

What was the impact of Key Stage 1 school closures on later attainment and social skills?

Findings from year 2 of a unique longitudinal study following the youngest school-aged children during the Covid-19 pandemic

The study aims to understand the long-term impact of Covid-19 disruption and partial school closures on pupils' attainment and social skills.

In March 2022, 6,029 pupils in 81 schools took part in year 2 of the study. We provided schools with NFER reading and maths assessments, and schools provided us with their pupils' data. Teachers completed a questionnaire on pupils' social skills for some of their Year 2 and Year 3 pupils. Contextual information about school practices and any catch-up activities undertaken with the pupils was also collected through a survey completed by 67 headteachers or senior leaders. We published the [report](#) from year 2 of the study on 24 November 2022.

The research highlights that catch-up support should focus on very low attaining pupils and closing the disadvantage gap.

It is essential that schools are both adequately funded and supported to ensure that the required long-term support can be delivered.

Many children had caught up, but younger pupils were still struggling with reading

Year 2 pupils were three months behind in reading compared with where Year 2 pupils would have been expected to be before the pandemic.

However, many children had caught up. Year 2 children had, on average, caught up to the level of attainment in maths of pupils before the pandemic. Year 3 children had, on average, caught up to the level of attainment in both reading and maths of pupils before the pandemic.

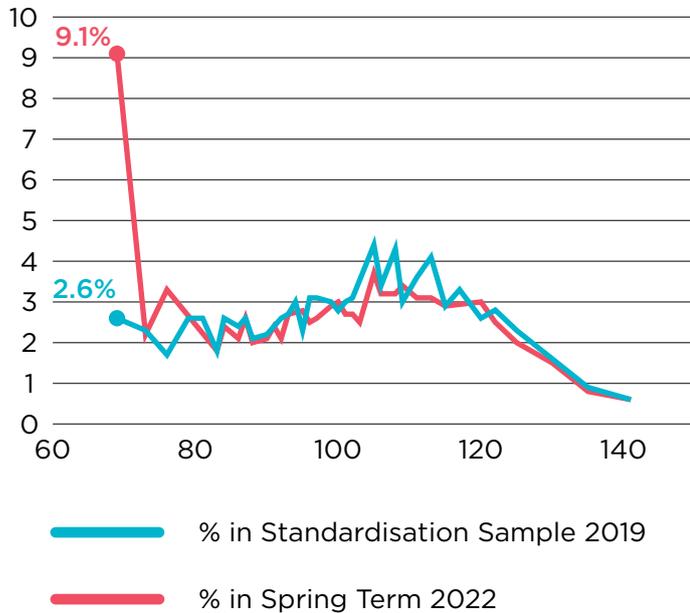


Thank you to all our participating schools. We could not have done it without you!

More very low attaining pupils in the typical classroom

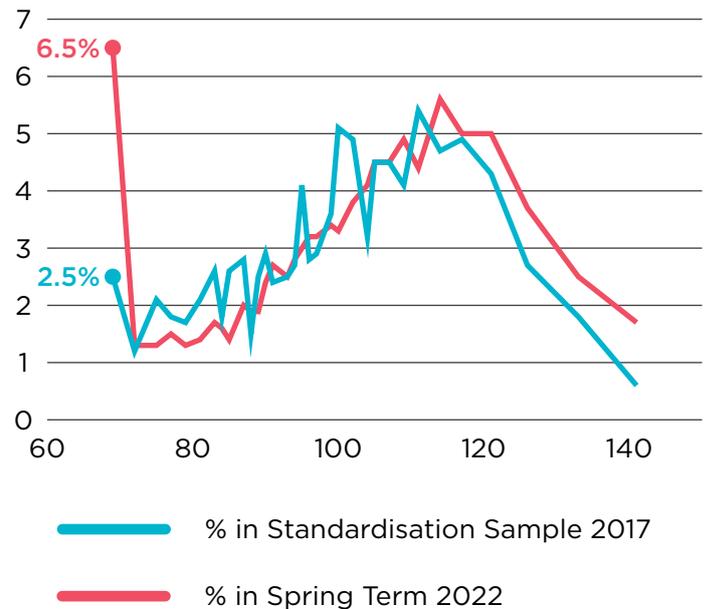
We found a large increase in very low attainers in reading and to a lesser extent in maths compared with before the pandemic.

Standardised scores in reading of Year 2 pupils in spring 2022



In Year 2, for reading, the proportion of low attaining pupils more than tripled from 2.6% to 9.1%, and for maths more than doubled from 2.6% to 5.5% compared with before the pandemic.

Standardised scores in reading of Year 3 pupils in spring 2022



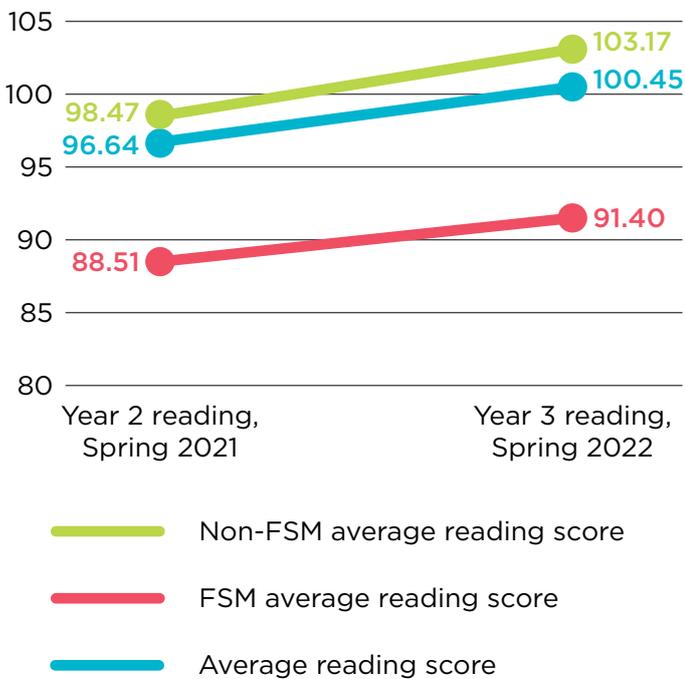
In Year 3, for reading, the proportion of low attaining pupils rose from 2.5% to 6.5%, and for maths from 2.4% to 3.9% compared with before the pandemic. This increase represents a substantial challenge for teachers across the country, particularly for teachers in schools in disadvantaged areas with higher proportions of lower performing pupils.



No signs of the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers reducing

The disadvantage gap that widened in 2021 in this cohort has not widened further, but neither has it narrowed.

Average change in standardised scores in reading of Year 3 pupils



In Year 2, the attainment gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and those not eligible was equivalent to around six months of schooling for reading and around five months for maths. In Year 3, there was a difference of around nine months for reading and around eight months for maths.

Headteachers concerned about their pupils' wellbeing

The wellbeing of pupils was an area of increased focus during 2021/2022. Small group sessions and staff redeployment were the top strategies for social and wellbeing support.

Teachers reported that the additional support had contributed to increased workload. This was alongside higher levels of staff absences. Nearly all schools reported higher than normal rates of absences among staff from Year 2 and 3 classes as well as increased work supporting pupils and increased work for catching up.

Most schools felt they were now well prepared to deliver effective home learning but that the greatest challenge created by the continued need for home learning was the increased workload involved.

The top three strategies implemented this year for maths and reading learning recovery were small group work, staff redeployment and a revised curriculum.



Spotlight on reading and maths achievement

Here are some of the findings on pupils' strengths and weaknesses in reading and maths in all schools which took part in the study in spring 2022 compared with before the pandemic. Schools which use the NFER online analysis tool are able to analyse pupils' performance in detail.



Reading

Year 2 pupils were assessed on five content domains classified in line with the Key Stage 1 test frameworks, and Year 3 pupils on six content domains classified in line with the Key Stage 2 test frameworks.

-  higher attainment
-  the same attainment
-  lower attainment

Year 2 reading

The Year 2 assessment focusses mainly on two domains: identify/explain key aspects of texts and make inferences from the text. There are a small number of questions testing the use of vocabulary and very few testing the remaining domains.

Reading test coverage

	Compared with pupils before the pandemic, Year 2 pupils showed...	Compared with pupils in Year 2 in spring 2021, Year 2 pupils showed...
Use knowledge of vocabulary to understand texts		
Identify/explain key aspects of texts		
Identify and explain the sequence of events in texts		
Make inferences from the text		
Predict what might happen from what has been read		

Reading test coverage

Compared with pupils before the pandemic, Year 3 pupils showed...

Give/explain the meaning of words in context	
Retrieve and record information/identify key details from texts	
Summarise main ideas from more than one paragraph	
Make inferences from the text/explain and justify inferences with evidence from the text	
Identify/explain how content is related and contributes to meaning	
Identify/explain how meaning is enhanced through choice of words and phrases	

Year 3 reading

The Year 3 assessment focusses mainly on two domains: retrieve and record information/identify key details from texts and make inferences from the text/explain and justify inferences with evidence from the text. There is a smaller proportion of questions requiring pupils to give/explain the meaning of words in context and very few testing the other domains.

Maths

The curriculum is divided into six domains which are the same for both Year 2 and Year 3.



Year 2 maths

The Year 2 assessment focusses mainly on two domains: number and place value, and calculations. There are a small number of questions testing the other domains as these are in the early stages of being introduced to pupils.

Maths test coverage

Compared with pupils before the pandemic, Year 2 pupils showed...

Compared with pupils in Year 2 in spring 2021, Year 2 pupils showed...

Number and place value	=	=
Calculations	=	=
Fractions	=	↑
Measurement	=	=
Geometry	=	=
Statistics	=	=

Maths test coverage

Compared with pupils before the pandemic, Year 3 pupils showed...

Number and place value	↑
Calculations	↑
Fractions	=
Measurement	=
Geometry	↓
Statistics	↑

Year 3 maths

The Year 3 assessment focusses mainly on two domains: number and place value, and calculations. There are more questions testing the other domains compared with the Year 2 assessment.

Pupils eligible for free school meals performed significantly lower than pupils not eligible in all reading and maths domains in both year groups.

Our earlier findings (in 2021) also found children from disadvantaged backgrounds had lower attainment in all curriculum areas in reading and maths.



This study was funded by the Education Endowment Foundation and conducted by NFER.