

Rapid evidence assessment

Impact of school closures on the attainment gap

This [rapid evidence assessment](#) examines the existing research for all available estimates of the impact of school closure on the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others, to help inform the potential impact of current school closures due to Covid-19.

Key findings and implications

1. School closures are likely to reverse progress made to narrow the gap in the last decade

The projections suggest that school closures will widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, likely reversing progress made to narrow the gap since 2011. The median estimate indicates that the gap would widen by 36%.

However, the estimated rate of gap widening varied substantially between studies, meaning that there is a high level of uncertainty around this average. Plausible “good” and “bad” estimates range from the gap widening from 11% to 75%.

2. Supporting effective remote learning will mitigate the extent to which the gap widens

Pupils can learn through remote teaching. However, ensuring the elements of effective teaching are present—for example through clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback—is more important than how or when lessons or support are provided.

To increase access to teaching, it would also be valuable to test the feasibility of online tuition as a way to supplement the support provided by teachers to disadvantaged children.

3. Sustained support will be needed to help disadvantaged pupils catch up

It is highly likely that the gap will have widened when pupils return to school, even if the strongest possible mitigatory steps are put in place. Catch-up provision, including assessment of lost learning and targeted support, will be essential. However, it is unlikely that a single catch-up strategy will be sufficient to compensate for lost learning due to school closures.

There is a risk that high levels of absence after schools formally reopen poses a particular risk for disadvantaged pupils.

Limitations

School closures due to coronavirus are different to the closures included in our rapid evidence assessment, meaning that the estimates above should be viewed as an imperfect guide.

For example, the search provided no examples of unplanned closures of the length already experienced by schools in England and the existing evidence on school closures almost exclusively focuses on summer holidays and younger children.

The projections do not incorporate information about activity during school closures due to coronavirus. It is possible that factors such as the provision of support for remote learning, or different rates of engagement with learning while at home mean that the projections are over-or under-estimates.

This briefing focuses on learning and does not aim to inform decisions about when pupils return to school, which should be based on pupil and teacher safety.

