

Education Committee

Oral evidence: Accountability hearings, HC 262

Tuesday 20 October 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 330 - 416

Witnesses

[I](#): Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education; and Lucy Smith, Director General for Covid-19 Response and Schools Recovery, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Nick Gibb and Lucy Smith.

Q330 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Committee today. I am very pleased to say we have Nick Gibb, the Minister for Education, and a director from the Education Department. For the benefit of the tape, could you both please introduce yourselves?

Nick Gibb: I am Nick Gibb, and I am the Minister of State for School Standards.

Lucy Smith: Hello, I am Lucy Smith. I am the director general for Covid response and schools recovery.

Q331 **Chair:** Just to get it on the record, Nick, could you kindly set out the current Government policy on exams next year?

Nick Gibb: The policy is that we expect schools to sit exams, and we expect all students in year 11 and year 13 who are studying for exams to take those exams. We have been working very closely with Ofqual and the exam boards, certainly on the timing issue to begin with. We have already announced that there will be a three-week delay to the timing, so they will finish on 2 July and start after the May bank holiday half-term. That means a constrained marking time, and we are dealing with the exam boards on that issue. We are now working through other contingencies with the exam boards.

Q332 **Chair:** In the Chamber, I asked you about assessment of children to find out how much lost learning there had been and how much catch-up was needed, and whether the Department would do this in collaboration with schools so you could assess what would happen in exams. Is that assessment going on?

Nick Gibb: Yes. Renaissance Learning, together with the EPI, is doing that research, so we can monitor pupils' progress from a baseline. That catch-up is absolutely key to Government policy. That is why we have a £1 billion catch-up fund—it is a very significant sum of money—to ensure that we help children to catch up. If you recall, going back to the June period, we brought back year 10 and year 12 part-time to make sure they were still on course with their studies.

Q333 **Chair:** If you find in that assessment that there is significant catch-up or learning needed, what would be your response? Do you think school holidays should be cut so that the catch-up can happen, or will you look possibly to change the exams curriculum later on?

Nick Gibb: We have tried to free up teaching time. We are very aware that even with the best remote education—and schools up and down the country have worked incredibly hard to put in place remote education—and the most conscientious student in the best home environment for being able to study, it is never as good as children being in front of the class teacher, having feedback and motivation and so on. Inevitably, all



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children will need some form of catch-up. That is what the £1 billion catch-up fund is all about.

We have also tried to free up teaching time wherever we can. That is why we have delayed the start of the exams, in order to free up about three weeks of teaching time. Ofqual consulted in the summer about how to change the assessment process, again in order to free up teaching time. There were no practicals, so it has reduced the time spent on oral exams and fieldwork. There is some optionality in some of the big subjects like history and English literature. It is all about ensuring we have more time to study. That is what it has all been about, to help children catch up on that lost education.

Q334 David Simmonds: We have heard what you said about the exams, and I think headteachers welcome that very much, but of course a lot of working teachers are also examiners for the marking boards. I am interested in how, given that reduced timetable, we can be confident there will be the capacity to get all those examinations marked and moderated and ready in time for things like university offers and all the rest of it that will need to happen afterwards, and also for the grades to be issued when they are planned to be issued.

Nick Gibb: Yes, this factor was very much on our mind in our discussion with exam boards. When you bring the exam period down from seven and a half weeks to four weeks, you are constraining that marking time. That is one of the reasons—it is not the only reason—why one paper in English and one paper in maths is taking place before the half-term. These are big volume subjects with a lot of marking. It is also, of course, so we can have a two-week gap for students in those subjects in case they have to self-isolate for 14 days. At least they will have been able to take one paper, either that paper or a paper subsequently. This is an issue, and we will be talking to the exam boards further about this and also to schools about being able to release more teachers to mark so we can get these results back to schools on time.

Q335 Chair: Just to be clear, though, do you think school holidays should be cut in order to ensure that the pupils can catch up?

Nick Gibb: No, I do not. Those holidays are necessary for the students to do their own work and to study. Teachers have also been working phenomenally hard over this period, and they need a break during those school holidays. It is not the intention currently to erode the school holidays.

Q336 Chair: What is the latest figure in terms of schools not being fully open?

Nick Gibb: In terms of schools being open, it is—

Chair: No, schools not being fully open.

Nick Gibb: Let me just grab those figures: 99.8% of schools are open. I just want to give you the right figures.



Q337 Chair: The figures I have are from 5 October, which suggest 21% of schools counted as not fully open, up from 18% in the previous week and 8% in mid-September. That is usually because they have sent pupils home because of Covid-related issues. Under those circumstances, what happens if it rises? How are you going to carry on the teaching and make sure that students are not missing out on learning for exams next year?

Nick Gibb: I will give you the facts as of the 8th, which we published on 13 October: 99.8% of state-funded schools are open; 91% are open to all pupils; over 7 million children are attending. That represents an attendance rate of about 90% compared with a normal attendance rate of 95%. I should also add that we changed the data collection last week so there is more granular detail of what is being collected from schools. The attendance data that is published this afternoon will be on a different timeline from the data we have published so far, because the data we have collected so far asks schools to report whether they have sent home groups of pupils. From last week, we started asking schools to tell us if they had sent home even one child, if even one child in the school was self-isolating, so there will be a different set of data published this afternoon from what we have been seeing.

Q338 Chair: If it is correct that 21% of secondary schools do not count as fully open as of 5 October, that number is likely to rise given the state of Covid, lockdown and different tiers. What will you do to ensure that these students do not miss out on exam learning? In terms of the temporary continuity direction that you have issued, can you set out what that means in practice?

Nick Gibb: The direction does not change the expectation, because the direction that we issued just clarifies the legal position for schools. It tells schools to have regard to the guidance that we issued and that already sets out the expectations for schools about the quality and content of the remote curriculum that they should be providing to students. The guidance we published on 2 July, which has been updated several times since, requires schools to prepare a broad curriculum for students that connects with their own curriculum that is taught in class to be able to be taught remotely to students if they are having to self-isolate at home.

Q339 Chair: Just to be clear, if students are sent home, how will you be sure that those students who are in exam years will not miss out on learning? What will you do if students are away and not able to carry out that exam learning? Because it is obviously going to affect whether they can take the exams next year.

Nick Gibb: This issue is at the forefront of our mind as we prepare for the 2021 exams. We are concerned about disadvantaged students who may not have access to a computer. As you know, we have already supplied 220,000 computers to disadvantaged students. We have procured another 250,000, so we are talking about nearly half a million laptops and tablets being distributed to students. By the end of this week, we will have distributed 100,000 devices since the beginning of



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September, since schools went back, for disadvantaged students who may not have a computer.

What we are working through with the exam boards are contingencies about what happens if students are self-isolating during the exam period. We will be announcing more about all these issues in the weeks and months ahead.

Q340 Chair: Can you set out a little bit now what exactly you perceive will happen? Every time I visit a school now—normally they ask about anything and everything—all they want to do is ask about exams and what will happen. Understandably, parents, teachers and support staff are also concerned. I am trying to understand what happens if children, pupils, miss learning because their schools are partially closed or bubbles are sent home. What happens in terms of doing the exams next year?

Nick Gibb: There are two issues. One is the issue across the country as a whole, the lost education that all students will have suffered as a consequence of the schools being closed to most students from March until the summer. We will have more to say about this in the next few weeks, but that will be dealt with through issues such as grading that Ofqual and the exam boards are working through.

The issue that worries me more than any other issue that we are having to grapple with at the moment is unfairness and unevenness, where different students have had a different experience of missing education during this period. That is something that, again, we are working with the exam boards and Ofqual to seek to address. It is not an easy issue to address, but it is something that worries me a lot.

Lucy Smith: I might be going back a bit, so I will not be long, in case you want to move on. On this question of lost learning and what happens to students when they have to self-isolate, it is worth adding that we are in close contact with areas that are going into different tiers. We are able to have a pretty good conversation with those areas about what is going on at the point at which they go to a higher alert level. We have a good feel for what is going on in schools, and obviously in this context we are particularly concerned with what is going on for those exam cohorts and what is going on in secondary schools. It gives us a chance to basically talk to local authorities and talk to the schools about what they need in that context. As the Minister said, our key aim at the moment is to keep kids learning through this period, even though at points they are perhaps not able to get the full face-to-face teaching that we want.

Q341 Chair: The *Times Educational Supplement* published a report showing that, during the lockdown, primary schools with the most deprived pupil intakes only had around half the attendance rates of those serving the least deprived intakes. What was the Department doing to monitor these children's attendance and encourage them to come into school?



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Nick Gibb: Are you talking about the period when the schools were locked down?

Chair: In lockdown, yes.

Nick Gibb: This was an issue we were concerned about. The schools were open to children of critical workers and to vulnerable children, those children with a social worker. We set up regional REACT teams across the country to work with the local authorities to make sure that those local authorities, and the social workers in those authorities, were in touch with the families that were not attending who we thought should attend. A huge amount of work was carried out by those local authorities and by our regional teams to make sure that contacts were happening with those families to find out why they were not attending.

Q342 **Chair:** We know that over 2 million children were learning hardly anything at all, according to academic studies. I know you have now issued your directive. Given that this took place, given that the online learning—despite the great efforts of many teachers, many schools and many support staff—was not even a postcode lottery, but was literally a road by road lottery depending on the school and individual circumstances, my concern is that there is not a proper plan if students are sent home for one reason or another. We will then be faced with a situation where they will have a significant amount of lost learning and not be able to do the exams properly next year.

Nick Gibb: This is a concern we have, but we are some months away from the summer. Schools are very well equipped. Teachers are very able to ensure that the children can catch up. Given that nationally, overall, it may well be the case—and probably will be the case—that students will have learned less than they would have learned in a normal two-year course, that will be reflected in the overall grading, something that Ofqual and exam boards can reflect to ensure that this cohort is not unfairly treated compared with previous cohorts.

Ensuring children catch up is important not just for the qualifications; it is important in all the year groups that children are able to catch up as swiftly as possible on the lost education that has been caused by this pandemic. We do not want this generation of schoolchildren to suffer long term as a consequence of having to close schools to most pupils from March to the summer. That is what the £1 billion catch-up premium is all about. Of that, £350 million is for the national—

Chair: We are going to come on to the catch-up fund. I am going to pass over to my colleagues, but I just make an observation that I worry there is no serious plan B for those students if they have to spend significant amounts of time at home.

Q343 **Ian Mearns:** That runs into the question I was going to ask anyway about students facing significantly different levels of disruption to learning, and about disadvantaged students who have been significantly adversely affected by school closures. What must happen to level the



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playing field for exams next summer? While there was a national lockdown and all schools were closed, the position regarding return was very patchy, to say the least, and since then and since all schools went back in September, some areas have had significantly greater levels of disruption for their pupils than others.

If we are going to have a nationally moderated scheme of exams next summer, how are we going to make sure that the youngsters in the areas that have the greatest levels of disruption, and then within those areas where the youngsters have had the greatest levels of disruption, that the poorest youngsters without access to online learning to the same extent as some of their peers are not going to be even more greatly affected by those lost learning periods?

In the north-east of England, we are now in a tier 2 situation, Merseyside is in tier 3, Greater Manchester may move into tier 3 any time. Of course, those areas are in those tiers because of higher levels of infection within the general population and, therefore, there is a propensity for more year groups to be sent home, particularly in the secondary sector. The national figure on school attendance is that it is between 86% and 87% in secondary schools, but that 13% or 14% non-attendance will be more prolific in certain areas, so how are we going to get around that?

Nick Gibb: That is one reason why we issued the directive. If a school sends home bubbles because of a confirmed case of Covid in the school, that does not mean to say that the teaching will end. The remote teaching will continue, and we have very clear expectations set out in the guidance about what that should comprise. If you also recall back in June, we allowed secondary schools to bring back year 10 and year 12 pupils part-time so they could make sure that they were on track, continuing to study at home while the schools were closed, in order to keep children facing exams in 2021 on track with their studies.

No one club will deal with this problem. It is a combination of issues. We are freeing up teaching time, extending the beginning of the exam period by three weeks. We are changing the time consumption elements of the assessment process in order, again, to free up teaching time. We have the £1 billion catch-up fund, £350 million of which, as we are going to come to later, is through the National Tutoring Programme to help disadvantaged students. All these issues combined are designed to deal with the problem that you are quite rightly highlighting in this discussion. It is something that worries me, this differential, unevenness and unfairness. Some students will have suffered greater lockdowns and a greater propensity to be self-isolating than students in other schools. That does worry me. I have discussed in great detail with the regulator, Ofqual, to see what more we can do to address this issue. There is a limit to what can be done through the exam process itself, but it is something that is foremost in our mind.

There is a series of issues we had to deal with, and we had to get schools back. The best place for children to be to catch up, to help with their



education, is to be in school. We put a lot of effort into making sure that all schools were ready to go back in September and we were very successful in achieving that: 99.8% of schools were back in September, schools up and running full-time education. We then had to deal with the decision about delaying exams. Again, that spawned a whole raft of decisions that we touched on earlier in this discussion about marking and so on. We have taken that decision, the exam boards are comfortable with it, and that again frees up teaching time. We are now addressing these other very challenging issues about what contingencies we can put in place for the very issues that you are highlighting.

Q344 **David Johnston:** I hope schools do not have to close again, but some heads have suggested to me that, if that did happen, they could use their buildings as spaces for those who do not have a good learning environment at home, where it is very cramped, so at least they could come in and be studying in a distanced way. You might apply that to school holidays, too, given the learning loss, but I do not know whether you have considered that. If you have not, I do not necessarily need your answer now, but it did seem quite a good idea in the event that we have to close them again, which I hope we do not have to.

Nick Gibb: Again, I agree with you. We do not want to close schools, but there is a case for looking at prioritising certain year groups should such a contingency occur. Those are the kinds of issues that we are working through at the moment.

Q345 **Christian Wakeford:** The Minister touched on some of this briefly, but looking back at what happened over the summer with students' grades, blended learning and many children missing out on school, what are the key lessons we have learned from these episodes?

Nick Gibb: I think it shows how important exams are. They are the fairest way we have of assessing children's work, ability and aptitude. That is why the Government are determined to ensure that the exams go ahead this year, and the contingencies that we are working through are based on the premise that they will go ahead.

Q346 **Christian Wakeford:** How will we be working differently with both Ofqual and, more importantly, Ofsted moving forward? Obviously, there have not been any inspections, so there has not really been any framework or guidance as to what online learning looks like. How will the lessons we have learned affect the relationships with those external bodies to make sure that children are at the centre of everything we do and that no one falls behind more than they need to?

Nick Gibb: As you know, we suspended Ofsted inspections in March because of the challenges schools were facing. We did not resume those in September because we know that schools are dealing with reopening and helping children to catch up. Ofsted will be visiting a sample of schools to discuss with them the challenges they are facing. It is not an evaluation of the quality of education. The intention is to resume full



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Ofsted inspections in January, although we keep that timing under review. It will look then at the quality of education, including the quality of remote education.

Q347 Tom Hunt: Just a point about exams and there not being exams this year. For children with special educational needs—I am particularly thinking of dyspraxia, dyslexia and unconventional learners—who usually benefit from there being exams and often do better in exams than many of their teachers may expect, has there been any assessment of how those pupils may have been particularly disadvantaged by the fact there were no exams this year and may have been marked down in many of their predicted grades?

Nick Gibb: Ofqual held a symposium in July about whether the approach it was taking disadvantaged certain groups. The initial data it had was that it was not disadvantaging certain groups, but that is perhaps something we can write to you about. The issue applies to special needs children as well as children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children from different ethnic backgrounds.

Q348 Tom Hunt: I do not like to bang on about it too much, but I have dyspraxia and dyslexia myself. Throughout my whole time in school I did not do well in class, and my teachers did not think I would do that well. I always did well in exams, so I feel pretty sure that, if I had been at school when the exams were cancelled, I would have underperformed. My concern is that many pupils with dyslexia, dyspraxia and other types of disability may have particularly lost out because of this year.

Nick Gibb: Yes, it is a real concern. That is why we think exams are the fairest way of assessing children's ability. As I said to Robert earlier, we will be looking at this research being conducted by Renaissance and the EPI on the degree to which all groups of children from all backgrounds and all abilities are catching up on their lost education while schools were closed.

Q349 Ian Mearns: In answer to a question put to you by the Chairman, you suggested there might be a partial solution via the grading process. Given what has happened this summer already, it rings minor alarm bells in the back of my mind about how that will be managed—the algorithm comes to mind. We know that disadvantage exists across the whole country, but we also know it is concentrated in areas that are densely populated. It is not the fault of youngsters who do not live in densely populated areas, but they are going to have, by comparison, an advantage over some of their peers in a nationally moderated process. We have to get this right, otherwise we could end up with another scenario where people are really concerned post what happens next summer.

Nick Gibb: We will have more to say on this in the next few weeks, but Ofqual is used to adjusting. For example, when new exams were introduced, the new GCSEs, there is a concept called the sawtooth effect,



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where schools take some years before they are familiar with a new curriculum. We do not want any particular year group to be treated unfairly just because we have introduced a new curriculum. Ofqual is used to using concepts such as comparable outcomes to adjust for that sawtooth effect. Ofqual is very experienced and used to adjusting for this kind of issue.

It is not something, however, that can be used to deal with disparities within the cohort, different effects that different students have had. It is something that worries me hugely, and it is obviously worrying you as well, that students will have suffered different amounts of time away from school if there has been an outbreak in a particular school. As you say, those cohorts being sent home are more likely to be in areas where the infection rates are high.

Q350 Ian Mearns: But by Ofqual's own admission, the grading process has some significant inaccuracies within it. I think Ofqual's own figures are that one in four grades is inaccurate by one grade one way or the other, 25%. Given that level of existing inaccuracy and all these other things being fed in, how much confidence can parents and young people themselves have in the overall system?

Nick Gibb: I think they can. Exams are the fairest system, and it goes to huge efforts to ensure that the marking is as accurate as possible. There are people whose careers are devoted to this very issue about making sure there is consistency between different types of exam and different exam boards. That expertise is very well accommodated in Ofqual and in exam boards, and that is their bread and butter. That is what they do to make sure the—

Q351 Ian Mearns: If a grade is inaccurate, one of the 25%, it could be a grade higher or it could be a grade lower. It goes both ways, I accept that, but given that level, Ofqual's own admitted inaccuracy of 25% in grading, is it not just too much margin for error?

Nick Gibb: This is something you should take up with the regulator, but—

Q352 Ian Mearns: Minister, come on. The regulator is not completely at arm's length from the Department. It is not.

Nick Gibb: What you are talking about is a general issue about the accuracy of exams, and human fallibility exists in any human endeavour. Of all the systems of assessing the ability, work and study students have carried out over the period of a course, the exam system is the most accurate way of assessing it.

Q353 Fleur Anderson: Good morning, Minister and director general. I would like to ask a question about mock exams and how you will be using them to assess progress through the year. Obviously, this year Covid happened after the mock results, so there was a disparity and you were blindsided when the results came out. This year, the mocks will happen and they



can be used to assess where we are in the year for a rapid analysis and then make potential changes to the plan B you have been talking about, as well as to exams and more modules, for example, to level the playing field. Will you be using the mock exams to have a good analysis of what is going on across the country?

Nick Gibb: This is the issue of contingencies. The main advantage we have for the 2021 exams compared with the sudden decision that had to be taken to close schools and, therefore, the inevitable decision that had to be taken to cancel exams is that we have a little more time to address these issues. As I said earlier, the focus initially was on making sure we could get schools open so that children could resume full-time education in school. That was an important exercise and it was very successful. We then dealt with the issue of delaying the exams by three weeks, and I think we have reached the right decision so far as the dates of the exams and the dates of the results. We are now addressing those contingencies, and that is what the exam boards, Ofqual and the Department are working on now. We will have more to say about the contingencies that will be put in place later in the autumn term.

Q354 **Fleur Anderson:** Will you be looking at mocks as part of that? Are you able to have an assessment of mocks to be able to use them rather than coming up later and saying, "We missed the opportunity to use them"?

Nick Gibb: Look, I fully understand the issues you are talking about. All these issues are subject to the discussions, the research and the work that is happening right now in Ofqual and the exam boards. We will have more to say on these issues as the term goes on.

Lucy Smith: You have probably covered it, Minister. We are working hard with Ofqual, with the exam boards and with the sector on those contingencies. Obviously, there is a balance to be struck about what we do in the exam system versus what we might ask schools to do versus our overarching objective, which the Minister has talked about, to free up teaching time and make sure that students get the whole curriculum. On the example of mocks, of course, we are looking at these issues of what the exam contingencies should be and what we should talk to schools about, but we are very concerned to make sure that, having taken decisions to free up teaching time, we do not then impose another national exam series on the system, which would take us back in a different direction.

Q355 **Fleur Anderson:** I accept that. My question was about using the data that is there rather than imposing a whole series of extra things, just using what we have so that we can be best informed.

Lucy Smith: Those are the things we are working through now, as the Minister said. Yes, agreed.

Q356 **Jonathan Gullis:** Good morning, Minister and director general. With regards to the curriculum, there does not appear to have been a massive amount of changes made to it. Am I wrong in my understanding of that?



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If so, can you please correct me and explain how the changes have been made to the curriculum to be fairer, especially on now year 11 and year 13 students? Also, what interaction have you had with exam boards about exams being modular next year?

Nick Gibb: Those changes might appear modest on an individual basis, but cumulatively they are substantial, particularly when you combine it with the three-week delay to the exams. What Ofqual proposed in the summer, and we have accepted its decision to proceed, is to take away field work, assessing students' practical work in science and English speaking at GCSE and the oral in foreign languages. Each of those items sounds modest on its own, but they add up to quite a saving of teaching time. In history and English literature, there is more optionality. For example, in English literature, Shakespeare remains compulsory, but you can take two out of the three other options, and that might mean not taking a post-1940 novel or it might mean not studying the anthology of poetry.

We did take a decision not to change the subject content, so there is a difference between the contents of the curriculum and how it is assessed. We took a view early on that we were not going to reduce the content, the curriculum, because we think all these issues should still be taught, but we would change what is assessed and announce it so that schools can adjust their approach to the exam. We still want the whole curriculum to be taught. Children go to school, of course, to gain qualifications, but the principal reason for going to school is to get an education, to be educated. We want children to get that education, notwithstanding all the challenges that the schools face and the students face from the lockdown and periods out of school.

Q357 **Jonathan Gullis:** I absolutely share your ambition for the entire curriculum to be taught and, of course, that is what I want. I just feel that we are in extraordinary times. Having spoken to former colleagues of mine, I am worried that, even though you have done great work in finding that additional three weeks and in the National Tutoring Programme, there is still not going to be sufficient time to cover the breadth and, most importantly, the depth of the curriculum that is required for students to take those exams and achieve as well as they could do. It is more of a comment, so do not feel that you need to answer, but my feedback is that there is a fear that we are going to put a lot of strain on the teaching profession to try to squeeze it in, unless some drastic measures like the cancellation of school holidays—throwing that out there—are looked into.

Chair: That is why I raised the school holidays at the beginning of this session.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and I would say that those changes to assessment will give rise to more teaching time. There is no question about that. It is something that we continue to look at. As this pandemic develops, we do not know for certain what is going to be happening over the next few



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months. Ofqual and the exam boards continue to look at this, as do we, to see if there is more that we can do. But I think if you combine all these issues together, combined with the catch-up fund as well, it does amount to quite a serious increase in teaching time and the ability of schools to be able to employ extra tutors, the academic mentors and so on, to help students to catch up on their lost education.

Q358 Jonathan Gullis: With regard to the catch-up fund, do you reckon there will be an opportunity for you to write to the Committee at a later date to inform us of how that fund has been allocated across the country and how it is being used by people like the Education Endowment Foundation? My worry is that in places like Stoke-on-Trent, which has a wide-ranging amount of young children who need support and are from disadvantaged, free school meals and pupil premium backgrounds, are you realistically going to be able to meet the needs of all the students who require that help? I am sure there are other Committee members who would say the same about their own constituencies. That is my only fear: will we reach the amount of people who require this catch-up?

Nick Gibb: Yes, it is a fair challenge and I am very happy to write to the Committee with more details, but the way it works is that £650 million of the £1 billion is distributed on a per-pupil basis across the school system, because all pupils have suffered education loss as a consequence of the pandemic and schools being closed to most students. Schools are free to allocate and use that money as they wish. They may wish to focus that money on those children who have suffered most during this period. The £350 million is for the National Tutoring Programme and the academic mentors.

As you rightly say, Jonathan, the Education Endowment Foundation is evaluating the tutoring companies to make sure that we have very high-quality tutors going into schools in Stoke-on-Trent and elsewhere, very heavily subsidised one-to-one and small group tuition. The evidence is overwhelming about the effectiveness of such programmes in helping children to catch up, with several months of catch-up in just a few weeks of one-to-one and small group tutoring. Then there are academic mentors, and that is a programme that Teach First is helping to administer.

Q359 Jonathan Gullis: Are we definitely ruling out centre-assessed grades being used next year in any capacity? A lot of teachers want to know whether they should be recording and gathering evidence in case of a plan B and we have to go to that system.

Nick Gibb: I would say to schools not to preempt what they think we might announce later in this autumn term. Our overwhelming objective is to make sure the exams go ahead. We want to keep schools open and we want exams to go ahead in all circumstances, but of course we are working through contingencies, and that is what we will be saying more about in the next few weeks and months.



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Q360 **Chair:** When you say “autumn term”, are you saying that you will be able to make an announcement on this in literally a few weeks’ time?

Nick Gibb: Yes. Some of these announcements are quite important, so we are looking at contingencies; we are looking at the issue of grading. All these issues are what we are now focusing on, having dealt with the delay.

Q361 **Chair:** You have not completely ruled out some centre-assessed grades?

Nick Gibb: I have been very clear that we want students to take exams, and we are looking at contingencies about what happens in worst-case scenarios. Lucy Smith hinted at some of the things we are looking at. I do not know whether the director general wants to come in on this, but all I am saying to schools is not to preempt what they think the Government will be announcing.

Chair: Before you come in, Lucy, I am going to bring in Caroline, because it is related.

Q362 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** My question was about contingencies for exams, which has been quite widely covered, but I have a couple of other points. First, if a pupil is ill or having to isolate on the day of the exam, you have said there will be two maths and English exams more than two weeks apart. That may be useful for GCSE students, but how does that help A-level students? What do you envisage being the backup plan for the students isolating on the day of the exam who are not doing maths and English?

Lucy Smith: I will slightly reference the Minister’s point, in that we are working through these issues now. You alight on one of the key questions that we know we need to answer in our contingencies plan, which is, “What if a student is ill or cannot sit the exam?” There will be things we can do through timetabling. As the Minister said about English and maths GCSE, if we can space important exams two weeks apart, we think that helps because if you were ill or self-isolating for the first paper, it is likely you would be able to sit the second paper. We know that sitting a paper is a good thing in terms of assessment, so we would be able to look at how we build our approach off students sitting at least part of the exam.

These are complex issues so, in a sense, I do not want to overly preempt the work that we have to do with Ofqual, the exam boards and schools and colleges over the next few weeks, because precisely what we do about that also feeds into what might be happening within schools as well. We have difficult things to balance, and we have a whole range of subjects to make sure this works for. In a sense, we need to do a very complex piece of work swiftly with our partners in order to be able to bring forward the propositions that the Minister has mentioned we will be doing later in the autumn.

Q363 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** My other question is about the number of children that are sent home and isolated, the level of disruption that they face. I



have been contacted by a constituent where there are five cases in a year of nearly 200 pupils, and they have sent 120 of those pupils home for two weeks. We are aware, for example, that there are Members of Parliament who have had coronavirus. They have not sent the whole of Parliament home and it has been done on a much more targeted basis. What can be done in schools to reduce the number of students who are sent home—table plans, apps, those sort of things? In some schools the number of students sent home seems relatively small in relation to the number of pupils who may have tested positive, and in others there seems to be a blanket, “Send the whole year home” approach, which obviously creates much more disruption, particularly as case levels rise.

Nick Gibb: You raise a very good point. The whole purpose of bubbles, of course, is to minimise contacts between students, but within a bubble, particularly in a secondary school, where the bubble will be a whole year group, the advice is to avoid unnecessary social contact between students. You are also right that there is a disparity between the way schools react when there is a confirmed case of Covid in a particular bubble. What we have been doing is publishing case studies of how some schools have been able to identify who that student has had contact with and have managed to send a much smaller group home than a whole year group, but other schools have struggled with that and have erred on the side of caution and have sent the whole year group home. That is why it is important that we have high-quality remote education so that, from the day after they are sent home, they can commence their studies at home as though they were still at school.

Q364 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** What can the Department for Education do, working perhaps with your colleagues in the Department of Health, to help those schools that are sending greater sized bubbles home to be more targeted in their approach?

Nick Gibb: Again, it is about demonstrating what other schools have been able to do, case studies. We have regional teams up and down the country that talk to schools about these issues in order to spread that best practice. I do not know whether Lucy Smith wants to come in on this as well, but you are right, there is a differential approach to how they react to the advice they are getting from Public Health England.

Q365 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Children will be going on holiday shortly, if they are not already in some areas of the country. What effect do you think the school holidays will have on the number of coronavirus cases in schools? Do you think that children will be mixing more outside their bubbles and outside their geographical region and that that will increase the number of cases, or do you think most children will be staying at home and that cases will fall? What is your projection?

Nick Gibb: It is quite a challenging question, but what we do know from the Chief Medical Officer is that schools are a safe place for students, with the extraordinary efforts made by schools up and down the country to make themselves Covid-safe through increased hand washing, hygiene,



one-way systems and keeping the children in separate bubbles, the desk configuration in classrooms facing the front, the gap between students and the teachers and so on. I saw a school in Leicestershire just before they opened that had different keyboards. Every teacher had their own keyboard to take into a classroom so they were not touching equipment there. They have gone to enormous efforts and students are safe, you could argue safer, in the school environment than they are outside that environment.

In terms of those kinds of projections, I am not qualified to answer those questions, but I can certainly say that schools are safe places. If you look at the study that I think PHE did back in June of confirmed cases, the overwhelming majority of those cases, if I am right in thinking, were where the virus had not been contracted in the school environment, it had been contracted in the community and then identified in the school.

Q366 Dr Caroline Johnson: That might lead to an increase in cases when the children come back, but it is good to know that you are alert to that.

My final question was about the quality control of the work that is sent home. You talked about the importance, where children are sent home and where their classroom learning is disrupted, of their being able to get work sent home. I was contacted by a year 11 student whose mother is very worried about her child's progress. She said that the online provision is now much better than it was before the summer, which is great, but it is very much broadcast only. If the child is able to follow the lesson and keep up with it, they are able to learn, but if they are not able to follow the lesson, there is no way in that particular school that the children can come back to the teacher and say, "Please can you explain that?" There is also no work marked, except for every half-term when there is a test to see if they have understood the topic. That means that, potentially, if the child has not understood, there is no real way of doing anything about it until they fail or do badly in the end of half-term test.

What information have you given to schools on the quality of provision that is required, notwithstanding the fact that some teachers—most teachers, in fact—have done a phenomenal job in what they have been able to achieve with online tuition? What is Ofsted and DfE doing to ensure that the quality is good in every location and that children are able to get real-time feedback, or at least same-week feedback, on the work they are doing, or do you not think that is important?

Nick Gibb: Everything you say on this issue is important, Caroline, because what we set out in the guidance are very clear expectations. For example, on the issue you raise, it says, "When teaching pupils remotely, we expect schools to gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks and set a clear expectation on how regularly teachers will check work".

It is clearly set out in the guidance, but we have also tried to support schools in delivering education. We have a lot of webinars and case study



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materials so that teachers and schools can look to see how they can do this. This is new for a lot of teachers, so we are trying to support the profession as much as we can through those webinars and training sessions about how to teach remotely. It is very different from the way teachers were trained to teach when they were at university.

Then we have things like the Oak National Academy, which has produced something like 10,000 lessons, produced by teachers up and down the country, very high quality. We have given that organisation £4.8 million to continue to produce these lessons, which are connected to the national curriculum and which schools can also deploy and use for children in all year groups.

Chair: We know all that. It was very good, the Oak Academy. I have met them and I think it is exceptional, what it is doing. I think underlying Caroline's question is that, despite all that, there are too many pupils in schools who were not getting any learning at all. If I am not mistaken, Caroline, you are asking, "What are you going to do about it this time around?"

Q367 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Essentially, yes. My constituent is not getting the standard of education that you are describing, which you have directed that she should receive. When I go back to my constituent, who contacted me this morning, how should I advise? I appreciate that the very vast majority are getting wonderful teaching and the teachers have done a great job, but for those few who are not getting what they are supposed to get, this is a huge lost opportunity. What do I go back to that year 11 student's parent and say? Who can they contact? They have spoken to the head already. Who can they contact to ensure that their child's education is brought up to the level that you wish it to be? What is Ofsted doing? You have stopped Ofsted inspections, so what accountability is in place?

Nick Gibb: That is right, they should talk to the school about it. The expectations and the guidance are very clear and we are also helping, as I said, with webinars and training to help schools to deliver this and, again, on top of that there is all the Oak stuff, et cetera. We are doing everything we can to support schools to deliver this high-quality education. We have suspended Ofsted inspections, although Ofsted is visiting schools to discuss these kinds of challenges. It will publish a letter that will come out of those discussions. Ultimately, of course, schools are held to account on the achievements of their pupils, and that will always be at the forefront of schools' minds.

All the professionals that I have spoken to in schools want the best for their pupils. They do. They are professional people, they go into teaching because they want to help and educate young people and, of course, the quality of education will be assessed when inspections resume in January. They will be looking at both in-class teaching and remote education, and they will be assessing that through the normal Ofsted inspections.



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Q368 Dr Caroline Johnson: With respect, Minister, that does not really answer my question of what my constituent can do. I understand that inspections will resume in January and this girl will get the grades that she gets in June or July, but that does not help her get the better grades and the better tuition that she needs now, today. What can this parent do today that is going to get her child better education? Who can she approach now?

Nick Gibb: As I say, she should talk to the school. There are complaints procedures that every school has as well, if it escalates to that level. But I think the best thing for her to do is talk to the headteacher, to cite the guidance that is available on the website for the parents of that child to look at and to express the concern that she has about the quality of remote education. We are doing all we can to help schools to deliver very high-quality education. We also have regional school commissioners, eight of them all over the country, with teams of people supporting them. They can also talk to the regional schools commissioners if they have concerns about a particular school.

Q369 Chair: What I do not understand about this is that you are so passionate about standards, rightly so, and you have led the debate on standards in your time as Schools Minister. Despite the individual efforts of many teachers and many schools, we still know that millions of children were not learning during lockdown. Caroline's constituent is a case in point, and I could mention many others. You just seem to be turning a blind eye to it. Are you ringing up academy heads yourself to check what is going on? Why can't Ofsted, if it is not inspecting, have a role as a candid friend, working with schools to make sure that the students are learning online? Why don't you give more force to the directive that you have issued, rather than hope for the best? Because clearly for many children, as I say, despite incredible efforts of great teachers and great support staff, they are not getting that learning experience when they are sent home. Caroline's constituent is just one example of many, and you know it. You should be doing more to try to ensure that that does not happen.

Dr Caroline Johnson: If I may interject, Chair, my constituent has already entered the complaints procedure, has already spoken to the head and has come to her MP because she does not know where else to turn. That is why I am asking the question.

Chair: The reason why I am surprised at this is because there is no one in the Government who is more passionate about academic capital, learning and standards in education than you, Nick, yet these children are forgotten about.

Nick Gibb: I do not accept the last point you make. The Government as a whole are as passionate as I am about making sure we have high academic standards in our schools. That is why we issued the directive and it is why the guidance is very clear, and it goes into several pages, about the very high expectations that we have for schools, for all 23,000 schools in this country. It is why we are providing support. It is all very



well ordering schools to do things. These are extraordinary times. This is a very new way of teaching. Teachers have not been trained in it, so we are also providing very extensive support to schools in how to deliver remote education to a very high quality.

Of course, in 23,000 schools, some will be better at this than others, as some schools are better at delivering in-class teaching than others. What we have been doing as a Government since 2010 is making sure that more schools are of high quality. We have been successful in delivering that, although there is still more to do, and we will continue to monitor this. Our regional schools teams are monitoring this. The candid friend is happening. That is what these Ofsted visits are all about. It will not be evaluating in a formal way, but it will be talking to schools about how they are coping with the crisis and how they are managing to deliver remote education to their pupils. Of course, we will have proper inspections, we hope, in January that will properly evaluate both in-class quality of education and remote.

Q370 Apsana Begum: Minister, you mentioned the inspections in January 2021, but given the diverse experiences of schools and school leadership teams in managing the pandemic, the education inspection framework inspections obviously place an emphasis on a variety of aspects that I think would be impossible to judge fairly during this academic year. We have schools that have improvement plans or are deemed to be good but declining. They might be judged negatively and unfairly on the pace of their improvement were they to be re-inspected under section 5 in the current academic year.

Also, if you look at good schools, it would be equally unfair to inspect outstanding schools, for example, who are currently exempt, as they would be judged in completely extraordinary circumstances that could unfairly place their hard-earned outstanding status in jeopardy. What plans are there, if any, to think about delaying the inspection framework and routine inspections in January 2021? Are you going to be providing any directive to Ofsted on that?

Nick Gibb: This line of questioning is the opposite of the line of questioning I have just had from Caroline and Robert, but of course inspections will be sensitive to the impact of the pandemic on schools. There is no question about that. It is not going to inspect a formerly outstanding school that is no longer exempt without taking into account all the challenges that school faces. Of course it will.

Q371 Apsana Begum: Are there going to be any changes to that framework to take into account the current environment?

Nick Gibb: No, not to the framework. These frameworks take many months to prepare, then they are consulted on and they then become the framework, but in implementing that framework, as I said, inspectors will be sensitive to the crisis that the country and the world faces, and to the



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particular challenges that schools face during this pandemic. Of course they would be sensitive.

Q372 Fleur Anderson: I have a question about the practicalities of exams and the plans you are going to have in place. I know that many headteachers will be watching this to see what advice they can get in advance. I do not want to always go on about mocks, but mock exams are coming up at the end of December and early January, and then the actual exams in the summer. What specific guidance and funding will the Department be putting in place for procuring additional accommodation to allow for social distancing during the exam time and still be able to run them along the same timetable? Will you be providing additional funding or resourcing to work with local councils for additional space? For example, in London, my constituency, the schools are quite small and compact and they will not be able to have the same space for exams that they would have done normally.

Nick Gibb: We have had an exam service in place where the DfE will help schools to find the extra space, extra invigilators and extra funding in part for the autumn series. There was not a huge call upon that service. Schools have managed to hold those exams, because there are far fewer than we had anticipated taking the exams in the autumn. As we work through all the contingencies, we will have more to say about those particular issues for the summer exams. We have not made an announcement on what provision we can provide for schools in the summer, but we have provided very detailed guidance about how exams for the autumn season need to be conducted in a way that is safe, about distances between desks and how students should be wearing masks before they go into the hall, and so on. We will be issuing that kind of guidance as we approach the summer exam season as well.

Q373 Fleur Anderson: My question is not just about the summer, which is good to hear, but also about the mock season in January. Those exams are so important for getting university places, that they are all able to happen in good time and we do not come up to January and schools are saying they cannot do it, so they cannot give good predictions. People might lose out on university places because of that, just as much as they would from the summer exams. Will any additional guidance be coming for those?

Nick Gibb: The guidance we issued in July, which we keep updating, is all about how to keep schools Covid-safe in all their routine day-to-day activities, including holding tests and exams in the school environment. That is a very extensive piece of guidance about all the things that schools need to do to minimise the risk of transmitting the virus within the school in terms of ventilation, hygiene and children facing the front and not facing each other, and so on. All that detail is in the guidance that is already published, but we will have more to say about the conduct of exams as we approach the summer exam season.

Q374 Kim Johnson: Good morning, Minister and director general. My



questions are around school attendance. The north-west, as you know, has seen infection rates increasing exponentially and Liverpool is now in tier 3. You have just stated that you believe schools are safe, but there is the difficulty of social distancing between pupils due to very large class sizes, because we have the largest class sizes in Europe. Can you explain the criteria for schools moving from tier 1 to tier 2 and what discussions you have had with schools and unions about the need to move to tier 2, with secondary schools moving to rotas on a two-week off, two-week on basis?

Nick Gibb: Even in those areas of the country with local alert areas at the highest level, we are still not moving to tier 2 of the contain framework. This is all about the annex to the Department of Health contain framework. It has four tiers for schools. Tier 1 is where all schools are at the moment. The criteria for moving to a different tier will be issues such as the local infection rate, the number of confirmed cases in a school and the number of staff absent in a school. All those criteria will help to inform the decision about whether to move schools to tier 2. Tier 2, as you rightly say, is that primary schools remain open for all pupils, but secondary schools move to a rota, either one week on, one week off or two weeks on, two weeks off. Then tier 3 is, again, primary schools remaining open but secondary schools being closed to all students except vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers. Tier 4, of course, is all schools closed except for those children.

Q375 **Kim Johnson:** I know that at the beginning of the autumn term some of the schools in my constituency were partially closed due to infection rates and class sizes, and that is increasing as time goes on, particularly in areas like Liverpool. What advice are you giving to schools in those areas?

Nick Gibb: The advice at the moment is that they are to stay in tier 1, because children are safer. What the Chief Medical Officer says is that the risks of children being out of school in terms of their mental wellbeing, their development and their education are higher out of school than in school. Schools up and down the country have gone to enormous lengths, based on the guidance that came out on 2 July about keeping schools safe and all those measures that I have mentioned. The advice is that if you have a confirmed case, then you need to identify, with advice from the local public health teams, the people that that student or teacher has had close contact with, and that is defined, and then those children should be asked to self-isolate.

Q376 **Kim Johnson:** The Department has now published guidance for remote learning from this week. There will be a legal obligation on schools to provide remote education. Can you explain why this was not put in place by you back in March? If schools do have to go into lockdown and children miss out on learning again, how will you monitor the quality of online learning being delivered? We have heard that the approach has been quite inconsistent, with lots of kids missing out over the last couple of months.



Nick Gibb: Yes, these are important issues. On the website we have the “Get help with remote education” page on gov.uk, which talks a lot about the support that schools can get to help them deliver high-quality remote education. As I said earlier in our discussions, we are providing nearly half a million computers to schools, with 220,000 already delivered. Some 100,000 have been delivered since September, taking that figure up to over 300,000, and we have more being procured. We want schools to be delivering high-quality remote education to ensure that no child loses out as a consequence of decisions taken by the school to ask students to self-isolate as a consequence of a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus.

Q377 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks, Minister, but I have heard those figures rolled out quite a lot on the amount of equipment that is being delivered. However, practically, what I hear on the ground is that that equipment has not gone to those kids who most need it. How many teachers have you spoken to personally about those kinds of issues?

Nick Gibb: We do have our teacher reference groups. We talk to teachers and headteachers all the time about the experience, but we did deliver 220,000 before the summer. The priority for those computers was children with a social worker so they could keep in touch with the local authority and their social worker even while they were confined to their homes during lockdown. We are determined that any school that requires children to self-isolate, and if there are disadvantaged children in that group who do not have access to a computer, they can order one from our system. The average delivery time is 1.3 days, so most schools will get that computer within a day. Since September we have managed to deliver 100,000 of these computers.

This is a mammoth procurement exercise. You cannot just walk into PC World and order 250,000 computers. It does require lead times, it requires a big procurement exercise. It has been one of the biggest procurement exercises in the UK for computers. On one single day during the summer we distributed 27,000 computers to local authorities to truck into schools. This is a big project, it is very expensive, £160 million, but we share your view that disadvantaged children should have the same opportunities to be able to access remote education as children who have a computer at home.

Q378 **Kim Johnson:** Unfortunately, there is a lot of evidence that suggests that has not been happening. I just want some assurances that those children who most need that type of support will get it.

Nick Gibb: Just to finish, we do monitor demand. Demand is high, and we are meeting demand at the moment. If we do not meet demand, we will increase procurement, so we are absolutely monitoring this thing to make sure that we can meet the demand that is coming from schools.

Q379 **Chair:** Can I go back to understand the procurement? The computers, while welcome, took a very long time to arrive. I have had headteachers



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in my own constituency saying that some of the computers only just arrived; some of the computers arrived to schools without the proper logins or passwords and were unusable; some schools received much less than they were told. Just to be clear, why is it that the Department could not have just arranged with Currys or PC World head office to give vouchers to individual headteachers to go and get their own computers? It would have probably been a lot cheaper, because they could have bought £200 Chromebooks from Argos or Currys or whatever it may be. Why did you have to set up this massive complicated procurement system that took months and months for the computers to arrive to schools?

Nick Gibb: Because there simply were not enough computers to do that. We are supplying 220,000 computers. It would be very easy for us just to give those vouchers, but there simply would not have been enough to enable that to have worked. In a globally demanding market, where other countries also want these pieces of equipment, we contracted with a company called Computacenter and it very successfully procured and delivered the computers on time.

Q380 **Chair:** But they were not delivered on time, because I have spoken to school after school and had messages from teachers. They are not misleading me. I saw a school on Friday in my own constituency where some computers had only just arrived from this procurement scheme. This seems to have gone on, from feedback, all over the place. When this was announced, I was very excited about it because I thought it was a really good initiative from the Government. I remember it was in the very early days of lockdown that the Secretary of State announced it in a big weekend press conference, but it was never intended that they would take four months and that, by the time the kids get them, they would be back at school.

Nick Gibb: One always hears about what goes wrong, but 220,000 computers went out and they went to local authorities, they went to schools, they went to trusts and they did go out. There are computers arriving now. As I said, by the end of this week we will have procured and delivered 100,000 computers since September; 96,000 had gone out by last Friday. They are still arriving because we are still procuring for this term as well. We want every disadvantaged child who is self-isolating to be able to have access to a computer if they do not have one already. Of course, this is in addition to what schools themselves are doing. I know of schools that are using their own supply of computers to help children. This is one contribution to making sure that every disadvantaged child has access to a computer and has access, therefore, to remote education.

Q381 **Tom Hunt:** I am very pleased to hear the Government's determination that exams should go ahead next year, but just in terms of those contingency measures that you mentioned, not being able to give us a 100% guarantee that exams will go ahead, to my mind those contingency measures should be socially distanced exams. As I said before, I completely understand why the exams could not have gone ahead this



year, because of the huge levels of Covid-19 and we did not really know what was going to happen, but we have had examples of countries such as Germany where socially distanced exams did go ahead. It would be quite reassuring to know that, at the heart of those contingency measures, the Government are having a proper look at what happened in Germany and how it was able to carry out socially distanced exams. Basically, those contingency measures should be socially distanced exams, not no exams. That is what I would like to see. I want to know your thoughts on that.

Nick Gibb: I agree with you totally. We want exams to go ahead in all circumstances for these particular year groups. If we are moving up through those contain tiers, the exam year groups will have priority in taking those exams. These are the kinds of issues we are looking at and we will have more to say. Even having said that, and even agreeing with you 100%, you still have to plan for the very worst occurrences because sometimes you need to put those plans in place before those worst-case scenarios occur. That is the kind of thing we are working through now with Ofqual, the schools sector and exam boards.

Q382 **Tom Hunt:** In terms of Ofsted, I completely understand that when the outbreak took place it was so unprecedented and it was very difficult to have ever foreseen any of the consequences. When the schools closed, it was the first time they had to put online learning in place at that level. I think it is right that Ofsted is perhaps not too harsh on any school that may not have got it completely right when it came to online provision in the past, but we now know a lot more and it is likely that blended learning, et cetera, will be with us for a while.

You have referred to Ofsted having a role in overseeing which schools are stepping up to provide decent online learning and which ones are not. I know there is this sort of legal obligation to provide good online learning, but will the quality of online learning be formally part of any future Ofsted inspections? When we talk about Ofsted having a role and overseeing it, will it have teeth to ensure that we do not see a continuation of this huge disparity of some schools providing decent online learning and others not? I think that is a problem at the moment, and I wanted to know if that is going to be sorted out going forward.

Nick Gibb: It will be looking at the quality of education once inspections start again in January. Quality of education will include, of course, the quality of education that students receive if they are home self-isolating. It will be something that Ofsted will be looking at in a routine way from January, if that is the date when section 5 inspections resume.

Q383 **Chair:** Why in January? Why can't Ofsted work with the schools directly now to make sure that the kids are learning from home from today, if not yesterday, if not over the past six months when the kids were in lockdown, where Ofsted had a very limited role? Why not now? Let these kids learn and get Ofsted to work with them to make sure they are doing what you, as a Department, suggest as the national guidelines for online



learning or at-home learning.

Nick Gibb: It is, as I said, visiting schools in a slightly less formal way, but not evaluating against the inspection framework. It is having those discussions with schools now.

Q384 **Chair:** What is it doing exactly? We have Ofsted coming in, but what is your understanding of what Ofsted is specifically doing to ensure that children are learning properly at home if they have to go home?

Nick Gibb: It will be having these discussions with schools as they go around in an informal way to understand the challenges. Look, you have to understand that we are in a crisis mode in terms of dealing with the pandemic. Schools are working around the clock to be open and safe. We have meetings with the trade unions and with teacher groups on the challenges of teaching in a Covid-secure way day in, day out as well as preparing remote education. All these things are huge challenges to schools and we have to balance the rigorous accountability approach to making sure schools are providing high quality while also managing 450,000 professionals and making sure they have the support to carry out those challenges.

Q385 **Chair:** No one doubts that. I have said time and time again that we should pay tribute to the schools, the teachers and support staff who have been doing an extraordinary job in extraordinary times, but it does not take away from the fact that we allowed millions of children not to learn over the past six months. It still is not clear what exactly we are going to do to make sure children who are sent home, including the ones who are being sent home already, get that proper learning experience as much as possible.

Nick Gibb: That is why we introduced the directive. It comes into force on Thursday, 22 October. The expectations set out in the guidance are very clear about what we expect schools to provide in terms of remote education. We share your concern about children who have lost and not had the highest quality of education during the lockdown period. That is why we have secured £1 billion of catch-up premium to enable schools to provide catch-up one-to-one tuition and so on so that children do catch up.

Q386 **Chair:** Why didn't you issue a similar directive in the early days of lockdown?

Nick Gibb: Because you are dealing with a crisis, you are dealing with schools. The reason we took away, for example, the inspection of schools in those early days was to enable schools to cope with the pressure they were under. Do not forget—

Q387 **Chair:** That is understood, but you still could have set the guidelines and had a directive for the required online learning at home, given that schools would have welcomed the guidance. You did the Oak Academy, which I think is an excellent initiative, alongside other things that people



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can access like the BBC and Google Classroom and so on. If you can issue a directive now, why couldn't you have done a similar directive earlier to make sure we were not left with a situation where over 2.3 million kids did not learn anything for six months?

Nick Gibb: Passing laws does not always deliver.

Q388 **Chair:** So why pass this one now?

Nick Gibb: Because it does not raise the expectation, it clarifies the law. Over the Easter holidays the concern we had was on giving them the support they needed. That was our approach. What support do they need to enable them to do something they have never done before at no notice? By the end of the Easter holiday we had a whole raft of resources online that schools could use. That was our priority as a Government, giving them the support to do that. Then the 40 able teachers set about it and, within two weeks, had the Oak National Academy online. We helped support that with some—

Q389 **Chair:** I have praised and supported that. I acknowledge it was a great initiative. I do not need you to answer this, but I repeat the point that 2.3 million children learned hardly anything during the lockdown, despite the Oak Academy.

Nick Gibb: We secured, with backing right across Government, £1 billion of catch-up funding. We hear billions being floated around all the time now. It—

Chair: No, it is great, I am very happy with the catch-up fund. In fact, it is perfect timing, because Christian is going to ask you a question about the catch-up fund.

Nick Gibb: I think Lucy is signalling she would like to come in as well.

Q390 **Christian Wakeford:** What assessment have you done of the number of children who, even after the deployment, will remain without connectivity? It is one thing having a laptop, but if they are in a black spot or a not spot, how are they going to access the education? Likewise, what assistance is there for families with more than one child but potentially only one device? I remember growing up with my twin brother that, if you have one device, you tend to end up fighting over it, so what kind of help is there from Government or schools to overcome some of these issues?

Nick Gibb: A calculation was made. We can send you details of how we estimated the level of demand for devices but, as I said, securing 220,000 computers before the summer was not a simple task and we wanted to prioritise vulnerable children and children with a social worker initially. Now we are getting another 250,000 devices so that any disadvantaged child who does not have a computer at home can use it. One of the differences in the state sector is that it will not be possible all the time to have live streaming.



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Some of the lessons will be recorded to deal with the very issue you are talking about, that some families may not have more than one device available for siblings to use at the same time. That is why this combined approach of physical work, textbooks, worksheets and recorded lessons, such as the Oak-type lessons, combined with teachers being in touch through traditional methods, phone calls and so on, is happening.

Lucy Smith: This is a sort of system-wide effort, and obviously the circumstances of remote education are important as well. This is not happening to all schools all of the time at the moment. They are sending home groups of students in particular places for particular lengths of time and then needing to provide online learning for them based on the curriculum they were learning up to that point. They are also having to adapt, for example, to incidents that might be different, where a teacher needs to teach from home, for example. All the examples are different from each other, and we need schools to understand what excellent practice is and be able to deploy that in different circumstances.

At the moment the key issue for the system is to learn and develop that best practice and then share it. I think what we are doing through peer-to-peer support, Ofsted visits and the Oak Academy to understand good practice is really important, because it is only by allowing schools and the system to develop those practices and then share them very quickly that we will be able to ramp up the quality in the way that I know everyone is very much behind us in doing.

Q391 **Christian Wakeford:** In regard to that particular point of connectivity, I know dongles have been sent out, but for locations or households where dongles are not suitable, what is the plan B?

Nick Gibb: Where there is no internet access, you rely on the physical work being sent home. I am aware of examples from rural areas where even getting the physical work to children in their homes is challenging. They use, for example, supermarkets as drop-off points where schools drop off the work and the children come and pick it up. There are all kinds of imaginative ways that happened before the summer for delivering remote education. The BBC has also been providing education programmes.

Q392 **Christian Wakeford:** Given the learning loss that has occurred—and we have already spoken about the over 2 million children—catch-up initiatives are urgently needed. Can you update us on how many tutors and mentors have been recruited so far and are now providing tuition and support in schools?

Nick Gibb: We have been working with the Education Endowment Foundation on the National Tutoring Programme. It has been evaluating tutoring companies during this period. The programme comes into effect in November. We will write to you with details of the numbers of tutors that it has managed to evaluate and are sending into schools. Once that



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has started in November, I am very happy to provide more details to the Committee.

Q393 Christian Wakeford: Thank you, Minister. Is it possible to have a regional breakdown as well? It may be great to say, "We have all these tutors but they are all in London", but that means nothing to the likes of Ian in the north-east or me in the north-west. Who will be responsible for the performance and delivery of the tutors? Is this something that Ofsted, the DfE, the Education Endowment Foundation or Teach First would be involved in? Who will be judging the actual outcome of the scheme? It is great that we are putting money into it, but we need to assess it fully.

Nick Gibb: It will be evaluated using quantitative and qualitative evaluation approaches, but the Education Endowment Foundation is responsible for the actual quality of the tutors, and it is monitoring and evaluating the companies that are supplying the tutors. It is very heavily subsidised, so the schools will be making some contribution to the cost of the tutors. It is a very highly effective way of ensuring children catch up. With a few weeks of one-to-one and small-group tutoring you can make so much progress. That is why we are so keen on this programme and are allocating £350 million to the National Tutoring Programme. There is also a Teach First programme for academic mentors. We will provide details of that to the Committee in due course, if that is helpful.

Q394 Christian Wakeford: What assessment has the Department done so far on the widening of the attainment gap during lockdown? Is it a reasonable, realistic and achievable outcome on the back of the catch-up programme?

Nick Gibb: Well, that is what we are worried about. There have been a number of reports published over recent months about the widening of the attainment gap as a consequence of the lockdown and children not being in school. We are worried about that, and that has helped us to secure £1 billion of catch-up funding so we can close that attainment gap. It has been the hallmark of this Government since 2010 that we wanted to close the attainment gap, and we have been successful in doing so, so far. We have closed the attainment gap in primary by 13% and in secondary by 9% and we don't want to lose that achievement. That is what we have been working for since 2010.

The reason we wanted to get schools back and we put so much effort into ensuring that schools could return full time was to make sure that we stopped the widening of the attainment gap that was going on while children were at home. On what assessment we have done, we have been looking at all the reports from the different bodies in recent months, and we accept the views they have come to.

Q395 David Simmonds: I have saved maybe the most boring question for towards the end, and it is about money. We have had some correspondence about the growing figure for the overspend on the



dedicated schools grant. I am interested in the Department's approach to how schools forums, and of course local authorities standing behind them, are going to deal with that issue. We know that since 2014 there has been a growing degree of overspend, particularly on the high needs block of the dedicated schools grant, and at the same time a tightening of the rules about what schools forums can do to allocate funds between the blocks to deal with that. That is pushing the degree of the overspends to a point of crisis at a time when there is about £1.4 billion in surplus balances held by schools across England.

I am interested in what the Department's approach to deal with this is going to be. In particular, given that as long as it sits on the dedicated schools fund and it is, therefore, subject to local government budget fixing rules, it has to be taken into account in the consultation process for the fixing of council tax. It potentially has a wider impact on council tax payers, who have no degree of influence whatsoever on how that money is spent.

Nick Gibb: These may be technical issues but they are hugely important and, again, it is something that we have been worried about over the last few years. There has been an increasing expense in delivering high needs education. It is a hugely important part of the education system. These are the most vulnerable children.

You will recall that several years ago we extended the age range up to 25 for the entitlement to educational support for children with special educational needs. That has added to costs. Parents want the very best for their children with special educational needs. Where local authorities don't have their own state-run provision for special schools, they have used the independent sector, which is very high quality but also very expensive. Of course, the great developments in medical science mean there are more children with severe special educational needs than there have been and who require very technical and specialised support, all of which comes with a cost.

Over recent years local authorities have incurred increasing expense, and that is why this year we have increased the high needs budget by £780 million and next year by £730 million. That is a 24% rise in funding for high needs education over those two years, simply to reflect the concerns that you are raising and that is what we are trying to do. We are also working with individual local authorities to see what extra help we can deliver to try to deal with their particular deficits in the DSG that is driven by high needs. There is also an element of the free schools budget so that we can have more special free schools, more state-funded special schools, to help deliver the kind of specialist education that parents increasingly want for their children. That is what we are trying to do, and we are also trying to bring down the cost of independent provision for local authorities.

Q396 **David Simmonds:** What engagement has the Department had with local authorities about the issue of the deficits that are currently sitting on its



dedicated schools grants? What assessment has the Department made of the adequacy of the additional funds, not just for meeting the rising costs—which I totally agree are exactly as you have described—but also the adequacy of the funds for meeting the costs that have already been incurred under the statutory duties that are currently sitting as a deficit on the DSG?

Nick Gibb: We know that some authorities around the country have very significant deficits and, in all reality, will need extra support from the Department, and that is being provided. There are discussions between our officials and those authorities on how we can help them tackle the deficits that will come with very significant conditions attached if we provide extra funds to deal with particular deficits. We know that some authorities are facing very challenging financial circumstances as a consequence of their high needs budget deficits.

Q397 **David Simmonds:** Are there any examples you can give of what that support means in practice, without naming individual authorities that you may not wish to highlight?

Nick Gibb: Maybe we will write to the Committee on this issue. You will probably know the particular authorities that I am thinking of where we have provided quite significant support to help them deliver. The consequence can be that the very valuable services to these children will be cut, and we do not want that to happen. We are working with a number of local authorities right now to deal with the deficits. We will help further authorities in the next financial year.

Q398 **Fleur Anderson:** To ask further on costs, especially on a Covid costs fund for schools, when I go to my local schools they say they are incurring significant additional costs for cleaning, additional staff for smaller groups, plexiglass and equipment, and a loss of income at the same time because they cannot hire out their halls and accommodation. They are losing money there, but they do not have any money or additional funding to cover those costs. I know it is a national issue. Ruth Davies, the president of the National Association of Headteachers, has spoken out about this recently, saying that schools are expected to put in additional Covid safety arrangements, “without any additional funding at all”, but those safety arrangements are keeping children in school and keeping them safe. I know there is a Covid costs fund, and schools are putting money into that, but they do not know if they are getting that reimbursed and they cannot afford the additional costs. Will the Government be providing a Covid costs fund for schools?

Nick Gibb: As you say, there was a fund available between March and July this year that covered the extra costs that schools were incurring, for example, in opening over the Easter holidays and so on, extra cleaning costs where there was a confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus in the school. Schools have been submitting claims, and £58 million of claims have been paid under that fund. We are assessing the other claims that did not necessarily fall within the clear elements of what is claimable



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and what is not. We will assess those to see whether they are reasonable or not, and we will make those payments shortly.

Going forward, schools are back full time and they are now into the new three-year funding settlement for schools, which is the best funding settlement schools have had in a decade—£2.6 billion more funding for schools in this year and a big increase of £4.8 billion next year compared to last year and so on. We expect schools to use that funding to fund the extra costs and we don't think the extra costs should be substantial in adapting schools to the—

Chair: We are going to try to finish in the next 15 to 20 minutes, so can we try to be concise?

Q399 **Fleur Anderson:** That is not the feedback we are hearing from schools. The costs are substantial and they need to have them covered. The additional funding is absorbed in what is necessary to run schools. We are facing a crisis further down the line because of lack of funding for Covid costs, so could this be reconsidered?

Nick Gibb: We keep these things under review, of course. Our priority for the money we can secure from the Treasury was, first, to get the funding settlement and, secondly, to make sure we had a £1 billion catch-up fund. We felt that the priority had to be on catch-up. The Treasury has so many competing demands on it at the moment, and we felt that the priority should be catch-up. Given that we had this very good settlement, we felt that was the best way of prioritising Treasury funds.

Q400 **David Simmonds:** On the finance, I am aware from my schools that the grant has been received. It would be helpful if you could give us a bit more detail or a sense of the monitoring that is being undertaken. I accept that schools have had a lot of exceptional costs. I have also seen some examples of what I would regard as quite unreasonable behaviour by schools. For example, one had spent £20,000 getting a plumber to turn off the water to the water fountains rather than perhaps putting a bag over them and saying that they are out of use. I don't think that is the kind of thing that taxpayers should be picking up the cost for.

Nick Gibb: We are always concerned about making sure schools are able to use taxpayers' money efficiently and to ensure that they get value for money. We have a cadre of specialists called school resource management advisers, and they can go in and help schools to manage their budgets. They will help schools find savings in things like that, in how they procure services and goods, to make sure that they are delivering the kind of efficiencies that we would expect from schools. We help schools to do that.

Q401 **Tom Hunt:** I have a couple of quick questions on SEND. I know that the national review on SEND is still being worked on at the moment, but bearing in mind that the closure of schools has had a particular impact on those with special educational needs, might it be worth increasing the scope of that national review? Perhaps one of the benefits of the fact that



it has not been published yet is that we can change the scope slightly to really look at some of the ways in which those with special educational needs are being particularly impacted by school closures.

My second question is on the potential shortfall in investment in SEND and EHCPs. Do you believe the high needs formula is currently fit for purpose, or are some of the schools that are most in need missing out?

Nick Gibb: I think that is right. The SEND review will, of course, take into account what has happened since March.

On the formula, the advantage of having these national funding formulas is that they can be changed and altered each year and then applied. Of course, we keep that formula under review. We don't underestimate the significant extra funding that we are putting into high needs of £780 million this year and £730 million next year. That is nearly a 25% increase over just two years, because we understand the pressure that the high needs budgets are under up and down the country.

Q402 **Jonathan Gullis:** Something that I am really keen to understand about multi-academy trusts is how the larger MATs are best working. At the moment, if a school wishes to leave a MAT, it makes it incredibly difficult, especially as there are MATs now that are not performing as they should be or have coasted for a long time. What can the DfE do to allow a school the flexibility to be able to leave a MAT much more easily if it feels it is no longer working in its interests financially or, most importantly, in the students' interests of being able to get the best quality learning?

Nick Gibb: Schools don't have a right to leave a multi-academy trust. Where a multi-academy trust is failing to deliver the quality of education we expect, the regional schools commissioners may rebroker schools away from that trust and move them into a more effective trust that can help to raise standards. The great advantage of multi-academy trusts is that they help schools to collaborate, to share best practice and to push up standards. We have a performance table of multi-academy trusts and you can see which are the most effective in the country. We hope and expect that multi-academy trusts will look to see what is driving the high standards in some of the most effective multi-academy trusts like the Star Multi-Academy Trust, for example, which is one of the most effective MATs in the country.

Q403 **Jonathan Gullis:** The issue is that, like you were saying, there are some really good examples but there are not enough good ones. I worked for one when I was in Birmingham where our partner school was in Middlesbrough, and we were one of 60 schools across the country. That is not feasible, and it doesn't mean that MATs are working as they should do, in my opinion, which is about having localised, small-scale MATs that are helping in a local area. The key principle here is that free market conservatism means that the school should be the buyer and it should be the selling of the MATs that entices them to go. I think some MATs have become large LEAs, which they were looking to replace, but with less



financial accountability and less accountability to the governance. Before I left my teaching career to become a Member of Parliament, I was on the verge of taking strike action against the CEO of a trust because of the very issue that we did not know where the money was being spent or who was accountable for what.

Nick Gibb: This is an evolving new structure. Don't forget it is all new and we are learning about how the most effective multi-academy trusts function. They all have reviews by regional schools commissioners that look at the financial side and the academic side to see how they are performing, and they will take action. As a Government, we take action against underperforming multi-academy trusts in a way that it was very difficult to take with an underperforming local authority. It is a very effective system and I am confident that it is the system that is driving up standards up and down the country.

Q404 **Ian Mearns:** As a result of schools being failed by multi-academy trusts, how many orphan schools are there?

Nick Gibb: There are too many. I can send you the precise number so that you know. The definition that you are using is a maintained school that has a directive academy order but has not yet secured a trust to sponsor it. We have set up a national trust that I think is called the Falcon Multi-Academy Trust to take those schools that have not found a home to sponsor them and sort out their problems. Often the reluctance of a MAT to take on an underperforming school is to do with the problems that they have with finances or with structural deficits or PFI arrangements, and we need to sort those things out before they are moved on. My colleague Baroness Berridge is absolutely determined that we are going to get those schools into multi-academy trusts.

Q405 **Apsana Begum:** Do you agree that there should be consultations on schools possibly turning into academies during the global pandemic?

Nick Gibb: There is a requirement to consult when the structure is changed, and I don't think it should delay them converting into academies. What is important is that we see standards rise. When we came into office, 68% of schools were good and outstanding. Today that figure is 86%, and that is due to the hard work of teachers and professionals up and down the country, but I also believe it is due to the structural changes that we have made to the system, and that includes academisation.

Q406 **Apsana Begum:** The question is about the consultations and whether there can be real, meaningful consultations with parents and other stakeholders in a pandemic, where there would usually perhaps be greater levels of engagement. Do you think it is possible to have meaningful consultation now?

Nick Gibb: I think so. I think we have all learned to use computers and remote forms of communicating and holding meetings using remote



methods that we never used to do in the past. There are solutions to the problem that you present.

Q407 **Apsana Begum:** I disagree. I think there are lots of parents, across my constituency certainly, who do not have the same levels of access to the internet as you suggest, not even at this point in the pandemic.

Moving on, I want to ask you a few questions about what the Government's current strategy is for tackling child food hunger. You will no doubt be aware of Marcus Rashford and his campaign. There are programmes that are in place during term time like the universal infant free school meals programme, and the school milk subsidy programme is one that was funded in part by the EU and then topped up by the Government here. The school fruit and vegetable scheme was for children aged four to six and is suspended because of the pandemic and is expected to resume in the autumn. These are programmes that are in place during term time, but now we are looking at the situation outside of term time and in the holidays, what is the overall framework? You have committed a £60 million grant for food aid charities, and £63 million for local authority support where they decide the eligibility criteria, but what is the overall national framework and strategy you are deploying here?

Nick Gibb: When we had to close schools to most pupils, we were determined that the children who were eligible for free school meals, even though they were not in school—and don't forget that for over a century we have had a school meals system that is free for the most disadvantaged—would still receive those meals, even though they were at home. That is why we decided way back in March that they were to continue to receive food. Initially, it was done on an ad hoc basis by schools either sending packages home or giving vouchers to the local supermarket. We then introduced the national voucher scheme, and something like £380 million of vouchers were claimed by families during that period. We took a decision to continue that into the Easter holidays, which was a new initiative, and we extended it into the Whitsun holiday in May. With prompting by Marcus Rashford, we decided to extend it into the very long period of the summer holidays as well.

It is important that children are back in school now, and we want to make sure that we support the catering companies that supply food in our schools. Now children are in school and getting a nutritious meal every lunchtime, which is absolutely the right thing to do.

Q408 **Apsana Begum:** That is your commitment for term time. What about outside of term time? We are now approaching the half-term holidays and again we are having a national conversation about tackling long-term child food hunger. Are you thinking about, for example, extending free school meals to those on universal credit or equivalent outside of term time?

Nick Gibb: We are not totally back to business as normal, but children are back in school full time. You are asking really whether the



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Department for Education should be part of the DWP. During the pandemic we know that families all over the country are facing severe financial constraints as a consequence of reduced hours or losing their jobs. That is why we have added another £9.5 billion to the welfare budget and have a £63 million fund for local authorities to help families that are in urgent need. In our judgment, that is the method by which we help families that are struggling during this pandemic.

Q409 Apsana Begum: Let me ask it differently. On 15 October, the Welsh Government made a long-term commitment to their school holiday enrichment programme. They have also announced that free school meals will be provided for children during all school holidays in Wales until spring 2021. Is that something you are considering at all?

Nick Gibb: We have the holiday activities and food programme that has been operating for three years in 17 local authorities, a £9 million a year programme. That continued this summer as well, which we think is important. It is nutritious food but also healthy activities for the most disadvantaged young people to participate in over the summer. But universal credit should be helping families to deal with the financial constraints that the pandemic has caused. That is why we have put in an extra £9.5 billion, £1,000 a year more for families who are facing financial constraints.

Q410 Apsana Begum: I appreciate that relates to the DWP, but for those on universal credit, entitlement to free school meals only applies if the household income is less than £7,400 a year. The household income is very precarious now for those who are losing employment. To be clear, Minister, the Covid summer food fund is not going to become the Covid autumn food fund at all?

Nick Gibb: We have listened very carefully to Marcus. I was very influenced and moved by Marcus Rashford's letter when he highlighted the kind of poverty that he still encounters in this country. We are absolutely with him in eradicating that kind of poverty in our country, and we need to do that. We are looking very carefully at the national food strategy that Marcus Rashford has backed, and we will look at that very carefully as part of the current spending review.

Q411 Ian Mearns: Marcus Rashford was able to put something into the public domain that an awful lot of us knew about beforehand. But I honestly detect that there are growing levels of cross-party support for this sort of ongoing support for families. When it is happening in the other nations of the United Kingdom, it becomes much more difficult for the Government and the Department, on an England-only level, to say, "We have done what we can". All those other DWP measures exist in the other countries, but they are still doing that holiday support for families because it is very difficult and we want, in the last analysis, to avoid children going hungry in the 21st century.

Chair: We know that the Office for Budget Responsibility said that family



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incomes had dropped by 32% on average during Covid, which is a huge amount even with universal credit. I think having a proper long-term plan to combat child food hunger is incredibly important, whether you agree with everything Marcus Rashford says or not.

Nick Gibb: I agree with a lot of the things that Marcus Rashford has said. We had the contingency plans in place to help children who were at home while schools were not open to make sure they had nutritious food. Schools are now open, and the overwhelming majority of pupils are now in school and their schools are providing meals free of charge to children who are eligible for free school meals. The Government also understand the huge constraints that families are under as a consequence of the pandemic. That is why, as I have said, we have added £9.3 billion or £9.4 billion to the universal credit system to make sure that families are supported. In addition to that, there is the £63 million to local authorities for families that are facing particular financial crisis.

Q412 **Chair:** If families are not working, the average universal credit is, what, £409 a month post-25 years old? That is not a lot to live on if you have issues with feeding your kids, paying your rent, your bills, whatever it might be. Often these families lost their income because of Government policy, which I happen to agree with on the health things, but they have lost their jobs or they have been made redundant. That is why this issue is more important than previously because of decisions made by Government. Through no fault of their own, people need assistance in helping feed their kids at this time.

Nick Gibb: I don't disagree with anything you have said. Now that schools are back full time and we are back, not to normal life as before but there is some element of normality back in schools, the schools are providing food to all children. The question is: where does the focus lie in helping families with their finances? Does it lie within the DWP or should it be a continuing responsibility of the Department for Education?

Q413 **Chair:** I think during the coronavirus the DfE should have a role while this is going on. I am not saying this should happen forever, particularly free school meals, but while we are in the midst of coronavirus and families are losing their jobs or kids being sent home, and so on.

Nick Gibb: That is the issue. I am aware of headteachers and teachers who did everything when schools were partially closed to make sure that all the families that they knew about received food or vouchers. In those early days I am aware of headteachers who went to the families to make sure that they had food. But schools are back full time now. The caterers are in the schools and providing food during term time. The question is: how do we help those families in the holidays now that schools are back full time?

Q414 **Chair:** Will you and Vicky Ford, the Children's Minister, meet with Marcus Rashford and the taskforce to look at a long-term food plan?



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Nick Gibb: We are looking at the national food strategy and we will work and are working with the taskforce as part of that work.

Q415 **Chair:** A final question on the catch-up fund. You will be aware of the *Schools Week* report in the last few days that said that £140 million, 40% of the funding for the National Tutoring Programme, has not been spent. There are suggestions that this may be used for future years. Can you confirm that all the money in the catch-up fund will be spent this year?

Nick Gibb: That is a matter that we will say more on once we are through the spending review. I will write to the Committee about those issues once we are through the spending review.

Q416 **Chair:** The Secretary of State said this is a £1 billion catch-up fund for this year. You have said it in this session. Part of that is the £350 million. Why can't you just say now to make it clear that that £350 million will all be spent this year? The priority, as you have said all the way through the Committee, is to help those left-behind children catch up.

Nick Gibb: As I said, there are various pots to the National Tutoring Programme and some of that is being discussed as part of the spending review. Once we are through that, I am very happy to write to the Committee about those figures.

Chair: Okay, thank you. I appreciate that you come to the Committee regularly and this has been a long session, covering a huge range of subjects. I think all of us really appreciate that you are always accountable to the Committee and come whenever we ask and face some very tough questioning from the members. I wish you and your officials well. Thank you, director general, for coming today, and thank you for what you are doing.