Lost Learning

How children can catch up after Covid

BY RACHEL WOLF, JONATHAN SIMONS & GABRIEL MILLAND

Centre for Policy Studies

About the Centre for Policy Studies

The Centre for Policy Studies is one of the oldest and most influential think tanks in Westminster. With a focus on taxation, economic growth, business, welfare, housing and the environment, its mission is to develop policies that widen enterprise, ownership and opportunity.

Founded in 1974 by Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher, the CPS has a proud record of turning ideas into practical policy. As well as developing the bulk of the Thatcher reform agenda, it has been responsible for proposing the raising of the personal allowance, the Enterprise Allowance and the ISA, as well as many other more recent successful policy innovations, such as increasing the National Insurance threshold, free ports, fixed-rate mortgages, full expensing, the public sector pay freeze, the stamp duty holiday, and putting the spotlight on how to use market-based solutions to reach Net Zero targets.

About Public First

Public First is a policy, research and communications firm that has worked with many of the world's biggest companies as well as charities, think tanks and Government departments. It is a member of the British Polling Council (BPC) and the Market Research Society (MRS). It also has considerable education expertise. The key authors of this report – Gabriel Milland, Jonathan Simons, and Rachel Wolf – were heavily involved in government education policy under Conservative and Labour governments. Data analysis and polling were provided by Ines Wittke and Seb Wride.

In writing this report, the authors have brought to bear some of their knowledge of past attitudes of parents (before the pandemic). Public First has run large numbers of focus groups and conducted extensive polling on education over the last five years, and this has given us some understanding of where opinion has shifted.

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Executive Summary

The closure of classrooms during the pandemic has led to widespread concern within government and among parents and teachers about the long-term impact on children's learning and prospects.

Public First and the Centre for Policy Studies have worked together on a major project on how far children have fallen behind and what the best solutions are, based on extensive polling of both parents and the public as well as a series of focus groups with parents of school-age children.

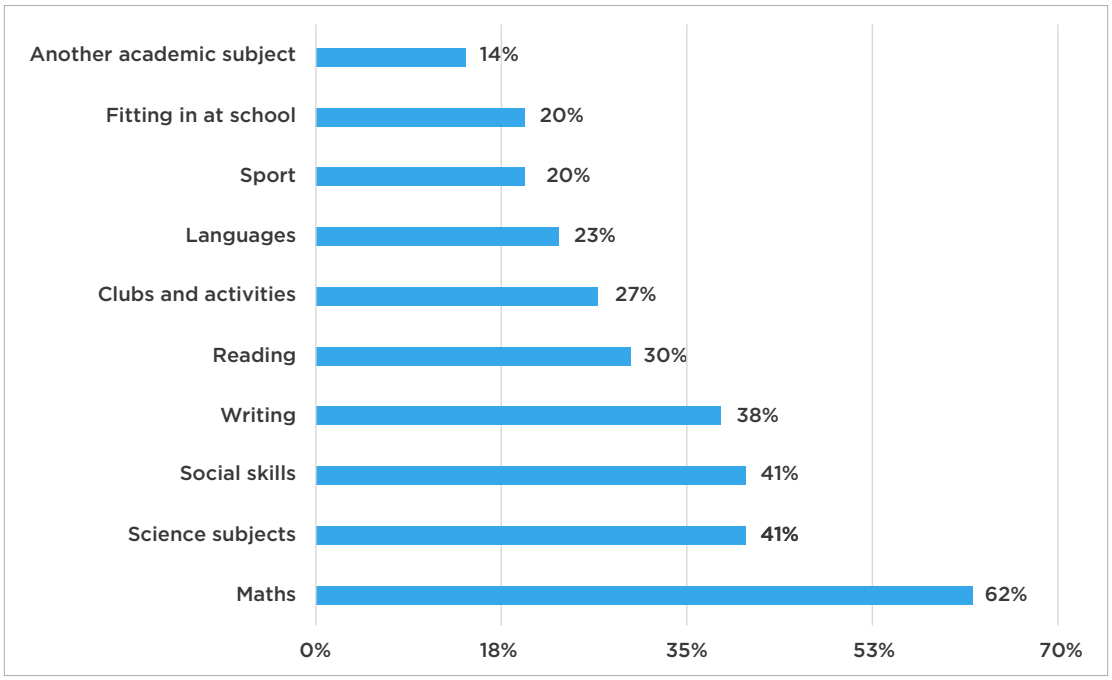
The case for catch-up

- Parents are substantially more worried about their children's education than before the pandemic. There is widespread worry that children have fallen behind because of lockdown. Our focus groups picked up even more concern than the polling.

- Although parents are worried about the impact on their children's mental health, their overwhelming and increasing concern is about the impact on academic standards and achievement - and in particular on maths skills.

- This concern is reflected in the evidence: independent assessments show that children are approximately three months behind where they would be in a normal year, and maths shows particular and consistent falls in performance. Disadvantaged pupils seem to be falling behind the most.

Areas in which parents think their child is further behind



Base: parents who think their child is further behind academically than they otherwise would have been

- In the wake of the pandemic, a narrative has emerged - especially among the teaching unions - that parents and teachers are fed up with the 'high stakes' school system.

- Our research shows that parents - quite reasonably - trust teachers as professionals, and have even greater respect for them after the experience of home learning. They want their children to be back in school, and taught by expert teachers.

- But they are also clear that many children are behind, and that there needs to be a concerted effort to repair the damage caused by the pandemic. And they are extremely clear that any intervention should be focused on academics, and in particular on the core academic subjects.

- Parents want any extra time in school to focus on 'the basics' rather than activities or co- or extra-curricular classes. If children are to be in school, they want them to be doing maths, English and other academic subjects – not things like sport, drama or trips.

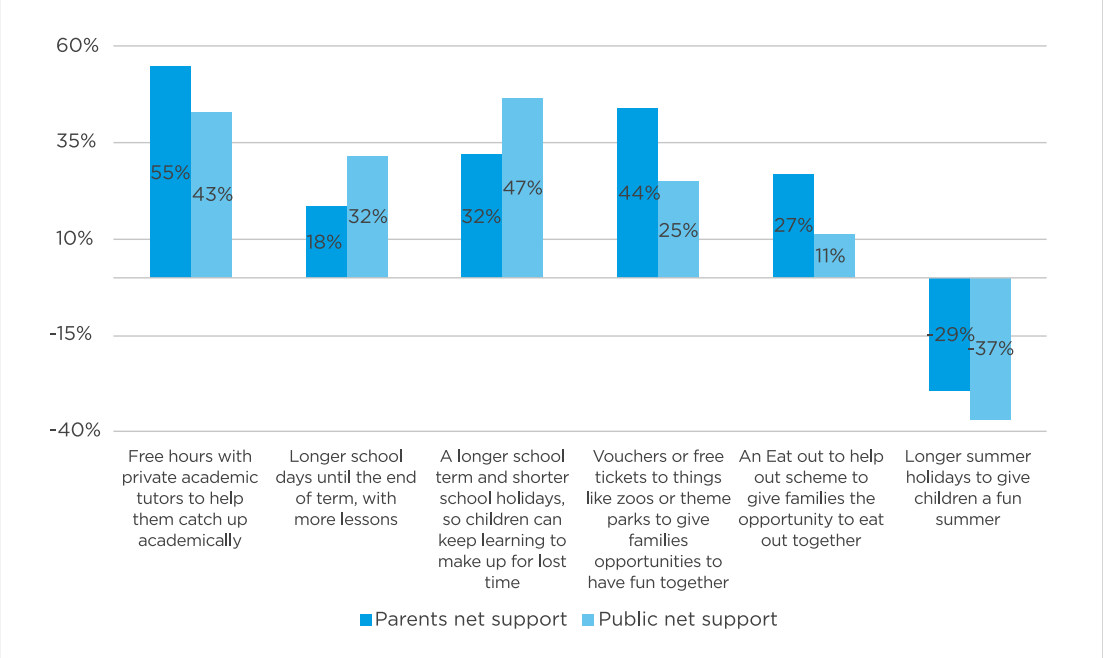
- We therefore tested and investigated four core options for catch-up: tutoring; a longer school day with academic focus; a longer school day with an 'enrichment' focus; and a longer school year.

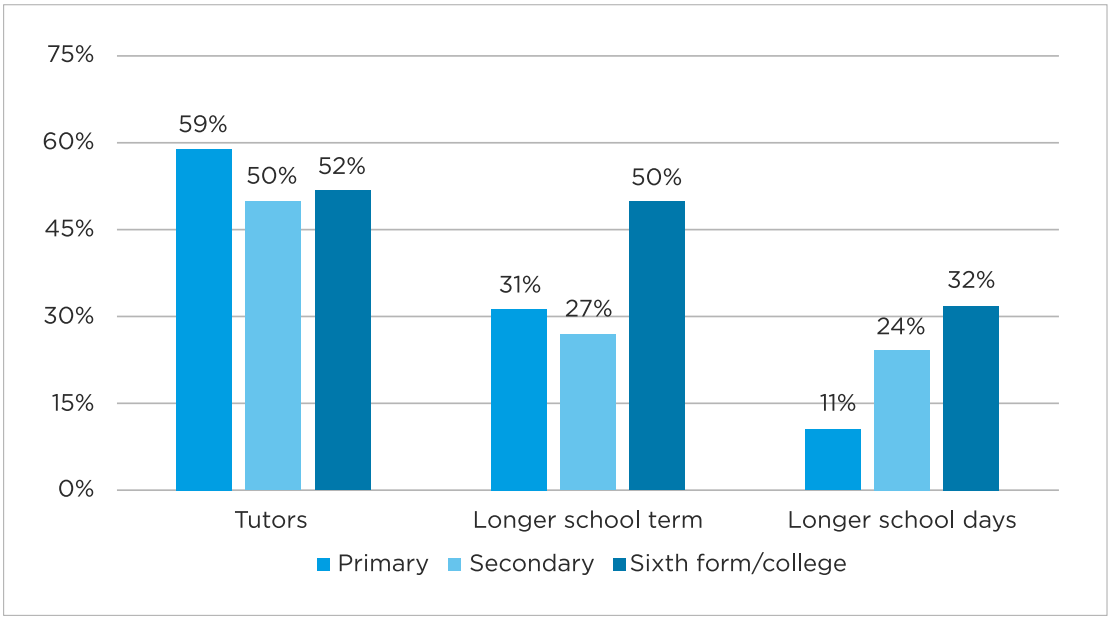
- There was substantial support, among the general population and parents, for all the pro-academic school policies we tested. Tutoring was far and away the most popular - though also the most expensive. Strikingly, almost no one in our focus groups was aware of the more than £1 billion the Government had already committed to this.

- After tutoring, parents' next preference would be for a longer school term, and after that for a longer school days with an academic focus. Support for a longer school day increased substantially when the proposal was for an additional 30 minutes being added, rather than a more dramatic transition to an 8am-6pm school day (even if voluntary).

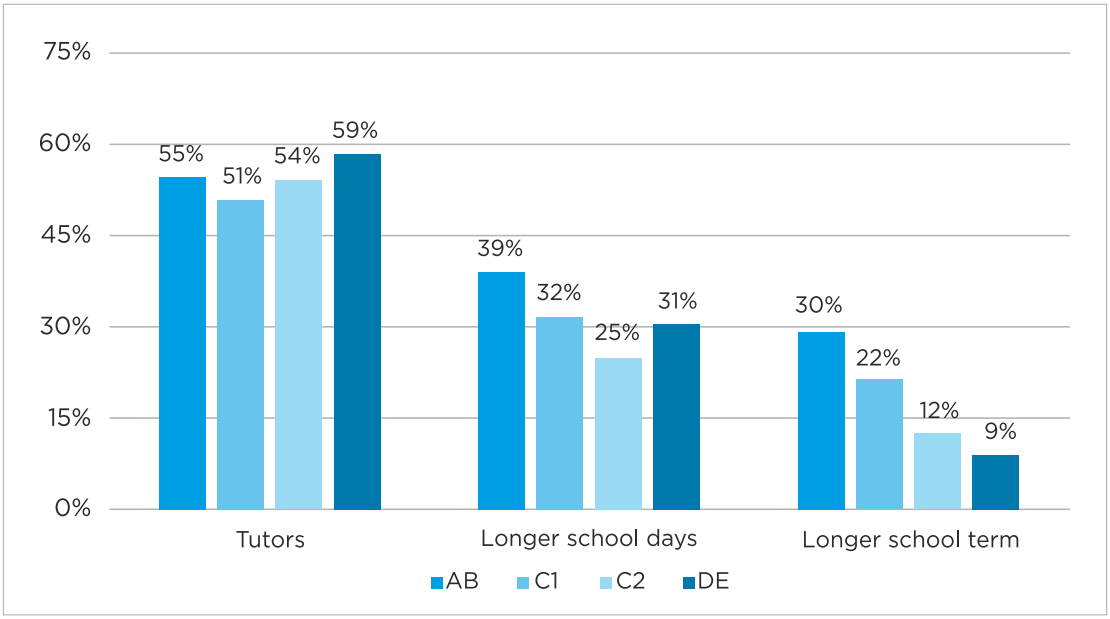
- Parents in general think that if the day is extended, it should be compulsory for everyone, though this is not true of the lowest socioeconomic group (whose children are the ones most likely to be in need of catch-up).

Net support for Government introducing the following measures





Base: parents



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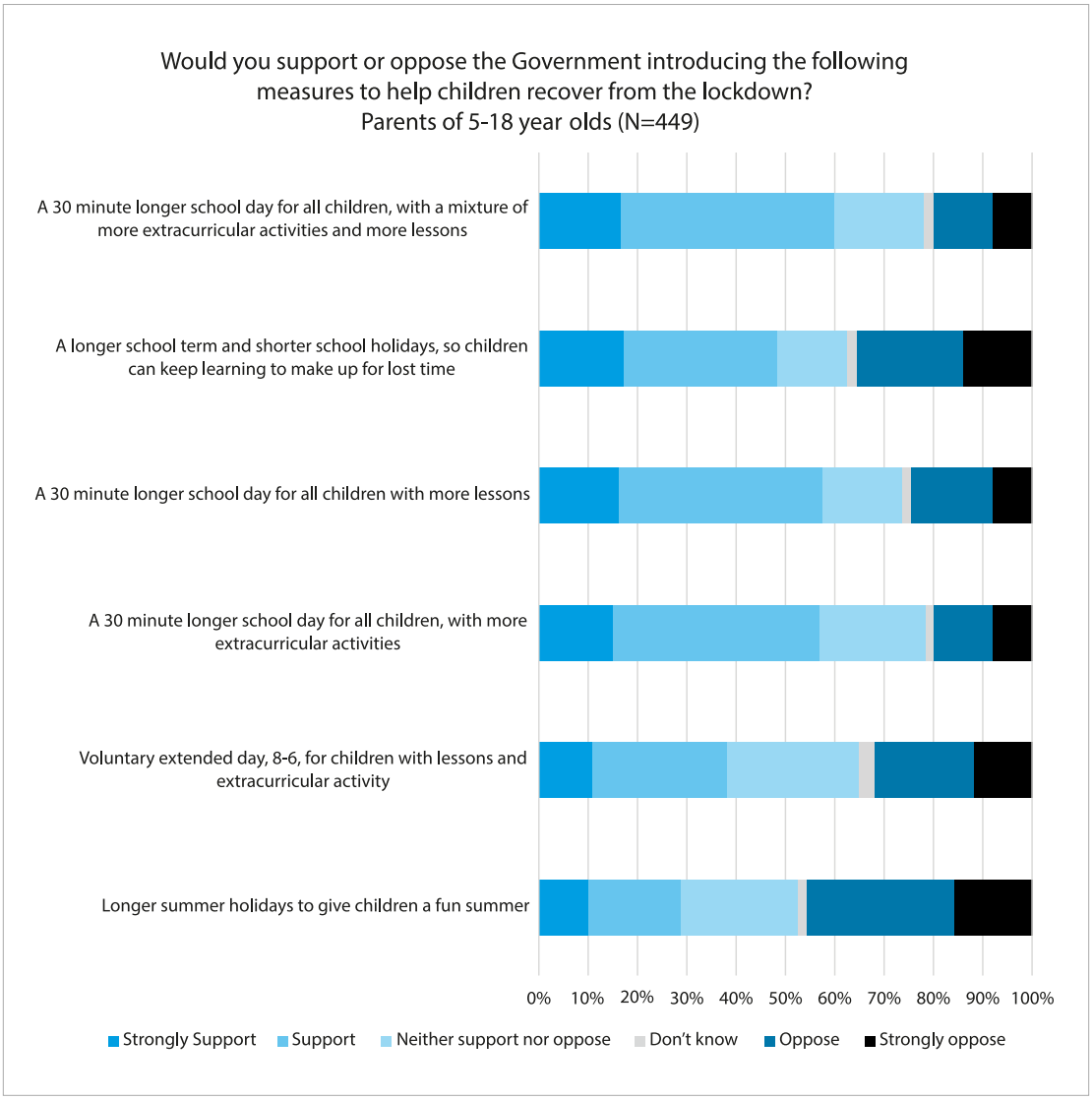


- Catch-up is, of course, not the only problem facing the education system. The difference between the best schools and the most underperforming is much greater than the learning gap from the disruption of the last year. Yet it is notable that the best schools, in England and in other countries, often have longer school days. There is also good evidence that more school time can be effective, and that tutoring can be highly effective.

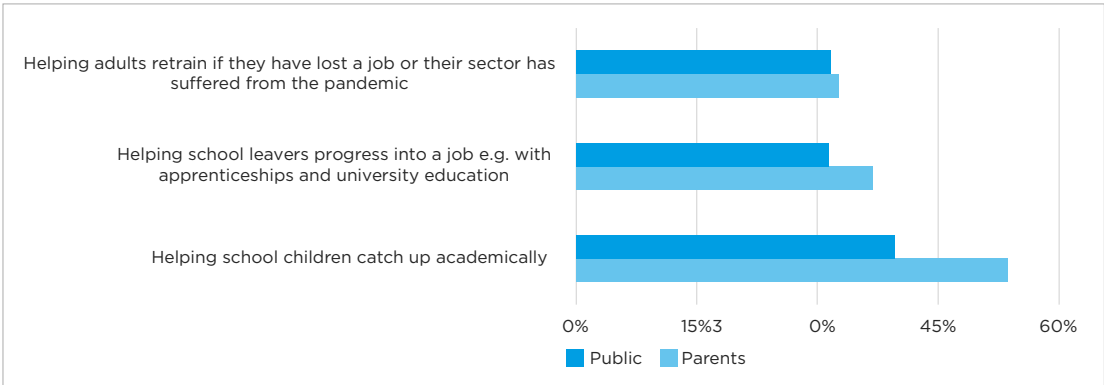
- At the same time, parents still trust individual teachers, and will listen to their opinion. Any programme of catch-up has to be staffed and funded properly. If there is a high profile row about funding, or staff being unable to manage, then parental consent will evaporate, and it will be impossible to implement.

- The Government has already committed substantial sums to various catch-up schemes - including a Recovery Premium of over £300m and over £1bn of funding for tutoring. Sir Kevan Collins, the newly appointed 'Education Recovery Tsar', is shortly to publish a plan with a series of recommendations for a longer-term catch-up programme.[1]

- There is near universal belief that taxes are going to have to go up for the costs of the pandemic. People have noticed that furlough etc. has been eye-wateringly expensive. No one wants to pay more tax, and people would rather other people paid it when it does happen. But education – including retraining for those whose jobs may no longer be sustainable after Covid – was seen in our focus groups with parents as a key priority (rivalling and often exceeding the NHS) when it came to things that extra tax might have to be spent on.

- That said, while support among the general population for academic-focused catch-up was even higher than among parents, the willingness to pay was not. Parents were much more likely to say they were willing for their own taxes to go up to pay for catch-up than the general population. The population as a whole were also relatively even in their support for catch-up for pupils and the need for adult retraining programmes.

Willingness to see personal level of tax rise to fund the following:



1 Amy Gibbons, *Catch-up plan expected 'before the summer', says Gibb.* Link

Our recommendations

Both the international evidence and our polling of parents show that any programme of catch-up must be focused firmly on academic subjects. However, it needs to be designed in such a way as to retain the support of teachers - while being affordable to the Treasury. We therefore propose:

- Tutoring is the most popular and most effective intervention. The Government has, however, utterly failed to communicate to parents what it has already put in place in this area

- There is support for parents for extending the summer term and shrinking the holidays, which we also endorse - but which would need to be rolled out over a longer time period.

- We also believe that a longer school day can play a valuable role in catch-up and could be enacted more quickly than a larger change to the school year.

  However, this should:

  - Focus on a 'short' extension to the day - around 30 minutes - rather than a 'full' extended day of 8am-6pm
  - Have academic activities - including tutoring - at the core
  - Be mandatory for all pupils
  - Be time-bound and linked to catch-up
  - Be fully funded and involve teachers - but not require teachers to staff all of it

- It is also essential we do three things. First, make clear this is a temporary measure to support catch-up, not a permanent increase in funding (at least until there is high quality evidence of very substantial academic improvements). Second, have a proper feedback and accountability regime from the government side to understand if extended time is effective. Third, have a proper feedback and accountability regime from the parent side.

- On Government accountability, there should be an immediate study launched by EEF of what is working in terms of catch-up, and use of extended hours, across the system. Many multi academy trusts (MATs) and individual schools have done astonishing work during lockdown and since, and this should be captured and rolled out more widely. As Ofsted returns to inspections next academic year, catch-up should form part of the formative feedback given to schools - and over time, Ofsted should produce a thematic report on what has worked based on examples from schools and MATs.

- The government should also put in place immediate evaluations, with regular sample assessments, of the effectiveness of catch-up academically.

- Embedding parental understanding and engagement is a long-term opportunity that will yield educational dividends well beyond the period of the pandemic. It is consistently associated with higher academic performance from students. It can also be a powerful force to hold schools, and the education system, to account.

- Because of the pandemic there has been a massive (and involuntary) increase in parental engagement in the content of education - what are their children learning, are they progressing, how do schools differ in what they are offering? This is perhaps most marked at primary level, where pupils found it difficult to do school learning entirely independently.

- Since the return to school, a number of the parents in our focus groups found they no longer understood what their children were doing and - crucially - whether they were in a good academic position or not.

- For the duration of a catch-up programme and beyond, therefore:

- The DfE should overhaul its entire approach to communications and model itself on the NHS, which puts direct-to-patient interaction at the heart of many of its programmes. There is no educational equivalent, for example, of the hugely successful 'Couch to 5k' programme (which is run by the NHS). Too much communication is designed for sector professionals.

- Instead, there should be a large direct-to-parent communication function which is designed to give parents an understanding of both the processes and content of what happens in schools and engage them as much as possible. As part of this, it should be clear who is and is not eligible for, for example, tuition support - which would help schools that are sometimes dealing with overwhelming numbers of enquiries.

- The DfE should develop longitudinal indicators to measure whether parents' understanding of their children's education at different key stages is increasing over time. Ofsted should consider the quality of parental communication as part of its leadership judgement on schools

- There should be clear exemplars, available to all parents, of what children should know and be able to do at different ages. This currently only exists for younger age groups, or at school age for highly dedicated parents who are determined to look for it. This information should include, for example, the kind of mathematical problems children should be able to finish and what writing looks like at different ages.

1. The need for catch-up

It has been three months since pupils returned to school. The last year has been immensely disruptive - with two periods of full national school closures, and forced isolation for many pupils.

We will not know the full effects of disrupted education - educationally, socially, or mentally - for some time. We already know enough, though, to have significant concerns.

Are children behind? What we know.

1. Early data from the Education Policy Institute and Renaissance Learning, funded by the Department for Education, showed that pupils had lost up to 2 months in reading in primary and secondary, and up to 3 months in maths (primary) by Autumn 2020 (i.e. before the second lockdown).[2]
2. The same study found that schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils showed 50% more learning loss, and there were also somewhat greater losses in the North East, and in Yorkshire and the Humber.
3. A report by a second assessment company - Rising Stars Assessment - on primary school pupils found that by Spring 2021 there had been a three-month decline in maths and grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) performance, and a two-month decline in reading. The biggest falls were in younger year groups (Years 1 and 2). Again, schools with more deprived pupils showed bigger declines.[3]
4. The most recent data from No More Marking, a comparative judgement assessment group, did not find a major average decline in Year 2 pupils' writing, but did find that the distribution had widened (in other words, some students were performing better than in previous years, and others were performing much worse).[4]
5. A recent survey by Teach First reported that schools serving the poorest were twice as likely to have fallen behind due to the pandemic.[5]

Further new data on learning loss in the Spring term will be published very shortly as part of the ongoing EPI/Renaissance Learning project.

2 Education Policy Institute, Learning loss research: Understanding progress in the 2020 to 2021 academic year. Link

3 Rising Stars Assessment, 2021 white paper: The impact of school closures on spring 2021 attainment. Link

4 Daisy Christodoulou, How does Year 2 writing attainment in 2021 compare with 2020?. Link

5 Teach First, Disadvantaged pupils twice as likely to have fallen behind during the pandemic. Link

We don't know, of course, how rapidly students will catch up. But attainment gaps have proved stubbornly difficult to close in the past, and it seems over-optimistic to assume that things will right themselves without additional intervention. And if there is to be intervention, it should be in a form which has a strong evidence base behind it and which can be targeted at those who may have the least capacity to catch up naturally.

We also know that parents are worried. For this report, Public First ran a poll of the population in England (since education is nationally devolved). We also conducted four focus groups of parents of school-age children.

Methodology

Public First carried out polling and focus groups in the first two weeks of May 2021:

- A nationally representative poll of 1,000 registered voters in England, and a similar poll of 500 parents of children in secondary schools and 500 parents of children in primary schools. Because education policy is almost wholly devolved, the polling was England-only.
- Four focus groups of parents:
  - One each with primary and secondary parents in Bolton in Greater Manchester;
  - One each with primary and secondary parents in the outer London boroughs of Sutton and Bromley.
  - Both are representative locations – the first a largely working-class town in the North of England, and the second two in the more affluent South East.
  - Both Bolton and the boroughs of Bromley and Sutton have some special educational characteristics. Bolton is among the places which have endured the longest series of multiple lockdowns, while both Bromley and Sutton have partially-selective secondary systems. But we saw nothing to suggest that responses in the groups were much different from what one would have expected among parents in similar places and from similar backgrounds anywhere in England. This is reinforced by the substantial agreement between our focus groups and polling.
  - All of the parents in the focus groups had children who attended state schools.
- We also polled a further selection of nationally representative questions for confirmatory purposes, run towards the end of May (24th-25th), with the intention of clearly identifying support levels for different changes to the school day. These results indicated no disparity with our previous findings, and indeed if anything indicated a stronger level of support when the policy was bounded by length (i.e. extra 30 minutes) rather than permanency (i.e. until the end of term).

  Throughout this report, we have referred to class using the traditional social grade classification commonly used in polling. This is described below as a reference point.

Social Grade	Description
AB	Higher & intermediate managerial, administrative, professional occupations
C1	Supervisory, clerical & junior managerial, administrative, professional occupations
C2	Skilled manual occupations
DE	Semi-skilled & unskilled manual occupations, Unemployed and lowest grade occupations

In our polling, around two thirds of both the public as a whole (62%) and parents (67%) said that children in England had been negatively affected by lockdown. Over half of parents (56%) said this about their own children.

This backs up a consistent finding in education polling that parents are more concerned about the general state of affairs than their own children's experience. It was also clear from focus groups that parents who initially did not express deep concerns about their children became more worried as the conversation continued.

'We did our best during lockdown, but we're not teachers. A lot of the stuff they did, especially the maths and English, was nothing like what I did in school – even for my eight-year-old.'

Father, secondary, Outer London.

'I think he's okay. But he's only little so he's got time to catch up. He's in Reception so he only missed a bit of school. But you don't really know when they're that age, do you?'

Mother, primary, Bolton

'It's bound to have affected them. But we don't know. The school isn't saying much.'

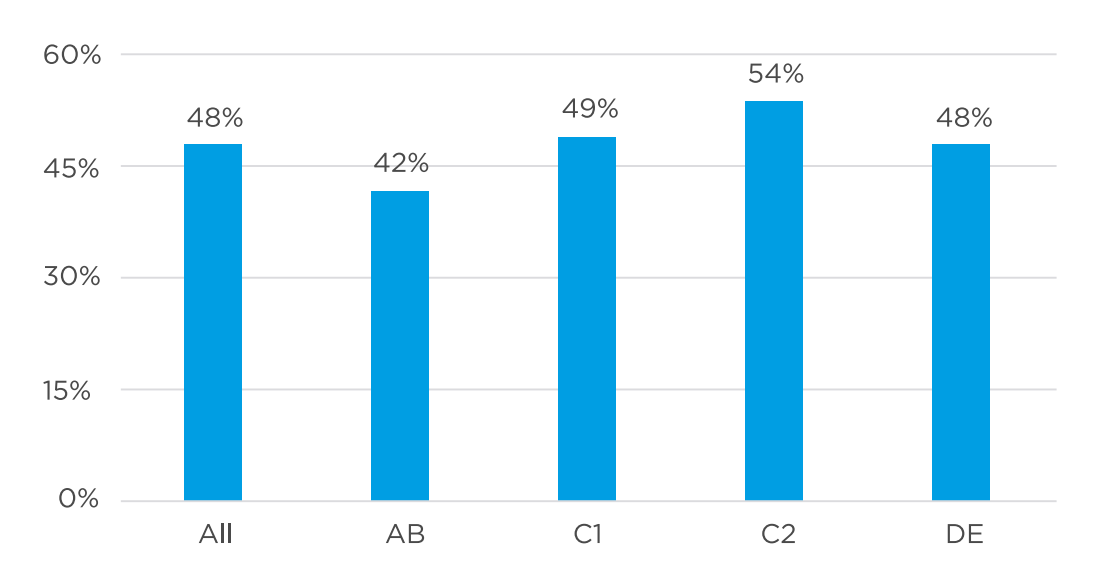
Mother, secondary, Outer London

'Yeah, I'd say my worry is pretty high. I'd say like seven or eight out of 10. Because we just can't do it on our own, in my opinion. You're working and stuff. The relationship you have with the child compared to what they had with the teacher. It's a very different relationship.'

Father, secondary, Bolton

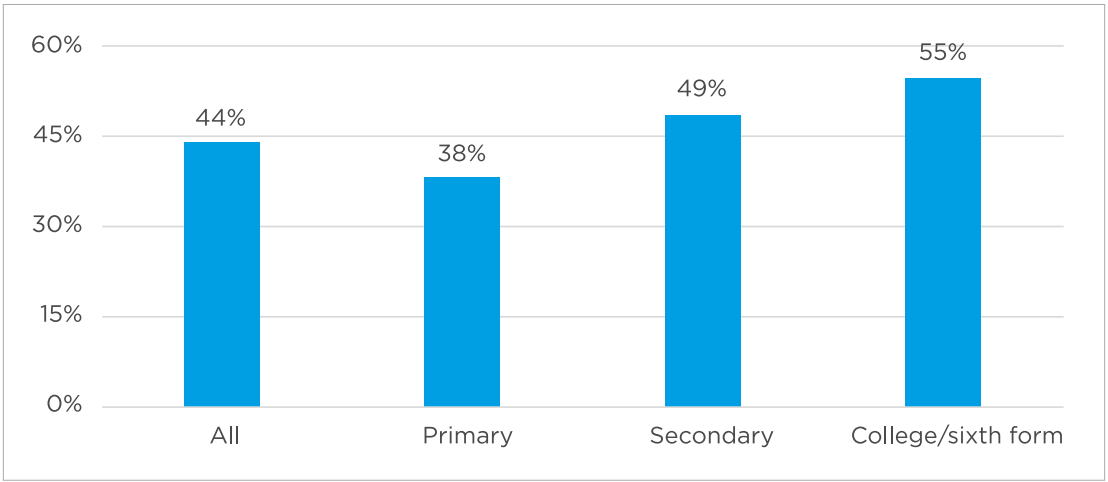
Concern was consistent across primary and secondary and social classes. It was also consistent across social class for negative academic (as opposed to general) effects: in fact, concerns about the academic impact of lockdown were highest among C2 households (skilled working class). From focus groups, this appears to be because those parents feel they lack the cultural and educational background to support their children at home while also being conscious of the importance of skills and education.

Parents who feel their child is further behind academically



Base: parents with children in primary, secondary school or sixth form/college

Parents who feel their child's prospects will be negatively affected



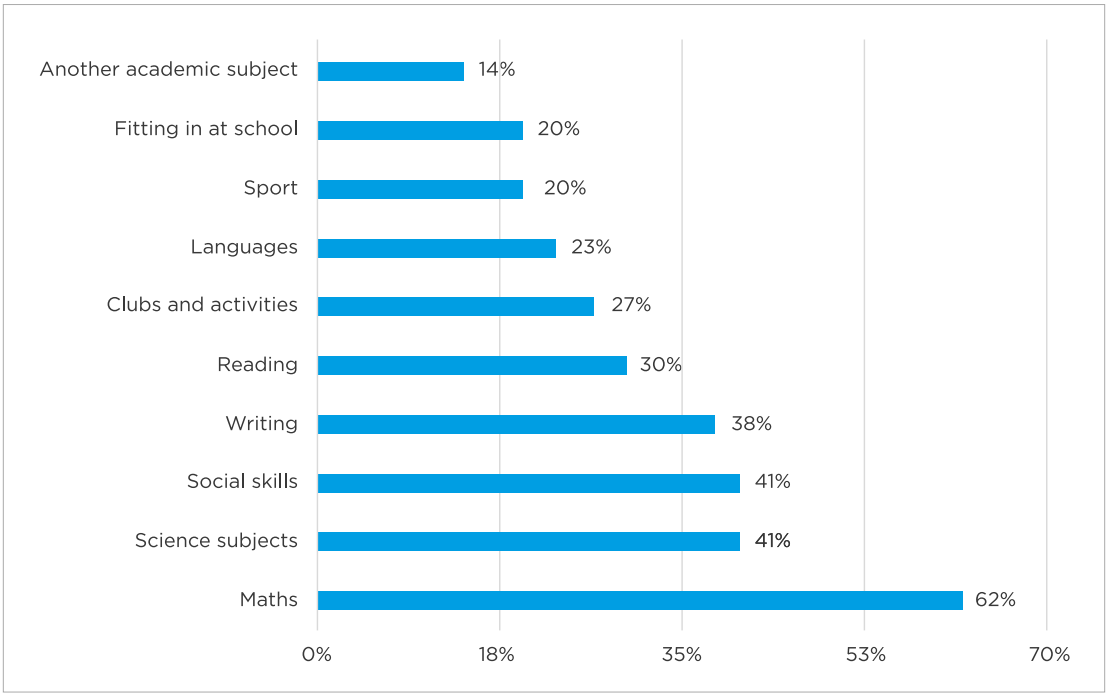
In our focus groups, we find that professional parents are more likely to think they can make up for lost learning time either by devoting more attention themselves, or through actions they take. Parents with lower educational attainment and less money are less confident.

For parents concerned that their children were academically behind, the most common areas were maths (62%), science subjects (41%), social skills (41%), and writing (38%).

'It's the maths which bothers me most. You need maths. Everyone needs maths. I couldn't help her with that during lockdown. It's changed since I was at school.'

Father, secondary, Bolton

Areas in which parents think their child is further behind



Base: parents who think their child is further behind academically than they otherwise would have been

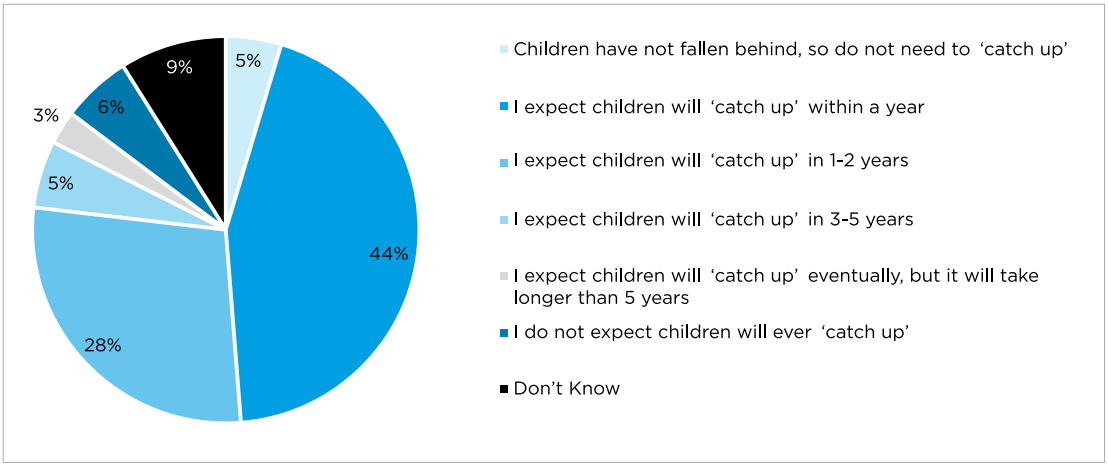
The findings were relatively consistent across social class, with no sign that better-off parents were more focused on 'harder' academic subjects. Where there was a marked difference was by gender, with mothers expressing a significantly stronger interest in academic subjects, perhaps reflecting the fact that they have been closer – as we have found in previous polling – to the grind of home-schooling than fathers. Hence 66% of all mothers selected maths while 58% of fathers did the same. Meanwhile 36% of mothers chose 'social skills' as an area of concern while 44% of fathers did.

Our focus groups found that parents often first mentioned aspects like social skills and mental health, before then going on to mention academic standards. But there was greater concern that the deficit in academic standards would not fix itself over time, especially for parents whose children were about to transition to secondary or soon faced GCSEs etc.

In a significant number of parents, there is confidence that children will eventually catch up, but a lot of this confidence is quite fragile. Most parents we polled thought children will take up to two years to catch up - 72%, with 44% saying within a year and 28% saying 1-2 years. Only 5% answered that children have not fallen behind so won't need to catch up.

There is a similar picture in the national population. In total, in the all-England sample, roughly half of all voters said that they believed that it would happen in a year.

When, if at all, do you expect children in the UK who were affected by the lockdown will be able to 'catch up'?



2. What can we do? The catch-up options and parental opinion

Fundamentally, for catch-up to happen, we need to achieve one of two things:

1. Children need to learn more rapidly than they normally would in school;
2. We need to extend the amount of time children spend learning in a given year. This, in turn, means:
   a. Extending the school term(s);
   b. Extending the school day.

Deciding what to do - and what the government prescribes versus what schools choose to do - is complicated, and there is no straightforward answer. The purpose of this report is to bring together policy thinking with what parents think and what parents want. We argue below for a model which we believe will best meet the tests for good policy, which is that it is affordable, feasible, deliverable, and could be accepted by both the school sector and by parents.

We can change policy and practice for some pupils, or all pupils. If the former, it could be targeted at particular children within a school, or at particular schools which have deprived populations or academic underperformance. We can also choose to focus extended school time tightly on academic subjects, or on a wider range of enrichment activities (including traditional extracurricular activities like sport, music, and art, and academic 'extension' like museum and theatre trips).

In our focus groups, however, there was strong resistance from parents of 'typical' or average-ability children to the idea that all help would be focused on children who might well have under-performed without the influence of the pandemic. They felt their own children deserved additional support as well.

This range of options led us to test four core options in our polling. These are also the options that we think form part of the government's own considerations:

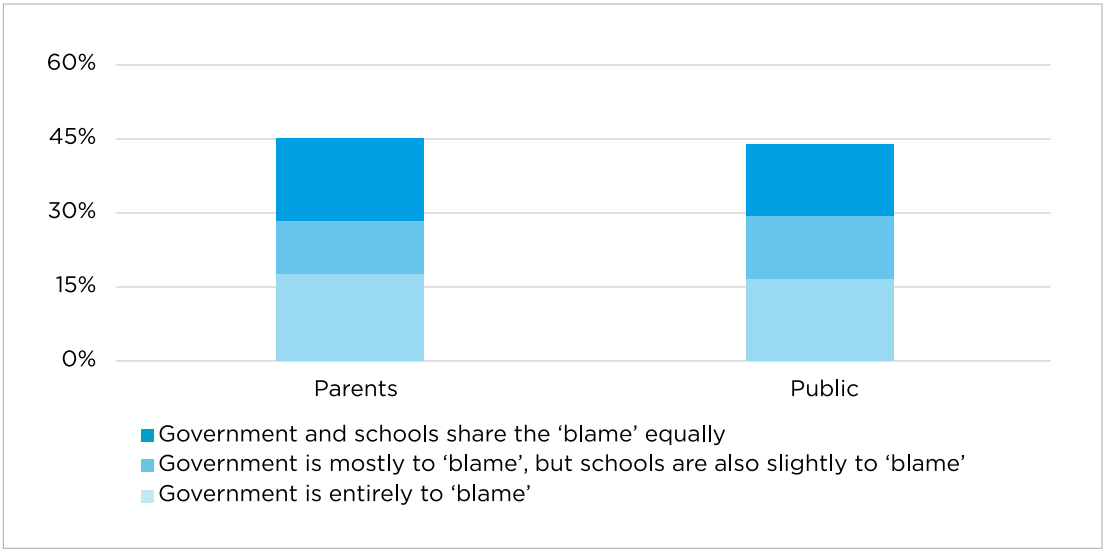
- Tutoring (1:1 or small group support for particular children)
- Longer school days with an academic focus
- Longer school days with an enrichment focus
- Longer school terms / a change to the school year.

We also tested some less academic options, to see how the population and parents valued interventions geared towards more family time, and relaxed time for children, versus academic catch-up. Finally, we tested views on a longer school day in terms of length and whether the change would be time-limited or permanent.

A. Who, if anyone, is at fault?

In terms of opinion, it's important to note that both the public and parents blame the pandemic, not the Government, for the current situation. They think the lockdowns were necessary. But they still expect action.

Is the Government to blame for children falling behind academically?



'Look, there was a pandemic. No one knew it was coming or what it would actually be like. But it now needs to be fixed'
Mother, secondary, Outer London

Direct responsibility for ensuring catch-up actually happens is seen as the responsibility of schools first, with 78% of parents and 76% of the all-England sample identifying them as important. But 59% of both parents and the all-England sample said that the government had a role as well.

B. Catch-up should focus on academics first, social and enrichment second
Interestingly, and contrary to the position of (for example) the National Education Union, our focus groups and polling agreed that it was academic support that children needed.

While they were unquestionably worried about mental health issues, many - though by no means all - parents thought this would resolve itself over time. In other words, mental health support was seen as an area that needed specific and targeted intervention for particular students, or something that should be part of the general school environment, rather than being the focus of general 'catch-up'.

'Yeah, it got a bit much, you know. He wasn't good at talking on FaceTime and he got a bit clingy. More clingy than he should be probably for a nine-year-old. I think he just got used to being around us or being around me. That said, it was good to have him back at school in a healthy environment and he's got much better.'
Mother, primary, Outer London

'There's different stages that you need to be at before you move on to the next year group. And I think they should just focus on the stages that they should be at. I think there's a massive need to just know the basics to move on to the next year group.'
Mother, primary, Bolton

'If it's going to be focusing on getting the basics and helping them catch up with them, then it might be worthwhile a bit of jigging around to try and make sure it happens.'
Father, primary, Bolton

'The most important thing is the core subjects - to get these kids passes on the core subjects. I mean, English and Maths initially. You know, your basic subjects that get you through to the next level. I think, for the kids that are struggling on that, if you really need extra hours, those are the ones you really need to focus on.'
Mother, secondary, Outer London

> **'In our poll, almost all policy options got net support except the idea that children should have a longer summer holiday to 'give children a fun summer''**

C. Catch-up should be based on what we know to be effective
We don't know exactly what will work for children emerging from a pandemic, needing help on a national scale, some of whom will come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and some of whom will not have been able to get the teaching or parental attention they needed in the last year.

But we do know what has the best chance of working, thanks to international evidence and the data gathered by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), a fund put in place by the Coalition government to assess and roll out effective programmes in schools. This is the evidence base that the government is drawing on most heavily to devise its catch-up programmes. We summarise that evidence here.

Tutoring. The EEF finds that 'one to one tuition can be effective, delivering approximately five additional months' progress on average'.[6] It is more effective if delivered by trained professionals (particularly teachers). The more pupils, the lower the impact - but small group tuition can still be effective (and is cheaper and easier to organise). There are probably differences depending on the precise topic, and group, being taught. There are also specific programmes, delivered by teaching assistants, that have shown positive effects.

Longer day/more school time. More time in school is less effective than intensive tutoring - although much cheaper. 'On average, pupils make two additional months' progress per year…there is some evidence that disadvantaged pupils…[make] closer to three months' additional progress.'[7] In other words, this should be sufficient to remove the gap identified in many of the studies from the lockdown.

Summer schools. Summer schools are less effective than tutoring, and they have very limited results unless they are explicitly academic in focus.[8] It is often extremely difficult to get pupils who need the help to attend (although this is likely to be less of an issue with an extended term in a pre-existing school).

It is worth noting that almost all of these reports rely on metastudies which, in turn, mask major differences in effectiveness between particular programmes and approaches. We know from long experience that the precise design, implementation, and funding of seemingly similar education programmes can yield different results.

It is also worth examining the performance of the Government's existing 'catch-up' programme for children who are either currently eligible for free school meals, or have

6 Education Endowment Foundation, *One to one tuition.* Link
7 Education Endowment Foundation, *Extending school time.* Link
8 Education Endowment Foundation, *Summer schools.* Link

claimed for them in the last six years. Under the pupil premium system, which has been in place since 2010, schools get an additional sum of money for each qualifying pupil, but can choose how to spend it. This could include approaches which benefit the whole school (such as teacher quality), not just those eligible for the premium.

As of March 2021, schools must demonstrate that their pupil premium approach is backed up by research evidence[9]. This change is in part because the effectiveness of the pupil premium is highly contested (as is its design). One of the challenges for researchers is that the inspection and assessment regimes change regularly, making 'like for like' comparisons very hard.

A 2020 report by EPI, for example, found that 'disadvantaged pupils in England are 18.1 months of learning behind their peers by the time they finish their GCSEs – the same gap as five years ago'.[10] A more recent academic paper - focussed on the primary phase - found that 'relative attainment for poor pupils improved markedly in the pupil premium era, even in regions like the North of England' - and that attainment improved largely over the 2010-2015 period before plateauing.[11]

The pupil premium demonstrates how challenging it is - at least with the most disadvantaged students - to make national catch-up programmes work even when they have high acceptability. Or at least, to demonstrate they have worked to everyone's satisfaction. All of this means that - as we make clear below - any large scale announcement of funding and reform should be accompanied by detailed evaluation of practice, impact, and cost effectiveness. The programme should also only be rolled out over the next three years, to address catch up, before we have evidence on long term impact. As we hope, such evidence comes through, then there would be a case for extending this further.

9 Education and Skills Agency, *Pupil premium: allocations and conditions of grant 2021 to 2022*. Link

10 Education Policy Institute, *Education in England: Annual Report 2020*. Link

11 Stephen Gorard, Nadia Siddiqui Icon and Beng Huat See, *Assessing the impact of Pupil Premium funding on primary school segregation and attainment*. Link

3. Tutoring - How to make it stick

The EEF's summary of the evidence on small group tuition finds that:[12]

- Overall, evidence shows that small group tuition is effective and, as a rule of thumb, the smaller the group the better. Tuition in groups of two has a slightly higher impact than in groups of three, but a slightly lower impact than one to one tuition. Once group size increases above six or seven, there is a noticeable reduction in effectiveness.

- However, although the above pattern is broadly consistent, there is some variability in impact. For example, in reading, small group teaching can sometimes be more effective than either one to one or paired tuition. It may be that in these cases reading practice can be efficiently organised so that all the pupils stay fully engaged as each take their turn.

- The quality of the teaching in small groups may be as or more important than the precise group size (there is evidence of the benefits of staff professional development on pupil outcomes).

- Overall, costs are estimated as moderate. Costs decrease as group size increases because the majority of the costs are for staff time.

In both the polling and the focus groups that we carried out, tutoring was by some margin the most popular intervention. In total, 65% of parent respondents in the poll supported the idea of free tutoring, with only 10% opposed; in the national voter sample, 57% supported it (despite not all having children who would benefit), and 14% were opposed. Support was also consistent across primary and secondary, and social classes, with only minor variations.

'The Government, in the wake of the pandemic, announced a fund of more than £1 billion to support tutoring'

The Government, in the wake of the pandemic, announced a fund of more than £1 billion to support tutoring.[13] But despite this being a hugely popular initiative, and strongly backed by the DfE, awareness of it in our focus groups was almost entirely non-existent. Out of the 24 participants who took part in focus groups for this project - all parents - only one was aware of any money for tutoring, let alone that their children might have access to small-group, intensive teaching. And that parent was a civil servant, who could reasonably be expected to pay more attention to government announcements than the general public.

12 Education Endowment Foundation, *Small Group Teaching*. Link

13 Department for Education, *Billion pound Covid catch-up plan to tackle impact of lost teaching time*. Link

'I've had a leaflet from the school home about tutoring. I'd love that for my daughter. But it was for a private firm. They said they could arrange that. But I don't think we could afford it.'
Mother, secondary, Bolton

'I did hear something on the news about it, I think. They were announcing it. But, no, I certainly haven't heard anything from the school. It sounded good but I don't know anything about it.'
Mother, secondary, Outer London

This is a familiar problem with the Department for Education's approach to 'stakeholder management': that the list of stakeholders tends to have parents at the bottom of the list.

In this instance, the Education Endowment Foundation has been given initial responsibility for the funding, through a wholly owned subsidiary organisation called National Tutor Programme (NTP)[14]. Its job is to identify a list of tutoring agencies who are approved to access the subsidy for tuition, which will be available from schools. These providers are expected to deliver actual tutoring via both online and in-person methods, for children identified by individual schools as being in a position to benefit from it.[15]

NTP is responsible for managing the rollout of the programme this academic year. And it has been, in our view, highly successful. From a standing start, it has reached 196,000 registered children, of whom 93,000 have started tutoring programmes (according to Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, giving evidence to the Education Select Committee in April this year).[16]

'Almost all communications around tutoring have been from the DfE to schools, concerning the contractual mechanism and the need to target provision appropriately'

And yet nowhere in the discussion - about whether the tutoring programme is reaching sufficient children, or whether there is enough money, or how schools can commission the support - has there been a focus placed on low visibility of this scheme to parents. Almost all communications around tutoring have been from the DfE to schools, concerning the contractual mechanism and the need to target provision appropriately.

It is clearly suboptimal from the Department's perspective - let alone that of parents - that a substantial sum of taxpayers' money is being spent on a scheme which is wildly popular, and yet almost completely unknown.

In the future, if the Government is to effectively manage financial resources and its broader communications to help strengthen education after the pandemic, it needs to focus on how to speak to the ultimate beneficiaries of schemes such as tutoring - the parents and children - rather than solely focus on the contracting and commissioning structure around schools.[17]

14 Education Endowment Foundation, *National Tutoring Programme.* Link

15 Education Endowment Foundation, *National Tutoring Programme launches in schools.* Link

16 Education Select Committee, *Oral evidence transcript: Accountability hearings, Thursday 29 April* 2021. Link

17 For further analysis of the Department for Education's communications materials and messaging around tutoring, see this piece from Jonathan Simons, a co-author of this paper Jonathan Simons, *The most popular government education policy that you've (probably) never heard of.* Link

In policy terms, this means that the Department should, as a matter of urgency:

- **Focus its rollout efforts from September 2021 on the twin aims of increasing quality of the tutoring scheme and increasing geographic take up - and de-prioritise a pure rush for numbers and greater school flexibility.** The Department has commissioned Randstad as the new national provider to run tutoring programmes from September 2021 onwards. Given the political pressure and complaints about slow rollout, it is likely that there will be efforts to increase take-up next year. In principle, this is a good thing. But the Department should make clear - in its contracting mechanism, in the way in which it sets KPIs to the national providers, and in its messaging - that it is more important that tutoring is of high quality rather than quantity. There is a good in-principle argument for allowing schools greater flexibility in how they commission and pay for tutors - including using teachers directly who are not linked to tutor agencies. But the model for tutoring is still an immature one and there are not large numbers of high-quality providers out there. The Department's priority should be to grow the market in high quality provision. If that means a slightly more restrictive form of commissioning which encourages more providers into the market, including in previously under-served areas, through offering the potential of a large volume of tutoring being commissioned for a high quality provider that has built a good service with a proven model, then that must be the primary objective. That would be preferable to lower quality provision, even if it means reduced flexibility for schools and even a reduction in the number of pupils being served.

- **Track, via frequent quantitative or qualitative pulse work, awareness of tutoring and NTP among parents.** There is significant communications agency capacity inside DfE and government more broadly. As one of the government's flagship commitments and a key priority for Number 10, resources should be allocated to allow awareness of tutoring to be tracked monthly. Ministers and officials should receive these numbers, with a clear expectation on the part of officials that awareness should rise significantly over the course of the next academic year.

'There is a good in-principle argument for allowing schools greater flexibility in how they commission and pay for tutors - including using teachers directly who are not linked to tutor agencies'

- **Refocus its communications around NTP away from serving only the sector and towards parents as well.** The messages should be tested but should largely focus on the opportunity available to parents - in consultation with the school - for their child(ren) to access free, high quality, small group tuition. This may cause some anxiety within the school sector, which may fear an increase of 'sharp elbowed' parents demanding their 'right' to free tuition. The department should be clear and firm that some (or many) families will not be provided with tuition because schools will judge that many children will make significant or sufficient progress via their taught curriculum. But schools also need to be able to manage parental engagement, and the Department should take a strong line with professional stakeholders who push back against the Department increasing parental engagement with and support for the policy.

- Begin immediate evaluations of how the current model of tutoring is working - particularly around key design questions such as whether it matters if the tutor is a teacher or not, the length of time needed for tutoring to have an impact, whether frequency has an impact, and whether there is a difference between tutoring in different subjects. As discussed below, this should be taken forward by the EEF as part of the formal evaluation of the next year of the NTP, and should also include thematic findings from Ofsted as to how schools have rolled tutoring out at scale.

Shorter Holidays - Popular but not a quick option

Among parents and the wider public there was very substantial support for the idea of shorter holidays. As with other options, some of this related to the very real difficulty that working parents face juggling after school and holiday-time childcare. This came through especially strongly in the focus groups.

'They're bored by the middle of the summer holidays. You have to spend all that time working out childcare or sorting out the grandparents. I'd love it if the summer holiday was shorter.'

Mother, primary, Outer London

'I couldn't understand why they went back and then they had that whole big break at Easter. Two weeks. They'd spent loads of time at home and there was nothing to do anyway. It seemed a waste.'

Mother, primary, Outer London

We found no vocal appetite in the focus groups for traditional, six-week summer holidays to remain set in stone. The polling showed very similar willingness to entertain the idea of shorter holidays. Asked if they agreed with Government introducing a longer school term and shorter school holidays, so children can keep learning to make up for lost time, the poll of parents found they supported it almost as much as they supported additional academic tutoring - at 57% compared to 65% for tutoring.

The difference between primary and secondary-stage parents was only 2% so within the margin of error. The differences between different social classes were also minor, with some indication that better-off parents were in favour - perhaps explicable by the strong support of parents with children in independent schools where summer and other holidays are still much longer. There was a strong split between men and women, with 62% of fathers supporting and 53% of mothers - still a majority, of course. A separate question found that if a longer term was made available then 48% of parents thought it should be compulsory for pupils to attend. Support was even greater among the general population, with 64% of the all-England sample supporting the idea of shorter holidays. Taking the focus groups and the polling together, it seems the traditional six week break has had its day as far as public opinion is concerned.

'There was a strong split between men and women, with 62% of fathers supporting and 53% of mothers - still a majority, of course'

There is a strong policy argument as well as public support for amending the structures of the school year. Indeed, it has been reported[18] that the DfE has considered a change to the school year, alongside or as an alternative to extending the school day, as part of a programme for catch up.

18 Walker, *Gavin Williamson considers changes to school year as pupils go back* Link

However, such a change requires a longer lead time to implement. This is because the maximum benefit only occurs if all schools across a Local Authority - and ideally nationally - change together. In the absence of this, such a change causes friction in the teacher labour market, as well as difficulties for parents who may have children in multiple schools[19]. It is also difficult to treat the question of changing the school term separately from discussions about 'Post Qualification Admissions' (PQA) to university and the timing of A Levels and other terminal exams. Again, the government has just finished a consultation on a PQA system[20] but it is not known when and if such a change would happen. Again, this requires a longer lead term to manage the flow of students into universities.

Therefore, while a change to the school term and year remains a sensible reform, it is not an option that can be introduced at speed to address lost learning and catch up.

19 Carter, *Why a 5 term year works so well (as long as well all do it)* Link

20 Department for Education, Post Qualification Admissions Reform Consultation, Link

4. The longer school day - Can you make it work?

As we described above, there is support across most groups of parents for some form of longer school day. But it is not as universally popular as tutoring, and support varies based on different characteristics:

- How long the extended day is for;
- Whether it is optional or mandatory for pupils;
- What the content of an extended day should be;
- Who staffs it.

Brief and generic surveys of opinion on this, which test the concept without any detail or explanation, should be taken with caution, because they assume a huge amount of prior knowledge among respondents, and a common understanding of what 'a longer school day' means - neither of which, in our view, should be taken for granted.

In other words, asking the question "cold" without any context will provide only instinctive answers. In reality, parents and everyone else thinks about such issues in a much more discursive way.

Making a longer school day work

The length of a school day and year are partly under the discretion of the headteacher (of an academy) or the local authority, for a maintained school. Maintained schools are required to open for 190 days (or technically 380 half-sessions) a year.[21] But exact term dates, and length of days within that, are at the head/school/local authority's discretion.

That said, the education sector, especially at the primary phase, still remains largely around a schedule of roughly 8.30am to 3.30pm for core timetabled lessons. Academies - the majority of which are at secondary - have taken more advantage of flexibilities to provide extended hours for a variety of purposes and although no one central data source of all school timings exists, it is estimated that up to 40% of longer running secondary Academies run a longer school day for at least some days a week.

The EEF's analysis on the longer school day found that:[22]

- Programmes which aim to provide 'stimulating environments and activities or develop additional personal and social skills' as well as academic work tend to do better (though this might be reduced if the school day is only half an hour longer).
- Attracting and retaining pupils in before and after school programmes is harder at secondary level than at primary level. To be successful, any increases in school time have be supported by both parents and staff.

21 House of Commons Library, *The School Day and Year.* Link

22 Education Endowment Foundation, *Extending school time.* Link

- Extreme increases (for example more than nine hours of schooling per day in total i.e. more than 9-6) do not appear to be beneficial.

Cross-country work from the OECD, focused on highly developed economies and education systems, found that:[23]

- Education systems where more **students tended to spend extremely short or long hours in regular lessons tended to score lower in reading.**
- Education systems where more students spent 20 hours or less per week in regular school lessons tended to show lower average performance in reading.
- Education systems where more students spent 39 hours or more per week in regular lessons in all subjects tended to have lower scores in reading.
- These relationships were observed both across OECD countries, and across all countries and economies, even after accounting for per capita GDP.

In **high-performing education systems, schools tend to provide a room where students can do their homework,** and school staff provides help with students' homework.

- Education systems where more students have access to a room for homework at school tended to perform better in reading.
- Education systems where more students attended schools where the staff provides help for their homework tended to perform better in reading.
- These relationships were observed both across OECD countries, and across all countries and economies, even after accounting for per capita GDP.
- Similar patterns were also observed for equity in mathematics and science performance (Table V.B1.6.24)

In other words, a longer school day can work - but only when designed effectively. Much like parental opinion, system design therefore matters.

'Education systems where more students spent 20 hours or less per week in regular school lessons tended to show lower average performance in reading'

The most pertinent question therefore seems to be not 'Should schools in England have a longer school day?' but 'If the government wants to extend the school day, what is the most beneficial way to do so?'. That is why the approach outlined below balances out spending commitments, parental support and engagement, system feasibility, demands on teachers, and the likely gains to students both academically and socially.

When thinking about whether and how such an intervention would be welcomed, the polling and focus group work in this report suggests that there are five design features which show how a longer day could be effectively delivered, with parental and teacher support. We set these out here.

23 OECD, PISA Results (Volume 5): *Effective Policies, Successful Schools.* Link

- Focus on a 'short' extension to the day - around 30 minutes - rather than a 'full' extended day of 8am-6pm. (This doesn't prohibit schools running longer days, or leaving buildings open longer, but this is conceptually different to extending learning.)
- Have academic activities - including tutoring - at the core of an extended school day.
- On the basis that it is an additional 30 minutes a day, make a longer school day mandatory for all pupils.
- Make a commitment to a longer day time-bound and linked to catch-up.
- Have such a programme fully funded and involving teachers - without requiring teachers to staff all of it - and focus on and fund the practicalities.

Focus on a 'short' extension to the day - around 30 minutes - rather than a 'full' extended day of 8am-6pm.

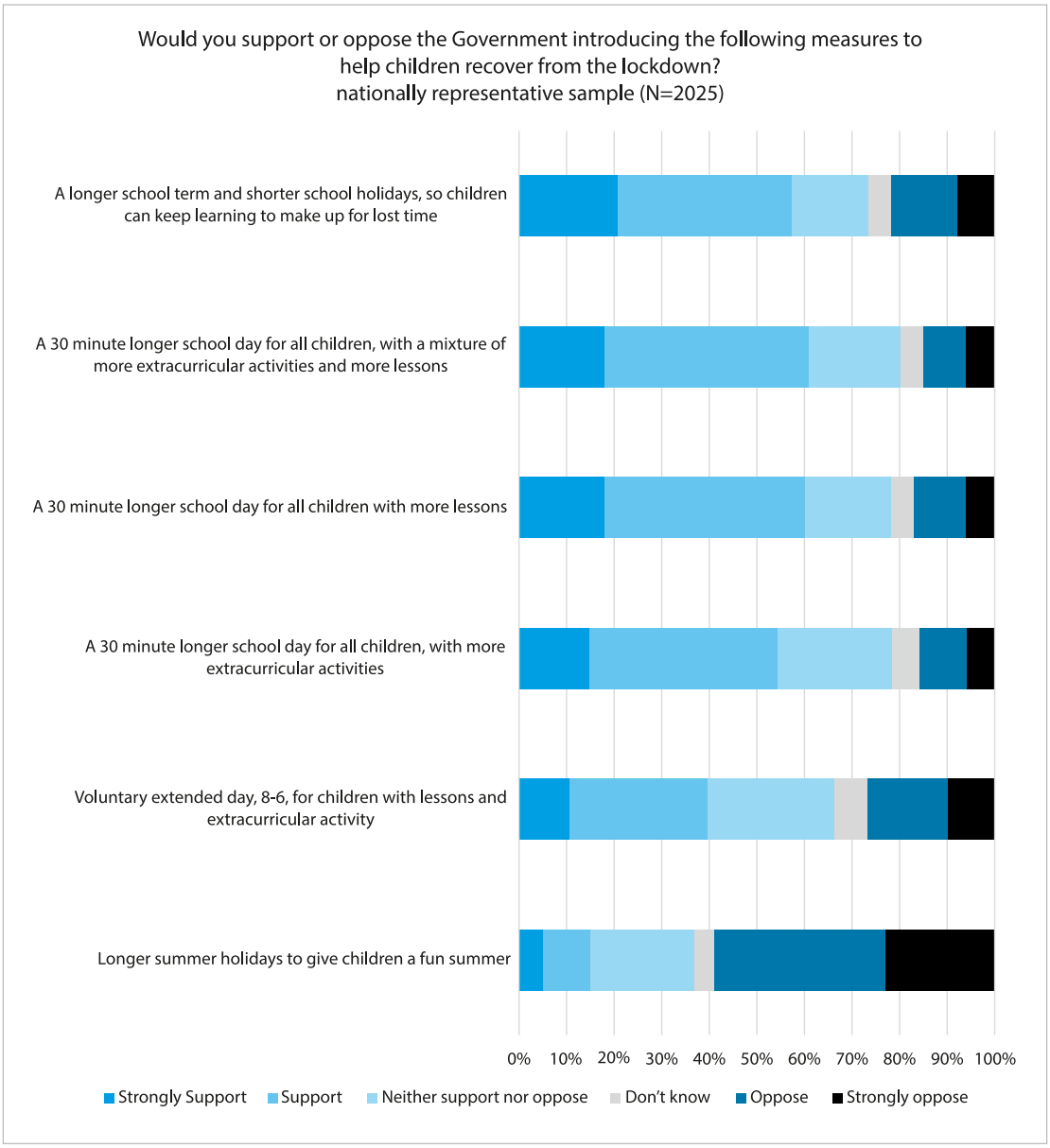
There appear to be two broad options under consideration by the government - and indeed, some schools are already offering variants of these. One is for what could be termed a 'full' extended day, with schools open from 8am to 6pm. Such a model is reminiscent of extended schools as operated under the Labour government in the 2000s.

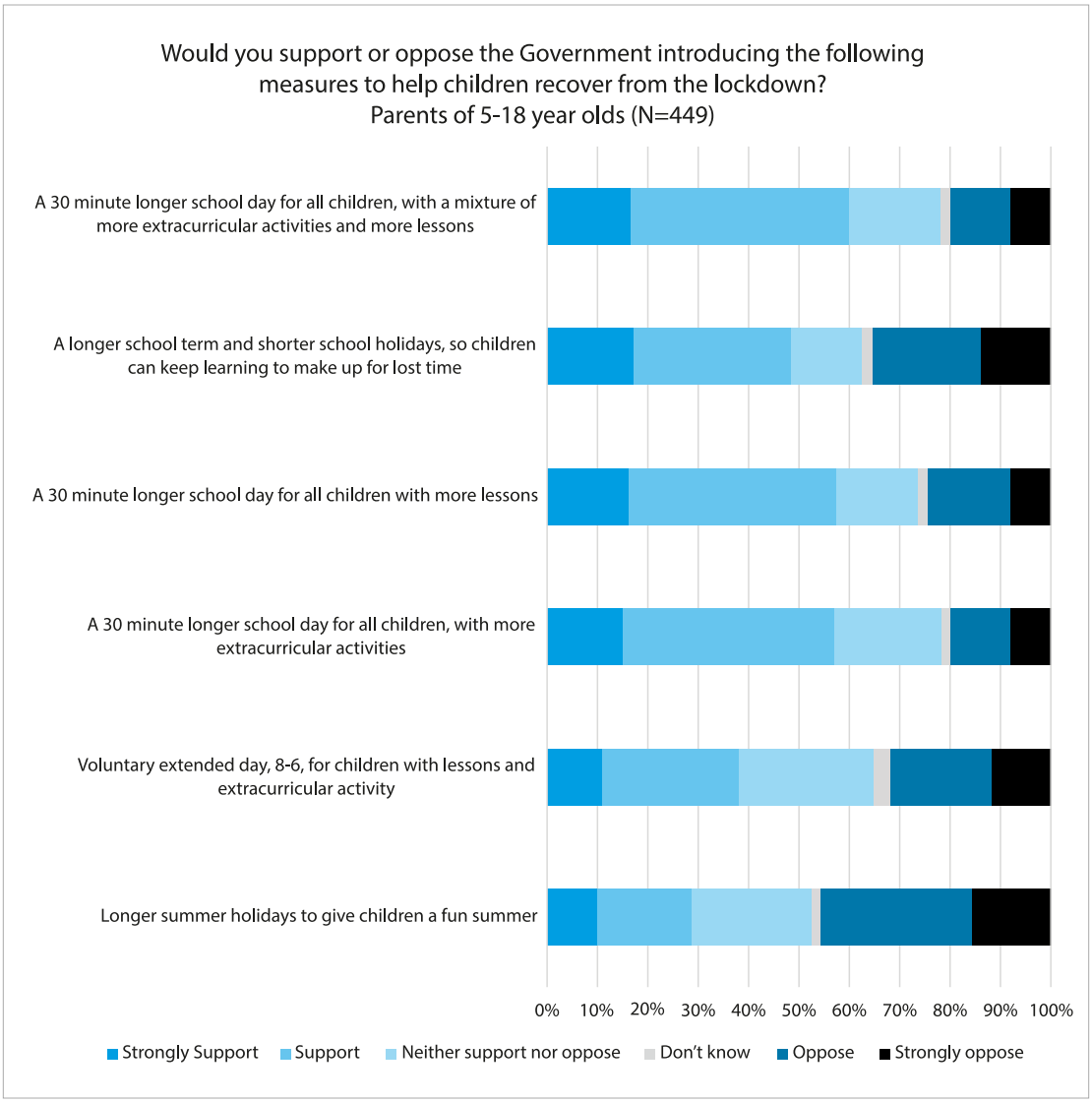
'There appear to be two broad options under consideration by the government - and indeed, some schools are already offering variants of these'

The other alternative is to extend what we could term a 'core' extended day, by perhaps 30 minutes a day.

In terms of determining which one would be most beneficial, the evidence on children's learning gains does not point strongly to one model over another. Evidence from effective education systems, such as that reviewed by the EEF and OECD above, suggests that effective use of any time - whether 8.30am-3.30pm or 8.30am-4pm under a 'core' extended day, or 8am-6pm under a 'full' extended day - is more impactful than the length of time itself. In other words, it does not follow that a full extended day would deliver greater benefits to students than a core extended day.

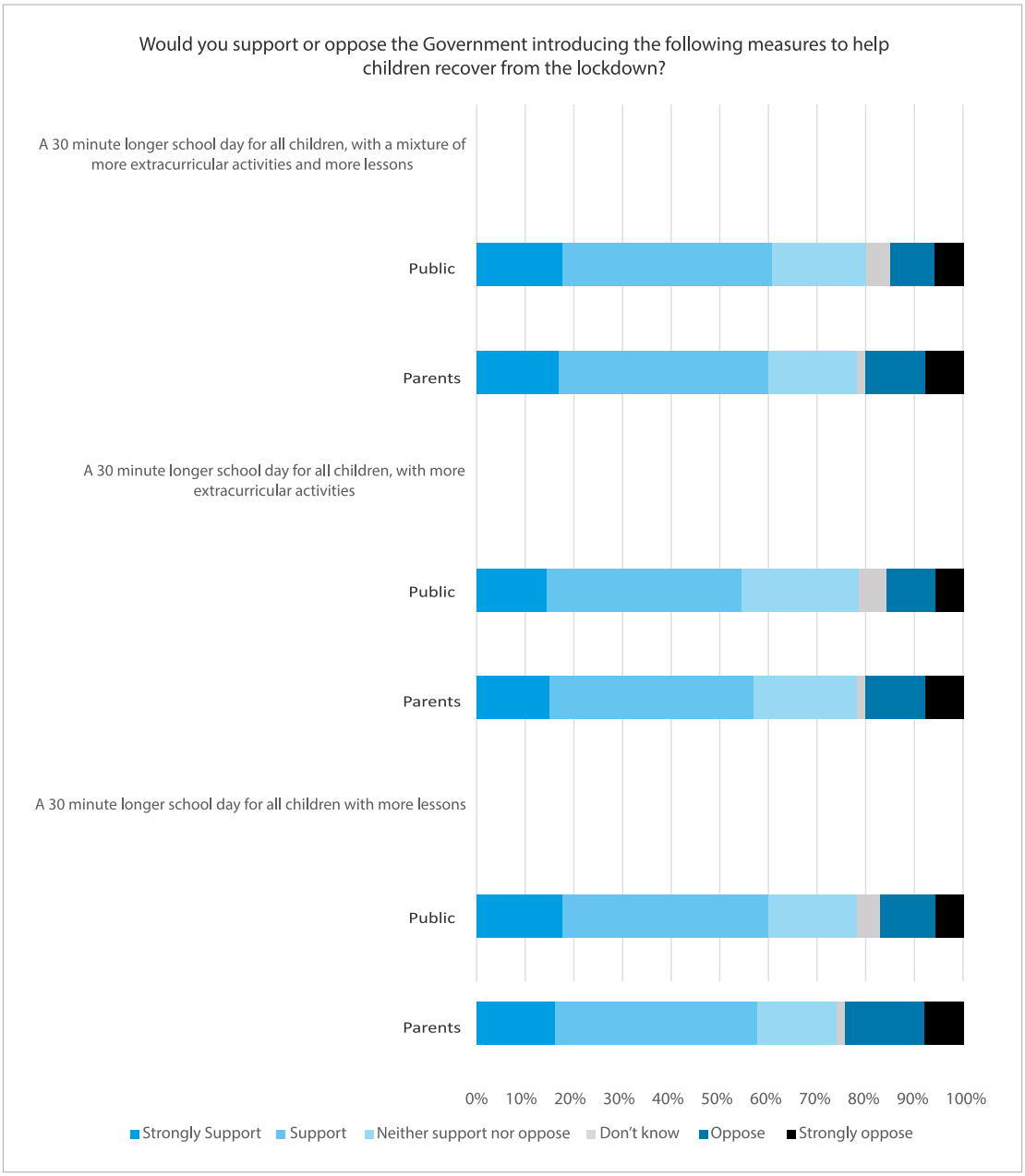
The polling for this report is clear that of the various options tested, a shorter extended day - the 'core' model - is more popular with both the public and parents. Support for a 30-minute extension is consistent among parents of all school-aged children- including primary parents, who are commonly supposed to be more sceptical of the idea.

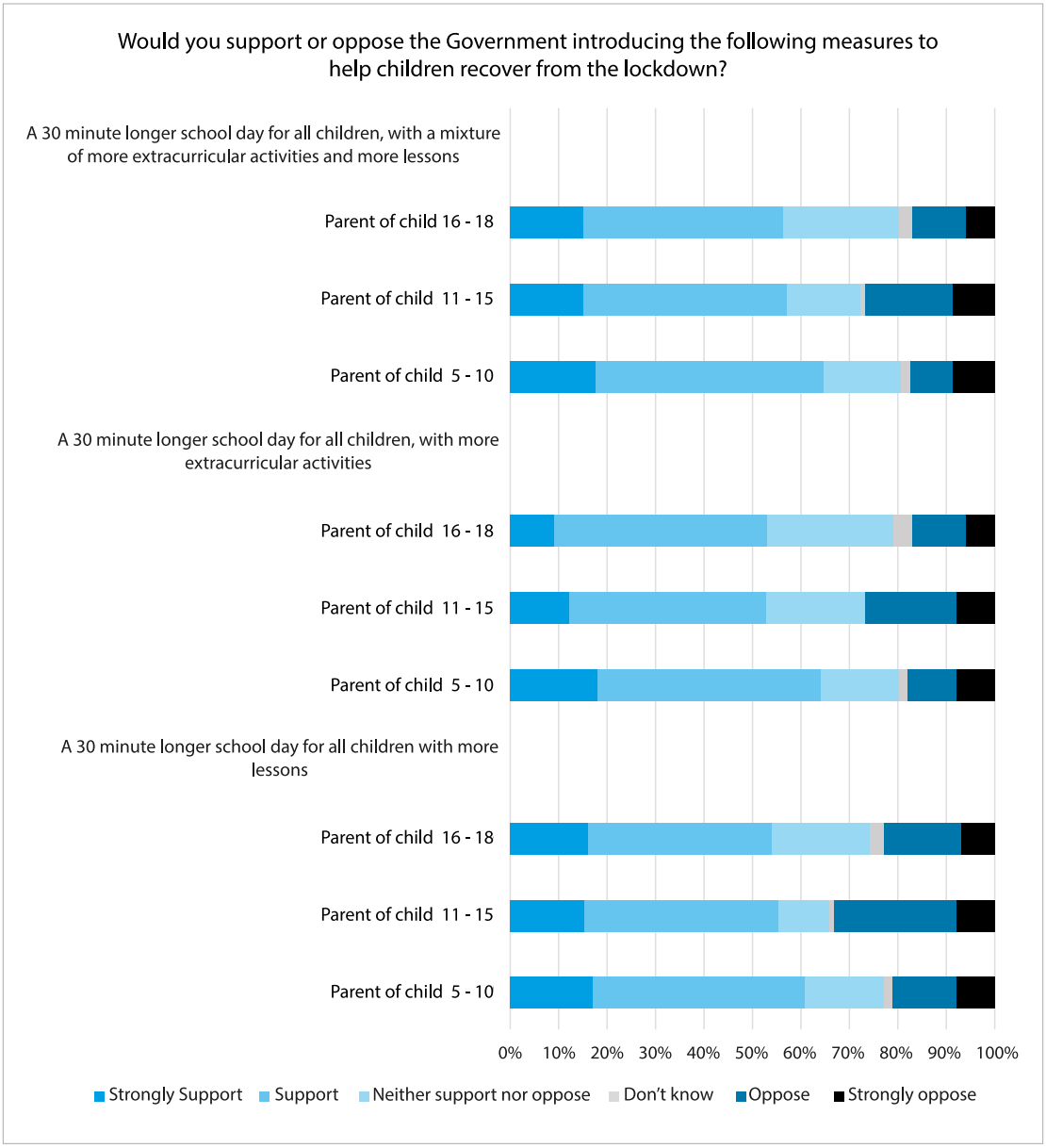

Would you support or oppose the Government introducing the following measures to help children recover from the lockdown?
nationally representative sample (N=2025)
A longer school term and shorter school holidays, so children can keep learning to make up for lost time
A 30 minute longer school day for all children, with a mixture of more extracurricular activities and more lessons
A 30 minute longer school day for all children with more lessons
A 30 minute longer school day for all children, with more extracurricular activities
Voluntary extended day, 8-6, for children with lessons and extracurricular activity
Longer summer holidays to give children a fun summer
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Strongly Support
Support
Neither support nor oppose
Don't know
Oppose
Strongly oppose



It seems clear that of all the options for extending school time, extending the term and shortening the holidays is the most popular option among both the general public and parents.

But of the five options in the charts above for extending a school day specifically, all enjoy net parental and public support. And within the various options for a longer school day, a shorter extension is more popular, and has net support across parents of children of all ages.


Would you support or oppose the Government introducing the following measures to help children recover from the lockdown?
A 30 minute longer school day for all children, with a mixture of more extracurricular activities and more lessons
Public
Parents
A 30 minute longer school day for all children, with more extracurricular activities
Public
Parents
A 30 minute longer school day for all children with more lessons
Public
Parents
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Strongly Support
Support
Neither support nor oppose
Don't know
Oppose
Strongly oppose

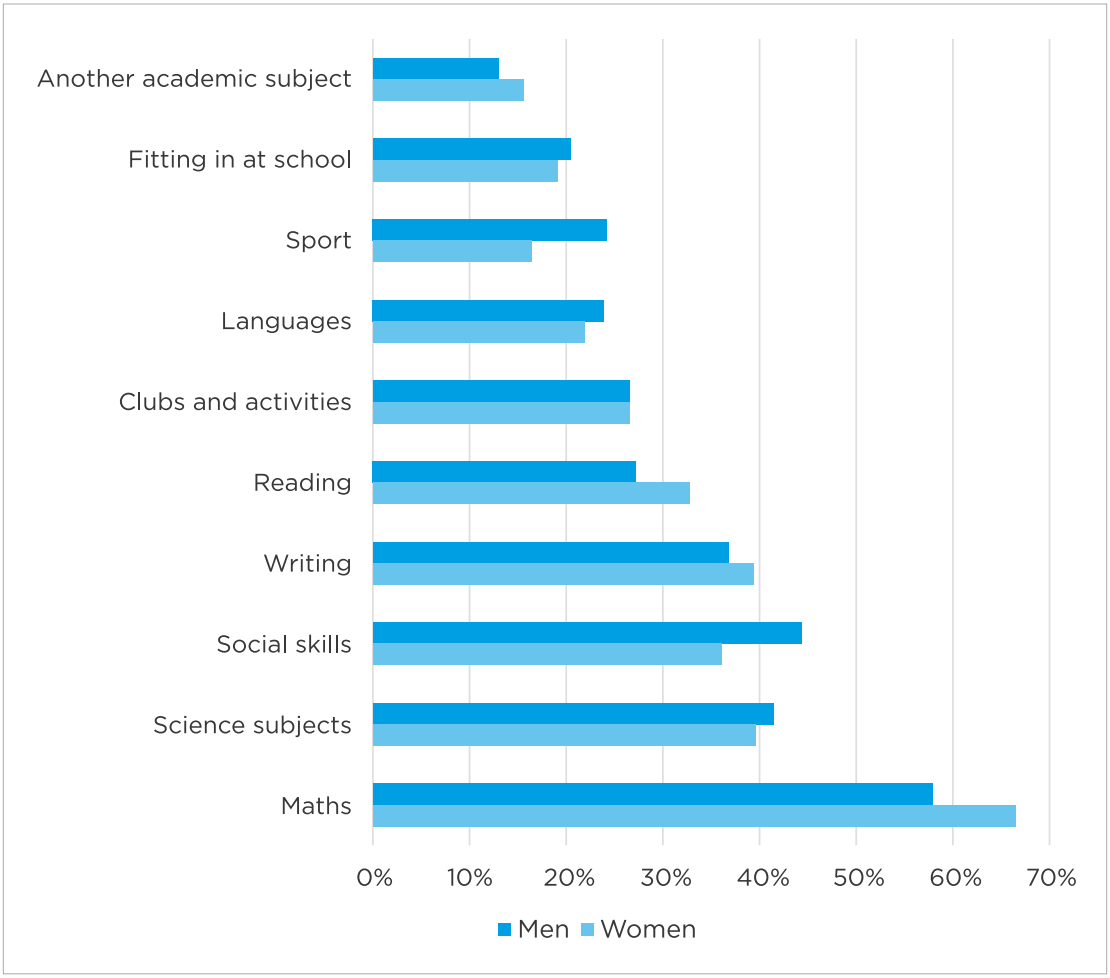


Given this, and given the additional cost and complexity of a 'full' extended day, we recommend that a 'core' extended day is the best choice, since it is most likely to pass the test of parental support, logistical feasibility and likely educational impact.

Have academic activities - including tutoring - at the core of an extended school day

The polling and groups for this report show that when given a list of options, parents tended to be more concerned that their children were behind in academic subjects - with maths coming top of the list. The academic evidence on learning loss cited elsewhere in this report also shows that there has been greater learning loss in maths than in other subjects.

Areas in which parents think their child is further behind



Contrary to some other research in this area, we did not find a difference between parents by age of child. Parents of primary school children were just as focused on academic catch-up over social and pastoral support as parents of older children. The findings were also relatively consistent across social class.

Where there was a marked difference was by gender, with mothers expressing a significantly stronger interest in academic subjects, perhaps reflecting the fact that they have been closer – as we have found in previous polling – to the grind of home-schooling than fathers have been.

Separately, the polling also shows that the general public favours a mixture of academic activity and extracurricular activities within the extended time, and parents favour a purely academic offering.

Thirdly, an extended day needs to be linked to tutoring. One of the concerns raised by some schools in this last academic year was how to build a tutoring programme of at least 15 hours' duration into the timetable in a way that benefited pupils, including consistent attendance. The EEF evidence on tutoring is clear that a sustained period

of tuition is required for maximum benefits. And all the current options for how schools can deliver tutoring have some drawbacks - (though we are also aware of some schools who have managed this well already).

Taking pupils out of the subject(s) they are behind in for tutoring is counterproductive. Consistently taking them out of another subject also risks progress in that subject. Running tutoring during break times or lunchtimes is inimical to pupils' wider outcomes. Running tutoring at varying times in different weeks risks a lack of consistency and pupils missing sessions due to confusion.

Logically, a dedicated time after the end of 'core' school - such as during an extended day - represents the best time to deliver tutoring.

Taking this all together - the evidence that pupils have fallen behind in core academic subjects; the strong public and parental support for academics to be at the core of an extended day (potentially alongside extracurricular activities); and a need to find dedicated time for tutoring - we recommend that at its heart, an extended day includes academic support, including tutoring for those who need it.

> **'Taking pupils out of the subject(s) they are behind in for tutoring is counterproductive'**

Schools may also wish to include elements of extracurricular programmes which are vital for a richer school experience for pupils; and time should be allowed to be used for that if schools wish. But a purely extracurricular offer should not be taken forward.

On the basis that it is an additional 30 minutes a day, make a longer school day mandatory for all pupils

Sir Kevan Collins has indicated that his preliminary assumption is that an extended day ought to be mandatory for pupils - in order to 'guarantee' that disadvantaged pupils attend.[24]

Current government policy often prioritises disadvantaged students, on the grounds that it is of greater benefit, and fairer, that limited resources should be targeted at those pupils - for example through schemes such as weighted student funding.

It is also true that, in general, disadvantaged families do not take up optional schemes to the same extent as more advantaged families. Indeed, the previous evaluation of extended schools found that:

'Seven in ten schools were targeting specific groups of pupils or families for support with extended services. Most commonly this was economically disadvantaged families and pupils with disabilities or special educational needs. However, there was still a participation gap (in terms of hours of activities taken up) between economically disadvantaged pupils and those from 'better off' families and this seemed to relate to the cost of activities.'

24 Amy Gibbons and Catherine Lough, *Catch-up tsar: Extended school day should be compulsory.* Link

Thirdly, optional schemes have the benefit of flexibility, but the downside of erratic and inconsistent implementation. Given the importance of fidelity to the tutoring model for impact, we think that consistency is more important here than flexibility.

Against this, the benefits of an extended day seem highly dependent on the time and structure and effectiveness. So set against the possible benefits should be parental views on compulsion.

On that score, our polling shows clearly that by at least a 2:1 majority, parents support a compulsory school day. By 57% to 25%, they support the explicit proposition of 'a 30 minute longer school day **for all**, with more lessons' (our emphasis here). By 57% to 20% they support a longer day with more extracurricular activities, and by 60% to 20%, a longer day for all with a mixture of academic and extracurricular activities.[25]

When breaking down the options of a longer day by age of child, we can see that parents of children of all ages support a mandatory longer day - whether that involves academic support or extracurricular activities. This is an important finding, because it runs contrary to perceived wisdom that parents, especially of primary aged children, do not support a longer school day. This polling question suggests that when framed explicitly with a time duration in it, and with context as to what it would cover and why, support is stronger.

On balance - though it is relatively finely balanced - we favour a mandatory extension of 30 minutes a day. This would offer more certainty that pupils who would benefit from tutoring would be present, as well as the wider equity benefits of the extra non-tutoring activities, both academic and extracurricular.

25 Hannah Carpenter et al, *Extended Services Evaluation: End of Year One Report.* Link

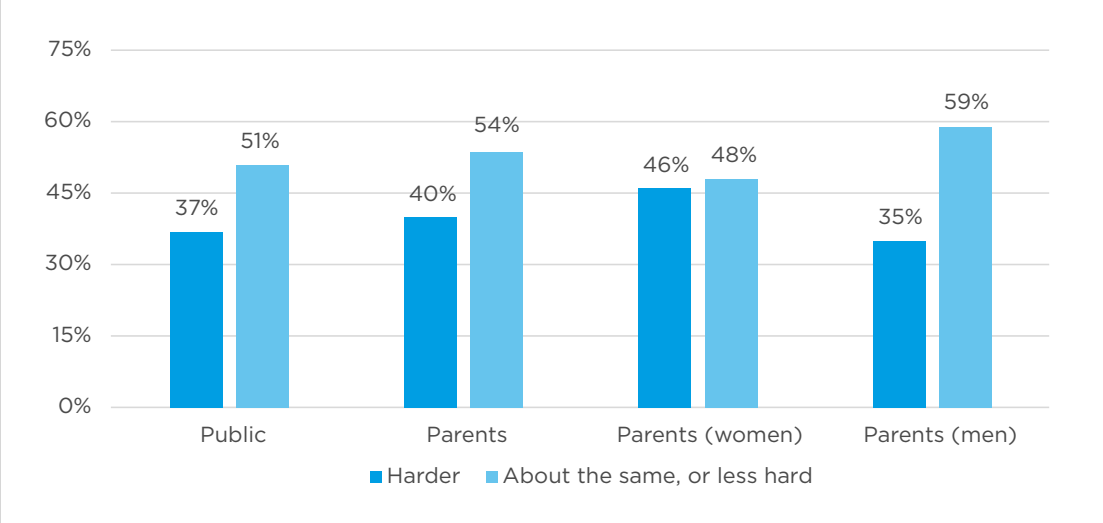
Make a commitment to a longer day time-bound and linked to catch-up

As mentioned above, other recent polling identified lower support for lengthening of the school day than ours.[26] We believe this is because we clarified the specifics of the policy - either short (30 minutes) or time-bound, with academics as a focus, but not the sole focus.

General questions about 'lengthening the school day' are likely to make parents think of an intensely academic, extremely long day (say 8am-6pm) - and make teachers feel sceptical too.

That said, we do think support for any change to a school day is fragile. Specifically, if teachers turn against this plan, so will parents. They respect teachers, often think they worked hard in the pandemic, and trust their opinion. Securing their consent is crucial - which in practice means giving them appropriate funding and encouraging schools to balance these additional hours by loosening workload requirements elsewhere.

Did teachers work harder or less hard than they did before lockdown?



We also think, given the contradictory polling results, that an extended day should clearly be linked to the immediate necessity for academic catch-up. In practice, this means a commitment for the next three years, linked to the period of the Spending Review. A shorter commitment risks being seen as ineffective - as well as not allowing the tutoring market to mature. A longer commitment may be harder to secure from the Treasury.

26 Nicola Woolcock and Rachel Sylvester, *Parents oppose longer school days to help children catch up.* Link
The Times commissioned YouGov to ask a wide number of questions to parents as part of their Education Commission work, one of which was on the longer school day. The results - 60% of parents disagreeing with the idea of extending the day and 30% agreeing - generated a significant splash. However, looking at the tables from YouGov, it is very possible that simply asking one question like this, with no context, and no option for 'neither agree nor disagree', gives an inaccurate perception of parental opinion - and as such, media around this finding and the finding itself should be taken with considerable caution.

Have such a programme fully funded and involving teachers - without requiring teachers to staff all of it - and focus on and fund the practicalities.

This report starts from the unequivocal position that teachers and schools should be funded to deliver additional hours, rather than being asked to reallocate existing resources.

Although HM Treasury has argued in the past that there are different models of school set-up, and that there are varying levels of efficiency in the way in which schools are managed, it is highly implausible that such inefficiencies can be systematically identified and savings found and recycled, including between institutions, to the timescales needed to support an extended school day.[27]

‘This report starts from the unequivocal position that teachers and schools should be funded to deliver additional hours, rather than being asked to reallocate existing resources’

To be clear, there are strong moral and educational arguments for improving the way in which schools use their taxpayer funding. We should definitely aim to move all schools up to the current median level of efficiency over the next Spending Review period. In many ways, this goal - of making all schools as effective as they can be, including by using a longer school day - is the bigger prize for government. But making schools in general more efficient and helping pupils to catch up post-pandemic are not mutually exclusive.

In terms of who would staff an extended day, clearly, any academic catch-up programme must be delivered by trained practitioners. Importantly, these can - and indeed should - be external tutors if it is catch-up tutoring delivered through the NTP, and not school staff. If it is some form of additional lessons - whether timetabled curriculum lessons, or more informal ‘catch-up’, or even some form of supervised homework - it is likely to best be staffed by teachers. This could include greater use by schools and tutoring agencies of retired teachers, part time teachers, and those with teaching qualifications who work elsewhere in the labour market.

However, very importantly, it is not necessary - and indeed almost certainly undeliverable - for serving teachers in a school to fully staff an extended day at that school, even for these additional 30 minutes a day

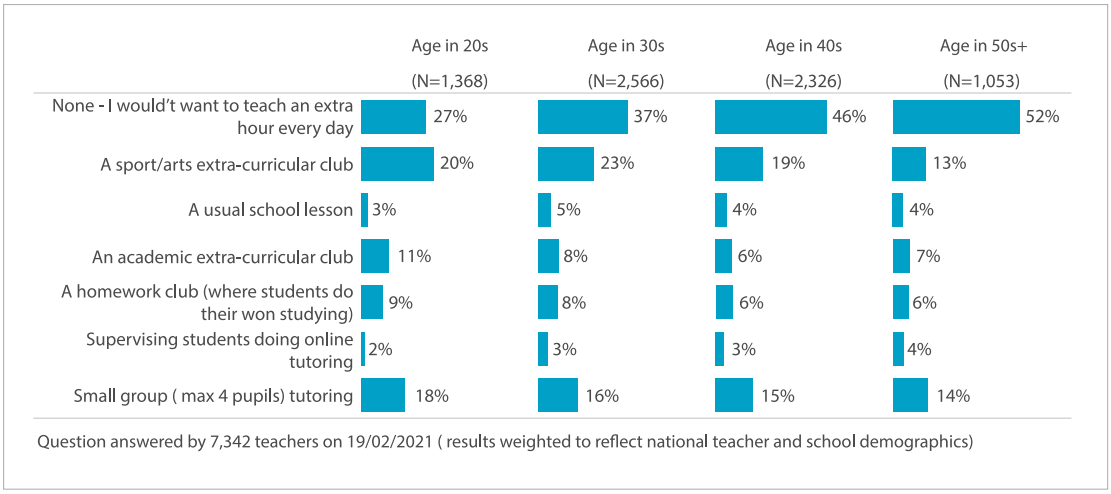
A delivery model would need to:

- Allow for teachers to be paid additionally for additional hours which they deliver.
- Allow for academic practitioners, such as from tutoring agencies, to be brought in for tutoring (and the supply of qualified tutors to expand especially in maths)
- Allow schools to offer other incentives or reduce other expectations to reduce workload in exchange for contact time
- Have all non-academic activities covered by a mixed market of private, voluntary and other providers coming into schools to deliver extended activities, rather than adding to teachers’ workload. This will also, crucially, need to be funded.

Recent Teacher Tapp survey data from over 7,000 teachers suggests that a majority of younger teachers would be amenable to being paid for an extra hour a day, with the proportion falling consistently as teachers become older.[28]

27 Alex Morton, *Saving £30 Billion: 9 Simple Steps.* Link
28 Teacher Tapp, *All Eyes on the 8th March – Findings on the return date, catch-up, voice notes and more!* Link

Next year, if you were to be paid additional salary to teach for an extra hour each day, which would you prefer to do?



Question answered by 7,342 teachers on 19/02/2021 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)

We must also recognise the way in which previous programmes - including on extended schools - have fallen apart when insufficient attention is placed on the broader ways in which schools operate.

Specifically, issues of school transport were a major issue in earlier iterations of extended schools. Whether it is activities being hosted off site, or pupils getting home, or parents changing work patterns, or use of school coaches (particularly for rural schools), unless schools are able to flex the ways in which pupils travel to and from schools, simply extending the school day will not work. Practical concerns, such as children walking home in the dark, surfaced in several of the focus groups - but not as much as comments about the practical benefits to working parents.

Schools will therefore need to collaborate to design an extended day when, for example, school transport is shared. Government funding for extended days must cover additional transport costs as well as other ancillary costs (energy and utilities, insurance, support staff such as caretaking and so on), and policy and funding rules must not inadvertently prevent any of these changes from happening.

In putting together such a plan, government should focus on clearly communicating what teachers will and won't do, and what parents can and can't expect. As early media commentary about the Collins review has demonstrated, there is great sensitivity among teachers and parents as to what reform might mean. There is a real likelihood that accidental or deliberate misunderstandings of the requirements on teachers may scuppers any reform before it can even begin.

So, to reiterate - this report does not recommend that any extended day is solely staffed by teachers, schools should work to reduce demand on teacher workload elsewhere to balance additional hours, and teachers should be remunerated for any extra activity. There can be no question of teachers working on a timetabled basis from 8-6, as some of the more excitable commentary has implied.

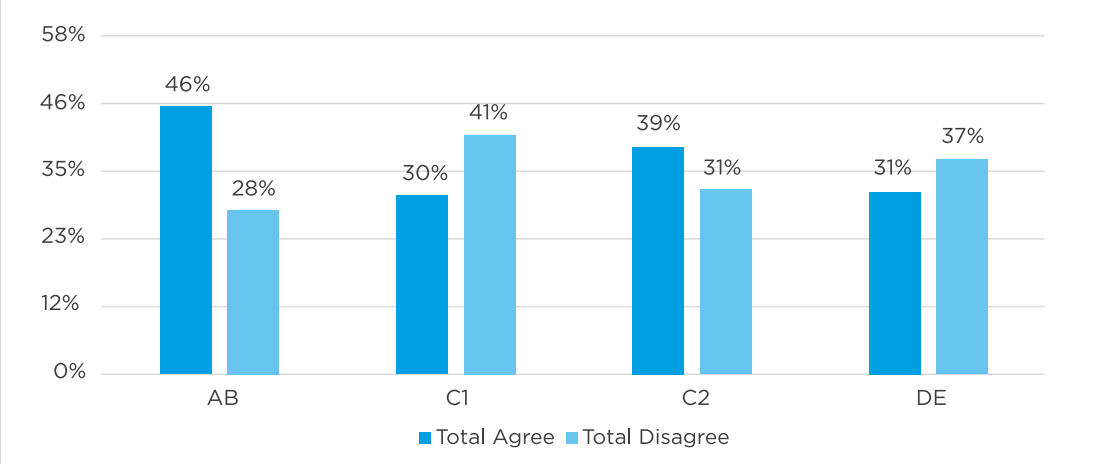
5. Making catch-up work

So far, we have blithely assumed the effectiveness of our proposals. The truth is, we are in uncharted territory. We do not know how much children will naturally catch up, and we do not know if tutoring and extended time at this scale will work. Money is tight, people have limited willingness to have their taxes raised, and it is therefore essential that any spending have maximum effect (and not undermine other government priorities, such as skills).

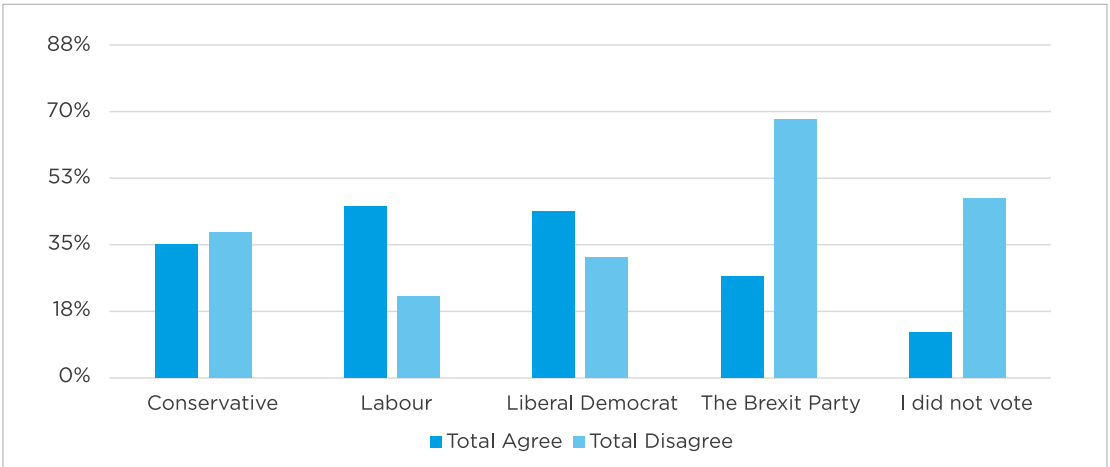
This was obvious from our national polling. Support among the general population was consistently *even higher* for academic interventions than for parents. However, willingness to pay was not. Parents were much more likely to say they were willing for their own taxes to go up to pay for catch-up than the general population.

The population as a whole was also relatively even in their support for catch-up for pupils and the need for adult retraining programmes (and saw both as important).

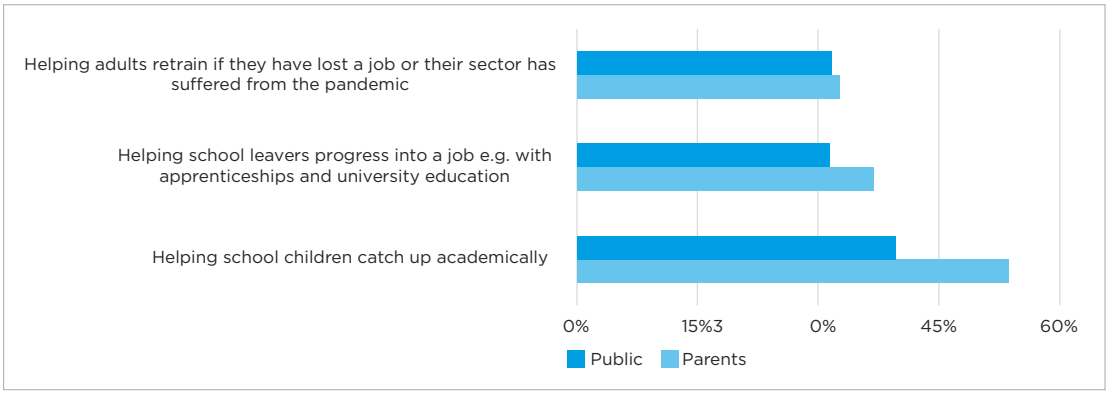
If it means my taxes going up to make sure children catch up after the pandemic, then that is a price I am willing to pay



If it means my taxes going up to make sure children catch up after the pandemic, then that is a price I am willing to pay (by 2019 vote)



Willingness to see personal level of tax rise to fund the following:



The message from our focus groups mirrored these findings. Everyone expects taxes to go up to pay for the pandemic. The fact that huge amounts of money have been spent on activities such as furlough is very plain to the public. In the focus groups, education was seen as a better way of spending money by parents than many other things – including, for some, the NHS.

There is a slightly higher level of support, and slightly lower level of opposition, to taxes going up to make sure children catch up among parents when compared to the all-England sample (parents support their taxes rising to pay for catch-up by 42:26, where as the population only support it by 36:34).

In terms of social class there is a substantial gap, with those who can more easily pay for tax rises being more supportive. Parents in higher SEGs are significantly more likely to agree that they are willing to pay higher taxes for children to catch up after the pandemic (49% in AB, 42% in C1, 41% in C2 and 35% in DE).

And among non-parents, the proportion who disagree rises from 24% for 18-24s to 41% for 55-64s.

Although there was a degree of sullen acceptance that taxes may be put up, the attitude in the focus groups was extremely negative.

'I don't know whether we could afford it. But we don't really have a choice. We just have to deal with it.'
Father, primary, Outer London, Tory voter 2019.

'I'm all for paying more tax for the kids, 100%. But you can't sting us in other ways too. I think that a lot of money goes into their bonuses and their flash cars and everything. They are making the decisions, and they're living the life of luxury.'

'Do you mean politicians in general, or MPs or ministers?'

'I mean them all. I don't disagree with what they all say. But I just think the money could be used a lot better.'
Mother, secondary, Bolton, Tory voter 2019.

'I think if you use it for the subjects that they're behind, but not the ones [co-curricular activities] that you mentioned earlier, they don't feel like a priority. It's the core subjects, I think. And then if for example, they want to do a language and they're behind on that. But the core subjects are the most important.'
Mother, secondary, Outer London, Lib Dem voter 2019

'It's so often misused. This is the problem, it has to be well spent. If you just look at the waste, you know, across the NHS.'

'When you say waste across the NHS, what sort of thing are you thinking of?'

'Oh, you know, where even to begin? Managers, you know, paying someone over the odds to come and put a ladder up, to put a light bulb in. I mean, everything. It's just everything.'
Mother, primary, Outer London, Tory voter 2019

As mentioned above, it is highly unlikely that savings from a more efficient way of running schools can be used to fund an extended day, or that can schools be expected to absorb these additional costs at scale. Additional resources will be needed and should be funded as part of Sir Kevan Collins's plan for education recovery.

'As mentioned above, it is highly unlikely that savings from a more efficient way of running schools can be used to fund an extended day, or that can schools be expected to absorb these additional costs at scale'

But there are clearly limitations in terms of cost. The Education Policy Institute has set out a three-year plan which would cost £13.5bn and Sutton Trust have set out a plan which calls for 'a substantial and sustained commitment'.[29, 30] The Treasury is unlikely to be willing to fund catch-up on that scale. This is why, as outlined below, such a programme is more likely to win support if it is time-limited and cost-effective. There is also the possibility of redirecting savings from elsewhere in Government, as identified in previous Centre for Policy Studies papers.

In order for catch-up to be cost-effective, and speak to the public's (and the Treasury's) concerns, it must therefore involve three things. First, the Government must be clear that any cash injection is a temporary measure to address lost learning, not a permanent increase in funding. Second, it must set up a proper feedback and accountability regime to understand if extended time is effective. Third, it must put in place a proper feedback and accountability regime from the parent side.

Government accountability
There should be an immediate study launched by Ofsted of what is working in terms of catch-up, and use of extended hours, across the system. Many multi academy trusts (MATs) and individual schools have done astonishing work during the lockdown and since, and this should be captured and rolled out more widely. As Ofsted returns to inspections next academic year, catch-up should form part of its quality of education judgement.

The government should also put in place immediate evaluations, with regular sample assessments, of the effectiveness of catch-up academically. This should potentially include control schools to make sure that academic catch-up is not happening naturally.

29 The Education Policy Institute, *Education recovery and resilience in England.* Link
30 The Sutton Trust, Fairness First: Social *Mobility, Covid and Education Recovery.* Link

Parental accountability

Embedding parental understanding and engagement in the education system is a long-term opportunity that will yield dividends well beyond the period of the pandemic. It is consistently associated with higher academic performance from students. It can also be a powerful force to hold schools, and the education system, to account.

> **'Embedding parental understanding and engagement in the education system is a long-term opportunity that will yield dividends well beyond the period of the pandemic'**

Because of the pandemic - and in ways almost none of those parents would have wished - there has been a massive increase in parental engagement in the content of education. What are their children learning? Are they progressing? How do schools differ in what they are offering? This has perhaps been most marked at primary level, where pupils found it difficult to do school learning entirely independently.

Since the return to school, however, a number of the parents in our focus groups found they no longer understood what their children were doing and - crucially - whether they were in a good academic position or not. This has to change - not least because it would make the impact of tutoring or longer days much clearer to the ultimate consumers. It is striking, as we have said before, that in our groups there was no awareness that the government was funding tutoring, or that pupils were already benefiting from it.

For the duration of a catch-up programme and beyond, therefore:

1) The DfE should overhaul its entire approach to communications and model itself on the NHS, which puts direct-to-patient interaction at the heart of many of its programmes. There is no educational equivalent, for example, of the hugely successful "Couch to 5k" programme (which is run by the NHS)[31]. Too much of its communication effort is designed for sector professionals.

   Instead, there should be a major direct-to-parent communication function which is designed to give parents an understanding of both the processes and content of what happens in schools and engage them as much as possible. As part of this, it should be clear who is and is not eligible for, for example, tuition support - which would help schools that are sometimes dealing with overwhelming numbers of enquiries.

2) The DfE should develop longitudinal indicators to measure whether parents' understanding of their children's education at different key stages is increasing over time, and Ofsted should consider the quality of parental communication as part of its leadership judgement on schools.

3) There should be clear exemplars, available to all parents, of what children should know and be able to do at different ages. From school age, this currently only exists for highly dedicated parents who are determined to look for it. This information should include, for example, the kind of mathematical problems children should be able to finish and what writing looks like at different ages.

31 Laura Hamzic, *Why Couch to 5k is so successful at getting people running – by the woman behind it.* Link

Conclusion

For millions of children, the pandemic has inflicted a brutal blow to their progress and learning. Some of that damage may heal over time - but it would be folly to assume that this will happen naturally, or that the repair work will be evenly spread across the population.

Our polling and focus groups make clear that parents are deeply worried about this situation, and have a firm idea of what they believe should be done. Fortunately, this parental instinct also chimes with the available evidence, both about the damage done by the pandemic and about how to help children catch up: the priority should be on maths and other core subjects, and the catch-up programme should involve the expansion of time spent in school and the provision of high-quality tutoring, given the evidence that both of these (and in particular tutoring) can have highly effective outcomes.

> **‘There should also be careful monitoring throughout to see what is working best, and at what cost, to spread the lessons of success - and potentially use them to improve the functioning of the wider school system going forward’**

However, this should also be done in a way that does not simply add to the workload on teachers, or cause them to turn against such reforms. There should also be careful monitoring throughout to see what is working best, and at what cost, to spread the lessons of success - and potentially use them to improve the functioning of the wider school system going forward.

The last word goes to a father in Bolton who attended one of our focus groups – a section manager at a large DIY warehouse. He was a first-time Conservative voter living in Bolton North East (Tory majority, 378). He said that now was the time for teachers, and the education system more widely, to show what they can do. They’d done their best during lockdown, he said. But they now had a chance to fix the problem which threatened to blight his daughter’s education and frustrate her ambition to go university. ‘Now’s their time to shine,’ he said. ‘They have got to rescue our kids - and make sure they do catch up.’

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