



Centre for Applied  
Education Research

# The impact of Covid-19 on learning and wellbeing

November 2020



Although schools have re-opened, Covid restrictions continue to affect children's educational experience, as well as the ability to access external support services.



This report presents findings from a survey looking at the key difficulties faced by schools across Bradford from March to July 2020. The focus of the survey was on vulnerable children, and children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and the impact of Covid-19 on their learning and wellbeing. Based on these data, this report also presents practical solutions to support schools and disadvantaged pupils over the next academic year. Although schools have re-opened, local lockdowns and the need for pupils to self-isolate during Covid outbreaks, means that remote access to educational provision will continue to be a part of children's school experience. In addition, schools are reliant on accessing external support for many pupils, particularly vulnerable and SEND children. This external support will also continue to be affected by Covid restrictions. Therefore, the findings from this survey provide important insights into the key issues that need to be considered and addressed to help schools provide the best educational experience for their pupils.

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This report is organised under five headings representing the key issues raised by schools in response to the survey. These include:

- Particular concerns for **vulnerable children, children with SEND, and children with English as an additional language (EAL)** (p.4). Lack of access to specialist support or resources, lack of routine, and difficulties understanding the situation put these children at particular risk.
- Negative effects on **mental health** and wellbeing for pupils, families and staff, with schools providing **support to families** well above and beyond their educational remit (p.4).
- The need for clearer and more timely **guidance from central and local government**, with many stating that they felt alone in trying to find a way forward (p.5).
- **Poor take up of lockdown places**. Although some children were offered places at school during lockdown, **attendance** was low, especially for vulnerable children and children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan (p.5).
- Difficulties with **access and engagement** for remote learning, which disproportionately affected disadvantaged children (p.6).

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Finally, schools were asked what would help them to provide the best support for their pupils over the next academic year, especially those with additional needs: these practical **recommendations** are presented at the end of the report (p.7). In addition, we present the **resources** available to schools via CAER that could also help provide solutions to the problems outlined in this report (p.8).

A summary of the findings under each of these key issues are presented below, and are based on quantitative and qualitative analyses of the questionnaire responses. Supplementary statistics can be found in the Appendix (p.9).

This report was produced by the Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) and is based on online questionnaires completed by senior leaders and SENCOs across 42 schools in Bradford in July 2020. The majority of responses were from primary schools, but all stages were represented from early years to sixth-form. Many schools were within areas of high deprivation, but schools were distributed across all ten deciles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The percentage of vulnerable children or children with Special Educational Needs in individual schools ranged from 1% to nearly one-third.

This report was authored by Dr Amanda Waterman and Dr Katy Shire, with support from Lydia Gunning and Dr Amy Atkinson. We would like to thank all the teachers and SENCOs who took the time to complete the questionnaire.

# Key Findings

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## 1. Difficulties supporting vulnerable and SEND children

Teachers expressed concern over the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on vulnerable children and children with SEND. Key issues included the lack of access to specialist services such as children's social services, Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), and counselling.

*"Children's services seemed powerless to have any impact on the family until they hit crisis point"*

*"Services such as SALT have been severely impacted and... face to face therapy has stopped. As a result, there has been a lack of advice in supporting our most vulnerable children"*

In addition, lack of resources for children with EAL created issues for schools in supporting these children in learning from home.

*"We are worried about language deprivation and that many of our pupils are not speaking English at home and parents do not speak English to support home learning."*

*"Lack of translators especially for Eastern European families"*

Even when children were attending school, there was concern over how to safely deliver interventions in this setting.

*"We are not clear on how to run interventions in the safest possible way, particularly those involving children from more than one class"*

*"How to run interventions safely with children from more than one group, or interventions that require the adult to be closer than 2m to a child, e.g. reading interventions"*

Finally, children with SEND did not always understand what was happening, and struggled to adapt to the new health and safety procedures.

*"not able to give answers that would make [the children] feel safe e.g. When can I hold your hand again?"*

### Solutions: Recommendation 1 and 3 (p.7)

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## 2. Mental health issues and addressing the needs of the whole family

Schools often reported concerns over mental health for pupils and their families. When asked what concerns they had for the coming academic year, many senior leaders mentioned the social-emotional health and wellbeing of their pupils, and were producing plans on how to identify and support such pupils.

*"Staff, students and parents have all taken a big hit to their mental health"*

*"It quickly became apparent that some families were not okay – generally, this was ... families ... who were self-employed (for example taxi drivers) who were*

*awaiting money/benefits and could not work and were struggling."*

*"Contacted parents and identified children who are already showing signs of having mental health issues"*

*"Providing bespoke plans for children struggling to come to school because of anxiety"*

Schools were providing support well beyond their remit, with all schools phoning families on a regular basis, and over 80% engaging in home visits as well as

providing emotional support to parents. Schools have also been central in helping families to access food vouchers or parcels. All this has in turn impacted on staff mental health, with senior leaders worried about the considerable pressure staff have been under.

*“As a school we were operating in a multi-agency way by providing free hygiene packs, door stop welfare visits, food parcels, learning delivered to children who were not accessing learning as well as bereavement support.”*

*“We liaised with our own staff (who donated plentiful and regularly!), and two charities – who both donated to us regularly. We repeatedly fed up to 160 people and 30 families throughout lockdown.”*

*“School leaders who have not had anytime off since lockdown including holidays and bank holidays could potentially face burnout”*

## Solutions: Recommendation 1 and 5 (p.7 & 8)

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### 3. More timely guidance and support from government

Schools have struggled with the perceived lack of clear central and local government guidance, and have felt alone in trying to make difficult decisions.

*“The government guidance is predicated on an adequate level of testing capacity and a functioning test & trace system which it appears we don’t have locally”*

*“It does need to be said that the amount and timing of guidance has made this a more difficult time than it needed to be. Whilst appreciating that there needs to be some clarity and some flexibility for individual schools to work out how things will work best for their context, the ambiguity has raised too many questions rather than providing answers. This means that schools are ‘going it alone’ leaving them open to criticism when everyone is trying to do their best.”*

*“This current testing debacle is ... completely*

*undermining our efforts to get children back in plus potentially undoing a lot of goodwill built up over the last six months”*

On top of this they have been stretched in terms of having adequate resources to support their pupils, both in terms of staff (given issues with staff shielding or being unwell) and having to spend more money on materials (for example sending physical resources to all pupils at home).

*“Costs of increased hygiene and cleaning, individual resources for pupils and budget constraints”*

*“We are heading to a deficit budget and we do not have high staffing levels”*

*“Additional teaching capacity to cover the staff who will be unable to return to work AND THE COSTS OF THIS”*

## Solutions: Recommendations 4 and 5 (p.8)

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### 4. Poor attendance

Many children who were offered a place at school did not attend. Fewer than half of vulnerable children, and only 1 in 5 children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan took up their offer of a place in school during the main lockdown period. Whilst this figure improved

slightly when schools started the phased re-opening in June, there were still only 2 in 5 children with an EHC plan attending. This compares with 4 in 5 children of keyworkers attending in June & July. The main reason reported for non-attendance was parent concerns about

health and safety, with transportation also proving difficult for some families.

*“We’ve had to work with parents and social care teams to build the confidence so [vulnerable and SEND children] attended everyday”*

Whilst schools have now fully re-opened, it has been reported that 48% of schools in Bradford have had positive Covid cases, and 26% of schools have had year

group/bubble closures as of the 25th September<sup>1</sup>. Such reports may increase parental anxiety around sending children to school. Findings from our questionnaire indicate that the children most likely to be affected by drop-off in attendance, particularly because of health and safety concerns, are vulnerable and SEND children. This then continues to exacerbate the disadvantage gap, with these pupils continuing to miss out on learning and support opportunities at school.

## Solution: Recommendation 2 (p.7)

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### 5. Problems caused by remote learning

Whilst schools have fully re-opened, local lockdowns or the need for schools to ask certain groups of pupils to self-isolate due to Covid outbreaks, means that remote learning will continue to be a part of children’s educational provision. Schools reported that on average 1 in 3 pupils do not have access to an appropriate device, or to reliable internet. This figure dropped to 1 in 10 for some schools in more deprived areas. Furthermore, teachers estimated that almost half of pupils were not engaging in remote learning, with this figure dropping to two-thirds for vulnerable and SEND children. On average, when teaching remotely, about 2.5 hours work a day was being set across schools. However, teachers estimated pupils worked about 2 hours a day overall, with vulnerable and SEND pupils only working about 1.5 hours a day. The lack of school routine, and the need for children to self-motivate and self-organise, created additional cognitive load especially for vulnerable and SEND children.

*“many share devices with siblings/parents who are also working from home. Many only have access to a mobile phone”*

*“In relation to SEND pupils, in particular children with EHCP’s the disruption to routine and boundaries severely impacted children”*

All schools expressed the difficulties many parents had in supporting children’s education at home, particularly parents of children with special educational needs. Level of parental support also varied considerably depending on level of deprivation, parents’ education level, and whether the parent spoke English as an additional language

*“many of our disadvantaged pupils come from homes where education is not valued or the parents are not confident themselves with basic literacy and numeracy skills.”*

*“Often parents have felt out of their depth and feel that they cannot support their children with work at home”*

## Solutions: Recommendations 3 and 5 (p.7 & 8)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/3pgZvTb>

# Recommendations

Schools were asked to suggest practical solutions that would help them over the coming academic year.

Qualitative analysis of these answers revealed some key areas, outlined below.

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## 1. Delivering and accessing interventions

Guidance on how to deliver face-to-face interventions under Covid restrictions such as social distancing and maintaining bubbles.

*“Circle Time, social skills groups have not been able to run. Can’t access support from outside agencies”*

Improving access to, and availability of, online interventions, for example:

- Mental Health support via video or phone, for both children and families.
- Enabling SALT delivery online or via phone, with possible use of hubs.

*“Increased access to mental health and well-being support for children and parents that are struggling with this aspect.”*

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## 2. Additional staff and access to Tutors

Provision of tutors, and funding for extra staff to provide catch-up classes.

*“Funding for additional staffing in schools to target key basic skills and catch-up”*

*“Access to tutoring outside school”*

In particular to try to reduce the growing disadvantage gap that teachers perceive.

*“Families from disadvantaged backgrounds are on the whole less able to develop good learning routines and provide the support to motivate and assist where needed”*

*“the non-disadvantaged parents who can help will have worked with their children at home whereas the disadvantaged households will have found it difficult to help”*

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## 3. Supporting children, and their families, who have English as an additional language

Developing additional resources, especially where remote learning is necessary for groups of pupils due to the need to isolate. Some of these resources could be developed by the Oak Academy or similar partners.

*“We are worried about language deprivation and that many of our pupils are not speaking English at home and parents do not speak English to support home learning.”*

*“We have sought to provide guidance for parents in other languages. This is an area where we could do more.”*

## 4. More timely guidance and support from central and local government

Schools are worried about the logistical and practical aspects of how to implement rules about social distancing, hygiene and cleaning, and maintaining bubbles.

*“Changes in policy guidelines is so quick and sometimes confusing and always stressful”*

*“There needs to be consistent information given to schools regarding Covid 19 and procedures”*

*“Planning for possible local lockdown/school closure”*

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## 5. Additional funding or resource

Many of the issues that schools face have funding implications. This includes the need to put extra hygiene measures in place and adhere to social distancing, the need for additional staff to implement additional support and interventions, and the need to provide additional resources to pupils such as home learning packs.

*“Many things limited by cost e.g. additional handwashing stations, additional cleaning”*

*“We also cannot afford a lot of new resources or*

*additional mental health support than what we already pay for (one afternoon p/wk)”*

*“Require more trained adults to help deliver 1:1 /small group interventions”*

*“Paying for any extra support as we simply do not have any funding available for this”*

*“Costs of increased hygiene and cleaning, individual resources for pupils and budget constraints”*

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## CAER Resources

CAER brings together researchers, schools, educational professionals, and health professionals, and is committed to using research to empower schools to provide the best possible education for their pupils. During this global pandemic, CAER has been working alongside the education sector to identify and promote resources to support schools. An overview of this can be found in our brochure or via our website [www.caer.org.uk](http://www.caer.org.uk). Some key examples are provided below.

We are running a series of webinars for schools in Bradford, bringing together experts in public health, epidemiology, paediatrics and mental wellbeing with school leaders, allowing them to directly gain the information they need to operate safely and with confidence.

The recordings of the previous webinars are available here: <https://bit.ly/2GUE09f>

Our partners in mental health have produced an overview of resources available to support students, parents, and staff wellbeing that can be accessed here <https://bit.ly/38PnzXd>.

In addition our partners in Bradford Public Health are commissioning a healthy schools programme called Living Well Schools which is part of a systems wide approach to improving health and wellbeing in the District.

# Appendix

These statistics are based on responses to the survey from Senior Leadership Teams and Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinators. 42 schools participated including 32 Primary Schools, 8 Secondary Schools, 1 Nursery, and 1 that described itself as a Primary & Secondary School.

**Table 1: Pupils in key groups as a percentage of the school roll**

	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Vulnerable children	8.3%	8.6	0%-30.4%
Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	1.9%	1.0	0%- 3.5%
Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)	12.6%	7.7	1%-30.5%
Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)	44.3%	36.4	0%-99%
Children entitled to Free School Meals	23.6%	12.2	0%-41.1%

**Table 2: Pupils who attended school during the main lockdown period (up to June 1st) compared to when schools partially reopened, as a percentage of those who were offered a place**

		Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Vulnerable children	During lockdown	45.7%	32.0	0%-100%
	From June 1st	55.2%	31.3	0%-100%
Children with an EHCP	During lockdown	20.4%	25.6	0%-100%
	From June 1st	39.8%	30.0	0%-100%
Children with SEND	During lockdown	39.3%	46.5	0%-100%
	From June 1st	43.1%	33.5	0%-100%
Children of key workers	During lockdown	67.7%	33.4	3%-100%
	From June 1st	79.6%	24.5%	16%-100%
All children	During lockdown	46.9%	29.2	4.8%-100%
	From June 1st	57.5%	29.4	13.3%-100%

**Table 3: Issues reported by schools as key concerns preventing parents from sending children to school**

Issue	Percentage of schools reporting this as an issue amongst parents
Health and Safety concerns	69.8%
A member of the family needing to shield	41.5%
The child themselves needing to shield	34.2%
Transportation issues	15.4%

**Table 4: Pupils with access to a device (e.g., a laptop) and pupils with access to the internet as a proportion of the school roll**

	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Pupils with access to a device	62.4%	26.4	10%-100%
Pupils with access to the internet	64.7%	25.1	20%-100%

**Table 5: Number of hours of homework set by teachers and number of hours of homework completed by pupils**

		Mean	Standard deviation	Range
All children	Hours of homework set	3.1	2.1	1-12.5
	Actual hours working	1.9	1.1	0-5
Vulnerable children/ children with SEND	Hours of homework set	2.9	2.2	0.5-12.5
	Actual hours working	1.4	.09	0-4

**Table 6: Pupils engaging in learning and submitting work as a proportion of the school roll**

		Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Percentage of pupils engaging in remote learning	All children	55.8%	29.6	0%-100%
	Vulnerable/SEND children	33.9%	32.0	0%-100%
Percentage of pupils submitting work	All children	49.8%	27.5	9%-99%
	Vulnerable/SEND children	32.8%	32.3	0%-100%

**Table 7: Pupils understanding of the lessons when learning remotely compared to understanding in class before lockdown**

	Significantly worse	Slightly worse	About the same	Slightly better	Significantly better
All children	18.7%	50.7%	29.3%	1.3%	0%
Vulnerable/SEND	30.6%	52.1%	17.4%	0%	0%

We would like to thank all the teachers and SENCOs who took the time to complete the questionnaire.





The Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) was created via the Bradford Opportunity Area and is committed to using research to empower schools to provide the best possible education and start in life for their pupils.



*CAER is a partnership  
between the Wolfson  
Centre for Applied  
Health Research,  
the Universities of  
Leeds and Bradford,  
the Bradford  
Opportunity Area,  
and the Bradford  
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