

Written evidence submitted by Fischer Family Trust

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

Fischer Family Trust submission: July 2020

Our submission is focused on three areas delineated in the terms of reference:

“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)”

“Children’s and young people’s mental health and safety outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education”

“What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency”

Summary

The Fischer Family Trust (‘The Trust’) is one of the foremost charities in the UK dedicated to improving the educational outcomes of the most vulnerable segment of pupils in UK schools. We have been active for more than two decades, with a particular focus on early literacy. We are involved in projects which we believe give us some specific insights into the impact of COVID-19. Some of our projects are directly relevant to reducing or avoiding some of the worst potential educational impacts of COVID-19. Relevant to this submission are:

- FFT Education - the information service for schools - <https://fft.org.uk/>
- FFT Education Datalab - <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/>
- Success for All UK - <https://successforall.org.uk/news/>
- Fischer Family Trust Apex Project

Early Literacy Failure

In the call for evidence, you have specifically identified the potential long-term impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable groups. The groups you have highlighted are, “pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need”. Depending on where the line is drawn, your highlighted segment constitutes approximately 5% of the pupils in primary school in England.

The most important information we would like to bring to your attention is that there is a further 15% of pupils who are also highly vulnerable to educational failure.

In the UK, pupils who are at the expected level will have mastered basic reading and writing by the end of Year 2. Increasingly during Year 2, and then across the curriculum in Year 3 onwards, lack of literacy, as well as being a problem in itself, virtually guarantees an inability to access the rest of the curriculum fully. Our experience working in schools with intakes from areas of high deprivation, is that if a child has not acquired basic literacy by the end of Year 2 then there is a high chance that they never become literate. Similarly, the FFT Education data shows that a very high percentage of those not reaching expected levels in KS1 continue to fall behind throughout their school career (see

longitudinal data to GCSE level). For a child's education literacy is 'not everything', but the absence of literacy by the end of Year 2 is often an almost complete barrier to 'everything'. We describe this as 'Early Literacy Failure'.

Recognising how early educational disadvantage manifests, and how many pupils fail to recover despite later interventions, our analyses show that on top of the 5% of vulnerable pupils you have highlighted, a further 15% of all pupils would experience Early Literacy Failure even without the impact of COVID-19. This eventually feeds into the 15% of adult population who are illiterate. We estimate that the 'Cost of Poor Quality' of this Early Literacy Failure is £50K or more of wasted resources per pupil during their years in school. The 'Cost of Poor Quality' to society per case of adult illiteracy is estimated to be more than £500k.

Unless significant mitigation is undertaken, the COVID-19 disruption in the literacy-critical years of Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 will significantly increase the prevalence of Early Literacy Failure and impact the overall, long term educational outcomes of the cohort of pupils most at risk.

Moreover, in areas of deprivation, Early Literacy Failure usually manifests in a vicious circle of vulnerabilities and disadvantages. In these schools a pupil most at risk of Early Literacy Failure often lacks oracy, communication skills, self-confidence, and often has other social and emotional problems. A likely impact of COVID-19 will be the amplification of these various deficits, and therefore a further increase in the prevalence of Early Literacy Failure.

Eyesight screening

One potential contributor to Early Literacy Failure is poor eyesight. Pre-COVID-19 we started piloting school-based eyesight screening in KS1. Early results indicate a significant number of children are in school with uncorrected deficiencies in their vision. This, undoubtedly, is a major cause of emotional stress, failure to learn, and, in some cases will also lead to permanent amblyopia. Pre-COVID-19, some Local Authorities have been implementing PHE guidelines on early eyesight screening. In other places, many concerned and attentive parents will have initiated this themselves. The impact of COVID-19 will be that the majority of this screening has come to a halt.

There is an effective, teacher-delivered, in-school eyesight screening test available from the Specsavers organisation, designed for pupils in year 3. As part of the FFT Apex Project, we successfully validated the use of this in the Unity Schools Partnership MAT in Year 1. Knowing which children have failed the screening and recommending that the parents request a full assessment by an ophthalmologist, is not sufficient. We aim to develop and implement a school-led system for ensuring that all pupils in need obtain glasses and reliably have them when needed at school. The project will also pilot this screening for all of the later year groups and look to see how to implement effective in-school screening in Reception.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on these extremely important vulnerabilities, we urge policy makers to consider the following:

For immediate impact at scale:

1. Support our early reading programme to offer 'Tutoring with the Lightning Squad' (TWL) either as part of the NTP, or as an additional programme for all KS1 and KS2 children who need it. TWL is a comprehensive, evidence-based and highly cost-effective tutoring programme that will bring children who have fallen behind up to the expected level.

TWL (onsite) is delivered by one Teaching Assistant (TA) supervising four pupils working in pairs, guided by a comprehensive online tutorial programme. TWL has the best pedigree and the best evidence-base for any affordable literacy tutoring program. The evidence shows that this affordable tuition provides a similar impact to one-to-one tuition using a fully qualified teacher.

TWL requires limited training, and it will be supported by FFT Education working together with Success for All Foundation UK (SFA-UK). FFT Education, the leading information provider for schools, already directly supports half of primary schools in England. The Success for All Foundation in the USA has developed 'Success for All' (SFA): the most systematic and comprehensive primary school system available. TWL was developed as part of this system. Under sponsorship from the Fischer Family Trust, SFA-UK has adapted the SFA system and has been delivering this to schools in the UK for two decades. We have been piloting an anglicised version of the predecessor to TWL in some UK schools, and we are actively working on the anglicisation TWL.

A pupil receiving tuition using TWL is provided with a 30-minute session, 5 times per week. Pre-COVID-19, full correction of the gap in attainment in Year 1 and Year 2 pupils, for all pupils behind expected levels, in schools in areas of high deprivation, requires on average 16 weeks of TWL tuition.

Given the Teaching Assistant (TA) to pupil ratio of 1:4, the average staff cost per pupil is £240. There will be small additional costs to cover TA training, support, and access to the programme, resulting in an estimated overall total cost per pupil of £265. This compares to the Cost of Poor Quality of avoidable Early Literacy Failure of £50K+ per pupil of wasted resources during school years, and £500K+ cost to society for each case of adult illiteracy.

TWL is also highly effective for supporting the development of a range of SEND pupils, delivered one-to-two or one-to-one as appropriate. TWL is currently being delivered remotely on a 'one-TA-to-one pupil' basis, and this approach can be replicated if local lockdowns require this.

2. Support the larger scale FFT Apex Project pilot of in-school eyesight screening, followed by a national roll-out.

For immediate impact in limited number of schools in areas of high deprivation:

1. Support a number of schools who are already seeking to take on board our SFA primary school systems. Our analyses show that when well-implemented, SFA can be used as the basis for a dramatic reduction in Early Literacy Failure of the most at risk pupils. SFA provides a uniquely effective and comprehensive solution which addresses all of the aspects of early literacy, providing an outstandingly supportive environment for children's confidence and emotional security as well as all of the pedagogy for communication, oracy and reading and writing.

As well as mitigating the impact of COVID-19 in these schools in the short term, growing the base of SFA schools in the UK will contribute to future resilience.

For longer term impact and resilience in future emergencies:

1. Support the FFT Apex Core Project – our project to develop and demonstrate a replicable and affordable model for tackling both the pedagogical vulnerabilities of Early Literacy Failure, as well as the strongly-coupled major non-pedagogical deficits prevalent in at-risk pupils in areas of high deprivation.
2. Support development of TWL so that it can be used remotely on a one-to-four basis, with the four pupils working in four different locations, also benefiting from the cooperative learning and teamwork which would have been delivered onsite.

Summary of Evidence

1. Pre-COVID-19, there is already high prevalence of Early Literacy Failure. We estimate this to be up to 20% of pupils in state schools in England (approximately 150,000 children per year). The evidence shows that a low literacy outcome at Key Stage 1 is highly predictive of enduring failure. In Table 1 we show the relationship between KS1 attainment and GCSE English attainment. Whilst on its own this does not demonstrate that Early Literacy Failure is the determinant of later failure, it does, at the minimum, demonstrate that poor KS1 attainment is the part of the road to this failure.

Table 1. The percentage of pupils who achieve a level 'C' or greater at GCSE English in 2017 in relation to their original KS1 reading and writing scores:*

KS4 % gaining C+		KS 1 Reading Level					
		W	1	2C	2B	2A	3
KS1 Writing Level	W	5%	13%				
	1	11%	21%	31%	51%		
	2C	22%	33%	45%	62%	74%	
	2B		44%	57%	71%	82%	88%
	2A		52%	65%	78%	87%	92%
	3			80%	89%	94%	97%

* Does not include EAL pupils

2. Pre-COVID, the prevalence of Early Literacy Failure is dramatically higher amongst disadvantaged groups. As shown in Table 2, a high-risk KS1 literacy score is defined as a combined literacy score at KS1 which offers a less than 50% chance of achieving C or above in GCSE English. In the cohort sitting GCSEs in 2016, the prevalence of a high-risk KS1 literacy score in the '**girls : no-free-school-meals : autumn-born**' cohort was **6%**, the prevalence in the '**boys : twice-free-school-meals : spring-born cohort**' was **66%**.¹

Table 2. Percentage of different groups with 'High Risk' literacy score (GCSE 2016 cohort)

KS4 % gaining C+	Girls		Boys	
	Born Autumn	Born Spring	Born Autumn	Born Spring
FSM 0*	6%	6%	21%	18%
FSM 1*	26%	35%	51%	61%
FSM 2*	31%	40%	56%	66%

*FSM relates to the periods for which the pupils qualified for free school meals. FSM 1 = for 1 year, FSM 2 = for 2 years or more, FSM 0 = never qualified for free school meals.

¹ Fischer, Michael & Treadaway, Michael. (2018). Chances of success at Key Stage 4, part one. FFT Datalab blogpost

The differences arising only out of season-of-birth demonstrate an example of the literacy impact of an additional stress factor. Boys who were born later in the year and who started Reception or Year 1 in Autumn 2019 will be particularly at risk of a COVID-19 impact, as the only complete term they will have experienced in that year will be their term of maximum immaturity.

3. The data in table 2 provides some examples of how each risk factor causes a material increase in the incidence of Early Literacy Failure. The data also shows the dramatic impact of multiple risk factors.
4. Early Literacy Failure is a multi-component outcome arising out of the interaction of behaviour and emotional deficits, oracy and communication deficits, as well as a lack of aptitudes required to learn to read and write at the expected time.
5. Based on this, we forecast that, in the absence of compensatory interventions, the impact of COVID-19 will be to substantially increase the prevalence of Early Literacy Failure. This will be due to due to gaps in literacy teaching, an increase in social and emotional problems arising in the home, the reduction of the contribution of the school to social and emotional enhancement.
6. As part of the FFT Apex Project we noted that the majority of pupils in England do not receive the early years eyesight screening recommended by PHE for the avoidance of Amblyopia. We recognised that this results in a substantial percentage of pupils failing to have the glasses which they need to be able to participate in the curriculum. This is particularly the case in children from a disadvantaged background. This lack of screening will directly lead to an increased prevalence of amblyopia. It is estimated that 1 in 50 children will develop this condition. Often younger children are unaware there is anything wrong with their vision, as they have grown up with it and become used to it. Amblyopia can be treated successfully in younger children but if undetected can result in permanent lifelong reduction in vision.
7. There is an effective teacher delivered in school eyesight screening programme available from the Specsavers organisation, designed for pupils in year 3. As part of the FFT Apex Project we successfully validated the use of this in year 1 in a pre-pilot working with the Unity Schools Partnership MAT. We established that this teacher or TA-delivered eyesight screening programme is manageable and effective. In one school that ran the screening for 47 children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, 10 were found to need follow up tests. 2 of these 10 children were able to get glasses before the COVID-19 shutdown. As part of FFT Apex Project, we are developing a complete methodology for making sure that all children potentially in need of glasses in Year 1 get the support they need.

The impact of COVID-19 will be a significant increase in the pupils at an educational disadvantage due to uncorrected vision. The impact will also be an increase in the numbers of children at risk of amblyopia.

8. There is a very strong evidence base for tutoring in reading and mathematics. In a recent meta-analysis of 97 studies on the impact of tutoring, the average effect size for tutoring for struggling readers in elementary schools was +0.28 years for teacher tutors, +0.29 years for teaching assistants, and +0.38 years for “paid volunteers.”²

² Slavin, Robert & Lake, Cynthia & Davis, Susan & Madden, Nancy. (2011). Effective programs for struggling

The main evidence for the effectiveness of TWL is the evaluation of its predecessor Tutoring with Alphie (TWA) in two cluster randomized experiments in high-poverty Baltimore City schools. One found an effect size of +0.40, and one an effect size of +0.46, for a mean of +0.43, equivalent to approximately five additional months of learning.³

To date more than 1000 schools in the USA have used TWA and 450 have used TWL.

Our early piloting of the earlier implantation of this approach provides proof of implementation, and early evidence of equivalent impact, in the UK.

Background

The Fischer Family Trust ('The Trust') is one of the foremost charities in the UK dedicated to improving the educational outcomes of the most vulnerable segment of pupils in UK schools.

The most effective improvement methodology ever to be developed in the manufacturing sector is the 'Deming-Juran' methodology, A.K.A 'Lean manufacturing', 'Six Sigma'. A key principle of this methodology is that of the need to identify those '**Vital Few**' aspects of a system which are the largest contributors to poor performance.

Using this approach to state education in Letchworth, FFT identified that in 1992, **33% of children entering state secondary education had a reading age of 9 years or below** and that the Letchworth figures were representative of the whole of the UK. We identified that this occurred through **Early Literacy Failure**, that is the failure of a child to acquire basic literacy at the expected time (UK pupils who are on target have limited but effective literacy by the end of year 2). In Deming-Juran terms **Early Literacy Failure** is not only one of the 'Vital Few' candidates for improvement, it is the single aspect of education in England which is so fundamental, that until and unless it is rectified, all other attempts at improving school outcomes for the lower third of the population will be disappointing.

This discovery lead FFT to be involved in a number of initiatives in UK schools over the last two decades – the most relevant in the context of this submission are:

FFT schools' information service: <https://fft.org.uk/>

FFT Education Data lab: <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/>

Success for All UK: <https://successforall.org.uk/news/>

Fischer Family Trust Apex Project

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readers: A best-evidence synthesis. Educational Research Review. 6. 1-26.

³ Madden, Nancy & Slavin, Robert. (2017). Evaluations of Technology-Assisted Small-Group Tutoring for Struggling Readers. Reading & Writing Quarterly. 1-8.