



Educational Inequalities and Post-pandemic Schools

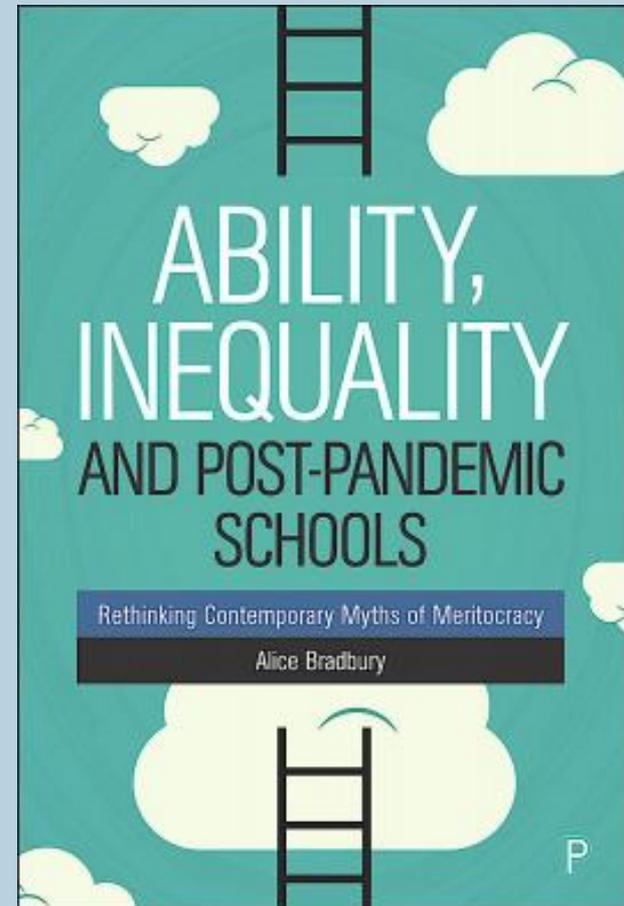
Alice Bradbury

Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy, UCL IOE

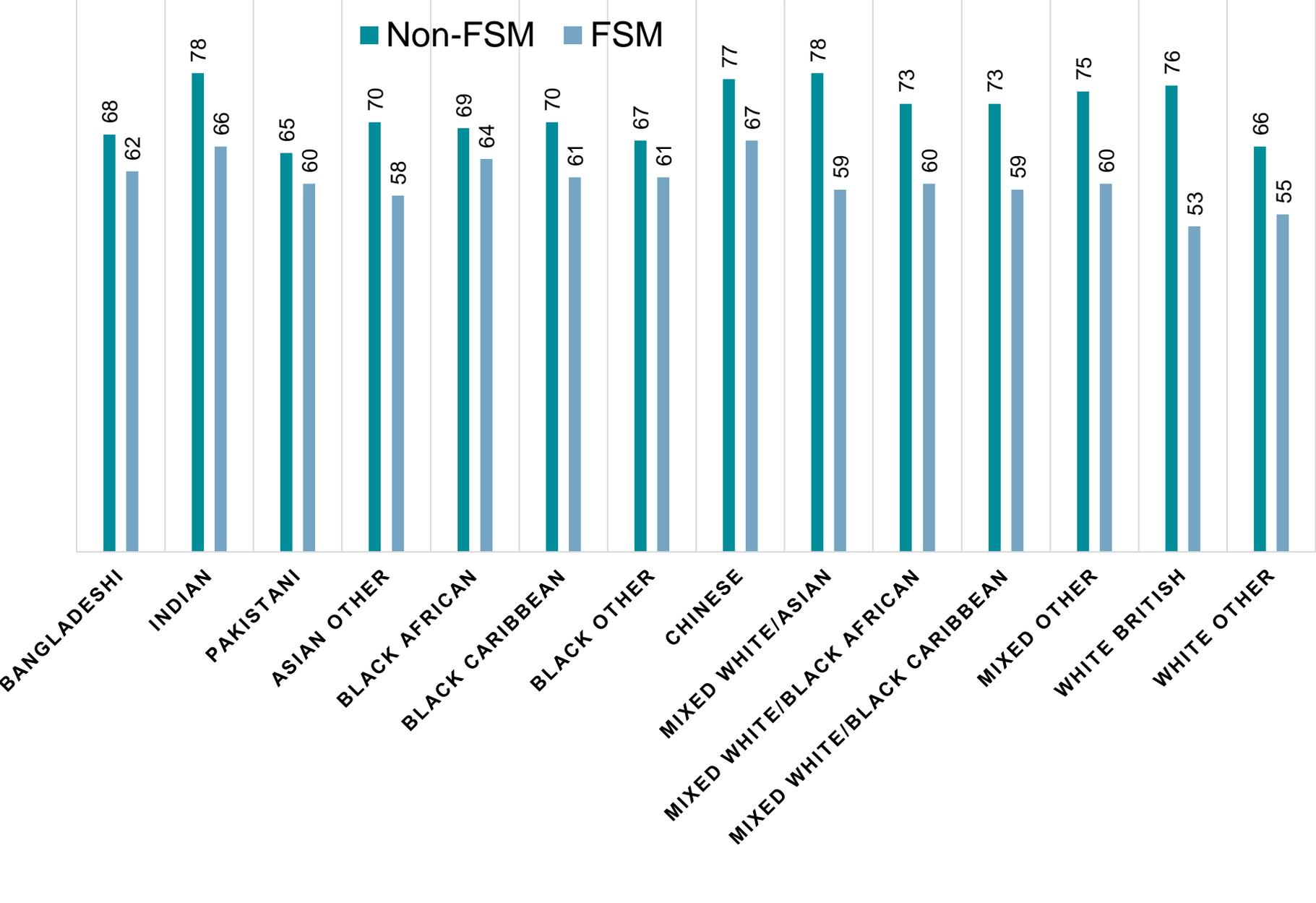
Inequalities
Pre-Covid

Pandemic
inequalities

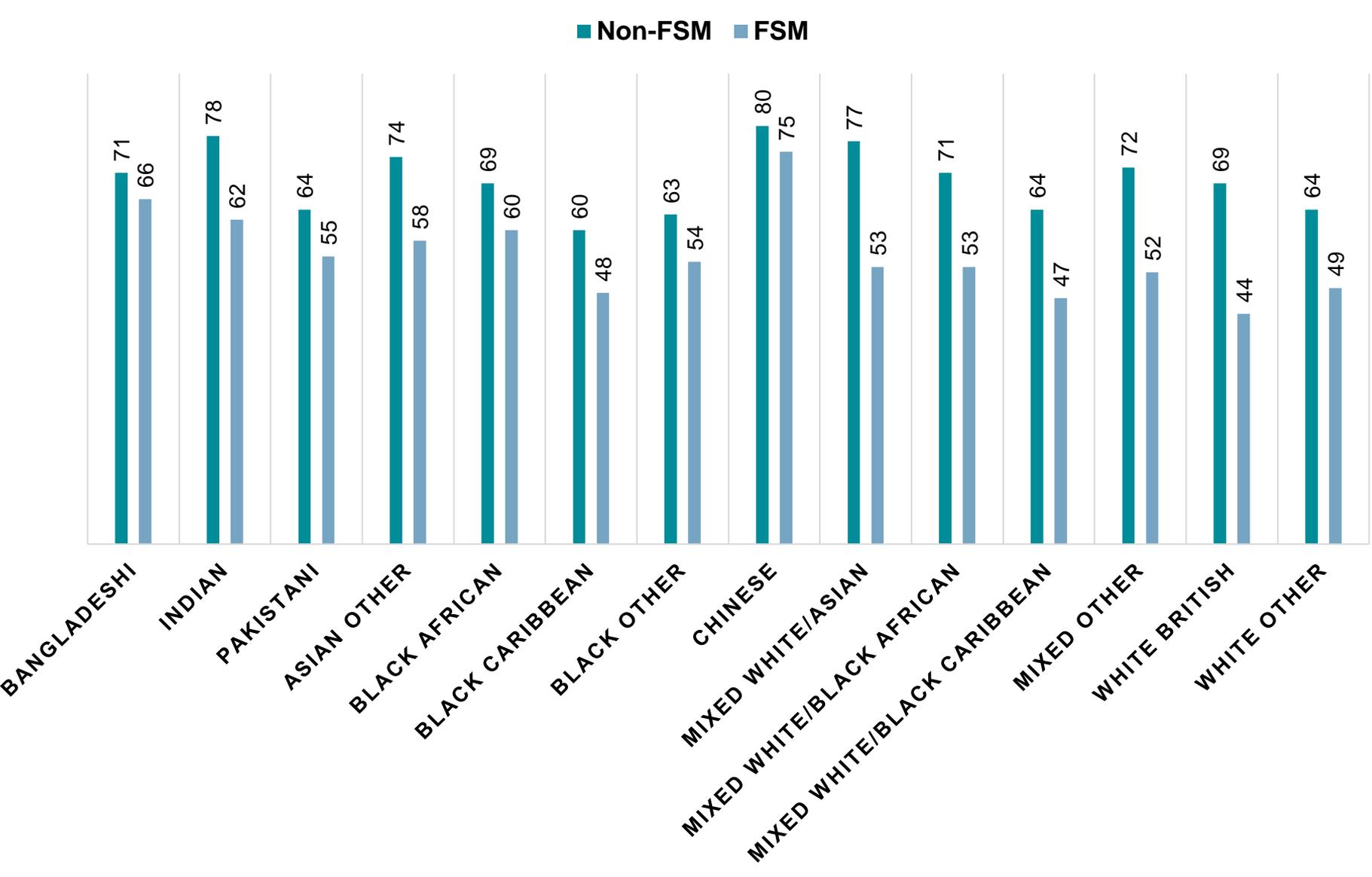
Post-pandemic
hopes



1. Inequalities pre-Covid: Percentage of children attaining GLD at age 4/5 in England, 2019 by ethnic group and FSM status



Percentage of children reaching the expected standard at age 10/11 by ethnic group and FSM status



Exclusion figures – temporary (2017-18)

Lowest rates		Highest rates	
Chinese	0.50%	Black Caribbean group	10.46%
Indian	0.75%	Mixed White/Black Caribbean	10.13%
Asian Other	1.45%	Black Other	5.80%

Inequalities and the concept of ‘ability’

- Ability, as an idea, does a great deal of work in establishing, maintaining and reinforcing patterns of inequality.

‘a façade that blinds actors to their own roles in creating or reinforcing education and social inequality’ (Ladwig and McPherson 2017, p. 348)

Relatedly, meritocracy as an idea does similar work:

‘merit is not an inherent personal quality but a set of social produced capabilities underpinned by capitals of different sorts, which ensures that social groups with wealth and heritage, and relevant cultural knowledge and social relations can respond to educational opportunities to assert or reproduce social and economic advantage’. (Jin and Ball 2020, p. 65)

Teachers' conceptions of 'ability'

innate	positional	attribute
intelligence, skills or talents	a set point	readiness
potential	attainment	knowledge
	relation to a norm	background

Educational trends:

Neuroscience

- 'neuroturn' (De Vos 2017)
- reworking of discourses of determinism related to background

Datafication

- Increased reliance on data
- data-focused practices work to reinforce long-standing ideas about children as positioned on a *spectrum of ability*, where they can be compared with each other

Influence of neuroscience

- Everything ‘neuro’ is regarded as fashionable, hyped and as cutting-edge science, despite the complexity of the field and its relative youth (Pykett 2012). Competing claims and ambiguities are glossed over in the attempt to present the ‘insights’ from this ‘new knowledge’ as revolutionary in our understanding of human nature and potential (McGimpsey *et al.* 2017)
- Translation into real life situations (such as classrooms) of these ‘insights’ is always problematic. There is danger of simplification of complex findings and the misapplication of ‘new’ ideas to re-inscribe older notions of hierarchy and deficit.

‘The psy-sciences as a discursive formation produced and continue to produce new categories and systems of classification which are then inscribed into the everyday practices of institutional life and institutional orderings, in terms of concepts like “intelligence”, “ability”, “hyperactivity”, “normal development”, “behavioural difficulties”, etc.’ (Ball 2013, p. 76)

Datafication

- A datafied education system is one governed by a specific rationality, whereby numbers become the means through which we understand children and their potential.
- Data form the basis for practices which establish and maintain the idea of fixed ability, especially grouping systems
- The prominence of data has an impact on the frames of the debate about equality in education, narrowing what it is possible to argue – because no one can argue with the numbers – and pushing other conceptions of learning to the margins.

The questions posed by Covid:

- Where does this leave ideas about ‘ability’?
- Can we cope without data? Or are data the way to measure recovery?
- Can we view children living in poverty as affected by the pandemic, without labelling and having low expectations?

2. Pandemic inequalities

- Continuation of key trends:
- ‘catch up’ narrative relies on data systems, and understanding of education as knowledge delivered and assessed
- Discussion of impact on lockdown on children reprises ideas about background (HLE), class and attainment, and trauma

2. Pandemic inequalities

- From ‘Duty of care or a duty to teach?’ project (UKRI/ESRC urgent covid project)
 - ‘Learning loss’ vs ‘learning disruption’ (Harmey and Moss, 2020)
 - Differential burden of pandemic and especially the duty of care on schools

Question: Thinking about YOUR school community, which of these had highest priority in communicating with families during lockdown? Please tick just THREE responses. (n=1653)

Statement	Q1 (affluent)	Q2	Q3	Q4 (deprived)
Checking how families are coping	68%	72%	72%	78%
Info on FSM vouchers	18%	24%	41%	51%
Support for families experiencing hardship	22%	31%	40%	42%
How to support children's learning at home	75%	68%	60%	52%

Question: How has lockdown changed your perceptions of your school's community?

Statement	Q1 (affluent)	Q2	Q3	Q4 (deprived)
I am reassured most families have the resources to support pupils' learning at home	46%	24%	12%	6%
I am more aware of the impact of poverty on pupils' lives	16%	22%	39%	48%
I am more aware of how difficult it is for my pupils to learn at home	45%	52%	65%	64%

The cumulative impact:

- 77% of our respondents agreed that:
“If testing and inspection goes ahead as normal next year, schools serving the most disadvantaged communities will be unfairly penalised”
 - rises to 84% in most disadvantaged areas

The extent of schools' welfare work:

- Survey of 40 education professionals run by HHCP

‘Schools have also provided a range of services for families who are seen as vulnerable, including food banks, free school meal vouchers, gift vouchers and packed lunches, or have directed children to nearby schools where they can eat a free lunch. Packages of items such as toys, resources, stationery, books and games have been distributed to families. In some cases, weekly food and care packages are being delivered to families who receive free school meals; in one case, furniture has been provided for families in need.’ (Written evidence submitted to House of Commons Education Committee Inquiry)

Pandemic inequalities

- Large survey of teaching assistants (n= 9055) for Teaching/Classroom Assistants' Experiences of Covid project

39% agreed that their current deployment gave them fewer opportunities to work with the children they were most concerned about.

Concern over worsening inequalities for children in need of additional support.

Inappropriate demands on return

- Statutory test for Year 1 moved to autumn of Year 2
- Survey of 967 teachers:

Only 16% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the test was necessary this term because the cohort missed it in Year 1 and 38% strongly disagreed. - **'It's getting in the way of what the children need right now'**

'Children are not on an even playing field - some continued to work on phonics during lockdown/school closure; some children didn't; some children were key workers/vulnerable and were at learning hubs'.

"This test makes me feel like they're absolutely not interested in the principle of education being about the children in front of you".

Pandemic inequalities

- International research has similar findings
 - e.g. Mutch 2021 on New Zealand finds ‘at risk students have fallen further behind’ due to differences in digital access, parental time/skills to support children, financial situation

3. Post-pandemic hopes?

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1) We can ask questions about statutory testing given its abandonment in 2020 and 2021



‘Subjecting working-class children to the diet of testing and assessment that has become normal practice in English schools will only exacerbate their anxiety, fear of failure and mental distress. “Business as usual” will further increase the attainment gap rather than doing anything to alleviate it. It is time to mind, and be mindful of, the gap’. (Reay, 2021 in Drop Sats for Good report).

- Pressure to meet nationally-set targets will distract schools from responding appropriately to the diversity of pupils' needs
 - Over 70% respondents identified children's wellbeing as their top priority in welcoming children back

As professionals I truly believe we need to do what we know is right for our pupils, whatever the government pressure might be. (Teacher respondent)

[From DCDT project]

Post-pandemic hopes

2) Reframe learning as something affecting the whole child, dependent on their welfare

- Covid has shown the importance of children's hierarchy of needs – food and welfare first, before learning
- Recognition of different conditions for children in different schools
- In DCDT project, over 70% agreed '**Primary education needs to begin again, with a broader definition of curriculum values and purposes**'

We have such a big opportunity now to really listen to children's and their families' needs [...] We have to let go of the rigid structures the government have put in place and allow teachers to make decisions as professionals who know the children best.

Post-pandemic hopes

3) Take the collectivity, empathy and care shown during the pandemic into the future

- schools working together rather than competing; better home-school relations

- Trust has gone between govt and schools – e.g.

over reopening plans fiasco – increasing opposition from headteachers.



‘Covid is a wake-up call for putting more agency back into the hands of the teaching staff who know their communities best and rebuilding the local and deliberative forums the system requires to function well’ (Moss, 2021 in Drop Sats for Good report)

Post-pandemic hopes

4) Disruption to the concept of ‘fixed ability’

- Recognition of the significance of this idea in reproducing inequality
- Care to make sure the ‘new normal’ does not involve further reinvigoration of this idea in new divisive ways (e.g. impact of different home lives on children’s brain development; further data collection as a means of measuring recovery).

Future questions

- How are schools ‘recovering’ or getting ‘back on track’?
- How are they balancing a duty of care and a duty to teach now?
- How can provision for recovery be directed towards schools’ very different local needs?

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Responding to COVID-19, Briefing Note 2: Learning after lockdown



Introduction: 'Recovery', 'catch-up', or business as usual?

This briefing note sets out key findings from our research* based on tracking primary schools' responses to the crisis from lockdown onwards. The briefing is intended to help guide primary schools in supporting pupil learning going forward.

Teachers' experiences of the COVID crisis have been hugely varied and influenced by the local circumstances that each school has faced. Schools and parents have had to grapple with difficult questions about how to keep everyone safe as well as keeping children engaged with education during turbulent times. This has meant schools developing new

There are many different visions for how schools should respond to what has happened and prepare for what lies ahead. Here we set out what our research tells us about the following issues:

1. Supporting pupils returning to school after a period of absence
2. Setting priorities for learning in the light of diverse needs
3. Preparing for further periods of disruption

Our research is of concern for attention here:

- Whether a quick reintroduction of statutory tests will help or hinder pupils in making progress in the coming year
- Whether statutory tests can accurately be used as school accountability measures, in the coming year
- Whether more fundamental flaws in the current testing and accountability regime have been revealed by the COVID crisis and require urgent reform

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Responding to COVID-19, Briefing Note 3: Primary Assessment and



Introduction: Primary assessment in turbulent times

This briefing note considers the place for statutory testing in primary schools during 2020-21, in the light of the COVID crisis*. The English system of primary statutory assessment, culminating in SATs tests in Year 6, was suspended during the 2020 lockdown. Yet many questions remain about how primary assessment should resume, given that COVID-19 may continue to cause disruption to children's learning in both the short and medium term.

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Responding to COVID-19, Briefing Note 3: Resetting educational priorities in challenging times



Introduction: Rebuilding, reconnecting and reimagining a more resilient education system

This briefing note is intended to prompt discussion on how to repair the fragilities in the education system that COVID has revealed. Over the length of our research project we have seen a gulf open up between government policy announcements and primary schools' experiences of the crisis on the ground (Bradbury, 2020). Our data show teachers, head teachers and system leaders have not felt listened to by the DfE. Our respondents have expressed little confidence in decisions taken by government or the ways in which these have been communicated. The very different priorities that have emerged during

This briefing note considers three critical issues:

- How the education system recognises the needs of our most disadvantaged communities and funds the schools that work with them
- The stresses in our testing and accountability systems that COVID has exacerbated
- The need to better support locally-responsive decision-making at times of crisis

Project links:

- [A duty of care and a duty to teach: educational priorities in response to the COVID-19 crisis \(DCDT\)](#)
- [The Impact of the Phonics Screening Check on Year 2](#)
- [The role of teaching assistant during the COVID crisis](#)

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