

Written evidence submitted by Teach First

About Teach First

Teach First is an education charity with a mission to build a fair education for all. We believe that every child deserves an excellent education and the chance to develop their skills and talents.

A child's postcode should never determine how well they do at school, yet there are huge disparities based on just that. Low attainment at GCSE is a real cause for concern as it can shut doors to future success and holds young people back from meeting their aspirations. [Twelve pupils in an average class in the poorest third of postcodes fail GCSE maths](#). This isn't right. And it isn't financially sensible when we need to grow our economy and compete globally. As a country we risk a shortfall of 2.5m highly skilled workers. Addressing this starts with more young people getting the entry requirements to get on the path to those high skilled jobs and that requires minimum GCSE qualifications. At Teach First, our expertise lies in supporting schools in disadvantaged areas so that teachers and pupils thrive. We've recruited over 14,000 teachers and leaders to work in thousands of schools serving disadvantaged communities and over 80 among our alumni are now transforming schools across the country as headteachers. Every day there are teachers unlocking the potential in pupils across the country who achieve against the odds showing that change is possible.

We believe the time has come for a transformation of our school system which ensures that the most disadvantaged children have access to the very best schools.

Why Fair Education Matters in an Equal Recovery

Prior to the pandemic, disadvantaged children were 18 months behind their more affluent peers by the end of secondary school. This means they were already significantly less likely to have the qualifications and skills needed to access good courses and jobs.

The most recent [evaluation](#) of the pandemic learning loss suggests that in March 2021, the average primary pupil was 3.5 months behind usual maths levels and 2.2 months behind in reading. The [evidence](#) also shows that disadvantaged pupils have lost more learning than their peers. This is no surprise, as they have had poorer access to technology, less study space and their parents are much less able to pay for extra tuition.

[According to the IFS](#), the average child missed half a year of school during lockdown equates to an astronomical £350bn in lost lifetime earnings across the 8.7 million school children in the UK. The unique challenges experienced by disadvantaged children during the pandemic can compound this problem further as lockdown learning loss is not only about specific knowledge missed out on this year or the next test results, but about the risk that disadvantaged children will have less knowledge and confidence to build on. Over time [this can leave them even further behind](#) and creating permanent damage to their education and work opportunities.

Making up for learning loss is not just a problem for these children and their families, it's a problem for us all. Without sufficient catch up, the impact on our economy will be huge. Even before the pandemic, our skills deficit, was already set to cost the country £120 billion by 2030 according to a [report by the Learning and Work Institute](#). The report showed that the country has too few highly skilled workers and too many low and intermediate skilled workers. Overall, the analysis suggested there would be a shortfall of 2.5 million highly skilled people and an oversupply of 8.1 million people with intermediate or low skills. With less high skilled, high paid workers paying more tax, the impact on public finances and the services they pay for (hospitals, schools etc) will hold our communities back.

Teach First Recommendations

So, we need to be ambitious for all children. There can be no equal recovery without serious efforts and investment in education.

Based on our 18 years of experience and what we are currently hearing from teachers and leaders, we have built a [list of recommendations](#) for a fairer post-pandemic education system. We are consulting on these recommendations over the summer and will then produce a final summary.

Invest to increase capacity in schools in disadvantaged areas

When it comes to closing the learning gap, we need to support teachers to be as effective as they can be, because teachers are the biggest factor in the quality of education a child receives.

But working in disadvantaged schools is harder than working in affluent ones. 93% of teachers [agree](#) and with good reason: Teachers in poor areas are helping their children clear bigger hurdles in an average day, and this takes more time inside and outside the classroom.

Ask yourself this.

Could you plan a presentation for up to 30 lively customers in 9 minutes¹ ? In an average class of 30 children that's just 18 seconds per pupil to plan an inspiring lesson, develop amazing resources, and give the sort of feedback that will make a child flourish. This is how much time the average teacher has within their working week. That's where the unpaid time comes in. Teachers have worked an average 48-hour week for the last 25 years. This isn't just about the unfairness of unpaid work. The problem is that teachers don't have the space to develop the quality lessons and support that pupils deserve and need to accelerate their learning.

That's why we're calling for many more teachers in schools in poorer areas, so there's a more realistic balance between teaching hours and planning and marking hours. With fairer timetables, schools in disadvantaged areas would not only have more attractive working conditions, helping to overcome their disproportionate recruitment and retention challenges – they would increasingly become places of expert teaching; teachers would have more time to plan great lessons, spend time on their own professional development, and provide additional academic and pastoral support for pupils who need it.

Our recent survey with TeacherTapp found that 67% of state secondary school teachers selected reduced timetables as the most popular out of 10 options that would make the most difference to support students in their school.

A timetable reduction would require the training and employment of additional teachers in disadvantaged schools. Teach First are currently carrying out research to propose a model for how this would be implemented and how much it would cost, and we would be delighted to update the Committee when the research is completed.

¹¹ This illustration is based on the following: A full-time teacher is paid to work [1265 hours a year](#) which equates to 32.5 hours a week. The average working week for a teacher is [an average of 48 hours each week](#). The average teacher (secondary and primary) teaches [21.3 lessons](#) in an average week. Teachers are entitled to a [minimum of 10% of a timetabled week](#) for lesson preparation, planning, and marking. This is called Planning, Preparation and Assessment time.

Ensure every household has access to the internet, and every young person in education has access to a working digital device.

Although school closures are hopefully behind us, some learning practices from lockdown will continue to influence how schools operate. Many teachers think they will continue to use technology to set and/or collect homework and around half think it'll influence the types of homework set as well as marking or giving feedback. Over 40% also think it will influence ways of communicating with parents². If some children and families still don't have access to the technology to take full advantage of these changes, it risks worsening inequality in accessing education. In a January 2021 survey, 32% of teachers in the most deprived schools reported more than 1 in 5 students lacking devices, compared to just 5% at the most affluent state schools and even lower, 3%, at private schools. This gap appears to have increased since March 2020.³

In the longer term, it could make it less attractive for teachers to work in disadvantaged schools, knowing that efficiency gains made in other schools are not possible if students can't engage online. To mitigate this, we urge the Government to ensure every household has access to the internet and every child and young person in education access to a working digital device.

Boost careers education – in primary and secondary schools

Post-pandemic, we face an increasingly competitive global jobs market.

It's essential that young people leave school with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

For this to happen, we need to rapidly expand the provision of high-quality careers training.

The eight Gatsby benchmarks set the standard on good careers guidance, but, on average, schools are still only achieving fewer than half of these. To give young people a better chance of achieving their potential, this must be boosted. We should prioritise age-appropriate careers education for younger children with priority given to children in disadvantaged areas to combat career stereotypes which set in early and can limit children from achieving their potential. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for STEM Diversity published a [report](#) last year highlighting how children as young as 3-4 years (Fawcett Society, 2019) have gendered ideas of certain characteristics and career choices

We need to:

1. *Train a careers leader in every secondary school by 2023. Schools in disadvantaged areas should receive full funding for this.*
2. *Publish a framework for effective careers learning in primary schools so that young people don't rule themselves out of careers at an early age.*
3. *Launch a fund to train primary teachers in disadvantaged areas to implement the framework.*

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² https://twitter.com/miss_mcinerney/status/1371487272042967046

³ <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/remote-learning-the-digital-divide/>