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Research and analysis

Education recovery in schools: spring 2022

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The picture overall

In December 2021, we published [a briefing on the continued effects of the pandemic and education recovery in schools (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-schools-autumn-2021)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-schools-autumn-2021). The effects of the pandemic on pupils, staff and leaders were evident. It was clear that many schools were working hard to respond to these challenges, including helping pupils to catch up academically.

In this briefing, we draw on evidence from a sample of inspections and from discussions with school inspectors to understand how schools are responding to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. It is promising that leaders were noticing improvements in pupils' learning, well-being and behaviour this term. We also saw how schools were using effective strategies to check what pupils have learned and to appropriately adapt the curriculum to meet their needs.

However, the pandemic continued to hinder pupils' learning and personal development. In January 2022, many schools said that COVID-19 had reduced pupils' attendance. This was a particular challenge for special schools. Leaders also continued to mention the negative impact of the pandemic on pupils' well-being and behaviour. This term, more leaders have noticed improvements in these areas. But many also reported that pupils in Reception needed more support to develop social skills such as taking turns and listening.

The pandemic has also continued to affect pupils' knowledge and skills, either because content had not been taught when schools were partially closed or because pupils did not learn well remotely. The leaders that we spoke to this term were identifying similar issues to those [reported in autumn (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-schools-autumn-2021)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-schools-autumn-2021), including knowledge gaps in phonics, mathematics and writing stamina. Some schools also reported a decline in pupils taking certain subjects for GCSE and A level, including triple science and English Baccalaureate subjects.

Schools were using a range of informal assessment practices to identify what knowledge pupils have (and have not) remembered from their teaching during lockdowns. Assessment practices were more effective in schools where staff had a strong vision and clear intent for their curriculum. This meant that they were clear what knowledge needed to be assessed. We saw less effective practice when leaders were assuming pupils had gaps in knowledge but were not identifying what specific knowledge was missing; when they were focusing disproportionately on core subjects; and when they were using standardised, high-level assessments that did not check that pupils have learned what has been taught.

Some schools were using information from assessment to adapt their curriculum. Adaptations this term were similar to those in autumn. Schools were dedicating time to revisiting concepts that pupils had not learned well remotely, and leaders were adapting their curriculum to prioritise knowledge that was crucial for pupils to move forward.

Assessment and curriculum adaptations will vary by subject. In subjects where knowledge is taught in a sequence, such as phonics, the adaptations help ensure that pupils learn crucial knowledge needed to progress. In other subjects, like history, progression may not rely so heavily on previous knowledge.[footnote 1]

Schools were also using assessment to identify individuals or groups of pupils who needed additional support, such as one-to-one interventions. Some were using tutoring to help pupils catch up. Most schools chose to use the school-led route offered by the National Tutoring Programme and trained their own staff internally or across academy trusts in tutoring.

In the spring term, staff absence due to COVID-19 had been an issue and was made more difficult by the challenge of recruiting supply teachers. This has increased the staff workload. Around a quarter of planned school inspections before the spring half term were deferred, predominantly due to staffing issues related to COVID-19.

Schools have faced external barriers, such as delays accessing external services, particularly in relation to mental health. Special schools have been especially challenged by this as they rely on a lot of services from external agencies. However, many leaders have also had support from academy trusts and local authorities.

Methodological note

In this briefing, we draw on evidence collected during routine inspections and through focus group discussions with school inspectors. We use this to illustrate:

- how the pandemic continues to impact on pupils' learning and personal development
- how schools are finding out what pupils do and do not know
- effective approaches that schools are using to help pupils catch up

We used evidence gathered from routine inspections of 43 primary schools, 48 secondary schools and 14 special schools in England between 22 November 2021 and 28 January 2022.

We held focus group discussions with 23 Ofsted colleagues: 17 Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and 6 Senior HMI. Participants in focus group discussions had personal experience of inspecting schools in the 2021/22 academic year and/or had overseen the work of HMI in their region. They had a range of inspection experience including primary, secondary and special schools. There was representation from all 8 Ofsted regions (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about).

The data collected cannot be assumed to be representative of the whole sector. During January, there were fewer school inspections than usual, which reduced the amount of evidence we could draw on. A small number of inspectors participated in the research, meaning that their observations are not conclusive. They do, however, help to triangulate and enrich findings from the inspection evidence.

Our overall findings in this briefing illustrate the challenges that some schools are experiencing and the approaches they are taking.

The current state of children's education and personal development

Ongoing COVID-related absence

During January 2022, the pandemic continued to reduce pupils' attendance in many schools. Data from the Department for Education (DfE) shows an increase in pupils not attending school for COVID-related reasons during January, but this reduced before the spring half term.[footnote 2] During January, we saw a larger proportion of pupils being absent during inspections than during the autumn term. In some schools, this was a few pupils; in others, many pupils were off with COVID-19. Some leaders of special schools said that attendance had been a challenge for them, particularly among pupils with complex health needs.

COVID-related anxiety among parents continued to be a challenge for some school leaders this term. Some parents were not sending their children to school because of their concerns. Anxiety around COVID-19 was thought to be higher among certain communities, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

A few schools faced challenges from parents about pupils' attendance. There was push-back from some parents when schools communicated high expectations and the importance of attendance. We recently published a short report on schools' approaches to improving and maintaining attendance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-good-attendance-and-tackling-persistent-absence).

Some schools also talked about their contingency plans for online learning in case of further lockdowns or to accommodate high levels of absence. However, compared with the national lockdowns, fewer schools were offering comprehensive remote learning for small numbers of pupils who were not at school.

Knowledge and skills

Our December briefing reported that pupils' subject-specific knowledge and skills continued to be affected by the pandemic. This was either because content had not been taught when schools were partially closed or because pupils did not learn well remotely. In January 2022, school leaders described similar gaps in:

- mathematics
- phonics
- reading
- writing stamina and handwriting
- languages, particularly in pupils' speaking and listening skills
- physical education (PE)

Leaders tended to mention subjects where the knowledge that was missing was essential for pupils to progress in the subject. This does not mean that other subjects, such as geography and history, have not been impacted. However, the knowledge gaps in these subjects may not be as critical for pupils' progression.[footnote 3]

Many leaders highlighted their concerns about the Reception Year cohort, particularly in relation to children's weaker speech and language development. Similar to in the autumn term, they also identified pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils as being hardest hit by the pandemic.

Compared with last term, more leaders said that pupils' gaps in knowledge and skills were closing or had closed in some subjects, and that pupils were 'where they should be'. They attributed this to providing effective remote learning during lockdowns, which meant gaps in knowledge were small, and/or to having successful strategies in place to help pupils catch up. On inspection, we have also seen pupils recovering skills and knowledge that teachers said had been affected by lockdowns. For instance, we have seen strong progression in pupils' writing since the start of this academic year.

In some schools, pupils' knowledge gaps were not solely attributable to missed teaching or pupils not learning well remotely during lockdowns. Other factors such as previous teaching, a previous curriculum or non-COVID-related staff absence had played a part.

Some schools said that the pandemic has influenced pupils' subject choices at GCSE and A level. For example, a few schools reported decreases in pupils opting for triple science and others had noted declines in the number of pupils taking English Baccalaureate subjects. One leader thought that the latter was due to pupils' lower level of confidence in languages following lockdowns.

Mental health and well-being

Many leaders said that the pandemic has had a negative impact on some pupils' mental health and emotional well-being. As reported in our December briefing, they continued to have concerns about pupils having lower resilience and confidence and greater anxiety. For some pupils, the impact of the pandemic had been most noticeable when they first went back to school, but others were still experiencing poorer well-being in the spring term. In some schools, safeguarding concerns and disclosures had increased. These school leaders spoke about more concerns relating to domestic abuse.

Schools were supporting pupils' mental health and well-being in several ways. A common approach was to increase the focus on mental health in the curriculum for all pupils, often through personal, social and health education. Schools were also providing therapeutic interventions for individual pupils, often by either training their own staff or employing staff with therapeutic qualifications. Some schools were adding these roles to their pastoral teams because it has been difficult to access external services, which often had long waiting times.

A few school leaders said that they had already seen that their approaches were successful. In one primary school, parents had spoken positively about a programme for those needing additional emotional support. In the spring term, a few leaders were optimistic that pupils' well-being was 'improving' and 'getting back to normal'.

Opportunities for pupils to take part in enrichment activities, such as clubs and trips, continued to vary between schools this term. Most schools were offering some activities, and a few were back to their full programme. A few schools seemed to find trips more challenging to organise compared with clubs on school premises and talks from external speakers. For example, one school had found that some parents were not comfortable with their child going out of school. On occasion, enrichment activities were hindered by staff absence.

Pupils' behaviour

Many more leaders this term said that poor behaviour following lockdowns had been addressed, or that they had seen improvements. Since September 2021, leaders had spent time re-establishing boundaries and communicating behavioural expectations to pupils. Staff were often modelling positive behaviours to develop the youngest pupils' understanding of sharing and listening skills. In a few schools, staff said that staggered lunch times, originally set up as a COVID-19 safety precaution, were still in place. They found that these had a positive effect on pupils' behaviour because they limited the number of pupils in an area at one time, which helped to create a 'calm atmosphere'.

However, some schools were finding that behaviour continued to be a challenge in January 2022. Leaders said that pupils' level of engagement and ability to stay on task continued to be worse than pre-pandemic. Several leaders mentioned that children in Reception were not as used to sharing and taking turns, and more work was needed to develop their listening skills. This was thought to be because pupils had had fewer pre-school social experiences. The early years briefing (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-early-years-providers-spring-2022) gives further detail.

Identifying gaps in learning

Assessment practices

Pandemic disruption resulted in gaps in many pupils' learning, either because content had not been taught during lockdowns or because pupils did not learn well remotely. Schools were using assessment to understand what pupils have (and have not) remembered. This information helped

leaders and teachers to adapt the curriculum appropriately so that pupils had the secure base they needed to access new content. In addition, most leaders were using assessment information to identify and target pupils who needed additional support to catch up.

A few leaders also referred to the importance of assessment information, both formative and summative, in monitoring successes. For example, where curriculum adaptations were having an impact, gaps in learning were closing and pupils were back on track so that the curriculum could continue as originally planned.

Assessment can take many forms. Inspection evidence showed that most teachers were continuing to use established informal assessment practices to understand pupils' enduring gaps in learning. Following initial assessments when pupils returned to school after lockdown, many teachers were extracting diagnostic information from assessments routinely built into the curriculum to reinforce pupils' learning and retention, such as:

- regular knowledge retrieval activities
- targeted questioning
- low-stakes quizzes
- revision tasks to carry out their prior learning checks
- mini tests

Some leaders had done baseline assessments and repeated these at intervals to monitor how well their adapted curriculum was filling the gaps and enabling pupils to catch up. This was prevalent in mathematics.

A few schools, primary and secondary, reported that they had changed assessment practices due to the impact of the pandemic, paying greater attention to formative assessment. Leaders in these schools said they were now 'tightening up' their assessment processes to focus on the gaps. Examples of changes they had made include:

- checking prior learning more carefully before moving to new units
- looking more closely at the key objectives to ensure more precise assessment
- reviewing routinely what pupils had learned in previous years, not just in recent units
- focusing on identifying pupils who require bespoke support
- introducing informal assessment in a broader range of subjects
- providing more feedback to pupils
- using more peer- and self-assessment

We also found that some leaders were purchasing new assessment packages, for example Year 7 baseline tests, and that activities at the start of lessons to check learning were taking longer as teachers checked for a wider range of gaps.

Facilitating effective assessment practices to identify gaps in learning

Teachers were using their normal practices to identify gaps. Understanding what makes assessment effective for identifying gaps, and therefore helping pupils catch up, is especially important in the context of education recovery. However, the findings may apply more widely than recovery from the pandemic. What is appropriate in terms of assessment will also vary by subject area.[footnote 4]

We have seen the importance of strong leadership for effective assessment. Strong leaders tended to have a clear strategic plan, including what essential knowledge teachers should focus assessment on. They were setting expectations for how assessment should inform curriculum adaptations.

Similarly, some leaders referred to the importance of their oversight of assessment information and what it was telling them about pupils' knowledge: what was still missing and how well gaps were being filled.

Having a well-informed understanding of the curriculum and strong subject knowledge helped schools use assessment effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. When teachers were clear about the knowledge that pupils needed to learn, they understood what knowledge needed to be assessed. They also had a greater understanding of where pupils should be, so they were more able to identify knowledge that needed consolidation and could precisely match curriculum adaptations to pupils' needs. For example, we often found mathematics was being assessed more effectively than other subjects. Many leaders knew the curriculum well and were clear about what pupils should know at each stage. Teachers were then able to benchmark pupils' current learning against these expectations. In schools where leaders were less clear about curriculum content and end-points, assessment was used less effectively.

In the best examples of assessment practice, leaders were focused on checking that pupils were building secure knowledge necessary to progress by continually tracking, in-class, what they knew at different points. Effective assessment resulted in teachers using the information they gathered to inform their teaching and to fill gaps, allowing for a return to a more usual curriculum.

We found that some schools needed to do further work to use assessment productively to strengthen pupils' knowledge. Others had not yet done enough assessment in some areas of the curriculum.

We also found that some primary schools were focusing assessment narrowly on the core curriculum and paying less attention to foundation subjects. This could be due to:

- a strategic focus on English and mathematics
- a lack of training for teachers resulting in weaker subject knowledge or confidence in assessing foundation subjects

Taking a narrow assessment focus and not checking what pupils know in foundation subjects may mean that schools have not yet clearly identified gaps in these areas. However, some leaders were aware of what content had been missed during remote learning, so assessment may not have been a priority.

In secondary schools, foundation subject teachers were assessing more clearly and understood what the learning gaps were. Their knowledge of the curriculum meant they were able to identify gaps.

We often had concerns with assessment practices when leaders had acknowledged that pupils had learning gaps but had not yet pinpointed the specific knowledge that was missing or weak. In some schools, leaders were 'assuming but not assessing' for gaps. However, appropriate assessment varies by subject and, in some areas, it may not be critical to identify gaps for pupils' progression.
[footnote 5]

Some schools referred to using standardised testing. A few repeated these assessments at intervals to monitor progress. When schools relied on this type of assessment, specific gaps in learning were not identified as effectively or as quickly as they were in schools that took a more granular approach, checking precisely what knowledge was missing and what was secure. We found that when assessments provided scores, rather than identified gaps, it was unclear how the assessment supported the recovery of pupils' learning. A few schools analysed pupils' responses to individual questions to help identify gaps in learning and offer targeted support. However, we would be concerned about an over-reliance on standardised assessment. It may not check the taught curriculum and so may not be an accurate reflection of whether pupils are learning what the school intends.

Other schools with weak assessment practice had identified gaps in learning and pupils' needs but this did not then lead to sufficient or timely curriculum adaptation. The pandemic appears to have amplified the impact of weak legacy assessment practices. Where assessment was already disjointed, inconsistent or overused summative tests, curriculum adaptations were less effective. However, some weaker schools had improved assessment practices in response to the need to identify learning gaps.

Preparing for national assessments

We found that there was a strong but understandable focus on assessing pupils in Years 11 and 13. The uncertainty over summer exams had led to some schools focusing significantly on collecting evidence of pupils' attainment in case it was required by exam boards for teacher-assessed grades. Ofqual has now released more information on this, which has provided some clarity for schools. [footnote 6]

Schools were also preparing pupils for their first external exams. Inspection evidence showed that some teachers of Year 11 and Year 13 cohorts were focusing on exam preparation. They were using extra formal assessments and practice questions, targeted on gaps emerging from mock assessments. It was a challenge for teachers in these year groups as they filled gaps in learning alongside helping pupils get ready for exams. In some schools, assessment practices for these year groups had been adjusted to account for this. However, inspectors pointed out that the potential for pupils being 'more weighed than fed' and the focus on assessment could mean learning suffers as a result.

Catch-up strategies

Adaptations to the curriculum

This term, many schools are continuing to adapt their curriculum. We saw a continuation of a lot of the practice that we reported in our December briefing. Leaders described how they would take time to fill gaps and ensure that key concepts were secure before continuing learning, and 'not just plough on'.

Some schools are continuing to adapt their curriculum by:

- teaching what has been missed
- providing opportunities across the curriculum for a lot of repetition, retrieval and revision of previous learning
- focusing on the core subjects for their catch-up work (particularly phonics, reading and mathematics in primary schools)
- investing in additional resources to support catch-up (staff, programmes and classroom resources)
- providing interventions to support catch-up for targeted pupils and groups of pupils
- prioritising practical work in science and technology
- prioritising PE, extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities

Most leaders said they were using assessment information in some subjects to inform their curriculum adaptations and decide where to target support to help pupils catch up. Some leaders referred to frequent – often daily – assessment, which meant adaptations were responsive and quick.

This was common in mathematics and phonics. Many leaders highlighted the importance of timely attention to pupils' needs and adaptive teaching when gaps are identified. We have seen good practice in schools that were responding and adapting quickly.

In other subjects, leaders were aware of what content has been missed and used this information to adjust the curriculum. For example, one leader said that geography content that had not been taught remotely during lockdown was instead covered during this academic year in a related topic.

In addition to the continuing trends from last term, some schools this term made new adaptations to respond to gaps in skills. For example, some schools were:

- providing time for pupils to practise extended independent writing to build up their writing stamina, and working on pencil grip for younger pupils
- introducing daily grammar revision to fill gaps in grammatical skills
- focusing on swimming lessons as these had been stalled by the pandemic

Some secondary school leaders said that careers education was disrupted when pupils were learning remotely. Some had resumed face-to-face work experience but others said that this is still being done virtually. In a few schools, Year 10 and 11 pupils said they had missed out on work experience because of the pandemic. However, leaders said they want to prioritise this soon and they are working to rebuild links with external partners. In special schools, leaders were keen to re-establish activities outside of the classroom to prepare pupils for adulthood, such as work experience and travelling on public transport.

A few schools had bolstered their teaching provision for online safety following pupils' increasing use of online technology. Alongside this, some schools have been reminded how much pupils rely on technology. This led them to review their computing curriculum and consider how best to make it relevant to their pupils. For example, one school noted that pupils were only comfortable using touch-screen devices, so they have addressed this by focusing on using desktop computers.

We have seen examples of both good and bad practice in curriculum adaptations. We found that, for most pupils, curriculum or GCSE options had not been narrowed. In focus group discussions, participants suggested that the education inspection framework, with its focus on a broad and balanced curriculum, had helped to dissuade schools from doing this.

We have commonly seen pupils with SEND taken out of foundation subjects to receive additional teaching in core subjects. This may be appropriate if, for example, the interventions are helping pupils catch up with learning to read. However, leaders need to be sure that their choices do not lead to unnecessary narrowing of the curriculum for these pupils.

We have seen some effective curriculum development across subjects. Some schools had adapted their curriculums to focus on the most crucial knowledge pupils needed to move forward with learning new content. This occurred in primary and secondary schools but was done particularly well in schools with strong subject knowledge and leadership.

Some schools used lockdowns to think about the school's context and the pupils they have, which they then used when adapting the curriculum. They had sharpened their curriculum design and built links across the curriculum to help pupils to retain knowledge and make more sense of what they are learning.

Targeted support and tutoring

Schools used assessment to identify pupils or groups of pupils for focused support. This was often through group or one-to-one interventions. For example, some offered additional teaching in an afternoon session or through 'pre-teaching' before a whole-class lesson. Frequent assessment ensured that these groupings were constantly adjusted and responded to pupils' specific needs. This was particularly common in phonics and mathematics, but also in other subjects to help pupils who have been absent for COVID-related reasons to catch up this term.

Some schools were using tutoring as part of their catch-up strategy, using the different routes offered by the National Tutoring Programme.[footnote 7]

Many schools using tuition partners had found that there was a lack of available tutors. Some schools had found that tutors did not follow their schools' teaching approaches and said there was not enough evidence about the quality of the tutoring, leading them to conclude that the additional tutoring may not benefit pupils.

Instead, many schools had chosen the school-led route and trained their own staff as tutors, internally or across academy trusts. We have seen some good practice in using trained teaching assistants as tutors but using internal staff has placed additional pressure on already strained school staff.

Most of these schools were directing their attention towards tutoring for mathematics and English, in particular phonics and reading. Most schools said they had targeted pupils for tutoring, for example those with specific gaps in learning, those not meeting expectations, pupils with SEND or those entitled to pupil premium funding. Some schools were holding tutoring sessions outside of normal teaching hours, either before or after school.

We are doing a separate review of tutoring in schools and 16 to 19 providers (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-independent-review-of-tutoring/terms-of-reference-ofsteds-independent-review-of-tutoring) and will publish a report following this.

School leadership

Staffing

Staff absence, primarily due to COVID-19 cases, hit schools particularly hard in the spring term. Data from the DfE shows that staff absence increased between December 2021 and January 2022. Around 5% of teachers and school leaders were estimated to be absent in January due to COVID-related reasons.[footnote 8] This has been compounded by the existing national shortage of teaching staff,[footnote 9] along with challenges finding cover.

Some schools filled staff absence by employing supply teachers. However, sourcing classroom cover was often a challenge due to the current high demand and because some supply teachers were working as tutors in the National Tutoring Programme instead. A few leaders also expressed concern that supply teachers may not know the school's expectations and teaching practices. Special schools found this particularly problematic because unfamiliar staff can be difficult for pupils who prefer routine and familiarity. Many schools used their own staff to cover lessons, including leaders, teachers and higher-level teaching assistants. This had increased staff workloads.

Around a quarter of school inspections planned before the spring half term were deferred due to COVID-related reasons, predominantly because of staffing issues. In these schools, covering lessons took up time that leaders would usually have had for operational and management duties, including engaging in inspection activities.

We found that in some secondary schools, difficult decisions had been made about which year groups to prioritise. For example, some had prioritised exam year groups by ensuring that they were taught by subject specialists, which left other year groups without specialist teachers.

A few secondary schools had felt forced by staff absence to send some children back to remote learning. In some cases, teachers who were self-isolating continued to teach lessons from home to pupils in the classroom.

During the spring term, staff absence and the increased workloads to cover this were causing some schools to delay implementing targeted support. For example, some had postponed intervention groups, programmes for phonics and mathematics, and staff training for tutoring.

We found that staff absence, increased workloads and competing demands had also prevented some leaders from monitoring teaching and learning as thoroughly as before the pandemic. Some school governors and trustees said their ability to monitor schools has also been hindered. With fewer opportunities to visit schools and meet face to face, they have not been able to challenge leaders as usual. A few schools said that governors and trustees had restarted visits in the autumn term.

External barriers

Circumstances outside schools' control have affected or continue to affect how they help pupils to catch up. These include:

- delays and changes to external services
- changing COVID-19 guidance and advice
- additional COVID-related duties
- challenging community contexts

Schools have had difficulties accessing external services such as mental health services, therapists and local authorities because they have been unable to come into schools or have long waiting lists. Accessing expertise to diagnose SEND or getting education, health and care plans drawn up by the local authority have been challenging for schools. In some cases, they have not been able to happen at all. Special schools have been particularly challenged as they rely on many services from external agencies.

When these services have been able to come into schools, in some cases they have been unable to provide the same quality of service due to COVID-19 precautions. For example, one inspector observed personal protective equipment hindering a speech and language therapist delivering therapy.

The lack of clarity over the continued implementation of COVID-19 measures in schools has also been a challenge. In January 2022, leaders were applying COVID-19 measures in varying ways. We have seen that this has resulted in very different practice across schools and therefore very different experiences for pupils.

We found that staff time and schools' resources have been put under pressure by the requirement to organise COVID-19 testing in schools. To manage this, some school leaders have had to take on more of a management role rather than a leadership role. Inspectors suggested that this has been detrimental to schools, even where there has been a track record of strong leadership.

The community context in which schools operate has also been difficult for some leaders. Disadvantaged communities have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and some schools have provided additional support to parents with mental health or substance abuse issues. Across a range

of different community contexts, schools have reported that they have had to help parents deal with COVID-related anxiety.

However, the pandemic had strengthened some schools' relationships with parents. The support they offered parents has helped to foster more collaborative relationships. When face-to-face meetings with parents have not been possible, schools have adapted to ensure that engagement continues. For example, some used online communication portals or talked to parents in the playground.

Support

Although schools are still facing some significant external barriers, they have been supported in their recovery by academy trusts and local authorities.

We found that most academy schools have been supported by their trust or multi-academy trust (MAT). Some MATs provided centralised assistance, including:

- pooling resources
- using trust-wide curriculums to identify the sequence and progression of subjects
- using trust-wide moderation to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge

Others offered less centralised support, such as having termly meetings to discuss catch-up and trust leaders taking learning walks with school leaders.

Maintained schools have also been supported by local authorities. Leaders gave examples of:

- using local authority resources to improve attendance
- local authorities playing an advising role in schools' catch-up work
- local authorities providing specialist teams to support pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs

The government has also provided extra funding to schools to spend on catch-up.[footnote 10] Schools have spent the funding on a range of initiatives, most commonly: interventions, tutoring, additional staff (for academic and pastoral purposes), extended school hours and extra-curricular opportunities. As recommended by the DfE, many schools said they had prioritised using the funding to support vulnerable pupils and those in receipt of pupil premium.

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