

Schools' responses to Covid-19

Key findings from the Wave 1 survey

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Introduction

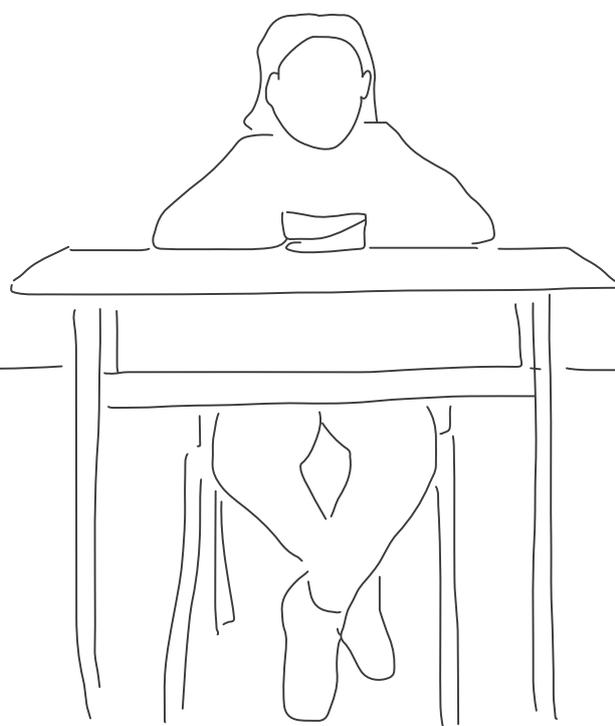
The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on all areas of society, including education. On 20 March 2020, the British Government ordered all schools to close to all pupils, except vulnerable children¹ and the children of keyworkers (such as those working in public health, transport and supplying food). National examinations were also cancelled. As a result, schools have been unable to carry out their normal activities in supporting pupils' learning and well-being, or in preparing them for transition to the next phase of their education. This represents an unprecedented disruption to the education of children and young people, raising concerns about their education and welfare and the ability of schools to provide effective learning approaches for pupils at home.

NFER has undertaken an independent investigation into the impact of the pandemic on schools in England and their pupils, in order to document the main issues and identify insights for policy and practice. From 7-17 May 2020, we sent a survey to all 20,553 publicly funded mainstream primary and secondary schools

in England. The survey explored schools' responses to the Covid-19 emergency, identifying how they were responding, the impact the crisis was having on pupils and teachers, and whether it was having a differential impact on specific groups. A second survey will be carried out between 8 and 15 July. Details about the Wave 1 survey sample, data collected, and analysis conducted are provided in Box 1.

This paper summarises findings from a suite of published reports. Each report focuses on a specific issue related to the impact of Covid-19 on schools and pupils.

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



¹ Vulnerable children are those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a social worker, or identified as vulnerable by the local authority or education provider.

Box 1. NFER Wave 1 survey of schools' responses to Covid-19

Sample

From 7 to 17 May 2020, NFER collected data via a survey sent to all 20,553 state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. We asked senior leaders (headteachers, principals and deputy headteachers) to complete the survey themselves and pass the survey on to up to two teachers of different key stages (primary schools), or up to four teachers of different subject areas (secondary schools). We received responses from 1233 senior leaders and 1821 teachers in 1462 primary schools (including middle deemed primary) and 691 secondary schools (including middle deemed secondary and all-through schools), representing nine per cent of the 17,170 primary schools and 20 per cent of the 3383 secondary schools in England. We weighted the data to ensure that our findings are representative of mainstream schools in England. Some schools provided more than the requested number of responses, which was also addressed by weighting the data.

Data collected

The survey focused on four main areas: schools' provision of remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and pupils' engagement; schools' provision for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers; staff workload and work satisfaction; and schools' preparedness for opening more fully after lockdown. The survey also asked respondents for some information about themselves, including their job role, time in teaching, gender and age.

Analysis

The NFER team used DfE [administrative data](#) to identify the characteristics of each school, including: phase, proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM), school type (local authority or academy), and region. Weighting used the distribution of the achieved sample relative to the national population of school phase and FSM quintile. Weightings were adjusted to account for the number of responses per school.

The analysis used three main approaches: descriptive statistics for all of the survey questions; tests of statistical significance to identify associations between selected questions and school characteristics; and regression models for pupil engagement with learning, engagement of disadvantaged pupils, work satisfaction, workload, and preparedness for opening schools more fully. Results were considered statistically significant if the probability of a result occurring by chance was less than five per cent ($p < 0.05$).

Reports

This research is producing the following reports on Schools' Responses to Covid-19:

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

A Wave 2 survey will take place from 8-15 July 2020, with findings to be published later in the summer.

Summary

This research reinforces concerns about the limited engagement of pupils with remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and the damage to their education. Whilst schools have gone to extraordinary lengths to support their pupils as best they can, they have been hampered by reduced teaching capacity; constraints on IT resources – for both pupils and teachers; and challenges in teachers' and senior leaders' own home lives. Meanwhile, teachers believe that only just over half of parents have been able to support their children's learning at home.

Remote learning looks likely to continue to be a key feature of our education system for some months, so it is crucial that it is delivered as effectively as possible. It has become an increasing challenge as more pupils have returned to school and more staff have been needed in school for face-to-face teaching or supervision. It will remain a challenge that needs to be balanced carefully with manageable staff workload levels. Although we found that some schools with higher levels of pupil engagement were using interactive remote teaching and learning approaches (such as pre-recorded video lessons or, to a lesser extent, live lessons or online conversations) only eight per cent of teachers said they were using approaches identified as effective by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2020a). Our evidence suggests that wider availability of IT resources (both for staff and pupils) and training for teachers in how to support remote learning effectively may help.

As schools began to open more fully, there were considerable concerns about the longer-term sustainability of the strategies adopted by schools in helping to manage the crisis, including their responses to remote learning and their support for vulnerable pupils. Our research indicates that schools only had 75 per cent of their normal teaching capacity available, with 22 per cent of their normal teaching staff only available to work from home. Schools will need more resources to enable them to provide effective in-school and remote learning activities going forward. They will also need greater levels of support from other service providers to support vulnerable pupils, both remotely, and as they return to school.

Our findings also paint a picture of diverse experiences across different schools and groups of pupils, with a

need for different kinds of support targeted at those who need it most.

Schools serving the highest proportions of disadvantaged pupils had the lowest levels of pupil *and* disadvantaged pupil engagement, and are likely to need intensive support to help them to manage a complex array of pupil needs over the coming months. Pupils in the most deprived schools were likely to spend longer out of school than their classmates. Their parents withdrew them from school more quickly before schools closed, and were less likely to send them back on 1 June (primary schools) and 15 June (secondary schools). Fewer pupils in these schools returned set work; they were less likely to have contact with their teachers; curriculum coverage was poorer; and they had lower levels of parental support and IT access. This highlights the need to target support at the most deprived schools, rather than at deprived pupils *per se*.

Teachers were concerned about the **education and welfare of their vulnerable pupils**. Only 15 per cent of them had been attending school, despite being entitled to do so, and their engagement in home learning was lower than for children eligible for Pupil Premium funding. Almost half of senior leaders were concerned about the safety and welfare of vulnerable pupils not attending school, and all schools were playing a significant role in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils. As schools open more fully and there are increasing pressures on the workforce, these levels of welfare support may become unsustainable. A substantial share of senior leaders (26 per cent) reported a lack of support from other agencies in supporting these children. There is a need to identify why and where this support was lacking and, if it endures, to ensure that resources are provided to schools and other agencies to guarantee that vulnerable children are supported and safeguarded.

As schools open more fully, government, local authorities, trusts and schools will need to work to ensure appropriate and reassuring messaging to parents, to encourage them to support their children's return to school. This is essential if teachers are to start assessing their needs, both emotional and academic, and to put in place plans to help them re-acclimatise and re-engage with learning.

Report 1 – Returning pupils to school

On 10 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced the phased return of some children to school from 1 June. The Government (DfE, 2020a) asked primary schools to open their doors to all children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, who were prioritised because these are in key transition years. Further guidance (DfE 2020b) stated that secondary schools should be prepared to offer Year 10 and 12 pupils some face-to-face support from 15 June. This report focuses on the challenges senior leaders experienced shortly before schools closed to the majority of pupils, and on their level of preparedness for opening more fully from 1 June.

Key findings

At the time the survey was conducted, both primary and secondary leaders had reservations about the practicalities of opening their school sites safely to more pupils after lockdown. Whilst the majority felt that it would be at least 'somewhat feasible' to open to more pupils, a significant minority (around 40 per cent of primary leaders and just under 20 per cent of secondary leaders) felt that it would be completely infeasible. A particular concern for primary senior leaders was their ability to manage a combination of face-to-face

and online lessons (66 per cent of primary leaders felt unprepared to manage this, compared to 52 per cent of secondary leaders). All leaders were concerned about their ability to implement social distancing once more pupils were on site.

On average, senior leaders predicted that almost half (46 per cent) of families would keep their children at home rather than sending them back to school, with primary leaders more likely to think this (47 per cent of families) than secondary leaders (42 per cent of families). Senior leaders in the most deprived schools expected a larger proportion of their families to keep their children at home than senior leaders in the most affluent schools (50 per cent of families, as opposed to 42 per cent of families). Leaders in the most deprived schools were also more likely to say that their school had experienced a significant drop in attendance prior to 20 March, than those in the least deprived schools (73 per cent compared with 56 per cent).

Regional differences

- Senior leaders were more likely to report an impact from Covid-19 in general on their schools prior to 20 March if they were based in the West Midlands (82 per cent), London (82 per cent) and the North West (79 per cent), compared with senior leaders based in the East Midlands (61 per cent).
- Senior leaders were more likely to report that they experienced a significant drop in the number of pupils attending school before 20 March if they were based in London (72 per cent) and the West Midlands (70 per cent).
- Senior leaders were more likely to estimate that a higher percentage of families (50 per cent on average) would keep their children at home if they were based in the North West, compared with leaders in the South West (who estimated that an average of 41 per cent of parents would keep their children at home).

Areas of concern and sources of support

Senior leaders' greatest concerns about opening more fully included:

- managing the movement of pupils to and from school, managing pupil movement around buildings, organising spaces to enable social distancing, and combining in-school and remote learning

A particular concern for primary senior leaders was their ability to manage a combination of face-to-face and online lessons

- getting young children to stay in small social groups, or to follow hygiene protocols, within the constraints of school buildings that are unsuitable for social distancing (primary leaders), and managing split classes and social distancing across multiple curriculum subjects, when pupils are taught by different teachers in different parts of the school building (secondary leaders)
- providing adequate teaching and staffing support for pupils on site while providing good quality distance learning for pupils still at home.

In May, senior leaders had less teaching staff capacity (just 75 per cent of their usual capacity) at a time when they needed more. In addition, 22 per cent of their usual teaching staff were only available to work from home. Senior leaders' preparedness to open their schools more fully was related to staffing. Those who had less of their normal FTE staffing capacity available to work in school in May were significantly less prepared to open their schools in June.

Their main calls for support included:

- clear instructions underpinned by scientific advice about the safety of different activities, coupled with detailed guidance related to their specific challenges (some of which has been provided by the DfE since the survey took place)
- additional resources to provide cover for reduced staffing capacity and essential supplies, including hand sanitising products and equipment such as screens and thermometers.

Implications for government, academy trusts, local authorities and schools

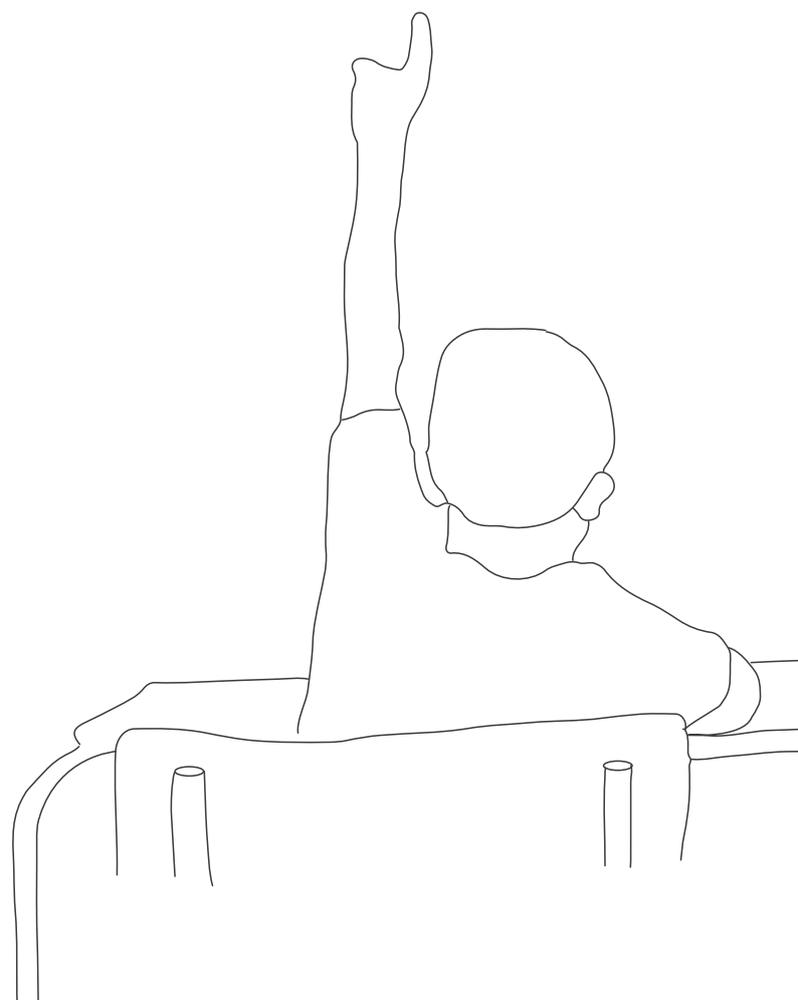
Resources need to be targeted to ensure schools have sufficient teachers, given that staffing shortages are a key barrier to lifting the lockdown. This reinforces the need for the Government, local authorities and academy trusts to ensure schools have adequate staffing and the resources to pay for additional staff if required.

Contrary to government guidance, primary leaders said they would find a rota system more feasible to operate, with different classes or groups of pupils attending on different days, as opposed to enabling all pupils in the specified year groups to return full time from the beginning of June. This suggests that the Government should consider the feasibility of its advice to schools.

While the pandemic continues, it will also be important for the Government, local authorities, academy trusts and schools themselves to ensure appropriate and reassuring messaging to parents, given the extent

to which senior leaders expected parents to keep their children at home during the summer term. Local authorities and academy trusts can also help schools by providing them with advice and access to resources that are tailored to their specific needs. However, this has to be of an appropriate quality. Our report on leaders' and teachers' job satisfaction and workload (see below) found that 30 per cent of senior leaders who had accessed LA support did not find it useful.

Click [here](#) to view the full *Returning pupils to school* report.



Report 2 – Pupil engagement in remote learning

While key transition year groups have started to return to school (DfE, 2020e), many pupils are not expected to return to the classroom until autumn 2020. Remote learning therefore remains at the heart of how schools are continuing to support pupils' learning. This report examines pupil engagement in remote learning and the factors that are driving this, as well as looking at how schools have been providing remote learning support to their pupils and the strategies that are proving most effective in engaging pupils.

Key findings on pupil engagement

While teachers were, on average, in regular contact with 60 per cent of their pupils, less than half of pupils (42 per cent) had returned their last piece of set work. Most teachers (90 per cent) believed that their pupils were doing less work than they would usually expect at this time of year. This reduced level of pupil engagement with learning during lockdown was reinforced by a relatively low level of parental engagement, with teachers reporting that only 55 per cent of their pupils' parents were supporting their children's learning. This reflects the difficulties parents themselves report in supporting their children's learning at home (Andrew *et al.*, 2020). Limited access to IT² at home was clearly a challenge: senior leaders reported that 23 per cent of their schools' pupils lacked IT access and teachers reported that 27 per cent of the pupils they taught had little or no IT access at home.

Teachers were concerned about the engagement of a range of pupil groups, but were most concerned about low engagement from pupils who had limited access to IT and/or space to study at home. Teachers reported that 81 per cent of pupils with limited access to IT, 62 per cent of vulnerable pupils, 58 per cent of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), 52 per cent of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding, and 48 per cent of young carers were less engaged than their classmates. Teachers from secondary schools consistently reported that higher proportions of each of these pupil groups were less engaged than did teachers from primary schools.

The pandemic has caused a substantial deficit in curriculum coverage across schools. Four-fifths (80 per cent) of teachers reported that all or certain areas of the curriculum were getting less attention than usual. However, almost all senior leaders said they were providing guidance on the *type* of work that teachers should be setting (95 per cent), the *amount* of work they should be setting (90 per cent), and *whether* they should be providing *feedback* to pupils on submitted work (85 per cent). Most teachers (two-thirds to three-quarters) rated their ability to offer remote learning support to pupils as 'good or very good'.

Level of disadvantage in the school

Pupil engagement *and* disadvantaged pupil engagement were both lower in the most deprived schools than in the most affluent schools. Just 30 per cent of pupils in the most deprived schools were reported to be returning work, compared to 49 per cent of pupils in the least deprived schools. Contact with teachers, curriculum coverage, parental support and IT access were all lower in the most deprived schools. Senior leaders in these schools were significantly less likely than those in the least deprived schools to have provided guidance to teachers on whether they should provide feedback to pupils on submitted work.

Differences by phase and school type

Although secondary pupils were more likely than primary pupils to return set work, primary teachers were more likely to be in contact with more of their pupils on a regular basis. Secondary schools were more likely than primary schools to be covering the full curriculum and offering guidance to teachers on remote teaching and learning approaches. They were also more likely to be using teaching and learning approaches that are associated with positive pupil engagement, such as virtual learning environments (VLEs) and undertaking 'active' forms of teaching involving some form of interaction between teachers and pupils. However, secondary leaders and teachers were significantly more likely to report having pupils with IT challenges than primary leaders and teachers. Secondary teachers were also significantly more likely to say that the hardware/ equipment provided to them by their school was very poor or poor.

2 This includes pupils with poor broadband access, pupils with little or no IT equipment in the home and pupils who have to share equipment with other family members.

Regional differences

Teachers in the West Midlands had lower levels of pupil engagement than in London. Schools in some of the northern regions of England had lower levels of parental engagement, pupil access to IT, and the proportion of teachers receiving guidance on the amount of work to be set and submitted, relative to some southern regions. Schools in some northern regions were also less likely to be engaging in online conversations between teachers and pupils, or pre-recorded video lessons (both of which are positively associated with pupil engagement) than schools in the south. With the exception of London, northern regions tend to have higher levels of deprivation (see, for example, Dunatchik *et al.*, 2018; Northern Powerhouse Partnership, 2018; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2018). This may have some bearing on these differences.

School and teacher contextual factors

Schools with low prior attainment and senior leaders who experienced a significant drop in the numbers of pupils attending prior to 20 March tended to report lower levels of pupil engagement. Teachers who felt well-supported by their school, and teachers who taught Key Stage 5 tended to have higher levels of pupil engagement; the latter probably due to the greater ability of these pupils to engage in remote learning independently. Teachers aged between 20 and 29 were likely to report lower pupil engagement. This may reflect their relative inexperience and possible lack of confidence, and suggests that this may be a development need for schools to address. Teachers with a good quality home working environment tended to report higher levels of engagement among their disadvantaged pupils.

Findings related to the nature of remote learning support

Schools using a virtual learning environment (VLE) to inform pupils about learning activities – rather than the school website, and those delivering learning content to pupils through online conversations or activities that involve consolidating previous learning or revising, had higher pupil engagement levels and an increased probability of having highly engaged *disadvantaged* pupils. Teachers that gave less attention to all areas of the curriculum than normal had lower levels of pupil engagement.

- **Method of notification** – just over half (52 per cent) of senior leaders said that their schools used VLEs to inform pupils about remote learning tasks, but the most commonly used methods were

emails or texts, the school website and telephone/video calls home. Many schools were also using labour-intensive methods to notify pupils and parents about work, including posting work and even delivering materials in person to pupils' home addresses.

- **Method of delivering learning content** – schools were most likely to be using materials produced by external providers such as educational websites and apps, or online resources such as pre-recorded video lessons. Where schools were providing their own resources, these were generally workbooks or worksheets. Few schools were using 'active' forms of teaching led by the pupils' own teachers, such as live remote lessons or online conversations. Under half of senior leaders reported that teachers were producing their own pre-recorded lessons for sharing with pupils. Only eight per cent of teachers said they were using forms of remote learning which the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2020a) has identified as effective, namely metacognitive approaches, collaborative work between teachers and pupils, or peer learning.

Level of disadvantage in the school

Senior leaders in the most deprived schools were significantly more likely than those in the least deprived schools to be using the school website as a method of communication, making telephone or video calls with pupils, organising deliveries or visits to pupils' homes, and posting work home. They were also significantly *less* likely than those in the least deprived schools to be providing live remote lessons, having online conversations or pre-recording videos of lessons. In contrast, senior leaders in the most deprived schools were significantly *more* likely than those in the least deprived schools to be using workbooks or worksheets. This is likely to reflect the fact that larger proportions of pupils in more disadvantaged schools have limited access to IT resources at home.

Differences by phase

Secondary leaders were more likely to use VLEs and postal services to communicate with pupils than primary senior leaders. Secondary leaders were also more likely than primary leaders to say that their teachers were providing live remote lessons for pupils, having online conversations and pre-recording video lessons. Primary leaders were more likely than secondary leaders to be using educational websites or apps, suggesting that leaders in this phase were more likely to draw on the support of third parties to provide learning content for their pupils, rather than producing it themselves.

Implications for government, academy trusts and local authorities

Our research shows that disadvantaged pupils were half as likely to be engaging in learning activities, and that pupils in the most deprived schools were less likely to be engaged than those in the most affluent schools. This is deeply concerning, given the implications it has for their futures and for the attainment gap. A rapid evidence review by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2020b) suggests that the past decade's progress in closing the gap is likely to be reversed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government prioritised six year groups for a return to school in June 2020, because these pupils were at key transition points in their education (DfE, 2020a, DfE, 2020b). However, our research shows the importance of also getting disadvantaged pupils, pupils in the most disadvantaged schools, and pupils with little or limited access to IT, back to school as soon as it is safe to do so. Through the ongoing period of remote learning, it will be vital to enable disadvantaged pupils to access digital devices in order to avoid any accumulation in disengagement, which would serve to widen the attainment gap still further. There is a strong case for extending the Government's scheme to fund digital provision for disadvantaged Year 10 and vulnerable pupils (DfE, 2020c; 2020d) to other year groups, and to all young people who have no access to IT at home, to ensure that they can access and undertake set work.

Now that many pupils in Nursery, Reception, and Years 1, 6, 10 and 12 have returned to school across split classes, schools have very limited teaching capacity available to maintain high quality remote learning support for pupils in year groups that are still working from home, especially in primary schools. Schools are likely to need additional resources to enable them to support effective remote learning both now and in the future.

Given the positive link between pupil engagement and schools' use of VLEs, there is a need to promote the benefits of these platforms to schools, to increase the number of schools using VLEs, and to support schools to implement them. Government, trusts, local authorities and senior leaders also need to ensure that teachers

have access to sufficient training and equipment to enable them to deliver effective remote learning support and to use technology effectively.

Implications for schools

It is important that schools work towards restoring the curriculum for pupils who are still based at home, via remote teaching and learning. Of course, this will be particularly challenging during a period when schools are dealing with a mixed diet of in-school and remote learning provision. Senior leaders will need to decide how to deploy staff, including teaching assistants (TAs), who are not able to work on the school site to support this effort.

The positive association between teachers feeling well-supported by their senior leaders and pupil engagement reinforces the vital role of leaders. Senior leaders should continue providing this support for all staff. They may also wish to put additional support in place for younger staff, who are comparatively inexperienced and may lack confidence, by, for example, providing them with additional development on effective strategies for remote teaching. Governors, local authorities and trusts also need to ensure that leaders themselves have access to support for their role.

While resources are tight, it is important that schools focus on the most effective means of supporting pupils' learning, for example, focusing on how to achieve high quality *teaching* (with or without interactive delivery methods) as opposed to ensuring that there is a flow of set work. Consolidation of learning and revision activities also have a positive relationship with engagement. Guidance from the EEF on remote learning (EEF, 2020c) highlights that it is important to couple these activities with explicit guidance for pupils on how to manage their own learning and work independently. Teaching assistants can be deployed to support these activities.

As more pupils begin to return to schools, there is also an opportunity for teachers to start the process of re-engaging pupils who have not been participating in remote learning, and assessing where their learning has fallen behind.

Click [here](#) to view the full *Pupil engagement in remote learning* report.



Report 3 – Support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers

Since 20 March, when the Government ordered all schools to close to the majority of pupils, many schools have continued to provide on-site education for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers. However, the level of school attendance for both vulnerable and keyworker children has been low, with only 15 per cent of vulnerable children attending school at the time of our research (DfE, 2020e). This report examines both the engagement of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers in school, and remote provision for vulnerable pupils. It considers the challenges involved in continuing to offer this provision as schools open more fully.

Schools and their staff have been adaptable and have used their initiative in supporting vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The current challenge for them is continuing to provide the necessary support for these pupils, without compromising teaching and learning activities for other pupils as schools open more fully.

Schools were finding it challenging to get vulnerable pupils to engage with them. Not only was in-school attendance very low, but many vulnerable pupils were also not engaging in any other forms of provision. School staff also found it more difficult to keep in touch with their vulnerable pupils than other pupils. Vulnerable children in the most deprived schools were less likely to engage in remote learning than those in the most affluent schools.

The engagement of vulnerable pupils in secondary schools was lower than in primary schools. This raises the concern that some vulnerable pupils may disengage with education altogether as a result of the pandemic. Schools, social workers and policymakers should look to initiatives that will help support the welfare of these young people during the pandemic and encourage them to re-engage with learning.

“ Vulnerable children in the most deprived schools were less likely to engage in remote learning than those in the most affluent schools

Key findings about in-school provision

While attendance has been low, in-school provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers has supported their learning, with many children getting greater support than children learning remotely. Nearly half (46 per cent) of secondary leaders reported that their main approach to supporting vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers was to teach them the same curriculum content that was being sent to pupils who were learning remotely. Compared to pupils learning at home, vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers in these schools may have been at an advantage as they were covering the same curriculum content but with additional teaching support. However, just under one third (29 per cent) of primary leaders reported that their schools' main in-school activities for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers were not curriculum based. This suggests that these pupils could be at a learning disadvantage, relative to their peers learning at home.

Vulnerable pupils attending the most deprived schools were more likely to be receiving pastoral support as opposed to curriculum content than those attending the most affluent schools. While 58 per cent of leaders in the most affluent schools were teaching the same curriculum content as was being sent to children learning at home, this was only the case for 35 per cent of leaders in the most deprived schools. These leaders were also twice as likely to be providing non-curriculum based activities for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers relative to leaders in the most affluent schools.

Key findings about remote learning provision

Most schools were using printed resources and worksheets to support vulnerable children learning remotely, particularly in primary schools and in the most deprived schools. Schools with the highest levels of disadvantage, and primary schools, were less likely to be providing laptops for their vulnerable pupils than schools with the lowest levels of disadvantage, and secondary schools. Although many vulnerable pupils should be able to access computer equipment through the DfE's roll-out of laptops and hotspot devices, this

policy is unlikely to equalise provision given that not all vulnerable pupils are covered by the scheme³, and not all schools will take up the support.

Key findings about welfare support

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have been playing an important role, over and above their usual remit, in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils. Three-quarters of senior leaders reported that their schools were providing welfare support to vulnerable pupils, with most working alongside other agencies to do so. Schools were also offering support by providing food vouchers and parcels (95 per cent), information (83 per cent) and home visits (39 per cent).

Senior leaders in the most deprived schools had greater concerns about the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils than those in the least deprived schools. Virtually all leaders in the most deprived schools (99 per cent) said that they were supporting their vulnerable pupils with food vouchers or parcels. Senior leaders in these schools were also much more likely to be carrying out home visits. However, they were also more likely than leaders in the least deprived schools to be concerned about the safety of their staff when visiting pupils' homes. Senior leaders in secondary schools were more likely to report welfare concerns relating to vulnerable children than those in primary schools, and primary school teachers were more likely to be carrying out home visits.

Implications for government, social services, academy trusts and local authorities

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have been playing a significant role in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils. As schools open more fully and there are increasing pressures on the school workforce, these levels of welfare support

may become unsustainable. Given that the impacts of the pandemic are likely to persist for some time, clear guidelines on the role of schools and other agencies are needed to ensure that the needs of vulnerable pupils are appropriately met. At the time of the survey, a substantial share of senior leaders (26 per cent) reported a lack of support from other agencies in supporting these children. Policymakers need to identify why and where this support was lacking and, if its absence persists, ensure that resources are provided to schools and other agencies to guarantee that vulnerable pupils are supported.

Policymakers should consider the different challenges in supporting vulnerable pupils across different contexts. Challenges vary between primary and secondary schools in terms of engagement, learning support and welfare needs. Further, the most deprived schools are likely to require a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources in order to support their vulnerable pupils. It is essential that policy solutions are targeted here.

Implications for school leaders

In-school provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers has generally supported their learning. However, just under one third of primary schools providing on-site facilities for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers (29 per cent) have not been covering curriculum content. These pupils were disproportionately likely to be in the most deprived schools, particularly in the North of England.

This research has shown that, while schools have done much to support their vulnerable pupils during the pandemic, senior leaders and teachers now face a difficult task in re-engaging the large share of vulnerable pupils who have disengaged from education, while balancing their welfare needs with the challenges of opening schools more fully.

Click [here](#) to view the full *Support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers* report.



³ The scheme extends to vulnerable children who have a social worker or are care leavers: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Report 4 – Job satisfaction and workload of teachers and senior leaders

Prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, England faced a considerable teacher recruitment and retention challenge. The last ten years have been characterised by insufficient numbers of new teachers joining the profession and an increasing proportion leaving the state sector, particularly in secondary schools (DfE, 2018).

This report considers the impact of the pandemic on senior leaders' and teachers' levels of job satisfaction, their sense of control over teaching and learning practices, their weekly working hours, the manageability of those hours and, ultimately, how these things might impact on retention in the longer term. In doing so, it outlines the key pressures and challenges leaders and teachers have been facing, together with the support mechanisms they have been using to help them get through the current crisis.

The research found that, on average, senior leaders and teachers were working fewer hours during lockdown than they had been in a typical week in February 2020. Senior leaders reported working a mean average of 52.4 hours in a 'typical week' in February 2020, compared to 47.8 hours in the last full week they worked since the lockdown on 20 March 2020. This represents an average reduction of 4.6 hours per working week. Similarly, teachers reported working a mean average of 45.8 hours in a 'typical week' in February 2020, compared to 34.4 hours in the last full week that they worked since the lockdown. This represents an average reduction of 11.5 hours per working week. The reasons for this are unclear but could be due to some leaders and teachers having to reduce their working hours to attend to other responsibilities such as caring for family members. In our first report in this series, senior leaders told us that they only had 75 per cent of their usual teaching capacity available during lockdown. The distribution of working hours was wide, particularly among senior leaders where the majority (71 per cent) were still working more than 40 hours per week, with 41 per cent working more than 50 hours per week.

In terms of the manageability of their working hours, the majority of senior leaders and teachers were finding their working hours during lockdown at least somewhat manageable. However, a notable minority (24 per cent of senior leaders and 14 per cent of teachers) were not. These findings compare favourably to previous estimates of the manageability of teachers' workloads:

for example, in the latest *Teacher Workload Survey*, conducted in 2019 (Walker *et al.*, 2019), 69 per cent of primary teachers and 79 per cent of secondary teachers reported that they 'disagreed/ strongly disagreed' that they had an acceptable workload.

In terms of job satisfaction, most senior leaders and teachers were at least somewhat satisfied with their work, although a greater proportion of senior leaders (31 per cent) were dissatisfied than teachers (22 per cent). Our analysis confirms that there is a significant association between job satisfaction and feelings of being in control of different aspects of teaching and learning practice. Senior leaders and teachers who reported feeling more in control of their work, despite the disruptive effects of Covid-19, were also more likely to have higher job satisfaction. This has positive implications for retention as previous research (Lynch *et al.*, 2016) has shown that job satisfaction is one of the strongest protective factors in teacher retention.

Sources of pressure

It is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic was placing some senior leaders and teachers under additional pressures. Many of these were work-related, but some were personal, such as parenting their own young children, and working from home.

- The main sources of pressure impacting on senior leaders 'to a large/very large extent' were: 'concerns about opening the school more fully in future' (86 per cent), the 'health and well-being of my staff' (76 per cent), and 'directives from government' (67 per cent).
- The main pressures felt by teachers 'to a large/very large extent' were: 'being responsible for estimating pupils' examination grades' (36 per cent of secondary teachers⁴), 'parenting my own young children' (25 per cent of all teachers), and 'difficulties supporting pupils' remote learning' (23 per cent of all teachers).

Sources of support

Senior leaders and teachers were drawing on a range of different sources of support to help them manage the current crisis and were finding some more helpful than others.

4 This response option was exclusive to secondary teachers.

Most senior leaders were accessing support from local authority services (88 per cent), their professional association (83 per cent), and senior leaders from other schools (77 per cent). Most teachers were accessing support from their colleagues/peers (97 per cent), senior leaders from their school (94 per cent), and their union (57 per cent). The sources they found most helpful were:

- **Senior leaders** – among those who had received support from multi-academy trust (MAT) senior leaders, most found this ‘very/extremely helpful’ (61 per cent). Similarly, of those who had received support from senior leaders from other schools, 60 per cent found this ‘very/extremely helpful’. On the other hand, the least helpful source accessed by senior leaders was local authority (LA) services. While 26 per cent found this support ‘very/extremely helpful’, a substantial minority (30 per cent) found it ‘not very/not at all helpful’.
- **Teachers** – the single most helpful type of support accessed by teachers was reported to be ‘my colleagues/peers’, with 73 per cent of those receiving this support finding this ‘very/extremely helpful’. Support from senior leaders was also a significant driver of teachers’ job satisfaction. Teachers were more likely to feel satisfied in their jobs if they felt supported by their senior leaders and local networks, and felt they had control over teaching and learning methods.

Implications for government, academy trusts, local authorities and governors

This research has revealed the emerging impacts of Covid-19 on senior leaders’ and teachers’ workloads, as they started to plan for opening their schools more fully during the 2020 summer term.

The first report in this series found that the pandemic has imposed severe constraints on school staffing, with senior leaders reporting that just over half of their

normal teaching capacity was available to work in schools and a further fifth were available to work at home in May. Even if teaching capacity increases as the immediate impact of the pandemic reduces, opening schools more fully will place significant additional pressures on the available workforce. It is likely to be unfeasible for all schools to provide high quality learning in school, and remotely, whilst also providing on-going welfare support for vulnerable pupils who are not attending schools.

Despite overall reductions in working hours, 41 per cent of senior leaders were still working more than 50 hours per week; a quarter were finding their workload unmanageable; and 31 per cent were not satisfied with their jobs. Governors, academy trusts and local authorities will need to keep closely in touch with headteachers, to support them and help avoid burnout. The education sector cannot afford to lose more senior leaders at this critical time. Government, local authorities and trusts will also need to ensure that schools have access to sufficient teaching capacity.

Further guidance for schools will inevitably emerge from central government over the coming weeks and months. In order to give leaders and teachers a greater sense of control, the Government needs to ensure that new directives are clear, kept to a minimum, reflect the concerns of the profession, and are sensitive to the pressures school leaders are facing.

Implications for school leaders

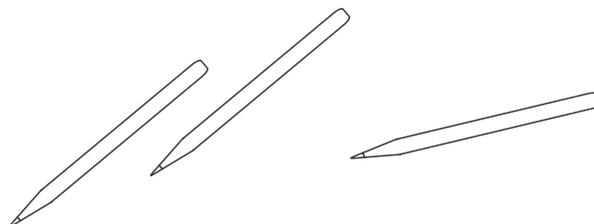
Headteachers will need to continue to monitor the hours worked by their staff, as well as their stress levels, to provide support and avoid problems escalating. They may also need to consider how to use TAs effectively, and address the home working needs of the 22 per cent of teachers who are only able to work from home.

Click [here](#) to view the full *Job satisfaction and workload of teachers and senior leaders* report.



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