

Foreword

“Lest we forget.” As a nation, England in 2020 ramped up its research on young people and the formal data requirements of schools – ranging from interviews and surveys of pupils and teachers to national submission of data on pupil absences. Researchers turned to the situations of young people and the issues being experienced by schools. Surveys were started, stats on school attendance were collected and, as young people returned to school, assessments were forensically examined for the patterns of loss and impact – we rightly sought understanding of the disruption to education, the impact on wellbeing and the pressured realities of schools. The findings of all studies in England converge on a single view of the disruption – while a few children benefited from the processes of remote learning and time in the home, the pattern of impact for the vast majority of the children in the country is negative, highly individualised and variable. This is the worst form of problem to respond to if you are a policy maker. It is fantastically hard to devise a means of supporting young people when the pattern of impact is so distributed and varied. The regional patterns in attainment emerging from the resumption of public exams indicates some systematic impact associated with deprivation, which we hope will enable government and agencies to consider how best to target support. The worry is that, as we try to resume “normality”, it would be all too easy to forget the experience of young people who were obliged not to attend school during the pandemic. Younger children entering primary school are likely to have experienced restricted social interactions and lack of participation in structured Early Years provision. Prior research tells us that we should not lapse into an “everything back to normal” sentiment and thus underestimate the long-term impact of any of these issues. But at least very young children have most of their compulsory education ahead of them, with more time to address issues of cognitive and social and emotional development. By contrast, those whose upper secondary education was adversely affected may have been unsuccessful in their efforts to progress to higher education or other destinations but now have no entitlement to continued fully funded education and training. This is the territory of “missing figures”, “forgotten third” and young people alienated from education and with little “voice”. It cannot be a “return to normal” in our support for any of these affected groups; they require us not to forget them. We need to research them for the purpose of **action** – to understand their circumstances and individual and collective experiences, and to put in place effective evidence-based support. And quickly.

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