

Covid-19 and social mobility impact brief: School shutdown

Introduction and background

At the beginning of April, the Sutton Trust released a brief detailing concerns about how the Covid-19 crisis is likely to affect poorer young people through their time in education and into the workplace (see summary 74, April). This latest brief focusses on school-aged pupils following the closure of schools across the country on 23rd March to all but the children of key workers. It explores the provision offered by schools, the support available at home and the provision of resources.

Key findings

Provision from schools

- When schools had been closed for a week, teachers were asked by Teacher Tapp (a phone app which asks teachers 3 survey questions a day) how they were providing work for a class they would normally teach. Most teachers reported setting work through an online platform (63% of all state schoolteachers, including 82 per cent of state secondary teachers). Many teachers in the state sector were putting instructions on a website (either the school website or a third party).
- Forty-eight per cent of teachers in the most deprived schools were setting work with physical worksheets or workbooks, compared to just 22 per cent in the most affluent schools.
- A substantial number of private schools were offering live videoconferencing (28%) and online chats (25%) between pupils and teachers.
- Teachers were asked which activities they were undertaking during the day. The most common activities cited were direct messaging or emailing students/parents (52% of state teachers) and creating distance learning resources for their students (48%). There were large differences according to the socioeconomic makeup of the school.
- In the most affluent schools, 58 per cent of teachers reported that they had direct messaged students or parents, compared to 47 per cent in the most deprived schools. Similarly, while 55 per cent of teachers in the best-off schools had created distance learning resources for students, only 45 per cent of those in the worst-off schools had done so.
- Teachers in private schools were significantly more likely to engage in direct messaging and creating resources (over 70%). They were overwhelmingly more likely to have hosted an online class (25%) or an audio/video call with a student (25%), compared to just 3 and 4 per cent respectively in the state sector.
- A Sutton Trust survey of parents carried out between 1st and 3rd April reflected these differences. According to this survey, work was being set through the school website for 45 per cent of children. For 34 per cent, work was set through an online platform. Twenty-eight per cent reported work being sent by email, and a further 13 per cent reported that no work had been set.
- According to parents, children at private schools were much more likely to work through an online platform than those in state schools (43% of children at primary private schools, and 54% at secondary private schools).
- Overall, 34 per cent of pupils are reported by their parents to be taking part in live or recorded online lessons, with 23 per cent doing so at least once every day. Pupils from middle class homes are much more likely to have taken part in this type of activity, with 30 per cent doing so at least once a day compared to 16 per cent of working class pupils. The numbers at private schools are much higher, with 51 per cent of primary and 57 per cent of secondary students reported by parents as taking part in online lessons.
- Forty-five per cent of students had communicated with their teachers in the last week, whereas 50 per cent have not (5% of parents were not sure). The figure for private primaries was 62 per cent, and for private secondaries it was 81 per cent; this highlights the personalised support which private schools can offer.
- According to parents, about two thirds of 16-18 year olds had been in contact with teachers, compared to around a third of 4-8 year olds.
- Before the lockdown, Teacher Tapp asked about school's readiness for online delivery. Responses showed much greater preparedness on the part of private schools; 60 per cent of private schools reported already having a platform which they could use to accept work from pupils, compared to 37 per cent in the most affluent state schools and 23 per cent in the most deprived schools.
- Overall, 61 per cent of parents are satisfied with the learning support provided by their child's school. The figure is higher for middle class families (66%) than for working class families (56%).

Support at home

- Children are mostly undertaking a mixture of working on their own and working under supervision. Children under 7 are reported to be mostly or entirely working under parental supervision, while a majority of those over 10 are working mostly or entirely independently.
- In terms of supervision, there was very little difference by economic background. Children in working class



households were slightly more likely to work entirely on their own (21% to 19% of those in middle class homes), but also slightly more likely to be working entirely supervised (14% v 11%).

- Parents were asked about how confident they felt in supporting their children. Unsurprisingly, those with higher levels of education were more confident. Over three quarters of parents with a postgraduate degree, and just over 60 per cent of those with an undergraduate degree felt confident, compared to less than half of those with A level or GCSE level qualifications.

Financial resources

- Teachers were asked by Teacher Tapp whether they thought their students had adequate access to an electronic device for learning. In the most deprived schools, 15 per cent of teachers thought more than a third of their students would not have adequate access to a device, compared to only 2 per cent in the most affluent state schools. A large proportion of teachers in private schools (42%) thought all their students would have adequate access, compared to just 9 per cent in the best-off state schools, and 2 per cent in the poorest state schools.
- Thirty-eight per cent of teachers in private schools thought that all their students would have adequate access to the internet, compared to only 12 per cent in the most affluent state schools, and 2 per cent in the most deprived state schools.
- Parents were asked about the number of internet enabled devices in their home. The median child had access to 4 internet enabled devices in the household, with 20 per cent having 7 or more. As the survey was completed online, the number of parents reporting no devices is likely to be an underestimate. Children in working class households less likely to have access to a high number of internet enabled devices.
- Parents were asked how much money they had spent on their child's learning in the week after lockdown. At the top end of spending, socio-economic differences were marked. Twelve per cent of middle class parents had spent between £50 and £99, compared to 7 per cent of working class parents. Nineteen per cent of middle class parents had spent £100 or more, compared to just 8 per cent of working class parents. For households earning over £100,000 per year, a third of children had more than £100 spent on their learning in the first week of shutdown.
- Children in households earning more than £60,000 are twice as likely as those earning under £30,000 to be receiving tuition currently, but the gap has narrowed due to the sharp decline in private tuition following lockdown.
- The Trust has spoken to several organisations which provide tutoring for disadvantaged young people. They have highlighted safeguarding issues as a key barrier in the process of moving provision online, which will take time to resolve. There are also concerns that the disadvantaged young people they are trying to reach may not have access to the resources needed for online tutoring. Some organisations said they were using the online tuition platform Bramble to move their provision online, which has been made available for free online to both tutors and agencies for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak.

Impact on schoolwork

- The Trust asked teachers, via Teacher Tapp, about the quantity and quality of work they are currently getting back from their classes. Almost all secondary school teachers reported that they are receiving work back from their

pupils. However, many are not receiving work from considerable portions of their classes; 24 per cent report that fewer than 1 in 4 children in their class are returning work they have been set.

- Teachers in independent schools were much more likely to say they had all the work they set returned (11%, vs 3% in the most affluent state schools, and 1% in the least affluent).
- Just 37 per cent of teachers in state schools are getting back work that they would characterise as the same standard as normal. Here again, there are socio-economic differences (32% in the most deprived state schools 45% in the most affluent state schools and 52% in private schools).

Mitigation strategies

- Teachers were asked what their schools were doing to mitigate socio-economic gaps and inequality. Some teachers cited targeted action to reduce inequality gaps between students, including contacting specific parents to offer advice about supervised learning (34%).
- Twenty-one per cent reported their school is providing pupils with laptops or other devices to minimise inequality gaps; this was much more common at secondary (31%) than primary schools (31% vs 11%). Very few teachers reported provision on internet access or dongles (2% in primaries and 6% in secondaries).
- Teachers in the state schools with the most affluent intakes were almost twice as likely as those with the least affluent intakes to report their school had provided students with laptops (28% vs 15%).
- Teachers were asked which measures they would support to stop vulnerable pupils from falling behind. The intervention most favoured was provision of additional food boxes to vulnerable families. The second most popular option was sending physical stationary or curriculum resource packs. These preferences reflect the level of basic needs that many children face in the crisis.
- Around half of teachers also supported some form of staggered return to school, or summer 'catch up classes' for disadvantaged pupils.

Recommendations

- While schools are closed, the government should help ensure all children have the resources necessary to access online learning. This includes a laptop or other suitable device, as well as a stable internet connection. These resources could be provided through a collaboration between the government and companies in the technology sector, or through donations.
- Disadvantaged pupils should have access to additional one-to-one or small group tuition to reduce the impact of school closures.
- Training should be provided to teachers to enable them to deliver content to students online. Online teaching being provided to children is currently highly variable, with poorer students less likely to have access to some types of provision.
- Schools should consider running 'catch up classes' for children from poorer backgrounds over the summer or when schools return. Disadvantaged students will be most likely to have fallen behind during closures, with those entering Year 7 at particular risk.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>