# Returning pupils to school

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# Executive summary

On 10th May the Prime Minister announced a phased return of some children to school In England from 1st June. Schools have been closed to all but vulnerable and keyworker children since 20th March, meaning that most children have been educated at home for a period of ten weeks, and some year groups are not expected to return to school until the autumn.

Nevertheless, opening their schools to selected year groups (Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and 6 in primary schools and Year 10 and 12 pupils in secondary schools) as well as continuing on-site provision for vulnerable and keyworker children and providing distance learning for others is a considerable challenge for school leaders. In this report we set out our initial findings on how prepared school leaders are for opening more fully, what challenges they face and what guidance and support they need.

This report is based on findings from a national survey of 1,233 senior leaders in publicly-funded, mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. Responses between 7th and 17th May have been weighted by phase and free school meal (FSM) eligibility to provide a nationally representative picture. Note that because senior leaders were answering questions over a ten-day period, some responses pre-date the Prime Minister's announcement on the 10th May and the publication of DfE guidance from the 12th to the 25th May (DfE, 2020a-f).

## Key findings

The main issues school leaders face when planning to open their schools to whole year groups concern practical issues, staffing and teaching. Senior leaders are using their experiences of the situation before lockdown to predict how the pandemic will continue to affect their schools in terms of potential pupil attendance and teacher availability. There are some issues that are likely to affect schools differently, according to their phase, the proportion of FSM pupils and region.

### Practical issues

- **Most school leaders feel unprepared for resuming a range of activities when more pupils return to school.** They feel least prepared for managing pupil movement around school (66 per cent say they are not at all or not very prepared for this) and organising school space to enable social distancing (65 per cent are not at all/not very prepared).

- Despite DfE advice to the contrary (DfE, 2020e) most primary school leaders (65 per cent) think it would be at least somewhat feasible to operate a rota with different year groups or classes in school on different days. This suggests that primary leaders would be willing to adopt the option explored by SAGE (2020) for schools to split classes and rotate attendance every one or two weeks.

- **Most senior leaders say that frequent cleaning (96 per cent) and regular handwashing/sanitising (94 per cent) are very necessary/essential for safety when opening their schools more fully.** Over half (56 per cent) consider it very necessary/essential to have access to personal protective equipment (PPE). Most feel at least somewhat prepared for maintaining hygiene when they open their schools to more pupils (66 per cent).

- **Senior leaders want the Government to provide clear, detailed and realistic guidance to schools on opening more fully.** They want information from the Government (and to a lesser extent from local authorities and trusts) on how to manage social distancing. They want to know what is expected of schools, and under what circumstances there is flexibility for leaders to reduce the number of pupils on site. School leaders want the Government to explain the scientific principles underpinning advice on opening schools more fully and to provide detailed advice about the relative safety of different activities. Local authorities and academy trusts can help by providing advice and access to resources, tailored to schools' specific needs.

- **Senior leaders identify a need for financial help to ensure good hygiene,** especially hand sanitising and handwashing, but also other equipment (such as screens and thermometers) to reassure staff and parents.

### Staffing

- **School leaders have fewer teaching staff available at a time when they need more.** At the end of May 2020, school leaders were operating with 75 per cent of their normal teaching capacity. Over a fifth (29%) of the teachers who are available to work are only able to work at home. Senior leaders explained that they will need extra staff to teach and supervise pupils while on site, provide distance learning for pupils at home and/or cover for absent staff and they need additional funding to pay for this.

- **Most senior leaders (72 per cent) say they are somewhat or very prepared** for staffing the school site and for staffing lessons (67 per cent) when they open the school to more pupils. However, the extent to which schools can staff lessons on-site and offer remote learning at the same time is likely to be influenced by the proportion of staff available to work outside the home.

## Schools' experiences before lockdown and pupil attendance

What happened before schools closed to most pupils in March provides an indication of what might happen in terms of staffing and attendance while schools start to make the transition back to normal working.

- **Three quarters (76 per cent) of school leaders had already experienced a negative impact of Covid-19 on their schools shortly before the March lockdown.**

- One key impact before lockdown was a **reduction in teaching capacity,** with 32 per cent of school leaders reporting that this had limited the standard of teaching and/or curriculum breadth (27 per cent). The effects were greater for secondary schools, reflecting the teacher supply challenges that already existed in this phase.

- **Over half (61 per cent) of school leaders had experienced a significant drop in numbers of pupils attending school in March.**

- **Senior leaders predict that when schools open**

**more fully, 46 per cent of families, on average, will keep their children at home.** This may be because there are families who need to self-isolate or because they have concerns about their children returning to school.

## Issues affecting particular schools

There is evidence that some issues are affecting schools differently, according to whether they are primary or secondary, the level deprivation (the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM) and region.

### Differences by phase

- **Only 18 per cent of primary school leaders think it is very/entirely feasible to open their schools more fully from June 2020.** Some say that it is simply not possible for them to ensure social distancing because children are too young to understand the rules and/or their school buildings are unsuitable.

- Secondary leaders are **more positive about opening their schools more fully,** with 37 per cent saying this is very/entirely feasible, despite the challenges secondary schools experienced in retaining sufficient teaching capacity prior to lockdown.

- Primary school leaders are less prepared than secondary leaders for **managing a combination of face-to-face and online lessons** if not all pupils are in school at once (66 per cent of primary leaders feel unprepared for this compared with

52 per cent of secondary leaders). This may be influenced by the higher demands on primary schools which will reduce the availability of teachers to support distance learning for other year groups.

- Secondary leaders are significantly more positive than their primary counterparts about the prospect of having a rota with different year groups/classes attending on different days (65 per cent of primary leaders consider this to be at least somewhat feasible, compared with 73 per cent of secondary leaders). Primary leaders are more willing to stagger break/lunch-times (78 per cent of primary leaders and 68 per cent of secondary leaders consider this to be at least somewhat feasible).

- Secondary leaders are significantly less positive than primary leaders about the feasibility of staggering the start and end times of the school day (60 per cent of secondary leaders and 78 per cent of primary leaders consider this to be at least somewhat feasible) – presumably because of the restrictions of the secondary timetable and the complexity of pupils' transport arrangements.

- **Primary school leaders predict that a higher percentage of parents (47 per cent) will keep their children at home:** secondary leaders predict that 42 per cent of parents will keep their children at home.

### Differences by deprivation

- **Senior leaders from schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils are most likely to report that they are very/extremely prepared for maintaining high levels of school hygiene** when their schools open more fully (31 per cent, compared to 24 per cent of all school leaders). This may reflect the arrangements that these schools had already put in place prior to lockdown in response to a greater impact of the pandemic on their schools.

- **Before 20th March, the pandemic had the greatest impact in general on schools serving the most deprived pupils.** More leaders from schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils (86 per cent) indicated that their school had experienced an impact of the pandemic prior to 20th March compared to schools with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils (68 per cent of whom reported an impact on their schools at that time).

- Leaders from schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils were more likely to report that they had **experienced a significant drop in numbers of pupils** attending school before the 20th March

(73 per cent) than those with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils (56 per cent). This suggests that disadvantaged pupils may have been missing school before the lockdown.

- **Senior leaders with the highest proportion of FSM pupils estimate that more families will keep them at home (50 per cent on average)** compared with an average estimate of 42 per cent from leaders with the lowest proportion of FSM. This raises concerns that pupils in most need of access to education will be least likely to receive it.

### Differences by region

- School leaders are more likely to report an impact from Covid-19 on their schools prior to 20th March if they are based in the West Midlands (82 per cent), London (82 per cent) and the North West (79 per cent) compared with school leaders based in the East Midlands (61 per cent).

- School leaders are more likely to report that they **experienced a significant drop in the number of pupils attending school** before the 20th March if they are based in London (72 per cent) and the West Midlands (70 per cent).

- School leaders are more likely to estimate that a higher percentage of families (50 per cent on average) will **keep their children at home** if they are based in the North West compared with leaders in the South West (who estimate that an average of 41 per cent of parents will keep their children at home).

## Discussion and conclusion

At the time the survey was conducted, both primary and secondary leaders had reservations about the practicalities of opening their school sites to more pupils after lockdown. Only 18 per cent of primary and 37 per cent of secondary leaders thought the proposed arrangements would be entirely feasible, although a much larger proportion thought the proposals would be at least 'somewhat feasible' (59 per cent of primary and 83 per cent of secondary leaders).

The use of rotas – with different classes or groups attending on different days – was seen as at least somewhat feasible by the majority (65 per cent of primary and 73 per cent of secondary leaders). This may be an area that the Government needs to look at again at their advice for primary schools, in line with the options explored by SAGE (2020).

**Leaders are particularly concerned about managing pupil movement around the building, organising school space to enable social distancing, and combining in-school and remote learning. There are some re**quirements that leaders consider essential for opening more fully, including increased site cleaning and hygiene. Their prediction that 46 per cent of families will keep their children at home suggests a high level of concern among parents.

Primary senior leaders are facing different challenges to their secondary counterparts, due the expectation to accommodate more year groups full-time, the difficulty of getting young children to stay in small social groups or follow hygiene protocols, and the unsuitability of their buildings.  On the other hand, subject teaching in secondary schools means that pupils are taught by different teachers for different subjects in different parts of the school, which will become more challenging to manage when larger number of secondary pupils return.

Senior leaders in schools serving a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils were more affected by the pandemic before March 20th. They predict that when schools open more fully, a higher proportion of their families will continue to keep their children at home, which risks increasing the deprivation gap in learning.

**There are some indications of regional differences, indicating that the pandemic has had a greater impact on schools in the West Midlands, North West and London. These findings suggest that support and guidance should be tailored to the needs of primary and secondary schools and targeted on those serving the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils. It will also be important for local authorities and academy trusts to ensure that appropriate support is available to schools at a loca**l level.

Overall, school leaders want clear instructions underpinned by scientific advice, coupled with detailed guidance on specific challenges (some of which has been provided since the survey took place). They also say they need additional funding for staffing and essential supplies. While the pandemic continues, it will be important for the Government, local authorities, academy trusts and schools themselves to ensure appropriate messaging to parents, given the extent to which senior leaders expect parents to keep their children at home.

This research has revealed the complexity of the challenge facing school leaders as they prepare to open their schools more fully during the summer term. Other reports in this series will focus on different aspects of schools' responses to Covid-19 during lockdown and as more pupils return to school.
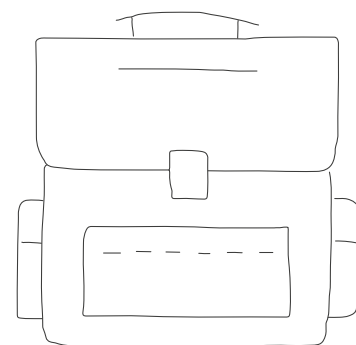
1   This refers to schools in the highest of five categories for the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM.
2   According to GOV.UK, 2020, in May 2020, the highest number of cases was in London.

# Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on all areas of society, including education. The Government ordered all schools to close on 20th March 2020, although schools were asked to provide on-site education for vulnerable children and children of critical workers (such as those working in public health, transport and supplying food).

On 10th May the Prime Minister announced a roadmap for how and when the Government will adjust its response to Covid-19 including the phased return of some children to school from 1st June 2020. DfE issued its Guidance for Parents and Carers (DfE, 2020b) on 11th May which stated that schools would only be open for more pupils if the Government's five tests to end the lockdown justified the changes at that time.

DfE's Guidance for Education and Childcare Settings (DfE, 2020c) issued on 12th May set out the next steps:

- primary schools to welcome back children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, prioritised because they are in key transition years

- secondary schools and colleges to prioritise Year 10 and 12 pupils preparing for important examinations next year, offering not full timetables but some face-to-face contact and support to supplement pupils' remote education.

The DfE issued an Initial Planning Framework (DfE, 2020d) also on 12th May to help school leaders prepare to open their schools for more pupils. This provided a key action list for senior leaders to consider including staffing levels and flexible working arrangements, communications to parents, protective measures and hygiene, pupil wellbeing and learning. The document stated that it was not possible to set national guidelines that were universally applicable. It advised school leaders and trusts to think through the steps and develop their own plans, making their own judgements for safe opening of their setting based on knowledge of their school community and premises.

Guidance for primary schools (DfE, 2020e) issued on 14th May stated that eligible children to return to school on 1st June should be offered a full-time place and stated the Government's ambition for all primary school children to return for a month before the summer break if feasible.

Guidance for secondary schools (DfE 2020f) issued on 25th May clarified that schools should be prepared to offer Year 10 and 12 pupils some face-to-face support from the 15th June. Secondary schools were asked to consider this as supplementary to remote education, and advised to have a quarter of their Year 10 and 12 cohort in school at any one time.

**Most countries favoured a staggered return to school with priority given to younger pupils**

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

4    The five tests are: 1. Protect the NHS ability to cope. 2. A sustained and consistent fall in daily death rates. 3. Rate of infection decreasing to manageable levels. 4. A range of operational challenges including testing capacity are in hand. 5. Any adjustments to current measures will not risk a second peak of infections.

A rapid review of international approaches to education during the Covid-19 pandemic for the Chartered College of Teaching (Müller and Goldenberg, 2020) reported that most countries favoured a staggered return to school with priority given to younger pupils, those at transition points in their education, the most vulnerable and those approaching high-stakes examinations. The review concluded that the decision-making process around a return to school was highly complex and needed to take the best evidence available from a range of disciplines into account, weighing up the risks and benefits of school closures to ensure the health and wellbeing of all pupils and staff. It recommended that practitioners should be consulted to ensure that the practicalities for schools were taken into account.

Feedback from head teachers and teachers (CooperGibson, 2020; Schoolzone, 2020; National Association of Head Teachers, 2020) collected in mid-May, identified several salient issues that they thought needed careful consideration in the preparation for the opening of schools to more pupils. They wanted more timely information on:

- safety measures including how to ensure social distancing in schools and use of protective equipment

- support for pupils and staff, especially those in high-risk groups

- ways of managing the transition of pupils back to school including addressing lost learning

- a phased approach to returning to school which included flexibility for schools.

Representatives from teachers' unions met the Government's scientific advisers on 15th May to find out more about the scientific evidence relating to the proposed opening of schools to more pupils. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL, 2020) said that they were reassured by the feedback from the scientific advisers and would continue to support their members in preparing for extending opening schools from 1st June with significant caveats. Because many primary schools (especially infant schools) could find it impossible to bring back all eligible pupils, ASCL wanted the Government to be more flexible and promised to back schools if they needed to take a more phased approach. The National Education Union (2020a) stated that they wanted schools to be opened to more pupils providing it was safe, setting out their tests for achieving this. The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (2020) wrote to the Secretary of State (18th May) sharing survey data showing that 85 per cent of their members did not think it would be safe to return to school on 1st June, and saying that they remained unconvinced that the wider reopening of schools from 1st June was appropriate or practicable.

Local authorities joined the debate about when primary schools should open for more pupils, with some warning that their primary schools would not be ready on 1st June (BBC, 2020). A statement by the Local Government Association (2020) issued on 20th May said: 'Councils are keen to support their local schools to get children back as soon as possible. However, the safety of children, their families and staff will always be top priority. As there are different infection rates around the country, schools and councils must decide how and when schools reopen to more children. Some areas may want to work faster than others.'

A nationally representative study of 4,000 parents by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Andrew et al., 2020) found that parents had mixed views about their children returning to school in June. The survey (29 April-12th May) reported that fewer than half would send their children back to school if they had the choice (39 per cent of primary school parents and 45 per cent of secondary school parents). Higher-income parents were more willing than lower-income parents for their children to return. The authors noted that this risked a situation where children struggling the most to cope with home learning remain at home while their better-off classmates are back in the classroom.

Similarly, a poll of 1,024 parents (5th-7th May) for the National Education Union (2020b) found that 49 per cent of respondents said they would send their child(ren) back to school as soon as their school reopens, 33 per cent at a later date and 18 per cent did not know. A Parentkind (2020) survey of 247,022 parents (23rd April-4th May) found that parents would be happy for their child to return to school with the following conditions: only when the Government said it was safe to do so – 23 per cent; only when school leaders/teachers said it was safe to do so – 18 per cent; only when staff and pupils at my child's school had been vaccinated – 10 per cent; as soon as the lockdown ended – 10 per cent; a July return date but confirmed now – 7 per cent; a September return date but confirmed now – 25 per cent.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE, 2020), reported modelling and behavioural science responses to seven scenarios for relaxing school closures. It investigated and presented evidence on the safety and impact of re-opening schools, concluding that the risk of Covid-19 infection to pupils going back to school was very small but not zero. The report identified the following scenario as likely to be the most effective to make school attendance normative: it was 'perceived

to be potentially preferable – both developmentally and practically – for young people and working parents'.

- School cohorts split into two. Half of each school attend for one week and then spend one week at home. The other half of the school then attend for the next week

- The school workforce is also split in two and staff stick with the same 'half' of the school.

Given the importance and implications of the way in which schools are re-opened, NFER identified the need for an independent assessment of the challenges schools are facing, including keeping children engaged in learning, managing staff wellbeing and workload, and providing education both face-to-face and remotely.

This report focuses on the challenges school leaders experienced shortly before schools closed to the majority of pupils, and on their level of preparedness for opening more fully. Subsequent reports will focus on: remote learning support and pupil engagement; provision for vulnerable and key worker children; and job satisfaction and workload.

5    However, SAGE also notes that the 'The modelling of Scenario 7 is the least robust of the scenarios, and further exploration is needed.'

# Timeline

Survey goes live (7th May)

## 23rd March

The government closes schools in England except for priority groups: vulnerable children and keyworker children.

## 10th May

The Prime Minister's Covid-19 roadmap includes phased return of some children to primary school from week commencing 1st June.

## 11th May

DfE provides guidance for parents and carers about opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1st June.

## 12th May

DfE publishes an initial planning framework for schools about opening schools for more children and young people.

## 12th May

DfE publishes actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1st June.

## 14th May

DfE publishes a planning guide for primary schools to help senior leaders and trusts prepare arrangements for more children returning to school.

## 15th May

Teachers' unions meet government scientific advisers to discuss evidence related to wider opening of schools from 1st June.

Survey closed (17th May)

## 20th May

Some local authorities warn that not all of their primary schools will be ready to reopen on 1st June.

## 21st May

LGA publishes its statement on schools' reopening plans.

## 28th May

Government reviewed evidence for its five key tests for ending the Covid-19 lockdown.
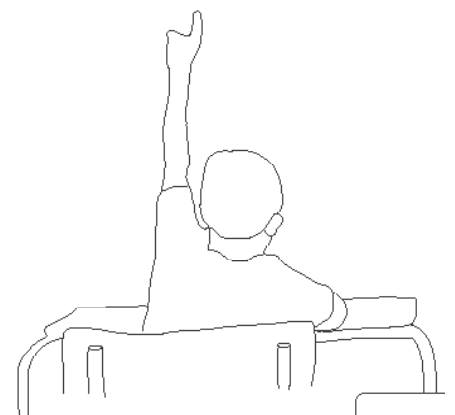
# Box 1. NFER survey of schools' responses to Covid-19

## 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 children 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 has produced 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.

# Research findings on schools' preparedness to open more fully after lockdown

## How feasible is it to open schools more fully in June?

This section considers how feasible primary and secondary school leaders think it is to open their schools more fully and reports their experiences just before lockdown. Note that we have analysed the answers to all closed questions according to phase (primary/secondary), deprivation (proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)) and region, but have only reported differences where these are statistically significant at the five per cent level ($p < 0.05$) . All percentages are based on the number of people responding to the question, excluding non-responses (valid per cent).

**A minority of primary school leaders (18 per cent) think it is very/entirely feasible to open their schools to selected year groups from June 2020.**

On Sunday 10th May 2020, Boris Johnson announced that if Covid-19 remained at manageable levels, we could expect to see Nursery, Reception, Year 1, and Year 6 classes returning to school in a phased approach from June 1st 2020.

From the 7th to the 17th May we asked school leaders if they are prepared to open their schools more fully while social distancing is still in force.  For most aspects involved (rotating year groups on different days, staggering the timing of the school day or staggering break/lunch times) over 20 per cent of primary senior leaders think this is not feasible, 40 per cent think it somewhat feasible and around 20 per cent consider it very/entirely feasible.

Some school leaders, especially in primary schools, say it is simply not practical to enable social distancing in their schools.

The Government (DfE 2020c) recognised that social distancing is not possible or necessary for younger age groups. The objective is to isolate 'groups' (e.g. half a class and their teacher) rather than individuals: 'We know that, unlike older children and adults, early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain

'Schools cannot open more fully and safely if social distancing is still in force ... our corridors are less than two metres wide, our classrooms are only 47sq.m. and can only have ten pupils in at a time, we don't have enough specialist staff to divide classes across classrooms.'

'Apologies but these socially distancing in school questions are ridiculous. We must accept that schools will find the social distancing of its pupils impossible – expectations from all parties must remain realistic, schools should not promise that they will be able to implement social distancing rules. Any illusion of social distancing in schools will be just that - an illusion.'

'Our building is open plan and that means passing through at least one other class to get anywhere.'

'We have tiny corridors and very small classrooms.  I can't honestly see how opening the school is an option.'

2 metres apart from each other and staff. In deciding to bring more children back to early years and schools, we are taking this into account'.

Rotating different classes or groups to return on different days has been the subject of recent debate. The DfE (2020e) stated that primary schools should not adopt a rota system, but the SAGE committee report (SAGE, 2020) highlights an option in which schools could split classes and rotate different groups to attend on alternate weeks. A majority (65 per cent) of primary leaders surveyed in May consider a rotation to be somewhat to entirely feasible but about a third (35 per cent) say that it is not feasible for them to have different year groups or classes in school on different days while maintaining remote learning for others.

The Government recommends that schools should not rotate different groups of pupils to attend school at different *times* of the day (DfE, 2020f). This option was very unpopular among the primary leaders we

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6    We refer to 'school leaders' rather than 'schools' 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).

7    We used a Bonferroni adjustment (Bonferroni, 1936) to adjust for multiple comparisons.

8    We use this phrase because most schools  have continued to be open to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. The DfE (2020a) estimated that 61 per cent of educational establishments were open during the period 27 March – 17 April 2020.

surveyed, with 69 per cent saying that it was not at all/ not very feasible. As well as the difficulty of maintaining hygiene, having more than one group in school per day would undoubtedly be complicated for schools to manage and would be impractical for working parents.

On the other hand, most primary school leaders (90 per cent) feel that prioritising attendance for vulnerable and keyworker children was somewhat to very feasible – most likely because the majority of their schools are already open for these pupils (see DfE 2020a).

**Table 1: Primary school leaders' views on opening their schools more fully**

| How feasible would it be for you to… | Not at all/not very feasible (%) | Somewhat feasible (%) | Very/entirely feasible (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Open the school site to priority year groups while maintaining remote learning for others, then opening more fully? | 41 | 41 | 18 |
| Have a rota, with different year groups or classes in school on different days and the remainder supported to learn remotely? | 35 | 43 | 22 |
| Have a rota, with different year groups or classes in school at different times of the day and the remainder supported to learn remotely | 69 | 24 | 7 |
| Stagger break-times and/or lunch-times | 22 | 43 | 35 |
| Stagger the start and end times of the school day | 22 | 45 | 33 |
| Prioritise attendance for vulnerable pupils, children of keyworkers and/or those at risk of falling behind | 10 | 34 | 56 |

Source: NFER survey of 957 primary school leaders: 844 gave at least one response.

Secondary school leaders are under less pressure than their primary counterparts to open their school site to as many pupils, as the Government advised them to enable some face-to-face contact for pupils in Year 10 and 12 during the summer term (DfE, 2020c and f). Our survey found that senior leaders in secondary schools are significantly more positive than their primary colleagues about the prospect of opening more fully, with 37 per cent saying this is very/entirely feasible. In addition to the different demands on primary and secondary schools, secondary teachers have more non-contact time to support remote learning as well as providing some face-to-face teaching. Secondary senior leaders are also significantly more positive than their primary counterparts about the prospect of having a rota with different year groups/classes attending on different days (which ties in with the guidance for secondary schools to accommodate a quarter of their year groups at a time) and are more willing to stagger break/lunch-times. However, they are significantly less positive than primary leaders about the feasibility of staggering the start and end times of the school day – presumably because of the restrictions of the secondary timetable and the complexity of pupils' transport arrangements.

Secondary leaders' views are similar to their primary counterparts on the feasibility of two options: 61 per cent think it is not feasible to have pupils attend on different times of the day; but most (88 per cent) think it would be at least somewhat feasible to prioritise attendance for vulnerable pupils, children of keyworkers and/or those at risk of falling behind.

**Table 2: Secondary school leaders' views on opening their schools more fully**

| How feasible would it be for you to… | Not at all/not very feasible (%) | Somewhat feasible (%) | Very/entirely feasible (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Open the school site to priority year groups while maintaining remote learning for others, then opening more fully? | 17 | 46 | 37 |
| Have a rota, with different year groups or classes in school <u>on different days</u> and the remainder supported to learn remotely? | 27 | 45 | 28 |
| Have a rota, with different year groups or classes in school <u>at different times of the day</u> and the remainder supported to learn remotely | 61 | 27 | 12 |
| Stagger break-times and/or lunch-times | 32 | 43 | 25 |
| Stagger the start and end times of the school day | 40 | 36 | 24 |
| Prioritise attendance for vulnerable pupils, children of keyworkers and/or those at risk of falling behind | 12 | 32 | 56 |

Source: NFER survey of 276 secondary school leaders: 188 gave at least one response.

**Only 24 per cent of school leaders had not already experienced the impact of Covid-19 before the March lockdown.**

School leaders' views on opening their schools more fully are likely to be influenced by their experiences from just before the official closing of schools on 20th March. At that time, those in high-risk medical groups and those displaying symptoms of Covid-19 were asked to self-isolate. Three quarters (76 per cent) of senior leaders say that this had more than a minimal impact on their schools. The main impact was to a drop in pupil attendance (reported by 61 per cent of school leaders).

Another impact of the pandemic before lockdown was a reduction in teaching capacity, with 32 per cent of leaders reporting that this limited the standard of teaching and 27 per cent saying that this restricted their ability to offer a full curriculum for all year groups.

A minority of leaders report an impact of the pandemic on the availability of support staff providing care for pupils (21 per cent), cleaning (11 per cent), or catering staff (six per cent). Only four per cent report that staff shortages forced their school to close before the 20th March.

**Table 3: Impact of Covid-19 before 20th March**

| Before schools were asked to close to the majority of pupils (on 20th March), those in high risk medical groups and/or those displaying symptoms of Covid-19 were asked to self-isolate. What impact did this have on your school? | % |
|---|---|
| It had no impact/a minimal impact | 24 |
| We had a significant drop in numbers of pupils attending school | 61 |
| We had insufficient teachers to provide pupils with the normal standard of teaching | 32 |
| We had insufficient teachers to operate a full curriculum for all year groups | 27 |
| We had insufficient support staff to care for pupils | 21 |
| We had insufficient facilities staff to keep the school clean | 11 |
| We had insufficient catering staff to run a school meal service | 6 |
| We had insufficient staff to keep the school open and had to close the site | 4 |

A multiple response question. Source: NFER survey of 1,233 school leaders: 1,944 gave at least one response.

In many respects, primary and secondary leaders were similarly affected by the pandemic before 20th March, although significantly more secondary than primary leaders report that it had more than a minimal impact on their school at that time (82 per cent secondary; 74 per cent primary). One issue affecting secondary leaders in particular was a lack of teaching staff. There are three specific impacts reported by a significantly higher proportion of leaders in secondary schools.

- More secondary leaders say they had insufficient teachers to operate a full curriculum for all year groups (42 per cent secondary; 24 per cent primary)

- More secondary leaders say they had insufficient teachers to provide pupils with the normal standard of teaching (49 per cent secondary; 28 per cent primary)

- More secondary leaders say that insufficient staff forced their school to close before 20th March (7 per cent secondary; 3 per cent primary).

The effects of staff sickness, self-isolation and shielding others in their household are likely to be greater for secondary schools as a result of the greater pressures on teacher supply which already existed prior to the pandemic – particularly in key subject areas. This has been investigated extensively by NFER in other research (Worth and Van den Brande, 2019).

If teachers still need to self-isolate when schools open more fully, it is unlikely that all classes will be taught by their usual teachers, either face-to-face or remotely.

**Before 20th March, the pandemic had a greater impact on leaders from schools serving the most deprived pupils and least impact on school leaders in the East Midlands.**

The pandemic particularly affected school leaders in schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM).

- Leaders from schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils are significantly more likely to report that their schools had been affected by the pandemic prior to March 20th than leaders from schools with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils (86 per cent compared with 69 per cent).

- Leaders from schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils are more likely to report that they had experienced a significant drop in numbers of pupils attending school in prior to March 20th than leaders from schools with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils (73 per cent compared with 57 per cent).

There were three significant differences between regions.

- School leaders are less likely to report no/minimal impact from Covid-19 on their schools prior to 20th March if they were based in the West Midlands (16 per cent), London (18 per cent) and the North West (21 per cent) compared with school leaders in the East Midlands (39 per cent).

- School leaders are more likely to report that they had experienced a significant drop in the number of pupils attending school before the 20th March if they were based in London (72 per cent) compared with the East Midlands (50 per cent) and South West (51 per cent).

## How prepared do senior leaders feel for opening their schools more fully in June?

This section focuses on senior leaders' preparedness for opening in more detail, including for specific aspects of providing lessons on-site while Covid-19 infection is still a concern, what percentage of teachers are available to work and what conditions senior leaders feel are needed. It should be remembered that this research was conducted in mid-May, and perspectives may have shifted over the last two weeks in response to new information and guidance.

**Most school leaders feel unprepared for resuming activities when more pupils return to school, especially managing pupil transport (69 per cent), managing pupil movement around school (66 per cent) and organising school space to enable social distancing (65 per cent). Most feel at least somewhat prepared for staffing the school site (72 per cent), staffing lessons (67 per cent) and maintaining hygiene (66 per cent).**

'[We need] support from school transport providers to ensure that social distancing can be achieved on buses.'

Over half (53 per cent) of school leaders feel unprepared for administering first aid or physically comforting pupils, but most feel at least somewhat prepared for health and safety aspects such as maintaining high standards of hygiene (66 per cent) or managing a situation where a child or adult displays symptoms of Covid-19 (65 per cent).

Senior leaders face a number of issues relating to staffing and organising the curriculum. Leaders' answers to a separate question reveal that the average teaching staff capacity in May was 75 per cent of the normal full-time equivalent (FTE). In addition, school leaders report that an average of 29 per cent of the available FTE teaching capacity is only able to work from home. Therefore it is not surprising that half (50 per cent) of leaders feel unprepared for delivering face-to-face lessons (though more leaders say they feel at least somewhat prepared to staff lessons – see below).

'Extra teachers will be needed to teach a smaller number of pupils, remote online learning cannot happen at the same time.'

A majority of school leaders feel unprepared for delivering a combination of face-to-face and online lessons (63 per cent) or delivering a flexible timetable that is responsive to changing pupil numbers (59 per cent).

On the other hand, most senior leaders feel at least somewhat prepared for staffing the school site (72 per cent say they are somewhat to extremely prepared), staffing lessons (67 per cent) and covering the curriculum (60 per cent). However if schools split classes, more teachers will be needed, as several primary leaders pointed out.

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9    This analysis compared responses from schools divided into five quintiles, representing the lowest to highest proportion of pupils with FSM. These results were statistically significant (p <0.05).

10   There were no significant differences related to deprivation in school leaders' answers to more specific questions about the type of effects that they had experienced.

11   This analysis compares responses from senior leaders based in nine regions of England. Note that we have not reported results from the North East, as this region was represented by the fewest schools (38) which means that their responses may not be representative of other schools in the region.

12   The confidence intervals indicate the true value lies between 73.6 and 75.8 per cent (p <0.05).

13   The confidence intervals indicate that the true value lies between 27.6 and 30.3 per cent (p <0.05).

**Table 4: Senior leaders' preparedness for different activities when opening more fully**

| How prepared do you feel for the following activities? | Not at all/not very prepared (%) | Somewhat prepared (%) | Very/extremely prepared (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Managing the movement of pupils to and from school (including managing school transport and advising parents on their movements) | 69 | 27 | 4 |
| Managing the movement of pupils around school (including during breaks and lunchtime) | 66 | 29 | 5 |
| Organising classroom and other school spaces to enable social distancing | 65 | 29 | 6 |
| Managing a combination of face-to-face and online lessons if not all pupils are in school at once | 63 | 32 | 5 |
| Delivering a flexible timetable that is responsive to potentially changing pupil attendance rotas | 59 | 33 | 8 |
| Administering first aid or physically comforting pupils | 53 | 33 | 14 |
| Managing face-to-face learning | 50 | 42 | 8 |
| Covering the curriculum | 40 | 47 | 13 |
| Managing a situation where a child or adult displays symptoms of Covid-19 | 35 | 40 | 25 |
| Maintaining high levels of school hygiene | 34 | 42 | 24 |
| Staffing lessons | 33 | 53 | 14 |
| Staffing the school site | 28 | 53 | 19 |

Source: NFER survey of 1,233 school leaders: 1,039 gave at least one response.
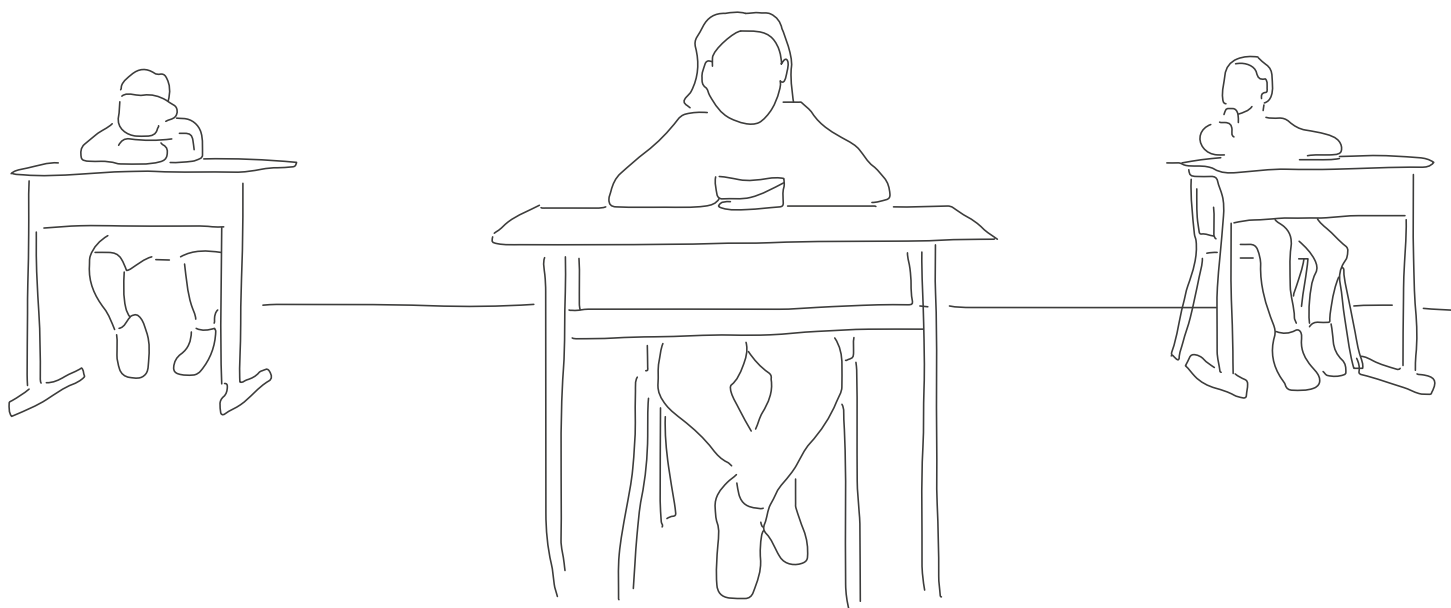
**Primary school leaders are less prepared for managing a combination of face-to-face and online lessons whereas secondary leaders are less prepared for managing the movement of pupils to and from school.**

There were two significant differences between primary and secondary leaders' preparedness for certain activities.

- More primary leaders say they are unprepared for managing a combination of face-to-face and online lessons if not all pupils are in school at once (66 per cent primary; 52 per cent secondary). This is likely to be influenced by the greater number of year groups that primary schools are expected to teach on-site and the consequent demands on teaching capacity.

- More secondary leaders say they are unprepared for managing the movement of pupils to and from school, including managing school transport and advising parents on their movements (80 per cent of secondary and 66 per cent of primary leaders). This is consistent with the Government's recent guidance regarding the wider opening of secondary schools, and which acknowledges that secondary pupils are more likely than primary pupils to use public transport and tend to travel further to get to school (DfE 2020f).

There was one significant difference in leaders' preparedness to open their school more fully according to the proportion of FSM pupils in the school.

- Senior leaders from schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils are most likely to report that they are very/extremely prepared for maintaining high levels of school hygiene when their schools open more fully (31 per cent, compared to 24 per cent for all school leaders). This may reflect the arrangements that these schools had already put in place prior to lockdown in response to a bigger impact of the pandemic, as noted above.

**Most senior leaders say that enabling staff to self-isolate (97 per cent), frequent cleaning (96 per cent) and regular handwashing/sanitising (94 per cent) are very necessary/essential for safety when opening their schools more fully. Over half (56 per cent) consider it very necessary/essential to have access to PPE.**

Senior leaders want reassurance that certain conditions are in place to ensure the safety of staff and pupils when their schools open more fully. In particular, almost all (98 per cent) want to ensure that any staff displaying symptoms, or whose family members were displaying symptoms must be able to remain at home. Most senior leaders also want to maintain more frequent/thorough site cleaning than usual (96 per cent) and provide facilities for more regular handwashing/sanitising (94 per cent). Most senior leaders consider it very necessary or essential to reduce pupil numbers to enable social distancing (93 per cent). Over half (56 per cent) of school leaders think that access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is very necessary/essential and a further 32 per cent think that this is somewhat necessary to ensure the safety of staff and pupils.

**Table 5: Necessary conditions for safety when opening more fully**

| How necessary will be the following to reassure you that your school will be safe for staff and pupils if it is to open more fully? | Not at all/not very necessary (%) | Somewhat necessary (%) | Very necessary/ essential (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Any staff displaying symptoms, or whose family members are displaying symptoms, must be able to remain at home | 1 | 2 | 97 |
| We must be able to maintain more frequent/thorough site cleaning than usual | 1 | 3 | 96 |
| We must have facilities for more regular staff and pupil hand washing/sanitising than usual | 2 | 4 | 94 |
| We must be able to reduce pupil numbers to enable social distancing | 2 | 6 | 92 |
| We must have access to Personal Protective Equipment | 12 | 32 | 56 |

Source: NFER survey of 1, 233 school leaders: 1,039 gave at least one response.

**At the end of May 2020, school leaders were operating with 75 per cent of their normal teaching capacity.**

## Do senior leaders expect parents to send their children to school?

This section presents school leaders' views on whether parents will be prepared to send their children to school in June.

**Senior leaders predict that when schools open more fully, 46 per cent of families will keep their children at home. Higher predictions are made by leaders in primary schools, those with the highest proportion of FSM pupils and leaders from schools in the North West**

School leaders do not expect all pupils to actually attend when invited to do so. This is undoubtedly influenced by their experiences before lockdown, when 61 per cent of school leaders experienced 'a significant drop in numbers of pupils attending school'.

On average, senior leaders estimate that when schools open more fully in the summer, 46 per cent of families will keep their children at home.

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

- Primary leaders give significantly higher average estimates of the proportion of families who will keep their children at home (47 per cent) than secondary leaders (42 per cent)

- Leaders in schools with the highest proportion of FSM pupils estimate that more of their children's families will keep them at home (50 per cent on average) compared with 42 per cent on average estimated by leaders of schools with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils. This echoes the finding from a survey of parents (Andrew et al, 2020), which found that lower income families were more likely to want to keep their children at home.

- School leaders are significantly more likely to estimate that a higher percentage of families will keep their children at home if they are based in the North West (50 per cent on average) compared with leaders in the South West (41 per cent on average).

## What support, guidance or resources do school leaders need?

This section presents the findings from an open question asking school leaders what support, guidance or resources they need to open more fully. Note that senior leaders were answering this question between the 7th and 17th May, so some responses pre-date the Prime Minister's announcement on the 10th May and the publication of DfE guidance from the 12th to the 25th May (DfE 2020a-f).

**Senior leaders want the Government to provide clear, detailed and realistic guidance to schools on opening more fully.**

It is evident that school leaders had already put plans in place to open their school more fully, and are actively attempting to find solutions to the challenges they face, but would welcome guidance, funding and resources to make the best decisions for their pupils, parents and staff.

> 'Children will be restricted to different areas of the school and no interaction will be allowed as far as possible.'
>
> 'I will need to be reassured that the strategies my team and I have put in place provide a safe learning environment for all - pupils and staff.'

Senior leaders want clear and detailed information from the Government (and to a lesser extent from middle tier organisations such as local authorities and academy trusts) on how to manage social distancing. They want to know what is expected of schools, and under what circumstances (such as lack of space or staffing) there is flexibility for leaders to reduce the number of pupils on site. Several school leaders made the point that they wanted rules, rather than guidance or advice because schools want parents to be aware what is expected of schools and parents themselves. However, others want to operate a rota system (which the Government is recommending for secondary but not primary schools) and/or to bring back year groups gradually over time, if necessary.

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14   The confidence intervals indicate that the true value lies between 44.7 and 47.1 per cent (p <0.05).

'Clear expectations from the DFE – not guidance that is woolly, keeps changing and is just down to us to decide!'

'Clear instruction from government – not just advice.... all schools need to be expected to do the same and only move from instruction for very clear reasons monitored by outside support services.'

'Support to implement a rota system that prioritises well-being and not just using school as childcare.'

'Autonomy to only open to a minimal number of children at a time.'

School leaders said they wanted the Government to explain the scientific principles underpinning advice on opening schools more fully to reassure staff and parents, and they wanted detailed advice about relative safety of different activities. Note that this was partially addressed when teachers' unions met the Government's scientific advisers on 15th May, the SAGE Committee published a paper on the scientific evidence related to different models (SAGE, 2020) and the Government has reviewed the evidence related to their five tests for easing the lockdown (Prime Minister's Office and Johnson, 2020).

'Evidence that social distancing does not need to happen in school. Scientific evidence that conclusively shows that children do not spread the virus. A dramatic drop in the R value, retrospective antibody testing and testing available to staff and children who develop symptoms.'

'Much clearer guidance from the Government on how their idea of returning pupils can be safely and reasonably implemented whilst keep all stakeholders SAFE and HEALTHY… More SCIENCE and facts about the transmission of COVID from children to adults.'

'Clear guidance on how to maintain social distancing in classrooms and at playtimes, particularly with the very young. Also, which activities are particularly risky? For example, how safe are – team games in PE – are assemblies – is singing – is it to administer first aid – is it to sit beside a child to hear them read or do guided writing etc. – is it to mark books/ take them home to mark – is it to touch things that have been brought in from pupils' home?'

School leaders wanted detailed guidance on how to organise social distancing and in what circumstances to use PPE. They also wanted resources to ensure good hygiene among pupils and staff, especially hand sanitising and handwashing, but also other equipment (such as screens and thermometers) to reassure staff and parents.

'Finances to provide for essential PPE, new shields and protection around the school e.g. in Reception, plus possible temperature gauges – all sanitiser etc. needs to come down in price as it is so expensive at the moment.'

'Face masks for pupils and staff, protective kit for staff, more cleaning taking place throughout the day as pupils move around school infra-red thermometers to check temperature of people on entry into the school, oximeters.'

'Adequate PPE gear for intimate care and those who are unwell. Adequate supplies of liquid soap, paper towels, hand sanitiser, cleaning products etc.'

Some primary leaders say that they do not consider it safe to follow the current guidance on opening more fully, due to the age of the children and the constraints of the school site. Leaders from schools with unsuitable buildings suggested that additional funding would help them to create more space to enable social distancing through hiring temporary/mobile classrooms or renting space nearby. Others suggested that local authorities or academy trusts could help by sourcing supplies (such as sanitiser and PPE) and supplying signage to promote social distancing.

School leaders say they need additional staffing to teach and supervise pupils while on site, provide distance learning for pupils at home and/or cover for absent staff. They wanted the Government to provide guidance tailored to operating during the Covid-19 pandemic on topics such as the recommended staff-pupil ratios for different activities and how to address pupil non-attendance and behaviour issues.

'Extra budget to pay for extra staff…. Will need more staff within early years and Year 1 in order to be vigilant with social distancing.'

Staffing is the key issue - if we are staffing the four year groups we have been asked to bring back (Nursery, Reception, Year 1, Year 6) but split them in half plus look after the remaining vulnerable group we effectively need double the amount of staff that we would normally require and also double the amount of space. That is a challenge when teaching capacity is only at 70%.

'Financial support to employ temporary teaching staff and teaching assistants to cover those who are either shielding a vulnerable person in the family or have an underlying health risk.'

'Guidance on who should be working e.g. should staff with asthma (mild) be in school? Should staff who live with someone who is over 70 or has a health condition be in school?

'Clear guidance on how to deal with staff members who live with an at risk person. At the moment, we have a significant number of colleagues who are unable to attend as they are at risk, but a much larger number who live with someone who is in an at-risk group. If we do not get clear guidance on this, we will have insufficient staff to open at all.'

Some senior leaders requested more detailed guidance on how to manage staff who had underlying health issues or were shielding others. In addition, several requested official guidance on risk assessment and liability for Covid-19 infection if traced to the school (DfE has since issued guidance on some of these issues).

Table 6 gives a summary of leaders' answer to this question. Note that because this is an open question, the percentage of school leaders giving any one type of response is lower than would be the case if these response options had been listed in the survey.

" Any illusion of social distancing in schools will be just that – an illusion.

**Table 6: Support, guidance or resources needed for opening more fully**

| What resources, support or guidance will your school need in order to safely open more fully while social distancing is still in force?' | (%) |
| --- | --- |
| | 34 |
| Guidance about PPE for school staff | 24 |
| Funding/guidance about cleaning | 24 |
| Increased staffing/funding to increase staffing | 14 |
| Guidance about opening more fully in general | 13 |
| Guidance/funding to manage and support staff | 12 |
| Allow our school to limit/phase in the number of pupils/hours | 12 |
| Social distancing is not possible in our school | 9 |
| Guidance to reassure/support parents | 9 |
| Guidance on how to respond to cases of Covid-19 or staff needing to shield family members | 8 |
| Other response | 13 |

An open-ended question with multiple responses.

Source: NFER survey of 1,233 school leaders: 641 gave at least one response.

# Discussion and conclusion

This research has shown that many school leaders do not feel well prepared to open their schools more fully in June. While they are prepared to think creatively around how to make it possible for some of their pupils to return, they also need practical support to make it work.

There are some requirements that leaders consider essential for opening more fully, including increased cleaning and new hygiene protocols. Their prediction that 46 per cent of families will keep their children at home suggests a high level of concern among parents who will need to be reassured that the benefits of sending their children to school outweigh their safety concerns.

Primary leaders are facing different challenges to their secondary counterparts, due the expectation to accommodate more year groups, the inability of young children to understand social distancing or follow hygiene protocols, and the unsuitability of their buildings. Primary leaders are particularly unprepared for managing a combination of face-to-face and online lessons, whereas secondary leaders feel more unprepared for minimising risks to pupils on their journeys to and from school. Subject teaching in secondary schools means that pupils are taught by different teachers for different subjects in different parts of the school. This will become more challenging to manage when larger number of secondary pupils return.

The use of rotas – with different classes or groups attending on different days – was seen as at least somewhat feasible by the majority (65 per cent of primary and 73 per cent of secondary leaders). This may be an area that the Government needs to look at again at their advice for primary schools, in line with the options explored by SAGE (2020).

The survey revealed some important indicators of the differential effect on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds: school leaders with the highest proportion of FSM pupils had been more affected by the pandemic before March 20th, and had experienced a significant drop in attendance at that time.  It seems likely that this has served to widen existing disadvantage gaps, especially for those at greater risk of being affected by their own or their family's self-isolation and/or exposure to the virus (for example, children with underlying health conditions; those from poorer families and from Black, Asian and Mixed ethnic backgrounds – see Windsor-Shellard and Kaur, 2020; White and Nafilyan, 2020).

Drawing on their experience of attendance from before lockdown, leaders serving the highest proportion of FSM pupils estimated that when invited to return in June, a significantly higher proportion of families would continue to keep their children at home compared to leaders with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils. This confirms the findings of research on family attitudes to children returning to school (Andrew et al., 2020) and

**School leaders want clear guidance from the Government and a recognition of the complexity of the situation for different schools.**

suggests that children who are most in need of school are in danger of missing out the most.

There are also some regional differences, indicating that the pandemic has had a greater impact on primary and secondary education in London, the West Midlands and the North West.

Given that schools will be facing very different challenges – for example related to their phase, level of deprivation, suitability of their buildings, and availability of staff, the Government will need to tailor some of its guidance and leave some discretion to school leaders. It will also be important for local authorities and academy trusts to ensure that appropriate support is available at local level.

School leaders want clear guidance from the Government and a recognition of the complexity of the situation for different schools. The demands of accommodating more pupils in school while dividing them into smaller groups and simultaneously providing distance learning for pupils at home are considerable, especially when only 75 per cent of teaching capacity (on average) is available and 29 per cent of the available teachers are not able to work away from home.

There are some important messages about the further support and guidance that school leaders would value to help them manage this situation. Overall, school leaders want clear instructions underpinned by scientific evidence, coupled with detailed guidance on specific challenges. Some of this has been issued by the

Government in the days since the survey took place. School leaders also highlight the need for additional funding for staffing and essential supplies. This will help school leaders to meet the challenge of providing a high standard of education to as many pupils as possible, both at home and at school.

While the pandemic continues, it will be important for the Government, local authorities, academy trusts and schools themselves to ensure appropriate messaging to parents, given the extent to which senior leaders expect parents to keep their children at home.

This research has revealed the complexity of the challenge facing school leaders as they prepare to open their schools more fully during the summer term. Other reports in this series will focus on different aspects of schools' responses to Covid-19 during lockdown and as more pupils return to school.
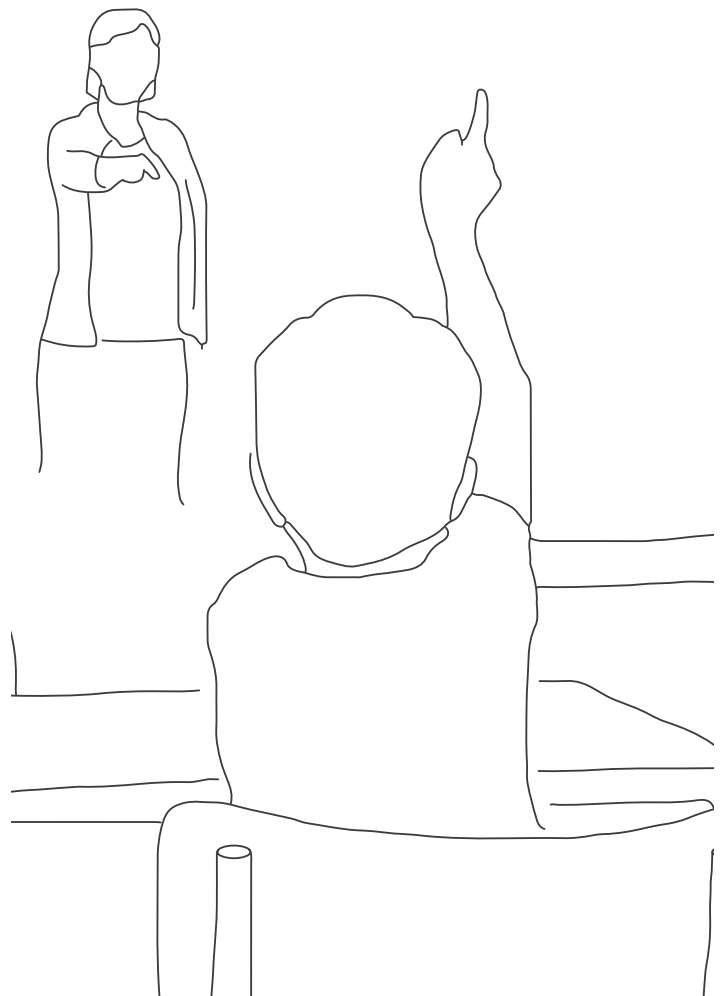
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# A note on sample weighting

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 phase 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.

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