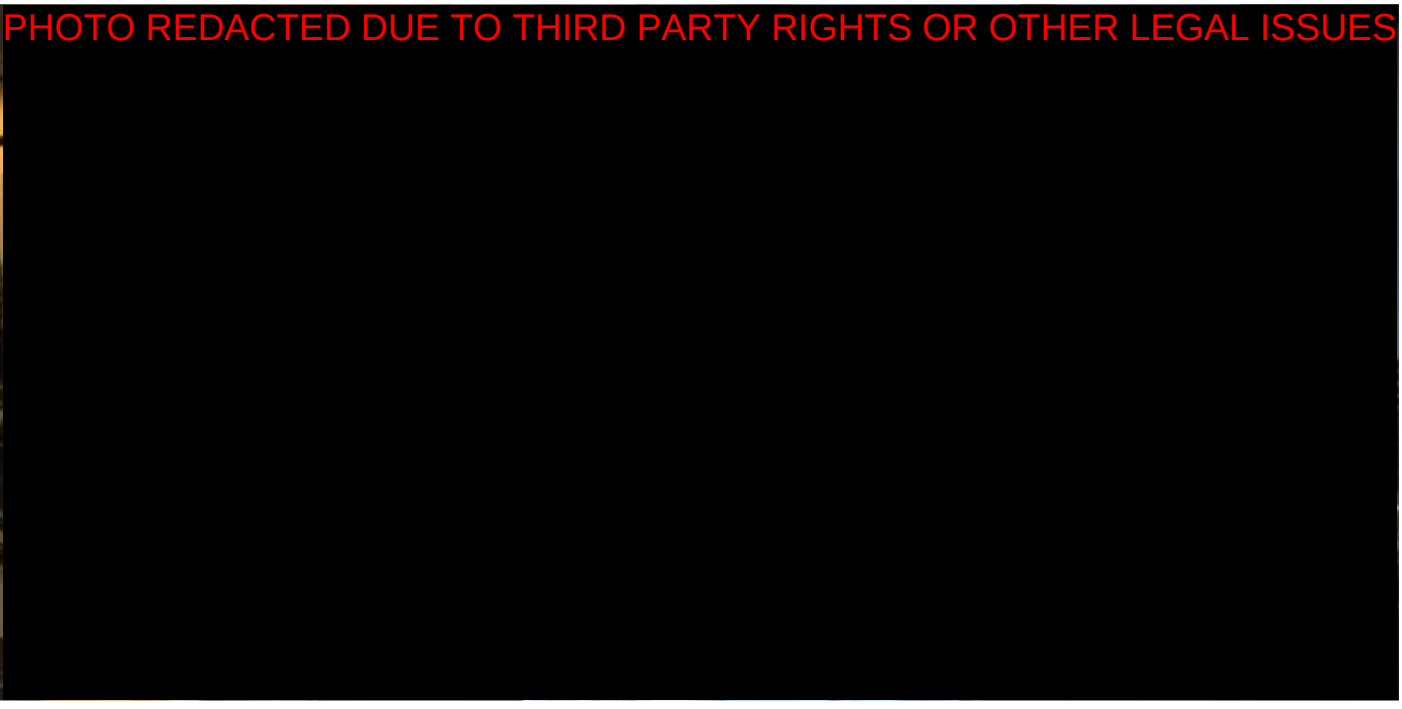
Provider group	Number of providers
Independent learning providers	1,260
Colleges	180
Higher education institutions	87
Adult community education providers	65
Independent specialist colleges	3
All providers	**1,600**

1. Independent learning providers include employer providers.
2. We judge higher education institutions on their FE and apprenticeship provision to Level 7. We do not judge the provider as a whole.
3. Numbers over 100 are rounded.

Source: Education and Skills Funding Agency

Around three quarters (74%) of these providers had a judgement made on the quality of their apprenticeship provision at the time of their full inspection or NPMV.[56]

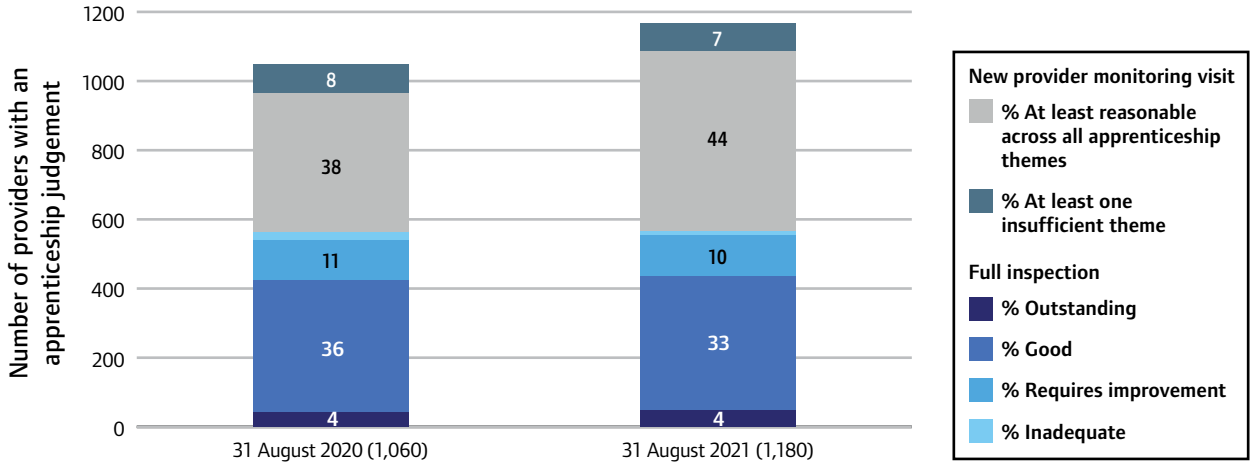
Of the 1,180 providers that had a judgement made on their apprenticeship provision, 81% were judged good or outstanding at their full inspection or were judged to be making at least reasonable progress across all apprenticeship themes at their NPMV. This is a two percentage point increase from the previous year.



56. The 26% of providers without a judgement on the quality of their apprenticeship provision include those awaiting an inspection grade for their apprenticeship provision or their first NPMV.

Figure 9: Quality of apprenticeship provision over time

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



New provider monitoring visits

NPMVs are brief interim inspections of new providers that have just started to be funded. They provide an early assessment of progress and risk, and this results in progress judgements against the set themes: leadership and management, quality of education and training, and safeguarding. New providers will normally have a monitoring visit within 24 months of being funded. They will then normally receive a full inspection within 24 months of the publication of the monitoring visit report.[57]

This year, we carried out almost 230 NPMVs. In these, we judged more than 170 providers (76%) to have made reasonable or significant progress across all themes and 55 (24%) to have made insufficient progress in at least one theme.[58] These proportions are similar to last year.

Progress monitoring visits

PMVs were brief interim inspections to new providers and those judged as requires improvement or inadequate. We carried these out remotely during the third national lockdown (January to March 2021). They resulted in a single progress judgement, which included the provision of remote/online learning. Because they were carried out remotely, we could not give the same level of assurance of quality as for on-site visits.

As with other, similar, visits, the judgements in PMVs were: insufficient progress; reasonable progress; or significant progress. Although inspectors judged most providers to be making reasonable or significant progress in the PMV, they judged around 15% to be making insufficient progress.

57. The usual inspection timescales have been extended on account of COVID-19.
58. In the autumn, we carried out 32 NPMVs to providers that were judged to be making insufficient progress against one or more themes at their previous NPMV and were due a full inspection. This allowed us to reassess the providers in a timely and proportionate way and in the interests of learners.

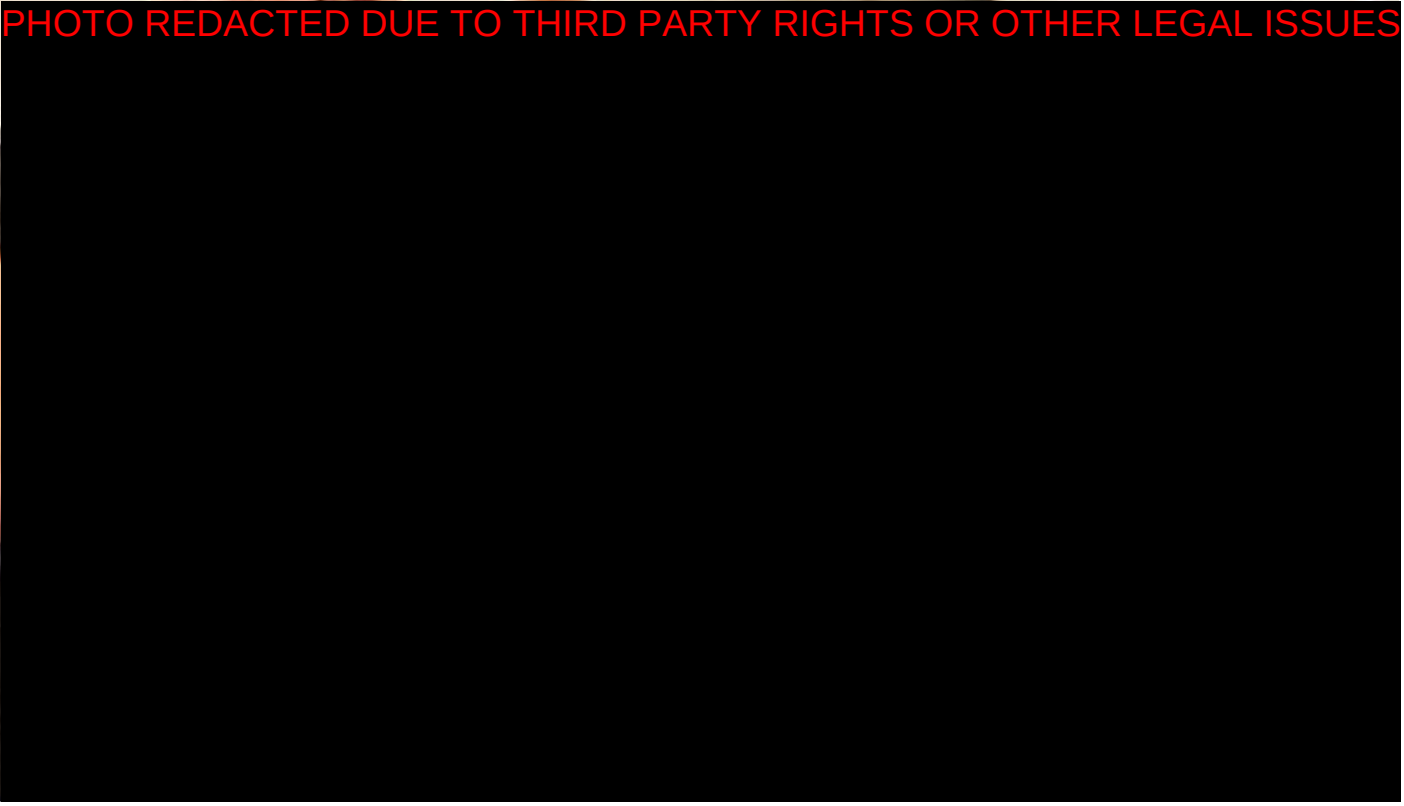


Table 3: Outcomes from PMVs 2020/21

	Number of visits			
Outcomes from all PMVs	Total number of providers visited	Insufficient progress	Reasonable progress	Significant progress
What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning?	140	20	87	28

1. Numbers over 100 are rounded.

Disruption to education and training programmes

Many students in FE and skills had significant disruption to their studies this year. Some returned to face-to-face education in the autumn term, but others did not. Around 80 providers that delivered apprenticeships lost their funding or closed during the year. Even after public health guidance no longer required it, some colleges retained an element of remote learning. Some had learners spend one week on site and the next week off site. Others divided their courses to teach practical skills face to face and theoretical knowledge virtually.

Apprenticeships and courses linked to the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, for example retail, customer service, childcare and health and social care, were least likely to be running fully. Reasons for this varied. For example, in some courses, learners had still not returned from furlough or learners were on a 'break in learning', and in other courses, employers were not taking on new work placements due to economic uncertainty or because of health and safety concerns.

Some apprentices were unable to finish their course because they had been furloughed, their employer had ceased trading or because of COVID restrictions. Others had been delayed in completing their end-point assessment (EPA) as increased work demands meant they did not have time to focus on their apprenticeship. Furthermore, some EPAs were cancelled, which led to a sizeable backlog in the system.

Learning loss and curriculum

Many colleges and adult community education providers assessed learners at the beginning of the autumn term to establish any gaps in their knowledge following the summer lockdown. They then used this information to change curriculum content. Providers identified gaps in English and mathematics and in practical skills for apprentices. For some providers, having to reorganise assessment and teaching due to restrictions, along with meeting learners' different needs, led to learning becoming disjointed and the logical sequencing of the curriculum being disrupted. This is likely to have hindered learners from developing and embedding new knowledge and skills.

We looked at how providers responded to these challenges. The best providers structured the curriculum logically to enable apprentices to learn basic knowledge and skills at the start of the programme and then to progress to more complex ones. Leaders ensured that training officers and workplace line managers developed apprentices' skills and behaviours to carry out their job roles and to achieve apprenticeship standards. Development coaches made sure the curriculum was accessible by supporting apprentices with SEND effectively. They identified apprentices' needs early in the programme and put in place strategies to enable equal access to lessons.

Strong providers also carried out rigorous initial assessments to check that apprentices were suitable for the programme. They made sure that employers had a full understanding of the level of commitment required. They used this initial assessment information to plan training tailored to the skills needs and the interests of individual apprentices and their employers. They linked the knowledge that apprentices had gained from independently researched projects to their job roles. As a result, most achieved merit and distinction grades in their final assessments.

These providers worked effectively to adapt the curriculum in the changing circumstances of the pandemic. Leaders made sure that teachers and trainers were trained to teach using online and remote means effectively.

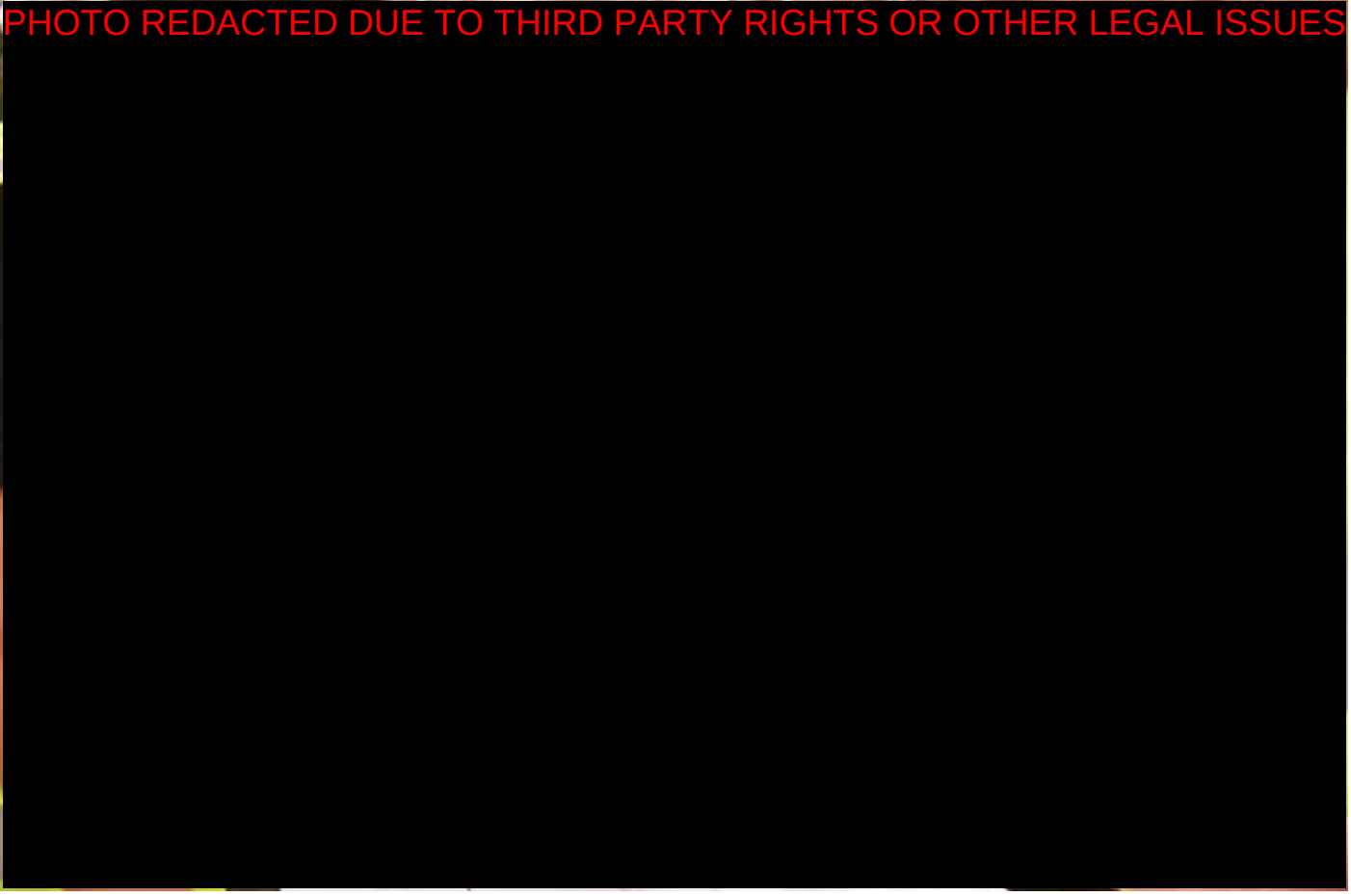
In contrast, leaders in weaker providers did not provide an ambitious curriculum for apprentices. As a result, too many apprentices were merely accrediting their existing skills, rather than developing significant new knowledge.

Weaker providers did not adapt their curriculum quickly and/or effectively to the changing circumstances of the pandemic. Teachers and trainers were not sufficiently skilled or trained to teach online or remotely. They tried to replicate what they would have done in the classroom in remote lessons or training sessions, without considering the pedagogy associated with a different teaching method.

In these providers, leaders and managers did not evaluate accurately (or at all in a few cases) the quality of education or training provided remotely or online. As a result, too much ineffective teaching and training did not improve, as teachers and trainers did not get any feedback about the quality of their work, or any training to help them improve. When learners were able to return to face-to-face teaching, they had too many gaps in their learning that teachers and trainers needed to remedy.

Learners' well-being and safeguarding

Providers reported that the number of learners with significant mental health problems had increased during the pandemic. They had also seen increases in safeguarding concerns such as domestic abuse, county lines, knife crime and larger numbers of families experiencing destitution or needing to access foodbanks. Many leaders referred more learners to local mental health, safeguarding or early help teams.



Learners with high needs

Senior leaders in ISCs for learners with high needs, and in other providers that run supported internships, told us that we are unlikely to see a rapid restoration of work placements and activities designed to promote independence for their learners. Many of these placements were run with the support of small businesses and charities that have closed during the pandemic.

In many providers, we found that safety and care were (quite rightly) prioritised for clinically extremely vulnerable learners. In some cases, such as in ISCs where learners were exceptionally vulnerable, leaders had designed the curriculum based on sorting learners into safe and workable groups, rather than grouping them by level, vocational area or aspiration.

Many learners with high needs found online learning more difficult. It was also challenging for providers to offer them an individualised curriculum. Some providers posted paper-based resources to learners who struggled.

Some learners' behaviour was severely affected by the circumstances of the pandemic. They found it hard to talk to inspectors and were not able to work with other learners.

Annual reviews for learners with high needs continued remotely. Some providers reported that these were successful and more convenient for the stakeholders required to attend.

Working with others

Leaders in the providers we visited continued to work closely with employers, local organisations and partners. Many made better use of technology to do this. Some leaders said that the growing economic impact of the pandemic meant employers needed more flexibility in how and when content was taught and assessment took place, so they were working more closely together to meet these needs. Some providers successfully established links with new employers for placement and work-experience opportunities.

Many leaders mentioned receiving help from professional organisations, such as the Association of Colleges, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, HOLEX and Natspec, as well as other, more local, networks. They said these have been an invaluable source of support, practical advice and guidance. Several leaders had created local support networks to help them, particularly to interpret government guidance.

Careers guidance

In our PMVs, we reported on positive work relating to careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and support for those who were furloughed or at risk of redundancy.

Providers doing well with CEIAG tended to:

- have employed a careers adviser/careers coordinator
- be monitoring furloughed apprentices and those on a 'learning break'
- support apprentices at risk of redundancy to complete qualifications and undertake job searches
- source alternative employment for apprentices who had been made redundant.

Finding work experience placements was a continuing challenge for providers. Many, however, found innovative ways for their learners to access remote and face-to-face placements. For example, some learners on health and social care programmes attended in-person work experience placements at vaccination centres and others had virtual work experience with a hospital pharmacist.

Providers that were weaker in CEIAG tended to offer insufficient advice and guidance for apprentices at the start of their course, or provided it too late (towards the end of the course). In some cases, CEIAG was not provided at all. In these providers, leaders also focused careers guidance too narrowly on apprentices' current employer and industry.

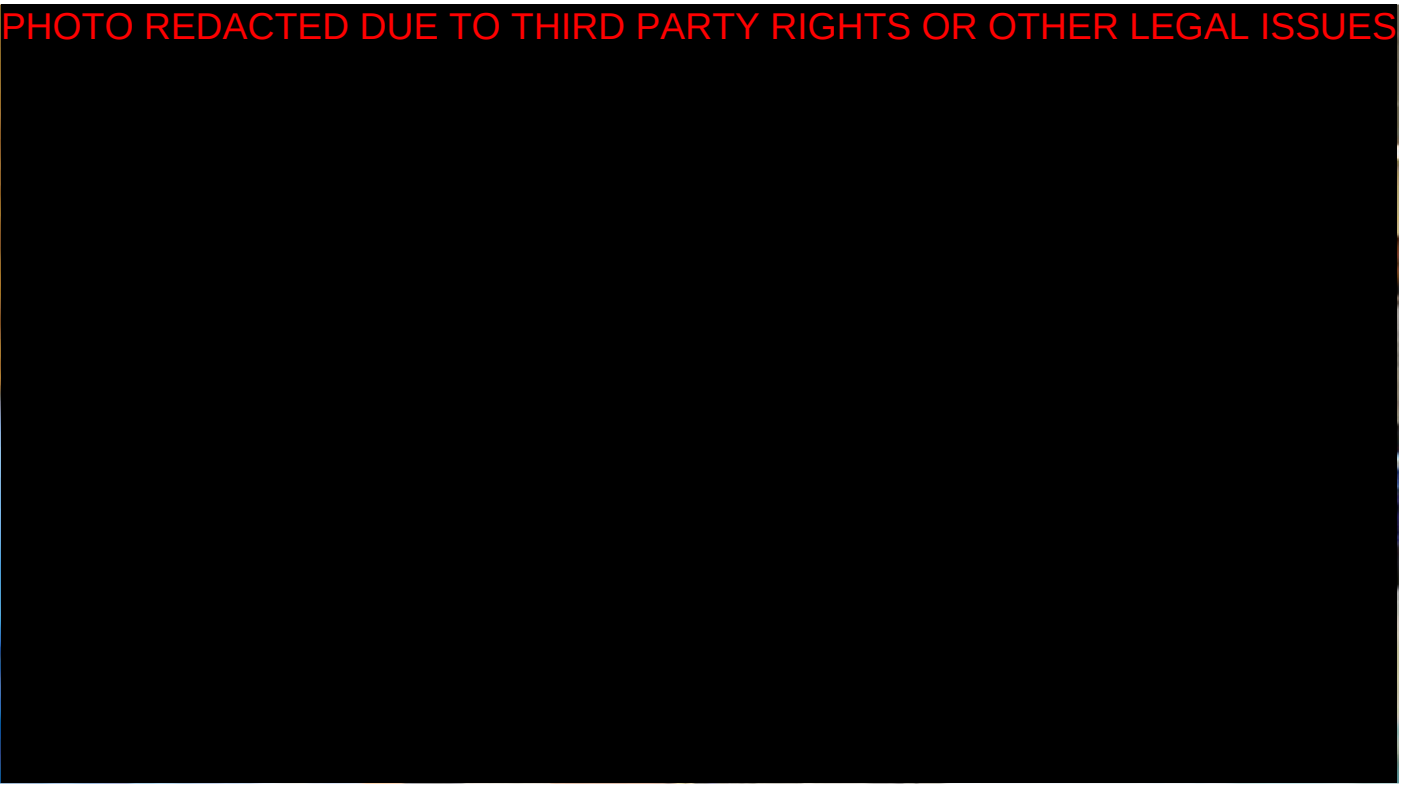
Adult learning

Adult learning is inspected and graded as a provision type in FE and skills providers.

General FE colleges had the most adult learners: just over 40% of all adult learners in England. Independent learning providers had 31%, adult community education providers and higher education institutions (HEIs) had a combined 23%, and other FE and skills providers had 6%.[59]

Continuing the trend seen during the first national lockdown, when the numbers of adults participating in learning declined by 44% (between March and July 2020), the overall adult participation rate declined by a further 11% between August 2020 and April 2021.[60] This was due to a combination of venue restrictions, other learners being prioritised, the reluctance of some to return to face-to-face teaching and the difficulties some learners had accessing remote learning platforms. However, participation rates for some groups of learners increased as they enjoyed the flexibility that remote learning offered them.

In many instances, the number of adult learners was low because job centres had only just reopened and begun mandating them to go on courses again. Inspectors also found that there were no sessions running in community venues, or they had only restarted in summer 2021. COVID restrictions also led to the cancellation of adult and family learning in community venues.



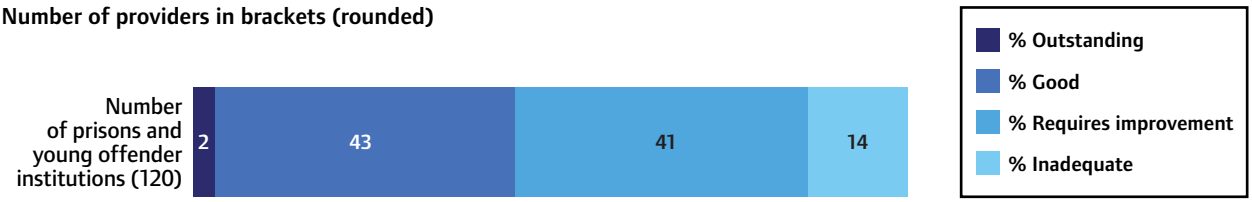
59. 'Further education and skills, academic year 2019/20', Department for Education, November 2020; https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-and-skills/2019-20.
60. See: 'Further education and skills, academic year 2019/20', Department for Education, November 2020; https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-and-skills/2019-20 and 'Further education and skills, academic year 2020/21', Department for Education, October 2021; https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-and-skills/2020-21.

Prisons

Over the last five years, at 31 August each year, around 60% of all prison and young offender institution inspections had resulted in a requires improvement or inadequate judgement for the overall effectiveness of education, skills and work. This compares with a maximum of 20% in other parts of the FE and skills sector that we inspect.

Figure 10: Overall effectiveness of education, skills and work in prisons and young offender institutions: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



1. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100. Some percentages are based on small numbers, and should be treated with caution.

This year, we were unable to carry out our routine inspections of prisons and young offender institutions. However, we were able to carry out a number of remote interim visits and face-to-face PMVs.

During much of the last year, opportunities for prisoners to take part in classroom education stopped. Many prisoners were limited to in-cell work packs, with little feedback from teachers. Initially, these packs were produced for mathematics and English but the range of subjects they covered increased over time, including theoretical elements of vocational courses. However, in some prisons, these were not available until up to six months after the first national lockdown started in March 2020, meaning there was no education to speak of until September 2020.

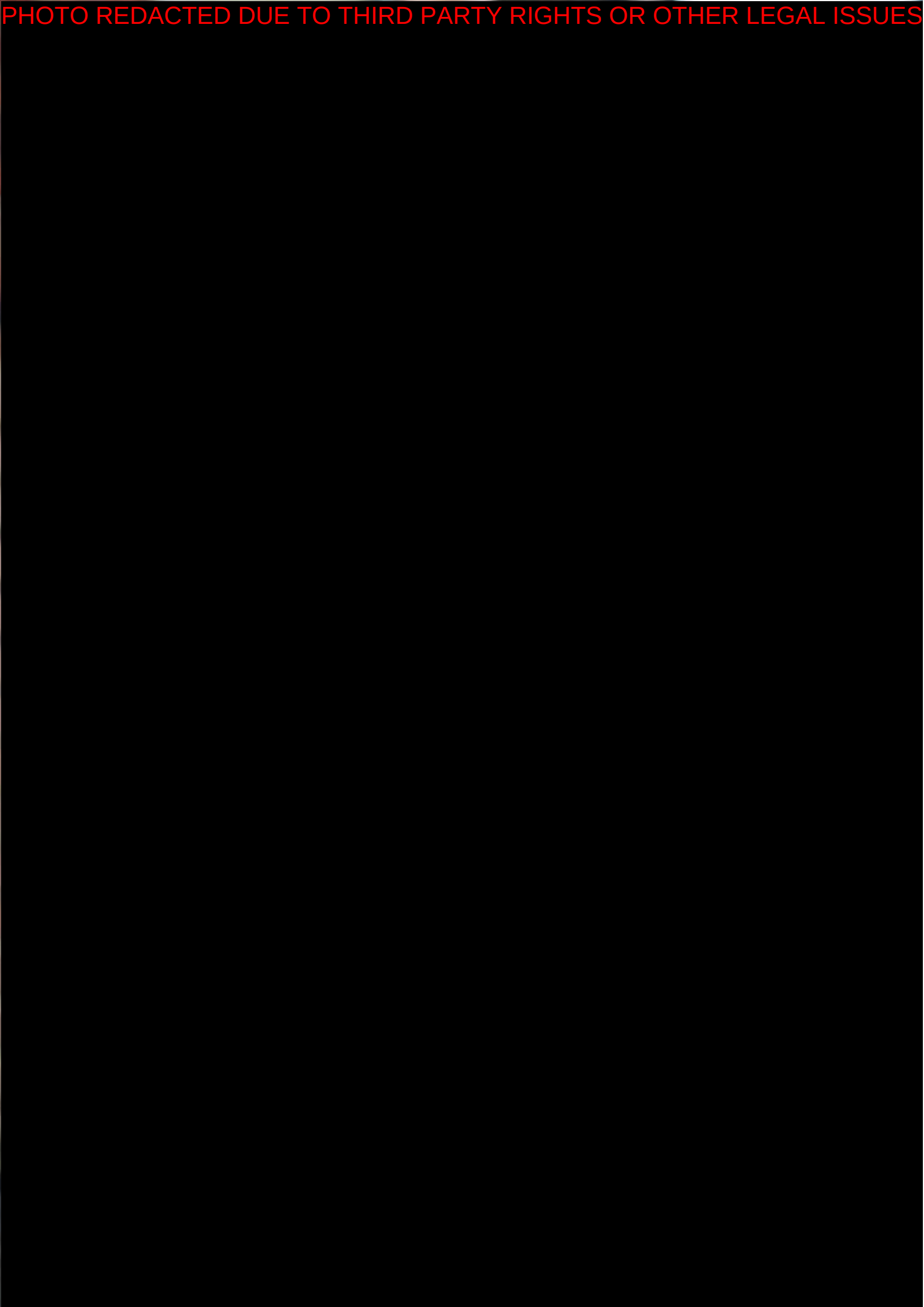
The lack of face-to-face teaching has affected prisoners. Some prisoners told us that, without a tutor to help them while working through the packs, they had to 'turn the page' if they came across something they could not do. They found this frustrating and demotivating.

Prison leaders and education providers must ensure that prisoners' learning needs are properly assessed and that they get learners back into the classroom as quickly as possible.

We understand the risk of COVID transmission is especially high in prison environments. Prison staff have worked hard to keep prisoners safe. However, we must ask, both of prison leaders and of government, whether enough is being done to get prison education back on course.

In September, we published a joint commentary with HM Inspectorate of Prisons launching our prison education review.[61] We will start the review by looking at how reading is taught in prisons, how it is assessed and what progress prisoners make with reading.

61. 'Launching our prison education review', Ofsted, September 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/launching-our-prison-education-review.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Social care

The pandemic has been extremely challenging, both for the children in social care and for the social workers and care staff who protect and care for them. All services came under pressure due to restrictions and the difficulties some families have faced. Many of the most vulnerable children were adversely affected by this.

Despite this, we saw much positive work in difficult circumstances by unsung heroes in the social care sector. Many social workers, care workers and others working with families found imaginative ways to help the most vulnerable children.

Although children's social care services have worked hard through the pandemic, there are still long-standing problems to overcome. There are too many children whose complex needs are not being met. The system is failing to deliver the right services for them where and when they need it most, including finding places for them to live and arranging specialist health provision.

What we did

Our urgent regulatory and enforcement work continued as usual.

In autumn 2020, we began assurance visits to children's homes and other children's social care providers. These visits aimed to reassure parents, government and commissioners that children were safe and well cared for. They did not result in a grade, but reports included requirements or recommendations for improvement and highlighted any serious or widespread concerns. Between September and March, we did 933 visits.

We also did 43 focused assurance visits to local authorities. On these visits, inspectors evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children within a local authority. This type of visit does not result in a judgement. Instead, we send the local authority a letter setting out narrative findings about strengths and areas to improve.

We prioritised lower-performing providers and local authorities and those where we had urgent safeguarding concerns. Findings from these visits formed the basis of three briefing notes about children's experiences of the pandemic.[62]

Throughout the year, we also carried out monitoring visits in order to focus on specific concerns, to monitor compliance with a notice, or to follow up an inadequate inspection. We did around 1,000 monitoring visits to just under 900 children's social care providers and one monitoring visit to a local authority.

We resumed routine inspections for all children's social care settings inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) in April 2021. Between 1 April and 31 August 2021, we carried out 1,100 full inspections, 180 monitoring inspections and four interim inspections, the majority of which were to children's homes. We also did one emergency inspection of a boarding school.

We restarted the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) programme in May 2021.

62. 'Ofsted COVID-19 series', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-covid-19-series.

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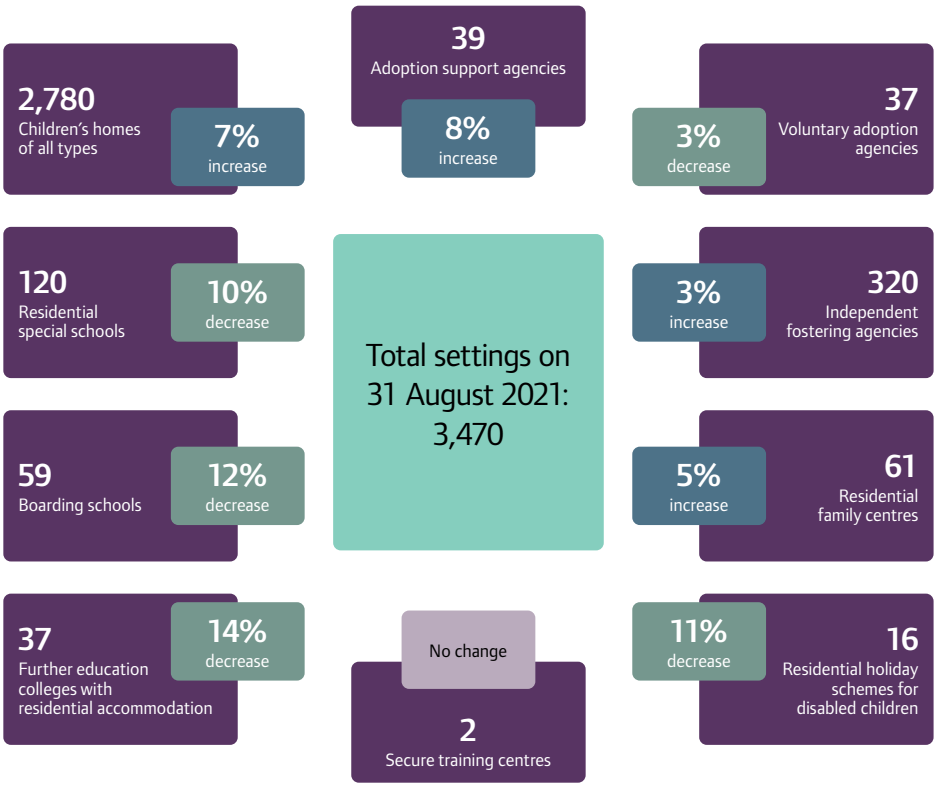
State of the nation

On 31 August 2021, there were 3,470 social care providers.

Figure 11: Number of settings on 31 August 2021 and percentage change since 31 August 2020

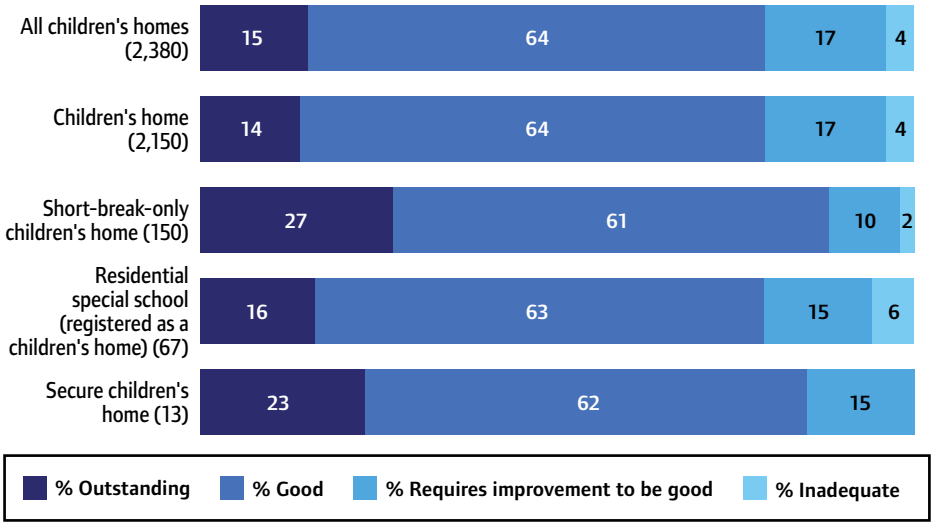


1. Ofsted inspects the boarding provision in maintained boarding schools, academies and non-association independent boarding schools.

Most registered social care providers are children's homes. As at 31 August 2021, 79% of the 2,380 inspected children's homes were judged good or outstanding, in line with 2020.

Figure 12: Overall effectiveness of children's homes: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)

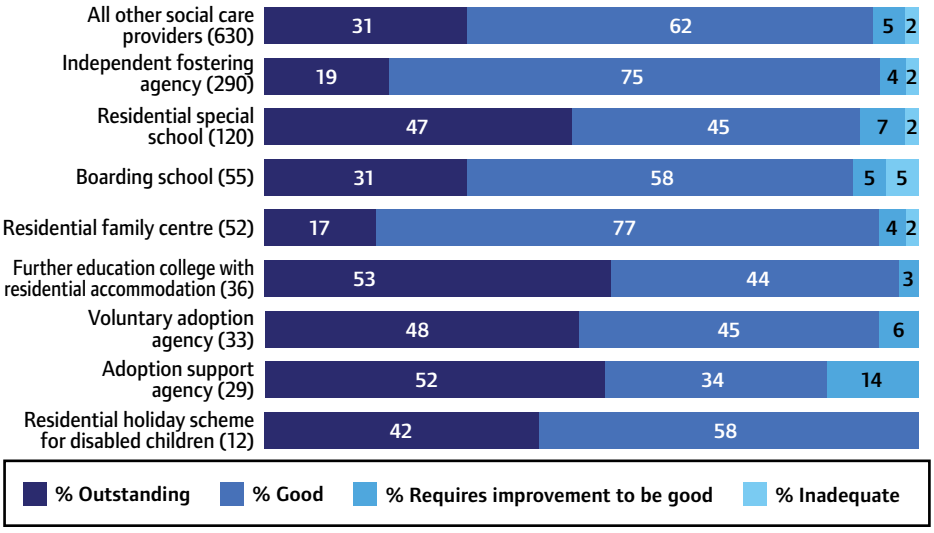


1. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100. Some percentages are based on small numbers, and should be treated with caution.

Of the remaining 630 inspected social care providers, 93% were judged good or outstanding. This is a small increase from 90% at the same point in 2020.

Figure 13: Overall effectiveness of other inspected providers: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)

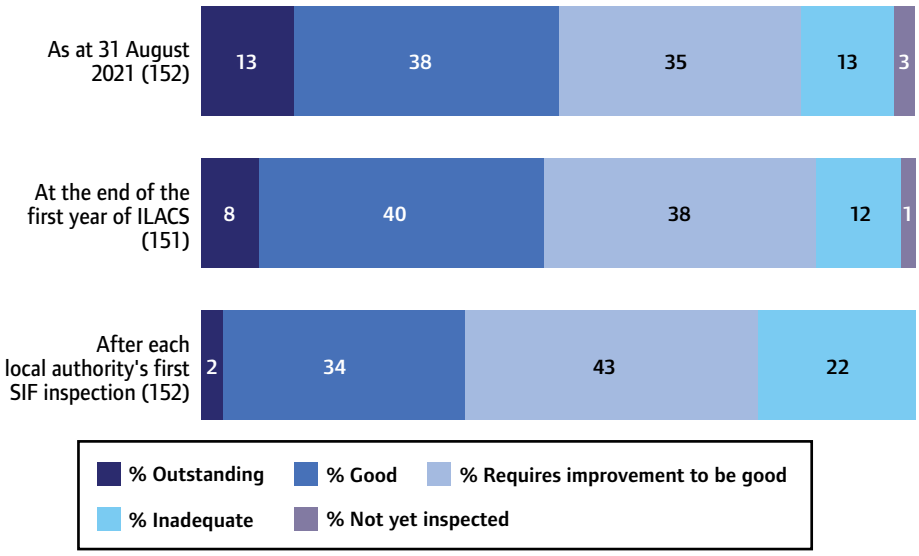


1. Due to very small numbers, STCs are not included in this chart.
2. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100. Some percentages are based on small numbers, and should be treated with caution.

Overall, 51% of local authorities were judged good or outstanding. This is an increase from just over one third after each local authority's first inspection under the single inspection framework (the framework that preceded ILACS).

Figure 14: Local authority inspection outcomes over time

Number of local authorities in brackets



1. With Northamptonshire dividing into two local authorities, the overall number of local authorities has changed slightly, as has the number not yet inspected.
2. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100. Some percentages are based on small numbers, and should be treated with caution.
3. In this chart, SIF stands for single inspection framework.

Sufficiency

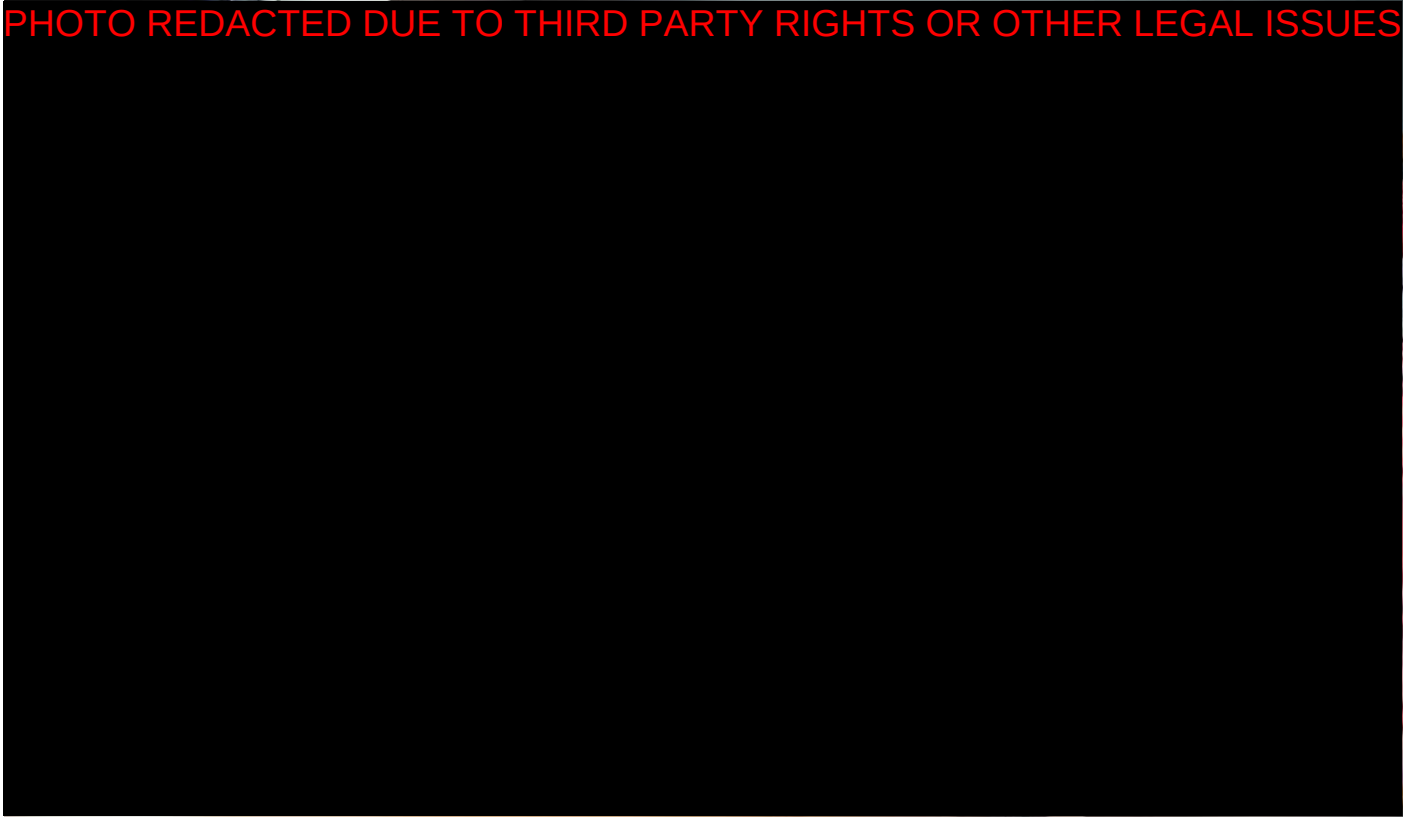
The greatest challenge in the children's social care sector is having enough places, especially for the most vulnerable children with the most complex needs. A lack of suitable provision limits choice for where children can live, meaning children do not always get the help and support they need. At times, the pandemic has reduced the number of suitable places even further. Sufficiency is a problem in many aspects of children's social care, as explained in each section.

Children's homes

Between September 2020 and August 2021, the overall number of children's homes rose by 180 (7%) to 2,770, the highest number since at least 2012. This is due to around 290 children's homes registering and around 110 closing. However, new children's homes are generally smaller, with an average of three places compared with an average of six for recently closed homes. The net result was still an increase in places, to 12,790 (a 2% increase from 2020).

The number of children's homes and places increased in all regions in 2020/21.[63] However, there is still a shortage of places in many parts of the country. As at 31 August 2021, a quarter of all children's homes were in the North West, while only 5% were in London, which has had the fewest children's homes for many years. Furthermore, many placements are ill-matched to children's needs.

63. See the data tables that accompany this Annual Report.



There are also regional differences in the types of care offered. For example, while London has the smallest number of children's homes, it has a high percentage of homes for children with sensory impairments (16%). The reverse is true for the East Midlands, which has a much smaller percentage of homes for children with sensory impairments (4%) than it does of all homes (11%). Similarly, the West Midlands, which has the second highest percentage of children's homes (18%) has a much lower percentage of homes for children with physical disabilities (11%) or complex health needs (13%).

This uneven distribution means that homes that cater for children with particular needs are often distant from the families whose children need them. For a small number of children, there are very few homes able or willing to provide what they need – particularly children with complex needs, including mental health needs.

Local authorities are undoubtedly in a difficult position when it comes to finding somewhere for children to live. But some are not doing all they can to make sure that the places they choose meet children's individual needs and are safe and secure.

A greater understanding of the characteristics and needs of children in care would help to resolve these gaps, overlaps and mismatches in provision. There is also scope for better planning above local authority level for high-cost, specialist provision – including for children who need bespoke placements in secure mental health or youth justice provision.

Many local authorities are struggling to find suitable placements for children who have spent time as mental health in-patients, but who were deemed not to have a treatable disorder and then released. A fifth (21%) of children's homes in England (475 homes) offer care for children with mental health difficulties. Of the 40 homes that specify the severity of difficulties that they are equipped to deal with, only around a third (15) state that they can care for children with moderate or severe mental health difficulties.[64] Half of these 15 homes are in the North West; none are in the East Midlands or the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber; and there is only one in each of the East of England, South West, South East, and London.

64. In most cases, the home's statement of purpose does not specify the severity of difficulties that it is equipped to deal with.

Children's homes that have done well during the pandemic usually achieved this through the commitment and flexibility of their staff.[65] Some staff have shown great creativity in finding solutions to restrictions, and are still managing to carry on with activities, family time and emotional support. In inadequate homes, the pandemic tended not to be the only reason for poor performance. But in some cases, it made existing problems worse.

Some providers have struggled to manage COVID restrictions, which has led them to reduce the activities they offer to children and also had a negative effect on children's education. These shortfalls were sometimes due to a lack of creative thinking, or linked to poor staff training or a lack of resources.

Staff shortages due to COVID have also been a problem in many homes. When a home's core team has needed to self-isolate, replacement staff did not always have the same strong relationship with children. And in the worst cases, staff shortages left children unsafe.

In some homes, regulation 44 independent visits have not been carried out effectively during the pandemic. With 'visits' taking place off site, some independent visitors were not doing all they should to assure themselves of children's welfare. This means that homes did not always get the same level of independent feedback about how they were functioning.

The 'market'

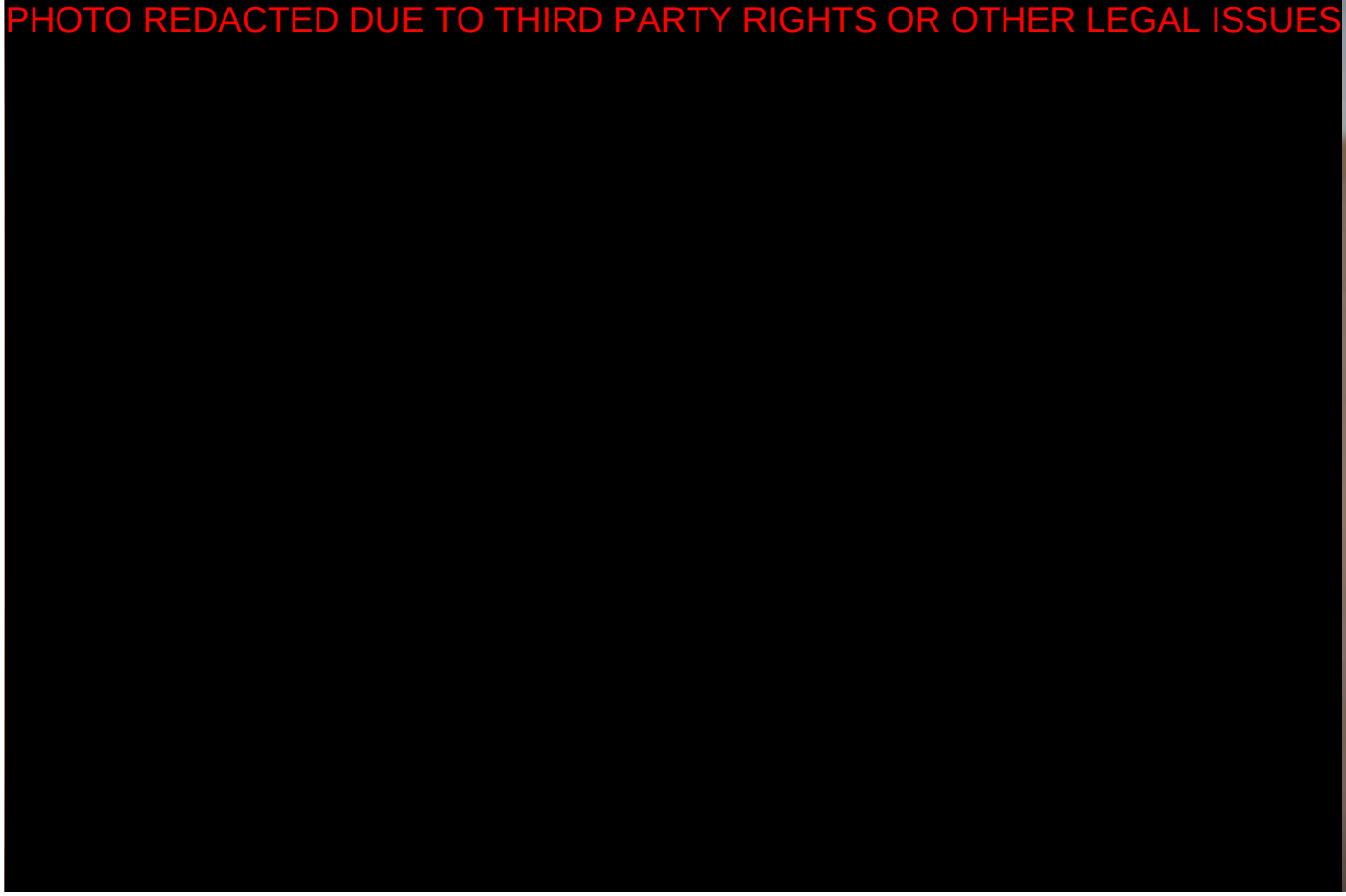
The children's social care 'market' remains problematic. Commissioning of specialist services is often linked to individual children, and involves high prices and limited choice. This means that commissioners are rarely in a good position to negotiate the best care and support for children. A national approach to commissioning these specialist services is necessary and long overdue.

The largest private owners of children's homes have grown, now owning more homes and offering more placements. The 21 largest companies own 880 homes, 43% of all private homes. These companies accounted for 38% of all growth in the number of private homes this year.[66]

The 10 largest companies own a third of all children's homes. This means that the loss of any of the bigger providers could leave major gaps in supply.

Meanwhile, our own regulatory powers reflect historical sector operating models. No organisation has the responsibility of overseeing the 'market' for children's home places in the same way that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) does for adults, providing important safeguards against business failure or withdrawal. In a dynamic 'market' with large providers that operate a considerable proportion of provision, this is a serious gap.

65. 'Ofsted COVID-19 series', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-covid-19-series.
66. 'Largest national providers of private and voluntary social care (March 2021)', Ofsted, July 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-outcomes-of-the-largest-childrens-social-care-providers/largest-national-providers-of-private-and-voluntary-social-care-march-2021.



The impact of the pandemic on children in care

Despite clear challenges, many social care providers did a good job of keeping children safe during the pandemic, helping them to live as normally as possible in difficult circumstances.[67]

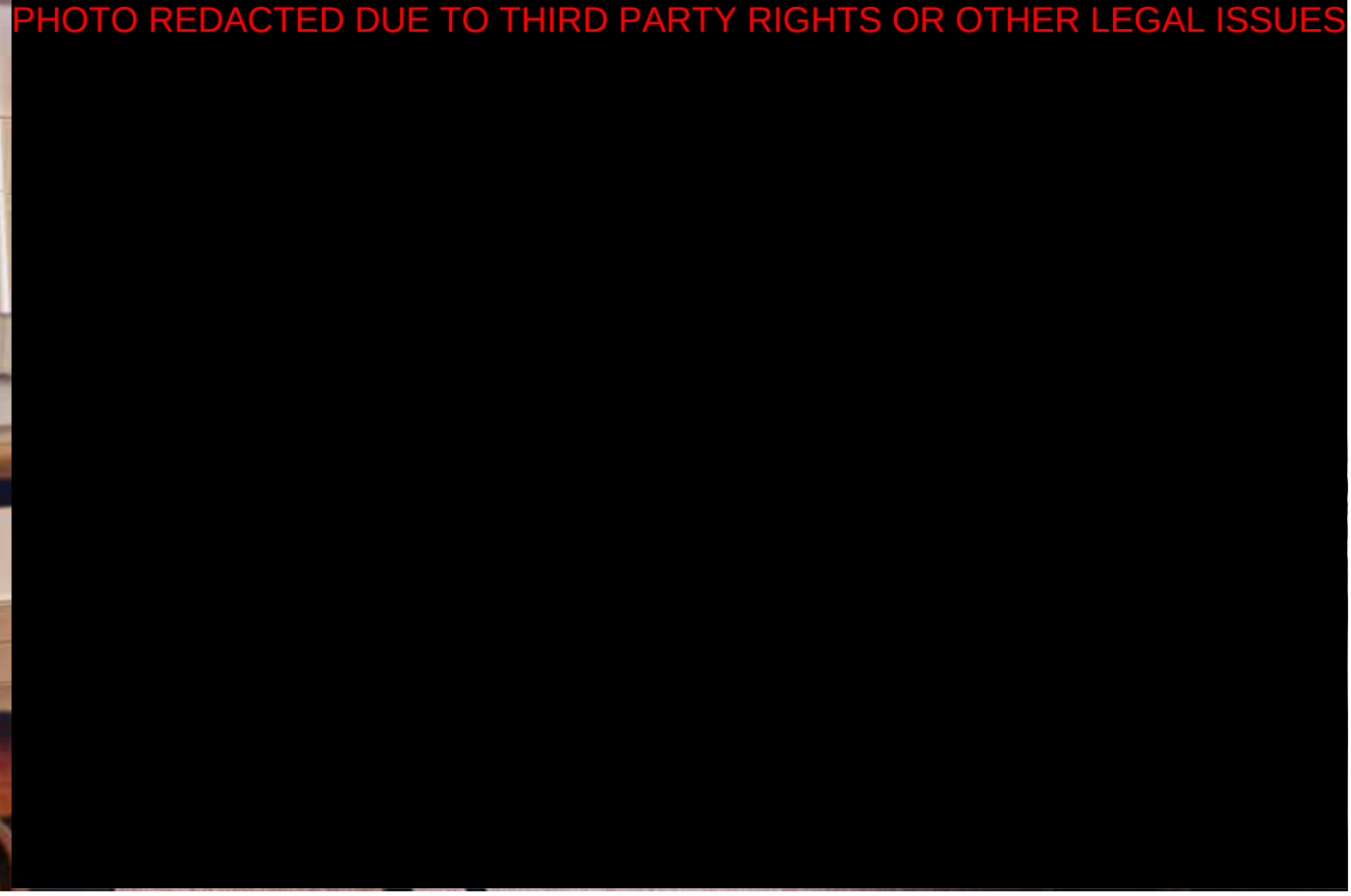
Providers worked hard to help children keep up with their schoolwork and to keep them motivated. Staff and carers appreciated the impact the pandemic was having on children's health and happiness. Many went the extra mile to support children, for example moving into children's homes to isolate with them when children had COVID-19 symptoms.

Children who responded to our social care surveys spoke highly of the support that staff had given them during the pandemic.[68] This ranged from helping them to understand the restrictions and how to keep safe, to making sure they had fun despite repeated lockdowns, to enabling them to keep in touch with family and friends.

Social care providers made good use of technology to help children keep in contact with their families and social workers. The move to online communication even helped some children who had previously found direct contact with family members or social workers stressful. In some instances, it also meant that partners could more easily attend multi-agency meetings.

Not all children found it easy to access technology. This affected their ability to learn remotely, access the job market, and keep in touch with friends and family.

67. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care providers, September 2020', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-childrens-social-care-providers-september-2020.
68. 'Children's social care questionnaires 2021: what children and young people told Ofsted', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-questionnaires-2021-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted.



For many children, being locked down in their children's home led to closer relationships with staff and carers. However, for some older children, the restrictions led to increased anxiety, low mood and, in some cases, self-harm and/or drug and alcohol misuse. School closures and isolation from friends proved particularly difficult for some children in care, as they did for most other children. Disruption to education and the challenges of remote learning and home schooling also placed increased demands on carers and staff.[69]

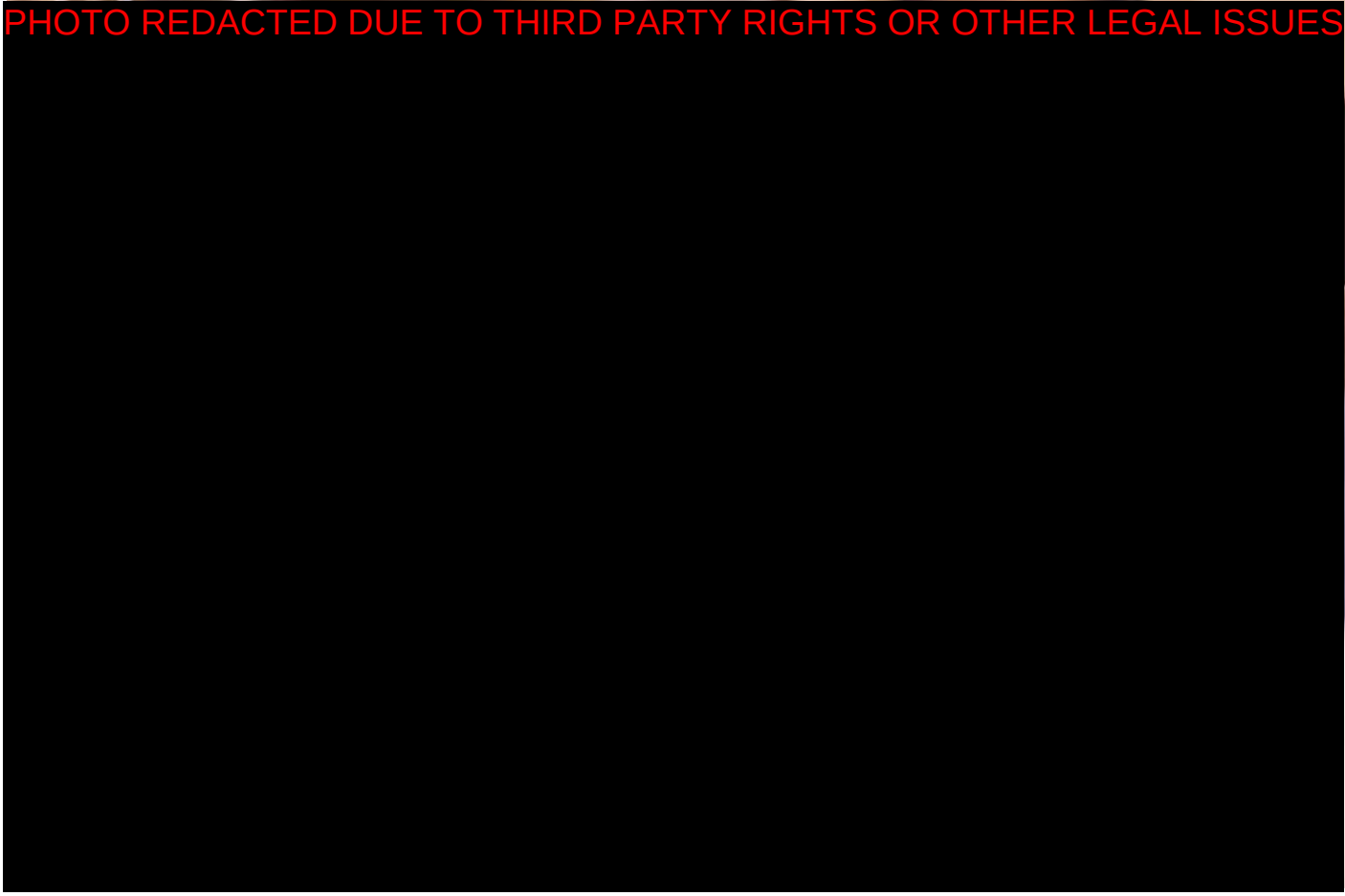
In every kind of provider, strong leadership and committed staff have been central to making the best of a very challenging time. But the picture has not been universally positive. Often, public health guidance was fit for the adult social care sector rather than the children's sector, so providers struggled. Access to personal protective equipment, testing and wider support was difficult. This all put extra pressure on the sector. Providers that were not managing well before the pandemic, because of a lack of structure or inadequate leadership or staffing vacancies, were put under even more strain. Many had difficulties working with partner agencies or accessing specialist services for children.

Fostering

Most children in care live in foster care. Our visits to fostering agencies this year showed that most agencies had adapted well to the unique and varied challenges of the pandemic. They were able to respond creatively and sensitively to the individual needs of children and carers, with very limited use of the flexibilities permitted by the temporary amendments to regulations.

During the restrictions, foster carers used technology well to help children keep in touch with family and friends. But, wherever possible, carers and agencies facilitated face-to-face visits. The combination of COVID restrictions and illness sometimes led to increased instability for children but, for many, the time spent at home had enabled them to develop stronger relationships with their carers. During lockdowns, the best agencies worked well with schools and local authorities to reach appropriate decisions about children's school attendance, and they continued to promote children's learning effectively.

69. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care, September 2020', Ofsted, October 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-childrens-social-care-providers-september-2020.



The shortage of foster carers continues to be a concern. As at March 2021, there were around 44,370 fostering households, the highest number since 2015.[70] However, this 2% increase in households occurred in the same period as an 11% increase in the number of children in foster care. The Fostering Network estimated that 7,300 new foster families were needed over the next 12 months alone.[71] Our own research into matching of children with foster families suggested that the shortage of fostering families is one of the most significant challenges in placing children, leading to undesirable compromises in some cases.[72]

Two thirds of all households are approved by local authority fostering agencies (rather than independent fostering agencies), and over a quarter of these are family and friends (kinship) households.[73] Kinship carers are under-resourced and often feel undervalued in some local authorities, despite providing an important route to a permanent home for many children.

There are clear signs of strain in the system. In 2019–20, a proportion (13%) of brothers and sisters assessed for foster care were not placed according to their care plan.[74] Foster carers also report being asked to take children outside their age approval range, or feeling pressured to accept children they are not qualified to look after.[75]

One quarter of all carers are aged 60 or over.[76] Without younger carers coming forward to replace older carers as they retire, there may be even more challenges to sufficiency ahead.

70. 'Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings.
71. 'Recruitment targets', The Fostering Network, 2021; https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/all-about-fostering/recruitment-targets.
72. 'Matching in foster care: making good decisions for children in care and care leavers', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/matching-in-foster-care-making-good-decisions-for-children-in-care-and-care-leavers.
73. 'Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings.
74. 'Fostering in England 2019 to 2020: main findings', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2019-to-31-march-2020.
75. 'State of the nation's foster care 2019', The Fostering Network, February 2019; https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/research/state-nations-foster-care-2019.
76. 'Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings.

Adoption

As at 31 August 2021, there were 37 voluntary adoption agencies in England. This is a fall of a quarter from 2019, when the number peaked at 50 after gradually increasing for several years. A number of changes have contributed to this fall. One is the introduction of regional adoption agencies. These are groups of local authorities, and in some cases voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs), working together to deliver regional adoption services. Some VAAs have chosen to close their regional branches that were registered separately. In addition, one large VAA with multiple registrations closed during 2019. We do not know whether the fall in numbers represents consolidation of capacity or loss of capacity across the country. With routine inspection suspended, we did not visit any adoption agencies this year.

We are pleased that the government's new national adoption strategy sets out plans to review the current inspection and regulation arrangements for adoption so they can match the way that services are now delivered. It is essential that we can provide the right level of scrutiny and reassurance of all key elements of adoption practice.

Secure estate

Secure children's homes (SCHs) mainly provide places for children who pose a significant risk to others or themselves and children who have been placed there on welfare grounds. They also accommodate children who are on remand or serving a custodial sentence. The children in SCHs are vulnerable, often with very complex needs.

The shortage of secure placements for children placed by local authorities under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 or under the inherent jurisdiction of the high court is a long-standing issue. Since 2002, 16 SCHs have closed. As at March 2021, 13 SCHs remained. When operating at capacity, they offer just 231 places, of which 101 are for children on remand or serving a custodial sentence, with the remaining places for children placed on welfare grounds. This limited number of SCH places means that, even when children get a place, they are likely to be living far away from home, which can make family visits harder.

On any given day, around 25 children are waiting for a secure placement. At times there have been substantially more, especially when homes have needed to reduce capacity because of COVID-19 restrictions.[77] Additionally, on any given day, around 20 children from English local authorities are living in Scottish secure homes, having been placed there due to a lack of places in England. The Scottish government has decided not to accept placements from local authorities outside Scotland from 2022, which will reduce available places even further. And in some cases, children's needs are so complex that SCHs' capacity has had to be reduced so that enough staff are available for these children.

During the pandemic, many SCHs also had to reduce the number of children they could look after when staff were off sick or had to isolate. With even fewer places available, some local authorities resorted to alternative placements. Some of these included unregistered provision, despite the risks this can pose for children.

77. 'Secure children's homes – helping the most vulnerable children', Ofsted, June 2020; https://socialcareinspection.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/09/secure-childrens-homes-helping-the-most-vulnerable-children.

SCHs generally performed well during the pandemic, despite facing these challenges. Children had an almost normal routine, including attending face-to-face education. However, new arrivals were required to self-isolate for 14-day periods, which only increased anxiety for children who were already emotionally vulnerable. In some cases, this resulted in children physically attacking others or self-harming.[78]

We also carried out assurance visits at the two remaining STCs: Rainsbrook and Oakhill. The Secretary of State for Justice is responsible for taking any necessary action to secure improvements.

After a monitoring visit in December 2020 found poor care and leadership at Rainsbrook STC, we issued an urgent notification to the Secretary of State for Justice. Inspectors found that children as young as 15 were subject to 14-day COVID-19 isolation periods and were only being let out of their rooms for 30 minutes a day. This decision by managers at the centre was not justified. In a full inspection in June 2021, we found the overall experiences and progress of children to be inadequate, due to serious concerns about their care and safety, as well as about leadership and staffing. Following the full inspection, we issued a second urgent notification. The Secretary of State for Justice then decided to remove all children from Rainsbrook STC.

We also carried out a monitoring visit to Oakhill STC in September 2021. While the focus of the visit was narrow, it found serious and widespread concerns about the care and protection of children. Our full inspection in October 2021 found the overall experiences and progress of children to be inadequate, with serious and widespread concerns about children's safety and well-being. We issued an urgent notification to the Secretary of State for Justice.

Children at risk of harm

In the first months of the pandemic, local authorities saw far fewer referrals to children's social care due to schools being closed to most pupils and the disruption to health services. Referrals remained low in some areas even after schools reopened fully in September, giving rise to concerns that neglect, exploitation or abuse could be going undetected – although this was not a universal picture.[79]

Most local authorities had responded quickly and appropriately to children at risk of harm. In most places, we saw child-centred, risk-assessed decision-making and sensible use of the flexibilities given by the COVID-19 regulations.

The pandemic placed a great deal of pressure on family courts and the family justice system, which were already significantly stretched. This in turn affected local authorities' ability to issue care proceedings to protect children. The backlog of public law cases also delayed adoption and special guardianship cases, as well as making it harder to return children home or move them out of care, with all that entails for children's well-being. This backlog is continuing to slow down decision-making for children.

78. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care, November 2020', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-childrens-social-care-november-2020.

79. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care, October 2020', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-childrens-social-care-october-2020.

Unregistered provision

In the absence of suitable placements, many local authorities resort to using unregistered provision. In recent years, there have been a number of high court cases where judges have reluctantly approved unregistered placements for children with complex needs in the absence of suitable registered places.

In December 2020, the President of the Family Division asked courts to notify Ofsted when using their inherent jurisdiction to authorise the use of unregistered placements to deprive children of their liberty.

Since then, we have been notified of 33 of these court-ordered placements. None of these settings has registered with Ofsted, although one (which is responsible for four placements out of the 33) had an application to register refused. Four of the 33 placements are in settings registered with the DfE or CQC.

The average age of children living in these placements is 15. Many have complex mental health needs that are defined as 'untreatable' by the NHS. As a result, they have nowhere else to go.

This year, we carried out 181 investigations into unregistered providers. Of these:

- 121 (67%) were found to be unregistered settings
- 54 (30%) were found not to be unregistered settings (for example unregulated provision for over-16s)[80]
- six (3%) are still being investigated.

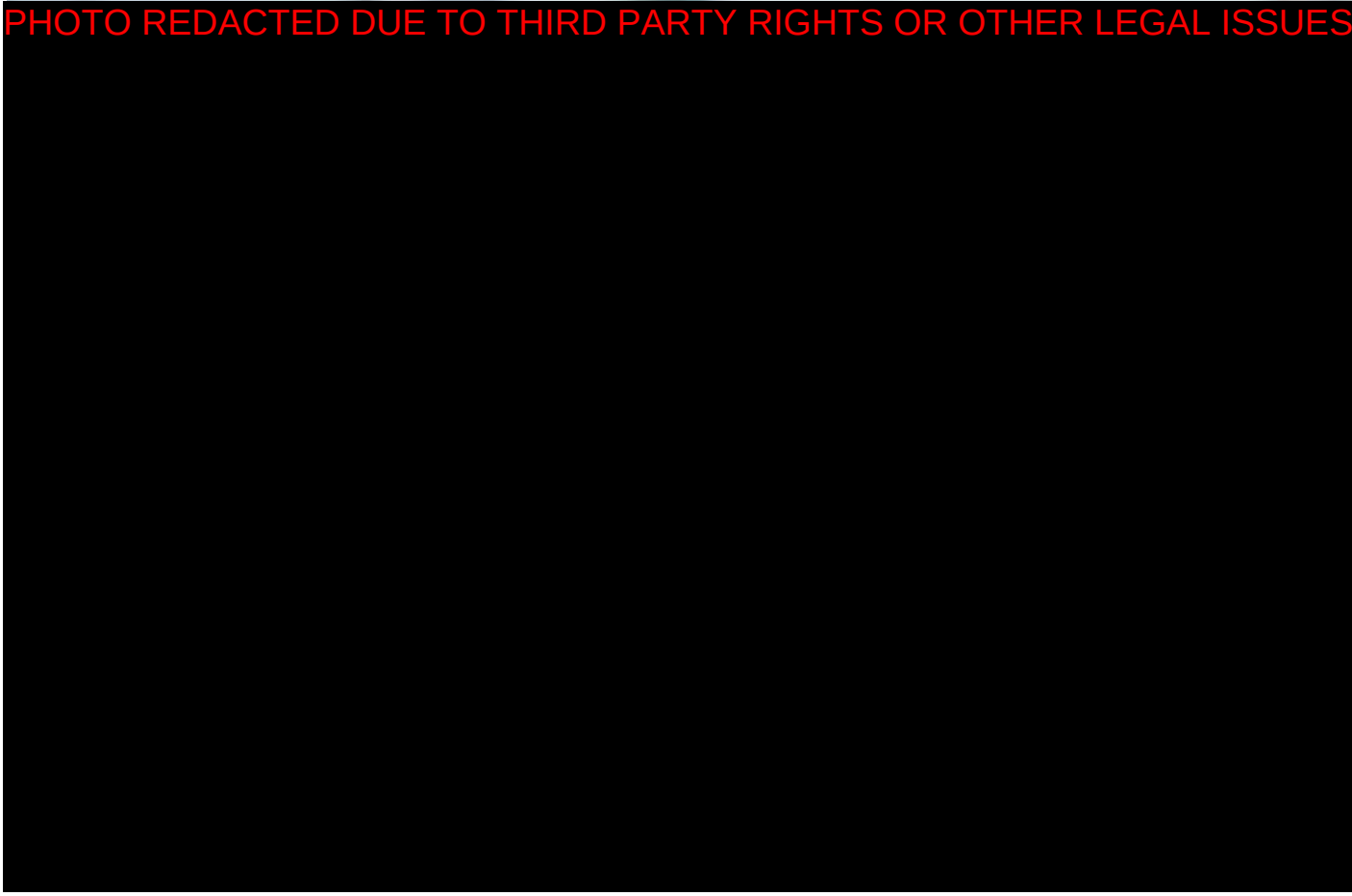
Care leavers

Local authorities that support their care leavers effectively tend to know their young people well and during the pandemic have been able to prioritise tailored, individual support to those who need it most.

Many care leavers continued to make progress and live with the right support this year. Personal advisers and social workers maintained good relationships or increased contact with care leavers, particularly young people who were vulnerable or isolated.[81] But not every care leaver had a positive experience. In some cases, the support that care leavers would normally have received was unavailable or extremely difficult to access.

The quality of relationships that care leavers had with their personal advisers and social workers had a strong bearing on the support they received during restrictions. Some young people reported frequent changes of social worker, leaving them feeling disillusioned and abandoned. For some care leavers, these issues were evident before the pandemic, which only magnified them. Some young people at university said that they felt as though they had to cope alone.

80. Unregulated provision is allowed in law for older children who need support to live independently rather than needing full-time care. Unregulated provision does not need to be registered and Ofsted does not have the power to regulate it.
81. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on children's social care, October 2020', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-childrens-social-care-october-2020.

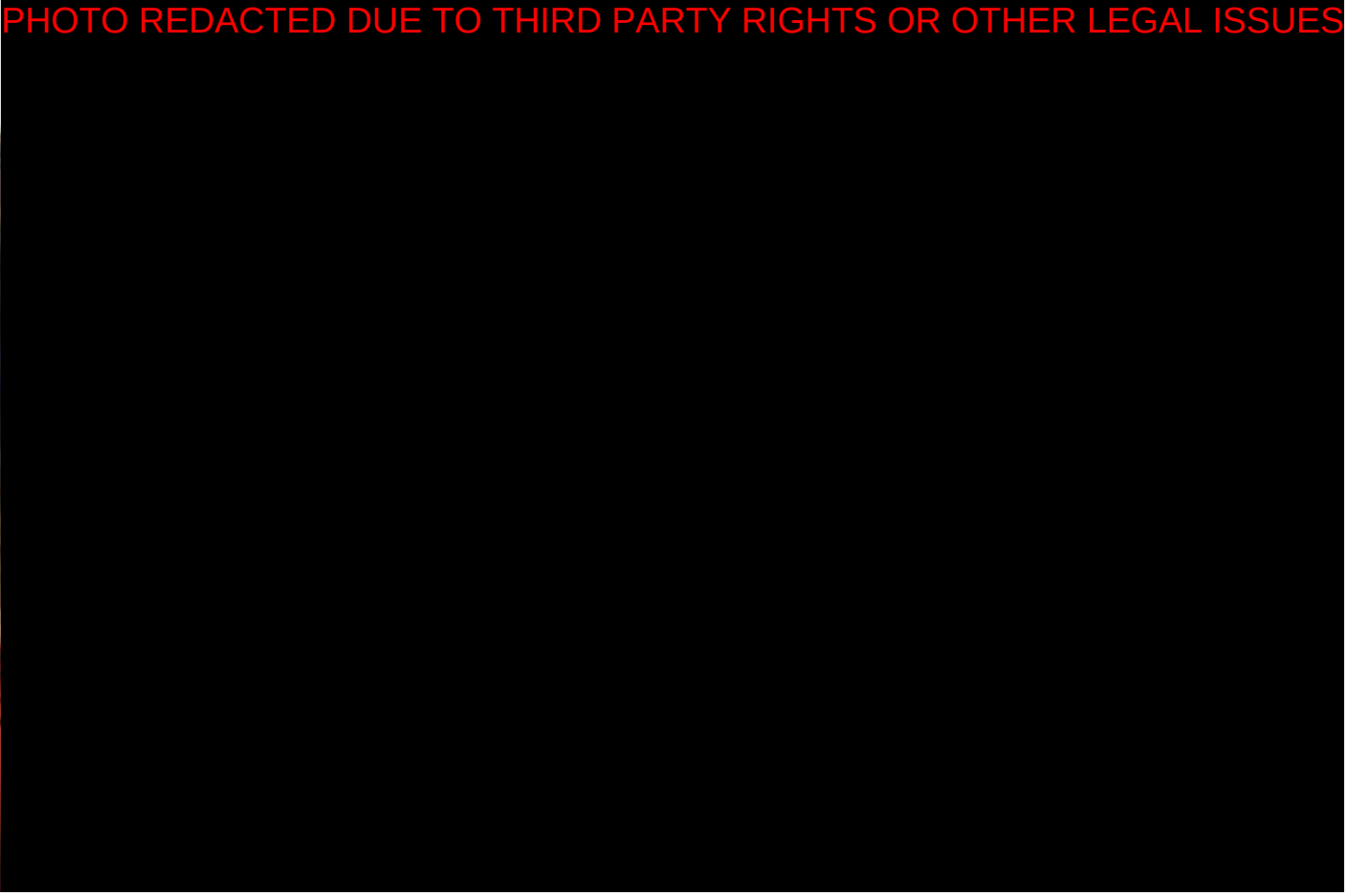


Residential special schools and short-break services

Residential special schools could continue to operate throughout the year, although some children stayed at home. Inspections from April 2021 showed that barriers to children's attendance included: the anxiety of parents, carers and children; the heightened risks for children with acute health needs; and having to choose between staying at school or having physical contact with their families. Some children struggled to adapt to restrictions in the school's environment. This created situations where staff were unable to manage children safely, resulting in some exclusions.

Many short-break settings ceased operating during lockdowns, although some offered full-time care for highly vulnerable children instead. Once short breaks resumed, the need for 'bubbles' meant that some settings could take only one or two children at a time. This led to limited opportunities for enrichment and socialisation for some children.

Staff in these residential providers found dealing with the pandemic extremely difficult. Staff in some residential special schools and homes showed huge commitment by staying for longer shifts or moving into the setting to cover colleagues' absence, forgoing seeing their own family to maintain bubbles with the children they were caring for.



Local authority children's services

Throughout the pandemic, critical social care services were still delivered to the most vulnerable children and families. Our assurance visits have shown that there has been vital leadership from many directors of children's services and other local authority leaders.

Between September 2020 and August 2021, we visited or inspected half of all local authority children's services departments. All authorities that we visited have been working hard to get back to normality after an extremely challenging year. Some managed to make improvements despite the pandemic, while others maintained a strong performance. More broadly, we saw good work in response to COVID from local authorities with lower ILACS judgements, as well as the more highly rated.

But some areas have struggled. Local authorities performing less well have not yet created an environment where good practice can thrive. Common issues include lack of leadership oversight, large caseloads and too many children not getting the services to keep them safely with their family. Some children, sadly, had experienced harm for far too long before action was taken to keep them safe.

There is no doubt that social care services and all agencies working with children and families are under huge pressure from COVID-related challenges. Despite these pressures, we did not find rising thresholds to be a common feature. We did find serious or widespread weaknesses in four local authorities, but these did not relate to how they applied thresholds in response to referrals. In four other local authorities we visited or inspected, we did identify areas for improvement related to thresholds. Two thirds of local authorities, working with partners, were making appropriate decisions for children and families at the 'front door'.[82] The remaining third fell into two groups (half demonstrating improving practice, and the other weaker practice) but not to the extent that inspectors highlighted this as their most pressing priority.

82. In a social care context, the 'front door' is a term used for the arrangement that local authorities have in place to respond to an initial contact from a professional or member of the public who is concerned about a child.

Cafcass

In April, we introduced a new approach to inspecting the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), the organisation that provides specialist social work advice to the family courts.[83] This includes shorter inspections every three years, with more regular contact in between, to build a better picture of practice. The new approach brings Cafcass inspections in line with our other inspections of children's social care.

Cafcass has come under extreme pressure over the past year, to the extent that it had to introduce an emergency prioritisation protocol in some areas. While closely monitored, this meant that some private law cases were deprioritised for a period of time, to allow children at greatest risk to get an order to keep them safe.

Our focused visit to Cafcass in April found strong practice in a number of areas, including excellent system leadership and swift identification of children at risk of serious harm. Skilled family court advisers worked patiently with children, helping them to understand what was happening so that children could tell their stories and express their views and worries.

Enforcement work

An important part of our work, which has continued throughout the pandemic, is the regulation of social care settings.

In this reporting year, we received 1,040 complaints about 720 providers. This is a higher number than in the previous two years, but broadly in line with the increase in the number of providers.[84] Around a quarter of homes were complained about, which is in line with the previous three years.

We also received 160 child protection notifications in the year. This is in line with previous years.

Of these 1,200 complaints and notifications, 970 (80%) had one or more actions recorded by the end of August 2021. Cases can have multiple actions taken, so there are nearly 1,500 actions to report.

83. 'Ofsted to introduce new Cafcass inspections', Ofsted, March 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-to-introduce-new-cafcass-inspections.

84. 960 complaints received in 2019/20 and 990 in 2018/19.

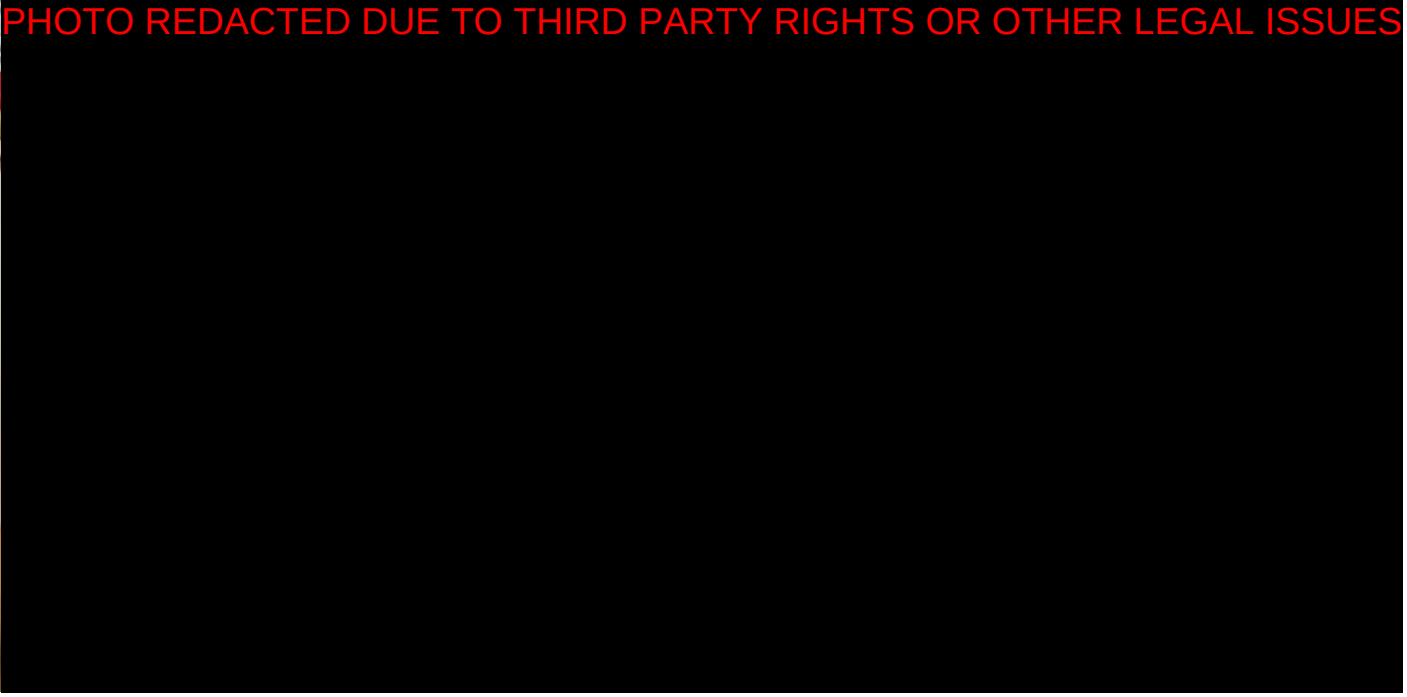


Table 4: Number and type of actions taken 2020/21

Action taken	Actions taken 2020/21
Key line of enquiry for next inspection	360
Continued monitoring by allocated inspector	340
Provider-led investigation	310
Monitoring visit	130
Inspection brought forward	64
Compliance and enforcement action	59
Referred to the local authority's child protection team	50
Other action not included in other categories	120
Not for Ofsted	37
Total actions	**1,470**

1. 'Other action' includes any action that does not fall under one of the named categories. An example of this would be a complaint about a possible unregistered children's home.
2. Cases can have multiple actions taken, so there are more actions than cases recorded.

In addition to responding to complaints and child protection notifications, we also take enforcement action. Our actions include restrictions of accommodation, suspensions and cancellations. In most cases, we take action because of concerns about children's safety or about the quality of leadership and management.

This reporting year, we took 140 enforcement actions against 120 providers. We had multiple concerns about most of these providers, sometimes from more than one inspection or visit.

In some of the starkest cases, we heard about children being given drugs, children going missing with no action by the home and inappropriate use of physical restraint. More common issues included concerns about staffing levels, poor management of children's behaviour, poor oversight of records, policies and procedures not being followed, and poor risk assessment and management.

Enforcement action more often results in the home resigning voluntarily than in Ofsted cancelling the registration. Of the 110 children's homes that resigned in the year, around a third (31 homes) had been subject to some form of enforcement activity before resigning.

Care review

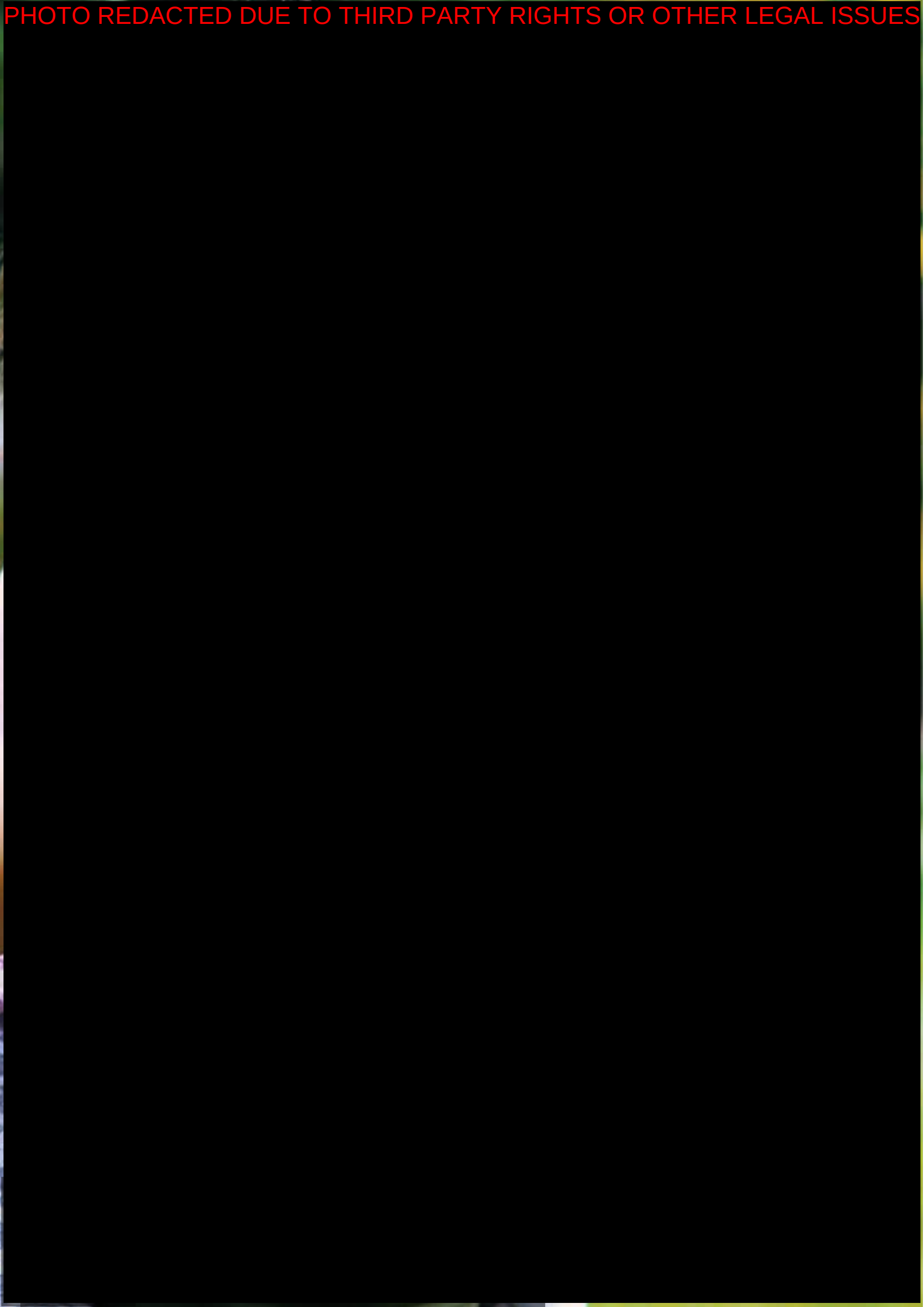
We welcome the independent review of the family support, child protection and care system. Our inspection findings show an improving but fragile system.

At their best, strong local social care leaders and partners work proactively with families. They secure the timely help and protection of children at risk of significant harm, and they are relentlessly ambitious for children in care and care leavers.

In struggling areas, there is a lack of focus on the risks to children and a failure to deliver timely, purposeful and effective help and protection. This leaves families unsupported and too many children at risk for too long. It also fails to secure timely permanency, and leaves children in care and care leavers without the support they need to thrive.

A review is therefore overdue and necessary. It is, in fact, a unique opportunity to create an ambitious and joined-up cross-government strategy for at-risk and vulnerable children.

In particular, there needs to be clarity about the funding for and accountability of all partners in providing help and protection services. Resources need to be carefully targeted to help children remain safely with their family, whenever possible preventing the need for more intrusive state intervention. For the children who need to be in care, we urgently need the right range and volume of fostering and residential places, as well as the right support for adoption and kinship families. Support for care leavers into early adulthood also needs considerable improvement to secure better education and employment opportunities and outcomes, as well as better physical and mental health. Beyond this, the care regulations need urgently updating to set sufficiently high standards while responding to the changing care market and gaps in oversight.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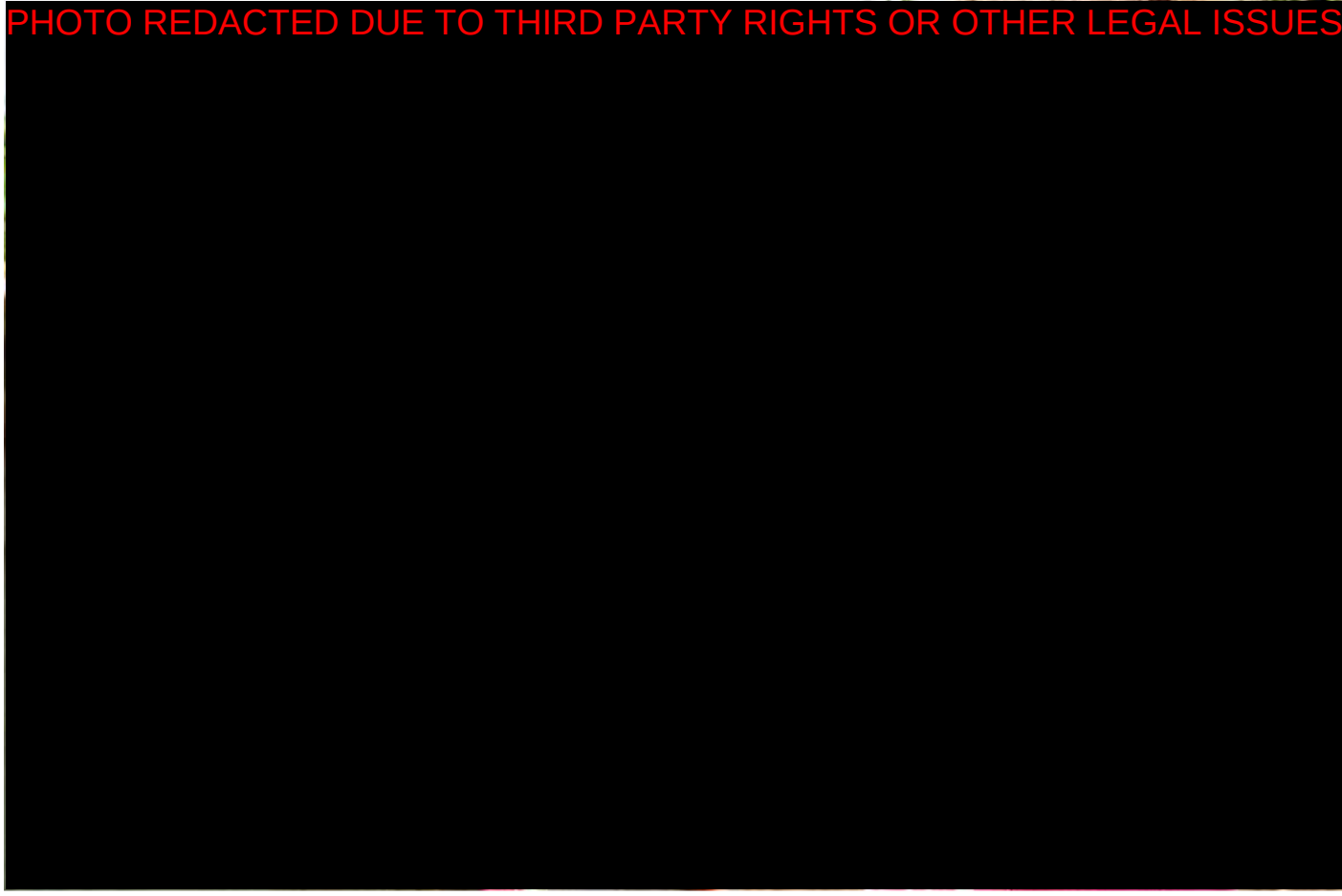


Area SEND

As we have said throughout this report, children and young people with SEND have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Their families and those who work with them have also faced significant challenges over the past year. However, not all local areas rose fully to the challenge across all of education, health and care. And sadly, few of the negative experiences that many had this year are new: there are long-standing issues in the SEND system. The pandemic has only served to highlight these issues and deepen their effects.

Since 2016, we have worked with CQC on joint inspections to judge how well areas fulfil their responsibilities for children and young people with SEND.[85]

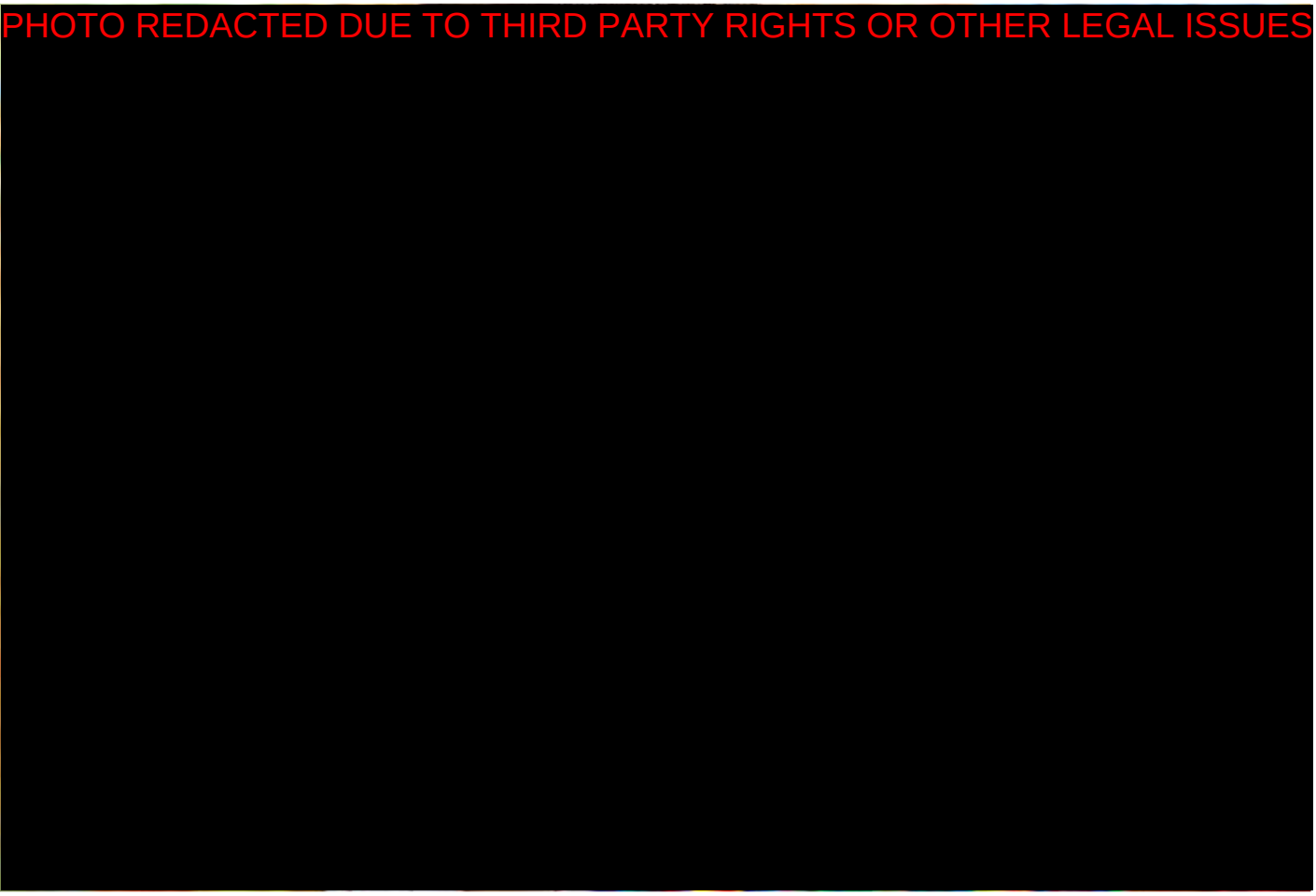
This year, children and families have told us about missed and narrowed education, the absence of essential services (such as physiotherapy or speech and language therapy) and long waiting times for assessment and treatment. Many families were exhausted, even despairing, particularly when they were persistently unable to access essential services for their children.

85. The local area includes the local authority, clinical commissioning groups, public health, NHS England for specialist services, early years settings, schools and FE providers. For further information, see 'Joint inspections of local area special educational needs or disabilities (or both) provision', Care Quality Commission and Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-information-for-families/joint-inspections-of-local-area-send-provision.

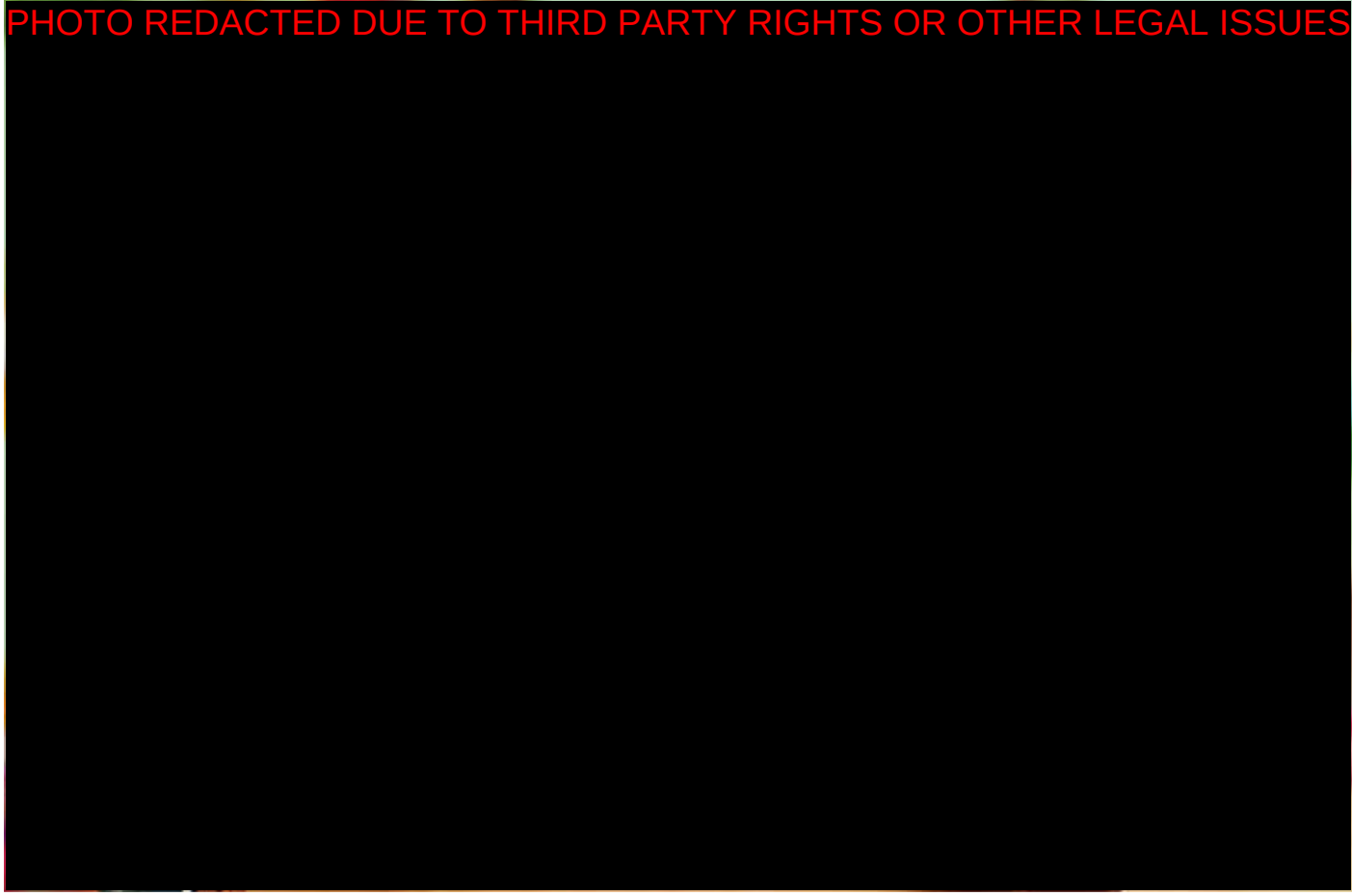
What we did this year

We carried out six interim visits to local areas with CQC in autumn 2020 and four more during spring 2021. We used a case-study approach that focused on a sample of children and young people with SEND to examine their experiences of support during the pandemic. During these visits, inspectors spoke to parents and carers, along with education, health and social care practitioners. Inspectors also met education, health, social care and children's services leaders. We published two briefing notes and a report setting out our findings.[86,87]

In summer 2021, we and CQC made eight full inspections and eight re-visits.



86. 'COVID-19 series: briefing on local areas' SEND provision, October 2020', Ofsted, November 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-local-areas-send-provision-october-2020; 'COVID-19 series: briefing on local areas' SEND provision, November 2020', Ofsted, December 2020; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-series-briefing-on-local-areas-send-provision-november-2020.
87. 'SEND: old issues, new issues, next steps', Ofsted, June 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-old-issues-new-issues-next-steps/send-old-issues-new-issues-next-steps.



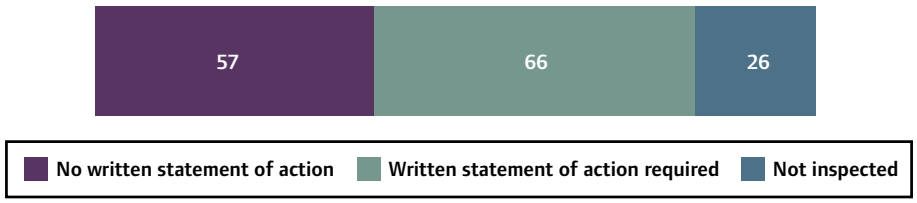
State of the nation

By the end of August 2021, we had inspected 123 areas. Twenty-six areas remain to be inspected under this framework.[88,89]

Just over half (66 out of 123) of those inspected have been required to produce and submit a written statement of action (WSoA), an indication of significant weaknesses. Of the eight areas inspected in this reporting year, seven required a WSoA.

Figure 15: Area SEND inspection outcomes: 31 August 2021

Figures represent number of areas



1. Includes inspections carried out between 1 May 2016 and 31 July 2021 with a report published by 31 October 2021.
2. Dorset was inspected before local government boundary changes in April 2019 and is not included in the figures. It required a WSoA.
3. Northamptonshire was inspected before local government boundary changes in April 2021 and is not included in the figures. It did not require a WSoA.

88. Dorset was inspected before local government boundary changes in April 2019 and is not included in the figures. It required a WSoA.
89. Northamptonshire was inspected before local government boundary changes in April 2021 and is not included in the figures. It did not require a WSoA.

Re-visits

Ofsted and CQC carry out re-visits to determine whether areas have made sufficient progress. The first re-visit was in December 2018. By the end of August 2021, we had carried out a total of 29 re-visits, including eight this year.[90]

Inspectors found that almost all areas were making at least some progress. Of these:

- just over a third (11) were making sufficient progress in addressing all significant weaknesses
- the majority (17) had made progress in addressing some significant weaknesses
- one area was found to have not made sufficient progress in addressing any of its significant weaknesses.

Of the eight re-visited areas this reporting year, two were making sufficient progress, with the remaining six deemed to have made some progress.

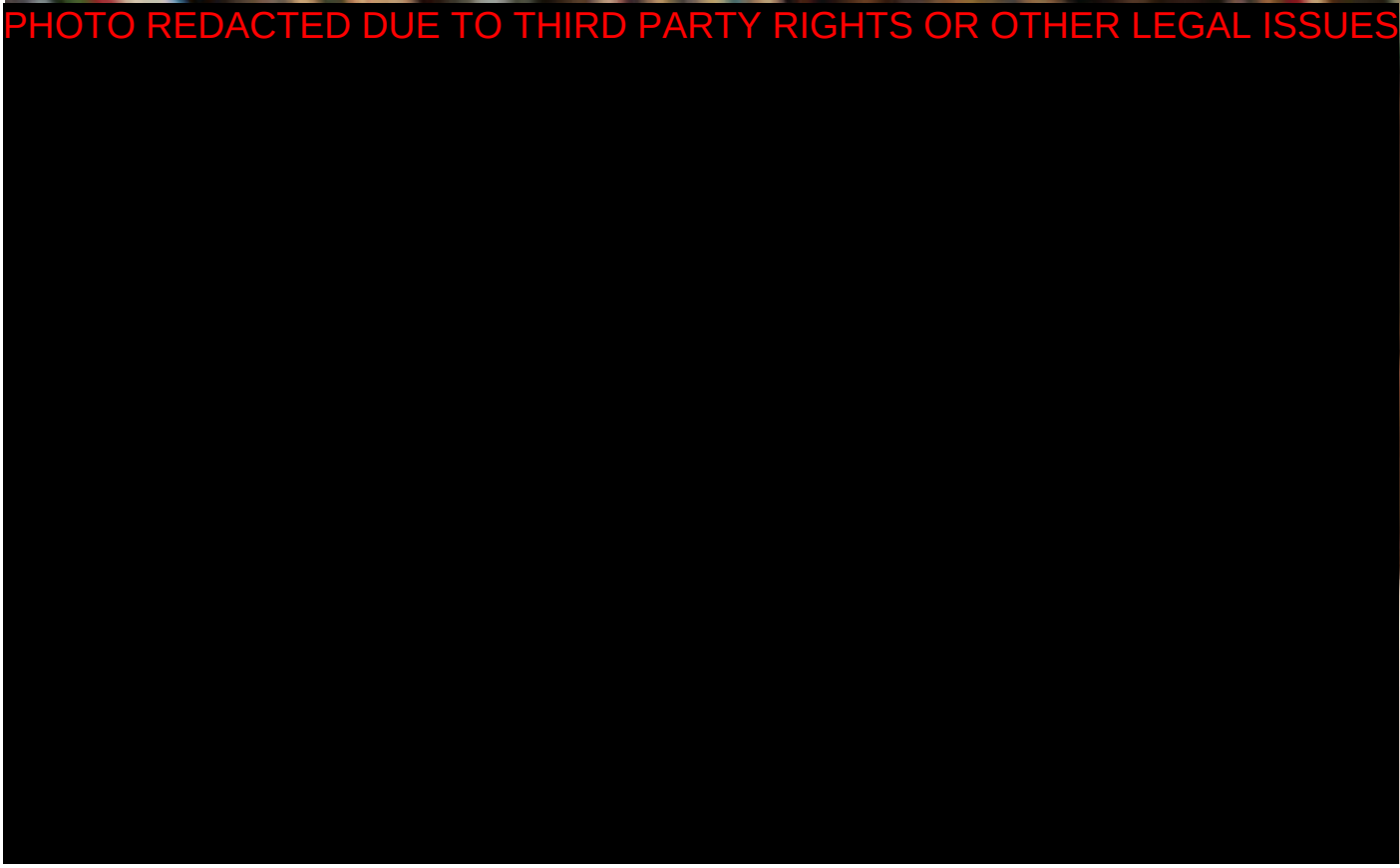
Figure 16: Area SEND re-visit outcomes: 31 August 2021

Figures represent number of areas

1. Includes re-visits carried out between 1 December 2018 and 31 July 2021 with a report published by 31 October 2021.
2. Dorset received a re-visit before local government boundary changes in April 2019 and is not included in the figures. It was deemed to be making sufficient progress in addressing some significant weaknesses.

The next steps for areas that have not addressed all significant weaknesses are determined by the DfE and NHS England, and may include the Secretary of State using their powers of intervention.[91]

90. Dorset received a re-visit before local government boundary changes in April 2019 and is not included in the figures. It was deemed to be making sufficient progress in addressing some significant weaknesses.
91. A small minority of areas (three out of 29) have been issued an improvement notice or statutory direction by the DfE. 'Improvement notices and directions', Department for Education, October 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/improvement-notices.



Impact of the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted established routines for many families of children with SEND. Some families struggled without specialist support and some of the informal and family support networks. Families spoke about their child's regression, their own emerging mental health difficulties, the challenges of explaining restrictions to their children, or real concerns about the risks the virus posed to their child's health.

However, some children and families reported positive experiences. Some children who remained in education flourished with smaller class sizes and more support. Others enjoyed being at home and made progress.

During the pandemic, some practitioners increased their monitoring of vulnerable children and young people, including linking up with community policing teams for welfare visits, and carrying out additional home visits for those with SEND. However, some children and young people were still exposed to increased levels of abuse and neglect while at home or in care.

Risk assessments for children and young people with EHC plans continued in many cases. However, we found that not all families were consulted during the risk assessment process. Some said they were unaware that a risk assessment had been carried out. In a small number of areas, the pandemic-related risks for disabled children were not assessed at all. We also found that, in some areas, children and young people with SEND missed out on support because their high COVID-19 risk meant that non-pandemic-related risks were sidelined.

Many in-person services were cancelled or curtailed, including short breaks, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. As a result, some parents and carers reported that children had regressed in communication skills and in wider learning. In several areas, access to child and adolescent mental health services was a particular concern. The lack of services overall left some parents and carers feeling isolated, exhausted or unable to fill in gaps in support. Without access to their usual services, some children and young people with SEND were left in pain, immobile or unable to communicate properly.

Furthermore, school and college leaders felt that children and young people needed additional mental health support and that extra pastoral provision for those with SEND was important. Some examples of extra support being provided included:

- one-to-one sessions
- additional personal, social, health and economic education
- COVID-19-themed lessons or bought-in pastoral support services.

We do not, however, know how much this benefited children.

Practitioners working with children and young people with SEND have found the pandemic personally and professionally difficult. Many leaders said that rapid changes to working practice, having to learn to use new technologies and having to work at a faster pace and for longer hours had all been stressful for them and for their teams. For example, we were told that staff in some residential special schools and homes took on longer shifts or moved into a setting to cover in colleagues' absence, sometimes at the expense of seeing their own families.

We did, however, also hear from practitioners that working collectively in a pressured environment created a team spirit that had some real benefits. They talked about everyone 'pulling together' to encourage one another and do the best they could for children and young people. Evidence from our interim area SEND visits shows that agencies had worked together more closely to support children and young people than they had previously.

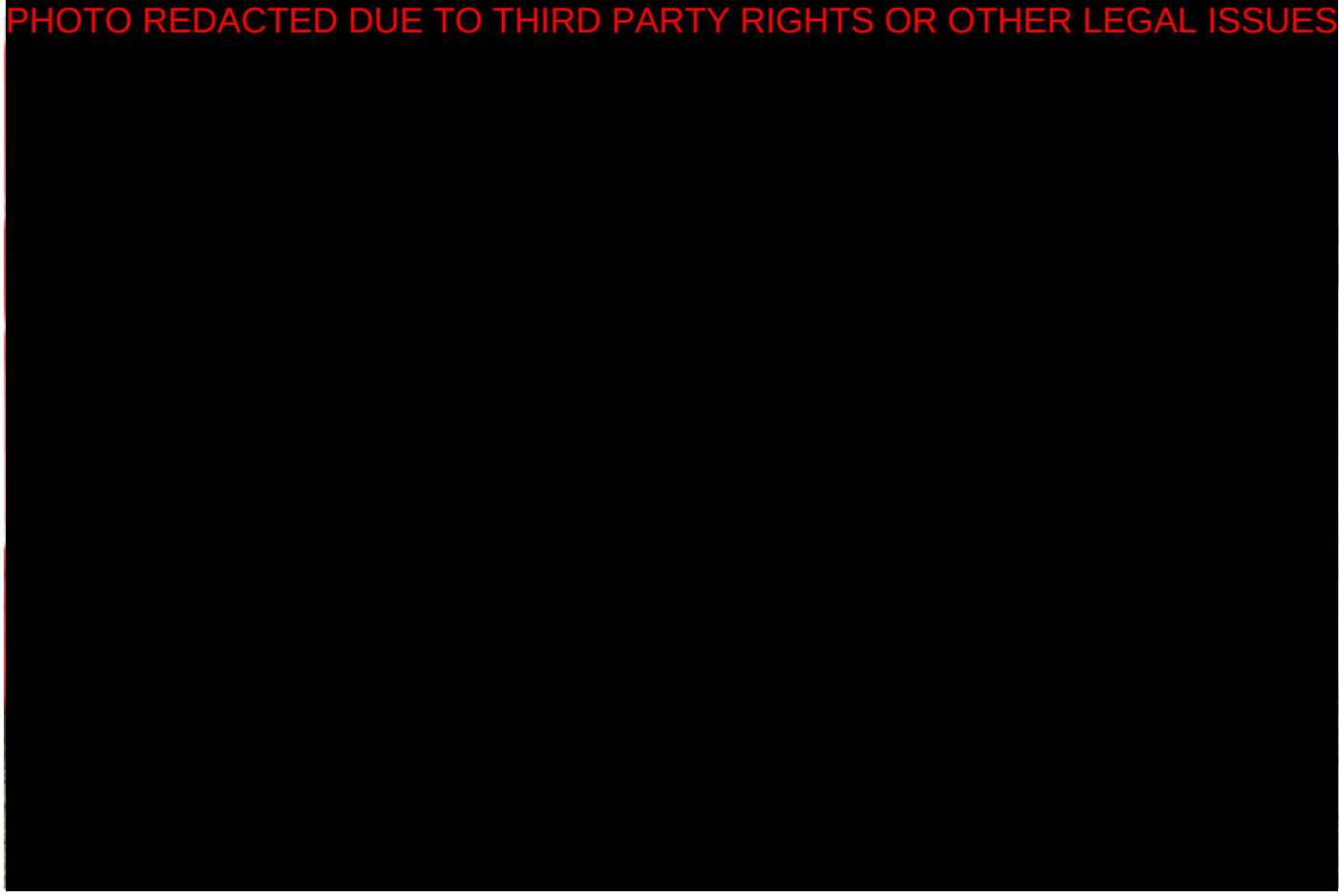
The SEND system

In most areas visited in our eight inspections over summer 2021, new leadership or a refreshed system has led to increased urgency around SEND work and a greater focus on understanding what is (or is not) working well. Leaders from different disciplines were working more collaboratively. Collaboration between staff and parents and carers is also key. In some of the areas we visited, this was a significant strength, with parents and carers involved at every stage of system design and decision-making. In others, however, this relationship was fractured, and some parents had lost faith.

Our inspections also revealed good work and innovative projects in some local areas during the pandemic. For example, health visitors in one area realised that their virtual appointments, while useful, did not identify some emerging needs. They subsequently introduced an additional point of contact with parents before children started nursery.

In most areas inspected this year, the quality of EHC plans remained weak. In too many cases, they had not been updated when a child or young person's needs changed, or when they reached a transition point. This means that some children and young people did not have their needs identified accurately. In most of the areas, overview of the quality of EHC plans and the annual review process were weaknesses.

Waiting times also remained a concern in most areas, especially for diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder. In some areas, families could not get support while they waited for assessment.

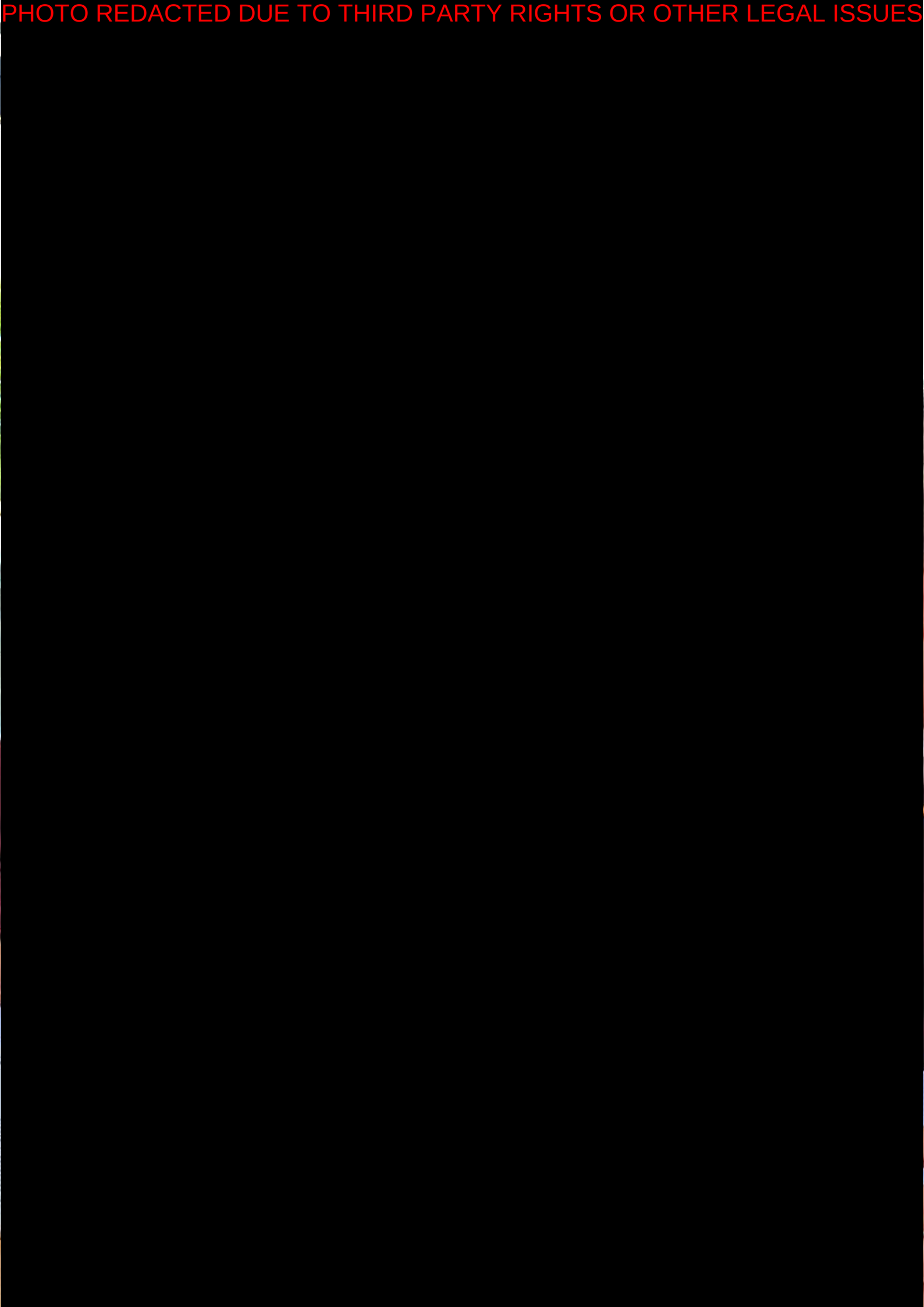


SEND review

Given the context outlined above, the government's SEND review is very much welcomed. Although the review has been unavoidably delayed by the pandemic, it will clearly be no less important when it is published.

We hope that the review clarifies the purpose of the SEND system, outlines changes that will result in SEND being identified accurately and early, embeds evidence-based provision that enables all children and young people to make the best possible progress, and clarifies the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all partners in the system. Parents cannot be the driving force in ensuring that agencies work together, as they too often are. This must be a cross-government effort.

The needs of some children and young people with SEND can be met in the classroom, while others will require additional support across education, health and care. It is important not to automatically conflate all types of SEND support with specialist provision and multi-agency arrangements. Whatever the level of support required, it is vital that all those with SEND receive a high-quality education, an ambitious curriculum and enough time to learn the essential knowledge and skills they need.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Teacher education

Initial teacher education

The purpose of teacher training is to make sure that trainee teachers, in all sectors, are prepared to a high professional standard. The initial teacher education (ITE) experience must equip them with the knowledge and skills to teach all pupils and learners well.

In 2021, after earlier pilots, we introduced a new framework for inspecting ITE. This puts a much greater emphasis on the quality of the ITE curriculum.

As the effort to get children back on track continues, the teaching profession needs a flow of consistently good new teachers, ready to start teaching and play their part in education recovery.

What we did

Inspections under the new framework were suspended during the spring term. Instead, we looked at the impact of COVID-19 on ITE provision, including on the quality of ITE curriculums.[92] We carried out remote research visits to 75 ITE providers and partnerships: about a third of the sector.

We started inspections under the new framework in summer 2021. We inspected 36 age phases in the year.

State of the nation

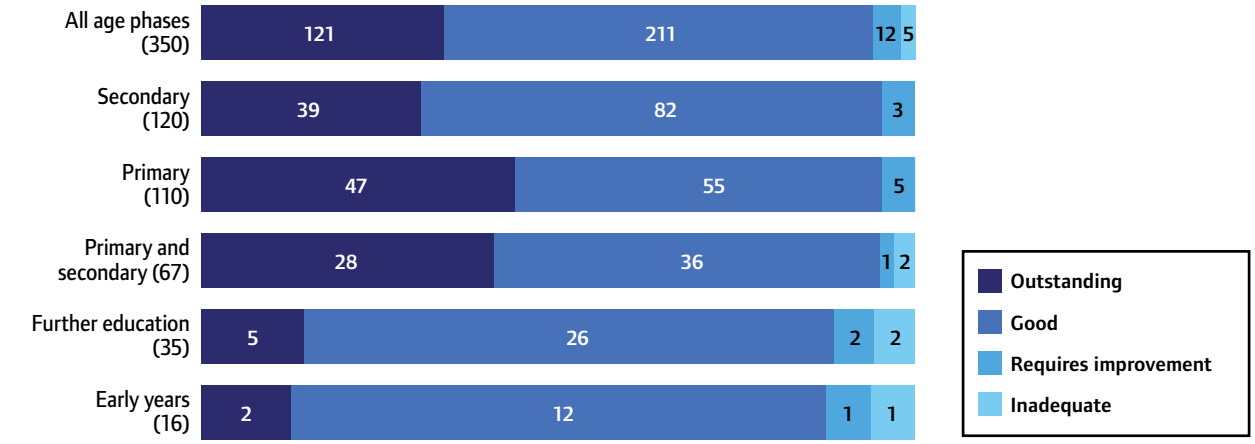
There are around 250 providers and partnerships (covering 420 age phases) that train teachers through school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT), higher education institutions (HEIs) and college providers.[93]

The new framework intentionally raises the bar on the quality of education and training provided to trainee teachers. In 2021, one age-phase partnership was judged outstanding, 16 good, 12 requires improvement and seven inadequate.[94] These grades may not be representative of the whole sector because it is a small sample, and we prioritised new providers not previously inspected and those not inspected for the longest time. This also means that the evidence base is too small to make any comment on the effectiveness by type of provider.

92. 'Teaching teachers during COVID-19', Ofsted, May 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19.
93. 'Initial teacher education: inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/initial-teacher-education-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2021.
94. 'Initial teacher education: inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2021', Ofsted, November 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/initial-teacher-education-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2021.

Figure 17: Overall effectiveness of ITE by age phase: 31 August 2021

Number of providers in brackets (rounded)



1. An ITE provider with more than one age phase will have a separate judgement for each (but see note 2). In general, the number of providers inspected is not the same as the total number of age phases inspected.
2. When a provider offering primary and secondary training only has a small number of trainees, Ofsted may inspect both phases simultaneously and produce a combined judgement for both primary and secondary training.

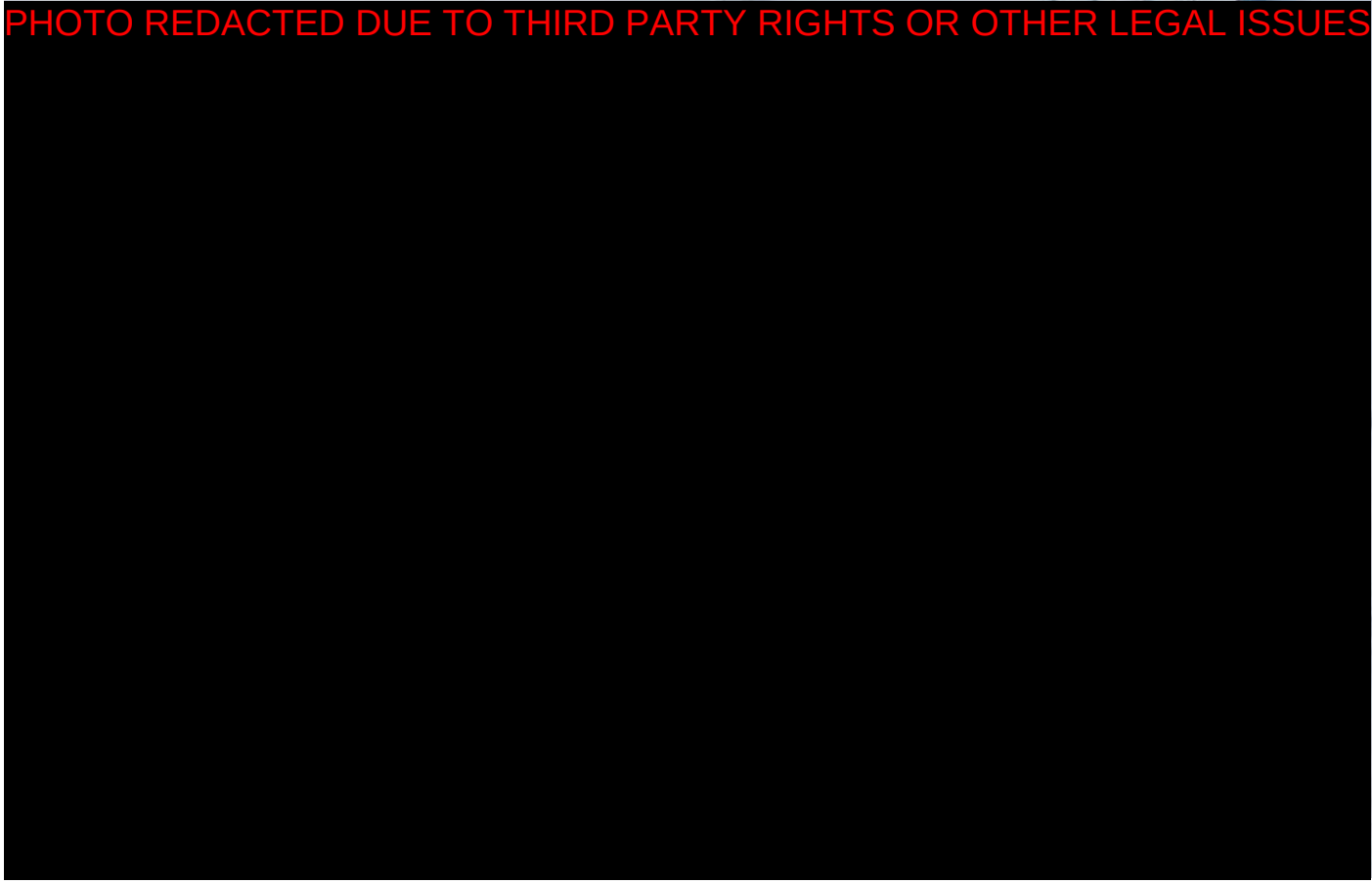
Teacher education during the pandemic

Due to the pandemic, trainees may not yet have had enough time to apply what they have learned in the classroom. Trainees are particularly behind in their experience of managing behaviour, and many in the primary phase have had limited experience of teaching early reading, including systematic synthetic phonics. All trainees are likely to need some additional support in their first year of teaching, and possibly longer, to make up for these shortfalls.

However, we found that too few providers and partnerships have a sufficiently ambitious ITE curriculum for their trainees.[95] This is equally true for SCITT providers and HEIs. Leaders were aware of the DfE's statutory minimum curriculum entitlement for trainees set out in the ITT core content framework where this applied to their phase.[96] However, most had not yet fully incorporated it into their curriculum plans.

Too many relied too heavily on placement experiences for learning the curriculum and this was a problem for both HEIs and SCITT providers. Some ITE curriculums contained very little subject-specific content to be taught during centre-based training, and so the quality of education depended mainly on what happened during the school or college placements. We also found that some mentors were relying too much on trainees to let them know what they had already learned and what they needed to work on, rather than making sure trainees were getting the essential building blocks. This was particularly apparent in the early years and primary phases, where learning subject fundamentals, like early reading, is essential.

95. 'Teaching teachers during COVID-19', Ofsted, May 2021; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19.
96. The core content framework only applies to primary and secondary phases.



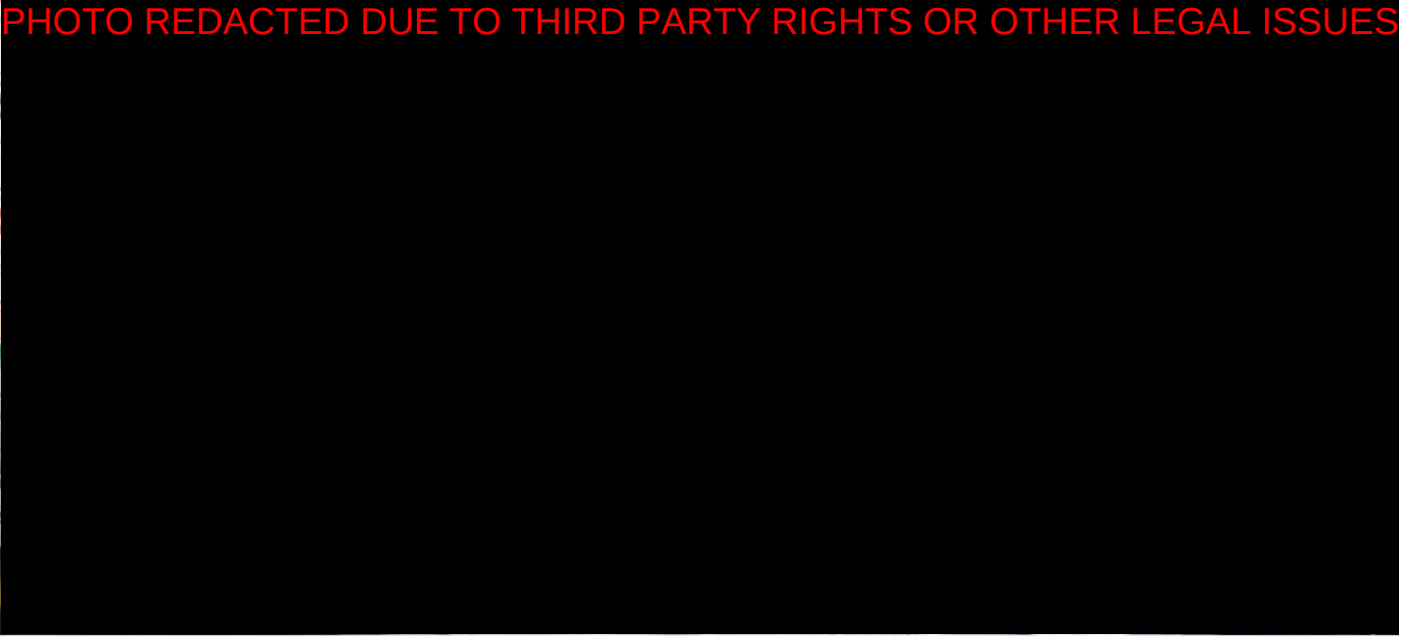
Although the pandemic has been an immense challenge for providers and partnerships and their trainees, the move to remote training and remote teaching has, in some cases, stimulated deeper and more connected thinking about the ITE curriculum. Providers and partnerships have generally either maintained or improved access to the ITE curriculum for those with caring responsibilities, and have worked particularly hard to support trainees with their well-being.

Wider issues with weaker providers and partnerships

Many issues in weaker providers and partnerships stem from leadership at a strategic level, such as inaccuracies with self-evaluation and priorities that do not focus closely enough on areas needing improvement. Teacher training schools may not be involved in decision-making, for example with recruitment of new trainees. Quality assurance systems and procedures are often ineffective, especially where these relate to the quality of the mentoring programme and the design and implementation of the ITE curriculum.

In weaker providers, the curriculum is typically not well developed. Some partnerships have not incorporated the core content framework (a mandatory minimum requirement for the primary and secondary age phases) within their curriculum planning or have done so in a superficial way. Some staff in partnerships do not work closely together to ensure that knowledge taught at the centre is practised by the trainees on placement. In the primary phase, this can mean trainees are limited in their understanding of teaching different subjects, particularly early reading, including systematic synthetic phonics. In FE and skills, programmes can rely too heavily on the expertise of individual mentors, rather than a carefully planned and sequenced curriculum.

The quality of mentoring programmes varies. For example, some mentors do not understand how to review and support trainees' progress, nor how to set effective targets linked to the ITE curriculum. Training and support for mentors are sometimes inconsistent, and mentors need more information to align their mentoring with other elements of the training programme.



Assessment of trainees is not always effective. Weaker providers misapply the teachers' standards as a formative assessment tool. Targets are set against end-of-course expectations rather than against what trainees should be learning.

Weaker providers do not fully develop trainees' subject knowledge and planning skills, which leaves some with a limited or an incomplete understanding. In the primary phase, for example, training in foundation subjects is superficial, especially relating to subject knowledge. In the secondary phase, trainees do not routinely learn what is special and unique about their subjects.

The early career framework and national professional qualifications

We support the government's ambition to improve training and development opportunities for qualified teachers, making teaching an attractive career that recruits and retains the best professionals. As everyone works hard to get children back on track, this could not be more important.

Earlier this year, the DfE announced the roll-out of the early career framework (ECF) and a suite of reformed national professional qualifications (NPQs) for teachers and school leaders, available from autumn this year.[97,98] As part of this, the DfE also confirmed that DfE-funded lead providers delivering the ECF and NPQs will be inspected by Ofsted.

Quality assuring ECF training and NPQs builds on our existing role inspecting ITE. It will give us oversight of training and development for trainee, early career and established teachers.

We are devising a new inspection framework and handbook for this work. The framework will assess how DfE-funded lead providers provide high-quality training and professional development aligned with the contents of the ECF and the NPQs. We expect inspections to begin in summer 2022.

We will also be carrying out an independent review of teacher development as part of our evaluation of education recovery.[99] This will include an assessment of the implementation and impact of the ECF and NPQs on the quality of teaching and leadership. We will publish the results of this work in early 2023 and early 2024.

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