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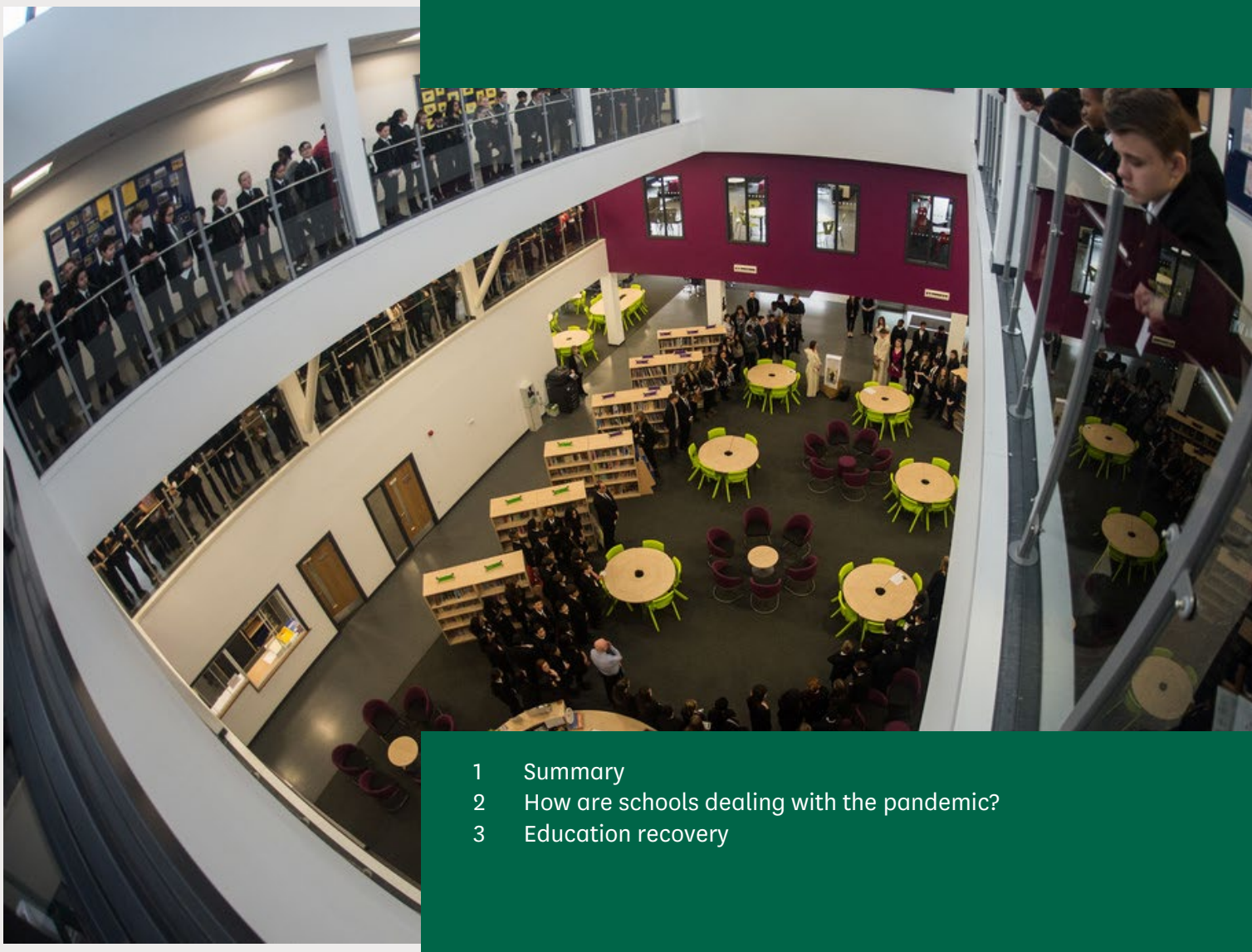
4 March 2022

Coronavirus and schools



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Contents

1 Summary

This briefing paper looks at the coronavirus pandemic and schools. It largely focuses on England. It has been updated following the removal of remaining public health restrictions, in February 2022.

It covers attendance rates, pupil coronavirus testing, operational issues for schools, and education recovery.

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

Timeline of recent events (England)

- **August 2021:** pupils' grades for GCSE, AS, A Level and equivalent qualifications, are issued to pupils, based on teacher assessment.
- **Early September 2021:** schools reopen for autumn 2021 term; no further requirement to keep pupils in separate groups, or 'bubbles', nor to routinely send home groups of pupils when one tests positive for coronavirus.
- **January 2022**: Schools return from the Christmas and New Year break; face coverings temporarily reintroduced for secondary-age pupils in classrooms and when moving around the school, unless exempt.
- **End of January 2022**: face coverings no longer required in either classrooms or communal areas.

Impact on education, development, and wellbeing

Early in the pandemic, survey evidence indicated wide disparities in young people's home learning experiences during the initial spring 2020 school attendance restrictions. There have been particular concerns about the impacts on disadvantaged children. Further evidence is now starting to emerge on the extent of the academic, mental and physical health impacts of the initial and subsequent attendance restrictions.

The Government is funding tutoring and other schemes to address the impacts of missing face-to-face provision. It has also provided some

additional money to support pupils' and teachers' mental health and wellbeing.

School funding and additional costs relating to the pandemic

The Department for Education (DfE) has made some additional funding available for free school meals, exceptional cleaning costs, catch-up funding and tutoring, laptops and digital devices, teacher training, and supply staff costs.

However, concerns remain about whether total education recovery funding announced to date is sufficient. There are also debates about how recovery funding should be spent.

At the autumn Budget/ Spending Review (SR) 2021, the Government announced an additional £1.8bn over the SR period, for education recovery. Much of this (£1bn) is for the Recovery Premium for the next two academic years. This is formulaic funding paid on a per-head basis to schools in England. In 2021-22, this can be spent on a range of support, including support to "deal with non-academic barriers to success in school, such as attendance, behaviour and social and emotional support".

Whilst the additional funding was welcomed, some remain concerned that it is insufficient, with the Education Policy Institute saying that the total amount allocated is "still some way off the £13.5bn that our research has shown is needed to reverse the damage done to children's education". The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) also noted that the additional circa £4.9 billion in total for England fell "a long way short" of the £15bn reportedly recommended by the then-Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.

2 How are schools dealing with the pandemic?

2.1 Academic year 2021/22

September 2021 reopening (England)

In September 2021, schools in England reopened to pupils after the summer holidays. All pupils are expected to attend as normal, unless they are themselves ill.

Lateral Flow Device (LFD) screening test for new term

The Department for Education (DfE) recommended that all secondary age pupils receive two lateral flow device (LFD) tests in school, at the start of the September term, and one LFD test at the start of the January 2022 term.

Thereafter, secondary pupils, and all school staff, were encouraged to test at home twice-weekly.

From 21 February 2022, staff and pupils in mainstream schools were no longer expected to undertake this routine twice-weekly testing. At the time of writing, those in specialist settings are advised to continue doing so.

'Bubbles': no longer routine

The DfE's current advice is that schools don't routinely need to keep children in consistent year group or other 'bubbles' any longer, to limit mixing. In line with the wider guidance on self-isolation, pupils aged up to 18 years and 6 months old, and who are close contacts of confirmed coronavirus cases, are no longer advised to routinely self-isolate unless they themselves become symptomatic or test positive.

Further advice on when control measures may be stepped up or down, in schools in response to infection rates, can be found in the DfE's main operational guidance for schools.

Face coverings

When schools returned after the Christmas and New Year break, face coverings were once again temporarily recommended for secondary age pupils, both within the classroom and whilst moving around the school

building. Face coverings have never been routinely recommended for pupils of primary school age, in England.

From 20 January 2022, the DfE advised that face coverings were no longer recommended in secondary classrooms, and a week later, extended that advice to all communal areas of secondary schools.

Pupils should still self-isolate, if positive or symptomatic

Although there are no longer regulations requiring those who have coronavirus to self-isolate, the Government still advises individuals to do so if they have tested positive or are symptomatic and awaiting the results of a test. On pupils and school attendance, UK Health Security Guidance says:

> Children and young people with COVID-19 should not attend their education setting while they are infectious. They should take an LFD test from 5 days after their symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms) followed by another one the next day. If both these tests results are negative, they should return to their educational setting if they normally attend one, as long as they feel well enough to do so and do not have a temperature. They should follow the guidance for their educational setting.[1]

The Department for Education (DfE) has published additional guidance for schools on recording attendance and absence during the pandemic:

- DfE, Addendum: recording attendance in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) during the 2021 to 2022 academic year, 3 March 2022

Vaccination of young people aged 5 to 15 (England)

Currently, NHS England advises:

> Everyone aged 12 and over, and some children aged 5 to 11, can get a 1st and 2nd dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.
>
> People aged 16 and over, and some children aged 12 to 15, can also get a booster dose.[2]

Following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI),[3] the Government has also confirmed the NHS in England will "prepare to extend the non-urgent offer of COVID-19 vaccination to children aged 5 to 11 during April".[4]

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1 UK Health Security Agency, "COVID-19: people with COVID-19 and their contacts", 3 March 2022

2 National Health Service, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine", 24 February 2022

3 Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, "JCVI statement on vaccination of children aged 5 to 11 years old", 16 February 2022

4 PQ 125180 [on Coronavirus vaccination], 23 February 2022

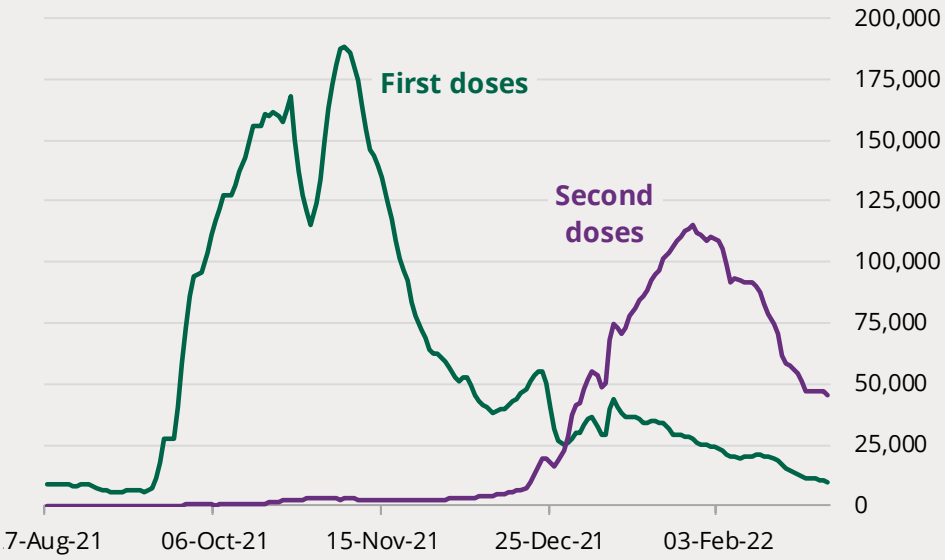
Statistics on vaccine uptake among children and young people

The chart below shows that the rolling weekly total of first dose vaccinations peaked on 6 November 2021, and has since generally followed a downward trend (excluding an increase in the run up to Christmas).

In late December 2021 the weekly rolling total of second doses exceeded that of first doses for the first time and has continued to exceed first doses since then.

Vaccinations of children aged 12-15 in England: rolling weekly total

Rolling weekly total: each date shows the number of vaccines administered in the past seven days



Source: GOV.UK, Coronavirus in the UK: Download data, vaccine age demographics file, accessed 2 March 2022

Prevalence of coronavirus among children and young people

The latest report from Imperial College's Department of Health and Social Care-commissioned REACT-1 coronavirus study for England was published on 25 January 2022. This reports data relating to swabs collected in round 17 (5 and 20 January 2022). The researchers said:

> In the most recent data, trends varied by age with infections decreasing in adults (R below 1) but rising in school-aged children (R over 1). 5-11-year-olds had the highest number of infections with 1 in 13 testing positive (7.81%).[5]

Further detail about covid-19 infections can be found within the coronavirus in the UK dashboard, national COVID-19 surveillance reports and coronavirus infection survey statistics.

A Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology briefing looks at the existing evidence on the impacts of coronavirus in children.

2.2 History of school attendance restrictions since beginning of pandemic

Schooling during the early pandemic: March to July 2020

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

In England, some other pupils in a limited number of priority year groups were encouraged to return later in the summer 2020 term. Information on attendance rates in England during this period can be found in the annexe supplied along with this briefing paper.

Start of the 2020/21 school year

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

January 2021: mainstream schools in all parts of the UK closed to most pupils

During an address to the nation on 4 January 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that primary schools, secondary schools, and colleges in

[5] Imperial College, "Post-peak dynamics of a national Omicron SARS-CoV-2 epidemic during January 2022", [pre-print], 25 January 2022; Imperial College news story, "Fall in coronavirus infections in England may have stalled at high level – REACT", 26 January 2022

England would move to remote learning for most pupils, until after February half-term, subject to review. Vulnerable pupils and critical workers' children could continue to attend face-to-face provision, and the DfE subsequently indicated that special schools and alternative provision would remain open. In England, pupils began returning to schools from 8 March 2021.

In **Northern Ireland**, **Wales** and **Scotland**, most primary and secondary school pupils were also taught remotely following the Christmas 2020/21 school holidays.

2.3 School attendance data for England

What data does the DfE publish?

The DfE publishes estimates for the number of pupils attending school during periods of attendance restrictions due to the pandemic, and when they reopened to most children. These are based on figures that schools provide to them through a daily survey. Daily absence data for Covid-19 related reasons is available from 7 September 2021 (previously weekly snapshot data was published).

For the new academic year starting in September 2021, the DfE has moved to fortnightly publication of this data.

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

Attendance rates have been generally high in the 2021/22 academic year so far

As of 10 February 2022, 90.3% of state-funded pupils attended school in person in England. This was an increase from 89.1% the week prior (3 February 2022). [6]

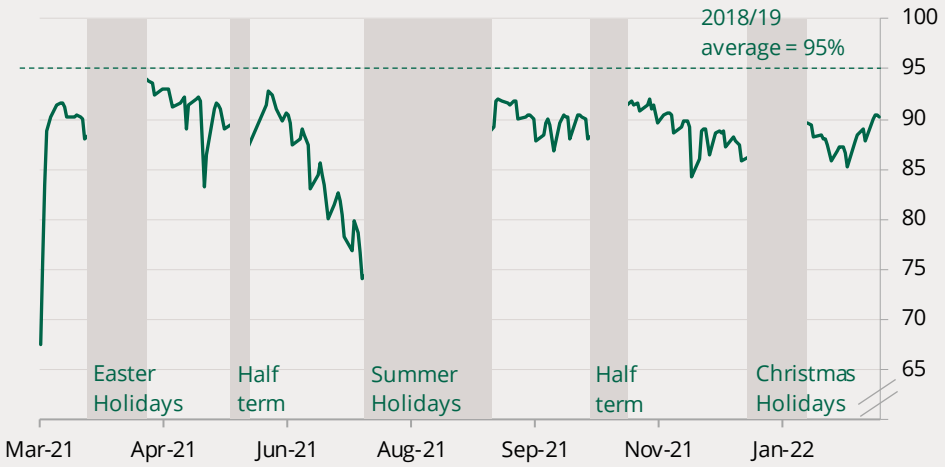
The chart below shows that since the start of the 2021/22 academic year, attendance rates were high: generally higher than the summer 2021 term.

[6] Source: Department for Education, Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, 22 February 2022, table 1b

However, attendance remains below the pre-covid attendance average of 95% in academic year 2018/19. [7]

Since September 2021 (the start of the academic year) attendance has been generally high and more stable

% of state-funded pupils attending school in England



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Figures post-May 2021 half term until the summer 2021 holidays have been adjusted to take account of pupils in exam years 11 and 13, who were not expected to attend. 2018/19 attendance rate should only be treated as a rough comparison because the groups of pupils included in the calculation do not match exactly with the covid-period attendance data.
Sources: Department for Education, Coronavirus (COVID-19): attendance in education and early years settings, 22 February 2022, table 1b; Department for Education, Pupil absence in schools in England: 2018 to 2019, 26 March 2021

Covid-related absence increased after Christmas but has fallen quickly in recent weeks

As of 10 February 2022, the "covid-related absence" [8] rate of pupils attending state-funded schools in England was 2.2%. This was a decrease from 3.9% the week prior (3 February 2022).

Since the start of the 2021/22 academic year covid-related absence has generally been lower (the highest absence rate recorded was 5.5%) compared to the summer 2021 term, one reason for this could be because self-isolation of close contacts was no longer required. Covid-related absence increased steadily after October half term and more sharply after the

[7] 2018/19 attendance rate should only be treated as a rough comparison because the groups of pupils included in the calculation do not match exactly with the covid-period attendance data; Department for Education, Pupil absence in schools in England: 2018 to 2019, 26 March 2021

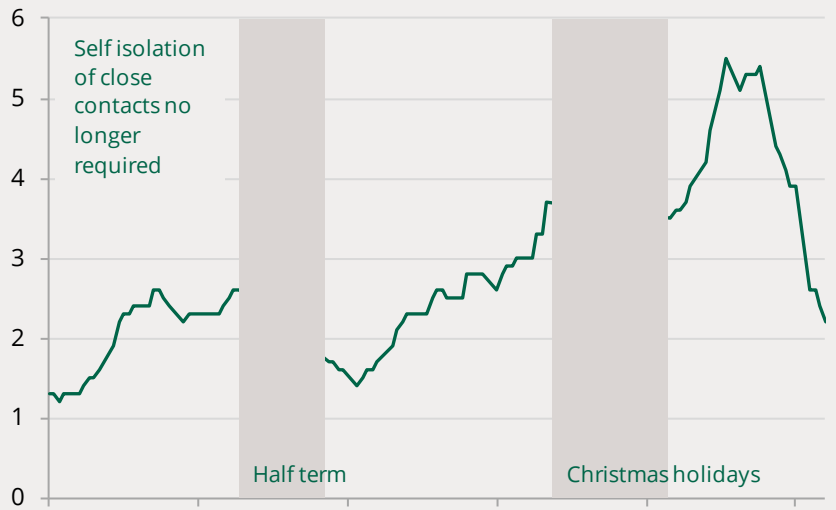
[8] Includes pupils who could not attend school in person because: they had coronavirus; were suspected of having it; were self-isolating; or where their school was closed for reasons relating to the pandemic

Christmas holidays. However, since 28 January 2022 it has been falling quickly.

The end of the summer 2021 term saw a steep rise nationally in the proportion of pupils absent for reasons relating to coronavirus. By 15 July 2021, 14.3% of pupils were absent for a reason relating to coronavirus.[9]

Covid-related absence increased after Christmas then quickly declined

% of state-funded pupils absent due to covid, England



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Figures to end July have been adjusted to account for exam-year pupils who weren't expected to attend during this period.
Source: Department for Education, Coronavirus (COVID-19): attendance in education and early years settings, 22 February 2022, table 1b.

The DfE has also published weekly snapshots of regional and local authority-level data on attendance and covid-19 related absence, it has now discontinued this data series.[10] Local authority level data is not adjusted for non-responses and so may not be representative.

The charts below show that between 11 March and 16 December 2021 regions followed broadly the same trend as national figures. With peaks in covid-19 related absence at the end of the summer 2021 term and an upward trend in the last few weeks. However, the magnitude of the absence rate was very different between regions. The highest covid absence rate over the period was

[9] Source: Department for Education, Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, 22 February 2022, table 1b

[10] Includes pupils who could not attend because: they had coronavirus; were suspected of having it; were self-isolating due to being a close contact; or where their school was closed for reasons relating to the pandemic.

recorded in the North East (26.5% as of 15 July 2021) and was lowest in London (9.6%).

However, this trend reversed in the most recent snapshot available (16 December 2021) when covid related absence was highest in London (5.1%) and lowest in the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber (2.6% respectively). These differences tend to reflect community transmission patterns of covid-19.

The DfE online tool allows you to produce customised data tables for individual local authorities by choosing Table 1C and then making your chosen selections.

Covid-related absence generally increased since October 2021 half term particularly in London

% of state-funded pupils absent for covid-related reasons, England 2021

Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Figures post-May 2021 half term until the summer 2021 holidays have been adjusted to take account of pupils in exam years 11 and 13, who were not expected to attend. This data series has been discontinued and will not be updated further.
Source: Department for Education, Coronavirus (COVID-19): attendance in education and early years settings, 22 February 2022, table 1b.

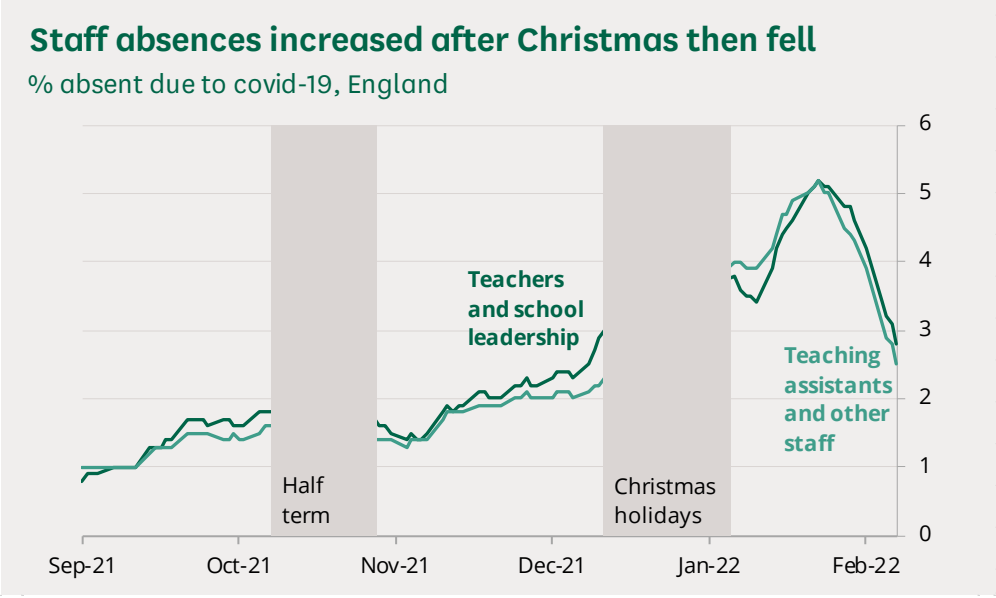
The House of Commons Library Insights Autumn Term 2020: how covid-19 affected England's state-funded schools and Spring Term 2021: how covid-19 affected England's state-funded schools provides attendance summaries and some local data for these periods.

Teacher covid-19 related absence data

The Department for Education also publishes the covid-19 related absence rate of teachers and school leaders. [11] The chart below shows that this has followed a similar pattern to pupils' covid-related absence: increasing steadily after October half term, and more sharply after the Christmas holidays. However, since 26 January 2022 the rate has been falling quickly. [12]

As of 10 February 2022, the proportion of teachers and school leaders absent due to covid-19 related reasons was 2.8%, a decrease from 4.4% the week prior (3 February 2022).

The trend for teaching assistants and other staff was similar in the last week, decreasing to 2.5% on 10 February 2022 from 4.1% on 3 February 2022. In general, covid-related absence rates for the two groups of teaching staff have converged since mid-January.



Note: figures are estimates and should be treated with caution.
Source: Department for Education, Coronavirus (COVID-19): attendance in education and early years settings, 22 February 2022, table 1d.

[11] Includes staff who could not attend school because: they had coronavirus; were suspected of having it; were self-isolating due to being a close contact; or where their school was closed for reasons relating to the pandemic.

[12] Source: Department for Education, Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, 22 February 2022, table 1d

3 Education recovery

3.1 COVID funding for schools and pupils (England)

The DfE has announced several coronavirus-related funding streams for schools and pupils since the start of the pandemic. Schools also continued to receive their normal revenue funding during periods when most pupils were unable to attend – ie, in the summer 2020 term, and part of the spring 2021 term. Additional support has included:

- Exceptional costs funding for the period March to July 2020, including cleaning associated with COVID cases, some premises costs, and additional school food provided outside of the FSM voucher scheme.
- A universal catch-up premium, the National Tutoring Programme, 16-19 tuition fund, further financial support for summer schools and a recovery premium. [13]
- Extra training and support for early years practitioners and school teachers.
- Funding for digital devices and 4G routers, for disadvantaged children unable to attend school because of closures or self-isolation requirements.
- £40 million funding for local authorities to support school transport in the autumn 2020 term. [14]
- Funding for free school meals during the initial and spring 2021 lockdown, and for some holiday periods in 2020.
- A COVID Winter Grant Scheme, to be run by councils in England, providing support from December 2020 to April 2021. Councils could spend this on supporting families in need, including by providing food.
- An expanded Holiday Activities and Food Programme across England in the Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays in 2021.

[13] Department for Education press releases, New education recovery package for children and young people, 24 February 2021; Huge expansion of tutoring in next step of education recovery, 2 June 2021

[14] Department for Education press release, Multi-million-pound funding package for school transport, 8 August 2020

- A COVID workforce fund, to cover the second half of the autumn 2020 term. [15]

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

- School meals and nutritional standards (England), Commons Library briefing CBP 4915

3.2 Level of education recovery funding

In May 2021, the Education Policy Institute (EPI) published a report on education recovery and resilience. [16] This called for a three-year package amounting to £13.5bn, to support a range of programmes including:

- Increasing the Pupil Premium (funding for disadvantaged children) and increasing the Early Years Pupil Premium, to the same rate as is paid for primary pupils.
- Extended schools and summer wellbeing programmes.
- A new Continuous Professional Development (CPD) fund for teachers.
- Funding to recruit mental health support workers in schools.
- More small group and one-to-one tuition through to 2023-24, and an extension of the 16-19 tuition fund until then, too.

On 2 June 2021, the Government said it would provide a further £1.4bn in education recovery funding, on top of the £1.7bn already announced – taking the total to more than £3bn over four academic years, including 2020-21. [17] Of the £1.4bn announced on this date, £1bn would be spent on "up to 6 million, 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged school children", as well as the 16-19 tuition fund. Other funding would support early years provision, and teacher development.

Reaction to June 2021 funding announcements

On the same day the funding was announced, Sir Kevan Collins resigned as Education Recovery Commissioner for England. He said that while he welcomed the funding, he believed it to be insufficient, and that he did "not

15 Department for Education press release, New funding to support schools and colleges during Covid pandemic, 27 November 2020

16 Education recovery and resilience in England. Phase one report, Education Policy Institute, 14 May 2021

17 HC Deb 22 June 2021, Vol. 697, Col. 745

believe it is credible that a successful recovery can be achieved with a programme of support of this size". [18]

EPI said the money amounted to "a fraction of the level of funding required to reverse learning loss seen by pupils since March 2020". [19]

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) called Government action so far "well below par, in terms of its speed of response, the scope of its ambition and the depth of its pockets. Education recovery cannot be done on the cheap, but as things stand, that is exactly what the government is proposing." [20]

The Early Years Alliance said that it was encouraging to see a greater focus on, and more money for early years, than there had been in initial announcements. Additional training for early years practitioners was "particularly welcome since tight budgets leave many settings with little money to invest in upskilling the workforce." However, it went on to say that the alliance hoped for further investment in the sector, given existing evidence on the importance of the early years in closing the attainment gap and missed opportunities for young children's personal and social development. [21]

Autumn Budget and Spending Review: October 2021

At the autumn Budget/ Spending Review (SR) 2021, the Government announced an additional £1.8bn over the SR period, for education recovery. Much of this (£1bn) is for the Recovery Premium for the next two academic years. This is formulaic funding paid on a per-head basis to schools in England. In 2021/22, this can be spent on a range of support, including support to "deal with non-academic barriers to success in school, such as attendance, behaviour and social and emotional support". [22]

Whilst the additional funding was welcomed, some remain concerned that it is insufficient, with the Education Policy Institute saying that the total amount allocated was "still some way off the £13.5bn that our research has shown is needed to reverse the damage done to children's education". [23] The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) also commented that the additional £4.9 billion in England fell "a long way short" of the £15bn

18 "Exclusive: Sir Kevan Collins resigns over catch-up plan', the TES, [online] 2 June 2021, accessed 11 January 2022

19 Education Policy Institute, "EPI responds to the government's new education recovery package", 2 June 2021

20 National Association of Head Teachers, "NAHT comments on education recovery plan", 9 June 2021.

21 Early Years Alliance press release, Alliance responds as DfE announces latest tranche of education recovery funding, 1 June 2021

22 Department for Education, Recovery premium funding, 6 October 2021

23 Education Policy Institute, "EPI response to spending review", 27 October 2021

reported to have been recommended by the then-Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.[24]

Alongside additional funding relating to education recovery, the Spending Review also promised increases to core school funding in the years to 2024/25. In 2022/23 some of this funding would cover the employer costs of the new Health and Social Care Levy.

Institute for Fiscal Studies annual report: November 2021

On 30 November 2021, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published its annual report on education spending in England. This examines long-run spending trends for all phases of education. On schools, this said:

> [D]ifferential spending trends across areas and pupils have made it more difficult to level up poorer areas of the country. In the case of schools, recent cuts to spending per pupil have been larger for schools in more deprived areas and the Pupil Premium has failed to keep pace with inflation since 2015. Spending cuts have been larger for colleges and sixth forms serving 16- to 18-year olds, with lower levels of funding focused on disadvantage than is the case for schools. Such challenges will be even larger if, as evidence suggests, educational inequalities have widened over the course of the pandemic.[25]

December 2021: £10 million for areas seeing greatest learning losses

In December 2021, the DfE confirmed that a further £10 million of the Government's £22 million Accelerator Fund (announced in February 2021) would be spent on improving literacy and maths teaching in areas that research suggests have seen the largest learning losses: the North of England; East Midlands & Humber; and the West Midlands.[26]

Targeting and takeup of education recovery support

A National Audit Office (NAO) report published in July 2021 looked at DfE support for children and young people during the early part of the pandemic.

This noted that schools were given considerable discretion in terms of how to support pupils during the initial 2020 school attendance restrictions, which reduced burdens on schools but also "contributed to wide variation in the education and support that children received". The NAO concluded that whilst the Government did take action enabling vulnerable learners to attend school, and funded online resources, it could have done more, and more

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24 2021 Annual report on education spending in England, Institute for Fiscal studies, November 2021, p10

25 As above, p50

26 Department for Education press release, Catch up learning accelerates with £10m for maths and literacy, 15 December 2021

quickly, in some areas. Areas identified included support for disadvantaged children, and setting clearer expectations on remote learning.

On education recovery, the NAO said:

> [It is] crucial that the Department now takes swift and effective action, including to learn wider lessons from its COVID-19 response, and to ensure that the catch-up learning programme is effective and reaches the children who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, such as those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.[27]

National Tutoring Programme (NTP)

On 11 January 2022, the DfE released statistics on National Tutoring Programme (NTP) uptake, since the inception of the scheme in 2020. These cover the three different tutoring routes: tuition through tuition partners – approved tuition providers; academic mentors; and, in the 2021/22 academic year, school-led tutoring, whereby schools directly source their own tutoring.

On 11 January 2022 the Department for Education published the first ad hoc statistical release about the National Tutoring Programme. Data as of 1 December 2021 is provisional and may be subject to revisions.

In each of these tuition "start" [28] measures reported below an individual pupil can be counted more than once and may not necessarily complete the course. The number of pupils which have received tutoring is not published.

As of 31 August 2021 an estimated:

- 207,000 "starts" had been made by pupils on courses provided through approved tuition partners in the 2020/21 academic year.
- 104,000 starts had been made by pupils on courses provided through academic mentors in 2020/21.

As of 1 December 2021 an estimated:

- 230,000 starts had been made by pupils on courses provided through school led tutoring so far in the academic year 2021/22.

As of 12 December 2021 an estimated:

- 52,000 starts had been made by pupils on courses provided through approved tuition partners so far in the academic year 2021/22.

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27 National Audit Office press notice, Support for children's education during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, 17 March 2021

28 Pupils are counted as making a "start" when they have received at least one tuition session.

- 20,000 starts had been made by pupils on courses provided through academic mentors so far in the academic year 2021/22. [29]

Commentary on NTP

Sector representatives and commentators have raised concerns about the rollout and uptake of the NTP, and have questioned whether it's reaching the pupils in most need. The Education Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the Government's support for education recovery. On 12 January 2022, it heard evidence from Randstad, the company that is currently the delivery partner for the NTP.

In a subsequent article for the online publication, Conservative Home, on 9 February 2022, Committee Chair, Robert Halfon MP, said:

> The National Tutoring Programme (NTP), currently contracted to Randstad, has the potential to be one of the great interventions made to date to support young people's recovery from the impact of the pandemic. And yet, despite significant investment, it is falling far short of its targets and it's not going far enough or happening quickly enough.
>
> [...]
>
> Perhaps most importantly of all, the Department for Education's own annual report, published in December, evidenced that the risk of the catch-up programme failing to recover lost learning is critical or very likely.
>
> The Government must look again at the contract with Randstad and seriously consider enacting the break clause. If Randstad cannot up its game, it is time to say goodbye.[30]

Later in February 2022, press reports suggested that Ministers were considering terminating Randstad's contract.[31] A PQ answered on 1 March 2022 asked about the Government's plans with regard to the contract. Minister, Robin Walker MP, said:

> The delivery and performance of the National Tutoring Programme is monitored closely through ongoing performance reviews, governance boards and senior level meetings.
>
> The department is unable to provide detailed information regarding the contract with Randstad as it is commercially sensitive. We continue to review the delivery of the programme and will set out our future plans in due course.
>
> A full independent evaluation of the programme will be published in summer 2023.[32]

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29 Department for Education, National Tutoring Programme: courses started, 11 January 2022, p4-9

30 "Robert Halfon: The Government's education recovery funding has created another North-South divide", Conservative Home [online], 9 February 2022

31 "Firm behind England's flagship tuition scheme faces dismissal after failing to hit targets", the Observer [online], 13 February 2022

32 PQ 128415 [on the National Tutoring Programme], 1 March 2022

In early March 2022, there were further press reports suggesting that a 65% target for the proportion of tutoring delivered to pupils that qualified for the pupil premium, had been removed. An article in the journal Schools Week said:

> Tutoring providers will no longer have to ensure their catch-up reaches at least two-thirds of poorer pupils after the target was ditched, Schools Week can reveal.
>
> Randstad, the for-profit contractor that runs the government's flagship National Tutoring Programme, said the move would "remove complexities".
>
> The under-fire scheme is way off meeting promises to provide two million tutoring courses this academic year. Just 302,000 courses began last term, figures released in January showed.
>
> Randstad has now told the NTP's 56 tutor organisations they are "no longer required to ensure that 65 per cent of their tuition support is provided" to children receiving the pupil premium.
>
> This followed feedback from school leaders and tutor organisations on how to "remove complexities" and "help schools to access" the scheme, the firm said.
>
> The Department for Education had stipulated the 65 per cent pupil premium requirement, which was also a key performance indicator in its contract with Randstad.
>
> A DfE spokesperson insisted the contractual target remains in place, but tutoring organisations have been given some "operational flexibility".[33]

In an Education Policy Institute report on education recovery, published in October 2021, EPI described the NTP as "rooted in evidence", continuing, "implemented effectively, the NTP could be a key component of the levelling up agenda and contribute to reducing long-standing inequities in the system." However, it identified a number of potential challenges, as well as concern with evidence on take-up at that point, including:

- Considerable regional variation in take-up, with schools in the south and London doing better against their target pupil enrolment, whilst schools in the north west and north east finding it harder to meet enrolment targets.
- Complexities involved in scaling up the scheme, whilst maintaining quality, and adding a third 'school-led' strand.
- The extent to which the NTP was reaching disadvantaged pupils.

A survey carried out by the National Association of Head Teachers in summer 2021 found that those surveyed tended to favour school-led tutoring, above

[33] "National Tutoring Programme target for poorer pupils ditched", Schools Week [online] 2 March 2022

tutoring via the NTP.[34] Subsequently, as noted above, the Government has made direct funding available to schools for school-led tutoring.

Ofsted review of tutoring

The Government has asked education inspectorate for England, Ofsted, to carry out an independent review of education recovery tutoring in schools and 16-19 providers. The inspectorate is planning to publish a first report in summer 2022, and a further one, the following summer.

3.3 Educational and other impacts of pandemic

Early pandemic survey data on home learning

During the early part of the pandemic, there were several surveys on home learning environments, and time spent on remote schooling. This pointed to marked differences in access to technology and engagement.

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

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

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

The UCL Institute of Education analysed survey data about home schooling from a sample of UK households, in the last two weeks of April 2020. The results were then adjusted to provide UK wide **estimates**.

The survey found the average amount of schoolwork that pupils were doing in a day was low (two and a half hours). It also found large differences between pupils' home learning experiences and access to technology when broken down by free school meal (FSM) status. [35]

Between 29 April and 12 May 2020, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) surveyed around 4,000 parents with children aged 4-15 about their home learning activities and resources. The results were then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

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34 National Association of Head Teachers press release, Tutoring is a top priority for education recovery – but not via the National Tutoring Programme, say school leaders, 17 June 2021

35 UCL Institute of Education, Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty [link to PDF file], p10

The IFS survey found large differences between state and private school parents' responses about the provision of online learning resources from schools. The results also showed large differences within the state sector when broken down by family deprivation levels. [36]

Teacher Tapp also carried out surveys of teachers in the early part of the pandemic. The results are then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

Early in the pandemic, the survey found very large differences between teachers' perceptions of state and private sector pupils' home learning environments, and also the average amount of online learning time. It also found large differences between state-funded school pupils, on measures of hours spent learning and access to technology, depending on how deprived their school intake was. [37]

3.4 Later analyses of pandemic impacts on pupils

In June 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) published research looking at maths and reading performance among a sample of school children in England. [38] This compared performance on standardised tests at different points during and prior to the pandemic, and aimed to assess how much progress pupils had made compared to what would normally have been expected. The data used relates to the spring term 2021; for the majority of this term, most students weren't able to attend in person.

The researchers note some of the difficulties inherent in undertaking this sort of analysis, including that the lengthy period of school closures stretching over two school years has meant that directly comparable data is not always available. They conclude that, depending on the method used, their estimates could be either under- or over-estimates of learning loss for primary school pupils (year groups 3-6). The sample size of this study for secondary school pupils was too small and so results for this group, as well as breakdowns by pupil characteristics will be provided in a subsequent report.

The researchers estimate:

- By the end of the spring term, primary-aged pupils had experienced a learning loss in reading equivalent to between 2.0 months and 2.3 months of progress depending on which of the two methods is used.

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37 Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Teacher Tapp (Google doc)

38 Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year, Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning for the Department for Education, June 2021

- In mathematics, primary-aged pupils experienced a much greater learning loss of between 3.1 months and 3.6 months, again depending on method used. [39]

A separate report [PDF] analysed data on learning loss in the first and second halves of the autumn 2020 term. This report suggested that, by the first half of the autumn term, "average learning losses were 3.7 months in maths for pupils in primary school and 1.8 months in reading for pupils in primary school". [40]

There were also regional differences, and differences based on pupil characteristics, when it came to the scale of learning loss. The authors say:

> The analysis [of reading skills in the first half of the autumn 2020 term] suggests that school closures in relation to the pandemic have led to a widening of the disadvantage gap. Furthermore, pupils from EAL backgrounds in secondary, pupils in Yorkshire and the Humber, and pupils in the North East, experienced a learning loss of a similar scale – around half a month larger than other pupils.
>
> The extent to which disadvantaged pupils lost learning, as a result of the first lockdown at least, appears to be at the lower end of some of the other published estimates of learning loss. That is not to downplay the effect that is seen in this analysis. It is still equivalent to undoing a third of the progress made in the last decade on closing the gap in primary schools, and given further school closures during 2020/21, it would seem likely that this gap could grow further. [41]

On maths skills by the first half of the autumn 2020 term, it concludes:

> This analysis provides further evidence that school closures in relation to the pandemic have led to a widening of the disadvantage gap. The difference of a months' progress lost relative to other pupils would be equivalent to two-thirds of the progress made over the past decade in closing the disadvantage gap in primary schools. [42]

A later report, published in October 2021 [PDF] summarised evidence collected to date, including on learning loss during the spring and summer terms in 2021.[43]

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) also publishes a rolling summary of domestic and international research on the impact of the partial school

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39 Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year, Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning for the Department for Education, June 2021, p9

40 As cited in Education Policy Institute website summary article, "EPI research for the Department for Education on pupil learning loss", 4 June 2021

41 Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year. Complete findings from the Autumn term, 2 June 2021, Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning for the Department for Education, p31

42 As above, p32

43 Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year, Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning for the Department for Education, 29 October 2021

closures. They conclude that research "shows a consistent pattern", namely that:

- Pupils have made less academic progress compared with previous year groups.
- There is a large attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, which seems to have grown. [44]

In May 2021, FFT Education Datalab published results from analysis carried out jointly with Education Endowment Foundation and Teacher Tapp. This looked specifically at the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils in later primary education, and their peers.

Their research uses in-school assessments in reading and maths, taken in the autumn term 2019, as a baseline. The results of these were compared with those from tests taken in the summer and autumn terms of 2020. A summary of the research's findings concludes:

> The attainment gap at the end of Key Stage 2 already stood at around 0.50 effect size units before the pandemic – the equivalent of six month's progress – so disadvantaged pupils can ill afford to fall any further behind.
>
> We found that the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils widened by the equivalent of one month in maths (0.07 effect size units) between Autumn 2019 and Autumn 2020. We didn't find any change in the gap in reading. [45]

A September 2021 research report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) looked at how the learning experiences of children evolved over the period March 2020 to March 2021, drawing on survey data. Key findings included:

- Both the amount and quality of learning time was greater during the second national lockdown (in early 2021) than in the original March 2020 lockdown. However, even by the second lockdown, around 40% of children were spending less time on remote learning than recommended by the DfE.
- Whereas in a normal term, children could be expected to have less than 3 days of absence, during the autumn 2020 term children lost an average of 8 days' on-site schooling.
- On remote learning time during the spring 2021 closures, there was "little or no" gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. However, during the autumn 2020 term, when pupils were attending but may have

[44] Education Endowment Foundation, "Best evidence on impact of Covid-19 on pupil attainment", accessed 4 March 2022

[45] FFT Education Datalab, "Have disadvantaged pupils fallen further behind during the pandemic?", 7 May 2021. The full report is published by the Education Endowment Foundation

had to self-isolate, "poorer pupils spent longer in self-isolation and had less access to school provisions when doing so".[46]

3.5 Further reading on impacts of pandemic on learning and wellbeing

UK evidence

- Sutton Trust, Covid-19 impacts: school shutdown, 20 April 2020
- Centre for Economic Performance, Covid-19 school shutdowns: What will they do to our children's education?, May 2020
- Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, Home schooling during lockdown: inequalities in inputs and perceptions, 5 June 2020
- YouGov, How are parents coping with home schooling?, 8 June 2020
- UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Parental involvement in home schooling and developmental play during lockdown [PDF], July 2020
- IFS, Primary school closures created substantial inequality in time spent learning between pupils from poorer and better-off families, 17 August 2020
- POST, Covid-19 and the disadvantage gap, 1 September 2020
- Education Policy Institute, Education policy responses across the UK to the pandemic, 9 October 2020
- National Foundation for Educational Research, How prepared were primary teachers and pupils in England for the shift to online learning? Insights from TIMSS 2019, 8 December 2020
- Observatory of Children's Rights in Scotland, Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the Response to Covid-19 in Scotland, July 2020.
- Sutton Trust, Learning in lockdown, 21 January 2021
- Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'The return to school and catch-up policies', 7 March 2021

[46] Sarah Cattan and colleagues for the Institute for Fiscal Studies, "Home learning experiences through the COVID-19 pandemic", 6 September 2021: summary article

- Education Policy Institute, Analysis paper: preliminary research findings on education recovery, 20 April 2021
- Education Endowment Foundation, The impact of Covid-19 on School Starters: Interim briefing. Parent and school concerns about children starting school, 1 April 2021.
- FFT Education Datalab, Have disadvantaged pupils fallen further behind during the pandemic?, 7 May 2021
- Education Policy Institute, Education recovery and resilience in England, 14 May 2021
- Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning for the Department for Education, Understanding progress in the 2020 to 2021 academic year: findings from the summer term and summary of all previous findings, 29 October 2021

International evidence

- UNESCO interactive map on global school closures
- UNESCO interactive map on school feeding and school meals during the pandemic.
- Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD), Ten principles for effective and equitable educational recovery from COVID, 2021.

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