

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Education Recovery in Schools, HC 998

Thursday 9 March 2023

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Members present: Dame Meg Hillier (Chair); Olivia Blake; Sir Geoffrey CliftonBrown; Mr Jonathan Djanogly; Mrs Flick Drummond; Mr Louie French; Anne Marie Morris.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, David Raraty, Director, National Audit Office, and Edward Pinney, representing the Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, were in attendance.

Questions 1-115

Witnesses

I: Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education, Andrew McCully, Director General of Schools Group, DfE, and Graham Archer, Interim Director General of the Strategy Group

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General
Education recovery in schools in England (HC 1081)

Examination of “witnesses

Witnesses: Susan Acland-Hood, Graham Archer and Andrew McCully.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Thursday 9 March 2023.

We all know that the covid-19 pandemic had a huge impact on children’s learning, with lockdowns and online learning, then trying to get established back into school after a long period. Over the past couple of years, the Government have invested £4.9 billion in programmes aimed at getting children back on the track they were on before the pandemic, but other pressures are hitting that, making for a perfect storm: recruitment challenges, budget squeezes, teachers’ pay and industrial action. Given that context, today we are asking officials from the Department for Education how well they think things are going in targeting catch-up support for schools, and what wider issues they are having to support children, in particular disadvantaged children, on as the Department seeks what we all hope for: a turbo-charged catch-up to ensure that pupils are not left behind.

I welcome our witnesses: Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, Andrew McCully, the Director General of the Schools Group, and Graham Archer, the interim Director General of the Strategy Group. We understand, Ms Acland-Hood, that Mr McCully and Mr Archer are both retiring after very long service at the Department. I wonder whether you would like to say a few words first.

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes. Thank you for giving me the opportunity. Andrew and Graham joined the Department at roughly the same time. Both have been exemplary public servants, who have contributed enormously across the work of the Department. Most recently, Andrew has been the face of everything that the Department has done on schools policy for a number of years. He has been responsible for a huge part of the improvement in standards that we have seen, particularly in the 10 years up to the pandemic. Graham has worked on both schools and children’s social care, and across a number of other areas. Both will be missed profoundly by colleagues across the Department, who have welcomed their wisdom and expertise.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q2 Chair: Mr McCully and Mr Archer, we thank you, too. You exemplify serious, long public service aimed at improving the lot of people in this country. At times, you have been before Committees such as this one where we have criticised and challenged you, but we appreciate your long-standing public service and what you have contributed to this country. Thank you for that.

That was the nice bit. It is your last two weeks and two months respectively, but we will challenge you. I am sure you have girded your loins and are prepared.

Before we go into the main session, , Ms Acland-Hood, I wanted to ask you about the increased disruption we have seen in our schools because of strikes. When I have spoken to teachers about that, they express concern; they do not want to go on strike, but they cannot afford to live, particularly in constituencies such as mine in inner London, and they are very concerned about the impact of funding in the classroom. One said that it was down to wondering whether they could afford gluesticks. Will you update us on the situation? Is the Department getting around the table with the unions to sort this out, avert strike action, and support teachers and pupils?

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes, I hear the same thing as you, which is that most teachers do not want to be on strike; they want to be teaching children and helping them to succeed. We are absolutely committed to getting round the table and sorting this out. We have made repeated offers to the unions for substantive, serious talks on pay on exactly the same basis that offers of talks have been made to the nurses and other health unions, who are now in negotiations. The one thing we have asked is that strikes be suspended to allow those talks to take place. Unfortunately, up until now, the NEU has not been willing to suspend strikes in order to come to the table. That is the barrier at the moment.

Q3 Chair: Have you put in any preconditions?

Susan Acland-Hood: Literally only that they suspend strikes in order to come to the table. That is the only precondition.

Q4 Chair: This has been going on a long time. The Government did not seek to have meetings with the unions before Christmas, so what has changed?

Susan Acland-Hood: Actually, the Secretary of State did offer a meeting with the unions just before Christmas. We have been meeting extensively through January and February. The challenge was that the key matters we were discussing were non-pay and pay for future years—at that stage, because we had made a significant pay offer in the current year, we were not talking about current year pay; we were talking about next year's pay principally in the context of the School Teachers' Review Body. That has changed; now there is an offer to talk about pay in all years and have substantive conversations. The one precondition is that strikes should be suspended to allow those talks to take place.



Q5 Chair: There's a bit of a face-off here, isn't there. Cutting off your nose to spite your face is the phrase that comes to mind. Is it not better just to get on with those discussions without a precondition, to ensure that there is progress. Someone has got to be the grown-up here, and both sides have very strong issues. From the evidence we have seen in preparation for today alone, we have been reminded of the big challenges schools are facing with finances, including on pay. Why can the Government not just get round the table?

Susan Acland-Hood: As I said, the Government are ready to get round the table.

Q6 Chair: But only with a precondition.

Susan Acland-Hood: I would leave this meeting and go and have the talks now if the unions are willing to come to the table and have those talks in a serious way.

Q7 Chair: It is a case of chicken and egg. If you could have the conversation and it went well, the strikes might be called off. There is no budging—is that what you are saying?

Susan Acland-Hood: It is exactly the same set-up as has been offered to the Royal College of Nursing, GMB, Unison and Unite. All of those unions have paused their strike action and come to the table. That is what is being offered to the NEU.

Chair: It is not the Committee's job to have a negotiation about this, but it is helpful to have your views on the record, and I am sure that they will be picked up. On the issue of staff, I hand over to Sir Geoffrey CliftonBrown.

Q8 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Good morning. I add my sincere thanks to Andrew McCully and Graham Archer on their very long service. To hear examples of what you have done is a real mark of the respect that you are held in by civil servants.

Ms Acland-Hood, I want to ask questions about staff recruitment and retention. I have talked to lots of teachers recently, as I am sure everybody in this room has. The pressures they face—particularly heads and deputies—are enormous. I am conscious of the submission from Education Support, which says that most staff stated that their working week had increased by between one and six additional hours. This is a significant addition when we consider that in 2021, 35% of all staff and 66% of senior leaders said they already worked 51 hours a week. It says that the 2022 teacher wellbeing index shows that 59% of staff had considered leaving the sector in the past academic year, and 30% of teachers reported that their work-life balance was either bad or very bad. More than one third of teachers said that, on average, they are working between 10 and 25 hours outside the school day. That is not a great situation, and I wonder what the Department can do. Clearly, pay is one element, but working conditions are also a significant element. What can the Department do to assist?



Susan Acland-Hood: It is important that we work with teachers on teacher workload. That is the approach that we have taken in the past as we have worked to reduce teacher workload, and we saw it make a real difference. We have good figures, particularly from before the pandemic, which show significant reductions in teacher workload, including the average number of hours that teachers were working each week as a result of the measures we put in, principally around ensuring there was good advice around necessary and unnecessary tasks.

There are quite a lot of things that build up over time. It is much easier to decide you need to do a new thing than to drop a thing you have previously done. I will ask Andrew to talk about this, because he worked extensively on the workload compact with the unions and trusts.

Andrew McCully: Susan is absolutely right. The practice in schools or wider multi-academy trusts was improving to meet the sort of challenge you are setting out.

Three particular areas were the focus of much of that improvement work. The first was marking. Much of the workload out of hours is about marking and the preparation of lessons, and there was improvement there through the school practice.

The second was taking out some of the myths of accountability and Ofsted preparation. Much of schools' time and the pressure on teachers was to do with expectations of what Ofsted was looking for. Ofsted helped with trying to drive out some of those myths, and that certainly helped.

Finally, there was a focus on meeting new employment expectations. Flexible working has been slower to take root in schools than in many other sectors, and we have been working with multi-academy trusts and experts across the system on how—especially because the primary system is very heavily tilted towards a female workforce—flexible working can be better integrated. Indeed, just in the last few months, we have announced additional support for ambassador schools to promote some of that practice on flexible working.

Marking and preparation, taking some of the myths out of accountability, and new practices—they are some of the big changes that walk down some of the workload hours.

Q9 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I hear those answers, but talking to one of my heads the other day tells me there is a whole load of pressures out there over and above normal school activities—a head dealing with school activities, exams, budgets, recruitment of teachers and so on. They are now having to deal with a whole range of social problems in the parents and in the pupils that you cannot just walk away from; they must be dealt with. The pressure on teachers out there is enormous. I am not sure that I am hearing a real plan from either of you on how that is going to be dealt with. I was speaking to one head the other day at a very good

Cotswolds school—it got the Sunday Times School of the Year Award—which, for the first time, could not recruit a maths teacher. The situation

is clearly getting pretty dire in schools. I do not hear from either of you a real plan on how you will tackle this.

Andrew McCully: We are both passionate about this.

Susan Acland-Hood: And we both have a plan. It is even the same plan.

The point is that we did a lot of work before the pandemic that had a really measurable impact on teachers' workload. We all accept that the pandemic has set us back in that, as in other areas. We need to go back, look at the things we did that worked and recommit, and do more. That starts with partnership with teachers in looking at what is driving their workload and understanding it. That is exactly what we did when we set out the previous workload plan. Part of our discussions with the teachers' unions through January and February was about how we can put more things in place and work together to take the next steps on teacher workload. There are some areas we will certainly look at again as part of that, including marking.

I think your point on the wider social problems and the things that schools are dealing with is really well made. That is where the joined-up portfolio that my Department has is extremely helpful. The plans we set out recently on both children's social care and, last week, on special educational needs and disability are highly relevant to some of the things that teachers tell us drive that additional workload, which feels as though it is a step away from the day job of teaching children.

Those two plans and the shorter-term actions we are taking to support the whole community to be partners—to ensure that teachers do not feel like they are alone and having to be social workers, rather than being supported by a community around them who can help to make those things happen—are extremely important.

Specifically on recruitment and retention, we have bursaries in place, particularly for the priority subjects where we see the most challenging recruitment. They go up to £27,000, with scholarships of up to £29,000, for those training in the priority subjects. We know that the bursaries have an impact. We are seeing that in the training and recruitment figures for this year. We take this really seriously, and we have a plan that is about those core teacher workload issues and also about the surrounding issues that you rightly raise.

Andrew McCully: We know that the biggest pressures and greatest loss of teachers from the profession occur in the very first years. The first couple of years for a newly qualified and newly trained teacher can be very daunting indeed. A big focus of our work has been, through the early careers framework, to improve a substantial offer. It was helped by some funding as part of the recovery package, but it has gone wider than that for dedicated training support and mentoring for every teacher in the first

two years. Some 93% of early career teachers receive the full package supported by the Government. The feedback from that is really strong, but we are responding to propositions on how it can be improved further. That is a key part of how we can support the teaching profession, because we know from previous years how many we lose in the first couple of years.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: There is quite a lot in those answers. I am sure the profession will want to digest that. It is probably a subject we will want to return to.

Chair: I was thinking exactly the same. In fact, when we asked Members of the House to give us their thoughts on our hearings, we had a lot on this, particularly from Afzal Khan MP, Samantha Dixon MP, Thangam Debbonaire MP and Valerie Vaz MP, who provided us with some heartbreaking evidence from their schools. Recruitment was a very big theme in some other evidence that I will touch on later. There are real shortages of teachers, which will have an impact on catch-up. Although it is a slightly separate subject, everything comes into catch-up. We will touch on some of that in the hearing. We might well come back to it, just to give you advance warning, Ms Acland-Hood. Olivia Blake MP is next.

Q10 Olivia Blake: Good morning to the witnesses. To add to the evidence that we received from the right hon. Member for Walsall South, I want to touch on the condition of school buildings. You might know that there was quite a serious incident at a school in my constituency, where a piece of cladding fell off and hit the head of a parent collecting their child and caused significant injury. That was not picked up as a risk in the recent condition survey of the school, and the school is not categorised in the most serious category. How confident are you that the surveys are picking up all the issues that schools should be aware of? And how accurate do you think the risk rating is of the schools that have been surveyed?

Susan Acland-Hood: There is no form of condition survey where a surveyor will tell you that you can reliably guarantee it has picked up every possible issue that a building might suffer. What we try to do is make sure that we have as much information as we possibly can in order to make our assessment of risk as good as it can possibly be. One reason why we have raised school building issues as a risk is that as we build a more and more comprehensive picture, we see more risk that we understand. Obviously we take immediate action where there is risk in the school estate, but we know that there will be a level of unknown risk underneath that.

This issue is in part driven by the age profile of the school estate. We had a huge bulge in building in the school estate in the post-war period because of demography and population trends and the raising of the school leaving age, so a big clump of buildings in the estate are coming towards the end of their design life all at the same time. That is why we have invested so much.

Since 2015, we have put about £13 billion into keeping schools safe and operational. Then we have the school rebuilding programme, which will rebuild or refurbish buildings at 500 schools over the next decade. We also have the work you described, through the condition data survey, which allows us to target both individual schools and school types that we know may come with elevated risks. For example, we identified a particular set of system builds where we were seeing higher levels of risk. We then went and targeted all the schools that had that building type. That is one of the ways that we mitigate for the fact that there is just no survey that can completely eliminate your risk of something unknown. What we try to do is feed the data back in so that we can understand the risk profile more broadly, and address it.

Q11 Olivia Blake: It is secondary to the risk-to-life risks that have been identified in the surveys, but buildings such as the school I am talking about are also cold and damp, and some have blind spots, which means extra staff are required just to make sure that all the children in the lower years are within sight. How are schools meant to balance their budgets with all these conditions and issues that they are trying to tackle? Is there a bigger plan around making our schools warmer and more eco-friendly as well?

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes. in 2022-23, we announced another £500 million, which was allocated out to schools and colleges specifically for improving buildings with a focus on energy efficiency. That allows schools to specifically target some of the issues and keep schools warm in winter and cool in summer in a way that helps them to reduce energy cost and improve sustainability and the impact on the planet as well.

Q12 Olivia Blake: Do you feel that the plan is adequate to tackle all the issues with this model of schools that you have been mentioning?

Chair: And how long will it take?

Susan Acland-Hood: On the specific system build that I described, those are all scheduled as part of the school rebuilding programme.

Q13 Chair: When will that end? When will we see a final result?

Susan Acland-Hood: The school rebuilding programme is a decade-long programme, but we frontload the areas of greatest risk in the programme.

Q14 Chair: The decade ends when? Just remind us?

Susan Acland-Hood: I would need to double check; I'm sorry, I should know that.

Chair: That's okay. Someone behind you is probably scribbling a note.

Susan Acland-Hood: There are other construction-type issues. The other one we are looking at, which you may well have talked to colleagues in Health about, is reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. We are going back around and asking schools some really dedicated questions about

that. It isn't something that is always easy to spot through survey, so we are going back around and testing and checking for that.

If you are asking whether I am confident that the scale of the programmes we have at the moment will eliminate risk across schools, I can't say that. But I can say that we have the best possible information to allow us to target the money and programmes that we have at the areas of greatest risk, and to make sure that we are reducing the risk across the school estate.

Q15 Olivia Blake: Asbestos is another big issue that is coming up regularly. What about the publication of the condition surveys? Would it be in the interests of parents to see these surveys?

Susan Acland-Hood: We have already given the condition data collection reports to schools and their relevant local authority or academy trust—every school has its own—which they can use alongside their own surveys and safety checks, because of course technically the responsibility for the condition of school buildings is with the responsible authority, which is the local authority for local authority schools or the trust for trust schools. We also published summary findings from the data collection in 2021. I am sure some schools share the information with parents already. We have also committed to publish the full dataset. It is taking us a little bit of time to do it, because it is quite large—it contains 1.2 billion datapoints. Getting that ready for publication in a way that is helpful and makes sense just takes a little bit of time.

Q16 Olivia Blake: And asbestos?

Susan Acland-Hood: We expect all local authorities, governing bodies and academy trusts to have robust asbestos management plans in place. Obviously, we follow HSE guidance on asbestos. We published refreshed guidance for schools, having launched the asbestos management assurance process in 2018. Again, we have spoken about this in the Committee before. We had 93.3% of schools who took part by November 2021 in that first round of the asbestos management process. We are working our way through the remaining who had not responded to that collection. About 24% of the non-responders have now been visited by the condition data collection 2 programme. The rest are scheduled through the rest of the programme, to make sure that we pick up the non-responders.

Q17 Olivia Blake: Finally, when do you imagine that the risks you have highlighted would allow for school buildings to move down your risk register, rather than being second?

Q18 Susan Acland-Hood: Because of the issue I described—the bulge in building—I don't think it is going to come down the risk register very soon. We will need to continue to put a lot of focus and attention on this.

Chair: Interesting. It is sobering, in 2023, that we are still talking about poor school buildings.

Q19 Mr French: On a more positive note, I am very grateful to DfE for several successful bids we had in Bexley for the condition improvement fund. I have already seen at first hand the positive impact that is having on the education of local students, and more new buildings will open next year, which I am looking forward to visiting. A quick question from me, just as a follow-up. We are now in this key window of 20 to 25 years after PFI. What kind of support is DfE providing to schools that may have buildings at the end of their life and that are having to consider what they do with them next?

Susan Acland-Hood: We have a dedicated programme for schools that are transitioning out of PFIs, to effectively support those transitions. The way the PFI programme worked means that there are quite a lot of different circumstances schools may be in with a PFI building, so we try to do that in a relatively bespoke way with those schools.

Q20 Mr French: So if there is an academy or a local school that needs advice, they can get in touch with the DfE.

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes, they can.

Q21 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: With this 10-year programme, obviously you cannot do all schools at once and you have to prioritise. Obviously, you should be prioritising things like asbestos and PRC concrete, but may I suggest that there is a third category you need to prioritise? This arose from a school in my constituency, which was using portacabins that had a design life of 25 years and were 40 years in. The local authority only wanted to continue to repair them. They were boiling hot in the summer and freezing cold in the winter. Worse still, there was a serious leak in one of them above the electricity meter, and all the local authority wanted to do was to make a repair. Really, we should be looking at replacing these portacabins with some more modern arrangements, so can we add that to the list of important priorities, please?

Susan Acland-Hood: Again, we always prioritise based on risk and impact. Whatever the form of the risk is, we will look at that and put it into the priorities list.

Mrs Drummond: The Education Committee is doing an inquiry on teacher recruitment and retention, so perhaps we could do a—

Chair: We are blessed on this Committee that a number of our members are on more than one Committee. Thank you, Mrs Drummond, for that.

Q22 Mrs Drummond: There has been an announcement about T-levels today, and you are delaying some of them. What impact is that going to have on the young people who were looking forward to doing those T-levels, such as hairdressing, barbering and beauty therapy; craft and design; and media, broadcast and production? You have deferred the catering T-level as well. What impact is that going to have on those young people?

Susan Acland-Hood: First, I want to apologise to students who were hoping to take those T-levels in September, and to the colleges who were preparing to offer them, because I know work has gone into that. What we have announced today is that we are delaying because the advice we have had from IfATE and Ofqual is that they are not confident enough about the quality of the work that has been done and the materials that have been prepared.

One of the things that we have been very clear about with T-levels is that we want to prioritise quality and make sure that the qualifications are really good and will set young people up for success. It was a very difficult decision for Ministers to make, and we wish we had not put them in the position of having to make it, but when students start on a brand-new qualification, they actually take a bit of risk. I talk to T-level students quite often about the fact that they are pathfinding with us and helping us to develop the qualifications, but I don't think we should ask them to take unreasonable risk on qualifications where there is a challenge with quality. One of the things we did as we prepared to make this announcement was talk to providers about whether they were confident that they had alternative courses to offer to young people. They were confident about that, and they were also keen that we made the announcement as quickly as possible once we had identified the issues, which is what we have done, in order to make sure there is time to plan.

Q23 Mrs Drummond: Are you confident, though, that deferring it by a year is going to rectify all those issues?

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes, I am. There are some specific issues related to a particular awarding organisation. We have had really good conversations with that organisation and with others, which puts us in a good position with the years to come.

Q24 Mrs Drummond: What are you going to do for the young people who do not have the qualifications to take T-levels and have been taking BTECs? You are getting rid of the BTECs.

Susan Acland-Hood: We are not getting rid of BTECs. We are removing BTECs that overlap with T-levels, but we will retain many BTECs that don't overlap with T-levels. A lot of young people take BTECs as part of mixed programmes of study with A-levels, and those smaller BTEC qualifications that form part of those mixed programmes of study will continue. The work that has been done over recent years on the quality of BTECs has helped to put us in a position where we are really confident about that.

One of the enduring challenges of the vocational education system in this country has been its enormous complexity. We have a relatively simple system on the general qualifications side, which most people understand and can explain, but we have had a spectacularly complicated qualifications landscape for students taking vocational qualifications. We have typically layered new things on top of old things in endless sort of geological strata. That makes it extremely difficult for people to navigate

the system, for employers to understand it and for parents to understand what their children might be doing. We want to simplify and streamline and to say, we've got really good qualifications, such as T-levels, which are equivalent to three A-levels—these are large qualifications—that we will really slim down. Then we won't have things that are effectively similar but not quite the same in that space.

Q25 Mrs Drummond: So will there be qualifications, like BTECs, for young people who are not able to take T-levels? I am looking at catering and hairdressing. Maybe they haven't got the academic qualifications to do T-levels, because they need a GSCE in maths and English, for instance. How are you going to provide qualifications for them?

Susan Acland-Hood: T-levels are a rigorous level 3 qualification; they are A-level equivalent. There isn't actually an entry requirement. You don't need maths and English to get on to a T-level course. Some colleges are currently setting that as an entry requirement, partly because the qualifications are new and partly because they are quite challenging and rigorous, but it is not part of the design of T-levels that students are required to have English and maths in order to enter the course.

I was talking to a group of T-level students during one of our DfE virtual visits. We do visits for everybody so that people in the Department can see things they are less familiar with. The tutor there was saying that he had seen students with a lot of different starting points have real success on his T-level. His view was that the entry requirements some other colleges made were partly a response to the newness of the qualification and the development of teaching the qualification.

The critical thing is that we are getting young people up to a standard at the end of the qualification that is really good quality and worthwhile, and that we are not reducing that standard in order to give the illusion of more access to more students. There will be some students for whom a level 3 course is not appropriate, and level 2 courses will remain for those students.

Q26 Chair: I wanted to add one final point before we head into the main session—thank you for your patience in dealing with these other topics. In London, we are seeing a lot of school rolls dropping. In my own borough, as well as elsewhere, we are seeing numbers reduce, yet there are still new free schools in the pipeline; obviously, London is a bit of a hotspot for that. Is there any plan to put a brake on or reduce new free schools opening in areas where pupil rolls are dropping?

Andrew McCully: We look at every free school project, even though an initial commitment may have been given, to ensure that there is place need for it. We have continued to take free school projects out of the system, to cancel them, when the need is not there.

Q27 Chair: Is there a point of no return at which you would not cancel a free school?

Andrew McCully: The only point of no return is when there is a signed funding agreement with the trust.

Chair: That is very helpful to hear. I put on record our thanks to all those who put in evidence to this session. We had a really interesting package of evidence. Some of it was heartbreaking, as I have highlighted. It was not just from MPs, who I mentioned earlier, but also from many other groups. That has been particularly helpful in our deliberations ahead of this session.

To kick off on our main topic, which is education recovery in schools, I call Olivia Blake MP.

Q28 **Olivia Blake:** Ms Acland-Hood, when will we start to see the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils start to close again?

Susan Acland-Hood: As soon as possible. For everybody in the Department, and everybody across the system, one of the most dispiriting effects of the pandemic has been that widening of the attainment gap, which we were successfully closing before the pandemic. We use the disadvantage gap index—I will briefly explain what that is, because it is a bit of a string of numbers.

We use a disadvantage gap index at both key stage 2 and key stage 4, which is arrived at by ranking every pupil in the country and then looking at the differences between disadvantaged and advantaged—

Chair: I think we need to cut to the answers, rather than the explanation.

Susan Acland-Hood: Sorry. If we were perfectly equal, it would be zero. If we were perfectly unequal, it would be 10.

In 2011, the gap at key stage 2 was 3.34. It reduced steadily—3.23 in 2012; 3.10 in 2015; down to 2.90 in 2018. In 2022, it was back to 3.23. That is not quite as wide as in 2011, but going significantly backwards.

How we can close that attainment gap has been the relentless focus of our education recovery work. That is why pretty much every element of the education recovery programme has been tilted towards disadvantaged pupils—the national tutoring programme, the recovery premium that is paid to receive pupil premium pupils, and everything we know about the investment in teacher education and training, which is another very large part of the recovery programme. Although that benefits every pupil, we also know that good-quality teaching benefits disadvantaged pupils the most.

I would hope to see a narrowing starting from this summer.

Q29 **Olivia Blake:** Mr Archer, how confident are you that the Department is doing enough to tackle the disadvantage gap, given that the gap is bigger now than at any point since 2012?

Graham Archer: Right through the pandemic, and certainly from the moment it was clear that that disadvantage gap was opening, we have focused sharply on the issue. We have distributed funding for the national tutoring programme so that it focuses very much on disadvantaged pupils; the recovery premium was different to the catch-up premium because we distributed it according to disadvantage and then according to both disadvantage and the differential between primary and secondary, focusing on the places where need was greatest.

In the schools White Paper, as we go forward and more generally, there is a package of measures that includes those things that are most likely to drive engagement from all pupils, and particularly disadvantaged pupils. The fact that we expect, for example, the national tutoring programme to be an ongoing part of the system is testament to that desire to see the gap close. The way in which we have incentivised teachers to work in the most disadvantaged places is a really important part of that, too.

I think it is a strong package of measures. I think that the opening of the gap over the pandemic is one of the worst impacts of that period. I think a good package of measures is now in place to help us to move that gap.

Q30 **Olivia Blake:** In a word, do you feel that it is enough?

Graham Archer: One can always do more, but I think that the package we have in place is a good strong one looking forward. It builds on things that happened during the pandemic to move us to a better place.

Q31 **Olivia Blake:** Okay. Ms Acland-Hood, when had you hoped to eliminate the disadvantage gap completely?

Susan Acland-Hood: It would be wonderful to eliminate the disadvantage gap completely. I asked the team whether there was any country around the world that had so far completely eliminated its disadvantage gap. There isn't. That means I am a little reluctant to promise the Committee a date by which we will manage to have done that, but we should be able to reduce the gap at least as quickly as we did in the 10 years before the pandemic. We know we can do that—we did it—and we ought to be setting ourselves the challenge of going as fast, or faster, in closing the gap.

Q32 **Chair:** "As fast"—that is still a decade to get back to where we were the year before the pandemic.

Susan Acland-Hood: As fast or faster. If we can go faster, we will.

Q33 **Chair:** But as we have heard from the heart-wrenching evidence, a lot of the issues are not just about what is happening in schools; they are about home life, mental health and all the rest of it. Are you talking to other Departments?

Susan Acland-Hood: Absolutely.

Q34 Olivia Blake: In terms of the vulnerable children in that disadvantaged group, do you think there is enough action in the plans you have just set out?

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes. Vulnerability has lots of dimensions to it. We did several things; one of the most important was that schools never closed for vulnerable pupils through the pandemic. I want to take a moment to thank teachers and heads who kept schools open for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children throughout the pandemic. They did the most phenomenal job. Given some recent events, I want to read into the record the fact that the huge hard work and dedication, and the impressive resolve and professionalism, of teachers through the pandemic has been an inspiration, and we honour that. We know that teachers have not always felt as well supported as they wanted to be, but we really have been working to try and support them as well as we possibly can.

Q35 Chair: In short, you were embarrassed by the recent leaked WhatsApp messages from the former Secretary of State?

Susan Acland-Hood: I could not possibly comment on that.

Q36 Chair: I think you have made your position clear, and I am sure that teachers will be glad to hear that you reward them.

Susan Acland-Hood: We allowed teachers to define who was a vulnerable pupil, for the purposes of keeping schools open during the pandemic. That was extremely important, because vulnerability comes in many forms.

We also have specific support for groups that we know to be vulnerable. For children with special educational needs and disabilities, we offered that support right in the early stages of the pandemic. But our recovery premium amounts are also significantly higher for pupils in specialist and alternative provision, including special units in mainstream schools.

We have also made sure that we are working through our children's social care responsibilities to support children in care. The work that the virtual school heads did over the years really came into its own, both during and after the pandemic. For example—I am sure the Committee will want to come on to attendance later in the session—one of the changes in attendance patterns over time that I do not think we talk about enough is that children in public care used to have worse attendance than other children. Now, they actually have better attendance than other children because of the support they are given by social workers and virtual school heads.

Q37 Mrs Drummond: Going back to attendance, and particularly SEND, the Education Committee discussed the issues involved this week, and you may have read the transcript. A huge number of children with SEND are not attending schools.

Chair: I should just say that SEND is special educational needs and disabilities.

Mrs Drummond: Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are also not attending. How are you making sure that those groups come into school to close that attainment gap? You said we are going to get there, but they are the ones we really need to focus on. Are you running any specific projects to get those groups of children back into school?

Susan Acland-Hood: On attendance specifically, a lot of our work starts from the principle that you begin with support. That is particularly important for children who have other disadvantages. We have set out a much stronger set of expectations on all the partners involved in attendance—schools and trusts, but also—

Chair: This is thinking about attendance for special educational needs children.

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes. I was just going to say that local authorities are a key partner in this, particularly for children with special educational needs. There is a distinction to be made between children who are not in school because they do not have an allocated school place—we are addressing that through the provision of more places, which we announced last week alongside the publication of the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan—and the group of children who have a school place but have challenges in attending.

For example, we see some children who became more anxious about attendance during the pandemic and need habits rebuilt. There is a set of proposals around local authorities identifying the children who are most at risk and creating bespoke action plans for them. In that, the role they play for children with special educational needs will be particularly pronounced because of their responsibilities in that regard.

Q38 **Mrs Drummond:** Do you have the resources needed to put that in place? I know local authorities are quite stretched at the moment.

Susan Acland-Hood: For special educational needs and disability in particular, there is a kind of bringing together of attendance resource and the special educational needs resource that local authorities are responsible for.

Some of the things we are doing more widely across the attendance piece are also relevant. We have 10 expert attendance advisers working with local authorities and trusts in a hands-on way to review their practices, develop plans and help them to meet the new expectations we have set, including for regular meetings on individual persistently absent children at the local authority level. We also have work going on in Middlesbrough piloting a mentor programme that provides direct support to persistently and severely absent children, for example.

Q39 Mrs Drummond: So you are using the good practice happening in some places and spreading it out to the rest of the country.

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes.

Q40 Chair: Thank you. I want to move on to the tutoring scheme—the Randstad scheme. Mr Archer, that was your baby, so to speak. It is interesting that, in your response to Ms Blake, you said you think there is a good job going on, but we highlighted earlier in the session that there are big challenges even just getting the right people—the teachers and classroom assistants—in place. A lot of evidence came in for that.

The contract you had with Randstad was that 65% of pupils supported with tuition through the partner scheme would be disadvantaged. It is interesting that schools in all their other tutoring already automatically had a focus on disadvantaged pupils, but you did not meet that target. Why was that? Why did you set the 65% target? I am interested in your thinking.

Graham Archer: It is worth starting with a little bit of the history. We had a smaller scale scheme that we established in the early part of the pandemic. When we appointed Randstad as our delivery partner, we were looking to scale that up by a factor of three or four, I think. As part of that, we established a target, which was that we wanted to see Randstad deliver 65% of those places to disadvantaged pupils, as you said.

That target was not achieved. It was always set as a stretch target, intended to go beyond the numbers we had in the first year. I think the target contributed significantly to about 50% of the tutoring that was undertaken being undertaken by disadvantaged pupils. While we did not hit the target we intended, we did have an impact on the way in which levels of disadvantage were tackled by the programme. It is worth saying that in the school population as a whole, 27% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Of the population of those tutored, the proportion was nearer to 50%. There was definitely a positive skew to those from disadvantaged backgrounds in schools.

We were keen. There is a balance in all of this, isn't there, between what you dictate from the centre and what you leave to schools, which know their pupils best? The permanent secretary has already said how much we valued the work of teachers over the pandemic period. Ultimately, leaving in their hands which of their pupils were the most likely to benefit from tutoring was a really important part of what we wanted to do.

Plainly, we did not hit the target, but I think the target did contribute to the overall impact of the scheme.

Q41 Chair: We will come to tutoring more widely later on, but on this particular target, money was provided to Randstad and it was set this target, which it didn't achieve. Only half of the tutoring was provided to disadvantaged pupils. Are you happy about that? We have just talked about the huge attainment gap increase. From what you have said, it could be 10 years



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before that gap is closed again, although we all hope it will be quicker. Given the contract you went into, are you happy with that 50% rate? What could you have done to increase that rate? What did you not do?

Susan Acland-Hood: I go back to Mr Archer's point that Randstad was working with schools, but ultimately schools decided which pupils were tutored, and a disadvantaged pupil was about twice as likely as a nondisadvantaged pupil to be tutored under the scheme. I would have been very unhappy if we had not seen a significant skew towards disadvantaged pupils, but in the catch-up data we also see that although there is a gap, lots of other pupils have also fallen behind significantly. For example, pupils with low prior attainment, whatever their disadvantage background, have been disproportionately affected. That is a pattern we see in the school system more widely, so if you have low prior attainment, there is a point where it becomes difficult to access the curriculum. There are some disadvantaged pupils whose attainment is good who may have been better served by really good-quality whole-class teaching.

Q42 **Chair:** The definition of "disadvantaged" is obviously quite narrow and technically defined. Are you saying that there were other pupils who had disadvantages who couldn't really be left out? The point is that there are still pupils who needed the tutoring who have not had it, so there is a gap.

Susan Acland-Hood: We made available as much tutoring as we possibly could for schools to point at the pupils they believed needed it the most. Within that, we wanted to assure ourselves that disadvantaged pupils were being well served. I think disadvantaged pupils being twice as likely to be tutored as non-disadvantaged pupils gives some comfort on that. What we did not seek to do was to prevent schools from tutoring pupils who did not meet a technical definition of disadvantaged. Indeed, when we asked schools how they targeted, the vast majority said they used "disadvantaged" and low prior attainment to target.

They also targeted pupils in exam years, particularly in secondary schools. There is logic in that because, effectively, you had a group of pupils whose time at school was running out, so schools were running out of opportunity to make a difference if they did not make an impact on them as they approached those final public exams. A school that targeted pupils in exam years would therefore be likely to give tutoring to slightly more nondisadvantaged pupils, but we thought it was important that schools had the opportunity to make those choices.

The last thing I would say is that we looked forward in the programme. With Randstad, we were running a national offering; Randstad was also working with the schools to bring them on board and into the programme. It was important for us to set a target to help it to direct its efforts, as we did not want Randstad to be targeting schools that didn't need it. So there was the between school and the in-school point, if that makes sense. Once we moved to school-led tutoring, we allocated money on the basis of pupil

premium, so we did the targeting towards disadvantaged pupils in a different way.

Q43 **Chair:** That is interesting. Ofsted found that schools were using “disadvantaged” as the main baseline criteria.

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes, they did.

Q44 **Chair:** Mr McCully, I think it was you or it may have been Mr Archer—

Andrew McCully: I am sure we can share.

Chair: With your vast years of experience, I am sure that is not a problem for either of you. Schools were making individual judgments. We have had a lot of evidence, which I do not have time to go into, on how well different things worked; I think we will come back to some of that later on. Are you trying to get lessons learned from the best performing schools passed around other schools? Embracing tutoring was a whole new extra thing for schools to take on. We can discuss whether the national or the local worked better, as we know there was a problem with some of the original contracts. What are you doing to make sure that the schools that are still struggling with this are learning from the better performing schools? Are there good examples that you can point to?

Andrew McCully: The national tutoring programme has developed year on year and the experience and learning have developed year on year. Sharing best practice is absolutely fundamental.

Q45 **Chair:** How are you doing that?

Andrew McCully: In a number of ways. We offer direct support to schools. We have webinars, and shared promotions and research. We have a fundamental programme of research that has embedded further guidance in schools about what effective tutoring looks like. I particularly want to highlight the work of the Education Endowment Foundation and NFER, which were behind that research. That enabled good practice to be shared across schools.

The model that is now underpinning the national tutoring programme involves a greater role for the Department itself. Our evidence and our direct digital support to schools—we have direct customer support into schools as part of the national tutoring programme in a way that we did not have before—are key parts of sharing directly into schools.

Q46 **Chair:** Are there any geographical areas of the country or types of school that, as a category—I’m not asking you to name individuals—you are very worried about? Are there others that are doing a particularly good job?

Andrew McCully: In the early days, we had a lot of worries and feedback from organisations about the fact that there were differential rates of tutoring, and indeed different access to professional tutors. One of the real

successes with the national tutoring programme is that we are not seeing that at the moment.

Q47 Chair: Was some of it geographical? There was some discussion earlier about that.

Susan Acland-Hood: There was an issue, but there isn't now.

Andrew McCully: The Sutton Trust has voiced concern over the years that disadvantaged children in certain areas of the country have not had access to tutoring, irrespective of the central Government programmes. That lack of access has been a key part of the trust's concern about social mobility. It is publishing a report today that says there has been a complete turnaround in terms of access, and it is the areas of disadvantage that are now increasingly benefiting from the input of school tutoring, which is counteracting that lack of access.

Q48 Chair: What has turned around? Where have these tutors suddenly appeared from? There were deserts.

Graham Archer: Perhaps I can explain a bit about that. In the early part of the programme, we monitored really closely both take-up and the availability of tutors in regions. Essentially, there were two things that we did to shift the dial. Very significantly, we encouraged tutoring organisations to expand their operations so that they moved into areas where there was less obvious availability. Essentially, we moved them northwards from areas where they had operated more frequently.

The second thing we did was respond to feedback from schools. I was going to say "particularly schools from the north of England" and that is sort of true: it was universal, but skewed towards the north. They wanted to control tutoring themselves, so the creation of the school-led route and the increased emphasis on the school-led route were precisely about responding to feedback from schools, including those in the north, where the tutoring market was a little less well developed at the beginning of the process.

Chair: Thank you. We will come back to some of the issues with tutoring a little later.

Q49 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Can I turn to the subject that Ms Drummond was talking about: absences? I will first come to you, Mr McCully. We know that in the autumn and spring terms of 2021-22, the average absence rate fell for all pupils to 7.4%, but it was 4.5% in the same terms before the pandemic in 2018-19. For disadvantaged pupils, the rate was 10.4% in 2021-22, compared with 7.2% in 2018-19. Although absences damage all pupils, they are particularly damaging for disadvantaged pupils. Can you fill out for us a bit more what the Department's plans are to deal with absences?

Andrew McCully: I recognise those figures, and it is important to recognise that they are improving. The most recent improvements are

coming off the back of reductions in illness over the end of last year. Illness and the prevalence of respiratory infections are part and parcel of understanding and managing attendance. It is improving, but as you rightly point out, there is more to be done.

A key element of improving attainment is that children need to be in school; that is the most important place for them. As Susan referred to earlier, the key actions of this inquiry include the strong expectation that attendance is everyone's responsibility—school leaders, those around school, and parents—so the guidance, which we still fully intend to make statutory when we have the legislative opportunity to do so, but which is already guiding partners, schools, local authorities and others, brings all those actions together.

Data is really important. Through revisions and quite a revolutionary change to the way in which schools offer the Department their attendance data, we have a full picture and schools can share that. That means that schools, the Department and other partners can extract from that data trends, issues and solutions in a way that has never been possible before. I think that is an important step forward to real management through information and data.

Leadership is really important. We have what we call the attendance action alliance at national level, and it is increasingly being replicated at local levels. It brings together those key players who can make a difference, both in terms of the leadership that they bring to their sectors and the expectations of the contribution of different sectors. To give one example of how that turns to action at the local level, one of our key participants at the national level is Rob Tarn, the chief executive of one of our very best multi-academy trusts, Delta. He has established a series of demonstration partnerships across other multi-academy trusts about how best to act on attendance.

I would also add the targeted support that Susan mentioned earlier in terms of working with local authorities, especially through the supporting families and virtual schools programmes. That gets to the most vulnerable children. You can see from that that this is a full set of complementary activities, because attendance needs to be everyone's business.

Q50 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: That is a very helpful answer, Mr McCully. I think everybody is now agreed that absences particularly affect disadvantaged children. I found the answer to the Chair's earlier question to Ms Acland-Hood about the attainment gap slightly alarming: it will take another 10 years to get back to where we were in 2012, if I have interpreted your answer correctly, Ms Acland-Hood. Considering that we now know a lot more about what mechanisms work and do not work to close this attainment gap, I would have thought we would be able to do a lot better than that in 12 years. Clearly, one of the elements of closing the attainment gap is this business of absence from school, particularly

for disadvantaged pupils. Why is it that disadvantaged children have a higher rate of absence from schools, and what can we do about it?

Andrew McCully: What everyone tells us, what partners tell us—I mentioned the attendance action alliance, which is not just a point of leadership, but enables the better understanding of what works right the way through the system—and what we have been learning through that is the whole range of different, effective approaches that great schools, great trusts, working with local authorities, have been bringing to bear. That range of different, individual approaches includes work with individual parents, direct support such as phoning parents up in the morning directly, and mentoring activities. The “support first” approach is a phrase that you will hear a lot from all members of the action alliance and their counterparts at the local level, because it is a reminder of how the combinations of different support need to be brought together to address the particular needs challenges of different, individual disadvantaged young people.

Q51 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am very interested in your data-driven approach. You are able to see the differences between schools, and trends taking place within schools. One of the anecdotal trends that we hear about is that absences are higher on a Friday. You should be able to pick that up, then start to do something about it.

Susan Acland-Hood: I might just come in on this. The data really does make a difference. We are now able to draw attendance data directly out of school management information systems on a daily basis. We do that for about 80% of the state-funded schools in the country. We have put that in place in a little more than a year—schools voluntarily sign up to give us that information. The burden is zero for schools, because it just falls straight out of the system, but it allows us to look in a much more fine-grained way at patterns across time, and to see things in much more real time.

What we offer back to schools in the system is views of their data. We have just introduced the latest shift to more benchmarking data, which allows them to compare themselves. Again, we will keep refining and developing that, so that they can look at themselves against other, similar schools. On other topics, we know that that benchmarking approach really helps.

On the days of the week, this is something that we picked up using our rather clunkier and less elegant data collection mechanisms during covid. It is one of those things that, anecdotally, people have always known to be true, but we have never been able to see it in the data before, because previously our attendance data collection was an annual school census mechanism—

Q52 Chair: Less of the mechanism—what is the information you are getting?

Susan Acland-Hood: It is true that the data shows that attendance is lower on a Friday than on other days of the week, and a little bit lower on a Monday.

Q53 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** That is really a matter for parents, is it not? It is for the school to get on to parents to say, "Look, it's not acceptable, just because parents are working at home, for the pupils and children to stay away from school on a Friday."

Susan Acland-Hood: I don't think you can infer that it is all about working from home, because again anecdotally, it is a pattern that preexists the pandemic. We still see the biggest driver of absence being illness, so for some children, for example, if they are ill, after four days of school they might be exhausted. We should be very careful. The data tells us that attendance is lower on a Friday; it does not tell us why.

Chair: You see a pattern, but you do not know the causes.

Q54¹ **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Finally on this absence business, I like the idea of your policy of feeding back to schools the data you receive. How quickly does that happen?

Susan Acland-Hood: They can see it in real time, on the same day.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: In real time, that's good. Thank you.

Susan Acland-Hood: It is completely automated.

Q55 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I will move on to a completely different subject: the SEND review. First, this Committee in its Treasury minute response agreed with the recommendation to set a target implementation for the SEND report of autumn 2020. Mercifully, we have now had it from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, on 2 March 2023— **Chair:** Spring 2023, rather than autumn 2020.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Three years later. Why did it take so long?

Susan Acland-Hood: First, I want to thank the Committee. This Committee has been absolutely dogged and dedicated to making sure that we not only do this well and seriously, but keep ourselves moving on it. I appreciate that.

Chair: We love it when you say such things, but will you answer the question about why it took so long?

Susan Acland-Hood: We have spoken about this in Committee before. It was absolutely right to start with the Green Paper and to make sure that we gave time for consultation, because the one thing that we know about SEND reform is that it will not succeed unless it is done in partnership with

¹ The data is collated the same day and typically fed back to schools the next working day



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parents and others in the system. So, the first thing is, we knew that in order for this to be a successful process, we would need to have a significant period of consultation.

There was a delay in getting that consultation document out. That was partly because, in the very early part of the pandemic, we had to divert people to do pandemic response. After that, we did work on the Green Paper and we started to share it with partners. We spoke about this at the time in this Committee. Partners expressed concerns that it did not sufficiently recognise the change of circumstances due to the pandemic; that it needed more thought and more work. It was important that we listened to that.

I know that it took longer than we had hoped, but it resulted in a better product. I would much rather do this well than do it as fast as possible and not well. I appreciate that it would be even better to do it both fast and well. Since the publication of that Green Paper, we have proceeded at quite a good pace. We consulted all over the summer. In the context of quite a lot of ministerial change, to publish this spring is not bad going.

I would really like to thank colleagues in the Department who have worked on this, and all the partners across the system who have worked with us.

Q56 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am sure that is appreciated. I agree that you need to do it well. It is now done and you have a nine-point plan that looks pretty comprehensive. It needs to be, because the current situation is pretty dire.

Why are you not expecting to have a full set of new national standards even by the end of 2025?

Susan Acland-Hood: We have made a commitment to start with the national standards that touch on the things that we know people most want—autism and mental health, for example. We want to go as quickly as we possibly can in creating the national standards, but we know that they will work only if we co-create them with others across the system. We need to make sure that we are bringing the right people together to set the national standards, and that they are standards that will hold and sustain.

We have set ourselves the aim of getting as many of the most urgent and wide-spectrum standards out as soon as possible, but with the range of need and experience that is covered by special educational needs and disability as a headline description, we think that the full suite of national standards is likely to be very extensive. It is one of those things for which we hope to have a set of national standards out that will cover a lot of the need that is out there, but there will be a very long tail of individual need and it will take us a bit longer to get through all the national standards.

Q57 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: If I were a parent of a child in



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Gloucestershire—which is particularly bad; it is incredibly difficult to get an EHCP; you have to jump through god knows how many hoops—I would say, “That’s all very well, but my child needs a special needs plan now.” What hope can you offer those parents?

Susan Acland-Hood: The first thing is that, as we have discussed in this Committee before, we are not waiting for the full implementation of the plan in order to take action. We have the work that we did through the Delivering Better Value and Safety Valve programmes, which put hundreds of millions of pounds into the system to help local authorities to look at and shift their service. The centre of the plan is about making clear the provision that parents and children can expect and that it can be accessed by many more people without needing to go through the process of getting a plan. We want to make sure that the EHCP process is streamlined, but we really want many more parents to get the support that they need for their child without having to go through a hoop-jumping process of writing a plan of that kind.

So the critical first stage will look at some of the national standards that make sure that parents, teachers and pupils know what should ordinarily be available, including in mainstream settings. We also have significant investment in teacher training. We will train several thousand more earlyyears special educational needs co-ordinators to help identify children who need support as soon as possible. We know that early identification helps to avoid escalation of need and ensures that people get the support that they need earlier.

We are training 400 more educational psychologists, which will reduce the wait times for specialist support. We have also reformed the accountability system. We will put in place dashboards that help people to see what those times are—taking that data-focused approach to drive change. We also have the announcement of 33 new special schools. That is in addition to the 49 that are already in the free schools pipeline. The other constraint in the system is the supply of specialist places, especially in the maintained sector, for children who need them.

Q58 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** The problem is that, if I were a head teacher or a deputy head teacher listening to this exchange, I would say,

“This is all very well, I would love to be able to make more special needs provision out of the statutory education and health plan, but I simply do not have the funding to do so. I do not have the staff to do it.”

Chair: The evidence we have had has been very particular, particularly on classroom assistants and one-to-one support.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Yes, the one-to-one support is often included in the plans, but in most of my schools it is not really available to anyone else, because they simply have not got the staff. They are struggling with class sizes and assistant teachers as they are.

Will the £2.6 billion between now and 2025 to fund new special and alternative provision places and improve the existing provision cover those situations?

Susan Acland-Hood: The £2.6 billion is particularly capital provision for new specialist school places, but we have also significantly increased the amount of funding going into the system. The high needs budget will rise to over £10 billion by next year, which is an increase of more than 50% since 2019.

We have discussed this in the Committee before, but the challenge we are meeting through the implementation plan is that we have a system in which we are both seeing cost and spending escalate and not seeing people feel as though their needs are being met. That is partly because more and more of the budget is being hoovered to the highest end, because we are less able to put that support in earlier.

Q59 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** But that is precisely my question. It is about those not quite at that very sharp end, but still in need of extra help. I was a very late reader; I needed extra help, but I would never have got a statutory EHC plan. How can you reassure the parents of people like me who need that extra help—I am just using myself as an example—that they are going to get that?

Susan Acland-Hood: That comes back to those standards about what should ordinarily be available. That is not just an expectation without support. Again, we see very different patterns across the country, and we see local authorities where they are much more successful in wrapping that support around lower-level needs in school. One-to-one support is not always the right answer. For example—

Chair: Sir Geoffrey is not talking about the one-to-one support.

Susan Acland-Hood: For early reading, for example, there is that investment we have made in systematic synthetic phonics. I was talking to a researcher at Cambridge the other day who said, “There used to be a thing called a garden-variety poor reader. We have essentially eliminated the garden-variety poor reader through investment in phonics.”

There is a really interesting thing there. That garden-variety poor reader locates the problem in the child. Actually, the problem was not located in the child; it was about making sure we were giving teachers the equipment to teach really well to a class of children. There is also a slice of this that is about investment in really good-quality whole-class teaching that helps every child do their best.

Chair: We could have a long discussion about inclusion and wider support, but we need to move on to mental health.

Q60 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Yes, I must take the Chair's hint and move on. We have had lots of evidence on mental health problems, from all sorts of witnesses.

I will start with the mental health evidence submitted by YoungMinds. They said: "The Department for Education should meaningfully implement a whole-school approach to mental health, wellbeing and social and emotional learning across all statutory and non-statutory guidance."

What more can you tell us? You are nodding your head, Mr McCully. I am sure you have dealt with this all your life. I would be grateful for your experience.

Andrew McCully: I agree with YoungMinds' recommendation. That is certainly the approach we try to promote and instil in schools. That is why a key part of the investment in improvement has been around both the identification and training of senior mental leads for every school. We now have over 10,000 schools and colleges that have been helped by that grant, and another £10 million is going in to reach two thirds of state schools and colleges by the end of this financial year.

That objective of promoting a whole-school approach is so important because of the range of different needs. One of the objectives in truly effective mental health support is not necessarily to pathologise and see it always as a clinical question but to have that support in early. The training is very much with that in mind.

Further rollout of the mental health support teams, which has been such a big part of our joint work with NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care, is also fundamental to that. We have an ambition, with the amount of funding that has been made available in this substantial programme, to reach 35% of schools through that support, and we are on track to do that. Indeed, the acceleration of work through additional investment for mental health from the Department of Health and Social Care really has supported that.

Q61 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: YoungMinds also say, "Mental Health Support Teams must sit alongside other forms of support to ensure that as many young people are able to access help that works for them within the school environment." Of course, part of that is recognising that a particular pupil has a mental health problem.

So, there are two elements to this: there is the ordinary teacher, who hopefully has had some training to recognise there is a problem with a particular pupil; and then there are the mental health support teams providing that help. Could you just address those two particular elements?

Andrew McCully: Again, so important—once again, I agree wholeheartedly with YoungMinds there. Indeed, the whole concept of a joint programme between the DfE and DHSC is to ensure that the join

between health and education is replicated right the way through the system.

For instance, I have a team of regional workers whose prime focus is to make sure that when NHS England is establishing those teams, they are effectively joined to the leadership and actions of headteachers in those areas, to provide the sort of whole-school approach that YoungMinds is talking about.

Q62 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: YoungMinds then says, “The rollout of Mental Health Support Teams and Designated Senior Leads for Mental Health should be accelerated to all schools by 2028.”

Chair: Similarly reflected in other evidence from the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition. I think you said that 35% of schools will get it. If it is working, which we hope it will, why not everyone?

Andrew McCully: That level of investment, which was secured in the last spending review, takes us to that level of 35%. Going beyond that would require more investment and that will need to be subject to the next spending review. But the success of the work so far will be a strong point of evidence and indeed encouragement for future decisions.

Q63 Chair: Whole cohorts of children will not get the support in the time they are in school?

Andrew McCully: We are going as fast as we can with the resources that have been made available.

Q64 Chair: It means there will be young adults who will have suffered but not had the support at an adolescent stage.

Andrew McCully: As fast as we can with the resources available.

Q65 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I cannot leave this section, Mr McCully, without talking about the mental health of teachers; I cannot just tear it up and find it at the moment—the evidence—but we have had evidence about the mental health of teachers. What more can be done? It is all part of the general pressure on teachers that I was referring to earlier, but at the worst end it does result in mental health problems for teachers and therefore absenteeism. What more can be done to support them?

Andrew McCully: I hear that a lot in all my conversations with school leaders and teaching unions. We have seen more of that from covid, as I’m sure you recognise.

We put in place and funded a support programme, particularly for leaders of schools, because that was where the biggest pressures from covid came. And that has been welcomed so much that we expanded it. We initiated a wellbeing charter, which was signed by organisations across the sector, focusing on the principles of support for teachers and for school leaders.

That, once again, brings together the focus that is needed because it is only with confident and well-supported teachers that the sort of attainment objectives that we were talking about earlier in the questions can be achieved. So it is a fundamental priority. It is the right thing to do, because it is important for teachers but also for the wider objectives.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Well, it's almost required of an employer to provide that support.

Chair: We have evidence from a Walsall MP who got evidence from different schools. One head said: "I see some of my staff ready to crumble, and that is not right. Some of this is impact from covid, but some is the erosion of funding for years and the funding of core services supporting schools and families." Having a charter on wellbeing is all very well, Mr McCully, but the pressures on schools before covid were immense. They have been exacerbated hugely. The points in the evidence are well made. I won't go into that more now. We have a quick point from Ms Blake.

Q66 **Olivia Blake:** On mental health, how will you ensure that a whole-school approach is inclusive, for example of students who may have hearing loss and deafness, a specific learning disability, or a neurodivergence? How will you ensure that the offer is there for all those students?

Andrew McCully: Susan has brought a copy with her, because it is something that we all see as one of the fundamental priorities, and the SEND improvement plan that we have just been talking about in answer to Sir Geoffrey's question has mental health as a fundamental, as one of the priorities, because it recognises how mental health support needs to be integrated with the response to a number of specific challenges. It includes physical conditions and mental conditions as well. So mental health is written through—

Q67 **Chair:** So you have a written document that—

Andrew McCully: It is written through that document.

Q68 **Olivia Blake:** Do you think that there has been any impact from longterm health conditions on attendance? For example, we know there has been a spike in eating disorders; there is long covid. Have you done any assessment of that when looking at attendance?

Andrew McCully: I think we are learning—

Chair: So the answer is "not yet". I paraphrase you just because of time.

Susan Acland-Hood: It is certainly true that when you look at the persistent absence figures, the biggest growth in persistent absence is illness-related rather than unauthorised absence.

Chair: So something needs to be done underneath—

Susan Acland-Hood: The persistent absence figures are a bit odd, because they're the percentage of possible school sessions missed, and what we have at the moment for this year is for the autumn term only, when there was quite a lot of illness going on. Because it is a percentage of the term, you only have to have missed seven days last term to have been classified as persistently absent, and quite a lot of people who got flu will have been off for seven days.

Q69 Chair: Well, things have circulated because we were all locked up for two years and no one got anything.

Susan Acland-Hood: Exactly. Disentangling that from things that actually are longer term will just take us a little bit of time.

Q70 Chair: There is some data management to be done. Thank you, Ms Blake. We will move on. Just before we move on, though, you mentioned the wellbeing charter, Mr McCully. In evidence from the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, they talked about the wellbeing for education recovery programme. What has happened to that? Is it the same thing as the charter? Is the charter part of it?

Andrew McCully: No, the charter was specifically for teachers and leaders. The wellbeing for education programme was a set of investments around particular programmes.

Q71 Chair: You say "was"; so it's finished now?

Andrew McCully: The first phase was in May 2021, when we invested £7 million, building on the success of £8 million that had gone before. So it was a specific level of investment for the last two years.

Q72 Chair: Have you evaluated that?

Andrew McCully: All our programmes are evaluated, but I haven't got the evaluation—

Q73 Chair: Would you write to us with the evaluation of that, because it is—

Andrew McCully: We will come back to you on that.

Q74 Chair: It is relatively small, although it is a lot of money—teachers will probably be very angry if I say that it's not very much money. If overall, across the country, that has achieved results, it would be interesting to know what it achieved and why it is not continuing.

Susan Acland-Hood: I can tell you it served about 14,000 schools and colleges and it was principally about expert training and support and resources for staff in dealing with children's anxieties—

Chair: I think we just need to see the data on what it achieved for the money, because it is an interesting element of the response to a much bigger problem. Now we will move on with Jonathan Djanogly MP.

Q75 Mr Djanogly: I am going on to the management of the recovery programme and I am going to start with paragraph 1.16 of the NAO Report, which says: "Schools have not used all the recovery funding that DfE has made available. We estimate that, by the end of the 2021-22 financial year, there was a £226 million (14%) underspend against the available funding." Perhaps I will put this to Ms Acland-Hood: why did schools not take up all the funding?

Susan Acland-Hood: We recognise that figure, which represents an underspend on summer schools and on the tuition partner and academic mentor pillars of the programme. What it does not reflect—this is not because the NAO did not do it right but because we had not got far enough through to solidify the figures—is that we took some of that underspend on the tuition partners and academic mentor pillars and fed it back into the school-led tutoring programme. This relates to the year in which we saw lower numbers than expected on tuition partners and academic mentors, and much higher numbers than expected on school-led tutoring, which is why, despite the underspend, we delivered the amount of tutoring that we said we would deliver. So we hit the target for the amount of tutoring.

Q76 Mr Djanogly: And how does that move on into the 2022-23 financial year? Will it even out as a result?

Susan Acland-Hood: No, we will still see some underspend. I will just take you through it. We made the summer schools programme money available as part of the recovery announcement relatively close to the summer term in the end. We wanted to make sure that money was not the limiting factor. We made a lot of money available, and we assumed that schools might want to do two-week summer school programmes, and we made enough money available, effectively, to cover the whole of the transition cohort going into year 7. What happened in practice was that, although a very large number of schools took it up, not every school ran a summer school, and many ran one-week rather than two-week summer schools. That is what drove the underspend, and there was also a bit of management of the figures.

On NTP, for the year in question we saw lower than expected demand on tuition partners and academic mentors, and higher than expected demand on school-led tutoring. Also, school-led tutoring was cheaper than tuition partners and academic mentors. What you see for this year, which was reflected in our supplementary estimates, is that we are still seeing some schools delivering a bit cheaper than our funding rates, but we have also seen some schools delivering less tutoring than we made the money available for. We have a programme to talk to schools that are not delivering tutoring.

The school-led tutoring mechanism was that we allocated money out to all schools based on pupil premium, on the assumption that all of them would do tutoring for all their pupil premium pupils. So the mechanism was designed to make sure that the money was out in schools and was not a barrier. But when you do it that way round, you tend to find that not

everyone will do it, and not everyone will do it to the extent that you expected, so some money then comes back in.

Graham Archer: I might add just one thing, which is that our target for tutoring overall was hit in that year. We reached and exceeded our near 2 million target, so it was not that we missed that metric.

Q77 Mr Djanogly: Looking at school-led tutoring, paragraph 2.21 of the NAO Report states: "DfE relies on schools to report how they have spent their funding allocation for school-led tutoring...If a school has provided fewer hours of tutoring than expected, or provided the expected number of hours but spent less than its funding allocation, the ESFA seeks to recover the overpayment by deducting it from future payments." Mr Archer, how much unspent money for school-led tutoring do you expect to recover from schools?

Graham Archer: We are still going through that process, so I cannot give you a figure. I think that the supplementary estimates figure for this year suggests that we are expecting not to use £165 million of that funding. That is the best estimate that I have at present. We are finalising that process of recovering from schools, and final figures will obviously come later and appear in our accounts.

Q78 Mr Djanogly: When do the final figures come out?

Graham Archer: In our departmental accounts.

Mr Djanogly: When will that be?

Q79 Chair: That is between the permanent secretary and the National Audit Office.

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes, it is. July is the plan.

Chair: Back before the summer recess.

Q80 Mr Djanogly: In paragraph 2.8, the NAO Report states: "DfE intended that the recovery premium would help schools make up for lost teaching...for disadvantaged pupils specifically". I note that you have been talking about disadvantaged pupils and you said there had been an increased take-up, but the NAO Report points out that the DfE has not routinely collected information on how schools have used the recovery premium. Mr Archer, what assurance do you have that schools are using the recovery premium to support disadvantaged pupils specifically?

Graham Archer: I would say two or three things in this space. The first goes back to the extent to which we rely, rightly, on schools and teachers to decide how best to use funding for their pupils. My second point is about the interventions that work best for disadvantaged pupils. Some of them, and tutoring is clearly an example of this, are sharply focused on those individual disadvantaged pupils. Some of them are about the nature of whole-class teaching and the nature of teaching more generally.

We have sharpened the way in which we expect schools to deliver the recovery premium—in the same way as we have the pupil premium—through providing a list of EEF-approved or EEF-identified interventions that make a big difference. We expect schools to provide a statement each year about how they have used their pupil premium—not for every individual pupil, but in the broad. That includes the way in which they have used their recovery premium. As a final point, the funding itself is a really big signal. We have provided schools with recovery premium funding based on the number of their pupils who are eligible for free school meals, and we have clearly signalled that meeting that disadvantage gap is the purpose of that fund.

Q81 Mr Djanogly: I think you are doing a review of the recovery premium strategy statements, are you not?

Graham Archer: We are indeed.

Q82 Mr Djanogly: When is that likely to be delivered?

Graham Archer: The progress is ongoing. I do not have the date for that in front of me, but I can certainly let you know.

Q83 Mr Djanogly: Please. Are there issues coming out of that exercise that you would like to give the Committee any pointers on?

Graham Archer: Only in the sense that we see a variety of practice. We see a good deal of adherence to the EEF measures that schools think are of critical importance. We see the balance that I have described between specific, targeted interventions for individual pupils and for whole schools. But we will take that evidence and do what we have done throughout this programme, which is push back into the system where it seems to have been most effective.

Andrew McCully: One of the points that we are learning all the time is just how much the ambition of school leaders using EEF evidence, which is the gold standard, has been followed. We see evidence that 70% of school leaders are following EEF evidence. One of the things we have done that I am proudest of over my time here is the establishment of the EEF as that gold standard. We re-endowed the EEF only last year for another 10 years. That has made such a difference in terms of—

Q84 Chair: Is it part of your legacy, Mr McCully?

Andrew McCully: I do regard it as part of my legacy, and I am really proud of the EEF work.

Chair: We do like it when people are proud of their public service.

Q85 Anne Marie Morris: Ms Acland-Hood, what work has been done to try to compare how we have done in the UK with other countries similarly impacted by covid? As a start point, I think we are different. I am interested to understand, particularly given that we are different, whether the processes and systems that have been used here—for example,



tutoring—were mirrored abroad. Did we see things going on abroad, think that they were a good idea and bring them in? Has that given us a comparatively better or worse outcome? Right at the start, you said that nobody was predicting being able to fully close the gap. None the less, how are we doing in terms of getting there?

Susan Acland-Hood: The gap I was talking about was the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils overall. We look a lot at the international evidence. I might bring in Mr Archer, who has our international function in his command. Very early in the pandemic, I spent quite a lot of time talking to my counterparts around the world about what they were putting in place to ensure that—exactly as you described—that we were not missing things that people were doing. It is slightly complicated because the pandemic experiences around the world were profoundly different.

Q86 **Chair:** Rather than dwelling on the differences, what lessons did you learn?

Susan Acland-Hood: Versions of the recovery premium, in other words additional money for schools to spend, basically targeted by them—

Chair: It is perhaps not rocket science that schools need money for catch-up.

Susan Acland-Hood: That is very common, and we saw a lot of that around the world. We have seen tutoring approaches. We have had more people coming to look at what we are doing on that; there has been more learning that way than in the other direction. The investment in teacher training and development is something that we both see around the world, and that we have a lot of international partners coming to talk to us about, because the work that we already had under way on the early career framework and the national professional qualifications allowed us to go quite far and fast on that.

I was talking to Andreas Schleicher yesterday. We also try to use international comparative work to look at differential experiences, but again a lot of the headline conclusions are just that people were in very different circumstances and therefore have ended up in different places.

Graham Archer: It is fair to say that we learn more from other systems in periods that are longer term and not interpolated and crisis management. On pedagogy and on teacher training, we've learned a lot, over a long period, from our partners. Each year we host an education world forum here, which is one way in which we drive that, but we've learned far more in those circumstances than we have from covid, where circumstances were different. As you say, Chair, not everything that was done was rocket science, although some of it was undoubtedly useful elsewhere—

Chair: A summary of your career, Mr Archer, for decades.

Q87 Anne Marie Morris: Just one question, Mr Archer. Given what you said about everyone starting from a different place and that therefore it is difficult to compare, are we doing better, worse or on a par with the speed of trying to reduce that attainment gap?

Graham Archer: We do not have very clear comparisons. We are broadly comparable, rather than significantly ahead or behind.

Chair: But we will not know until we see the impact on young people over the next decade.

Q88 Olivia Blake: I want to ask a few quick questions about the summer school programme. Do you feel the purpose and impact of those programmes were what the DfE anticipated?

Graham Archer: We have already had a bit of an exchange about the funding. We did not spend as much money as we had made available. That is partly because of an ongoing and dynamic period of disruption, partly about us announcing that the funding was available close to the time, and partly about the way schools felt most and best able to use the money. But 340,000 children benefited in 2,800 schools.

In terms of effectiveness, almost all those who expressed a view said that that was effective in improving transition from primary to secondary. You would hope that that was the case, wouldn't you? About 73%—so, three quarters—said it was also effective in improving wellbeing as part of that transition. For that not at all insignificant—indeed, rather large—group of children, I think the summer school programme did what we hoped and intended it would do.

Q89 Olivia Blake: If you do this again, do you think you might not give the money directly to schools but potentially to a secondary provider?

Graham Archer: My principle in most things is that schools are the place and they have the people who are best able to determine what is best for their pupils. You need to be really clear about who those providers might be and who might be part of those local partnerships. We do rely, in a number of ways, on strong local partnerships to provide provision in partnership with schools, but I am not sure that I think that taking away the funding or the means to direct that funding is the way to best target pupil needs.

Susan Acland-Hood: Part of the purpose of the summer school programme was that focus on transition and recognising that there had been particular challenges for pupils who had missed out on the opportunities that they typically have to visit schools that they are going into, in the term beforehand, and so on. With that transition aim in view, it would have been odd not to give the money to schools, because it is the school that can best support transition into itself, if that makes sense.

It is worth remembering that we were doing other things as well—the holiday activities and food programme, for example, which provides



activity support and good-quality food for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the summer holidays.

In terms of the long-term aim to address the summer learning loss we typically see more acutely among disadvantaged pupils, those programmes that make sure children have the opportunity to be engaged in a really good-quality and purposeful activity over the summer, in the way that their more advantaged counterparts may take for granted, also have a really important role to play.

But the summer schools were particularly about transition, so I think it made sense to give money to schools.

Q90 Olivia Blake: Given that transition is an issue every year—that was quite an impressive percentage you gave in your answer, Mr Archer—do you think that this is something that DfE would consider going forward?

Graham Archer: We were in a very particular situation where children had missed out on the experiences that would normally lead them up to and into that transition. We had a piece of funding that was specifically for that purpose, so I don't think we would be replicating exactly the same thing. As with all these "Is future funding available?" conversations, that is very much a matter for the next spending review.

Chair: Absolutely, and you won't be here to worry about that at that point. You could have just said yes and then left Ms Acland-Hood to deal with that, but clearly you are a professional civil servant right to the end.

Q91 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I have several quick questions—short answers, please, as time is moving on. First, the Department is to be congratulated on the speed with which you intervened with the national tutoring programme.

Given our exchange, why did you think you would best be able to deliver this national tutoring programme centrally through Randstad, rather than through schools, where the teachers know what is best for their pupils, who the disadvantaged ones are and who needs this support most? Why did you think it was right to deliver it centrally?

Graham Archer: My view is that there are three ways in which schools can best engage tutors. I think all three are important and may benefit different pupils differentially.

The first is using existing tutoring organisations, and obviously there is an existing tutoring market outside of the national tutoring programme. The second is bringing in new, trained and dedicated people to do tutoring. The third is using your own staff and local partners to deliver tutoring.

We began with the areas that most obviously put in additional resource and drew on existing capacity. I think we did that successfully, in both the first and, notwithstanding some of the difficulties with Randstad's performance, the second year. We provided a great deal of support to

schools through tutoring organisations and through what we called academic mentors—the centrally appointed and then pushed-out-to-schools additional resource. I think that worked well.

We learned through the programme, as you would hope we would, first, that some pupils did not benefit from that. The most obvious example of that is that a lot of pupils with special educational needs were better being tutored by people they knew and people in schools. That is one particular example, but there are many other examples of where tutoring from within the school was better. So alongside those other two methods we put a more directly school-led approach.

That approach proved significantly more popular, so we switched our means of funding so that it was much more school-led, learning from the previous point, but hoping that schools were still using those three methods, and I think they are. We have organisations that support schools with quality assurance and with training, so that, whatever route tutoring is delivered by, it is delivered at a really good quality. I think we have got benefit out of all three of those routes, and we have shifted, given the evidence in front of us of what is happening in the system.

Chair: Much of the evidence in front of us is not very focused on the school-led tutoring.

Q92 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Why have 13% of schools not taken part at all in the national tutoring programme?

Graham Archer: That remains, for me at least, the biggest disappointment in the programme. I think schools will have a range of different reasons for why they engage. Some of those will be about their view of the value of tutoring. Some will be about the process of engaging people to do tutoring. What I can assure the Committee of is that we have put a good deal of resource, and continue to put a good deal of resource, into persuading those schools of the benefits of tutoring. We are seeking to reduce that number, both directly through phone calls and other contact, and through identifying what has worked really well and looking to use that to engage a wider group of schools.

Q93 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: This is a little worrying going forward, but can we move to a slightly different issue, Mr Archer? This was raised with us by a number of colleagues, and particularly Paul Howell MP, the Member of Parliament for Sedgefield. He says, "My understanding from Action Tutoring is that the tutor subsidy is set to fall to 25% this year from its current rate of 60%. Given the challenges facing many schools, Action Tutoring has said this may put significant pressure on their activities." This is the worry that the plans are there to carry on the national tutoring programme, but schools are increasingly being asked to do it out of their own budgets. I know from my own constituency schools that they are having great difficulties meeting their budgets, with all the



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other things they have to do, such as mental health—we have discussed all of that—recruitment and so on. How are they going to actually do this?

Graham Archer: The first thing to say is we have always been clear that the programme would taper in its share of the subsidy, and the tapering process has already begun. I also think that if you want tutoring, as we do, to be a normal and embedded part of the school system, it has to be funded through the normal school funding process. Our intention was to provide support in a particularly difficult period, post covid, to sell the benefits of tutoring to those schools who had not previously used it, and to show clearly the way in which that picked up on narrowing the disadvantage gap, in particular. Going forward, with the additional funding that has gone into the main school budgets this year, we expect to see schools increasingly using their mainstream funding to do this and to make it sustainable.

Q94 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I understand your wish to put it through the main school funding. That is fine if you actually do it, but if they do not have any actual extra funding, given the pressures on their budgets already, what it will effectively mean is that this national tutoring programme will start to wither on the vine. Given the catch-up that is obviously still needed, particularly with disadvantaged children, surely this would not be a great thing to do.

Graham Archer: Except that what I think the programme has shown thus far is the value of tutoring as a specific intervention and one that you would therefore want schools to use their existing budgets, their pupil premium—

Q95 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Mr Archer, you misunderstand my question. I was not in any way questioning the value of the national tutoring programme. We all admit that it has had huge value and still could have huge value. Ms Acland-Hood, perhaps this is a question for you because this is a high-level question on funding. Unless the schools are funded specifically for it—with extra funding over what they are getting now—it will inevitably wither on the vine. Would that not be the wrong thing to do, given the benefits we have already seen?

Chair: The evidence is really clear on this from various parties. They are very worried about it.

Susan Acland-Hood: There are three distinct things here. First, do we at some point want to mainstream this into core schools' budgets? If we want it to be a core feature of the system, we must do that.

Secondly, do you then soft ringfence a chunk of money and say, "This is for that and it is going into schools' budgets"? We tend to try not to do that, because what we want is schools making good choices in their budgets. We want schools to be sufficiently funded to do all the things they need to do for their pupils. We have put an extra £2 billion into the system in the autumn statement this year. School funding overall this year



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is therefore going up by something in the order of £4 billion. The pupil premium is specifically for interventions targeted at individual pupils. One of the things we want to do through the national tutoring programme is demonstrate the value, so that people can think about the choices they make with the money they have.

The third point is about the taper of the subsidy and whether moving from 60% to 25% in a single year is too big a drop in order to achieve that end. The NAO Report made a recommendation that we should model the impact of that shift in the subsidy. We accepted that recommendation. We thought it was important that we do so. It is something that we have had an eye on, because it clearly is a significant drop in the level of subsidy, and that is an action we will be taking and discussing with our friends in the Treasury.

Q96 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I hear what you say, and I accept that those extra resources are going into schools, but will you undertake today to keep monitoring this and, if there is a significant drop-off in tutor training, to look at this whole issue of funding again to see what more needs to be done?

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes.

Q97 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: That is very helpful. One final point, again from Paul Howell. He said he understood that the NTP originally had targets of 65% pupil premium, but this has been removed.

Chair: We discussed that earlier.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: That would seem to indicate that we are lessening the importance of pupil premium and those disadvantaged children.

Susan Acland-Hood: We did touch on this briefly earlier. The target we set was when we had a national programme for Randstad. We thought it was important, when we had a single national programme delivering, that they thought about how they were targeting to schools. What we now do is allocate the funding to schools based on the number of pupil premium pupils that they have, so we are achieving the same ends through a different means.

Chair: But in terms of the evidence on the tutoring and the budget pressures, people were basically saying, "I've got several job vacancies to support." People cannot recruit, so even if they have got money to spend on tutoring, they are finding it hard to recruit people for that, let alone the core stuff. I think that the basic funding issues in schools were one of the big messages that came through in evidence from a range of witnesses and Members of Parliament. Olivia Blake MP is next.

Q98 Olivia Blake: I have two questions on specific support. What extra support are you giving to children in the north of England, given the greater learning loss, Mr McCully?

Andrew McCully: The tilting of all the funding that we have been talking about means that it reaches, and is focused on, those schools and areas with the greatest proportions of disadvantaged pupils. That is not necessarily specifically the north, but in terms of the way in which it is distributed to disadvantaged people, it does do that. At every level, even in the core school funding system, we have reviewed the factors, and the national funding formula every year since its introduction, and this year the biggest proportion of funding is going into disadvantage, which has meant that the orienteering of funding benefits the north more than in the previous iterations of the funding formula.

Q99 **Olivia Blake:** So there is nothing specific in this programme.

Andrew McCully: I would draw attention to the education investment areas, which are a key part of the schools White Paper, developed alongside our work around the fund for education recovery. Those education investment areas have full representation in the north of England. It is in those areas that we are targeting our key action on school improvement; it is those areas where we are targeting, in particular, the teacher recruitment premium that Susan mentioned a moment ago for shortage subjects such as maths, physics and computing. In addition to those activities, we have additional funding around some of the bespoke partnership activities. The identification of those areas, and the additional support going into those areas, does benefit parts of the north of England.

Q100 **Olivia Blake:** Very quickly, on maths, given the ambitions of No. 10, what specifically is going into pupils' catch-up in maths?

Andrew McCully: Maths has a fundamental and extensive set of responses. I would highlight how much maths tuition is a key part of the national tutoring programme. If you look down the range of tutors and support, maths is one of the most predominant uses of the national tutoring programme by far.

I would highlight the further extension of the maths hubs, which are now reaching substantial numbers of schools, and the extension of our maths mastery approaches, based on the very best evidence from Shanghai, in particular. I think that has been a fundamental change in the way that we teach maths in this country and the benefit of that.

I would also highlight the accelerator fund, which is part of the recovery package, and the demonstration of effective maths teaching through the accelerator fund, particularly in the mastering number programme, which has been a key part of the maths hubs' activities.

The outside the school programme, into 16 to 19, is another key part of the education recovery area. Given the current and future focus on maths, we are working even more on developing those approaches.

Q101 Olivia Blake: I will move on quickly, as I am conscious of time. Without milestones, how are you going to track that you are meeting your attainment targets for 2030, as set out in the White Paper for schools?

Andrew McCully: I would point to a number of things. First of all, we set out the metrics and our measures in our Department's operational plan that we publish. Clearly, the annual results from our tests and GCSEs are fundamental moments of setting progress levels. The long-term ambition in the schools White Paper invites a recognition of the importance of setting progress measures. We didn't do that in the schools White Paper. We are looking to do that, especially in our plans for further reinforcing and implementing the schools White Paper measures, and I expect to be able to share with the wider world—and, indeed, possibly even this Committee—plans for primary in the next couple of months.

Q102 Olivia Blake: That would be very helpful. That links to my next question: how will you keep Parliament updated on progress towards the ambitions of the White Paper targets?

Susan Acland-Hood: I think Mr McCully has covered quite a lot of that. We set those ambitious targets in the schools White Paper at both key stage 2 and key stage 4, but every year in our outcome delivery plan, we actually publish a wider range of metrics at both key stage 2 and key stage 4. We also publish the results of the key stage 1 tests—the phonics screening check, the multiplication tables check and so on. We use all of those to hold ourselves to account, and we expect other people to use them to hold us to account for progress.

Q103 Olivia Blake: Thank you. I have a question about the performance and risk committee. How often will they be scrutinising the education recovery programme?

Susan Acland-Hood: We have boards for each of the three main pieces of the Department: skills, schools and families. The schools board will look at this; it meets monthly. In effect, it will look at this every month, because the business of education recovery is so closely entwined with the core business of the schools board, which is the progress that children are making in schools. Essentially, the schools board will look it every month. The performance and risk committee, as I hope you would expect, takes a risk-based approach to what it looks at and focuses on making sure it has covered our top risks in rotation. It is a bit difficult to predict exactly how often it would take this as a core substantive item, but it will look across the performance of the whole Department in every meeting, so it does that quarterly.

Q104 Olivia Blake: Mr McCully, it would be interesting to know what measures you will report back to the performance and risk committee to show the impact and whether things are working or not.

Andrew McCully: Certainly against some of the key inputs. At the beginning of this discussion, we talked about the teacher quality

improvements. At the moment, that is mostly important inputs: how many teachers and whether the courses are being completed. We are reporting on that regularly. Increasingly, now that the accountability system, testing and processes are back on stream, we have that as a regular piece. The phonic screening check and multiplication table check are a number of the other inputs.

The NAO, in its recommendations, encourages the further development of longitudinal studies. That is a very good recommendation. We have had some of that in the past, and we have committed to investigate how we do that. I would love to add that to the suite of information and reporting that we have, to make sure that we are on track. That is something that, as a result of the NAO Report, we have committed to do.

Q105 Olivia Blake: That is reassuring to hear and links to my next question. In an ideal world, what datapoints would you like to have at your disposal?

Andrew McCully: In that ideal world, we would certainly have some of that, but we don't have it at the moment. We had more of that through very specific research pieces that we had during covid, working with organisations such as the Education Policy Institute. As the NAO Report identified, we could do better by returning to and expanding on that experience, and that is something we have committed to do.

Q106 Chair: We are heartened to hear about the idea of longitudinal study, because that is important, but I am quite concerned that, from what we have been hearing today, we have a very urgent situation right now. It was predictable during covid that we were going to have a problem, yet there will be cohorts that, as we have heard in evidence and from you, will never get the benefit of some of this support, or not enough. Only 35% of schools are taking up some of the programmes, and schools are finding it a struggle to pay for others. Cohorts going through will not have had the level of support, because they identified exam pupils—quite rightly on one level. Will there be a cohort that will lose out?

Susan Acland-Hood: It is important to say that the first announcements around investment in education recovery were made in June 2020, which was pretty early in the pandemic—

Q107 Chair: I am not suggesting that there was not work done, but it will never be enough, will it?

Susan Acland-Hood: No, I think that is true. Again, there is a bit of thanks to those in the system who have made this possible, but the longitudinal data we had during the pandemic showed that, by autumn 2021, something like two thirds of the learning lost by spring 2021 in primary reading had been caught up, and about half the learning lost in primary maths. That is quite rapid and quite a significant achievement. The challenge is always—there is a very typical pattern—that the first bit of recovery is quick, and then it slows, so there is something about continuous investment. But the reach of the programmes has been

something we have been really trying to focus on, and although Graham is ruthlessly chasing down the 13% of schools that have not taken part in the national tuition programme, the vast majority of schools in the country have taken it up.

Q108 Chair: One of the lessons that have come out of all the evidence we have seen and from previous work that we have done is that if you do not have qualified teachers in the classrooms and you cannot recruit, and if you cannot recruit teaching assistants and you cannot pay for teaching assistants, that will put a brake on children's ongoing attainment, and in catch-up that is a wicked issue. Mr McCully is nodding.

Susan Acland-Hood: We know that the single biggest contributor to children's education is a great teacher, which is why so much of the investment has gone into teacher education. We acknowledge the challenges of recruitment and retention, but it is probably worth saying that we have more teachers—about 24,000 more—in the system than we had in 2010, and the largest number of teachers across the school system that we have ever had.

Q109 Chair: Yet we still can't recruit.

Susan Acland-Hood: There are challenges. There are particular challenges in recruiting for particular subjects, but we have seen a significant growth in the overall teacher workforce.

Chair: Certainly in London, pupils and heads tell you that if a teacher leaves, they are replaced by a non-specialist. Children are very aware when a non-specialist is teaching them. I am surprised how savvy—well, perhaps that is a bit patronising to teenagers. Teenagers are very alert to having a non-specialist teacher.

Q110 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: A very quick question to you, Mr McCully. Given that the skills required for the tutoring programme are different from general teaching skills—in one you are dealing with a class of 20 to 30 pupils; in the other you might be dealing on a one-to-one basis or at least with a very small group—if we are not to see this national tutoring programme wither on the vine, which I am concerned about, how are we going to create a sustainable market in tuition? How are you going to assist teachers with that different skillset?

Andrew McCully: Quality is the watchword. It is not just about finding additional tutors through the tuition partner route, important though that is, but about effective practice and use of the evidence on how effective tuition is delivered. That could be the most fundamental legacy of the work that we have done so far in a way that embeds tutoring into the system for good.

I would particularly point to the training that goes into all limbs of the NTP. We had the training quality assured and overseen by one of our contractual partners, the Education Development Trust. That is



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underpinned by the research and best practice we talked about earlier, demonstrated by the Education Endowment Foundation and the National Foundation for Educational Research implementation evidence and research. That, for me, is as important a part of the legacy of tutoring embedded permanently into the system as identifying additional organisations or tutors.

Susan Acland-Hood: May I say one more thing about the training? We have had 20,000 people go through that dedicated training. We initially said that people must be trained if they were going to do tutoring as a teaching assistant in a school context, but they did not have to be trained if they were already a qualified teacher. Interestingly, most schools put their qualified teachers through the training as well, and the feedback on the training has been extremely positive from both qualified teachers and teaching assistants. There is a long-term legacy of having skilled up more people in schools to deliver one-to-one and small group tutoring. As you say, the skills are different from those needed for whole-class teaching.

Andrew McCully: Indeed, I have seen so many exciting legacies from the training up of teaching assistants, and the work that we are doing. Having a fundamental training offer and development for teaching assistants is so important.

Chair: And that is going to be an ongoing programme. Okay, thank you.

Q111 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Do you have any analysis of the 20,000? What percentage is teachers and teaching assistants from the schools and what percentage is teachers and other well qualified people from outside the schools? Presumably, this is going to be delivered not just by teachers in the schools but by outsiders as well?

Andrew McCully: Indeed it is. I do not have those figures, but I will look to see if we can provide them. You are absolutely right that typical schooled tuition is looking not just at teachers and teaching assistants, but at retired teachers, and in some instances parents engage with the school as well.

Chair: It depends on the level.

Q112 **Olivia Blake:** Ms Acland-Hood, how and when will we know whether the schemes for education recovery and the extra funding has delivered value for money?

Susan Acland-Hood: I think we will know different things about different parts of the programme at different times. We have got evaluation wrapped around every element of the programme and we are putting those out as we have them. The evaluation of the summer schools programme that you quoted from is already out there, for example. There is continuing evaluation of the national teaching tutoring programme.

There are lots of extremely positive signs, including the fact that we have delivered the amount of tutoring that we said we wanted to deliver, at a

somewhat lower cost than we initially thought it would take. I suspect this will be an ongoing exploration between us and the National Audit Office, but we will continue to put as much evidence out about the value for money of the work that we are doing as quickly as we have it.

Q113 Olivia Blake: Mr Archer, what lessons have you learnt from the first two years that you are going to apply to the next two years?

Chair: Not you necessarily, Mr Archer, but you can pass them on.

Graham Archer: For me it is about the power of data to help you to effectively target the pupils and places that need it most. There is a powerful thing about trusting schools and teachers and the great work they do to drive the sharp targeting on those pupils who need it most. It is about targeting in the broad, and then targeting in the narrow by trusting schools and teachers to do a really good job—as they do.

Chair: I think that is a wonderful note to finish on, because we would all say amen to that. But Sir Geoffrey has a question to finish.

Q114 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I will go away from this session still quizzical if I do not ask this slightly different question. What embedded lessons have we learnt from the pandemic in terms of remote learning and the roll-out of the computer programme and so on? We must have learnt some useful lessons; what are they?

Susan Acland-Hood: I might bring in others on this as well. I think we have learnt that remote learning is not a good substitute for a teacher. Quite a lot of us thought that to start off with, but there is quite a lot in the ether about whether or not you were—

Chair: There were indicators that some pupils found it a bit easier to speak online than in the classroom.

Q115 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To focus the question, it may be that some of this remote learning is useful in addition to in-class teaching, particularly for things such as homework.

Susan Acland-Hood: That is what I was going to go on to say. We have learnt a lot about using technology to support homework. We have learnt quite a lot about using technology to support teachers in how they deliver learning. There were some instances where teachers were using more ed tech packages alongside the remote learning. It goes back to Graham's point about targeting; it allowed them to be able to see more clearly and understand patterns of attainment among their pupils.

There is a programme of work we are now doing in the Department; we have added education technology more clearly to the EEF's remit, as part of its endowment, and we have work following on from the legacy of the ed tech demonstrator pilot and some other things. That work looks at the lessons that have been learnt about not just remote learning but the use



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of technology in schools during the pandemic more widely. Plus, remote parents' evenings are everybody's favourite thing.

Chair: Thank you all very much. The transcript will be up on the website, uncorrected, in the next couple of days. I thank Mr McCully and Mr Archer for their decades of service at the Department for Education. We hope you have a happy retirement.