



BRIEFING PAPER

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Coronavirus and schools: FAQs

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Summary

This briefing paper looks at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and pupils. It largely focuses on England, but includes some information about Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. You can use the links in the contents page on the previous page to navigate to the areas you are interested in.

School closures during initial lockdown period, and attendance in autumn 2020 term

Schools and other education settings across the UK were closed to most children and young people from the week beginning 23 March 2020.

The Governments of all four UK nations planned for a return to full-time education for the vast majority of pupils, after the school summer holidays.

The DfE has recently begun publishing more detailed attendance data for schools for the autumn 2020 term as well as some data about Covid-19 related absences.

Examinations and results

No public examinations took place in summer 2020. Students in England received calculated A Level grades, derived from a combination of teacher judgement and statistical adjustment. However, the grading process was highly controversial and Ministers announced on 17 August 2020 that A Level (and GCSE) pupils in England would either receive grades based on their unadjusted centre (teacher) assessment grade, or their adjusted grade – whichever was higher.

The Scottish Government had earlier made a similar decision, withdrawing standardised grades after their issue. Wales and Northern Ireland also took similar courses of action to England.

Exams in 2021

The Government's intention for England is that GCSEs and A Levels will go ahead next year. The Scottish Government says that National 5 examinations (broadly, GCSE equivalent) will not go ahead in 2021, but Highers and Advanced Highers will – subject to review.

Guidance on school re-opening following the summer holidays

All four UK nations have published guidance on social distancing, the use of personal protective equipment, and what to do where cases are suspected or identified in a school setting, for the autumn term.

Impact of 2020 school closures on children and young people's education, development and wellbeing

Survey evidence indicates wide disparities in young people's home learning experiences; there have been particular concerns about the impact of school closures on disadvantaged children, leading to the Department for Education (in England) announcing catch-up funding and a national tutoring programme.

Free school meals

For information and resources about the provision of free school meals during the Covid-19 pandemic please see [Opposition Day Debate Free school meals](#), 20 October 2020.

1. What happened with exams and awarding in 2020?

1.1 England

There were no GCSE or A Level examinations in Summer 2020. Instead, a different process, including statistical standardisation, was initially used to provide most candidates in England with A Level grades. This process proved highly controversial, and on 17 August 2020 it was announced that school or college assessments of pupils' ability would be used instead, unless the moderated grade was higher.

17 August announcements

A level results in England were originally announced on 13 August 2020. Significant concern was raised about the impact of the system used to assign grades (see below), focusing in particular on students from less advantaged schools or colleges who had been awarded lower grades than expected, preventing them from taking up places at their preferred university.

On 17 August, Ofqual issued a [statement](#) withdrawing the previous system, and stating that grades would be awarded on the basis of information teachers had submitted about individual pupils – known as Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs). This would apply to AS and A levels, and also to the GCSE results to be published on 20 August:

There was no easy solution to the problem of awarding exam results when no exams have taken place. Ofqual was asked by the Secretary of State to develop a system for awarding calculated grades, which maintained standards and ensured that grades were awarded broadly in line with previous years. Our goal has always been to protect the trust that the public rightly has in educational qualifications.

But we recognise that while the approach we adopted attempted to achieve these goals we also appreciate that it has also caused real anguish and damaged public confidence. Expecting schools to submit appeals where grades were incorrect placed a burden on teachers when they need to be preparing for the new term and has created uncertainty and anxiety for students. For all of that, we are extremely sorry.

We have therefore decided that students be awarded their centre assessment for this summer - that is, the grade their school or college estimated was the grade they would most likely have achieved in their exam - or the moderated grade, whichever is higher.

The statement further said Ofqual was working with the Department for Education and universities on the way forward.¹

Ofqual issued a separate statement on the [grading of vocational and technical qualifications](#) (VTQs), such as BTECs. A different system had been in place for grading these qualifications:

¹ Ofqual, [Statement from Roger Taylor, Chair, Ofqual](#), 17 August 2020

Under the framework for VTQs, each awarding organisation has been responsible for developing its own model for issuing results in line with a set of principles. The framework allows awarding organisations, where necessary, to prioritise the issue of sufficiently valid and reliable results over the maintenance of standards. Ofqual developed and implemented this framework in close collaboration with awarding organisations and the wider sector. Although calculated results have been issued for many VTQs, in only a very few cases has the same kind of statistical standardisation process of Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) been used – in other words, we think there are few qualifications where the cohort has received entirely algorithmically determined grades.

Where a standardisation model similar to the Ofqual model for GCSEs and A levels had been used, Ofqual had asked the relevant organisations to review their approach. As a result, Ofqual believed “a small proportion” of VTQ results would be reissued.²

On 19 August, following Ofqual’s announcements, the awarding body Pearson announced that it was [regrading the following BTECs](#): BTEC Level 3 Nationals (2010 QCF and 2016 RQF), BTEC Level 1/2 Tech Awards, BTEC Level 2 Technicals and BTEC Level 1/2 Firsts.

Pearson said this was “to deliver fair outcomes for BTEC students in relation to A Levels and GCSEs and to ensure that no student is disadvantaged,” and that no grades would go down as part of the review.³

Original process for awarding grades

Schools and colleges were asked to provide a centre assessment grade (CAG). This is the grade a student would have been most likely to have achieved if they’d sat their exams and completed any non-exam assessment. They were also asked to supply awarding bodies with a list of candidates in rank order, within each grade, for each subject.

Standardisation

Following a [consultation](#), exams regulator for England, Ofqual, also decided that exam boards should standardise grades. This involved the use of:

a statistical model which will include the expected national outcomes for this year’s students, the prior attainment of students at each school and college (at cohort, not individual level), and previous results of the school or college.⁴

The consultation set out the aims of standardisation as:

- i. to provide students with the grades that they would most likely have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020;

² Ofqual, [Grading of vocational and technical qualifications](#), 17 August 2020

³ Pearson, [Results day support for learners and parents](#), 19 August 2020

⁴ Ofqual news story, [‘Ofqual GCSE and A level consultation outcomes and autumn exam series proposals’](#), 22 May 2020.

- ii. to apply a common standardisation approach, within and across subjects, for as many students as possible;
- iii. to use a method that is transparent and easy to explain, wherever possible, to encourage engagement and build confidence;
- iv. to protect, so far as is possible, all students from being systematically advantaged or disadvantaged, notwithstanding their socio-economic background or whether they have a protected characteristic;
- v. to be deliverable by exam boards in a consistent and timely way that they can quality assure and can be overseen effectively by Ofqual.⁵

In response to the consultation, Ofqual confirmed that the standardisation process would:

place more weight on a centre's historical performance in a subject than the submitted centre assessment grades where that will result in students getting the grades that they would most likely have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020.⁶

Further information on the standardisation process can be found in Ofqual's [interim report on awarding in summer 2020](#).⁷

What proportion of Centre Assessed Grades were adjusted?

As noted above, on 13 August, Ofqual announced the (standardised) A level and AS level results for England.

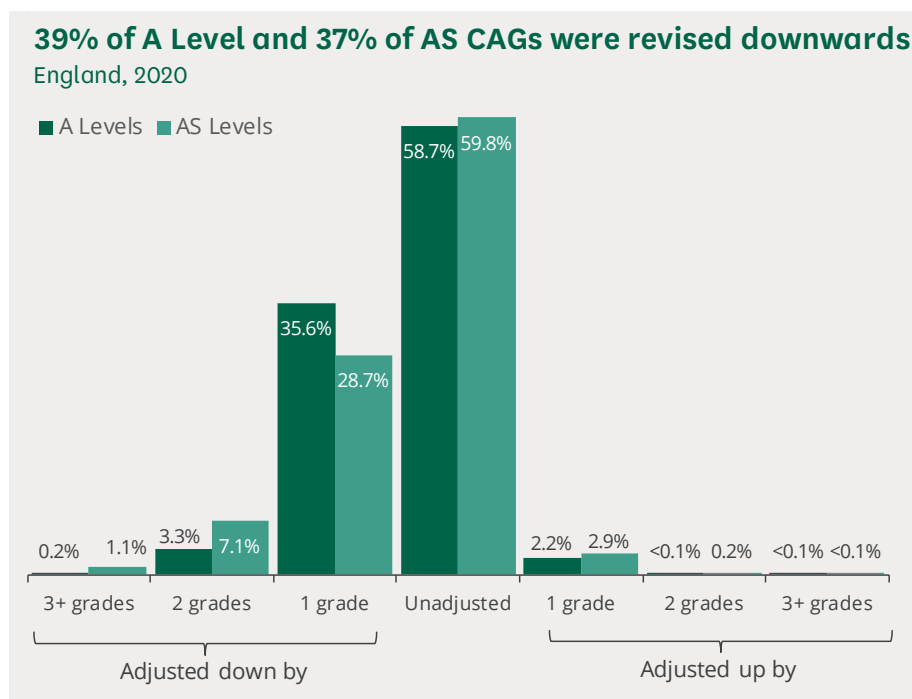
The table below shows that in total **39.1%** of A level Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) were adjusted downwards, around **2.2%** were adjusted upward, and **58.7%** of entries were not adjusted. While **36.9%** of AS level CAGs were adjusted downwards, around **3.1%** were adjusted upward, and **59.8%** of entries were not adjusted.⁸

⁵ Ofqual consultation, [Exceptional arrangements for assessment and grading in 2020](#), 24 April 2020, p7.

⁶ Ofqual news story, '[Ofqual GCSE and A level consultation outcomes and autumn exam series proposals](#)', 22 May 2020

⁷ Ofqual, [Awarding GCSE, AS, A level, advanced extension awards and extended project qualifications: Summer 2020](#), 13 August 2020.

⁸ Ofqual, [Awarding GCSE, AS, A level, advanced extension awards and extended project qualifications: Summer 2020](#) (Table 9.8)



Source: [Awarding GCSE, AS, A level, advanced extension awards and extended project qualifications: Summer 2020, Ofqual](#). (Table 9.8)

There were 718,276 A level exam **entries** in total, this means that around 280,800 CAGs were adjusted downwards, 15,800 were adjusted upwards and 421,600 were not adjusted.

There were 70,505 AS level exam **entries** in total, this means that around 26,000 CAGs were adjusted downwards, 2,200 were adjusted upwards and 42,200 were not adjusted.⁹

Equivalent information about the proportion of GCSE grades that were adjusted is not available because they were published on 20 August after the change to the grading system.

Parliamentary activity on exam grading

On 2 September 2020, Ofqual officials gave evidence to the Education Committee. The Committee had earlier published a report, [Getting the grades they've earned](#), which warned that young people may miss out on the grades they should get, and that the moderation process risked inaccuracy and bias.¹⁰

Chair of Ofqual, Roger Taylor, spoke about the original system for awarding grades, telling the Committee that it had been a “fundamental mistake” to believe that the original system would ever have been acceptable to the public.¹¹

He also told the Committee that Ofqual’s initial advice to the Government had been to hold exams in a socially-distanced manner.

⁹ Ofqual, [Awarding GCSE, AS, A level, advanced extension awards and extended project qualifications: Summer 2020](#) (Table 9.8)

¹⁰ Education Committee press release, [‘Young people risk missing out on deserved results in this year’s system for awarding grades, MPs warn’](#), 11 July 2020.

¹¹ Education Committee, [Transcript of Oral Evidence](#), 2 September 2020, Q944

The second option was to delay exams, and the third was to use calculated grades.¹²

There was also an [opposition day debate on exam grading](#), and the involvement of Ministers, on 9 September 2020.

1.2 Scotland

Scotland's original approach to awarding qualifications in 2020 was similar, but not identical, to that proposed for England, in that it used a combination of teacher assessment and moderation. Information on Scotland's original awarding methodology can be found on the [Scottish Qualification Authority's \(SQA\) website](#).

Scotland announces withdrawal of lowered grades

Scottish exam results for National 5s, Highers, and Advanced Highers were announced on 4 August 2020. Press reports noted that large numbers of students had received lower grades than they might have expected.¹³

In a statement six days later, on Monday 10 August 2020, First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon said that in reference to exam awarding, the Scottish Government "did not get this right, and I am sorry for that". She added that "too many students felt they had lost out", as a result of "a statistical model or an algorithm", and that the burden had not fallen equally across society.¹⁴

Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, made a further statement in the Scottish Parliament the following day, Tuesday 11 August 2020. In this, he apologised to students who received lower grades than they were expecting, but noted that three-quarters of grades were not adjusted during the statistical process at all. He said that the Scottish Government would:

- Require that all awards that were downgraded following statistical standardisation were **withdrawn**, and reissued based solely on teacher or lecturer judgement.
- Ensure affected students got fresh certificates.
- Permit learners whose grade was increased following statistical moderation, to keep those grades.
- Ensure that there were sufficient places in universities for the 2020-21 academic year.
- Commission an independent review of the awarding process, led by Professor Mark Priestly, of the University of Stirling.¹⁵

¹² As above, Q797.

¹³ See e.g., '[Scotland's results day: Thousands of pupils have exam grades lowered](#)', BBC News, 4 August 2020.

¹⁴ Nicola Sturgeon speech, '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) update: First Minister's speech 10 August 2020](#)', 10 August 2020.

¹⁵ Statement to the Scottish Parliament, [Examination Results](#), 11 August 2020.

The Scottish Government published [its response](#) to Prof. Priestly's rapid review on 7 October 2020.¹⁶

1.3 What about exams in summer 2021?

England

Students currently in school years 10 and 12, and their peers in colleges, are due to take GCSE, A Level and equivalent qualifications in Summer 2021, yet will have missed a considerable amount of face-to-face teaching owing to school and college closures. This has led to some in the sector advocating that adjustments are made for next year's exam series.

On 2 July 2020, Ofqual launched a consultation on examinations in 2021.¹⁷ It published its response on 3 August 2020.¹⁸ Key decisions included that exam boards:

- Should change how they assess content in GCSE geography, history and ancient history
- Should change how they assess GCSE English literature, to allow for some choice in the content to be covered.
- Should not, in general, make greater use of optional questions in exams – this had been proposed as a way of accounting for the fact that some students may not have covered the whole exam syllabus owing to school closures.
- will not, in general, be required to change the length, number or format of the exam papers.
- should allow for a range of adjustments to the assessment arrangements in some subjects owing to public health requirements, for example, GCSE food preparation and nutrition, GCSE, AS and A level music and GCSE physical education.

On 12 October 2020, the Department for Education confirmed that GCSE, AS and A Level exams in England were planned to go ahead in summer 2021, but in most cases, the start would be delayed by 3 weeks.¹⁹

On 13 October 2020, Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, [wrote to](#) exam regulator, Ofqual, about contingency planning in the event that COVID-19 disrupted 2021 exams.

Scotland

the Scottish Government has announced that National 5 exams will not go ahead in 2021.²⁰ National 5s are roughly equivalent to GCSEs.

¹⁶ Scottish Government, '[National Qualifications experience 2020 - rapid review: our response](#)', 7 October 2020.

¹⁷ Ofqual, '[Consultation on proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021](#)', 2 July 2020.

¹⁸ Ofqual, '[Consultation decisions - proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021](#)', 3 August 2020

¹⁹ Department for Education press release, '[Students to be given more time to prepare for 2021 exams](#)', updated 13 October 2020.

²⁰ Scottish Government news article, '[SOA awards 2021](#)', 7 October 2020.

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The intention is that there will be an alternative certification model for these qualifications.

Higher and Advanced Higher exams are still planned for Scotland for 2021, subject to review. Further information on the plans for Scotland can be found in:

- SQA, [‘Consultation outcomes – National Qualifications in 2020/21’](#).
- The Scottish Government’s [response to an independent rapid review](#) of National Qualifications in 2020.

2. Background on school closures and re-openings

2.1 School closures

Schools in all parts of the UK were closed to most children by the start of the week commencing Monday 23 March 2020. In England, some schools remained open where necessary for the children of critical workers, and vulnerable children, including:

- Those with a social worker
- Looked-after children
- Those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan because they have complex special educational needs.

Information on attendance rates can be found in section 3, below.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also put similar arrangements in place for the children of critical workers, and vulnerable pupils.

2.2 A phased re-opening in England

In his [address to the nation](#) on 10 May 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that if the Government's conditions were met, more children and young people could begin returning to school from 1 June 2020, at the earliest.²¹

The DfE published [further guidance](#) on 11 May 2020. Initially, and for mainstream settings, the focus would be on children in the following year groups:

- Nursery
- Reception (aged 4 to 5)
- Year 1 (aged 5 to 6)
- Year 6 (aged 10 to 11 – in the final year of primary schooling in two-tier systems).
- Year 10 (aged 14 to 15 - the year before GCSE or equivalent exams)
- Year 12 (aged 16 to 17 - the year before A level or equivalent exams)

The DfE subsequently said it would encourage middle schools²² to open to year 6 pupils first, "to ensure national parity for children in this year group."²³

Special schools would work toward a phased return, but without a focus on specific year groups.

²¹ [PM address to the nation on coronavirus](#), 10 May 2020.

²² Some areas of England have three-tier systems of schooling, with first, middle, and upper/ higher schools. Middle schools typically cater for pupils aged 9 to 13.

²³ Department for Education, '[Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020](#)', updated 16 June 2020.

From 15 June 2020, secondary pupils in years 10 and 12, and their equivalents in colleges, were able to partially return.

In an oral statement to Parliament on 9 June 2020, Gavin Williamson said:

While we are not able to welcome all primary children back for a full month before the summer, we continue to work with the sector on the next steps, where we would like schools that have the capacity to bring back more children—in those smaller class sizes—to do so if they are able to before the summer holidays.

We will be working to bring all children back to school in September.

He also confirmed that “exams [would] take place next year” and said that the Government was working with exam regulator, Ofqual, on the arrangements for this.²⁴

On 23 June 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed that “primary and secondary education [would] recommence in September with full attendance”.²⁵

Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, told LBC Radio on 29 June 2020 that attendance at school would not be at parents’ discretion (as it has been in the summer term). Parents would be expected to send in their children unless there were good reasons not to – for example, a local spike in infections. Fines for non-attendance, suspended during the stricter lockdown period, would be re-introduced.²⁶

2.3 Infection and outbreak rates in schools during the partial reopening in England

Public Health England (PHE) calculated Coronavirus infection rates for staff and students attending all education settings in England between 1 June and 31 July. There was a total of 198 confirmed cases (70 students and 128 in staff members) across all educational settings in England.²⁷

PHE also published both infections and attendance data for certain settings (early years, primary and secondary schools). This means that the estimated proportion of pupils infected can be calculated for these types of settings.

During the period there were a total of 174 confirmed cases (67 students and 107 in staff members) in early years, primary and secondary schools. The vast majority of cases occurred in early years and

²⁴ [Oral Statement to Parliament](#), 9 June 2020, Col 176 onward.

²⁵ [HC Deb 23 June, 2020 Col. 1167](#).

²⁶ ‘Penalty fines for missing school next term’, *BBC News*, 29 June 2020.

²⁷ Public Health England, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), 23 August 2020 (page 3)

primary schools (65 students) and a minority in secondary schools (2 students).²⁸

The number of confirmed cases expressed as a proportion of the average number of students attending these settings was less than 0.01%, and for teachers it was around 0.02%.²⁹

The proportion of these settings with at least one infection was around 0.17%. However, this does not take into account the possibility that during the period subsequent infections occurred at the same setting.³⁰

These findings suggested that overall infections and outbreaks were “uncommon” across all educational settings, especially compared to other institutions such as hospitals, care homes, prisons and certain workplace settings. This is in line with findings from other countries.³¹

The study also found there was a “strong correlation” between the number of outbreaks and regional COVID-19 incidence which “emphasises the importance of controlling community transmission to protect educational settings”.³²

However, PHE highlighted that because their findings were from a period when schools were only partially reopened (with stringent infection control measures and while attendance was not mandatory) they may not be generalisable to the conditions when schools fully reopen. In addition, the small sample of open secondary schools means their findings are “not likely to be generalisable to secondary schools”.

³³

2.4 England’s schools from September 2020

The DfE has published guidance on how schools should operate from September 2020. Key points are that:

- Schools have been asked to reduce contacts between individuals, including by creating ‘social bubbles’.
- Older children will be encouraged to keep a distance from others, and staff, where possible.
- Schools are expected to offer a broad and balanced curriculum again, in all subjects.
- Where children are not attending because they are following clinical or public health advice, then absence will not be penalised.
- The planned introduction of a statutory reception baseline assessment would be postponed to September 2021.³⁴

²⁸ Public Health England, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), 23 August 2020 (Table 1)

²⁹ Same as above (Table 1)

³⁰ Same as above (Table 1)

³¹ Same as above (page 10)

³² Same as above (page 2)

³³ Same as above (page 12)

³⁴ Department for Education, [Guidance for full opening: schools](#), (21 October 2020).

- There is no blanket advice that all pupils should wear face masks in all situations – and at the time of writing the advice against the wearing of face masks in classrooms.

The DfE has updated its [guidance for parents and carers](#), and published separate [guidance for special schools](#).

It has also published [additional guidance on face coverings in education](#).

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) has published [guidance for areas with local restrictions](#), which refers to schools.

What are schools in England required to do when children aren't attending for reasons linked to COVID-19?

The Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, has issued a [temporary continuity direction](#) under the *Coronavirus Act 2020*, as amended. This concerns remote education where pupils are unable to attend school for reasons connected to the pandemic. The direction applies to schools and other settings in England that educate state-funded pupils of (and in some cases, below) compulsory school age.

An [explanatory note](#) to the direction clarifies that:

- Qualifying schools and settings are expected to provide immediate remote education where a pupil or group of pupils cannot attend
- The direction comes into force on 22 October 2020.

The DfE's expectations on how remote education should work are outlined [in the main COVID-19 guidance for schools in England](#).

2.5 How many pupils were absent due to Covid-19 related reasons since schools reopened?

The Department for Education has published estimates for the number of pupils absent from school due to Covid-19 related reasons based on the daily attendance figures which [schools have provided](#) to them. Data is available as of 15 October and 22 October. Due to half term falling between these dates caution should be taken when making comparisons. The DfE has excluded schools closed for half term for the data as of 22 October.

As of [22 October](#), 557,000 pupils (6-7%) in state-funded schools did not attend school for COVID-19 related reasons (excluding schools closed for half term). This compares to 412,000 pupils (4-5%) the previous week (earlier data is not available).

Of these 557,000 pupils not attending due to Covid-19 related reasons:

- 10,000 pupils (0.1%) had a confirmed case of coronavirus
- 33,000 pupils (0.4%) had a suspected case of coronavirus

- Up to 459,000 pupils (4.8-6.0%) were self-isolating due to potential contact with a case of coronavirus
- 55,000 pupils (0.7%) attended schools which were closed for COVID-19 related reasons

As of 22 October, approximately 26% of state-funded schools said they had one or more pupils self-isolating who had been asked to do so due to potential contact with a case of coronavirus inside the school. This is 55% of state-funded secondaries and 20% of state-funded primaries.

A smaller proportion (16-18%) had 30 or more pupils self-isolating due to potential contact with a case of coronavirus inside the school.

The average (median) size of groups asked to self-isolate was around 14% of pupils on roll in state-funded primaries and around 6-7% of pupils on roll in state-funded secondaries.

Further detail about Covid-19 infections can be found within the [coronavirus in the UK dashboard](#), [national COVID-19 surveillance reports](#) and [coronavirus infection survey pilot statistics](#).

2.6 Re-opening of schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Traditionally, Scottish schools have an earlier summer break than those in England and Wales; they began re-opening from mid-August 2020, around the same time as they would normally.

Originally, the Scottish Government had planned that schools would operate a blended learning model in the autumn term, with pupils only attending part-time. However, on 23 June 2020, Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, [stated that](#) given progress on tackling the virus, the intention was to allow pupils to attend full-time.³⁵ It subsequently [published guidance](#) for local authorities and schools on planning for the phased reopening³⁶.

Schools in **Wales** opened to all pupils in September 2020. On 19 October 2020, the Welsh Government published [updated advice](#) on considerations for schools in the autumn term.

The **Northern Ireland** Executive confirmed that the new term would start on 24 August 2020 for children and young people in primary 7, year 12 and year 14, as well as for vulnerable children across all year groups. Guidance about current expectations for schools, colleges and universities in Northern Ireland is [available on the NI Direct website](#).

³⁵ Scottish Government, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): statement by the Deputy First Minister on re-opening of schools](#), 23 June 2020.

³⁶ Scottish Government, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): re-opening schools guide](#), 28 May 2020.

3. How has school attendance in England changed during lockdown, the partial reopening, and reopening?

The DfE has [published](#) national **estimates** of the number and proportion of children attending schools in person since 23 March based on the daily attendance figures which [schools have provided](#) to them. This data is for England only.

The published figures are **estimates** because they have been adjusted for non-responses using certain assumptions. Lower response rates from schools can make these estimates less accurate.³⁷

3.1 School attendance rates since reopening in September

Due to half term falling between these dates caution should be taken when making comparisons over time. The DfE has excluded schools closed for half term for the data as of 22 October.

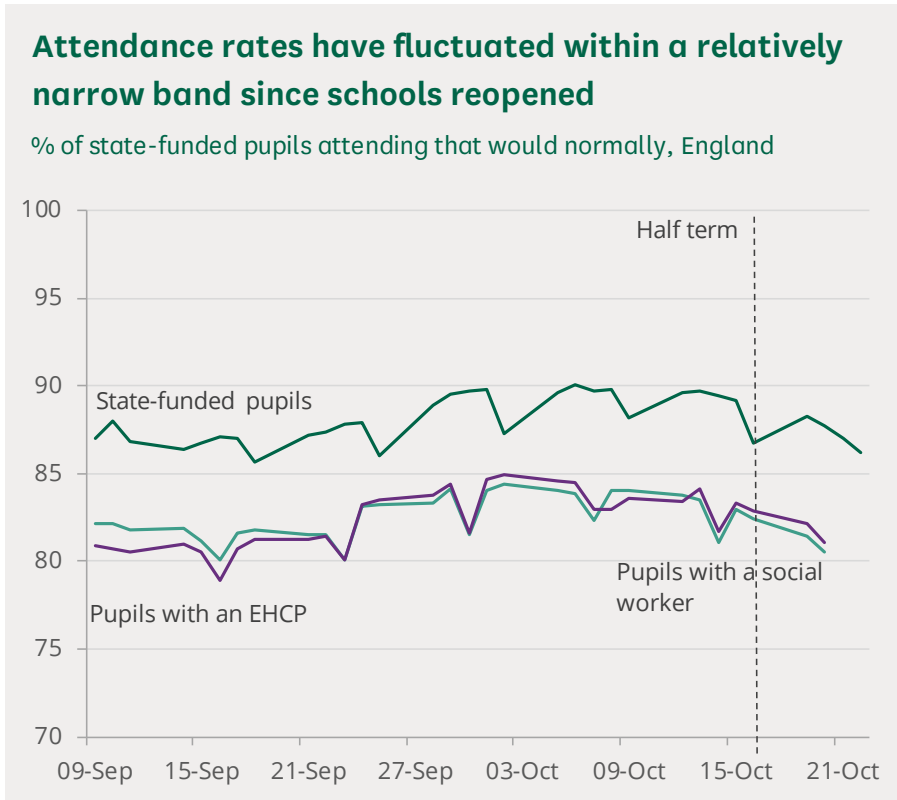
As of [22 October](#), around 86% of state-funded pupils (excluding schools on half term) attended schools in England, this compares to 89% the previous week. The decline was driven mainly by secondaries (down from 87% on 15 October to 83% on 22 October), and to a lesser extent primary schools (down from 92% to 90%).

As of 22 October around 81% of pupils with a social worker and 81% of pupils with an EHCP attended schools in England, this compares to around 84% for both groups the previous week.

The DfE suggested that the majority (around two thirds) of the decline in overall attendance was due to an increase in Covid-19 related absence and not due to half term.

As of 22 October, 557,000 pupils (6-7%) in state-funded schools did not attend school for COVID-19 related reasons (excluding schools closed for half term). This compares to 412,000 pupils (4-5%) the previous week (earlier data is not available). Additional data about Covid-19 related absence can be found in Section 2.5.

³⁷ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE \(p4\)](#)



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 27 Oct 2020, DfE](#)

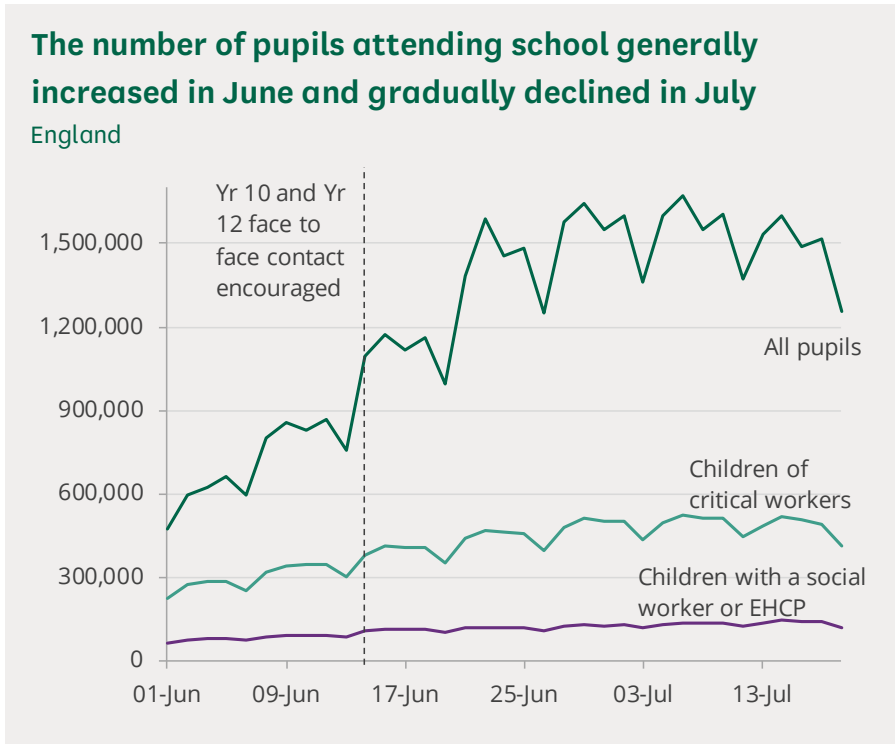
Attendance rate breakdowns by phase of education and local authority as of 15 October were published by the DfE on a one off basis in response to [PQ 104751](#). This information is based only on survey responses and has not been adjusted to produce national level estimates.

3.2 School attendance rates during the partial reopening

Government guidance as of 1 June encouraged nursery, reception, year 1, and year 6 pupils to attend school in person. From 15 June schools were encouraged to provide some face to face contact time for year 10 and year 12 pupils. For more details please see section 1.2.

Between 1 June and 17 July, the response rate of schools to the DfE's request for daily attendance data has varied between 55% and 77% of establishments.

After 17 July the survey which collects attendance data was closed for the Summer holidays.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. From 1 June the year groups encouraged to attend school were reception, year 1, and year 6. From 15 June schools have been encouraged to provide some face-to-face contact time in school for those in year 10 and year 12. Education Health and Care plan is known as an EHCP.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 17 July 2020, DfE](#)

Summary Statistics

As of Friday 17 July 2020 (the last data available before the Summer holiday period):³⁸

- Around 1,253,000 pupils attended schools in England. This was an estimated 13.1% of pupils that would normally attend. This was a decrease from an estimated 14.4% the previous week.
- Around 14,300 schools were open to nursery, reception, year 1 **or** year 6 (an estimated 71% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was a decrease from 77% for the previous week.
- Around 3,200 schools were open to year 10 **or** year 12 (an estimated 55% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was a decrease from 65% the previous week.
- Around 20,500 schools in total were open (an estimated 83% of schools that are normally open). This was a decrease from 89% the previous week.

³⁸ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 17 July 2020, DfE](#)
(p5-6)

3.3 School attendance rates prior to 1 June

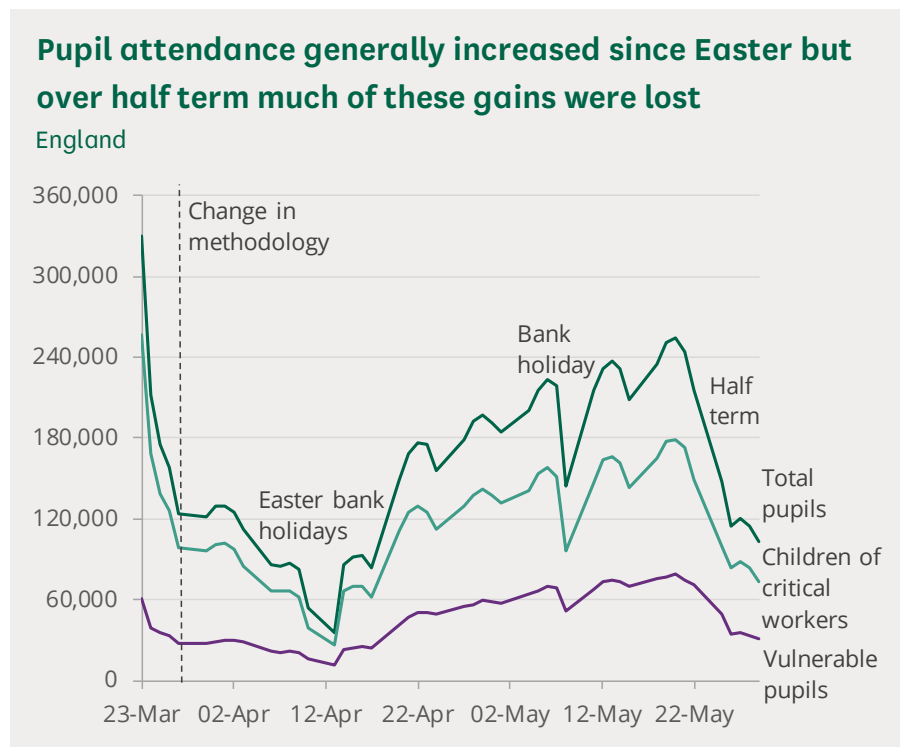
From Monday 23 March, the Department for Education (DfE) [asked schools to report](#) daily attendance figures for vulnerable children, and the children of critical workers. Due to the reasons outlined above it is not appropriate to compare attendance data from before and after 1 June.

Over this comparable period (27 March to 29 May), the response rate of schools varied between 12% and 74% (the low response rate was on 25 May, a bank holiday during what is usually half term).

Summary Statistics

As illustrated in the following chart, in the first two weeks of the comparable period (27 March to 29 May), the number of pupils attending school in person followed a downward trend in general, but this reversed rapidly after the Easter bank holidays among both children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils. Attendance increased (excluding the dip on the Early May Bank holiday) and peaked at around 254,000 pupils on 20 May. The following week was what is usually half term. During this week attendance levels declined and erased much of the increases in attendance since Easter.

In addition to these trends, attendance levels also tend to fluctuate within the week. In general, the highest numbers of pupils attended in the middle of each week.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. The methodology for the adjustment changed from Friday 27 March, this means like for like comparisons before this time cannot be made. Caution should be taken for the results of 1 May, 13 May, 15 May. Due to technical issues with the DfE sign-in, lower rates of establishments were able to record attendance. The response

rates were also lower on the bank and school holidays. The DfE cautions that vulnerable children attendance figures are underestimates.

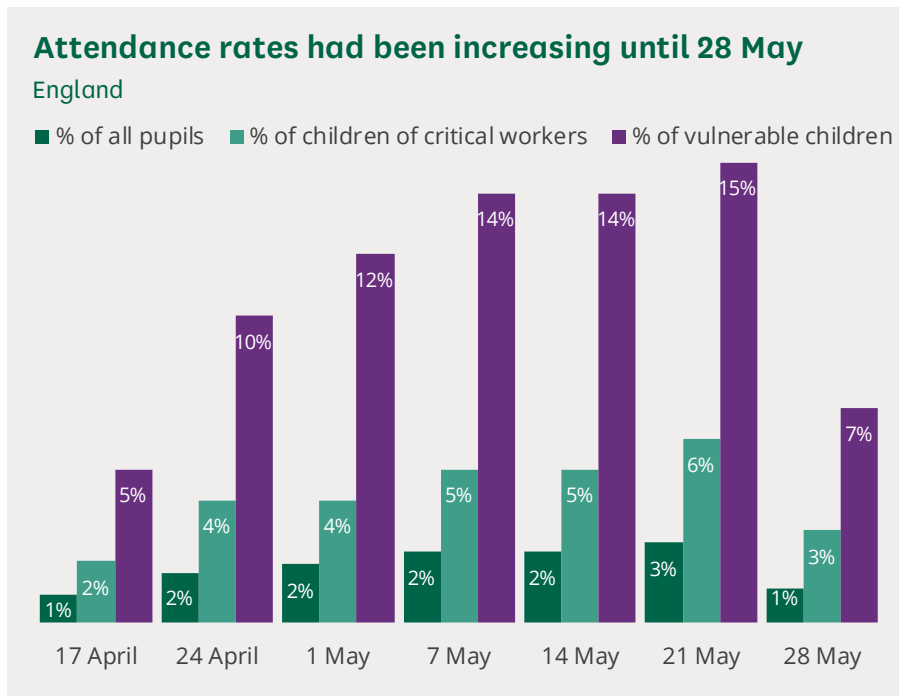
Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

The number of pupils attending school in person expressed as a proportion of the children that would normally attend followed similar trends as above. Overall it remained consistently low. During the comparable period (27 March to 28 May) this proportion ranged between 0.4% and 2.7%.

The DfE also estimated the number of pupils attending school expressed as a proportion of those that are eligible to attend on a weekly snapshot basis since Friday 17 April. The most recent snapshot within the comparable period was as of 28 May, which recorded lower rates of attendance from the previous week.

As shown in the following chart, between Friday 17 April and Thursday 28 May, the proportion of both vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers attending school had been increasing gradually, until 28 May (which would usually have been half term).

Tom Hunt MP stated in an Education Select Committee [oral evidence session](#) that the uptake of school places among children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils is lower than the Government’s initial expectations of “around 20%”.³⁹



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Due to technical issues with the DfE sign-in, on 1 May only 14% of establishments were able to record attendance. The DfE cautions that attendance rates of vulnerable children are underestimates.

³⁹ Education Select Committee, [The impact of covid19 on education and children’s services](#), 22 April 2020. (Q16)

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

A breakdown was also published by setting type on a weekly snapshot basis since 30 April, the most recent snapshot within the comparable period was 28 May. Unsurprisingly, pupil attendance rates were highest in non-mainstream settings and lowest in mainstream settings for older pupils. The attendance rate varied between less than 0.5% in further education and secondary school settings, and 20% in special post 16 institutions.

Pupil attendance was highest in non-mainstream settings

28 May 2020, England

	Establishment Response rate	% of open establishments	% of pupils attending
Special post 16 institution	21%	49%	20%
Alternative provision	17%	40%	2-4%
Special	25%	48%	3%
State-funded nursery	21%	41%	3%
State-funded primary	36%	53%	2%
Independent school	10%	40%	1%
State-funded secondary	40%	60%	<0.5%
Further Education	15%	28%	<0.5%
Total	33%	52%	1%

Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted by the DfE for non-responses. Figures are ranked in the table by % of pupils attending. The DfE estimated a range of pupil attendance for alternative provision to communicate the uncertainty involved. This is due to pupils at these settings often being enrolled in other settings as well.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE](#)

4. What evidence do we have about differences in home learning?

4.1 UCL Institute of Education survey

The [UCL Institute of Education](#) analysed survey data about home schooling from a sample of UK households which included 4,559 children. The survey was carried out in the last two weeks of April. The results were then adjusted to provide UK wide **estimates**.

The survey found the average amount of schoolwork that pupils were doing in a day was low (two and a half hours).

The survey also found large differences between pupils' home learning experiences when broken down by free school meal (FSM) status.

For example, an estimated 25% of pupils eligible for FSM spent no time or less than one hour on schoolwork in a day compared to 18% of pupils not eligible. In addition, an estimated 11% of pupils eligible for FSM spent four hours or more on schoolwork in a day compared to 19% of pupils not eligible.⁴⁰

The survey also found an estimated 20% of FSM pupils had no access to a computer at home. This compares to 7% for other children.⁴¹

4.2 Teacher Tapp survey

[Teacher Tapp](#) have asked a range of survey questions to a sample of around 7,000 teachers several times per week during the school closures. The results are then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

The survey found very large differences between teachers' perceptions of state and private sector pupils' home learning environments, and also the average amount of online learning time.⁴²

For example, 5% of private school teachers thought that more than 20% of the children in their class did not have access to an electronic device for learning (as of 25 March). In contrast, 15% of state-funded teachers thought the same.

In addition, 13% of private school teachers thought that pupils were learning less than one hour per day (as of 27 March). In contrast, 42% of state-funded school teachers thought the same.

The following charts show that there were also large differences in responses within the state-funded sector when schools are broken down by deprivation.⁴³

⁴⁰ UCL Institute of Education, [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#), p19

⁴¹ UCL Institute of Education, [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#), p10

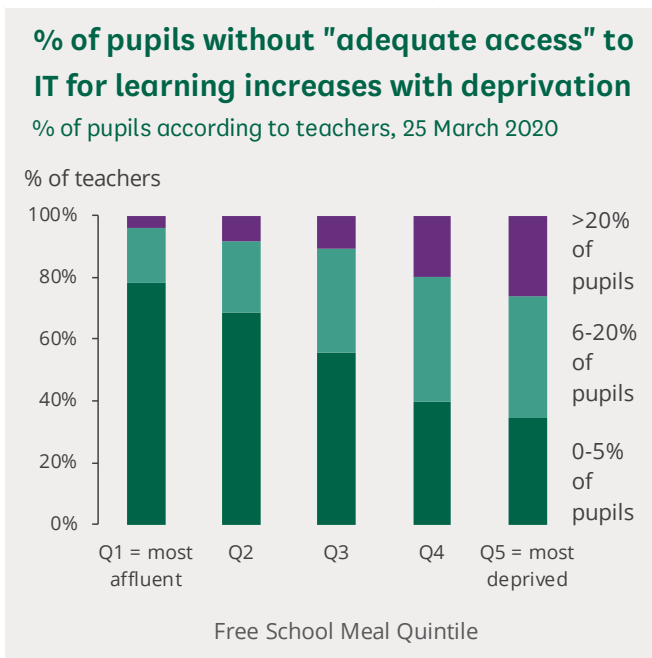
⁴² NA responses have been excluded

⁴³ As above.

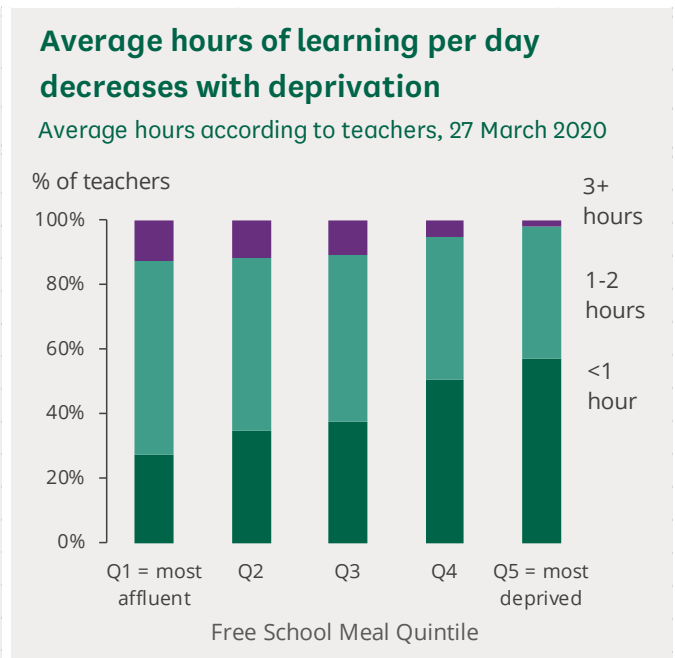
For example, in the least deprived state-funded schools 4% of teachers thought that more than 20% of the children in their class did not have access to an electronic device (as of 25 March). In contrast, 26% of teachers in the most deprived schools thought the same.

In addition, in the least deprived state-funded schools 27% of teachers thought that pupils were learning less than one hour per day (as of 27 March). In contrast, 57% of teachers in the most deprived schools thought the same.

Some disadvantaged pupils without digital devices or internet access are eligible for Government support. Further details about this scheme are available [here](#).



Notes: All figures are estimates
 6,877 teachers responded to this survey question
 NA responses have been excluded (3-5% of sample)
 Source: [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Q3144 25 March, Teacher Tapp \(Google doc\)](#)



Notes: All figures are estimates
 2,068 teachers responded to this survey question
 NA responses have been excluded (4-7% of sample)
 Source: [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Q3143 27 March, Teacher Tapp \(Google doc\)](#)

4.3 Institute for Fiscal Studies survey

Between 29 April and 12 May, the Institute for Fiscal Studies ([IFS](#)) surveyed around 4,000 parents with children aged 4-15 about their home learning activities and resources. The results were then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

The IFS survey found large differences between state and private school parents' responses about the provision of online learning resources from schools. The results also showed large differences within the state sector when broken down by family deprivation levels.⁴⁴

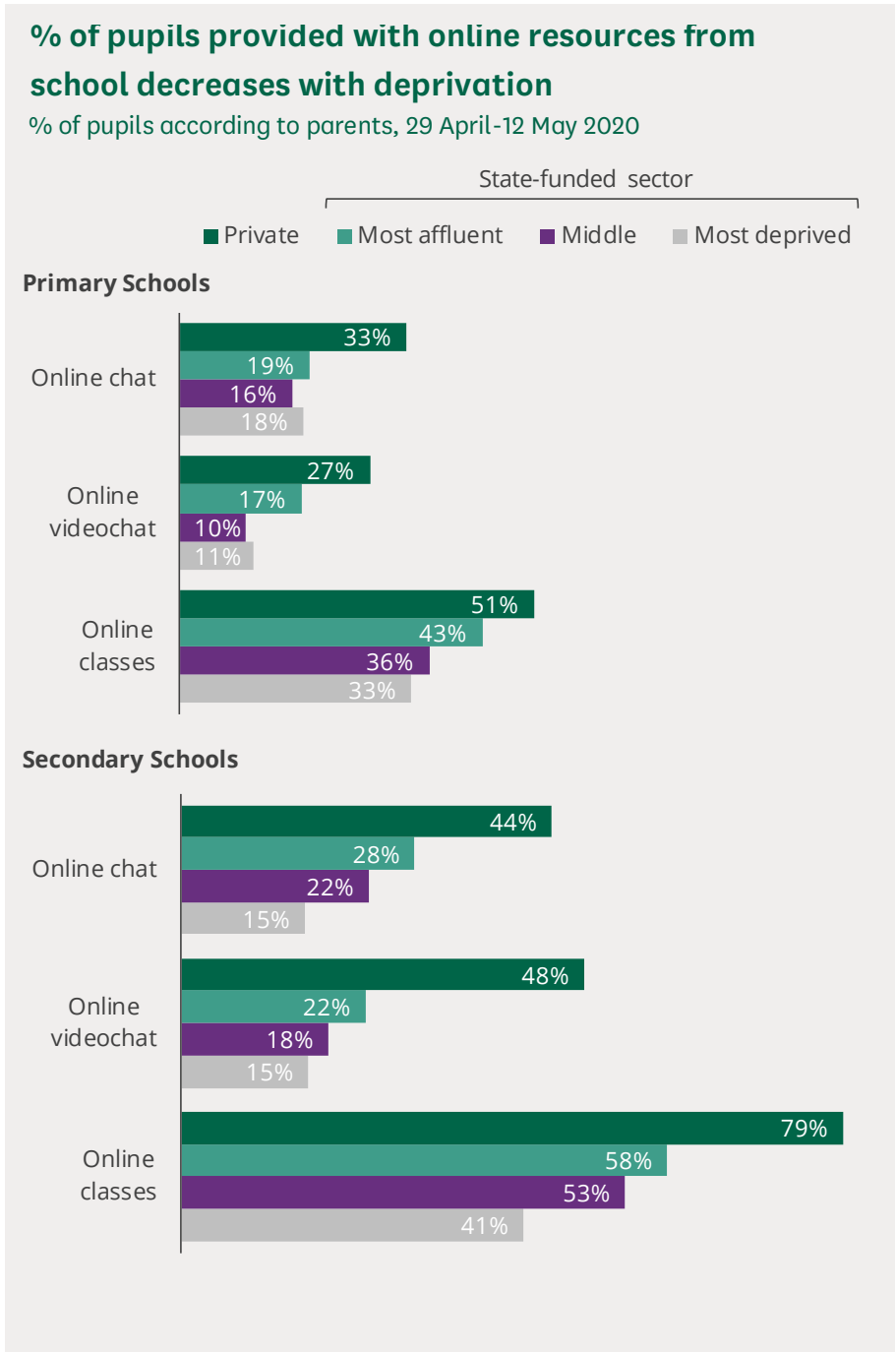
For example, the proportion of parents that report their child's primary school has provided online classes⁴⁵ (regardless of whether or not the child has attended them) is 51% for children attending private schools, 43% for the most affluent in state-funded schools and 33% for the most deprived in state-funded schools.

The differences are more pronounced in secondary schools. For example, the proportion of parents that report their child's school has provided online classes is 79% for children attending private schools, 58% for the most affluent in state-funded schools and 41% for the most deprived in state-funded schools.

The IFS concluded from the survey results findings overall that "school closures are almost certain to increase educational inequalities".⁴⁶

⁴⁵ There may be differences in the way parents from different groups interpret what is meant by 'online classes'. Some schools are offering short online catch-ups while others are running full lessons.

⁴⁶ IFS, [Learning during the lockdown](#), 18 May 2020, p3



Notes: All figures are estimates based on a survey sample of 3,091 primary parents and 1,554 secondary school parents. Parents were asked, 'Which of the following activities has [child]'s school provided while schools are closed? Please tick all that apply.' Deprivation quintiles are based on equivalised pre-pandemic family earnings, only most affluent, middle, and most deprived quintiles are shown here.

Source: [Learning during the lockdown](#): 18 May 2020, IFS ("Underlying data", Fig4)

4.4 Further reading

- Sutton Trust, [Covid-19 impacts: school shutdown](#), 20 April 2020
- Centre for Economic Performance, [Covid-19 school shutdowns: What will they do to our children's education?](#), May 2020

- Education Endowment Foundation, [Impact of school closures on the attainment gap](#), June 2020
- Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, [Home schooling during lockdown: inequalities in inputs and perceptions](#), 5 June 2020
- UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, [Parental involvement in home schooling and developmental play during lockdown](#) , July 2020
- IFS, [Primary school closures created substantial inequality in time spent learning between pupils from poorer and better-off families](#), 17 August 2020

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