



Department  
for Education

# **School Recovery Strategies: Year 2 findings**

**Research report**

**January 2023**

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## Executive summary

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ipsos UK, 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. The research took place over the 2020/2021 academic year (Wave 1) and 2021/2022 academic year (Wave 2).

This report presents final findings from Wave 2 of the research. It is based on data collected from school leaders and their responses to an online survey run by Ipsos UK in the autumn 2021 term (764 survey responses in total), 22 qualitative semi-structured online interviews conducted by SHU in the spring 2022 term, and case studies with 10 schools conducted by the CfEY in summer 2022. This report draws comparisons to the Year 1 research findings, where appropriate. The Year 1 findings report can be accessed [here](#).

## Key findings

### Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on school attendance in the autumn 2021 term

The survey found that in the autumn 2021 term, the most common challenge faced by primary and secondary schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was staff and pupil absence. Staff absences had the greatest impact on schools' ability to deliver their recovery strategies. It is clear that, at this time, schools were continuing to operate within the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, rather than being able to fully focus on recovery.

Beyond the immediate challenge of staff and pupil absences, secondary schools viewed pupils' emotional health and wellbeing as the main challenges in helping pupils recover their lost learning.

### Recovery strategies

Academic recovery strategies varied by year group, with schools demonstrating a tailored approach to the needs and abilities of particular year and pupil groups. Within this, the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) or small group or one-to-one tutoring was a common strategy used across schools surveyed. The School-Led tutoring route of the NTP was broadly well received and judged as effective for pupils, because schools could source and deploy their own staff flexibly to best meet pupil needs.

Additional, targeted intervention sessions for specific pupils were viewed as important, though leaders recognised the needs to balance these with the detriments of missing more class-time. These interventions typically focused on core subjects and were delivered by teachers, teaching assistants and tutors.

Smaller class sizes, enabled by having extra staff, also supported effective catch-up. Other strategies which facilitated recovery were adjustments to lesson pace, curriculum changes, and recovery software, as well as restructuring the school day.

Academic recovery strategies were mostly seen as effective for the older year groups in both primary and secondary schools. Teachers were less likely to agree that support strategies had helped expectations for vulnerable pupil groups to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Given the impact of the pandemic on pupils' emotional health and wellbeing, academic interventions were designed with consideration to this and delivered to avoid additional stress.

Almost all schools reported having strategies to support pupil mental health and wellbeing. Offering a broad curriculum including sports, music, and arts was the most commonly reported strategy.

Leaders described provision of a wider range of whole-school, whole-class, small group and individual wellbeing interventions to address the whole-school, whole-class, small group and individual interventions to address mental health and wellbeing support needs, including pupils with SEND. They were tailoring their interventions to their own pupils' needs, for example, internally developed pastoral interventions were provided for specific pupil groups in both primary and secondary schools.

Staff wellbeing was also a priority for leaders who observed that teaching through the pandemic was continuing to have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing and resilience of teachers and other school staff. To support school staff, schools offered support for their wellbeing and mental health as well as ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in response to teaching and learning need.

Recovery Premium funding was deemed to be the most useful type of support received by primary and secondary schools. However, school leaders reported that the Recovery Premium was insufficient to meet all the additional needs their schools faced.

## **Attainment, progress and academic assessment in the spring term 2022**

In the qualitative interviews with 22 school leaders, they reported that spring 2022 was the most challenging term of the pandemic for COVID-19 related illness, staff and pupil

absences. The disruption to teaching and learning in schools affected attainment, progression and recovery interventions. As such, progress across the core skills of reading, writing and maths was reported as uneven in both primary and secondary schools.

Leaders reported that there had been an increase in the numbers of pupils with SEND and the proportion who had significant support needs. Leaders noted that disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, and children with mental health challenges were still further behind their peers. All participating leaders reported that pre-existing attainment gaps had increased as a result of the pandemic.

Leaders observed that the academic and socio-emotional development of younger year groups (Years 1 to 3 in primary and Years 7 to 8 in secondary) had sustained the greatest negative impacts due to the pandemic.

### **Pupil and staff absences in the spring 2022 term**

Leaders reported a rise in absences due to infectious diseases (not just COVID-19) and a perceived increase in parents taking their children out of school for holidays in spring 2022. Teachers noted that rates of persistent absence were considerably higher than before the pandemic and felt this was now a much more significant challenge for schools.

Staff absence was high, leading to challenges in maintaining consistency of learning and marking, covering lessons and in some cases, keeping schools open. Leaders reported that they had to put their strategic plans to one side in order to focus on delivering lessons for pupils. Some smaller schools in particular had to put 'all hands on deck' to keep schools running, with teachers stepping in to do cleaning and serving lunches when needed.

In summer 2022, attendance rates for pupils and staff were 'returning to normal' although persistent pupil absenteeism and long-term staff illness were reported to be still creating challenges.

### **Pupil mental health and wellbeing and pupils with Special Educational Needs**

Secondary schools generally reported more pupil mental health/wellbeing needs than primary schools, in terms of range, incidence, frequency and severity. Schools with higher proportions of pupils receiving free school meals (FSM) and with SEND were more likely to report higher rates of mental health and wellbeing-related needs.

Pupils' social and emotional related difficulties were the most frequently cited needs and leaders also referred to anxiety, autism, ADHD and learning difficulties. Many of these

pupils were awaiting assessment. School leaders identified a shortage of external provision and local specialist support as a barrier to efforts to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

## **Longer term impacts, future plans and sustainability**

Transition years and exam groups were the highest priority year groups for further support for the rest of the 2021/2022 academic year. The pupil groups prioritised for further support for the rest of the 2021/2022 academic year in both primary and secondary schools were those identified to have fallen behind, FSM/pupil premium pupils, children with SEND and pupils with a history of persistent absence.

Schools wanted accountability measures and examinations in the 2022/2023 academic year to continue to recognise that they are still experiencing the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. As such, changes to accountability measures and examinations were the most commonly identified wider sector changes to help support primary and secondary schools.

Additional funding was the most commonly received type of external support for both primary and secondary schools, along with peer-to-peer support, which was also widely requested.



## List of Abbreviations

ARE	Age-related Expectations
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CfEY	The Centre for Education and Youth
CIN	Children in Need
DfE	Department for Education
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
FSM	Free School Meals
K-coded	Pupils with a SEND diagnosis but who do not qualify for additional funding for specialist provision
NTP	National Tutoring Programme
PP	Pupil Premium
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator - the school teacher who is responsible for assessing, planning and monitoring the progress of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. For consistency, the term SEND is used throughout this report, rather than SEN (special educational needs). The authors recognise that not all pupils with SEN have a disability, and disabled pupils do not necessarily have special educational needs. In the qualitative research, some interviewees used the terms interchangeably.
SHU	Sheffield Hallam University
TA	Teaching Assistant

TAGs

Teacher Assessed Grades

# Introduction

## Background

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ipsos UK, 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 years 2020/21 and 2021/2022 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 future and the support they believe they need in order to most effectively support education recovery in the future

This report presents final findings from the research study.

The interim research report for Year 1 was published in January 2022:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-recovery-strategies-year-1-findings>.

## Methodology

### Overview

This project covers several strands of quantitative and qualitative research, outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Research design**

**Year 1: Dec 2020 – Jul 2021**



**Year 2: Sep 2021 – Jul 2022**

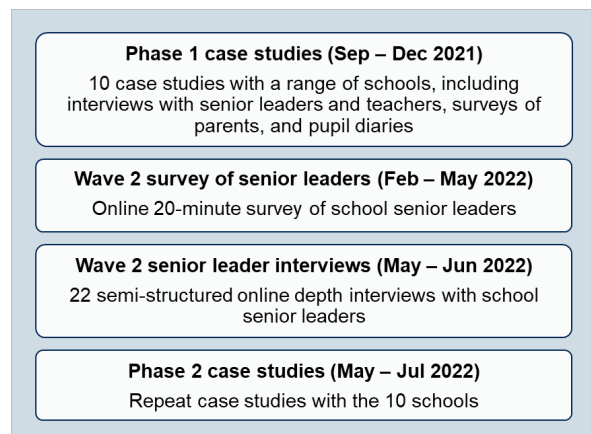
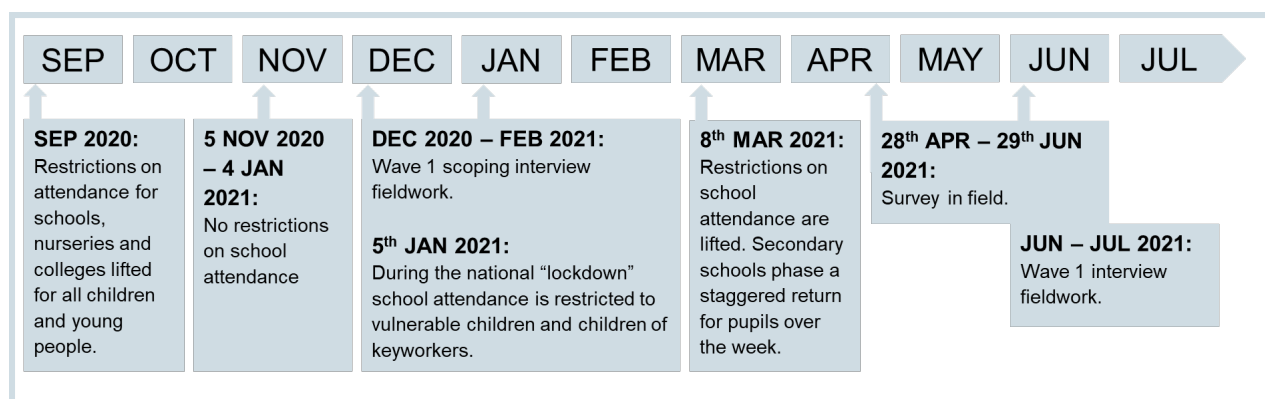


Figure 2, below, sets the Wave 1 findings in this report in context by showing the key dates of the second wave of the pandemic as they relate to schools, alongside the research fieldwork dates.

**Figure 2: Timeline of key dates (Wave 1 findings) relating to schools and the research fieldwork**



In Wave 2 of the research, there were no restrictions on school attendance during or immediately after the fieldwork periods.

## Quantitative survey – Wave 1 and Wave 2

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> Schools were invited to take part in the 20-minute online survey via schools' publicly available email addresses. We received 1,018 responses in total (649 primary, 369 secondary) to the Wave 1 survey and 764 responses in total (594 primary, 170 secondary) to the Wave 2 survey. 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.

## Senior leader qualitative interviews

The senior leader qualitative interviews were designed and conducted by Sheffield Hallam University.

A total of 63 senior leaders from primary and secondary schools in England were interviewed over 3 rounds of fieldwork and 2 years:

Wave 1 Scoping – January/February 2021 (21 senior leaders)

Wave 1 Mainstage – June/July 2021 (20 senior leaders)

Wave 2 Mainstage – May/June 2022 (22 senior leaders)

The Wave 1 scoping interviews used a rapid opportunistic sample<sup>4</sup> of schools. The Wave 1 and 2 mainstage senior leader interviews were mainly sampled from school leaders who took part in the survey and who agreed to be recontacted for interviews. To broaden geographical representation, SHU augmented this strategy with targeted regional approaches to schools that had not completed the survey.

The achieved samples 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).

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<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>

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

All senior leader interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Interview durations ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, with the majority around 60 minutes. Following transcription, researchers populated an Excel spreadsheet with key research questions and abridged versions of leaders' responses, including selected key quotations. Thereafter, individual researchers took responsibility for particular sections and analysed the full range of responses from the 22 primary and secondary school leaders who were interviewed. The research team came together for a half-day analysis meeting to discuss their respective key findings and reach agreement on interpretations.

A full sample table for the qualitative interviews can be found in the appendix.

## Case studies

The case studies were designed and conducted by the Centre for Education and Youth.

In consultation with the Department of Education (DfE) CfEY designed a sampling frame covering a range of school characteristics at the inception of Phase 1. These ensured that the schools represented a range of phases, geographical regions, Ofsted ratings, attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (in comparison with the national average for that phase), and proportions of white British pupils.

CfEY used publicly available data from school performance tables and census data to identify schools' characteristics. Schools were sampled using the following approach:

1. 10 schools were randomly sampled and approached about participating in the research. Only one school agreed; the others said they did not have capacity.
2. A further 60 schools were randomly selected. CfEY secured participation from a further 4 schools (those who declined to participate again cited capacity).
3. A call for interest from schools was issued in the DfE's newsletter. CfEY received 72 expressions of interest, from which they selected the remaining schools.

Both phases of case study fieldwork consisted of:

- Interviews with 2 senior leaders
- Interviews with 2 classroom teachers (teaching a range of age groups and subjects)
- A short parents survey, asking questions about their children's school's recovery strategies

- A pupil diary task. This asked pupils to log what they find easier and more difficult about learning and the support that is in place for them

CfEY completed the interviews at all the schools. At Phase 1, 3 schools completed the diary task and parental survey. In Phase 2, 2 schools completed the pupil diary task. The others were unable to complete these because of capacity constraints.

Informed consent was secured from every participant in the fieldwork. Schools either sought parental consent for pupils' participation or provided loco parentis consent.

## Interpreting the findings

### Quantitative data

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 the surveys. 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.

### Qualitative data

Where data from the qualitative research (senior leader interviews and case studies) 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.

We do not use staff or schools' real names in quotes or case studies to protect participants' identities. Quotes from school leaders have been assigned a number to protect their anonymity.



## Section A: Quantitative findings

### 1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions in face-to-face teaching on pupils' education in the autumn 2021 term

In this chapter we present the key challenges schools faced in supporting pupils' education recovery and pastoral outcomes in the autumn 2021 term, the impacts of staff and pupil absences on attempts to recover lost learning and the way this impact was measured. We also look at the impact on extra-curricular activity.

#### Key findings

- In autumn 2021, the most common challenge among primary and secondary schools was staff and pupil absence, with staff absence having the greatest impact on schools' strategies or plans for recovery.
- Pupil absences were similar across all year groups.
- At secondary schools, pupils' emotional health and wellbeing was seen as one of the top challenges to helping them recover lost learning.
- Hours taught of curriculum subjects compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic varied by key stage. Around half of primary schools increased the teaching hours for English and Maths. Secondary schools were more likely to keep teaching hours the same for all subjects.
- School-based extracurricular activities had mostly returned to levels seen before the pandemic. Extracurricular activities which required external travel (trips) or visitors (external speakers and concerts) were less likely to be fully offered.
- Methods used to measure the impact of COVID-19 and school closures on pupils' academic progress were similar across all year groups, with the main exception being how testing (both internal and external) was used. Secondary schools were more likely to use more formal methods of measurement, with primary schools more likely to rely on informal methods.

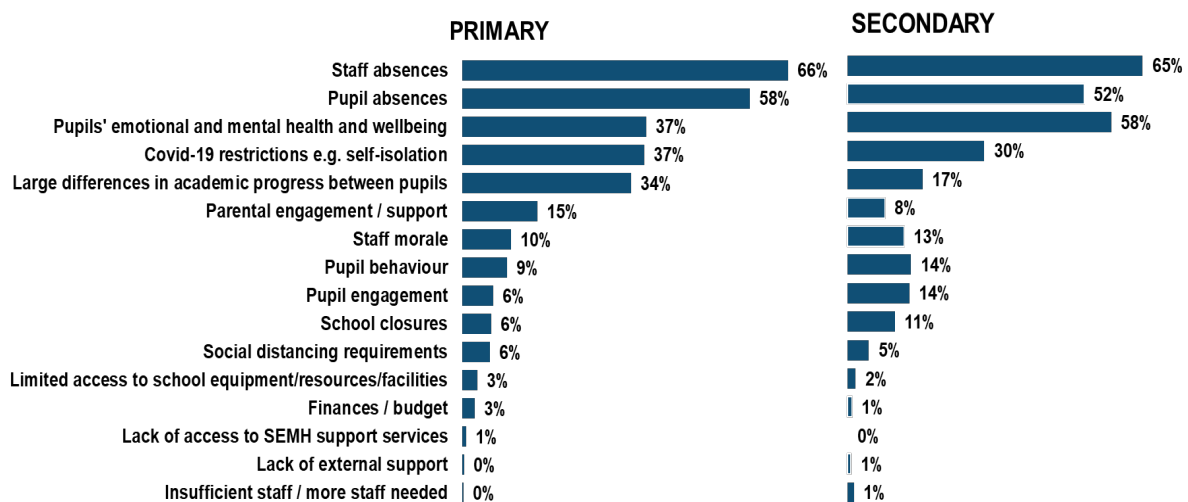
#### 1.1 Schools' challenges for supporting recovery in autumn 2021

In the autumn 2021 term, staff and pupil absence were, by some distance, the most common challenge faced by schools in supporting pupils to recover from the impacts of the pandemic and adjust to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.

As shown in Figure 3, the three largest challenges that both primary and secondary schools faced were staff absences (66% for primary schools and 65% for secondary), pupil absence (58% for primary and 52% for secondary) and pupils' emotional health and well-being (37% for primary and 58% for secondary). COVID-19 restrictions were seen as a challenge by nearly 4 in 10 primaries (37%) and 3 in 10 secondaries (30%). Large differences in academic progress between pupils was experienced as a challenge by around a third of primaries (34%) and one in six (17%) secondaries. This reflects that, as illustrated in the qualitative findings (see chapter 4 and 5) schools reported that they were still experiencing the impacts of COVID-19 in the autumn term.

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

*Primary and Secondary comparison*



Base=594

Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary) Primary

Base=170

Q.5 Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary) Primary

**Impact of staff and pupil absences**

As Figure 3 shows, staff and pupil absences were identified as the biggest challenges to recovering lost learning. The proportions of leaders identifying these as challenges was far higher than in Autumn 2020 (when staff absence was an issue for 26% and 33% respectively and pupil absence 16% and 29%).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From 14 October 2020, social mixing was restricted under a system of tier regulations. On the 5 November 2020 the tier regulations were replaced by [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(England\) \(No. 4\) Regulations 2020](#), which enforced stricter restrictions on social gatherings, although

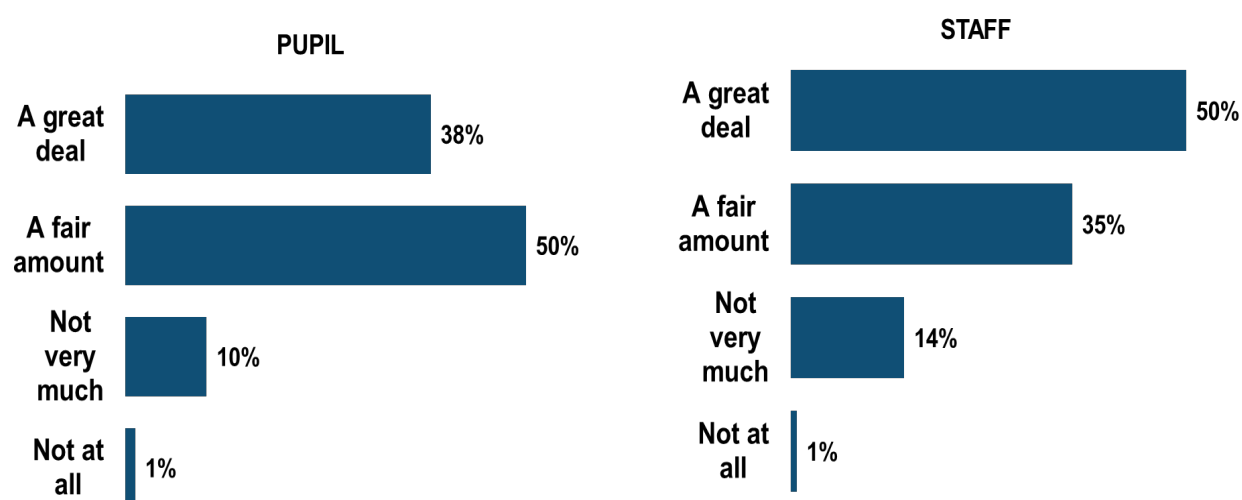
The research explored the impact of staff and pupil absence to examine how it had impacted the school's strategies or plans for education recovery.

Staff absence had the greatest impact, with half of all schools in the survey (50%) saying it had impacted plans "a great deal". A further third said plans had been impacted "a fair amount" (35%). Results were similar across primary and secondary schools. Just 1% said staff absences had not affected them at all.

Pupil absences had a smaller impact on the delivery of education recovery plans; however, the impact was still significant. Approaching 4 in 10 (38%) said pupil absence impacted their plans "a great deal" and half (50%) "a fair amount". Again, just 1% were not affected at all.

**Figure 4: Impact of staff and pupil absence on schools' strategies/plans for education recovery**

*Pupil and staff absences*



Base=764

Schools most commonly said pupil absences were similar across all year groups (40%). Primary schools were more able to identify particular year groups that had notably more pupil absences, with Year 6 the most common (28%); however, figures for the other year groups were fairly similar (from 16% in Years 2 and 3 to 23% in Year 5). Secondary schools' results ranged from 4% saying Year 7 had most pupil absences, to 6% saying Year 11.

Half of schools said pupil absences were similar across pupil groups (52%). Just over a third of schools (36%) said pupils eligible for pupil premium had notably more pupil absences compared to others, and around a quarter said this was the case for children

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schools remained open to all pupils at this time. Restrictions on school attendance for some pupils were put in place from early January 2021.

with SEND (24%) or those identified as having fallen behind during school closures (22%).

## **1.2 Changes to the curriculum**

Schools who took part in the survey were asked how, if at all, the hours they taught curriculum subjects (these differed by key stage) had changed in the autumn 2021 term compared to before the pandemic. Results varied by key stage.

In Reception (Early Years Foundation Stage), hours had been increased by a majority of schools for both communication and language development (76%) and personal, social and emotional development (74%). Approaching half (43%) had increased hours for literacy, and around a third had increased hours for mathematics (36%) and physical development (24%).

Around 1 in 5 schools teaching Reception reported spending fewer hours teaching “understanding of the world” (21%) and “expressive arts and design” (19%).

Around half of schools teaching Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 increased hours for English (ranging from 49% to 55% across the year groups) and only slightly fewer had increased hours for Maths (ranging from 42% to 52% across the year groups). Most other subjects had remained the same in the vast majority of schools; however, in Key Stage 2, around a quarter in each year group said they had reduced learning hours for languages, and around 1 in 7 for arts and technologies.

There were few changes to learning hours for each subject in Key Stages 3 and 4. Upwards of 85% of schools said they taught the same number of hours in each subject (English, Maths, Science, Humanities, Languages, Arts and Technologies). The exception is languages that were not taught at all in around 1 in 10 secondary schools, across each year group.

### **Ability to offer learning resources and extracurricular activities relative to before the COVID-19 pandemic**

In autumn 2021, learning resources and extra-curricular activities were being either fully or partially offered by most schools. Nearly all of schools were fully or partially offering: access to books in lessons (98%); access to key areas for skills (96%); access to resources to support the application of learning (94%); access to a school library or books (93%). Over 8 in 10 were offering school assemblies (84%) and extracurricular clubs (83%).

There were few differences between primary and secondary schools, the exception being that extra-curricular clubs were less likely to be offered in primary school (16% not offering at all) than secondary (7% not offering at all).

Extra-curricular activities which involved leaving the school or having visitors to the school were less likely to be offered. Trips and external speakers were offered by around 6 in 10 (62%) of all schools surveyed, while just over half (53%) were running concerts.

### **Methods used to measure the impact of COVID-19 and restrictions in school attendance on pupils' academic progress**

To contextualise the reported impacts of the pandemic on academic progress, schools were asked what methods they had used to help understand these impacts. Methods were similar across all year groups, with the main exception being to how testing (both internal and external) was used. Secondary schools were more likely to use more formal methods of measurement, with primary schools more likely to rely on informal methods.

Most commonly, schools used formative teacher assessments (used between 86% and 97% across all year groups) and internal monitoring and tracking systems to track pupil's progress (85% to 92%).

Internally developed summative assessments (for example, tests or practice exams developed by teachers) were commonly used for older year groups, with their use among secondary level year groups rising from 86% in Year 7 to 94% in Year 11. They were less common in primary school but still used by 40% in Reception rising to 61% in Year 6.

Externally developed summative assessments (including SATS, mock exams and externally purchased assessments) varied by year group. They were most commonly used at primary level, in Year 6 (73%), and in Years 2 to 5 (56% in Year 2 rising to 61% in Year 5). In secondary schools, external assessments were most commonly used in Year 7 (49%) and Year 11 (46%).

The use of behaviour records broadly rose in line with pupil age, from 45% in Reception to 75% in Year 11.

Other commonly used methods included check-ins with pupils who had higher absence rates when online learning (rising from 41% in Reception to 63% in Year 11), the tracking of pupil absence from online learning (rising from 36% in Reception to 65% in Year 11) and changes to informal communications with parents (only a little variation by year group, from 35% to 45% with no consistent pattern).

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

This chapter looks at the strategies schools used to help pupils to recover learning and support their wellbeing in the autumn 2021 term and for which pupils' schools considered the strategies to be most effective.

### Key findings

- Use of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) was more common among secondary schools than primary, mainly due to the higher use of NTP Tuition Partners in secondary schools. A majority of schools found NTP resources useful for supporting recovery in the autumn 2021 term.
- Whilst the support strategies used varied by year, providing small group or one-to-one work was a common strategy across schools. Reflecting pupil needs and abilities, primary schools prioritised phonics interventions for Reception to Year 3. From Year 3 through to Year 11, providing pupils with access to computers was a common support strategy.
- The perceived effectiveness of academic interventions/strategies was highest among the older year groups in primary and secondary schools. Teachers were less likely to agree that support strategies had helped expectations for vulnerable pupil groups' return to pre-pandemic levels.
- To support pupils' mental health and wellbeing, the vast majority of primary and secondary schools offered a broad curriculum including sports, music, and arts.
- Pastoral support was mostly offered through internally developed pastoral interventions for specific pupil groups in both primary and secondary schools. Both primary and secondary schools additionally prioritised outreach work with parents / families and internal pastoral interventions for all pupils. However, the majority of secondary schools surveyed also employed additional pastoral staff (compared to previous years) (71%), compared to only 4 in 10 primary schools (40%).
- Almost all primary and secondary schools had used at least one initiative to support staff in the autumn 2021 term. Most schools offered support for staff wellbeing and mental health, ongoing Continuous Professional Development in response to teaching and learning need, and targeted ongoing Continuous Professional Development.
- Both primary and secondary schools identified Recovery Premium Funding as the most useful type of support received.

## 2.1 Strategies for recovery

Schools employed a range of strategies to support recovery in the autumn 2021 term, reflecting the wide range of pupil needs.

### Academic recovery strategies

School leaders were asked about their use of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), which supported schools by providing access to tutoring to help pupils whose education has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the School Led Tutoring element of the NTP had not yet been fully implemented in the autumn 2021 term, 45% of all schools surveyed used the NTP in the autumn 2021 term. A quarter (24%) had used NTP Tuition Partners to provide subsidised tutoring and a fifth (21%) used NTP Academic Mentors to provide intensive support to pupils. Use of the NTP Academic Mentors or tuition partners was more common among secondary schools (58%) than primary (42%) – this was driven by a higher use of NTP Tuition partners in secondary schools (37% compared with 20% of primary schools).<sup>6</sup>

School leaders were also asked which strategies overall they used to help support pupils recover learning missed due to COVID-19 and school closures.

The support strategies used varied by schools' age and year group. In Reception and Key Stage 1, the most common strategy was phonics interventions, used by 81% of schools for Reception pupils, 93% for Year 1 and 91% for Year 2. NTP or other small group / one-to-one tutoring<sup>7</sup> was the second most commonly used strategy (63%, 81% and 85% respectively) and use of a reading scheme (55%, 58% and 60%), reflecting the core skills being taught in these early school years from reception to Year 2.

At Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6) NTP or other small group or one-to-one tutoring was the most commonly used support strategy (83%, 83%, 85%, and 88% respectively), with providing pupils with access to computers and software second (61%, 62%, 63%, and 63% respectively). In Year 3 phonics interventions were a key strategy (64%) and from Year 4 to Year 6 the proportion of schools which used these drops considerably (34%, 19%, and 17% respectively).

For Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9) and Key Stage 4 (10 to 11), access to computers and software was the top strategy to help support pupils (83%, 83%, 83%, 84%, and 86% respectively), followed by NTP or other small group or one-to-one tutoring (73%, 70%,

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of the wave 2 survey fieldwork (21<sup>st</sup> February – 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022) the NTP had not been fully rolled out. More recent evidence on the use of NTP by schools sourced by the Department for Education can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-tutoring-programme-year-2-implementation-and-process-evaluation>

<sup>7</sup> In the questionnaire, National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and 'other small group or one-to-one tutoring support' were asked as separate codes. They have been netted here given the likelihood that schools used the NTP to fund this type of support.

69%, 79%, and 85% respectively). For Year 11, revision classes and booster groups were also key (81%).

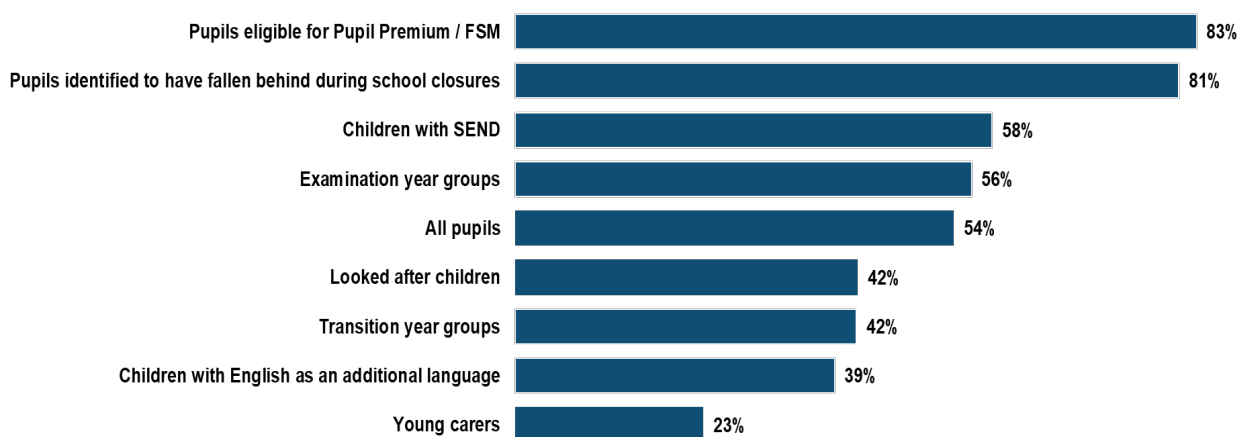
### Perceived usefulness of the NTP

Schools found the NTP resources useful, with 82% that used NTP Tuition Partners rating it as “Very” or “Somewhat” useful, and 86% for NTP Academic Mentors.

Around 8 in 10 (83%) schools using NTP with pupils eligible for the pupil premium/FSM rated it effective, as did a similar proportion (81%) of those using it for pupils identified to have fallen behind during school closures (NTP's stated aim is to support disadvantaged pupils whose education has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic). Just over half of schools (54%) rated the NTP as being “very” or “somewhat” effective for supporting education recovery across all pupils. See Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Effectiveness of the National Tutoring Programme for different pupil groups**

*Effectiveness: very/somewhat combined*



Base=306

### Perceived effectiveness of interventions in bringing pupil outcomes in line with expectations before the pandemic

When asked about how well interventions to support pupils had brought individual outcomes in line with expectations before COVID-19, views from school leaders were mixed. Across all stages and year groups, no more than around 4 in 10 school leaders agreed that the interventions they had used had managed to bring outcomes in line with expectations before COVID-19. Perceived effectiveness of interventions and outcomes being aligned with expectations before the pandemic were highest among the older year groups in the schools.



Primary school leaders were most likely to agree that expectations for Year 6 were in line with expectations before COVID-19 (43%) followed by Year 5 (39%). This is aligned with the proportion who agree that expectations for Year 4 pupils were now aligned with expectations from before the pandemic (36%) and significantly higher than the proportion who agree this was the case for reception (35%), Year 1 (32%), Year 2 (30%) or Year 3 (29%) pupils.

Secondary school leaders were most likely to agree that outcomes for Year 11 (41%) and Year 10 (38%) had returned to previous expectations. This was aligned with the proportion who believe that individual outcomes for Year 9 were now in line with expectations before the pandemic (33%) and significantly higher than the proportion seeing this to be the case for Year 8 (30%) and Year 7 (28%).

Amongst specific pupil groups, a minority of school leaders across primary and secondary phases agreed that outcomes were now in line with expectations before COVID-19. Around 3 in 10 school leaders agreed that this was the case for children with English as an additional language (32%), pupils identified to have fallen behind during school closures (32%), looked after children (31%), and around a quarter (26%) for Pupil Premium pupils.

### **Health and wellbeing and pastoral support strategies**

The survey asked school leads which strategies they had used to **support pupils' mental health and wellbeing** in the context of COVID-19.

In the autumn 2021 term, almost all (91%) primary schools supported pupil mental health and wellbeing by offering a broad curriculum including sports, music, and arts. This was the same proportion of primary schools as in autumn 2020 (91%). Other strategies used by a majority of primary schools were: teaching about mental health and wellbeing (82%), information on the topic of pastoral issues to pupils and / or parents (82%), additional training for some or all staff compared to previous years (76%), sessions on skills to support mental health and wellbeing (74%), and increased mental health support (64%).

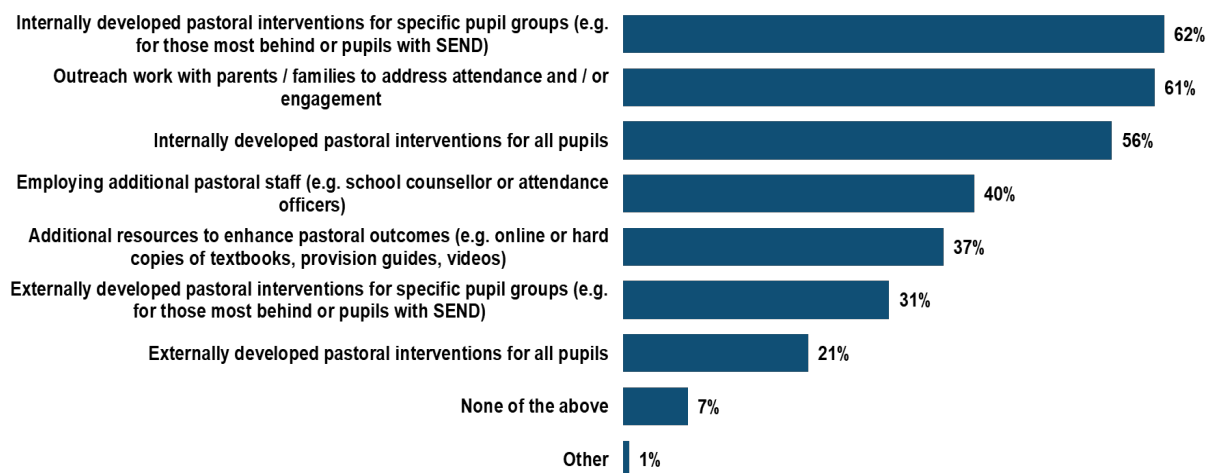
Secondary schools deployed similar actions to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing. Like primary schools, 9 in 10 (90%) saw offering a broad curriculum as a key mechanism for supporting mental health and wellbeing. This marked a move away from the most common strategy among secondary schools in the autumn 2020 term of providing information on the topic to pupils and / or parents (94%), perhaps reflecting schools' ability to provide a wider curriculum, and embed pastoral support into it, during in-person teaching. Other strategies used by most secondary schools were similar to those used by primary schools: providing information on the topic to pupils and / or parents (87%), additional training for some or all staff compared to previous years (84%),

teaching about mental health and wellbeing (81%), and increased mental health support provided by the school (76%).

School leads were asked which **pastoral interventions** their schools provided in the autumn term. Both primary and secondary schools since the autumn 2021 term deployed similar pastoral strategies to support pupils, albeit there was very slight variation in the most common strategies. Primary and secondary schools mostly used internally developed pastoral interventions for specific pupil groups (62% and 77%). Primary schools with a high proportion of pupils receiving free school meals (66%) were most likely to use this strategy. Both primary and secondary schools prioritised outreach work with parents / families (61% and 66%), and internal pastoral interventions for all pupils (56% and 62%). 7 in 10 secondary schools also employed additional pastoral staff (compared to previous years) (71%), compared to only 4 in 10 of primary schools surveyed (40%), reflecting their larger size. As discussed in Chapter 1, a much larger proportion of secondary schools identified pupil mental health and wellbeing as a challenge to education recovery, which also helps to explain this additional investment in pastoral staff.

**Figure 6: Types of specific pastoral interventions used by primary schools since the start of the autumn 2021 term**

*Primary only*

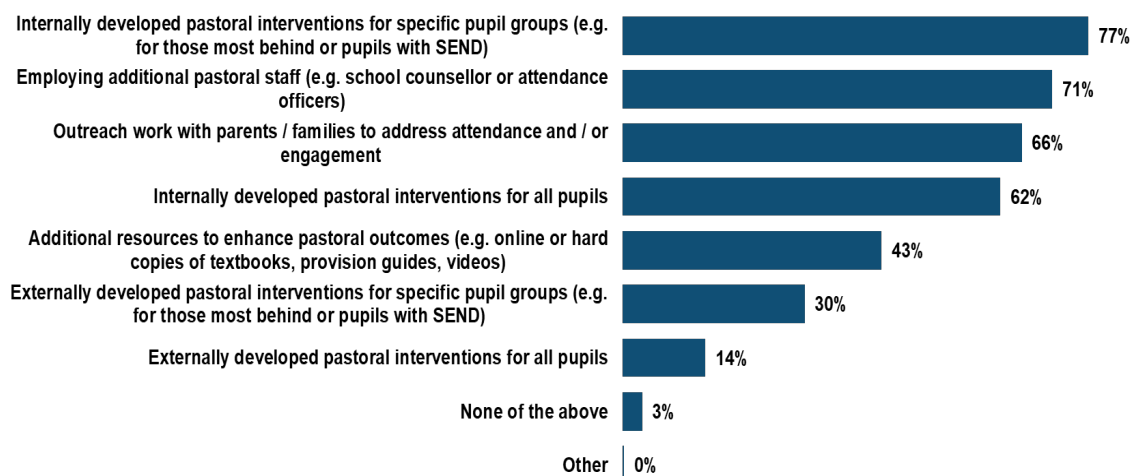


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Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary): Primary

**Figure 7: Types of specific pastoral interventions used by secondary schools since the start of the autumn 2021 term**

*Secondary only*



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Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary): Secondary

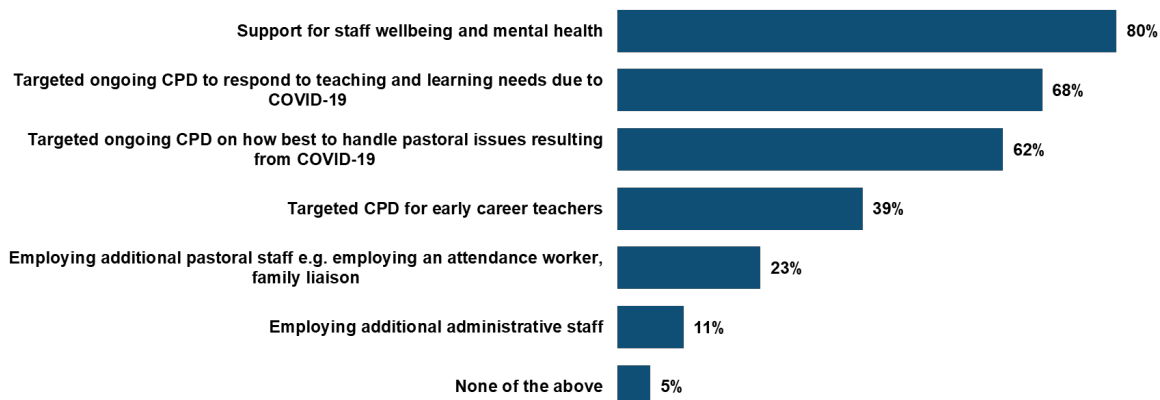
**Support for staff**

School leaders were asked about support made available to staff in the autumn 2021 term. Almost all primary (95%) and secondary schools (99%) had used at least one initiative to support staff.

The most common strategies used were similar across primary and secondary schools. The majority offered support for staff wellbeing and mental health (80% of primaries and 82% of secondaries), provided ongoing Continuous Professional Development in response to teaching and learning needs (68% in primaries and 83% in secondaries), and targeted ongoing Continuous Professional Development to handle pastoral issues (62% of primaries and 77% of secondaries). Whereas the majority of secondary schools offered targeted continuous professional development for early career teachers (62%), around 4 in 10 primary schools (39%) adopted this strategy. See Figure 8 and 9.

**Figure 8: Support provided by primary schools to school staff during COVID-19**

*Primary only*

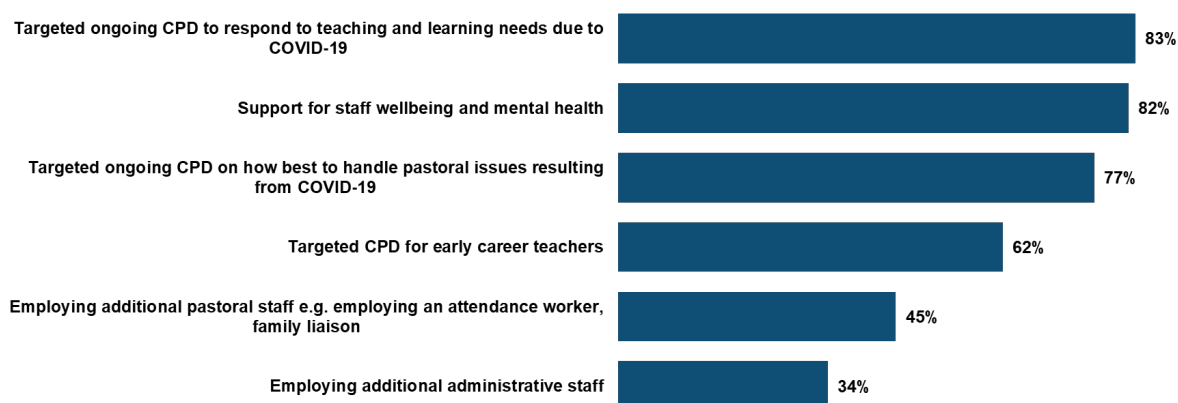


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Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary): Primary

**Figure 9: Support provided by secondary schools to school staff during COVID-19**

*Secondary only*



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Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary): Secondary

**Usefulness of support**

The survey also asked school leaders how useful different forms of support had been in supporting educational recovery. Both primary and secondary schools identified Recovery Premium Funding as the most useful type of support (68% of both primary and secondary schools said this was ‘very useful’). Beyond this, there was variation in perceived usefulness amongst the different phases.

Amongst primary schools, after Recovery Premium Funding (68%) Continuous Professional Development (CPD) support (46%), and the School Led Tutoring Grant element of the NTP (40%), and Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) resources (36%) were the forms of support seen as most useful.

Secondary schools had a wider range of support which they saw as useful. After Recovery Premium Funding, the NTP School Led Tutoring Grant (37%), EEF resources (35%), Continuous Professional Development for teachers (34%) and Holiday education (summer schools) (30%) were seen as the most useful forms of support.

### 3. Longer term impacts and sustainability

This section covers schools' priorities for support in the rest of the 2021/2022 academic year and the 2022/2023 academic year. It covers specific year and pupil groups prioritised for further support. The section then progresses to examine priorities for wider sector changes and longer-term support that schools receive from external bodies.

#### Key findings

- Transition years and exam groups were the highest priority year groups for further support for the rest of the 2021/2022 academic year. The pupil groups prioritised for further support for the rest of the 2021/2022 academic year in both primary and secondary schools were children identified to have fallen behind, FSM/pupil premium pupils, children with SEND and pupils with a history of persistent absence.
- Changes to accountability measures and changes to examinations in the 2022/2023 academic year were most commonly identified as the wider sector changes to help support schools by both primary and secondary schools.
- Secondary schools tended to receive a wider array of external forms of support than primary schools to respond to the longer-term impacts of the pandemic. Additional funding was the most commonly received type of external support for both primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools were more likely to have sought advice on external assessment. Over half of both primary and secondary schools used informal peer-to-peer support.

#### 3.1 Priorities for the 2021/22 academic year

##### Priority Groups

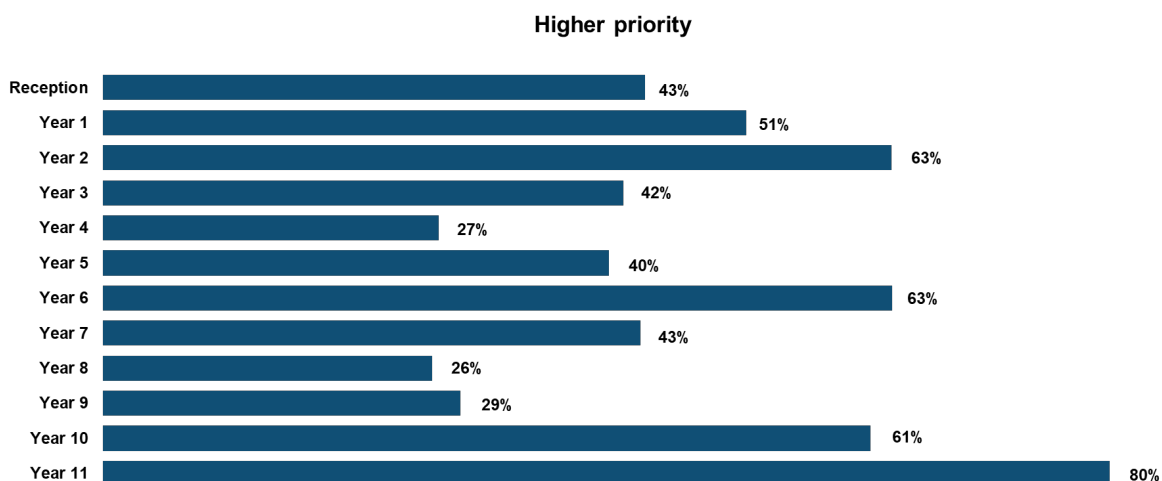
At the time of being surveyed in February – April 2022, school leaders were asked which year groups they were prioritising for further support for the rest of the 2021/2022 academic year.

Year groups transitioning to the next key stage and exam years were seen as the highest priorities for further support. In primary schools, Year 2 (transitioning to Key Stage 2) (63%) and Year 6 (transition to Key Stage 3 and taking SATs) (63%) were mostly prioritised for support. This was consistent from Wave 1 where Year 2 (64%) and Year 6 (72%) were deemed as the two primary year groups to be the highest priority for support in the 2021/2022 academic year.

In secondary schools, Year 10 (61%) and Year 11 (80%), key transition and exam years were prioritised. In Wave 1, secondary schools also gave higher priority to Year 11 (86%) and Year 7 (69%) was prioritised over Year 10 (47%), perhaps reflecting the challenges this year group had faced moving to home-schooling after less than two terms at secondary school. See Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Year groups prioritised as a higher priority for further support/interventions for the rest of the academic year 2021/2022**

### Year groups



Base=542/543/543/556/555/546/536/166/168/167/167/166

School leaders were also asked which pupil groups they would prioritise for further support for the remainder of the 2021/2022 academic year.

The highest priority pupil groups in primary and secondary schools were those identified to have fallen behind (82% and 63%), FSM/pupil premium pupils (78% and 86%), children with SEND (72% and 82%), and pupils with a history of persistent absence (70% and 80%).

## 3.2 Wider Sector Changes

Schools were asked about the usefulness of wider sector changes which had been put in place to support them in responding to the long-term impacts of the pandemic. Primary schools identified changes to school curriculum content (53%), live feedback from teachers to inform policy in 'real-time' (49%), and changes to examinations for the academic year (2021/2022) (46%) as the most useful changes. Secondary schools identified changes to examinations for this academic year (2021/2022) (68%), changes to school curriculum content (63%), and flexibility in face-to-face teaching days (63%) as most useful.

When asked about which future wider sector changes they saw as priorities to support schools with the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19, most primary and secondary schools cited changes in accountability measures (for example, revision of Ofsted inspection criteria, approach or process) (79% and 76%) as a higher priority. The prioritisation of changes to accountability measures amongst schools was consistent with Wave 1 of the survey, held in spring 2021 (77% and 69% for primaries and secondaries respectively).

A similar proportion of primary and secondary schools saw changes to examinations for the next academic year 2022/23 (55% and 58%) as higher priority wider sector changes. Primary schools were equally likely to cite changes to examinations in the next academic year as a priority in Wave 2 and Wave 1 (58% of primary schools at Wave 1). The proportion of secondary schools who saw this as a higher priority dropped from 73% previously at Wave 1.

Low priority wider sector changes in Wave 2 were flexibility in school face-to-face teaching days (10% of primaries and 19% of secondaries saw this as high priority), review of initial teacher training curricular (14% and 12% respectively) and extending teacher training for NQTs (13% for both).

### **3.3 External support for longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on teaching and learning**

School leaders were asked about the external support they received to help with responding to the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on teaching and learning since March 2021.

The most commonly received forms of external support amongst primary schools were additional funding for challenges faced due to COVID-19 (for example, Recovery Premium funding)<sup>8</sup> (79%) and informal peer to peer support (57%). Around half of primary schools received external guidance (50%), formal school to school support (48%) and free Continuous Professional Development (46%).

Amongst secondary schools, the most widespread types of external support were additional funding (79%)<sup>9</sup>, guidance on assessment (67%), informal peer to peer support (66%), external guidance (54%) and free Continuous Professional Development (52%). This shows that this school phase used a wider array of external support than primary schools to respond to the longer-term impacts of the pandemic.

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<sup>8</sup> It may be that some survey respondents were not aware of the additional funding which was provided to their school, as all schools in England received additional funding through the recovery premium funding.

<sup>9</sup> It may be that some survey respondents were not aware of the additional funding which was provided to their school, as all schools in England received additional funding through the recovery premium funding.



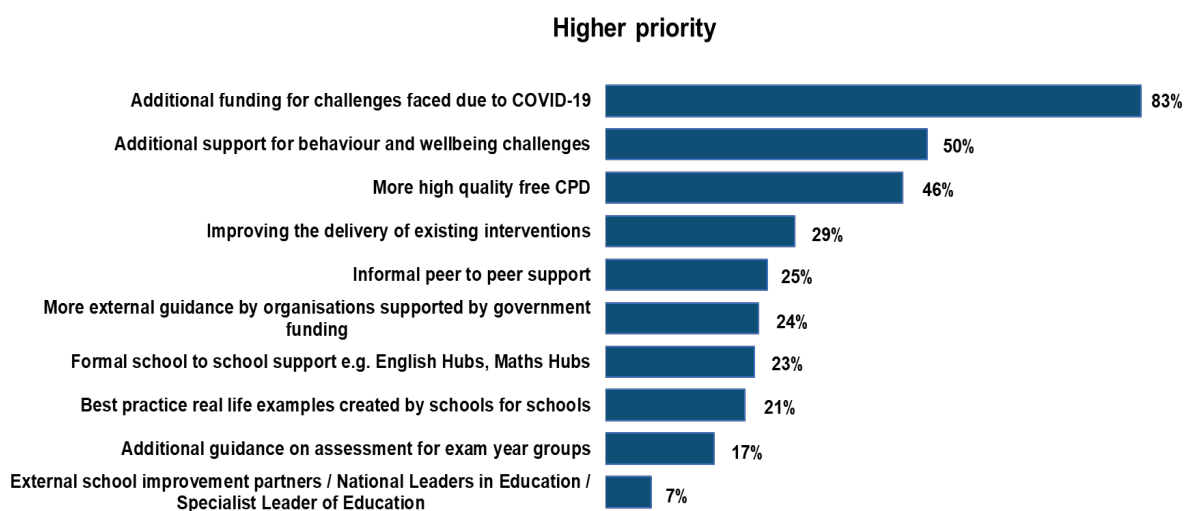
Leaders were asked what further support for the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic they placed as either a high, medium, or low priority. Additional funding was cited as being high priority for around 8 in 10 primary and secondary (83% and 78%). Additional support for behaviour and wellbeing challenges was seen as high priority by half of primary schools (50%) and around 3 in 5 secondary (59%). Amongst primary schools there was an increase in the proportion who saw additional support for behaviour and wellbeing challenges as a priority from Wave 1 (44% at Wave 1).

Both primary and secondary schools saw external school improvement partners as lower priority forms of support at Wave 2 (41% and 42%).

See Figures 11 and 12.

**Figure 11: Further support prioritised by primary schools as a higher priority to help support schools with the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning**

*Primary only*

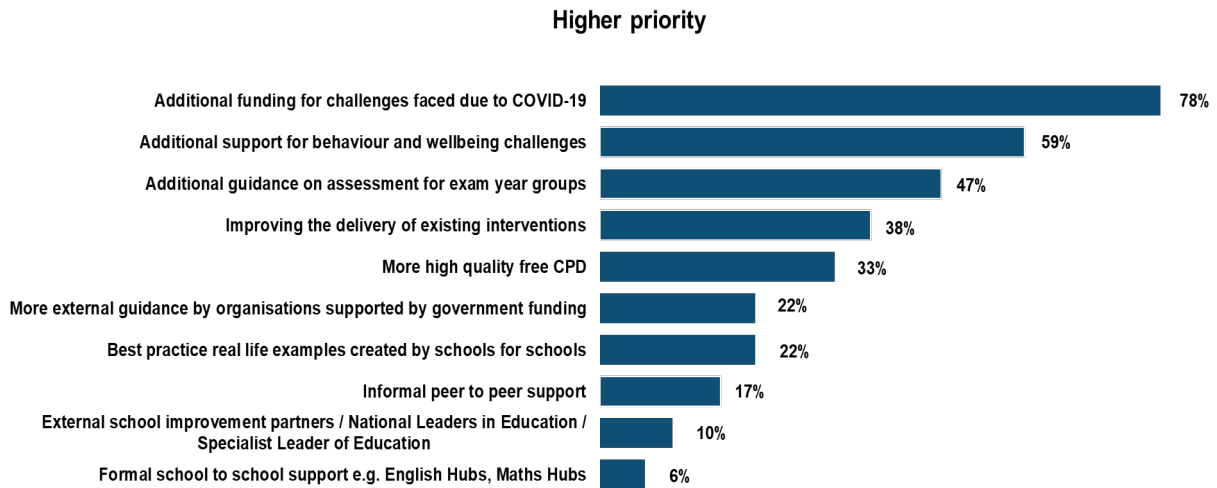


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Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary): Primary

**Figure 12: Further support prioritised by secondary schools as a higher priority to help support schools with the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning**

*Secondary only*



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Q5. Phase Choice (Primary / Secondary): Secondary

## Section B: Qualitative findings

The findings in this section are drawn from the qualitative interviews with school leaders conducted by Sheffield Hallam University. The interviews were conducted in the summer term of 2022 and teachers were asked about the spring term of 2022. The case studies are drawn from the case study research conducted by CfEY and it is indicated where the findings are drawn from this strand of the research.

### 4. Attainment, progress and academic assessment in the spring term 2022

In this section, we present findings from 22 senior leader interviews concerning the patterns of attainment and progress in primary and secondary schools in spring term 2022, followed by a summary of the assessment and tracking approaches used by schools to inform their COVID-19 recovery strategies.

#### Key findings

- In the school leader interviews, spring 2022 was reported as the most challenging term of the pandemic in terms of COVID-19 related illness, staff and pupil absences. The disruption to teaching and learning in schools affected attainment, progression and recovery interventions to varying extents.
- Leaders reported improvements in attainment and progress since the autumn term, especially in secondary schools, in response to recovery interventions. Broadly, developments were characterised as 'getting back on track'.
- Progress across the core skills of reading, writing and maths was reported by the leaders as uneven in both primary and secondary schools.
- Disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, and children with mental health challenges were still noticeably further behind their peers. All participating leaders reported that pre-existing attainment gaps had increased as a result of the pandemic.
- Leaders observed that the academic and socio-emotional development of younger year groups (Years 1 to 3 in primary and Years 7 to 8 in secondary) had sustained the greatest negative impacts due to the pandemic.
- Schools used more varied and frequent forms of assessment to track pupil progress. Formal testing was minimised where possible in favour of less stressful approaches such as quizzes and book checks.

## **4.1 Overall trends in progress to 2022**

Findings from the summer 2021 interviews indicated uneven progress in reading, writing and maths, yielding highly variable, 'spiky' attainment profiles for year groups, classes and individual pupils. Leaders reported that the most profound learning lags were evident for younger year groups (Years 1 to 3 and Years 7 to 8), pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with SEND, and those who struggled to engage with remote learning. These pupil characteristics often overlapped.

A year later, with recovery interventions underway, similar patterns were still evident. School leaders reported that the spring 2022 term was extremely challenging, with spikes in COVID-19 related illness leading to the highest levels of pupil and staff absences and the greatest disruption to teaching and learning since schools reopened. Leaders noted that this disruption had a significant impact on the delivery of the recovery curriculum and interventions to address learning losses from the previous two years.

Despite these challenges, all participating leaders reported that pupils' attainment overall was improving in response to the recovery interventions, compared to autumn term 2021. Additional resourcing enabled smaller teaching groups which leaders regarded as effective for pupil catch-up (see Section 6 on recovery strategies).

It was reported across all schools and year groups that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were continuing to lag furthest behind. Consistent with the 2021 findings, leaders in 2022 identified pupils with SEND, pupils on FSM and Pupil Premium, pupils with mental health needs, and pupils who did not engage with remote learning during the restrictions on school attendance as the ones sustaining the worst academic impacts of the disruptions. Leaders reported that the numbers of pupils in these categories had increased during the pandemic; the higher the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in a class, the greater the challenge for teachers in getting these pupils back on track. The attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils had also increased, despite interventions. In some of the most disadvantaged schools, leaders reported that all years were behind age-related expectations (ARE) due to disruptions.

## **4.2 Attainment and progress in primary schools**

### **Progress in recovery but inconsistent patterns of improvement**

Primary leaders described patterns of attainment, progress and learning loss in different ways, but all indicated that recovery interventions were broadly working and achieving improvements in the core skills of reading, writing and maths. However, improvements were not consistent across all subject areas or groups of pupils. For example, one school's reported pattern was good school-wide catch-up in reading but persistent lags in maths and writing.

Improvements were also seen as relative over time. Some leaders compared the spring progress to the autumn term when learning losses were:

Really quite staggering – Year 1 and 2 were miles behind in their maths and English... they were all, on average, I'd say about six months behind where they should have been. Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 are all not where they should be, but not anywhere near as far behind as our Key Stage 1 children. (Primary 7)

Following targeted interventions, one school reported increasing the numbers of children at ARE by around a fifth since September 2021, but said that many pupils were still noticeably behind in their expected progress. In another primary school, progress in classes was reported to fluctuate between 65% and 90% of pupils at ARE which they said was much lower (and more variable) than in typical years. Commonly, leaders estimated that pupils were one or two terms behind where they would otherwise be.

### **Greater-depth pupils, disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with additional needs**

Pupils who would normally be expected to be working at greater depth were often not. This was particularly a concern for Year 6, where leaders were anticipating lower SATs results than pre-pandemic. Pupils who would work at greater depth at school were not always challenged to do so at home. One leader pointed out that greater depth relies on cultural capital and opportunities that were missing from most children's lives due to the pandemic.

Primary leaders reported that the most disadvantaged pupils were posing the most concerns overall, and cited the increasing gap between those on Pupil Premium and their peers as an indicator of the widening inequalities as a result of the pandemic:

The Pupil Premium gap has just absolutely widened immensely for the last two years - across the board and for every year group (...)  
Prior to 2019 there was a gap of say 5% between the non-FSM and the FSM children, say for reading in Year 6. But that gap has widened by, on average, about 20% in all years. (Primary 3)

Leaders had additional concerns about cohorts with higher levels of need and K-coded pupils (those with no education, health and care plan (EHCP) but in need of support). Concerns varied across classes, years and schools. In one school, Reception pupils were presenting the most worrying social and behavioural problems, which leaders attributed to limited access to nursery during lockdowns:

They haven't socialised as much with other children, now we see an awful lot of behaviour issues – biting and kicking the staff and trashing the classroom. (Primary 3)

Leaders felt under-resourced to deal with these severe additional needs and had concerns for academic recovery in pupils with SEND, given the lengthy wait for assessments and the high-needs funding required to support the increase in pupils with additional needs. Teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) were struggling to support these pupils as well as whole-class recovery. As a result, the progress of all pupils in these classes was typically slower. In some schools, TA absences in the spring term in particular meant that staff were spread more thinly to cover absences rather than lead recovery interventions, further impacting those in most need of additional support.

Teachers and school leaders interviewed for the CfEY case studies also reported that the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils had widened in 2020-21 and had not narrowed back to pre-pandemic levels. For example, a primary school in the East of England reported that higher achieving pupils (who were largely more economically advantaged) had been able to recover from learning loss more quickly. Teachers and school leaders found that the pace of improvement in lower achieving pupils had been much slower.

### **Year groups of concern in primary schools**

Younger year groups were perceived as hardest hit by the disruptions. Leaders had significant concerns about progress of pupils in the current Years 1 to 3 who had missed large parts of Reception and Year 1. These are critical periods when social and emotional development, speech and language development, early phonics skills and foundational maths concepts are usually established. One leader (Primary 4) described Key Stage 1 progress as '*falling off a cliff*' to 50% at ARE in spring from 80%-95% previously.

In most primaries, leaders reported that reading, writing and maths in Years 1 to 3 were particularly behind, and more so for vulnerable pupils who did not come into school during lockdowns. In one school:

Foundational phonics and number knowledge had gone backwards for an awful lot of them. (Primary 3)

One headteacher pointed out that although Key Stage 1 pupils were furthest behind, this was less problematic than for pupils in older groups because the younger cohorts still had time ahead to catch up before key assessment and transition years.

Most primary leaders reported that since the autumn term Key Stage 2 pupils were tending to catch up faster than Key Stage 1. They attributed this to their foundational literacy and numeracy skills having been established before the pandemic, and older children being more able to engage with online learning. Although recovery for Years 5 and 6 was generally seen as proceeding comparatively well, there were cases where teacher and pupil absences had disrupted recovery interventions, and standardised assessment test (SAT) results were expected to dip. Teachers reported that in the run-up to SATs, classes were still covering the basics rather than going to greater depth. Also, many pupils had not made the required jump in emotional maturity between Years 5 and 6, making it more challenging for teachers to *'push pupils beyond their comfort zone and develop the independence'* needed to progress well academically.

### **Curriculum areas of concern in primary schools**

Reading scores and fluency were reported as below expected standards across the primary phase and were therefore the focus of interventions (see Section 6 on Recovery). Reading was recognised as fundamental to all subjects, so deficits affected all aspects of curriculum delivery and learning outcomes.

Pupils were also struggling with writing. Physical handwriting had suffered due to less writing practice during periods of online learning. Fine motor skills were reported as weaker for younger year groups, while Year 6 pupils' writing stamina was a concern in preparation for SATs. Negative attitudes to writing were reported for some Pupil Premium and pupils with SEND. Spelling also presented challenges as a result of pupils' over-reliance on software spell-checking functions when completing screen-based work.

In most schools, pupils were still behind in maths in some areas, despite interventions, because some basic topics and key skills were still lacking:

They have missed two years of that topic [variously] in Y3, 4, 5 and 6, so they weren't able to access the assessments as well because they had not got the knowledge. (Primary 2)

In schools where literacy was not as badly impacted, leaders reported that maths suffered, which they felt was because parents found it harder to support maths learning than reading. Leaders reported that maths recovery was sometimes complicated by having to 'undo' the maths methods used by parents who had used approaches they were taught in childhood. In hindsight, some teachers felt that some of the work set during restrictions on school attendance had embedded misconceptions through lack of adequate support and feedback.

Solid-expected children have still got gaps in their learning. The gaps tend to be with things that we couldn't teach effectively remotely.  
(Primary 1)

Beyond literacy and numeracy, leaders also reported gaps in science that they attributed to lack of practical lessons including experiments. Even when pupils were in school, science learning was 'very passive' due to COVID-19 rules on physical contact and shared objects, which had the effect of reducing hands-on experience.

In addition to these subject-related gaps, some leaders observed that primary pupils had lost much of their learning independence and wider learning skills. In some cases, these losses affected pupils' resilience and attitudes to learning overall.

### **Case study: Attainment**

This case study is drawn from the research conducted by CfEY.

**Case Study: A primary school and nursery in Norfolk (East of England), with an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement' and around 30% of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM).**

The headteacher described this school as a "very small, rural, coastal school". Children are taught in multi-year classes, incorporating Years 1, 2 and 3 and Years 4, 5 and 6.

In the Wave 1 interview, a teacher at this school suggested that teaching and learning at their school was quite weak prior to the pandemic. As a consequence, the teacher felt that students had not been missing out on as much high-quality learning as peers in other schools during school closures. Another teacher said that SEND pupils and those with low prior attainment had experienced greater learning loss than their classmates. However, they were also expected to recover their learning more quickly, due to the greater degree of support and interventions they were receiving.

This prediction was not realised in Wave 2. The same teacher as referenced above reported that disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment had caught up much more slowly than their peers. This manifested in their weaker knowledge of key concepts at KS1 (for example, fractions) and their performance in formative assessments. This was more noticeable for pupils at KS2 compared to KS1.



“The most able Year 6, you wouldn’t realise - they’re no different. However, the less able have missed consolidation.” Primary teacher, Norfolk, Wave 2

## 4.3 Attainment and progress in secondary schools

### General improvement in academic recovery

Schools reported overall improvements in recovery and progress over the spring term of 2022. Leaders often cited evidence that tutoring and targeted interventions were having positive impacts and closing some of the learning gaps. As was the case in primary schools, these improvements were relative over time, coming from ‘a very low autumn base’ when pupils were much further behind.

Leaders indicated that improvements from autumn to spring were mostly due to:

- better attendance rates
- improvements in pupils’ mental health as a prerequisite to academic progress
- pupils’ better preparedness, organisational skills and attitudes to learning
- precise and effective targeting of interventions and recovery support

While most leaders described progress as generally ‘back on track’ with spring attainment levels ‘mostly on par’ with expectations, many identified specific pupil groups, year groups and subjects where the recovery trajectories still raised concerns.

### Pupil groups of concern

Across the secondary schools interviewed, leaders expressed major concerns about disadvantaged and disengaged pupils, as well as pupils with SEND and Pupil Premium. Leaders reported increasing numbers in these often-intersecting categories, further exacerbating the existing attainment disparities. Despite overall progress in recent recovery, the gap between PP/FSM pupils and their peers was still larger than before the pandemic. One leader commented that it was difficult disentangling recovery progress from the school’s ‘significant ongoing journey improvement’.

Leaders reported that eligible children who did not attend school during periods of restrictions in attendance also missed crucial online learning, due to limited support at home and less access to electronic devices and conducive study environments. Although schools sought to address the learning losses of these pupils through recovery interventions, in some cases leaders reported challenges in engaging these pupils in tutoring interventions - particularly where the tutors were unfamiliar to the pupils (see Section 7 Recovery strategies).

Secondary leaders also commented that the pupils' lower than expected levels of socio-emotional and behavioural maturity were barriers to learning, further delaying and complicating their overall recovery. Absence and mental health needs were reported to exacerbate these challenges (see Section 6 on Pupil mental health and wellbeing).

Given the interconnecting factors influencing the recovery of these groups, leaders emphasised that academic attainment could not be tackled in isolation. Rather, addressing pupil wellbeing was the first step to overcoming COVID-related barriers to learning (see Section 7 on Recovery strategies).

While Pupil Premium could be treated as a rough proxy for disproportionate disadvantage in the pandemic, there are notable exceptions. Leaders in the 2021 interviews indicated that vulnerable pupils who attended school during restrictions on school attendance benefited from the small-group support, while some autistic or socially anxious pupils preferred working independently at home and had made good or better progress than expected. Leaders in 2022 commented that the full reopening of schools was challenging for some of these pupils and they struggled to adjust to this change.

Another exception is a trend reported by leaders in spring 2022 that Key Stage 3 pupils with working parents (not usually considered disadvantaged) were still lagging behind more than expected. This was explained in terms of the limited support the children had during home learning – a shortfall which has continued to compromise their independent learning skills and recovery.

In the summer term, the rising cost of living was emerging as a serious concern according to leaders who observed that families were facing economic hardships which were negatively impacting pupils' educational progress. These challenges were affecting a wider range of families, not just those who were deemed disadvantaged. For example, one leader reported that a pupil's persistent absence was due to parents being unable to afford petrol to drive their child to school.

### **Concerns about specific year groups**

Years 7 and 8 presented the greatest concerns for school leaders in terms of academic progress and recovery. Pupils in Year 8 in 2022 had experienced substantial disruption in Year 6, including preparing for and sitting SATs and taking part in transition activities that prepare pupils for secondary school. Moreover, the absence of SATs and other assessment data that usually inform transition increased the challenges faced by secondary schools in establishing the pupils' learning and socio-emotional needs. The pupils' disrupted experience of Year 7 also meant they missed out on critical foundations of learning and behavioural expectations at secondary school.

Consistent with the 2021 interview findings, in 2022 leaders said that lagging maturity in Year 8 continued to be an issue in attitudes to and preparedness for learning. The

descriptions ‘*miles behind*’ or ‘*one grade below in progress overall*’ are illustrative. Often these challenges related to other aspects of the pupils’ development:

Year 8 and Year 7 – mentally, socially, emotionally, they’re still in primary. We are managing their behaviour more than their studying at the moment. (Secondary 11)

Years 9 to 11 had more varied patterns of progress and recovery according to school leaders. Some suggested that these older cohorts had adapted better to independent working online at home. Other leaders were concerned about ‘*huge knowledge gaps*’ persisting into the spring term, despite interventions. These gaps stemmed from deficits in foundational learning during periods of remote teaching and were taking longer to plug than anticipated. Again, this pattern tended to affect disadvantaged pupils disproportionately, and in some cases leaders linked it to pupils’ increased absenteeism, anxiety, pessimism and ‘*fatalistic attitudes*’ towards their school outcomes and futures.

Years 11 and 13, the critical exam cohorts, were a key focus for tracking and recovery. Leaders voiced concerns about exam preparedness given the limited build-up time, the coverage of curriculum content due to COVID-19 disruptions, and the late arrival of official guidance on exam specifications. Lower maturity levels of some Year 11s were also said to be hindering preparedness. Some leaders reported that pupils were still 20% adrift from targets in the spring term, with half of Pupil Premium pupils half a grade, on average, below expectation, and a wider disadvantage gap than ever before. In one school, Year 12 was exhibiting fundamental gaps in required skills at A level across all subjects.

Nevertheless, other leaders felt pupils had caught up by the spring term, thanks to considerable efforts and consistent interventions:

Year 11s and 13s, we found that after we came back in September, people were below where they should be. They started to rapidly increase their progress between September and Christmas. However, what we found is we’re putting a lot more in with the tutoring programme and extra interventions, just to be at the same point [as we would expect to have been before the pandemic]. (Secondary 11)

### **Subject areas of concern**

Reading was a widespread concern among secondary school leaders interviewed, particularly for Years 7 and 8. In one school, 50% of the Year 8 cohort were below expected reading levels and their phonics and spelling were reported as two years behind. For disadvantaged pupils, reading interventions were seen as especially vital:

They read a lot in school. Some families don't have any books in the house, so obviously their reading has been affected. Reading is the foundation of all learning. (Secondary 6)

Schools reported that targeted reading interventions were leading to improvements, which by the spring term were closing the reading gap. Similarly, improvements in writing were reported. Gains in both domains were having benefits across the curriculum.

Maths in some schools was further behind literacy, but leaders reported rapid progress with the return to classroom teaching and in response to targeted interventions. In some schools, leaders identified greater lags in specific year groups (e.g. Year 8). One leader described maths as a 'big dip, some bounce back but we're still behind' (Secondary 2).

Leaders reported that progress in practical and/or creative subjects such as art, music, dance, drama, photography, engineering and science were also negatively impacted, but schools were less likely to have standardised comparative data to chart attainment and recovery trends in the same way. Pupils studying 'content heavy' GCSE subjects such as history were said to be struggling to keep pace. Modern foreign languages saw further downturns which were attributed to less listening and speaking practice during restrictions on school attendance. Some leaders reported their lowest ever uptake of GCSE languages.

#### **4.4 Assessment and tracking in all schools**

A few (mostly primary) schools had continued to track pupil progress using the same approaches they used pre-pandemic. Most leaders, however, reported more frequent and varied tracking to identify and address gaps in learning. Typically, staff used a range of formal and informal assessment and monitoring strategies set by the trust or at school or class level. Some assessments were built into intervention packages. Time points for assessments were sometimes adjusted to enable fuller curriculum coverage so that pupils were secure in their learning before assessments. In a few schools, assessments were brought forward to the start of each term to identify gaps earlier.

As in the 2021 interviews, leaders in 2022 spoke about a focus on informal assessment and monitoring methods in spring term 2022. These methods included quizzes, recapping strategies, more frequent book-checks, and close observation of children in class. In primary schools, TAs were deployed to identify additional learning needs in a wide range of pupils, not just those with SEND. With leaders and teaching staff mindful of pupils' wellbeing needs, the emphasis was on robust, routine monitoring rather than additional, stressful testing to track progress.

Where formal assessments were used, leaders said that these were typically confined to core subjects, particularly in primary schools. Some leaders mentioned their continued

use of National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and White Rose Maths testing, for example, which provided reliable data over time to gauge the ongoing impact of disruptions and address key areas of learning need.

Leaders reported that the temporary suspension of national standardised testing in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years presented challenges for tracking and benchmarking progress. In primary schools, the current Years 5 and 6 are the only cohorts where progress can be tracked against Key Stage 1 data. Similarly, without Key Stage 2 national assessment data, Year 7 teachers found it harder to establish starting points for Key Stage 3 English and maths teaching and recovery, adding to their assessment and planning workloads.

The increased reliance on teacher assessments necessitated more rigorous tracking and moderation of these assessments to ensure that the data are robust, for example, externally marked mock exams. Some leaders reported that their schools have established new pupil progress meetings to support more consistent and effective progress monitoring and use of interventions.

## 5. Pupil and staff absences in the spring 2022 term

This chapter presents qualitative findings on pupil attendance and absence in primary and secondary schools in spring term 2022 and the impacts on teaching and learning.

### Key findings

- Some school leaders reported that pupil absences were at their highest in the spring term. There were concerns that persistent absences were disproportionately affecting vulnerable pupil groups
- Leaders observed that spikes in staff absence did not always coincide with peak pupil absences and led to ongoing periods of disruption to teaching and learning.
- In summer 2022, leaders reported that attendance rates for pupils and staff were 'returning to normal' although persistent pupil absenteeism and staff illness (some due to long Covid and other long-term sickness) were still prevalent.

### 5.1 Patterns of attendance and absence across all schools

Leaders commonly stated that the spring term was the most challenging term of the two years of the pandemic, with pupil and staff absences in the spring term being highly variable from week to week and between classes. Some schools reported dramatic falls in attendance, such as:

We were absolutely decimated. Some classes were down to 50% during the half-term. (...) Staff-wise, we were just about managing. At one point I think I had about 11/27 staff off. (Primary 3)

Leaders commented that as COVID-19 infection rates rose, parents tended to keep children home if they had very low thresholds of cold-like symptoms. Leaders said that schools tended to be even more mindful of the risks to clinically vulnerable staff when restrictions eased and so were also more likely to send pupils home if there was any suspicion of illness. As well as high levels of COVID-19 infections, some primary schools also reported outbreaks of other transmissible illnesses including chicken pox and scarlet fever.

Some schools reported that compared to pre-pandemic times, pupils were more likely to miss school for medical appointments in school hours (e.g. dentists' appointments which were hard to schedule out of school hours).

Unauthorised absences for rescheduled holidays or family visits abroad in term time were widely reported to have added to pupil absence rates in spring 2022 and contributed to the patterns of persistent absence.

[Families have] had holidays delayed from last summer and the summer before. So that's caused some of our persistent absences as well – delayed holidays and illness. When you look at all the reasons [being] recorded, it isn't people just being off with two days here and two days there [it can be several weeks including illness and other non-attendance]. (Primary 8)

As well as temporary absences due to illness, primary and secondary school leaders commented that the pandemic had changed pupils' habits and attitudes to regular attendance. One leader reported that the figure for persistent absence reached '*really scary levels*' of 35% having previously been 8%-9%. Commonly, the persistent absentees were a core of students struggling to attend due to their additional unmet needs. Poor mental health, such as anxiety, was said to be a significant factor contributing to absence. Absenteeism was also more pronounced amongst disadvantaged pupils dealing with multiple challenges.

It's almost become normalised to not come to school... the resilience of parents and children in attending school has got a lot worse... We've never had more than maybe one or two children with persistent absence, but now we've 30 [out of 110] children. (Primary 7)

Schools reported working hard with families to address absenteeism through pastoral support and strategies including offering alternative provision off-site or out of hours (see Section 7 on Recovery strategies). These efforts were slowly proving successful for some individuals.

Schools reported that although attendance levels were returning to normal after COVID-19 spikes, there remained a number of pupils who had not come back at all or whose attendance was not regular. In one school of around 1000 pupils, approximately 29 had never returned since schools had fully reopened. Leaders cited various reasons including financial strain:

Pupils are coming back in dribs and drabs. Currently includes six non-attenders from Year 8, three from Year 9, eleven from Year 10, and three from Year 11. The increasing cost of living crisis is not helping, for some parents it's petrol costs - parents will work on the fact that it costs them more money to send them to school than it does to keep them off. (Secondary 7)

## Case Study: Attendance

This case study is drawn from the research conducted by CfEY.

### **Case Study: A Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Birmingham, with an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement', and nearly 70% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals.**

The local authority commissions places at the school for over 300 pupils, including those who: have been temporarily or permanently excluded from mainstream education; are on EHCPs with behavioural or social difficulties; are on reman or are looked-after children with no school place.

During Wave 1, a senior leader at this PRU reported that “the biggest barrier [they] had faced during Covid is attendance”. Pupils’ low attendance had many causes – primarily a feeling of “disengagement with education”, anxiety among pupils with prior mental health needs, and the distance to travel between pupils’ homes and the PRU.

By Wave 2, the same senior leader reported that attendance had improved beyond the setting’s expectations. The leader had been worried that pupils would “vote with their feet and not attend exams” due to the learning loss pupils had experienced over the pandemic. However, the PRU had experienced “surprisingly high turnout” for GCSE examinations. Nevertheless, attendance was reported by the school leader as “lower than where it would be normally”. Much of this was due to pupils’ difficulties in accessing and paying for reliable public transport.

“Around 75% of our pupils travel more than three miles to get to school. That means we’re reliant on taxis, buses, public transport to get them in. We’re trying to get help with money for taxis at the moment. This meant that over Covid it was even harder than usual to get young people, especially at secondary age, into school” PRU School leader, Birmingham, Wave 2

## 5.2 Work at home and on return to school

With illness reported as the main cause of pupil absence in the spring term 2022, most pupils were not well enough for online learning and were not expected to work during these periods of absence. This contrasts with earlier stages of the pandemic when pupils were sent home during bubble closures or periods of isolation and were encouraged to engage in lesson material at home.



Leaders reported that strategies in place in the spring term for pupils returning to school after absence included TA or teacher check-ins to identify catch-up work, additional interventions, and book checks. Secondary leaders said that pupils returning after absence were directed to online lessons and resources to help them catch up independently. A few secondary schools operated a 'buddy' system where pupils would use a fellow pupil to keep them up to date if they had been off for just a couple of days.

When multiple staff and pupils were absent, the catch-up process was often more complicated due to resource limitations. Personalised approaches became unfeasible so more small-group intervention sessions were organised to address the learning gaps caused by sickness absence (see Section 7 on Recovery strategies). One leader described this as *'just an ongoing cat-and-mouse game really'* (Primary 3).

### 5.3 Staff absence, cover and closures

Although patterns of staff absence varied across the autumn and spring terms and between schools, depending on local infection outbreaks, most schools reported spring term to be the worst overall.

On [the] worst day we had 24 staff off. That week, which was about three weeks before the Easter holidays, we had more staff absence in one week than we normally have in a year. (Secondary 5)

To compound the problem, spikes in pupil infections and absence did not always correspond with staff absence, which prolonged the periods of disrupted learning for pupils. Moreover, *'on-going, relentless re-infections'* extended the challenge of catch-up. Staff absences due to COVID-19 hit in successive waves and sometimes impacted whole departments in turn, for example: *'maths teachers were hit in the autumn, science teachers in spring and currently it's English teachers off'* (Secondary 8).

Several schools also reported having staff who were off long-term (or on phased returns) due to long Covid or other illnesses, or maternity leave.

Schools reported difficulties sourcing reliable supply cover, as other local schools were often in the same position, with demand for substitute teachers outstripping supply. Leaders were disappointed in the quality of some agency cover staff and tutors available. Adequate subject-specific cover in secondary schools was especially challenging when several members of departments were ill at the same time.

School leaders said they struggled with these staffing challenges and tackled them by combining classes, covering lessons themselves, and having teachers deliver or record lessons from home. One secondary hired recent former Year 13s to *'look after some lessons aligned to their A levels'* (Secondary 5). In smaller schools, leaders also stepped

in to help with other duties such as cleaning the school and serving lunches when non-teaching staff were off ill. Several leaders commented that much of their strategic leadership work was put on hold while they provided teaching cover.

When staffing resources were stretched too far, classes or year groups were sent home, or the whole school would be closed as a 'last resort'. Staff absence seemed to have a greater impact on smaller schools. For example, one primary leader reported that they were forced to close the school when 11 of the 27 staff were off. Some schools introduced a rolling programme of having one year group out at a time. Other leaders implemented closures for parts of the day:

Mostly it was partial closures where we would be saying for the last period of the day or for the afternoon or for the first period of the next morning where we just genuinely didn't have enough adults to cover.  
(Secondary 1)

The extraordinary financial costs of providing teaching cover raised serious concerns for leaders about school budgets. While some schools had insurance for staff illness, leaders explained that this did not cover short-term absences due to the need to isolate. In one case where a teacher fell ill with COVID-19 a second time, the insurers deemed it a pre-existing condition. The financial burden of cover was reported to have implications for cutting staffing budgets going forwards, even though more staff will be needed to provide ongoing small-group recovery interventions.

## **5.4 Impact on teaching and learning**

Staff absences placed significant strain on other school staff as well as pupils. Protracted instability, disruption to normal routines, unsettled pupils, and difficulty maintaining standards and consistent expectations were all identified as impacting pupils' independence and social interactions, highlighting that the implications are wider than just gaps in content knowledge alone.

Across schools, the impact on pupils was said to be greatest when their class teacher or subject teacher was on long-term sick leave. Often this entailed inconsistent cover with teaching of variable quality, which severely disrupted teaching and learning. The sequence of learning over extended periods was also affected because having different substitute staff meant that continuity and reinforcement of learning from previous lessons was limited. Leaders reported knock-on impacts for pupil behaviour, engagement and motivation, as well as academic progress. These challenges disproportionately affected those from more disadvantaged backgrounds who were already behind.

Recovery supports to plug learning gaps were often delayed when many staff were absent, especially where the TAs providing the support were pulled away from

interventions to provide cover elsewhere, including for teachers who were off ill. Lesson delivery and feedback was often not as robust as usual:

The impact was seen in their writing – children’s books had many gaps [where they were off]. Teachers were off ill, so marking wasn’t as precise as it would have been. So obviously it really is becoming more and more obvious now that the writing is really the area which has been affected the most. (Primary 5)

## **5.5 Summer term 2022**

In May to June 2022 when the interviews were conducted, schools were experiencing *‘returning to normal’* differently. Most leaders reported that COVID-19 cases were slowly falling and fewer staff had been isolating during the summer term, but most schools were contending with higher levels of staff absence due to long Covid or mental health concerns. Leaders reported that filling permanent and temporary vacancies was also taking much longer.

In most schools, pupil attendance was generally improving. However, there were pockets of continuing concern around unauthorised pupil absence for family holidays and also further outbreaks of other illnesses (e.g. chicken pox). There were continuing ‘stubborn’ patterns of absenteeism among Pupil Premium children, pupils with SEND and pupils with mental health needs.

The resumption of normal routines in the summer term was welcome but changes in government rules to relax restrictions and reduce access to free testing were contentious for some staff. Higher numbers of ill or asymptomatic pupils in school brought risks for vulnerable staff and made it harder to control further potential outbreaks that staff worried would cause more disruption to the summer exam period.

## 6. Pupil mental health and wellbeing and pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEND)

In this section we present qualitative findings from the senior leader interviews on pupil mental health and wellbeing and pupils with SEND and how this interacted with recovery strategies.

### Key findings

- In the interviews, secondary schools generally reported more pupil mental health/wellbeing issues than primary schools, in terms of range, incidence, frequency and severity.
- Primary school leaders commonly referred to immaturity factors in their cases of adverse pupil mental health and wellbeing.
- Leaders in schools with higher proportions of FSM and SEND reported more mental health and wellbeing-related issues in pupils.
- According to leaders, the impacts of the pandemic are blurred with the effects of the worsening cost-of-living crisis as contributory factors in pupils' mental health problems. Substantial increases in safeguarding concerns, including social services referrals, were felt to be connected.
- Persistent pupil absenteeism was reported to be difficult to overcome in some settings.
- Leaders reported that rates of SEND were rising, especially in primary, and that schools were struggling to meet all the additional needs.
- Pupils' social and emotional related difficulties were the most frequently cited needs, but leaders also referred to anxiety, autism, ADHD and learning difficulties. Many of these pupils were awaiting assessment.

### 6.1 Range and extent of issues raised

Primary school leaders described a mixed picture of mental health and wellbeing-related issues in the spring term 2022. Many of the primary schools reported marked improvements since the autumn, with incidence largely 'levelling out'. Whilst these schools still had wellbeing-related concerns, the leaders interviewed did not perceive the pandemic to be a significant factor. By contrast, other primary school leaders were still grappling with the pandemic's legacy for adverse mental health and wellbeing in pupils.

Secondary school leaders across the board said that the magnitude and range of pupil mental health and wellbeing issues remained well above pre-pandemic levels. In the

words of one leader, the pupils had ‘suffered massively’ and the impacts were lingering. Leaders also reported instances of pupils being exposed to domestic abuse.

A common thread through many leaders’ accounts was the difficulty in distinguishing between the impacts of the pandemic and the effects of the cost-of-living crisis that were putting families under strain.

School leaders’ interviews suggest a possible link between the breadth and severity of pupil wellbeing/mental health issues and the school’s proportions of FSM pupils and pupils with SEND. Several leaders highlighted that the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils widened during the academic year up to spring 2022 in terms of wellbeing as well as academic progress.

Across the interview data, the following themes in pupil mental health and wellbeing emerged.

### **Reduced pupil resilience and mental stamina**

Erosion of pupils’ resilience and mental stamina was the wellbeing impact most often cited by the school leaders. Some also voiced concerns about pupils’ ‘lethargy’ in and out of class, linked to deterioration in physical fitness and stamina. Impaired resilience manifested as pupils’ reduced ability to sustain concentration, struggles to ‘bounce back’ after mistakes, and ‘giving up’ more readily than before the pandemic. Some leaders reported that schools had to help pupils unlearn certain strategies introduced by parents which were not conducive to a growth mindset and constructive self-appraisal skills.

Their resilience is really the thing. To make a mistake and bounce back from it, that takes us a lot of work on that because I think when their parents were [next to them] they were saying no that’s not right, do it again. And so actually you made a mistake, it’s not a problem, and going back to that – so what have we learnt from that, and not wanting to rub out mistakes. Children were a lot more self-critical [in their] feedback, so that’s something we’ve had to take away. (Primary 9)

Pupils also demonstrated a regression in independent learning habits. In the case of pupils in the early phase of their schooling, there had been less opportunity to embed independent learning habits.

It’s the youngest children that are the ones who seem to be the ones who initially found it difficult just to settle into school and into that pattern of learning and being able to sustain their effort. (Primary 4)

## **Anxiety, reduced confidence, and issues with emotional regulation**

Pupils' anxiety, confidence levels and emotional regulation caused concerns. School leaders observed that many younger pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 had ongoing dependency on their parents ('a huge surge in attachment issues') and struggled to function outside the family setting. This tendency was more pronounced in pupils who were bereaved or whose family members had ill-health (in some cases COVID-19 related).

Children don't want to get out of bed, they don't want to leave their parents. Obviously bereavement. Children have lost people very close to them. Some of our kids have lost both their grandparents to Covid and they're terrified that this is going to happen. (Secondary 6)

Secondary school leaders reported that pupils had become far more anxious about the prospect of exams, in part linked to uncertainties about exam format and expectations and also reflecting pupils' worries about the breadth of their curriculum knowledge and lack of in-person exam experience.

They [students] don't feel equipped or adequately resourced [or that they] have enough knowledge to cope with the exams, even though many of them have. (Secondary 7)

Leaders also reported pupil anxiety due to greater awareness of wider societal issues, stemming from greater engagement with news and social media during the pandemic. School leaders observed that these pupil anxieties fuelled low mood, negative views of the world and/or a sense of being 'overwhelmed'.

We've noticed since Covid that children have a greater awareness of world events. The Ukraine/Russia situation really troubles them, and they know far more about it than they've ever known about other world situations. So it seems to be that people used to settle down with their families and watch the Covid report every day, and that news report – and not have recognition really that our children are too young for this. So we had a child who'd come up with an escape plan in case Russia bombed our school. (Primary 9)

Many pupils have a profound underlying concern about the future world they're going to inhabit. (Secondary 5)

## **Case study: Pupil Mental Health and Wellbeing**

This case study is drawn from the research conducted by CfEY.

**Case study: A secondary school in Yorkshire, with an Ofsted rating of 'Good', and 17.8% of pupils on FSM.**

In the Wave 1 interviews, a teacher from the school reported that “the effect of the pandemic on pupils’ mental health cannot be overstated.” This manifested as many more pupils in the school presenting with the symptoms of mental health conditions and approaching teachers for support with this. The responding teacher stated that workload and stress were leading to a “scary amount more” anxiety among their pupils.

During Wave 2, a school leader reported that they had employed two counsellors, resulting in them having three full-time counsellors to support with dealing with pupil mental health needs. Thirty-two members of school staff completed mental first aid training, positioning them to better spot early signs of mental health conditions among pupils and know what support to direct them to. Neither school leader nor teacher respondents had data on whether mental health conditions in the school had decreased but believed that this become less of a challenge for their setting due to these interventions.

“Our mental health first aiders, and we’ve got 32 of them now, are vital as a first line of defence.” - School Leader, Yorkshire, Wave 2

### **Diminished engagement in school and persistent absenteeism**

School leaders reported that some pupils were still struggling to readjust to regular school life and persistent absenteeism was a major concern in nearly all schools interviewed (see Section 5 above) and was linked to mental health/wellbeing issues in many cases. A few leaders expressed frustration at having exhausted strategies to re-engage pupils in returning to school.

Parents are telling us, “we’re trying our hardest to get these kids to move but they won’t come out of their bedroom and they’re just sitting in the house all day...” they’ve had so much time at home that I think that had a massive impact on what they can and can’t do... We’ve offered every single one of those [a range of measures to support return], and as I say we’re finding that it’s very, very hard to get them back to school.  
(Secondary 7)

A related and growing reported trend was that students were physically coming to the school premises but not attending lessons and not turning up to exams in some cases.

Truancy, but quite blatant. Walking around, [instead of going to] the lesson... We’ve had kids not show up for exams. That’s never ever

happened. I've been teaching 20 years – that has never happened.  
(Secondary 6)

### **Immaturity and behaviour**

Pupil immaturity was highlighted as an issue by many leaders but was noted to be particularly striking at transition points to Key Stages 1 and 3.

The children are not as mature as you would expect them to be at any point. (Primary 7)

Mindset and behaviour in KS3 - still very primary in the way that they behave in the playground. Taking each other's ties, moving a seat when someone is about to sit down, that kind of thing. Babyish behaviour.  
(Secondary 6)

Leaders often attributed pupils' immaturity to disrupted transition activities, with impacts on pupils' social skills and readiness for new expectations in learning and behaviour. These problems were most noticeable in Reception and Year 1, with leaders pointing to the interruptions in early years education.

Noticed a change in terms of behaviour and attitude in Reception. They've been really hard to settle... my feeling is it's the amount of nursery they missed. (Primary 8)

Low-level, disruptive behaviour was commonly cited by school leaders who spoke about pupils pushing boundaries and flouting rules (for example, shouting out in lessons).

The current Year 7, whilst they had a transition, they had both Year 5 and Year 6 affected, so the basics I don't think have been as embedded, both in terms of what is acceptable in terms of behaviour.  
(Secondary 10)

In some schools there were upsurges in more severe behaviour incidents, including swearing and assaults on staff, use of racist or homophobic language, damage to property (such as throwing chairs in class), physical violence between students on and off-site, and misuse of social media, including online bullying. Several leaders were aware that such behaviours were often the result of unmet emotional needs. One secondary leader attributed 'oppositional defiance' against teachers to pupils being unaccustomed to boundaries during lockdown. Others lamented the lack of capacity at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and for high-needs assessments, which put schools and pupils under additional pressure.



The problem is when you're trying to refer children for more specialist support like CAMHS for example. I know that they have a huge waiting list – they had a huge waiting list prior to Covid – you were sort of looking at two to three years for children. I think that's increased now.  
(Primary 10)

Greater numbers of fixed-term and permanent exclusions were reported by a small number of school leaders, owing to the severity of pupil behaviour and the risk posed to other pupils. One average-sized secondary school had already permanently excluded nine students in the academic year up to the spring term. This number was three times higher than typical before the pandemic. Further examples are noted below:

Autumn and spring term were really challenging, behaviourally, and we had a spike in the use of fixed-term suspensions in terms of our own internal sanctions. There was a real spike. (Secondary 1)

We've got five students who are at serious risk or could be at serious risk of permanent exclusion because of the repeated defiance.  
(Secondary 3)

### **Self-harm and eating disorders**

In some secondary schools, the incidence of self-harm was described as alarming. One school had registered 27 incidents – significantly higher than in pre-pandemic years.

The anxiety and self-harming is through the roof... Kids I would never have thought it from as well. Real surprises. You've no idea. Not a day goes by that we don't take sharp objects off these children.  
(Secondary 4)

Anorexia and body image concerns in pupils were also reported to be on the increase. Some leaders attributed the rise in part to pupils' increased use of social media over lockdowns, and greater incidence of online bullying.

They've spent hours on videos on TikToks watching people doing all these videos, and then judging themselves against body standards. I'm fat, I'm fat. We've got two being diagnosed with anorexia at the minute, and they're 10. (Primary 5)

### **Domestic pressures and safeguarding concerns**

Interviews with school leaders suggested escalations in pupil safeguarding concerns during and since the pandemic. As noted above, the impacts of restrictions on school

attendance and social distancing requirements were seen to be coalescing with the strains of the cost-of-living crisis, leading to more cases of domestic abuse, neglect, and safeguarding issues. Schools also noted an exponential rise in referrals to social services.

Our safeguarding before the pandemic, we had six referrals for social services on children. In the same period after the pandemic, we had 37. (Secondary 7)

We've had a number of parents who've been sectioned under mental health (...) I think when we went into lockdown we had two children with a Children in Need (CIN)... who were brother and sister. When we came out, Christmas last year, I was up to 14... mostly linked to neglect. That's because they'd come back to school and we'd started going, they're not clean, they haven't had a bath, their clothes aren't washed, they haven't got a packed lunch. They'd not had any eyes on them, and they'd slipped. (Primary 5)

Cross-cutting the themes set out above were concerns expressed by some leaders about imprecise or inappropriate 'labelling' of mental health and wellbeing issues which sometimes overlapped with emotional and behavioural challenges for some high-needs pupils. They urged caution in these matters, without wishing to underestimate the incidence or gravity of poor mental health in their pupil population. Some reflected on the complexity involved in judging what to treat as a referable mental health concern as opposed to the widespread impacts of the pandemic on pupils' resilience and increased self-reporting.

We're trying to make them much more aware in lessons and we're trying to give them the message that it's fine to have mental health – everybody has it and everybody needs to manage it – but it's fine to feel depressed and anxious because that's what life is about unfortunately, sometimes. (Secondary 7)

It's almost in danger of becoming fashionable to have a mental health issue at the moment. I caution against that sort of over-labelling and thinking that every single kid that's a bit upset on a particular day needs to be referred to counselling. (Secondary 2)

### **Impact of wellbeing needs and disruptive behaviour on teaching and learning**

According to school leaders, pupils' mental health and wellbeing needs had impacts on teaching and learning in different ways and degrees. Leaders commonly cited the harmful effects of poor behaviour (low-level disruption and more serious incidents) on

teachers' capacity to deliver high-quality lessons. It also impacted on staff resource for working with pupils undergoing sanctions.

Schools reported that teaching staff had adapted their pedagogies in response to pupils' changing needs as shaped by their experiences of the pandemic. A particular challenge for teachers was the greater differentiation of content and methods to meet a more diverse range of pupil needs including behavioural and wellbeing factors.

Schools are back, but actually it's not back to normal. The spring term was one of the hardest terms I think I've ever done in my whole career due to the fact that the pupils are exhibiting such diverse and complex needs since lockdown. So, what worked before isn't working now. This is what we're saying about the adaptation of the pedagogy in the classroom (...) you might have your children who are more subdued and introvert due to lockdown but then you'll have your ones who are exhibiting signs of almost mania sometimes because they're struggling to cope in a rigid school day. (Secondary 9)

School leaders also referred to the impacts on pupil wellbeing of reduced enrichment provision in the 2021/22 compared to pre-pandemic. Enrichment-related recovery strategies are outlined in Section 7.

## **6.2 SEND and pupils with additional needs**

Rising rates of SEND presentation were widely reported by school leaders, particularly in primary settings. Numbers of pupils either formally diagnosed with SEND or suspected of having needs and awaiting formal assessment were regarded as unprecedented. Social and emotional difficulties were the most frequently cited categories but leaders also referred to anxiety, autism, ADHD and learning difficulties. The transition points of nursery to primary, and primary to secondary, were highlighted as periods of heightened challenge. Many primary leaders made links between nursery closures during lockdowns and lack of school readiness for many children, especially those with greater needs.

[In] EYFS we have had the highest number of high-needs children we have ever had. Six children who we would deem to need specialist education, special provision. Nappies. Non-verbal. So, massive, huge issues coming into EYFS and going forward. (Primary 2)

The pandemic was said to have had adverse effects on students with an existing SEND or identified additional needs, including K-coded pupils, with certain leaders reporting that the SEND/non-SEND learning gap had become even greater.

However, as reported in Section 4, the partial school closures during lockdown brought indirect benefits to some high-needs pupils.

Our two children with complex needs made more progress than I could ever have imagined. And I think that's because of Covid, because they had smaller groups in school, their one-to-ones – we were able to focus with them. School was a lot quieter. (Primary 1)

### **Management of increase in SEND**

Leaders referred to various ways that schools responded to the increased number and range of pupils with high needs, including employing more TAs, delivering nurture-based provision, and revising whole-school strategies for SEND. However, some leaders were troubled by the knowledge that despite their best efforts the school could not fully cater for all needs of pupils with SEND.

Hand on heart, we do not meet our children's special educational needs. We do our best and we do a good job here. (Primary 4)

Several reasons were cited for the limitations in schools' SEND provision. Taken together these factors give a picture of schools working vigorously and creatively to support pupils with SEND but ultimately thwarted by lack of external resources and school staff.

First, as discussed above, limited access to mental health support services and educational psychologists meant long delays getting pupils assessed. In the interim periods, pupils' K-coded status did not permit access to the funding needed urgently by schools to support often profound levels of need.

Massive issues with access to Ed Psych which has put a massive delay to the EHCP process, to the EHCP reviews. (Primary 6)

Second, pupil referral units (PRUs) and other specialist education centres had limited capacity. Some leaders called for expanded specialist provision and raised concerns about the inadequacy of their own schools' resources for pupils with severe social, emotional and mental health needs.

All you're doing is containing [keeping them in mainstream settings without appropriate resources]. (Primary 3)

Third, leaders had concerns about the workload pressures on Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) given the increasing paperwork required to manage rising numbers of pupils with high needs and related referrals and external liaison. Some

leaders commented that it was unrealistic to expect SENCOs to be trained in specialist support for all types of incoming needs.

Finally, shortfalls in school budgets were cited as a major factor. Some leaders referred to needing to be 'creative' to fund support for pupils with additional needs. Two leaders were very worried about the impact of rising numbers of EHCPs on over-stretched school budgets, given that schools must find the first £6,000 of each EHCP.

I don't have enough teaching assistants to meet all my needs. And just generally trying to keep earning money, promoting our breakfast, after-school clubs, promoting our nursery, and just trying to get extra funding into school in any way we can. My SENCO is going out and working with the local authority to try and earn a bit of extra money, because we've got to pay for the education, health and care plans.  
(Primary 8)

### 6.3 Staff health and wellbeing

School leaders also expressed major concerns that the challenges of meeting pupils' needs during the pandemic had affected staff health and wellbeing. Taking a wide lens, several leaders commented that staff had sustained high levels of goodwill, professionalism and endurance during an unprecedentedly stressful period, for the sake of children's education. However, the cumulative effects of the pandemic had put great strain on many staff's mental health and wellbeing and extended to family life and work/life balance.

Leaders also mentioned specific stressors related to changing policy. In the spring term, there were anxieties about COVID-19 transmission to medically vulnerable staff and reconciling the risk with guidance removing isolation requirements and ceasing provision of free lateral flow tests. Also contributing to the pressures on staff were the frequent changes (often at short notice) in government directives to schools on matters including school closures and openings, exams and accountability.

My [pupil level] priority... can only happen if my staff are happy and healthy. And I don't know how to do that with the pressure that's coming from the government. (Primary 9)

According to school leaders, staff felt that the government did not fully recognise or understand the contribution of school staff to the nation's response to COVID-19. This had negative effects on morale, with leaders reporting that some staff were experiencing burn-out. Some were contemplating leaving the profession altogether, which presented challenges for ongoing recovery plans.

## 7. Recovery strategies

In this section we present findings from the senior leader interviews on the wellbeing and academic recovery strategies which were being used in schools.

### Key findings

#### Wellbeing recovery strategies

- In the interviews, school leaders reported that pupil wellbeing was a major concern for schools. 'Returning to normal' required ongoing wellbeing support in order for academic recovery to be effective.
- Leaders described provision of a wider range of whole-school, whole-class, small group and individual wellbeing interventions to address the growing complexity of pupils' psychological needs, including pupils with SEND.
- Shortage of external provision and local specialist support was hampering schools' efforts to support recovery of pupils' mental health and wellbeing, according to leaders.
- Staff wellbeing was also a priority for leaders, as staff were supporting greater numbers of vulnerable pupils.

#### Academic recovery strategies

- In the interviews, leaders reported that schools used a combination of approaches to deliver recovery activities, often concurrently, working at individual, group, class and whole-school levels.
- Leaders commented that academic interventions were sensitive to pupils' wellbeing and delivered to avoid additional stress.
- The School Led Tutoring route of the National Tutoring Programme was generally reported as well received and effective for pupils because schools could source and deploy their own staff flexibly to best meet pupil needs.
- Additional regular intervention sessions for targeted pupils were valued, although some leaders had concerns about missed whole-class lessons. These interventions typically focused on core subjects and were delivered by teachers, TAs and tutors.
- Leaders reported that smaller class sizes, enabled by extra staffing, also supported effective catch-up. Other strategies which facilitated recovery were adjustments to lesson pace, curriculum changes, recovery software, and restructuring the school day.

Schools developed a variety of strategies to address the academic and wellbeing challenges pupils faced as a result of the pandemic. This section of the report outlines the range of interventions schools used to enable recovery. We present the wellbeing recovery approaches first, given that the emotional, social and pastoral needs of pupils were often highlighted by school leaders as the predominant barrier to effective teaching and learning, which had to be tackled first. However, schools planned their wellbeing and academic recovery in tandem and saw them as interconnected and equally important.

## 7.1 Wellbeing-focused interventions

Supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing was still a major concern for all schools at the time of the summer 2022 interviews with school leaders and remains central to their ongoing recovery strategies. Evidence from the interviews strongly suggested that many of the wellbeing interventions put in place by schools before and during the pandemic have continued to be developed and increased in response to the ongoing and often severe levels of pupil need (as outlined in Section 6).

In spring term 2022, leaders were still balancing the need to return to 'normal' educational trajectories and the need to alleviate the effects of long-term disruptions to every aspect of young people's lives. Central to most schools' approaches to recovery was prioritising emotional wellbeing before dealing with academic catch up:

For us it was all about the wellbeing first. That has to come first. A lot of the reintroduction and the coming back into school was actually not about learning first, it was about how are you, let's get you back on track. (Secondary 3)

### School and class-level approaches

Schools adopted whole-school and whole-class approaches to wellbeing through assemblies, increased form/tutor time, changes to curriculum, PSHE lessons, CPD for staff on trauma-informed practices, and mental health first-aid training, as well as more informal measures in their classrooms that underpinned the 'wellbeing first' ethos.

All of our adults have had professional learning in being emotionally available and how to support all young people. We also have a group of five trauma-informed practitioners that work across our schools. (Secondary 1)

[We kept] the curriculum broad [*including emphasis on sports and music etc*], to support socio-emotional development alongside the academic... creating more spaces to talk with children about any concerns they may have. (Primary 9)

In some schools, online tools were used to track pupil wellbeing, anxiety and metacognition. For example, Impact Ed<sup>10</sup> was used across all schools in one MAT.

### **Provision to increase capacity to meet pupils' individual needs**

In addition to the school and class-level provision, increasing numbers of pupils required more intensive one-to-one emotional, pastoral or mental health support. Most schools used a combination of approaches to meet these individual needs:

- Increased hours for existing staff and created new posts to expand pastoral and family support teams, safeguarding teams, and TA and mentor teams
- More school counsellors' hours/days were contracted, although pupil demand still exceeded availability
- More referrals to specialist mental health services (e.g. CAMHS or local organisations)
- Nurture provision was expanded, such as drop-ins or hubs in school where individual pupils could go for wellbeing support:

[We introduced] 'Listening Ear' – that's at lunchtimes and after school, knowing that sometimes children don't need a specific intervention but just need to talk, and just need to know they've got an adult they can talk to. (Secondary 1)

- Widened the range of specialist pastoral interventions on offer
- Made flexible, personalised provision for vulnerable pupils according to individual needs, for example to diminish anxiety about school attendance:

We've had to be really creative with the type of provision across the schools [in the MAT] – so we have some provision on-site and some provision in other settings that we've got available. Not being afraid that if a child is really struggling for example in the secondary phase, using [their familiar primary school in the MAT] as a way of getting them back into school – just being really open-minded. (Secondary 1)

- SEND provision and resources were expanded in schools to cater for pupils' specific additional needs:

A new dyslexia teaching team – seven accredited teachers that have been working across the schools... using Recovery

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<sup>10</sup> A digital platform for monitoring and evaluation, providing measures of impact on both academic and non-academic outcomes.



Premium to support the development of that team and address needs. (Secondary 2)

As outlined in Section 6, leaders reported that there was insufficient external provision and specialist support for mental health and SEND which compounded the pressures on schools. Many leaders also reported that there was no capacity in local specialist schools where the needs of the most complex pupils would be better met.

### **Role of supporting staff wellbeing**

Several school leaders talked about the importance of addressing staff members' wellbeing to enable them to effectively support pupils. These leaders had interventions in place to support their staff's emotional health with the aim of reducing staff absence and ultimately benefitting pupils too:

We have also developed the wellbeing and the emotional support that we have in place for staff post-Covid as well. I think that's really important because you genuinely can't be an emotionally available adult if you are recovering from trauma yourself. I think it's quite a leveller for everybody to recognise that whatever had happened before Covid, everybody has now experienced trauma. (Secondary 1)

## **7.2 Academic recovery approaches and interventions**

As outlined in Section 3 (Attainment, progress and assessment), schools' tracking and assessment of pupils revealed delayed and variable attainment and progress in the spring term 2022. The focus of most academic interventions continued to be learning gaps, principally in the core subjects of reading, writing and maths. Class and subject teachers identified pupils' embedded misconceptions, common difficulties and specific individual learning needs and made decisions on how best to respond, depending on the extent of the issue and the resources available (staff or materials).

Evidence suggests that schools used a combination of different approaches, often concurrently, to deliver their recovery activities targeted at individual, small group, whole-class and whole-school levels. As outlined above, teachers continued to be aware of the reduced resilience of pupils and tailored their academic recovery accordingly:

We don't want to overwhelm them. We know they haven't got that resilience, we know they're struggling with their learning, so we don't want to put pressure. So what we do is we note if they've missed a particular [unit] in maths, because it's a spinal curriculum. When we come back to that area, we know that that child is going to need specific

intervention with an adult before they'll be able to access the main teaching. (Primary 9)

### **Individual and small-group tutoring**

Based on what leaders reported in their interviews in 2021 and 2022, there was an increase in the use of one-to-one and small-group tutoring in spring 2022 as a recovery intervention strategy.

In the interviews in 2021, most leaders expressed difficulties and frustrations in using the earlier phases of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) introduced in November 2020, when tutors were mainly sourced externally. Leaders often described the quality and reliability of the tutors as poor, and pupils had difficulty working with tutors who were unfamiliar to them. The programme was reported to be highly bureaucratic to navigate, and inflexible in terms of meeting the specific needs of pupils. The DfE responded to feedback and changed the structure and mechanisms for funding tutoring for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils from September 2021.

Several primary and secondary schools mentioned using the NTP's School Led Tutoring route, a ring-fenced grant for schools to source their own tutoring provision to support recovery interventions for Years 1 to 11. Primary and secondary leaders who took this route were very positive about the scope it gave them to use existing teachers and TAs to deliver tutoring by increasing their hours. Also, where leaders did use the grant to source external tutors (e.g. from The Tutor Trust, Tutor First or via agencies), the experience seemed to be more positive. Leaders valued the flexibility of the revised scheme to augment their own budget, Pupil Premium funding and Recovery Premium for staffing interventions.

Existing staff and externally sourced tutors provided a variety of intensive and individualised academic support to pupils in either one-to-one or small group formats, in both primary and secondary phases. Usually the intervention was focused on core subjects. Under the school Led tutoring route, staff and hours were tailored to specific pupil needs, for example:

The intervention has been very prescriptive with knowing exactly what they're needing to be teaching and when and how. And that consistency, that regular 15, 20 minutes, every day – which is the way we have run our interventions, our school-led tutoring. We've done it so the children have a very significant block every day, four days a week. (Primary 2)

Y5 have had Tutor Trust in and focused on core subjects in order to prepare for SATs in Y6 which they styled as 'closing the gap'; while for

Y1 and 2 before or after-school extra clubs were employed for reading and phonics. (Primary 6)

While leaders acknowledged the value in using tutors to provide more bespoke learning support, some expressed concerns that it was not always possible to avoid removing pupils from lessons for tutoring interventions (an issue also raised in the 2021 interviews). Teachers were aware that missed class learning would require catch-up later. Some schools timetabled tutor/intervention sessions to avoid pupils missing the same lessons or subjects repeatedly or they made adjustments to the school day to minimise this problem.

We're very hesitant about taking pupils out of classrooms to do other things because of the impact that that then would have because if they've already missed a week or two weeks because of Covid, and then they're missing more time. (Secondary 9)

They were brought out of other lessons to do their additional maths or English, which wasn't too bad for the group that we used but longer term that wasn't something that we wanted to do. (Primary 10)

Others stressed the importance of quality-first teaching meaning high-quality, inclusive teaching for all pupils in a class, including differentiated learning, strategies to support high-needs pupils' learning in class, and ongoing formative assessment.

A second NTP route mentioned by a small number of primary and secondary leaders was Academic Mentors. Some confusion about the eligibility criteria had precluded their earlier engagement with this route:

When I researched it, we weren't eligible, and I spoke to several people about it and no we weren't eligible [but then the rules/contract changed and found out] from September [2021] we could have had 95% of a member of staff paid for... but it's only now that we've been told that. ... The member of staff that I'd employed to teach my Year 2 Maths, she fit all of their criteria, so now some of the work which she was doing unpaid, she's now able to claim hours for. Then from September hopefully we will be able to get 60% of her salary. (Primary 4)

**Online tutoring** was more common in secondary schools than primary schools and was mainly funded through NTP's Tuition Partners, the School Led Tutoring route or schools' other budgets. Some leaders valued online tutoring because it enabled better monitoring of progress and coverage, it was accessible to more students per tutor, and was less prone to disruption from COVID-19 isolations. In contrast, other leaders identified drawbacks in using online tutors:

Some of the problem with it is that although they have online tutors, because they're not their teachers, the dialogue isn't necessarily there between the online tutors and their teachers so they don't necessarily know what their gaps are other than what the students tell them or what they identify themselves. (Secondary 8)

**Home tutoring**, including provision at weekends, was a strategy used by one MAT's dedicated recovery service, funded through a range of sources. The school leader reported that the majority of pupils at their primary school received some form of tutoring over the period.

Overall, tutoring through the NTP and other funding appeared to be well received in the spring term and was widely reported to be making a positive difference to staffing and pupils. Tutoring provision enabled smaller class sizes which leaders perceived were having a significant impact on pupils' recovery (see Section 3 on Attainment, progress and assessment). One secondary school used funding to create a 'low literacy class' in Year 7, enabling intervention in a small, whole-class setting rather than taking children out of usual larger class.

### **Case study: Recovery strategies**

This case study is drawn from the research conducted by CfEY.

#### **Case Study: A secondary school in Merseyside, with an Ofsted rating of 'Good', and 25% of pupils on Free School Meals.**

In Wave 1, a senior leader from the school reported that they had been using the NTP as a major part of their academic recovery strategy. However, the school leader expressed scepticism towards the programme and voiced concerns with the quality of tutors recruited through external providers. In particular, they reported that Academic Mentors frequently failed to turn up to booked sessions and that pupils did not enjoy attending tutoring sessions with external tutors they had no prior relationship with.

During Wave 2, the same senior leader reported that they had expanded their use of the NTP. The school was now using small group tutoring extensively with Year 11 exam classes. They reported drawing tutors from

both external tutoring providers and paying some of their own staff to tutor outside of normal teaching hours, including on Saturdays. Despite this extensive engagement with the NTP, they reported that many of the issues from Wave 1 had persisted, particularly around the quality of external tutors. However, they had drawn as much as they could on the NTP to make the most of the programme whilst it was available.

“We were open every Saturday, since January for [small group tutoring], we’ve done catch-up every single night after school. We did half terms, holidays...but it’s all well and good saying there’s £200 million going towards tutoring, but the problem is that there’s not a pool of good tutors just around [where our school is located] to do that work.” - School Leader, Liverpool, Wave 2

### **Class-focused interventions**

‘Quality-first teaching’ to improve whole-class delivery for recovery was highlighted as an important approach for learning catch-up. School leaders mentioned various class-based methods including recapping strategies, regular alignment of taught content with learning gaps, identifying and tackling gaps and misconceptions in learning in situ, informal in-class assessment, and book checks. Some leaders added caveats that marking and feedback was less consistent in the spring term due to pupil and staff absence.

Re-engaging pupils with learning through different strategies was a theme across schools. The focus on high quality pedagogy also helped to ensure that the narrowed recovery curriculum, focused mainly on literacy and numeracy, could be kept engaging for pupils. Several leaders noted the tension and balance between the need to focus pupils on the core skills and the need to find ways to reignite pupils’ interest and engagement, particularly those who struggled to return to sustained, structured learning expectations.

Attention to pace of learning was an important strategy for re-engagement and progress. Some leaders reported that teachers slowed the pace according to pupils’ needs, to keep them on track and re-establish the basic foundational skills for future learning. One primary leader said:

We don’t want to move through them too rapidly and then lose those firm foundations for the future years. (Primary 1)

In contrast, secondary leaders reported that teachers sometimes quickened the pace in the interest of curriculum coverage. There was some acknowledgement that breadth and/or depth had to be sacrificed slightly:

You're covering the course but you're perhaps not able to just take a little bit of extra time on things you want to do... I think there's a richness that's gone. (Secondary 4)

In primary schools, teachers sought to re-engage pupils with learning through more use of 'fun' strategies, such as class quizzes instead of tests. Some primary leaders also mentioned the importance of sports, music and art in re-engaging and re-energising pupils for learning, as well as for the socio-emotional benefits of those activities.

Recovery software packages were also commonly mentioned as part of schools' armoury for academic catch up. These were wide-ranging and included:

- White Rose maths, Chris Quigley Curriculum, for greater depth (primary schools)
- Online assessment tools to monitor pupils more closely, affording quicker response to identified needs (particularly in secondary schools)
- Sounds Right programme (Primary 4), Precision Teaching for spelling and number (Primary 5) and Tutor Trust software (Primary 6).

Curriculum changes and review enabled teachers to identify gaps in teaching, particularly in practical subjects where specific topics and skills had been dropped during remote learning through lockdowns. Topics and skills were replanned and revisited and 'overlapping' curricula were used to support continuity for example, overlapping content from Year 3 to Year 4.

We have totally restructured our curriculum for September, and we run short blocks... short-burst topics because we've found the children's resilience isn't there. (Primary 5)

### **Differentiated, strategic approaches to recovery interventions**

Comparing the evidence from the 2021 interviews to those in 2022 suggests that some schools have developed a more strategic approach to their selection and delivery of recovery programmes, using evidence-based interventions to inform training and deployment of staff in more coordinated ways:

We've focused on research evidence-backed interventions. So, I've basically scrapped all of our previous interventions and we've only gone for evidence-based, so we now only do more selective [interventions for SEND, reading and maths]. (Primary 5)

Another way in which schools demonstrated more strategic and differentiated recovery approaches in the spring term was to identify the key gaps in each class/year group and target a few specific areas for catch-up in each cohort.

In primary schools, other examples of specific academic recovery strategies included:

- Adopting Early Years approaches for Year 1
- Mastery-focused interventions for maths, writing and reading to embed solid foundational learning, build skills and practice slowly, with longer and deeper topic focus
- Interventions in speech and language
- SEND-specific interventions, including new software (e.g. Lexia for dyslexia)
- Focus on SATs preparation for Year 6

In secondary schools, specific approaches to academic recovery included:

- Focus on exam year interventions (Years 11 and 13) homing in on exam recovery priorities:

The biggest need was to get the Year 11s up to speed, knowing they were going to be studying exams. So we've had holiday classes, we've had after-school classes, we've had one-to-one after-school classes. (Secondary 7)

- Focus on transition support and catch-up for Years 7 and 8
- Science 'drop-down' days (Secondary 11) where schools tackled subject-specific gaps in an intensive way
- NTP-funded Academic Mentors were employed to provide additional support in core subjects for Years 8 to 11 via six-week interventions (Secondary 3)
- Online tutoring for secondary pupils
- Smaller class sizes were reported as key to recovery in several secondary schools
- Saturday school and library access to extend the school week

Restructuring the school day was another way to build in opportunities for recovery interventions. Examples included staggered starts in the morning, timetable changes during normal school hours, afternoon breaks (primary schools) for pupils needing individual or small-group interventions, and extensions to the school day. Some settings also offered extra recovery learning in holiday time, for example summer school.

## 8. Recovery Premium

This section presents findings from the senior leader interviews on how Recovery Premium funding was used.

### Key findings

- In the interviews, leaders reported that Recovery Premium was valued by schools for covering some of the significant additional costs of supporting pupils' recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 disruptions.
- Leaders stated that these additional costs were due to increased staffing for individual and small-group interventions – extra hours for teachers, TAs and tutors for academic and wellbeing support. To a lesser extent, resources were an additional cost.
- Leaders funded these additional staffing costs through a combination of sources, including Recovery Premium, NTP and general school budgets, so it was not possible to disaggregate funding and interventions.
- School leaders reported that the Recovery Premium was necessary but insufficient to meet all the additional needs.

### 8.1 Use of the Recovery Premium 2021/22

Recovery Premium funding was an additional grant provided to schools in 2021/2022 to support any pupils whose education had been disrupted by the pandemic. Linked to Pupil Premium numbers, the Recovery Premium was intended to fund evidence-based interventions for a wider group of pupils who may be in greatest need of learning and support, including tutoring. It was provided in addition to the subsidised tutoring support provided through the NTP.

The 2022 interviews with leaders indicated that schools were using their Recovery Premium funds to meet the specific needs of their pupils. Leaders appreciated the flexibility of the scheme:

What I loved about it was it was up to the school to decide how to use it. There was a recognition that we know best what our children need. (Primary 9)

This flexibility enabled leaders to extend support to all pupils identified by the school as in need – not just those who were furthest behind:



We've also used it to do things for our more able students – we've accessed The Brilliant Club programme because we found that they also need that stretch and challenge as well ... If they're [more able students] not making the progress that they should be making, they still need that support. (Secondary 8)

However, not all schools shared this wider interpretation of the Recovery Premium:

It's mainly meant to be for your Pupil Premium students. [We got £28K] this year for Recovery Premium, which I don't think was enough, but I don't think they realise that it's not just certain groups of students that are struggling – it's all groups. (Secondary 11)

While the Recovery Premium was intended to fund a wide range of staff and resource needs, it was staffing that predominated given the substantial additional costs of teaching and support for targeted tutoring interventions, particularly for those working with individuals and smaller groups.

I think our total [Recovery Premium] money was about £64,000. [It was spent] largely on people as opposed to stuff. So, the academic mentor, the 0.2 maths teacher, the safeguarding and welfare officer hours were up, and the creation of the pastoral and wellbeing manager. And for a secondary setting, the hours for a careers advisor were increased. (Secondary 3)

Schools drew different sources of funding together – including budgets and subsidies from Recovery Premium, NTP, Pupil Premium, and wider school budgets – to cover the costs of the range of recovery interventions they were using (see Section 4 on Recovery strategies).

We've supplemented it [with] our Pupil Premium funding. It's largely been used on staffing. We've also used it for an additional support in Year 6 interventions... Also, this particular member of support staff, who is very skilled in maths, trying to improve the children who could be at greater depth. (Primary 2)

In this research, it was not possible to disentangle the combined strands of funding for different interventions. Although it was hard to discern detailed differences between schools in this regard, it seemed that secondary schools tended to use their Recovery Premium and NTP funding to cover the external tutors and supply staff. Primary schools tended to use their Recovery Premium and NTP to pay their existing teachers, TAs or pastoral support staff for extra hours, or to contract additional staff to work in school.

While academic interventions were the primary target for the Recovery Premium), schools also reported investing in more provision for pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs (see Section 6 on Recovery strategies). Sometimes these programmes included spending on material resources and staff training, but there were also extra hours for existing staff such as safeguarding and wellbeing officers, as well as more counselling hours and expanded pastoral support for pupils.

Online learning resources purchased by secondary schools to promote recovery included programmes to support self-diagnosis of learning gaps. Several leaders invested in these assessment tools to complement the school's progress monitoring and promote pupils' independent learning skills.

We've also used some of it to finance some online learning programmes in different subjects so that we can set homework and things that are self-marking but also not just self-marking – they're almost self-diagnostic. So, as students are using them, they're identifying their weaknesses and they're directing them to do things that are more beneficial in improving those weaknesses.  
(Secondary 8)

Primary school leaders referred to purchase and continued use of online platforms, resources and assessments to a lesser (and varying) extent, given that younger pupils typically required more adult support in accessing these. Generally, the earlier investments in technology to support access to learning during partial closures have been integral to ongoing recovery, as have the additional skills developed by staff and pupils in using the technology.

## **8.2 Shortfalls in recovery funding support**

School leaders were grateful for the support through the Recovery Premium, but most reported that the funds were insufficient to recover from the impact of the pandemic, and that they had to use additional school funding to cover the costs of specific recovery interventions.

[It comes] nowhere close. Ideally [we] would have had a primary teacher in full time for reading recovery for Y7/8. Plus another SEND specialist just focused on maths. We could have done with so much more counselling and support. (Secondary 4)

Leaders also expressed frustrations about the perceived bureaucratic burden of accounting for spending much earlier in the pandemic. This detracted from the focus on the current level of need and getting students ready for exams. There were also reports

of schools postponing key maintenance of infrastructure to free up funds for COVID-19 recovery:

We haven't been able to refurbish computers and things like that. Things that we just wanted to get tidied up around the site, we've not done. (Secondary 12)

Moreover, school leaders noted that the government's guidance tended to focus on Pupil Premium students, and staff felt this was too narrow because the pandemic had impacted on all students in different ways. Schools felt they needed greater levels of long-term recovery funding to respond to the diverse range of needs. Many schools, both primary and secondary, indicated this was compounded by the wider context of underfunding of education.

### **Case study: Recovery Premium**

This case study is drawn from the research conducted by CfEY.

**Case study: A secondary girls school in Bath and North East Somerset, with an Ofsted rating of 'Good', and 10% of pupils on FSM. The school has a mixed intake that draws on families from very wealthy areas as well as deprived areas.**

During Wave 1, both a teacher and school leader reported that they would welcome additional funding for improving pupils' mental health and wellbeing. In particular, they were interested in money sufficient to support an in-school mental health lead. The interviewed staff at the school reported feeling that their current access to the Recovery Premium was insufficient in amount and structure to allow them to hire in the necessary staff.

During Wave 2, school staff repeated the same concerns. They maintained that the extra recovery funding their school receives is all allocated to specific areas (e.g. tutoring) and this was preventing them from having a "big pot" to keep programmes such as their mental health work and summer schools running. Their request for further support from the DfE emphasised the need for additional un-ringfenced money to be able to support their setting's goals that go beyond the parameters defined by central government.

"I think one of our biggest strengths at our school as a school last year was our summer school, where we had had half the [school] year. I think we had 120 kids in and they all super engaged, and there were so many nice things that really brought them into the school this year. Of course,

the money's all gone for that. So now we're down to 30 kids for summer school this year. We'd need a large pot of money from the government again to do anything different." School leader, Bath & North East Somerset, Wave 2

## 9. Future plans

This section covers findings from the senior leader interviews on continued plans for education recovery, including the role of social and emotional recovery in achieving this.

### Key findings

- In the school leader interviews, ‘returning to normal’ in attendance, behaviour and curricula continued to be the main priority for schools.
- Leaders regarded the longer-term social and emotional recovery of pupils as crucial for achieving academic recovery sooner.
- Leaders reported that academic recovery initiatives and curriculum adaptations would continue. They envisaged that closing the now-wider attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils would take longer and remain an ongoing focus and priority.
- Leaders also reported that enrichment activities would be reinstated and extended to support pupils’ personal and social development and ‘soft’ skills.

### 9.1 Future plans for recovery

School leaders’ next steps and future plans emphasised the need to return to normality in attendance, behaviour and full balanced curricula – notwithstanding the continued disruptions caused by COVID-19 spikes and staff and pupil absences. They recognised that recovery (particularly wellbeing) was going to be a long-term process, with some school leaders envisaging at least three years, and others anticipated that the effects would follow children throughout their school careers:

Thinking from primary through to secondary, it’s going to take a generation. (Secondary 10)

The leaders interviewed suggested that the protracted recovery would not be due primarily to unmet academic gaps but would arise from children not having developed the behavioural and social skills associated with learning success.

Schools also reported variations in pupils’ recovery trajectories and predicted that closing the widened gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students would take much longer. Similarly, pupils’ mental health was a major concern among school leaders, and a further reason why they reported that recovery will take longer than expected:

You’ve got many more applications for EHCPs for much younger children. I think the knock-on... I would say five years for me to recover it. If I’m honest, 15 probably. It’s probably going to take, for

these children... any child who is two years old now is going to have to get to 16 – so, 14 years, there you go. (Secondary 4)

Leaders envisaged that academic recovery would entail continuing review of the curriculum in response to students' gaps and needs, small-group teaching for core subjects, one-to-one interventions, and tutoring. Both primary and secondary schools reported that students needed ongoing support particularly in maths and English to recover from pandemic-related delays in children's numeracy and literacy skills.

In terms of future wellbeing recovery, primary schools were planning to focus on reinstating and extending enrichment activities, amid concerns that the pressures on pupils to catch up academically is leading to further mental health issues. In secondary schools, the range of future plans for wellbeing recovery and the development of students' soft skills also included enrichment and extracurricular activities, as well as programmes to build social skills and a collaborative school culture.

## 9.2 Barriers to future recovery

Primary schools reported delays in the assessment of their high-needs pupils as one of the main barriers to recovery. Schools struggled to distinguish between learning deficits due to the pandemic and those associated with SEND. Pupils were experiencing delays in accessing funded support and expertise at a time of profoundly complex and increasing need. Similarly, secondary school leaders reported lengthy delays to adequate mental health support for their pupils as a barrier and cause for concern.

I think it's the wellbeing. It's about us being able, having the resources and the budget to support students' wellbeing. That's going to be key really. That's what's going to take longer than the academic recovery. It's the wellbeing and the mental health.  
(Secondary 8)

Primary and secondary school leaders were calling for more SEND funding, improved and quicker access to external agencies such as CAMHS, and CPD opportunities for SENCOs and wider teaching staff to support pupils with SEND and those struggling with mental health issues that affect their learning.

Nearly all school leaders raised concerns about staff recruitment and retention as a major barrier to further recovery. Their concerns were linked to observed decreases in staff wellbeing due to the pandemic. While the leaders commended their staff's teamwork, goodwill and resilience over the challenging pandemic period, they were clear that things were not sustainable. Leaders emphasised the need for more teaching and support staff at all levels, as some current staff members are struggling to sustain the heavy workload associated with ongoing COVID-19 recovery. They highlighted that educators are

expected to respond to evermore challenging health and social care issues faced by pupils and their families in lieu of under-resourced specialist services. These pressures were felt to be intensified by the cost-of-living crisis.

Perhaps more so than primary schools, secondary schools experienced the requirement to meet pre-pandemic standards and expectations as an unfair and unhelpful pressure that had heavy impacts on both staff and pupil wellbeing. The secondary leaders called for continued adjustments to exams and support from the exam board, as well as modifications to Ofsted inspection to take into account the wide-ranging and long-term impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning in schools.

In terms of ongoing and future financial support for COVID-19 recovery, schools clearly expressed their desire for more flexibility in determining how best to use future recovery funding, given that the impact of the pandemic is not confined to academic domains or to disadvantaged pupils.

### **9.3 Practice changes to be retained post-pandemic**

Some changes to school practice during the pandemic will be retained by schools as they move forward. These changes relate primarily to the benefits of technology for hybrid working in schools. Leaders' plans include: continuing to build on the new skills that staff have acquired in online teaching to enhance the learning experience of pupils; a balance of online and face-to-face staff meetings; and maintaining the improved communication with parents and the wider school community through virtual means, such as online parents' evenings, regular contact with parents via online tools (e.g. Google Classroom), and increased use of social media.

## 10. Conclusions

Ipsos UK conducted an online survey with 764 schools and Sheffield Hallam University conducted 22 qualitative interviews with school leaders from across the UK.

### 10.1 Recovery strategies

In the autumn 2021 and spring 2022 terms, recovery was constrained by ongoing absence, amongst both pupils and teachers. In both the survey (autumn 2021) and qualitative research (spring 2022), this was cited as the single largest barrier to education recovery. Teacher absence led to challenges delivering lessons and monitoring pupils' progress, such as high-quality marking. Schools also reported challenges in accessing high quality cover for teachers, noting that demand for supply teachers outstripped supply at this time.

Pupil wellbeing was seen as directly linked to academic engagement and attainment, with many leaders recognising the importance of addressing wellbeing needs before academic interventions could be effective. Therefore, schools prioritised recovery strategies to support pupil wellbeing. This was particularly the case in secondary schools, where leaders were more likely to report seeing mental health concerns increasingly affecting their pupils.

Almost all schools reported developing provision to support pupil mental health and wellbeing. The most common strategy reported in the survey, amongst both primary and secondary schools was a broad curriculum, as well as specific teaching and information for pupils and parents on mental health and wellbeing. This was demonstrated by high proportions returning to offering classroom resources and extracurricular activities at similar levels to before the pandemic. Leaders in the qualitative interviews referred to using a variety of tailored approaches including wellbeing assemblies, mental health focused PSHE lessons and expanded in-school counselling provision. However, leaders reported that long waiting lists for CAMHS and other specialist services meant that pupils who needed specialist support were unable to access it quickly, requiring schools to support these pupils, which was beyond their capabilities.

Regarding learning recovery, the research found that primary schools were more likely to have made changes to their timetable to support this, increasing teaching of English and maths. Secondary schools were more likely to be teaching subjects for the same number of hours as before the pandemic. However, secondary schools made greater use of weekend and after-school sessions, home-work clubs and giving pupils resources to use at home, suggesting they supported learning recovery in this way.

Across all year groups, schools consistently made use of small groups or one-to-one tutoring or support to help recover missed learning. This included use of the NTP and, in



secondary schools, NTP Tuition Partners. Most schools found the school-led NTP route useful. In the qualitative interviews, leaders reported valuing the autonomy it gave them, in contrast to the previous NTP format.

Considering wider support from government, school leaders highly valued the additional funding to support COVID-19 recovery. The Recovery Premium Funding was seen as being most useful, along with NTP School Led Tutoring Grant (for secondary schools), CPD for teachers and EEF resources. The qualitative research found that the funding available was seen as insufficient to fully support schools' recovery strategies as they would have wanted to deliver them, particularly in the context of the challenges presented by ongoing staff and pupil absence in spring 2022. Leaders reported that the application processes and eligibility criteria for the different interrelated funding schemes (PP, NTP, Recovery Premium) were sometimes difficult for leaders to navigate and understand. Leaders valued flexible funding which they could tailor to their school needs particularly in light of wider economic pressures and existing pressures on budgets.

There were groups of pupils who had been able to attend school during periods of restricted attendance who benefitted from the smaller class sizes and quieter environment in the school. School leaders reported that these pupils made better progress in these conditions than usually expected.

Only a minority of leaders believed that individual outcomes for their pupils were back in line with expectations before the pandemic, across all pupil years and pupil groups. Leaders were least likely to agree that outcomes were now in line with expectations for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils, who started school during the restrictions on attendance, pupils receiving PP/FSM and pupils with SEND.

## **10.2 Ongoing recovery**

The evidence from across the research strands found that academic recovery was a continuing process, into the summer term 2022. Leaders felt that recovery would need to be ongoing, encompassing academic, social and emotional and wellbeing elements. They envisaged at least three more years of recovery and highlighted that some pupils would feel the effects of restrictions on school attendance throughout their school career.

Across all strands, teachers and school leaders reported that the most vulnerable pupils had been worst affected by the pandemic. Pre-existing gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils had widened even though recovery strategies were getting schools back on track overall. In addition, when restrictions on school attendance were removed, an increase in pupils with SEND and mental health conditions was observed, as well as an increase in pupils about whom schools had safeguarding concerns. These pupils needed ongoing support from schools, which in turn require system-level support, including funding, to provide this effectively. In the qualitative interviews, school leaders

identified delays in pupil assessment and access to specialist services as a potential barrier to recovery.

However, leaders and teachers also emphasised that all pupils, not only the most vulnerable, had been negatively affected by the pandemic and were likely to continue to require greater support. Teachers cited pupils who were expected to be working at greater depth but were not.

As well as ongoing academic support, pupils' social skills and understanding of appropriate behaviour were seen as being behind what would be expected, at both primary and secondary levels. This was attributed in part to lack of transition preparation. Schools needed to continue to support pupils with these challenges.

Transition year groups (Years 2, 6 and 11) were identified as high priority for support in the future, along with FSM/PP pupils and pupils with SEND. Schools were also clearly supporting pupils individually, as their needs emerged, evidenced by the high proportions who specified they were prioritising pupils who had fallen behind and pupils with a history of persistent absence.

Schools also saw a need to support staff, who had themselves experienced both personal and professional challenges during the pandemic and teaching during the restrictions on school attendance. In the quantitative survey, almost all schools had put some form of support for staff in place. In the qualitative research, leaders expressed concerns about staff health and wellbeing. Related to this, they reported that teachers were leaving the profession due to the sustained pressures of teaching during the pandemic, and this would be a potential barrier to future recovery. Schools needed support to assist recruitment and retention of teachers.

To facilitate the required ongoing recovery, for pupils and teachers, schools wanted targeted funding and flexibility to decide how to allocate this. This was particularly important in the context of increasing numbers of pupils with SEND. Support from other schools and external guidance was also seen as being valuable to supporting ongoing recovery.

Alongside this, school leaders wanted accountability measures, such as Ofsted, to acknowledge the uneven impacts of the pandemic in different settings during inspections and judgements. Similarly, teachers also wanted the examination system to continue to reflect the challenging learning circumstances pupils will have experienced.

There were areas of practice which had developed in response to the pandemic which leaders intended to take forwards, including building on teachers' skills in online teaching, using online meetings for staff and enhanced communication with parents through online tools.

In the summer term, leaders reported that pupils' families were already starting to experience increased financial pressure from rising inflation. They stated that increased economic hardships were likely to negatively impact pupils' educational progress, making recovery more challenging.

## 11. Appendix

### 11.1 Quantitative sample profile

Table 1 and Table 2 outline the details of the sample profile for achieved primary and secondary schools<sup>11</sup> in Wave 2 of the survey.

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

	Unweighted Number	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)
<b>Total</b>	594	100	100
Mainstream	576	97	97
Special school	21	4	3
Alternative provision	1	<1	<1
Large school size <sup>12</sup>	162	27	26
Medium school size	269	45	46
Small school size	97	16	14
Very small school size	66	11	13
Low FSM <sup>13</sup>	45	8	8
Medium FSM	256	43	43
High FSM	293	49	49
Rural	163	27	29
Urban	431	73	71
London	89	15	12
South East	99	17	16
South West	49	8	10
North East	34	6	5
North West	80	13	14
East of England	77	13	12
East Midlands	57	10	10
West Midlands	50	8	10
Yorkshire & Humberside	59	10	11
Outstanding Ofsted rating	83	14	12
Good Ofsted rating	410	69	67
Requires improvement Ofsted rating	36	6	7
Inadequate Ofsted rating	0	<1	<1

<sup>11</sup> Where figures do not sum to 100% this is due to rounding.

<sup>12</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

<sup>13</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

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

	Unweighted Number	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)
<b>Total</b>	170	100	100
Mainstream	134	79	86
Special school	28	16	12
Alternative provision	9	5	2
Large school size <sup>14</sup>	85	50	56
Medium school size	42	25	28
Small school size	43	25	16
Very small school size	0	<1	<1
Low FSM <sup>15</sup>	45	26	15
Medium FSM	53	31	38
High FSM	68	40	39
Rural	22	13	15
Urban	148	87	85
London	29	5	4
South East	35	21	18
South West	15	9	10
North East	5	3	4
North West	18	11	13
East of England	30	18	15
East Midlands	11	6	8
West Midlands	11	6	8
Yorkshire & Humberside	16	9	9
Outstanding Ofsted rating	32	19	17
Good Ofsted rating	89	52	52
Requires improvement Ofsted rating	21	12	13
Inadequate Ofsted rating	1	1	1

## 11.2 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 obtained 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

<sup>14</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

<sup>15</sup> Definitions based on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs/2019-to-2020-dashboard-guidance>

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	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
100 interviews	6	9	10
500 interviews	3	4	4
1,000 interviews	2	3	3
594 interviews (primary achieved sample)	2	4	4
170 interviews (secondary achieved sample)	5	7	8

For example, with a sample of 594 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 2 sample results must be greater than the values given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Differences required for significance**

Size of sample compared groups	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
100 and 100	8	13	14
250 and 100	7	11	12
500 and 250	5	7	8
1,000 and 500	3	5	5
1,000 and 1,000	3	4	4

## 11.3 Qualitative school leader interviews sample profile

**Table 5: Wave 1 scoping stage – school characteristics**

School	Number of pupils <sup>16</sup>	% FSM <sup>17</sup>	%SEND support <sup>18</sup>	% EAL <sup>19</sup>	Ofsted	Region
Primary A1	600-700	High	High	High	Good	London
Primary A2	200-300	High	Medium	High	Outstanding	London
Primary A3	400-500	Medium	Low	High	Good	Midlands
Primary A4	400-500	High	High	Low	RI	Yorks & Humber
Primary A5	100-200	Medium	High	Low	Good	Midlands
Primary A6	500-600	High	High	High	Good	Yorks & Humber
Primary A7	400-500	Medium	Medium	Medium	Good	Yorks & Humber
Primary A8	<100	-	-	-	Good	South West
Primary A9	200-300	Low	Medium	Medium	Good	North West
Primary A10	200-300	Medium	High	Medium	Good	East of England
Primary A11	100-200	Low	Medium	Medium	Good	Yorks & Humber
Secondary A1	900-1000	-	-	-	Good	London
Secondary A2	200-300	Medium	Medium	Low	Outstanding	Yorks & Humber
Secondary A3	1000-11100	Medium	Low	High	Good	North West
Secondary A4	800-900	High	High	Low	RI	East of England
Secondary A5	1500-1600	Medium	High	Low	Good	Yorks & Humber
Secondary A6	1400-1500	Low	Low	Low	Good	South East
Secondary A7	600-700	Medium	Low	Medium	Good	South West
Secondary A8	1100-1200	Medium	Low	Low	Good	Yorks & Humber
Secondary A9	1000-1100	Medium	Medium	Low	Good	Yorks & Humber
Secondary A10	<100	-	-	-	-	South East

<sup>16</sup> School sizes identified as most accurate 100 range to protect anonymity.

<sup>17</sup> % of pupils eligible for FSM at any time during the past 6 years. FSM primary tertiles: low (<18%), medium (19%-36%) and high (>37%). FSM secondary tertiles: low (<18%), medium (19-32%) and high (>33%).

**Table 6: Wave 1 mainstage – school characteristics**

School	Number of pupils	% FSM	%SEND support	% EAL	Ofsted	Region
Primary B1	400-500	High	High	High	Good	Yorks & Humber
Primary B2	400-500	Medium	Low	Low	Good	North West
Primary B3	100-200	Low	High	Low	RI	East of England
Primary B4	200-300	Medium	High	Medium	Good	South West
Primary B5	200-300	Medium	Low	Low	Outstanding	North East
Primary B6	900-1000	High	High	Medium	Good	North West
Primary B7	400-500	Medium	Medium	High	Good	East Midlands
Primary B8	200-300	High	High	High	RI	South West
Primary B9	300-400	Low	Low	Medium	Good	West Midlands
Primary B10	400-500	Medium	High	Medium	Outstanding	London
Secondary B1	1200-1300	High	Medium	High	Good	London
Secondary B2	900-1000	High	Medium	Low	RI	North East
Secondary B3	1100-1200	Medium	High	Low	Good	South East
Secondary B4	900-1000	High	Medium	Medium	Good	North West
Secondary B5	200-300	Low	Low	High	Outstanding	South East
Secondary B6	900-1000	Low	Low	High	Good	East of England
Secondary B7	1000-1100	High	High	Low	Good	North West
Secondary B8	900-1000	High	High	High	RI	Yorks & Humber
Secondary B9	900-1000	17%	High	Low	Outstanding	South West
Secondary B10	-	-	-	-	-	London

<sup>18</sup> % SEND support. Primary tertiles: low (<11%), medium (12-18%) and high (>19%). Secondary tertiles: low (<7%), medium (8%-13%), high (>14%).

<sup>19</sup> % of pupils whose first language is not English. EAL primary tertiles: low (<3%), medium (4-14%), high (>15%). Secondary tertiles: low (<4%), medium (5%-14%), high (>15%).



**Table 7: Wave 2 mainstage interviews – school characteristics**

School	Number of pupils	% FSM	% SEND support	% EAL	Ofsted	Region
Primary 1	100-200	Low	Low	Low	Good	North West
Primary 2	300-400	High	Medium	High	Good	East of England
Primary 3	200-300	High	High	Low	Good	North East
Primary 4	100-200	Medium	Low	Low	RI	South West
Primary 5	200-300	High	High	Medium	Good	Yorks & Humber
Primary 6	100-200	High	High	Medium	RI	North West
Primary 7	300-400	Low	Medium	Medium	Outstanding	South East
Primary 8	100-200	Low	Low	Low	Good	North West
Primary 9	100-200	Medium	Low	Mid	Good	East England
Primary 10	200-300	High	High	Low	Good	North East
Secondary 1	1300-1400	High	Low	Low	RI	South East
Secondary 2	800-900	High	High	High	Good	London
Secondary 3	900-1000	Low	High	Low	RI	South West
Secondary 4	900-1000	Medium	Low	Medium	Good	South East
Secondary 5	1200-1300	Low	Low	Medium	Outstanding	South East
Secondary 6	800-900	High	High	Low	Outstanding	North West
Secondary 7	800-900	High	High	Low	Good	North East
Secondary 8	1600-1700	Low	Medium	Low	RI	East England
Secondary 9	1000-1100	Medium	Medium	High	Good	Yorks & Humber
Secondary 10	800-900	Medium	Low	Low	Good	East of England
Secondary 11	500-600	Medium	High	Low	Good	West Midlands
Secondary 12	1000-1100	Low	Medium	Medium	RI	East Midlands



Department  
for Education

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**Reference: DFE- RR1318**

**ISBN: 978-1-83870-454-4**

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