

Data about children's lives in the pandemic

A pilot study on the experiences of children,
families and teachers in England during the
coronavirus pandemic

Contents

About	3
Executive summary	4
Background: school closures during emergency lockdowns	5
Project design	7
Research questions	7
Methods and methodology	8
Quantitative survey	8
Qualitative interviews	8
Online forums: data from Mumsnet	9
Data from Barnardo's	9
Children and young people	9
Limitations of the data	10
Sharing our research data	11
Impact of lockdown on educational attainment	13
Previous research	13
Teachers' perspectives on children's academic performance	15
Differences by pupil characteristics	16
Learning experiences during lockdown: views from children, parents/carers and teachers	18
Parents' discussions during lockdown: insights from Mumsnet data	20
Parents' perspectives from interviews	22
Teachers' perspectives on children's learning	23
Impact of lockdown on socioeconomic circumstances and emotional wellbeing	25
Impact on children's socioeconomic provision/circumstances	25
Teachers' support for children during lockdown	26
Impact of lockdown on children's mental health and wellbeing	27
Data from the Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond Partnership	28
Increasing demand for support	28
The role of schools in referrals	30
Mental health, isolation and loneliness	31
Priority groups	32
Data on parents/carers' mental health: indications from Mumsnet forums	34
Teachers' mental health and wellbeing	35
Conclusions and recommendations	38
Conclusion	38
Recommendations	38
Bibliography	40

About

This report has been researched and produced by the Open Data Institute (ODI), and published in November 2020.

The report's lead author is Christine Singer, with guidance from Professor Jeanette Steemers, King's College University and Professor Cynthia Carter, Cardiff University. The research for this project was carried out by the ODI, in collaboration with three partners: [ODI Leeds](#), a node of the ODI, responsible for the data sourcing, analysis and the open data publication; [Allegory](#), a strategic communication agency that has worked with the ODI for eight years and is responsible for the research project management and communications; and [MyEd Limited](#), a startup that delivered the research qualitative interviews.

We would like to thank the ODI's Louise Burke, Mahlet (Milly) Zimeta, Jeni Tennison and Roger Hampson for their guidance and support, and Ellen Goodman for project management. We would also like to thank Emma Thwaites, Charlotte McLeod (Project Lead), Alex Vryzakis, Kristin Hadland and Emma Foster from Allegory; Giles Dring and Patrick Lake from ODI Leeds; Harmil Pardesi, Professor Upkar Pardesi and Joy Krishnamoorthy from MyEd; and Christian Howes for assisting with data visualisation.

November 2020

Executive summary

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has created new and sudden challenges for the education sector. Extended school closures during lockdown and beyond have put increasing pressure on teachers, parents/carers and pupils. Yet little data exists on the educational and psychological impacts of periods of enforced homeschooling.

Between September and October 2020, the ODI carried out a rapid-response pilot study that investigated what current data could tell us about education during the coronavirus pandemic. It combined analyses of shared and open data with targeted quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, and looked at what these could tell us about the challenges faced by children, teachers and families. It collected and analysed data from a variety of sources, including the government, academia and the third sector. These data sources were combined with analyses of data shared with us from Barnardo's, Mumsnet and Teacher Tapp to support the research findings. The data analysis and visualisations produced as part of this project are publicly accessible via an [interactive web page](#).

The ODI project team helped Barnardo's to curate data they hold into something that could be safely published as open data. We also worked with Mumsnet to understand – at an aggregate level – discussions taking place on its forums. As our analyses of Barnardo's and Mumsnet datasets show, third-sector organisations and social-media platforms that aggregate data they hold – and make it public in a safe and ethical way – can assist other organisations with public-interest research, such as identifying how vulnerable children can be monitored and supported.

All the data sources we looked at agree that emergency school closures due to coronavirus have led to differences in educational progress and learning between pupils from different backgrounds. Teachers, in turn, have been tasked with identifying and supporting pupils who have fallen behind with their learning and re-teaching knowledge from before lockdown. Furthermore, emergency school closures have had adverse impacts on the social, economic and emotional wellbeing of some children and families, and teachers are grappling with increased work-related anxiety.

As a rapid-response pilot project, this research has limitations, including biases in the users of digital platforms and a small data sample of 29 interviews, carried out in the West Midlands area. This research is not comprehensive and not representative of the UK as a whole, and, like all evidence, should be interpreted carefully. Addressing these data gaps, which in turn can reinforce existing social inequalities, is both urgent and necessary in future research.

This project seeks to inspire further research on the impact of coronavirus using new data sources for rapid analysis, and to provide incentives for better investment in our data infrastructure to support emergency responses in the education sector and beyond.

Background: school closures during emergency lockdowns

When the coronavirus pandemic broke out in the UK, the daily lives of teachers, parents and pupils abruptly changed. Schools closed to the majority of pupils at the end of March 2020. The exceptions were children of key workers and children assessed as vulnerable – this includes looked-after children, children who have an education, health and care plan whose needs can be as safely or more safely met in the educational environment, and those who have been assessed as ‘otherwise vulnerable’.¹ Teachers and school leaders had to rapidly find new ways to deliver learning and pastoral care (the provision schools make to ensure the physical and emotional welfare of pupils) while children and families grappled with finding ways to study from home.

Schools reopened to all children in the UK in September 2020, but much about the upcoming school year remains uncertain, including assessments, social distancing measures, self-isolation requirements and the unknown long-term effects of lockdown on the mental health of pupils, families and teachers. Recent spikes in coronavirus infection rates have already led to a pattern of varied, short-notice emergency lockdowns at local, regional and national levels, and a new nationwide lockdown in England was introduced just days before the publication of this report. Wales had already gone into a two-week firebreak lockdown, and Scotland had separately introduced further restrictions on 2 November 2020.

Existing research has provided valuable insights into the impact of school closures during the first nationwide lockdown on parents/carers, pupils and teachers. Studies have identified a range of challenges: a gap in learning and educational progress between economically advantaged and disadvantaged children;² teachers struggling with work-related anxiety and mental health;³ teaching and technical issues with online learning;⁴ and growing evidence of the detrimental impact of school closures on children’s emotional wellbeing.⁵

However, existing research is – with some exceptions⁶ – on average published two-to-three months after data collection has been carried out, leading to a lack of timely data during this constantly evolving situation. There are also gaps in the data on how the impact on education has changed at different points since the coronavirus outbreak in March. Moreover, the source data – data that has not

¹ UK government (2020), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers](#)

² Child Poverty Action Group (2020), [‘The Cost of Learning in Lockdown: family experiences of school closures’](#)

³ Teacher Tapp, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL CEPEO (2020), [‘How did the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic affect teacher wellbeing?’](#)

⁴ Beng, H. S. and Wardle, L. (2020), [‘Teachers’ wellbeing and workload during Covid-19 lockdown’](#). Durham University and School Zone

⁵ Barnardo’s (2020) [‘Time for a Clean Slate: Children’s Mental Health at the Heart of Education’](#). Barnardo’s

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2020). [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 16 October 2020](#)

been processed for use and upon which research is based – is often not published and is therefore not accessible to other researchers.

During an unpredictable crisis like this, access to up-to-the-minute data is more important than ever. Government, teachers, headteachers and policymakers urgently need access to accurate, current data to understand how periods away from school have affected, and are affecting, pupils' learning and emotional wellbeing. Having access to reliably updated data available would help with the development of strategies to assist those children who are hit hardest by emergency school closures due to coronavirus.

Based on a small research sample, this pilot study sought to investigate the data that exists on the impact of the lockdown on education; what we could tell from this data; whether this data is both current and publicly available; and where more data is urgently needed.

This report highlights the need for further research and investment in data infrastructure in the education sector, to provide information and inform decision making in a rapidly evolving situation.

Project design

Research questions

The ODI started this pilot project with desk research in the following areas:

- Existing published research on the key challenges faced by parents/carers, children and teachers during periods of enforced homeschooling and 'blended learning' – a combination of online and offline teaching methods (March–November 2020)
- Identifying gaps in data within this existing research
- Education and mental-health data landscape
- Data needs and challenges to support organisations working with schools, teachers, parents/carers and children

We then established the following research questions:

What are the main challenges experienced by parents/carers, teachers and children during periods of enforced homeschooling and blended learning (March–November 2020), and how can good data infrastructure help schools and other organisations in monitoring, understanding and addressing these challenges, and in providing direct, real-time support to parents/carers, teachers and children?

Sub-questions:

1. What do teachers, parents/carers and pupils at primary and secondary schools identify as the main challenges of enforced homeschooling during the coronavirus pandemic, specifically in relation to:
 - a. Homeschooling, including online and blended learning?
 - b. Coping emotionally with the disruption to education?
2. How do these challenges differ by socio-economic backgrounds of parents/carers and pupils?
3. What, if any, data already exists in the UK that enables us to answer these questions?
 - a. How can this data be made widely accessible?
 - b. What data is missing?

To explore these questions, our research aimed to:

- collect and analyse timely data from different sectors (government, private, third and academic) that demonstrates the key challenges of emergency school closures experienced by parents/carers, pupils and teachers during the coronavirus pandemic
- collect data that shows how emergency school closures had different impacts on different groups of children and families
- highlight relevant data that is currently available for analysis; identify gaps in the data; and encourage/facilitate the wider sharing of the data from this research to make further analyses possible.

Methods and methodology

Research findings should be given weight proportionate to the representativeness and robustness of the data they are based on. In this section, we describe some of the features of the data we have used in this research that influence how it should be interpreted. Further details can be found in the ODI Data Ethics Canvas which accompanies this report.⁷ The Data Ethics Canvas was completed to help explore the implications of the use of data in this research.

Quantitative survey

The ODI collaborated with Teacher Tapp⁸ (an app that asks teachers daily questions to get their opinions on aspects of school life and education) to carry out a quantitative survey. Teacher Tapp asked teachers across England three survey questions, two on 20 October 2020 and one on 27 October 2020, to further test the findings from the open and shared datasets. The Teacher Tapp survey panel comprises 9,000 teachers across the state and private sectors in England. Via an app, and after providing valid credentials, teachers sign up to receive three multiple-choice questions each day at 3:30pm. Teachers are recruited to the panel via social and traditional media, promotion at professional development events, and word of mouth in schools.

The ODI received an aggregated version of this data from Teacher Tapp, including some statistical characterisation of the teachers who responded. This data is aggregated and anonymised, as outlined in the ODI Data Ethics Canvas that accompanies this report.⁹

Qualitative interviews

The ODI's research partner, MyEd, carried out 29 interviews. These were with teachers (10 interviews), parents/carers (10 interviews) and pupils (aged 13–18 years; nine interviews) located mainly in the West Midlands area. MyEd runs an open data platform that helps parents and students search for nurseries, schools, colleges, universities and courses.

The research MyEd carried out for this project is also contributing to an Innovate UK-funded project for the development of MyEd Open School, aimed at connecting teachers with their pupils to enable the continuity of formal structured education.¹⁰

Interviewees were recruited through MyEd's networks and contacts with schools. MyEd carried out the interviews remotely, by phone or video call. Interview participants were told the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw from it at any point. Participation was entirely voluntary.

MyEd sought written informed consent from parents/carers of young people under 18 years to carry out the interviews and publish them in this report.

Online forums: data from Mumsnet

During this project, we collaborated with Mumsnet, the largest parenting website in the UK. Its discussion boards, Mumsnet Talk, receive over seven million unique visitors per month.¹¹ Mumsnet granted the research team access to anonymised

⁷ ODI (2020), [Data on children in lockdown - Data Ethics Canvas](#)

⁸ Education Intelligence Ltd (2020), [TeacherTapp](#)

⁹ ODI (2020), [Data on children in lockdown - Data Ethics Canvas](#)

¹⁰ UK government (2020), [Innovate UK - GOV.UK](#)

¹¹ Mumsnet (2020), ['About us'](#)

data and forum search tools for one week (19–23 October 2020). This was the first time Mumsnet had shared their data for analysis purposes with another organisation.

The dataset was analysed via both an inductive and a deductive approach. We identified the 10 most frequent terms used by Mumsnet users at different points in time – before and during lockdown, and when schools reopened to all pupils (January, April and September 2020, respectively). We also searched for key terms used by people posting on Mumsnet relating to the research questions (eg ‘learning’, ‘safe’, ‘mental health’), across the forums, and how frequently they were used during January, April and September. This analysis aimed to obtain a sense of how parents/carers’ discussions and concerns changed over time, and how these concerns related to the findings from our interviews and surveys.

Data from Barnardo’s

We sourced data in collaboration with the Barnardo’s See, Hear, Respond Partnership¹². Barnardo’s shared aggregated data on its weekly referrals to the See, Hear, Respond service. By late October, the See, Hear, Respond Partnership was delivering support to more than 20,000 children and young people. Barnardo’s shared almost 7,000 records from this dataset with the ODI, which covered the period from 17 June 2020 (when the programme was launched) to 12 October 2020.

Information in each record includes location (at local authority level), week of referral, reason(s) for referral (one or more, as assessed by worker triage), priority group(s) (as assessed by worker triage) and referral channel. In addition, a series of operational details were provided, which we have not analysed due to the time limitations of this project (status, outcome).

Referrals were assigned a random ID in the shared data, which means it is not possible to identify a child who is referred to the service multiple times. The ID is not used in the aggregations. The only conceivable risk to identifying a child would be someone in a region with an unusual combination of needs. To mitigate this risk, we did not aggregate by need or priority group, which could be tied back to a record. Each group and reason for intervention was counted independently.

Children and young people

Children and young people need particular protection when organisations and researchers are collecting and processing personal data about them, because they may be less aware of the risks involved.¹³ As outlined in the ODI Data Ethics Canvas that accompanies this report, we considered the need to protect data about children and young people from the outset of the research, and designed our project with this in mind, for example, by deciding not to publicly share any interviews that were carried out with young people (aged 13–18 years) and by sourcing only aggregated, anonymised data on children from other organisations.

Confidentiality, and compliance with the data protection principles, has to be central to all processing of children’s personal data.¹⁴

Limitations of the data

This pilot research was carried out over a short time period (five weeks), which allowed for sourcing, analysing and publishing timely data that was collected within one month prior to the publication of this report.

¹² Barnardo’s (2020), [See, Hear, Respond Partnership](#)

¹³ Information Commissioner’s Office (2020), [Children: data protection](#)

¹⁴ *ibid.*

Given the limited time and resources available for this project, the findings are based on a small sample of research participants who took part in the Teacher Tapp survey questions and qualitative interviews. MyEd's interviews were carried out mainly in the West Midlands region. Moreover, the Teacher Tapp survey panel constitutes teachers from England only. The data collected through interviews and the survey may, therefore, not be representative of other regions of the UK.

Furthermore, the results of the Teacher Tapp survey represent teachers' current judgements of their pupils' performance rather than standardised assessment results. While teachers typically have a good understanding of their pupils' progress, teachers' assessments could, in some circumstances, be subject to bias related to pupils' gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and special needs. The findings of the survey should, therefore, be interpreted as subjective teacher estimates about pupils' current academic progress, rather than an exact picture of their skills and knowledge.¹⁵

With the limited time available, it was also challenging for the interviewers to recruit interviewees from families with low socioeconomic status, which means that the perspectives of these families are, for the most part, absent from the current research sample. This gap in our data highlights the need to collect more data on different socio-economic groups, as a lack of information on the perspectives of families from low socio-economic status could potentially reinforce marginalisation.

Our research was conducted via digital media platforms, including online surveys, online forum research and video calls. Therefore, digital exclusion – when people are unable to, or choose not to, engage with digital platforms – presents a significant risk of inequality and bias in the data we collected.¹⁶ To an extent, digital exclusion is linked to socioeconomic status, as the ability to access and engage with digital platforms, and the skills required to use digital tools fully, increases with income. In 2019, 51% of households earning between £6,000 and £10,000 had access to the internet at home, compared with 99% of households with an income of £40,000 or above.¹⁷ Families with low socioeconomic status are, therefore, likely to be excluded from research that is carried out via digital media platforms. This data gap ought to be emphasised, since – as noted above – it potentially reinforces existing social inequalities.

Analysing data from Mumsnet forums is valuable in ascertaining what the contributors to the forums are discussing. However, since Mumsnet is an open platform and it is not possible to break down the profiles of people who post on education-related posts, we were unable to effectively eliminate bias in the voices we picked up.¹⁸ One clear limitation is the Mumsnet readership which is 85% female.¹⁹ Mumsnet forum posts are, therefore, likely to represent female perspectives in particular. Furthermore, the research team analysed those posts that were identified by Mumsnet as education-related (tagged with 'e-learning'), which means that it is possible we missed potential targets. In a longer project, we might have been able to refine the set of hits and carry out clustering analyses, which in turn would have enabled better extraction of topics.

¹⁵ Teaching and Teacher Education (2017), '[Subjectivity of Teacher Judgments: Exploring Student Characteristics That Influence Teacher Judgments of Student Ability](#)'

¹⁶ ODI (2020), '[Monitoring Digital Inequality](#)'

¹⁷ University of Cambridge (2020), '[Opinion: Coronavirus has intensified the UK's digital divide](#)'

¹⁸ A voluntary annual census conducted by Mumsnet suggests a core demographic across the platform of 18-45 year-olds of which 88% are parents/carers. 85% are in social grade ABC1 (upper, middle and lower middle class), with 77% being homeowners. 79% of Mumsnet users are in paid work (Source: Mumsnet 2020).

¹⁹ Mediatel (2017), '[Mumsnet founder on anonymity, authenticity and influence](#)'

Mumsnet's privacy policy²⁰ informs users that it is a public rather than private space, and that Mumsnet occasionally shares anonymised data for analysis purposes. The ethics arising from sourcing and analysing data from online forums for research purposes are, however, a subject of debate.²¹ There is currently no consensus on whether the informed consent of users who post on online forums should be sought if their contributions are to be used in research as long as they are anonymous.

As discussed in the ODI Data Ethics Canvas that accompanies this report²², we decided not to seek separate consent of Mumsnet users to use their content in our research, since we were not analysing individual contributions by forum users, but analysing key terms emerging from forum texts; and since users' identities, accounts and individual posts were not revealed and therefore their anonymity is assured. However, we will be holding a discussion on Mumsnet with Mumsnet users about the use of their data in this research project, and how they feel about other similar uses.

As outlined in the ODI Data Ethics Canvas that accompanies this report, it was difficult for us to mitigate these potential biases in the data available to us. This research should, therefore, be treated as a pilot project that, we hope, will encourage further research that provides different perspectives and fill the gaps in data outlined in this report.

Sharing our research data

The data collected for this project is publicly available via a dedicated, interactive webpage and tool, created by ODI Leeds: odi-analyses.odileeds.org. The site allows anyone to explore the data for free, including results from the surveys, Barnardo's site, and the analysis of Mumsnet forums.

Barnardo's and the ODI are exploring options for sharing the anonymised data more widely, to support research within a robust ethical framework. In turn, Mumsnet data was accessed under a data-sharing agreement which allowed the ODI to search and analyse terms under the provision that we only retain data for the duration of the project. This means we are unable to publish the raw data we have analysed. All forum posts are publicly available via the Mumsnet website.

As noted earlier, after completing the ODI Data Ethics Canvas, we decided not to release the qualitative interviews carried out by MyEd, as they contain personal and potentially sensitive information that risks identifying the interview participants, which include children and young people.

²⁰ Mumsnet (2020), [Privacy policy](#)

²¹ Emotion, Space and Society (2018) . [‘What Are You Feeling Right Now?’ Communities of Maternal Feeling on Mumsnet.](#)

²² ODI (2020), [Data on children in lockdown - Data Ethics Canvas](#)

Impact of lockdown on educational attainment

Previous research

Since March 2020, many pupils have experienced disruptions and a reduction in their education, and a marked slowdown in their educational progress. There is very little publicly available data on how pupils' academic performance has been affected by emergency school closures during coronavirus. With exams cancelled this year, A-level and GCSE results were based on teacher assessments, and the DfE did not publish SATs results for 2020.²³ Except for A-level and GCSE grades, little is known about how the lockdown has affected pupils' academic progress, and how the current disruptions to education due to the pandemic are affecting children's learning experiences.

Research by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) provides an indication of how emergency school closures during coronavirus affected academic learning. The study suggested that, on average, just under four in 10 (38%) pupils in the UK experienced full schooling during the first lockdown.²⁴ Furthermore, a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) showed that teachers felt that their pupils were, on average, three months behind in their curriculum learning as a result of the first public lockdown. In a survey of 3,000 senior leaders and teachers at more than 2,000 schools in England, nearly all teachers (98%) reported that their pupils are behind where they would normally expect them to be in their curriculum learning at the end of the 2019/20 school year.²⁵ These results are, however, based on teachers' judgements of children's progress and do not give a clear picture of exactly how behind children are with their curriculum learning.

Existing research suggests that lockdown was experienced differently by pupils from different types of schools. For example, private schools were more likely to be able to provide online resources, live classes and one-to-one contact with pupils than state-funded schools.²⁶ A Teacher Tapp survey commissioned by the Sutton Trust suggested that, at private schools, 51% of primary and 57% of secondary students in England accessed online lessons every day; more than twice as likely as their counterparts in state schools.²⁷

Disruptions to education during the first lockdown also disproportionately affected children from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. Many economically disadvantaged children did not have the digital technology they needed to study effectively from home. An estimated 700,000 children in the UK currently do not

²³ UK Government (2016), The DfE usually publishes results of A-Levels, GCSEs and SATs on a yearly basis, including data on pupil demographics. See: [National curriculum assessments at key stage 2 in England, 2016 \(provisional\)](#)

²⁴ LSE (2020), The findings are based on a representative random sample of 10,010 individuals aged 16 to 65 who were surveyed between 14 September and 12 October 2020. See: [Generation COVID: Emerging work and education inequalities](#)

²⁵ NFER (2020). [Schools responses to Covid-19: The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020](#) (Accessed: 9 October 2020)

²⁶ Sutton Trust, April 2020. ['COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief'](#) (Accessed: 5 October 2020)

²⁷ Sutton Trust (April 2020), ['COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief'](#)

have a desktop, laptop or tablet, and 60,000 children do not have internet connectivity at home.²⁸ A study by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) indicated that families with low incomes were twice as likely to lack technical equipment to support homeschooling (laptops, computers, tablets) during lockdown as families with high incomes.²⁹

A report by the Education Policy Institute suggests that the most disadvantaged children are also the most likely to currently miss the most learning as a result of the disruptions to schools.³⁰ The analysis suggests that in areas with the highest rates of the virus in the UK, such as north-west England, as many as four in 10 secondary pupils were unable to attend school during October. Based on a snapshot survey by the DfE,³¹ the report shows that the overall attendance rate for secondary schools in England was 82% for secondary schools and 90% for primary schools. However, in some areas, attendance was less than 70%. In Knowsley, Merseyside – one of the areas worst affected by coronavirus – 61% of secondary pupils and 78% of primary school children attended school on 15 October 2020.³²

It is possible that the ongoing impacts of coronavirus will further increase existing disparities in children's academic progress. Data from the DfE shows that prior to coronavirus, children from families of low socioeconomic status have worse academic performance than their wealthier peers. In 2019, of pupils who were eligible for free school meals (FSMs) in England, or who were in care or adopted from care, only 25% achieved grades 9–5 in GCSE English and Maths,³³ compared with 50% of all other pupils.³⁴

The NFER study, noted earlier, showed that 61% of teachers reported in May 2020 that there was a learning gap between socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils and their peers that had widened during lockdown, with the remainder judging that this gap had either remained the same (32%) or had reduced (7%).³⁵ NFER attributed the reduction in the learning gap reported by a minority of teachers to non-disadvantaged pupils having lost more learning than their disadvantaged peers, rather than disadvantaged pupils having progressed with their learning during lockdown. It has also been suggested that some children, such as those in care, coped well with the disruption of education because they did not have the pressure of going to school during lockdown.³⁶

There is, however, a lack of timely data that might confirm whether differences in academic progress between disadvantaged pupils and others have indeed widened as a result of lockdown, and which pupils currently require extra support from teachers. While some research exists in this area, the source data is often not shared with school leaders or made open for other researchers or organisations to analyse.

²⁸ The Children's Commissioner for England (2020) '[Tackling the disadvantage gap during the Covid-19 crisis](#)'

²⁹ CPAG (2020) '[The Cost of Learning in Lockdown: family experiences of school closures](#)'.

³⁰ Education Policy Institute (2020). '[School attendance rates across the UK since full reopening](#)'

³¹ UK Parliament (2020), '[Written questions and answer: Schools: Coronavirus - question for Department for Education](#)'

³² Education Policy Institute (2020), '[School attendance rates across the UK since full reopening](#)'

³³ GCSEs are graded 9 to 1, while A-levels are graded A* to G. Grade 9 is the highest grade, set above the old A*.

³⁴ See: '[Key stage 4 performance, 2019 \(revised\)](#)' and: '[Opinion: Coronavirus has intensified the UK's digital divide](#)'

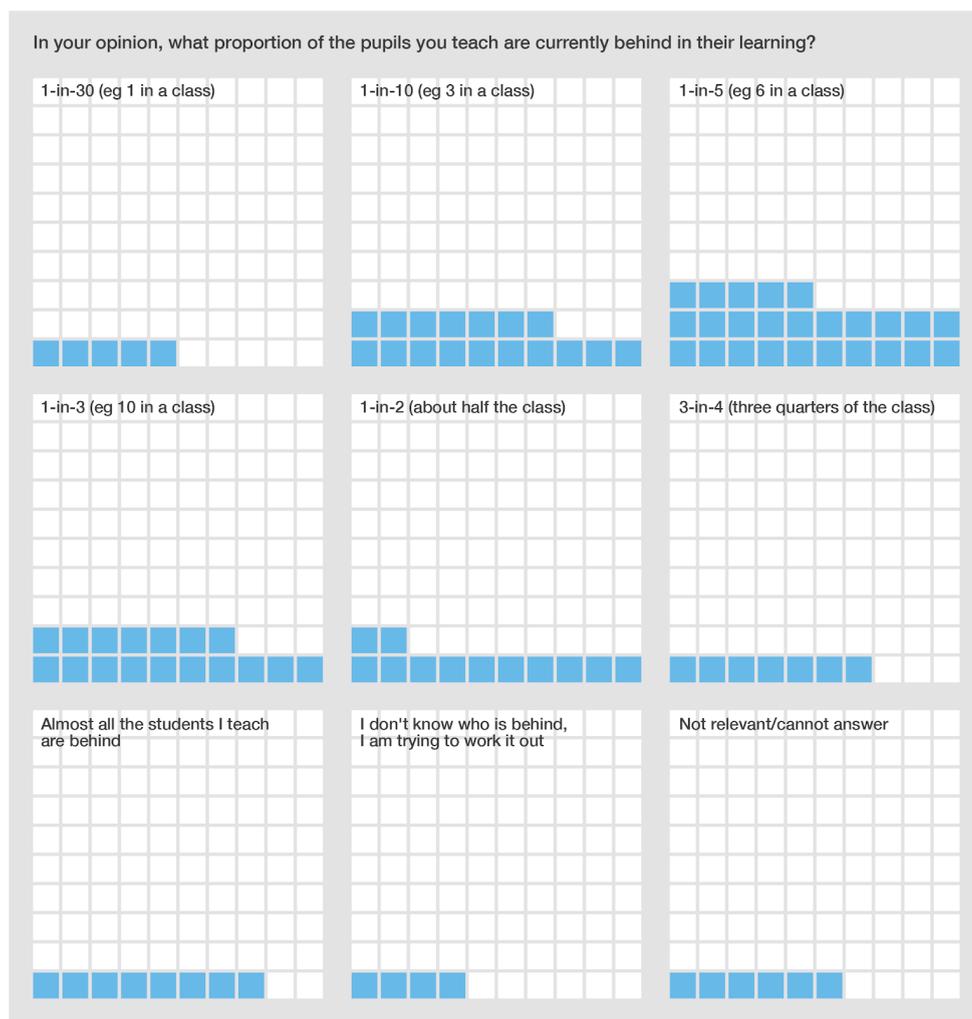
³⁵ NFER (2020), '[Schools Responses to Covid-19](#)'

³⁶ The Telegraph (2020), '[Children in care are 'thriving' during lockdown because they do not have the pressure of school, children's services boss says](#)'

Teachers' perspectives on children's academic performance

In collaboration with Teacher Tapp, we carried out a quantitative survey on 27 October 2020 that asked 6,460 teachers in England what proportion of the pupils they teach are currently behind in their learning. This question aimed to investigate teachers' assessments on where their students should be in their curriculum learning at that point in time, shortly after schools in England reopened to all students following the lockdown.

The results showed that 69% of teachers who took part in the survey stated that one fifth of their class or more was behind. Five per cent of the teachers said that one pupil in their class (one in 30 pupils) was behind; 44% said that one third of their class or more was behind; 12% said that half of their class was behind; 8% stated that 'almost all of their pupils were behind; and 10% said they did not know who was behind or could not answer the question.



- Teacher Tapp survey | Total respondents: 6,460 | Questions asked on 27 October 2020
- [View full-size version](#)

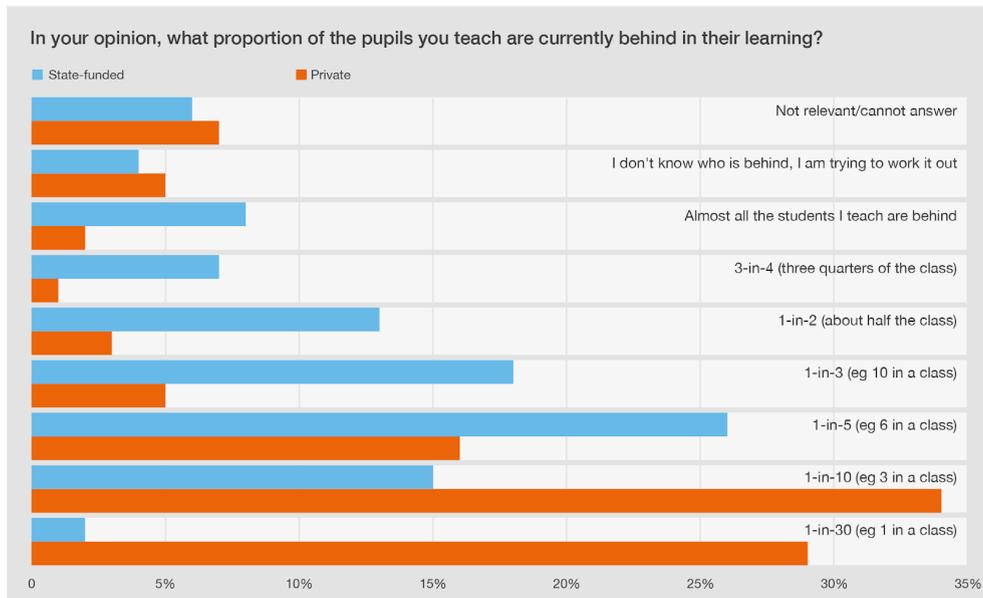
The survey results are teachers' current judgements of their pupils' performance, rather than standardised assessment results. As noted earlier, teachers' assessments can be subject to bias and should, therefore, be interpreted as subjective estimates about pupils' current academic performance.³⁷

Differences by pupil characteristics

³⁷ Teaching and Teacher Education (2017), '[Subjectivity of Teacher Judgments: Exploring Student Characteristics That Influence Teacher Judgments of Student Ability](#)'.

The survey revealed significant differences between the responses of teachers from state schools and teachers from private schools. Just over one quarter (26%) of teachers from state schools reported that one in five pupils are behind, compared with 16% of teachers from private schools. By comparison, one in three teachers from private schools (29%) stated that only one in 30 students (one in a class) are behind, compared with 2% of teachers from state schools.

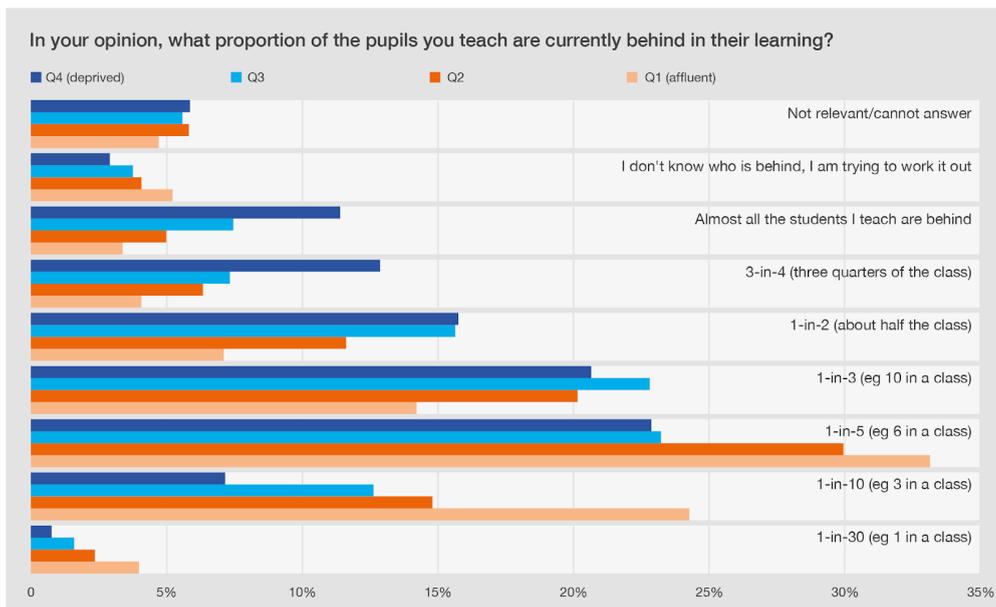
The largest difference in responses was between primary private school teachers and primary state school teachers. Of primary school teachers in private schools, more than two thirds (72%) reported that fewer than three pupils in their class are currently behind in their curriculum learning, compared with just 7% of primary school teachers in state schools.



→ [View full-size version](#)

Teachers in schools with a higher proportion of children eligible for free school meals (FSMs)³⁸ were more likely to report that their pupils were behind in their curriculum learning. Nearly one in four (24%) teachers in schools with a small proportion of children eligible for FSMs said that three pupils per class were behind, compared with only 7% of teachers in schools with a large proportion of children eligible for FSMs.

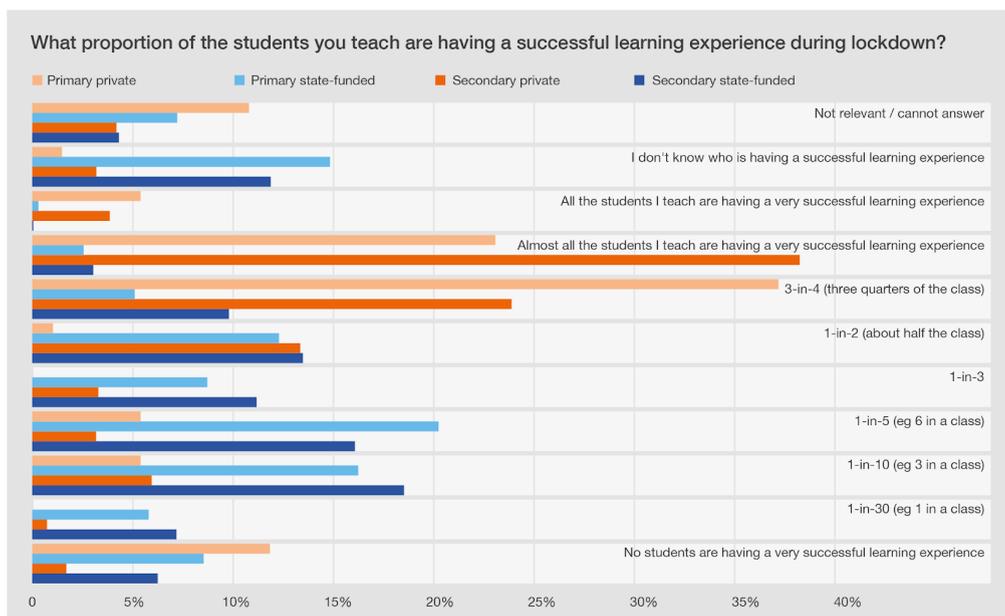
³⁸ Teacher Tapp's weighting includes free school meals quartile: state schools are split into four groups, separately for primary and secondary. The three cut points for primary are: 5.3, 10.4, 19.2, and the 3 cut points for secondary are: 6.7, 11.4, 18.6.



→ [View full-size version](#)

These results indicate that there is a gap in educational progress between pupils from private schools and pupils from state schools, and between schools with a large proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs and with a small proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs.

To investigate these findings further, we asked Teacher Tapp to share the results of one of its earlier surveys on learning during lockdown. On 1 May 2020, Teacher Tapp asked 7,700 teachers across England if they felt their pupils were 'having a successful learning experience at home' (that is, learning as much or more than they would if they were at school). There were variations in the answers of teachers from state schools and those from private schools. While 42% of secondary teachers from private schools reported that all or almost all of their students had a very successful learning experience (at the time when the survey was carried out), only 3% of secondary school teachers from state schools said the same. In turn, 28% of primary school teachers from private schools said that all or almost all of their students had a very successful learning experience, compared with 3% of primary school teachers from state schools. There was no significant difference in responses to this question from teachers from different regions or from schools with different proportions of pupils eligible for FSMs.



→ [View full-size version](#)

While this data gives an indication of the impact of lockdown on children’s academic progress, it does not show how achievements might have changed at different points during lockdown. Since we do not have a reliable baseline from before the pandemic, the same survey question would need to be asked on a regular basis in order to document teachers’ perspectives on different pupils’ educational achievements over time.

What is more, the survey did not consider other potentially important factors that may predict loss of learning for different pupils, including gender, ethnicity, whether they grew up in an economically disadvantaged family (the bottom 20% of family income distribution), pre-lockdown employment status of their parents, and changes in the labour market status of parents during lockdown. Collecting data that takes into account these variables will be crucial in future research; in identifying other reasons why certain children have different learning experiences during lockdown than others.

Our sample of 29 qualitative interviews with teachers, parents/carers and pupils provided insights into factors that could be explored, although it must be kept in mind that the number of interviews is very small and did not include parents/carers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Learning experiences during lockdown: views from children, parents/carers and teachers

In the interviews that were carried out for the project, parents/carers whose children attended a private school reported that the school provided a significant amount of learning resources during lockdown, including a structured timetable, live online classes, online learning materials and one-to-one support from teachers.

Parents/carers of primary school children at state schools had mixed experiences of how their children’s schools provided learning materials and online classes. Some parents/carers said they received a good amount of learning resources and personal support from their child’s school, while others lamented having had insufficient contact with their children’s teachers, receiving insufficient learning materials, and lacking guidance on which online resources to use for

homeschooling. The latter group said that they would have benefited from more guidance from schools on how to use online resources, how to structure learning for their children at home, and how to teach certain concepts.³⁹

Pupils who we interviewed who attended a private school reported having a wealth of learning resources available to them, but some reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the large volume of work set for them. One young person reported spending over five hours on online classes every day. We will explore the impact of lockdown on pupils' emotional wellbeing in the next section.

Teachers explained to us that lack of access to electronic devices was an obstacle to effective homeschooling during the first national lockdown. Five out of the 10 teachers we spoke to talked about their pupils' lack of access to digital technology and/or good broadband connection as a major obstacle to their ability to deliver remote teaching. Children who had to share electronic devices with parents and/or siblings also had less time to study compared with their peers from families where multiple electronic devices were available.

However, not all pupils with good access to online learning resources and online classes reported being able to study effectively from home during lockdown. Some young people we interviewed said they lacked motivation to study from home during lockdown because they did not enjoy spending long periods of time learning on the screen. One secondary school pupil said:



Doing online lessons and work at home meant I was completely on the computer all the time; we were expected to sit and watch the screen all day which is not good for our health and gave me headaches.

Other pupils said that online learning was difficult due to a lack of immediate, face-to-face communication with their teachers and peers. One pupil noted that they found it difficult to concentrate during online lessons held on platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams, as it was noisy and unsuitable for having class discussions. Teachers, too, reported encountering difficulties when attempting to carry out group discussions during online lessons and when trying to provide one-to-one assistance to pupils online. They also said that it was difficult to monitor pupils' attendance when they were studying remotely.

There were also pupils, however, who said they enjoyed studying online because it allowed them to study at their own pace, they were able to structure their learning themselves, and they had fewer distractions than at school.

Teachers suggested in the interviews that children who had a positive homeschooling experience during the first nationwide lockdown often had support from their parents/carers available to them. Teachers reported that children who did not have significant gaps in their learning had parents/carers who managed to make learning at home relevant and engaging, as opposed to children whose

³⁹ This finding confirms the result of a report by the Child Poverty Action Group in which parents reported difficulties in finding appropriate resources to support their children's learning at home.

parents/carers were not able to support their children’s homeschooling. One primary teacher said:

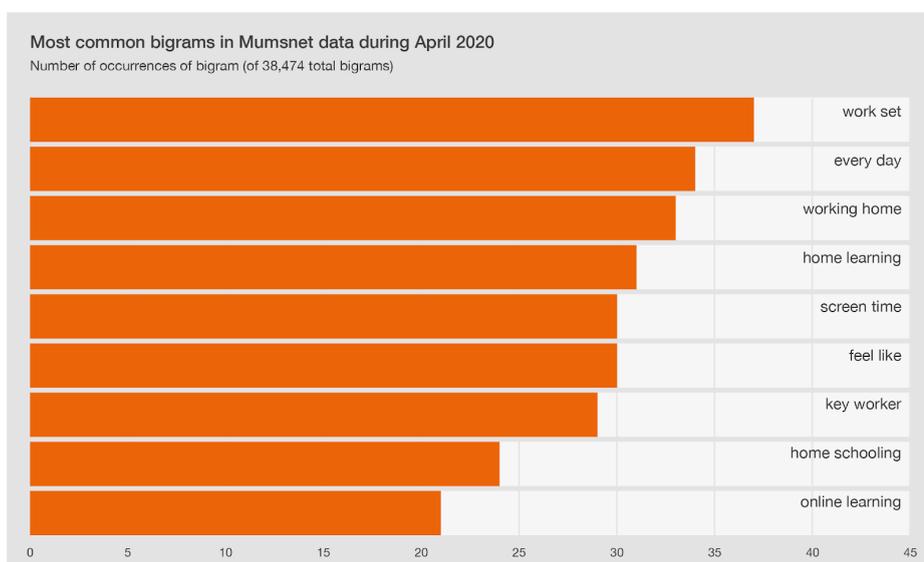


Those [pupils] whose parents were supportive, who made learning relevant and fun and reinforced it [...] did some fantastic things and came back without major gaps. [...] Those that had virtually nothing in terms of support at home and nothing digitally – we had no idea of whether they’d done it well or were making paper aeroplanes of the work. They had definitely lost some key skills, reading in particular.

Parents’ discussions during lockdown: insights from Mumsnet data

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Mumsnet created a new forum, ‘Lockdown learning’, in response to large numbers of users posting to different forums to seek advice about enforced homeschooling during lockdown.⁴⁰ This forum is dedicated to discussions about homeschooling during coronavirus.

Parents’ preoccupation with homeschooling is demonstrated by our high-level analysis of education-related terms on Mumsnet forums. The 10 most prevalent bigrams (a pair of consecutive written words) in April are presented in the chart below. This shows the number of occurrences of the word pairing in all the text analysed from the forum data we had access to.



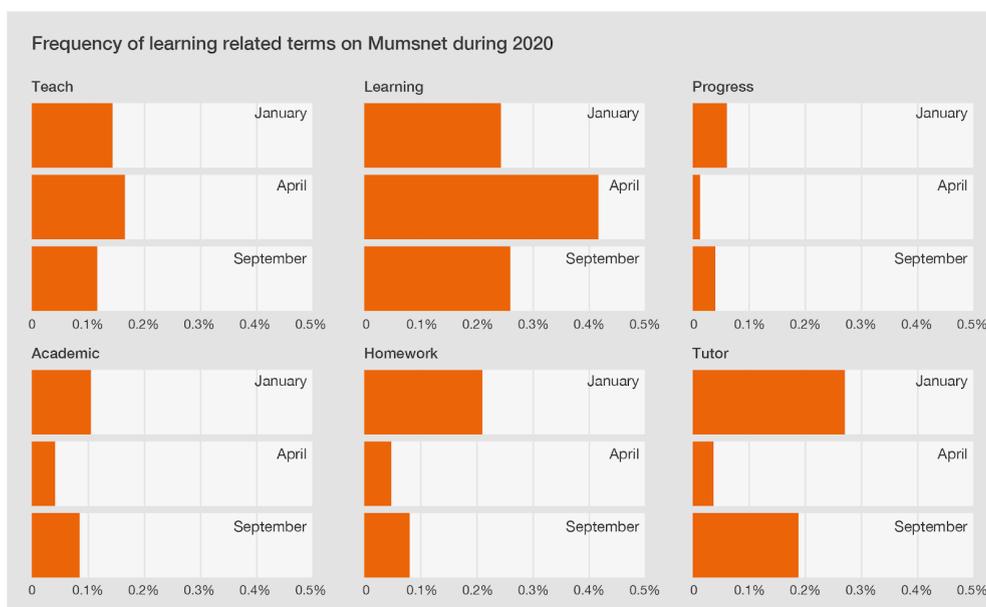
→ [View full-size version](#)

⁴⁰ Conversation with Mumsnet, 12 October 2020.

The most frequent bigrams during April included: ‘every day’ (34), ‘working home’ (33), ‘home learning’ (31), ‘screen time’ (30), ‘key worker’ (29), ‘home schooling’ (24) and ‘online learning’ (21). These terms align with some of the concerns parents/carers expressed in the research interviews, who said they struggled with juggling homeschooling and working from home. These terms show that, as schools closed abruptly, many parents/carers wanted to discuss their experiences of homeschooling and online learning with other parents/carers. In September, ‘sent home’, ‘face mask’, ‘risk assessment’ and ‘go back’ were among the most frequent bigrams, signaling parents’ discussions about their children’s return to school.

The research team selected terms associated with homeschooling (eg ‘learning’, ‘progress’, ‘academic’) and searched for these during the months of January, April and September 2020 across all Mumsnet forums, to identify the prevalence of these terms in each month. In the following assessment, it is the relative change between months in frequency of these terms that is significant, not the absolute frequencies. This analysis showed that ‘teach’ and ‘learning’ had a high frequency in April (0.16%, or one in 625, and 0.4%, or one in 250, of all words used in Mumsnet posts tagged ‘e-learning’, respectively) compared with January and September, where these words did not feature among the 10 most frequent terms. The term ‘progress’ had a higher frequency in September (0.06%) compared with April.

These findings could suggest that Mumsnet users discussed their children’s learning from home during early lockdown in April, and that they discussed their children’s academic progress as schools reopened in September.



→ [View full-size version](#)

Mumsnet’s forum data could offer researchers the opportunity to source data on parents’ perspectives on school closures due to coronavirus. However, the limits of our analysis of Mumsnet’s data ought to be acknowledged. During the limited time available for this project, only a high-level analysis of key terms and bigrams was possible. It is not possible to draw too many general conclusions from this dataset given the random nature of threads that users choose to start. There is also no guarantee that a thread, once started, will attract any interaction with other users, further reducing the robustness of conclusions drawn.

Furthermore, Mumsnet users are predominantly economically advantaged families and those with good internet connection at home. This means that the perspectives of families from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be absent from the discussions. Furthermore, as indicated earlier, 85% of Mumsnet users are female.⁴¹ Mumsnet forum posts are, therefore, likely to represent female rather than male perspectives.

In future research, an in-depth analysis of the meta-narratives emerging from discussions on Mumsnet forums would provide valuable insights for researchers focusing on parents' concerns and discussions in general, and during crisis situations like coronavirus.

Parents' perspectives from interviews

The interviews carried out by MyEd with parents/carers provide further potential insights into the challenges parents/carers experienced during lockdown. The interviews highlighted a variety of reasons why some parents/carers encountered challenges in supporting their children with homeschooling. First, in the context of an abrupt, largely unprepared shift to home learning, many parents/carers continued to work and had limited time available to support their children with their learning, especially if they looked after multiple children at the same time. These parents reported that juggling work and homeschooling was a major challenge during the first lockdown.

Furthermore, parents/carers' ability to support their children with studying depended on parents/carers' own education level. One teacher explained that pupils of parents/carers who lack formal education themselves were less able to teach certain subjects (eg maths) to their children during lockdown. The teacher noted that at their school, many parents were unable to read or write.

Finally, some parents/carers with children with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN) who took part in the interviews said they struggled with supporting their children's learning at home as they did not have the same tailored support and resources available as was normally provided by their child's school.

These interviews could provide important additions and details to data sourced via Mumsnet forums. However, there are limits to the information our interviews can provide. As noted in the [Methods and methodology section](#), the data collected through the interviews is limited as it is based on a small sample of 29 interviews. What is more, this data is, to an extent, biased, since pupils and parents/carers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were under-represented. Collecting data on these families' perspectives through qualitative interviews is both urgent and necessary for explaining which pupils have fallen behind with their learning during lockdowns.

Teachers' perspectives on children's learning

The ODI carried out a survey on 20 October in collaboration with Teacher Tapp, which suggests that teachers are finding it challenging to identify gaps in different children's learning. The survey asked 6,692 teachers in England what they identified as the key challenges of their daily lives as teachers. Participants were able to tick all options that applied to them. The biggest challenges identified by teachers were: implementing hygiene and social distancing regimes (62% on average); identifying gaps in children's learning and working out how to help those in need of extra support (61%); designing remote learning resources for isolating

⁴¹ Mediatel (2017), [Mumsnet founder on anonymity, authenticity and influence](#)

pupils/future lockdown (56%); and having to re-teach knowledge/skills from before lockdown (48%).⁴²

Similar challenges were also mentioned by teachers who took part in the interviews for this project. Some teachers reported finding it challenging to identify which pupils currently have gaps in their academic performance and in which subjects, and which ones do not. This is because they did not know which children had continued to study during lockdown and which ones had not. Other teachers said they struggled with helping children who were finding it difficult to concentrate on learning tasks, following long periods away from school earlier in the year.

Furthermore, teachers told us that coronavirus-related hygiene routines, social distancing measures, and keeping class bubbles separate were taking up a significant amount of their teaching time. This suggests that teachers are currently being tasked with keeping schools 'Covid secure', and that this is taking up a significant amount of planning, maintenance, time and energy.

This survey provided us with data on teachers' daily lives and challenges at a single point in time (20 October 2020). It does not, however, map how these concerns change over time. Collecting this data regularly – through quantitative, qualitative, reflexive approaches and insights from teachers/pupils, and parents/carers – and sharing it or making it open to others, could be beneficial for teachers and school leaders. This data could help schools identify and enable the development of strategies that assist school leaders with responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

⁴² ODI Leeds (2020), [Data about children's lives during the pandemic: interactive visualisations of the survey results](#)

Impact of lockdown on socioeconomic circumstances and emotional wellbeing

Impact on children's socioeconomic provision/circumstances

An emerging body of research suggests that school closures did not only have an impact on academic performance, but also affected the social and economic environment of children and families. Research by the Food Foundation suggests that the first nationwide lockdown had negative impacts on the food security of children from different demographic groups, as many children no longer received free school meals (FSMs). This study was published as part of the joint #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign with Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford.⁴³ Based on a survey of 1,000 children, conducted by Childwise in September 2020,⁴⁴ the Food Foundation showed that 29% of children aged 8-17 were registered for FSMs, and that 42% of these children were newly registered to the scheme. The Food Foundation estimates that an additional 900,000 children have become eligible for FSMs this year.⁴⁵

The survey by the Food Foundation/Childwise also showed that 64% of the children newly claiming FSMs are from households where the main earners were in higher income occupations. Moreover, a report by the Food Foundation published in August showed that 32% of households with children had experienced a drop in income since late March 2020.⁴⁶ This suggests that the redundancies, furlough and loss of income during coronavirus are affecting parents/caregivers from a wide variety of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Allen et al. suggest that, during the first nationwide lockdown, teachers carried out a wide variety of pastoral tasks to continue monitoring and supporting pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. According to this study, teachers prioritised responding to the effects of poverty and food insecurity, including running food banks and delivering food parcels to disadvantaged pupils. Some teachers reported that they gave greater priority to these tasks than maintaining academic performance.⁴⁷

⁴³ Earlier this year, the Food Foundation's research catalysed a joint campaign with Rashford which resulted in a government U-turn on the provision of food vouchers during the summer holidays. This campaign reversed initial plans to drop the scheme.

⁴⁴ Childwise's online survey, conducted between 8-10 September, obtained data on 1,064 children aged 7-17 years from different regions of the UK.

⁴⁵ Food Foundation (2020), [Demand for free school meals rises sharply as the economic impact of Covid-19 on families bites](#)

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Teacher Tapp, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL CEPEO (2020), [How did the early stages of the](#)

However, there is very little open data on children's food security, and it is therefore not possible to analyse the raw data from existing studies any further. In addition, statistics on food insecurity do not provide detailed information on how different groups of children and families responded to these challenges during lockdown, and what may have helped them cope with it.

Teachers' support for children during lockdown

The interviews carried out by MyEd as part of this study suggested that teachers played an important role in helping pupils and families cope with some of the socio-economic impacts of school closures. Some teachers we spoke to told us they focused on monitoring children who were socially and economically vulnerable during the first nationwide lockdown, and that the academic performance of these children during this time was not their major concern. One teacher reported that their school made calls to every family to check on the welfare and protection of economically disadvantaged pupils. Another teacher explained that staff at her school participated in running a local food bank every day during lockdown and once a week in the summer holidays. One primary school teacher said:



We made calls to every family, not just for accessing but for safeguarding. We needed to know our kids were safe. We have some highly vulnerable kids, so our priority was to check their welfare and protection. [...] We wanted them to know that: "My teacher is still there, and my teacher still cares".

It is useful to contextualise these personal accounts with real-time, open data published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This data shows that the number of couples with child dependant(s) claiming Universal Credit rose from 194,943 in May 2019 to 590,462 in May 2020, and the number of single parents with child dependant(s) nearly doubled from 552,912 in May 2019 to 1,035,165 in May 2020.⁴⁸ Furthermore, since March 2020, there has been a surge in applications for Universal Credit in the UK. The number of people on Universal Credit in the UK on 11 July 2019 was 2.3 million.⁴⁹ By 10 September 2020, this number had more than doubled to 5.7 million people, with the highest numbers of people claiming Universal Credit located in London and Essex, North and East Midlands, and North East England.⁵⁰ This data could suggest that many children and families' socio-economic status has been negatively affected since the initial lockdown in late March.

Furthermore, the findings from our Teacher Tapp survey on 20 October 2020 showed that teachers in England are currently providing additional support to pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and to those who are

[COVID-19 pandemic affect teacher wellbeing?](#)

⁴⁸ Department for Work and Pensions (2020), '[Log into Stat-Xplore](#)'

⁴⁹ Department for Work and Pensions (2019). '[Universal Credit Statistics 29 April 2013 to 11 July 2019](#)'

⁵⁰ Department for Work and Pensions (2020). '[Universal Credit: Official Statistics](#)'

struggling with their mental health now that schools have reopened. The survey showed that one third (32%) of teachers identified the need to support pupils who are socially and economically disadvantaged as a key challenge. This response was the same across all regions of England.

Detailed quantitative and representative information on how teachers are currently supporting pupils who continue to face economic hardship as a result of coronavirus is, however, not included in the data collected via the Teacher Tapp survey. This gap in data needs to be filled so that schools and policymakers can identify ways to support these children in the event of future disruptions to education.

Impact of lockdown on children's mental health and wellbeing

During lockdown, children living in unsafe or challenging family environments, and/or children exposed to poverty and domestic violence, may have lost a safe space to learn, previously provided by schools – unless officially assessed as 'vulnerable' and therefore able to continue to attend school. Existing research suggests that the school closures during the coronavirus pandemic have had a variety of adverse impacts on children's mental health and emotional wellbeing. The children's charity Barnardo's carried out a survey in May 2020 with over 100 school staff at primary, secondary and special needs schools. Of the participants, 88% reported that the coronavirus pandemic was likely to have had an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils.⁵¹ In the survey, more than one quarter (26%) of teachers reported that they did not have sufficient information on the kind of tools and resources that can help them support children's mental health and wellbeing, as well as access to social and emotional learning programmes.⁵² Young Minds (2020) carried out a survey of over 2,000 young people which showed that 83% of those who had pre-existing mental health needs felt that their mental health issues had worsened during the first lockdown.⁵³ It also showed that the absence of daily routines provided by the school day, not being able to see friends and teachers at school, and more engagement with social media, exacerbated existing mental health problems.

However, we need more data that provides information on how the effects of lockdown continue to affect the mental health of different groups of children, and what schools, government and third sector organisations can do to support them. Building a better data infrastructure in this area could start with relevant organisations sharing data they hold in a way that protects children's privacy and, at the same time, is beneficial for other stakeholders. We explored what this might look like with Barnardo's.

Data from the Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond Partnership

The See, Hear, Respond Partnership,⁵⁴ led by Barnardo's and funded by the DfE, is a new service developed to provide a safety net for vulnerable children and young people during lockdown. The partnership involves collaborating with schools and charities to identify those children who are hidden from view; that is, those who are not receiving support from statutory organisations and those who

⁵¹ Barnardo's (2020), ['Time for a Clean Slate: Children's Mental Health at the Heart of Education'](#)

⁵² Barnardo's (2020), ['Time for a Clean Slate: Children's Mental Health at the Heart of Education'](#)

⁵³ Young Minds (2020) ['Coronavirus Report: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs'](#)

⁵⁴ Barnardo's (2020), [See, Hear, Respond](#)

are at risk and/or experiencing adverse impacts to their health and emotional wellbeing.⁵⁵ The initiative seeks to connect children and young people, in particular those who are vulnerable and isolated, with services such as online counselling or face-to-face therapy, and to support children with reintegrating at school.

See, Hear, Respond works with more than 80 different voluntary sector organisations, made up of local and national charities, including 30 black, Asian, minority ethnic and refugee (BAMER) specific organisations. All delivery partners record requests for referrals of children via a shared case management system, which was developed specifically for the See, Hear, Respond Partnership. Partners are jointly collating data to create one single dataset that provides anonymous information about children who are being referred onto the programme, the support provided, and outcomes of the referral. This joint approach to data collection recognises the importance of collating and sharing data among organisations supporting young people and children whose mental health and wellbeing is affected by the pandemic.

By late October, the See, Hear, Respond Partnership was delivering support to more than 20,000 children and young people. Barnardo's shared more than 6,000 records from this dataset with the ODI, which covered the period 17 June (when the partnership was launched) to 12 October 2020. Information in each record includes location (at local authority level), week of referral, reason(s) for referral (one or more, as assessed by worker triage), priority group(s) (as assessed by worker triage) and referral channel. In addition, a series of operational details are provided, which we have not analysed in the study (status, outcome). As noted earlier, referrals – but not people – are assigned an ID, which means it is not possible to identify a child who is referred to the service multiple times. The ID is not revealed in our analysis.

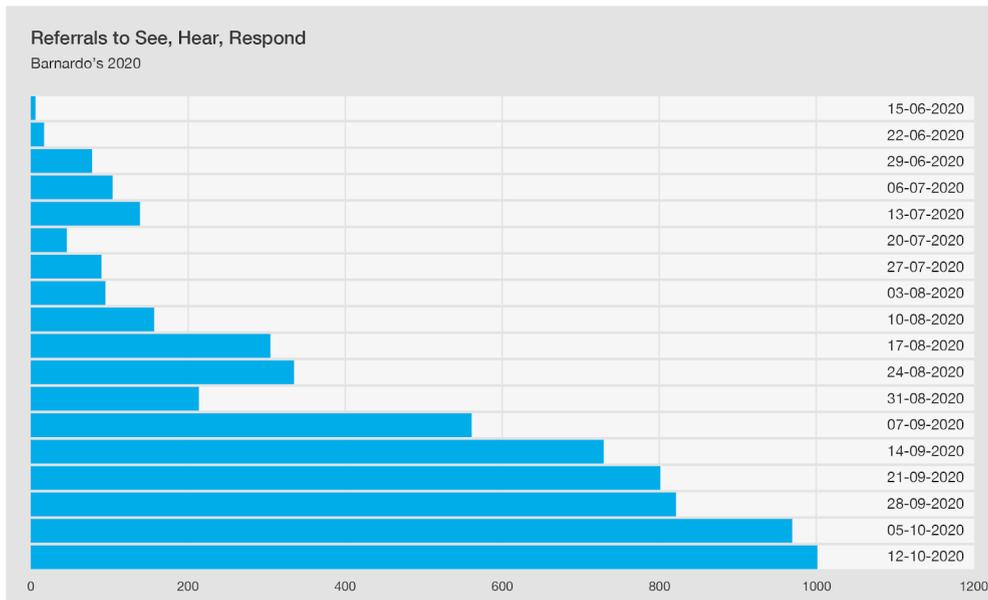
Barnardo's decided to share this data with the ODI so that it could be analysed for trends and to explore how it could be made open in a way that is beneficial to other organisations working with children, while also protecting children's personal data.

Increasing demand for support

From the period 17 June to 12 October 2020, 6,468 referrals of children were recorded on the See, Hear, Respond Partnership secure case management system. These requests were individual referrals (either self-referred, parent-referred or professional-referred). This data does not include children Barnardo's reached in detached street work, including groups of youth workers in public spaces and places who provide emotional and practical support to children. According to Barnardo's, the latter group accounted for a further 12,451 referrals.

The number of referrals to Barnardo's steadily increased between June and October 2020, reaching 1,000 in the week commencing 12 October 2020. The absence of a plateau in the graph below suggests that there is ongoing demand for the support services for children's health and wellbeing.

⁵⁵ Barnardo's (2020) [New Barnardos service launched -See Hear Respond](#)

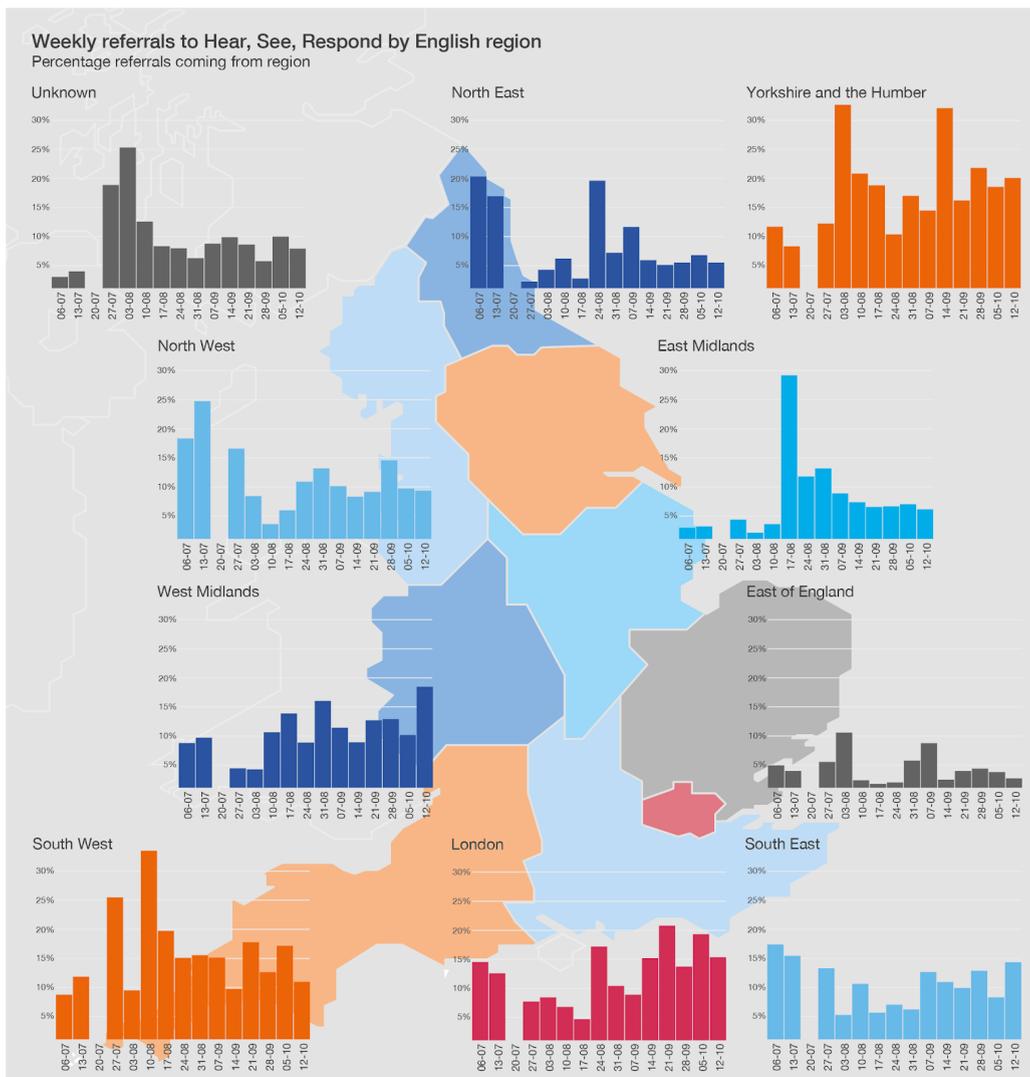


→ [View full-size version](#)

As the above graph shows, referrals increased significantly from September 2020 onwards. Barnardo's explained there are several possible explanations for this increase, including schools reopening and referring children who needed help and those who were still missing from school; partners being on-boarded and reaching into local communities; and increasing public awareness of the See, Hear, Respond Partnership. For example, between mid-July and late August 2020, Barnardo's secured more than 190 pieces of media coverage in professional and public press; they promoted See, Hear, Respond on social media; and information about the partnership was published on GOV.UK coronavirus-related web pages⁵⁶ and coronavirus support sites for professional organisations. There were no significant differences in the numbers of referrals received across different regions of the UK.

In general, the number of referrals has increased over time. However, there were two notable drops in referrals from all sources: one drop from 139 referrals per week to 46 referrals per week in mid-July; and one drop from around 300 referrals per week to 200 referrals per week at the end of August. These drops coincide with the beginning and the end of the school holidays.

⁵⁶ UK government (2020), [What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges in the autumn term](#)



→ [View full-size version](#)

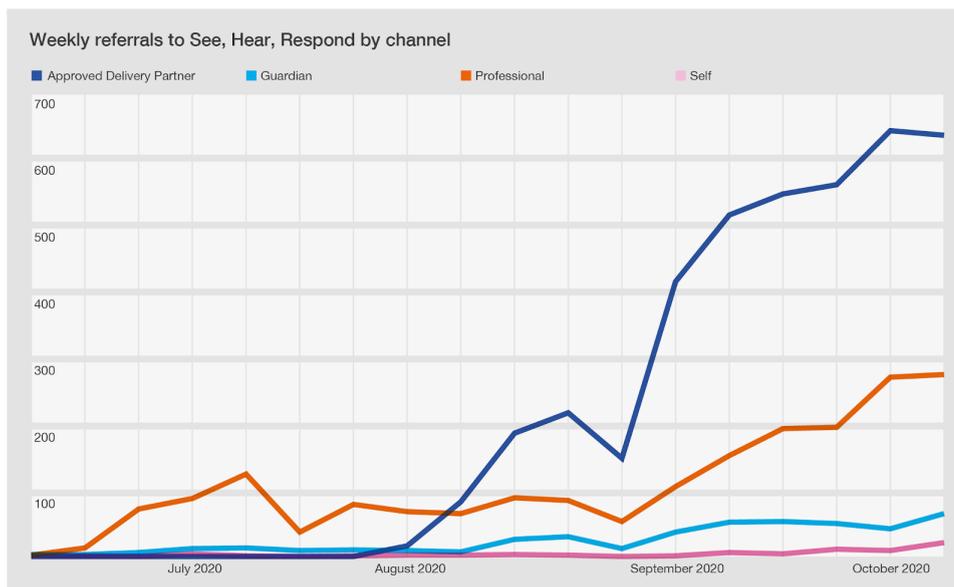


The role of schools in referrals

In the See, Hear, Respond dataset, those who carried out the referrals were grouped into: guardians, professionals, delivery partners and children themselves. As the graph below shows, professionals (eg teachers, healthcare workers, nursery workers and education professionals) were the main source of referrals until early August, after which delivery partners were the major source of referrals. Referrals from children themselves and guardians were low, never exceeding 100 per week.

In July, the number of referrals by professionals dropped significantly, from 125 referrals during the week commencing 13 July 2020, to 37 referrals during the week commencing 20 July 2020. This period coincided with the start of the summer holidays. The number of referrals rose again to 78 during the following

week. At the end of August, the number of referrals dropped once again slightly, from 85 referrals recorded during the week commencing 24 August 2020 to 53 referrals during the week commencing 31 August 2020. From early September onwards – coinciding with the end of the summer holidays – the number of referrals from professionals steadily increased week-by-week, rising from 53 referrals during the week commencing 31 August 2020 to nearly 300 referrals by 12 October 2020.

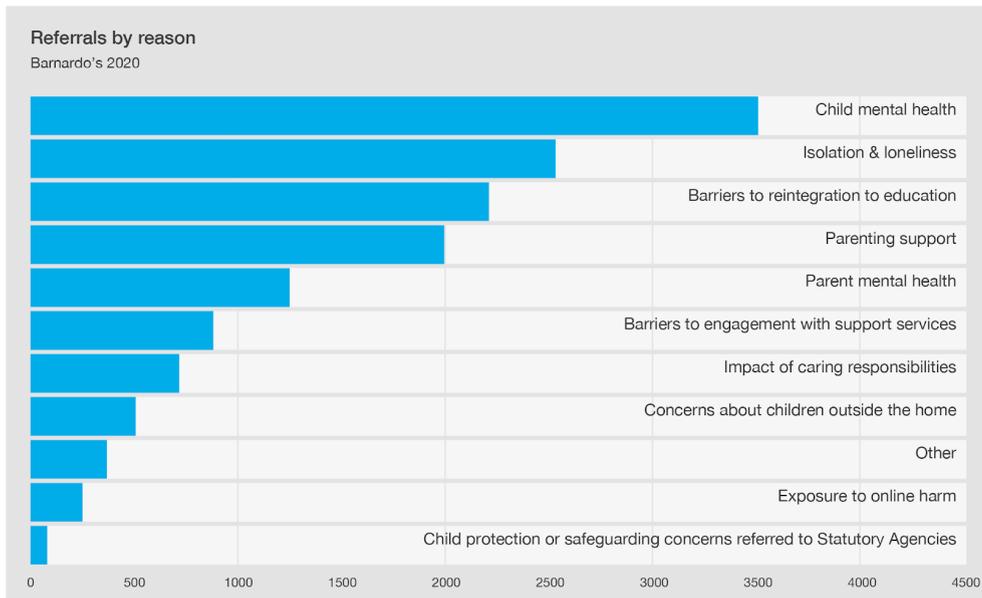


→ [View full-size version](#)

This pattern of referrals by professionals provides an indication of the important role schools play in referring vulnerable children and young people to support services. When schools reopened in England in early September 2020, the number of vulnerable children and young people referred steadily increased. This suggests that schools play a key role in monitoring the emotional wellbeing of children.

Mental health, isolation and loneliness

The five major reasons for the referral of children during June and October 2020 were concerns about: a child's mental health; isolation and loneliness; barriers to reintegration to education; parenting support; and parents' mental health. The relative proportions of referrals for these reasons remained roughly constant during this period.

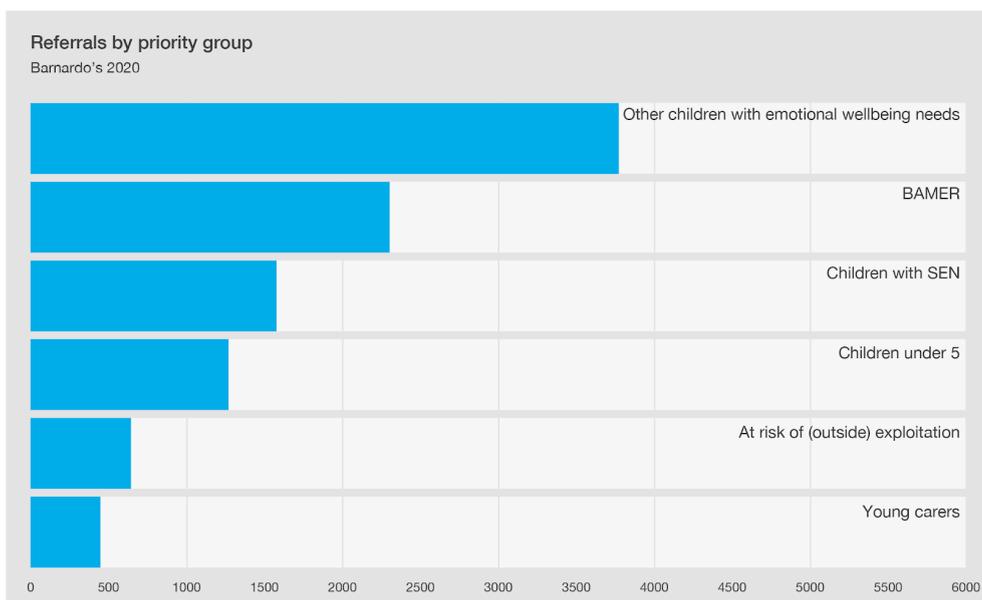


- *There may be multiple reasons for referral
- [View full-size version](#)

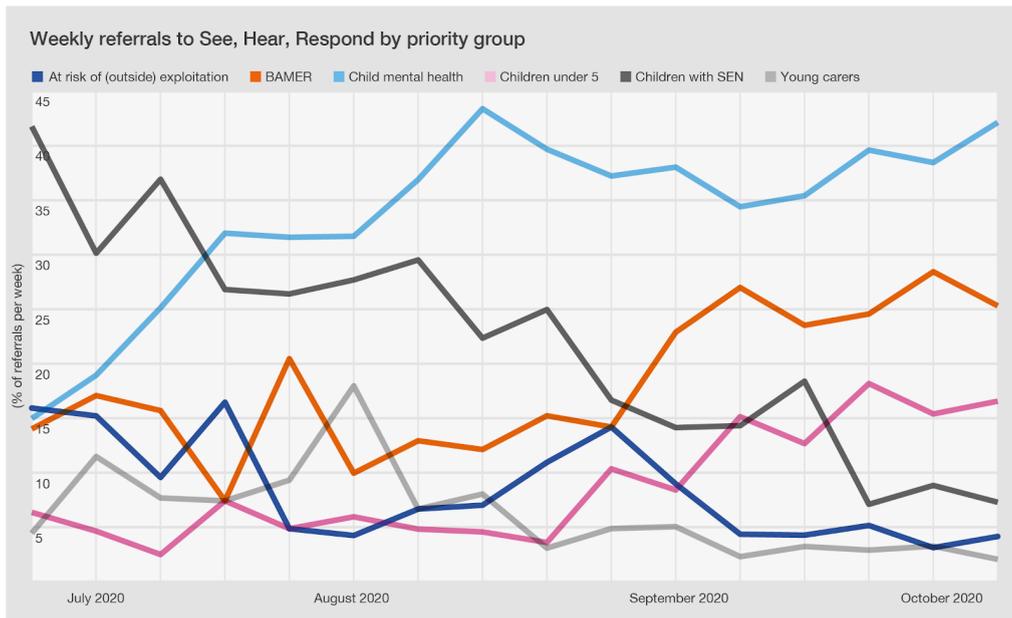
Priority groups

Data from See, Hear, Respond provides information on the groups of children who were prioritised by the programme, namely: BAMER children who experience barriers to accessing services; children with SEN; children under five years old; children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation outside of the home; young carers; and other children with emotional wellbeing needs. Referrals can be associated with multiple groups.

Our data analysis showed which groups of children were referred via See, Hear, Respond. From 17 June to 12 October 2020, more than 3,500 of the 6468 referrals were related to emotional wellbeing; nearly 2,500 were related to BAMER children; and just over 1,500 referrals were related to children with SEN.



- Each child may be in multiple priority groups
- [View full-size version](#)



- Referrals can be associated with multiple groups
- [View full-size version](#)

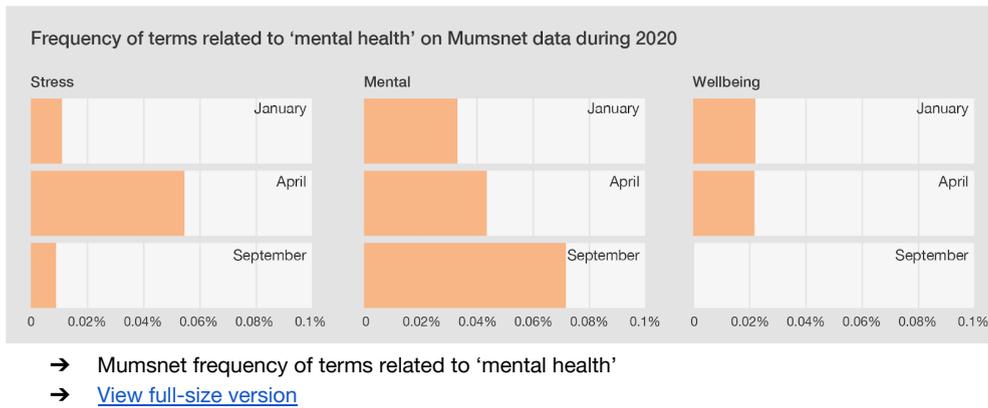
This data provides valuable information on different groups of children who have been referred to services to support their mental health and wellbeing, and demonstrates the demand for support services like this. Analysis of this data also shows the crucial role of schools in monitoring and supporting children at risk of mental health problems. This data can provide valuable information for other third sector organisations in prioritising their work with vulnerable children.

Certain limits to these findings need to be acknowledged. Since the See, Hear, Respond Partnership only started in June 2020, as an initiative that assists children whose mental health was affected by lockdown, it has not been possible to compare the results on children’s mental health to historical data from Barnardo’s, collected prior to the outbreak of coronavirus. Increases in numbers of referrals and changes in their composition could be artefacts of the growth in awareness and use of the service, rather than indications of underlying need. This data will become more robust over time.

Data on parents/carers’ mental health: indications from Mumsnet forums

The findings of this project suggest that, as a result of coronavirus, some parents/carers are stretched further than ever. Many families have been hit hard financially, and have new homeschooling and caring responsibilities, all of which can put additional strain on parents/carers’ mental health. In our interviews, parents/carers said they felt ‘overwhelmed’ by having to juggle homeschooling, existing work commitments and household chores.

An indication of how parents felt during the lockdown is also provided by our analysis of Mumsnet forum terms. During September 2020, ‘mental health’ was among the 10 most frequent bigrams across all forums, which could be an indication of parents/carers discussing concerns about their own, or their children’s, mental health as a result of the pandemic – but could also simply arise from other issues parents/carers are currently dealing with.



This analysis of Mumsnet forums demonstrates the benefits of data collection and sharing during the current crisis. Mumsnet forums can provide timely data on some of the challenges currently experienced by parents/carers, while in-depth, real-time analyses of it could support actors in different sectors involved in providing support for parents/carers during the pandemic.

Teachers' mental health and wellbeing

The sudden closure of schools in March 2020 impacted the professional lives of teachers, who had to adapt quickly to unfamiliar working patterns and new routines. This had a significant impact on some teachers' emotional wellbeing. Previous research carried out by University College London, via Teacher Tapp, found that school closures earlier this year negatively impacted the mental health of teachers.⁵⁷ Teacher Tapp surveys indicate that shortly before schools closed to the majority of students in March, teachers' anxiety levels peaked and they reported high staff absence rates, emergency closures and uncertainty about when school would reopen.⁵⁸ During the first nationwide lockdown, work-related anxiety fell slightly for state school teachers, some of whom reported having more energy and time for their own families.⁵⁹

The study also found that work-related anxiety rose specifically for headteachers during lockdown, when they were required to manage a number of challenging administrative tasks. Towards the end of June, one in five headteachers felt that the experience has made it more likely that they will seek to leave the profession.⁶⁰

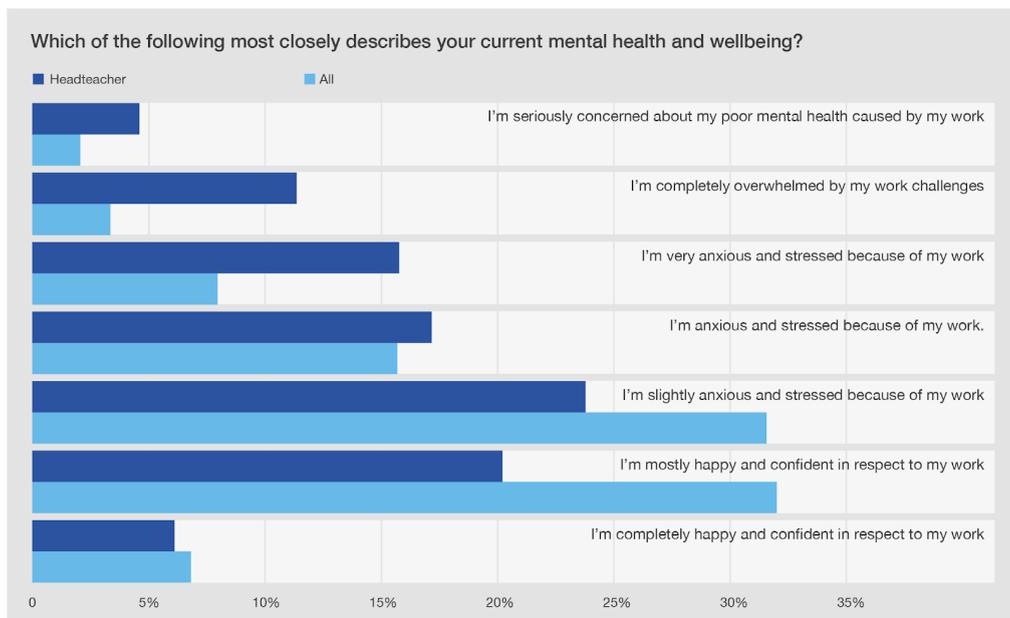
This project builds on this research by collecting data on teachers' mental health during the current period of uncertainty. We carried out a survey with 6,599 teachers in England via Teacher Tapp on 20 October, in which they were asked how they would describe their current mental health and wellbeing. Teachers' responses were similar across all sectors and geographic areas. The majority of teachers said they were either 'mostly happy and confident in respect of my work' (32%) or 'slightly anxious and stressed because of my work' (31%). The exception to this were primary school teachers, of which 44% stated they were 'mostly happy and confident in respect of my work'.

⁵⁷ Teacher Tapp, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL CEPEO (2020), ['How Did the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Teacher Wellbeing?'](#)

⁵⁸ Teacher Tapp (2020), [Lessons you look forward to \(and the ones you dread\) and an update on wellbeing](#)

⁵⁹ Teacher Tapp, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL CEPEO (2020), ['How Did the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Teacher Wellbeing?'](#)

⁶⁰ Allen, Rebecca, John Jerrim, and Sam Sims (2020). "How Did the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Teacher Wellbeing?"



- Teachers and headteachers response to question: Which of the following most closely describes your current mental health and wellbeing?
- [View full-size version](#)

The survey results indicate that headteachers continue to be affected by work-related anxiety and stress. One in four headteachers (27%) – compared to one in five in June 2020 – reported feeling either ‘completely overwhelmed by my work challenges’ (11%), or feeling ‘very anxious and stressed because of my work’ (16%). This extended period of stress and anxiety may have long-term consequences for the retention of headteachers in the future. Data collection on the unique needs of headteachers and how to support them within the current crisis is both urgent and necessary.

Interviews with teachers by MyEd gave some insights into the various challenges experienced by teachers on a daily basis during and after lockdown. Teachers told us that, when schools closed abruptly in March, guidelines and information from the government was minimal and that staff were worried about their pupils, especially about their mental health and wellbeing. Some teachers also said it was difficult for them to switch from teaching in the classroom to online teaching, as they did not have the digital skills necessary to prepare online classes and/or online learning resources.

Since schools in England reopened to all pupils in September, teachers continue to juggle a variety of complex tasks. Teachers who took part in the MyEd interviews told us that they are finding it difficult to implement time-consuming coronavirus-related hygiene routines and social distancing measures alongside identifying pupils who are behind with their learning, and responding to disruptions to learning incurred by pupils and/or staff who fall ill with coronavirus. Since teachers are having to juggle a variety of different tasks, it is possible that less time for teaching remains, which, in turn, could lead to more gaps in educational attainment and/or more stress for teachers. One primary school teacher summarised these challenges as follows:



The challenges now, from talking to colleagues, will be the disparities between the children that were supported and carried on learning and those that didn't. And the difficulties in concentration, as you get them back into a learning mindset. And then you'll have social difficulties in that they can't mix with children they would have wanted to because of bubbling. A lot of teachers are feeling that the days are very intense. If they're intense for teachers, imagine how the kids feel.

This survey provided data on teachers' emotional wellbeing during the current situation, building on earlier surveys on teachers' mental health during lockdown carried out by Teacher Tapp. Collecting more of this data and combining it with qualitative interviews with teachers, and sharing it or making it open to policymakers, could be beneficial in supporting teachers and school leaders with the challenges they are facing during the current crisis. This data infrastructure could assist policymakers with developing coping strategies to support teachers with their work, and could also address the risk of more and more headteachers leaving the profession.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusion

Periods of emergency school closure and disruption to schooling due to the coronavirus pandemic have different effects on the learning experiences and mental health and wellbeing of different groups of pupils. This pilot project provides a rapid data response to the current crisis. This response was made possible by sourcing timely datasets from a range of sources (government, third sector, private sector and academic sector) and using different approaches (qualitative and quantitative) to support a wide range of actors in different sectors involved in providing support for children, families and teachers. Working closely with Barnardo's and Mumsnet, this project has surfaced some of the insights that are possible when data from civil society organisations and social media platforms is made available.

Our findings highlight the need to address educational attainment gaps. However, the data we have used and interviews we carried out may itself exclude or fail to highlight the specific challenges faced by children and families from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds and other groups (eg young carers and children with SEN). Educational challenges may, therefore, not simply be related to one's ability to access learning resources and digital technology, but also depend on one's ability to be represented within research and data collection.

We hope that our research will inspire the collection and safe sharing of more qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources, for all regions/nations in the UK, and across variables (age, SEN, gender, ethnicity). This data needs to be collected and shared in real time, so that resources can be mobilised promptly to respond quickly to emerging issues.

These challenges and findings have informed our recommendations outlined below.

Recommendations

Schools, headteachers, children's services and policymakers currently face unprecedented challenges. Some of these could be helped to be addressed through better access to data. We urgently need a data infrastructure that is as open as possible, while protecting people's privacy, to provide the timely information that teachers, headteachers and policymakers need to support different groups of children during the current, constantly evolving, crisis.

The creation of an efficient data infrastructure in this area needs to take into consideration:

- There is a need to collect timely data on a repeated and ongoing basis that documents the changing needs of different groups of children, families and teachers within the current period of uncertainty.
- This data needs to include the needs of children and families with disadvantaged socio-economic status, and of those without access, or limited access, to digital technologies. Collecting this data can provide a clearer picture of the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society and may require non-digital approaches.
- Data needs to be shared and opened up in a safe way, to enable a variety of analyses that can inform organisations, policymakers and schools in their work with children, families and teachers. This includes data that is stewarded by civil society organisations and social media platforms, as well as those in the education sector.

This project has highlighted the need to build a better data infrastructure within the education sector, and has demonstrated how real-time, open, shared data can inform the response of schools and other organisations to the various challenges posed by the coronavirus crisis. It demonstrates the benefits of enabling more data to be shared and made open in a safe and ethical way, to ultimately inform decision-making processes that benefit society as a whole.

If you have data that you think could be used to shed light on the impact of coronavirus on education and children's wellbeing, and need help in making it available for others to understand and reuse, please get in touch with us at info@theodi.org.

Bibliography

- Allen, R. et al. (2020) 'How did the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic affect teacher wellbeing?' Teacher Tapp, UCL Social Research Institute, UCL CEPEO, p. 15. Available at:
https://johnjerrim.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/allen_jerrim_covid_final.pdf.
- Andrew, A. et al. (2020) 'Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning'. Institute for Fiscal Studies. doi: [10.1920/BN.IFS.2020.BN0288](https://doi.org/10.1920/BN.IFS.2020.BN0288)
- Barnardo's (2020) 'Time for a Clean Slate: Children's Mental Health at the Heart of Education'. Barnardo's. Available at:
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/time-clean-slate-mental-health-heart-education-report> (Accessed: 21 September 2020)
- Beng, H. S. and Wardle, L. (2020) 'Teachers' wellbeing and workload during Covid-19 lockdown'. Durham University and School Zone. Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342439172_Teachers'_wellbeing_and_workload_during_Covid-19_lockdown (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) (2020) 'The Cost of Learning in Lockdown: family experiences of school closures'. CPAG. Available at:
<https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
- Children's Commissioner (2020) 'Tackling the disadvantage gap during the Covid-19 crisis'. Available at:
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/tackling-the-disadvantage-gap-during-the-covid-19-crisis/> (Accessed: 28 September 2020).
- Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, 'Children's Information about coronavirus (COVID-19)' (2020) Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine, Edgehill University. Available at:
<https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/health/research/children-and-covid19/> (Accessed: 21 September 2020)
- Clayton, C., Clayton, R. and Potter, M. (2020) 'British Families in Lockdown'. Leeds Trinity University and UKRI England. Available at:
<https://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/research/british-families-in-lockdown-study/> (Accessed: 21 September 2020)
- Cullinane, Carl and Montacute, R. (2020) 'COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief. Sutton Trust'. Available at:
<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/> (Accessed: 23 September 2020)
- Department for Education (2019). 'Schools, pupils, and their Characteristics': January 2019. Available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019> (Accessed 17 October 2020).
- Department for Work and Pensions (2020). 'Universal Credit: Official Statistics'. Available at:
<https://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489> (Accessed 18 October 2020).
- Department for Work and Pensions (2019). Universal Credit Statistics 29 April 2013 to 11 July 2019. Available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-29-april-2013-to-11-july-2019/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-11-july-2019>
- Eivers, E., Worth, J. and Gosh, A. (2020) 'Home learning during Covid-19: Findings from the Understanding Society Longitudinal Study'. National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Available at:
<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/home-learning-during-covid-19-findings-from-the-understanding-society-longitudinal-study/> (Accessed: 28 September 2020).
- Elliot, Lee, Major Andrew Eyles and Stephen Machin (2020). 'Generation COVID:

- Emerging work and education inequalities'. A CEP Covid Analysis. LSE and UKRI. Paper no. 011. Available at: <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-011.pdf> (Accessed 2 November 2020)
- Evans, C. et al. (2020) 'Teaching under Lockdown: the experiences of London English teachers', *Changing English*, 27(3), pp. 244–254. doi: [10.1080/1358684X.2020.1779030](https://doi.org/10.1080/1358684X.2020.1779030).
 - Food Foundation (2020). 'New Food Foundation Survey: Five Million People Living in Households with Children have experienced food insecurity since Lockdown started', May 2020. Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/new-food-foundation-survey-five-million-people-living-in-households-with-children-have-experienced-food-insecurity-since-lockdown-started> (Accessed 10 October 2020)
 - Girlguiding (2020) 'Early findings on the impact of Covid-19 on girls and young women'. Available at: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girlguiding-covid19-research-briefing.pdf> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
 - Montacute, R. (2020) Social Mobility and COVID-19. Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/social-mobility-and-covid-19/> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
 - Meissel, Kane, Frauke Meyer, Esther S. Yao, and Christine M. Rubie-Davies. 'Subjectivity of Teacher Judgments: Exploring Student Characteristics That Influence Teacher Judgments of Student Ability.' *Teaching and Teacher Education* 65 (July 1, 2017): 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.02.021>
 - Moss, G. et al. (2020) Primary teachers' experience of the COVID-19 lockdown: 'Eight key messages for policymakers going forward'. Institute of Education, UCL. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/international-literacy-centre/duty-care-and-duty-teach-educational-priorities-response-covid-19-crisis/reports> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
 - Murray, C. et al. (2020) 'Reconceptualising relatedness in education in "Distanced" Times', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 0(0), pp. 1–15. doi: [10.1080/02619768.2020.1806820](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1806820)
 - National Youth Trends (2020) Take the Temperature. Available at: <https://www.beatfreksyouthtrends.com/take-the-temperature> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
 - Office for National Statistics (2020a) 'Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain: April to June 2020'. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/coronavirusandhomeschoolingingreatbritainapriltojune2020> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
 - Office for National Statistics (2020b). 'Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 16 October 2020'. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain16october2020> (Accessed 17 October 2020)
 - Pedersen, S., and D. Lupton (2018). 'What Are You Feeling Right Now?' *Communities of Maternal Feeling on Mumsnet.* *Emotion, Space and Society* 26, pp. 57–63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2016.05.001>
 - Power, K. (2020) 'The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families', *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 16(1), pp. 67–73. doi: [10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561](https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561)
 - Sharp, C. et al. (2020) 'Schools' responses to Covid-19: The challenges facing schools and pupils in September 2020'. National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), p. 72. Available at: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4119/schools_responses_to_covid_19_the_challenges_facing_schools_and_pupils_in_september_2020.pdf (Accessed: 2 October 2020)
 - Sibieta, Luke (2020). School attendance rates across the UK since full reopening. Education Policy Institute, October 2020. Available at:

- <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/school-attendance-since-full-reopening/> (Accessed 31 October 2020)
- The Trussell Trust. 'Summary Findings on the Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis on Food Banks,' June 2020. Available at: https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf. (Accessed 17 October 2020)
 - UNESCO Centre, School of Education, Ulster University (2020) Northern Ireland 'Parent Surveys: Experiences of Supporting Children's Home Learning During Covid-19'. Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/597969/UU-School-survey-Report-web.pdf (Accessed: 21 September 2020)
 - Walsh, G. et al (2020) 'Home-schooling in Northern Ireland during the COVID-19 crisis: the experiences of parents and carers'. Stranmillis University College. Available at: <https://www.stran.ac.uk/research-paper/creu-home-schooling-during-covid/> (Accessed: 21 September 2020)
 - Young Minds (2020) 'Coronavirus Report: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs'. Available at: <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/reports/our-impact-reports/> (Accessed: 28 September 2020)
 - Youth Sports Trust (2020). 'Evidence Paper: The Impact of Covid-19 Restrictions on Children and Young People', Available at: <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/system/files/Evidence%20paper%20-%20The%20impact%20of%20Covid%20restrictions%20on%20children%20and%20young%20people%20-%20external%20report.pdf>