



COVID-19 and Social Mobility

Impact Brief #1: School Closures



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KEY FINDINGS

- 23% of pupils are reported to be taking part in live and recorded lessons online every day. However, pupils from middle class homes are much more likely (30%) compared to 16% of working class pupils. At private schools, 51% of primary and 57% of secondary students have availed of online lessons every day, twice as likely as in state schools.
- 60% of private schools and 37% of schools in the most affluent areas had an online platform to receive work, compared to 23% in the most deprived schools. 45% of students had communicated with their teachers in the last week. At independent schools, the figure is 62% for primaries and 81% for secondaries.
- Despite the challenges faced, parents are overall positive about schools. 61% of children learning at home had parents who were satisfied, similar to 65% of those who are still in school as their parents are keyworkers. Middle class parents were more likely to be satisfied than working class parents (66% of ABC1 children v 56% of C2DE children).
- The home learning environment is likely to play an even more crucial role as most learning is now done in the home. More than three quarters of parents with a postgraduate degree, and just over 60% of those with an undergraduate degree felt confident directing their child's learning, compared to less than half of parents with A level or GCSE level qualifications.
- While 44% of pupils in middle class families were reported to spend more than 4 hours a day learning, this was 33% for those in working class families.
- In the most deprived schools, 15% of teachers report that more than a third of their students learning from home would not have adequate access to an electronic device for learning, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools. 12% of those in the most deprived schools also felt that more than a third of their students would not have adequate internet access.
- Parents have also been spending money on their children's learning since the lockdown. While most had spent less than £50 in the first week of the school shutdown, 14% had spent more than £100. 19% of children from middle class homes had £100 or more spent on them, compared to 8% in working class homes. For households earning over £100,000 per year, a third of children had more than £100 spent on their learning.
- Two thirds of children who previously received private tuition reported to no longer have such a service, while a third continued to have tuition through online services. The effect of these changes has been to narrow the 'tuition gap', but this is likely to only be temporary.
- These inequalities are reflected in the amount and quality of work being received by teachers. 24% say that fewer than 1 in 4 children in their class are returning work they have been set. 50% of teachers in private schools report they're receiving more than three quarters of work back, compared with 27% in the most advantaged state schools, and just 8% in the least advantaged state schools.
- Teachers in the most deprived schools are also more than twice as likely to say that work their students are sending in is of a much lower quality than normal (15% vs 6%).
- Schools are already working to lessen the impact of school closures on inequality gaps among pupils. 34% of teachers reported contacting specific parents to offer advice about supervised learning. 21% reported their school is providing pupils with laptops or other devices, with significant differences between secondary (31%) and primary (11%) schools. Most concerningly, 28% of the most advantaged state schools had offered devices to pupils in need, compared to just 15% in the most deprived schools.
- Teachers were asked for their preferred strategies to prevent some pupils from falling behind during the period of shutdown. Over half of secondary teachers cited the provision of tech devices. Another popular option was providing less well-off families with stationery and curriculum resource packs, which could help to address the divide in digital access. Half of teachers also cited some form of staggered return to school, or summer 'catch up classes' for disadvantaged pupils.

INTRODUCTION

The closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges for everyone involved, from the students themselves, to their teachers and their parents. Since the end of March, schools have been closed to all but the children of key workers and specific groups of vulnerable children,¹ with provision for most pupils moved online. However, not all students will have equal access to this online provision, and without additional action, this risks further opening-up already existing attainment gaps, with the impacts felt the most by those from the poorest backgrounds. Issues range from technology and internet availability, to the level of access children have to additional support, and the resources available for schools to conduct remote learning. While children from disadvantaged students will likely need the most help at this time, they are the least likely to have access to the help and resources needed.

Before the current crisis, there was already a sizeable attainment gap between the poorest and richest children, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds already twice as likely to leave formal education without GCSEs in English and maths compared to their better-off classmates.² These gaps open up throughout a child's time at school, with children who achieve high marks at primary school still ending up twenty percentage points less likely

to achieve top marks at GCSE than their better-off peers with the same previous attainment.³

Time away from school risks further widening this attainment gap, with an extensive body of research showing that poorer students fall further behind during breaks from school, such as the summer holidays.⁴ But we are facing an unprecedented situation in this country. It is not a holiday for students, but rather a time when pupils are learning from home, but in extremely different working environments. As such it is difficult to say what the long-term impact will be, but without significant action to mitigate the unequal barriers faced by pupils learning in the home, there is a significant risk that the gap may widen even further.

While some parents will be able to spend large amounts of time supporting their children or be able to spend money on additional tuition or on educational resources, other children will be trying to work in cramped housing conditions, with inadequate access to learning technology or stable internet, and with parents less able to support their learning. Due to the economic impact of the crisis, more children are also likely to be facing challenges which indirectly impact on attainment, such as poverty or food insecurity, along with the stress of financial worries, and some will not have the resources needed to access learning online at all.

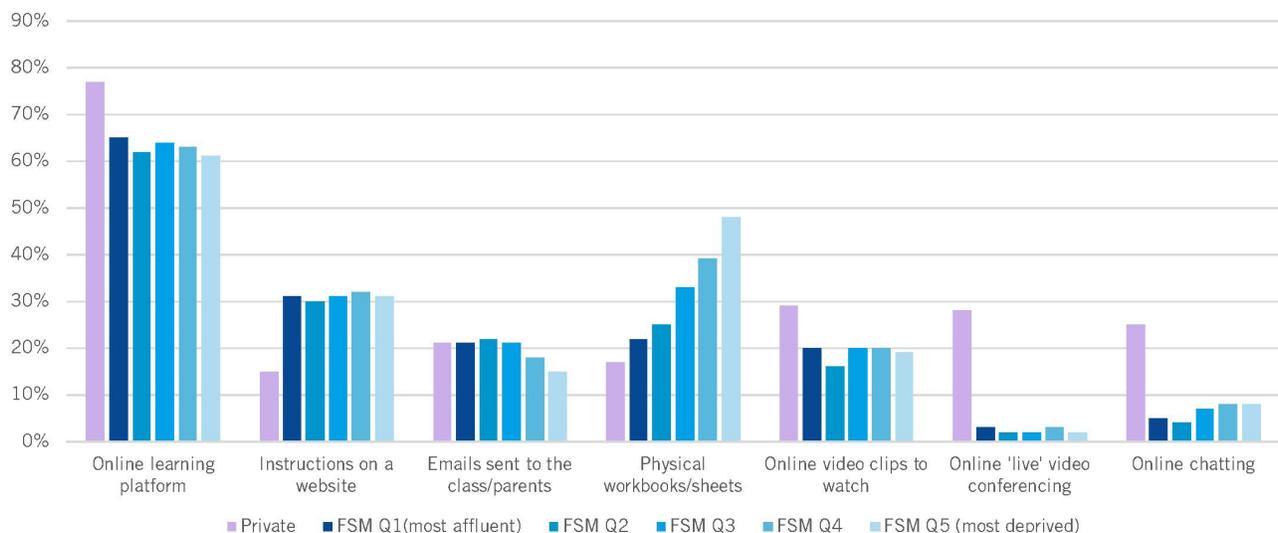
Last week, we released a briefing of our immediate concerns, looking at how the ongoing crisis is likely to impact poorer young people through their time in education and into the workplace.⁵ This brief looks in more detail at the issues facing school aged pupils, with views on the ground from both teachers and parents, including what has been provided by schools since their physical closure, the support pupils have access to at home, the physical and financial resources available to them (including technology, or other support such as private tuition), and the impact this has had on the schoolwork being completed in the home. It concludes by looking at possible mitigation strategies open to schools and the government, in order to try to reduce any impact on the already wide attainment gap between the richest and poorest pupils, and protect the prospects for long-term social mobility.

PROVISION FROM SCHOOLS

On the 23rd March, schools across the country shut down for all pupils but the children of key workers and vulnerable learners. This has had profound effects on both teachers and their pupils, with schools needing to very quickly adapt to a whole new model of teaching and learning at a distance.

The first week after schools had been closed, teachers were asked by Teacher Tapp how they were providing work for a class they would

Figure 1. How teachers were providing work for their classes, by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 23rd 2020

normally teach.⁶ Figure 1 shows that most teachers reported setting work through an online platform (63% of all state school teachers, including 82% of state secondary teachers), with many teachers in the state sector putting instructions on a website (either the school website or a third party). Online learning platforms can offer a flexible and centralised portal for providing audio, video and text content, communicating with students, along with systems for setting, receiving and tracking work.

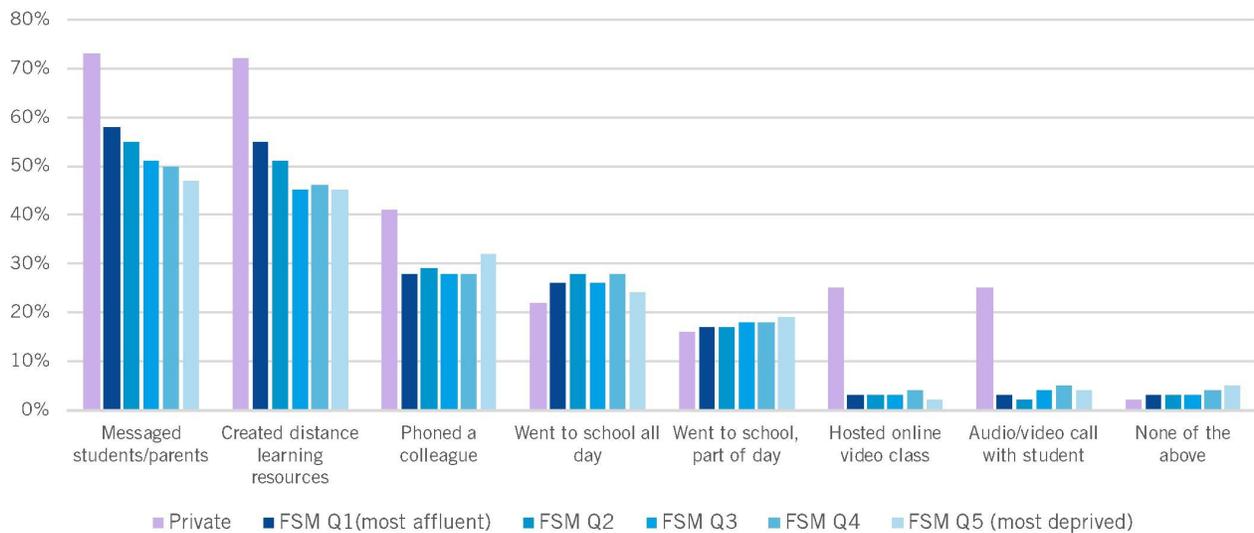
In more deprived areas, schools were much more likely to set work with physical worksheets or workbooks (48% in the most deprived schools,

compared to 22% in the most affluent), potentially due to concerns that many of their pupils may not be able to access content provided online. A substantial number of private schools were offering live videoconferencing (28%) and online chats (25%) between pupils and teachers.

Teachers were also asked which activities they were undertaking during their work day (Figure 2). The most common activities cited were direct messaging or emailing students/parents (52% of state teachers) and creating distance learning resources for their students (48%). But again, there were large

differences by the socio-economic make-up of the school. 58% of teachers in the most affluent schools reported they have direct messaged their students or parents, compared to 47% in the most deprived schools. Similarly, while 55% of teachers in the best-off schools had created distance learning resources for students, only 45% of those in the worst-off schools had done so. Teachers in private schools were most likely to engage in direct messaging and creating resources, and overwhelmingly more likely to have hosted an online class (25%) or an audio/video call with a student (25%), both rare in the state sector (3% and 4% respectively).

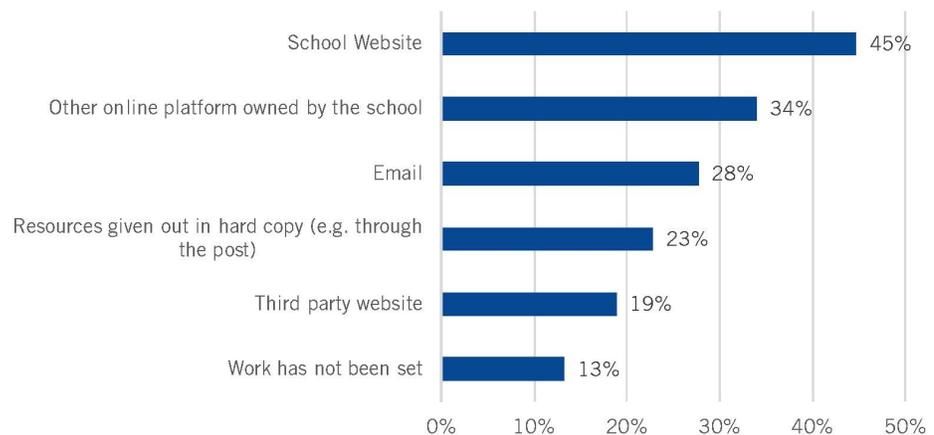
Figure 2. Activities teachers undertook during their work day, by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 26th 2020

These differences in provision are reflected in parents' reports on their children's learning (Figure 3). According to parents, for almost half of children (45%), work was being set through the school website. For 34%, work was set through an online platform. Children at private schools were much more likely to work through an online platforms than state schools (43% of children at primary private schools, and 54% at secondary private schools).

Figure 3. Parent reports of how schoolwork is set



Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

34% of pupils are reported to be taking part in live or recorded online lessons, with 23% doing so at least once every day. Pupils from middle class homes are much more likely to have taken part, with 30% doing so at least once a day compared to 16% of working class pupils. At private schools, 51% of primary and 57% of secondary students take part in online lessons.

Parents also reported that 45% of students had communicated with their teachers in the last week, whereas 50% have not (5% of parents were not sure). At private primaries the figure was 62%, and 81% at private secondaries, underlining the resources available at independent schools, and the personalised support they can offer as a consequence. 51% of pupils in middle class households had received teacher communications, compared to 38% of working class pupils.

This also differed by the age of the student, with about two thirds of 16-18 year olds in contact, compared to about a third of 4-8 year olds.

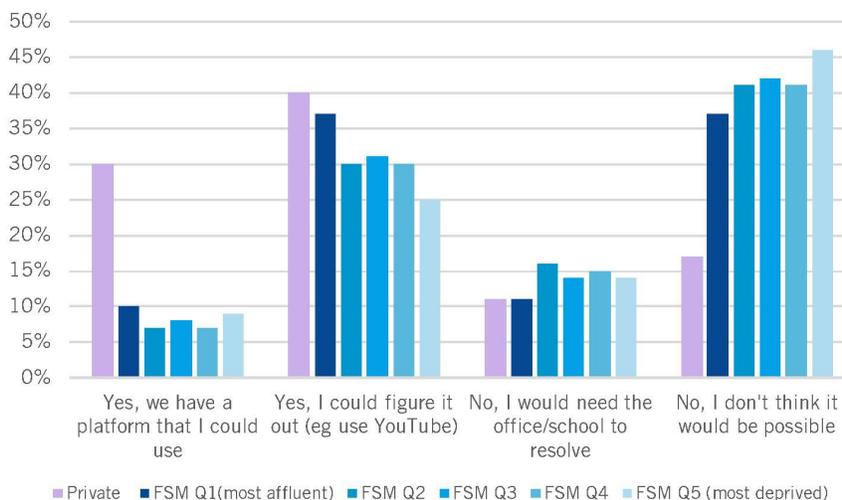
Ready for lockdown

Why have such wide gaps in provision opened up? Before schools were closed, Teacher Tapp looked at schools' readiness to cater for distance learning (Figure 4). Most state school teachers (52%) did not feel able to broadcast a lesson online themselves. Only a small proportion (10%) were already set up to be able to do so, but 32% said they would be able to figure out how to do so themselves.

Many private schools entered the crisis already set up to deliver learning online. Almost a third (30%) of teachers in private schools reported they already had a platform they could use to broadcast a lesson, compared to less than 10% at state schools.

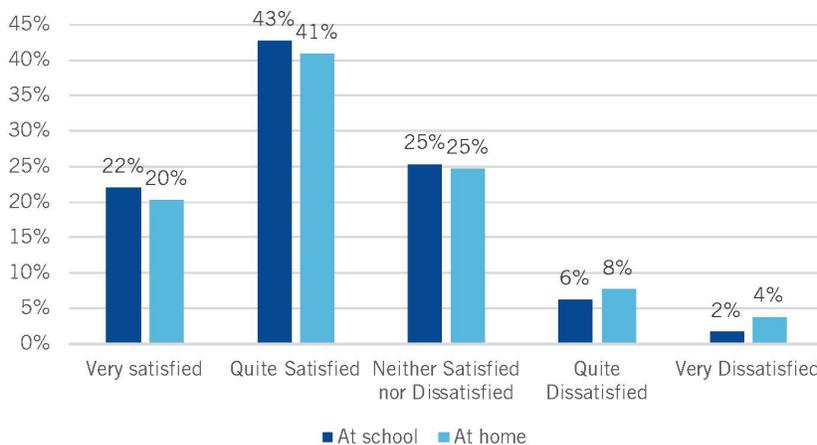
In state funded schools, almost half (46%) of teachers in the most deprived schools reported they did not think broadcasting a lesson would be possible, compared to 37% in the most affluent state schools, and 17% in private schools.

Figure 4: Teachers' anticipated ability to broadcast a lesson to their class before shut-down, by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 3rd 2020

Figure 5. Parental satisfaction with school support, those learning from home v those still in school



When it came to online platforms to accept work from pupils, similar patterns emerged. Again, private schools were much better prepared, with a large proportion (60%) already having a platform to use, compared to 37% in the most affluent state schools and 23% in the most deprived schools.

Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

Despite these challenges, parents are overall quite positive about how schools have reacted to the shutdown. As Figure 5 shows, most report being satisfied with the learning support provided for their child (61% very or quite satisfied, of those with children learning from home). In fact, satisfaction with the school is very similar for the parents

of children learning from home, and the children of keyworkers who are still in school. For comparison, for pupils of keyworkers still in school, 65% of parents report being satisfied (including 22% very satisfied), with just 8% dissatisfied.

There were however differences in satisfaction between parents from different socio-economic backgrounds. For children learning from home, 66% of their parents in middle class families, compared to 56% of their parents in working class families, reported being satisfied with the level of support provided by their school.

SUPPORT AT HOME

With many young people primarily doing their learning from home, the impact of parental support and the home learning environment becomes even more important.

Parents report that 20% of children are undertaking home learning entirely on their own, and 13% entirely supervised by parents. However, for most, it is a combination of both. 29% of children work mostly on their own with some parental supervision, while for 15% it is about half and half. Naturally, this differed substantially by the age of the child, with children under 7 mostly or entirely working under parental supervision, while for those over 10 the majority worked mostly or entirely independently.

Interestingly, there was little evidence of substantial class or income differences in the level of supervision received at home. Children in working class households were slightly more likely to work entirely on their own (21% to 19% of those in middle class homes), but also slightly more likely to be working entirely supervised (14% v 11%).

However, the nature of that supervision varies, with differences in how confident parents were in providing learning support for their children. While 42% of parents overall were confident supporting all of their children, this figure was higher for middle class parents (47%) compared to working class parents (37%). More educated parents were much more likely to feel confident as an educator themselves. More than three quarters of parents with a postgraduate degree, and just over 60% of those with an undergraduate degree felt confident, compared to less than half of parents with A level or GCSE level qualifications.

Putting in the hours

There were also differences in terms of the time children

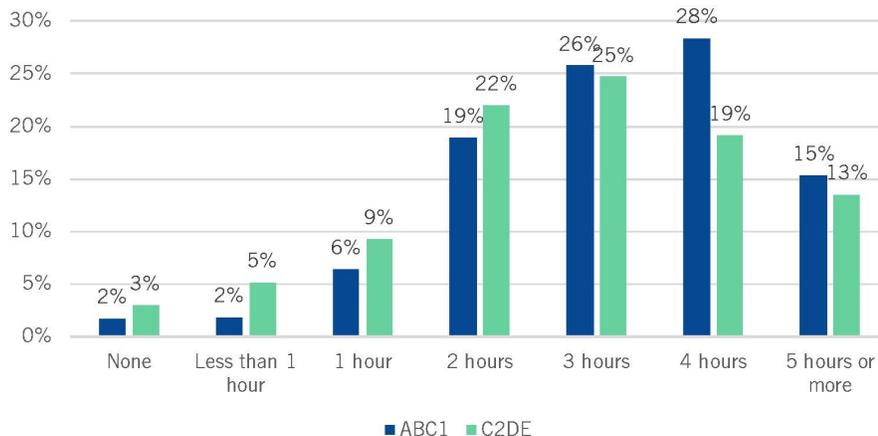
spent learning each day. Overall, the typical child was spending just over three hours per day on learning, with 34% spending two hours or less and 38% spending 4 hours or more. However, while 44% of pupils in middle class families reported spending more than 4 hours a day learning, this fell to 33% for those in working class families (Figure 6). The children of parents with an undergraduate or postgraduate education were also much more likely to spend more time learning per day, potentially reflecting the comfort of such parents directing learning.

Children at private schools are also spending more hours per day on learning. In fact, those at private schools are twice as likely to be

spending more than 5 hours per day on learning than those in the state sector (19% in private primaries v 10% in state primaries, and 35% in private secondaries v 17% in state secondaries).

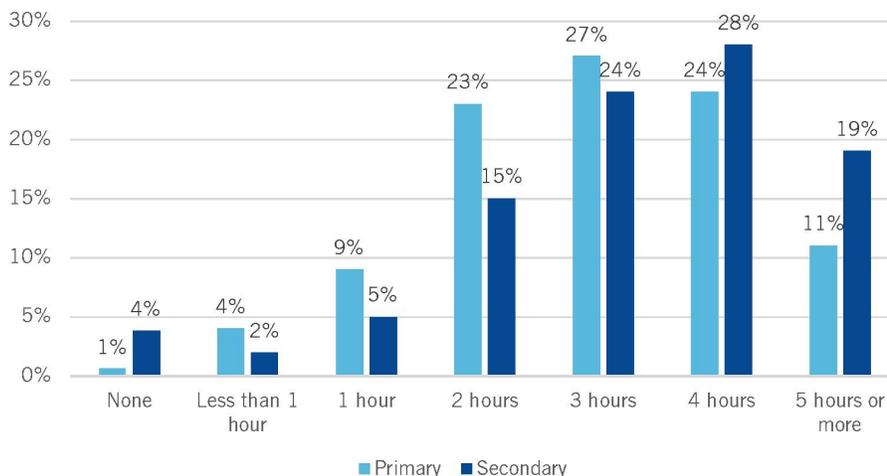
There were also substantial differences for children of different ages (Figure 7), with older pupils spending more time learning. 35% of primary school pupils overall were learning for 4 hours a day or more, compared to 47% of secondary pupils.

Figure 6. Hours spent on schoolwork per day, by social grade



Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

Figure 7. Hours spent on schoolwork per day, by phase of schooling



Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

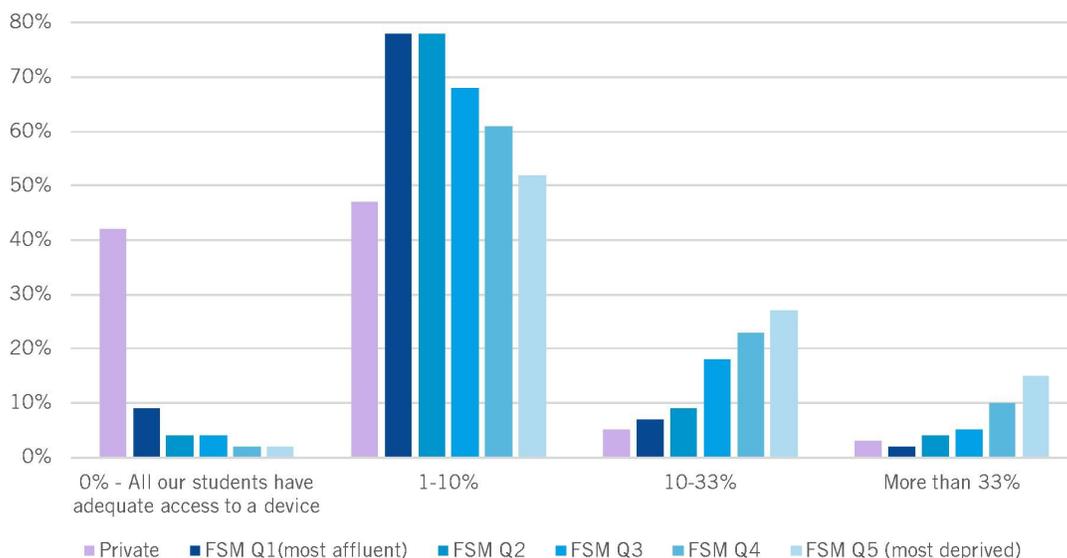
Access to devices

With the transition to home learning, a major issue is access to technology that will facilitate such learning. It is difficult to measure the scale of this issue, because, by definition, such households are difficult to access for research. However, teachers are in a position to understand the often complex needs of their students, and were asked by Teacher Tapp whether they thought their students had adequate access to an electronic device for learning. A small number felt that lack of access is widespread in their class, with 7% of state school teachers overall saying that more than a third of their pupils would not have adequate access to

technology. However, there were again substantial differences by the socio-economic make-up of the school (Figure 8). In the most deprived schools, 15% of teachers thought more than a third of their students would not have adequate access to a device, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools. Notably, a large proportion of teachers in private schools (42%) thought all of their students would have adequate access, compared to a much lower figure (just 9%) in the most well-off state schools, and only 2% in the poorest state schools. Most teachers put the figure between 1-10% of their class, with the median likely close to 5%, a substantial number of pupils over the whole country.

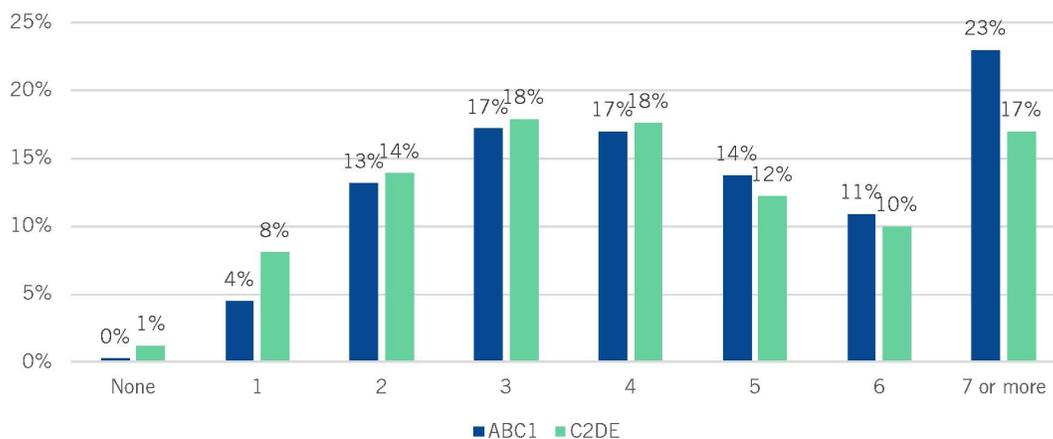
Similarly, most teachers felt their students would have adequate access to the internet for learning purposes, with only 5% saying they thought more than a third of their class would not have sufficient access. But again, a much larger proportion (12%) of teachers in the most deprived schools said they thought more than a third of their class would not have adequate internet access, compared to only 1% in the most affluent state schools, and 1% of teachers in private schools. Teachers in private schools were also much more likely to think all their students would have adequate access, with 38% saying so, compared to only 12% in even the most affluent state schools, and only 2% in the most deprived state schools.

Figure 8: Proportion of children in a teacher's class working from home without adequate access to an electronic device for learning (eg. laptop/tablet), by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, March 25th 2020

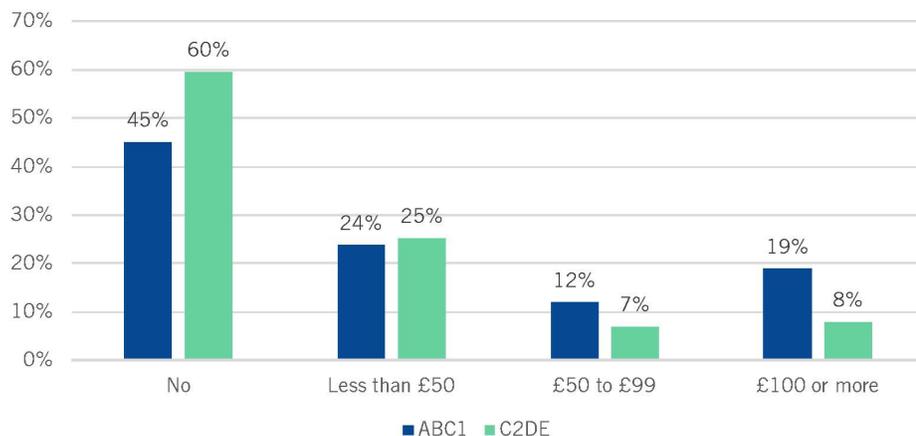
Figure 9. Number of internet-enabled devices in the home reported by parents, by social grade



Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

Parents were also asked about the number of internet enabled devices in their home (Figure 9). The median child had access to 4 internet enabled devices in the household, with 20% having 7 or more. However, as the survey was completed online, the number of households with none, or very few devices is likely to be an underestimate. Nonetheless, there were differences by social class, with children in working class households less likely to have access to a high number of internet enabled devices.

Figure 10. Money spent by parents on children in the first week of school shutdown, by social grade



Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

Spending on learning

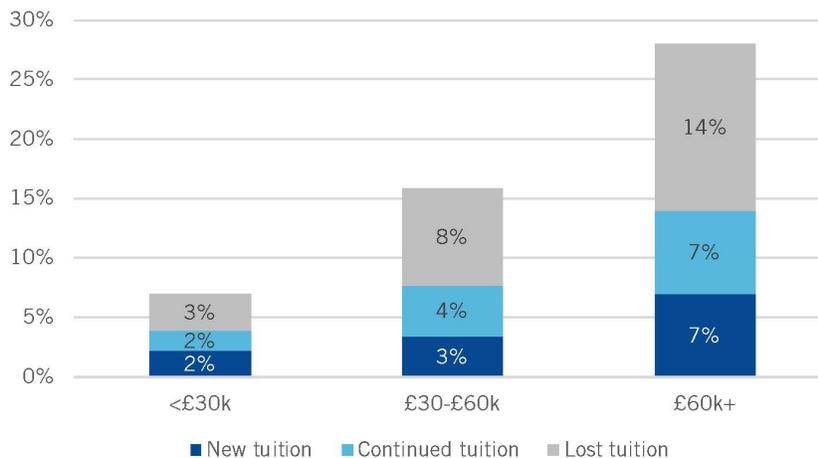
As previous Sutton Trust work has shown,⁷ financial resources in the home play a significant role in a child's learning. This is likely to be even more accentuated in the current period. Around half of children have had money spent by their parents on their learning since the lockdown, for instance extra books or resources, subscriptions to websites or apps, or on electronic devices. 24% of parents have spent less than £50, and 14% more than £100 in the week after schools closed. Of course not all families can afford such expenditure, particularly at a time of financial upheaval, with many parents laid off, furloughed, or losing much of their income. As would be expected, children in middle class households and households with higher incomes were more likely to have had money spent on their learning (Figure 10). 19% of children from middle class homes had £100 or more spent on them, compared to 8% in working class homes.

For households earning over £100,000 per year, a third of children had more than £100 spent on their learning in the first week of shutdown.

Private tuition

Sutton Trust research has shown that private tuition is a key way in which more well-off parents support

Figure 11. Current and previous tuition, by household income band



Source: Public First/Sutton Trust survey of UK parents, 1-3 April 2020

their children

outside of school.⁸

The period of shutdown is unlikely to be different. However, the national lockdown and social distancing policies have delivered a shock to the private tuition industry, with face to face tuition to all intents and purposes currently banned. A rapid transition to online poses problems for tuition companies, as well as schools. This is reflected in the data from parents, with two thirds of children who previously had private tuition reported to no longer be availing of such a service a week after shutdown, while the remaining third continued to have tuition through online services.

8% of children overall were currently accessing private tuition, of which half had previously had tutoring. A

small number of children, 4%, had, since the school shutdown, begun receiving tuition for the first time. The overall effect of these changes has been to narrow the 'tuition gap', but this is likely to be temporary, as parents and tuition companies adapt to the new environment. At the top of the income distribution (for households earning above £100k), 25% of children were now receiving some form of tuition since the lockdown.

Figure 11 shows the changing shape of tuition across the income categories. Children in households earning more than £60k are twice as likely as those earning under £30k to be receiving tuition currently, but the gap has narrowed due to

the immediate decline in private tuition after the shutdown.

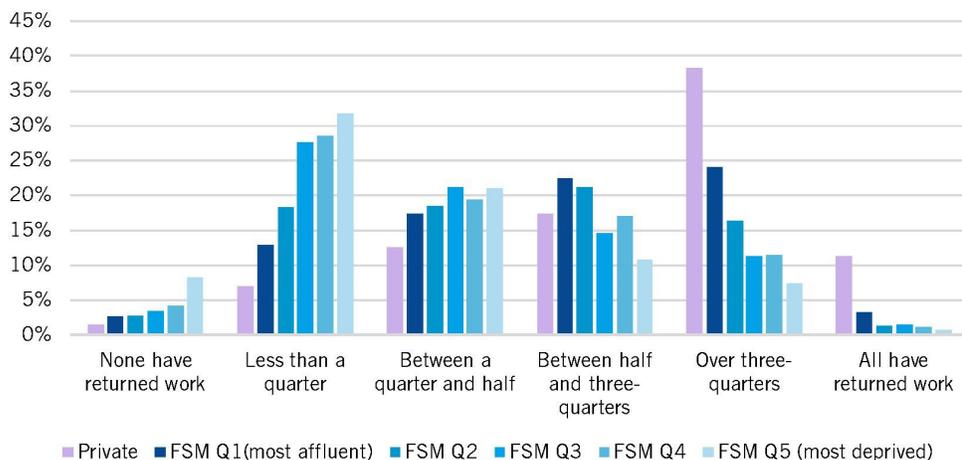
Charities and private organisations who provide tuition to disadvantaged young people are facing significant challenges in the ongoing crisis, with organisations the Trust has spoken to echoing the findings here; that there is an overall reduction in demand for tuition online. Organisations the Trust has spoken to also highlighted safeguarding issues as a key barrier in the process of moving provision online, which will take time to resolve, as well as some concerns that the disadvantaged young people they are trying to reach may not have access to the resources needed (computers/laptops/tablets and internet with adequate data) for their tutoring.

Some organisations said they were using the online tuition platform Bramble to move their provision online, which has been made available for free online to both tutors and agencies for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak.⁹ As all sessions are recorded, the use of this platform is helping organisations with safeguarding concerns, and it makes all previous sessions searchable, so students can go back to topics they have struggled with.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLWORK

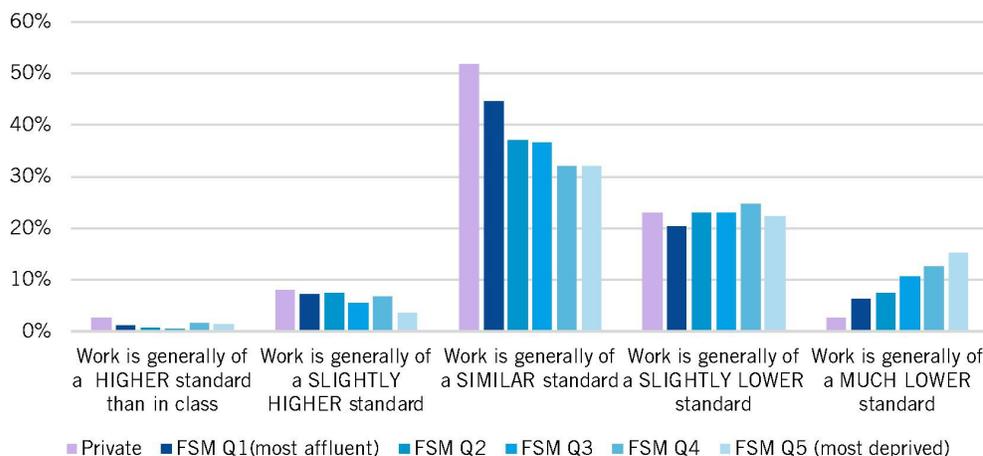
Together, differences in school provision, support in the home, and in financial resources are combining to impact on the quality of learning during the school shutdown. The extent of this impact will not be clear until much further down the line, but it is possible to see now how these

Figure 12. How many students have returned the work that was expected to be submitted back to you, secondary school teachers, by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, April 3rd 2020

Figure 13. Quality of work received compared to the normal standard from that class, secondary teachers, by level of deprivation in school



Source: Teacher Tapp survey of teachers in England, April 3rd 2020

inequalities are reflected in the work currently being received by teachers. The Trust asked teachers, via Teacher Tapp, about the quantity and quality of work they are currently getting back from their classes. Almost all secondary school teachers reported that they are receiving work back from their pupils. However, many teachers are not getting work back from considerable portions of their classes, with around a quarter (24%) saying that fewer than 1 in 4 children in their class are returning work they have been set.

There are also sizeable gaps in whether work is being returned by socio-economic background (Figure 12). In the most deprived schools, almost a third of teachers (32%) are getting less than a quarter of the work

they set returned, compared to just 13% of teachers in the most affluent schools, and only 7% in private schools. Teachers in independent schools were also much more likely to say they had all the work they set returned (11%, vs 3% in the most affluent state schools, and 1% in the least affluent), or a large proportion (three quarters) of the work they set back (38%, vs just 24% in the most affluent state schools, and only 7% in the least).

Furthermore, most of the work teachers are getting back from pupils is not of the same standard as they would receive in the classroom. Much less than half of teachers in state schools (37%) are getting back work that they would characterise as the

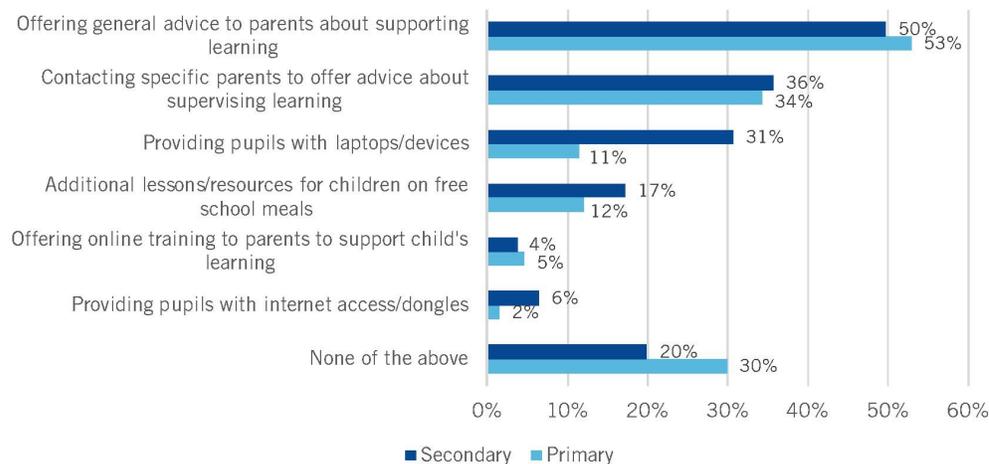
same standard as normal, with around a third of teachers saying the work they have had back is of a slightly lower or much lower standard. Unsurprisingly, very few teachers reported work is of a better standard than normal.

The perceived quality of work teachers are receiving back differed by the socio-economic background of their school (Figure 13), and importantly this is compared to the work they would normally be receiving, controlling for any differences in normal work quality. Teachers in schools with the highest proportions of students eligible for free school meals are more than twice as likely as their counterparts in schools with the lowest levels of disadvantage to say that work their students are sending in is of a much lower quality than normal (15% vs 6%). They are less likely to say work has maintained a similar standard to normal (32% in the most deprived state schools, compared to 45% in the most affluent state schools, and 52% in private schools). While in normal times the school system works to compensate for the disadvantages that many children face due to their social background, the current crisis makes this task substantially more difficult.

MITIGATION STRATEGIES

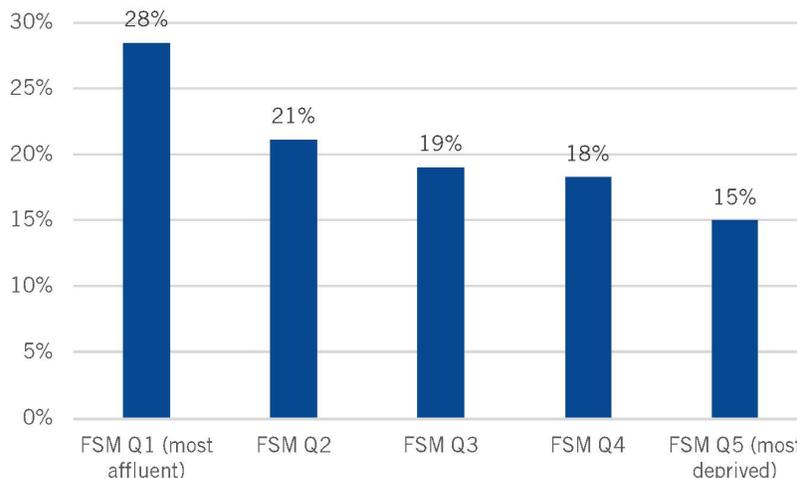
Given these substantial additional challenges, the Trust also asked teachers what they and their schools were currently doing to try to lessen the impact of school closures on inequality gaps among pupils (Figure 14). The most common intervention cited by teachers was giving general advice to all parents about supporting learning, with just over half of teachers in state schools (52%) mentioning this approach. However, other teachers cited more targeted action to reduce inequality gaps between students, including contacting specific parents to offer advice about supervised learning (34%).

Figure 14. Actions being taken by schools to mitigate inequality gaps among pupils



Source: Teacher Tapp/Sutton Trust survey of teachers in England, April 4th 2020

Figure 15: Proportion of teachers reporting their school was providing laptops and devices to students



Source: Teacher Tapp/Sutton Trust survey of teachers in England, April 4th 2020

About 1 in 5 teachers in state schools (21%) reported their school is providing pupils with laptops or other devices to mitigate inequality gaps, although this was much more common at secondary (31%) compared to primary (11%) level. Despite reported problems with internet access, few teachers reported their school was providing pupils with internet access or dongles (just 2% in primaries and 6% in secondaries).

As Figure 15 shows, teachers in the state schools with the most affluent intakes were almost twice as likely to report their school had provided students with laptops, with 28% saying their school had done so, compared to only 15% in the most

deprived schools. This is concerning, given the much greater levels of need reported in these deprived schools. This may be due to a combination of factors, including schools with less affluent intakes potentially having less resources to provide such devices, coupled with a much greater need. Faced with such need, schools may be reluctant to provide devices to some when they cannot do so for all. Furthermore, schools in the poorest areas are facing a situation where many of their pupils have profound challenges, including access to food, so the provision of such basic needs may be taking precedence.

Teachers were also asked their views on which additional interventions they would support to stop vulnerable

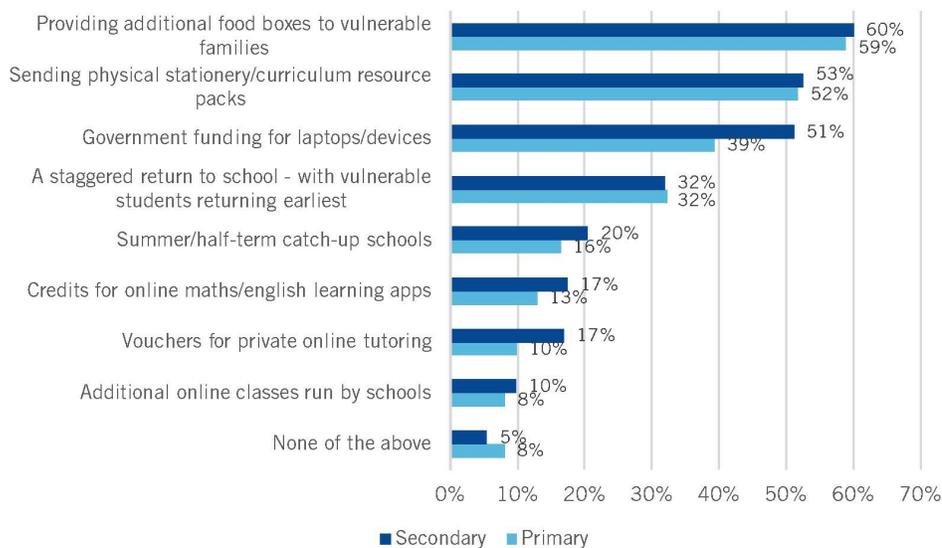
pupils from falling behind in their schoolwork (Figure 16). The intervention most favoured by teachers was providing additional food boxes to vulnerable families, with most teachers (around 60% in both primaries and secondaries) choosing this support. This reflects the level of basic needs that many children face in the crisis.

Other popular options included sending physical curriculum resource packs and stationery (just over 50% of teachers supported this in both secondaries and primaries), which could help pupils who have difficulties accessing learning online, along with government funding for laptops and other devices, addressing the same issue. Support for providing tech was more popular among secondary teachers (51%), compared to primary teachers (39%), potentially because this technology is seen as more essential for older students. Additionally, about half of teachers also supported some form of staggered return to school, or summer 'catch up classes' for disadvantaged pupils, before schools reopen fully, to help all pupils return to school in the autumn on a more even footing.

DISCUSSION

This brief has laid out the challenges facing both schools and government in the coming months in reducing the impact of school closures on children from the poorest backgrounds and making sure that the social mobility prospects of the current cohort are not damaged. From ensuring access to technology, to supporting vulnerable learners to catch up when they return to school, there are a variety of mitigatory strategies which can be put in place to lessen the impact of closures on students. It is a very positive sign that schools have already embarked on such efforts, particularly in such short timescales and facing huge constraints, but there is still work to do, at both a national and local level.

Figure 16: Teacher support for interventions for vulnerable pupils to stop them from falling behind in their school work (up to three chosen), by phase of education



Source: Teacher Tapp/Sutton Trust survey of teachers in England, April 4th 2020

Beyond accessing meals, one of the immediate challenges is to increase the level of delivery of online content, including supporting more teachers to be able to do so. At the moment, provision to students is variable, with students in schools with greater deprivation less likely to have access to more intensive approaches such as recorded or live online classes. All teachers should be given access to training and resources needed to provide high quality teaching to students online, with guidance to ensure teachers in all schools are delivering the best provision available in the current circumstances. The Trust's sister charity, the Education Endowment Foundation, will be working to make evidence available to teachers on the most effective ways to support home learning in the near future.

But high-quality provision is useless if children cannot access it, and another significant challenge is providing all pupils with the equipment needed to learn online, as well as ensuring all have the stable internet connection necessary to access that content. Findings here demonstrate that children from the poorest families are the least likely to have access to the devices needed, and many teachers are concerned that not all their students have good enough internet access at home. However, the poorest children are

also the most likely to benefit most from online content while schools are closed, with working class parents much less confident than middle class parents in directing their children's learning. Enabling access to online learning, for all children who need it, should be a priority for the government in preventing the widening of the attainment gap. Nonetheless, in the absence of technology solutions, schools providing physical learning resources will continue to be vital for some pupils.

Additional tuition also has the potential to reduce the impact of school closures on the poorest students, with tuition known to be an effective intervention to support learning.¹⁰ It is also clear from the data that many private schools have been in a position to offer one-to-one support for students at home. Many tutoring organisations are currently working to move their provision online, but children from the poorest families are the least likely to be able to access this support, despite being the most in need of it. Action from government to increase access to online tuition for these children could play a sizeable role in mitigating the impacts of school closures for the poorest pupils.

It is also important that when schools can re-open, support is put in place

to help disadvantaged children to catch up to their peers. Even with the best quality provision accessible to all students, many pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds will be facing challenges at home which will make it difficult for them to work. Putting in place 'catch up' provision will be especially important for these children, while also helping to mitigate the impacts of time away on the attainment gap for all disadvantaged pupils. This could for example include students from poorer backgrounds going back to school for catch up sessions later in the summer once it is safe, before other students return in September. It could also include additional in person one-to-one or small group tuition, provided to

these students alongside their return to school, to help them to catch up on content they have missed. This may be particularly important for pupils in transition years, especially those entering Year 7.

Underpinning all the issues discussed here is the need for disadvantaged children to be able to access food while schools remain closed. If pupils are hungry, learning cannot be their main priority, and for some a free school meal was their only guaranteed meal of the day. The introduction of the government scheme to provide food vouchers to families eligible for free school meals was vital,¹¹ but reports of schools struggling to access these vouchers and families waiting

up to a week to receive them are of concern.¹² Findings here demonstrate that providing this support is a priority for teachers.

The current situation has landed schools, pupils, parents and government in uncharted waters. The efforts made thus far to secure the wellbeing of pupils during the shutdown have been significant and heartening. Reducing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on educational inequality and social mobility poses an unprecedented challenge, but one which must be met by all of us in order to secure the future of the current generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. While schools are closed, the government should help ensure all children have the resources necessary to access online learning.** This includes a laptop or other suitable device, as well as a stable internet connection. These resources could be provided through a collaboration between the government and companies in the technology sector, and we would encourage any organisations able to do so to offer donations of these resources.
- 2. Disadvantaged pupils should have access to additional one-to-one or small group tuition to reduce the impact of school closures.** The poorest children are likely to be the most impacted by time away from the classroom. Additional tuition to reduce the impact on their learning could be provided both online while schools and closed, and face to face when restrictions have loosened.
- 3. Training should be provided to teachers to enable them to deliver content to students online.** Online teaching being provided to children is currently highly variable, with poorer students less likely to have access to some types of provision. Ensuring all pupils have access to high quality content is vital, so guidance and training for teachers could help to make provision more consistent between schools.
- 4. Schools should consider running 'catch up classes' for children from poorer backgrounds over the summer or when schools return.** Disadvantaged students will be most likely to have fallen behind during closures, with those entering Year 7 at particular risk. Schools should put in place additional support for these students when it is safe for schools to return, either before other students are back, or alongside the resumption of normal lessons.

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