

Schools' responses to Covid-19

Support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers

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Executive summary

When the British Government ordered all schools to close to the majority of pupils on 20 March 2020, they were asked to provide on-site education for vulnerable pupils¹ and the children of keyworkers (such as those working in public health, transport and supplying food). Since then, the level of school attendance for both vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers has been low, with only 15 per cent of vulnerable pupils attending school (DfE, 2020a). This report focuses on the engagement of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers in-school; remote provision and welfare support for vulnerable pupils; and the challenges involved in continuing to offer this provision as schools begin to open more fully.

The report is based on findings from a national survey of 1233 senior leaders and 1821 teachers in publicly-funded, mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. Responses between 7 and 17 May have been weighted by phase and free school meal (FSM) eligibility to provide a nationally representative picture.

Key findings

Engagement

- **Lack of engagement and parental² support are the most important challenges that senior leaders and teachers are facing in supporting vulnerable pupils.** Not only is in-school attendance for vulnerable pupils low, but many vulnerable pupils are not engaging in remote provision. Most teachers also report that engagement for vulnerable pupils is lower than their classmates. As schools open more fully, it will be crucial to increase the engagement of these vulnerable pupils and to support their parents to provide a secure and safe environment for them, to prevent gaps in their learning from widening.
- **Vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools are less likely to engage in remote learning and are more difficult to keep in touch with relative to other children – although larger numbers of vulnerable pupils are attending in-school provision in the most deprived schools.** These vulnerable pupils are likely to need the most support in terms of both their immediate social care needs and longer term educational support.

- **Vulnerable pupil engagement is particularly low in secondary schools.** Senior leaders in secondary schools are one and a half times more likely to report that lack of pupil engagement in learning is a challenge. This raises the concern that some vulnerable pupils may disengage with education altogether as a result of the pandemic. Schools, social workers and policy makers should look to initiatives that will help support the welfare of these young people and encourage them to re-engage with learning. For example, the Government recently announced funding to support vulnerable pupils in alternative provision to stay on in education or training, using transition coaches and mentors to provide one-to-one support (DfE, 2020d). A similar scheme could be used to support vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools.

In-school provision

- **Many vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers are having similar – and in many cases better supported and supervised – learning provision than children at home.** Nearly half (46 per cent) of secondary senior leaders report that their main approach to supporting the learning of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers is teaching them the same curriculum content that is being sent to children who are learning remotely. Compared to children learning at home, these pupils have the benefit of additional teaching support and supervision.
- **Just under one third of primary leaders say that their main approach towards in-school provision is extra-curricular activities:** 29 per cent of primary senior leaders report that their school's main approach for children is on providing non-curriculum based activities such as games or crafts. These vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers could be at a disadvantage relative to their peers learning at home.
- **In-school activities for vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools are more likely to be extra-curricular.** While 58 per cent of senior leaders in the least deprived schools are teaching the same curriculum content as is being sent to children learning at home, this is only the case for 35 per cent of senior leaders in the most deprived

1 Vulnerable pupils are those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a social worker, or identified as vulnerable by the local authority or education provider.

2 In this report we use the word 'parent' to refer to parents and carers.

schools. Over a third (37 per cent) of leaders in the most deprived schools report that their main approach is providing extra-curricular activities, compared to 17 per cent in schools with the lowest levels of deprivation.

Remote provision

- **The majority of schools are using printed resources and worksheets to support vulnerable pupils who are learning at home.** In particular, remote provision for vulnerable pupils is less IT-focused in more deprived schools and in primary schools. Senior leaders in the most deprived schools are less likely to provide laptops for their pupils and more likely to be relying on printed resources. Similarly, the proportion of senior leaders in primary schools providing IT equipment (33 per cent) is less than half that in secondary schools. Although schools will increasingly have access to computer equipment with the current DfE roll-out of laptops and hotspot devices, this policy is unlikely to equalise provision as not all vulnerable

pupils are covered by the scheme³, and not all schools will choose to take up support⁴ (given that the coverage of the scheme is very limited (DfE, 2020c)).

Welfare support

- **Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have been playing an important role, over and above their usual remit, in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils.** Three-quarters of senior leaders report that their schools are offering 'social or welfare' support to vulnerable pupils, often by working with other agencies. Further, many schools are supporting their pupils by providing food vouchers and parcels (95 per cent), home visits (39 per cent), and providing non-education related information (83 per cent) to assist families.
- **As schools open more fully and there are more pressures on the school workforce, the current levels of welfare support may become unsustainable.** As a substantial share of senior leaders report a lack of support from other agencies (26 per cent), it is essential that these other agencies provide more support to schools where this is currently lacking. Senior leaders in the most deprived schools are also likely to be concerned about the safety of staff undertaking home visits, with nearly 17 per cent of senior leaders reporting safety concerns (compared to seven per cent in the most affluent schools).
- **There are more concerns about the welfare of vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools:** 54 per cent of senior leaders in these schools report significant concerns for the safety and well-being of vulnerable pupils, relative to 35 per cent of senior leaders in the least deprived schools. Similarly, the share of senior leaders reporting that their school is carrying out home visits ranges from 26 per cent in the most affluent schools to 46 per cent in the most deprived schools. Practically all of the most deprived schools (99 per cent) are supporting their vulnerable pupils with food vouchers or parcels – a role over and above schools' remit before the pandemic, where this was largely confined to free school meals.

29% of primary senior leaders report that their school's main approach for children is on providing non-curriculum based activities

3 While vulnerable pupils with a social worker and all care leavers are eligible for the scheme, vulnerable pupils with an EHCP will not necessarily be covered by it.

4 Our survey indicates that take-up in secondary schools is likely to be high, with four in every five secondary senior leaders intending to access digital devices using the scheme. In contrast, only ten per cent of primary senior leaders plan to access digital devices through the scheme. Scheme take-up may be lower in primary because fewer pupils are eligible for the scheme.

Discussion and conclusion

This research has shown that schools and their staff have been adaptable and used their initiative in supporting their vulnerable pupils throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The current challenge for schools is to continue providing the necessary support for vulnerable pupils without compromising teaching and learning activities as schools open more fully.

Implications for government, social services, academy trusts and local authorities

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have been playing a significant role in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils. As schools open more fully and there are more pressures on the school workforce, the current levels of welfare support may become unsustainable. Given that impacts from the pandemic are likely to persist for some time, clearer guidelines on the role of schools and other agencies - in terms of the level of support that other agencies should be providing to schools - are needed to ensure that the needs of vulnerable pupils are appropriately met. Policy makers need to identify why and where this support is lacking; and ensure that resources are provided to schools and other agencies to guarantee that the needs of vulnerable pupils are supported.

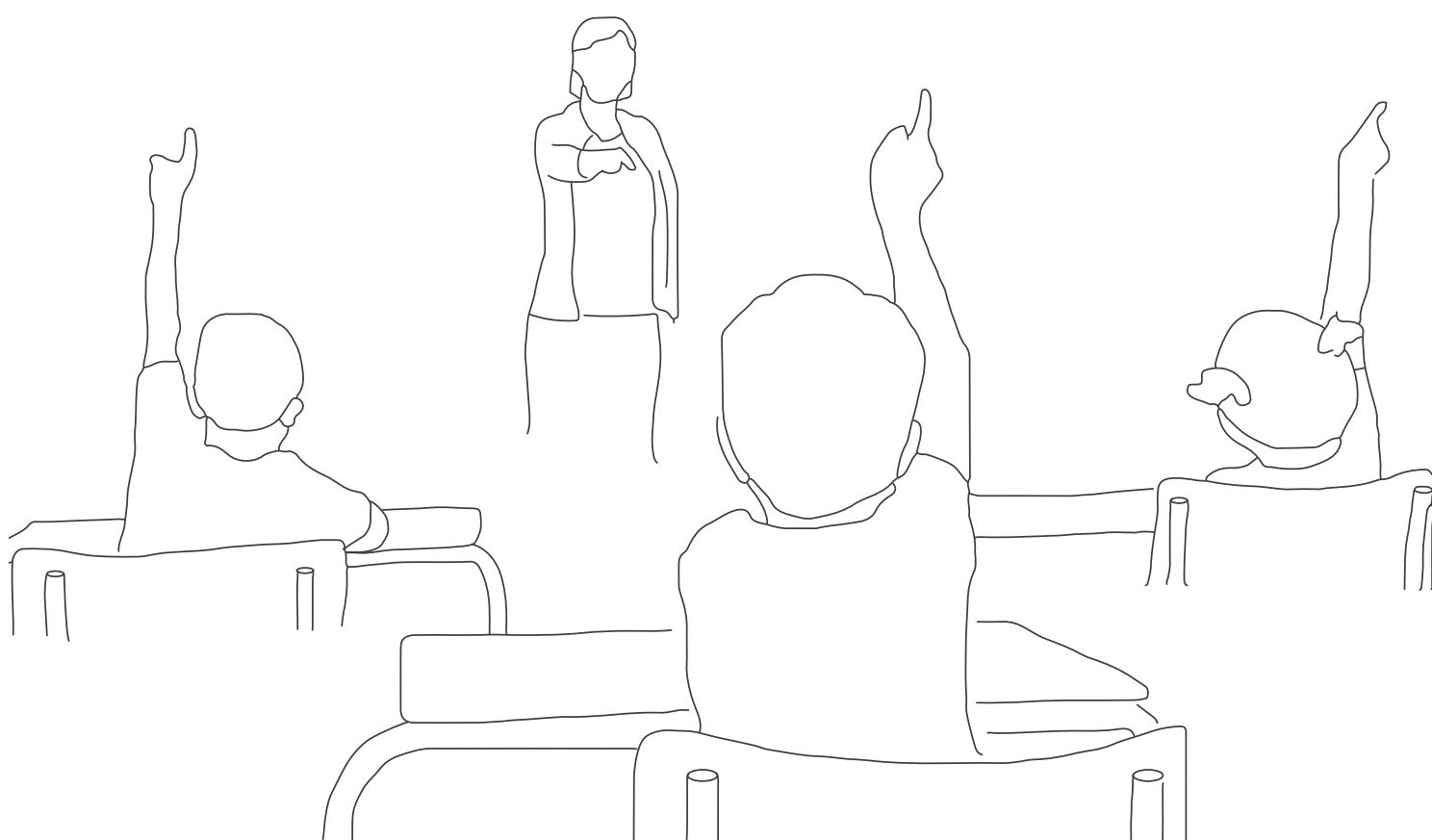
Policy makers should consider the different challenges in supporting vulnerable pupils across different contexts. Challenges vary between primary and

secondary schools in terms of engagement, learning support and welfare needs. Schools with more vulnerable pupils are likely to require more staff and resources in order to support their pupils. It is essential that policy is targeted towards the different needs of vulnerable pupils and their schools.

Implications for senior leaders

Many vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers are having similar – and in many cases better supported and supervised – learning provision than children at home. However, there is a small share of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers (in 29 per cent of primary schools) where the main focus of in-school provision is not on the curriculum. These pupils are disproportionately likely to be in the most deprived schools. Senior leaders in schools where the focus has been on extra-curricular activities will need to provide additional support to these pupils as schools open more fully, to address any learning gaps which may have opened up.

This research has shown that, while schools have done much to support their vulnerable pupils during the pandemic, they face significant challenges in continuing to support these pupils as they open more fully. Senior leaders and teachers face the difficult tasks of re-engaging the large proportion of vulnerable pupils who have disengaged from education, and balancing the challenges of teaching other pupils, both on-site and remotely, with the need to support the welfare of vulnerable pupils, and helping those who have fallen behind to catch up.



Introduction

Whilst impacting the lives of every child in the country, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on vulnerable pupils are likely to be disproportionately large.

When the British Government ordered all schools to close to the majority of pupils on 20 March 2020, they were asked to provide on-site education for vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers⁵ (such as those working in public health, transport and supplying food). Vulnerable pupils are those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a social worker, or identified as vulnerable by the local authority or education provider. Children and young people with an EHCP typically require extra help for their special educational, health or social care needs than would normally be provided in a mainstream education setting. In England, there are approximately 500,000 vulnerable pupils and three million children of keyworkers⁶ (DfE, 2020a).

Given that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to disproportionately impact on the most vulnerable children in society, NFER identified the need for an independent assessment of the support that schools are providing to their vulnerable pupils and the challenges involved. This includes the extent to which vulnerable pupils are engaged in learning, the focus of in-school provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers, and the welfare support provided to vulnerable pupils.

Since schools closed to the majority of pupils in March, the level of school attendance for both vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers has been low, but has increased over time. As of 21 May, shortly after our survey closed, the proportion of vulnerable pupils attending school was around 15 per cent and the proportion of keyworker children was five per cent⁷. The number of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers attending in-school provision, as of 21 May, represents just three per cent of the children that would normally attend school.

The Children's Commissioner (2020) noted the disproportionate effects of school closures on

disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. There are many vulnerable children in society with additional needs – the Children's Commissioner estimated that 2.3 million have a vulnerable family background and two million of these children are living in a household where there is domestic abuse, parental substance abuse or parental mental health problems. For these children, school provides a crucial outlet and a means for any concerns and risks to be identified. However, as the Children's Commissioner observed, places in school were only available for the smaller group of children listed as vulnerable and only a small share of these were attending school. These groups represented only a small fraction of the total number of vulnerable children who may benefit from going to school.

A recent National Youth Agency (2020) study also highlighted how existing vulnerabilities are likely to be exacerbated by Covid-19, and that children may no longer be able to access support for their well-being in the same way as before. This is illustrated by a Young Minds (2020) survey of young people with existing mental health problems, which found that 84 per cent reported worse mental health following school closures, while 26 per cent of young people were no longer able to access mental health support.

A strong association has been documented between vulnerable pupils and deprivation, with vulnerable pupils being disproportionately likely to live in more deprived areas (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). This suggests there will be an overlap in challenges faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. The Sutton Trust (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020) has shown that existing inequalities in the education of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children from better off families are prominent, following the partial closure of schools owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report focuses on the engagement of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers in-school; remote provision and welfare support for vulnerable pupils; and the challenges involved in offering this provision as schools open more fully.

⁵ Also referred to as 'critical' workers.

⁶ These groups are not mutually exclusive and there may be children who are both vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers.

⁷ It is worth noting that it may not be appropriate for all vulnerable pupils to attend school. For example, if they or a member of their household are shielding for health reasons. However, the share of vulnerable pupils attending in-school provision is still low given the concerns about the safety and well-being of these pupils.

Box 1. NFER survey of schools' responses to Covid-19

Sample

From 7 to 17 May 2020, NFER collected data via a survey sent to all 20,553 state-funded mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. We asked senior leaders (head teachers, principals and deputy head teachers) to complete the survey themselves and pass the survey on to up to two teachers of different key stages (primary schools), or up to four teachers of different subject areas (secondary schools). We received responses from 1233 senior leaders and 1821 teachers in 1462 primary schools (including middle deemed primary) and 691 secondary schools (including middle deemed secondary and all-through schools), representing nine per cent of the 17,170 primary schools and 20 per cent of the 3383 secondary schools in England. We weighted the data to ensure that our findings are representative of mainstream schools in England. Some schools provided more than the requested number of responses, which was also addressed by weighting the data.

Data collected

The survey focused on four main areas: schools' provision of remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and pupils' engagement; schools' provision for vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers; staff workload and work satisfaction; and schools' preparedness for opening more fully after lockdown. The survey also asked respondents for some information about themselves, including their job role, time in teaching, gender and age.

Analysis

The NFER team used DfE **administrative data** to identify the characteristics of each school, including: phase, proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM), school type (local authority or academy), and region. Weighting used the distribution of the achieved sample relative to the national population of school phase and FSM quintile. Weightings were adjusted to account for the number of responses per school.

The analysis used three main approaches: descriptive statistics for all of the survey questions; tests of statistical significance to identify associations between selected questions and school characteristics; and regression models for pupil engagement with learning, engagement of disadvantaged pupils, work satisfaction, workload, and preparedness for opening schools more fully. Results were considered statistically significant if the probability of a result occurring by chance was less than five per cent ($p < 0.05$).

Reports

This research is producing the following reports on Schools' Responses to Covid-19:

1. Returning pupils to school
2. Pupil engagement in remote learning
3. Support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers
4. Job satisfaction and workload of teachers and senior leaders
5. Summary of key findings
6. Technical report.

A second survey will take place in July 2020, with findings to be published later in the summer.

Research findings on support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers

How engaged are vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers with educational provision?

This section considers how engaged vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers are with in-school and remote provision. We have analysed the answers to all survey questions according to phase (primary/secondary), deprivation (proportion of children eligible for free school meals (FSM)) and region, but have only reported differences where these are statistically significant at the five per cent level ($p < 0.05$)⁸. All percentages are based on the number of people responding to the question, excluding non-responses (valid per cent). Where applicable, percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Most schools have stayed open for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers.

When schools closed in March, they were asked to provide on-site education for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers. At the time of the survey, most senior leaders reported their schools were open for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers (90 per cent)⁹ ¹⁰. Only a small share of senior leaders' schools were either closed (eight per cent) or operating on a rota system with other schools (two per cent). School location and characteristics – including whether a school is part of an academy trust – are unrelated to whether schools are open for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers.

Whilst the number of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers attending school is related to school size, some smaller schools are still having to manage larger numbers of pupils.

As of 21 May, the DfE attendance publication (DfE, 2020a) estimates that only 15 per cent of all vulnerable pupils and five per cent of keyworker children were learning in school. Attendance of vulnerable pupils and

the children of keyworkers – measured as a proportion of the pupils who would normally attend – is higher in state-funded primary schools (four per cent) compared to state-funded secondary schools (one per cent).

We asked senior leaders to indicate approximately how many children attended the school in person for at least one day during the week commencing 27 April. Almost half (44 per cent) of senior leaders report that fewer than ten children attended school during that time, and a further 51 per cent report that between ten and 29 children attended. Only five per cent of senior leaders report that 30 or more children were attending school.

On average, senior leaders in larger schools, with a larger workforce and resource, have higher numbers of vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers attending in-school provision. For example, large primary schools are seven times more likely to have 20 or more children attending the school than small primary schools¹¹.

There are, however, a small number of schools where numbers of vulnerable pupils attending represent over ten per cent of the total number of pupils on the school roll. Further, senior leaders in primary schools with more deprived children, on average, have more vulnerable and keyworker children attending provision in school. This is hardly surprising as there will be more vulnerable pupils in schools with more disadvantaged children.

This highlights that the demands on schools associated with providing support for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers are not always commensurate with school size. This is an important consideration in providing guidance and support to schools as they start to open more fully. The workforce demands on schools opening more fully with split classes is likely to be higher in schools where the number of vulnerable pupils already attending the school is relatively large. However, this may be mitigated to some extent by the fact that schools with large numbers of vulnerable pupils will already have the experience and routines in place to support pupils on-site.

8 A Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons (Bonferroni, 1936) was applied where appropriate.

9 We refer to 'senior leaders' rather than 'school leaders' in this report because we received responses from more than one senior leader per school (957 primary senior leaders from 892 schools and 276 secondary senior leaders from 245 schools).

10 This is higher than DfE attendance statistics, which estimate that 83 per cent of state-funded primary schools and 85 per cent of state-funded secondary schools were open as of 21 May (DfE, 2020a).

11 A small primary school is defined as having fewer than 200 pupils on roll; a large primary school is defined as having over 332 pupils on roll.

A number of senior leaders report using teaching assistants (TAs) to help support vulnerable and keyworker children on-site as part of a rota with teaching staff¹². As schools invite more children to attend, senior leaders may wish to continue to deploy their TAs to support vulnerable children, whether supported in a separate group or integrated with the returning year groups.

‘Those (TAs) able to be in school have been working in the childcare key worker provision, cleaning and doing everything else needed alongside teachers. Our TAs have been invaluable and stopped the school closing to key workers and vulnerable children.’

Lack of pupil engagement and parental support are the most important challenges that senior leaders and teachers are facing in supporting vulnerable pupils.

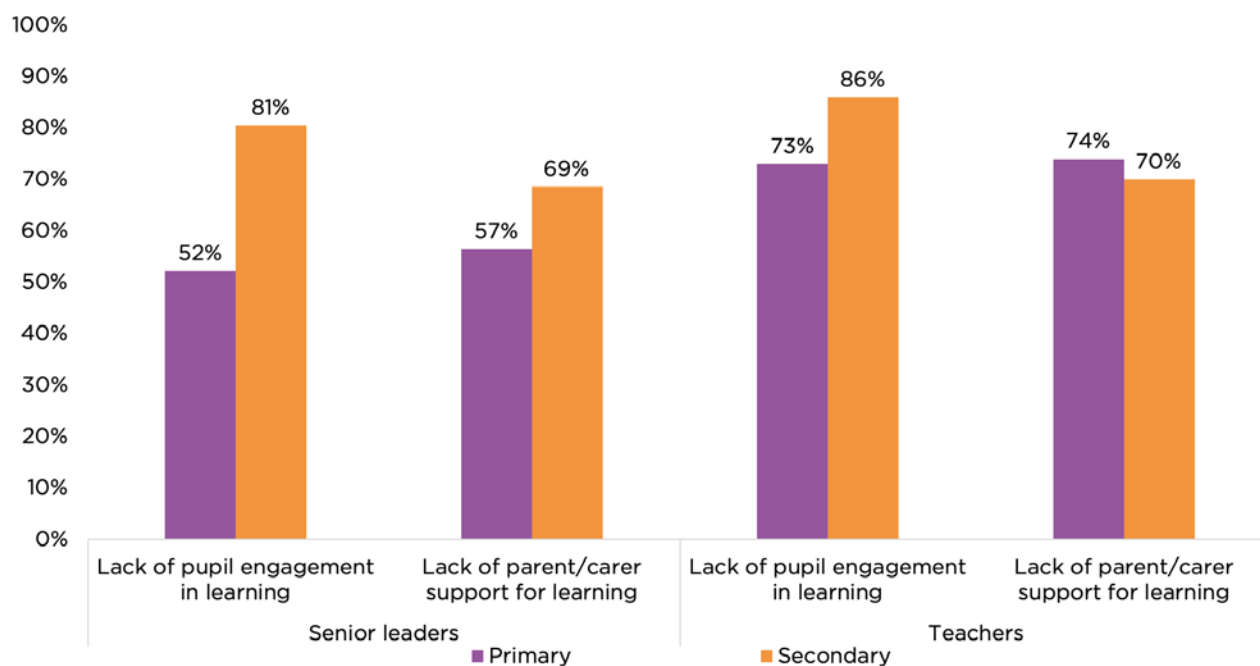
Senior leaders and teachers report a lack of pupil engagement in learning as one of their main challenges in supporting vulnerable children (57 per cent of senior leaders; 75 per cent of teachers). This demonstrates that, despite the significant efforts made by schools

to engage vulnerable pupils and their families, a large number of vulnerable pupils are falling through the cracks of both in-school and remote provision.

Vulnerable pupils are, on average, also *less* engaged than their classmates. When asked to report to what extent vulnerable pupils are engaging in learning activities compared to their classmates, three in every five (62 per cent) of teachers and half (50 per cent) of senior leaders report that vulnerable pupils are *less* likely to be engaging in learning activities compared to the rest of the class. A sizeable share of teachers (18 per cent) and senior leaders (16 per cent) do, however, report that vulnerable pupils are *more* likely to be engaged than their classmates¹³. One possible explanation for this pattern is that vulnerable pupils attending in-school provision are engaging more in learning activities than their classmates.

Schools opening more fully may increase school attendance for vulnerable pupils currently not engaging in learning at home. However, the fact that many of these children have been kept at home until now suggests that re-engaging these pupils with in-school provision will present a challenge. Part of the solution may be for schools and social services to work with parents to find effective solutions that will support vulnerable pupils whilst easing parental concerns: a majority of both senior leaders (59 per cent) and

Figure 1: Challenges in supporting vulnerable pupils who are not attending schools by school phase



Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders and 1821 classroom teachers: 956 leaders and 1241 teachers gave at least one response.

¹² In a response to an open question, 20 and 16 per cent of responding senior leaders report using teaching assistants in school to support keyworker children and vulnerable pupils respectively. Responses were provided by 904 senior leaders.

¹³ The remaining 19 per cent of teachers and 33 per cent of senior leaders report that vulnerable pupils are engaging in learning activities to the same extent as their classmates.

teachers (74 per cent) report that a lack of parental support is a significant challenge in supporting vulnerable pupils who are not attending schools.

Differences by phase

Senior leaders in secondary schools are more likely (81 per cent) to report concerns related to vulnerable pupil engagement in remote learning compared to senior leaders in primary (52 per cent). This pattern is also true for classroom teachers: 86 per cent of teachers in secondary report that lack of vulnerable pupil engagement in learning is a challenge compared to 73 per cent in primary.

Teachers in secondary schools (68 per cent) are also significantly more likely than teachers in primary schools (61 per cent) to report that vulnerable pupils are *less* engaged in learning activities compared to their classmates. (There is a similar trend among senior leaders, although the differences are not statistically significant.)

Pupil engagement is likely to be related to parental support for learning. More senior leaders in secondary schools report that a key challenge in supporting vulnerable pupils who are not attending schools is a lack of parental support for learning (69 per cent) relative to primary senior leaders (57 per cent). However, this pattern is not reflected in the teacher survey where similar shares of teachers report a lack of parental support for learning.

Given that vulnerable pupil engagement is particularly low in secondary schools, there is a concern that some

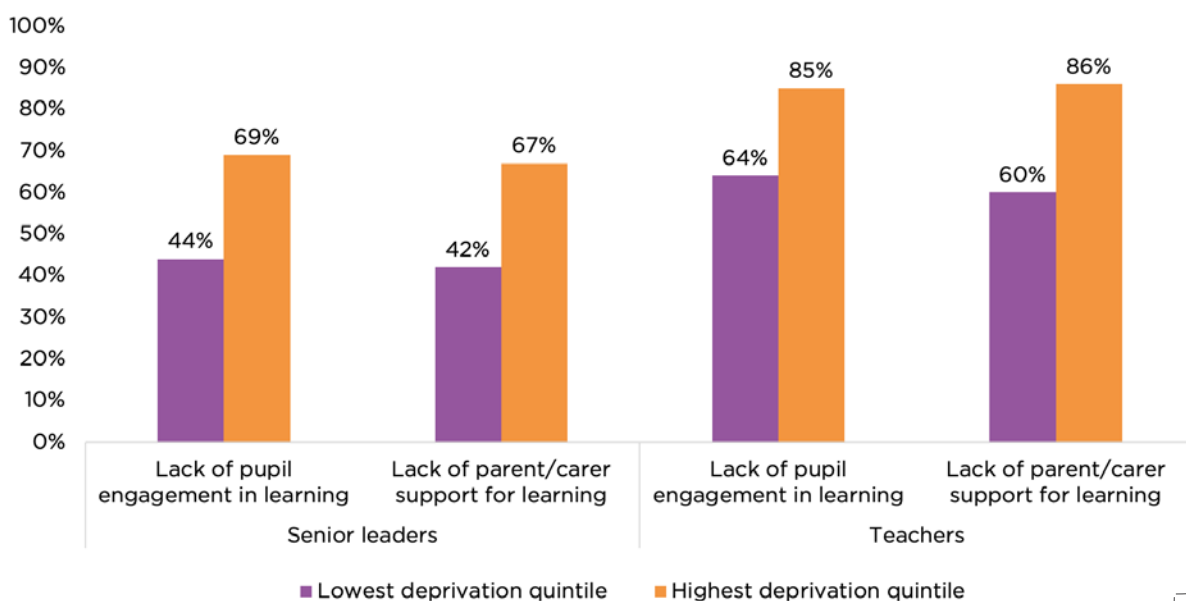
may disengage with education altogether as a result of the pandemic. There is also a concern about whether the social care needs for these vulnerable pupils are being met. Schools, social workers and policy makers should look to initiatives that will help support the welfare of these young people during the pandemic and encourage these young people to re-engage with learning and return to school.

For those pupils who do end up disengaging from education altogether as the lockdown eases, appropriate support and opportunities will be needed to prevent these vulnerable pupils entering the group of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). The Government recently announced funding to support vulnerable pupils in alternative provision to stay on in education or training, using transition coaches and mentors to provide one-to-one support (DfE, 2020d). A similar scheme could be adopted to support vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools.

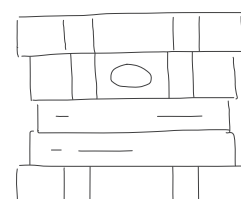
Differences by disadvantage

Vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools are less likely to be engaged in learning: senior leaders in these schools are one and half times more likely to report a lack of pupil engagement in learning (69 per cent) relative to those in the least deprived schools (44 per cent). There is a similar trend among teachers: 85 per cent of teachers in the most deprived schools report that lack of pupil engagement in learning is a challenge compared to 64 per cent of teachers in the least deprived schools.

Figure 2: Challenges in supporting vulnerable pupils who are not attending schools in the most and least deprived schools



Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders and 1821 classroom teachers: 901 leaders and 1169 teachers with FSM quintile information gave at least one response.



Teachers and senior leaders in more deprived schools are also more likely to report that vulnerable pupils are less engaged in learning activities compared to their classmates. For example, 56 per cent of senior leaders in the most deprived schools report that vulnerable pupils are *less* engaged than their classmates in learning activities, compared to 39 per cent in the least deprived schools¹⁴.

A very similar pattern is observed in the relative proportions of senior leaders and teachers in different types of schools, reporting that parental engagement is a challenge in supporting vulnerable pupils when not attending school.

The large differences in vulnerable pupils' engagement across schools with different levels of deprivation suggest that government support at the *school-level* may be more effective in supporting pupils most in need than policies which aim to support *all* vulnerable pupils. For example, policies which give school trusts and local authorities resources to tackle engagement issues at a local level could help target support towards those vulnerable pupils in schools serving a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils.

A majority of teachers and senior leaders have mixed views on the difficulty of keeping in touch with vulnerable pupils who are not attending school.

Despite the low engagement of vulnerable pupils, only 11 per cent of senior leaders and 14 per cent of teachers report that it is 'difficult' or 'very difficult' for their school to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils who are not attending school¹⁵. Around half of senior leaders and teachers have 'mixed views' about this (52 per cent and 58 per cent respectively); while the remaining 37 per cent of senior leaders and 29 per cent of teachers report that it is 'easy' or 'very easy' for them to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils.

Senior leaders in primary schools are more likely to report that keeping in touch with pupils is 'easy' or 'very easy' (39 per cent) than senior leaders in secondary schools (24 per cent). The pattern is similar for teachers.

There are significant differences between schools with different levels of deprivation. Over half (52 per cent) of senior leaders in the least deprived schools report that it is 'easy' or 'very easy' to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils, compared to roughly a quarter (23 per cent) of senior leaders in the most deprived schools.

Vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools are less likely to engage in remote learning and their teachers find it more difficult to keep in touch with them, compared to vulnerable pupils in less deprived schools. These vulnerable pupils – and the schools trying to support them – are likely to need the most support in terms of both their immediate social care and longer term educational needs.

What in-school provision is being provided to vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers?

This section considers the provision available for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers who are learning in-school.

Research by the Sutton Trust (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020) and Institute for Fiscal Studies (Andrew et al., 2020) has highlighted that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to increase educational inequalities between children from different backgrounds. The extent to which in-school provision will mitigate these inequalities for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers who are attending school depends on the in-school support provided.

Senior leaders report that the main focus of in-school provision is providing a place where pupils are safe and cared for.

Educational providers have the freedom to determine the type of in-school provision they offer to vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers during the pandemic (DfE, 2020b). We asked senior leaders about the relative balance between their approach to ensuring pupils are safe and cared for and to providing curriculum-based teaching for children who are currently in school.

The majority of senior leaders (74 per cent) view the focus of in-school provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers as providing a place where pupils are safe and cared for, rather than on providing curriculum-based teaching, with primary senior leaders more likely (75 per cent) than secondary senior leaders (67 per cent) to have this view. However, this does not necessarily mean that these schools are avoiding all curriculum content, particularly in secondary schools.

14 Similar shares of senior leaders in the most and least deprived schools report that vulnerable pupils are more engaged in learning activities compared to their classmates.

15 Based on senior leaders' and teachers' responses to the question 'How difficult or easy is it for your school to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils who are not attending school?' Respondents were offered the following five response options: 'Very easy', 'Easy', 'Mixed views', 'Difficult' and 'Very difficult'.

Secondary-aged vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers learning in-school may have more support covering curriculum content than most pupils learning at home.

Despite senior leaders in secondary schools viewing the primary focus of in-school provision as providing a safe and caring environment, nearly half (46 per cent) report that their main approach to supporting the learning of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers is teaching them the same curriculum content that is being sent to children who are learning remotely. Compared to children learning at home, these pupils have the benefit of additional teaching support and supervision.

A further 41 per cent of senior leaders report that secondary-aged children are being provided time or resources to work on curriculum content with limited teaching input (this support could be similar to the support that many children are receiving at home). Seven per cent of senior leaders report that vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers are being taught different curriculum content than is being sent to children learning at home.

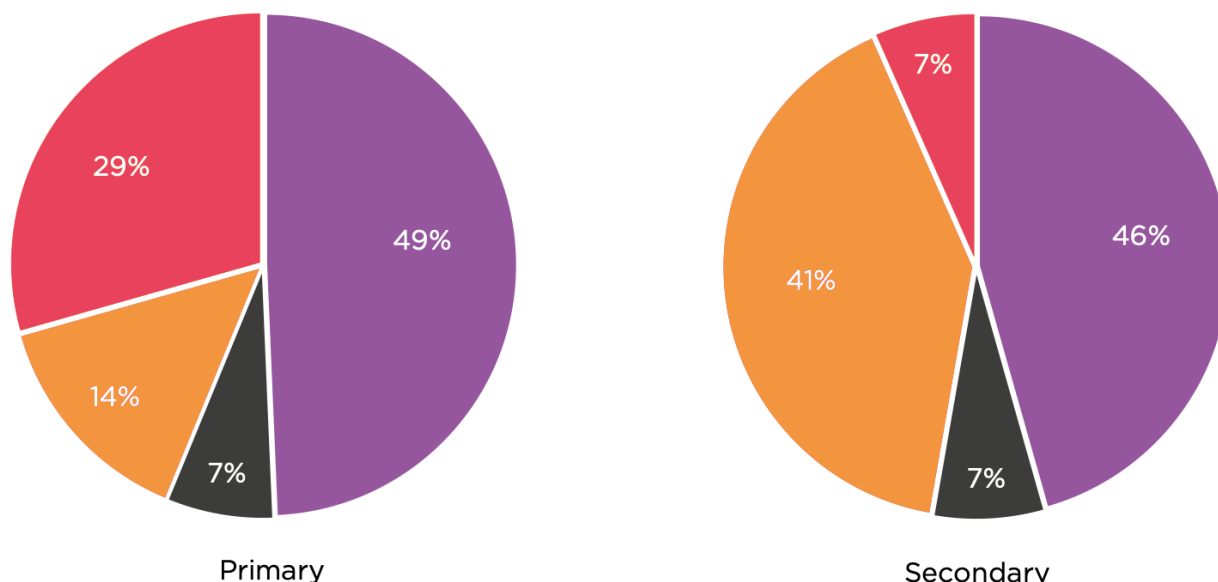
Only seven per cent of secondary senior leaders report that the main approach of in-school provision for vulnerable pupils or the children of keyworkers

is providing extra-curricular activities, with the main approach of the other (93 per cent) covering aspects of the curriculum. Our findings demonstrate that secondary-aged vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers learning in-school are largely in either the same or a more supported position in relation to their learning relative to their peers who are based at home. Teacher supervision also ensures that pupils are engaging with their schoolwork which is not the case for all pupils learning remotely.

A minority of primary schools are not covering curriculum content as their main approach.

Half of primary senior leaders report that their main approach to supporting the learning of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers in-school is teaching them the same curriculum content that is being sent to children who are learning remotely. However, 29 per cent of primary senior leaders report that their school's main approach for vulnerable pupils and keyworker children is extra-curricular activities, such as arts, crafts or games. While this is a minority of schools, and non-curriculum based activities may be beneficial, especially for younger children, this suggests that a number of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers may have covered less curriculum content than their peers who are based at home.

Figure 3: Senior leaders' main approach to supporting the learning of vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers while they are attending school



- Teaching them the same curriculum content as is being sent to pupils who are learning remotely
- Teaching them different curriculum content than is being sent to pupils who are learning remotely
- Providing time and/or resources for pupils to work on curriculum content, with limited teaching input
- Providing non-curriculum based activities for pupils while they are in school (e.g. arts, crafts or games)

Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders: 995 gave a response.

In-school activities for vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools are more likely to be extra-curricular.

While 58 per cent of senior leaders in the most affluent schools report their main approach is teaching the same curriculum content as is being sent to other pupils, this is only the case for 35 per cent of senior leaders in the most deprived schools. Similarly, leaders in the most deprived schools (37 per cent) are twice as likely to report their main approach is providing non-curriculum based activities for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers as those in the least deprived schools (17 per cent).

There are also significant differences across regions, suggesting a divide between the north and south. Senior leaders in the North West are the most likely (39 per cent) to report that their main approach is providing non-curriculum based activities for pupils. In comparison, senior leaders in the South and East of England are half as likely to report vulnerable pupils are mainly covering non-curriculum based activities (17 per cent in London, 17 per cent in the South West, 18 per cent in East Midlands, 19 per cent in the South East and 21 per cent in East of England). As these patterns mirror those observed in more deprived schools, it seems likely that these findings reflect the relative deprivation levels in these regions, apart from London (Northern Powerhouse Partnership, 2018; Hutchinson et al., 2018).

How are schools supporting remote provision for vulnerable pupils?

This section considers the additional resources provided to vulnerable pupils who are learning remotely.

There is a strong association between vulnerable pupils and deprivation (Crenna-Jennings, 2018). The Education Development Trust (Horrocks, 2020) highlights the digital divide in young people's and their families' access to remote learning: one million children and their families do not have access to a device or connectivity at home. The author notes that the drive to have more high-tech learning solutions is likely to increase existing inequalities and education equity gaps, stressing that it is especially important to ensure access to technology for disadvantaged pupils.

We asked senior leaders to indicate how they are supporting vulnerable pupils to learn from home.

Secondary schools are providing many more laptops and computer equipment to vulnerable pupils than primary schools.

On average, 40 per cent of senior leaders report providing laptops to vulnerable pupils. This is similar to the share of senior leaders who report providing laptops or tablets to support pupils without IT equipment (and who are not necessarily vulnerable)¹⁶.

There are large differences in the provision of laptops and computer equipment by school phase. The majority (74 per cent) of secondary senior leaders report that their schools are providing laptops and/or computer equipment to their vulnerable pupils. The proportion of primary leaders providing IT equipment to their vulnerable pupils is half as high (33 per cent).

Patterns between different school phases are similar to the shares of primary (36 per cent) and secondary (71 per cent) senior leaders who report providing laptops or tablets to support pupils without IT equipment (who are not necessarily vulnerable). This suggests that – in terms of resource provision – vulnerable pupils are getting comparable support to non-vulnerable pupils who do not have access to IT.

This finding also suggests that, as with vulnerable pupils learning in-school, quality and access to remote provision is different for vulnerable pupils in primary relative to secondary schools. One likely explanation is that the primary curriculum can more easily be supported through non-IT based methods, especially in the early years and Key Stage 1.

There are also some notable differences by deprivation and region.

- Senior leaders in the most disadvantaged schools are significantly less likely to provide laptops for their vulnerable pupils.
- Schools in London are significantly more likely to provide computer equipment (55 per cent) relative to other areas. On the other hand, schools in the North West (31 per cent) and West Midlands (29 per cent) are significantly less likely to provide computer equipment relative to other areas.

In response to an open-ended question, a number of teachers and senior leaders in our survey cite a lack of IT access as one of the key challenges they are facing in providing remote provision to vulnerable pupils,

16 There is likely to be overlap between vulnerable pupils and pupils without IT given the strong association between vulnerable pupils and deprivation.

suggesting that current provision is inadequate¹⁷. This will improve with new free devices and internet access being provided from the DfE laptop scheme (DfE, 2020c) to some vulnerable pupils (children with a social worker, care leavers and Year 10s who are eligible for FSM)¹⁸. These devices were not expected to arrive in schools until late May or June (after our survey was administered). However, the survey indicates that take-up in secondary schools is likely to be high, with four in every five secondary senior leaders intending to access digital devices using the scheme. In contrast, only ten per cent of primary senior leaders plan to access devices using the scheme. As not all vulnerable pupils are covered by the scheme and not all schools will choose to take up support, it seems unlikely that it will be sufficient to meet all vulnerable pupils' needs. Schools have also experienced substantial delays in securing the equipment; many were unable to access the devices almost three months after schools were required to close (Education Policy Institute, 2020).

A large share of senior leaders report providing printed material to support vulnerable pupils.

A large share of senior leaders in both primary and secondary schools report providing printouts of worksheets or other resources to vulnerable pupils (83 per cent).

There are two significant differences by school phase and deprivation.

- This share is higher in primary (84 per cent) than in secondary schools (77 per cent), reinforcing the point that primary schools seem to be relying less on technology to support learning for their vulnerable pupils.
- Senior leaders in more deprived schools are more likely to rely on printing out resources or worksheets for their vulnerable pupils: 88 per cent of senior leaders in the most deprived schools do this in comparison to 73 per cent in the least deprived schools.

This reliance on printed materials may be related to many vulnerable pupils not having access to online learning devices or internet connectivity at home. We found similar patterns for economically disadvantaged pupils, and for non-disadvantaged pupils in the most deprived schools: these findings are reported in the second report in this series *Pupil Engagement in Remote Learning* (Lucas et al., 2020).

What welfare support is being provided to vulnerable pupils?

This section sets out the additional support schools are providing to their vulnerable pupils, both remotely and in-school.

The Children's Society (2020) highlights how the widespread changes to children's' everyday life resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic – such as increased time at home, isolation from friends and reductions in parental income – are likely to increase their anxiety, worry and mental health issues. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the role of schools in safeguarding and supporting the mental health issues of children had been becoming wider. The NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey (NFER, 2019) found:

- 68 per cent of all senior leaders reported their staff were spending more time on safeguarding relative to the previous academic year.
- 85 per cent of all senior leaders reported their staff were spending more time on mental health and well-being services relative to the previous academic year.

When asked about the challenges experienced in supporting vulnerable pupils who are not attending schools, almost half of all responding senior leaders and teachers report concerns for their safety and well-being.

Comparing primary and secondary schools, there are different patterns for senior leaders and teachers. Senior leaders in secondary schools are significantly more likely to report concerns about vulnerable pupils, with 61 per cent expressing concerns compared to 41 per cent of senior leaders in primary. Teachers in primary and secondary schools report similar levels of concern.

There are also significant differences by the level of deprivation in the school: 54 per cent of senior leaders in the most deprived schools report significant concerns for the safety and well-being of vulnerable pupils, relative to 35 per cent of senior leaders in the least deprived schools. There is a similar pattern for teachers: 61 per cent of whom - in the most deprived schools - have concerns for pupils' safety and well-being, relative to 29 per cent in the least deprived schools.

¹⁷ This is based on 11 per cent of teachers and ten per cent of senior leaders who chose to provide an open response to the question 'Which challenges are you experiencing in supporting vulnerable pupils when they are not attending school?'.
¹⁸ Young people aged between 16 and 19 who do not have computer equipment or internet access can also apply for support via the 16-19 Bursary Fund (DfE, 2020f).

Schools have adapted quickly to the additional pressures of Covid-19 on children and most senior leaders report providing social and welfare support.

Schools have demonstrated great adaptability during the pandemic and are playing an important role in providing welfare support to vulnerable pupils. When asked whether their school was providing social or welfare support to their vulnerable pupils, three in every four senior leaders report providing this kind of support.

There are two significant differences by school phase and deprivation.

- 82 per cent of senior leaders in secondary schools report providing welfare support to vulnerable pupils compared to 73 per cent of senior leaders in primary schools.
- The most deprived schools are substantially more likely to be providing welfare support to vulnerable pupils: 85 per cent of senior leaders in these schools report providing social welfare support to vulnerable pupils compared to 52 per cent in the least deprived schools.

This shows that the burden of providing additional welfare support to vulnerable pupils is falling disproportionately on the most deprived schools, and it is not clear whether the additional funding that more deprived schools currently receive will cover the costs of the additional resources which are required to provide this support. Indeed, senior leaders have already expressed the need for additional resources as result of the pandemic (Sharp et al., 2020).

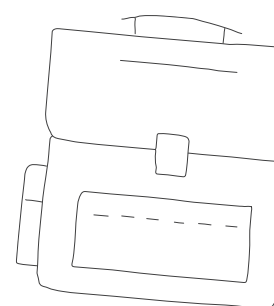
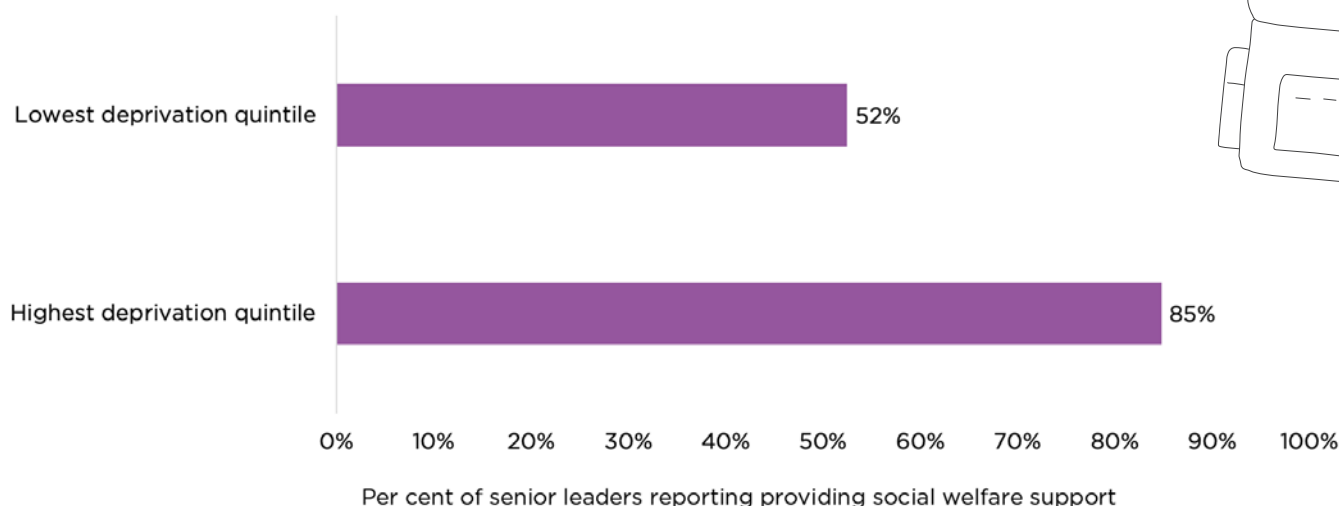
A quarter of school senior leaders do not feel they are getting adequate support from other agencies.

Most schools are providing social and welfare support in combination with other agencies: only eight per cent of senior leaders providing such support report that their schools are offering support without engagement from other agencies. A further 37 per cent of senior leaders report providing social and welfare support both with and without other agencies, and 55 per cent of senior leaders report providing support exclusively with other agencies.

Despite the high levels of collaboration between schools and other agencies, around a quarter of senior leaders and 13 per cent of teachers report a lack of support from other agencies as a challenge in supporting vulnerable pupils. As one senior leader said: 'Accessing social workers has not always been easy', while another reported differences in support from different local authorities: 'We work across two counties, and the level of social and welfare support is very different'. This is a particular concern in the most deprived schools: 30 per cent of senior leaders in these schools report this as a challenge, compared to 14 per cent of leaders in the least deprived schools.

As schools open more fully with split classes, this will put greater pressures on the available school workforce and current levels of welfare support may become unsustainable. It is therefore essential that other agencies provide more support to schools where this is currently lacking. The Government has also recently announced £7 million to support a new service *See, Hear, Respond* to provide support targeted towards

Figure 4: Senior leaders in schools providing welfare support



vulnerable pupils (DfE, 2020e). However, given the challenges schools are facing in supporting vulnerable pupils, they are still likely to require additional support.

Nearly all schools are also providing additional support for vulnerable pupils.

On 31 March 2020, the DfE announced a new national voucher scheme for FSM pupils – which includes a substantial number of vulnerable pupils – in instances where schools were unable to work with their usual catering suppliers to provide meals for collection or delivery. The vast majority (95 per cent) of senior leaders report providing food vouchers or food parcels to vulnerable pupils. Senior leaders in more deprived schools are more likely to provide vouchers or parcels: 89 per cent of senior leaders in the least deprived schools report providing vouchers or parcels relative to 99 per cent in the most deprived schools. In other words, practically all of the most deprived schools are supporting their vulnerable pupils with food vouchers or parcels – a role over and above schools' remit before the pandemic where this was largely confined to free school meals.

Four-fifths of senior leaders are also providing information to parents about where to find support (which is not just educational). Again, there are significant differences by school deprivation levels: 89 per cent of senior leaders in the most deprived schools report providing information on where to find support compared to 76 per cent in the least deprived schools.

Other forms of welfare support highlighted by senior leaders include: providing their own food banks, toys, book vouchers, clothes and even financial support for utilities (e.g. electricity) to support parents. These findings demonstrate how schools have provided a wide range of support to pupils and their families during the pandemic. However, this high level of support may not be sustainable should the partial closure of schools continue or new waves of lockdown occur.

“ Two in every five senior leaders also report that staff are undertaking home visits to support vulnerable pupils.

Two in every five senior leaders report that staff are making home visits to vulnerable pupils.

Almost all senior leaders report that their schools are providing support to vulnerable pupils through regular checking in and communication (96 per cent). This is common to all schools regardless of phase, region or level of deprivation.

Two in every five senior leaders also report that staff are undertaking home visits to support vulnerable pupils. Amongst teachers where at least one of the vulnerable pupils they normally teach is not attending school¹⁹, 28 per cent report visiting vulnerable pupils at their place of residence; 15 per cent are visiting pupils less than once a week and the remaining 13 per cent are visiting vulnerable pupils at least once a week. Many of these home visits are being undertaken by classroom teachers (as opposed to special educational needs (SEN) coordinators or counsellors).

Home visits typically entail investing a large amount of time for each pupil and, as schools open their gates to more children, they may not continue to be sustainable. Visits may also be diverting valuable teaching resource away from in-school and remote learning. Schools are likely to require additional funding and staff to continue to support these vulnerable pupils adequately, and social services may need to increase the support being offered.

In response to an open-ended question, a number of senior leaders cite using teaching assistants (TAs) to help support the welfare needs of their vulnerable pupils²⁰. Support offered can range from providing welfare checks and phone calls to delivering meals. Some senior leaders and teachers also mention that TAs have been using their time during lockdown to complete training on topics such as children's mental health and domestic violence. As schools open their doors to more pupils, targeting TA support towards vulnerable pupils may be one means for schools to continue their support for such pupils.

There are some significant differences by school phase, level of deprivation and region.

- Primary senior leaders are no more likely to report that their staff are conducting home visits than leaders in secondary schools. However, a larger share of primary school teachers (30 per cent) report visiting pupils at home than secondary school teachers (18 per cent). Further, primary school teachers are conducting home visits more

¹⁹ While we asked this question of teachers for whom at least one of the vulnerable pupils they normally teach is not attending school, teachers whose vulnerable pupils are attending school inconsistently may also be making home visits.

²⁰ See Table 2 in the Appendix for further details.

frequently than teachers in secondary schools: 49 per cent of primary teachers conducting home visits are doing them at least once per week, compared to 38 per cent of secondary teachers.

- Pupils in the most deprived schools are more likely to be visited at home. The share of senior leaders reporting that staff in their school are undertaking home visits ranges from 26 per cent in the most affluent schools to 46 per cent in the most deprived schools. Similarly, while 22 per cent of teachers in the least deprived schools report visiting vulnerable pupils at home, 34 per cent of teachers in the most deprived schools are undertaking home visits.
- The share of senior leaders reporting that staff are undertaking home visits is particularly high in the North West (48 per cent); almost twice the share in the East of England (26 per cent). Teachers in the East of England are also least likely to report visiting vulnerable pupils (17 per cent), while the teachers who are most likely to report visiting vulnerable pupils are in the South East (35 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (37 per cent) and West Midlands (39 per cent). These differences do not suggest a clear pattern related to either deprivation or the incidence of Covid-19.

Home visits to vulnerable pupils may be putting some staff at risk.

Some senior leaders are concerned that school staff may be putting themselves at risk by supporting their pupils through visits and contact: 13 per cent of senior leaders report concerns about the safety of staff visiting or offering support to vulnerable pupils. This is particularly true for senior leaders in the most deprived schools, with 17 per cent reporting safety concerns for their staff (compared to seven per cent of leaders in the least deprived schools). Nine per cent of teachers report having concerns about their own safety. This ranges from six per cent in schools with the lowest levels of deprivation to 11 per cent in schools with the highest levels of deprivation.

Senior leaders and their staff have largely taken their own initiative in increasing the welfare support provided to vulnerable pupils. Given that impacts from the pandemic are likely to persist for some time, clearer guidelines on the role of schools and other agencies - in terms of the level of support that other agencies should be providing to schools - are needed to ensure that the needs of vulnerable pupils are appropriately met, while also ensuring that resources are not being diverted away from teaching and learning. Consideration will also need to be given to the additional resources required by schools to enable them to provide this support going forward, to ensure that the welfare burden does not come at the expense of children's education.



Discussion and conclusion

This research has shown that schools and their staff have been adaptable in supporting their vulnerable pupils throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of policy and practice implications emerge from the research.

For government, social services, academy trusts and local authorities

Our research finds that lack of pupil and parental engagement are the most important challenges that senior leaders and teachers are facing in supporting vulnerable pupils who are not attending in-school provision. Given that vulnerable pupil engagement is particularly low for older children, one concern is that some vulnerable pupils may disengage with education altogether as a result of the pandemic. It is also a worry that these children may not be getting the welfare and safeguarding support they require. As schools open more fully, it will be crucial to increase the engagement of these vulnerable pupils to prevent gaps in learning widening and to support their parents to provide a secure and safe environment. For example, the Government recently announced funding to support vulnerable pupils in alternative provision to stay on in education or training, using transition coaches and mentors to provide one-to-one support (DfE, 2020d). A similar scheme could be used to support vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools.

The majority of schools are using printed resources and worksheets to support vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers who are learning at home, particularly in primary schools and the most deprived schools. Our findings also suggest that there are vulnerable pupils working remotely who do not have the appropriate IT resources for their learning. Although more vulnerable pupils will have access to computer equipment as a result of the Government's roll-out of laptops and hotspot devices, this policy is unlikely to equalise provision, as not all vulnerable pupils are covered by the scheme and not all schools will choose to take up support (given that the coverage of the scheme is very limited). In the absence of getting digital devices to vulnerable young people, schools serving vulnerable pupils, particularly those with larger proportions of disadvantaged pupils, are likely to need additional financial and human resources to enable them to support these pupils effectively.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have been playing a significant role in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils. As they open more fully with split classes, there will be increased pressure on the school workforce and current levels of welfare support may become unsustainable. Certain schools are also not getting sufficient support from other agencies: a quarter of senior leaders report a lack of support and some are concerned that their staff are putting themselves at risk by visiting vulnerable pupils at home.

Given that impacts from the pandemic are likely to persist for some time, clearer guidelines on the role of schools and other agencies - in terms of the level of support that other agencies should be providing to schools - are needed to ensure that the needs of vulnerable pupils are appropriately met. Government and social services also need to identify why and where support is lacking and ensure that suitable resources are provided, either from schools or from other agencies. Senior leaders are already expressing the need for additional resources as a result of the pandemic (Sharp et al., 2020). Although the Government recently announced £7 million to support a new service to provide support targeted towards vulnerable pupils (DfE, 2020e), given the challenges schools are facing in supporting these pupils, they are still likely to require additional support for this role.

Policy makers should consider the different challenges in supporting vulnerable pupils across different contexts. For vulnerable pupils in secondary schools, engagement and welfare are significant concerns – but those who are attending in-school provision are likely to have had access to similar resources and, in some cases, more learning support and supervision than many of their peers. For vulnerable pupils in primary schools, engagement and welfare are less likely to be a concern for senior leaders. There is, however, a comparatively greater concern that provision for vulnerable (and keyworker) pupils has focused less on the curriculum in primary than in secondary schools.

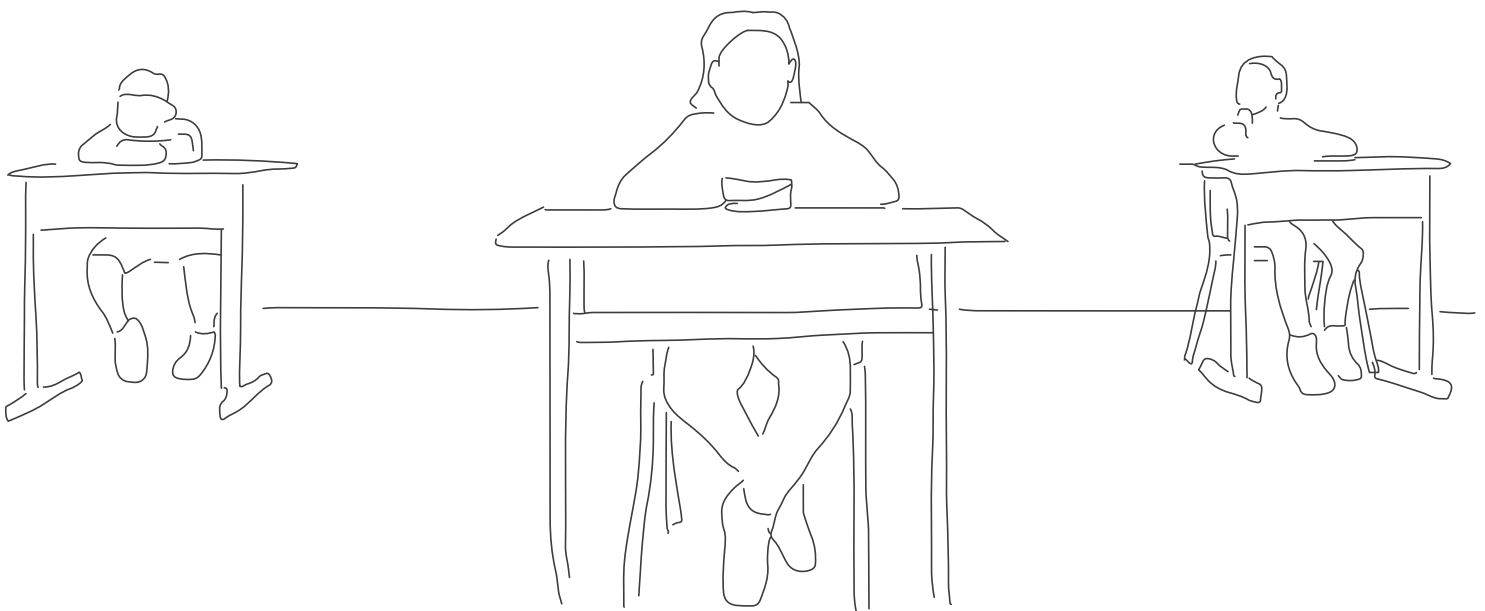
Our research also identifies a group of vulnerable pupils at greater risk of educational disadvantage. These are those vulnerable pupils in the most deprived schools less likely to engage in remote provision and likely to require greater welfare support. Schools serving these pupils are likely to require more staff and resources in order to support them effectively.

For senior leaders

The majority of senior leaders (74 per cent) view the focus of in-school provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers as providing a safe and caring environment rather than on covering the curriculum. Nevertheless, many vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers who are attending in-school provision are receiving similar – and in many cases better supported and supervised – learning provision than children at home. However, senior leaders in 29 per cent of primary schools report that the main approach of their provision for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers is on extra-curricular activities, such as arts, crafts and games. These pupils are disproportionately likely to be in the most deprived schools. Senior leaders in schools where curriculum activities have not been a focus are likely to need to provide additional support to vulnerable pupils as schools open more fully, to address any learning gaps which may have developed as a result.

This research has shown that, while schools have done much to support their vulnerable pupils during the pandemic, they face significant challenges in continuing to support these pupils as they open more fully. Senior leaders and teachers face the difficult tasks of re-engaging the large proportion of vulnerable pupils who have disengaged from education, and balancing the challenges of teaching other pupils, both on-site and remotely, with the need to support the welfare of vulnerable pupils, and helping those who have fallen behind to catch up.

Schools have been playing a significant role in ensuring the safety and well-being of their vulnerable pupils.



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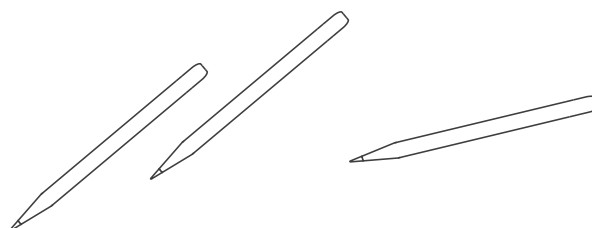
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Appendix A: Data

A note on sample weighting

To ensure the sample of respondents was representative of the population of all schools, we created a variable that identifies whether a school is a primary or secondary school and its level of free school meal eligibility (FSM). FSM information was downloaded from the Department for Education's website in April, and the figure identifying the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was used to separately create eligibility quintiles for both primary and secondary schools. This created a 13-category variable of sector and quintile, including two missing categories and a single category to indicate all-through schools. The distribution of the responding schools was compared to the population distribution and a chi square test for independence was used to determine if weighting was required.

Tables

Table 1

Arrangements in place for vulnerable pupils and the children of keyworkers

What arrangements are in place ...	(%)
Our school is open for them to attend	90
Our school is partially open to them to attend on a rota with other schools and/or providers	2
Our school is closed and these pupils are able to attend a hub or partner school/provider	8

Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders: 1089 responded. Three senior leaders report not having any vulnerable pupils or keyworker children on roll.

Table 2

Use of teaching assistants

How have you deployed/used teaching assistants to help you manage the current situation?	Senior leaders (%)	Teachers (%)
Working in school (in general)	41	19
Supporting keyworker children (in school)	20	27
Training at home	17	8
Supporting vulnerable children (in school)	16	9
Preparing resources and learning activities	12	7
Supporting pupils and parents remotely	10	10
I have not used TAs/none are available	3	12

An open-ended question with multiple responses. Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders and 1821 teachers: 904 leaders and 1363 teachers gave at least one response.

Table 3
Challenges experienced by senior leaders

Which challenges are you experiencing in supporting vulnerable pupils when they are not attending school...	(%)
Lack of pupil engagement in learning	57
Lack of parent/carer support for learning	59
Concerns for pupils' safety/well-being	45
Concerns about the safety of staff who need to visit or contact pupils to offer support	13
Lack of support from other agencies	26
Insufficient staff time to provide adequate support	9
Other	7
No challenges	15

Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders: 956 gave at least one response.

Table 4
Challenges experienced by teachers

Which challenges are you experiencing in supporting vulnerable pupils when they are not attending school...	(%)
Lack of pupil engagement in learning	75
Lack of parent/carer support for learning	74
Concerns for pupils' safety/well-being	48
Concerns about own safety if need to visit or contact pupils to offer support	9
Lack of support from other agencies	13
Insufficient time to provide adequate support	15
Other	8
No challenges	6

Source: NFER survey of 1821 teachers: 1241 gave at least one response.

Table 5
Support provided according to senior leaders

Which of the following types of support is your school currently providing to vulnerable pupils....	(%)
Food vouchers/parcels	95
Laptops/computer equipment	40
Printouts of worksheets or other resources	83
Information about where to find support (not just educational)	83
Social/welfare support (in combination with other agencies)	69
Social/welfare support (in the absence of other agencies)	33
Check-ins/communication/monitoring	96
Home visits	39

Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders: 952 gave at least one response.

Table 6
Senior leaders' views on keeping in touch with vulnerable pupils

How difficult or easy is it for your school to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils who are not attending school?	(%)
Very difficult	2
Difficult	9
Mixed views	52
Easy	25
Very easy	11

Source: NFER survey of 1233 senior leaders: 962 responded.

Table 7
Classroom teachers' views on keeping in touch with vulnerable pupils

How difficult or easy is it for your school to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils who are not attending school?	(%)
Very difficult	3
Difficult	11
Mixed views	58
Easy	23
Very easy	5

Source: NFER survey of 1821 teachers: 1239 responded.

Table 8
Frequency of teacher visits to vulnerable pupils' homes

How frequently are you visiting vulnerable pupils at their places of residence (e.g. to deliver provisions/learning resources, or to provide pastoral support?)	(%)
Not at all	72
Less than once per week	15
Once or more per week	13

Source: NFER survey of 1821 teachers: 1238 responded.

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