

Written evidence submitted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission

We welcome your focus on this issue. It is also one of the Commission's priorities. Indeed, our new strategy for 2022-25 will focus on the importance both of equality among children and young people, and within health and social care.

A particular issue of concern for us is the limited availability of data on learning loss and catch-up by protected characteristic group. Gathering this evidence should be part of the Government's compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. This will help the Government to produce more targeted and effective policies that respond to the attainment gaps that already existed pre-pandemic

and particularly affected boys, Black Caribbean children, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and pupils with additional support needs.

The Department for Education has recognised the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children with special educational needs, and we are pleased that the education recovery programme prioritises these students. We welcome the additional funding allocated to children in specialist settings. But we think that the Government should have allocated a higher per-pupil rate to mainstream schools to enable additional support to pupils with special educational needs who are in these settings as well.

The current gaps in evidence mean that the impact of the pandemic on learning loss across groups with different protected characteristics remains unclear.

Initial [research](#) from the Department concludes that there was no overall impact of the pandemic on children with special educational needs within the 2020/21 academic year. However, the research considers ethnicity using high-level categories and focuses on data from a small number of school subject areas. This could mask differences between different groups and result in conclusions that are not specific enough. Other [studies](#) have reached different conclusions. We consider that more research is needed for there to be a more complete picture to enable effective policy interventions.

Your Committee has a crucial role in scrutinising the Department's education recovery work. As such, we ask that you consider the following questions for future evidence sessions with its officials:

- What evidence is the Department for Education collecting in relation to learning loss and education recovery broken down by protected characteristics at key stages throughout education?
- How is the Department for Education targeting their education recovery programmes in the light of any evidence of disproportionate adverse impacts experienced by particular groups?

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