

Ofsted: Children hardest hit by COVID-19 pandemic are regressing in basic skills and learning

- Ofsted's second report into the impact of the pandemic finds that children who were hardest hit by school closures and restrictions have regressed in some basic skills and learning
- Some young children, who were previously potty-trained, have lapsed back into nappies, particularly those whose parents were unable to work flexibly
- Older children have lost stamina in their reading and writing, some have lost physical fitness, others show signs of mental distress, including an increase in eating disorders and self-harm
- Concerns remain about children who were out of sight during school closures, with falling referrals to social care teams raising fears that domestic neglect, exploitation or abuse is going undetected

Ofsted has today published its second report in a [series looking at the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across the sectors it inspects and regulates](#), from early years and children's social care, through to post 16 education.

The report finds that some children, of all ages and backgrounds, have lost some basic skills and learning as a result of school closures and restrictions on movement.

Ofsted carried out more than 900 visits to education and social care providers during September and October. These visits are not judgemental and do not result in an inspection grade. Instead, they are a way for inspectors to hear how providers are coping with this challenging start to the new academic year. Overwhelmingly, leaders and managers have said they find the visits helpful and constructive.

Today, 5 reports have been published from the visits, reflecting on the experiences of leaders working in schools, further education and skills, early years, social care and special education needs and/or disability (SEND).

Read reports on our findings for:

A [commentary from HM Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman](#), published alongside the reports, says that children and learners have slipped back in their learning to varying degrees since the first national lockdown in March. Some have coped well in the face of restrictions, while others have been particularly hard hit largely because of the interplay between their circumstances and the impact of the pandemic.

Inspectors found children's experiences weren't necessarily determined by privilege or deprivation. Rather, those who are coping well have good support structures around them and have benefited from quality time spent with families and carers. This includes children from all backgrounds, including those within the care system, some of whom who saw relationships with carers improve.

However, among children who were greatly impacted by school closures and other restrictions, basic skills and learning have regressed. For example, some young children whose parents were unable to work more flexibly, and who experienced less time with parents and other children, have lapsed back into nappies, while others have forgotten how to eat with a knife and fork, or lost their early progress in numbers and words.

Among older children, inspectors heard that many now lack stamina in reading and writing; some have lost physical fitness; and others are showing signs of mental distress, manifesting in an increase in eating disorders and self-harm.

Across all age groups, children with SEND have been seriously affected in both their care and education, as the services that families relied on – particularly speech and language services – were unavailable.

Inspectors found that senior leaders across the board are working more intensively than ever and showing remarkable resilience. However, leaders across education and social care expressed their concerns over budgets. Covering for staff absences and maintaining enhanced cleaning regimes are pushing up costs in schools and children's homes. These concerns are compounded in early years and further education by worries over income streams.

Ofsted also continues to be worried about the children who were out of sight during the closure of schools. Referrals to social care teams have fallen and have not returned to more typical levels since schools have reopened. This raises concerns that domestic neglect, exploitation or abuse is going undetected.

[Ofsted's first report, published last month](#), found that around a third of the schools visited had seen an increase in children being educated at home. Today's report finds that this remains a concern, with around a half of schools visited seeing an increase in home schooling. School leaders reported that this was being motivated by parents' fears about the virus, rather than their committed desire to home educate.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman said:

We have now entered a second national lockdown. This time, at least, schools, colleges and nurseries are to remain open. That is very good news indeed. The impact of school closures in the summer will be felt for some time to come – and not just in terms of education, but in all the ways they impact on the lives of young

people.

As it was in the first lockdown, the work of teachers, social workers and carers, with the support of parents, will again be critical to the future success and happiness of our children.

Ofsted's programme of visits will continue remotely during the current lockdown, and further reports will be published in December.

[HMCI commentary: findings from visits in October](#)

Last month, I discussed the [initial findings from our autumn visits](#) to education and social care providers. These visits, unlike inspections, are not aiming to grade schools, colleges, nurseries or children's homes; they are not judgemental at all. Instead, we want to hear from the leaders of these services and use those conversations to better understand the experiences of children and learners during this very challenging start to a new academic year.

In September, we were only able to visit schools and children's homes, but during October we visited all the institutions we would normally inspect. We have published reports that reflect the experiences of leaders working in schools, further education and skills, early years and social care – and we have also looked separately and in more depth at the experiences of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Read reports on our findings for:

Now, after hundreds of visits and discussions, we are developing a clearer picture of how education and social care are responding to the challenges they face at the moment. And we have a better grasp of what those challenges are – both the impact of the pandemic on children, learners and staff, and the systemic issues highlighted or exacerbated over the last 8 months. I'd like to thank all of the leaders and managers who have spoken to us for their candour – and I'm delighted that so many have said they found the discussions helpful and constructive.

It's becoming clear that children's and learners' experiences since the first national lockdown in March fall into 3 broad groups. There are those who have been, and still are, coping well in the face of restrictions; there is a group who have been hardest hit, largely because of the interplay between

their circumstances and the impact of the pandemic; and there is the majority – a group who have slipped back in their learning to varying degrees since schools were closed to most children and movement restricted.

The first group – those coping well – can best be summarised as those with good support structures around them, who benefited from quality time spent with families and carers. This shouldn't be confused for a simple message about privilege versus deprivation. It includes children from all backgrounds, including those within the care system, who saw relationships with carers improve, at the same time as the lockdown meant they weren't dealing with wider pressures and challenges that might exist outside of the home.

For some children with SEND, the simpler routines proved beneficial. Without the timetable pressures of a regular school day, remote learning was a positive for those children who enjoyed learning at their own pace. More time for some with family or carers also helped improve language, literacy and communication.

More generally within education, leaders also reported improved communication skills and development among younger children within this group, resulting from more quality time with family – which mitigated the time lost with peers. And older learners also form part of this group. Many further education courses were already partly taught remotely, so the shift away from the classroom was not such a deprivation for those students, who were already used to flexibility and independent learning.

At the other extreme are those children who were hardest hit by school closures and other restrictions: the children in their earliest years of education whose parents were unable to work more flexibly and who experienced the double whammy of less time with parents and less time with other children. Leaders reported regression back into nappies among potty-trained children and others who had forgotten some basic skills they had mastered, such as eating with a knife and fork – not to mention the loss of early progress in words and numbers.

We were told of older children losing stamina when it came to reading and writing; some who had lost physical fitness; and others showing signs of mental distress, including an increase in eating disorders and self-harm. In further education, we know that many apprentices lost their placements or were furloughed. Across all age groups, children with SEND were seriously affected in both their care and education, as the services that families relied on, particularly speech and language services, were unavailable.

And of course, there continue to be concerns about the children who were out of sight while schools were closed to most pupils. Referrals to social care fell and have still not fully returned to more usual levels as schools have returned, raising concerns that neglect, exploitation or abuse is going undetected.

We also know that there has been an increase in the numbers of children who have not returned to school. We reported last month that around a third of

the schools we visited reported an increase in children being removed from school to be educated at home. During October, around a half of schools visited reported a rise – with leaders clearer that this was being motivated by concerns around the virus, rather than from parents' committed desire to home educate. From our conversations, it seems that there is more of a pattern within minority ethnic communities and households including people who are deemed at greater risk from COVID-19.

Listening to leaders across education and social care, it's apparent that the majority of children have neither thrived nor significantly suffered since March – but it's also clear that there has been a negative impact, particularly on their educational development. Lost learning is unarguable, but it is hard to assess. Identifying exactly what children have not learned from the planned curriculum and what is essential for their next steps is key. School leaders believe they will be able to gauge the longer-term impact over time, which will allow them to structure catch-up more effectively. Currently, alongside some interventions such as small-group support, there are more widespread adaptations to the curriculum to focus on core subjects, as we reported last month. It's important that these adaptations are short term and do not slide into a more corrosive, longer-term narrowing of the curriculum.

For now, though, school leaders recognised they were 'firefighting' – which takes a number of forms. Managing COVID-security seems to be evolving. This is particularly the case when it comes to the issues of 'bubbles' and the response to a positive test within the school. While some schools send an entire bubble home to isolate, others have put in place measures such as fixed seating arrangements, to allow for the test and trace process to be more targeted.

Remote learning for those who are self-isolating is the focus of much attention. As we reported last month, schools are putting remote learning in place, often supported by technology and sometimes involving live-streaming lessons.

However, it remains the case that the home learning experience is patchy and, in many cases, not aligned effectively with the classroom curriculum. Children who isolate as part of a bubble seem to be better off than the very many children who are isolating individually, sometimes because of their own health, but more often because of contact with someone who tested positive. And of course, remote learning also requires motivation from pupils who might otherwise be distracted by other technological temptations.

School leaders reported that boys in particular had spent much of the lockdown gaming online with friends. That, and social media use more generally among boys and girls, has impacted on the established social networks in schools. Leaders told us that although the return to clear structures and boundaries at school has often resulted in an unexpected improvement in behaviour, online squabbles while schools were closed are now being played out in classrooms.

The challenges of aligning the classroom curriculum with work done remotely

was cited as one of a number of workload pressures on teachers and schools. Others included the need to cover staff absences, with many headteachers reporting that they were taking classes to provide cover, in addition to their leadership duties. There are frustrations too with the shifting guidelines that schools are required to follow. It is clear that senior leaders across the board are working more intensively than ever, and showing remarkable resilience.

Budgets, as ever, are clearly on the minds of leaders across education and social care. Covering for staff absences and maintaining enhanced cleaning regimes are budgetary pressures most affecting schools and children's homes; these are compounded in early years and further education by concerns over income streams. Local authorities are also feeling the financial squeeze, particularly in relation to supporting vulnerable families and the costs of placements for looked after children. And not all systemic issues are financial. The availability of support and services for children with SEND is a perennial issue, as is sufficiency in the care system. Added to that, the pandemic has led to backlogs in the family courts, which can leave children at risk for longer or conversely, slow them down from moving to a permanent home. These are thorny issues for policymakers to deal with in good times; they have added gravity now.

We have now entered a second national lockdown. This time, at least, schools, colleges and nurseries are to remain open. That is very good news indeed. The impact of school closures in the summer will be felt for some time to come – and not just in terms of education, but in all the ways they impact on the lives of young people. As it was in the first lockdown, the work of teachers, social workers and carers, with the support of parents, will again be critical to the future success and happiness of our children. Our visits will continue remotely – and we will report again in December.

PM call with Prime Minister of Canada: 9 November 2020

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada this evening.



The Prime Minister talked to Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada this evening.

They discussed the coronavirus pandemic and welcomed the promising results from the Pfizer / BioNTech vaccine trials – but agreed that these are early days and there are no guarantees.

The leaders committed to work closely together and with international partners – including President-elect Biden – to champion openness, shared values and the rules-based system during the UK's G7 Presidency in 2021.

Ahead of the Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December and the COP26 Summit in Glasgow next year, they also discussed the importance of global climate action and the need for countries to set ambitious targets to cut emissions and to reach net zero.

The leaders agreed to continue strengthening the bilateral relationship between the UK and Canada – in areas such as trade and security – and to work together to address shared global challenges, including through groupings such as Five Eyes and the Commonwealth.

Published 9 November 2020

[Expulsion of two British diplomats from Belarus: Foreign Secretary statement](#)

Government response

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab gave the following statement on the expulsion of two British diplomats from Belarus.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

“The expulsion of two British diplomats for legitimately observing protests in Minsk is wholly unjustified. As independent reports show, this is part of a concerted campaign of harassment aimed at activists, media and now diplomats.

“Instead of trying to bully those shining a light on his repression, Mr Lukashenko must agree to free and fair elections and enable those responsible for violence against demonstrators to be held to account.”

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[More rapid COVID-19 tests to be rolled out across England](#)

- Next stage of partnership between NHS Test and Trace and local directors of public health will enable increased testing of priority and high-risk groups in local communities on a weekly basis
- Increase in asymptomatic testing will help pick up more cases, stop the spread of the virus and support communities and critical industries

Over half a million rapid-turnaround lateral flow tests will be sent out by NHS Test and Trace to local public health leaders this week, signalling the next phase of the government’s plan to expand asymptomatic testing for COVID-19, the Prime Minister announced today.

Test kits will be issued to over 50 directors of public health across England this week, to enable local teams to direct and deliver community testing based on their local knowledge. Each will receive a batch of 10,000 antigen lateral flow devices as part of a new pilot to enable them to start testing priority groups.

Directors of public health will determine how to prioritise the allocation of

these new tests, based on the specific needs of their communities, and will determine how people in the local area are tested. They will be supported by NHS Test and Trace to expand testing programmes in their area through access to training and clinical and operational guidance.

This initial 600,000 batch will then be followed up with a weekly allocation of lateral flow antigen tests. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has now written to all upper-tier local authority leaders, confirming that all directors of public health will be offered this weekly allocation, equivalent to 10% of their population. This will build on the existing partnerships between NHS Test and Trace and local leaders.

Directors of public health were prioritised for the first phase of rapid community testing based on the local prevalence of COVID-19 and expressions of interest to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Any director of public health who wants to start rolling out local testing using lateral flow tests can do so by contacting DHSC.

Proactively testing asymptomatic individuals will help identify those who unknowingly have the virus and enable those who test positive and their contacts to self-isolate, which can help drive down the R rate locally and save lives. This is crucial to break the chains of transmission of the virus and to support critical industries, key workers and institutions. With lower rates of transmission, those at highest risk from the virus will be more protected and residents will feel more confident in getting back to their day-to-day lives.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, said:

Last week we rolled out mass testing in Liverpool using new, rapid technology so we can detect this virus quicker than ever before, even in people who don't have symptoms. Mass testing is a vital tool to help us control this virus and get life more normal.

I am delighted to say 10,000 of these tests will now be sent out by NHS Test and Trace to over 50 directors of public health as part of our asymptomatic testing strategy. I want to thank all directors of public health for their support and efforts over the past months to help us tackle this virus, bring it under control and get the country back to what we love doing.

This rollout will further develop the evidence base for how testing with fast, reliable COVID-19 tests can be delivered at scale. Local leaders will also benefit from a more accurate picture of the number of cases in their area, by picking up those who may not have symptoms, supporting local decision-making to manage the spread of the virus and support their communities.

This innovative new testing technology – which is already being rolled out as part of whole-city testing in Liverpool that began on Friday – can provide results within an hour without needing to be processed in a lab.

Liverpool has set up 16 testing sites for asymptomatic testing, a number of mobile test units and is delivering a significant number of home testing kits across the city.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

I am delighted that as part of our expansion of testing we are able to partner with local authorities to deliver these new rapid turnaround tests to our local communities. Building on national capacity of 500,000 tests a day, we are now moving to the next stage of testing tailored around the individual needs of local areas with control in the hands of local directors of public health.

There has been a huge amount of work to develop these new testing capabilities and I want to thank colleagues across NHS Test and Trace, Public Health England and the wider scientific community for ensuring that we are one of the first countries in the world who are able to deploy these new tests for the benefit of our public.

Anyone who tests positive must self-isolate along with their household immediately and their contacts will be traced. Eligible individuals who test positive – and contacts who are required to self-isolate – will be entitled to the [£500 Test and Trace Support Payment](#) in the same way as a regular swab test ordered through NHS Test and Trace.

Those who test negative will need to continue to follow all national guidance.

Today's announcement follows the [Prime Minister's commitment on 16 October](#) that lateral flow antigen tests would soon be made available to directors of public health in England for them to direct and deliver an expansion of asymptomatic testing in line with local priorities.

The government has also committed to providing the Devolved Authorities with an allocation of lateral flow tests as they are made available, as part of UK-wide collaboration to stop the spread of the virus. Eligibility and deployment of testing in devolved administrations will be determined by the respective administrations.

NHS Test and Trace is already working closely with local authority leaders to tailor testing to local need. This includes agreeing the sites of mobile testing units and local (walk-in) test sites, surging in testing to support outbreak management and in managing regular testing in care homes. This deeper partnership with local authorities builds on this with NHS Test and Trace providing the tests, clinical and operational expertise, designs of test sites and protocols and creating a best-practice network to share learning across local areas and with the national team.

Lateral flow antigen tests are a new kind of technology that could be used to

test a higher proportion of asymptomatic people, better enabling us to identify and isolate more people who are at high likelihood of spreading virus, and break the chain of transmission.

Lateral flow devices do not require a laboratory to process the test. Swabbing and processing of these tests must currently be conducted at a dedicated testing site by trained personnel. The devices are designed to be intuitive and require minimal training to operate, and we are looking at how this test could be self-administered.

The devices will be issued to directors of public health in the following local authorities:

- Barking and Dagenham
- Bexley
- Birmingham
- Blackburn and Darwen
- Blackpool
- Bolton
- Brent
- Bristol
- Bury
- Calderdale
- Camden
- City of London
- County Durham
- Coventry
- Darlington
- Doncaster
- Dudley
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Enfield
- Essex
- Gateshead
- Greenwich
- Hackney
- Halton
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Hartlepool
- Hertfordshire
- Kingston upon Hull
- Islington
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Kingston upon Thames
- Knowsley
- Lambeth
- Lewisham
- Luton
- Manchester
- Middlesbrough
- Newcastle upon Tyne

- Newham
- North Tyneside
- Northumberland
- Nottingham City
- Nottinghamshire
- Oldham
- Redbridge
- Redcar and Cleveland
- Richmond upon Thames
- Rochdale
- Salford
- Sefton
- South Tyneside
- Southwark
- St Helen's
- Staffordshire
- Stockport
- Stockton-on-Tees
- Sunderland
- Tameside
- Tower Hamlets
- Trafford
- Wakefield
- Waltham Forest
- Wandsworth
- Warrington
- Wigan
- Wirral
- Wolverhampton

Stoke on Trent, Liverpool and Lancashire have already been provided with lateral flow tests before this week.