

Strong signs of recovery across education, but challenges remain

The reports find that much good progress has been made across the education sector to help children and learners recover the knowledge and skills they missed out on during the pandemic. However, amid strong signs of recovery, it's also clear that many education providers continue to face challenges, some of which could have longer-term consequences.

The [4 reports, which follow on from those published in December](#), draw on evidence from around 280 inspections and multiple focus groups with inspectors to understand how early years, schools, further education and skills, and prison education providers are responding to ongoing issues, and the approaches they are taking to help children and learners catch up.

Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

We have seen lots of really good work across early years, schools and further education this term. Most providers are using effective catch-up strategies to spot gaps in children and learners' knowledge and skills and help get them back to where they need to be. In many cases, those gaps have closed altogether. And we've also seen promising improvements in children's well-being and behaviour.

But elsewhere concerns remain, and it's clear that the pandemic has created some lingering challenges. I'm particularly worried about younger children's development, which, if left unaddressed, could potentially cause problems for primary schools down the line.

Early years

Today's report finds that the pandemic has continued to affect young children's communication and language development, with many providers noticing delays in speech and language. Others said babies have struggled to respond to basic facial expressions, which may be due to reduced social interaction during the pandemic.

The negative impact on children's personal, social and emotional development has also continued, with many lacking confidence in group activities.

Children's social and friendship-building skills have been affected. Some providers reported that toddlers and pre-schoolers needed more support with sharing and turn-taking. To address this, staff were providing as many opportunities as possible for children to mix with others and build confidence in social situations.

There continues to be an impact on children's physical development, including delays in babies learning to crawl and walk. Some providers reported that children had regressed in their independence and self-care skills. As a result, several have increased the amount of time children spend on physical activities, to develop gross motor skills.

An increasing number of providers were concerned that, compared with before the pandemic, fewer children have learned to use the toilet independently. This means that more children may not be ready for school by age 4. Providers were also concerned about obesity and dental health, so have focused on providing well-balanced meals and increased time for physical activity.

Many providers reported difficulties retaining high-quality staff since the start of the pandemic. This has left some short of skilled practitioners, which has affected the quality of teaching and catch-up strategies.

Some providers are concerned about their long-term sustainability given fluctuations in numbers of children on roll.

Schools

Today's report finds that the pandemic continued to hinder pupils' learning and personal development into this year. Leaders still described gaps in pupils' knowledge, particularly in mathematics, phonics and writing stamina. However, compared with last term, more leaders said these gaps were closing.

Inspectors saw schools were using effective strategies to check what pupils have learned and to adapt the curriculum to fill gaps in knowledge and skills. Some schools were using regular assessment to identify what pupils have remembered and providing time to revisit concepts that had not been learned well remotely.

The pandemic's impact on some pupils' mental health and well-being remained a concern. Leaders talked about pupils having lower levels of resilience and confidence, and increased levels of anxiety. Many schools were providing in-house support for these pupils because external agencies often had long wait times. This has been particularly challenging for special schools, who rely on a lot of support from other agencies.

Some schools were using the National Tutoring Programme to help pupils who need additional support, but most told Ofsted they preferred to train their own staff as tutors rather than using tuition partners, mainly due to a lack of available tutors. However, this placed additional pressures on school staff.

Staff absence related to COVID-19 was a challenge for schools in the spring term, which was exacerbated by difficulties recruiting supply teachers. This resulted in increased staff workloads, as schools used their own staff to cover lessons.

Further education and skills (FES)

Providers have continued to respond to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic with creativity and resilience. New elements have been added to programmes to reflect the pandemic's impact on the employment landscape, and there has been increased collaboration across the sector to address gaps in learning.

Sixth form colleges noted that many learners had lower levels of knowledge and skills, and were adapting their curriculum to help them make progress.

Work experience placements remained difficult to secure, particularly in health and social care, but providers were working hard to offer alternatives.

The disruption to GCSEs experienced by the newest intake of learners had adversely affected behaviours and attitudes. Providers reported that social skills and confidence had dwindled, and more disruptive behaviour was observed.

The recruitment and retention of staff was challenging for many providers. In some cases, this had impacted on the quality of education and increased staff workloads.

Mental health concerns remained high. New learners who had enrolled from school were experiencing higher levels of exam anxiety. Providers were offering additional support to help learners increase their stamina and prepare for formal examinations.

Many apprentices were not at the required level to take their end-point assessments, and a significant number remained on programmes beyond their planned end date.

Prison education

The number of prisoners participating in education, skills and work was increasing, albeit slowly. But prisoners' participation was still a lot lower than pre-pandemic levels. In some cases, no classroom activity had taken place since March 2020.

Many prison leaders had taken a cautious approach to reintroducing face-to-face classes. This has had a particularly negative impact on prisoners who find it difficult to learn independently, for example those with low levels of literacy and numeracy, who speak English as an additional language, or who have additional learning needs. In some cases, prison leaders were providing one-to-one support for these groups.

Pandemic-related restrictions have reduced the number of prisoners who can take part in face-to-face education. Leaders have therefore had to prioritise which prisoners they offer these opportunities to. Some leaders have prioritised those who have already engaged well with remote education, rather than prisoners with the greatest need for support.

The few education, skills and work activities that were taking place were generally of a good quality. However, the support and resources available did not meet the needs of all learners.

As they returned to the classroom, staff in most prisons were assessing prisoners to identify any gaps in learning due to COVID-19. However, this information was not always used to plan the curriculum in a way that would meet their needs and help them to catch up on missed learning.

Support for prisoners identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) remains insufficient.

An increased number of COVID-19 outbreaks has led to staff absences at all levels, including managers, who have had to turn their hand to operational issues. This has meant that leadership activities, such as planning for an effective curriculum and assuring the quality of education, have been neglected.

[Prime Minister's statement on Ukraine: 3 April 2022](#)

Press release

A statement from Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Russia's despicable attacks against innocent civilians in Irpin and Bucha.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Russia's despicable attacks against innocent civilians in Irpin and Bucha are yet more evidence that Putin and his army are committing war crimes in Ukraine.

No denial or disinformation from the Kremlin can hide what we all know to be the truth – Putin is desperate, his invasion is failing,

and Ukraine's resolve has never been stronger.

I will do everything in my power to starve Putin's war machine. We are stepping up our sanctions and military support, as well as bolstering our humanitarian support package to help those in need on the ground.

The UK has been at the forefront of supporting the International Criminal Court's investigation into atrocities committed in Ukraine, and the Justice Secretary has authorised additional financial support and the deployment of specialist investigators – we will not rest until justice is served.

Published 3 April 2022

[Foreign Secretary statement on appalling acts by Russian invading forces](#)

Press release

Foreign Secretary statement on appalling acts by Russian invading forces in towns such as Irpin and Bucha.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

As Russian troops are forced into retreat, we are seeing increasing evidence of appalling acts by the invading forces in towns such as Irpin and Bucha.

Their indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians during

Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine must be investigated as war crimes.

We will not allow Russia to cover up their involvement in these atrocities through cynical disinformation and will ensure that the reality of Russia's actions are brought to light.

The UK will fully support any investigations by the International Criminal Court, in its role as the primary institution with the mandate to investigate and prosecute war crimes. The UK-led effort to expedite and support an International Criminal Court investigation into crimes in Ukraine was the largest State referral in its history.

We will not rest until those responsible for atrocities, including military commanders and individuals in the Putin regime, have faced justice.

At this time, more than ever, it is essential that the international community continues to provide Ukraine with the humanitarian and military support it so dearly needs, and that we step up sanctions to cut off funding for Putin's war machine at source.

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Eligible pensioners urged to apply for Pension Credit in new campaign

It comes as new figures show many pensioners could be missing out on Pension Credit, a vital financial boost that can be worth over £3,300 a year.

Starting this month, advertising for Pension Credit will feature in internet search results and on social media, before being expanded to national and regional newspapers.

The Department for Work and Pensions will also be distributing leaflets within local communities, while businesses can also get involved in the campaign by spreading the word to their customers using the department's digital toolkit and encouraging them to call the claim line between the hours of 8am-6pm.

All State Pension recipients will continue to receive reminders about Pension Credit in the post as part of the department's annual updating communications.

Currently, over 1.4 million pensioners in Britain receive Pension Credit. However, many are still not claiming this extra financial help and it is estimated up to £1.7bn is being left unclaimed. This is why the DWP is renewing calls for all pensioners to check if they could be eligible.

Minister for Pensions Guy Opperman said:

We recognise the challenges some pensioners will be facing with the cost of living which is why promoting Pension Credit is a priority.

That's why we're calling on everyone with retired family, friends and loved ones to check in with them and see if they can get this extra financial support.

The campaign also includes tackling some of the myths that may stop people applying, such as how having savings, a pension or owning a home are not necessarily barriers to receiving Pension Credit.

It also reminds people that even a small award can provide access to a wide range of other benefits – such as help with housing costs, council tax or heating bills. For those over 75, this includes continued entitlement to a free TV licence.

Pension Credit can be claimed by phone and online, ensuring that older people can apply safely and easily, wherever they are. The online [Pension Credit calculator](#) is also on hand to help pensioners check if they're likely to be eligible and get an estimate of what they may receive.

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK, said:

Pension Credit can make a big difference if you've reached State Pension Age and haven't got much money coming in. With prices rising rapidly at the moment it's more important than ever to claim what's rightfully yours. We urge any older person who thinks they may be eligible to put in a claim and Age UK is here to provide advice and practical support to help you with the process.

Pension Credit is something of a well kept secret – many people have simply not heard of it. That's a real shame because at Age UK we see how much it helps those who actually receive it. We hope this campaign is the first step in a sustained government effort to bring Pension Credit to the older public's attention, and we warmly support it for this reason. Pension Credit is really important for older people and deserves to be much better known.

Morgan Vine, Head of Policy and Influencing at Independent Age, said:

We welcome this campaign to increase Pension Credit uptake. We know this support can be life-changing but for too long, too many people over 65 who are eligible have been missing out.

Older people have told us that before receiving Pension Credit they would skip meals, struggle with a cold home and feel isolated, as they would turn down opportunities to see people because they couldn't even afford a cup of tea in a café.

With the cost-of-living crisis making life even more harsh for people over 65, it has never been more urgent to take action on Pension Credit. Awareness campaigns are one part of the strategic approach that is needed at this critical time, so it is very positive to see the government working with local partners to deliver awareness raising materials.

We look forward to seeing the impact of this campaign, so that further, fast action can be taken to target those who are missing out.

Pension Credit is designed to help with daily living costs for people over State Pension age and on a low income, though you do not need to be in receipt of State Pension to receive it.

It tops up a person's income to a minimum of £177.10 per week for single pensioners or £270.30 for couples. These amounts will rise to £182.60 per week for single pensioners and to £278.70 for couples from 11th April.

Further information

- Knowing that one of the best ways to reach eligible customers is through trusted stakeholders working in the community, the government has also developed the [Pension Credit toolkit](#) as an online tool for agencies and welfare rights organisations to use in order to encourage take-up.
- For more information, to use the free online calculator, to check eligibility or to claim, visit [Pension Credit](#) or call 0800 99 1234.

Media enquiries for this press release – 0115 965 8781

Follow DWP on:

New review launched into Vitamin D intake to help tackle health disparities

- Around one in six adults in the UK have low levels of vitamin D, which can lead to rickets, bone pain and disabilities
- Call for evidence issued to the public, experts, industry and patient groups on innovative ways to boost Vitamin D levels

A new review has been launched to promote the importance of vitamin D and identify ways to improve intake across the population, including through dietary supplements and fortified food and drink.

Around one in six adults and almost 20% of children in the UK have vitamin D levels lower than government recommendations. Older people, the housebound and people from Black and South Asian communities are more likely to have lower levels of the vital vitamin.

Vitamin D deficiency is linked to rickets in children and bone pain and muscle weakness in adults.

The call for evidence, launched today by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), will kickstart a national campaign to raise awareness of the importance of vitamin D and gather views from the public, public health experts, retailers, food manufacturers and other industry bodies on ambitious ways to improve uptake and tackle disparities.

The review comes ahead of the Health Disparities White Paper due to be published later this year, which will set out action to reduce health disparities between different places and communities and address their causes, so that people's backgrounds do not dictate their prospects for a healthy life.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“We must break the link between background and prospects for a healthy life, and I am determined to level up the health of the nation and tackle disparities.

“People from Black and Asian communities, older people and people who have limited access to the outdoors are more likely to have lower levels of vitamin D, which is essential for bone and muscle health and improving years of life lived in good health.

“I have launched this call for evidence to identify innovative ways we can encourage people to increase their vitamin D intake and help people live longer, healthier and happier lives.”

In the UK, people obtain the majority of vitamin D from sunlight on their

skin during the spring and summer, as dietary sources of vitamin D are limited.

Current advice is for all adults and children to consider taking a daily 10 micrograms supplement of vitamin D between October and March. Some at-risk groups are advised to consider taking a supplement throughout the year. However uptake is low with only one in six adults reporting taking a daily supplement.

The call for evidence will last for six weeks and aims to consider how we improve the population's vitamin D levels, particularly among at risk groups.

OHID will engage with representatives from major retailers, pharmacy and health organisations, patient groups and bodies representing people from at risk groups to support the national awareness campaign.

Dr Tazeem Bhatia, Interim Chief Nutritionist at OHID, said:

"I welcome this call for evidence as part of OHID's continued drive to improve health outcomes and tackle health disparities. We want to improve the dietary health of the population and this includes supporting everyone to maintain sufficient vitamin D levels to support strong and healthy bones and muscles."

As part of the Healthy Start scheme, pregnant women and new mothers who are eligible can receive free supplements, which contains folic acid, vitamin C and vitamin D. Children under the age of four who are eligible can also receive free supplements. However, estimated take-up of free vitamin supplements is extremely low.