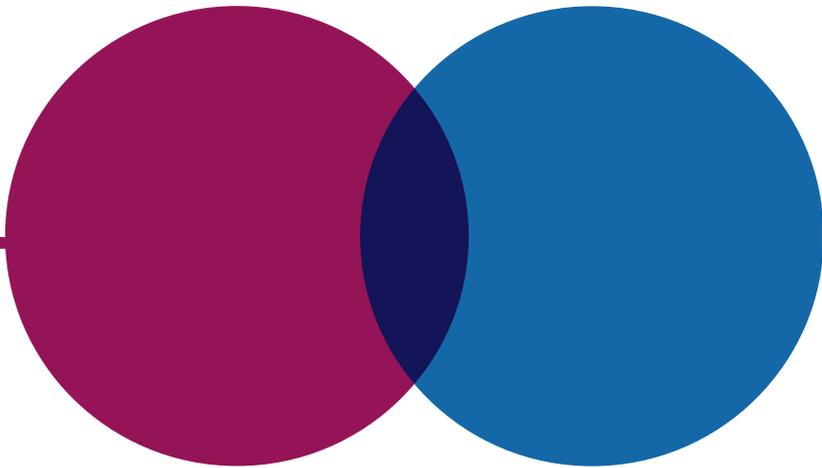




National Audit Office



REPORT

Education recovery in schools in England

Department for Education

SESSION 2022-23
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National Audit Office

Education recovery in schools in England

Department for Education

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act

Gareth Davies
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

25 January 2023

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Key facts

£3.5bn

funding announced for education recovery in schools by the Department for Education (DfE) covering 2020/21 to 2023/24

2.5mn

number of courses started under the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) across 2020/21 and 2021/22

**2.2, 0.9
and 1.2
months**

estimated average amount in summer 2021 by which pupils were behind the level of attainment that would have been expected in primary maths, primary reading and secondary reading respectively, compared with 3.6, 1.8 and 1.5 months in autumn 2020

87%	proportion of schools that participated in some form of tutoring under the NTP in 2021/22
1.3 million	number of pupils (one in five) who received school-led tutoring in 2021/22
45%	percentage achievement against DfE's target for the number of courses started under the NTP tuition partners scheme in 2021/22
81%	proportion of NTP courses started in 2021/22 accounted for by the school-led tutoring scheme
47%	proportion of the pupils who received school-led tutoring in 2021/22 who were disadvantaged
3.23	the disadvantage gap index (a measure of the difference in attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils) at the end of primary school in 2022, compared with 2.91 in 2019

Throughout this report, central government financial years are written as, for example, '2021-22' and run from 1 April to 31 March; school academic years are written '2021/22' and run from 1 September to 31 August.

'Disadvantaged pupils' are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years, and may also include children who have ever been looked after by their local authority.

Summary

1 In January 2022, there were 21,600 state schools in England, educating 8.3 million pupils. Around 11,800 of these schools (55% of the total), with 3.6 million pupils, were maintained schools, funded and overseen by local authorities. The remaining 9,800 schools (45%) were academies, with 4.7 million pupils. Each academy school is part of an academy trust, directly funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and independent of the relevant local authority. DfE is responsible for the school system in England and is ultimately accountable for securing value for money from the funding provided for schools.

2 To help limit transmission of the COVID-19 virus, schools were closed to pupils other than vulnerable children and children of critical workers from March to July 2020 and again from January to March 2021. During these periods, education for most children took place remotely at home. Even when schools were open during the pandemic, pupils' learning was disrupted, with restrictions on activities and more children, teachers and other staff absent than usual.

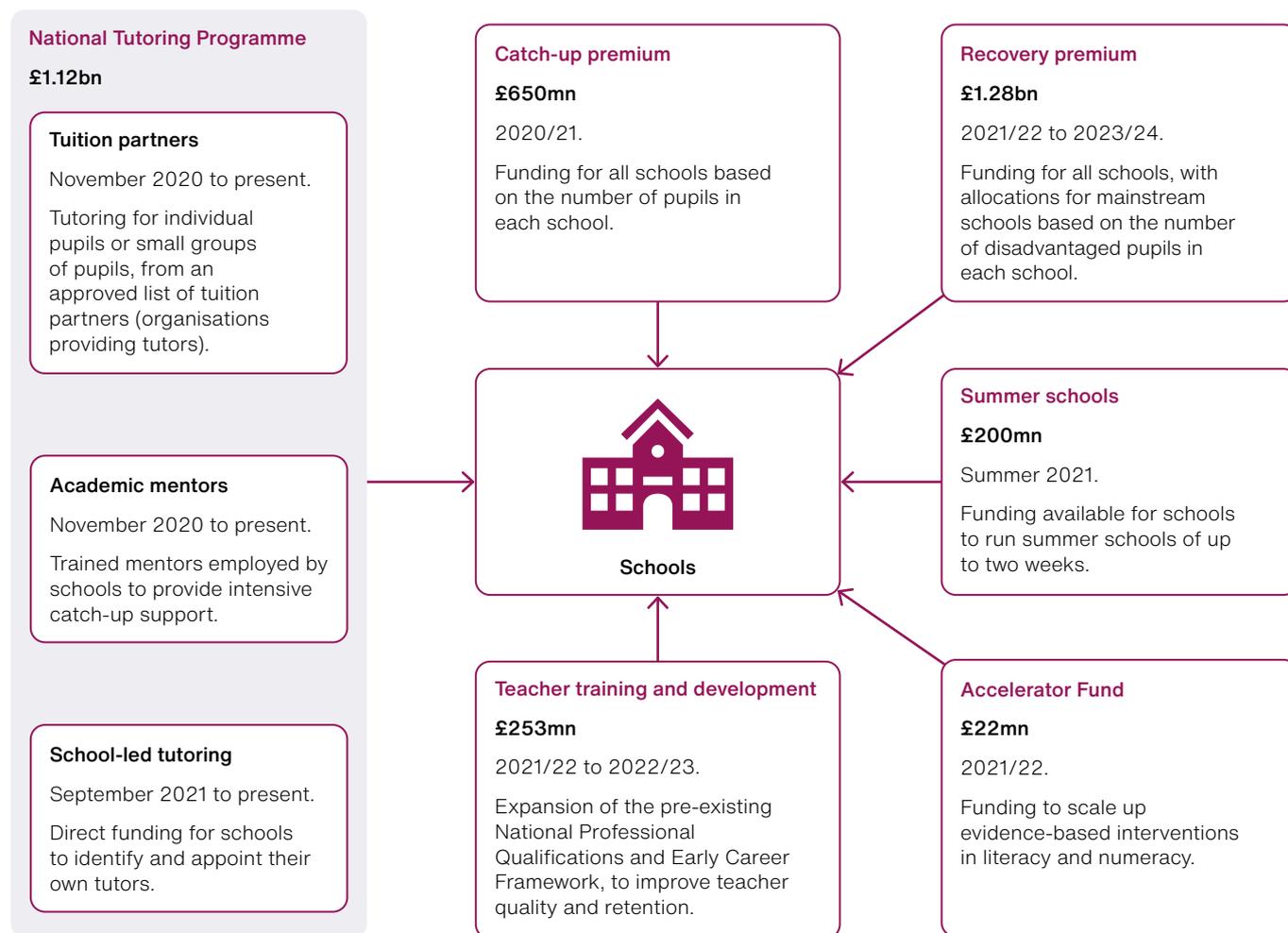
3 Disruption to children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic led to lost learning for many pupils, particularly for disadvantaged children. DfE has announced total funding of £4.9 billion to address learning loss and support education recovery, covering early years, schools and education for 16- to 19-year-olds. Most of this funding (£3.5 billion) is for recovery interventions in schools (**Figure 1** overleaf). The main interventions are:

- the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), which subsidises individual or small-group tutoring and mentoring through three schemes, with a focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils;
- the catch-up premium, which was per-pupil funding for schools during 2020/21; and
- the recovery premium, which replaced the catch-up premium from 2021/22 and, for mainstream schools, is allocated based on how many disadvantaged pupils they have.

Figure 1

The Department for Education’s (DfE’s) interventions to support education recovery in schools

DfE has a range of interventions to support education recovery in schools



Notes

- 1 This Figure shows DfE’s recovery interventions in schools. It does not present support for early years or education for 16- to 19-year-olds.
- 2 The amounts shown are the funding made available, not the amounts spent.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education information

Focus of our report

4 We reported in March 2021 on support for children's education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ We concluded that it was crucial that DfE took swift and effective action to ensure that the catch-up learning programme was effective and reached the children who had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, such as those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. Lost learning, if not addressed, may lead to increased disadvantage and significant lost earnings for those affected. It is also likely to have adverse impacts on society and the economy, with implications for productivity and growth, particularly if a generation of young people is affected.

5 This report examines whether DfE is achieving its objective to help pupils recover lost learning by effectively supporting education recovery in schools following the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluative criteria that we used to assess value for money included: whether DfE used the available evidence in designing its package of recovery interventions; whether DfE has assurance that funding is being used for the intended purposes; what evidence there is on take-up and whether the interventions are reaching disadvantaged pupils as intended; and whether the package of interventions is having an impact in terms of reducing learning loss. Our work did not cover early years, education for 16- to 19-year-olds, or further or higher education.

6 The report covers: the design and funding of the recovery package for schools (Part One); the main interventions provided to support education recovery (Part Two); and the recovery package's impact (Part Three). Details of our evidence base are set out in Appendix One.

¹ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Support for children's education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1239, National Audit Office, March 2021.

Key findings

Design and funding

7 DfE drew on available evidence in designing and subsequently adapting its education recovery interventions. DfE recognised by summer 2020 that disruption to schooling was leading to children falling behind in their learning and responded quickly to pull together an initial package of measures. In designing its approach to education recovery, DfE drew on existing research, particularly from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), for evidence of what approaches would be most likely to work. This led DfE to include support for tutoring among its first interventions, in the form of the NTP, and later to extend the recovery package to include extra funding for teacher training and development. From June 2020 to October 2021, DfE made four announcements that successively expanded the scope and scale of its interventions. From 2021/22, DfE adjusted the balance of the package so that interventions were more focused on disadvantaged pupils, given their greater learning loss (paragraphs 1.8 to 1.13).

8 Extra funding for education recovery is time-limited, with DfE looking to schools increasingly to fund tutoring themselves. DfE's funding for education recovery in schools totals £3.5 billion and extends across four academic years from 2020/21 to 2023/24. The funding available is forecast to peak at £985 million in 2022/23. DfE is progressively reducing the amount of subsidy it provides under the NTP. So, to continue providing this support, schools will need to fund tutoring from other sources. DfE told us it would like to embed tutoring in the school system because it is recognised as an effective way to address low attainment. However, some of the stakeholders we consulted raised concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of tutoring and mentoring, given the pressures on school budgets. Schools have not used all the recovery funding that DfE has made available. We estimate that, by the end of the 2021-22 financial year, there was a £226 million (14%) underspend against the available funding (paragraphs 1.14 to 1.19).

Interventions to support education recovery

9 DfE gave schools freedom to decide how to use the catch-up and recovery premiums and has not routinely collected information about how the money was used. DfE considered that schools were best placed to decide how to use the extra funding in a way that suited local circumstances and met their pupils' specific needs. It expected them to adopt evidence-based approaches to help pupils catch up on lost learning, and intended that the recovery premium would help schools make up for lost teaching time for disadvantaged pupils specifically. In line with its approach to pupil premium, DfE requires schools to publish a statement each year explaining how they plan to spend the recovery premium and demonstrating that their approach is informed by research evidence. DfE told us it plans to review a sample of these statements in early 2023 (paragraphs 2.4, 2.5, 2.8 and 2.9).

10 DfE strengthened governance of the NTP for 2021/22, which provided it with more assurance than it had in 2020/21 about how funding was spent, although there were still gaps. To get the NTP running quickly in 2020, DfE appointed EEF and Teach First, with whom it had existing relationships, to lead the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes respectively. NTP funding in 2020/21 was treated as an extension of existing grant or contract arrangements and DfE lacked robust processes to provide it with detailed assurance about how the new money was spent. For 2021/22, DfE put delivery of the NTP on a fully contractual footing. After a competitive procurement, it appointed a single contractor, Randstad, to manage both the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes. DfE had reasonable assurance about how funding for tuition partners was spent, but there were gaps in the information on academic mentors' activity (paragraphs 2.14 to 2.18 and 2.25).

11 To help boost take-up, DfE adapted the NTP by adding a school-led tutoring scheme. In September 2021, DfE introduced school-led tutoring in response to feedback from schools that logistical factors (such as the amount of management time needed) were deterring them from engaging with the existing tutoring schemes. School-led tutoring proved more popular with schools than the two other NTP schemes. For 2022/23, DfE decided not to extend its contract with Randstad and to allocate all NTP funding directly to schools. DfE relies on schools to report how they have spent funding for school-led tutoring. The Education and Skills Funding Agency is seeking to recover funding that schools did not use in 2021/22 and expects to publish data in spring 2023 on the amounts recovered (paragraphs 2.19 to 2.23).

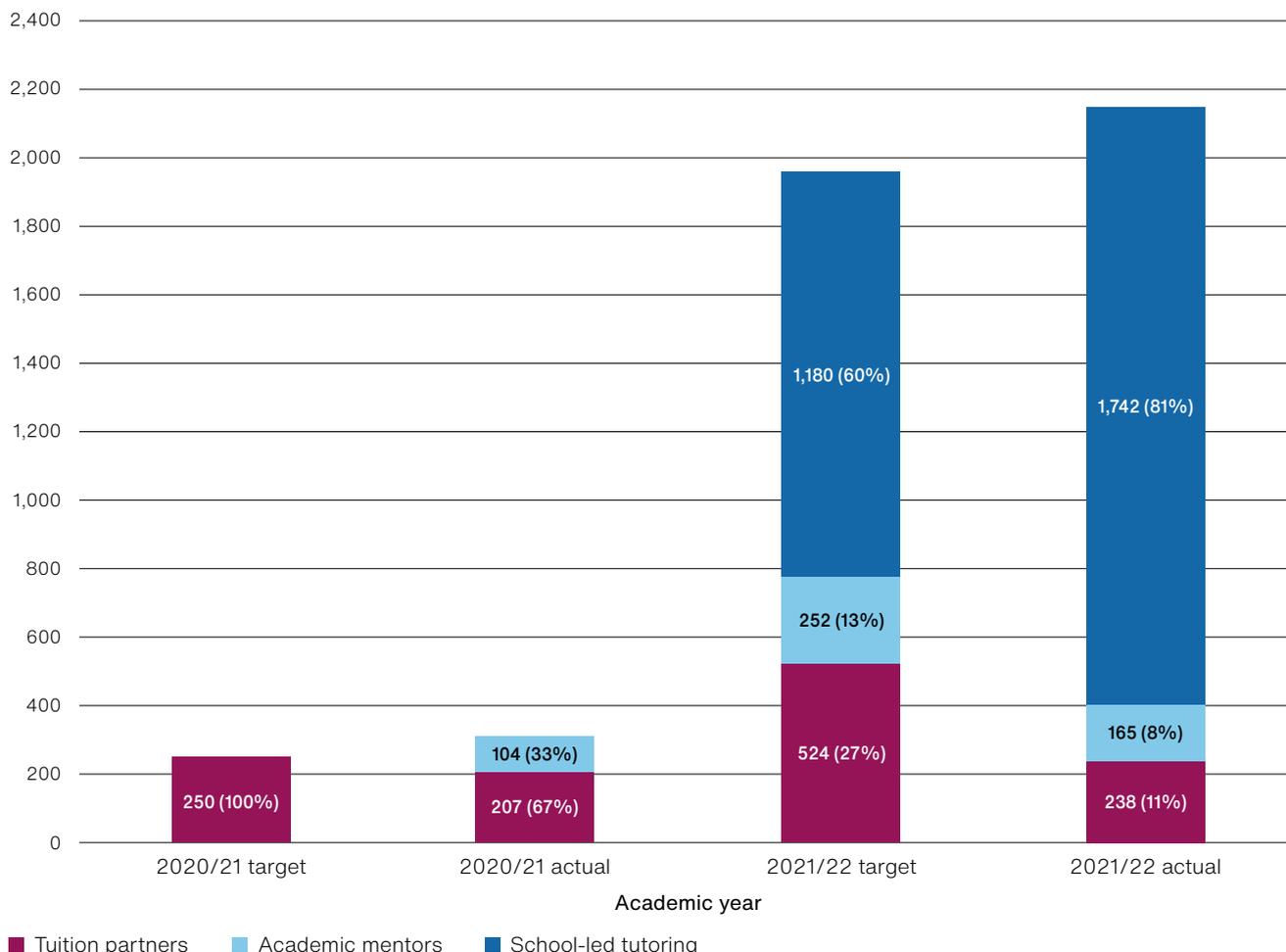
12 Take-up of the NTP tuition partners and academic mentors schemes in 2021/22 was lower than DfE expected, but school-led tutoring more than made up the shortfall. DfE has sufficient data to estimate national take-up of the NTP schemes in 2020/21 and 2021/22. It does not know, however, the extent to which pupils participated in more than one scheme, and therefore the number of unique pupils who were supported by the NTP. Overall, pupils started 311,000 courses under the NTP in 2020/21 and 2.14 million courses in 2021/22, 110% of DfE's target of 1.96 million for that year. In 2021/22, the number of courses started was 45% of DfE's target for the tuition partners scheme and 65% for the academic mentors scheme. School-led tutoring exceeded DfE's target and accounted for 81% of the courses started in 2021/22 (**Figure 2** overleaf). More than 1.3 million pupils (one in five) received school-led tutoring. Between 85% and 90% of schools in each region participated in some form of tutoring under the NTP in 2021/22, with an average of 87% across England (paragraphs 2.24, 2.26 and 2.27, and Figure 5).

Figure 2

Number of courses started under the National Tutoring Programme, 2020/21 and 2021/22

The number of courses started in 2021/22 was 2.14 million, 110% of the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) overall target for that year

Number of courses started (000)



Notes

- 1 Figures refer to courses started. An individual pupil may attend more than one course on the same tutoring scheme or receive tutoring under more than one scheme.
- 2 Figures for courses started are rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are calculated from the unrounded data.
- 3 DfE did not set a target for the number of courses started under the academic mentors scheme in 2020/21.
- 4 Figures for the actual number of courses started under the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes for 2020/21 were supplied to DfE by the Education Endowment Foundation and Teach First respectively.
- 5 Figures for the actual number of courses started under the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes for 2021/22 were supplied to DfE by Randstad.
- 6 Figures for the actual number of courses started under the academic mentors scheme for 2021/22 are estimates that DfE calculated using data from a sample of academic mentors who appeared to have supplied reliable data. This group accounted for around 38% of all academic mentors and DfE produced the estimates assuming this sample was representative of the whole population.
- 7 Figures for the actual number of courses started under the school-led tutoring scheme are based on data collected by DfE from schools using the year-end statement. All schools that received funding for school-led tutoring were required to submit this statement once they had completed their tutoring for 2021/22. Figures are based on statements submitted up to 21 November 2022. The number of courses is estimated from the number of pupils receiving tutoring and the number of hours of tutoring delivered.

13 Around half the pupils receiving tutoring under the NTP were disadvantaged.

DfE set out to focus the NTP on the quarter of children who are classified as disadvantaged, although schools are free to choose which children would benefit most from support. Ofsted found that most schools it visited were using disadvantage as a starting point for identifying which pupils should be prioritised for tuition. Overall, disadvantaged pupils were more likely to receive tutoring in 2021/22 than other pupils. We assessed how far the NTP reached disadvantaged children in 2021/22 in two ways.

- The proportion of pupils receiving tutoring who were disadvantaged: this varied from 47% for school-led tutoring to 51% for tuition partners. DfE's contract with Randstad included a target that 65% of the pupils supported through the tuition partners scheme should be disadvantaged.
- The proportion of all disadvantaged pupils who received tutoring: this was 25% for school-led tutoring (compared with 14% of all pupils) and 5% for tuition partners. DfE did not set a target for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who should receive tutoring and did not expect them all to be supported in this way (paragraphs 2.30 and 2.31).

Impact of the recovery package

14 DfE has made some progress in addressing pupils' learning loss but this has been inconsistent.

DfE commissioned research to assess pupils' learning loss and how this changed, from autumn 2020 onwards. While there are limitations in the completeness of the data, the research has found variation – by school phase, subject and geographical area – in how far and how quickly pupils have recovered learning. By summer 2021, learning loss had reduced for most pupils. For example, in maths, primary pupils were on average 3.6 months behind where they were expected to be in autumn 2020 and 2.2 months behind in summer 2021. Regionally, the greatest levels of learning loss have consistently been in the north of England. The Key Stage 2 tests of pupils in their final year of primary school in 2022 indicated significant drops in attainment compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 59% of pupils reaching DfE's expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths, down from 65% in 2019 (paragraphs 3.11 to 3.14 and Figures 9 and 10).

15 The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils has grown since 2019.

Learning loss for disadvantaged pupils has followed a similar pattern to that for all pupils, but the extent of the loss has been consistently greater. For example, in summer 2021, the research for DfE found that disadvantaged secondary pupils were 2.4 months behind where they were expected to be in reading, compared with 1.2 months for all secondary pupils. The 2022 Key Stage 2 tests also indicated that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils at the end of primary school had widened since 2019: the disadvantage gap index (a measure of the difference in attainment) was 3.23 in 2022, compared with 2.91 in 2019 (paragraphs 3.15 to 3.17 and Figure 10).

16 DfE has not specified what level of progress would constitute success for its recovery interventions because it regards the interventions as part of its overall activity to improve pupils' attainment. In May 2021, the Committee of Public Accounts recommended that DfE should set out clear metrics that it would use to monitor the catch-up learning programme, and indicate what level of performance would represent success.² DfE pointed us to the March 2022 white paper which set out the government's ambitions for pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy by 2030. It is working to monitor progress towards these ambitions but has not set milestones between now and 2030. DfE had a series of strategy and implementation boards that met during 2021-22 and focused specifically on education recovery. After April 2022, DfE subsumed governance of education recovery into its mainstream oversight arrangements, reflecting its view that recovery now forms part of its core business (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.6).

Conclusion on value for money

17 Since 2020, DfE has acted to support education recovery in schools through a range of interventions that were informed by the available evidence as to what would be most likely to work. DfE said that support should be targeted at disadvantaged pupils, given their greater learning loss, but gave schools freedom to decide how best to help pupils catch up. There is limited evidence on how extra direct funding for schools was spent and how far it was used to support disadvantaged pupils. Take up of the centrally run NTP schemes was lower than DfE intended but school-led tutoring boosted take-up to above target. Disadvantaged pupils have been more likely than other pupils to receive tutoring through the NTP, although only a minority have received this extra support. Research indicates that pupils' learning loss is generally reducing but disadvantaged pupils remain further behind the expected level of achievement than other pupils.

18 Our examination focused on the first two years of DfE's interventions to support education recovery in schools. While progress is being made, a final assessment of whether DfE has effectively supported recovery will depend on what happens in the coming years, with nearly half the extra funding scheduled to be spent in 2022/23 and 2023/24. It is vital therefore that DfE maintains its focus on the implementation and impact of its recovery interventions if it is to achieve its ambitions of giving all children the chance to make up the learning they lost and improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils specifically.

² HC Committee of Public Accounts, *COVID-19: Support for children's education*, Third Report of Session 2021-22, HC 240, May 2021.

Recommendations

- 19** We recommend that DfE should:
- a** further develop its approach to monitoring progress towards achieving the ambitions for pupils' attainment in 2030, as set out in the schools white paper, and report regularly on progress;
 - b** use research and evidence, including exploring the possibility of systematic longitudinal monitoring, to assess education recovery in schools, including whether children have recovered lost learning and whether progress is being made to close the disadvantage gap;
 - c** model the impact of withdrawing the recovery premium and subsidy for the NTP, to assess whether tutoring in schools is financially sustainable given DfE's objective for tutoring to become embedded in the school system;
 - d** build on the evidence and insights being gathered from stakeholder bodies and schools to understand how recovery interventions can best support disadvantaged pupils in the way DfE intends, and use the findings to inform and share good practice; and
 - e** ensure regular senior oversight of education recovery in schools remains in place, since funding is to continue until 2023/24 and successfully delivering programmes and achieving education recovery is not yet assured.

Part One

Design and funding

1.1 This part of the report covers how the Department for Education (DfE) designed and funded its education recovery package for schools.

The school system

1.2 In January 2022, there were 21,600 state schools in England, educating 8.3 million pupils. Around 20,200 of these schools were mainstream primary and secondary schools, with 8.1 million pupils. The remaining 1,400 schools were special schools or alternative providers, teaching 157,000 pupils, most of whom had special educational needs and disabilities.

1.3 Around 11,800 state schools (55% of the total), with 3.6 million pupils, were maintained schools, funded and overseen by local authorities. The remaining 9,800 schools (45%) were academies, with 4.7 million pupils. Each academy school is part of an academy trust, directly funded by DfE and independent of the relevant local authority.

1.4 DfE is responsible for the school system in England and is ultimately accountable for securing value for money from the funding provided for schools. DfE works with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, which distributes funding for schools and provides assurance about how the money has been used. Ofsted inspects schools and provides independent assurance about their effectiveness, including the quality of education.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

1.5 To help limit transmission of the COVID-19 virus, schools were closed to pupils other than vulnerable children and children of critical workers from March to July 2020 and again from January to March 2021. During these periods, education for most children took place remotely at home. Even when schools were open during the pandemic, pupils' learning was disrupted, with restrictions on activities and more children, teachers and other staff absent than usual.

1.6 In March 2021, we reported that there was a growing body of evidence on the detrimental impact of the disruption to schooling on children's learning and development.³ For example, in a July 2020 survey, the National Foundation for Educational Research found that 98% of teachers considered their pupils were behind where they would normally expect them to be in their curriculum learning at the end of the 2019/20 academic year. Early assessments expected disadvantaged children to have lost out disproportionately compared with other children. In June 2020, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) projected that the school closures in the 2019/20 academic year might widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers by between 11% and 75%, with a median estimate of 36%, likely reversing progress made to narrow the gap since 2011.

1.7 In September 2020, DfE commissioned Renaissance Learning and the Education Policy Institute to estimate the impact of the disruption to schooling on pupils' academic development. We set out some of the main findings from the research in Part Three of this report.

Design of the recovery package

1.8 DfE recognised by summer 2020 that disruption to schooling was leading to children falling behind in their learning. It responded quickly to pull together an initial package of measures to help pupils catch up, which it announced in June 2020. However, at that time, it could not assess the scale of the likely learning loss, since the duration and impact of the pandemic were unknown and limited data were available to measure the nature and extent of the loss. It was therefore uncertain what interventions would ultimately be required.

1.9 In designing its approach to tackling learning loss, DfE drew on existing research, particularly from EEF, for evidence of what approaches would be most likely to work. EEF is the government-designated What Works Centre for Education. EEF's review of available research evidence had indicated that pupils could make additional progress of up to five months with one-to-one tuition and up to four months with small-group tuition. This led DfE to include support for tutoring among its first interventions, in the form of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). In June 2021, DfE extended its recovery interventions to include extra funding for teacher training and development, consistent with established evidence that the quality of teaching is crucial to pupil outcomes.

³ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Support for children's education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1239, National Audit Office, March 2021.

1.10 DfE did not take forward a potential approach to education recovery that was less strongly supported. In the second half of 2021, it explored options to extend the school day or week to increase the amount of teaching time for pupils. Following its review, DfE decided not to pursue this option for pupils aged five to 16 because the evidence on benefits was mixed and because ensuring additional time was delivered and used well would require legislation and accountability measures sufficient to ensure quality.⁴

1.11 In a statement to the House of Commons in January 2021, the then Prime Minister announced that the government would work with parents, teachers and schools “to develop a long-term plan to make sure pupils have the chance to make up their learning over the course of this Parliament”. In February 2021, the government announced the appointment of Sir Kevan Collins, former Chief Executive of EEF, as Education Recovery Commissioner to advise ministers on the approach to education recovery. Sir Kevan left in June 2021, earlier than planned, and was not replaced. In his resignation letter, he said that, while the package of measures that the government had announced provided valuable support, including important investment in teaching quality and tutoring, he did not believe it was credible that a successful recovery could be achieved with a programme of support of that size.

1.12 DfE told us that it would be more accurate to think of its approach to education recovery as an iterative or evolutionary process, rather than a fully developed portfolio of projects from the outset. From June 2020 to October 2021, DfE made four major announcements that expanded the scope and scale of the recovery package and extended funding to August 2024 (**Figure 3**).

1.13 DfE increasingly focused its recovery interventions on disadvantaged children, given their greater learning loss. Its initial imperative was to mitigate the impact of school closures on all pupils, and funding in 2020/21, the first year of the recovery package, was dominated by a universal per-pupil grant – the catch-up premium. From 2021/22, DfE adjusted the balance of the package so that interventions were more targeted on disadvantaged pupils. Specifically, it replaced the catch-up premium with the recovery premium, which is allocated to mainstream schools based on the number of disadvantaged pupils each school has. DfE also provided more funding for the NTP, covering 2021/22 to 2023/24. DfE’s contract with the supplier administering the NTP in 2021/22 required the supplier, in making tuition available, to address disproportionate need in disadvantaged areas.

4 DfE did take forward proposals for extra teaching time for pupils aged 16 to 19 because it was confident there was capacity to deliver quality additional time.

Figure 3

Development of the education recovery package for schools

From June 2020 to October 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) made four major announcements about funding for education recovery in schools

Date	What DfE announced	Funding for schools	
		Amount announced	Cumulative total
		(£mn)	(£mn)
19 June 2020	<p>Support in 2020/21</p> <p>Catch-up premium (£650 million). Funding allocated directly to schools on a per-pupil basis.</p> <p>National Tutoring Programme (NTP) (£109 million). Funding to increase access to high-quality tuition for the most disadvantaged children and young people.¹</p> <p>Support in 2021/22</p> <p>Continuation of the NTP (£132 million).</p>	891	891
24 February 2021	<p>Additional support in 2020/21</p> <p>Summer schools (£200 million). Funding available for schools to offer face-to-face summer schools to help pupils catch up on lost learning during the summer holiday.</p> <p>Support in 2021/22</p> <p>Expansion of the NTP (£83 million).</p> <p>Recovery premium (£302 million, including £22 million for the Accelerator Fund²). Funding allocated directly to schools to support pupils who need it most, with allocations for mainstream schools based on the number of disadvantaged pupils each school had.</p>	585	1,476
2 June 2021	<p>Support in the period 2021/22 to 2023/24</p> <p>Continuation of the NTP (£797 million). DfE announced a target to support up to six million 15-hour tutoring courses for disadvantaged pupils, targeting key subjects such as English and maths.</p> <p>Teacher training and development (£253 million). Expansion of existing training and development for teachers, at all stages in their careers.</p>	1,050	2,526
27 October 2021	<p>Additional support in 2022/23 and 2023/24</p> <p>Recovery premium (£1 billion). Extension of the recovery premium for two more academic years.</p>	1,000	3,526

Notes

- 1 Includes an unspecified amount of funding for early language support for reception-aged pupils.
- 2 The Accelerator Fund provides funding to scale up evidence-based interventions in literacy and numeracy.
- 3 DfE announced total funding of £4.9 billion to address learning loss and support education recovery, covering early years, schools and education for 16- to 19-year-olds. Most of this funding (£3.5 billion) is for recovery interventions in schools. Measures to support recovery in early years and education for 16- to 19-year-olds are outside the scope of this report and excluded from this Figure.
- 4 All years are school academic years.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of: UK government announcements; HM Treasury, *Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021*, HC 822, October 2021; and Department for Education data

Funding

1.14 DfE has announced total funding of £3.5 billion for education recovery in schools. The funding extends across four academic years, from 2020/21 to 2023/24 (**Figure 4**).

1.15 The funding that DfE announced for education recovery represents a relatively small proportion of school funding. Core revenue funding plus pupil premium allocated to schools in England totalled £47.8 billion in 2020-21 and £50.2 billion in 2021-22 and will be £53.4 billion in 2022-23. At its highest, the funding DfE has made available for education recovery specifically will represent around 2% of total funding for schools.

1.16 DfE made funding available through a mix of allocations paid to schools in advance and payments made in arrears following a claim. Schools have not used all the recovery funding that DfE has made available. We estimate that, by the end of the 2021-22 financial year, there was a £226 million (14%) underspend against the available funding.⁵

1.17 Should schools wish to continue to fund tutors or academic mentors, they will have to meet a growing proportion of the cost from other sources, such as pupil premium funding. DfE's announced funding for education recovery in schools is forecast to peak at £985 million in 2022/23 and to end in 2023/24. DfE has changed the funding arrangements each year and is progressively reducing the amount of subsidy it provides under the NTP.

- For 2020/21, DfE covered 75% of the cost of tutoring from tuition partners. Schools could also claim 100% of academic mentors' direct salary costs. Schools covered additional employer costs, such as National Insurance and pension contributions, from other budgets.
- For 2021/22, schools could claim 70% of the cost of tutoring from tuition partners. DfE paid for 95% of academic mentors' salary costs. Schools were allocated funding, based on the number of disadvantaged pupils they had, to cover 75% of the cost of school-led tutoring.
- For 2022/23, DfE has given schools a single funding allocation that they can use to subsidise the cost of tutoring under any of the three NTP schemes, up to a maximum of 60% of the total cost incurred by the school.
- For 2023/24, the level of DfE subsidy for tutoring will drop to 25%.

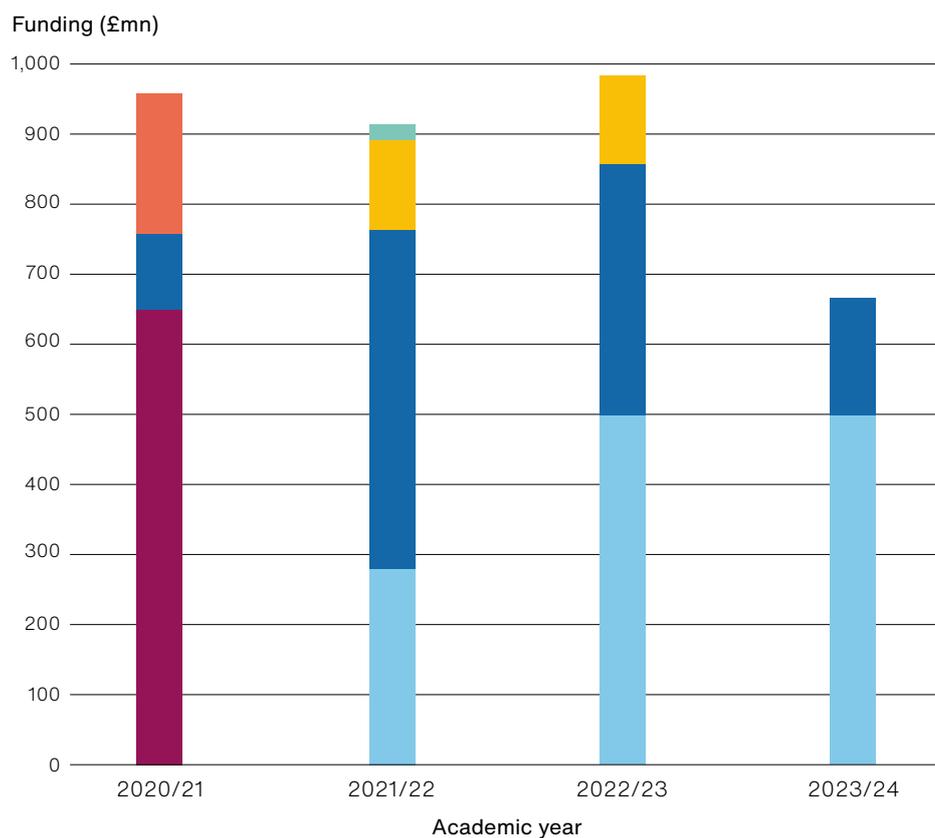
1.18 DfE told us it sees education recovery as part of its ongoing activity to promote high-quality teaching and learning, and it would like to embed tutoring in the school system because it is recognised as an effective way to address low attainment. That would mean schools continuing to fund tutoring for pupils needing additional support once DfE has withdrawn its subsidy.

⁵ The estimated underspend may be understated because it does not take account of potential recoveries relating to school-led tutoring (see paragraph 2.21).

Figure 4

Funding for education recovery in schools, 2020/21 to 2023/24

Funding for education recovery decreases after 2022/23



	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Accelerator Fund	0	22	0	0
Summer schools	200	0	0	0
Teacher training and development	0	127	126	0
National Tutoring Programme	109	485	359	168
Recovery premium	0	280	500	500
Catch-up premium	650	0	0	0
Total (£mn)	959	914	985	688

Note

1 Funding figures are not adjusted for inflation.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of: UK government announcements; HM Treasury, *Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021*, HC 822, October 2021; and Department for Education data

1.19 Some of the stakeholders we consulted raised concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of tutoring and mentoring, given the pressures on school budgets. We reported in July 2021 on the cost pressures that schools had faced, including rises in teachers' pay and higher pension and National Insurance costs.⁶ In its consultation response to us on education recovery, the National Association of Head Teachers highlighted the impact of rapidly increasing energy costs and told us that schools determined to maintain tutoring provision may increasingly redeploy existing teaching assistants as tutors rather than employing additional staff. In November 2022, the government announced extra funding of £2.3 billion for the core schools budget in each of 2023-24 and 2024-25 in addition to the settlement in the 2021 Spending Review.⁷

6 Comptroller and Auditor General, *School funding in England*, Session 2021-22, HC 300, National Audit Office, July 2021.

7 HM Treasury, *Autumn Statement 2022*, November 2022.

Part Two

Interventions to support education recovery

2.1 This part of the report covers the Department for Education's (DfE's) main interventions to support education recovery in schools.

Extra funding for schools

2.2 As with core revenue funding for schools, DfE has distributed the extra funding for education recovery through local authorities and academy trusts. Local authorities had to pass on the full amount allocated to their maintained schools. Academy trusts did not have this obligation and were free to redistribute the funding between their schools, or to pool funding centrally, based on their assessment of what would best support their pupils.

Catch-up premium

2.3 In 2020/21, DfE gave schools extra funding in the form of a catch-up premium. It distributed this funding based on the number of pupils in each school. Mainstream primary and secondary schools were allocated £80 per pupil (those in reception to year 11). DfE allocated £240 per pupil to special schools, high-needs units in mainstream schools, alternative provision and hospital schools in recognition of the higher costs of supporting the pupils in these settings.

2.4 DfE intended that the catch-up premium would help schools minimise the impact of lost teaching time and improve educational outcomes for all children. Its grant conditions allowed schools to spend the money in a way that suited local circumstances and met their pupils' specific needs. DfE expected schools to use the funding for specific activities, following evidence-based approaches, that would help pupils catch up on missed learning.

2.5 DfE did not routinely collect information on how schools used the catch-up premium, partly because it did not want to place additional administrative burdens on them at a time of significant pressure. Based on visits to schools, Ofsted reported in December 2020 that schools' use of the funding often involved paying for extra teaching and intervention classes, using current or external staff, focused on English and maths. Schools also spent the catch-up premium on learning resources (such as laptops, online tutoring and new books), training for staff or measures to support pupils' wellbeing, mental health and attendance.⁸ Research for DfE found that schools used guidance and resources to support their recovery planning and delivery. Guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and from national and local government was seen as most useful, along with resources created by other educators.⁹

Recovery premium

2.6 In the three years from 2021/22 to 2023/24, DfE is providing extra funding for schools in the form of a recovery premium. It is distributing the funding for mainstream schools in the same way as the existing pupil premium.¹⁰ This means that funding allocations are based on the number of pupils in each school who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years or who are, or have been, looked after by their local authority.

2.7 For 2021/22, DfE allocated £145 per eligible pupil in mainstream education, and £290 per pupil in other provision including special schools. For 2022/23, it increased the rates for secondary pupils to £276 in mainstream education and £552 in other provision.¹¹ It made this change in response to evidence of greater learning loss among secondary pupils and because these pupils have less time left at school to catch up on lost learning.

2.8 DfE intended that the recovery premium would help schools make up for lost teaching time for disadvantaged pupils specifically, since evidence indicated that this group had lost learning disproportionately. Its grant conditions give schools freedom to decide how to use the recovery premium in a way that suits local circumstances and meets their pupils' specific needs.

⁸ Ofsted, *COVID-19 series: briefing on schools, November 2020*, published December 2020.

⁹ Department for Education, *School Recovery Strategies: Year 1 findings*, January 2022. The research was carried out by Ipsos MORI, in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and the Centre for Education and Youth.

¹⁰ The pupil premium is funding provided for schools to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils.

¹¹ For both years, DfE provided extra funding where necessary so that no primary school received less than £2,000 and no secondary school received less than £6,000.

2.9 DfE has not routinely collected information on how schools have used the recovery premium. It relies on a number of mechanisms, including established pupil premium arrangements, for assurance that the extra funding has been used well.

- Schools are required to publish an annual pupil premium strategy statement, explaining how they plan to spend the recovery premium and the pupil premium, and demonstrating that their approach is informed by research evidence, including EEF's guidance.¹²
- DfE told us it plans to review a sample of the strategy statements in early 2023 to build its understanding of how schools are planning to use the money.
- Parents and school governing bodies may scrutinise the strategy statements and challenge schools on how they plan to use their recovery premium funding.
- Ofsted may review schools' strategy statements as part of their preparation before inspections. During inspections, inspectors may discuss schools' plans for using their recovery premium funding.
- From 2022/23, DfE requires schools to use their recovery premium in line with a 'menu of approaches' which has been informed by evidence of effective practice. Schools will also have to declare at the end of the year that they have spent the funding in line with the grant conditions and that they can demonstrate this on request.

National Tutoring Programme

2.10 DfE's vision for the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) is to improve the academic outcomes of the most disadvantaged children and young people, with an ambition to create a sustainable high-quality tuition market for schools. Its overall aim is to provide six million 15-hour tutoring courses by 2024.

2.11 DfE's guidance to schools is that they should prioritise disadvantaged pupils to receive tutoring. However, DfE has also given schools the flexibility to exercise professional judgement to identify and support other pupils who would significantly benefit from tutoring.

2.12 The NTP comprises three subsidised tutoring schemes.

- **Tuition partners**
Schools can access tutoring for individual pupils or small groups of pupils, from an approved list of tuition partners (organisations providing tutors).
- **Academic mentors**
Trained mentors are employed by schools to provide intensive support to pupils.
- **School-led tutoring**
Schools are provided with funding to identify and appoint their own tutors, which can include existing staff (such as teachers or teaching assistants), staff with an association to the school or local private tutors.

¹² Education Endowment Foundation, *Guidance for Teachers: Using your pupil premium funding effectively* (viewed January 2023), available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/using-pupil-premium>

How the NTP was run in 2020/21

2.13 When DfE introduced the NTP in 2020, there were only two schemes: tuition partners and academic mentors. DfE set up the NTP as a centrally run initiative, considering that this would best reach all parts of the country quickly and would fill gaps in the private tutoring market, particularly in disadvantaged areas where pupils needed most support.

2.14 As we reported in 2021, to get the NTP running quickly in summer 2020, DfE looked to organisations with whom it had existing relationships to lead the schemes, rather than carrying out a competitive procurement exercise.¹³ For the tuition partners scheme it appointed EEF and for the academic mentors scheme it appointed Teach First, through a variation of its existing grant arrangement and contract respectively.

2.15 To monitor the NTP schemes, DfE received management information from EEF and Teach First, but not granular data. DfE told us that it treated NTP funding in 2020/21 as an extension to existing arrangements and did not have robust processes to provide it with detailed assurance about how the money had been spent.

How the NTP was run in 2021/22

2.16 For 2021/22, DfE put the delivery of the NTP on a fully contractual footing and undertook a competitive procurement exercise. It decided to appoint a single supplier to manage both the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes. It considered that this arrangement would be simpler in terms of interaction with schools and its own ability to hold the contractor to account, as well as allowing the contractor to exercise some flexibility between the two schemes.

2.17 DfE received bids from two suppliers but assessed only one of these as compliant with its requirements. The successful bidder was Randstad, an international recruitment agency which also had experience of working in the education sector in England. Randstad's contract to manage the NTP schemes was signed in May 2021.

2.18 The contractual footing gave DfE the opportunity to introduce more robust governance and accountability arrangements than had been in place in 2020/21. In addition to reporting requirements on Randstad, DfE established a performance and contract board, which met monthly and was attended by Randstad. DfE had more assurance than in the previous year about how funding for tuition partners and academic mentors was spent, but some gaps remained (see paragraph 2.25).

¹³ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Support for children's education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1239, National Audit Office, March 2021.

Introduction of school-led tutoring

2.19 In September 2021, DfE added a school-led tutoring scheme to the NTP with the aim of giving schools more flexibility and boosting take-up. It made this change in response to feedback from schools that logistical factors (such as the amount of management time needed), rather than financial ones, were deterring them from engaging with the existing tutoring schemes. DfE decided to introduce this third scheme after Randstad had been identified as the preferred bidder to run the NTP and a contract amendment was agreed to reflect the change. DfE recognised that its decision to introduce school-led tutoring when it had almost completed the procurement created a significant risk that it would not achieve value for money as there was no competition for the elements of the contract relating to school-led tutoring.

2.20 Under school-led tutoring, schools identify their own tutors. Randstad's role was limited to working with its sub-contractor on training for tutors and to promoting school-led tutoring to schools. School-led tutoring proved more popular with schools than the other NTP schemes (see paragraphs 2.26 and 2.27). Ofsted has reported that it gave schools greater control and oversight of quality than using tuition partners or academic mentors.¹⁴

2.21 DfE relies on schools to report how they have spent their funding allocation for school-led tutoring. At the end of the academic year, schools have to complete a statement for the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), confirming how much they have spent on school-led tutoring, the number of pupils who have received tutoring and the total number of hours of tutoring provided. If a school has provided fewer hours of tutoring than expected, or provided the expected number of hours but spent less than its funding allocation, the ESFA seeks to recover the overpayment by deducting it from future payments. If a school does not complete the year-end statement, the ESFA assumes that the school has provided no school-led tutoring and seeks to recover the full allocation. This process was ongoing at the time of our work. The ESFA expects to publish data in spring 2023 on the amounts recovered from schools.

How the NTP is being run in 2022/23

2.22 DfE had the option to extend its contract with Randstad for up to two further years from 31 August 2022. The popularity of school-led tutoring compared with the other two NTP schemes, along with a desire to simplify the programme for schools, led DfE to decide not to extend the contract.

¹⁴ Ofsted, *Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 1 findings*, October 2022.

2.23 In place of the single central supplier model it used in 2021/22, DfE is allocating all NTP funding for 2022/23 directly to schools, with allocations based on the number of disadvantaged pupils in each school. It has engaged three new contractors to help ensure the quality of tutors.

- Tribal, which checks that tuition partners meet quality criteria agreed with DfE and maintains a list of approved partners.
- The Education Development Trust, which trains new school-based tutors and academic mentors.
- Cognition Education, which recruits academic mentors and deploys them to schools.

Take-up of the NTP

Evidence base

2.24 DfE has sufficient data to estimate national take-up of the NTP in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The data were generated at scheme level. DfE does not know the extent to which pupils participated in more than one scheme, and therefore the number of unique pupils who were supported by the NTP. In addition, for 2020/21, it does not hold the detailed data needed, for example, to analyse the characteristics of pupils who were supported.

2.25 The quality of data on take-up for 2021/22 varies between the three NTP schemes.

- **Tuition partners**

Randstad collected and shared with DfE data from its online 'tuition hub'. Schools used the hub to confirm that tutoring sessions had taken place, and that payments to tuition partners were due. This provided a basic check that the data were correct. These data were at pupil level and collected throughout the year.

- **Academic mentors**

Although academic mentors were encouraged to record their work on Randstad's tuition hub, there was little incentive for them to do so. As a result, there were gaps in the data about this scheme. After the end of the academic year, DfE identified a sample of mentors whose input data it considered sufficiently reliable to use to estimate total activity.

- **School-led tutoring**

DfE obtained data on take-up in several ways, including through the school censuses in October 2021, January 2022 and May 2022. It also collected data from schools in the year-end statement, which covered the whole of 2021/22.

Take-up among all pupils

2.26 Pupils started 311,000 courses under the NTP in 2020/21 and 2.14 million courses in 2021/22, 110% of DfE's overall target of 1.96 million for that year. In 2021/22, the number of courses started through the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes was below DfE's targets (45% and 65% of the target respectively). School-led tutoring was more popular, exceeding DfE's target and accounting for 81% of the courses started (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5

Numbers of courses started and pupils supported under the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), 2020/21 and 2021/22

School-led tutoring made up 81% of all courses started in 2021/22, but the numbers of courses delivered via tuition partners and academic mentors remained below the Department for Education's (DfE's) targets

Academic year	NTP scheme	Number of courses started				Number of pupils supported
		Target	Actual	Actual as a percentage of target	Actual as a percentage of all courses started	
2020/21	Tuition partners	250,000	207,000	83%	67%	Not available
	Academic mentors	No target set	104,000	Not applicable	33%	Not available
	Total		311,000			
2021/22	Tuition partners	524,000	238,000	45%	11%	186,000
	Academic mentors	252,000	165,000	65%	8%	92,000
	School-led tutoring	1,180,000	1,742,000	148%	81%	1,324,000
	Total	1,956,000	2,145,000	110%		

Notes

- 1 An individual pupil may attend more than one course on the same tutoring scheme or receive tutoring under more than one scheme.
- 2 Figures for courses started are rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are calculated from the unrounded data.
- 3 Figures for the actual number of courses started under the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes for 2020/21 were supplied to DfE by the Education Endowment Foundation and Teach First respectively.
- 4 Figures for the actual numbers of courses started and pupils supported under the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes for 2021/22 were supplied to DfE by Randstad.
- 5 Figures for the actual numbers of courses started and pupils supported under the academic mentors scheme for 2021/22 are estimates that DfE calculated using data from a sample of academic mentors who appeared to have supplied reliable data. This group accounted for around 38% of all academic mentors and DfE produced the estimates assuming this sample was representative of the whole population.
- 6 Figures for the actual numbers of courses started and pupils supported under the school-led tutoring scheme are based on data collected by DfE from schools using the year-end statement. All schools that received funding for school-led tutoring were required to submit this statement once they had completed their tutoring for 2021/22. Figures are based on statements submitted up to 21 November 2022. The number of courses is estimated from the number of pupils receiving tutoring and the number of hours of tutoring delivered.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education data

2.27 We found some geographical variation in schools' participation in the NTP schemes. In 2021/22, across the nine regions of England:

- the proportion of schools participating in the tuition partners scheme ranged from 16% to 27%. For academic mentors, the range was 3% to 12%, and for school-led tutoring the range was 83% to 88% (**Figure 6** on pages 29 and 30);¹⁵
- overall, between 85% and 90% of schools in each region participated in some form of tutoring under the NTP, with a national average of 87%; and
- in terms of the proportion of pupils who received tuition, the most variation was for school-led tutoring where take-up varied from 15% in the South East to 22% in the North East.

2.28 We considered why the different NTP schemes proved more or less popular. DfE told us schools were likely to have found school-led tutoring easier to use than the tuition partners scheme, so it was understandable they chose that option. It noted that some schools said they had found it difficult to use Randstad's online tuition hub, and this was also referenced by some of the stakeholders we consulted. The Tutors' Association told us that tuition partners had also preferred the school-led tutoring route.

2.29 Randstad told us that schools' demand for academic mentors had outstripped the numbers it had been able to recruit and train. In areas of high population density, there was high demand and high supply of academic mentors and good awareness of the scheme. However, Randstad had found that not all academic mentors working in 2020/21 continued to do so in 2021/22 and that others joined the scheme. Randstad also said it had been difficult to recruit mentors in a tight labour market and that DfE's agreement to increase the salary for academic mentors from £19,000 to £21,000 had helped recruitment. At the end of 2021/22, there were 2,000 academic mentors, against DfE's target of 3,600 (56%).

¹⁵ The academic mentors scheme was targeted at disadvantaged schools and not all schools were eligible.

Figure 6

Proportion of schools participating in the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), by scheme and region, 2021/22

Overall, 87% of schools participated in some form of tutoring, with participation in school-led tutoring much higher than for the other two schemes

Region

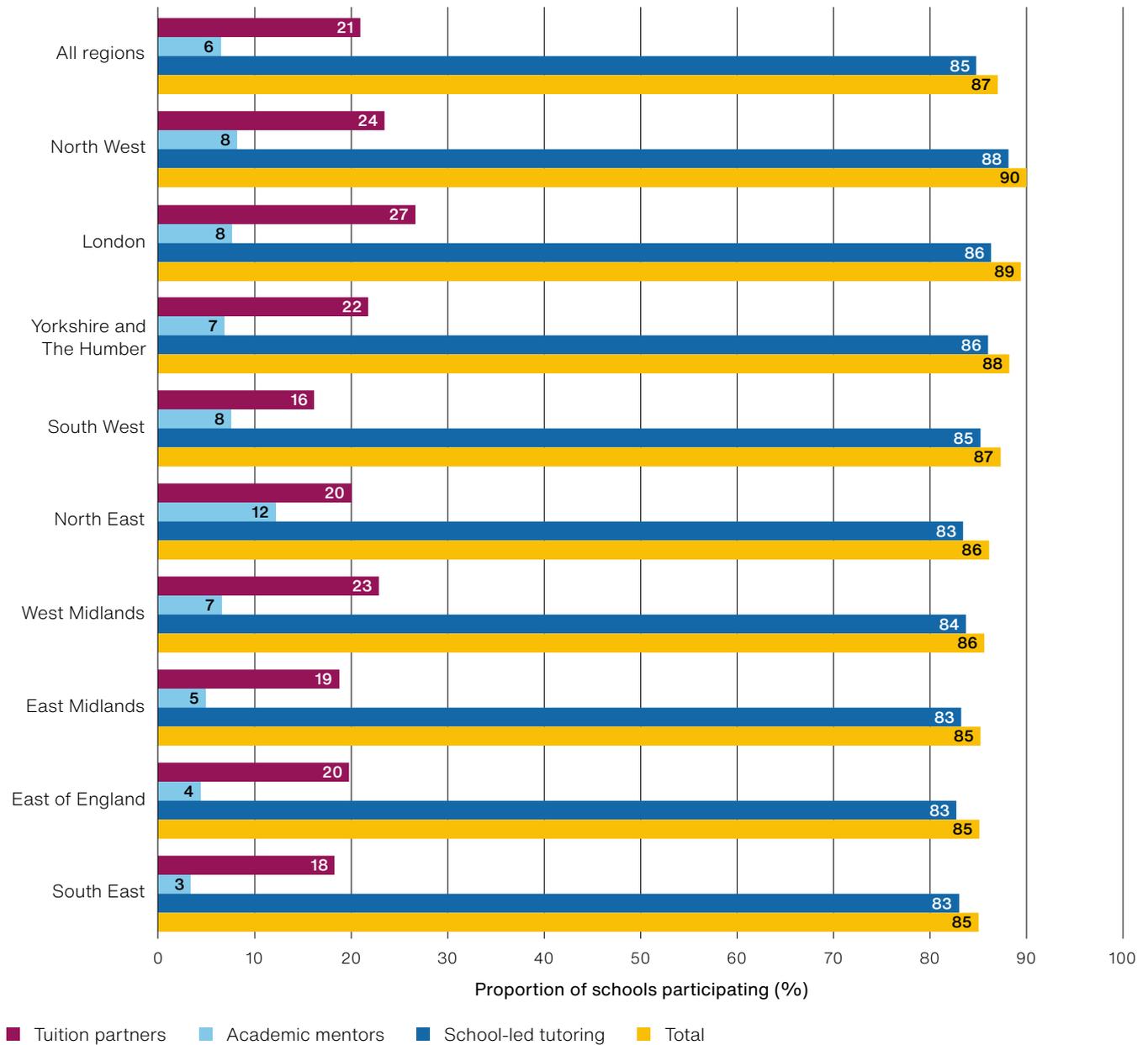


Figure 6 *continued*

Proportion of schools participating in the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), by scheme and region, 2021/22

Notes

- 1 Figures for the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes were supplied to the Department for Education (DfE) by Randstad.
- 2 The academic mentors scheme was targeted at disadvantaged schools and not all schools were eligible.
- 3 Figures for school-led tutoring are based on data collected by DfE from schools using the year-end statement. All schools that received funding for school-led tutoring were required to submit this statement once they had completed their tutoring for 2021/22. Figures are based on statements submitted up to 21 November 2022.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education data

Reaching disadvantaged pupils

2.30 DfE set out to focus the NTP on the quarter of children in England who are classified as disadvantaged, while giving schools flexibility to choose which pupils would benefit most from support. Ofsted found that most schools it visited were using disadvantage as a starting point for identifying which pupils should be prioritised for tuition. The better schools were also using a range of additional information to refine their prioritisation, while some schools were using other criteria, such as prioritising specific year groups.

2.31 Overall, disadvantaged pupils were more likely to receive tutoring in 2021/22 than other pupils. We assessed how far the NTP reached disadvantaged children in 2021/22 in two ways:

- First, the proportion of pupils receiving tutoring who were disadvantaged:
 - 51% of pupils receiving tutoring through the tuition partners scheme were disadvantaged, compared with a target in DfE's contract with Randstad that 65% should be disadvantaged.
 - 48% of pupils receiving support from academic mentors were disadvantaged (estimated using DfE's sample data).
 - 47% of pupils receiving school-led tutoring were disadvantaged.¹⁶

¹⁶ For school-led tutoring, pupils are counted as disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years. For the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes, pupils are also counted as disadvantaged if they have ever been looked after by their local authority. The narrower definition of disadvantage for school-led tutoring is likely to account for at least some of the difference in the proportion of pupils receiving school-led tutoring who were disadvantaged compared with the proportion for the other schemes.

- Second, the proportion of all disadvantaged pupils who received tutoring. While DfE did not set a target for this and did not expect all disadvantaged pupils to receive tutoring, we consider this is a useful indicator of reach:
 - 5% of disadvantaged pupils received tutoring through the tuition partners scheme, with little variation by region.
 - We could not estimate this figure reliably for the academic mentors scheme due to incomplete data.
 - 25% of disadvantaged pupils received school-led tutoring up to May 2022, compared with 14% of all pupils for the same period. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils receiving school-led tutoring ranged from 28% in the North East to 23% in the South East (**Figure 7** overleaf). Although there were some outliers, in most local authority areas between 20% and 30% of disadvantaged pupils received school-led tutoring (**Figure 8** on pages 33 and 34).

2.32 Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were more likely to receive tutoring than pupils without SEND. Overall, 16% of pupils had SEND in 2021/22. The proportion of pupils receiving tutoring who had SEND varied from 19% for tuition partners to 24% for school-led tutoring.

Other interventions

2.33 In addition to the extra funding and the NTP, DfE has two other main interventions to support education recovery in schools.

Teacher training and development

2.34 DfE is providing extra funding of £253 million to expand two existing schemes for teacher training and development:

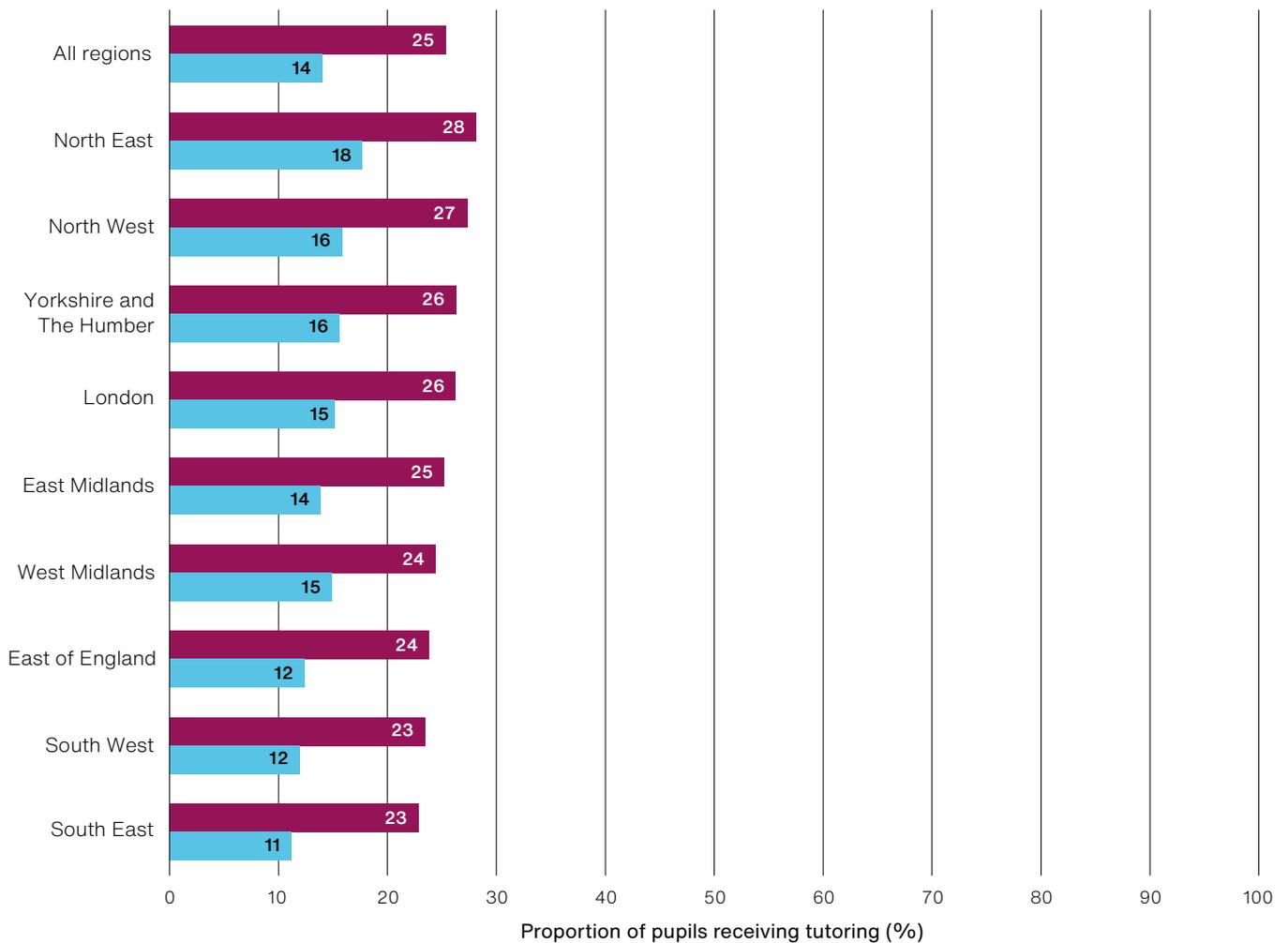
- National Professional Qualifications, which are available for teachers and school leaders who want to develop their knowledge and skills in specialist areas of teaching practice. The extra funding is to increase the number of scholarships and qualifications available; and
- the Early Career Framework, which sets out what teachers are entitled to learn about and learn how to do when they start their careers. The extra funding is to expand the capacity of the induction programme for new teachers following disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 7

Proportion of pupils who received school-led tutoring, by region and disadvantage, September 2021 to May 2022

In all regions, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring was higher than the proportion of all pupils

Region



- Disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring
- All pupils who received school-led tutoring

Notes

- 1 This Figure shows pupils who received school-led tutoring as a proportion of pupils eligible for support under the National Tutoring Programme (those in school years 1 to 11). Pupils may have received tutoring from other sources, including from the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes.
- 2 The Department for Education calculated the numbers of all pupils and disadvantaged pupils receiving school-led tutoring using data from the May 2022 school census. Therefore the Figure does not reflect the position for the whole of the 2021/22 academic year.
- 3 Pupils are counted as disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education data

Figure 8

Proportion of disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring, by local authority in England, September 2021 to May 2022

In most local authority areas, between 20% and 30% of disadvantaged pupils received school-led tutoring

Proportion of disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring

- less than 20%
- 20.0% – 24.9%
- 25.0% – 29.9%
- 30.0% – 34.9%
- 35.0% – 39.9%

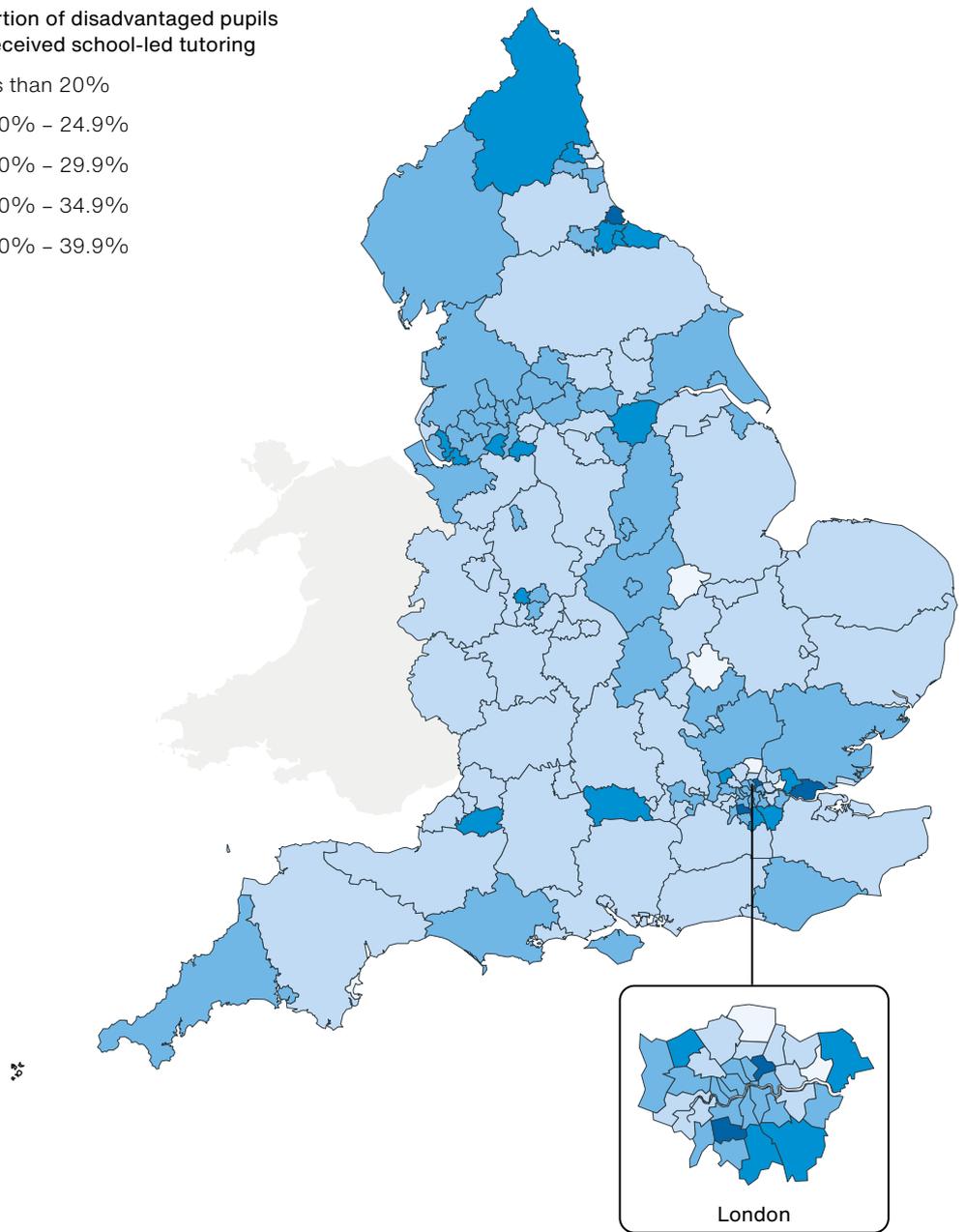


Figure 8 *continued*

Proportion of disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring, by local authority in England, September 2021 to May 2022

Notes

- 1 The map shows the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring under the National Tutoring Programme. Pupils may have received tutoring from other sources, including from the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes.
- 2 The Department for Education calculated the numbers of all pupils and disadvantaged pupils receiving school-led tutoring using data from the May 2022 school census. Therefore the map does not reflect the position for the whole of the 2021/22 academic year.
- 3 Pupils are counted as disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years.
- 4 The 'less than 20%' band includes the Isles of Scilly, for which no school-led tutoring was recorded. The next lowest value is 12.5%.
- 5 The map is based on counties and unitary authorities (upper-tier local authorities) at December 2021.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education data. Map boundaries from the Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2021

2.35 DfE told us it intends that the extra funding will help provide 500,000 teacher development opportunities by the end of 2024, leading to improved teacher quality and retention and, in turn, better pupil outcomes. It publishes information on the number of participants in the two schemes, but this does not identify how many additional places have resulted specifically from the recovery funding.¹⁷

Summer schools

2.36 In February 2021, DfE announced that up to £200 million would be available for secondary schools, special schools and alternative provision to run face-to-face summer schools during the 2021 summer holiday, to help make up for learning lost. It subsequently published detailed allocations to individual schools totalling £143 million. The summer schools scheme was a per-pupil grant sufficient to pay for one week (100% funded) or two weeks (50% funded). DfE intended that the summer schools would involve a mix of academic learning and other activities. It expected that there would be a focus on pupils transitioning into secondary school but schools determined which pupils, from any year group, would benefit most from attending.

2.37 Demand was considerably lower than DfE predicted and £76 million of the available funding was claimed by schools. Around 340,000 pupils in 2,800 schools took part in the scheme. Research commissioned by DfE found that the summer schools may have had a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing and supported their readiness for the next school year. The research did not explore the direct impact on attainment.¹⁸

¹⁷ Department for Education, *Teacher and Leader development: ECF and NPQs, Academic year 2021/22*, July 2022.

¹⁸ Department for Education, *Summer schools research: Final research report*, March 2022.

Part Three

Impact of the recovery package

3.1 This part of the report covers the impact of the package of education recovery interventions in schools, including what the available evidence indicates about the progress being made to address pupils' learning loss.

Measuring success

3.2 In May 2021, the Committee of Public Accounts concluded that the Department for Education (DfE) had not set out how it would judge the effectiveness of the catch-up programme in making up for the learning children lost. It recommended that DfE should set out clear metrics that it would use to monitor the catch-up programme, and indicate what level of performance would represent success.¹⁹ In response, DfE set out its approach to monitoring effectiveness and said it was developing metrics to monitor progress in reducing lost learning.²⁰ However, it did not write to the Committee in autumn 2021 with this information as it said it would.

3.3 DfE recognises that it needs to demonstrate what has been achieved for its spending on education recovery. It told us it has not specified what level of progress would represent success for its recovery interventions because it regards the interventions as part of its overall activity to improve pupils' attainment. It pointed us to the ambitions for pupils' attainment in literacy and numeracy that the government set out in the March 2022 schools white paper.²¹ This stated that by 2030:

- 90% of primary school children will achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst-performing areas will have increased by a third; and
- in secondary schools, the national GCSE average grade in both English language and maths will increase from 4.5 in 2019 to 5.

¹⁹ HC Committee of Public Accounts, *COVID-19: Support for children's education*, Third Report of Session 2021-22, HC 240, May 2021.

²⁰ HM Treasury, *Treasury Minutes – Government responses to the Committee of Public Accounts on the First to the Sixth reports from Session 2021-22*, August 2021.

²¹ HM Government, *Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child*, March 2022.

3.4 DfE has not set milestones between now and 2030 but is working to monitor progress towards the ambitions in the white paper. At the time of our work, it was developing a model to illustrate what might happen to attainment in the years to 2030 under given scenarios. DfE has noted, however, that these trajectories have multiple sources of uncertainty, which means they should not be interpreted as definitive predictions.

Oversight

3.5 DfE's arrangements for governance, oversight and risk management of its spending on education recovery evolved. The arrangements included a series of strategy and implementation boards that met regularly during 2021-22 and focused specifically on education recovery. They covered recovery interventions in schools, early years and education for 16- to 19-year-olds.

3.6 After April 2022, DfE subsumed governance of education recovery into its mainstream oversight arrangements, reflecting its view that recovery now forms part of its core business. It disbanded the education recovery board and transferred oversight of the overall recovery portfolio to the performance and risk committee of its main departmental board. DfE's leadership team considered progress and next steps on education recovery in May 2022, and the performance and risk committee took a paper on the recovery portfolio at its November 2022 meeting. The schools board covers recovery interventions in schools specifically as part of its oversight of DfE's schools group.

Evaluation

3.7 The Education Endowment Foundation commissioned evaluations of the impact of both the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes for 2020/21 from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). It published the evaluation reports in October 2022. The tuition partners evaluation found that key analyses – of the impact of tuition partners on disadvantaged pupils at primary school and the end of secondary school – were unable to detect whether the scheme had an impact because of the relatively low proportion of disadvantaged pupils receiving tutoring compared with all disadvantaged pupils in the schools analysed.²² Similarly, the academic mentors evaluation could not conclude with any certainty on whether the academic mentors had an impact on the attainment of pupils who received support.²³

22 National Foundation for Educational Research, *Evaluation of year 1 of the tuition partners programme: Summary and interpretation of key findings*, October 2022.

23 National Foundation for Educational Research and University of Westminster, *Evaluation of year 1 of the academic mentoring programme: impact evaluation for year 11*, October 2022.

3.8 Central government guidance makes clear that departments are expected to undertake evaluations of their interventions to support learning and accountability. At the time of our work, DfE had commissioned evaluations of some elements of the recovery package. For the National Tutoring Programme, it commissioned both an implementation and process evaluation and a quantitative impact evaluation for 2021/22, from NFER. It published the report of the first of these in October 2022 and expects to publish the impact evaluation in 2023.²⁴

3.9 DfE also commissioned a review of tutoring in schools from Ofsted, and Ofsted published the first of two planned reports in October 2022.²⁵ It found that the quality of tuition varied, with sessions taught by qualified teachers tending to be of higher quality than those taught by other types of tutor. Ofsted reported that the perceptions of leaders, staff and pupils were overwhelmingly positive about the tutoring provided. Most schools, however, had not been assessing tuition effectively to evaluate its impact on pupils' progress, often because their tutoring approach had not been established for long enough.

Progress in addressing learning loss

Evidence base

3.10 DfE usually relies on regular national assessments to gain assurance about pupils' attainment and progress. These assessments include national curriculum tests at Key Stages 1 and 2 for children at primary school, and GCSE exams for pupils at secondary school. Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these assessments either did not occur or were not comparable with previous years because different methods of assessment and grading were used.

3.11 In the absence of the usual attainment measures, in 2020 DfE commissioned research from Renaissance Learning and the Education Policy Institute to generate information about progress. The research assessed the learning loss experienced by pupils as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and how this changed, from autumn 2020 onwards. The research set out to estimate learning loss in reading and maths for primary and secondary pupils, effectively by comparing what pupils did achieve with what they would have achieved had they progressed at the same rate as pupils in the most recent comparable pre-pandemic period, usually 2019/20.²⁶

24 Department for Education, *Independent Evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme Year 2: Implementation and Process Evaluation*, October 2022.

25 Ofsted, *Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 1 findings*, October 2022.

26 For the summer term 2021 the comparison period was the summer term 2019, because no comparable assessment took place in the summer term 2020 due to disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.12 The research reports set out a number of limitations to the research. In particular, the sample sizes achieved were not always large enough to derive robust estimates of learning loss for both subjects across primary and secondary education. As a result, the reports do not present estimates of learning loss for secondary pupils in maths throughout, or for secondary pupils in reading for spring 2021. The reports also highlight that learning loss estimates for different periods are not always directly comparable, because they may not be based on the same groups of pupils.

Progress among all pupils

3.13 DfE has not set out when it expects children and young people to recover fully the learning they lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the research has found variation in the extent to which pupils have recovered learning and how quickly (see Figure 10 on page 40). The main findings included the following:

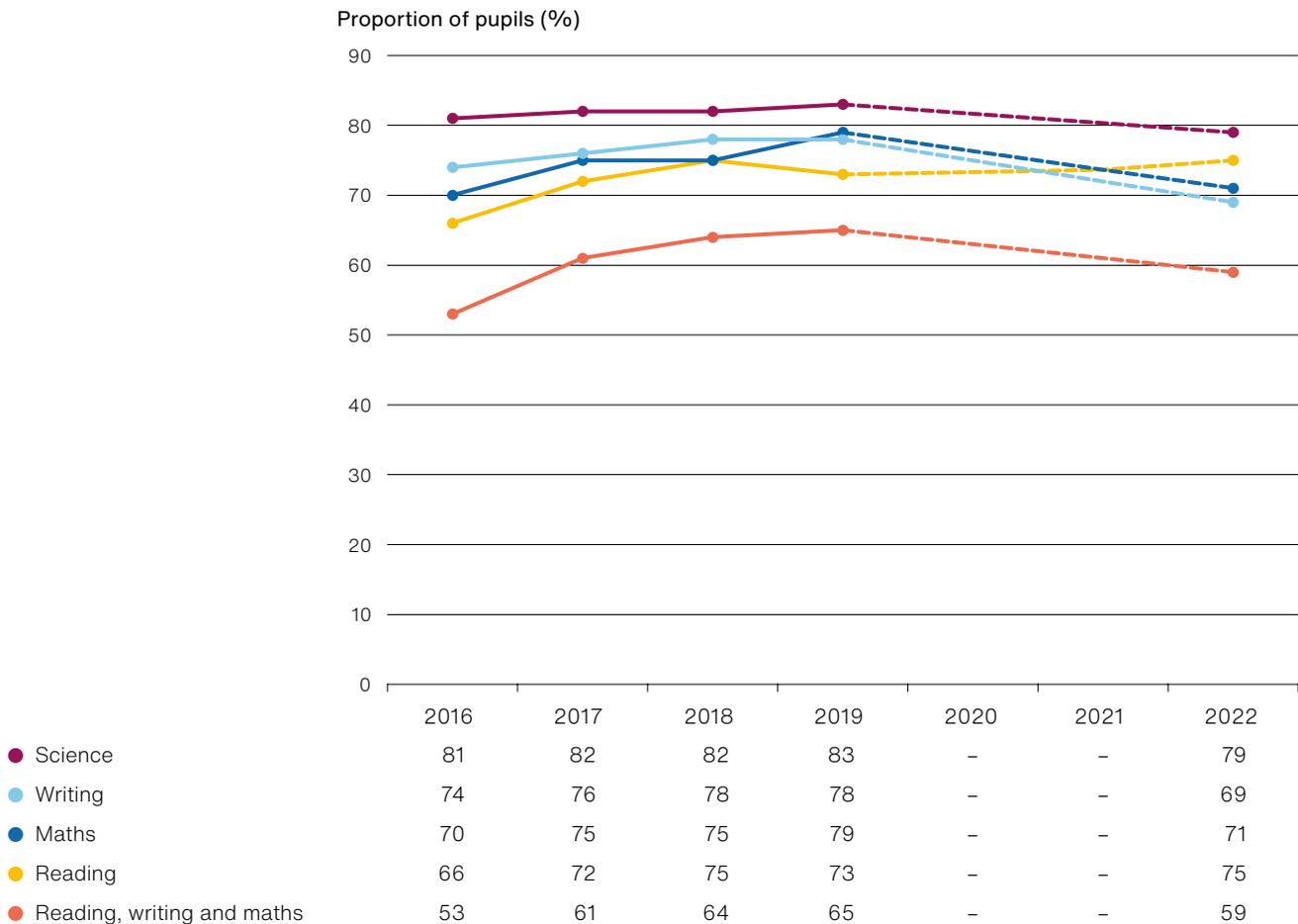
- While some progress was made between the first half of the autumn term 2020 and spring 2021 to recover primary pupils' lost learning in maths, they lost further learning in reading after the school closures in early 2021.
- Learning loss for most pupils had reduced by summer 2021. For example, in reading, primary pupils were on average 1.8 months behind where they were expected to be in autumn 2020 and 0.9 months behind in summer 2021.
- Primary pupils' learning loss has consistently been greater in maths than in reading. For example, in summer 2021, these pupils were on average 0.9 months behind where they were expected to be in reading but 2.2 months behind in maths.
- The findings for autumn 2021 are not directly comparable with all previous findings because they were based on a different group of pupils. The research suggested that since summer 2021 learning loss for primary pupils had improved in maths and was largely unchanged in reading. However, there had been a significant increase in learning loss for secondary pupils in reading.
- Regionally, the greatest levels of learning loss have consistently been in the north of England. In autumn 2021, the learning loss in the North East, the North West, and Yorkshire and The Humber was more than one month for primary reading and three months or more for secondary reading. The smallest learning losses have been in London and the South West.

3.14 The 2022 Key Stage 2 tests also provided evidence of primary pupils' continuing learning loss. They indicated significant drops in attainment since 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there was an improvement in reading, attainment fell in all other subject areas to levels lower than in 2017. The proportion of pupils reaching DfE's expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths was 59%, down from 65% in 2019 (**Figure 9**). Attainment at Key Stage 1 in 2022 also decreased in all subjects compared with 2019.

Figure 9

Proportion of pupils meeting the Department for Education's expected standard at the end of primary school, 2016 to 2022

In 2022, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard dropped to below 2017 levels for most subjects

**Notes**

- 1 Figures for 2022 are based on revised data. Figures for other years are based on final data.
- 2 Dashed lines indicate that data are not available for 2020 and 2021 as assessments were cancelled in these years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Includes all schools with pupils eligible for assessment at the end of primary school (Key Stage 2). Participation by independent schools is voluntary so the figures include results from independent schools that chose to submit data.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Department for Education data

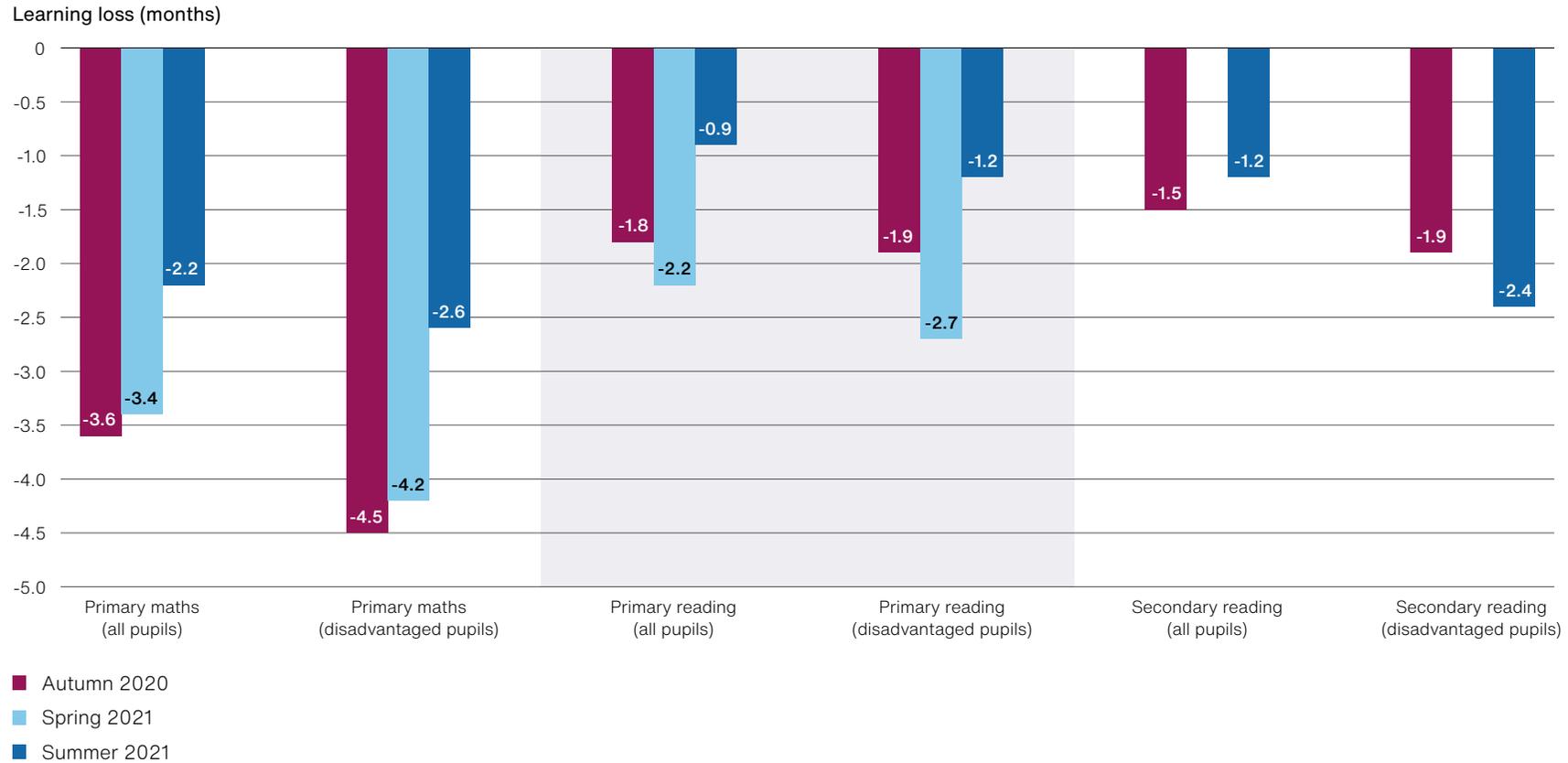
Progress among disadvantaged pupils

3.15 Learning loss for disadvantaged pupils has followed a similar pattern to that for all pupils, but the extent of the loss has been consistently greater. For example, in summer 2021, the research for DfE found that disadvantaged secondary pupils were 2.4 months behind where they were expected to be in reading, compared with 1.2 months for all secondary pupils (**Figure 10** overleaf).

Figure 10

Actual achievement compared with expected achievement in autumn 2020, spring 2021 and summer 2021, for all pupils and disadvantaged pupils

Estimated learning loss for disadvantaged pupils has consistently been greater than for all pupils



Notes

- 1 Learning loss is estimated by comparing what pupils did achieve with what they would have achieved had they progressed at the same rate as pupils in the most recent comparable pre-pandemic period – autumn 2019, spring 2020 and summer 2019 respectively – for each period shown in the chart.
- 2 Results are not available for secondary pupils in maths for any period, or for secondary pupils in reading for spring 2021, because the sample sizes achieved for these groups were not large enough to derive robust estimates of learning loss.
- 3 Figures for autumn 2020 are for the first half of the autumn term.
- 4 Pupils are counted as disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Renaissance Learning and Education Policy Institute data

3.16 Disadvantaged pupils have, on average, lower attainment than other pupils. This is known as the disadvantage gap. Results from Key Stage 1, 2 and 4 tests taken in 2022 indicated that the disadvantage gap had grown. For example, the 2022 Key Stage 2 tests found that attainment in reading for disadvantaged pupils remained at 2019 levels. However, attainment in most subjects declined further than for pupils who were not disadvantaged.

3.17 The disadvantage gap index (a measure of the difference in attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils) at the end of primary school was 3.23 in 2022, compared with 2.91 in 2019.²⁷ The index in 2022 was the highest since 2012. In December 2022, DfE highlighted that one of the key risks it was managing was that children and young people do not recover from the impact of COVID-19, leading to widened attainment gaps between pupils.²⁸

3.18 In terms of location, pupils living in disadvantaged areas have continued to experience greater learning loss than those living in more affluent areas. Both the October 2021 and March 2022 research reports noted that area-based deprivation had an effect on learning loss, with non-disadvantaged pupils in areas with medium and high levels of deprivation experiencing a similar degree of learning loss to disadvantaged pupils in areas with low levels of deprivation.

3.19 The research on learning loss also found a correlation between the proportion of days pupils were absent from school (despite schools being open for all pupils) and estimates of their learning loss.²⁹ Pupil absence has remained higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic, for all pupils and for disadvantaged pupils. In the autumn and spring terms of 2021/22, the average absence rate for all pupils was 7.4%, compared with 4.5% for the same terms before the pandemic in 2018/19. For disadvantaged pupils, the rate was 10.4% in 2021/22, compared with 7.2% in 2018/19.

²⁷ An index score of 0 would indicate that there was no disadvantage gap.

²⁸ Department for Education, *Consolidated annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022*, December 2022.

²⁹ The research cautions that this should not be assumed to imply causation.

Appendix One

Our evidence base

Scope

1 Our independent conclusions on whether the Department for Education (DfE) is achieving its objective to help pupils recover lost learning by effectively supporting education recovery in schools following the COVID-19 pandemic were reached following our analysis of evidence collected mainly between June and December 2022.

2 The evaluative criteria that we used to assess value for money included: whether DfE used the available evidence in designing its package of recovery interventions; whether DfE has assurance that funding is being used for the intended purposes; what evidence there is on take-up and whether the interventions are reaching disadvantaged pupils as intended; and whether the package of interventions is having an impact in terms of reducing learning loss.

3 This report builds on our March 2021 report on support for children's education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰ We examined education recovery in schools in England and did not cover early years, education for 16- to 19-year-olds, or further or higher education. We focused on the government's announcements, from June 2020 onwards, for new interventions to support education recovery.

Methods

4 In forming our conclusions, we drew on a variety of evidence sources, as described in the paragraphs below. We collated and analysed the evidence we obtained, using our evaluative criteria as a framework. We looked across different sources of evidence to support each of our findings. We considered our findings for the recovery interventions both individually and collectively.

³⁰ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Support for children's education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic*, Session 2019–2021, HC 1239, National Audit Office, March 2021.

Interviews

Interviews with DfE

5 We interviewed departmental officials to understand DfE’s approach to education recovery in schools. Those we spoke to were selected based on their current or past roles within DfE and were, or had been, responsible for policy in the following areas: the overall design of the package of interventions; the National Tutoring Programme (NTP); and the catch-up and recovery premiums. Some of these interviews were conducted in person and some took place online.

6 We used these interviews to develop our understanding of areas such as: DfE’s aims for education recovery; the basis for decisions about the design of, and changes to, the package of interventions; how DfE monitored progress, including oversight of its contract with Randstad; and the arrangements DfE put in place for governance and accountability.

7 We also held a number of online meetings with DfE officials responsible for analysing performance data, particularly relating to the NTP. We used these discussions to ensure that we understood both the robustness and the limitations of each of the relevant datasets, so that we could undertake our own analysis, and rely on the findings, in an appropriate way.

Interviews with other bodies

8 We interviewed staff from the following bodies:

- **Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)**

We conducted an online interview with officials at the ESFA to understand its role in administering DfE’s funding and the information it has collected from schools in relation to the recovery interventions.

- **Ofsted**

We conducted an online interview with Ofsted officials to understand how Ofsted has considered education recovery in its school inspections, the extent of its role in reporting on this topic, and relevant themes arising from its work.

- **Randstad**

We interviewed in person senior staff from Randstad, the contractor responsible for managing the NTP in 2021/22. We used this interview to discuss Randstad’s experience of delivering the contract, to understand the management information Randstad collected, and to seek Randstad’s views on scheme performance, including tutoring capacity and take-up.

Document review

9 We reviewed a range of published and unpublished documents to develop our understanding of: the package of recovery interventions as a whole and its component parts; the evidence supporting DfE’s interventions; and the findings of research into topics including learning loss and the impact of tutoring. The documents included:

- unpublished DfE documents such as business cases, board papers and internal briefings;
- research findings published by bodies including DfE, the Education Endowment Foundation, the Education Policy Institute and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Those findings we have drawn on directly are referenced in our report and detailed in footnotes;
- other published DfE documents such as funding announcements and guidance to schools;
- documentation relating to DfE’s contract with Randstad; and
- Ofsted’s series of COVID-19 briefings and the findings from its review of tutoring in schools.

Quantitative analysis

DfE data on schools and pupils

10 We used DfE data to provide information on schools in England and the pupils aged five to 16 attending them. The schools covered were:

- mainstream primary and secondary schools; and
- special schools and alternative provision, including pupil referral units and non-maintained special schools.

Data held by DfE on take-up of the NTP schemes

11 We undertook analysis to assess how many schools have engaged with the three NTP schemes, the proportion of all pupils and of disadvantaged pupils who have received tutoring, and whether DfE has met its targets for delivery of tutoring courses.

12 We accessed the data DfE held on take-up of the NTP in 2020/21, which were provided as management information on the courses delivered under the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes.

13 Our analysis of national and regional take-up of each NTP scheme in 2021/22 was based on data published by DfE as experimental statistics in December 2022 (paragraphs 14 to 16 below).

14 The number of courses delivered, pupils tutored and schools participating in 2021/22 were taken from the NTP delivery data, which DfE collected from the following sources.

- For the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes, data were supplied to DfE by Randstad. Because not all academic mentors submitted information on courses delivered and pupils tutored, DfE estimated take-up based on a sample of academic mentors for whom it judged it had reliable data. This group accounted for around 38% of all academic mentors. DfE assumed this sample was representative of the whole population.
- For the school-led tutoring scheme, DfE collected information from schools via the year-end statement, a form completed by schools that received funding for school-led tutoring. All schools that received funding were required to submit this statement once they had completed their tutoring for 2021/22. The figures we used are based on statements submitted up to 21 November 2022. The number of courses is estimated from the number of pupils receiving tutoring and the number of hours of tutoring delivered.

15 For our analysis of the number of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities who received tutoring in 2021/22, we drew on NTP pupil characteristics data, which DfE collected from the following sources.

- For the tuition partners and academic mentors schemes, data were supplied to DfE by Randstad, including data on pupil characteristics recorded by schools. For these two schemes, pupils are deemed to be disadvantaged if they are eligible for the pupil premium.³¹ Data cover the whole of the 2021/22 academic year, up to the end of August 2022.
- For the school-led tutoring scheme, DfE matched data on how many pupils had received tutoring, sourced from the May 2022 school census, with pupil characteristics data. For this scheme, pupils are deemed to be disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years. Because data were collected in May 2022, before the end of the academic year, for this analysis the total number of pupils recorded as receiving school-led tutoring is lower than the whole-year data reported in schools' year-end statements.

³¹ The elements of pupil premium for which pupils needed to be eligible in order to be recorded as disadvantaged under the tuition partners or academic mentors schemes were the 'disadvantage pupil premium' (pupils who had ever been eligible for free school meals) or the elements for children who are or were ever looked after by their local authority.

- When calculating the proportions of all pupils and disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring (Figure 7), the comparison populations were:
 - all pupils in years 1 to 11 (the group who are eligible for the NTP) for schools in scope, sourced from DfE data on schools and pupils; and
 - all pupils in years 1 to 11 in 2021/22 who had been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years, sourced from unpublished DfE data (paragraph 16 below).

16 For our analysis of the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who received school-led tutoring by local authority in 2021/22, we used the following sources.

- Unpublished DfE analysis of the number of pupils who received school-led tutoring at local authority level.
- Unpublished DfE data on the number of pupils in years 1 to 11 who had been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years, at individual school level. These data were then aggregated to local authority level.

DfE data on pupil attainment

17 For our analysis of the progress that pupils have made to recover lost learning, we used information published by DfE on the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard of attainment at the end of the 2021/22 academic year at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4, compared with previous years. We also drew on the disadvantage gap index (a measure of the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils) at the end of primary school.

Data from research reports

18 We drew on research commissioned by DfE from Renaissance Learning and the Education Policy Institute for information about learning loss and recovery. The research set out to estimate learning loss in reading and maths for primary and secondary pupils, effectively by comparing what pupils did achieve with what they would have achieved had they progressed at the same rate as pupils in the most recent comparable pre-pandemic period.

19 The research findings are set out in several reports, two of which are referenced in this report:

- *Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year – Findings from the summer term and summary of all previous findings*, published in October 2021. This report covers the whole of 2020/21 and includes longitudinally comparable results for the same cohort of pupils for the first and second halves of the autumn term, and for the spring and summer terms. We used these findings to understand trends in the extent of pupils' learning loss; and

- *Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year – Extension report covering the first half of the autumn term 2021/22*, published in March 2022. This report covers the autumn term 2021/22 and includes longitudinally comparable results for the summer term 2020/21 and the first half of the autumn term 2021/22. We used these findings to understand the extent of pupils' learning loss in autumn 2021, which was the most up-to-date position at the time of our work.

20 The research reports set out a number of limitations to the research. In particular, the sample sizes achieved were not always large enough to derive robust estimates of learning loss for both subjects across primary and secondary education. As a result, the reports do not present estimates of learning loss for secondary pupils in maths throughout, or for secondary pupils in reading for the second half of the autumn term 2020/21 or the spring term 2020/21. The reports also highlighted that learning loss estimates for different periods are not always directly comparable, because they may not be based on the same groups of pupils.

Financial data

21 The main sources of financial information we drew on were:

- the government's public funding announcements;
- HM Treasury's *Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021*, published in October 2021;
- DfE's published funding allocations for schools and guidance for schools on the conditions of grant funding; and
- DfE's unpublished financial data.

22 DfE publishes school funding statistics, including a core funding time series and funding allocations, at a national level for all material revenue grant streams received by all schools. We included the following grants in calculating core funding for schools: the schools block and high-needs block elements of the dedicated schools grant; pupil premium; teachers' pay and pension grants; and the schools supplementary grant provided in 2022-23. We excluded funding for early years and education for 16- to 19-year-olds.

23 We used this financial information to establish:

- how much funding DfE made available for each recovery intervention for academic years 2020/21 to 2023/24, and financial years 2020-21 to 2024-25;
- the sums of money allocated to individual schools, where available;
- actual spending, and the difference between forecast spending and actual spending; and
- the scale of funding for education recovery compared with other funding provided for schools.

Stakeholder consultation

24 We wrote to selected stakeholder bodies, inviting them to provide their views on any or all of the following questions.

- How well placed are schools to support education recovery?
- To what extent do you think the education recovery programme has been effective so far?
- What factors are helping or hindering schools from effectively supporting education recovery and pupils from catching up on lost learning?
- What are your views on how DfE has implemented the National Tutoring Programme, and on the quality and availability of tutoring?
- What are your views on the overall design of the education recovery programme?

25 In selecting the bodies we wrote to, we aimed to get a cross-section of views from those representing different types of stakeholder including schools, teachers, parents and tutors.

26 We met or received written submissions from:

- the Association of Directors of Children's Services;
- the Confederation of School Trusts;
- NASUWT, the Teachers' Union;
- the National Association of Head Teachers;
- the National Education Union;
- Parentkind; and
- The Tutors' Association.

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