

Written evidence submitted by the Education Development Trust

Education Development Trust response to Education Committee inquiry considering “the impact of COVID-19 on education and children’s services”

1. Introduction

1.1 Education Development Trust (EdDevTrust) is a leading education not-for-profit organisation, with over 50 years’ experience of improving educational outcomes internationally. We have worked in over 90 countries, including the UK, to improve the life chances of children and young people through transforming education. We deliver programmes in the United Kingdom, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South-East Asia, and combine our on-the-ground insight with international best practice to improve education systems and transform lives around the world.

1.2 In this evidence submission, we draw on our broad expertise and our international research programme, which includes a series of rapid research reports in the face of Covid-19. We have looked outwards to evidence and emerging literature from around the world, identifying key themes and lessons which can be applied to the UK context. We address the following areas identified in the Terms of Reference:

- Support for pupils and families during closures, including the consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning
- The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department’s approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)
- What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency.

2. Executive summary

2.1 To ensure high quality education during the phase of school reopening, there should be an emphasis on both support for schools and monitoring of participation and provision. The Government and DfE should:

- Encourage Ofsted to set standards and establish measures for quality educational provision on behalf of students and their families, both during school closures and in the period of reopening.
- Ensure the collection of high-quality, disaggregated data to monitor pupil engagement and progress through periods of disruption.

2.2 Teachers remain central to successful learning, in both remote learning and school reopening contexts, but in a context of disruption, increased relevant support for teaching staff is essential. The Government and DfE should:

- Ensure that teachers are provided with clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities in the context of disruption, including school closures and reopening – and in the event of further periodic or partial closures.
- Make support for teachers a priority, including consideration of specific professional development for digital pedagogies, online safety, and safeguarding, as well as dedicated support during the reopening phase, including on additional pastoral duties.
- Ensure tailored support for newly qualified or early career teachers who have missed valuable classroom time.

2.3 The impact of school closures and reopening on the most disadvantaged students must be mitigated: solutions must work for all, no matter their background. The Government and DfE should:

- Provide support and guidance to schools and local authorities to help identify students who have lost learning opportunities or disengaged and help them to catch up.
- Ensure that schools and the wider education system are equipped to enable educational provision for students without access to digital devices or internet connectivity. This may include a detailed audit of available technologies in both the short and medium term, accounting for the possibility of sustained disruption.
- Continue to ensure educational continuity, including access (or increased access) to schools, for the most vulnerable pupils and children with SEND, including in potential future closures.
- Ensure high quality data collection and analysis for educational engagement and outcomes in remote and blended learning among disadvantaged students and use this as a key policy review consideration.

2.4 Use this experience of crisis to strengthen key aspects of the education system and address fundamental weaknesses. The Government and DfE should:

- Support school leaders and system leaders – such as National Leaders of Education – in designing and implementing frameworks for resilience for use in the context of future disruptions.
- Encourage further research into remote pedagogy at school level.
- Apply lessons from the current crisis to build future resilience and adaptability in the education system.

3. To ensure high quality education during the phase of school reopening, there should be an emphasis both on support for schools and monitoring of participation and provision.

3.1 Our analysis of plans for school reopening worldwide suggests that policymakers in many countries have placed insufficient emphasis on the importance of monitoring the level of participation and the nature of provision in order to ensure that all students, regardless of background, thrive in these unsettling times. This lack of focus on performance in reopening follows on from a similar lack of due stress on such quality assurance measures during the phase of school closure. The need for high accountability, and comprehensive data relating to student engagement, is particularly high in England, where there is a high degree of decentralisation and autonomy at the level of schools or groups of schools, such as multi-academy trusts. Since the government does not direct professional practice, there is a need to set standards and monitor provision on behalf of students and their families. We understand that this can be done in a heavy-handed way which would be counterproductive. Teachers, of course, need high levels of support in difficult times. However, there seems to us to be no reason why policymakers cannot ensure a judicious mix of high support and high professional expectations linked to reliable quality assurance systems and data.

3.2 Our global survey indicates that there have been some examples of systems where engagement levels and approaches to provision were measured in a systematic way during the pandemic crisis.

3.3 In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), all schools – both public and private – are being reviewed to ensure that provision during school closure meets expectations.¹ External reviewers are conducting online discussions with students, teachers, school leaders and parents. The reviewers have also

¹ Ministry of Education UAE (2020) Distance Learning Evaluation Tool. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.khda.gov.ae/CMS/WebParts/TextEditor/Documents/Distance-Learning-Evaluation-Tool-English.pdf>

joined online classes to get a sense of the student experience. There are no judgements about attainment, but the reviewers were able to provide the schools with an external view of how provision met a good standard.

3.4 The Office of Education Standards in the Cayman Islands has conducted a review of school support for home learning in both primary and secondary schools.² This was done in a similar way to the UAE quality assurance process, with extensive stakeholder engagement and the observation of virtual online lessons. The Cayman Islands' review of home learning has highlighted a level of inconsistency in provision and problems of unequal access and engagement. The Office of Education Standards has been able to make a series of evidence-based recommendations to the government in order to apply the lessons learned from the review process.

3.5 In the recent period of school closure, class teachers in South Korea were obliged to check on the engagement and virtual absenteeism level of all students every day. According to the figures that were reported up from schools to the ministry of education, 98.8% of students in South Korea were engaged in remote school study in Korea during the period of school closure.³ This figure is no different to pre-crisis attendance levels and indicates high participation levels for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special needs and disabilities.

3.6 This was achieved through various measures. Before school closure, the government undertook a rapid audit of those students who lacked devices and connectivity at home. They also ensured that there were no data charges for accessing educational websites. Some home visits were made to check that students with disabilities were engaged and had necessary adaptations. Mentoring systems were also put in place for teachers lacking in skill or confidence.⁴

3.7 The success of the South Korean online schools was, of course, greatly assisted by the context. Unlike some jurisdictions, South Korea is relatively homogeneous in linguistic and ethnic terms. Before the crisis, an excellent digital infrastructure was already in place and schools were well equipped and well connected. South Korea also has a prevalent pro-education culture and a marked anxiety among many parents that students must not fall behind, because of the system of high-stakes public examinations.

3.8 While recognising the great importance of contextual factors, it is possible to identify some instructive features of the Korean case study.

- Firstly, there was clarity regarding the responsibilities of schools and teachers. Teachers understood that they had the prime responsibility to ensure that the education system was in contact with every individual student and any individual-level engagement problems were identified.
- Secondly, this case study shows the power of comprehensive monitoring data. The Korean authorities mapped disadvantage and disability at household level and tracked the daily participation levels of all students.
- The South Korean model demonstrated a mix of high accountability and high support, including professional development for teachers. While teachers were responsible for tracking student engagement on a daily basis and teaching online, a national programme of

² Office of Education Standards, Cayman Islands (2020) No place like home? [Online]. Available at: <http://www.gov.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12974497.PDF>

³ UNESCO Webinar, 27 April 2020, *Back to school: Preparing and managing the reopening of schools* <https://en.unesco.org/news/back-school-preparing-and-managing-reopening-schools>

⁴ UNESCO Webinar, 27 April 2020, *Back to school: Preparing and managing the reopening of schools* <https://en.unesco.org/news/back-school-preparing-and-managing-reopening-schools>

support for teachers was also put in place. Teachers lacking digital confidence were assisted by peer mentors.

3.8 Quality assurance measures, accountability, and the collection and use of high-quality monitoring data are crucial to ensuring that the education pupils receive in this period of disruption is of the high quality expected. This is especially important for disadvantaged or vulnerable students who may be at risk of falling behind as a result of the school closures (see section 5).

3.9 DfE should:

- Encourage Ofsted to set standards and establish accountability measures for quality educational provision on behalf of students and their families, both during school closures and in the period of reopening.
- Ensure the collection of high-quality, disaggregated data to monitor pupil engagement and progress through periods of disruption.

4. Teachers remain central to successful learning, in both remote learning and school reopening contexts, but in a context of disruption, increased relevant support for teaching staff is essential.

4.1 It is beyond doubt that teachers have had – and continue to have – a fundamentally important role throughout the ongoing period of disruption to the education system. Now that schools are reopening, teachers remain on the front line, coping with the need to assess progress or lost learning during the period of school closure and working on catch-up programmes and other remedial initiatives where necessary. This is likely to be combined with increased pastoral and safeguarding duties for their pupils, many of whom have reported poor mental health⁵ and other issues⁶ during the coronavirus lockdown. Moreover, some teachers may be facing the additional pressure of delivering multiple – and possibly simultaneous – models of provision, as some students remain learning at home, either by government mandate or parental choice.⁷

4.2 Given the centrality of the role of the teacher, the increasing complexity of their roles, and the competing demands placed upon them, it will be hugely important for schools to be able to maintain effective use of teacher resource and teachers' time. Throughout the school closure period – and into the period of reopening – many teachers have been dividing their working hours between in-school supervision and lessons and remote instruction, but there has frequently been a lack of clarity around their roles. In some other countries – such as France and New Zealand – there has been a greater degree of role clarity for education professionals. Clear role descriptors (for instance, provided by an individual school or trust, perhaps with centralised guidance) for crisis scenarios, protracted remote or blended learning scenarios, and subsequent reopening plans should give staff direction and help to reduce unnecessary duplication of work. There has been some evidence of success in this endeavour in other countries. In Norway, for example, the government provided training and guidelines for school administrators and school leaders so that they could guide their

⁵ Young Minds, 2020. *Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs*. [online] Available at: https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf [Accessed 30 June 2020].

⁶ Mental Health Foundation, 2020. *Returning to School After the Coronavirus Lockdown*. [online] Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown> [Accessed 30 June 2020].

⁷ Gorgen, K. & McAleavy, T. (forthcoming) *An international review of plans for school reopening*. EdTech Hub. edtechhub.org/coronavirus.

teams in the phased reopening and to comply with the new rules.⁸ Related to this, there may be room for more central direction regarding the content to be taught remotely, or to be prioritised during catch-up or remedial initiatives.

4.3 Moving forward, there needs to be focused support for teachers related to the specific needs of the academic year ahead, as well as equipping them in the longer term to navigate potential future disruption. In the immediate sense, with schools now reopening, this may include additional professional support or training for school staff in i) assessing pupils' progress in remote learning, ii) catch-up initiatives, and iii) addressing pastoral or safeguarding concerns, especially where children's mental health and/or wellbeing has been impacted by lockdown. Moreover, ensuring quality support for newly qualified or trainee teachers will be especially important (for their development – and potentially for teacher retention), particularly where they have missed out on valuable classroom experience as a result of school closures.

4.4 In the event of future crises and the possibility of further rounds of school closures, further guidance and training for teachers on remote pedagogies (for both entirely remote and blended learning), may be a helpful resource, especially as many teachers lack the necessary digital skills and knowledge of remote pedagogy to feel confident in this mode of instruction.⁹ According to the PISA 2018 survey, 35% of secondary school students in comparatively wealthy OECD countries are enrolled in schools where teachers typically lack the necessary technical and pedagogical skills 'to integrate devices in instruction'.¹⁰ Strong professional and peer support systems may also be valuable, as in Italy, where the *La scuola per la scuola*, a collaborative online community, has produced over 90 free webinars, involving over 18,000 teachers sharing good practices.¹¹ It will also be important, however, to ensure that teachers have the necessary professional training to cope with new learning contexts, and can continue with other training that they may need to develop their careers. They may also need centrally designed training to help ensure the safety of their pupils online. Social distancing measures are likely to preclude traditional, in-person training for the foreseeable future, so continuous professional development (CPD) programmes may need to be developed and made available remotely. For example, the London Connected Learning Centre (CLC), part of Education Development Trust, has been running remote teacher CPD sessions, including on using technology for remote teaching across a range of phases and contexts of education.

4.5 DfE should:

- Ensure that teachers are provided with clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities in the context of disruption, including school closures and reopening – and in the event of further, periodic or partial closures.

⁸ Government of Norway (2020). Norway to lift COVID-19 restrictions gradually and cautiously. Press release. 8th April 2020. [Online]. Available

at: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/norway_to_lift_covid-19_restrictions_gradually_and_cautiously_-_regjeringen.no_.pdf

⁹ McAleavy, T., Joynes, C., Gibbs, E. & Sims, K. (2020). *What steps are being taken to reach the most disadvantaged students during the period of Covid-19 school closure?* EdTech Hub. Available at: <https://edtechhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/disadvantaged-students.pdf> [Accessed 30th June 2020].

¹⁰ McAleavy, T. & Gorgen, K. *What does the research suggest is best practice for remote teaching?* EdTech Hub. Available at: <https://edtechhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EDT-report01-1.pdf>; Schleicher, A. (2020), Education disrupted – education rebuilt: Some insights from PISA on the availability and use of digital tools for learning, *OECD Education and Skills Today*. Available at: <https://oecdeditoday.com/coronavirus-education-digital-tools-for-learning/>

¹¹ D'Addio, A.C. & Endrizzi, F. (GEM report UNESCO). Covid-19: How is Italy coping with school closure? *World Education Blog*. Available at: <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/04/02/covid-19-how-is-italy-coping-with-school-closure/>

- Make support for teachers a priority, including consideration of specific professional development for digital pedagogies, online safety, and safeguarding, as well as dedicated support during the reopening phase, including on additional pastoral duties.
- Ensure tailored support for newly qualified or early career teachers who have missed valuable classroom time.

5. The impact of school closures and reopening on the most disadvantaged students must be mitigated: solutions must work for all, no matter their background.

5.1 School closures and remote learning have clearly highlighted issues of inequality, both in the UK and globally. It is now vitally important to ensure that these inequalities do not have a long-term impact on pupils' educational outcomes and engagement, especially if there is sustained disruption in the education system (a recent OECD report stated that disruption would be the 'new normal' for at least the next 18 months).¹² Disparities in educational engagement and access have become increasingly apparent during the period of school closures.¹³ As schools reopen, it will be critical to ensure that these issues are adequately addressed and pupils who have fallen behind are able to catch up.

5.2 Moreover, there must be efforts to ensure that disadvantaged groups are not disproportionately affected in potential future crises or closures. In the UK, an estimated one million children and their families do not have adequate access to a device or connectivity to participate in online learning at home.¹⁴ 11% of young people accessing the internet at home cannot do so with a computer on a broadband connection, a further 6% are dependent on dial-up modems, and another 12% cannot use these devices in the home at all.¹⁵ This creates challenges for completing schoolwork at the best of times, but such problems are exacerbated where online learning forms a key or predominant component of their schooling. It is therefore vitally important to ensure that schools and the wider education system are equipped to enable educational provision for students without access to devices or the internet. In Germany, for example, disadvantaged students have been able to register for financial or material support with remote education technology.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in Quebec, students who cannot access the necessary technological tools will be provided with tablets and internet access, as part of a partnership between the government, Telus (a telecommunications provider) and Apple.¹⁷

5.3 Where devices cannot be made available, students might instead be provided with alternative learning materials, or increased time in school. As our researchers noted in a recent report on best

¹² OECD (2020a). Corona virus special edition: Back to school. Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 21. 15th April 2020. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/Spotlight-21-Coronavirus-special-edition-Back-to-school.pdf, p. 2>

¹³ Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2020). *COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown*. The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Impact-Brief-School-Shutdown.pdf>

¹⁴ Nominet, 2020. *Digital Access for All Launches to Help Solve Problem of Digital Exclusion - Nominet*. Available at: <https://www.nominet.uk/digital-access-for-all-launches-to-help-solve-problem-of-digital-exclusion/> [Accessed 30 June 2020].

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Burchard, A., 2020. *Schulen Können Laptop-Klassensätze Kaufen - Aber Nicht Für Alle Schüler*. Tagesspiegel.de. Available at: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/digitales-lernen-schulen-koennen-laptop-klassensaetze-kaufen-aber-nicht-fuer-alle-schueler/25833606.html> [Accessed 30 June 2020].

¹⁷ Government of Quebec (2020). *Preschools and elementary and secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Ministry website. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/education/preschool-elementary-and-secondary-schools/etablissements-scolaires-prescolaires-primaires-et-secondaires-dans-le-contexte-de-la-covid-19/>

practice in remote pedagogy,¹⁸ alternative low-tech or no-tech approaches (e.g. radio or television broadcasts or printed resource distribution), based on realistic audits of available technologies,¹⁹ may be viable ways of helping teachers to continue to provide lessons. Such audits were successfully carried out in South Korea and Chile in the context of Covid-19. However, such audits may also be carried out at a more local level: schools could be supported in identifying strategies to support families with different levels of digital access and capability.²⁰ Ultimately, any education regime which incorporates remote learning must be able to ensure good provision for every child, no matter their home circumstances.

5.4 Notably, provision must also be made for the most vulnerable students and their families, as well as students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), both as schools reopen, and in any future closures. The UK's decision to keep schools open for the most vulnerable students during the Covid-19 pandemic, along with its provision of educational continuity for children with SEND, should be seen as a leading international example of good practice. Where closure is necessary, Vienna (Austria) has also demonstrated good practice, allowing welfare benefits to be used to cover teaching assistants for SEND students during online learning in the same way as they would be during face-to-face learning.²¹ Parents of children with additional needs are also likely to need targeted support. For example, in South Africa, there is a national parent WhatsApp support line for families with children with disabilities, while in Jamaica, the National Parenting Support Commission is running a national network of parent helplines for disadvantaged families, to help with both continuity of learning and other issues, such as difficulties in accessing food. Such models may be helpful not only during periods of closure, but also in adapting to a return to school.

5.5 DfE should:

- Provide support and guidance to schools and local authorities to help identify students who have lost learning opportunities or disengaged, and help them to catch up.
- Ensure that schools and the wider education system are equipped to enable educational provision for students without access to digital devices or internet connectivity. This may include a detailed audit of available technologies in both the short and medium term, accounting for the possibility of sustained disruption.
- Continue to ensure educational continuity, including access (or increased access) to schools, for the most vulnerable pupils and children with SEND, including in potential future closures.
- Ensure high quality data collection and analysis for educational engagement and outcomes in remote and blended learning among disadvantaged students, and use this as a key policy review consideration.

6. Use this experience of crisis to strengthen key aspects of the education system and address fundamental weaknesses

¹⁸McAleavy, T. & Gorgen, K. *What does the research suggest is best practice for remote teaching?* EdTech Hub. Available at: <https://edtechhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EDT-report01-1.pdf>

¹⁹ McAleavy, T., Joynes, C., Gibbs, E. & Sims, K. (2020). *What steps are being taken to reach the most disadvantaged students during the period of Covid-19 school closure?* EdTech Hub. Available at: <https://edtechhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/disadvantaged-students.pdf> [Accessed 30th June 2020].

²⁰ The London Connected Learning Centre, part of EdDevTrust, addresses this in its guide to remote learning for schools: <https://londonclc.org.uk/remote-learning/>

²¹ Bizeps.or.at. 2020. *Coronavirus: Wichtige Informationen Für Menschen Mit Behinderungen Und Deren Angehörige In Wien - BIZEPS*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bizeps.or.at/coronavirus-wichtige-informationen-fuer-menschen-mit-behinderungen-und-deren-angehoerige-in-wien/>> [Accessed 30 June 2020].

6.1 The Covid-19 crisis has brought to light structural and system-wide issues with education systems all over the world, and the UK is no exception. However, the exposure of key weaknesses – as well as key strengths – can contribute to the creation of stronger and more resilient systems. As we look to the future, what is needed in the long-term is not a rescue plan, but a blueprint for building a system which can better cope with new disruptions and upheavals.

6.2 For example, the rapid shift to remote learning has demonstrated that many teachers lack or lack confidence in the necessary technological skills, digital literacy, and knowledge of online pedagogies for teaching online some or all of the time.²² Moving forward, this might sensibly be addressed in CPD programmes, especially if future outbreaks or novel pandemics cause repeated, periodic, or partial school closures.

6.3 Such an uncertain future context has implications for the role of school and system leaders, who, in addition to ensuring the aforementioned support for teaching staff, will also need to ensure new frameworks and preparations are put in place to enable flexibility and resilience in potential future crises. For school leaders, this would not only mean preparing for significant changes to teaching methods and pedagogy to make remote learning solutions work, but also deploying a framework for formative assessment or monitoring to track student progress, as well as for targeted teaching plans for school reopening to help close learning gaps for disadvantaged students.

6.4 System leaders need to take a wider view: moving forward, there may be an enhanced role for such system leaders in taking an area-wide view on issues such as teacher shortages or patterns of vulnerability, and brokering expertise or resources to ensure that interventions demonstrate impact across clusters of schools. This further reinforces the need for the collection of high-quality, disaggregated data (as discussed in section 1).

6.5 Finally, the disconnect between the higher education system and the primary, secondary, and further education systems has also become apparent as a result of school closures. For instance, while many higher education (HE) institutions have been using distance learning techniques for decades (especially in the UK, where the Open University has successfully used remote learning methods since the 1960s), this has not been the case in the school system, and lessons from HE have not frequently been applied to other parts of the education system. Further attention to remote and blended pedagogy at school level, which can be applied in the event of future closures, would be valuable in future research.

6.6 DfE should:

- Support school leaders and system leaders – such as National Leaders of Education – in designing and implementing frameworks for resilience for use in the context of future disruptions.
- Encourage further research into remote pedagogy at school level.
- Apply lessons from the current crisis to build future resilience and adaptability in the education system.

²² Gorgen, K. & McAleavy, T. (forthcoming) *An international review of plans for school reopening*. EdTech Hub. edtechhub.org/coronavirus.