



Fairness First: Social Mobility, Covid and Education Recovery

The Sutton Trust

AT A GLANCE

- Investment in the school recovery plan should be a substantial and sustained commitment, with the bulk coming in the form of a **multi-year increase to the pupil premium, targeted at pupils who have suffered the most**, and using existing accountability mechanisms.
- Early years education should also form a central plank of recovery, and so **eligibility for funded early education for three and four year olds should be increased beyond 15 hours, with a focus on those from less well-off homes.**
- An **increase in the Early Years Pupil Premium to the levels of primary schools, and funding for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of the early years workforce**, should form part of a new funding settlement so small early years settings and those in less affluent areas can survive and deliver high quality provision.
- **Pupil premium and recovery premium funding, as well as National Tutoring Programme provision should be extended to 16-19 year olds** in education and training.
- **Teachers should be incentivised through an expansion of phased bursaries and increased pay to work at and be retained by challenging schools in deprived areas.**
- Opportunities for CPD, including through National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), should also be **targeted at attracting and skilling up experienced teachers at such schools**, through bursaries and other targeted financial support.
- The **National Tutoring Programme should be extended to a multi-year commitment, with clear targets for the number of disadvantaged pupils served by the scheme**; a focus on delivering high quality provision, especially in cold spot areas; and independent evaluation.
- As the government looks to **expand tutoring in other ways, maintaining high quality standards is essential**, with interventions rooted in the evidence of what works to ensure it is delivering value for money and real benefits to pupils.
- An **ambitious extended schools programme** should be funded at a level which enables high quality provision, designed to attract the most disadvantaged and focused on essential life skills and wellbeing, as well as academic catch-up.
- All disadvantaged pupils should have an **ongoing entitlement to access to digital learning**, including flexible use of school laptops or tablets, and data allowances/wireless dongles where necessary. Educational websites should be excluded from data allowances on an ongoing basis.

INTRODUCTION

In the 14 months that have passed since the closure of Britain's schools in March 2020, our education system has faced an extraordinary challenge. Remote learning, closed facilities, cancelled exams and social distancing restrictions, amid both a public health crisis and an economic recession have made this period unimaginably difficult both for educators and families. With the re-opening of schools in March 2021

and the roll out of the vaccination programme we are, hopefully, on the road to recovery. However, it will undoubtedly be a long journey. Young people have shown themselves to be remarkably resilient since the disruption last spring; our priority now should be to do everything in our power to help them bounce back, and to make sure none are left behind in this process. That is why we must put social mobility and fairness at the centre of our national recovery plan.

The Sutton Trust believes three principles should underline the education recovery plan:

- 1) It needs to be of **sufficient scale and duration** to match the challenge.
- 2) It must be **targeted** at those who have suffered most.
- 3) It must include all children and young people, from **nursery to college and sixth form.**

1) Scale and duration

Investment in the recovery plan must be of sufficient scale to match what is a generation-defining challenge. In recent months, the US government have announced a \$122 billion rescue plan for US schools.¹ An equivalent per head rate in England would amount to about £15.5 billion.² Last week, the Education Policy Institute called for a £13.5 billion three-year investment.³

These are substantial sums no doubt, but an unprecedented challenge requires unprecedented measures. It should also be seen for what it is: an investment in our future. Estimates of the long-term impact on young people's careers and earnings range anywhere from £11 billion for current secondary students over the next twenty years,⁴ to £350 billion for all current schoolchildren over a lifetime.⁵ It is in everyone's interest that such outcomes are avoided, and a carefully thought out, sustained multi-year plan is needed if we are to succeed.

2) Targeting

The Sutton Trust has demonstrated during both periods of school shutdown that those from lower income backgrounds have suffered most.⁶ They had less support

from home, lower levels of remote learning provision from school along with problems accessing suitable technology, and faced a variety of other challenges, including greater impacts of the pandemic in more deprived areas,⁷ as well as more severe economic consequences in households with fewer resources. Study after study has since shown this has had knock on impacts on their educational progress.⁸ At primary schools the gap between them and their peers has widened to 7 months of learning.⁹ While recovery measures should obviously aim to help all children, it is essential that interventions should be shaped and targeted in such a way that they narrow gaps rather than widen them. It is vital that the recovery plan reflects the additional challenges faced by disadvantaged groups if we are to avoid a 'lost generation' for social mobility.

3) Including all ages

Children of all ages have been impacted by the pandemic, and the recovery plan must include all children and young people, from pre-school to sixth form. Much focus over the past year has been on what has happened in schools, but we cannot afford to forget the youngest and oldest children. Pre-school age

children are at a highly sensitive stage in their development, with potential long-term consequences of any disruption to that development. Early years must be at the heart of the recovery plan. Joe Biden's US administration has taken the opportunity to do just that: proposing a transformational move to universal early education for three and four year olds, with the White House estimating that the returns will be three times greater than the investment.¹⁰ With a universal allowance of just 15 hours per week in England, we cannot afford to be left behind.

Young people over the age of 16 also find themselves in a perilous position. Nearing the end of their compulsory education or training, next year's Year 12s and 13s both missed out on GCSE exams, have the least time of anyone to bounce back, and face a 16-19 education sector that too often remains an under-resourced afterthought. The uncertain economic outlook and the fragile labour market they will face as they emerge from education over the next few years, also underlines the importance of doing all we can to protect this group of youngsters from the scarring effects of unemployment.

The following sections outline how the Sutton Trust believes we can make it a fairness-first recovery.

1. TARGETED FUNDING

Given the inequalities in how the pandemic has affected young people, it is essential that funding for recovery must also be targeted at those who need it most. The 'Recovery Premium' of £300m announced in March is a promising start, but this must be increased and extended for the remainder of this parliament. The Trust has called for a £750m boost to the pupil premium, equivalent to £400 per pupil, which should form a central pillar of the recovery funding plan.

Funding should also reflect the additional challenges for families suffering from the economic impact of the pandemic. However, changes to pupil premium funding for 2021/22 will mean many pupils whose parents suffered a hit to their incomes after October of 2020 will miss out. This unnecessarily limits schools' capacity to support these students and should be rectified. It will also be important to monitor gaps in attainment that emerge over the coming years, both in terms of certain groups of pupils, but also geographically, and target additional funding where necessary.

- ➔ **Overall investment in the school recovery plan should be a substantial and multi-year commitment, combining extra funding for schools, who will understand the needs of their pupils best, with targeted pots of money for national priorities.**
- ➔ **The bulk of the investment should come in the form of a substantial multi-year increase to the pupil premium, targeted at pupils who have suffered the most, and using existing accountability mechanisms.**

2. EARLY YEARS

The pandemic has reminded us how crucial the early years sector is for the functioning of many of our daily lives and our children's futures. But it also laid bare the fragility of a sector which comprises many small and poorly funded private and voluntary providers, particularly those in less well-off areas.¹¹ Pre-school age children have faced the same challenges as those of other children: lack of access to learning, fewer opportunities to play with their friends, as well as interact with other adults. Our polling shows this has led to huge concerns among parents about the healthy development of their children, as well as widespread worries from schools about the readiness of the next generation of pupils starting reception.

With a focus in schools on providing extra supports and extra time to boost both academic learning as well as wider skills and wellbeing, pre-school age children should not be forgotten. This age group also need more time in a high quality educational setting, more time playing with other children, and more time interacting with those outside their immediate family. Eligibility for funded early education must be increased, particularly for those in low income homes who have faced the greatest challenges. The most disadvantaged two year olds are currently covered by a 15 hour funded offer. However, for three and four year olds the emphasis is flipped, with funded 30 hours of childcare currently only available to households earning above a certain income threshold,¹² and so excludes the very children who need help most and who stand to benefit most.

In order to ensure this extra provision is of high quality, we need greater investment in a sector which was already struggling. An increase in the Early Years Pupil Premium to levels equivalent to those in primary school would help, as well as increased rates of funding, to invest in a skilled workforce that can make the most impact. Upskilling the early years workforce through CPD, attracting graduates and providing better paths for career progression is essential for ensuring quality provision. Settings should be supported to attract and pay qualified staff as well as develop the skills and qualifications of their existing workforce, with the Trust previously recommending a 'Leadership Quality Fund' to pay for such measures.¹³ Above all, we need to see early years provision as an opportunity to provide a great start in life for all children, and not just as a way to provide childcare. The aftermath of the pandemic provides an opportunity to do just that. That's why the Trust's [A Fair Start?](#) project will explore in detail policy options in this area in the coming months.

- ➔ **Eligibility for funded early education for three and four year olds should be increased, with a focus on those from less well-off homes. A phased introduction to a universal offer of 30 hours, similar to that being applied in Scotland, should be considered.**
- ➔ **A new funding settlement should be reached to ensure small early years settings and those in less affluent areas can survive and deliver high quality provision. An increase in the Early Years Pupil Premium to the levels of primary schools should form part of this.**

3. 16-19 EDUCATION

Pupils of all ages have been impacted over the past year or so, but few more so than those who moved into post-16 education in 2020 and 2021. Two crucial years of education disrupted, compounded by ongoing uncertainty around exams and future opportunities, and making a crucial transition amid significant disruption. Yet most of the significant policy solutions put forward so far – the recovery premium, the pupil premium, the National Tutoring Programme – end at age 16.

It is vital that this support is extended to post-16 settings to get students back on track for A Levels, T Levels, BTECs, and for those who need GCSE passes to progress. Colleges and sixth forms would then be able to invest in interventions that can make a short- and long- term difference: tailored support for students resitting English and maths GCSEs, interventions which support transitions into careers and further study, but also high quality professional development for their staff and incentives to attract and retain specialist teachers. These students have the least time left in secondary education before they move onto higher education, training and the labour market, therefore it is vital that resources are invested in helping this group before they leave education. The Sutton Trust and UCL are leading the national [COSMO](#) study to examine the short, medium and long term impacts of the pandemic on the education and life chances of the cohort moving into post-16 education this summer. It is vital that this group are not left behind.

- ➔ **Pupil premium and recovery premium funding should be extended to 16-19 year olds in education and training.**
- ➔ **The National Tutoring Programme should be extended to those in post-16 education to ensure quality provision.**

4. TEACHING

Without doubt, teaching is the most important factor in improving the outcomes of all pupils, and especially the poorest. Teaching should rightly be central to the recovery plan. We need to harness the boost in applications for teacher training we have recently seen and which will likely continue over the coming months, and ensure these teachers are retained in the system by providing the right support, training and opportunities for progression. In previous recessions those who enter teaching have been more likely to leave when other opportunities open up, and this should be avoided this time around.¹⁴

Above all, we need to improve access to the best teaching among all students by incentivising the most effective teachers to work in the most disadvantaged schools. To do this, the government should consider expanding incentives for pay in challenging and deprived schools, such as phased retention bursaries as set out in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, going significantly beyond the current maths and physics retention payment.¹⁵ However, we know that pay is not the only factor in influencing decisions of where to work. Recent efforts in establishing an Early Career Framework to support professional development for teachers, along with the programme of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), should be used to help incentivise teachers to work at challenging schools. Working at such schools should be seen as a stepping stone to career progression for those seeking to become senior leaders.

At a school level, attracting and retaining good teachers is also a good use of pupil premium funding, and schools should be encouraged to invest accordingly. Efforts must also be made to improve teacher workload, with consideration also given to the mental health and wellbeing support that teachers may need. Reducing social segregation in the school system would also help to tackle some of the barriers the most disadvantaged schools face in attracting staff.

- ➔ **Teachers should be incentivised through phased bursaries or increased pay to work at and be retained by challenging schools in deprived areas. Existing schemes should be expanded beyond maths and physics and to a greater number of disadvantaged schools.**
- ➔ **Opportunities for Continuous Professional Development, including through NPQs, should also be focused on attracting and skilling up experienced teachers at such schools, through bursaries and other financial supports for schools, including arranging cover.**
- ➔ **It is vital that new teacher recruits are retained for the long term, by tackling workload, stress and behaviour management.**

5. TUTORING

One to one and small group tutoring has consistently been shown to have some of the best evidence for its impact on learning, and in its potential for narrowing attainment gaps and scalability. The establishment of the National Tutoring Programme in 2020 was welcome and, in barely ten months, has ensured hundreds of thousands of children will receive the sort of high-quality tutoring which was previously the preserve of the better off. However, this strong start needs to be built on, with a long-term plan; a renewed focus on reaching the most disadvantaged; and flexible opportunities for schools to engage with tutors as a source of supportive, expert extra capacity. As tutoring grows, it is essential however, that quality is maintained to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive support that is both consistent and effective and in line with the best the sector has to offer.

- ➔ **The National Tutoring Programme should be extended to a multi-year commitment, with clear targets for the number of disadvantaged pupils served by the scheme; a focus on delivering high quality provision, especially in cold spot areas; and an independent evaluation.**
- ➔ **As the government looks to expand tutoring in other ways, maintaining high quality standards is essential, with interventions rooted in the evidence of what works to ensure it is delivering value for money and real benefits to pupils.**

6. EXTENDED SCHOOLS TO PROMOTE ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS AND WELLBEING

As parents across the country can attest, the pandemic hasn't just impacted children's academic learning, but affected their wider development and wellbeing as well. Over a year of cancelled activities, closed facilities and lockdown limiting access to their friends has inevitably taken a toll. It is essential that any recovery plan takes a holistic approach to learning and development. It should not just be focused on academic catch up, but also on providing the opportunities for pupils' wider development to flourish once more. The government is right to be looking at extended school days, as well as summer programmes, but these should have a substantial focus on activities that give young people a chance to develop vital non-academic skills like confidence, communication and social skills, as well as a chance to have fun. Sport, arts and drama, clubs and societies all have a part to play. Independent-state school partnerships and collaborations with community groups could help to relieve the burden on schools in delivering this extra provision. It must also be designed so that it attracts the very children who have lost out most from the pandemic, especially those from low income homes. Variations in schools' capacity to offer quality extended hours, as well as attendance rates of pupils from different backgrounds runs the risk of widening gaps rather than narrowing them.

- ➔ **An ambitious extended schools programme should be funded at a level which enables high quality provision, designed to attract the most disadvantaged. The programme should be focused on essential life skills and wellbeing, as well as academic catch-up.**

7. DIGITAL DIVIDE

Technological poverty already existed before Covid-19, but the move to remote learning during school closures accentuated this digital divide. The direction of travel towards greater digital learning and use of online resources has only been accelerated by events over the past year. Despite the return to face-to-face teaching, digital learning will be here to stay, and to realise its full potential it is imperative that no child is left behind.

Stocks of school-provided IT equipment have swelled substantially over the past year thanks to investment from schools themselves, government funding, as well as charitable donations. However some gaps remain, so that all schools have sufficient supplies to cater for their pupils without equipment. Going forward, all pupils eligible for the pupil premium should have an entitlement to access online learning at home, including both laptops or tablets, or wireless dongles where necessary. Moves to remove educational websites from data allowances ('zero rating') should be made permanent. The vast range of curriculum resources brought together by the online Oak National Academy could also be valuable as a long-term resource and support for teachers. Together these measures can ensure we harness the potential of online learning for all.

→ **All disadvantaged pupils should have an entitlement to access to digital learning, including flexible use of school laptop/tablets, and data allowances/wireless dongles where necessary.**

→ **Educational websites should be excluded from data allowances on an ongoing basis.**

WIDER ISSUES

All the above are measures that should play a role in the immediate education recovery plan. However, the Trust has also been looking more widely, speaking to experts, teachers and educators across the sector to understand how to best take the opportunity for longer term reform, and we will share that work in the coming months. Furthermore, such policies do not operate in a vacuum. The pandemic has demonstrated how deeply external factors can impact the education system and has underlined the wider context that should also be considered in the post-pandemic landscape.

A socially segregated school system

The pandemic has exposed the vast differences between schools across the country. While independent schools and many high performing state schools with affluent intakes adjusted quickly to school closures and got online provision up and running quickly, other schools in areas of deprivation faced greater challenges than ever, including providing meals, physical resource packs and other supports to children who needed them. The Sutton Trust has long highlighted the social segregation of schools in this country, be they independent schools, grammar schools, or high performing

comprehensives. This concentration of disadvantage and privilege has consequences for teacher recruitment and retention, the attainment gap, social cohesion, and of course social mobility.

Once the immediate impacts of the pandemic subside, we need to see further reforms to admissions across all school types to reduce the 'siloing' of certain types of students into the same schools. At an appropriate time, the Trust will resume its 'Comprehensively Fair' campaign for fairer school admissions. Oversubscribed comprehensive schools should prioritise pupil premium applicants, or conduct ballots to give everyone a fair chance; grammar schools should deliver on their promise to admit greater numbers of disadvantaged students with more effective prioritisation; and the government should consider the Trust's 'Open Access' scheme to provide funded places for less well-off children at independent schools.

Levelling up beyond the school gates

Another issue highlighted by the pandemic is the increasing burden on schools to support pupils and their families beyond learning. Cuts to wider supports and local authority services in recent years, particularly in deprived parts of the country, has meant that schools often pick up

the slack. Early intervention funding through local authorities has been cut by two-thirds over the last decade.¹⁶ Teachers and schools often find themselves increasingly providing support, advice and resources to their pupils and parents, because of their trusted role in children's lives. During the pandemic, for example, enormous energy was devoted to providing food for children both during and outside term time.

However this burden falls unequally. Schools in areas of greater disadvantage have more pupils and families in need of such help. While the national funding formula recognises this to some extent, the scale of the extra challenges faced by such schools should be recognised. Young people's mental health is going to be particularly key, given the experiences of this generation of young people, with initial evidence indicating that the wellbeing among disadvantaged pupils was worse during the crisis.¹⁷

While the recent announcement of a £17m fund for schools to bolster mental health support is a step in the right direction,¹⁸ in the context of increasingly widespread youth mental health problems, this should only be seen as a first step. It should also be accompanied by a substantial boost for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) outside of school. Significant investment is needed in order to ensure we are

not storing up an epidemic of adult mental health problems in the future.

Within a broader framework of levelling up the parts of the country which need it most, schools can play their part, but they should not be expected to shoulder all of the burden. Schools themselves cannot address issues of social deprivation and life chances on their own, but should form part of a wider strategy to address child poverty and level

up opportunity. Broader facilities, particularly in deprived communities, including youth centres and a reinvigoration of children's centres are also needed.

A holistic approach, connecting education, with mental health and wellbeing, addressing material poverty, skills development and employment opportunities should characterise any plan for the post-pandemic era, be that through

the framework of the education recovery plan, the Opportunity Area programme or the government's 'levelling up' agenda. The impacts of the pandemic have been wide ranging and multi-faceted, and so our plan to recover must also be, if we are going to avoid a generation lost to social mobility.

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