Written evidence submitted by Education Endowment Foundation

Written submission to the Education Select Committee Inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services from the Education Endowment Foundation – June 2020

About the EEF

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement, ensuring that children and young people from all backgrounds can make the most of their talents. We aim to raise the attainment of 3-18 year-olds, particularly those facing disadvantage; develop their essential life skills; and prepare young people for the world of work and further study. We do this by generating evidence of what works to improve teaching and learning, funding robust trials of high-potential programmes and approaches which have yet to be tested. We then support schools, nurseries and colleges across the country to put this evidence to good use so that it has the maximum possible benefit for young people.

We believe that evaluating practice and building evidence is key to securing equitable outcomes for all pupils. Our priorities are driven by what the evidence suggests will have greatest impact on young people, but we are also very keen to ensure our research agenda is relevant to teachers and practitioners, as well as policy makers.

Summary:

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures for majority of pupils across England, with emergency school provision provided for the children of key workers and those identified as vulnerable. Since March 2020, schools have developed remote learning approaches and are continuing to deliver educational provision to their students (Teacher Tapp, 2020).[1]

There is a strong likelihood that during this period, the educational attainment gap between children from low-income backgrounds and their peers will increase. We estimate the current period of closures will at least reverse the gains made to narrow the socio-economic gap in attainment since 2011.

The EEF's response focuses the potential impact of school closures due to coronavirus on the educational progress of the pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. In response, the EEF has developed a framework based on:

- *Mitigation* (when pupils are learning at home)
- *Compensation* (when schools reopen)

1. The impact of school closures on learning

Children learn less when they are not in school. There is an extensive literature examining the impact of holidays on learning, as well as studies exploring the impact of pupil absence or enforced school closures due to extreme weather.

In some studies, there are indications that school closures lead to learning loss, e.g. pupils knew more before the summer break than when they returned. In other cases, the impact on learning is relative, e.g. pupils might make some progress but learn less than peers who were in school.

To provide quantitative estimates of the likely impact of school closures on the attainment gap, the EEF conducted a rapid evidence assessment of existing literature.[2] The search encompassed a wide variety of reasons for schools being closed, including summer holidays.

The projections suggest that school closures will widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, likely reversing progress made to narrow the gap since 2011. The median estimate, based on the existing literature on school closures, indicates that the gap would widen by 36% by September 2020. The range displayed stems from 11% to 75%.

Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, there several reasons why this estimated impact may be under or overestimated.

An important consideration is the fact that coronavirus has had a differentially large economic and health impact on disadvantaged families[3] which may in turn affect educational outcomes.

Other factors relate to pupils' duration out of school and their access to teaching and learning while at home. It likely that some pupils will return to school earlier than September and for these pupils, the estimate of gap widening may be overstated.

Schools have been providing substantial support to enable remote learning, including by providing resources and online teaching. In addition, national initiatives such as Oak Academy have been watched by millions of pupils.[4] Issues on access to remote learning and findings from the EEF's review of the available evidence are discussed in the section on mitigation below.

2. **Mitigation phase: supporting pupils at home**

The two key factors that can affect learning while pupils are at home are:

- *Remote learning*
- *Parental engagement*

Access to remote learning:

A recent review of remote teaching conducted by the EEF found that remote learning can be effective, given the right conditions.[5] A review of the impact of online schools in the US found that although pupil outcomes online were, on average, poorer for all groups compared to in-school learning, attainment gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers were no wider[6]. This might suggest that, if online schooling were operating well for all children, the impact on the attainment gap may be overstated.

2 Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Impact of school closures on the attainment gap, Rapid Evidence Assessment, London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-school-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/

3 Office for National Statistics (2020). Statistical bulletin: Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april

4 Schools Week (2020). Oak National Academy delivers 2m lessons in a week. Available at: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-oak-national-academy-delivers-2m-lessons-in-first-week/

5 Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Remote Learning, Rapid Evidence Assessment, London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/.

6 Woodworth, J., Raymond, M., Chirbas, K., Gonzalez, M., Negassi, Y., Snow, W. & Van Donge, C. (2015). Online Charter School Study. Stanford: Centre for Research on Education Outcomes. Available at: https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/online_charter_study_final.pdf.

However, while efforts to support remote learning are likely to have been of considerable benefit to many children, and are likely to have reduced the overall amount of learning loss due to closures, there are indications that, overall, the remote learning that has taken place during school closures is likely to have further widened rather than narrowed the gap.

Surveys of teachers and parents in England in 2020 show that many pupils are not engaging in high-quality home learning and that disadvantaged pupils appear to be learning less than their peers.[78] Findings from these studies suggest that children from the most disadvantaged families are spending less time on learning activities, are submitting less work and typically have access to fewer resources at home.

A key challenge is ensuring that access to teaching is provided to all pupils. There is a significant risk that disadvantaged children have less access to teaching than their peers, in part due to having reduced access to technology or finding a quiet space to work, exacerbating the impact of school closures on the attainment gap.

It is very hard to use technology to replace the learning relationships that exist between teachers and pupils in the classroom. However, providing access to teaching via technology has the potential to make a small-to-moderate positive impact on learning during school closures.[9]

Evidence on effective remote learning

In response to an urgent need for or an accessible overview of the evidence on how to improve learning for pupils that are not able to attend classrooms, the EEF conducted a rapid evidence assessment.[10] It is important to note that the evidence in the review is drawn from diverse contexts that do not closely parallel the circumstances facing schools responding to the pandemic.

A key finding from the review emphasised that the pedagogical quality of remote learning is more important than how lessons are delivered. Ensuring the elements of effective teaching are present – for example; clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback – is more important than how or when they are provided. There was no clear difference between teaching in real time ("synchronous teaching") and alternatives ("asynchronous teaching"). In some studies, it was suggested that pupil interaction in online learning environments – for example, through peer marking – could boost pupil motivation and engagement.

In addition to providing access to technology, ensuring that teachers and pupils are provided with support and guidance to use specific platforms is essential, particularly if new forms of technology are being implemented.[11]

To increase access to teaching, it would be valuable to test the feasibility of online tuition as a way to supplement the support provided by teachers to disadvantaged children.

Parental and carer engagement

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[7] Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020). Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning. Available at: https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14848.

[8] Sutton Trust (2020). Coronavirus and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/coronavirus-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/.

[9] Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Teaching and Learning Toolkit. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/.

[10] Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Remote Learning, Rapid Evidence Assessment, London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/

[11] Education Endowment Foundation. Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

Parental and carer engagement in children's learning and the quality of the home learning environment are associated with improved academic outcomes at all ages.[12]

However, the evidence indicates that it is very challenging for schools to increase levels of engagement successfully. Schools may need support in communicating effectively with parents and carers to help them to understand specific ways to support their children's learning.

It is likely to be particularly valuable to focus on developing and maintaining two-way communication with parents and promoting the development and maintenance of reading habits.

The effectiveness of strategies will differ by age group. For example, in primary schooling, shared book reading and linked activities such as building vocabulary and practising spellings are valuable, while in secondary schools parents can support children to read independently and create study routines.[13]

Parents and carers can support older children by encouraging them to set goals, plan, and manage their time, effort, and emotions. This type of support can help children and young people to regulate their own learning and will often be more valuable than direct help with schoolwork.

EEF has developed a range of evidence-based resources for schools on supporting parents during school closures which are available here.

3. Compensation phase: Supporting catch-up after pupils return to school

It is highly likely that the gap will have widened when pupils return to school, even if the strongest possible mitigatory steps are put in place. Approaches that could support catch-up when pupils return to school include:

- *Targeted support*
- *Professional development for teachers*

This section also discusses the need for sustained support and the potential negative impact of pupil absence on the educational attainment gap when schools reopen.

Targeted support

The EEF has identified a list of 18 promising projects that have been evaluated through randomised controlled trials and shown to have positive impacts on learning, with particularly strong effects for disadvantaged children in most cases.

Notable examples include:

- *The Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme*

The NELI programme is designed to improve the language skills of reception pupils (aged 4–5) and involves scripted individual and small-group language teaching sessions delivered by trained teaching assistants (TAs). 193 schools across England took part in the independent, large-scale effectiveness trial.

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[12] Education Endowment Foundation. Teaching and Learning Toolkit.
[13] Meyer F., Meissel, K., & McNaughton, S. (2017). Patterns of literacy learning in German primary schools over the summer and the influence of home literacy practices. Journal of Research in Reading 40(3), pp.233-253

An independent evaluation found children receiving the NELI programme made the equivalent of 3 additional months' progress in language skills, on average, compared to children who did not receive NELI. This result has a very high security rating.[14]

The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers opens early and continues throughout schooling. Progress on closing the early years attainment gap stalled in 2017-18 at 4.5 months[15] and is likely to have grown as a result of school closures. There is a wealth of evidence to show that early intervention has great potential to narrow the gap, but few nursery and reception year programmes have been as rigorously tested as NELI.

-   *The Tutor Trust*

The Tutor Trust provides affordable tuition to primary and secondary schools by recruiting and training university students as paid tutors. This project aimed to improve the maths attainment of Year 6 pupils (aged 10–11) in disadvantaged schools who were working below age-expected levels. Children received 12 hours of tuition, usually one hour per week for 12 weeks in groups of three, during the school day. 105 schools across the Greater Manchester and Leeds area participated in the large-scale effectiveness trial.

An independent evaluation found children who received tutoring from Tutor Trust made three months' additional progress on Key Stage 2 maths scores.[16]

The EEF funded this project because Tutor Trust offers a way of providing high quality tuition to schools at a competitive rate. According to a survey from the Sutton Trust, students who benefit from private tuition disproportionately come from more affluent backgrounds.[17]

Increasing the availability of affordable online and face-to-face tuition is likely to be a particularly effective approach for catch-up. There is good evidence that one-to-one and small group tuition can have a positive impact on attainment. The EEF estimates that the average impact of one-to-one tuition is five additional months' progress.[18]

Professional development

Improving the quality of teaching is the strongest lever schools have to improve pupil outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students.[19]

The EEF recommends that when spending the pupil premium schools take a tiered approach, starting with efforts to improve teaching quality. EEF has published guidance on creating a pupil premium strategy and using evidence to inform decision-making, available here.

Priorities for professional development might include: ensuring high-quality materials are available for early career teachers linked to the Early Career Framework; online courses linked to the best available evidence on improve literacy and maths; and online courses linked to pedagogical

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[14] Dimova. S. et al. (2019). EEF Evaluation Report. Nuffield Early language Intervention. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Nuffield_Early_Language_Intervention.pdf

[15] Education Policy Institute (2019). Annual Report 2019. Available at: https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EPI-Annual-Report-2019.pdf

[16] Torgerson, C. et al. (2018). EEF Evaluation Report: The Tutor Trust. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/tutor-trust-effectiveness-trial/.

[17] Sutton Trust (2019). Private Tuition 2019. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/private-tuition-polling-2019/

[18] Torgerson, EEF Evaluation Report: The Tutor Trust.

[19] Education Endowment Foundation (2020). Teaching and Learning Toolkit.

approaches that are likely to be particularly effective for disadvantaged learners such as metacognition.

Sustained support

Sustained support will be required to help disadvantaged pupils catch-up after they return to school. While a focused catch-up programme – including assessment and targeted support – would be beneficial when pupils first return to school, it is unlikely that a single catch up strategy will be sufficient to compensate for lost learning due to school closures.

Pupil absence

Finally, there is a risk to the educational progress of pupils from low-income backgrounds when schools reopen, related to the distinction between school closures and pupil absence.

Schools are typically able to deal relatively effectively with school closures, be they planned or unplanned.[20] In contrast, missing school due to absence is typically associated with a substantially greater negative effect.

Part of this difference is likely to be driven by methodological challenges. For example, there are likely to be unobservable factors that are associated with being absent that lead to low attainment, even when pupils compared to apparently similar peers. However, it is also likely that it is easier for teachers to respond to closures — for example, by repeating key content as a class — than it is to support individual children who have been absent.[21] [22]

The severe negative effect of absence poses a particularly high risk for disadvantaged children who typically have lower rates of attendance[23] and whose families have indicated that the they would be substantially less likely to send their child back to school if given the choice.[24]

Additional EEF resources

The EEF has created a number of resources that are relevant to supporting learners during the Covid-19 outbreak. All resources can be found here.

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[20] Goodman, J. (2014). Flaking Out: Student Absences and Snow Days as Disruptions of Instructional Time. NBER Working Paper No. 20221. Available at: https://www.nber.org/papers/w20221.

[21] Department for Education (2016). Absence and attainment at key stages 2 and 4: 2013 to 2014. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/absence-and-attainment-at-key-stages-2-and-4-2013-to-2014.

[22] Gottfried, M. A. (2010). Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. American Educational Research Journal 47(2), 434–465.

[23] Department for Education (2019). Pupil absence in schools in England: 2017 to 2018. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2017-to-2018.

[24] Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020). Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning. Available at: https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14848.

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