

CRACKS IN OUR FOUNDATIONS

Addressing the longstanding attainment gap in England's primary schools

February 2023



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About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report Breakthrough Britain. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report It Happens Here shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises and other grass-roots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2023 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

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Disclaimer: the views and recommendations in this report are those of the CSJ and do not necessarily represent those of the individuals or organisations mentioned above.



LAW FAMILY CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Foreword

As chief executive of the Sutton Trust charity, I witnessed the power of ideas that unsettle the status quo. Our most effective social mobility campaigns and programmes helped thousands of young people, but they also managed to upset both the right and left of the political spectrum. I've been attracted to ideas that go against the grain ever since. And I believe new thinking is required to address the biggest scandal of our education system: the failure of 100,000s of pupils to gain basic foundational skills at the end of primary (and secondary) school.

Improving the home learning environment and equipping parents with the skills to help the children develop for school and life has always been a taboo subject in politics. Politicians fear they will be seen as telling parents what to do, imposing their own middle-class values on others, encroaching on the freedom of people to live their home lives as they see fit.

Yet one of the few robust and recurring findings from education research is that much of the variation in pupils' achievement is due to factors that lie outside the school gates. A big part of this is due to what parents do - or don't do: whether they ensure their children are fed and ready for school, whether (and how) they read with their children, whether they engage with the teachers to track their children's progress at school. These practices should be the right of all children. Alarming, home divides are widening for current generations of young children. Any national drive aiming to improve school standards that neglects these facts of life is doomed to fail.

That's why I so wholeheartedly support the core recommendations set out in this report. All trusts and schools should be incentivised to develop effective parent participation and engagement plans. In my book *The Good Parent Educator* I tried to advise parents on the simple home habits that could help their children's progress at school. But I believe schools, as trusted anchor organisations in local communities, are our best bet for improving learning in the home.

Policies should involve schools better understanding all their parents and children, whatever their backgrounds or educational histories happen to be. Teachers would be trained in how to work with parents. A recurring lesson is that schools need to form non-hierarchical, mutually respectful relationships with parents which require time to develop.

During my school visits I've seen many promising practices – recruiting parents as champions to engage other parents for example, or empowering students to organise parent-teacher meetings. Clever use of texts to help parents has also been trialled in different countries. Family support practitioners can be highly effective. Investment in these additional staff would have huge future benefits. We need to pilot approaches and develop guidance for schools.

This would be a win-win strategy for teachers: the evidence suggests pupils would be more likely to turn up to school and better prepared to learn when they arrived. Improving basic literacy, numeracy and oracy are realisable aims.

There are many other sensible proposals in this report, including those aiming to attract and develop teachers. But for me a National Parental Participation Strategy would be a potential game changer. The Government can publish all the ambitious targets for maths and English it likes. But failing to embrace this core education truth will mean they turn into unfulfilled dreams – condemning hundreds of thousands of pupils to leave school lacking the foundational skills needed to get on in life. It's time for us to take a bold step and embrace the power of parent participation in education.



Lee Elliot Major is Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter.

Executive Summary

England's primary school system has a long-standing problem: each academic year thousands of pupils leave primary school without reaching expected standards in foundational skills. These children go on to secondary school ill-equipped to engage in further learning and unable to reach their true potential.

In 2022, two in five pupils (41 per cent) completed year 6 without meeting the expected standards in reading, writing and maths (combined). In total, over 275,000 children left year 6 without a secure grasp of foundational skills.

The odds are even worse for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Last year, the majority (57 per cent) of children from disadvantaged backgrounds left primary school without reaching the expected standard in these subjects.

The attainment gap for primary school children now stands at its widest level in a decade. The roots of the attainment gap start in the early years. If we want to improve educational outcomes, we have to start in the first 1,001 days. Many more babies, young children and their families could and should be getting a better start in life. However, we know that inequalities open up early, poverty can scar deeply, and life chances are cut short. The Centre for Social Justice helped to lead the Early Years Commission which set out a radical plan to improve early years provision. This report centres on changes that should be made to improve the life chances of children in primary school.

Unquestionably, outcomes from children have been made worse by the disruption to education following school shutdowns. However, while the pandemic poured fuel on the fire of education inequality, these gaps were evident even before Covid-19 struck. In 2019, a disadvantaged pupil aged 11 was, on average, nine months behind their non-disadvantaged peers. Children living in persistent poverty were a whole year behind.

While the government is ambitious about improving education and life chances for young people, teachers fear that they are not on course to achieve their aims. The idea that 90 per cent of all children in 2030 will leave primary school reaching these expected standards is a far cry from reality.

Our polling reveals that at the just 40 per cent of teachers said that they were confident that most of their pupils would meet expected standards in 2023. Even starker, just 17 per cent of teachers are confident that this will be true for most of their disadvantaged pupils.

Our education system needs to ensure every child leaves primary school with a strong grasp of foundational skills, at the very minimum. Foundational skills are essential for future education, work, and wellbeing.

This report sets out an ambitious plan to create an education system which allows all children to secure the foundational skills they need to thrive.

In chapter one, we examine the important role played by families and parents in children's education. The home learning environment often shapes a child's academic success, yet the UK suffers from one of the lowest rates of parental engagement in home learning. Unlocking the power of parents could help to tackle the attainment gap and bolster the foundational skills of our young people.

Chapter two uncovers the damage caused by Covid. We examine the existing education recovery package and analyse the extent to which existing programmes are reaching those children who are most in need. Huge swathes in children are not in school and many are unable to access the benefits of additional targeted support. Repairing the damage of Covid is essential, especially for primary school children who missed out on their first years in education.

Our final chapter examines the state of the school system. High-quality teaching has the biggest influence on whether a child develops foundational skills at school and yet, currently, our education system is suffering from acute recruitment and retention difficulties. In this chapter, we call on the government to strengthen the school workforce, to develop leaders in foundational skills, and to ensure that pupils can access targeted support when they need it.

While the government must play a key role in guiding and implementing these reforms, they do not need to start from scratch. Our report uncovered droves of charities who are already driving system change in their local areas. From enrichment activities through to parental engagement, charities are leading the way in improving educational outcomes. The government should draw upon their strength and work with philanthropists to bolster their amazing work.

Ensuring that every child leaves primary school with a secure grasp of foundational skills must be seen as a moral imperative. This report provides a plan to ensure that every child leaves school with the foundational skills they need for life.

Summary of Recommendations

Seeing parents as partners in education

Teachers and schools can transform children's lives, but they cannot do so if they work in isolation. Children spend much more time at home, with their families, than they do at school and, therefore, how parents support their children's learning at home often shapes their academic success.

The first section of this report provides a blueprint for greater parental engagement where parents are seen as equals in helping to develop children's foundational skills.

Recommendation 1: The Department for Education should outline a National Parental Participation Strategy. The strategy should create a new duty for multi-academy trusts (MATs) to focus on parental participation and publish parental participation plans. The Department for Education should also set out a structure for parental engagement that targets support towards those who need it most and make clear the responsibilities of other local agencies in achieving this vision.

Recommendation 2: The national strategy on parental engagement should create a duty for all multi-academy trusts and schools to establish parental engagement policies. Trusts and schools should design these policies in consultation with parents and guardians to reflect the needs of local families. There should be an explicit focus on reaching families from more disadvantaged areas and using parental participation to reduce the attainment gap.

Recommendation 3: Introduce a mandatory position of a Pupil Premium governor for all schools. This role is currently recommended to schools, making it mandatory would allow all schools to benefit. This role should also be expanded to include holding the school to account on the extent to which they engage with parents from a disadvantaged background.

Recommendation 4: Pilot scheme of family support practitioners focused on schools in Education Investment Areas. Family support practitioners should be trialled and evaluated. These practitioners would play a key role in supporting families with additional needs which act as a barrier to learning at home.

Recommendation 5: The National Parental Participation Strategy should outline the expectation for schools and Family Hubs to collaborate to provide better support to parents. The government should commission research on the best ways for Family Hubs to integrate with existing school services and examine the benefits of Family Hubs being collocated on primary school sites. The review of Family Hubs and schools should look at the flexibility in funding models and should make more funding available to support parents and families beyond the early years.

Recommendation 6: The Government should seek to boost the number of parents on family learning courses. Family learning should become a core part of the Department for Education's plans to tackle the attainment gap and improve literacy and numeracy. Primary schools should partner with Adult Community Education providers to deliver accessible family learning courses collocated on primary school sites.

Fixing the damage of Covid

The school climate and challenges facing 'Generation Covid' are significantly different to those that were being grappled with prior to school shutdowns. Children's grasp of foundational skills has been damaged by the impact of lockdowns and disruption to learning.

This chapter explores some of the key mechanisms for supporting children to catch up on lost learning over the pandemic and also to repair the damage caused by school shutdowns.

Recommendation 7: The Department for Education should appoint 2,000 school attendance practitioners to address the underlying causes of school absence and remove the barriers to engagement for severely absent pupils. Funding for this proposal could be derived from the Supporting Families programme and the additional investment given to Education Investment Areas to tackle issues including severe absence.

Recommendation 8: The Department should refocus the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) to focus on disadvantaged pupils who have been disproportionately affected by the disruption to schools over the pandemic. The Department should review how schools are using the funding allocated via schools-led tutoring to ensure that it is being spent on additional tutoring. The Department should also reinstate targets for the number of children eligible for pupil premium accessing the NTP.

Recommendation 9: Schools should introduce an Enrichment Guarantee, offering weekly enrichment activities for all pupils. The Enrichment Guarantee could be trialled in primary schools across one local authority before being scaled up. Given that capacity constraints are often a key barrier for schools who struggle to set up enrichment programmes, the government should look at the role of community groups and voluntary organisations in delivering the extra-curricular activities.

Strengthening the school system

Getting the right high-quality staff into schools is essential if we want to improve young people's foundational schools. At school-level, high-quality teaching is the most important factor in improving pupil's attainment followed by strong leadership.

This chapter makes the case for a stronger school system which delivers high-quality teaching for all pupils and delivers targeted support for those who need it.

Recommendation 10: The Department for Education should explore the feasibility of introducing an undergraduate level Degree Apprenticeship for primary school teachers. Schools would be able to use existing Apprenticeship Levy funding to invest in existing staff members and to develop teaching support staff who may not have an undergraduate degree.

Recommendation 11: The Department for Education should introduce a ring-fenced fund for continuing professional development (CPD) focusing on improving teacher's understanding of how to develop foundational skills in the classroom. Schools should be expected to publish details about how the fund is spent and how they use this funding to focus on improving outcomes for all pupils, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Recommendation 12: The Department for Education should review the free school meals eligibility threshold and the academic outcomes of children by the length of time that they have been eligible for free school meals. The Department should consider an uplift in the threshold for free school meals eligibility and reweighting Pupil Premium to provide additional support for children living in persistent poverty.

Recommendation 13: The Department should outline plans to enable primary school teachers to better identify and provide support for SEND in the classroom. The Department for Education should provide training for teachers identifying and supporting SEND in the classroom and should map cold spots of SEND support provision, such as the availability of speech and language therapists.

Recommendation 14: The Department for Education should introduce new National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for Leading Numeracy and Leading Oracy. Leading Numeracy and Leading Oracy NPQs would create a rung of strong middle leaders in foundational skills who are equipped to run whole-school foundational skills strategies and develop the knowledge of other teachers.

Recommendation 15: The Department for Education should put oracy education on an equal footing with literacy and numeracy by introducing oracy in the National Curriculum and piloting new Oracy Hubs, in the style of English and Maths Hubs. The introduction of oracy on the curriculum partnered with a new Oracy Hub network could increase confidence, consistency, and ultimately standards of oracy skills development on a national scale.

State of the Nation

Literacy, numeracy, and oracy are foundational skills which underpin children's development and life outcomes. Lacking these vital skills can hold a person back at every life stage: from education, to work, to everyday activities.

These essential skills should sit at the heart of our primary school system as they are the cornerstone of a successful education. Foundational skills are among the first a pupil develops yet they are not mastered automatically. They need to be explicitly taught and interwoven across the school curriculum.¹

However, far too many children leave primary school without a grasp of these foundational skills. England's primary school system has a long-standing problem: each academic year a large proportion of year 6 pupils do not reach expected levels in foundational skills. In 2022, two in five children left primary school without reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths.²

The Government's ambition is that 90 per cent of all students develop reading, writing and maths skills to an expected standard by 2030.³ This would require a 30-percentage point jump in attainment levels from 2022.⁴

It seems unlikely that the education system is on course for achieving this ambition. Our polling showed that, at the start of the academic year 2022/23, just 40 per cent of teachers said that they were confident that most of their pupils would meet expected standards in these subjects.⁵ Even starker, just 17 per cent of teachers are confident that this will be true for most of their disadvantaged pupils.⁶

Additionally, teachers in schools in areas of higher deprivation were less confident that pupils would meet expected levels, than those working in areas of lower deprivation. Just 32 per cent of teachers working in schools in the areas of highest deprivation were confident that most of their pupils would meet targets in numeracy and literacy skills development this academic year, compared to 51 per cent in more affluent schools.⁷

1 Department for Education, 2021, "The reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102800/Reading_framework_teaching_the_foundations_of_literacy_-_Sept_22.pdf]

2 Department for Education, 2022. "Key stage 2 attainment (revised): 2022" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2>]

3 Department for Education, 2022, "Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063601/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child_web_-_accessible.pdf]

4 Matilda Martin, 2022, "SATs 2022: The data behind this year's results." [Accessed via: <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/primary/sats-2022-data-behind-years-results>]

5 Teacher Tapp survey, September 2022, created for CSJ, Question: Concerning literacy and numeracy skills which of the following are true?

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

Nearly one in five teachers (19 per cent) reported that they were concerned that most of their children would not meet literacy and numeracy targets in 2022/23.⁸ Again, teachers in schools in areas of higher deprivation were more concerned. 28 per cent of teachers in the most disadvantaged schools were concerned that most of their pupils would not meet targets, compared with 12 per cent of teachers in the most affluent schools who said the same.⁹

According to a survey for Speech and Language UK (a charity which supports children with speech, language and communication difficulties, formerly known as I CAN), two thirds of primary school teachers believe that the children that they teach are behind with their speaking and/or academic understanding due to Covid-19. 62 per cent of primary school teachers who believed that their children were behind also worried that their children would not be able to catch up.¹⁰

Children who leave primary school without foundational skills go on to secondary school ill-equipped for further learning. A yawning gap develops between children with these foundational skills and those without. The scarring effects of low literacy, numeracy, and oracy are present at every stage of later education.

This report interrogates the state of the nation of primary foundational skills and sketches out a blueprint to ensure that all children leave primary school with the skills they need to thrive.

Which skills are foundational?

Literacy, numeracy, and oracy skills are the foundation from which future learning and lifelong opportunities are built.¹¹ They are the bedrock of wider educational outcomes and enable access to the wider curriculum.¹²

Literacy

Literacy skills include reading, writing, and a wider grasp of written language.

Reaching expected levels in literacy skills enables a range of other skills and knowledge to be developed.¹³ As one headteacher told us, ‘The most important gift our school can give a child is the power to read,’ a sentiment echoed by others.¹⁴

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 I Can, 2021, “1.5 million children and young people are at risk of being left behind as they struggle to speak and understand language.” [Accessed via: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/news/i-can-publishes-speaking-up-for-the-covid-generation>]

11 Department for Education, 2022, Opportunity for all, Foreword from the secretary of state for education. [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063602/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child_print_version_.pdf]

12 *Ibid.*

13 Department for Education, 2014, “National curriculum in England: English programmes of study.” [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>]

14 Ofsted, 2010, “Reading by 6: how the best schools do it.” [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379093/Reading_20by_20six.pdf]

Adults with poor literacy skills often have worse life outcomes than their peers. They find themselves locked out of the jobs market, with lower lifetime earnings, and, as a parent, they find it more difficult to support their child's learning.¹⁵ This can end up reinforcing intergenerational low levels of literacy.

Numeracy

Numeracy skills include the ability to solve numerical problems,¹⁶ reason mathematically in the classroom, and improve fluency in the fundamentals of maths.¹⁷

Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at the OECD, has previously said: *"Good numeracy is the best protection against unemployment, low wages and poor health"*.¹⁸ Numeracy skills are essential to many different aspects of life. Numerical confidence impacts our financial, social, and professional advancement.

However, for a large proportion of the population, maths is a language they cannot speak.¹⁹ Poor numeracy skills are a defining national characteristic.²⁰ Half of the working age population have the expected numeracy skills development of primary school children.²¹

Oracy

Oracy, while often overlooked, is the third foundational skill which underpins further learning.²² There is no single definition of oracy in education, often the term is used to describe a wide range of concepts. The APPG on Oracy has adopted a broad definition of oracy as: "the ability to speak eloquently, to articulate ideas and thoughts, to influence through talking, to collaborate with peers, and to express views confidently and appropriately".²³

15 National Literacy Trust, Adult Literacy. [Accessed via: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy>]

16 National Numeracy. "What is numeracy?" [Accessed via: <https://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/what-numeracy>]

17 Department for Education, 2021, "National curriculum in England: mathematics programmes of study." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-mathematics-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-mathematics-programmes-of-study>]

18 National Numeracy, 2020. "Attitudes towards Maths" [Accessed via: <https://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/research-and-resources/attitudes-towards-maths>]

19 Dr Samantha Callan, 2015, "The fear factor: maths anxiety in girls and women." [Accessed via: http://mathsanxietytrust.com/MACJ3578_Fear_Factor_Report_08.15_WEB_26.08.15.pdf]

20 MP Nick Gibb, 2016, "Speech: building a renaissance in mathematics teaching." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nick-gibb-building-a-renaissance-in-mathematics-teaching>]

21 GOV.UK, 2022. "Numeracy support to boost maths skills for all the family" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/numeracy-support-to-boost-maths-skills-for-all-the-family>]

22 Neil Mercer, 2019, "Language and the joint creation of knowledge." [Accessed via: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429400759>]

23 APPG on Oracy, 2021, "Speak for Change" [Accessed via: https://oracy.inparliament.uk/sites/oracy.inparliament.uk/files/2021-04/Oracy_APPG_FinalReport_28_04%20%284%29.pdf]

Poor language skills development at age five significantly impacts children's literacy and numeracy skills at age 11.²⁴ Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study, undertaken by the UCL Institute of Education, showed that one in four pupils who struggled with language at age five did not reach expected standards in English at the end of primary school. In comparison, only one in 25 pupils with good language skills failed to meet expected standards. One in five children with poor language skills at age five did not reach expected standards in maths at the end of primary school, compared with one in 50 who had good language skills.²⁵

Why are these skills important?

Foundational skills are the building blocks of future learning. Literacy, numeracy, and oracy are transferrable skills that, once mastered, allow children to develop further skills throughout their time at school.

These three skills all mutually reinforce one another. Pupils who do well in English language examinations also do well in maths.²⁶ Similarly, children who have a secure grasp of language and speech skills at the start of primary school are more likely to reach expected standards in maths and English at the end of primary school.²⁷

There is also a strong relationship between the level of foundational skills at the end of primary school and future academic success. In 2022, only 10 per cent of pupils who did not meet the expected standard in either reading, writing or maths when they were in key stage 2 achieved grade 5 or above in their English and maths GCSEs at the end of key stage 4. For comparison, 53 per cent of pupils who met the expected standards in all three skills and 91 per cent of pupils who met the higher standards went on to achieve grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs.²⁸

Similarly, a young person's language skills are a strong predictor of later academic success. Vocabulary skills at age 13 strongly predict GCSE results at age 15. In some subjects, vocabulary and language development has a stronger relationship with higher grades at GCSE level than socio-economic background.²⁹

24 RCSLT, Voice21 and ICAN, 2021. "The centrality of spoken language to developing literacy and numeracy skills" [Accessed via: https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Language-and-Literacy-briefing_2nd-December-final-version-006.pdf]

25 Save the Children, 2011. "Early Language Development and children's primary school attainment in English and maths: new research findings." [Accessed via: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/policy/early-language-development-and-childrens-primary-school-attainment.pdf>]

26 Rashid et al, 2010. "The levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy of 13- to 19-year olds in England" [Accessed via: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/21953/1/doc_4690.pdf]

27 Save the Children, 2011. "Early Language Development and children's primary school attainment in English and maths: new research findings." [Accessed via: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/policy/early-language-development-and-childrens-primary-school-attainment.pdf>]

28 Department for Education, 2022. "KS4 national data" [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/eb85bc78-eb28-44ae-961f-e3dbd52bc574>]

29 Spencer et al, 2016. "Contribution of spoken language and socio-economic background to adolescents' educational achievement at age 16 years" [Accessed via: https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/98306/9/WRR0_98306.pdf]

Foundational skills shape adults' life chances. Adults who mastered foundational skills in primary school tend to have higher earnings in later life, regardless of their background.³⁰ Stronger literacy and numeracy skills are associated with higher employment rates and with spending more time in employment.³¹

England has one of the strongest links between the level of foundational skills and salary in the OECD.³² Numeracy skills of workers in England are a bigger predictor of economic returns than in most other developed countries³³ and, conversely, 59 per cent of people who lost their job in the pandemic had low numeracy skills.³⁴

Oracy skills development at primary school similarly has a clear lifelong influence. A 2022 Ofsted report warns that the gap between the word-rich and word-poor in education "correlates with lasting socioeconomic and health inequalities".³⁵ A young person who does not meet expected spoken language levels aged 11 is twice as likely to be unemployed at the age of 34.³⁶

Levels of foundational skills impact all aspects of adult life. Everyday activities such as reading labels on medicine, filling out a job application, or finding key information on the internet are a challenge without them.³⁷ Children who have poor language skills aged 5 are more likely to fail to reach expected levels in literacy by Year 6, which in turn makes them three times more likely to experience mental health problems as adults.³⁸ The lifelong consequences of poor foundational skills development are far from purely academic.

Low levels of foundational skills can even increase the likelihood of interaction with the criminal justice system. As Andrea Ellison, from the Leeds Library service, told the CSJ: *"I strongly believe that if we want to keep our children in Leeds out of long-term poverty and the criminal justice system, we need to make sure they can read."*

A high proportion of people who have been in prison in the UK have literacy levels far below the national average. Almost six in ten prisoners in Britain have a reading age lower than an 11-year-old.³⁹ Furthermore, the development of speech and language skills is a large indicator of an ex-prisoner being able to gain employment on release.⁴⁰

30 Claire Crawford and Jonathon Cribb, 2013, "Reading and maths skills at age 10 and earnings in later life: a brief analysis using the British Cohort Study" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190625/Reading_and_maths_skills_at_age_10_and_earnings_in_later_life.pdf]

31 Bynner et al, 1997. "It doesn't get any better: The Impact of Poor Basic Skills"

32 OECD, Kuczera et al, 2016, "Building skills for all: A review of England." [Accessed via: <https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf>]

33 *Ibid.*

34 Pro Bono Economics, 2021, "Press release: Covid job losses disproportionately impact people with low numeracy skills." [Accessed via: <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/news/press-release-covid-job-losses-disproportionately-impact-people-with-low-numeracy-skills>]

35 James Carr, Schools Week, 2022, "Speed read: Ofsted's guide to a 'high-quality' English curriculum." [Accessed via: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/speed-read-ofsteds-guide-to-a-high-quality-english-curriculum>]

36 University of Oxford, 2022, "British Academy creates new 'oracy' fellowship- to investigate levelling up through talk." [Accessed via: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2022-03-21-british-academy-creates-new-oracy-fellowship-investigate-levelling-through-talk>]

37 National Literacy Trust, 2019, "Words matter: the role of literacy combatting social exclusion." [Accessed via: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/blog/words-matter-role-literacy-combatting-social-exclusion>]

38 *Ibid.*

39 Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Ofsted, 2022, "Research and analysis, prison education: a review of reading education in prisons." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons>]

40 Education Committee, 2022, "Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need the education to climb the ladder of opportunity." [Accessed via: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/28707/documents/173902/default>]

The state of the nation: Low levels of foundational skills

At the start of primary school

Gaps in foundational skills often open up before children even start at school. Using figures from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, measures typically taken in the summer term of reception year, we can examine the state of foundational skills at the start of primary school.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile collects information on childhood development at age five across several areas of learning including:

- Physical development;
- Expressive arts and design;
- Personal, social and emotional development;
- Understanding the world;
- Communication and language;
- Maths; and
- Literacy.

In 2021/22, 65 per cent of children were at a good level of development by age five and 63 per cent were at the expected level across all early learning goals.⁴¹

Across every area of learning, the majority of five-year-olds achieved the expected standard.⁴² However, data from the Department for Education shows that communication and language, maths and literacy had the lowest proportions of children reaching expected standards when compared to other learning areas.⁴³

In 2021/22, 127,500 five-year-olds in England started primary school without the communication skills expected for their age, equivalent to one in five (20.5 per cent) of all children by the end of Reception.⁴⁴

Fewer children reached the expected standard in maths by the end of Reception. In 2021/22, nearly a quarter (24.1 per cent) of five-year-olds did not reach the expected level of learning by age five. This equates to 150,000 pupils.⁴⁵

Literacy had the lowest proportion of children achieving the expected standard by age five, according to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. In total, 32.0 per cent of children in Reception did not reach the expected standard. This is equivalent to 199,100 pupils in the 2022 cohort.⁴⁶

Children who start school not “school ready” and who do not meet expected standards of development are more likely to leave school without a grade 4 pass in GCSE English language and maths. Half of pupils who fail in these subjects at GCSE were judged to be behind at age 5.⁴⁷

41 Department for Education, 2022. “Early years foundation stage profile results” [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results/2021-22>]

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 Elliot Major et al, 2022. “The forgotten fifth: examining the early education trajectories of teenagers who fall below the expected standards in GCSE English language and maths examinations at age 16” [Accessed via: <https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CLS-Working-Paper-2022-6-The-forgotten-fifth.pdf>]

A major study of the Millennium Cohort Study, carried out by Lee Elliot Major and Sam Parsons, found a series of family and individual characteristics which this cohort of pupils share. They found these pupils were more likely to be born to a teenage mother, live with a single parent, live in a workless household, have parents with low levels of qualifications, live in a private rented home, live in a home which is overcrowded or damp, and live in poorer areas.⁴⁸

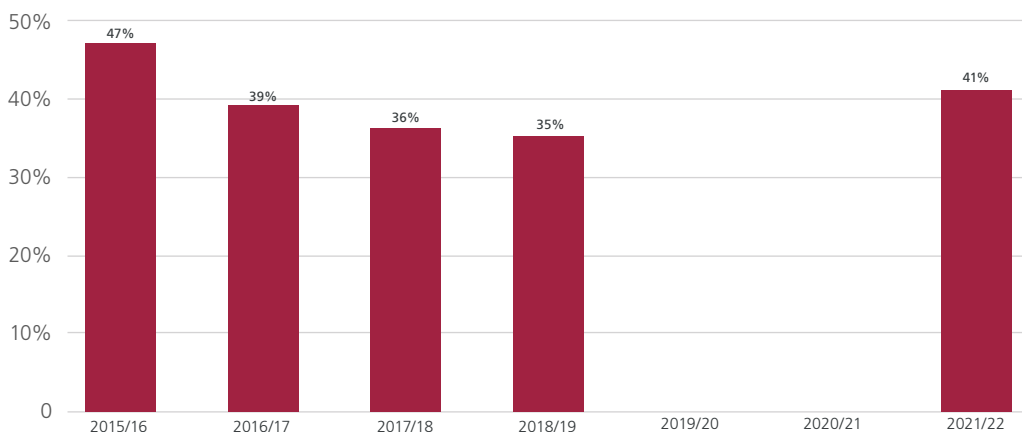
Individual characteristics associated with lower level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy from early years through to GCSEs included: being male, having low birthweight, having never been breastfed, and not being the first-born child.⁴⁹

At the end of primary school

Gaps that emerge in early years can become entrenched if they are not sufficiently addressed in primary school. Even before the pandemic, in 2019 over 220,000 pupils left primary school without reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. This was equivalent to 35 per cent of all year 6 pupils.⁵⁰

Up until 2019, the total number of pupils not reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths had been falling.

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils not meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined)



In 2016, 47 per cent of all children at the end of key stage 2 did not reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined). By 2019, that figure had steadily fallen year on year to 35 per cent.⁵¹ While this was a trend of improving results, still more than a third of children were leaving primary school with reading, writing and maths skills below expectations.

2022 SATs results confirmed what was feared by many, which is that the progress made in improving overall attainment had been largely reversed. School shutdowns had an immediate and detrimental impact on primary educational outcomes. In the first full year after school shutdowns, 41 per cent of all year 6 pupils left school without reaching expected standards.⁵²

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*

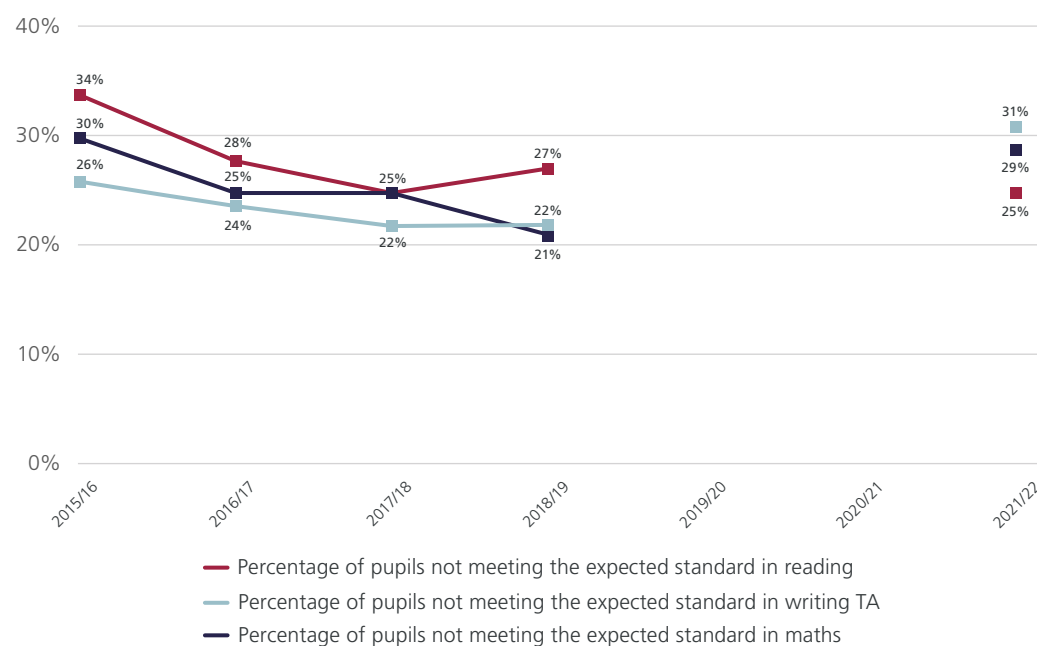
50 Department for Education and Standards Testing Agency, 2019, "National, local authority and regional tables: national curriculum assessments at Key Stage 2 in England, 2019 (provisional)." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2019-provisional>]

51 Department for Education, 2022. "Key stage 2 attainment (revised): 2022" [Accessed via: [gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2)]

52 *Ibid.*

The total number of pupils leaving school without reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and maths (combined) stood at 275,243 in 2022.⁵³ This represents an increase of 50,000 pupils compared with 2019 results.⁵⁴

Figure 2: Percentage of pupils not meeting the expected standards by subject



In the individual subjects, in maths and writing there was a decrease in the number of pupils who met the expected standards in 2022. The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in writing fell by 9 per cent, from 78 per cent in 2019 to 69 per cent in 2022.⁵⁵ Similarly, in maths the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard fell by 8 per cent from 79 per cent in 2019 to 71 per cent in 2022.⁵⁶

However, in reading, the overall proportion of pupils reaching expected standards increased. In 2022, 75 per cent of pupils met the expected standards in reading, this was up 2 per cent compared to 2019.⁵⁷ This was largely driven by an increase in the number of non-disadvantaged pupils who achieved the expected standard.

Speech and language skills are not measured nationally at the end of primary school in the same way that literacy and numeracy skills are. However, a recent study from I CAN estimates that 1.5 million children across the UK were at risk of being educationally left behind, following the pandemic, due to underdeveloped speech and language skills.⁵⁸

53 *Ibid.*

54 Gov.UK, 2022, Permanent data table, 'Key stage 2 attainment by school characteristics' from 'Key stage 2 attainment'. [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/46c96eb6-7fc1-46b6-8678-08dad51ca1cc>]

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 I Can, 2021, "1.5 million children and young people are at risk of being left behind as they struggle to speak and understand language." [Accessed via: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/news/i-can-publishes-speaking-up-for-the-covid-generation>]

The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers

These overall figures, while concerning, mask a gulf which has opened up between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils.

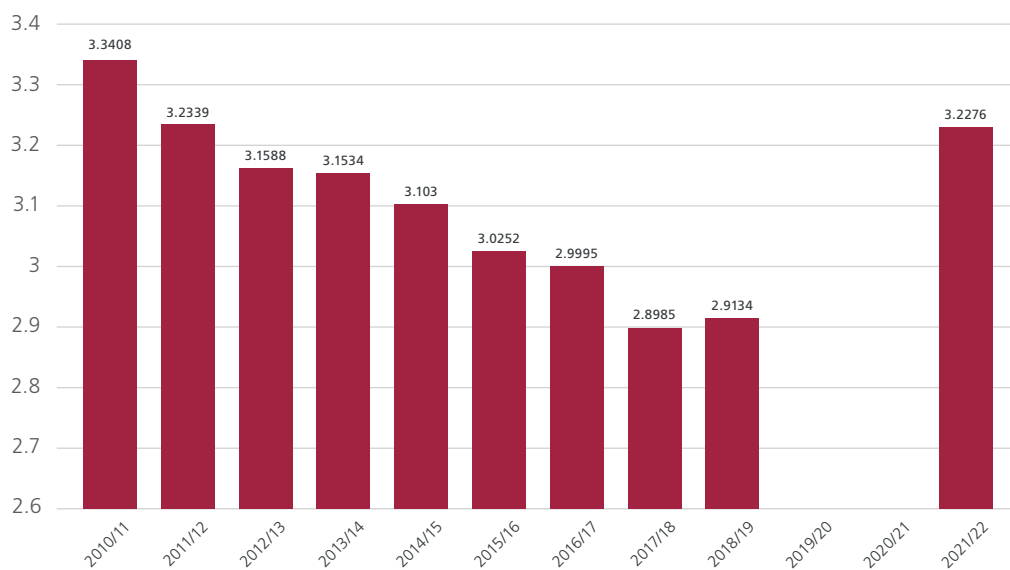
For the purposes of this report, a disadvantaged pupil is defined as a pupil who is registered as eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, children looked after by a local authority or who have left local authority care. The key stage 2 foundational skills outcomes for this cohort are significantly worse than for their peers.

Even before the pandemic, a disadvantaged pupil aged 11 was, on average, nine months behind their non-disadvantaged peers in terms of learning. Pupils who were persistently disadvantaged were a further three months behind.⁵⁹

Prior to Covid-19, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had been reducing between 2011 and 2018.⁶⁰ However, the key stage 2 results in 2022 confirmed that all of the progress in closing the gap had been wiped out by school disruption over the pandemic.

Post-pandemic, the attainment gap has grown to the largest level in a decade.⁶¹ The disadvantage gap index has grown to 3.23, up from 2.91 in 2019.⁶²

Figure 3: Key Stage 2 Attainment Gap since 2010/11



In 2022 SATS, over half of all disadvantaged pupils (57 per cent) did not reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined). In comparison, 35 per cent of pupils from non-disadvantaged backgrounds did not meet the expected standards in these subjects.⁶³

59 Education Policy Institute, 2020, "Education in England: Annual report 2020." [Accessed via: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-in-england-annual-report-2020>]

60 *Ibid.*

61 Gov.UK, 2022, Key stage 2 attainment, 2021-22. [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment/2021-22>]

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

In reading, the proportion of non-disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standards increased in 2022 but the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving these standards fell. As a consequence, the attainment gap for reading grew when compared to 2019. In 2022, 38 per cent of disadvantaged pupils and 20 per cent of non-disadvantaged pupils reached expected standards. Disadvantaged pupils were almost twice as likely to not reach the expected standards in reading.⁶⁴

In writing, 45 per cent of disadvantaged pupils did not meet the expected level at SATs compared to 25 per cent of non-disadvantaged pupils and in maths attainment fell to 56 per cent for disadvantaged pupils and to 78 per cent for other pupils.⁶⁵

Other educational inequalities

Poverty is not the only fault line of education inequality in England. Educational outcomes for children at primary school are closely linked with a pupil's special educational needs (SEN), geographic location, and the quality of the school they attend. Educational inequalities often compound one another and thus any plan to improve foundational skills at primary school must consider the various factors that are linked to low levels of attainment.

Special educational needs

Just one in five children accessing SEN support achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and maths (combined). Only 7 per cent of children who had an EHCP achieved the expected standard.⁶⁶ For comparison, 69 per cent of children with no identified SEN met the same standards.

Regional variation

There is also significant regional variation across England in outcomes at KS2 level. A greater proportion of children living in London reach the expected standards in reading, writing and maths (combined) than in other regions.⁶⁷

While 66 per cent of children in London reached the expected standard in these foundational skills by the end of year 6, in the South West, West Midlands, East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber only 57 per cent of children reached the same standard.⁶⁸

Similarly, the impact of learning losses has varied significantly across regions in England. For primary-aged pupils, the greatest learning losses in reading were recorded for pupils in the North East (1.3 months), North West (1.2 months) and Yorkshire and the Humber (1.1 months).⁶⁹

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 Gov.UK, 2022, Key stage 2 attainment, Percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by SEN status, 2019 and 2022 (England, state-funded schools). [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/a75ec3ca-7eb1-435a-867d-08dad51ca1cc>]

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*

69 Renaissance Learning, Education Policy Institute, 2022. "Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063488/Understanding_Progress_in_the_2020_to_2021_Academic_Year_Extension_report_covering_the_first_half_of_the_autumn_term_2021.pdf]

Ofsted ratings

Ofsted's 2022 Annual Report concluded that there is a slight correlation between Ofsted ratings and the proportion of pupils in a school which achieve the expected standard in foundational skills. In the academic year 2021/22, an average of 74 per cent of pupils who attended an Outstanding primary school reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in key stage 2 SATs.⁷⁰ In comparison, 47 per cent of pupils in Requires Improvement and Inadequate schools reached the expected standards in these subjects.⁷¹

The impact of the pandemic

The pandemic created new inequalities while exacerbating old ones. Covid has added another layer to an already complex issue.⁷² The pandemic hit the most disadvantaged pupils the hardest, according to 97 per cent of teachers.⁷³ On return to fully opened schools, lost learning in the 2020-21 academic year was around 50 per cent higher for disadvantaged pupils than for non-disadvantaged pupils.⁷⁴ This has contributed to a growth in educational inequality even from 2020 to 2021.⁷⁵

Attainment gaps could widen even further as there is a concerning pattern of disadvantaged students "catching up" more slowly post-pandemic compared to their peers⁷⁶. Another study found that between Autumn 2019 and Autumn 2020, the attainment gap in primary maths widened by between 10 and 24 per cent.⁷⁷

As Hannah Nash, Associate Professor in Developmental Psychology at the University of Leeds, told the CSJ: *"Two rounds of school disruption created new inequalities between young pupils and left a large proportion of pupils with gaps in basic skills and knowledge."*

Following the pandemic, research shows the range of effects that school and early education disruption has had.⁷⁸ Anna- Louise Van Der Merwe, Trust Director for the Foundation Years Trust, told the CSJ

70 Ofsted, 2022, Ofsted Annual Report, 2021-22. [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1122628/31357_Ofsted_Annual_Report_2021-22_WEB.pdf]

71 *Ibid.*

72 Weidmann et al, 2021, Education Endowment Fund, "Covid-19 disruptions, Attainment gaps and primary school responses." [Accessed via: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Covid-19_disruptions_attainment_gaps_and_primary_school_responses_-_May_2021.pdf]

73 Gerri Peev, The Spectator, 2022, "The curious social backlash that comes with private education." [Accessed via: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-curious-social-backlash-that-comes-with-private-education>]

74 Renaissance Learning and Education Policy Institute, 2022, "Understanding progress in the 2020/21 academic year." [Accessed via: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/39025/1/Understanding_Progress_in_the_2020_to_2021_Academic_Year_Extension_report_covering_the_first_half_of_the_autumn_term_2021-1.pdf]

75 Blainey and Hannay, 2021, "The effects of educational disruption on primary school attainment in summer 2021." [Accessed via: https://www.risingstars-uk.com/media/Rising-Stars/Assessment/Whitepapers/RSA_Effects_of_disruption_Summer_Aug_2021.pdf]

76 Education Committee, 2022, "Is the catch-up programme fit for purpose?" [Accessed via: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9251/documents/160043/default>]

77 Education Endowment Fund, 2022, "Impact of Covid-19 disruptions in primary schools: attainment gaps and school responses." [Accessed via: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9251/documents/160043/default>]

78 Education Endowment Fund, 2022, "Pandemic adversely affected young children's development, with fewer reaching expected levels by the end of reception class." [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/new-pandemic-adversely-affected-young-childrens-development-with-fewer-reaching-expected-levels-by-the-end-of-reception-class>]

“After the pandemic, schools are reporting greater issues of regulation and behaviour, particularly with speech and language development. Issues with toilet training, not holding a knife and fork properly and other physical factors are also presenting within the new primary cohort.”

Some primary schools have reported that almost no pupils are ready for learning following the pandemic, especially concerning speech and language development.⁷⁹

The impact of the pandemic on education is far from over; it has barely begun. As Professor Mick Waters, previously the Director of Curriculum at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, attested:

“The impacts of Covid-19 are still being felt by schools daily. One school I spoke with recently had staff attendance down at 60 per cent long after lockdowns had ended. After Covid-19, schools are more variable than ever in outlook. Some are fearful, many feel lockdowns have shed light on areas that have always been the biggest issues, which are now exacerbated.”

79 Kindred and YouGov, 2021, “School readiness survey.” [Accessed via: <https://kindredsquared.org.uk/category/school-readiness>]

Part 1. Seeing parents as partners in education

Teachers and schools can transform children's lives, but they cannot do so if they work in isolation. Children spend much more time at home, with their families, than they do at school and, therefore, how parents support their children's learning at home often shapes their academic success.

There is a wealth of evidence which shows the value of parental participation in education. Levels of parental engagement are consistently associated with better academic outcomes, according to the Education Endowment Foundation.⁸⁰ Their systematic review of parental engagement found that the benefits ranged from improved academic success, such as better literacy and maths skills and closure of the attainment gap, to improved attendance at school.⁸¹

Parental participation can be even more important in a child's outcomes than school level variables. A study from the Department for Education has shown that parental participation has a significant positive impact on a child's educational success, even after all other factors which shape attainment have been accounted for.⁸²

Parental participation incorporates parental involvement and engagement,⁸³ as both can positively impact pupil progress.⁸⁴ The term "parent" covers anyone with parental responsibility.⁸⁵ Parental involvement requires schools to inform parents of pupil progress and support them in acting on this information.⁸⁶ Engagement includes actively listening to the wants and needs of families.⁸⁷

Parental engagement activities can be very low cost and include: programmes which develop parental foundational skills; general approaches which encourage parents to help with homework; the involvement of parents in their children's learning; and more intensive programmes for families who need additional support.⁸⁸

80 Education Endowment Foundation, 2018. "Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/supporting-parents>]

81 Education Endowment Foundation, 2019. "Parental Engagement: Evidence from Research and Practice" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/parental-engagement>]

82 Department for Education, 2010. "Review of best practice in parental engagement". [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182508/DFE-RR156.pdf]

83 Parents Opening Doors: Parent carer forum, "What is parent participation." [Accessed via: podstelford.org/what-is-parent-participation]

84 Harris and Goodall, 2006, "Engaging parents in raising achievement: do parents know they matter?" [Accessed via: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6639/1/DCSF-RW004.pdf>]

85 SHINE Trust, 2022, "Time To Engage: Targeting Parental Engagement" [Accessed via: shinetrust.org.uk/2017/04/04/time-to-engage]

86 William Jeynes, 2012, "A meta-analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students." [Accessed via: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042085912445643>]

87 Parentkind, 2019, "Parent participation framework report for Parentkind." [Accessed via: <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/assets/resources/Parentkind-Parent-Participation-Framework-Report-March-2019.pdf>]

88 Education Endowment Foundation. "Parental engagement" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement>]

Free Flow Info

Free Flow Info enables schools to report to parents on a regular basis, keeping them up to date about the progress children are making and allowing parents to share information about their children's learning outside of school. Parents, children, and teachers can all share photos and stimulate conversations around learning through an online portal. The approach requires no subject-specific knowledge from parents and therefore has been effective in engaging parents who lack confidence academically.

Free Flow Info replaces traditional termly report writing with a data rich method of reporting to parents. The portal harvests data from work that teachers are already doing and uses it to create a steady flow of information on pupil progress for parents. By drawing on existing work and automating reporting, Free Flow Info ensures that parental involvement is consistent, is positive, and does not impose huge additional workload pressures on teachers and staff.

Both parents and teachers have reported improved academic outcomes for children as a result of better parental involvement. 93 per cent of teachers who used Free Flow Info saw a positive impact on the school generally and 90 per cent saw a positive impact on pupils' academic work. Furthermore, 84 per cent of parents reported they were having more conversations about education in the home and 74 per cent stated they had increased confidence in supporting their children's learning.

The benefits of parental participation

Parental participation is especially important when it comes to the development of foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and oracy in primary school. At primary level, parental participation has been shown to be a greater influence on academic success than other factors including the quality of the school.⁸⁹ Engaging with parents earlier on reaps dividends: parental engagement can have a greater impact on academic progress in primary school than later in education.⁹⁰

Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation suggests that parental engagement can lead to four months of additional progress for an average student.⁹¹ On average, parental engagement adds five months of progress per academic year in literacy skills and three months in numeracy.⁹² The impact of parental engagement is higher in primary school than secondary and for pupils with low prior attainment.⁹³

89 Department for Education, 2010. "Review of best practice in parental engagement". [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182508/DFE-RR156.pdf]

90 The Education Endowment foundation, 2021, "Parental Engagement." [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement/>]

91 *Ibid.*

92 *Ibid.*

93 *Ibid.*

Effective partnerships between school and parents can help to close the attainment gap.⁹⁴ Disadvantaged pupils are more likely to experience barriers to learning in their home learning environment and evidence suggests that sometimes disadvantaged pupils' attainment levels regress during the summer due to a lack of formal and informal learning activities. If parental engagement is designed to reach this cohort of pupils, it can mitigate some of these causes of educational disadvantage.⁹⁵

Learning with Parents

Learning with Parents is a home learning programme which supports parents to teach and reinforce learning methods used in primary school. The platform covers foundational skills including literacy, oracy, and numeracy. Teachers choose topics that are aligned with the part of the curriculum that they are teaching in class. For each topic, the platform provides child-led videos on the learning methods used in primary school.

Once the curriculum has been set, Learning with Parents provides the interface with families. They text and remind parents to complete activities with their children at home. Families watch the videos together and then complete easy and accessible activities at home which link foundational skills to the real world. Parents can share feedback with teachers about what the child struggled with via the platform. Teachers can use this feedback to shape their lessons and to better understand which parents are supporting their children's learning at home.

Their approach has improved the outcomes for children and families. 90 per cent of teachers who use Learning with Parents say that the programme supports parents to engage more effectively in their child's learning and 84 per cent said that the programme helps pupils embed their understanding of the topics they are learning about.

The barriers to parental participation

Despite the well-known benefits of parental participation, our research shows that parental participation is not always used consistently across the primary education system.⁹⁶ According to our Teacher Tapp poll, just one in three primary school teachers agreed that their school has a clear and coherent parental participation policy, a similar proportion of primary school teachers disagreed.⁹⁷

Teachers in schools in more disadvantaged areas were more likely to disagree that their school had a clear parental engagement policy: 38 per cent of teachers in more disadvantaged schools disagreed with this statement, compared to 31 per cent of teachers in more affluent schools.⁹⁸

94 Action for Children, 2016. "Success starts at home, The importance of the early home learning environment to improving life chances." [Accessed via: [bl.uk/collection-items/success-starts-at-home-the-importance-of-the-early-home-environment-to-improving-life-chances](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/collection-items/success-starts-at-home-the-importance-of-the-early-home-environment-to-improving-life-chances)]

95 The Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, "Parental Engagement." [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement>]

96 Jay et al, 2017, "Finding "Mathematics": Parents Questioning School-Centred Approaches to Involvement in Children's Mathematics Learning, School Community Journal, Vol. 27, No. 1." [Accessed via: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1146482.pdf>]

97 CSJ/Teacher Tapp polling, ID 1003402.

98 *Ibid.*

The education system lacks expertise in parental engagement, with only a small proportion of teachers trained in parental participation each year.⁹⁹ The organisation Parentkind told the CSJ: *“Two thirds of teachers have received no recent training in parental participation and have no selected member of the leadership team who can support with a parental participation plan.”*

Conducting effective parental participation programmes can feel insurmountable for some educators.¹⁰⁰ It is not the cost of parental participation that is the main barrier, as evidence suggests that many forms of parental participation are low cost.¹⁰¹ Instead, schools lack the confidence to engage parents.

Over half of teachers have had a negative experience when previously attempting parental participation.¹⁰² When the Foundation Years Trust ran an anonymous teacher survey on parental participation with schools they told us, that “Fear” came up in the feedback, when talking about engaging parents.

The Parenting Circle

The Parenting Circle aims to improve school-readiness through a programme of peer mentoring. The Parenting Circle trains a designated member of school staff to lead parent peer mentoring groups. These groups meet regularly as a follow up to parenting classes delivered in school. In due course, parents from within the group are identified and trained to succeed as leaders themselves. These groups then become sustainable support networks for parents.

One of Parenting Circle’s partner schools is based in Thanet, the most deprived ward in Kent. The school told The Parenting Circle that many of the parents they worked with were ill-prepared to support their children’s school readiness.

Support staff at the school attended The Parenting Circle’s training. Following this, the school began to deliver parenting lessons and established regular discussion groups with parents. The school reported that parents, given the chance to explore their own relationships with their children, quickly gained the vocabulary and confidence they needed to describe their children’s behaviour and needs. In doing so, they built relationships of trust with the school staff running the support sessions. The school readiness programme has been incorporated into the parenting classes and has become part of a collaborative and supportive approach to improving the outcomes for all children.

99 Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, “Working with parents to support children’s learning.” [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/supporting-parents>]

100 Dani Sorenson, Edutopia, 2015, “5 ways to engage reluctant parents.” [Accessed via: <https://www.edutopia.org/discussion/5-ways-engage-reluctant-students>]

101 The Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, “Parental Engagement.” [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement>]

102 January 18th, Teacher Tapp poll, 7,355 responses

Parents feel similarly overwhelmed when it comes to helping their children with schoolwork. Parents in the UK spend far less time helping their children learn at home than our global counterparts. A quarter of parents in the UK do not help their children with homework. A poll of 27,830 parents in 29 countries found that only one in ten parents spend an hour a day helping their children with homework. On average, UK parents spend only 3.6 hours a week supporting their children with schoolwork, far behind the global average of 6.7 hours a week.¹⁰³

Part of the reason for low engagement with homework is that parents themselves are confused by the work that is set. In a poll commissioned by White Rose Maths, over a third (35 per cent) of parents admitted that they often end up feeling stressed out by homework.¹⁰⁴

26 per cent of parents said that they are often confused by the work their child is set, with maths being the subject which they find the hardest.¹⁰⁵ Three quarters (76 per cent) of parents stated that they felt guilty because they do not feel they support their child enough.¹⁰⁶

Often, primary school parents want to help but they do not feel that they have the necessary expertise to support their child. 21 per cent of primary aged children stated that their parents made mistakes when trying to help them and 22 per cent said that their parents make matters worse.¹⁰⁷

Parents may not always want to engage with schools directly: in some cases, there they are suspicious or feel that asking for help carries a stigma.¹⁰⁸ To make parental participation successful, the relationship between the state and family needs to be reset. This calls for a culture that supports and empowers families to access support.

The impact of the pandemic on parental engagement

The pandemic forced some schools to engage more thoroughly with parents and improve their parental participation offer during school shutdowns.¹⁰⁹ As children had to learn at home and parents took on an active role in supporting them, the demand for regular contact with parents heightened.¹¹⁰ The stigma associated with asking for help was reduced as the demands put on parents to educate at home were increased.

Hannah Nash, Associate Professor in Developmental Psychology at the University of Leeds told the CSJ: *“Improvements in communication between home and school were a positive to emerge from school disruption and should form the foundation of a partnership to best support children in the future.”*

103 Varkey Foundation, 2018. “Global Parents’ Survey” [Accessed via: <https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/media/4340/vf-parents-survey-18-single-pages-for-flipbook.pdf>]

104 Education Business, 2020. “A quarter of primary school parents baffled by homework” [Accessed via: <https://educationbusinessuk.net/news/19112020/quarter-primary-school-parents-are-baffled-kids%E2%80%99-homework>]

105 *Ibid.*

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*

108 Children’s Commissioner, 2022. “Family Review” [Accessed via: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/cc-a-positive-approach-to-parenting-part-2-of-the-independent-family-review.pdf>]

109 Martinez, 2021, “Family and school relationship during Covid-19 pandemic: A systematic review.” [Accessed via: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34770223/>]

110 Kerry- Jane Packman, 2020, “The pandemic has shown us that parents have a bigger role to play in education.” [Accessed via: <https://involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/pandemic-has-shown-us-parents-have-bigger-role-play-education>]

A blueprint for parental participation

Parents and carers want what's best for their children. They seek to help them grow up happy and healthy and to get on in life. For all pupils to have the opportunity to develop foundational skills at primary school, policy makers must value greater parental participation just as much as they value improvements in the school system.

All parents struggle at some point and sometimes they will need to ask for help. Presently, however, asking for help is too difficult. Parents do not know who to turn to for advice.¹¹¹

In this chapter, we sketch out a blueprint for a stronger, national approach to parental participation which values parents as equals in education. Our proposals include:

- A National Parental Participation Strategy which outlines clear responsibilities for schools and other local services to engage, inform, and support parents of primary school children.
- A statutory duty for schools and multi-academy trusts to publish their parental engagement policies and appoint a Pupil Premium Parent Governor.
- Pilots for key workers to support vulnerable families whose children face additional barriers to learning at home.
- An integrated approach to parental engagement which makes support services, such as family learning programmes and Family Hubs, more accessible.

If we want to give all children the opportunity to develop strong foundational skills, it is vital that parents, guardians, and families are seen as partners in a child's education and that we support them to play this role.

A national approach to parental participation

Families are the bedrock of society yet, at present, we are failing to integrate parents consistently into the education system. Yet the evidence is clear that strong supportive families can transform a child's educational opportunities.

Grant Hopkins, Headteacher at Lockwood Primary School, told the CSJ: *“Understanding of true parental engagement and involvement is limited in education and often superficial...But once you get it right the positives are endless”*.

A national strategy which empowers parents and carers to better support their children's learning could revolutionise learning and boost levelling up. To avoid progress being patchy and ill-informed, the Department for Education should set out a robust and comprehensive national strategy.

111 Children's Commissioner, 2022. "Family Review" [Accessed via: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/cc-a-positive-approach-to-parenting-part-2-of-the-independent-family-review.pdf>]

Parental engagement should be grounded in evidence. When used effectively, it positively impacts progress in foundational skills,¹¹² but when delivered poorly parental participation can negatively impact pupil progress.¹¹³

The starting point for a national strategy of parental engagement took root in proposed government policy in 2022.¹¹⁴ Beginning in the 2022/23 academic year all schools have been told to factor in the government's "Parent Pledge".¹¹⁵ This will include support for "any child that falls behind" in English and maths who should receive "timely and evidence-based support to enable them to reach their full potential".¹¹⁶ Ofsted will then hold schools to account for ensuring that parents are kept informed about the catch-up support.¹¹⁷

Two-thirds of teachers stated they were in favour of the pledge in principle, but only 17 per cent said the proposed wording of the pledge would be effective at raising standards.¹¹⁸ Many primary schools already follow an approach which is similar to the Parent Pledge. 87 per cent of primary school teachers stated they already delivered what the pledge outlined.¹¹⁹ As currently drafted, the Parent Pledge would not significantly change practices in primary schools. While the focus on parental engagement is promising, the Parent Pledge should be only the start of a robust national strategy.

Recommendation 1:

The Department for Education should outline a National Parental Participation Strategy. The strategy should create a new duty for multi-academy trusts (MATs) to focus on parental participation and publish parental participation plans. The Department for Education should also set out a structure for parental engagement that targets support towards those who need it most and make clear the responsibilities of other local agencies in achieving this vision.

112 Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017, "Parental involvement as a important factor for successful education." [Accessed via: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1156936>]

113 Desforges and Abouchar, 2003, "The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: A literature review." [Accessed via: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6305>]

114 Department for Education, 2022, "Opportunity for all." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child>]

115 *Ibid.*

116 *Ibid.*

117 *Ibid.*

118 Teacher Tapp poll, March 29th, 2022, 7093 responses.

119 UCL, 2022, "Understanding of how we can raise attainment in mathematics." [Accessed via: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research-projects/2022/jul/understanding-how-we-can-raise-attainment-mathematics>]

Building bridges with the community

At present, there are no expectations placed on multi-academy trusts about how much they should engage with parents. As a result, the extent to which schools and trusts work with parents varies greatly. Many schools still have family support practitioners or support family learning; however, these approaches are not systematically embedded across the education system.

There is no single central government policy on the role of schools and trusts as an intermediary with families, no expectations around parental engagement and no national guidance around how to work with families to support children's learning and development at home.

85 per cent of parents want to play an active role in their child's education yet only two-thirds of parents agree that their school provides the help they need to support their child's learning at home.¹²⁰

Recommendation 2:

The national strategy on parental engagement should create a duty for all multi-academy trusts and schools to establish parental engagement policies.

Trusts and schools should design these policies in consultation with parents and guardians to reflect the needs of local families. There should be an explicit focus on reaching families from more disadvantaged areas and using parental participation to reduce the attainment gap.

Pupils at risk of not reaching expected levels in foundational skills often live in areas where bridging the gap between community and school proves more challenging.¹²¹ In these areas, the importance of parental voice is even greater. It is important to understand the local needs of parents and to ensure that their views are reflected in any school level decision making.

Parents want a say in school level decisions. Three quarters of parents (76 per cent) want a say in decisions that happen at school level. However, 27 per cent of parents state that they weren't asked to participate in school life and a further 15 per cent said that they did not know how to get involved.¹²²

120 CFEY, 2023. "Parent Voice Report 2022" [Accessed via: cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Parent-Voice-Report-2022.pdf]

121 Public Health England, 2014, "Building children and young people's resilience in schools." [Accessed via: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355766/Review2_Resilience_in_schools_health_inequalities.pdf]

122 CFEY, 2023. "Parent Voice Report 2022" [Accessed via: cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Parent-Voice-Report-2022.pdf]

SHINE

Schools and parents both bring expertise to a partnership and two-way communication is essential for effective participation. SHINE have seen the positive effect of this in their pilot programmes of school-led projects.

When teachers apply for SHINE grants to run a project in their school they often include how they will engage and involve parents effectively in their application. Previous projects have included the use of informal events to build stronger relationships between schools and parents¹²³ to support with the overcoming of barriers to learning.¹²⁴

In addition, a further project has allowed children to receive specialist literacy support in their own homes, this project was initiated due to evidence showing that working with families in a familiar setting raises attainment, increases knowledge and confidence of parents, and strengthens relationships with the school.¹²⁵

Schools and communities are often linked by school governors.¹²⁶ Good governance can positively impact the attainment of pupils¹²⁷ and help a school with the meeting of a long-term goal, such as closing the attainment gap.¹²⁸ The use of quality school governors can effectively address historic issues of attainment,¹²⁹ as disadvantaged pupils can benefit greatly from attending a school with good governance.¹³⁰

Ofsted has found that strong governance is critical to schools' successful use of pupil premium funding. When leaders and governors fail to ensure that pupil premium funding is being spent effectively, often the school's attainment gap is wide. Governors can play a crucial role in informing decisions around pupil premium spending and monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives funded by pupil premium.¹³¹

123 SHINE, 2022, "Project that will see schools working closer with parents will 'make a huge difference to lots of little lives.'" [Accessed via: <https://shinetrust.org.uk/2022/03/25/project-that-will-see-schools-working-closer-with-parents-will-make-a-huge-difference-to-lots-of-little-lives>]

124 PDF: SHINE. "Case study: Parklands Primary School, Leeds." [Accessed via: shinetrust.org.uk/case-study/parklands-primary-school-leeds]

125 SHINE, 2021, "Ambitious project sees young children in South Yorkshire receive specialist literacy support in their own homes." [Accessed via: shinetrust.org.uk/2021/09/10/ambitious-project-sees-young-children-in-south-yorkshire-receive-specialist-literacy-support-in-their-own-homes]

126 Governors for Schools, "Types of school governor and roles." [Accessed via: <https://governorsforschools.org.uk/types-of-school-governor-and-governing-boards>]

127 Luschei and Jeong, 2020, "School governance and student achievement: Cross-national evidence from the 2015 PISA." [Accessed via: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0013161X20936346>]

128 Nexus Education, 2022, "The importance of effective school governance." [Accessed via: <https://nexus-education.com/blog/the-importance-of-effective-school-governance>]

129 National Governance Association, "Everyone on board." [Accessed via: <https://www.nga.org.uk/News/Campaigns/Everyone-on-Board-increasing-diversity-in-school-g.aspx>]

130 Department for Education, 2019, "Guidance, Pupil Premium." [Accessed via: gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium]

131 Ofsted, 2014. "The pupil premium: an update" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379205/The_20pupil_20premium_20-20an_20update.pdf]

Recommendation 3:

Introduce a mandatory position of a Pupil Premium governor for all schools. This role is currently recommended to schools, making it mandatory would allow all schools to benefit. This role should also be expanded to include holding the school to account on the extent to which they engage with parents from a disadvantaged background.

Understanding and supporting families who need extra help

A range of non-school factors can affect a child's ability to engage in learning. A child's home learning environment is a key determinant of a child's ability to learn. Children who are turning up to school hungry, tired, and distressed will be less likely to engage in lessons and can find it difficult to develop foundational skills. Schools are not always aware of the barriers to learning that exist at home.

For example, half a million children arrive at school each day too hungry to concentrate.¹³² Furthermore, 800,000 children in the UK have caring responsibilities at home which can affect readiness to learn in the classroom, and one survey states that only half of schools know of carers' responsibilities in the home.¹³³

One of the most prominent physical barriers to learning is poor housing. Over 127,000 children in the UK live in temporary accommodation,¹³⁴ enough pupils to fill one in 35 primary schools in the UK¹³⁵. This is often short-term and transient accommodation¹³⁶ and can mean growing up in houses that lack safe communal spaces, access to green space, are overcrowded or are in poor condition¹³⁷.

132 UK EdChat editorial, 2019. "Skipping breakfast linked to lower GCSE grades." [Accessed via: ukedchat.com/2019/11/20/breakfast-gcse]

133 Children's Commissioner, 2022, "The big ask voices: Shining a light on young carers." [Accessed via: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2022/03/16/the-big-ask-voices-shining-a-light-on-young-carers/>].

134 Local Government Association, 2021, "Around 450 primary school's worth of children stuck in temporary accommodation during lockdown." [Accessed via: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/around-450-primary-schools-worth-children-stuck-temporary-accommodation-during-lockdown>]

135 *Ibid.*

136 Department for Work and Pensions, 2019, "Section 6: Temporary accommodation." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-guidance-manual-2018-to-2019/section-6-temporary-accommodation>]

137 Joint report by Director of Community Services and Director of Care and Learning, 2018, "Highland Council, Children living in temporary accommodation." [Accessed via: https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3982/care_learning_and_housing_committee_formerly_the_people_committee/attachment/73859]

Living in temporary accommodation can have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of a young person.¹³⁸ Children who live in temporary accommodations during primary school are less likely to meet expected levels in foundational skills.¹³⁹ Despite the huge number of children affected by this issue, less than half of teachers are confident that they understand the housing situation of their pupils.¹⁴⁰

Factors such as the parental mental health and hardship caused by other external stresses have an impact on the home learning environment.¹⁴¹ Economic stresses such as debt and the associated financial pressure on a family can also influence the capacity to engage with education.¹⁴² Such pressures are not consistently understood or addressed by the primary education system.

The cost-of-living crisis means a rising number of families are feeling stretched financially, and essentials such as school uniforms are becoming harder to afford.¹⁴³ Increased financial stress in society can add pressure to the primary education system¹⁴⁴ too, as a child in poverty is currently half as likely to develop foundational skills to expected levels as their peers.¹⁴⁵

Parental participation serves to overcome potential barriers to learning. Many schools benefit from a dedicated member of staff who can support pupils and families with pressures experienced in the home learning environment.¹⁴⁶

Research shows that a designated key member of staff has a positive impact on families who previously found it challenging to engage with the primary education system.¹⁴⁷ School staff who work with families can have an especially profound impact in areas of high deprivation¹⁴⁸. A dedicated member of staff for parental participation within the school can support with attendance, signposting enrichment opportunities, classroom engagement, and pupil well-being.¹⁴⁹ All of which can positively impact the development of foundational skills.¹⁵⁰

138 *Ibid.*

139 Shelter, "The impact of homelessness and bad housing on children's education, A view from the classroom." [Accessed via: https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/briefing_the_impact_of_homelessness_and_bad_housing_on_childrens_education]

140 *Ibid.*

141 Cooper and Stewart, 2020, "Does Household income affect children's outcomes? A systematic review of the evidence." [Accessed via: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-020-09782-0>]

142 Kerris Cooper, 2020, "Are poor parents poor parents? The relationship between poverty and parenting among mothers in the UK." [Accessed via: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0038038520939397>]

143 BBC, 2022, "Record numbers can't afford school uniforms, charity warns." [Accessed via: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-62484841>]

144 Friedline et al, 2021, "Families' financial stress and well-being: The importance of the economy and economic environments." [Accessed via: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7362317/>]

145 The Guardian, 2019, "Poorer pupils twice as likely to fail key GCSEs." [Accessed via: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/aug/21/poorer-pupils-twice-as-likely-to-fail-key-gcse>]

146 Reach Academy Website, "Support for our parents." [Accessed via: <https://www.reachacademy.uk.com/safeguarding/support-for-parents>]

147 Early Years Alliance, "What is a 'key person' and why are they so important?" [Accessed via: <https://www.familycorner.co.uk/what-is-a-key-person-and-why-are-they-important/>]

148 Simon and Johnson, 2015, "Teacher turnover in high-poverty schools: What we know and can do." [Accessed via: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/016146811511700305?journalCode=tca>]

149 Gov.Wales, 2022, "The Welsh Government Programme for Government and Co-operation Agreement" [Accessed via: <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-annual-report-2022>]

150 *Ibid.*

Koala North West

Koala North West are an organisation based in the Wirral, they offer a range of services for families, including emotional and practical support for every member of the family to improve life at home for any family with a child aged 0-11 years old. In 2020-21 they supported 1,042 families and 1,321 children with a range of services including family support delivered in the home.¹⁵¹

Their staff members work with families directly in their own home for up to 6 months. Their programme of support is designed to increase confidence and parents' capability to build a positive home learning environment. Koala North West also run the Family Toolbox, which provides a free online resource to support all families.

This bespoke support for families can help support children's development and academic attainment. 82 per cent of parents who worked with Koala North West in 2020-21 reported an improvement in their children's emotional health and wellbeing.¹⁵²

Our polling showed that over half of primary school teachers said that a designated member of staff such as a family support practitioner would improve parental participation.¹⁵³ This rose to 62 per cent concerning teachers working in areas of high deprivation and two-thirds of all head teachers stated it would improve communication with the home.¹⁵⁴

Recommendation 4:

Pilot scheme of family support practitioners focused on schools in Education Investment Areas. Family support practitioners should be trialled and evaluated.

These practitioners would play a key role in supporting families with additional needs which act as a barrier to learning at home.

151 Koala NW, 2021, Annual Review 2020-21. [Accessed via: <https://koalanw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Koala-AnnualReview-2020-21-DIGITAL.pdf>]

152 *Ibid.*

153 Teacher Tapp survey, September 2022, Created for CSJ, Question: In an ideal world, how would your school ensure all parents are effectively communicated with?

154 *Ibid.*

An integrated approach to parental participation

Family Hubs

Schools do not hold all the answers. Even with the additional capacity provided by a key worker, often issues at home cannot be addressed within the confines of a school.

Family Hubs play a key role in convening support services for families for all children aged 0-19 and for children with SEND aged up to 25. The Family Hub model, introduced by the CSJ in its landmark 2007 report, *Breakthrough Britain*,¹⁵⁵ has been established to provide a one-stop shop for family services.

Family Hubs can work alongside schools to improve access to services and timely interventions. An evaluation of the Family Hub rollout in 2021 found that collaboration between service professionals and the hub team was proving difficult. One solution is for hubs to locate their services on school sites.¹⁵⁶

EX5 – Alive

EX5-Alive is the Community Support Hub for Cranbrook. The hub is attached to a local all-through school, Cranbrook Education Campus, and offers an integrated pipeline of cradle to career support to local residents.

The Community Hub has extensively mapped all the local services and groups, both statutory and community based. During the day, the hub is used by professionals and in the evenings the wider community can book the hub to put on community group activities. They have developed strong relationships with all of these organisations and offer a community office where any organisation can hot desk. The real-time intel from the community means that EX5-Alive has a deep understanding of issues locally which may affect children at school.

EX5-Alive offers support for the physical, social, and emotional aspects of day-to-day life. The services on offer have been curated based on extensive listening campaigns throughout the community to reflect the needs of residents. Services include early years support, midwifery, public health nursing, wellbeing interventions, energy bills and debt advice, a food hub, enterprise activities, adult learning, and parenting support.

Being based on a school site makes EX5-Alive more accessible for parents and helps to integrate the community support services with school. Teachers have a better understanding of local issues and can refer parents for additional support when needed.

While it is too early to evaluate the impact on outcomes for children whose families are supported by the hub, case histories provide testament to the success of this model. One parent stated: "I found it really hard to communicate with the school and I just don't think they were listening. I was really sceptical at first about the hub but

¹⁵⁵ Centre for Social Justice, 2007. "Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown" [Accessed via: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BB_family-breakdown.pdf]

¹⁵⁶ Department for Education, 2021. "Evaluation of family hubs" [Accessed via: [gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-family-hubs](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-family-hubs)]

when they made it about our family and how they could help, it kind of made sense. Although not everything is perfect, my daughter has been going to school more often.” Another stated: “I didn’t know what to do, where to turn or who to ask. The hub really helped me get help I really needed.”

Hub relationships with partner services have been made more difficult following the pandemic. Following lockdowns, some of these essential services have faced heightened demand and pressure to resume as normal and have retreated to working in silos. Schools, children’s and health services were singled out as sectors that have faced considerable extra pressure.¹⁵⁷

The integration of the school sector with the Family Hub model has been varied to date. In some areas, working with schools has been a key challenge (particularly academies) while other areas have found that schools have taken on the role of hosting the hubs services and actively engaged with the Family Hub agenda.¹⁵⁸

Recommendation 5:

The National Parental Participation Strategy should outline the expectation for schools and Family Hubs to collaborate to provide better support to parents. The government should commission research on the best ways for Family Hubs to integrate with existing school services and examine the benefits of Family Hubs being colocated on primary school sites. The review of Family Hubs and schools should look at the flexibility in funding models and should make more funding available to support parents and families beyond the early years.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Family learning

Some parents themselves may lack the foundational skills that they need to support their children's educational journey. Nine million working-aged adults lack functional literacy or numeracy skills.¹⁵⁹ This cohort of the population would struggle to do basic maths such as estimating the amount of petrol left in a tank from the site of a gauge and would find it difficult to process written information such as reading the back of a paracetamol packet.¹⁶⁰

Family learning classes equip parents with knowledge and skills needed to help children learn at home.¹⁶¹ This approach to parental participation can build parents' confidence, so that they may in turn contribute to improvements in their child's educational outcomes.¹⁶² Furthermore, carefully planned family learning at a convenient time and location can build a trusting relationship between the school and home¹⁶³.

Low level foundational skills can be inter-generational in a family.¹⁶⁴ In England, if parents found school challenging, their children are more likely to as well.¹⁶⁵ Effective parental participation, by contrast, is linked to the educational attainment of a family.¹⁶⁶

Evidence has shown that family learning could increase the overall level of a child's development by as much as 15 per cent for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁶⁷ Experts have argued that family environment, not school, has more influence on a child's outcomes. Despite this, most policy attention has been focused on the latter.

159 Learning and Work Institute, 2021. "Getting the basics right: The case for action on adult basic skills" [Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/getting-the-basics-right-the-case-for-action-on-adult-basic-skills>]

160 OECD, 2016. "Building skills for all: A review of England" [Available at: oecd.org/unitedkingdom/buildingskills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf]

161 Wright and Corney, 2022, "Parents, children and adult learning, Family learning policy in the 2020s." [Accessed via: https://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Policy/family_learning_pamphlet_2022_final.pdf]

162 Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, "Working with parents to support children's learning." [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/supporting-parents>]

163 *Ibid.*

164 The Centre for Social Justice, 2014, "Closing the divide: Tackling educational inequality in England." [Accessed via: <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/closing-the-divide-tackling-educational-inequality-in-england>]

165 Macleod et al, 2015, "Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473975/DFE-RB411_Supporting_the_attainment_of_disadvantaged_pupils_brief.pdf]

166 Goodall et al, 2010, "Review of best practice in parental engagement." [Accessed via: https://purehost.bath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/146139638/DFE_RR156.pdf]

167 NIACE, 2013. "Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales" [Available at: learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Family-Learning-Works-The-Inquiry-into-Family-Learning-in-England-and-WalesSummary.pdf]

In some areas of England, more than 1 in 10 adults have no formal qualifications, and many adults who have low levels of foundational skills are not aware of the adult education offer available^{168 169}. Adults with degree-level education are twice as likely to engage with subsequent adult educational opportunities than their non-university-educated peers¹⁷⁰. Raising awareness of adult education support could allow parents with low levels of skills to develop their own foundational skills¹⁷¹ and increase the likelihood of participating with the primary education system¹⁷².

Not all parents are confident in their educational ability, and how they can improve their own educational attainment and their families. Previous family learning provision has proved effective in addressing this issue. One impact report saw 70 per cent of adult participants able to encourage their child academically more effectively following family learning courses and 47 per cent felt their home learning environment improved as a result of the academic course.¹⁷³

Family learning also provides a route to further formal learning for many parents. An evaluation of the Family Learning Impact Fund, targeted at families from disadvantaged backgrounds, found that 85 per cent of participants on family learning courses went on to attend a further course after participating in family learning. In addition, family learning courses have been shown to improve health, wellbeing, and social cohesion.¹⁷⁴

In the absence of a national family learning strategy, the number of parents enrolled on family learning courses has dwindled in recent years. Family English, maths and language enrolments dropped by 53 per cent between 2012 and 2019 and wider family learning (which helps parents and carers to support childhood development) fell by 36 per cent over the same period.¹⁷⁵

Recommendation 6:

The Government should seek to boost the number of parents on family learning courses. Family learning should become a core part of the Department for Education's plans to tackle the attainment gap and improve literacy and numeracy. Primary schools should partner with Adult Community Education providers to deliver accessible family learning courses collocated on primary school sites.

- 168 Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011, "Review of research and evaluation on improving adult literacy and numeracy skills." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32356/11-1418-review-research-on-improving-adult-skills.pdf]
- 169 Legatum Institute, 2021, "The levelling up agenda is held back by an "adult skills crisis" and "lack of access to business loans" in Red Wall areas – not infrastructure". [Accessed via: <https://lii.com/commentaries/levelling-up-held-back-by-adult-skills-crisis-and-lack-of-business-loans-in-red-wall-areas-2>]
- 170 Department for Education, 2018, "Adult education survey 2016 research report." [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-education-survey-2016>]
- 171 Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011, "Review of research and evaluation on improving adult literacy and numeracy skills." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32356/11-1418-review-research-on-improving-adult-skills.pdf]
- 172 Clare Campbell, 2011, "How to involve hard-to-reach parents: encouraging meaningful parental involvement with schools." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340369/how-to-involve-hard-to-reach-parents-full-report.pdf]
- 173 Wright and Corney, 2022, "Parents, children and adult learning, Family learning policy in the 2020s." [Accessed via: https://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Policy/family_learning_pamphlet_2022_final.pdf]
- 174 NIACE, 2013. "Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales" [Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Family-Learning-Works-The-Inquiry-into-Family-Learning-in-England-and-WalesSummary.pdf>]
- 175 Centre for Social Justice, 2020. "The Long Game" [Available at: <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CSJ-The-Long-Game.pdf>]

Part 2. Fixing the damage from Covid

The school climate and challenges facing ‘Generation Covid’ are significantly different to those that were being grappled with prior to school shutdowns. Children’s grasp of foundational skills has been damaged by the impact of lockdowns and disruption to learning.

We are only just beginning to understand the effects of school shutdowns on pupil attainment. Recent figures on key stage 2 attainment reveal that the attainment gap, post-Covid, has reverted to its highest level in a decade.¹⁷⁶

There is some evidence to suggest that children in primary schools and in younger year groups (especially key stage 1) have been the most significantly affected by the disruption to learning.¹⁷⁷ Teachers in primary school report that while some children thrived during lockdown, other children struggled to access learning during school closures. More pupils are struggling to focus and retain information. Children entering key stage 2 in 2022 had their entire key stage 1 disrupted.¹⁷⁸

Any plans for the school system must account for this and provide additional capacity to bolster catch-up provision, especially for the most disadvantaged pupils who are even further behind their peers.

Tackling severe absence

One of the greatest scarring effects of school shutdowns has been the increased levels of school absence. In total, over 118,000 children were severely absent in Spring 2022, double the number of severely absent children compared to before the pandemic.¹⁷⁹

There has been a lot of volatility in attendance in primary schools since school shutdowns. Before the pandemic, 16,466 children were severely absent in Autumn 2019. When schools reopened in full a year later, this number had surged to 40,681. While the total number of children who are severely absent has come down in primary schools to 22,791, it still stands at a level which is 38 per cent higher than before the pandemic.¹⁸⁰

176 Department for Education, 2022. “Key stage 2 attainment” [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment/2021-22>]

177 Education Endowment Foundation, 2022. “Best evidence on impact of COVID-19 on pupil attainment” [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-covid-19-on-pupil-attainment>]

178 *Ibid.*

179 Department for Education, 2022. “Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn and spring terms” [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-and-spring-terms>]

180 *Ibid.*

While the government has invested heavily in catch-up support, most of this is based in schools and relies upon children turning up to school to access it. Children who have disengaged with school entirely suffer from increased disruption to learning and are even less likely to secure strong foundational skills in primary school.

School-Home Support

School-Home Support works with schools and local authorities to provide personalised support to children and families, tackling the underlying barriers to attendance to improve the life chances of children.

School-Home Support practitioners work directly with families, earning their trust and developing a strong relationship to better understand the root causes behind school absence. The practitioner service is flexible and interventions are not time-limited. They recognise that each family is different and what they need to improve attendance at school can vary significantly. Practitioners work with families to assess their needs and co-produce a personalised plan which increases their resilience and independence.

Children who receive support from a School-Home Support practitioner over two years improve their attendance by an average of 46 days per academic year. They are also 18 per cent more likely to achieve 5 A*-C grades at GCSE.

Data from the Department for Education shows the strong relationship between attendance and foundational skill development in primary school. Generally, pupils with higher attainment in key stage 2 have lower levels of absence over this key stage compared with those with lower attainment.¹⁸¹

Pupils who do not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths have an average absence rate which is over 1.7 times higher than the absence rate for pupils who do achieve these expected standards (4.7 per cent versus 2.7 per cent).¹⁸²

The level of absence is a key determinant in whether children leave school with expected levels of foundational skills development. Less than half of all children who are persistently absent throughout key stage 2 achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. 40.2 per cent of persistently absent children leave primary school meeting these standards compared to 83.9 per cent of children who are absent for 0-5 per cent of possible sessions.¹⁸³

The Department for Education has stated that this is a critical risk for vulnerable young people and that the risk to children has worsened this year.¹⁸⁴ Their annual reports state that additional absence cannot be explained by Covid related absences alone.¹⁸⁵

181 Department for Education, 2022. "The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4" [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/the-link-between-absence-and-attainment-at-ks2-and-ks4>]

182 *Ibid.*

183 *Ibid.*

184 Department for Education, 2022. "Annual Reports" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dfe-annual-reports>]

185 *Ibid.*

School shutdowns have left a legacy of disengagement which is hampering all attempts to support children to catch up. Kids can't catch up if they don't show up. Given the rising tide of school absence, it is vital the government put in place additional resource and support to get children back into school.

Recommendation 7:

The Department for Education should appoint 2,000 school attendance practitioners to address the underlying causes of school absence and remove the barriers to engagement for severely absent pupils. Funding for this proposal could be derived from the Supporting Families programme and the additional investment given to Education Investment Areas to tackle issues including severe absence.

The National Tutoring Programme

As part of its efforts to support children to catch up in education, the government invested £1 billion in the National Tutoring Programme (NTP).¹⁸⁶ The aim of the programme was to deliver six million tutoring packages by 2024, with a vision of embedding tutoring across the school system.¹⁸⁷

There is a strong evidence base for the effectiveness of tutoring. Studies show that, compared to their peers who do not participate in tutoring, pupils in primary school who receive small group tuition make four months additional academic progress¹⁸⁸ and pupils who receive one-to-one tuition make six months additional academic progress.¹⁸⁹

The impact of tutoring tends to be greater in primary school than in secondary school. The effect of tutoring on literacy also appears to be higher than the effect on maths, according to the Education Endowment Foundation.^{190 191}

In the government's white paper on the school system, the Department for Education stated that its focus was on delivering tutoring to children who need additional support and ensuring that tutoring is no longer the preserve of families who can afford to pay.¹⁹² Originally, the National Tutoring Programme had a stated target that at least 65 per cent of children who were enrolled on tutoring courses should be eligible for pupil premium.

186 Department for Education, 2022. "Opportunity for all" [Accessed via: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063602/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child__print_version_.pdf]

187 *Ibid.*

188 Education Endowment Foundation. "Small group tuition" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition>]

189 Education Endowment Foundation. "One to one tuition" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition>]

190 Education Endowment Foundation. "Small group tuition" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/small-group-tuition>]

191 Education Endowment Foundation. "One to one tuition" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition>]

192 Department for Education, 2022. "Opportunity for all" [Accessed via: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063602/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child__print_version_.pdf]

In 2021/22, the NTP delivered 2.14 million courses. This was over the original target of two million courses for this academic year. 87 per cent of schools participated in the NTP and an estimated 23.5 million hours of NTP tutoring took place in the 2021/22 academic year.¹⁹³

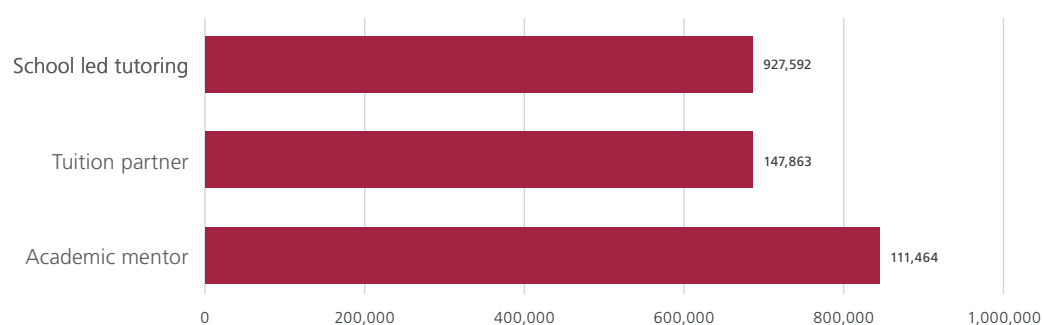
Overall, the NTP came in as being over its targets, at least on paper. However, over the course of the year the quality and accessibility of tutoring were both raised as key issues. Despite the high number of NTP courses, concerns have been raised over whether the NTP has truly met its ambitions.¹⁹⁴ An evaluation of the impact of tutoring in the academic year 2021/22 found that most headteachers did not know whether tutoring was working. In some schools, tutoring was haphazard and seen as an ad hoc “bolt-on”.¹⁹⁵

According to a Teacher Tapp poll conducted for the Centre for Social Justice, 2 in 5 school leaders believe that they are providing the same amount or less tutoring when compared to before the pandemic, even with the additional NTP funding. While 50 per cent of senior leaders reported providing more tutoring with the NTP, 29 per cent stated that they were providing the same levels of tutoring as before the pandemic and 8 per cent said that they were providing less. Originally, the NTP was set up to deliver tutoring via three pillars: approved tuition providers, school-led tutoring, and academic mentors. Both tuition providers and academic mentor provision were overseen by the contractor Randstad. Throughout 2021/22, this HR firm came under sustained criticism for failing to meet targets and introducing unnecessary bureaucracy.¹⁹⁶

Uptake of the NTP varied significantly across the three pillars. In total, 81 per cent of all courses, 1.7 million courses, which were delivered came through the school-led tutoring pillar. Only 11 per cent, 238,247 courses, were directly provided through tuition providers. The remaining 8 per cent of courses, 164,957, were delivered by an academic mentor.¹⁹⁷

Primary schools benefited from 1,186,920 courses delivered by the NTP. Uptake patterns at primary school level broadly mirror the uptake levels nationally.¹⁹⁸

Figure 4: Total number of courses delivered in primary schools



193 Department for Education, 2022. “National Tutoring Programme” [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/national-tutoring-programme/2021-22>]

194 Education Select Committee, 2022. “Is the Catch up Programme fit for purpose?” [Accessed via: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9251/documents/160043/default>]

195 Ofsted, 2022. “Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 1 findings” [Accessed via: [gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-tutoring-in-schools-and-16-to-19-providers/independent-review-of-tutoring-in-schools-phase-1-findings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-tutoring-in-schools-and-16-to-19-providers/independent-review-of-tutoring-in-schools-phase-1-findings)]

196 Financial Times, 2021. “UK’s post-Covid tutoring scheme at risk of ‘catastrophic failure’” [Accessed via: <https://www.ft.com/content/27588bf7-53ab-43e5-86e8-05e118213218>]

197 Department for Education, 2022. “National Tutoring Programme” [Accessed via: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/national-tutoring-programme/2021-22>]

198 *Ibid.*

At primary school level, pupils received an average 8.1 hours of tutoring per course via academic mentors, 11.3 hours via school-led tutoring, and 12.3 hours via tuition partners.¹⁹⁹

School-led tutoring was more popular with schools throughout the course of the last academic year. Between September and December 2021, 302,000 tutoring courses began. Of these courses, 230,000 were being provided via the schools-led pillar while only 52,000 courses were being delivered via tuition partners and 20,000 were being delivered via the academic mentors route.²⁰⁰ Overall, in the first term, the NTP had reached only 15 per cent of its target for the academic year and was not on track to provide the two million courses that Ministers had outlined.²⁰¹ Particular concerns were raised around the routes delivered by Randstad. Schools and tutoring providers told the Education Select Committee that the NTP had come to be viewed as a bureaucratic nightmare and that the tuition hub set up by Randstad was “dysfunctional”.²⁰² While the increased uptake of the school-led pillar of the National Tutoring Programme has been hailed as a success, concerns remain over the quality of tutoring being commissioned under this pillar.

A report from Impetus, one of the initial founders of the NTP in 2020, concluded that schools picked tutors “regardless of quality” and this undermined the aims of the NTP.²⁰³ As of September 2022, schools will only be allowed to hire pre-approved tutoring organisations.

Amid sluggish take-up rates, the Department for Education announced a series of reforms which watered down the National Tutoring Programme. One of these reforms was the move towards bigger tutor groups: the Department loosened its cap on ratios from one tutor to every three pupils to one for every six.²⁰⁴

Recent figures also show that the National Tutoring Programme failed to reach the expected number of pupil premium pupils. 65 per cent of tutoring courses delivered under the tuition partners’ pillar was supposed to be for children eligible for pupil premium. However, halfway through the year, Randstad ditched the pupil premium target.²⁰⁵ The HR firm faced significant criticism that such a move would water down the National Tutoring Programme and could widen the attainment gap.²⁰⁶

The National Tutoring Programme did not reach the expected proportion of 65 per cent pupil premium pupils across any of its pillars. At primary school level, 50.0 per cent of children accessing school-led tutoring were eligible for free school meals, 47.1 per cent of children accessing tutoring via a tuition partner and 47.1 per cent of children accessing tutoring via academic mentors were reported to be eligible for pupil premium.²⁰⁷

199 *Ibid.*

200 Schools Week, 2022. “Flagship tutor scheme ‘scandalously’ short of targets – with just 8% of mentoring provided” [Accessed via: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/flagship-tutor-scheme-scandalously-short-of-targets-with-just-8-of-mentoring-provided>]

201 *Ibid.*

202 Education Select Committee, 2022. “Is the Catch up Programme fit for purpose?” [Accessed via: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9251/documents/160043/default>]

203 Impetus, 2022. “The National Tutoring Programme will fail young people unless it reforms” [Accessed via <https://www.impetus.org.uk/news-and-views/2022/ntp-needs-reform>]

204 Schools Week, 2022. “Long read: How the flagship tutoring programme is slowly sinking” [Accessed via: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/long-read-how-the-flagship-tutoring-programme-is-slowly-sinking>]

205 Schools Week, 2022. “Randstad ‘failure’ blamed for ditched tutoring target” [Accessed via: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/randstad-failure-blamed-for-ditched-national-tutoring-programme-target>]

206 Schools Week, 2022. “National Tutoring Programme target for poorer pupils ditched” [Accessed via: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/national-tutoring-programme-target-for-poorer-pupils-ditched>]

207 Centre for Social Justice FOI to the Department for Education.

Recommendation 8:

The Department should refocus the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) to focus on disadvantaged pupils who have been disproportionately affected by the disruption to schools over the pandemic. The Department should review how schools are using the funding allocated via schools-led tutoring to ensure that it is being spent on additional tutoring. The Department should also reinstate targets for the number of children eligible for pupil premium accessing the NTP.

An Enrichment Guarantee

As part of the response to Covid and academic catch up, Sir Kevan Collins, then Education Recovery Commissioner, put forward plans to extend the school day as part of a broader education recovery package. His proposals would have seen the school day extended by half an hour for three years. Initially, this approach would have been piloted in a number of academies before being scaled up.

There is strong evidence for the effectiveness of extending school time as a way of improving academic attainment. Education Endowment Foundation estimates that extended school time can lead to three months additional progress. Most of the evidence centres on the impact on literacy and numeracy; studies have found that there are similar effects in both subjects. Effects are higher (on average) in primary schools (+3 months) than they are in secondary schools (+ two months).²⁰⁸

Extended school time can be used for many purposes such as extending core teaching and learning time, providing targeted academic support, and providing enrichment activities. The content and format of the school day extension has a massive bearing on the likelihood of improving academic attainment. Before and after school programmes with a clear focus are more clearly linked to academic benefits than other types of extended hours provision.²⁰⁹

Enrichment activities without a specific focus on learning can have an impact on attainment but the impact of different interventions on improving foundational skills can vary a great deal. The Education Endowment Foundation states that sports interventions can lead to an average of one months' additional academic progress²¹⁰ and arts and crafts interventions lead to an average of three months' additional progress.²¹¹ Their reviews caution that while the academic benefits of enrichment activities may be lower on average, they may be beneficial for their own sake as they contribute to a range of wider outcomes.²¹²

208 Education Endowment Foundation. "Extending school time" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/extending-school-time>]

209 *Ibid.*

210 Education Endowment Foundation. "Physical activity" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/physical-activity>]

211 Education Endowment Foundation. "Arts participation" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/arts-participation>]

212 Education Endowment Foundation. "Extending school time" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/extending-school-time>]

The Extended Services in Schools programme, which ran between 2003-2010, provides a deep reservoir of evidence on the benefits of extending school time with a focus on enrichment. The evaluation of this programme highlighted the multiple, overlapping benefits of enrichment activities.

The evaluation considered the impact of school day extension across 1,500 schools. 97 per cent of these schools had extended their school day to offer activities including sport, music, arts/crafts, study support, volunteering and business/enterprise activities.²¹³

According to the survey of 1,500 participating schools:

- 71 per cent of schools reported that [extended school services] helped them engage disadvantaged families;
- 68 per cent found it had at least some influence on raising attainment;
- 82 per cent reported greater pupil enjoyment of school; and
- 45 per cent noted improved pupil attendance.

Looking at attainment specifically, two thirds of schools said that extending school services had at least some influence in raising attainment levels across the school, including 13 per cent of schools which reported extended services had “considerable influence”. Just eight per cent of respondents said that there had been no rise in educational attainment.²¹⁴

Schools in more deprived areas were more likely to state that extended services influenced attainment. 59 per cent of schools where more than 20 per cent of pupils were eligible for free school meals thought that extended services had a considerable or moderate influence on attainment compared to 43 per cent of schools with lower levels of free school meal eligible pupils.²¹⁵

This study looked at the interaction between the different benefits of extending school time. Schools that said “Extended services have helped the school to engage disadvantaged families” were more likely to think that extended services influenced a rise in attainment. Similarly, schools that thought extended services brought the school and community together were also more likely to think that extended services influenced attainment.²¹⁶

213 Department for Education, 2010. “Extended Services Evaluation: End of Year One Report” [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182634/DFE-RR016.pdf]

214 *Ibid.*

215 *Ibid.*

216 *Ibid.*

Dixons Music Primary, Bradford

Dixons Music Primary, Bradford, is situated within one of the most deprived wards in Northern England. It is well respected by the local community, shown by the fact that in 2022 it received 235 admissions for 60 available places.²¹⁷

The school effectively addresses social disadvantage by ensuring that all pupils gain experiences to build their cultural capital through an extensive enrichment programme.²¹⁸ Their enrichment programme is heavily focused on the use of music to develop the full range of foundational skills. Studies have shown that learning to read music can help to accelerate development of key literacy and numeracy skills²¹⁹.

Many pupils join the school not meeting age-related expectations in development yet, in 2022, at the end of KS2 80 per cent of pupils reached the expected level for maths, reading and writing (combined). The school is rated Outstanding and is in the top 10 per cent of schools nationally for KS1 outcomes.²²⁰

Rather than increasing the focus on enrichment when schools returned, it appears that some schools deprioritised learning that was not directly linked to assessments following school shutdowns. Enrichment activities and complementary subject content received less focus.²²¹ The Ofsted Annual Report similarly stated that staff absence in 2022 prevented some schools from providing enrichment activities.²²²

Despite the benefits of extending school time for enrichment, there's evidence that wealthier children and those attending private schools are more likely to have access to extra-curricular activities. According to a 2021 YouGov poll commissioned for the Centre for Social Justice, one in five primary and secondary pupils do no enrichment activities in an average week. This figure rises to one in four disadvantaged pupils who do no enrichment activities.²²³

Only 61 per cent of parents in the DE social grade report that their child does any enrichment activities in an average week, compared to 81 per cent in the AB social group. This finding is statistically significant.²²⁴

The Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme was set up between summer term 2018 and September 2019. It was intended to enable children to participate in extracurricular activities. Funding of £21.7 million supported a range of extra-curricular activities such as sports, arts, debating and IT.²²⁵

217 Dixons Music Primary, Admissions Policy. [Accessed via: <https://www.dixonsmp.com/admissions/admission-policy>]

218 Dixons Music Primary, Enrichment at DMP [Accessed at: <https://www.dixonsmp.com/why/enrichment-at-dmp>]

219 Dixons Music Primary, DMP Student experience overview. [Accessed at: <https://www.dixonsmp.com/uploads/files/dixonsmp/About/DMP-Student-Experience-Overview.pdf?v=1651067070>]

220 Dixons Music Primary, Ofsted. [Accessed via: <https://www.dixonsmp.com/about/ofsted>]

221 Ofqual, 2021. "Learning during the pandemic: review of research from England" [Accessed via: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/998935/6803-4_Learning_during_the_pandemic_-_review_of_research_from_England.pdf]

222 Ofsted, 2022. "The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2021/22" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1122628/31357_Ofsted_Annual_Report_2021-22_WEB.pdf]

223 Centre for Social Justice, 2021. "A Level Playing Field" [Accessed via: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CSJ-A_Level_Playing_Field.pdf]

224 *Ibid.*

225 Department for Education, 2020. "Process evaluation of the Essential Life Skills programme" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942557/ELS_Process_Evaluation.pdf]

From the outset, one of the key focuses was on ensuring that disadvantaged young people could benefit from extra-curricular activities. The programme was delivered across the twelve Opportunity Areas and providers had a clear focus on designing provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged young people.²²⁶

A range of barriers to engagement were identified in the project evaluation. The most common barriers were a lack of encouragement from parents/carers, young people's lack of confidence in taking part, general disengagement, young people not recognising the potential benefits of extracurricular activities, and logistical issues. The report noted that where families did not have a strong relationship with the school, it was a challenge to get them on board with school-based ELS projects.²²⁷

Pupils' confidence was seen as a key challenge for ELS. Some providers said that pupils were not in the habit of participating in extra-curricular activities. They stated that it would be helpful to start earlier in primary school but at primary the opportunities for enrichment activities were often limited.²²⁸

Further, there was a perceived stigma attached to taking part in free, targeted activities. Some respondents stated that pupils felt singled out and that staying behind outside school hours was seen as a punishment when ELS was not offered as an open or blanket provision.²²⁹

The ELS programme specifically worked to unpick some of these barriers to engagement. In the case of parental engagement, providers engaged in proactive communication with families and helped to arrange logistical/financial support where needed. The types of activities offered and the extent to which providers promoted the activities and their benefits to pupils were seen as key success factors in engaging pupils.²³⁰

ELS had a high level of engagement: the average attendance rate across ELS was 90 per cent and half of all recorded participations were by disadvantaged pupils. The extent of engagement from disadvantaged pupils often surpassed providers' expectations.²³¹

Recommendation 9:

Schools should introduce an Enrichment Guarantee, offering weekly enrichment activities for all pupils. The Enrichment Guarantee could be trialled in primary schools across one local authority before being scaled up. The government should review the role of philanthropy and the existing provision of charitable enrichment activities. Given that capacity constraints are often a key barrier for schools who struggle to set up enrichment programmes, the government should look at the role of community groups and voluntary organisations in delivering the extra-curricular activities.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

Part 3. Strengthening the school system

Staffing shortages have compounded the issues caused by Covid this academic year. The Ofsted Annual Report stated that teacher recruitment was a key frustration for leaders in schools and schools were also reporting shortages of teaching assistants.²³²

Getting the right high-quality staff into schools is essential if we want to improve young people's foundational skills. At school-level, high-quality teaching is the most important factor in improving pupil's attainment followed by strong leadership.

This chapter outlines proposals to strengthen the school workforce, to develop leaders in foundational skills, and to ensure that pupils can access targeted support when they need it.

Investing in the school workforce

The quality of teachers is the single most important school-level factor concerning pupil outcomes, especially for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.^{233 234} It is crucial that teachers know how children learn and can lay firm foundations to support children in their foundational skills acquisition.²³⁵

High-quality teachers differentiate teaching to meet pupil needs in the classroom. They track pupil progress, identify ideas and concepts that may need to be revisited and highlight individuals whose misconceptions may need further support outside of the classroom.²³⁶

Schools that are more successful in raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils focus on improving classroom teaching first rather than looking at bolt-on strategies and activities outside of the classroom.²³⁷

232 Ofsted, 2022. "The Annual Report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2021/22" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1122628/31357_Ofsted_Annual_Report_2021-22_WEB.pdf]

233 Education Endowment Fund, "1. High Quality teaching." [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/support-for-schools/school-planning-support/1-high-quality-teaching>]

234 H Slater, N. M. Davies and S. M. Burgess. 2012 "Do teachers matter? Measuring the variation in teacher effectiveness in England". [Accessed via: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0084.2011.00666.x>]

235 Education Endowment Fund, "1. High Quality teaching." [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/support-for-schools/school-planning-support/1-high-quality-teaching>]

236 *ibid.*

237 Department for Education, 2015. "Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473974/DFE-RR411_Supporting_the_attainment_of_disadvantaged_pupils.pdf]

High-quality teaching is one of the most effective ways that schools can close the attainment gap. Disadvantaged pupils who are taught by a very effective teacher gain 1.5 years of learning compared with 0.5 years of learning when taught by a low-quality teacher. The difference between a high-quality teacher and a low-quality teacher is a whole year's worth of learning.²³⁸

Recruitment and retention

Despite the importance of classroom teaching, our school system is currently facing a recruitment, retention and workforce development crisis which is damaging the life chances of our children.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract high-quality teachers to the profession. This is an issue which is particularly acute in secondary schools but is also a concern for the primary sector.

Our polling shows that nearly 1 in 5 primary school teachers (18 per cent) said that recruitment and retention would be their biggest priority if they were put in charge of tackling the attainment gap nationally.²³⁹

While official figures suggest that the 2022 recruitment target for primary school teachers is expected to be met, individual schools have reported significant challenges in attracting high-quality applicants.²⁴⁰

In a Teacher Tapp survey conducted in Summer 2022, 11 per cent of primary school teachers stated that not all of their job posts had been filled this season, an increase of 4 percentage points from last year.²⁴¹ Over half of all survey respondents from the primary sector said that they had fewer applicants for jobs than normal in the 2021/22 academic year, compared to 20 per cent of primary schools that said that they had more.²⁴²

Early warning signs also suggest that the deep-rooted issues of retention have worsened for primary schools, following school shutdowns. During the pandemic, the leaving rate for primary and secondary school teachers dropped, but now schools have returned, the retention difficulties have resumed. For the first time on record, in 2020/21 more primary teachers left the school workforce than secondary teachers.²⁴³ Last year, 8 per cent of primary school teachers left the profession.²⁴⁴

238 The Sutton Trust, 2011. "Improving the impact of teachers on pupil achievement in the UK – interim findings" [Accessed via: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2teachers-impact-report-final-1.pdf>]

239 *Ibid.*

240 House of Commons Library, 2022. "Teacher recruitment and retention in England" [Accessed via: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7222/CBP-7222.pdf>]

241 TES Magazine, 2022, "Teacher adverts up 14% compared with pre-Covid" [Accessed via: <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/teacher-recruitment-jobs-vacancy-ads-14-pre-pandemic-rates>]

242 *Ibid.*

243 Department for Education, 2022. "School workforce in England: November 2021" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2021>]

244 *Ibid.*

Primary senior leaders commonly rely on school leaders to do more teaching than usual, make greater use of teaching assistants, and rely upon supply teachers to mitigate the impact of being short staffed.²⁴⁵

Recruitment and retention difficulties are widespread across the education system, but they are particularly acute in areas of disadvantage. The Government's 2022 White Paper on the School System said that: *"At present, pay and incentives are not always attractive enough to attract and keep the teachers we need – and we know that this is especially acute when recruiting to areas of disadvantage, making it harder for those schools to improve outcomes for children they serve."*²⁴⁶

Schools with more pupils who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) have more teachers leaving, more vacancies and have to spend more on bringing in expensive supply staff. The latest NFER data for 2020 shows that primary schools with the highest proportion of FSM eligible pupils spent £128.30 per pupil on supply teachers, compared to £88.10 in schools with the lowest proportions of FSM eligible pupils.²⁴⁷

In primary schools with the highest levels of FSM, the turnover rate of teachers was 13.5%. The turnover rate in primary schools with the lowest levels of FSM was 11.2%. Similarly, schools with the greatest levels of pupil deprivation had higher rates of early-career primary teachers leaving their school.²⁴⁸

Recruitment and retention of quality staff is of great importance and can be a challenge for schools, 48 per cent of teachers in primary schools in the most deprived areas agree that the inability to recruit suitably qualified staff affects the quality of education that they can provide at their school.²⁴⁹

It is too early to tell whether exacerbated retention difficulties will become entrenched in primary schools. However, with increased tightness across the whole labour market stoking recruitment difficulties, the Department needs to focus on recruiting and retaining high-quality, trained teachers as part of any workforce plan.

Evidence suggests that the best way to recruit new teachers is to focus on a local strategy. When asked: "Suppose there is a school 100 miles away that is struggling to recruit. Which of the following perks is attractive enough for you to seriously consider applying to work there?" 44 per cent of teachers said that there were no benefits which would induce them to apply for the job. Teachers who are out of their twenties and more experienced tend to be more geographically immobile.²⁵⁰

245 NFER, 2022, "Teacher supply and shortages" [Accessed via: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/5143/teacher_supply_and_shortages.pdf]

246 Department for Education, 2022. "Opportunities for all" [Accessed via: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063602/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child__print_version_.pdf]

247 NFER, 2022. "Teacher recruitment and retention in England data dashboard." [Accessed via: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/key-topics-expertise/school-workforce/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-england-data-dashboard>]

248 *Ibid.*

249 Sutton Trust, 2019. "The Recruitment Gap" [Accessed via: [suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Recruitment-Gap.pdf](https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Recruitment-Gap.pdf)]

250 *Ibid.*

Very little research focuses on what makes teachers stay in a challenging school. A British Academy study of teacher retention in schools with high levels of disadvantage found that the most important reasons why teachers stay in these schools is a sense of social responsibility and feeling valued by senior leaders. Several of the school leaders spoke of the value of a “growing your own strategy” which identified staff whose careers could be developed at the school.²⁵¹

Recommendation 10

The Department for Education should explore the feasibility of introducing an undergraduate level Degree Apprenticeship for primary school teachers.

Schools would be able to use existing Apprenticeship Levy funding to invest in existing staff members and to develop teaching support staff who may not have an undergraduate degree.

Professional development

Whole-school policies are important for foundational skills. Literacy and oracy cannot be seen as the preserve of literacy lessons and numeracy cannot be relegated to academic maths. These skills need to be practiced across the curriculum and all teachers need to feel confident in their ability to develop foundational skills through both formal and informal learning.

While teachers in primary school largely agree that it is their job to teach children foundational skills, many teachers do not feel equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively deliver literacy, numeracy, and oracy outcomes.

Voice 21 network: National demand for training in oracy skills

Voice 21 is set to work with 2,000 primary and secondary schools by 2025, and as of 2022 works with 144,217 students across England, Wales, and Scotland. The charity's national network of schools has grown from a single school in East London to work with schools from Plymouth to Dundee, showing the growth in demand for high-quality oracy education in schools.

Voice 21 focuses its work on schools with a higher proportion of students eligible for free school meals and in left behind areas, as this is where the need is greatest for oracy skills development.

²⁵¹ British Academy, 2020. “What makes teachers decide to stay in challenging schools?” [Accessed via: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/summer-showcase-2020-what-makes-teachers-decide-stay-challenging-schools>]

Research from the Department for Education has shown that schools which are more successful in closing the attainment gap devolve responsibility to frontline staff and train them accordingly.²⁵² Effective continuing professional development (CPD) therefore plays a crucial role in improving pupil outcomes.²⁵³

Studies have shown that giving teachers an entitlement to 35 hours of high-quality CPD every year could improve pupil attainment in foundational skills by an additional month.²⁵⁴

Flying High Trust Partnership: Making CPD more accessible

Flying High Trust Partnership has over 30 schools within its network and serves over 7,000 pupils. All schools within the trust have a Good or Outstanding Ofsted rating and improved their rating when joining the trust.²⁵⁵ Flying High Trust contains an English Hub school and a Teaching Schools Hub.

Flying High Trust Partnership have a training and development manager, a relatively unique role, which is utilised to signpost facilitate continual development opportunities for all members of staff within the trust.

Flying High Trust Partnership also use professional learning communities, often with a subject focus such as English or maths. The trust creates a half day each half term to meet in person on these subject areas, as well as facilitating collaboration through an online portal. These alleviate pressure on individuals and share expertise within the hub and ensure linear improvement across all settings in the trust.

There is also a 'one stop shop' online CPD portal in production, to "clear the noise" and allow teachers greater access to any information they could require at any time.

Alongside improving the quality of teachers, effective professional development has been shown to improve retention of teachers, especially for early-career teachers.²⁵⁶ Teachers love the work they do when they feel that they are being supported by professional development that allows them to do their job better.²⁵⁷ Around 12,000 more full-time equivalent teachers may remain in the profession each year if they were given a 35-hour high-quality CPD entitlement.²⁵⁸

252 Department for Education, 2015. "Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/473974/DFE-RR411_Supporting_the_attainment_of_disadvantaged_pupils.pdf]

253 Education Endowment Foundation, 2021. "Effective professional development" [Accessed via: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/effective-professional-development>]

254 Education Policy Institute, 2021. "Education recovery and resilience in England" [Accessed via: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-recovery-and-resilience-in-england>]

255 Flying High Partnership Website, "Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire's Flying High Trust CEO awarded OBE for services to education." [Accessed via: <https://www.flyinghighpartnership.co.uk/news/nottinghamshire-and-derbyshires-flying-high-trust-ceo-awarded-obe-for-services-to-education>]

256 Education Policy Institute, 2020. "Evidence review: The effects of high-quality professional development on teachers and students" [Accessed via: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/effects-high-quality-professional-development>]

257 Department for Education, 2019. "Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/786856/DFE_Teacher_Retention_Strategy_Report.pdf]

258 Education Policy Institute, 2021. "Education recovery and resilience in England" [Accessed via: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-recovery-and-resilience-in-england>]

Recommendation 11

The Department for Education should introduce a ring-fenced fund for continuing professional development (CPD) focusing on improving teacher's understanding of how to develop foundational skills in the classroom. Schools should be expected to publish details about how the fund is spent and how they use this funding to focus on improving outcomes for all pupils, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Targeted support for children who need it

It is essential that teachers identify learners with low attainment early on and treat each learner and the support needed as individuals. While “catch up” has become a common phrase across our education system, in response to the learning gaps that emerged during school shutdowns, the aspiration for children with lower attainment shouldn't be a cycle of constant catch-up.

Children who need additional support need it to be provided in a timely manner such that they can keep up, rather than catch up.

Disadvantaged Pupils

In England, schools receive additional funding, known as pupil premium, to improve the educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools receive pupil premium for every pupil who is eligible for free school meals or who have been eligible in the past six years, for pupils who have been adopted or who have left care and for children who are looked after.²⁵⁹

Free school meal (FSM) eligibility is a relatively blunt instrument to identify pupil need. Currently, pupils are eligible to claim free school meals if they are in receipt of Universal Credit and have net annual earnings of up to £7,400. Families earning just over this threshold would not be eligible for any support.²⁶⁰

Despite increasing inflation, the £7,400 threshold has not been updated since 2018.²⁶¹ If the eligibility threshold had been updated with inflation, it would have been set at £8,575 in 2022 and up to 110,000 more children would have been eligible.²⁶²

259 Department for Education, 2022. “Pupil premium: overview” [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium>]

260 Department for Education, 2018. “Free school meals: Guidance for local authorities, maintained schools, academies and free schools” [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700139/Free_school_meals_guidance_Apr18.pdf]

261 *Ibid.*

262 Guardian, 2022. “Teachers reveal scale of pupils' hunger as 100,000 frozen out of free school meals” [Accessed via: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/nov/10/children-not-eligible-for-free-school-meals-going-hungry-say-teachers>]

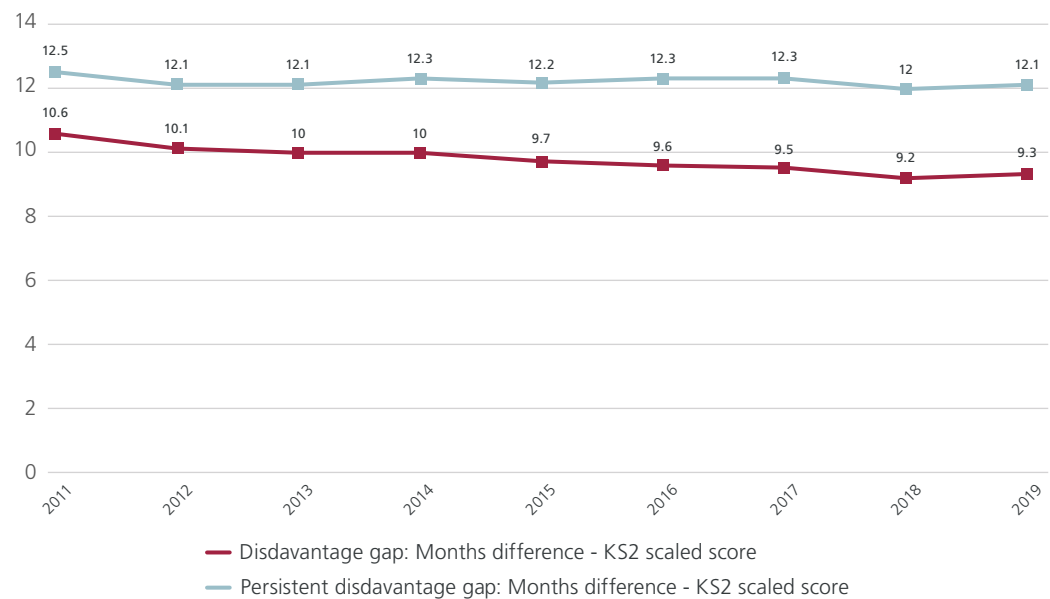
Pupil premium has also been criticised because it treats all children who have ever been eligible for free school meals equally. Additional funding is not weighted to account for the length of time that a child has been living in poverty, even though children’s academic outcomes are often much worse the longer a child has been living in poverty.

Pupils who have been eligible for FSM at any point in the last six years have significantly lower attainment in key stage 2 when compared to their peers who have never been eligible. However, average attainment for pupils at key stage 2 decreases the longer a child has been eligible for FSM.²⁶³

While the overall attainment gap had been steadily closing over time pre-pandemic, there has been much less progress in closing the attainment gap for children living in persistent disadvantage. Analysis shows that increases in persistent poverty have contributed to the halt in the closing of the attainment gap.²⁶⁴

As of 2019, primary school children living in persistent disadvantage were 12.1 months behind their peers in reading and maths at the end of year 6. Between 2011 and 2019, the persistent disadvantage gap has fallen by only 0.4 months.²⁶⁵

Figure 5: Disadvantage gap and persistent disadvantage gap over time



263 NFER, 2022. “Investigating the changing landscape of pupil disadvantage” [Accessed via: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4762/nfer_investigating_the_changing_landscape_of_pupil_disadvantage.pdf]

264 Education Policy Institute, 2020. “Education in England: Annual Report 2020” [Accessed via: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-in-england-annual-report-2020>]

265 *Ibid.*

Focus Trust: Speech and language skills and educational recovery

In 2020, Focus Trust decided the need for speech and language skills development in their schools was great, made greater by the lack of socialisation for pupils over the pandemic.

The Communication Trust's "study of language development", found that of the children who persistently experienced poverty attending one of the trust's schools 75 per cent arrived at school below average in language development. This school was Boothroyd Academy, where around 90 per cent of students speak English as an additional language.

The development of speech and language skills at this school has allowed pupils to catch up on lost learning experiences post-Covid. Including those who experienced far less academic language in English within the home over the pandemic.

The development of speech and language skills is driving up attainment across the Trust, regardless of the level of speech and language skills when pupils first join the school. For instance, Boothroyd Academy's current Year 5 cohort had 73.2 per cent of students working at expected levels in literacy in 2022, higher than the national average.

Recommendation 12

The Department for Education should review the free school meals eligibility threshold and the academic outcomes of children by the length of time that they have been eligible for free school meals. The Department should consider an uplift in the threshold for free school meals eligibility and reweighting Pupil Premium to provide additional support for children living in persistent poverty.

Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

Our polling showed us that two-thirds of primary school teachers said a lack of support for children with speech, language and communication needs was the biggest barrier to pupils gaining expected levels in foundational skills post-pandemic.²⁶⁶ This concern was especially prevalent in areas of higher deprivation and in schools rated below Outstanding.²⁶⁷

Demand for support remains high for children with speech and language needs. According to the most recent data on NHS community use, in January 2019 172,000 children under the age of 9 were referred to NHS speech and language support.²⁶⁸ In terms of demand, only 'immunization' and 'health child pathway' were more common reasons for referral.²⁶⁹ The demand for such support leads to long waiting lists, which are now increasing following the pandemic.²⁷⁰ This leaves pupils without the immediate support required to meet expected levels in many cases.

Our polling showed that 68 per cent of head teachers use a local NHS or out-of-school speech therapist service for speech and language support in their school, often with a long waiting list, and only 15 per cent of teachers say there is an in-school speech and language therapist for pupils to access²⁷¹.

Our polling also showed that four-in-five teachers say that demand for speech and language needs support has increased post pandemic²⁷². The majority of teachers and headteachers say they cannot meet this demand with current provision, and just 8 per cent of teachers said their school had a clear plan on how to meet this demand.²⁷³ This issue of speech and language needs support was shown to be more urgent among primary teachers than secondary teachers.²⁷⁴

266 Teacher Tapp survey, September 2022, created for CSJ, Question: What is the biggest barrier to supporting all students to gain at expected levels post pandemic?

267 Teacher Tapp survey, September 2022, created for CSJ, Question: What is the biggest barrier to supporting all students to gain at expected levels post pandemic?

268 NHS England, May 2019, "Community services statistics- January 2019." [Accessed via: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/community-services-statistics-for-children-young-people-and-adults/january-2019>]

269 *Ibid.*

270 Health and Social Care Committee inquiry, "Clearing the backlog caused by the pandemic, Written evidence submitted by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (CBP0010)." [Accessed via: <https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/RCSLT-submission-Clearing-the-backlog-caused-by-the-pandemic.pdf>]

271 Teacher Tapp survey, September 2022, Created for CSJ, Question: If you were in charge of supporting disadvantaged students' literacy and numeracy skills across the country, which would be your BIGGEST priority?

272 Teacher Tapp survey, September 2022, Created for CSJ, Question: Considering speech and language needs in your school post pandemic, which is most true?

273 *Ibid.*

274 *Ibid.*

The RCSLT: Identifying and supporting those with speech and language needs

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK, with around 12,000 of its members working with young people.

The RCSLT is concerned about limited resources in areas of the country. This means that therapy is often only available to the small minority of students who have Education, Health, and Care Plans, rather than to all pupils who would benefit.

At the same time, in other areas of the country, there are examples of excellent practice. Partnerships between speech and language therapy services and educational settings enable the development of whole school approaches to support speech, language, and communication skills and needs. However, the current variation in service provision means that many needs go unsupported or even unidentified.

Given the links between language skills and outcomes in literacy and numeracy, any post-pandemic plan for primary schools must include a greater understanding of speech, language and communication needs and how to support them.

Similar issues with access to support exist for other types of special educational needs. The APPG for Dyslexia has found that some schools tell parents that their child needs to be at least two years behind their peers in literacy before they can apply for an Education, Health and Care Plan. They also found instances of schools carrying out assessments without specialist knowledge.

SEND identification varies widely across England. Two thirds of the variation in identification at primary level can be accounted for by school level factors. Children living in the most disadvantaged local authorities are much less likely to be identified with SEND than children with similar backgrounds living in more affluent areas. Families in poorer areas are more likely to face higher thresholds for accessing support.²⁷⁵

In an attempt to standardise access to special educational needs support, the government has outlined plans for new nationally consistent standards for how needs are identified and met as part of the SEND Review.²⁷⁶

275 Education Policy Institute, 2021. "Identifying pupils with special educational needs and disabilities" [Accessed via: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/identifying-send>]

276 Department for Education, 2021. "SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063620/SEND_review_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf]

Recommendation 13:

The Department should outline plans to enable primary school teachers to better identify and provide support for SEND in the classroom. The Department for Education should provide training for teachers identifying and supporting SEND in the classroom and should map cold spots of SEND support provision, such as the availability of speech and language therapists.

School leadership

There is a strong evidence base for the importance of leadership in improving pupils' acquisition of foundational skills. Strong leadership is second only to high-quality teachers as an in-school influence on children's academic attainment.²⁷⁷

In a recent review of reading, Ofsted found that schools where reading was led by a deputy head or literacy lead were able to create a well-thought-out curriculum which integrated reading across the wider school. Having a strategic, senior leader with expertise in reading meant that staff in the wider school did not view reading as solely the responsibility of the English department.²⁷⁸

277 Department for Education, 2021. "Opportunity for all" [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063602/Opportunity_for_all_strong_schools_with_great_teachers_for_your_child_print_version_.pdf]

278 Ofsted, 2022. "Guidance 'Now the whole school is reading': supporting struggling readers in secondary school" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/now-the-whole-school-is-reading-supporting-struggling-readers-in-secondary-school/now-the-whole-school-is-reading-supporting-struggling-readers-in-secondary-school>]

Ark UK

Ark Schools is a national network of schools, including 24 primary schools. Across Ark schools nationally 42 per cent of students are disadvantaged, compared with the national average of 25 per cent of students.²⁷⁹ Ark's approach aims to transform children's lives through education and ensure that every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to go to university or pursue their career of choice.²⁸⁰

The Ark approach includes allocating twice the national standard of training days, to ensure all teachers are empowered to deliver quality first teaching at all times, and use of 'Ark teacher summits' where over 1,000 professionals come together in a collaborative space to facilitate development for all.²⁸¹

Ark has also launched 'curriculum partnerships', bringing together expertise on a specific topic from both inside and outside of the Ark network. This collaborative approach allows the sharing of expertise and resources, and ultimately is mutually beneficial for all involved.²⁸²

Additionally, Ark has partnered with Ambition to deliver NPQs to leaders across their schools, including Leading Literacy and Leading Teaching qualifications. Ark states, "Schools can have confidence that all their educators, from early career teachers to leaders of multiple schools, are building and developing their practice from the same evidence-based framework."²⁸³

The strong focus on creating high-quality teachers and leaders has led to significant improvements in outcomes for young people. In 2018, 25 out of the 26 schools in the Ark network had improved their attainment rank since joining the Ark network.²⁸⁴ Similarly, the percentage of disadvantaged Ark primary students reaching the expected level in reading, writing and maths is 16 percentage points higher than the national average.²⁸⁵

As of 2022, the Department has introduced two further national professional qualifications (NPQs), one in Early Years Leadership and another specialist NPQ in Leading Literacy.²⁸⁶

The Leading Literacy NPQ prepares teachers to effectively teach and promote literacy across the whole school, year group, key stage or phase.²⁸⁷ The NPQ in Leading Literacy does not lead to a single role across all schools, however teachers who take the NPQ often play a key role in middle leadership. They contribute to the schools' wider strategy and have responsibility for developing a team of teachers to effectively teach literacy across the school.²⁸⁸

279 Ark Online, "Our results." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/our-results>]

280 Ark Online, "What we do." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/about-us/what-we-do>]

281 Ark Online, "Ark 2019 Teacher Summit." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/blog/highlights-arks-2019-teacher-summit>]

282 Ark Online, "Ark launches new curriculum partnerships for primary schools." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/news/ark-launches-new-curriculum-partnership-primary-schools>]

283 Ark Online, "Teaching school hub." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/teaching-school-hub>]

284 Ark Online, "Our schools." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/our-schools>]

285 Ark Online, "Our results." [Accessed via: <https://arkonline.org/our-results>]

286 Department for Education, 2022. "National Professional Qualification (NPQ) Leading Literacy Framework." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1025652/NPQ_Leading_Literacy_Framework.pdf]

287 Department for Education, 2022. "National professional qualifications (NPQs)" [Accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-professional-qualifications-npqs-reforms/national-professional-qualifications-npqs-reforms>]

288 Department for Education, 2022. "National Professional Qualification (NPQ) Leading Literacy Framework." [Accessed via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1025652/NPQ_Leading_Literacy_Framework.pdf]

NPQs successfully allow individuals to develop their understanding of key topics within primary education and then share this expertise.²⁸⁹ NPQs can have a transformational impact on continued professional development within a school and this expertise can be shared with other schools too.²⁹⁰

While the introduction of the NPQ for literacy is very welcome, the government must go further and introduce similar qualifications for numeracy and oracy. It is crucial that we develop primary school leaders who can champion a whole-school strategy for all foundational skills.

There is a weaker evidence base around what works in numeracy and oracy, when compared to literacy. In comparison to reading, teachers have access to less evidence and resources to help children achieve in maths.²⁹¹ Primary school teachers are often inundated with information about different approaches and resources for teaching numeracy but there is limited evidence around the impact of these interventions.²⁹²

Sussex Maths Hub: The Hub model

The Sussex Maths Hub supports schools across Sussex to develop the teaching of maths, including in areas of higher deprivation. The hub promotes high expectations for all young people, through the sharing of expertise between schools facilitated by accredited Numeracy Mastery Specialist Teachers, who provide bespoke advice on effective strategies to support a school's local need.

A well-connected learning community of hundreds of schools across Sussex have directly benefitted from key practitioners sharing this unique experience. Which has enabled leaders to develop and improve their own numeracy provision and improve pupil outcomes as a result, especially in numeracy.

The mastery model is based on a belief that all children can succeed with access to high-quality teaching, it is built on a strong bedrock of international research. The Department for Education has provided opportunities for specialist practitioners from Sussex to visit provisions in other countries, to observe best practice and reflect upon how this can be applied in a UK setting.

As part of the Maths Hub, teacher research groups have been created that meet regularly to share practice, collaborate, and support one another. This has led to positive outcomes for pupils across Sussex.

289 Ambition Institute website, "The leadership NPQs: six reasons to get excited." [Accessed via: <https://www.ambition.org.uk/blog/new-leadership-npqs-six-reasons-get-excited>]

290 Department for Education, 2022, "National Professional Qualifications: how NPQs have transformed CPD in our Multi Academy Trust." [Accessed via: <https://teaching.blog.gov.uk/2022/05/26/national-professional-qualifications-how-npqs-have-transformed-cpd-in-our-multi-academy-trust/>]

291 Nuffield Foundation, 2019. "Improving mathematical achievement in primary school-aged children" [Accessed via: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/improving-mathematical-achievement-in-primary-school-aged-children>]

292 *Ibid.*

Oracy suffers from an even greater lack of expertise. Over 60 per cent of primary school teachers lack confidence in their ability to develop the speech and language skills of their pupils.²⁹³

Oracy is not explicitly included in the national curriculum and a lack of shared understanding of what should be taught is cited as a key barrier to the consistency of oracy education. There is no universal framework for oracy, no age-related expectations and no common understanding of what constitutes a good oracy education. Oracy lacks the same infrastructure as exists for literacy and numeracy.²⁹⁴

Recommendation 14:

The Department for Education should introduce new National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for Leading Numeracy and Leading Oracy. Leading Numeracy and Leading Oracy NPQs would create a rung of strong middle leaders in foundational skills who are equipped to run whole-school foundational skills strategies and develop the knowledge of other teachers.

Recommendation 15:

The Department for Education should put oracy education on an equal footing with literacy and numeracy by introducing oracy in the National Curriculum and piloting new Oracy Hubs, in the style of English and Maths Hubs. The introduction of oracy on the curriculum partnered with a new Oracy Hub network could increase confidence, consistency, and ultimately standards of oracy skills development on a national scale.

293 I Can, "The cost to the nation of children's poor communication." [Accessed via: https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/media/1592/2_the_cost_to_the_nation_of_childrens_poor_communication.pdf]

294 Oracy APPG, 2021. "Speak for Change Inquiry" [Accessed via: https://oracy.inparliament.uk/sites/oracy.inparliament.uk/files/2021-04/Oracy_APPG_FinalReport_28_04%20%284%29.pdf]



