



Department  
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Social Research

# **School Recovery Strategies: Year 1 findings**

**Research report**

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## Executive summary

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ipsos MORI, in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY), to carry out research among primary and secondary schools to understand how they have responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and what further support they believe they need looking forwards.

This report presents interim findings from the first year of the research, conducted in the 2020/21 academic year. It is based on data collected from school leaders and their responses to an online survey (1,018 survey responses in total) and 40 qualitative interviews. The research is set to continue in the 2021/22 academic year.

## Interim findings

### Challenges facing schools

- In Autumn 2020 the most common challenge among primary schools was the large differences in progress between pupils. For secondary schools it was pupils' emotional and mental health. COVID-19 restrictions and staff and pupil absences were also key challenges for both phases.
- As the academic year progressed, primary and secondary school leaders reported that disparities in pupils' social, emotional and academic progress increased, with pupils having increasingly complex and variable needs.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who did not attend school and/or engage well online during home-schooling seem to have been most profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Schools' response to academic and pastoral challenges

Schools adapted and responded rapidly and innovatively to COVID-19 restrictions and the changing needs of their pupils. They did this by making changes to the curriculum and by employing multiple strategies to support academic and pastoral issues.

### *Curriculum changes*

Schools had to make decisions about which subjects, topics or aspects to teach and when, based on their pupil/student needs and school context. Around half of primary schools increased teaching hours for English and Maths each week compared to before COVID-19, whilst for most secondary schools weekly hours for English, Maths and Science remained the same.

- Some primary and secondary schools also reported that they re-established and/or increased teaching hours per week for Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and Physical Education (PE) or other outdoor activities.
- Hours for subjects that involved equipment or specialist facilities (for example, music) were reduced in some schools due to practical restrictions (for example, time for disinfecting equipment).
- Schools were also unable to offer some extracurricular activities that enriched pupils' experience either academically or non-academically (trips, concerts, performances) or encouraged a sense of belonging to school, such as assemblies.

### ***Academic interventions***

- In Autumn 2020, primary schools focused on reading and maths interventions, particularly phonics, mainly to support Reception to Year 3 pupils. Secondary schools worked to ensure that pupils could access remote lessons by providing computers and software.
- Internally developed interventions for reading, writing and maths, and small group or one-to-one interventions were most commonly used. Externally developed interventions were less popular, as was the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). Leaders believed that more tailored approaches, fine-tuned by the teachers to meet specific learning needs, were more effective.
- In the Spring and Summer 2021 terms, academic interventions seemed to become more honed and extensive, with more in-class, individual and small group interventions used across all year groups and subjects depending on identified needs and resources.
- There was a continuous effort from Autumn 2020 and into Spring/Summer 2021 terms for schools to provide pupils with access to the basics for learning, such as laptops or other devices, online platforms, and COVID-19 related equipment, particularly in schools with a high proportion of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM).

### ***Pastoral interventions***

- In Autumn 2020, primary and secondary schools employed multiple strategies to provide pastoral support, including ensuring a broad curriculum offer given the circumstances, information to parents, tailored support and skills development for pupils and additional staff training.
- Some schools also employed more Teaching Assistants (TAs), pastoral staff, family workers and school counsellors to support additional pastoral interventions,

but in some areas demand for these roles was higher than supply, resulting in schools lacking these specialist services.

- Pastoral interventions often placed substantial demands on staff resources, as these were delivered in addition to their existing responsibilities. Teachers noted that academic and pastoral support needs were often highly related.

### **Guidance and resources**

Schools used guidance and resources to support their delivery and planning for recovery, some of which they reported as being more useful than others:

- EEF guidance, and national and local government guidance were seen as most useful. Resources created by other educators and schools, Oak Academy and the EEF, especially for primary schools, were reported to be most useful.
- Schools highlighted that collaboration and sharing good practice within the Local Authority (LA), Multi-Academy Trust or with other schools helped support recovery. Schools were keen to maintain the development and use of free resources and collaboration.

### **Schools' priorities for 2021/22 and further support they need**

- For the academic year 2021/22, schools reported that they were focusing on returning to 'normality' for pupils and focusing on a responsive approach based on identifying needs. In particular, schools suggested that their focus for the year would be reading recovery, mental health and wellbeing interventions, quality first teaching and extra staffing provision.
- Schools identified specific groups of pupils who they felt were the priority for further support or interventions going forwards These included transition and examination year groups; pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds; those who had fallen behind due to the pandemic; and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- To respond to the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning, schools identified the following priorities for support:
  - additional funding for responding to COVID-19 related challenges, with the ability to use it flexibly and enough time to plan how it would be used.
  - more high quality free continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure high quality teaching and learning.
  - additional support for remote education practice and recovery/catch up pedagogy and behaviour and mental health and wellbeing challenges.

- timely and clear communication of government changes and timescales and accountability measures.
- for secondary schools, more guidance on assessment for exam year groups and career guidance for Year 10 to Year 13.

### **Schools' suggestions for system-wide changes**

Primary and secondary schools held similar views on the highest priorities for wider system changes that could help with education recovery, including:

- changes in accountability measures, with concerns that inspections and ratings may not adequately recognise the complex challenges faced by pupils and schools following the pandemic and extended home-schooling.
- changes to examinations for 2021/22, particularly for secondary schools.
- more live feedback from leaders and teachers to inform policy in real time for government to work with and consult schools in a more direct, timely way.
- changes to curriculum content.
- further cross-sector working with families and further support and funding for social care and welfare services to address the wide-reaching impacts of worsening inequalities in education and mental health, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas.
- support to address staff burnout and potential staff retention issues, particularly in disadvantaged areas, as well as additional support for early career teachers.
- further public and government recognition and positive messaging of the wide-ranging and vital role schools have played and continue to play in supporting the education and wellbeing of children and young people.

### **Unexpected positives**

Whilst the pandemic has been a significant challenge for schools, school leaders uncovered some unexpected positives that emerged and that schools planned to maintain going forwards, including:

- the accelerated use of IT and rapid skill development of staff and pupils in using digital platforms, software and of resources.
- benefits of virtual learning, with some schools suggesting they will continue to use existing and new methods for blended teaching, learning and assessments.
- stronger staff culture and resilience, and stronger relationships with families resulting from working through adversity.

- improvements in sanitary procedures and school systems (for example, lunch rotas), and better use of dedicated spaces.

# Introduction

## Background

The Department for Education (DfE) has commissioned Ipsos MORI, in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) and the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY), to carry out research among primary and secondary schools to understand how they have responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what further support they believe they need to support education recovery.

The project set out to:

1. Map the landscape of learning loss in the academic year 2020/21 as perceived by primary and secondary school leaders.
2. Examine schools' assessment of learning loss, and their teaching and learning strategies implemented to support education recovery from COVID-19.
3. Explore schools' curriculum offer and how it adapted to challenges relating to COVID-19.
4. Identify the guidance and resources schools found useful.
5. Discuss schools' priorities for the academic year 2021/22 and the support/changes they believe they need in order to most effectively support education recovery in the future.

This report presents brief interim findings from the first year of the research in the 2020/21 academic year. The final report will be published after the end of the project, which is expected to be in late 2022.

## Methodology

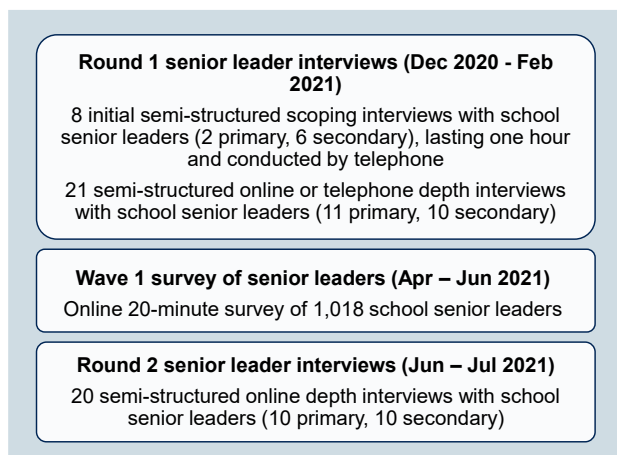
### Overview

This project covers several strands of quantitative and qualitative research, outlined in **Error! Reference source not found.** Findings from the completed elements of the research in year 1 (wave 1 questionnaire and 49 interviews with senior leaders from primary and secondary schools) are included in this interim report. Over the 2021/22 academic year, a second wave survey of senior leaders, a third round of senior leader interviews, and school case studies will be conducted.



**Figure 1: Elements included in year 1 and year 2 of the research**

**Year 1: Dec 2020 – Jul 2021**



**Year 2: Sep 2021 – Jul 2022**

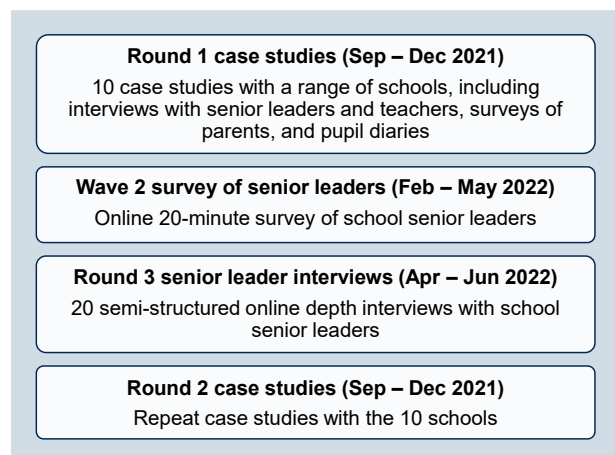
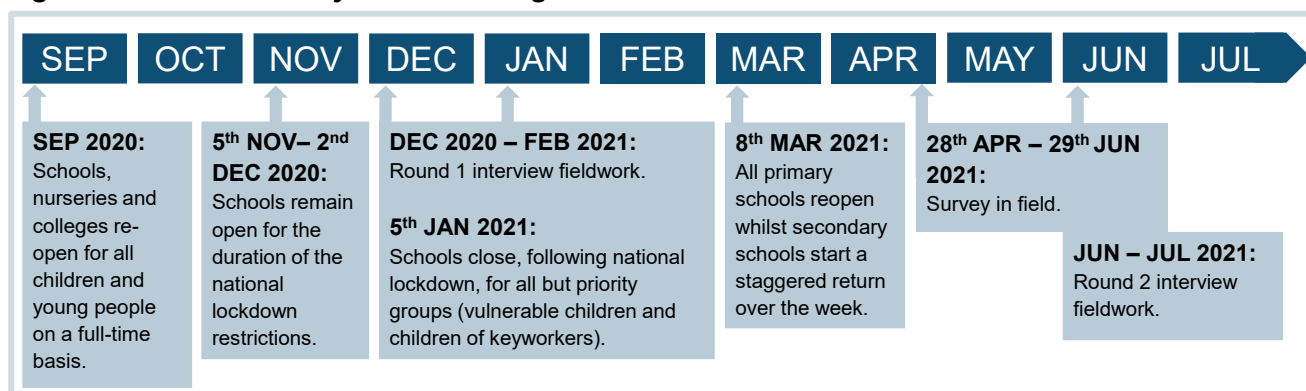


Figure 2, below, sets the findings in this report in context by showing the key dates of the second wave of the pandemic as they relate to schools, alongside the research fieldwork dates.

**Figure 2: Timeline of key dates relating to schools and the research fieldwork**



**Year 1 approach**

For the survey of senior leaders, a nationally representative sample of state primary, secondary, all-through, middle, special schools<sup>1</sup>, and alternative provision<sup>2</sup> in England was drawn from the DfE’s ‘Get Information About Schools’ database<sup>3</sup>, and invited to take

<sup>1</sup> Special schools are those that provide an education for children with a special educational need or disability (SEND), whose needs cannot be met within a mainstream setting, and whose parents or carers have agreed to or requested a special school placement.  
<sup>2</sup> Alternative provision covers education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not receive suitable education in a mainstream setting; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/942014/alternative\\_provision\\_statutory\\_guidance\\_accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942014/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_accessible.pdf)  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-information-about-schools>

part in the 20-minute online survey via schools' publicly available email addresses. We received 1,018 responses in total (649 primary, 369 secondary). The final data was weighted to be representative of the school population. Further detail on the achieved sample profile and weighting can be found in the Appendix.

For the senior leader qualitative interviews, round 1 used a rapid opportunistic sample<sup>4</sup> of schools, whilst for round 2 the sample was mainly schools who took part in the survey and who agreed to be recontacted for interviews. The achieved sample covered a range of schools in terms of regional spread, Ofsted rating size, school type, proportion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), Free School Meals (FSM), and English as an additional language (EAL).

## Interpreting the findings

Where data from the survey are presented, it is important to note that overall, only a proportion of the total population of schools in England took part in this wave of the survey. As such, we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are the same as those we would have obtained if the total population completed the survey. We can, however, predict the variation between these results. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually set at 95% - that is, if we ran this survey 100 times, each time with a different sample of people, the survey results would be similar to the total population results 95 out of 100 times. Further information on statistical reliability can be found in the Appendix.

It should be noted that schools who took part in the survey have been analysed separately depending on whether they answered about primary or secondary year groups. A small number of all-through and middle schools are included in the sample, and were asked to choose to answer about either their primary or secondary year groups for the purpose of this survey.

Where data from the qualitative research are reported, it is important to remember that findings are from a small number of qualitative interviews which are not designed to be statistically representative. They are intended to be illustrative, providing insight into the schools' decision-making and planning among a small selection of schools. The qualitative findings presented in this report reflect only the perspectives of those interviewed and cannot be generalised to a wider sample of schools. Furthermore, these findings reflect participants' experiences and perceptions which may differ to other teachers within the schools; the information provided has not been verified through other means. This report also recognises that each school operates under a different set of circumstances and governance.

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<sup>4</sup> Using school leader contacts available at the time and willing to take part.

# 1. What was the situation in the Autumn 2020 term and how did it develop over the academic year?

In this section we present key challenges schools faced in supporting pupils' education recovery and pastoral outcomes in the Autumn 2020 term, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the curriculum, and how the situation developed throughout the school year.

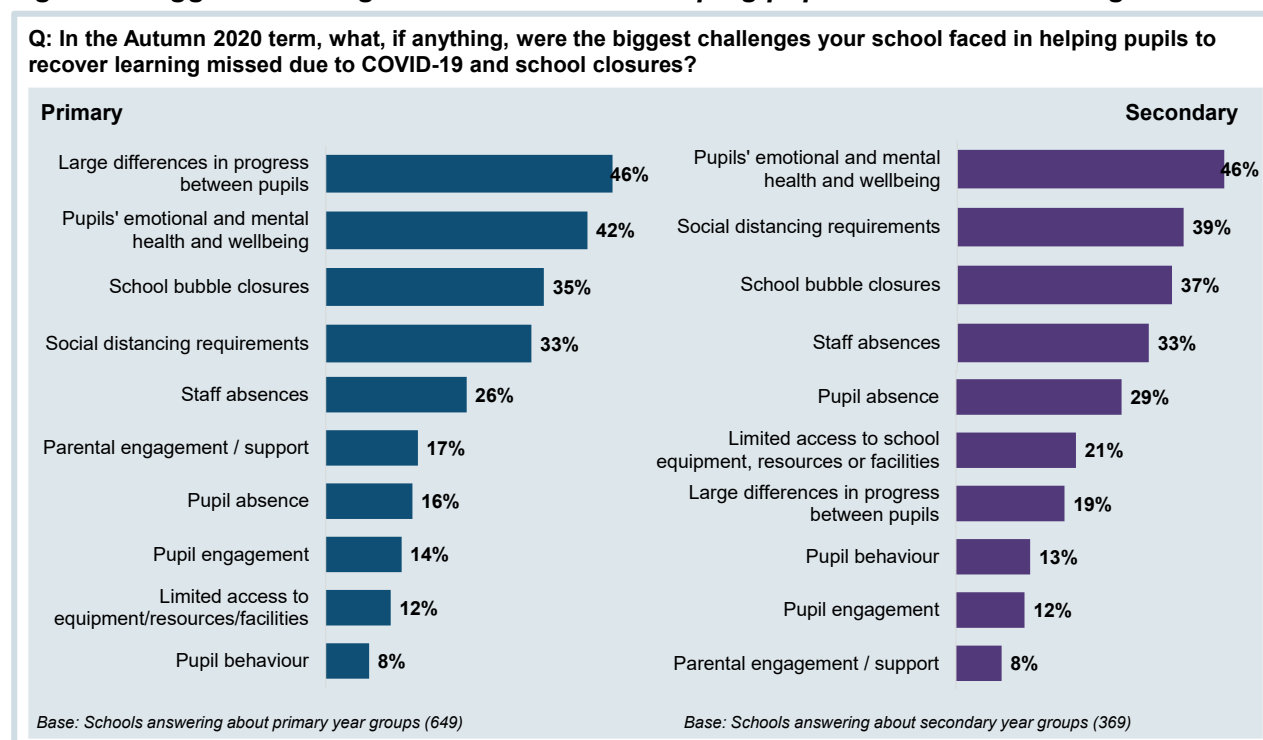
## Key findings

- In Autumn 2020, the most common challenge among primary schools was the large difference in progress between pupils, whilst for secondary schools it was pupils' emotional and mental health. COVID-19 restrictions and staff and pupil absences were also key challenges for both phases.
- Amongst other strategies, schools adapted to changing pupil needs and responded to physical COVID-19 restrictions by refocusing and streamlining the curriculum, with a focus on English and Maths, particularly in primary schools. Schools also often expanded their Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education curriculum and wider pastoral offer. Hours of teaching for subjects that involved equipment or specialist facilities were reduced in some schools due to practical restrictions (e.g. time for disinfecting equipment), and many schools were unable to provide some extracurricular activities to support academic and non-academic related aspects of school life.
- As the academic year progressed, primary and secondary school leaders reported in interviews that disparities in pupils' social, emotional and academic progress increased, with pupils having increasingly complex and variable needs.

## Schools' challenges for supporting recovery in Autumn 2020

In the Autumn 2020 term, schools faced significant challenges in supporting pupils to recover from the impacts of the pandemic and adjust to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. The biggest challenges schools reported in the survey are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Biggest challenges schools faced in helping pupils to recover learning**



### Academic and pastoral challenges

As seen in Figure 3, more than two fifths of both primary and secondary schools in the survey mentioned **pupils' emotional and mental health and wellbeing** as a main challenge (42% and 46% respectively) in Autumn 2020. In interviews, school leaders explained that social and wellbeing concerns were an even bigger issue than 'lost learning', with wellbeing seen by some as a higher priority to address before academic interventions could be used effectively.

Concerns around wellbeing included the loss of social development during the pandemic (e.g. friendships, class discussions), issues relating to pupils' motivation, interest and engagement in learning, confidence and resilience, transition-related losses (e.g. rites of passage, memorable experiences), and increased stress at home or family issues during the pandemic. Some pupils were described as more anxious and some had experienced severe mental health issues, as well as more behavioural and social difficulties (e.g. difficulties with friendships, more conflict). In particular, leaders reported that Children in Need (CIN) were negatively impacted when social services visits were stopped during lockdowns. As a result of the increased need for pastoral support, schools reported the challenge of taking on many more social aspects of supporting pupils' needs.

*“[Issues due to] personal development aspects of not being in school and not being with friends... how [they] maintain relationships were even more significant than academic regression.” – Primary school, June/July 2021*

Unsurprisingly, these pastoral challenges were highly interlinked with challenges relating to **pupils' academic outcomes**. Findings from interviews showed that, when pupils returned to school in person in Autumn 2020, academic progress varied widely between schools, year groups, individual pupils and subjects. Leaders discussed pupils' progress both relative to the expected level for a particular age or stage, and relative to their previous attainment (e.g. those who regressed the most compared to their previous attainment were not necessarily those further behind compared to other pupils).

The survey highlighted that for primary schools in particular, dealing with large differences in progress between pupils was a common challenge (42%). In interviews, leaders reported that some pupils were lagging further behind than others on their return to school in September 2020. In particular, leaders mentioned pupils who faced challenges during remote learning (e.g. due to a lack of good internet or access to access to devices), and pupils whose parents were less able to support home schooling (e.g. due to time or ability). The survey found parental engagement and support to be a more common challenge in primary schools (17%) than secondary schools (8%), potentially because younger pupils required more parental support to continue their learning from home. Interviews also raised cases where parents themselves had similar needs and/or additional difficulties as their child (e.g. SEND, English as an additional language), which made supporting this group of pupils during the pandemic even more challenging and required multi-agency working<sup>5</sup>.

Overall, it was difficult for school leaders to generalise or quantify academic 'learning loss', and not all pupils were falling behind. Some were making better progress than expected, for example pupils whose parents were able to invest more time in home schooling, or those for whom school was not the best learning environment. From the interviews, school leaders recalled that some pupils with special needs, autism spectrum disorder and/or school anxiety, for example, preferred to learn from home and/or learned more effectively in their home environment than in school. Leaders also described the uneven nature of how the curriculum was accessed, and the learning undertaken during the second lockdown, with different family circumstances making them relatively more or less able to facilitate their children's learning.

## **COVID-19 challenges**

As well as academic and pastoral challenges, both primary and secondary schools mentioned key challenges they faced in the Autumn 2020 term relating to COVID-19 restrictions and illness, which were influenced by contextual factors. Findings from the survey indicated that challenges related to **school bubble self-isolation and home-**

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<sup>5</sup> Schools working with other services (e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) to support individuals and families with multiple and complex needs.

**schooling**<sup>6</sup> (35% primary, 27% secondary), and **social distancing requirements** (33% primary, 39% secondary), meant that schools had to adapt teaching strategies and school routines at short notice. **Staff absences** (e.g. due to illness, self-isolation) were also a major challenge for more than a quarter of both primary and secondary schools (26% primary, 29% secondary). Pupil absences were a particular challenge for secondary schools (29%, compared with 16% primary), which may be due to higher levels of infection among secondary pupils<sup>7</sup>.

*“Most of the Autumn term, each day operated with about 10 staff absent due to COVID-19 related incidences, that was a significant factor to have to deal with” - Primary, June/July 2021*

*“Very little in terms of infection rate last year and only one case between September and our October half term, but between October half term and December, which we can only assume was the new variant, we had exponential growth to the point where we ended up just before Christmas with 800 students having to self-isolate” - Secondary, June/July 2021*

Some schools were more likely to face particular challenges than others:

- Primary schools with a high proportion of FSM pupils<sup>8</sup> were more likely than average to mention several challenges, including school bubble self-isolation requirements (41% of high FSM schools mentioned this challenge, compared with 35% of schools on average), staff absences (32% high FSM, compared with 26% on average), parental engagement or support (23% high FSM, compared with 17% on average), and pupil absence (25% high FSM, compared with 16% on average).
- School bubble self-isolation was also a more common challenge among primary schools in London and the North West, primary schools in urban areas (39%), and large<sup>9</sup> primary schools (51%).
- For secondary schools, school bubble self-isolation was more often reported as a challenge by large schools (50% of large schools, compared with 37% of schools

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<sup>6</sup> In the 2020/21 academic year, schools were asked to keep children in consistent, distinct groups, known as ‘bubbles’ (i.e. children were only to mix with a fixed year or class group), with ‘bubbles’ asked to self-isolate when members tested positive for COVID-19.

<sup>7</sup> Positive COVID-19 cases were slightly higher in secondary schools than primary schools in November – December 2020:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/covid19schoolsinfectedsurveyengland/round2december2020>

<sup>8</sup> FSM definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

<sup>9</sup> School size definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

on average).

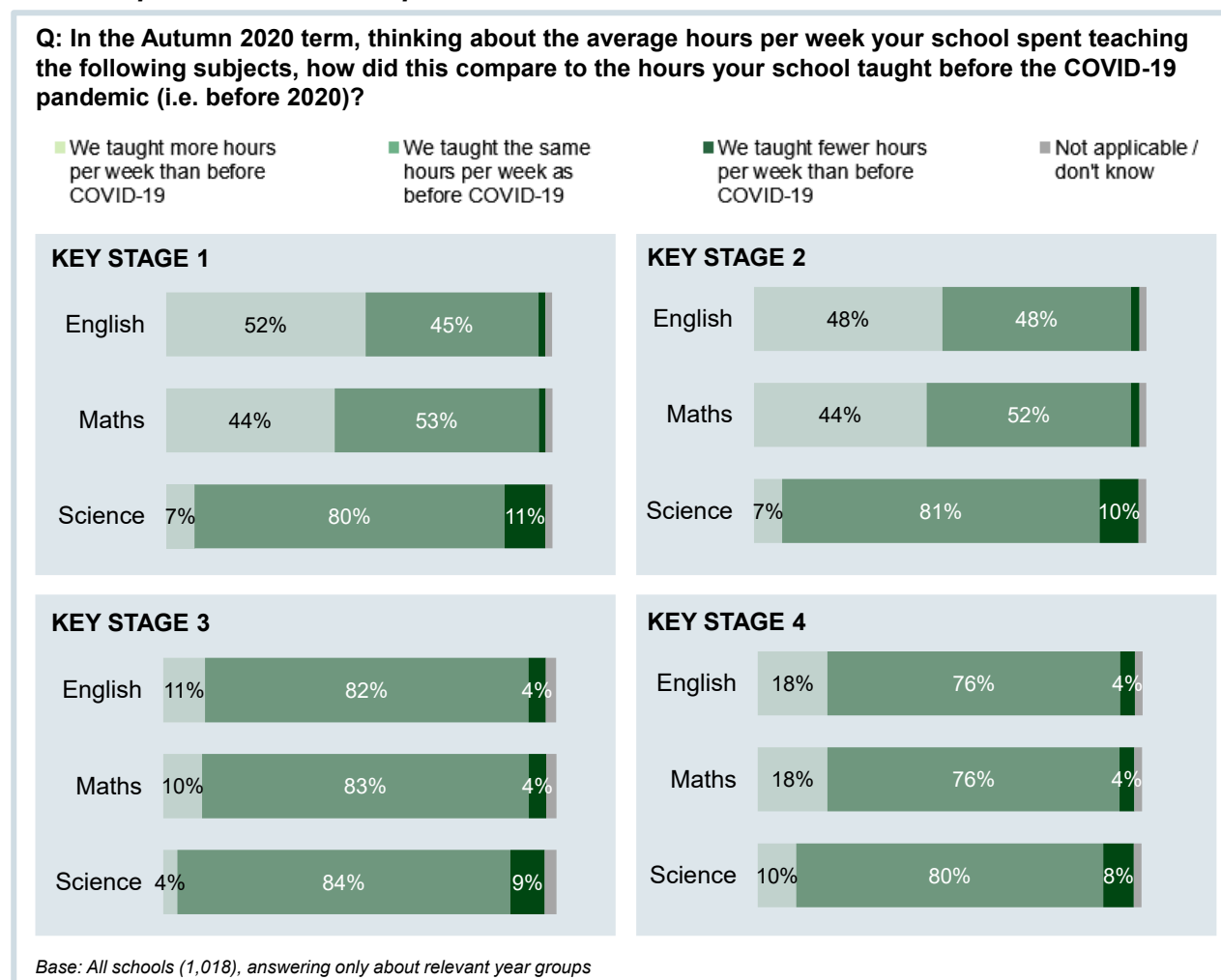
*“We were very lucky, we had no teacher or TA (Teaching Assistant) absence, at all. [...] So, not really any teacher absence and no bubbles closed. We didn’t have any positive cases across the school. So, very lucky, but also I think reflective of the nature of the children, the nature of the catchment area. The vast majority of our families have a garden and are either in jobs that they can work from home or from the farming community, so self-employed.” - Primary, June/July 2021*

## **Changes to the curriculum**

Schools who took part in the survey were asked how, if at all, the hours they taught of English, maths and science had changed in the Autumn 2020 term compared to before the pandemic. As shown in Figure 4, around half of primary schools increased hours of teaching for English (52% for Key Stage 1, 48% for Key Stage 2) and maths (44% for both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2) per a week, whilst for most secondary schools weekly hours for English, maths and science remained the same.



**Figure 4: Changes to the average hours taught of English, maths and science in Autumn 2020 compared to before the pandemic**



Apart from English and maths, some schools also reported increasing hours per week for PSHE and Physical Education (PE) or outdoor activities.

Many schools reduced the hours taught for other subjects, particularly those requiring equipment. In the survey more than half of primary schools (56%) and nearly two fifths of secondary schools (37%) mentioned reducing hours for other subjects, particularly music and PE. Primary schools also reported reducing hours for languages and singing, and secondary schools mentioned Design and Technology (DT).

The interviews provided further detail on the reasons for schools' curriculum changes. For example, subjects with **practical elements** such as music and science were harder to deliver during home-schooling in particular, and to some extent once pupils returned to school (e.g. because of restricted access to instruments or labs). One school described how equipment needed 72 hours of disinfecting before reuse, which meant that pupils were not able to use equipment as frequently as they would before the pandemic. Furthermore, schools were struggling with **staffing** (e.g. due to teachers self-isolating), or



felt they needed to **increase time spent on other subjects** such as English and PSHE and wellbeing. Reasons such as the above resulted in schools having to make difficult decisions about which subjects, topics, or aspects to teach and when, based on their circumstances and school context.

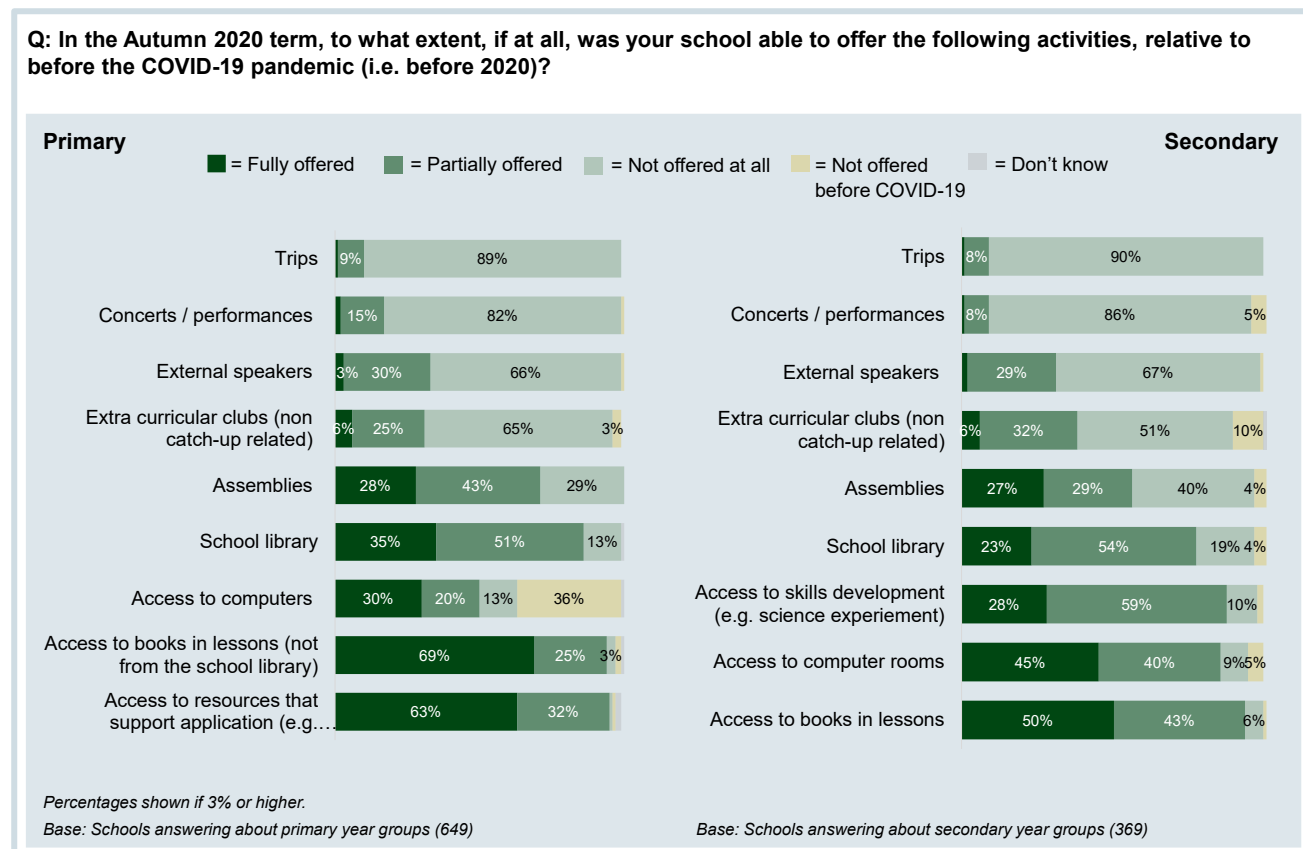
*“The subject leaders edited the termly overviews, identified things that weren’t covered last year and the non-negotiables and they pulled out the key strands from the summer and tried to fit them into the autumn term (2020) where possible.” - Primary, June/July 2021*

*“We took out anything that was non-statutory, which is a real shame actually, because it’s the stuff that children enjoy doing, and we didn’t take all of that. It wasn’t like we were monsters, but some of the non-statutory stuff had to be removed so that we could cover the statutory things [...] It probably dried the curriculum from the children’s perspective, it was probably a little bit less engaging, but we have got a three year plan to put that back in depending on where children are at points in the year groups and we have tracked a child through the school rather than thinking about the child in a particular year group.” - Primary, June/July 2021*

### **Extracurricular activities**

In addition to core curriculum changes in the Autumn 2020 term, due to home-schooling and lockdown restrictions, schools were unable to provide some extracurricular activities to support academic and non-academic aspects of school life. As shown in Figure 5, most schools did not offer trips, concerts and performances, external speakers and extracurricular clubs at all.

**Figure 5: Changes to the extracurricular activities schools offered in Autumn 2020 compared to before the pandemic**



## How did the situation develop in Spring/Summer 2021?

By the end of the Autumn 2020 term, headteachers suggested in interviews that pupils had made some progress in catching up in core subjects, but by the Summer 2021 term after the third lockdown (January to March 2021), some of these academic gains were seen to have been lost. Patterns of attainment were reported to vary even more widely between individual pupils and differed across classes and year groups, with wider and more complex differences in attainment in March 2021 compared to September 2020. This complex picture of widening gaps was attributed to greater variance in access and engagement with remote learning over the beginning of the Spring term (third lockdown), despite more of the curriculum being taught. More pupils (particularly in primary) were defined as ‘vulnerable’ during the third lockdown and attended school, further widening the gap between those at school and those struggling at home.

Whilst most behaviour issues settled within the first few weeks of returning to school, leaders explained that pastoral issues (for example dealing with pupil conflict, anxious, upset and bereaved pupils) in general were more prevalent and acute in March 2021 compared to the Autumn 2020 term, due to time away from peers and school. Unexpected behaviour issues also occurred in March in some cases, such as resentment

or conflict from pupils learning from home towards those attending in person during lockdown, based on evidence from the school leader interviews.

The curriculum continued to be adapted in the Spring/Summer 2021 terms in response to the impacts of the pandemic. Interviews suggested additional changes some schools made as the academic year progressed, including:

- More centralised overarching curriculum planning to allow teachers more time and autonomy to adapt and develop bespoke classroom interventions to respond to individual pupil needs
- Focus on core areas (reading / English, maths, science) and streamlining the curriculum (e.g. dropping non-statutory aspects to free up time for catch-up and wellbeing activities)
- ‘Streaming’ brought in to support lower attaining pupils
- Increased focus on PSHE, circle time for younger pupils, and careers focus for older pupils to raise aspirations and motivation

*“We streamed all of our year groups, which is not something I believe in, but I think that in this instance it was the right thing to do, to make sure that we were offering the specific support for the weaker academic pupils, so we have in slightly larger classes at the higher academic end and the smaller classes with support for the weaker academic, so we did that across the board.” - Secondary, June/July 2021*

## 2. What strategies did schools use to support pupils and overcome challenges?

This section looks at the strategies schools used to help pupils to recover learning and support their wellbeing in the Autumn 2020 term, for which pupils schools considered the strategies to be most effective, and how strategies changed as the year progressed.

### Key findings

- Schools employed multiple strategies to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing in Autumn 2020, both within and outside school. These included ensuring a broad curriculum offer, providing information to parents and support directly to pupils, as well as additional staff training.
- To support academic education recovery in Autumn 2020, primary schools focused on reading and maths strategies, and secondary schools worked to ensure that pupils could access remote lessons by providing computers and software. Internally developed interventions, and small group or one to one support, were also widely used in both primary and secondary schools.

### Strategies for recovery

Reflecting the wide array of school contexts and pupil needs, schools employed a range of strategies to support recovery in the Autumn 2020 term.

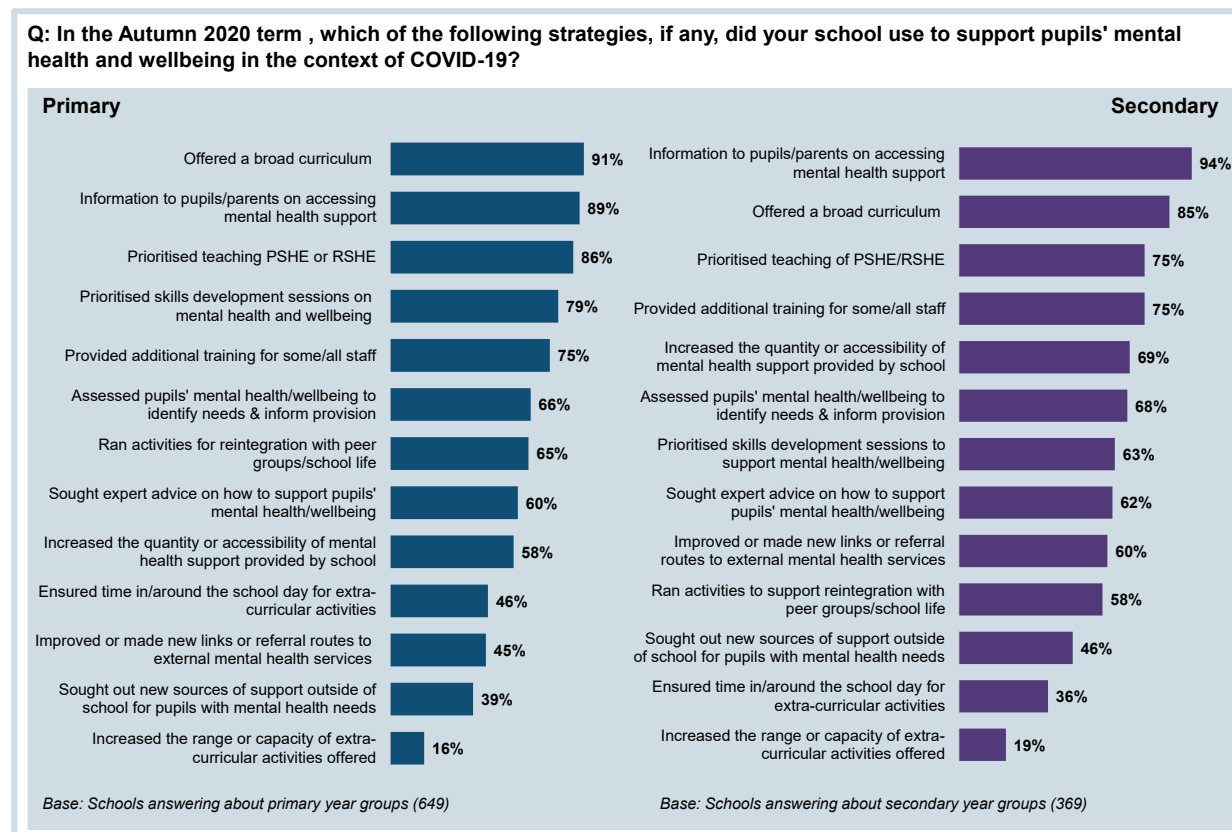
### Pastoral interventions/strategies

In response to the significant challenges and high priority afforded to supporting pupils pastorally (as discussed in Chapter 1), schools employed multiple and varied strategies to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing within and outside the school (Figure 6).

Nearly all primary schools in the survey (91%) mentioned that they offered a broad curriculum including sports, music, and arts to support wellbeing, and most provided information on the topic to pupils and/or parents (89%), specific teaching in class (86%), additional skills sessions (79%), and training for staff (75%).

Amongst secondary schools, the most common strategy for supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing was to provide information on the topic to pupils and/or parents (94%). Most secondary schools also adopted approaches similar to primary schools, including offering a broad curriculum (85%), prioritising teaching about mental health and wellbeing (75%), and providing additional training for staff (75%).

**Figure 6: Strategies schools used to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing in Autumn 2020**



In interviews, school leaders explained that many wellbeing interventions were started online during school home-schooling (e.g. home calls, online assemblies), and in March 2021 when schools returned to teaching in person, wellbeing interventions were prioritised. *“Rebuilding the school community”* (Secondary) was universally seen as a long-term ongoing priority, with pupil and parent/carer surveys used to highlight needs and inform interventions.

Overall, schools mainly focused on **re-establishing routines** in March, especially for Year 7 and Year 8, including activities to build confidence, sports, and opportunities to talk through issues, which were seen as highly necessary and effective.

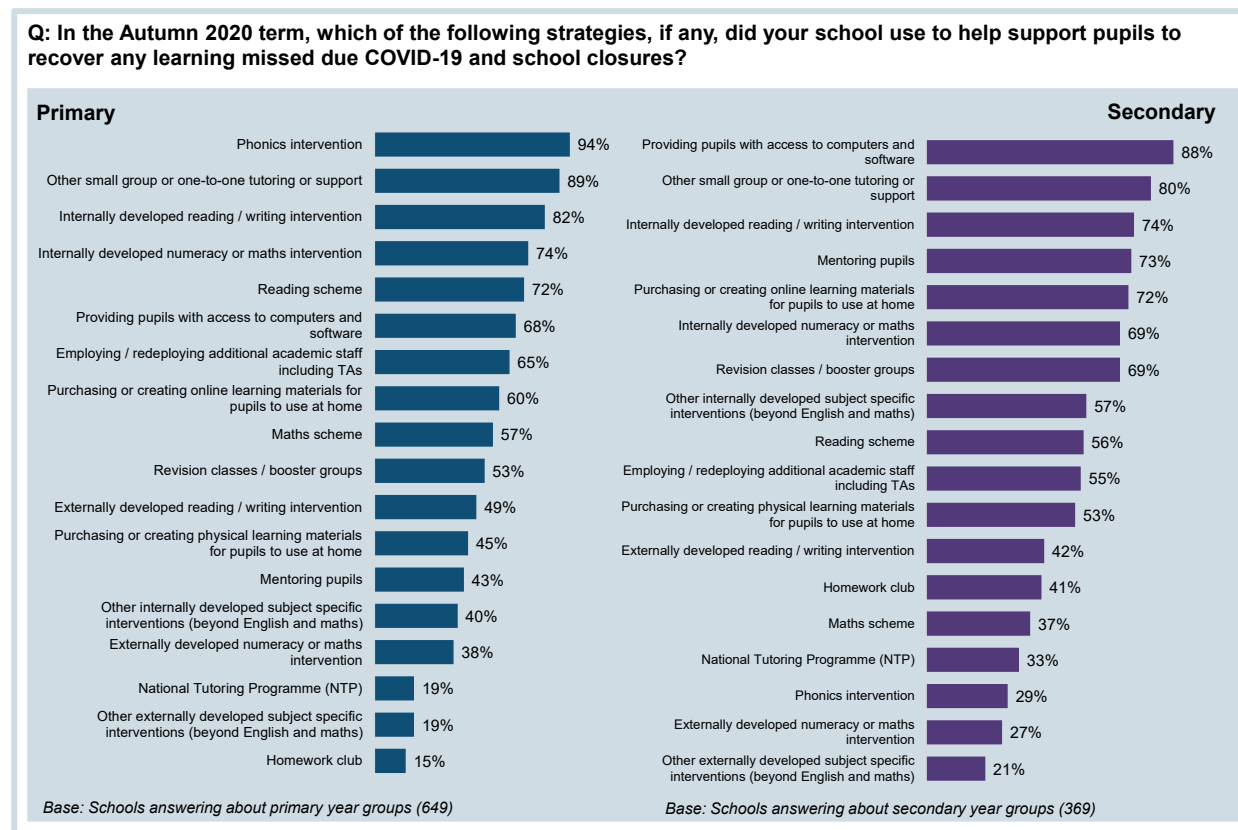
There was also **additional training for staff** to support pupils' emotional needs, and some schools **employed more or increased the hours** of TAs, pastoral staff, family workers and school counsellors. In some areas, however, there was more demand for these roles than supply, resulting in some schools lacking the specialist services they needed.

Delivering additional wellbeing interventions was particularly challenging in the context of social distancing, bubbles and the administration of lateral flow tests. Leaders reported that this often placed substantial demands on staff resources, in addition to the scaled up, tailored academic interventions also being delivered.

## Academic interventions / strategies

Schools used an array of recovery strategies to support academic progress, with primary schools focusing on reading and maths interventions and secondary schools trying to ensure that students could access remote lessons.

**Figure 7: Strategies schools used for education recovery in Autumn 2020**



As shown in Figure 7, nearly all primary schools in the survey (94%) used phonics interventions to support pupils, mainly for Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 pupils.

Across year groups, most primary schools (89%) also used small group or one-to-one tutoring or support (not including the National Tutoring Programme, NTP<sup>10</sup>). Many primaries also used internally developed reading and writing interventions (82%), and maths or numeracy interventions (74%) for pupils across year groups.

For secondary schools, nearly all leaders in the survey (88%) mentioned that they provided pupils with **access to computers and software** to support education recovery in the Autumn 2020 term. **Small group or one-to-one interventions** were also

<sup>10</sup> The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) is a scheme intended to provide additional, targeted support for those children and young people in schools who have been most affected by disruption to their education as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The NTP was launched in November 2020 and has been developed to continue in the 2021/22 academic year. Further details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-tutoring-programme-ntp/national-tutoring-programme-ntp>

commonly used across year groups (80%). **Reading and writing interventions** remained a key strategy across year groups, and in particular **revision classes** or booster groups and **mentoring** were used for Years 10 and 11.

*“We have looked at some one-to-one [reading interventions]... so one-to-one has been quite key.” – Secondary, June/July 2021*

In the survey, externally developed interventions were less popular than internally developed interventions amongst both primary and secondary schools, as was the NTP. In interviews, leaders explained that more tailored approaches, fine-tuned by the teachers to meet specific learning needs, were more effective than the NTP.

## **Effectiveness of strategies**

### **Primary**

Schools who used each of the listed strategies were asked for which groups of pupils they felt the strategies had seemed most effective. Findings from interviews suggested it was likely that often the characteristics and descriptors of pupil groups overlapped and/or were used interchangeably by leaders to describe a wider group of pupils with complex needs, compounded by the impacts of the pandemic.

Among primary schools, most of the listed strategies were felt to be effective for all pupils, such as reading schemes, maths schemes, purchasing or creating physical and online learning materials for pupils to use at home, and employing or redeploying additional academic staff including TAs.

Some of the strategies that were helpful for all pupils in primary schools were also felt to specifically help target pupils who were identified as having fallen behind during home-schooling. These strategies that were used to support all pupils as well as those who had fallen behind included:

- Phonics interventions
- Small group or one to one tutoring (not NTP)
- Internally developed maths, English, and subject-specific interventions
- Externally developed maths, English, and subject-specific interventions

Revision classes or booster groups and homework clubs were also seen as particularly helpful for primary pupils who had fallen behind during home-schooling.

For primary schools who used the NTP, it was felt to be most useful for pupils who had fallen behind during school home-schooling as well as pupils eligible for FSM. Providing

access to computers and software and homework clubs were also particularly effective at supporting recovery for primary pupils eligible for FSM.

## **Secondary**

For secondary schools, many of the listed strategies were again seen as effective for all pupils, including maths and reading schemes, purchasing or creating physical and online learning materials for pupils to use at home, and internally developed maths, English, and subject-specific interventions.

Many of the listed interventions were also seen to particularly benefit pupils with SEND, such as phonics interventions, externally developed reading and writing interventions, small group or one to one tutoring or support (not NTP), and employing or redeploying staff including TAs (e.g. to create smaller class sizes).

Providing access to computers, software, and the NTP, were again most helpful for pupils eligible for FSM. Revision classes were seen as most effective for examination year groups.

## **How did the strategies/interventions used change in Spring/Summer 2021?**

When pupils returned to learning in person in March 2021, both primary and secondary schools in the survey were planning similar activities to support pupils' pastoral and academic education recovery. Schools' focus continued to be on **internally developed interventions**, particularly those **targeted at specific groups of pupils** who needed it the most (e.g. revision classes for those most behind only, or support for pupils with SEND).

Interviews suggested that as the school year moved into the Spring and Summer 2021 terms, academic interventions became more honed and extensive, with more in-class, individual and small group interventions used across all year groups and subjects depending on identified needs and resources. These interventions were delivered by school-based teachers, TAs, supply staff and external tutors.

*"...for children that really went backwards [with their reading], we do something called 'a fresh start' for Year 7 [based on] a pilot many years ago... because we found that it worked and it goes right back to the beginning of phonetics and everything else for children to help them reading... it was [run by] our LSAs and they [pupils] come in as a group." - Secondary, June/July 2021*



Secondary schools in the survey were more likely than primary to be providing additional support for transition year groups<sup>11</sup>. More schools were planning to use the NTP in March 2021 than in Autumn 2020.

Leaders and teachers were sensitive to academic pressures and demands on pupils, and highlighted the careful balance between the need for additional booster sessions (i.e. targeted support for specific pupils who had fallen behind) with concerns about pupils missing the main whole-class lessons.

*“If you take students out of lessons for interventions, then all you’re doing is creating a gap somewhere else.” – Secondary, June/July 2021*

There was a continuous effort from Autumn 2020 and into Spring/Summer 2021 terms for schools to provide pupils with access to the basics for learning, such as laptops or other devices (85% primary, 92% secondary), online platforms (81% primary, 75% secondary), and COVID-19 related equipment (77% primary, 82% secondary), particularly in schools with a high proportion of pupils on FSM.

Overall, there was recognition and realism about recovery being long-term and not a ‘magic bullet’ or ‘quick fix’, with some expectations that complete education recovery may not be possible for all, or indeed may not be necessary for all parts of the curriculum.

*“So we know that with young children you can go as hard as you like with the academic learning but actually sometimes it can be counterproductive ... without wishing to bore the kids silly.” – Primary, June/July 2021*

This recognition meant some leaders called for more supportive language and approaches to reduce negativity and pressure on pupils, such as avoiding negative language around ‘catch-up’, ‘loss’, and ‘gaps’. This framing was felt to have a demoralising impact on pupils’ recovery and anxiety.

## Summer schools

When asked in the survey in the summer 2021 term<sup>12</sup>, three in five (60%) secondary schools were planning to organise a summer school<sup>13</sup>. In interviews, nearly all of the secondary school leaders interviewed were planning to provide summer school days to

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<sup>11</sup> The DfE’s Summer Schools programme made funding available to secondary schools for provision delivered during the school summer holidays. Further information on the programme can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-schools-programme/summer-schools-guidance>

<sup>12</sup> Wave 1 survey fieldwork dates: 28<sup>th</sup> April – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

<sup>13</sup> The DfE’s Summer Schools programme made funding available to secondary schools for provision delivered during the school summer holidays. Further information on the programme can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-schools-programme/summer-schools-guidance>

support the Year 6 to Year 7 transition in particular<sup>14</sup>, sometimes planned in addition to other transition days delivered in the Summer 2021 term or virtually. Most transition provision was targeted at a larger group of pupils identified as vulnerable.

DfE Summer School funding was not made available for primary schools<sup>12</sup>, and plans for summer school provision were not common amongst primaries (6%). None of the primary leaders interviewed indicated they were running a summer school for academic or recovery purposes, but some were running pre-existing holiday clubs (for paying parents) that were not focused on recovery.

Several schools interviewed reported that the **additional transition funding from the DfE was welcome** to support the summer provision. It would either be used to cover their usual transition costs or enable them to scale up more than previous years to meet increased needs. However, some difficulties were reported with the funding in terms of planning, as the funding was retrospective and based on the numbers attending, so concerns were raised about recruitment and attendance. For example, one school offered transition pupils a Chromebook laptop as an incentive for attending.

There was also a sense of reluctance to run holiday ‘recovery’ clubs and/or interventions from some school leaders because both pupils and staff were exhausted and needed a break.

*“Staff were deprived of a proper break at Christmas and Easter due to government U-turns and last-minute changes.” – Primary, June/July 2021*

*“We think that it’s contrary to what we as professionals feel that the children need [...] families need to return to being a family unit beyond their doorstep and that is a priority [...] Our staff are mentally tired and they need a little fire break from that to be able to really bring themselves in to that very positive mode of thinking and look back.” -  
Primary, June/July 2021*

Instead, some schools provided additional enrichment activities before the end of term (e.g. combining academic and social interaction, or focused on building resilience, team work, problem solving), or suggested additional summer work or activities (e.g. reading lists, online first aid courses, bridging work for A level starters, life skills projects).

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<sup>14</sup> DfE Summer Schools guidance suggests that schools may want to focus summer school provision on pupils making the transition into Year 7. Further information on the programme can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-schools-programme/summer-schools-guidance>

### 3. What guidance and resources did schools find useful?

This section covers the sources of guidance and resources that schools found useful to plan and support recovery strategies.

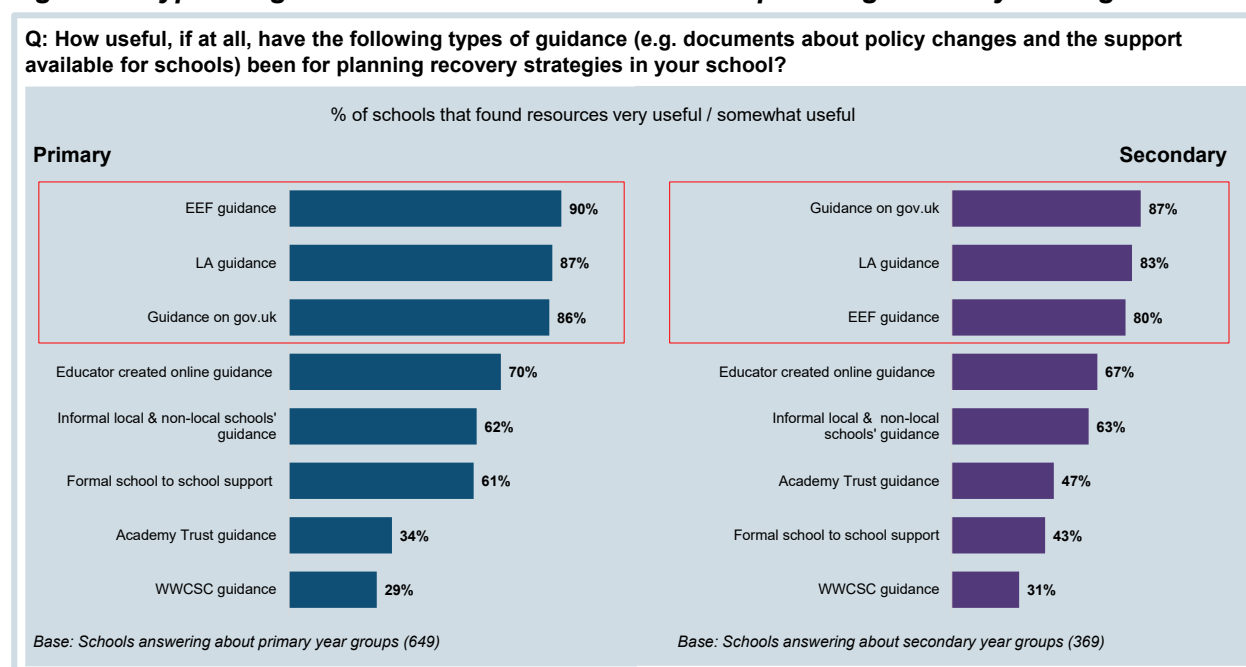
#### Key findings

- Schools used guidance and resources to support their delivery and planning for recovery, some of which they reported as being more useful than others. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)<sup>15</sup> guidance, and national and local government guidance was seen as most useful. In terms of resources, those created by other educators and schools, Oak Academy<sup>16</sup> and the EEF were reported to be most useful.

#### Guidance

As shown in Figure 8, the majority of school leaders in the survey reported that they found **EEF guidance** (90% primary, 80% secondary), **Local Authority (LA) guidance** (87% primary, 83% secondary) and **guidance on gov.uk** (86% primary, 87% secondary) useful for planning school recovery strategies.

**Figure 8: Types of guidance schools found useful for planning recovery strategies**



<sup>15</sup> See <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.thenational.academy/>

Interviews highlighted the need for guidance developed **in consultation with leaders**, recognising schools' varied contexts and the need for trust in school leaders as being in the best position to identify and address their pupils' recovery needs. In particular there were calls for guidance to cover:

- Remote education practice and recovery/catch up pedagogy
- Amended assessment and examination systems (SATs, GCSEs and A levels)
- Scaled back curriculum specifications with appropriate lead in times
- Effective catch up intervention implementation guidance
- Support for Year 10 to Year 13 next steps (careers guidance)

Schools also asked for timely, clear communication of government changes and timescales, as uncertainties and confusion around policy changes and communications throughout the pandemic was felt to place additional pressure on staff. In particular, schools asked for increased clarity around 2022 exams, as well as around catch up funding to enable effective planning (e.g. sourcing specialist staffing, continuing professional development (CPD) and training for interventions, replenishing IT assets to meet local needs). At the end of the summer term 2021, some schools were still unclear about the funding and planning necessary for September 2021<sup>17</sup>:

*“The biggest challenge for us just at the moment is the unknown. It’s the unknown about what we’re planning for September.” – Primary, June/July 2021*

## Resources

Schools highlighted that **collaboration and sharing good practice** (e.g. within the LA, Multi-Academy Trust, with other schools) were useful for supporting recovery. 92% of primary leaders and 87% of secondary leaders in the survey found that online **resources created by other educators** (e.g. Research Schools Network) were useful, as well as **Oak Academy resources** (79% primary, 72% secondary). Most primary (69%) and secondary (74%) schools also found **resources created by schools** and shared with other schools to be useful.

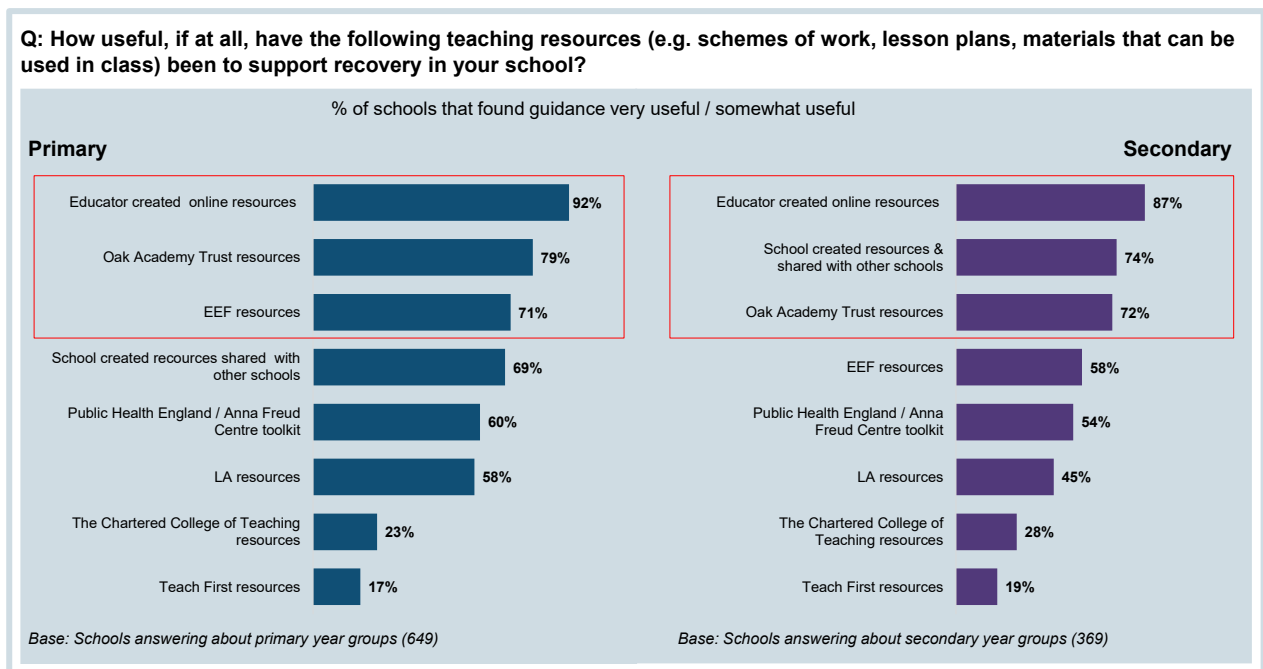
**EEF resources** were also widely used and valued (71% primary, 58% secondary). For example, schools used EEF evidence, toolkits and guidance to inform interventions and implementation (e.g. on pupil assessment and feedback, transition support, small group interventions, extended school time, strategies to support parents/carers). Schools were

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<sup>17</sup> DfE curriculum guidance for curriculum planning was published in July 2021: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1003469/Teaching\\_a\\_broad\\_and\\_balanced\\_curriculum\\_for\\_education\\_recovery.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1003469/Teaching_a_broad_and_balanced_curriculum_for_education_recovery.pdf)

keen for the continued use and development of **free resources and collaboration** (including online).

**Figure 9: Types of resources schools found useful for supporting recovery**



## 4. What are schools' priorities and plans moving forwards?

This section covers schools' priorities moving forwards in the 2021/22 academic year, including the pupil groups they feel need the most urgent further support, and schools' priorities for the 2021/22 academic year and beyond.

### Key findings

- For the 2021/22 academic year, schools reported that they were focusing on returning to 'normality' for pupils and focusing on a responsive approach based on identifying specific recovery needs. Schools identified specific groups of pupils who they felt were the priority for further support/interventions, including transition year groups and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- To respond to the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning, schools outlined the following priorities for support they need:
  - Additional funding for COVID-19 related challenges, with enough time for planning and ability to use it flexibly
  - More high quality free CPD
  - Additional support for behaviour and wellbeing challenges
  - For secondary schools in particular, more guidance on assessment for exam year groups
- Primary and secondary schools held similar views on the highest priorities for wider system changes that could help with the long-term impacts of COVID-19, including:
  - Changes in accountability measures
  - Changes to examinations for 2021/22 (particularly for secondary schools)
  - Changes to curriculum content
  - More live feedback from teachers and leaders to inform policy in real time i.e. for government to work with and consult with schools in a more direct and timely way so that challenges on the ground are resolved more quickly

## Priorities for the 2021/22 academic year

Interviews suggested that a common emphasis for schools in the next academic year and beyond will be on **returning to 'normality'**, with contingencies in place for managing changes and uncertainties. For example, schools mentioned going back to teaching all aspects of subjects and the curriculum, reviewing policies and plans, running extracurricular activities, working with partner schools, and allowing parents on site.

**Reading recovery** was a widespread focus across phases, with schools aiming to integrate effective interventions into mainstream teaching. Based on leaders' assessments of learning gaps, pupil needs, and available resources, academic recovery plans were frequently reported to focus on **quality-first teaching**<sup>18</sup>. Leaders also highlighted in interviews that their recovery plans would continue to include more responsive approaches using small group or individual interventions as required, together with the focus on building confidence and resilience - rather than adding more lesson time to the school day.

*"I don't think that it's necessarily about more teaching, I think that it's about better teaching. I think the reason for having more time [added to the school day] would be to kind of get your childhood back and to have more structured fun that pushes you to the edges of your comfort zone which is then building your personality and building your resilience."* – Secondary, June/July 2021

Reflecting the biggest challenges schools mentioned as a result of the pandemic, a key priority was long term planning for social and wellbeing interventions. Secondary schools in particular predicted having to deal with the impacts on current primary pupils in the years ahead, including their general wellbeing, aspirations and careers, and were making plans to support these areas in PSHE, assemblies, external speakers and enrichment.

To achieve these priorities, schools require **extra staffing provision**. Any plans were dependent on budgets, and a preference was raised for flexible use of their own staff, rather than the NTP if other options weren't available.

*"We are at absolute maximum capacity. There isn't a drop of resource, of people, of anything that's being used."* - Primary, June/July 2021

To inform their response, schools reported that they planned to continue to assess pupil progress, listen to the **student voice**, and use research and **evidence-based teaching** (e.g. EEF, data driven 'instructional coaching'). Both now and looking forwards, school leaders emphasised the importance of **evaluating impacts** and **identifying the ongoing**

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<sup>18</sup> Quality First Teaching (QFT) was first introduced in 2010 and is an approach to teaching that focuses on high quality and inclusive teaching for every child in a classroom. It includes using differentiated, personalised learning and SEND resources.

**needs of pupils and families** for recovery, for example through staff, pupil, and parent feedback and surveys.

### Priority groups

At the time of the survey in April/May 2021, school leaders were asked to identify which year groups were a higher priority for further support and interventions for the 2021/22 academic year compared to other pupils in their school. Across primary and secondary schools, key transition years were highest priority. For primary leaders, **Year 6** was most commonly a higher priority (for 72% of schools), followed by **Year 2** (64%) and **Year 1** (55%). For secondary schools, **Year 11** and **Year 7** were most often a higher priority (for 86% and 69% of schools respectively).

Evidence from the primary leader interviews suggested that the Year 6 transition was often seen as a critical focus for support, whilst Years 1 and 2 were a particular priority for settling into school and learning to read. In secondary schools, the transition and exam years were also a key focus for additional intervention.

School leaders also identified which specific pupil groups were a higher priority for further support and interventions. Primary schools were most concerned about **pupils identified to have fallen behind during the pandemic** (83%), as well as **pupils eligible for Pupil Premium or FSM** (79%) and **children with SEND** (75%).

For secondary schools, **children with SEND** and **pupils eligible for Pupil Premium or FSM** were equally chosen as higher priority groups (83% and 82% respectively). **Pupils with a history of persistent absence** (74%), **looked after children** (72%) and **pupils identified to have fallen behind** (69%) were also higher priority for most secondary schools. As highlighted earlier, these 'vulnerable' pupil groups overlap, and leaders reported an increase in the number of pupils falling into these categories as a result of the pandemic and home-schooling, with their needs becoming more complex.

### Support for longer term impacts on teaching and learning

As figure 10, below, shows around three in five primary and secondary schools in the survey reported that receiving **additional funding** to support challenges due to the pandemic and home-schooling was a higher priority (62% primary, 60% secondary). This need for additional funding was reported as a high priority across all different types of schools in the survey.

Interviews highlighted that leaders appreciated the autonomy to spend the catch-up premium funding as desired, and further funding should continue to be provided in this way.



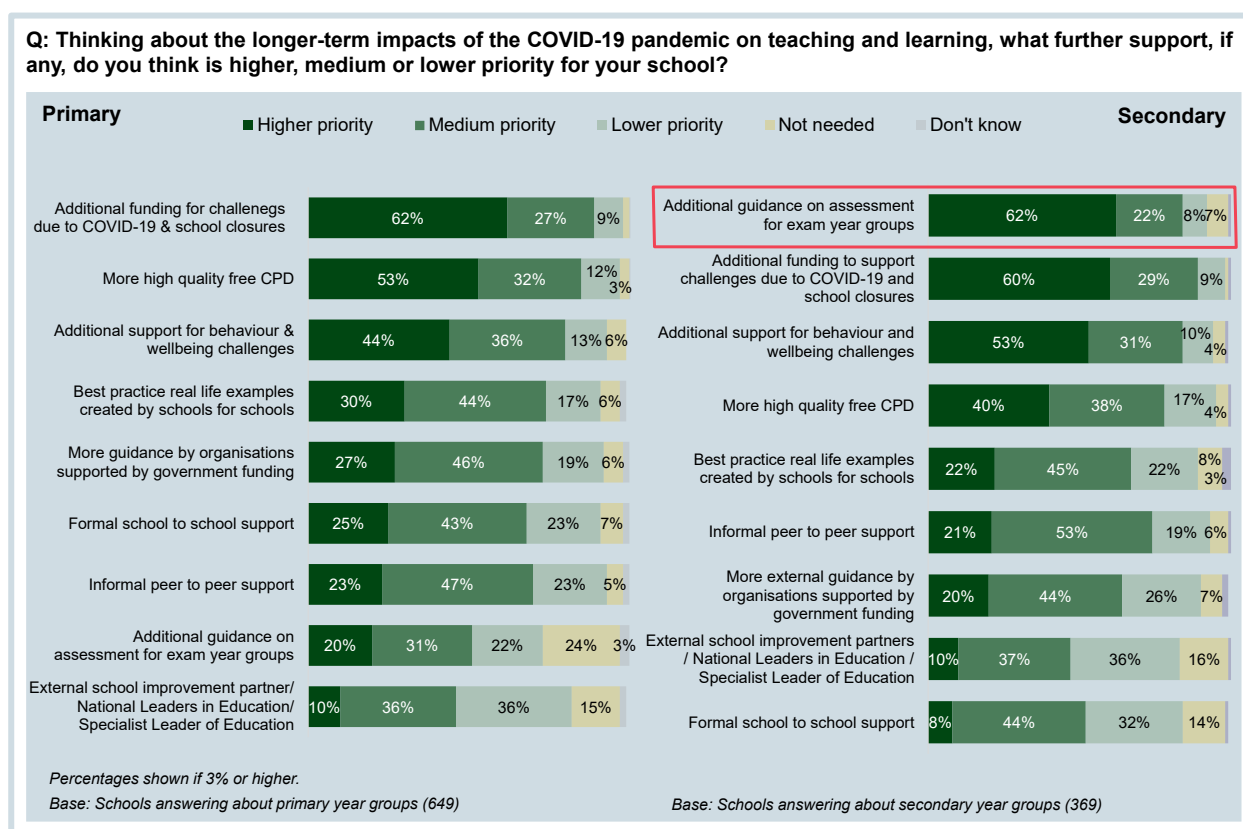
*“The lack of red tape around the expenditure of catch up premium and pupil premium is spot on.” – Primary, June/July 2021*

*“Allocate [recovery funding] directly to schools to use in the way that they see fit.” – Secondary, June/July 2021*

However, schools reported difficulties making concrete recovery plans at present, as the longer-term funding and guidance was viewed as uncertain. Longer-term **financial stability** could help ensure recovery programmes are adequately staffed and supported in the long-term.

Secondary schools also highlighted **additional guidance on assessment for exam year groups** as a higher priority (62%), and in line with the biggest challenges faced by schools, **support for behaviour and wellbeing** (44% primary, 53% secondary) and more **high quality free CPD** (in general) (53% primary, 40% secondary) were a higher priority request for many schools.

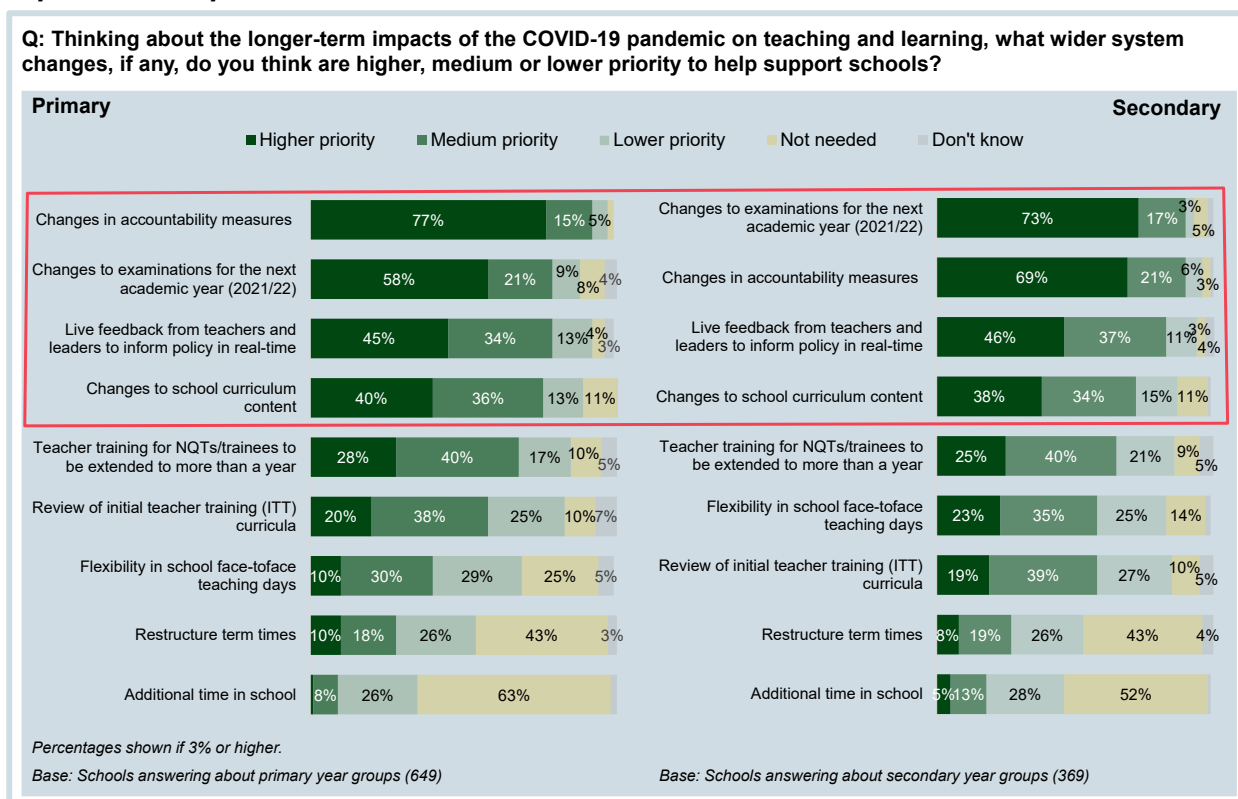
**Figure 10: Schools’ priorities for further support to address the longer-term impacts of the pandemic**



## Wider system changes

In the survey, schools were asked to think about the wider system changes that could support recovery from the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on teaching and learning. Both primary and secondary schools saw two key changes as higher priority: **changes in accountability measures** (e.g. revision of Ofsted inspection criteria / approach / process) (77% primary, 73% secondary), and **changes to examinations** for the next academic year (2021/22) (58% primary, 69% secondary).

**Figure 11: Schools' priorities for wider system changes to address the longer-term impacts of the pandemic<sup>19</sup>**



School leaders discussed **Ofsted uncertainties** in interviews, with concerns around inspections and judgements that may not adequately recognise the complex challenges faced by pupils and schools following the pandemic and extended home-schooling. It was suggested that Ofsted frameworks and inspections be adapted to take account of schools' current challenges, whilst holding schools appropriately accountable for their ongoing improvement. Better clarity and understanding of accountability measures was seen as urgent.

*"I welcome catch up funding but have big concerns about how Ofsted and other agencies will be holding us to account for it – there is very little information currently. When and*

<sup>19</sup> The red box indicates the top priorities

*where do we get held accountable for that and how do you measure the elements that we're talking about?" – Primary, June/July 2021*

*"I am concerned that those schools that bust a gut in order to make sure those children are mentally stable in order to access learning - that could be misconstrued as a school not having high expectations of their children in terms of learning." – Primary, June/July 2021*

From interviews, other suggestions leaders made to support schools:

- Strategies to address the wide-reaching **impacts of worsening inequalities in education and mental health** for young people, such as more cross-sector working with families to recognise the much broader context than just educational loss, and strengthening of safeguarding outside school.

*"Schools can't do it all." - Secondary, June/July 2021*

- Further **public and government recognition** of the wide-ranging and vital role schools have played and continue to play in supporting the education and wellbeing of young people, and more supportive and positive government and media messaging for pupils and parents to help build resilience and confidence in recovery programmes, for years to come.

*"It is going to require a sustained commitment and acknowledgment there won't be easy solutions... I think that this is going to take ... years to work through." – Primary, June/July 2021*

- Calls for further support and funding for **social care and welfare services** to meet the increasingly complex needs of children and families, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas.
- Support to address **staff burnout and potential staff retention issues**, particularly in disadvantaged areas, as well as additional support for schools for early career teachers (e.g. Newly Qualified Teachers, NQTs).

Leaders also indicated that the pandemic has created an opportunity for a **wider rethink of education** and for government to work with education leaders to develop a better education system for the future.

*"A really exciting opportunity to press pause and ask is our education system fit for purpose, is Ofsted fit for purpose?" – Primary, June/July 2021*

*"Can we do assessment differently to have a better world class system – can we take the positives and work together to develop something better, more resilient?" - Secondary,*

## Unexpected positives

Whilst the pandemic has been a significant challenge for schools, interviews with school leaders uncovered some unexpected positives that emerged and that schools planned to keep going forwards.

For example, schools recognised the **accelerated use of IT** and **rapid skill development of staff and pupils** during remote teaching and learning, improved virtual learning environments and wider use of software, whilst also highlighting the critical importance of in-person classroom teaching.

*“The development of online tools... and other learning approaches for independent learning [has increased] our skills and resources, they could submit work, and that whole process opened up a whole new way of working that is actually far more efficient and won’t change going forward. We will use it in addition to the face-to-face.” – Secondary, June/July 2021*

Some schools planned to use existing and new methods for blended teaching, learning and assessments, such as new platforms or software packages, continuing parents evening online, and online marking due to the benefits of these approaches.

*“New innovations that will have taken, without COVID-19, 15 years for us to get to the stage that we’re at now.” – Secondary, June/July 2021*

School leaders also recognised the **stronger staff culture and resilience** that has resulted from working through adversity, with huge commitment, goodwill, deeper knowledge of complex needs and **stronger relationships with families**.

*“Our staff and community have made it happen.” – Secondary, June/July 2021*

*“The relationship between school and home has improved / staff have really pulled together, have really supported each other.” - Primary, June/July 2021*

Lastly, some mentioned improvements in sanitary procedures and school systems (e.g. lunch rotas), and better dedicated spaces, which they planned to keep.

## Conclusions

In summary, schools faced complex challenges in the Autumn 2020 term, relating to pupils' academic progress, wellbeing, and behaviour, as well as managing the ongoing to COVID-19 restrictions.

Schools adapted and responded rapidly and innovatively to these challenges and the changing needs of their pupils by making changes to the curriculum and by employing multiple strategies to support academic and pastoral issues. Most commonly, strategies and interventions were focused on English and maths, and targeted to specific groups such as those who had fallen behind, pupils from disadvantaged background, pupils with SEND, or transition year groups.

Looking forwards to the 2021/22 academic year, schools planned to focus on returning to 'normality' for pupils and to adopt a responsive approach based on identifying needs. In particular, schools suggested that their focus would be on reading recovery, mental health and wellbeing interventions, quality-first teaching and extra staffing provision.

To support schools' response to the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning, schools outlined the following priorities:

- Additional funding for responding to COVID-related challenges, with the ability to use it flexibly and enough time to plan how it would be used.
- More high quality, free CPD to ensure high quality teaching and learning.
- Additional support for remote education practice and recovery/catch up pedagogy and behaviour and mental health and wellbeing challenges.
- More timely and clearer communication of government changes and timescales, including to accountability measures.
- For secondary schools, more guidance on assessment for exam year groups and career guidance for Year 10 to Year 13.

Schools also suggested wider system changes that could help support education recovery in the long-term:

- Changes in accountability measures, in response to concerns that inspections and ratings that may not adequately recognise the complex challenges faced by pupils and schools following the pandemic and extended home-schooling.
- Changes to examinations for 2021/22, particularly for secondary schools.
- More live feedback from leaders and teachers to inform policy in real time for government to work with and consult schools in a more direct, timely way.

- Changes to curriculum content.
- Further cross-sector working with families and further support and funding for social care and welfare services to address the wide-reaching impacts of worsening inequalities in education and mental health, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas.
- Support to address staff burnout and potential staff retention issues, particularly in disadvantaged areas, as well as additional support for early career teachers.
- Further public and government recognition and positive messaging of the wide-ranging and vital role schools have played and continue to play in supporting the education and wellbeing of children and young people.

# Appendix

## Sample profile

Table 1 and

Table 2 outline the details of the sample profile for achieved primary and secondary schools<sup>20</sup>.

**Table 1: Sample profile for schools that answered about primary year groups**

	Unweighted Number	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)
<b>Total</b>	649	100	100
<b>School type</b>			
Academy	215	33	35
Maintained	399	61	60
Free school	9	1	1
Alternative provision	1	<1	<1
Special school	25	4	3
<b>School size<sup>21</sup></b>			
Large	141	22	25
Medium	300	46	46
Small	96	15	13
Very small	97	15	13
Missing	15	2	3
<b>FSM<sup>22</sup></b>			
Low	78	12	13
Medium	291	45	46
High	264	41	39
Missing	16	2	3
<b>Urban/rural</b>			
Rural	222	34	28
Urban	427	66	72
<b>Region</b>			
London	65	10	11
South East	104	16	15
South West	68	10	12
North East	39	6	5
North West	75	12	14
East of England	110	17	12
East Midlands	59	9	10
West Midlands	60	9	10
Yorkshire & Humberside	69	11	10
<b>Ofsted rating</b>			
Outstanding	101	16	17
Good	463	71	69
Requires improvement	53	8	9

<sup>20</sup> Where figures do not sum to 100% this is due to rounding.

<sup>21</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

<sup>22</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>



Inadequate	18	3	3
Missing	14	2	2

**Table 2: Sample profile for schools that answered about secondary year groups**

	Unweighted Number	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)
<b>Total</b>	369	100	100
<b>School type</b>			
Academy	225	61	51
Maintained	73	20	15
Free school	14	4	4
Alternative provision	13	4	7
Special school	44	12	23
<b>School size<sup>23</sup></b>			
Large	193	52	39
Medium	98	27	29
Small	37	10	11
Very small	34	9	18
Missing	7	2	3
<b>FSM<sup>24</sup></b>			
Low	86	23	17
Medium	163	44	36
High	110	30	41
Missing	10	3	5
<b>Urban/rural</b>			
Rural	51	14	14
Urban	318	86	86
<b>Region</b>			
London	47	13	16
South East	67	18	15
South West	27	7	10
North East	22	6	4
North West	52	14	17
East of England	50	14	12
East Midlands	27	7	8
West Midlands	39	11	11
Yorkshire & Humberside	38	10	8
<b>Ofsted rating</b>			
Outstanding	100	27	23
Good	186	50	50
Requires improvement	41	11	11
Inadequate	18	5	6
Missing	24	7	10

<sup>23</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

<sup>24</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

## Statistical reliability

As with any survey, the respondents to the questionnaire are only samples of the total population, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if the entire population of eligible school leaders in the country had been surveyed (the true values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the true values based on the results obtained from our sample (i.e. the % results at each question), and the number of respondents taking part. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually set at 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

Table 3 illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the 95% confidence interval.

**Table 3: Approximate sampling tolerances by sample size**

Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentage at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
<b>100 interviews</b>	6	9	10
<b>500 interviews</b>	3	4	4
<b>1,000 interviews</b>	2	3	3
<b>649 interviews (primary achieved sample)</b>	2	4	4
<b>369 interviews (secondary achieved sample)</b>	3	4	5

For example, with a sample of 649 where 30% give a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been surveyed) will fall within the range of plus or minus 4 percentage points from the sample result.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be “real”, or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been surveyed). To test if the difference is a real one - i.e. if it is “statistically significant”, we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume the “95% confidence interval”, the differences between the two sample results must be greater than the values given in

Table 4.

**Table 4: Differences required for significance**

Size of sample compared groups	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentage at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
<b>100 and 100</b>	8	13	14
<b>250 and 100</b>	7	11	12
<b>500 and 250</b>	5	7	8
<b>1,000 and 500</b>	3	5	5
<b>1,000 and 1,000</b>	3	4	4



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# Sheffield Hallam University

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