



# School attendance since September

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Briefing

December 2020

## Contents

Foreword by the Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield .....	2
Executive summary .....	4
Main findings .....	7
The scale of Covid-19 among pupils in school .....	7
Attendance rates.....	10
Total days of missed classroom learning .....	12
Methodology .....	19
Weekly attendance .....	19
Total days of missed classroom learning .....	19

## Foreword by the Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield

Today I am publishing new analysis of what has happened in schools since they reopened in September. It shows that in a challenging context of increasing community transmission and resources being stretched, schools have done remarkably well so that children get an education, while also limiting the risks from Covid-19.

This term children are on track to miss an average of 5 days of classroom learning because of Covid-19, and in the worst affected areas it stands at just under 10 days. But in the spring and summer terms of 2020, children lost an average of 65 days of classroom learning. Compared to that, this term has been a huge success for children’s learning and development.



It’s true that cases of Covid-19 are now rising again among children, but they are rising among *all* age groups following the end of the second lockdown. And before that, cases among children were *falling* – while schools stayed open. We should also recognise that only a small proportion of the children missing school as a result of Covid-19 actually have it. The pupils reported by schools to have a confirmed case of Covid-19 account for only 2.4% of all Covid-related absence, and only 0.2% of a school population of 8 million.

On top of that, all of the UK Chief Medical Officers have stated that children are better off in school, and the risks to children from missing school are higher than the risks they face from Covid-19. The World Health Organization has said schools are not significant drivers of Covid-19 transmission, and that closing schools leads to serious adverse consequences: educational, social, psychological and physical.

This report shows that a one-week delay to the start of the January term would effectively double the average amount of classroom learning children have missed since September, and a two-week delay would triple it. But there would also be many other consequences for children, especially the most disadvantaged.

I have long said that schools should be the last to close, and the World Health Organization agrees. It would be completely wrong to order schools to close schools now or in January, especially while allowing gyms or shops to stay open. It is a conscious choice, not a forced inevitability, to close schools – and a choice where society decides that children are less important.

None of this is to deny that Covid-19 has put massive pressure on some schools, especially in areas of high transmission. I and my office often speak to teachers and pupils to understand these challenges, and I’m fully aware how tirelessly teachers have worked to keep schools running.

I’m most concerned about schools in the worst-hit local areas which are getting a ‘quadruple hit’: significant disruption to attendance, increased costs of supply teachers, on top of poorer educational outcomes before the pandemic, as well as poverty and economic deprivation. I want to see much more support for these schools and their pupils. Schools need more funding to bring in supply teachers and other staff, as well as mass testing and priority vaccine access for teachers. And looking ahead to the summer, the children in these schools need an exams system which recognises how they have been disadvantaged and takes steps to correct that.

And finally, as Christmas approaches, I can understand if some parents feel they would rather keep their children at home this week because they want to meet relatives and grandparents without worrying about infecting them.

These are all valid issues, but I believe they can be managed without closing schools altogether, if we put enough will and resources into it. So instead of talking about closing schools, let's recognise how successful schools have been at providing education and creating what children tell me is "some kind of normality", in the most challenging circumstances. It beggars belief that we could now decide to undo all this progress. We need to protect it, build on it and ask what the rest of society can learn from schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Longfield." followed by a horizontal line underneath.

**Anne Longfield OBE**  
**Children's Commissioner for England**

## Executive summary

In March 2020 schools across England closed for nearly all pupils. Those allowed to attend rarely did, and even a partial re-opening of schools in July saw a peak school attendance of just 17.5%. By the time schools re-opened in September, 575 million days of school had been missed by children in England. The impact on children – particularly those without the [technology](#), [space](#) and support at home to learn remotely – was enormous.

Since September, the overwhelming majority of children have returned to school, as outlined in a previous [briefing](#) from the Children’s Commissioner. Attendance rose throughout September, plateaued during October, dropped slightly in early November, and now appears to have levelled out again. While the numbers out of school are greater than at this time last year, they are tiny compared to Summer Term 2020.

Perhaps most importantly, most children are happy and excited to be back to school, as demonstrated by our [survey](#) of 1,500 children in September. If anything, they are most likely to be worried how to catch up on the education they have missed.

Despite this, the continued opening of schools remains contentious. Some have called for all schools to be closed on the basis that the virus is ‘running riot’ through schools and posing an unacceptable risk to staff. Others have argued that closing schools is necessary to suppress the virus to enable the wider opening of the economy, in particular pubs and restaurants. Others have argued that school attendance has ‘collapsed’ to such a point that the continued opening of schools to all children was not viable. Some are now arguing for the Christmas holiday to be extended to delay the start term in January.

The evidence we have analysed for this briefing does not support these conclusions. Instead, we find the reopening of schools to have been highly successful and that, given the increasing prevalence of Covid-19 in the community, schools have done a remarkable job in limiting transmission. Keeping schools closed for longer in January would also be a mistake – sacrificing children’s learning and wellbeing in order to prioritise other sectors of society such as gyms and shops. It would also be a choice rather than an inevitability, and one that does not put children first.

Our top findings are:

**1) Cases in school remain rare in the context of the numbers of schools open and children attending**

There are 17,000 children (0.2% of pupils) off school with a confirmed case of Covid-19, out of a school population of over 8 million children. The latest data from Public Health England shows that in the most recent week less than 1 in 100 schools had a confirmed “outbreak” – defined as two or more cases linked to the school.<sup>1</sup>

**2) Very few of the children missing school because of Covid-19 actually have it**

While the data shows that 690,000 children are absent from school for reasons related to Covid-19, only 2.4% of these children are reported by schools to have a confirmed case of Covid-19. By contrast, 86% of this group – over 590,000 children – are self-isolating because they may have been in contact with someone else who has Covid-19. This means that on average, for each pupil with a confirmed case of Covid-19, an additional 35 pupils are self-isolating. Of the 690,000 a further 8% of this group – some 53,000 children – are unable to attend because their school has had to close (most likely because of staffing issues or other logistical challenges caused by Covid-19).

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [PHE Influenza Surveillance graphs, Week 50](#)

**3) Some local areas with high rates of Covid-19 in the community are still managing to achieve high rates of school attendance**

Many local authorities have similar rates of Covid-19 transmission but quite different rates of school attendance, and vice versa. Furthermore, 3 in 4 local authorities with a local case rate of 250 per 100,000 (the national peak case rate in the second wave) have been able to achieve an attendance rate above 80%. In the most recent week for which we can report this (3 December), this was the following local authorities: Blackburn with Darwen, Redbridge, Lincolnshire, Barking and Dagenham, Hartlepool and Leicester.

**4) A one-week delay to the start of the January term would on average double the total amount of missed classroom learning due to Covid-19 since September.**

Across England as a whole, children are on track to miss around 5 days of classroom learning this term because of Covid-19, on top of an average of 65 days earlier in the year. Closing schools for a week, or delaying the start of the January term, would mean all children losing an additional 5 days of classroom learning, thereby doubling the average level of disruption. A two-week closure or delay would triple the disruption.

**5) But there are some pockets of the country struggling with multiple issues, and where real support needs to be focussed. These areas are facing a ‘quadruple disadvantage’:**

- (a) Higher rates of educational disruption this term due to more days of missed classroom learning
- (b) Long-term issues of entrenched educational disadvantage and poor educational outcomes
- (c) High rates of economic deprivation and pupils eligible for free school meals. Pupils in these are more likely to be disproportionately disadvantaged by school closures due to issue of digital access, space to work and support at home.<sup>2</sup>
- (d) Increased costs for schools due to Covid-19, especially in terms of supply teachers, meaning less resources available to invest in catching up

However, while there are important challenges facing many schools, these can – and should – be addressed without having to close schools, if the will and the resources are there.

The Children’s Commissioner is calling for:

- > The Government to maintain its policy of keeping all schools open, and for all local and regional leaders to support this approach.
- > Further financial support to high-affected areas to help keep schools open and mitigate against learning loss.
  - > No child should be sent home due to a lack of funding, and no school should be punished for doing everything it can to stay open.
  - > Where schools have had to use their ‘catch-up’ funding to pay for ongoing costs caused by Covid-19, this funding must be replenished by government. The Department for Education has been too slow in providing this reassurance to schools and it remains unclear how what support is available this term, or what additional funding will be available next term.

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<sup>2</sup> For a summary of this evidence see <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/cco-childhood-in-the-time-of-covid.pdf>

- > Schools to receive mass testing, and teachers and other school staff to be included within the priority groups for access to the vaccine. Both of these measures should focus on the areas of the greatest educational disruption due to Covid-19 and the highest rates of transmission.
- > Reform of the 2021 examinations system to include specific mitigations that address the increased learning loss for those children in areas which have been most affected by Covid-19.

## Main findings

Since very shortly after the beginning of lockdown in March, the Department for Education have collected and published [statistics on attendance in education and early years settings](#) based on daily survey returns from schools. These statistics have so far only shown attendance and other measures at a national level, giving a detailed picture of [how many children were off school and why](#). However, since these statistics were first published, the path and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has become increasingly local, with most public health measures administered on a local level (i.e. the tier system) using local statistics (such as the number of confirmed cases). At the same time, information on how schools have fared at a local level has mainly come from individual local authorities releasing a single day of data.<sup>3</sup>

The latest release from the Department for Education means that we can, for the first time, provide a representative look at local variation in Covid-19 in schools, attendance and the overall impact on children's time in school. There are important limitations to this data – it only provides estimates for reporting schools, and the schools that do not respond may be quite different from those that do. For statistical reasons, data is not analysed for the two weeks during which *any* schools were on half-term, even though each individual school would only have been off for a week. Nonetheless, it remains more rigorous and representative than individual reports of local authorities.

In addition to this newly public data from DfE, the Children's Commissioner's Office has used its [unique data gathering powers](#) to publish provisional estimates of missed classroom learning at a local authority level due to the impact Covid-19 has had on attendance. This enables us to understand the different levels of in-person learning that students will have going into exams and how this disruption correlates with other forms of inequality. [Download and view the data here](#).

## The scale of Covid-19 among pupils in school

### 1) Cases in school remain rare in the context of the numbers of schools open and children attending

Nationally, the number of pupils isolating from open state-funded schools with confirmed cases of Covid-19 peaked in late November at 18,500 or 0.2% of pupils on-roll. It now stands at 17,000 (again roughly 0.2%) as the rate of Covid-19 has fallen among children.

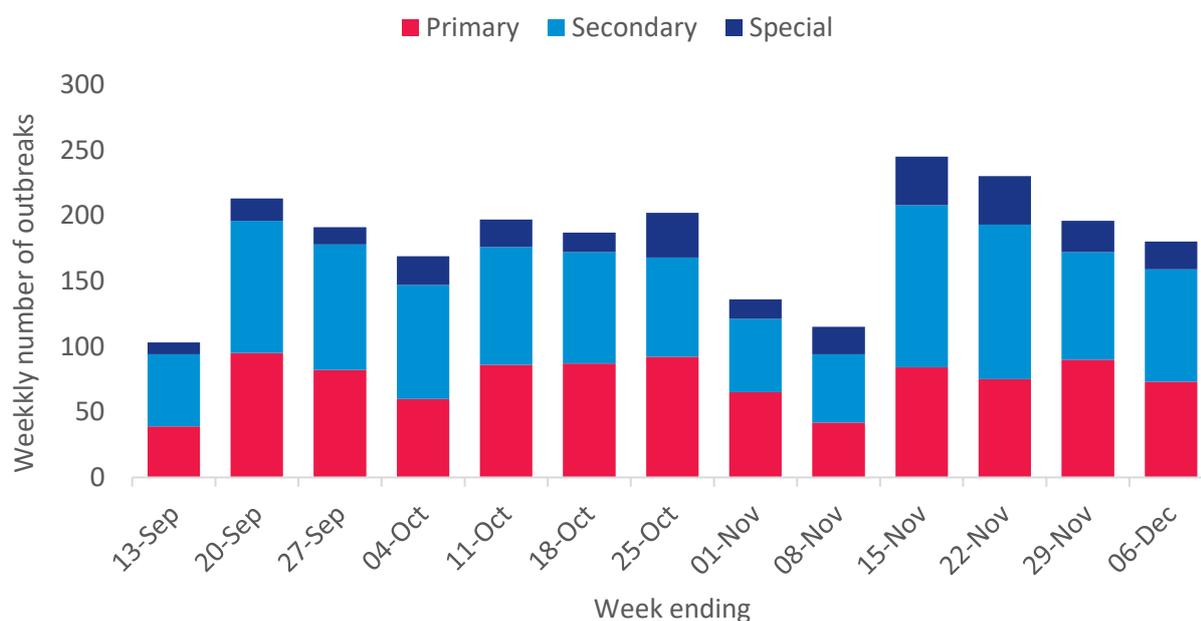
There are local authorities with much higher rates of Covid-19 among pupils – for example Havering recorded a rate roughly 4 times higher than the national average on December 10<sup>th</sup> – but even then, the worst local authority in the worst week recorded a rate of 0.8% of pupils on-roll. In every week since DfE began collecting data, at least some local authorities have reported no children isolating with a confirmed case of Covid-19. In the week that cases in schools peaked (November 26<sup>th</sup>) there were 5 authorities with no confirmed cases among pupils whatsoever.

The latest data from Public Health England shows that “outbreaks” in schools – defined as two or more confirmed cases within a school – are relatively rare compared the number of schools. The latest level is now back to where it was around the beginning term – around 200 outbreaks or so per week (see Figure 1 below). In the context of just over 24,000 schools, this works out to a weekly rate of less than 1 in 100 schools which report an outbreak.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/17/one-in-four-hull-children-absent-from-school-as-covid-cases-soar>

Figure 1: Weekly number of Covid-19 outbreaks in educational settings<sup>4</sup>



## 2) Very few of the children missing school because of Covid-19 actually have it

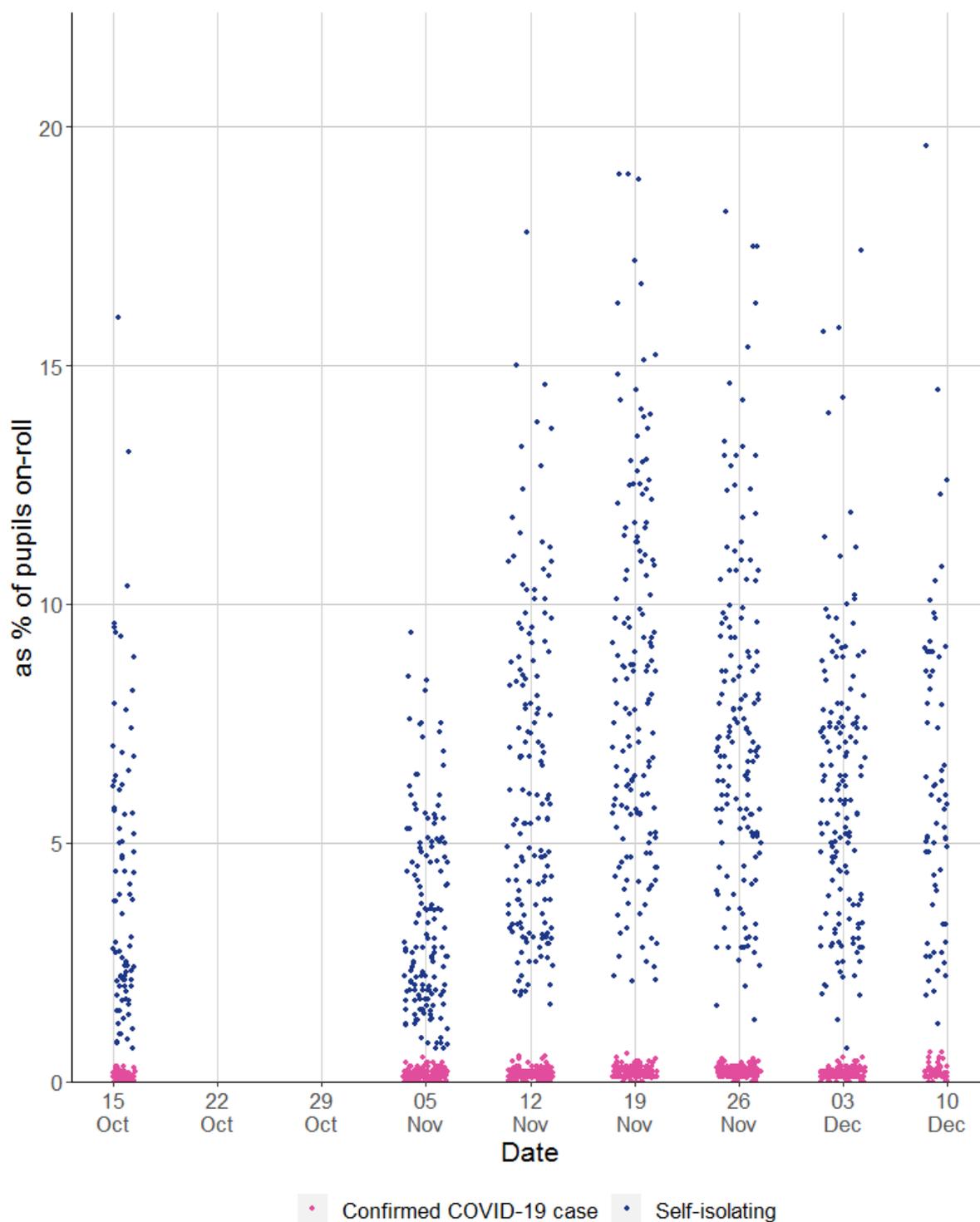
Although 17,000 children (0.2% of pupils on-roll in state-funded schools) were missing school due to confirmed cases of Covid-19, up to<sup>5</sup> 690,000 (8.4%) were off school altogether last Thursday for reasons directly attributable to Covid-19. This means that pupils reported to have a confirmed case of Covid-19 account for only 2.4% of all Covid-related pupil absence.

Figure 2 (on the following page) shows the overall estimated proportion of children self-isolating from open schools (in blue) and the proportion self-isolating with a confirmed case (pink), with each point representing a local authority. Even when there are local authorities recording very high rates of self-isolating students, the rate of confirmed cases remains low. For example, on November 19<sup>th</sup> up to 19% of pupils in the East Riding of Yorkshire were self-isolating, but only 0.3% were doing so with a confirmed case.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [PHE Influenza Surveillance graphs, Week 50](#)

<sup>5</sup> The total number of pupils off school for COVID-19 related reasons is reported as an upper and lower estimate, as there is possible double counting in the number of students self-isolating. This analysis uses the former, as even the upper estimate [fails to account for the full difference in pre- and post-pandemic attendance](#).

Figure 2: Weekly rates of pupils with confirmed Covid-19 cases and pupils self-isolating due to potential contact with a case,<sup>6</sup> by Local Authority<sup>7</sup>

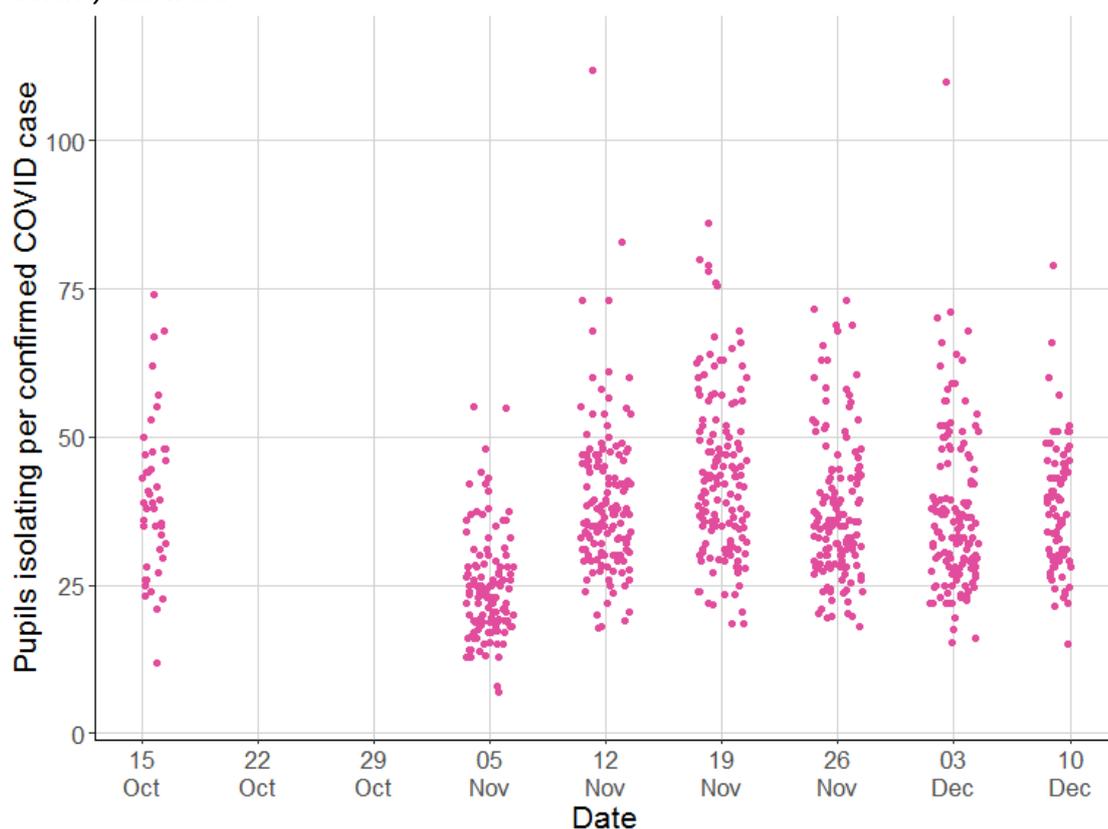


<sup>6</sup> The rate of self-isolating pupils used is the upper estimate provided by DfE, equal to the sum of students isolating due to a confirmed or suspected Covid-19 case, or due to contact with a confirmed case inside or outside the setting.

<sup>7</sup> As the rate of confirmed Covid-19 cases in each LA is rounded to the nearest tenth of a percentage point, a small amount of “jitter” has been added to each point to make densities easier to understand at low levels of prevalence.

Therefore, one of the main drivers of attendance is less so the proportion of pupils with Covid-19 in schools, and more likely how schools respond to cases. Different approaches to bubbles, contact tracing and isolation lead to big differences across local areas, as shown by Figure 3 below. Each point represents the number of children self-isolating per confirmed case in schools. While, in most local authority areas, schools are sending home between 25 and 50 pupils per confirmed case, in other areas schools are sending home far more with instances of over 100 pupils isolating per confirmed case.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 3: Average number of pupils self-isolating per pupil with confirmed case of Covid-19, by Local Authority and week<sup>9</sup>



## Attendance rates

Nationally, attendance has been remarkably stable since term began in September. School attendance has mirrored the path of Covid-19 rates. Attendance rose gradually over September when infections were low, plateaued in October as the second wave began, fell in the weeks following half-term as England went into a second lockdown and has risen since as the second wave has ebbed. However, attendance has been remarkably stable overall: all of this variation has occurred within a small band between 80% and 90%.

Just as the path of Covid-19 has varied by local area, so has the path of school attendance rates. This local variation means that even in the weeks where the national attendance rate was at its lowest, the

<sup>8</sup> Any individual instance of a higher number of isolating children per confirmed case could in fact reflect a data error or the specific timings of confirmation and isolation, rather than the decision-making of the schools and public health teams.

<sup>9</sup> Any local authority with zero confirmed cases among pupils is excluded from this graph (because the ratio of isolating pupils to confirmed cases is infinite).

overwhelming majority of local areas had attendance above 80%. On 19 November, this was 75% of local authorities, and last Thursday (10 December), it was 87% of local authorities.

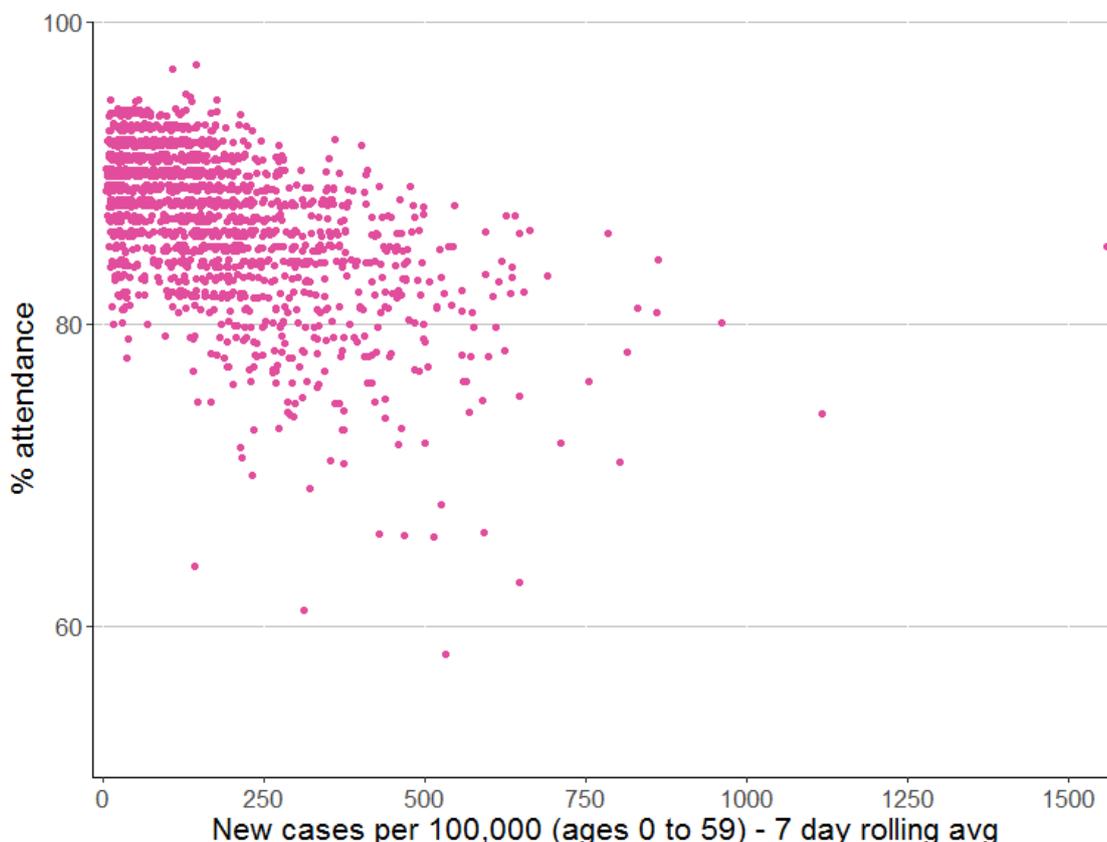
### 3) Some local areas with high rates of Covid-19 in the community are still managing to achieve high rates of school attendance

In the same way that the national attendance rate has moved with the level of Covid-19 in the community, attendance at a local level is associated with the local rate of Covid-19 cases. Figure 4 (below) shows the relationship between local school attendance and the local rate of Covid-19 cases, where each point is a local authority in any given week. Overall, a higher rate of local cases is associated with lower school attendance, but relationship is quite weak and fuzzy. Many local authorities have similar rates of Covid-19 cases but vastly different school attendance rates, and vice versa.

Furthermore, many local areas have seen attendance rates above 80% despite relatively high levels of local cases. Of the local authorities with case rates above 250 per 100,000 (roughly the peak national case rate during the second wave), 76% have an attendance rate above 80% – these are the points towards the top right of Figure 4. On 3 December, this was the following local authorities: Blackburn with Darwen, Redbridge, Lincolnshire, Barking and Dagenham, Hartlepool and Leicester.

This shows that, while Government should be acting to keep community infections low to protect schools, schools *can* operate even in a context of high community infection rates with enough support.

Figure 4: Local authority attendance rate compared to community case rates



Note: this graph combines all LAs across all weeks for which both attendance rates and community case rates are available, which is why there are more points than there are LAs in England Data on new cases by specimen date from [coronavirus.data.gov.uk](https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk), 10th December is not included due to lags in reporting.

## Total days of missed classroom learning

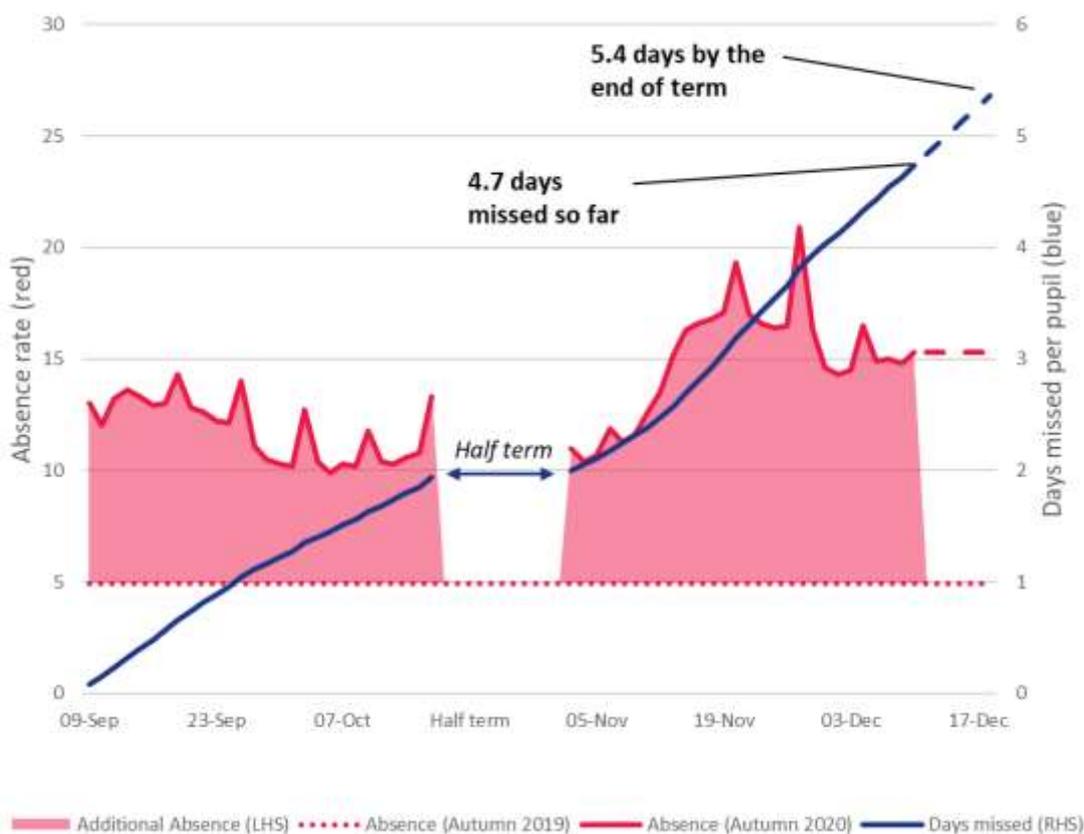
### 4) A one-week delay to the start of the January term would on average double the total amount of missed classroom learning due to Covid-19 since September

School attendance is much higher than it was before the summer holidays – during the Summer term it peaked at 17.5% - but is lower than during the autumn term in previous years. Every day that attendance is lower than it would otherwise be means some children missing out on classroom learning.

As shown in Figure 5 (below), the rate of absence in Autumn 2019 (the red solid line) has been higher than the Autumn 2019 average (the red dotted line) every day of term so far – last year overall absence averaged just under 5% while this term it has not dropped below 10%. The shaded red area in between the two lines represents the proportion of additional children who are missing out on a day of classroom learning. The blue line represents the running total of days in school missed per pupil due to lower attendance this term.

On average, a total of 4.7 days per pupil has been missed so far (as of December 10<sup>th</sup>) and that number is projected to reach 5.4 by the end of term (assuming attendance stays at the current rate). The more schools close and the lower the rate of attendance, the faster the days of classroom learning per pupil missed will increase.

Figure 5: Additional absence and days of missed classroom learning in Autumn 2020<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Additional absence is calculated as the rate of absence in 2020 (100% minus the attendance rate) minus the overall absence rate in Autumn 2019. The days of lost face-to-face learning per pupil are then the cumulative sum of the rate of absence. Projections are based on assuming that the attendance figures for December 10<sup>th</sup> persist for the last week.

A national week-long delay to the start of the January term would mean an additional 5 days of lost classroom learning for all pupils, while a two-week delay would mean 10 days of missed classroom learning. These measures would therefore see the total amount of classroom learning that children have missed since September (due to Covid-19) being doubled or tripled respectively.

National-level averages do not show the local variation in days of missed classroom learning. Figure 6 (below) shows that every local authority in England has seen at least some disruption to classroom learning, but the amounts per pupil differ considerably. While most areas (59%) have lost less than 5 days of classroom schooling so far, other areas have lost almost twice as much. At the highest end of the scale, local authorities have seen around 10 days of missed classroom learning per pupil, equivalent to two full weeks of school.

Figure 6: Distribution of days of missed classroom learning, by Local authority



Table 3 (below) lists the ten local authorities with the highest rates of missed classroom schooling due to Covid-19 since September (the right tail on Figure 6, above). The full list is available [in the accompanying dataset](#).

*Table 3: 10 local authorities with highest levels of missed classroom schooling since September*

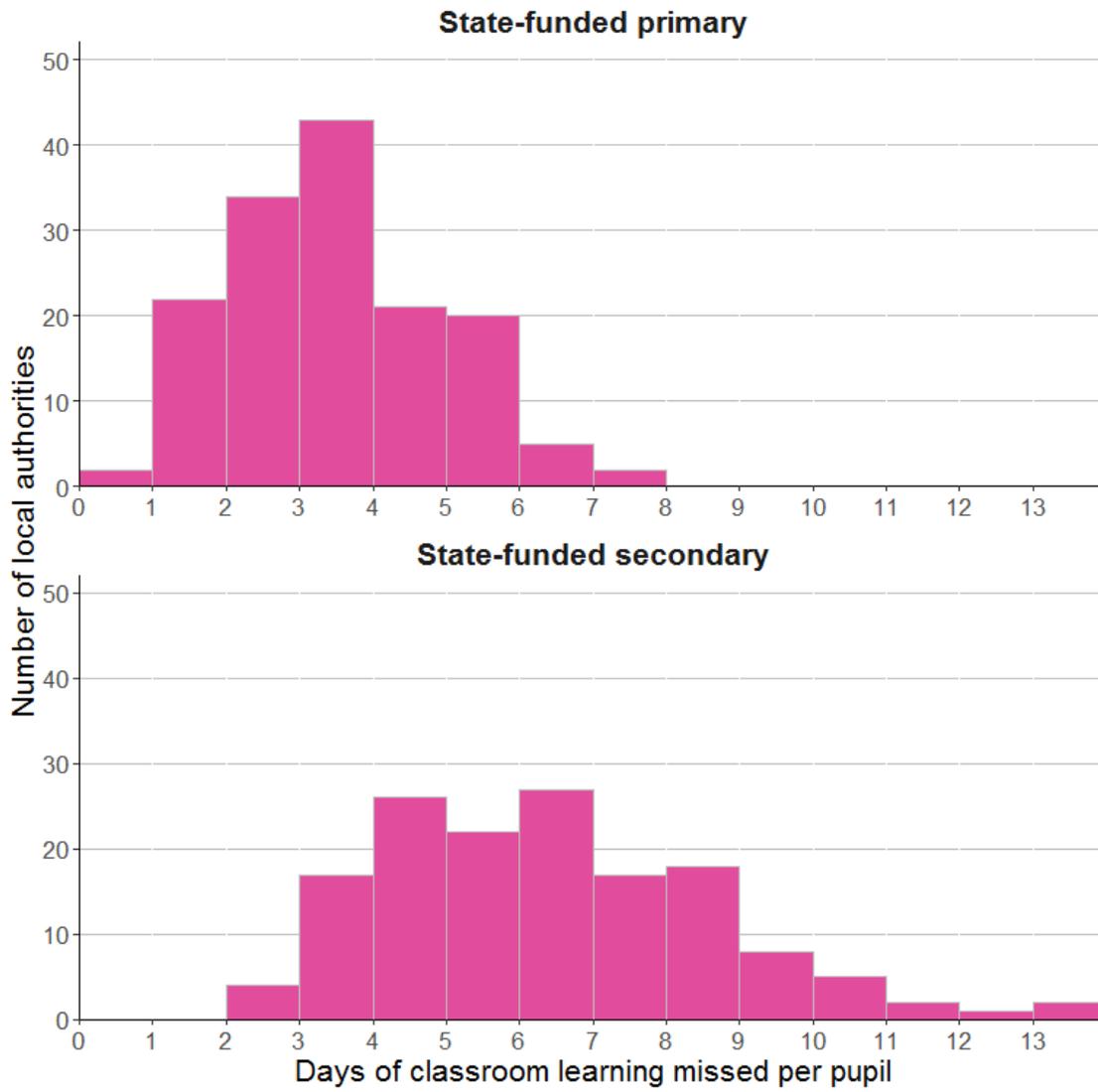
Local authority	Total days of missed classroom learning per pupil
<b>Sandwell</b>	<b>9.6</b>
<b>Oldham</b>	<b>9.2</b>
<b>Rochdale</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>Tower Hamlets</b>	<b>8.5</b>
<b>Medway</b>	<b>8.1</b>
<b>Leicester</b>	<b>8.0</b>
<b>Birmingham</b>	<b>7.9</b>
<b>Bolton</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Bradford</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Kingston Upon Hull, City of</b>	<b>7.7</b>
<b><i>National average</i></b>	<b><i>4.7</i></b>

Secondary schools have generally seen greater disruption to classroom learning than primary schools as attendance at a secondary level has been lower. State-funded secondary schools have seen an average of 6.3 days of classroom learning missed per pupil, compared to 3.5 days for primary schools.<sup>11</sup> Significantly for pupils facing exams in the summer, the distribution of missed classroom schooling is much wider for secondary than for primary schools, with some local areas (a similar group to Table 3, above) seeing two full weeks or more of in-person schooling missed per pupil while others see less than a week.

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<sup>11</sup> These figures are not available in the downloadable data accompanying this briefing, and are constructed by taking the mean of local authority-level estimates using public figures on the number of pupils by LA and phase as weights (from the Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2019/20)

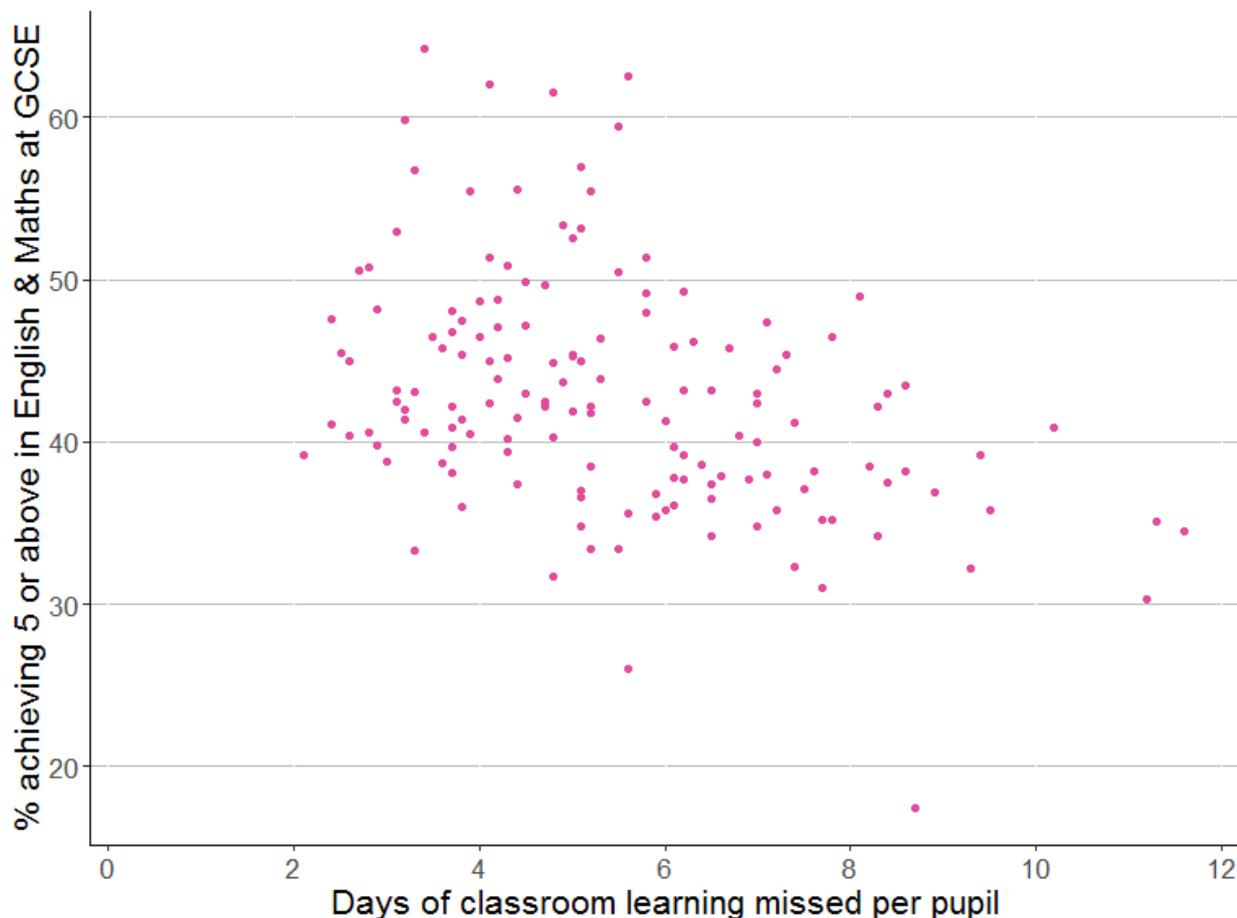
Figure 7: Distribution of total days missed classroom learning, by local authority and Phase



5) There are some pockets of the country struggling with multiple issues, and where real support needs to be focused. These areas are facing a 'quadruple disadvantage' of high disruption, low pre-existing attainment, high economic deprivation and high costs for schools.

The disruption to schooling has been larger in local areas that already had lower rates of attainment. Figure 8 (below) shows relationship between the percentage of pupils who achieved a 5 or above in both Maths and English at GCSE and the number of days lost per pupil. It shows a slight negative relationship between the two numbers at the local authority level, meaning that areas with lower attainment were more likely to see lower attendance relative to Autumn 2019.

Figure 8: Missed classroom learning at secondary schools vs. GCSE attainment, by local authority



It is also the case that level of disruption to schooling educational has been higher in local areas that are more deprived. Figure 9 (below) compares days of missed classroom learning to Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility. It shows that local authorities with a higher proportion of pupils eligible for FSM have seen more days of classroom learning missed.

Figure 9: Missed classroom learning vs. FSM eligibility, by local authority

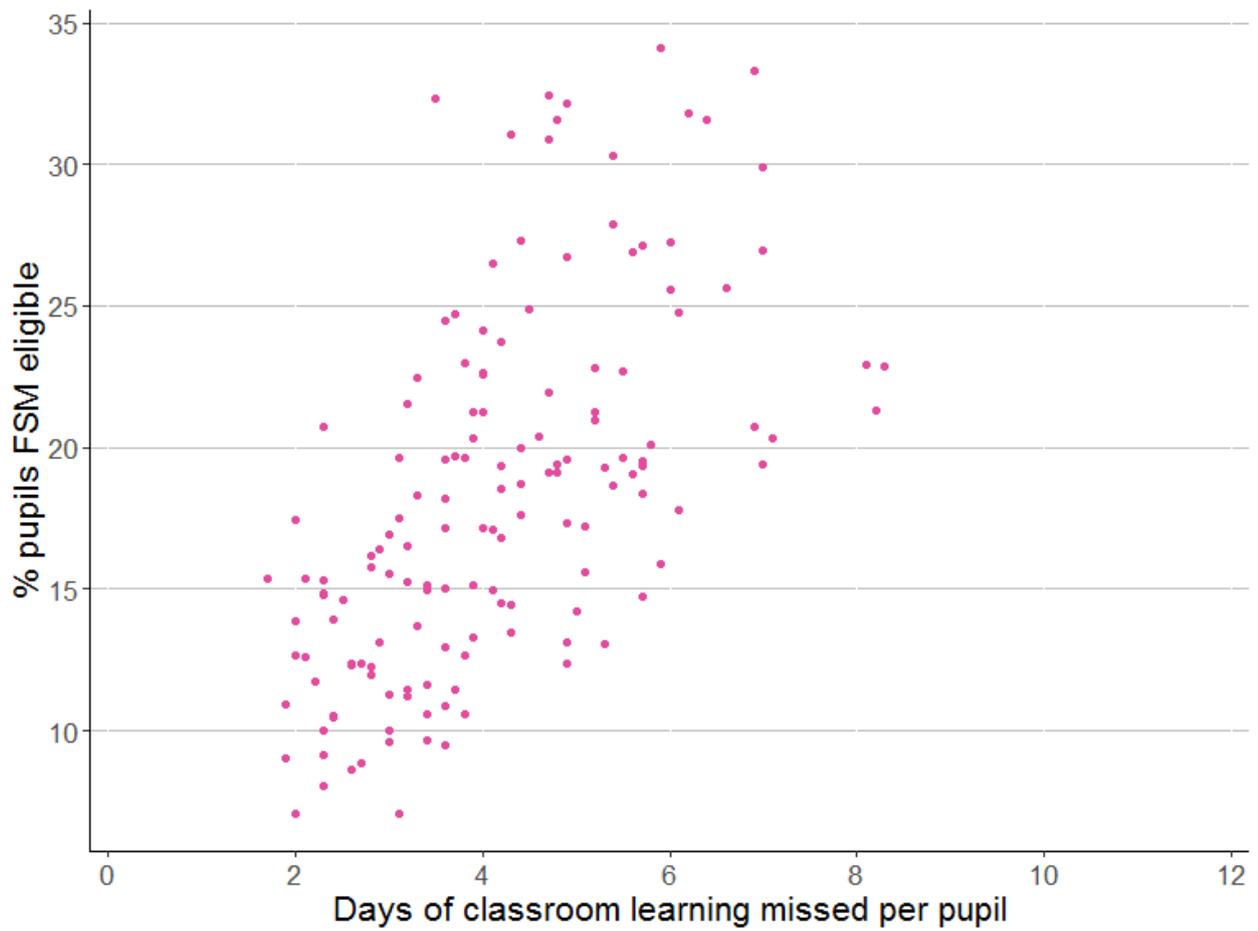


Table 4 (below) shows the same 10 local authorities as in Table 3 alongside information on GCSE attainment and FSM eligibility. The table confirms that these local areas, which will be most disadvantaged going into exams next summer, tend to already have below-average rates of GCSE passes and above-average rates of FSM eligibility.

*Table 4: Educational and economic deprivation in local authorities with highest total levels of missed classroom learning*

Local Authority	Days of missed classroom learning per pupil	% achieving 5 or above in English & Maths at GCSE	% FSM eligible
<b>Sandwell</b>	8.3	30.3	<b>22.9</b>
<b>Oldham</b>	8.2	35.1	<b>21.3</b>
<b>Rochdale</b>	8.1	34.5	<b>22.9</b>
<b>Bolton</b>	7.1	40.9	<b>20.3</b>
<b>Birmingham</b>	7.0	42.2	<b>29.9</b>
<b>Leicester</b>	7.0	36.9	<b>19.4</b>
<b>Liverpool</b>	7.0	35.8	<b>26.9</b>
<b>Bradford</b>	6.9	34.2	<b>20.7</b>
<b>Tower Hamlets</b>	6.9	45.4	<b>33.3</b>
<b>Kingston Upon Hull, City of</b>	6.6	32.2	<b>25.7</b>
<b>National average</b>	4.7	43.0	<b>17.3</b>

It is important to note that all of these comparisons of missed classroom learning focus on average disruption at the local authority level. However, there will also be substantial variation in attendance across schools within a local area, and also across pupils within a school. Some schools have children that may have spent significantly more time at home self-isolating than the numbers reported here.

Further comparisons of the rate of missed classroom learning and measures of childhood vulnerability can be done using the CCO's [CHILDREN](#) app.

## Methodology

### Weekly attendance

This analysis is based primarily on the Department for Education's [official release](#) on attendance in education settings during the Covid-19 outbreak. The official figures are used to explore recent variation and trends in attendance by local authority, and how attendance figures have interacted with community cases of Covid-19.

The official release provides weekly estimates of the number of children in attendance at state-funded schools for each local authority on a Thursday, including specific estimates for the number of children with an EHCP and the number of children with a social worker in attendance. The data is based on daily returns from a survey of all state-funded education settings, but only data for state-funded schools is reported.

The period covered by official statistics is from September 9<sup>th</sup> to December 10<sup>th</sup>, excluding the two weeks during which any schools were on half term and the first day of the following week (October 19<sup>th</sup> to October 30<sup>th</sup>, and November 2<sup>nd</sup>). As academies are not required to follow half-term dates for their local authorities, and because local authority half terms occur on different dates, these weeks use alternative non-response adjustments and have therefore been excluded from this analysis.

Greater detail on the methodology used to produce the DfE's attendance statistics is available [here](#), and the data itself is available for download [here](#).

Figures for the local community case rate are taken from the underlying data on age demographic of cases by specimen date from [coronavirus.data.gov.uk](#). This data is ultimately collected by Public Health England and gives the number of cases by specimen date for each local area on a daily basis. For this analysis, the 7-day rolling rate of cases per 100,000 for adults aged 0 to 59 in each local authority on the Thursday of each week is taken as a measure of local community infection.

### Total days of missed classroom learning

In addition to a detailed analysis of the DfE's published school attendance data, this paper uses the underlying data returns from the attendance survey to estimate cumulative days of missed face-to-face schooling for each local authority and phase. This data is available to the Children's Commissioner due to the office's [unique data gathering powers](#), but parts of the underlying data it is based on (specifically daily estimates of attendance for local authorities) have not yet been published by the DfE.

The processing of these daily returns mirrors as closely as possible the [methodology](#) used by DfE to produce their official statistics (including non-response adjustments by school type), and in part uses interim calculations by the DfE directly. However, there may be small differences in the figures due to different methodological choices. This also means that caveats that apply to published DfE figures also apply to these figures, including the fact that attendance rates based on the September form may be an over-estimate as schools were also reporting attendance for school-based nurseries.

We have only used our own processing of unpublished data where there is no comparable, usable data from the DfE yet published, specifically on *daily* attendance by LA and phase and what that means for missed classroom schooling. By contrast, the statistics officially released only show attendance (and other statistics) for the Thursday of each week, the average of which would give a less accurate estimate of missed classroom learning. However, in the event that these figures are published by DfE in the future, those should be considered the point of reference due to their classification as official statistics.

Estimates of average attendance (and by extension average absence) between September 9<sup>th</sup> and December 10<sup>th</sup> are calculated by first calculating daily ungrossed figures for each type of state-funded school in each Local Authority. Attendance is only calculated for weekdays excluding weeks during half term. Then the average of these figures over the entire period is taken by local authority. This ensures the figures are not skewed by changing response rates by phase or specific day (attendance is systematically lower on Fridays and in secondary schools, for example).

A number of specific adjustments are made to ensure the figures presented are an accurate reflection on the underlying data. The Isles of Scilly and the City of London have been removed from calculations, as they have a very small number of schools and are therefore disproportionately affected by changes in response rate. A clear note has been placed on individual LAs with response rate <50%, but all figures should be interpreted carefully with respect to their response rate. The DfE has previously tested for any systematic differences in attendance rates between responding and non-responding schools and found no significant difference, but this has not been done at a local authority-specific level.

The calculations for missed classroom schooling undertaken in this paper are very simple and based only on school-level rather than pupil-level data. Missed classroom schooling due to COVID-19 is defined as the number of additional days of classroom schooling per pupil due to absence relative to what would be expected in a “normal” year. This is done firstly by calculating average absence for each local authority over the course of the Autumn term, including the weeks before October 12<sup>th</sup> that are covered by the DfE official release. Secondly, a “normal” level of absence is assumed, based on overall absence rates by local authority from the DfE release on [absence in the Autumn 2019 term](#).

These missed schooling figures should be taken as highly provisional, early estimates based on a source of data that will be superseded when pupil-level data is made available and more detailed analysis undertaken. The following caveats should be kept in mind when interpreting this data:

- > Attendance estimates include 4-year olds in reception (up until October 12<sup>th</sup>), 16-year olds in year 11 and all students in sixth forms. Pupils on roll in alternative provision (who have a higher than average absence rate) are included in our attendance estimates, but excluded from the 2018/19 overall absence rates.
- > Potential days of learning lost before 9<sup>th</sup> September, or during half term (October 19<sup>th</sup> to October 30<sup>th</sup>) or on November 2<sup>nd</sup> are excluded from the calculations. During these periods, many schools were open and many children were told to self-isolate, meaning schooling was missed that this methodology does not account for.
- > Distribution of pupil-level learning loss may be much wider than at the local authority level.
- > Estimates are based only on responding schools, and therefore may be misleading if there are systematic differences between non-responding and responding schools (see above)
- > INSET days are treated as absences in this data, when in reality they do not reflect any missed schooling for children. However, this bias is likely to partially offset (or be partially offset by) the exclusion of half-term and early schooling figures.

The estimated absence rate since 9<sup>th</sup> September and days of learning loss per pupil for each local authority are [available to download](#).

Levels of local learning loss are compared to GCSE results and FSM eligibility at the local authority level. Figures for GCSE results are taken from the underlying data in the DfE’s [statistics on Key stage 4 performance in 2019](#). The numbers used are the percentage of students in state-funded schools in each LA achieving English and Maths at grade 5 or above. Figures for FSM eligibility are taken from the [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#) release for the academic year 2019/20.



Children's Commissioner for England  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330  
Email: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)  
Visit: [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)  
Twitter: @ChildrensComm