

Fifty-fifth Report of Session 2022-23

Department for Education

Education recovery in schools in England

Introduction from the Committee

In January 2022, there were 21,600 state schools in England, educating 8.3 million pupils. The Department for Education (the department) is responsible for the school system in England and is ultimately accountable for securing value for money from the funding provided for schools.

To help limit transmission of the COVID-19 virus, schools were closed to pupils other than vulnerable children and children of critical workers from March to July 2020 and again from January to March 2021. During these periods, education for most children took place remotely at home.

Disruption to children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic led to lost learning for many pupils, particularly for disadvantaged children. The department has announced total funding of £4.9 billion to address learning loss and support education recovery, covering early years, schools and education for 16- to 19-year-olds. Most of this funding (£3.5 billion) is for recovery interventions in schools extending across four academic years, 2020/21 to 2023/24. The main interventions are: the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), which subsidises individual or small-group tutoring, with a focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils; the catch-up premium, which was per-pupil funding for schools during 2020/21; and the recovery premium from 2021/22 which, for mainstream schools, is allocated based on how many disadvantaged pupils they have.

Based on a report by the National Audit Office, the Committee took evidence on 9 March 2023 from the Department for Education, about education recovery in schools. The Committee published its report on 7 June 2023. This is the government's response to the Committee's report.

Relevant reports

- NAO report: [Education recovery in schools in England](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 1081)
- PAC report: [Education recovery in schools in England](#) – Session 2022-23 (HC 998)

Government response to the Committee

1: PAC conclusion: It is alarming that it may take a decade for the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others to return to what it was before the COVID-19 pandemic.

1: PAC recommendation: The Department should publish a plan setting out how, building on good practice, it will reduce the disadvantage gap as quickly as possible, and the expected trajectory.

1.1 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

1.2 The Department for Education (the department) is committed to narrowing the disadvantage gap as quickly as possible, using proven programmes and the best evidence, for example through the department's funded work of the Education Endowment Foundation. This objective is central and should be threaded through all of the department's programmes and work, rather than being a further separate plan.

1.3 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, progress was made on improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. That progress was achieved through evidence-based improvements to curriculum and pedagogy, targeted help for pupils through the National Funding Formula, the continued development of the Pupil Premium and tilting of major programmes across all phases of education.

1.4 The Schools White Paper, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) (published March 2022) set out steps to improve attainment for all pupils, including helping to provide children who fall behind with the support they need to get back on track.

1.5 The pandemic impacted on the learning and development of all pupils, in particular disadvantaged pupils. That is why the £5 billion recovery programmes are principally targeted at disadvantaged pupils, supporting the narrowing of the disadvantage gap to pre-pandemic levels as quickly as possible.

1.6 Key stage (KS) 2 national statistics, released on 11 July 2023, show that overall more pupils met the expected standard in this year's mathematics and writing assessments than last year, and although reading has declined from last year it remains consistent with results in 2019 prior to the pandemic.

1.7 Statistics on attainment in KS1, KS2 and phonics at regional and local authority level, and broken down by pupil and school characteristics (including disadvantaged pupils) will be published in Autumn 2023. The department continues to use evidence and wider insights to review progress towards our 2030 ambitions, across different cohorts and phases, to determine how best to support to support all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.

2: PAC conclusion: Effective recovery relies on pupils being at school but absence is higher than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among disadvantaged pupils.

2a: PAC recommendation: The Department should develop a better understanding of why disadvantaged pupils have higher rates of absence than others.

2.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: July 2024

2.2 Over the academic year 2023-24, the department will build on existing absence analysis and use available data to develop a better understanding of why disadvantaged pupils have higher rates of absence than others, including in identifying any new post-pandemic trends.

2b: PAC recommendation: The Department should, in addition to its ongoing work on attendance, take targeted action to reduce absence rates among disadvantaged pupils.

2.3 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

2.4 The department is strongly committed to reducing absence among disadvantaged pupils. The current approach includes comprehensive measures and a system-wide strategy that is already supplemented by targeted action to address the underlying causes of absence rates among disadvantaged pupils. New guidance places an expectation on schools to use data to identify at-risk pupils, then work with families to support absent students, while local authorities are required to establish an attendance support team and hold termly meetings with every school to plan interventions for children at risk of persistent or severe absence.

2.5 These expectations provide a framework for identifying children who need additional support. They are supplemented via targeted programmes that will particularly benefit disadvantaged pupils. These include the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme (£200 million annually), the National School Breakfast Programme (£30 million) and - to address wider multiple challenges - the Supporting Families programme (an additional £200 million). The government has also committed to investing £2.6 billion via the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) improvement plan, and £2.9 billion annually in pupil premium funding, the latter of which can be used to address non-academic barriers such as attendance difficulties.

3: PAC conclusion: We share the Department's disappointment that 13% of schools did not take up the National Tutoring Programme in 2021/22, meaning pupils at these schools missed out on the benefits of subsidised tutoring.

3: PAC recommendation: The Department needs to do more to understand why some schools are not taking part in the National Tutoring Programme and take more effective action to increase participation, informed by evaluation of the first two years of the scheme.

3.1 The government agrees with Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: August 2024

3.2 The government is committed to narrowing the attainment gap and improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged in society.

3.3 Informed by evaluation of the first two years of the scheme, on 31 March 2022 the department announced plans to simplify the programme for academic year 2022-23. This has seen the department provide £349 million of core tutoring funding directly to schools and give them the freedom to decide how best to provide tutoring for their pupils. Schools welcomed these changes, and the same model of providing funding directly to schools will apply in academic year 2023-24. This will see the department provide £150 million to schools, bringing total spend on tutoring over the duration of the programme to £1 billion.

3.4 The department is always interested in understanding more about the barriers to participating in the National Tutoring Programme. The department is using administrative data to look further into the characteristics of schools that have not engaged. The department will continue to use evaluation information in academic year 2023-24 to understand barriers to participation.

3.5 Various evidence, including the regular School and College Panel survey, has indicated that schools report funding as overwhelmingly the largest barrier to continuing to deliver tutoring. Having listened to schools' concerns over the 25% subsidy rate previously communicated, the department has set the subsidy rate for the academic year 2023-24 at 50% to make the programme more deliverable for schools. This means that schools now need to contribute less of their own money than originally planned. The department nevertheless recognises that funding can be challenging for schools. To meet their costs when providing tutoring, schools will be able to continue to use funding streams like the Pupil Premium, which will rise to almost £2.9 billion in 2023-24.

4: PAC conclusion: We are not confident that schools will be able to afford to provide tutoring on the scale required to support all the pupils who need it once the Department withdraws its subsidy.

4: PAC recommendation: The Department should monitor how much tutoring is being provided, in 2022/23 and 2023/24 when it is providing a subsidy, and in subsequent years, and intervene if tutoring levels drop significantly.

4.1 The government agrees with Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: December 2024

4.2 The department agrees that it is important to monitor the volume of tutoring that schools are providing, which is why schools are asked to report on tutoring via the termly school census and a bespoke year-end statement. This monitors the number of pupils receiving tutoring, the number of hours delivered, and schools spend on tutoring overall. Because schools report their tutoring delivery at pupil level, the department is able to examine the characteristics of pupils receiving tutoring. This monitoring approach has worked well in academic year 2022-23 and will continue for academic year 2023-24.

4.3 The department's approach was agreed with the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board, a panel of external partners from local authorities, schools, unions, and Ofsted. This board reviews all Department for Education data collection activities to ensure they are feasible, necessary, provide value for money and do not place undue burdens on schools.

4.4 The department has committed that from 2024, tutoring will be embedded across schools in England, and expects tutoring to continue to be a staple offer from schools. Further information on this will be provided in due course, including on any associated data and monitoring requirements.

4.5 The department is developing interventions that may be deployed, as appropriate, in academic year 2023-24 or in subsequent years, should there be a significant reduction in the amount of tutoring schools provide.

5: PAC conclusion: The Department has no interim targets to track progress towards the 2030 attainment ambitions set out in the Schools White Paper.

5: PAC recommendation: The Department should set out measures of progress for the 2030 attainment targets (starting with the measures for primary pupils which it should publish by the 2023 summer parliamentary recess) and report progress against the measures to Parliament each year.

5.1 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

5.2 The department already publishes national attainment data, for phonics, key stage 1, key stage 2, key stage 4 and key stage 5, which indicate trends in attainment and pupil progress. The department also publishes data on key performance indicators and critical programmes, including through its annual reports and accounts. Collectively, these provide measures of progress for improving the school system.

5.3 The Schools White Paper [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) (published March 2022) set out the department's ambitions for schools in England and approach to raising attainment for all pupils, including through ensuring a supply of high-quality teachers, improving standards in classrooms through effective, evidence-based programmes and providing children and young people with the additional support they may need, such as tutoring through the National Tutoring Programme.

5.4 The department has increased the core schools' budget by an additional £2 billion in 2023-24 and 2024-25, and continues to build a stronger school system, delivering the recommendations of the [Academies regulatory and commissioning review](#) (published March

2023) and taking forward the [Special educational needs and disability \(SEND\) and alternative provision improvement plan](#) (published March 2023).

5.5 Statistics on attainment in KS1, KS2 and phonics at regional and local authority level and broken down by pupil and school characteristics will be published in Autumn 2023. This will provide the department with the latest picture of progress towards the 2030 ambitions on attainment. Detailed 2023 attainment data across key stage 2 and key stage 4 will not be available prior to the 2023 summer parliamentary recess. Key stage 2 national statistics were released on 11 July 2023. This shows that overall, more pupils met the expected standard in this year's mathematics and writing assessments than last year, and although reading has declined from last year it remains consistent with results in 2019 prior to the pandemic. The department continues to use evidence and wider insights to review progress towards our 2030 ambitions, across different cohorts and phases, to determine how best to support all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.