

Written evidence submitted by Mr James Bowen

Education Select Committee Call for Evidence: The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

1. NAHT welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education Select Committee's call for evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services. NAHT is the UK's largest professional association for school leaders. We represent more than 30,000 head teachers, executive heads, CEOs, deputy and assistant heads, vice principals and school business leaders. Our members work across: the early years; in primary, special and secondary schools; independent schools; sixth form and FE colleges; outdoor education centres; pupil referral units; social services establishments and other educational settings, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition to the representation, advice and training that we provide for existing senior leaders, we also support, develop and represent the senior leaders of the future, through NAHT Edge, the middle leadership section of our association. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere. This puts us in an excellent position to provide a response to this consultation.

Introduction

2. The coronavirus pandemic is clearly the most significant national emergency the UK has faced for decades.
3. The consequences of the current crisis for the education sector are hard to overstate. Schools, colleges and nurseries have felt the full impact of the national emergency and the government's response to it. The Secretary of State for Education has described these institutions as being "at the forefront of our national response to this crisis."
4. Schools, colleges and nurseries have been asked to take on an entirely different role to the one they ordinarily play in society and to fundamentally transform how they operate. The government tasked the sector with making this transformation in a matter of days and with very limited guidance on how to do it. The scale of the challenge faced by the sector was enormous and unprecedented.
5. At the same time schools, colleges and nurseries were having to cope with the direct impact of the virus on their own communities, including their pupils, staff and families. Tragically, we know already that pupils, parents and school staff have lost their lives to COVID-19.
6. In this call for evidence we have attempted to provide an initial evaluation of how the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting nurseries, schools and colleges, as well as how the Department for Education and government has handled the situation to date.
7. The majority of NAHT members are serving leaders in schools and colleges, including Maintained Nursery Schools, and so throughout this evidence we will use the term 'school' as a shorthand for the wide range of institutions that our members work in.

8. Any attempt to analyse the impact of COVID-19 or the government's handling of the crisis can only be seen as an initial, early-stage review. A comprehensive evaluation will only be possible at a much later date when it is possible to look back on the crisis as a whole.
9. Given the rapidly moving nature of the crisis and the response, the response below is accurate as of the date it was written (early May 2020). It is inevitable that by the time this is read, events and the government response will have moved on significantly, and as such this evidence will quickly become out of date.
10. To support the committee's request for a concise response, this evidence has been closely aligned to the terms of reference as outlined. This inevitably means that the evidence does not cover in detail every aspect of the impact of Covid-19 on schools, to do so would require a far longer response.
11. Given the specific nature of the terms of reference, we have also refrained from providing comment on and an evaluation of the government's broader overall national strategy for dealing with the current crisis.

Executive Summary

12. NAHT acknowledge the unprecedented nature of the current national emergency. We recognise the scale of the challenge this has posed for the Department for Education (DfE) and for DfE officials in particular. In a short space of time officials have had to redesign swathes of existing government policy and procedure as it relates to schools. Almost every single aspect of school policy has been affected by this crisis.
13. In NAHT's dealings with the DfE it has become very apparent that officials have been working exceptionally hard as they attempt to manage these changes. We know that officials have been determined to play their part in the national response to Covid-19.
14. Since the outbreak of the current crisis, the department has shown a willingness to engage with NAHT and other key stakeholders on a wide variety of issues. The DfE has been proactive in canvassing views from across the sector as it has drafted guidance for schools. Whilst this does not mean that NAHT's views have always been reflected in the published guidance, there does appear to have been a genuine willingness to engage and listen.
15. In some areas of education policy, the government has provided pragmatic solutions to difficult and highly complex problems. Often this has meant finding the 'least worst' option when there is no ideal solution. The response to the cancellation of GCSEs and A-Levels is a good example of this.
16. One of the most significant frustrations for school leaders throughout the crisis has been the delay in government guidance being published. This has meant that school leaders have felt they have been left to fend for themselves and it has meant that NAHT has been compelled to step forward and provide detailed advice and guidance where it is lacking from the government.
17. School leaders have also been highly frustrated that they have often found out about major school-related policy announcements via the mainstream media. This has placed them in an invidious position as it means that sometimes parents

have heard the news ahead of the school leaders who are being tasked with implementing the policy. The announcement that Free School Meal vouchers would be available over the Easter holiday during a Saturday afternoon Downing Street press conference serves as a good example of this. Similarly, school leaders had no advanced warning of the announcement that schools would be closing for the majority of pupils on March 20th .

18. There have also been examples of policy announcements based on good intentions being hampered by poor execution and delivery. The national Free School Meal voucher scheme serves as a strong case in point here. Whilst the government was right to launch the scheme, serious operational problems has meant that many schools have found it unusable. Whilst NAHT recognises that such policies are being introduced quickly in an attempt to provide solutions to schools, the problems with their implementation have created significant issues for families and schools alike.
19. There were a number of other very significant frustrations for school leaders in the immediate weeks following the announcement that schools would remain partially open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. These included:
 - The absence of clear scientific explanation for why the government deemed it safe for schools to remain open even on a reduced basis for a minority of pupils when strict social distancing rules and instructions to remain at home were being issued for the rest of society. The explanation offered seemed to be based in the principle that young children were less susceptible to the virus, but this appeared to ignore the health and safety of the adults working in schools.
 - The delays in clear guidance regarding comprehensive safety measures schools should be taking and the role of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Guidance on such safety measures was only issued a number of weeks after schools had already been operating this reduced provision model and even then was not comprehensive. Specific information relating to PPE remained absent for a substantial period of time. This left school leaders in a vulnerable position as staff understandably sought assurances about their own safety. To date, schools still find themselves in the position where NHS and education guidance is not aligned. In practice, this means that school nurses are equipped with PPE when school staff are not, even when they are carrying out very similar, or exactly the same procedures.
 - The lack of specific guidance for special schools. Special schools faced specific and significant challenges in terms of providing the 'reduced provision'. Many were not able to reduce pupil numbers in the way that the majority of mainstream schools were able to. This made any form of social distancing very difficult to achieve. In addition, the staff in these schools work with pupils with the most complex needs. Not only did this make social distancing impossible, but it also posed challenges in terms of intimate care, challenging behaviour (including spitting) and use of restriction and restraint. In addition, these schools found themselves under increasing pressure, often from Local Authorities, to increase the number of pupils attending in an attempt to get more vulnerable pupils back into school. In some cases Local Authorities were simply pressuring schools to admit more pupils without fully engaging in comprehensive risk assessments or providing appropriate support to those schools.

The impact on vulnerable pupils

20. NAHT fully supports the government's desire to protect and support vulnerable pupils at this time. School leaders, like others, are particularly concerned about those pupils who might be at increased risk of harm. School leaders know only too well that schools can be havens of safety and act as a protective factor for such pupils. Schools have done incredible work to support pupils they have identified as being vulnerable. This support has been provided both directly to pupils attending school and indirectly to pupils who have stayed at home. Schools have an important role to play in this regard but they cannot be expected to do this alone. NAHT has previously expressed concern about the capacity of children's services prior to the Coronavirus outbreak. The current crisis has revealed the scale of this problem. The pressure on an already stretched social care workforce has meant that the task of supporting and monitoring vulnerable pupils and families has often fallen to schools.
21. Prior to the current crisis there was not a clearly agreed national definition for 'vulnerable pupils' and the term has been used to cover a wide range of groups. In the past the term 'vulnerable pupils' has been taken to include all pupils eligible for and claiming Free School Meals (currently representing approximately 15% of the school population). This has led to some confusion in subsequent discussions about what the sector is doing to support vulnerable pupils at this time. The definition that has been used during this crisis includes an incredibly diverse group of pupils, from those on a child protection plan, through to those with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. It is essential that any consideration of the impact on 'vulnerable pupils' takes this into account.

Disadvantaged pupils and the attainment gap

22. Whilst it is too early to make any definitive statements about the impact of the current crisis on the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, like many others NAHT are concerned about the potential impact on both the wellbeing and achievement of this group of pupils.
23. Whilst schools will continue to do all they can to mitigate the negative impact on this group of pupils during the period of closure, it is very clear that schools will need the appropriate resources to support these pupils on their return. This will not be achieved through a short-term strategy based on a quick 'catch-up', it will require a long-term commitment to these pupils and the resources for schools to provide the support this group of pupils needs.

The impact on pupils with SEND

24. Pupils with SEND will undoubtedly be affected by the current situation. However, it would be wrong to look at SEND pupils as a homogenous group who will all be affected in a similar way. Pupils with SEND have a wide range of different and diverse needs and any attempt to consider the impact on this group must take that into account. As with vulnerable pupils, it is too early to make any reliable judgements about the long-term impact at this stage.
25. In the short to medium term it is clear that there has been an impact on pupils with SEND and their families. Many pupils with SEND will have remained at home. This undoubtedly will have created challenges for some families and for

the pupils themselves, particularly where pupils have the most significant and complex needs.

26. During the period of closure, schools have worked hard to support pupils with SEND and their families. NAHT is aware of examples of schools putting advice and resources on their website that parents can access and use at home. Staff in many schools have been in regular contact with families to check on the well-being of pupils and to offer support and advice to parents. Schools have also considered carefully how to provide appropriate learning resources for pupils with SEND, taking into account the unique needs of their cohorts.
27. NAHT members have reported that many families and children have actually benefited from time together at home. Members have told us that some parents of pupils with SEND have reported with real pride how their children have developed many domestic and independence skills, of which they are very proud.
28. Special schools have faced particular challenges during this period and some of these have been noted above.

Home / Remote Learning

29. Given the challenges schools have faced in recent times it is quite remarkable that so many schools have, in such a short space of time, found ways to provide pupils with access to remote learning opportunities.
30. These offers have had to take account of the unique circumstances of each school and the community it serves.
31. Schools have developed a range of different approaches to remote learning. Some schools provide a weekly list of ideas for activities and tasks that pupils and parents can work through at a time that suits them, others have taken a more structured day by day approach. Some schools have utilised existing online learning platforms, others have had to start from scratch. Teachers have drawn on a range of existing online resources and also designed their own.
32. At the same time schools have had to be very mindful of the very different circumstances and challenges that pupils and families are currently facing. This has included taking into account factors such as: internet access, access to devices, the capacity of parents to support learning and the range of needs that learners have.
33. Members have reported that there have been additional challenges in providing effective home learning opportunities for pupils with SEND. In many cases, this is because of the critical role skilled professionals play in overcoming language and communication barriers when pupils are in school.

The financial impact on schools

34. Prior to this outbreak, schools were already in the middle of a funding crisis. The current situation will put additional financial pressure on school budgets that were already close to breaking point.

35. The government's initial response was to announce that schools would be reimbursed for these additional costs and it subsequently launched the School Reimbursement Scheme. This was welcomed by NAHT.
36. However, NAHT has a number of concerns about the scheme which now appears to be far more limited in scope than was first suggested by government. The scheme is also restricted by an overarching caveat that schools cannot apply to it if they are able to 'add to their reserves' at the end of the financial year. Very few schools have what they would regard to be separate 'reserves' and so it is not at all clear what the government mean by this phrase. NAHT's concern is that this could be taken to mean that any school that has any form of surplus, however small, at the end of the year will not be able to apply.
37. Another very significant issue for many schools has been the loss of additional income. Due to the scale of the school funding crisis prior to this outbreak, many schools have found ways to supplement the money they receive from government with additional, private income. This includes income streams related to activities such as lettings, sports facilities and minibus hire. Schools are also having to deal with the loss of income for extended services such as breakfast and after school clubs. The loss of this could have a very significant impact on many school budgets. This loss of income is likely to continue for some time to come.

The cancellation of exams

38. NAHT recognises the very significant challenge the government has faced when it comes to how to approach exams in 2020. NAHT believes that the government had little option other than to cancel all statutory tests and exams this summer.
39. From a primary perspective, NAHT believe that the decision to scrap statutory assessments will not have a major impact on either pupils or schools. Primary statutory assessment has for many years been primarily about school accountability, rather than supporting individual pupils.
40. Clearly, it is a far more complex picture from a secondary perspective where GCSE, A Levels and other qualifications have a much more direct impact on individual students and their ability to progress to the next stage of education or employment.
41. NAHT welcomed the initial pragmatic guidance on the awarding of general qualifications but has a number of specific concerns about some of the proposals and these are outlined in detail below.

Re-opening and long-term considerations

42. NAHT has maintained a clear and consistent position regarding proposals to increase the number of pupils in schools: that schools should return when it is safe to do so. Safe for pupils, parents and staff. NAHT members want to see their schools re-open to a wider range of pupils, but they need to be reassured that it is safe to do so.
43. It is clear that alongside any announcement to increase the number of pupils attending schools, the government will also have the more difficult task of ensuring parents, pupils and school staff have the confidence that it is safe to

return. At the time of writing, it is clear that the government have not yet achieved that.

44. Aside from the critical scientific and medical considerations, there are a wide range of logistical and practical challenges that school leaders will face if a phased return is planned and these are explored in detail below.
45. Whilst it is not listed in the terms of reference, NAHT believes it is vitally important to draw the committee's attention to the wide range of decisions and considerations that will need to be made over the longer-term for schools.
46. When this happens it is very clear that there will need to be a period of recovery, rebuilding and reintegration. It would not be desirable or even possible for schools to simply return to 'business as usual'.
47. Schools will feel the full impact of the current crisis. Virtually all schools will be dealing with the issue of 'loss' in one form or another. Pupils and staff will have sadly lost loved ones and, tragically, in some circumstances members of the school community including pupils and staff will have been lost. It is hard to overstate the impact this will have on communities. Schools will need time to focus on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of both pupils and staff and to support them in dealing with some of these incredibly difficult experiences that could have long-lasting effects.
48. With the above in mind, careful consideration needs to be given to how government can allow schools the space and time to focus on this vital work by removing some of the additional burdens schools usually face. A number of these are explored in more detail below.

NAHT's response to the key issues raised in the terms of reference

The initial closure of schools and the critical workers list

49. The announcement that schools would close for the majority of pupils was made on Wednesday 18th March. On the same date schools were asked to effectively 're-open' for the children of critical workers and for vulnerable pupils just a few days later. This announcement and the subsequent publication of the critical workers list created significant pressure on school leaders.
50. There were two specific problems in relation to the critical workers list. The first was the late publication of the list which was only made available to schools in the early hours of the morning of Friday 20th March, ahead of schools re-opening for critical workers on Monday 23rd March. This effectively gave school leaders less than 24 hours to liaise with parents and to identify the scale of the demand whilst also preparing staffing rotas and making adaptations to the school layout. The second issue was the extremely broad nature of the categories included in the list. These ranged from national government roles to communication and financial services. In many cases this meant that there was a need for schools to prioritise based on the number of pupils they could realistically accommodate given the need for social distancing and staffing restrictions as staff became ill or needed to self-isolate.
51. Initially the fundamental principle that, 'if it is at all possible for children to be at home, they must be' was not communicated as clearly as it could have been by

government. Nor was it initially made clear that this applied to children of critical workers too in cases where it was possible for them to remain at home. As a result, it was left to schools to communicate this message to parents and carers. NAHT, along with others, worked hard over the weekend of 21st March to communicate that important message. School leaders found themselves in a position where they were having to prioritise families based on what they could safely manage.

52. Overall, the national attendance figures showed that the messaging over the weekend of 21st March was largely effective in reducing the number of pupils in school. The DfE's figures later confirmed that around 2% of pupils were attending school in that first week of partial closure. However, the national figure masked some quite significant local variations. For example, there have been very significant challenges for special schools where a high number of pupils qualify as being 'vulnerable' and therefore are eligible for a place. NAHT's own survey of members showed that there were some schools (albeit a minority) where attendance was over 50% (many of these were special schools). NAHT were also alerted to individual cases of schools close to hospitals where the attendance figure was much higher than the national average. This is something the government will need to be extremely mindful of as it plans to expand the number of pupils attending schools at a future date.
53. Mixed messages from government about 'safe proportions' of pupils attending did not help school leaders trying to plan for their partial re-opening. Initial communications from DfE officials suggested that a figure of around 20% would be considered safe. The Health Secretary then repeated that figure in relation to school openings on The Today Programme. Later guidance from the government then suggested that there was no agreed definition of a 'safe level' for schools. This led to confusion within the sector and meant school leaders were left to try to work out for themselves what proportion of pupils could safely be in school based on their staffing levels, and the ability to implement reasonable social distancing measures.

The use of centralised local hubs

54. In some parts of the UK, Local Authorities responded to the call from government to provide childcare for vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers by setting up local 'hubs'. Whilst these look different in each region, generally speaking, hubs are based on a model where children from a range of different local schools are brought together in one central location.
55. NAHT raised serious concerns about this approach. These concerns included:
- The impact of increasing the number of pupils and staff in a single location and what this could mean for transmission rates.
 - The ability to implement social distancing measures if numbers were concentrated in a single location.
 - The increased mixing of a greater number of adults and pupils from different households.
 - The need for increased transport options as pupils were taken to locations further away than their local school.

- The impact on pupils' wellbeing if they were to be cared for in an unfamiliar location by staff they did not already know, at a time when they were already likely to be experiencing high levels of anxiety.
 - The implications for safeguarding, particularly for pupils with Child in Need or Child Protection Plans working with new and unfamiliar staff who did not have a detailed understanding of their case history.
56. As a result, NAHT issued guidance to members suggesting that there should be a clear order of preference for how children were to be cared for at this time. NAHT's view is that, wherever possible children should be cared for in their usual school with staff who are familiar to them. In cases where that is not possible schools should look to form small-scale local partnerships where staff and buildings can be shared to ensure provision can be made. Only where these two options were not possible, should a hub model be considered.
57. A number of weeks after NAHT published this guidance, the DfE published guidance taking a similar approach. The DfE guidance also outlined more detailed considerations for Local Authorities should a hub approach be being considered.
58. The delay in issuing this guidance meant that a number of authorities had already adopted a hub model as a first preference.
59. It is important to note that the partnership and hub models outlined above will have had an impact on the official figures for how many schools have remained open to vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers. Where schools have joined a partnership or become a part of a hub, the official data will indicate that they are closed, however this should not be taken to mean that there is not available care for those pupils.

Support for vulnerable pupils

60. NAHT fully supports the government's desire to protect and support vulnerable pupils at this time. School leaders recognise that schools have a critical role to play in this, working alongside other professionals and agencies. School leaders, like others, are particularly concerned about those pupils who might be at an increased risk of harm. School leaders know only too well that schools can be havens of safety and act as a protective factor for such pupils.
61. Schools have an important role to play here but they cannot be expected to do this alone.
62. Prior to the current crisis there was not a clearly agreed national definition for 'vulnerable pupils' and the term has been used to cover a wide range of groups. In the past the term 'vulnerable pupils' has been taken to include all pupils eligible for and claiming Free School Meals (currently representing approximately 15% of the school population). This has led to confusion in subsequent discussions about what the sector is doing to support vulnerable pupils at this time.
63. NAHT believes that the government's definition of vulnerable pupils in the context of the current crisis is a pragmatic one. The government has been clear that in

the current context, vulnerable pupils refers to those with a social worker, or those with an Education Health and Care Plan. Government guidance also allows schools to exercise a degree of discretion and add additional pupils to their own lists, based on their unique knowledge of the pupils and families that attend their school. Again, this is a pragmatic and sensible approach to have taken.

64. Whilst national attendance data suggests that the number of vulnerable pupils currently attending school is relatively low (as of 30th April, the figure stood at 12%), it is important to note that this does not mean that provision for these pupils is not available. In many cases, parents have taken the decision not to send their children to school despite there being the offer of a place available. NAHT's own survey of 4,784 members highlighted the relatively low levels of take-up of school places for vulnerable children. 14% of respondents stated that no vulnerable pupils at all had taken up the offer of a school place, while 28% of respondents reported that only 1%-5% had done so. 72% of respondents stated that parents / carers of eligible pupils were unwilling to access a school place because of safety concerns for their children, while a further 50% reported that parents / carers were unwilling to access a school place because of safety concerns for others in their household. This is understandable given the government's messaging to the general public around the importance of staying home and not making unnecessary trips. It is important to note that the key issue here was take-up, not a lack of places being offered.
65. It is also important to point out that in 'normal times' schools can often experience attendance issues with pupils in this vulnerable group. This can be due to medical reasons in the case of pupils with EHCPs, or family circumstances where social workers are supporting families. Sometimes low attendance may actually have been one of the triggers for a referral to Children's Services in the first place. Clearly, this is not the case for all pupils in the vulnerable category, but it is an important issue to be aware of when considering attendance levels.
66. Where vulnerable pupils and families have not taken up the offer of a place, schools have taken a wide range of actions to provide support, NAHT's survey of members shows that this has included: calling vulnerable pupils and/or their families at home (98%), liaising with social services to ensure continued provision of support (81%), making online contact with vulnerable pupils and/or their families at home (79%), liaising with health care services to ensure continued provision of support (50%), providing access to school-based wellbeing support (e.g. counsellor) (43%) and conducting regular or ad hoc home visits (35%).
67. It is important to point out that the government's own guidance is clear that where it is safe to do so, pupils with EHCPs should also remain at home. EHCPs cover a wide range of very different needs and so this represents a pragmatic and sensible approach. For example, a pupil with an EHCP for a specific learning need such as dyslexia has very different needs to a child who has complex physical and medical needs. NAHT believe that school leaders, in consultation with parents are best placed to carry out individual risk assessments and make decisions about whether a pupil is able to have their needs met at home or if they should be in school.
68. NAHT recognises the statutory responsibility of Local Authorities in this regard and appreciates the need for a strong partnership between parents, pupils, LAs and schools when these decisions are being made.

69. There are many examples where this strong partnership exists and has worked well. Unfortunately, NAHT are also aware of some cases where Local Authorities have put unreasonable pressure on schools to offer pupils places at very short timescales. In some cases the Local Authorities have insisted that schools offer a child a place even when the school has deemed it not safe to do so.
70. Special schools warrant particular attention in this section. By definition, virtually every single child in a special school will meet the DfE's definition of a vulnerable pupil. The announcement on Wednesday 18th March by the Secretary of State that schools would remain open for vulnerable pupils put special schools under significant pressure. As noted above, it meant that special schools had a period of 24 hours to evaluate and discuss with parents which pupils they should remain open for. In reality, it also meant that many special schools would remain open for a much higher proportion of pupils than most mainstream schools as the country went into lockdown. Special schools faced particular challenges as, in many cases, pupil levels remained relatively high at a time when staff members were having to self-isolate or shield due to government advice.

The capacity of children's services to support the most vulnerable young people

71. NAHT has previously expressed concern about the capacity of children's services prior to the Coronavirus outbreak. A survey of 653 school leaders at the end of 2019 found that just 4 per cent of school leaders agreed that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) responds quickly to requests for support. Just 5 per cent agreed that children referred to CAMHS get help when they need it. Our June 2019 survey on the crisis in supporting children with SEND found that 83% of respondents were not receiving ANY funding from health and social care budgets to support pupils with statements or EHCPs, while 30% of respondents were not receiving services from health and social care to support their pupils. The current crisis has revealed the scale of this problem.
72. In 2019 the Education Committee established an inquiry into the children's social care workforce and highlighted that it would: "pick up on concerns about the impact of time-pressures on social care work, with increasing reports of time not being available to social workers to properly do their work. There is also likely to be a focus on issues such as the causes and impact of high turnover of staff in some social care departments across the country." NAHT note that this inquiry was paused, but we hope to see it re-open as it remains an important issue.
73. NAHT members have reported that social workers with large case-loads have struggled to support and engage all the families that have needed them at this time.
74. This pressure on an already stretched social care workforce has meant that the task of supporting and monitoring vulnerable pupils and families has often fallen to schools, and NAHT is aware of school leaders being asked not just to make regular phone calls, but also to carry out home visits to the most vulnerable families.
75. Given the complex issues some of these young people and families face, teachers and school leaders will not be best placed to provide this support as they do not have the specialist training required, nor do they have the capacity to do so as they look after children of critical workers and provide remote learning.

76. NAHT believes that it is vital the most vulnerable pupils and families receive support during this period of national crisis. Such support requires a cross sector approach with the appropriate professionals each playing their part in the support package that is put in place. To date, the response has placed too much emphasis on schools and school staff. At times, this has meant that schools have been asked to take on a role more suited to social workers and children's services. Whilst for some vulnerable pupils, being in school will be the best and most appropriate option, this is not always the case and too often it has been the only solution considered.

Free school meal provision

77. As stated in the introduction, free school meal provision has been one of the clearest policy failures of this crisis.

78. The government's national voucher scheme, whilst well-intentioned, has proven to not be fit for purpose.

79. A poll of just under 1,000 NAHT members who are School Business Leaders showed that 96% had experienced problems with the national scheme. 65% said that their attempts to get technical support with the scheme had been unsuccessful and 84% had been forced to switch to an alternative voucher scheme instead. 5% reported that they had actually given their own money to support families.

80. The problems experienced have included: an inability to log into the website, excessive delays in using the website, frequent crashing of the site, extended delays in receiving any vouchers and parents experiencing problems with the vouchers once they have been issued. The consequence of all of this has been families not receiving the vouchers and schools having to step in and make alternative arrangements. NAHT has received a number of emails from members telling us that they have given parents their own money so that a child could be bought a lunch.

81. When the scheme was originally announced by the government, the message to school leaders was that if their existing caterers were able to continue to provide solutions, such as lunch-bags, they should continue to do so, but if not schools should use the national voucher scheme. Where schools had their own voucher schemes established, they were encouraged to move to the national voucher scheme.

82. The pressure on the national scheme was exacerbated when the restrictions placed around the School Financial Reimbursement Scheme (discussed below) meant that a high number of schools felt they had no alternative other than to use the national voucher scheme or run the risk of not being fully reimbursed for the additional costs incurred.

83. Once it became clear that the national scheme was not working well, schools were then told that they could use their own local schemes and apply for reimbursement at a later stage. However, given the restrictions noted above many school leaders simply did not have confidence that they would be reimbursed and so chose to stick with the national scheme.

84. At this point, a relatively simple solution would have been to make an unequivocal statement that all schools would be reimbursed for any additional spending as a result of providing free school meal vouchers and that such a commitment would be separate from the more bureaucratic and restricted reimbursement scheme.
85. In summary, it would appear that the government significantly underestimated the likely demand for the national voucher scheme and that the provider was unable to handle the scale of the requests from schools.

The impact on disadvantaged pupils

86. As noted above, the terms 'vulnerable' and 'disadvantaged' has often been conflated when talking about the impact of the current crisis on pupils.
87. NAHT believes it is important to make a distinction between these two groups, whilst recognising that there is overlap between the two.
88. Whilst 'vulnerable', in the current context is taken to mean those pupils with a social worker or those with an EHCP, 'disadvantaged' refers to a wider group and is usually taken to mean those pupils who are, or who have been eligible for free school meals.
89. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has existed for a number of years and whilst there has been some promising signs that there might be some narrowing of the gap, 2019 data from the Education Policy Institute suggests this remains an enormous challenge for all involved in education. By the time they leave secondary school, disadvantaged pupils are over 18.1 months behind non-disadvantaged pupils. The most persistently disadvantaged pupils at secondary level – the very worst-off – are almost two years (22.6 months) behind all other pupils by the time they finish their GCSEs. In the early years (pupils in reception year), disadvantaged pupils are 4.5 months behind, whilst at primary school, disadvantaged pupils are 9.2 months behind their peers. The five year rolling average now suggests that it would take 560 years to close the gap.
90. Whilst it is too early to make any definitive statements about the impact of the current crisis on the attainment gap, like many others NAHT are concerned about the potential impact on both the wellbeing and achievement of this group of pupils.
91. Whilst schools will continue to do all they can to mitigate the negative impact on this group of pupils during the period of closure, it is very clear that schools will need the appropriate resources to support these pupils on their return. This will not be achieved through a short-term strategy based on a quick 'catch-up', it will require a long-term commitment to these pupils and the resources for schools to provide the support this group of pupils needs.
92. It is highly likely that the number of pupils categorised as disadvantaged is likely to grow as a result of the current crisis. Already schools are seeing an increasing number of families experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the wider economic impact of the current crisis.

93. It is important to remember that the disadvantaged gap was not caused by the current crisis and has existed for a very long time. Whilst NAHT is concerned about how the current crisis might further exacerbate this issue, this is a deep seated issue caused by a diverse range of long-standing factors that go well beyond the school gates.

The impact on pupils with SEND

94. Pupils with SEND will undoubtedly be affected by the current situation. However, it would be wrong to look at SEND pupils as a homogenous group who will all be affected in a similar way. Pupils with SEND have a wide range of different and diverse needs and any attempt to consider the impact on this group must take that into account. As with vulnerable pupils, it is too early to make any reliable judgements about the long-term impact at this stage.

95. In the short to medium term it is clear that there has been an impact on pupils with SEND and their families. Many pupils with SEND will have been kept at home by parents. This undoubtedly will have created challenges for some families and for the pupils themselves, particularly where pupils have the most significant and complex needs.

96. NAHT support the government policy that in many cases it is better for pupils with SEND, including those with EHCPs to remain at home. In some cases, due to underlying medical conditions, this may in fact be essential. Reducing the number of pupils attending school was a core part of the government's initial response to the coronavirus outbreak and it was right that, wherever possible, this should apply to pupils with SEND too.

97. Schools, and special schools in particular, along with Local Authorities were given the incredibly difficult task of carrying out risk assessments for their pupils with EHCPs to decide whether or not a child would be safer at home or in school. The scale of this task should not be underestimated, especially in special schools with hundreds of pupils on roll, all with EHCPs. The challenge of doing this within just a few days made the task even greater.

98. In many cases, parents took the decision in consultation with the school not to send their child to school, even if they had an EHCP. However, NAHT's own survey data showed that the demand on special schools for places was overall much higher than mainstream schools and in some cases as many as 70% of pupils were attending school in the week beginning 23rd March. This put significant pressure on those schools, especially in terms of staffing and social distancing measures.

99. This was not helped by a lack of guidance with regards to the role of PPE in special schools. Many of these schools carry out personal care for pupils and also have to manage extremely challenging behaviours, including spitting and the need for physical intervention. In the first few weeks of schools remaining partially open there was no guidance on what PPE should be used. When guidance was published it was very limited and did not prove helpful in many cases. At the time of writing, special schools are still awaiting more detailed guidance on the use of PPE.

100. NAHT is also aware that many special schools came under intense pressure from Local Authorities to admit more pupils with EHCPs. Unfortunately, this was

sometimes approached in an abrasive manner with schools being told they must offer a certain pupil a place. Whilst NAHT recognises that some pupils with EHCPs are better off in school at this time, it is school leaders, in consultation with parents, who know the individual child and the unique circumstances of their schools (including staffing levels) who are best placed to make that decision. Having these decisions challenged or overruled by others who did not have this knowledge was a significant frustration for many special school leaders. NAHT would reiterate that this was not the case in all areas and we are aware that many Local Authorities have provided excellent support to schools during this time.

101. During the period of closure, schools have worked hard to support pupils with SEND and their families. NAHT is aware of examples of schools putting advice and resources on their website that parents can access and use at home. Staff in many schools have been in regular contact with families to check on the well-being of pupils and to offer support and advice to parents. Schools have also considered carefully how to provide appropriate learning resources for pupils with SEND, taking into account the unique needs of their cohorts.
102. Schools will need to give careful consideration to the reintegration of pupils with SEND when the time comes for a larger number of pupils to return to school. This issue is likely to be exacerbated if there are significant changes to the usual school routine and layout due to protective and safety measures being adopted. For example, pupils could find themselves working with different members of staff than they are used to, in different classrooms. In some cases, pupils with SEND will face additional challenges in this respect and may find readjusting to school life difficult. Schools will need to be given the time, space and resources to support these pupils to make that transition.
103. The decision to temporarily relax the legal duty to secure or arrange the provision set out in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan and to replace it with a duty to use 'reasonable endeavours' was a pragmatic decision given the circumstances. The partial closure of schools meant that some aspects of provision outlined in EHCPs became very difficult and in some cases impossible to meet. NAHT is clear that this should only be a short-term measure and subject to regular review.
104. NAHT do have some concerns about the reduced duty on Local Authority to meet the educational needs of pupils with SEND. We are concerned that this could result in schools being urged or expected to address the provision shortfall. This could mean non-specialists trying to fulfil a specialist provision for children and young people.

Remote / home learning

105. Given the speed at which the changes to school provision were announced and the lack of notice school leaders received, the initial priority for leaders and teachers was to identify, plan and organise provision for the pupils that would continue to attend school.
106. This involved contacting individual families, re-organising the school layout, putting in place new procedures for social distancing, planning an entirely new timetable and activities, identifying which staff were able to attend school and planning staffing rotas. Alongside this, schools had to make plans to monitor the

wellbeing of vulnerable pupils not attending and organise the provision of Free School Meals.

107. As a result, this meant that in many cases it was not possible to immediately put together a comprehensive remote learning offer for the pupils who were to remain at home.
108. As time has passed since that initial transformation, many schools have been able to develop remote learning offers. These offers have had to take account of the unique circumstances of each school and the community it serves.
109. For example, remote learning in an infant school will look entirely different to the remote learning provided by a secondary school. Similarly, special schools will need to have very different offers to mainstream schools. Talk of a single model for remote learning entirely misses this crucial point and is deeply unhelpful.
110. When planning a remote learning offer, schools have had to take into account a wide range of factors, including (but not limited to):
- The technology available to the school and individual teachers working from home.
 - The technology available to all pupils, including online connectivity and device access.
 - The capacity for parents to support pupils, especially when parents are working from home.
 - The availability of staff to populate and provide the resources.
 - The need to balance the needs of those pupils attending school with those remaining at home.
 - The different levels of attainment and specific needs within each cohort.
 - Safeguarding requirements and the need for due regard to 'safer internet usage' and online protection for pupils and staff.
 - The differing expectations of parents and willingness to engage with home learning.
111. Given the above challenges, it is quite remarkable that so many schools have, in such a short space of time, found ways to provide pupils with access to remote learning opportunities.
112. As there is not an agreed national approach, schools have developed a range of approaches to remote learning. Some schools provide a weekly list of ideas for activities and tasks that pupils and parents can work through at a time that suits them, others have taken a more structured day by day approach. Some schools have utilised existing online learning platforms, others have had to start from scratch. Teachers have drawn on a range of existing online resources and also designed their own.
113. NAHT's recent survey of 4,784 members found that 99.7% of respondents are providing home learning resources for pupils not attending school at this time.
114. 86% of respondents were sharing existing online resources (e.g. via email or school websites) while 78% were producing/creating their own online resources. 71% were providing physical resources (e.g. books, worksheets).

115. It remains essential is that schools are allowed to develop and tailor approaches that work for their unique circumstances.
116. In the survey of members, respondents were asked to estimate what proportion of their pupils would be unable to access online learning at home because they do not have the appropriate technology or internet connection. 41% felt that between 1% and 10% of their pupils may face this difficulty, whilst a further 16% identified 11%-20% of their pupils who may struggle. We also had some small percentages of respondents who felt that the majority of their pupils would face this challenge (8% of respondents said that over 51% of their pupils would face this difficulty)
117. NAHT is concerned about the impact that a lack of access to the relevant technology could have for the most disadvantaged pupils. It is self-evident that pupils who do not have easy access to devices or reliable access to the internet will be at a significant disadvantage in this respect. We are aware that many schools have taken steps to try to address this, with 55% of respondents to our most recent survey stating that they have been providing offline versions of online resources for pupils without the necessary technology or internet connection. 70% of respondents provide physical resources such as books or worksheets. However, schools are not well placed to solve some of the most pressing challenges such as a lack of internet access.
118. NAHT welcomed the government announcement that it would seek to provide devices to some vulnerable pupils in year 10 and to those pupils with a social worker. However, whilst this represented a step in the right direction, we were disappointed at the limited nature of this scheme and the relatively small number of pupils that it would reach. NAHT also notes the delay in getting devices to pupils.
119. NAHT notes that there has been some suggestions that this provision should somehow be monitored or inspected. NAHT completely rejects such suggestions as unhelpful and unworkable, and welcomes the Chief Inspector's clear message that Ofsted has no intention of doing this.

The impact of cancelling exams and statutory assessments

120. NAHT recognises the very significant challenge the government has faced when it comes to how to approach exams in 2020. NAHT believes that the government had little option other than to cancel all statutory tests and exams this summer.
121. From a primary perspective, NAHT believe that the decision to scrap statutory assessments will not have a major impact on either pupils or schools. Primary statutory assessment has for many years been about school accountability, rather than supporting individual pupils. As such the cancelling of SATs and other tests such as the phonics screening check is unlikely to have a major negative impact. Schools will be able to use their own teacher assessment judgements to inform transition planning and to help identify which pupils need specific support and intervention when it is safe to re-open. The government announcement that there will be no performance tables for primary schools in 2020 was an inevitable and sensible step to take.
122. Clearly, it is a far more complex picture from a secondary perspective where GCSE, A Levels and other qualifications have a much more direct impact on

individual students and their ability to progress to the next stage of education or employment.

123. The wholesale cancelling of these exams will undoubtedly have a significant impact on these students. Their expectations and plans have been completely transformed within a matter of weeks. The practical and emotional impact of this on these students should not be underestimated.

124. NAHT welcomed the initial pragmatic guidance on the awarding of general qualifications. Progress regarding the awarding of technical and vocational qualifications has been slower. It is vital that those who were expecting to gain technical and vocational qualifications this summer know how these will be awarded. These qualifications are just as important for a student's progression into further education and the world of work as GCSE, AS and A levels.

125. NAHT remains concerned about aspects of the processes being developed. Of those concerns, the most significant are:

- Allowing schools and colleges to decide whether, and how, to include evidence for centre assessed grades produced after school closures on 20th March. NAHT members are sharing their concerns about practice they are seeing locally and there are growing numbers of students who believe that teachers using any work completed after schools closed as evidence for their judgements is unfair. This growing sense of unfairness amongst the student body could undermine faith and trust in the whole awarding process this summer.
- Centres will face difficulties in trying to provide a rank order of their cohort in a subject. In some cases there would be no evidence to justify a teacher putting one pupil above or below another. Additional support and guidance for centres must be provided by awarding organisations to enable them to provide an accurate, evidence-based rank order of students. It must also be permitted for centres to submit a rank order with "tied" students where there is no evidence to distinguish between them.
- The huge disruption to education this year will have a significant impact on 2021 for both secondary and primary schools. Schools must be reassured now that exams, assessment and the use of performance data next year will fairly reflect that. It is vital that the negative impacts arising from the exceptional processes of awarding in summer 2020 are alleviated in the fairest way possible for all centres. In addition, NAHT members have raised significant concerns regarding the impact of school closures on current Year 10 and Year 12 students. It would be unreasonable to expect that content which has been missed could be covered alongside the content planned for teaching in Year 11 and Year 13; this would place significant pressure on both teachers and students, impacting on both workload and wellbeing. There are similar considerations for pupils in the current Year 5 due to take SATs in 2021.
- NAHT members have raised significant concerns regarding any expectation that they share centre assessed grades or rank orders with students at any time, even after results are issued. Ofqual's suggestion of only sharing this information following a formal request under data protection law may lead to an increase in workload for schools in dealing with such requests, which could be numerous. This approach will not avoid some incredibly difficult and challenging conversations with students and parents post results, with individual teachers being pressured to justify judgements which were made.

- Although NAHT recognises the potential negative impact of this summer's arrangements on private candidates, we advise caution regarding any expectations that centres may be able to provide the information required for awarding grades to such candidates. Schools and colleges should be supported to make a professional decision, without undue influence or perverse incentives, on whether they have sufficient information and evidence to make such a judgement.
- NAHT members have raised concerns about the emphasis on historical evidence of centre performance given the prior attainment of students. The most important outcome for 2020 is that students get the results they deserve and they should not be penalised for a centre's past performance; this would be unfair. Applying a historical view on the school's teacher assessed grades will likely see these grades reduced and those students not receive the improved outcomes they actually deserved.
- There have been announcements that autumn exams will be an opportunity for students who feel that their grades from the summer do not reflect their ability and for those, mainly private candidates, for whom schools have been unable to submit a centre assessed grade/ranking. NAHT has significant concerns regarding the timing of this series of exams, the numbers of students who might be involved and the capacity of schools and colleges to cope with this additional burden.

The financial impact on schools

126. The following section should be read in the context of a school system that has already faced a sustained and prolonged funding crisis that predates the Coronavirus outbreak. Independent commentators agree that schools have faced budget cuts since 2010, with total school spending per pupil in England falling by 8% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2019–20. Although the government has recently announced it will be increasing school funding, this was over a phased period of three years and as such schools have yet to see any real benefit from that announcement. Moreover, this increased funding will only return school budgets to 2010 levels in real terms.
127. Many schools are already in a precarious financial position and have had to make a range of cuts to balance their budgets. A previous NAHT survey on school funding 2017/18 found that almost 40% of respondents said that they had only managed to balance the budget because they had made cuts and carried over a surplus and a further 14% had only managed to balance their budget by making significant cuts. For the second year in a row we saw an increase in the number of respondents that said they have reduced investment in equipment, the number of hours for teaching assistants, CPD and non-educational services and support in order to try and make their budget balance for 2017/18. The current crisis will put additional financial pressure on school budgets that were already close to breaking point.
128. Whilst it is too early to evaluate the overall financial impact on schools, it is clear that schools have incurred a range of additional costs associated with the current crisis.
129. These include, but are not limited to:

- The costs associated with providing free school meal provision prior to the establishment of the national voucher scheme, and ongoing costs where the national scheme has not been appropriate to meet the needs of families.
- The cost of paying term-time only staff to work over the Easter holidays (this mainly applies to Teaching Assistants and support staff)
- Other costs associated with Easter opening, such as premises costs
- Extraordinary costs of supply teachers to cover teachers ill with Covid-19 or self-isolating
- The cost of conducting unplanned deep cleaning, establishing additional cleaning regimes to protect pupils and staff and the provision of additional cleaning supplies
- The cost of new equipment and resources to implement social distancing measures
- Purchase of IT equipment, software and licences to support pupils' remote learning, including supplying technology to families who otherwise would not have access
- Costs associated with establishing remote working facilities for staff, including additional hardware, software and licences.
- The cost of providing physical resources to support home learning.

130. Moreover, NAHT has broader concerns that the support for schools additional costs appears to be far more limited in scope than was first suggested by government. To take just one example, it is not clear whether the government intends to reimburse schools for the cost of employing term-time only staff who worked over the Easter holidays to look after vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers. Whilst the government has said that schools will be able to apply to the DfE for additional costs, greater clarity about what these could include would be helpful.

131. A key source of concern is the overarching caveat that schools' applications for exceptional financial support cannot apply where schools are able to 'add to their reserves' at the end of the financial year. Very few schools have what they would regard to be separate 'reserves' beyond a required annual contingency budget. NAHT remains unclear about the meaning of this phrase. NAHT's concern is that this could be taken to mean that any school that has any form of surplus, however small, at the end of the year will not be able to apply.

132. Due to the way local budget setting works, very few schools will be permitted by their Local Authority or trust to set a deficit budget. This means that most schools will have been required to submit a budget that is either balanced or includes a small surplus to cover contingencies such as unexpected supply costs due to staff illness. In addition, there may be a number of schools who are carrying forward an end of year surplus to meet future budget pressures, or to meet the unexpected maintenance costs that occur as a result of the ageing school estate. It is worth noting that government has planned to reduce the capital budget required for the renewal of the estate. For example, a school may have planned a small surplus at the end of the year to protect against an expected dip in pupil number the following year. This is prudent and sensible planning and prevents schools having to make short-term and costly redundancies, only to have to start recruiting again in future years as pupil numbers increase.

133. NAHT believes that it would be unreasonable to prevent schools in such circumstances being able to access the scheme where they have incurred

additional costs as a result of Coronavirus. It is essential that the government clarifies what it means by the use of the phrase 'surplus'.

134. In addition, a very significant issue for many schools has been the loss of additional income. Due to the scale of the school funding crisis prior to this outbreak, many schools have found ways to supplement the money they receive from government with additional, private income. This includes income streams related to activities such as lettings, sports facilities and minibus hire. The loss of this could have a very significant impact on many school budgets and currently there is no government support for such lost income.
135. Schools have also come under significant pressure where their extended services, such as breakfast clubs or after-school clubs are sustained through private income streams such as parental contributions. Initially, it was not clear whether schools could use the government's 'furlough scheme' in these circumstances, although more recent guidance has suggested it could be used.

The financial impact of cancelled trips

136. One specific but very significant issue schools continue to face is related to local, national and international trips planned for the rest of this year and beyond.
137. A large number of NAHT members have been in touch to share the problems they have faced when dealing with trip operators and insurance companies. We have heard examples from members of trip operators telling schools they have 48 hours to pay trip balances or they will assume the trip has been cancelled and that no refund will be provided. This has placed school leaders in an incredibly difficult position. They have had parents requesting refunds whilst trip operators demand payment or threaten the cancellation of trips. We have also heard examples of companies insisting that trips can only be rescheduled for the following year, not cancelled. Where year groups are leaving school at the end of this academic year, such as in year six this is clearly not possible, while many school trips are linked to the curriculum of a specific year group, meaning that a refund to parents will be required. This has the potential to have a very significant impact on many school budgets. Schools continue to struggle to get answers from insurance companies and travel companies about whether or not they will be covered in the event that trips are cancelled.
138. NAHT has asked the DfE to intervene and support schools facing these issues. It would have been helpful if the government had given a direct instruction that all schools trips, particularly international trips were to be cancelled for the rest of the academic year.

Maintained nursery schools

139. NAHT have long made the case that many Maintained Nursery Schools are in a dire financial position. There is a genuine fear that the current crisis could see more of these vitally important schools close.
140. As with primary and secondary schools, Maintained Nurseries entered this crisis in a very difficult financial position and were not well placed to weather any further storms.

141. The DfE took the early decision to treat Maintained Nursery Schools like other Early Years Providers in terms of financial support. Whilst NAHT understands the logic behind this approach we have a number of concerns about the unintended consequences of doing so. It should be noted that by taking this approach, it has meant that these nurseries will not be eligible for the school reimbursement scheme discussed above, even though they may have incurred additional costs in a similar way to schools.
142. One of the other main concerns NAHT has in this regard is that whilst other Early Years providers will be exempt from business rates, this will not apply to Maintained Nursery Schools. It has been a long-running issue that there is no consistent mechanism for reimbursement of business rates to Maintained Nursery Schools, unlike other schools. The Supplementary Funding includes a historical amount for business rates for some LAs, but this does not reflect increases in business rates since 2016-17, and in many LAs MNS receive no funding at all to reimburse the business rates they pay. If Maintained Nurseries are to be treated in line with the rest of the Early Years sector, it would seem only fair and right that they also benefit from the business rates exemption.
143. In addition, the decisions taken by local authorities about how to allocate early entitlement funding to providers for the summer term could have a significant impact on setting viability. Occupancy rates in the summer term are the highest of the year, and help to offset the typically lower occupancy rates of the autumn term in particular. If summer term funding is calculated on the basis of the spring term numbers, this will penalise providers compared to the funding they would have expected in normal times. If it is calculated on the basis of numbers signed up for summer term settings, this does not take into account that many parents, knowing that they were advised to keep their children at home, will not have gone ahead to find summer term places for their children, so this will significantly underestimate expected occupancy rates. This is likely to be further compounded in the autumn, as normal admissions processes will have been disrupted, and many parents may still be nervous about their children going into settings so take-up rates may well be unusually low then too.
144. If it is left to the discretion of local authorities to calculate summer term funding rates based on notional numbers we are likely to see inconsistent decisions which will feel unfair to those providers which are worst affected.

Independent schools

145. Throughout the current crisis, NAHT has heard from a number of school leaders in independent schools who are facing particular and acute challenges. Many have remained open for children of key workers like their colleagues in the state sector but have not been eligible for the same financial support as state schools.
146. NAHT would also like to highlighted the specific issue of independent special schools that provide education for pupils with EHCPs. Many of these schools have continued to provide care for the vulnerable pupils that attend but will not have access to the schemes available to state schools. To take one example, many have provided free school meal provision but have no access to either the national voucher scheme or the schools reimbursement scheme.

Re-opening of schools

147. Whilst not outlined as a specific line of enquiry in the call for evidence, NAHT believes it would be remiss not to provide some observations on the issue of a potential phased re-opening of schools.
148. Within a matter of weeks of schools organising provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers as well as home learning resources, speculation began to emerge in the press regarding a 're-opening' of schools. Anonymised briefings from 'senior ministers' or 'unnamed Whitehall officials' proved to be unhelpful, contradictory and created significant anxiety within the sector.
149. NAHT has maintained a clear and consistent position regarding increasing the number of pupils in schools: that schools should return when it is safe to do so. Safe for pupils, parents and staff. NAHT members want to see their schools re-open to a wider range of pupils, but they need to be reassured that it is safe to do so as it will be they who face the myriad of questions from parents on the school gate.
150. NAHT believes that the government needs to clearly explain the scientific evidence that underpins any decisions they take on the further opening of schools.
151. NAHT has welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback to the DfE regarding the issue of a possible expansion of the number of pupils attending school and has provided detailed feedback about the practicalities and challenges of any return, including the challenges involved in implementing any form of social distancing, managing large number of parents and families returning to the school site, transport of pupils, operating with reduced staffing levels, balancing the need to provide home learning with groups of pupils returning, the specific challenges special schools will face and the expectations in terms of the use of PPE.
152. In addition, NAHT asked members to submit questions that their staff and parents have been posing about any potential return and received over 18,000 responses within 72 hours. The vast majority of these questions related to the safety of staff and pupils.
153. It is clear that alongside any announcement to increase the number of pupils attending schools, the government will also have the more difficult task of ensuring parents, pupils and school staff have the confidence that it is safe to return. At the time of writing, it is clear that the government have not yet achieved that.
154. Responding to a survey carried out by the NAHT, school leaders indicated that there was a requirement for clearer and more specific guidance on the following issues ahead of any planned return:
- Social distancing measures
 - How to support staff and pupils in the high risk groups and what the expectations were for them in terms of school attendance
 - The requirement for PPE
 - Safety measures that could be implemented in a school setting
155. NAHT members cited a wide range of challenges that a phased return could pose and also highlighted a number of issues that could prevent them from safely

re-opening or maintaining the operation of their schools for a higher number of pupils. These included, but were not limited to:

- An inability to implement social distancing
- Lack of available staff
- Lack of access to PPE
- Lack of necessary supplies, such as cleaning equipment

156. NAHT members have made it clear that they stand ready to re-open schools to a larger number of pupils when it is clear that it is safe to do so, but the scale of the practical challenges they will face when this is judged to be the case should not be underestimated.

Planning for the longer term

157. Whilst it is not listed in the terms of reference, NAHT believes it is vitally important to draw the committee's attention to the wide range of decisions and considerations that will need to be made over the longer-term for schools.

158. Whilst at the time of writing, it is not possible to identify a date at which schools will return to some degree of normality, at some point we know that pupils and staff will return to school.

159. When this happens it is very clear that there will need to be a period of recovery, rebuilding and reintegration. It would not be desirable or even possible for schools to simply return to 'business as usual'.

160. Schools will feel the full impact of the current crisis. Virtually all schools will be dealing with the issue of 'loss' in one form or another. Pupils and staff will have sadly lost loved ones and, tragically, in some circumstances members of the school community including pupils and staff will have been lost. It is hard to overstate the impact this will have on communities. Schools will need time to focus on the wellbeing and mental health of both pupils and staff and to support them in dealing with some of these incredibly difficult experiences that will have long-lasting effects.

161. Beyond that, schools will also need to consider the issue of reintegration. Pupils will have spent an extended period at home and away from the daily routine of school, for some this will have had a significant impact, especially those pupils with additional needs. Pupils will have missed out on crucial transition activities and some may be walking into a new school for the very first time having missed out on all the usual preparation work that ordinarily takes place in the summer term.

162. Schools may face additional challenges in regards to staffing in 2020-21 if they have not been able to recruit or replace teachers and leaders who have left or retired at the end of the 2019-20 academic year.

163. With all the above in mind, careful consideration needs to be given to how government can allow schools the space and time to focus on this vital work by removing some of the additional burdens schools usually face. This should include:

- A careful consideration of the role of accountability – Ofsted inspections as schools begin to return would be entirely inappropriate and a significant distraction from the crucial rebuilding work that needs to take place.
- A review of new government policies and initiatives due to take effect in September 2020 – It is clear that it will not be helpful for schools to be dealing with a raft of new national policies as they work through the rebuilding process. NAHT recommends that all new policies and initiatives are at least postponed, unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.
- The future of exams and testing – as stated above, there will need to be a significant amount of thought given to the role of exams and tests for primary and secondary pupils in 2020-21 and the associated performance measures. NAHT recommends that these should all be subject to a thorough and comprehensive review and that the profession is fully consulted on this.

June 2020