

2021 Summer Schools: Compensating for learning loss?

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Executive Summary

Question: The Department for Education considered a summer school programme in 2020. This briefing assesses the merits of revisiting the policy.

Issue: Educational achievement and wellbeing are being compromised by Covid-19 related disruption. This disproportionately affects disadvantaged pupils, undermining progress towards departmental priorities and manifesto commitments.

Recommendation: The DfE should establish a non-mandatory grant-funded summer programme run by schools and VCSE organisations.

Context

Academic learning loss

The Sutton Trust estimates that the cost of covid related learning loss among the 2019-20 GCSE cohort will total £1.1 billion to students, and £621 million to the exchequerⁱ.

Emerging data suggests that the true extent of learning loss has been underestimated, with data from Year 7 pupils in October suggesting they were 22 months behind expectations in writingⁱⁱ. At primary school, year two pupils' are two months behind expectations in reading, and the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students is equivalent to seven monthsⁱⁱⁱ.

Wider impact

Average pupil wellbeing initially remained stable in the first lockdown but has declined markedly since June 2020. Averages mask important variation and levels of wellbeing are much lower among disadvantaged pupils.^{iv}

Mental health has also worsened. In July 2020, 16.0% of children aged 5 to 16 years were identified as having a probable mental disorder (compared to 10.8% in 2017)^v. More than half of 11- to 16-year-olds who have a probable mental disorder say that lockdown has made their life worse^{vi}.

Research has also shown:

- High levels of student disengagement^{vii}.
- Heightened parental concerns^{viii}.

Options

If current trends go un-checked, they will jeopardise the DfE's goal of closing the attainment gap and manifesto commitments around levelling up.

Potential responses include:

1. Additional school time during the academic year
2. Family support and home learning
3. Summer schools
4. No action

For brevity, this paper focuses on option three, taking into account politics, evidence and delivery. It reviews cost-effectiveness and compares this with alternative options.

Evidence

The impact of summer schools on learning

Summer schools can yield two months additional progress but impact varies. Intensive provision led by experienced teachers is most effective – with potential for four months progress^{ix}.

Programmes using 'traditional instruction' tend to impact on academic outcomes whereas 'experiential learning' programmes impact on socio-emotional skills. Effects in both areas are small^x.

An evaluation of a previous DfE summer programme found some impact on wellbeing, but limited improvement on academic attainment, perhaps because many schemes did not prioritise the latter^{xi}.

Any future should programme therefore specify a clear set of outcomes, as this will

determine programme design, evaluation and efficacy.

Impact on the attainment gap

Poorer pupils may particularly benefit from summer schools but some schemes fail to impact on the attainment gap because disadvantaged pupils are less likely to attend^{xii}. Consultation with young people could help shape schemes that are more attractive to target groups, particularly given high levels of reported boredom^{xiii}, their desire to see friends back at school^{iv} and reported appetite for summer activities^{xiv}.

Feasibility

The DfE abandoned a planned summer school policy in 2020 but three shifts favour the idea in 2021:

1. A likely underspend on the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and additional catch-up funding announced in the October 2020 budget;
2. A longer runway for planning;
3. Progress with vaccination.

Capacity

In 2020, 61% of teachers indicated willingness to work on a summer programme^{xv}. Importantly, the Voluntary, Community and Social-Enterprise (VCSE) sector has now demonstrated its potential to provide additional capacity (see case study).

School leaders’ capacity to organise provision would be a challenge. However, an early announcement would help, and 2020 consultations suggest enthusiasm among some Heads^{xvi}.

Cost effectiveness

The EEF describes summer schools as having “low impact for moderate cost, based on extensive evidence” (between £250 and £440 per student per week)^{xvii}. Total costs could be limited by focusing on left-behind areas and involving cheaper VCSE staff (teachers would still be required for academic impact). NTP underspend could also be reallocated.

The EEF considers additional learning time outside of summer holidays a cost-effective alternative, but reports similar levels of impact (two months). Given somewhat lower than expected uptake of the NTP and the logistical challenge of extending the school

day at scale fast, summer schools provide a promising short-term alternative.

Additional support for home learning might provide a cost-effective option which has been shown to have a similar degree of impact on reading^{xviii}. However, pupils have already spent considerable time at home, and this approach’s vulnerability to disparities in home learning environments could unintentionally widen gaps whilst failing to address social and emotional needs.

Funding for partnerships with VCSE organisations could have positive spill-over effects by reinforcing the DCMS’ current grant programme, which aims to shore up this vulnerable sector.

Case Study: Drawing on third sector capacity to support the return from lockdown

Learning through Landscapes (LtL) is a charity which received a £250k Heritage Emergency Fund grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund in July 2020.

This pilot project, “My School My Planet” helped children from disadvantaged ethnic groups and low socioeconomic backgrounds re-engage with learning after a lockdown.

LtL were able to mobilise rapidly, building partnerships with 49 schools across the UK and delivering 700 hours of in-school support to 1,029 6-13 year olds by November 2020. The fact that this scale of activity was successfully delivered in only four months, despite the summer holidays demonstrates the significant capacity the third sector could provide.

The pilot evaluation demonstrated impact on a number of key outcomes including pupil knowledge and levels of physical activity. The pilot was particularly successful in securing participation from disadvantaged pupils and ethnic groups as well as those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Public and sector appetite

Policies increasing teachers' time in school will face resistance from some quarters. However, as noted, attitudes among teachers are relatively positive thus far and organisations like Teach First have supported the idea^{xiii}. As this briefing notes, considerable capacity could also be mobilised at short notice by drawing on the third sector.

In terms of parental attitudes, a recent poll showed that 45% of parents supported *compulsory* summer schools,^{xix} but further consultation is needed on different options.

Overall, the main risks in relation to summer provision are linked to time-scales, underlining the need for an urgent decision.

Conclusion

Evidence regarding summer schools is inconclusive but provision may reduce attainment gaps and/or support pupil wellbeing when delivered in line with best practice and with a clear focus.

Subject to costing and equalities assessment, the DfE should:

1. Introduce a non-mandatory, grant-funded programme co-delivered by schools and VCSE organisations.
2. Grants should be contingent on best practice adherence.
3. Awardees should demonstrate a credible plan for recruiting disadvantaged pupils, prioritising opportunity areas.

ⁱ Halterbeck, M., Conlon, G., Patrignani, P., and Pritchard P., (2020), *Lost Learning, Lost Earnings* <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Lost-Learning-Lost-Earnings-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Christodoulou, D. (2020, October 30). *Baseline Secondary Writing: Have Year 7 pupils gone backwards?*, No More Marking, <https://blog.nomoremarking.com/baseline-secondary-writing-have-year-7-pupils-gone-backwards-5497ac10b894>

ⁱⁱⁱ Rose et al., (2020) Impact of school closures and subsequent support strategies on attainment and socio-emotional wellbeing in Key Stage 1: Interim Paper 1 https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Covid-19_Resources/Impact_of_school_closures_KS1_interim_findings_paper_-_Jan_2021.pdf

^{iv} ImpactEd (2021), *Lockdown Lessons Pupil learning and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic* <https://impacted.org.uk/covid-19>

^v NHS Digital (2021) *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020 Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey* https://files.digital.nhs.uk/AF/AECD6B/mhcyp_2020_rep_v2.pdf

^{vi} *ibid*

^{vii} Nelson, J. and Sharp, C. (2020). *Schools' responses to Covid-19: Key findings from the Wave 1 survey*. Slough: NFER

^{viii} Parentkind (2020). *5th Parent Coronavirus Survey Results - England Only*.

^{ix} Education Endowment Foundation (2019). *The Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Summer Schools*. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/summer-schools/>.

^x Kidron, Y., and Lindsay, J. (2014). *The effects of increased learning time on student academic and non-academic outcomes: Findings from a meta-analytic review* <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>

^{xi} Martin, K., Sharp, C., Day, L., Gardner, R., Mehta, P., & Cook, R. (2013). *Summer Schools Programme for Disadvantaged Pupils: Overview Report*. National Foundation for Educational Research.

^{xii} Mulcahy, E., Menzies, L., Shaw, B., (2020) *Can summer schools help disadvantaged pupils bounce back from lockdown?* <https://cfey.org/reports/2020/05/can-summer-schools-help-disadvantaged-pupils-bounce-back-from-covid/>
^{xiii} *ibid*

^{xiv} *Menzies (2020, Feb 12) Exams 2021: Young People Share their Views* <https://cfey.org/2021/02/exams-2021-young-people-share-their-views/>

^{xv} Teach First (2020, May 7) *Teach First calls for support for summer schools to close the COVID-19 attainment gap* <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/press-release/teach-first-calls-support-summer-schools-close-covid-19-attainment-gap>

^{xvi} Yeeles, P., Baars, S., Mulcahy, E., Shield, W., Mountford-Zimdars, A. (2020), *Assessing the early impact of school and college closures on students in England*. <https://cfey.org/reports/2020/06/assessing-the-early-impact-of-school-and-college-closures-on-students-in-england/>

^{xvii} Education Endowment Foundation (2019). *The Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Summer Schools*. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/summer-schools/>.

^{xviii} Kim, J. S., & Quinn, D. M. (2013). *The effects of summer reading on low-income children's literacy achievement from kindergarten to grade 8: A meta-analysis of classroom and home interventions*. Review of Educational Research, 83(3), 386-431

^{xix} *The Times* (2020, Feb 14), "No catch-up school, say 'red wall' mums — just let kids see their friends" <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/no-catch-up-school-say-red-wall-mums-just-let-kids-see-their-friends-wzfm6m97g>