

Written evidence submitted by Teach First

Teach First submission: The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

About Teach First

Teach First is an education charity with a mission to build a fair education for all. Less than half of disadvantaged students pass English and Maths GCSEs, compared to almost two-thirds of other students. We know that teachers and school leaders can make the decisive difference to close this gap, which is why we work to support schools with the teachers, leaders and networks that they need to thrive.

The charity has recruited over 14,000 teachers and leaders, and now has over 60 head teachers among our alumni. We operate across all regions of England.

Those on the Training Programme commit to a minimum of two years at their school, where they teach a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) timetable; around half stay on for a third year. More than half of all the teachers who've completed training since 2003 are currently teaching.

The charity's other activities include:

- Support for whole school leadership teams through Leading Together.
- Developing individuals to become effective leaders through Middle Leader, Senior Leader and Headship programmes leading to a National Professional Qualification.
- Careers Leader training to develop long-term, school-wide careers strategies to improve student opportunities after school.
- Connecting schools through networks to share knowledge and resources on how to tackle inequality in education.

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic is not hurting each member of society equally. The virus is already more widespread in the areas of the country with the highest rates of poverty and ethnic diversity, and the economic downturn is making it increasingly likely that even more people will slip into poverty. During six weeks of the pandemic, 1.8 million new Universal Credit claims were made, over five times the number made in the same period last year.¹ Before the outbreak, there were already 4 million children living in poverty in the UK.² As time goes on, hardship is set to bite even more families.

These consequences will significantly affect children and their learning. By the end of secondary school children who grow up in disadvantaged circumstances are on average 18 months behind their better-off peers.³ Learning lost during school closures will have a lasting impact on disadvantaged

¹ The Department for Work and Pensions, [Universal Credit: 29 April 2013 to 12 March 2020](#), 2020

² Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [UK Poverty 2019/20](#), 2020

pupils. The impact of worsening financial circumstances will last even longer. And schools will be supporting pupils to rebound for many years ahead long after news headlines have moved on. Successive governments have invested to close the attainment gap, and now more than ever it will require monumental efforts across government, business and the education sector to ensure that progress is not lost.

This submission sets out what Teach First thinks can be done to overcome the challenges. It considers the main risks of the pandemic to the education of disadvantaged children and puts forward evidence on how these risks can be mitigated. The response should be considered in two phases: interventions during the period when schools are partially closed, and interventions for when schools fully resume. During the first period we want to see support for home study, so that less learning is lost. During the second phase the challenges will shift. Schools will face into difficulties resulting from the pandemic that could endure for years to come, and they will need support as they step-up to meet these challenges.

Recommendations

Recommendations whilst schools are closed to most pupils:

1. **Give disadvantaged children access to devices and internet to learn from home.**
This could be achieved by extending the eligibility of the Government's technology support scheme to children of all ages from low-income families. Devices and internet access should be distributed as swiftly as possible, to limit learning loss, and the reach should be reviewed on a weekly basis.
2. **Ensure GCSE and A-level grades are awarded as fairly as possible.**
Ofqual should monitor the distribution of grades that are submitted by schools and exam boards. If pupils eligible for the pupil premium or pupils from ethnic minority groups receive lower grades than past years, then scores must be changed in the moderation process before pupils receive their final grades.
3. **Acknowledge improving schools in grade awards**
Ofqual should explore how they can provide flexibility to schools that are able to justify grade improvements compared to previous years. A school should be able to submit evidence that awarded grades have been informed by school improvement. This could be evidenced by standardised commercial tests results which have been used at the school for several years or recent Ofsted reports.
4. **Provide intensive catch-up for children from disadvantaged backgrounds**
If gatherings are allowed later in the year, catch-up provision can be through summer schools. Alternatively, catch-up could be after-school provision once schools are back.

Recommendations to support schools to rebound:

5. **Continue and enhance efforts to recruit and retain new teachers**
The Government must continue to prioritise plans to attract more people to the teaching profession and help them stay. This includes progressing starting salary increases, extending financial incentives to work in disadvantaged areas and an earlier full rollout of The Early Career Framework.
6. **Invest in school leaders**
School leaders should be supported to thrive as they help their schools and pupils to rebound. They should be offered coaching from experienced school leaders and given access to peer-to-peer networks.
7. **Weight school funding increases towards schools serving disadvantaged pupils**

³ Education Policy Institute, [Education in England: Annual Report 2019](#), 2019

The challenges faced by schools once the crisis has passed will be greatest in disadvantaged areas. Funding allocations should reflect this disproportionate impact. The pupil premium should also continue to be allocated for six years after a child has a period of receiving free school meals, including those children who are becoming eligible during Covid-19.

8. Commission research on the impact of school closures

The government should commission ongoing research to understand the pandemic's impact on children's learning. In particular, the research should consider how this differs across families by demographics to help the sector understand how learning losses can be mitigated and accelerate the closure of the attainment gap.

Interventions while schools are closed

Digital inclusion

Recommendation 1: Give disadvantaged children access to devices and internet to learn from home.

This could be achieved by extending the eligibility of the Government's technology support scheme to include children of all ages from low-income families. Devices and internet access should be distributed as swiftly as possible, to limit learning loss, and the reach should be reviewed on a weekly basis.

For most children learning is currently taking place at home. Some children of key workers, and pupils with a social worker are at school. But many children who are eligible to be at school are not. And there are many more pupils who are vulnerable and not eligible to be at school, who are also at home.

Learning conditions at home are not equal. Home schooling is challenging for all families, and there is a good chance most children will learn less during this period. But for some, the barriers are much higher. A survey carried out by Teacher Tapp for Teach First showed that only 2% of teachers working in the most disadvantaged schools believe all their pupils have adequate access to digital devices to learn from home.⁴ In the most affluent schools, 62% of teachers think that no more than 2% of their pupils will struggle with internet access when learning from home, compared to only 17% in the most disadvantaged schools.

When teachers were asked by Teacher Tapp before the school closures whether they could easily either set class work remotely or give a video lesson for their last class, teachers in the most disadvantaged schools were significantly less likely than those in the most advantaged to say they would be able to (53% vs 70% for setting work remotely and 34% vs 47% for giving a video lesson).⁵

In addition to being more likely to have access to devices and the internet to learn at home almost half (47%) of middle class parents say they feel confident teaching their children at home compared to 37% of working class parents.⁶

Significant increases in business for tutoring companies that offer online support have also been reported.⁷ A fifth of children in middle class homes had £100 or more spent on their learning in the

⁴ Teach First, [Only 2% of teachers working in the most disadvantaged communities believe all their pupils have adequate access to devices for home learning](#), 2020

⁵ Teacher Tapp, [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools](#), 2020

⁶ The Sutton Trust, [Most parents don't feel confident about teaching their child](#), 2020

⁷ The Guardian, [UK school closures prompt boom in private tuition](#), 2020

first week of school closures, rising to a third of those in households with earnings over £100,000.⁸ This compares to 8% of children in working-class homes, highlighting the opportunities available only to those parents who have the resources.⁹

Testimonies from the Teach First community show that schools are doing their best to help every single child to keep learning. Many are frequently calling parents and using their resources to provide families with digital devices and internet connections. However, according to a recent survey, while almost a third of the most advantaged schools have provided digital devices to the students who needed them, only 15% of the most disadvantaged have been able to do so.¹⁰ The recent Government initiative to provide digital devices and 4G routers to disadvantaged secondary students is therefore paramount to overcome the digital inclusion gap.¹¹

An indicator of the impact of these inequalities is that 50% of teachers at private schools say they are receiving at least three quarters of the homework set. This compares to 27% in the most advantaged state schools and only 8% in the most disadvantaged state schools.¹²

Some opportunities for continued learning have already been missed, but the sooner every student has access to online learning, the better the chances of reducing the detrimental impact on the attainment gap.

Grade allocation

Recommendation 2: Ensure GCSE and A-level grades are awarded as fairly as possible

Ofqual should monitor the distribution of grades that are submitted by schools and exam boards. If pupils eligible for the pupil premium or pupils from ethnic minority groups receive lower grades than past years, then scores must be corrected in the moderation process before pupils receive their final grades.

Recommendation 3: Acknowledge improving schools in grade awards

Ofqual should explore how they can provide flexibility to schools that are able to justify grade improvements compared to previous years. A school should be able to submit evidence that awarded grades have been informed by improvements. This could be evidenced by standardised commercial tests which have been used at the school for several years, or evidence of improvement from recent Ofsted reports.

Sitting GCSE and A-level exams is a rite of passage for most young people. They're an annual milestone that teachers and schools work towards. This year those rituals have changed.

We want to make sure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are awarded grades fairly. The impact of these grades will last a lifetime. They affect the next steps young people take, onto further study, jobs or apprenticeships. But they also affect the choices young people make later in life. Less than half of disadvantaged students pass English and Maths GCSEs, compared to almost two-thirds of other students. Passing GCSEs, particularly in English and Maths, are often the minimum

⁸ The Sutton Trust, [COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown](#), 2020

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Department for Education, [New major package to support online learning](#), 2020

¹² The Sutton Trust, [COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown](#), 2020

requirement for many jobs and training opportunities. Resitting later in life is much harder for most people than getting it right first time.

But evidence shows that high-attaining A-level students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be underpredicted compared to their better-off peers.¹³ It has also been shown that black students are less likely to receive the correct predicted grades, being the most likely young people to be both under- and overpredicted.¹⁴ There is likely to be inherent bias in the system, as is the case in most systems. Awareness of this bias is the first step in overcoming it. We welcome the consultation launched by Ofqual and are encouraged by the extensive consideration for the process of awarding grades for students who were expecting to sit their final exams this spring.

We urge Ofqual to closely monitor the grades of pupils eligible for pupil premium and pupils who belong to an ethnic minority group. Even marginal changes in grade distribution would be an indication of unfair grade awarding. Any bias must be corrected in the grade moderation process before pupils receive their final grades. If any bias is found in the system the response should tend towards giving young people the benefit of the doubt rather than risk underestimating them due to factors outside of their control. This is particularly important for pupils on the GCSE maths and English pass borderline. Not achieving pass grades in those subjects can close doors for a lifetime.

There is also a risk that students in schools that have made vast improvements in the past year may not see the full progress reflected in their grades. While Ofqual's provisional guidance has stated that changes to a school's grade distribution could be accepted if there has been a change to the characteristics and prior attainment of the student cohort, it has not put forward a way of assessing whether school improvement could explain more generous grading this year. One option is to support schools to submit evidence from commercial tests that have been used for several years, thereby proving whether there has been progress since 2019. Schools could also submit evidence from Ofsted inspections or monitoring reports showing they have made progress on teaching and learning.

Catch-up provision

Recommendation 4: Provide intensive catch-up for children from disadvantaged backgrounds
If gatherings are allowed later in the year catch-up provision can be through summer schools. Alternatively, catch-up could be after-school provision once schools are back.

Many disadvantaged children are likely to have fallen further behind during home schooling. The need for catch-up provision is greater than ever before. Research suggests that students who attend a summer school on average make two months' additional progress compared to similar students who do not attend a summer school.¹⁵ This, however, can increase to four months' progress if summer schools are intensive, well-resourced, and involve small group tuition by trained and experienced teachers.

A number of teachers in the Teach First community have successfully run catch-up provision including [this group](#) in Gateshead that Ian Mearns MP visited. Following a successful start the group expanded provision across the North East and there are other teachers across the 14,000 strong network who have run or are planning to run catch-up provision this year.

¹³ The Sutton Trust, [Rules of the Game](#), 2017

¹⁴ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Investigating the Accuracy of Predicted A Level Grades as part of 2009 UCAS Admission Process](#), 2011

¹⁵ Education Endowment Foundation, [Evidence summary: Summer schools](#), 2019

Costs of running summer schools include: teacher time (overtime should be paid), meals for pupils, and transport for pupils in isolated areas. Additional benefits of summer schools this year include the opportunity to re-engage pupils with school. Re-establishing school day routines so that when schools fully resume they can hit the ground running with learning.

Delivering summer schools requires gatherings to be permitted by the late summer. If this isn't appropriate intensive catch-up provision could be phased into next academic year once schools are back.

Investing in catch-up provision is a well-evidenced intervention that could in part be partly funded through the pupil premium, particularly as the number of pupils eligible for the funding is increasing.

Long-term interventions

Empowering teachers

Recommendation 5: Continue and enhance efforts to recruit and retain new teachers

The Government must continue to prioritise plans to attract more people to the teaching profession and help them stay. This includes progressing with starting salary increases, extending financial incentives to work in disadvantaged areas and an earlier full rollout of The Early Career Framework.

Before the pandemic hit there were national shortages of teachers. In 2019, only 43% of the trainee physics teachers and 64% of the maths trainees needed were recruited across all teaching routes.¹⁶ Schools in disadvantaged communities were already missing out most on teachers. Around 29% of schools in the most deprived areas outside London and 46% in the most deprived areas inside London, reported vacancies or temporarily filled positions¹⁷. Teachers in the most disadvantaged secondary schools are also twice as likely to say that their department is not well-staffed with suitably qualified teachers.¹⁸ Teachers and school leaders will play a central role in the recovery of our country, supporting the hardest hit communities to bounce back. The need for high-quality teachers will be greater than ever before.

There could be a temporary improvement in teacher retention. Teacher Tapp highlights that 15% of teachers say that they will not or may not look for a new job as they had planned. Instability in the economy, and a reduction in jobs elsewhere may hold teachers considering leaving the profession a little longer. Efforts should be made to seize this opportunity to retain more teachers. However, supporting pupils to overcome the trauma of this period and learning lost will make teaching a more rewarding and more challenging job than ever before. Facing those challenges will put increased pressure on teachers and could see exit rates rise once schools and the economy settle.

But even if more teachers are temporarily retained it will not be sufficient to meet growing demand. More secondary school teachers will be needed than ever before to address the ongoing rise in student numbers with over 400,000 more pupils expected in England's state secondary schools by the year 2027.¹⁹ This is more than the number of pupils who currently live in the whole of London.²⁰

¹⁶ Department for Education, [Initial teacher training: trainee number census 2019 to 2020](#), 2019

¹⁷ Education Policy Institute, [Teacher shortages in England: Analysis and pay options](#), 2020

¹⁸ The Sutton Trust, [The Recruitment Gap](#), 2019

¹⁹ Department for Education, [National pupil projections – future trends in pupil numbers: July 2018 \(2019 update\)](#), 2019

²⁰ Mayor of London, [Annual London Education Report 2017](#), 2017

The gap between starting salaries in teaching and other professions is an important aspect of the teacher recruitment challenge. This is why we [called on Government](#) to increase teacher starting salaries to £30,000 to close the gap with other professions, including in the public sector. We greatly welcome Government's commitment to increase starting salaries. This must continue at pace and be fully funded. The Education Policy Institute estimates that on current funding projections, 90% of Inner London schools and 50% of the most disadvantaged schools will benefit from funding increases of only 1.8%, the projected inflation rate.²¹ These schools are likely to have a high number of teachers at the beginning of their career and will therefore could be left short of funding for this much needed increase to starting salaries. The Government should consider allocating funding for higher starting salaries through the Teacher Pay Grant to overcome this challenge, or weighting the funding towards those schools statistically more likely to have early-career teachers.

Increasing starting salaries will go a long way to supporting teacher recruitment. But extra incentives to get teachers to the schools where they're needed most would be valuable. Currently, shortage subject teachers including science and maths teachers can make an additional £6,000 within their first four years of teaching. This increases to £9,000 if they are working in disadvantaged areas. However, the first retention payments for STEM and modern language teachers is not planned to be made until 2022.²² To reap the benefits sooner payments should be accelerated and apply to teachers who have already started teacher training on any route.

With partial school closures many new teachers have lost out on essential training opportunities; trainees on the PGCE route will have lost out on months of school placement. At Teach First we are adapting our Training Programme by phasing support for trainees into the next academic year, so that learning and development is not lost. The Government has already introduced the hugely positive Early Career Framework (ECF), which is set to be rolled out in some locations from September. Given the urgent need to support new teachers to thrive and stay in the profession through the challenges ahead, we're calling for the Early Career Framework to be rolled out nationally from September.

Supporting school leaders

Recommendation 6: Invest in school leaders

School leaders should be supported to thrive as they help their schools and pupils to rebound. They should be offered coaching from experienced school leaders and given access to peer-to-peer networks.

With support from the Department for Education, school leadership teams are adapting swiftly to the current challenges. But when schools resume, the challenges will grow and the extent of those challenges isn't yet known. Many disadvantaged pupils are likely to have fallen further behind their peers from wealthier homes. The scale of additional mental health needs for pupils and teachers could be significant.

Parents and pupils may struggle to see the long-term value in school if their siblings have not sat exams, yet there is no discernible impact on their lives. As such, achieving pre-shutdown attendance rates could require vast attention. Previously well-implemented behaviour policies are likely to see disruption, at least in the short-term. Schools will need to recontract with parents and pupils alike as they find a way forward and make up for lost time. Facing these issues will be challenging for the strongest of school leadership teams. But without strong leadership, they could seem impossible to overcome.

²¹ Education Policy Institute, [Teacher shortages in England: Analysis and pay options](#), 2020

²² Department for Education, [Early-career payments: guidance for teachers and schools](#), 2019

Many headteachers are due to retire in coming years and over a third of school governors already think it is difficult to attract good candidates when recruiting for headteachers.²³ We face a significant leadership shortage if those with great potential continue to cite the risks of headship accountability and isolation as barriers to career progression.

Our research found that greater networks between new and experienced headteachers, and ongoing training at the beginning of headship, could make a significant difference to incentivising more school leaders to take on headship and make the role more sustainable.

Headteachers cannot overcome the challenges ahead alone. Research behind the Teach First Leading Together programme highlighted that improving the performance of whole leadership teams is important for pupil outcomes, and makes school improvement a more sustainable journey.²⁴ We will be in a much better position to overcome the challenges ahead if we also invest in training that equips full leadership teams alongside individual headteachers.

Funding

Recommendation 7: Weight school funding increases towards schools serving disadvantaged pupils

The challenges faced by schools once the crisis has passed will be greatest in disadvantaged areas. Funding allocations should reflect this disproportionate impact. The pupil premium should also continue to be allocated for six years after a child has a period of receiving free school meals, including those children who are becoming eligible during Covid-19.

The ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic will hit the country for years to come. Some families will recover relatively quickly - and some may even be financially better off.²⁵ But more will have lost jobs or had their hours reduced. Many will slip into poverty. We must do everything in our power to combat the additional barriers to education that will be faced by children and families in disadvantaged circumstances.

School funding in England proudly follows a principle of distributing resources according to the scale of the challenge schools and pupils face. This is absolutely the right approach and is achieved through factors in the national funding formula and the pupil premium. These measures to ensure resource is directed to where it's needed most are more important than ever.

The Government has made welcome funding commitments for schools, with an additional £7.1bn added to school budgets over the three years from 2019-20 to 2021-22. Providing a three-year funding plan is also a hugely positive step to support school planning. This additional investment should be made following the principle of weighting funding towards schools serving disadvantaged communities. Only then will it help to minimise the growth in the attainment gap and make a fair education for all.

Measuring the impact

Recommendation 8: Commission research on the impact of school closures.

²³ National Governance Association, [School governance in 2018](#), 2018

²⁴ Teach First, [Leading Together](#), 2018

²⁵ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Many better-off households may increase savings as spending on 'banned' activities falls. Poorer households spend much more of their income on necessities and will be less resilient to any falls in income](#), 2020

The government should commission ongoing research to understand the pandemic's impact on children's learning. In particular, the research should consider how this differs across families by demographics to help the sector understand how learning losses can be mitigated and accelerate the closure of the attainment gap.

To know how best to overcome the challenges in education created by Covid-19, we need to know as much as possible about the long-term impact of school closures and the increased hardships families face. If we find reliable estimates for the learning loss and how this is distributed across different groups of children, it will be clear how best to allocate resources effectively. This would support initiatives to have the greatest impact on minimising the attainment gap. This research could be managed by an expert institution such as the Education Endowment Foundation.

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