



# Education Committee

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From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP  
Minister of State for School Standards  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

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## ***Educational Disadvantage: Covid-19***

Dear Nick,

As you will have seen, much of our attention in recent weeks has been on the implications of lockdown on children and young people, and particularly on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. There has been broad agreement that without a significant intervention several years of progress in closing the attainment gap could be reversed. Therefore, we very much welcome the extra £1 billion of funding being provided this year for an educational catch-up and the creation of a national tutoring service. We write now to seek further information on these programmes.

### ***Targeting catch-up funding***

We would like to consider how the Government is targeting the extra money it is putting into catch-up. During our recent evidence sessions, we heard different ways through which catch-up funding could be targeted. The Education Policy Institute were in favour of a targeted approach through doubling the pupil premium for key transitional years, for vulnerable children, and also allocating money to disadvantaged children in early-years and post-16 students. Their total package was £1.2 billion and so not wholly dissimilar to the Government's level of new funding. It would be helpful to explore how DfE may be prioritising its new allocation.

### ***Early-years and 16-18 education***

In addition to the money announced, what plans has the Government for providing catch-up support to early-years children and post-16 students? What were the reasons for the Government not including these groups as part of its catch-up intervention announced on 19 June?

### ***Distribution of funding***

Others we heard from also supported a targeted approach, with funding being allocated to areas in accordance with levels of deprivation. You have announced that £650 million will be spent on ensuring all pupils have the chance to catch up, and a separate £350 million fund to establish a national tutoring programme. Can you explain how both funds will be distributed throughout the country? Will the £650 million of additional money be targeted at areas of

deprivation or will it be a national allocation available to all schools for pupils from primary to age 16? What bearing will the pupil premium formula and those who qualify for free school meals have for schools when using this funding?

The announcement suggested that the £1 billion package is new, additional funding and further to the £55 million fund already agreed and announced for the year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium. Can you confirm this is the case?

***Supporting vulnerable children and those with additional needs***

We also heard strong arguments for doubling the pupil premium for looked-after children and for those on child protection registers. Can you set out how these groups will be treated under the Government's catch-up proposals?

Several other witnesses identified children with special educational needs, including those with lower level needs, as being a cohort that will have struggled during lockdown and who will need specific support as part of a national and local recovery plans. What guidance and extra support will be provided for those children and young people with special educational needs who do not qualify for an education, health and care plan? How will these children be treated under the Government's catch-up programme?

***A national tutoring service***

Alongside this universal catch-up offer, the Department announced a national tutoring service, which will support interventions to the most disadvantaged young people. Can you set out how the Government will drive momentum behind this programme and what role it will take in recruiting volunteers? What role will the DfE have in coordinating the service, accrediting providers, setting standards for tuition, and putting in place safeguarding standards and measures for use of volunteers?

Also, what, if any, structure and mechanism will DfE put in place for the fees that will be charged for tuition and what discussions has the Department had with the Treasury over whether VAT will be applicable for tuition provided through registered charities? What oversight role will the DfE have in measuring the standards of tuition being delivered by external providers across different regions of the country and what actions can and will be taken should there be shortfalls in standards or provision in any areas?

***Encouraging take-up***

We have heard that one of the biggest challenges will be getting the hardest to reach children to engage in extra tuition. How will Government encourage take-up? Will the Government consider running a national campaign to help explain the importance tutoring can make to children's attainment and future life chances?

A study by UCL's Institute of Education indicated that since March over two million children may have done no schoolwork at home. This being the case, what measures will the Government be taking to identify and target those who have not been learning during the lockdown and to ensure that these children attend catch-up programmes?

### **Summer schemes**

In light of the time children will have been out of school, we believe there is now a strong case for running programmes and activities in schools and other local facilities over the summer holiday period. These programmes would allow extremely valuable breaks for many children, especially those living in difficult home conditions. We heard in evidence that there is also significant interest and enthusiasm from many different groups to support these taking place. What would the Government like to see happening over the summer in schools for children?

The Government is providing £9 million to fund a holiday activities and food programme which will support up to 50,000 children across 17 local authorities, which follows on from programmes at a similar scale in previous years. Given the unprecedented situation of Covid-19, will the Government consider widening this programme over the summer? And for those schools wanting to run well-being and educational programmes over the summer, can you confirm that these can be funded through the additional catch-up provision that has been announced?

### **Tackling the attainment gap**

The Government's extra £1 billion funding for catch-up should help mitigate the impact of the Covid crisis on disadvantaged children if it is spent effectively. What guidance and assurance measures is the Department putting in place to ensure schools can be held accountable for their use and targeting of this extra money. When will DfE's own guidance be published? How will the provision of this extra funding be evaluated and separated out in any evaluation from the general pupil premium funding that is provided to schools to support disadvantaged children?

The Committee plans to conduct further work on tackling the attainment gap as part of our Covid inquiry. We would therefore be grateful for responses to the questions we raise above by Friday, 10 July 2020.

Yours sincerely,



**Robert Halfon MP**  
Chair of the Education Committee