Article

Impacts of the COVID-19 Control Measures on Widening Educational Inequalities

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Abstract

COVID-19 has resulted in a global public health crisis. Measures adopted by governments across the world to reduce transmission have resulted in the closure of educational institutions and workplaces and reduced social interaction. The aim of the article is to reflect on the consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic for the lives of young people from different social groups, with a special focus on education. It is a desk-based review of empirical research that has emerged in the wake of COVID-19 that has explored the impact of the control measures adopted, resulting in 'learning loss' and the widening of the 'learning gap' among students. The review shows that rather than utilizing the current situation to tackle pre-existing social inequalities in education, current debates often narrowly focus on immediate rather than long-term measures. The article calls for a broader research agenda on the short- and long-term compensatory measures needed to re-engage students, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Keywords

COVID-19 global pandemic, review, international research on Covid-19, educational inequality, learning gap

Introduction

The emergence of a novel coronavirus—now widely known as COVID-19—towards the end of 2019 and the control measures that were introduced to curb the spread of the virus have had a considerable impact on young people's lives in developed

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and developing countries, with both direct and indirect impacts on their education and well-being (Dreesen et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2021). Emerging research (for an overview, see Darmody et al., 2020) has made it increasingly evident that the ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the already existing socio-economic inequality and disparity across societies. The consequences of the current situation are particularly grave for individuals at the lower end of the income distribution, who are more vulnerable to the ever-changing circumstances. While different social groups face many common challenges brought about by the pandemic, the scale of the impact tends to be very different, as discussed later in the article.

Much of the current debate has focused on the situation of children and young people, especially in relation to their disrupted education and what learning loss may mean for their future educational outcomes and life-chances. While the number and duration of periods of school closures has varied across countries, for many, life in the classroom has been replaced by life online, at least some of the time, both educationally and socially. The experiences of young people during the lockdown(s) have varied. Inequalities are apparent in the extent to which their learning is or can be supported by their families and home environments due to unequal resources. Extensive international research has shown that children's social class background is one of the most significant predictors of their educational success (Bernstein, 1971; Cheadle, 2008; Crosnoe, 2004; Dilnot, 2016; Lareau, 2003). Performance gaps by social class emerge early on and rarely narrow as children progress in education, with many not being able to make up the lost ground (Betthauser, 2019; Gaynor, 2012; Stopforth et al., 2019). Families with children with special educational needs (SEN) and other vulnerable groups (migrants and asylum seekers) are also likely to have faced challenges, especially at a time of reduced or discontinued supports (Bagger et al., 2020; Birkelund, 2019; Brinbaum & Cebolla-Boado, 2007; Dempsey et al., 2016; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Jackson et al., 2012).

Imposed restrictions, job losses and physical distancing, as well as many other factors that impact on the social climate in homes, have further impacted the lives and well-being of children and young people and may have an indirect influence on their educational engagement. Structural inequalities are also evident in the extent and type of school-parent interactions at the time of the pandemic, even if schools and teachers are doing their best to continue teaching in these challenging circumstances. According to a survey by OECD (2020a) in 59 countries, education systems have endeavoured to provide continuous education and alternative learning opportunities for children and young people. However, the survey indicates that just about half of the students in the participating countries have been able to access all or most of the curriculum, resulting in a considerable learning loss for some young people. Furthermore, efforts have mainly focused on learning continuity, with less attention paid to students' socio-emotional development and well-being. Yet, as discussed later in this article, children and young people have found the current situation highly challenging, not only in terms of changes to their education and learning routines but also changed family dynamics and home atmosphere, especially in more vulnerable and disadvantaged settings.

Education systems and people's lives more generally do not exist in a vacuum. Broader structural factors both impact on and perpetuate existing inequalities. In other words, social contexts matter for child's education and well-being; what goes on 'outside the school gates' is equally important to what goes on 'inside them'.

Schools are nested in certain communities and are best placed in identifying and supporting students most in need. However, De Lissovoy and Cedillo (2016) argue that neoliberal policies have introduced particular power relationships in education, shifting decision-making regarding schooling from schools and teachers to higher political structures that are often removed from more nuanced situations on the ground; instead of focusing on a 'whole child', the attention is often addressed to performance and behaviour. Teaching and learning are often seen under this ideology as 'a set of prescribed tasks and performances' as testing and accountability tend to encourage the development of scripted curricular programmes. It could be argued that this may make it difficult for schools and educators to be sufficiently flexible in delivering 'education during the crisis' and come up with alternative pedagogies and approaches to try to address the 'learning gap' and re-engage the more disaffected and vulnerable students. In fact, De Lissovoy and Cedillo (2016, p. 2) argue that: 'ideologies of accountability drastically narrow the range of types of social relationships that are allowed to flourish in contemporary schools and classrooms'. The extent to which decision-making in the field of education regarding COVID-19 control measures (generally driven by central government level, within a public health discourse) was and is informed by child and education experts merits further attention, as there is, currently, little information available on this topic.

This article identifies what the current empirical evidence tells us about the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 measures on the education and well-being of children and young people. It is based on a larger study, documenting emerging empirical studies (including research reports, journal articles, pre-prints and rapid reviews), from a range of developed countries, published in English before June 2020. The studies referenced therefore relate to the first period of school closures. In selecting the studies analysed, greater weight has been given to research based on representative samples of children, young people, families and/or schools. The main themes highlighted in this article are those that emerged from the literature rather than following a pre-specified framework. The aim of the article is to demonstrate how COVID-19 is affecting students from different social groups, pointing towards limited discourse on possible measures that could be used in helping in narrowing the 'learning divide' between students and preventing long-term educational disengagement in the context of school closures.

COVID-19 and Widening Educational Inequalities

There are various strands of emerging evidence to suggest that children and young people may be hit hardest by the social distancing and lockdown measures. The closing of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the quick switch to distance learning have laid bare the gaping and persistent inequities in educational opportunities that exist across jurisdictions. School closures risk exacerbating existing inequalities in student engagement and educational attainment. Existing evidence suggests that the richest households are more likely to be offered active help from school, and that they are spending more hours a day on home learning. Given the impact of school closures on educational attainment, it is not surprising that much of the emerging research, both rapid reviews and more representative studies, has focused on this topic.

Socio-economic Background

It is widely recognized that students do not start their schooling careers with a blank slate, but from an unequal society. Throughout the pandemic, the responsibility of providing early learning opportunities for younger children and home schooling for older ones has fallen predominantly onto parents and carers. Some families (those from more advantaged social classes and with higher levels of education) have been able to cope with the current situation better than others. They are more likely to have the resources (high-speed broadband, technologies, educational resources) at home to assist their child's learning, as well as being more likely to be working from home during periods of restrictions. During school closures, parents with higher levels of educational attainment have been found to be more likely to teach their children directly or actively support their learning (Walsh et al., 2020) and better-off parents spend longer in supporting the educational activities of their children (Andrew et al., 2020). The latter study indicated that if schools remain closed for at least 34 days, students in the more affluent families would gain more than 7 full school days' worth of extra learning time (Andrew et al., 2020). Parents with lower levels of educational attainment (below degree level) have been found to have lower levels of confidence in managing homeschooling, while essential workers were least able to spend time on homeschooling their children (Andrew et al., 2020). In the UK, more than three-quarters of parents with a postgraduate degree and just over 60% of those with an undergraduate degree felt confident directing their child's learning, compared to less than half of parents with A-level or GCSE-level (upper and lower secondary) qualifications (Cullinane & Montecute, 2020). However, a survey in Ireland (see Doyle, 2020) indicated that there is a universal concern among parents across different social classes about the impact of homeschooling on their children.

Vulnerable Groups

In addition to more disadvantaged groups, it is likely that prolonged learning in the home may have been more challenging for children with SEN and migrant children. In the UK, Asbury et al. (2020) found a reported increase in anxiety and fear among families with children with an SEN (the majority of whom were on the autism spectrum), with many parents feeling overwhelmed by the challenges they faced. Parents highlighted as the key challenges the loss of school- and community-based supports alongside the effect of the disruption to routine for the child. The disruption to routine was seen as having very negative effects on children with SEN, with many parents pointing to a regression in their child's behaviour and social skills (Barron & Emmett, 2020b; Inclusion Ireland, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020). O'Connor et al. (2020) found that almost all parents of children with SEN indicated that support for emotional–behavioural difficulties had been affected by the pandemic, being stopped/postponed (61%), moved to online support (21%) or reduced (13%), with similar patterns reported for access to social services and educational support.

While there is currently limited empirical evidence available on migrant/refugee/ asylum-seeking children, it is likely that their education may equally be compromised under the current conditions (You et al., 2020). Migrant-origin young people may also experience additional difficulties as their parents may be less familiar with the curriculum (Smyth et al., 2009), thus making homeschooling more challenging. Asylum-seeking and refugee children may have already had disrupted education, and they are thus now likely to fall even further behind. These children are likely to have difficulties rejoining education due to their lack of educational technology and thus opportunities to engage in online education (Save the Children, 2020) as well as often lacking a quiet place to study. While these children may lack the resources to fully connect with remote learning, a school's ability to provide opportunities for distance learning significantly affects the learning engagement and academic progress of students (Mohan et al., 2020). For example, a study in the UK shows that school provision for distance learning fully explains the gap between children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage and their peers (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020).

Unequal Resources

While parents vary regarding the time available and their confidence in supporting their child's learning at home at the time of lockdown, other factors, like resources in the home, contribute to the extent parents can support their child. This, it can be argued, is likely to contribute to the emerging learning gap between students. The Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2020) in the UK found that homeschooled children spent an average of 11 h learning per week during the first period of school restrictions. The most common resources used were digital devices provided by parents (73%), schoolprovided digital resources accessed through online learning platforms (61%) and digital online learning resources found by parents (49%). Various studies (see Walsh et al., 2020 in Northern Ireland; Drane et al., 2020 in Australia) note that many families have serious difficulties in supporting their child's learning over a prolonged period due to the lack of or limited digital resources (e.g., printers, computers, slow broadband). Furthermore, resources often needed to be shared between (several) children and parents working remotely, causing strain for all concerned. This considered, it is not surprising that unequal resources often translate into poor quality of work received by teachers. Cullinane and Montacute (2020) show that 50% of teachers in private schools in England report that they receive more than three-quarters of work back, compared to 27% in the most advantaged state schools, and just 8% in the least advantaged state schools. A total of 24% of teachers report that fewer than one in four children in their class return work they have been set. Teachers in the most disadvantaged schools are also more than twice as likely as those in advantaged schools to report that the work their students are submitting is of a much lower quality than before (15% vs. 6%). When asked how to mitigate against some students falling behind, most teachers recommended the provision of digital devices or stationery and curriculum resource packs to compensate for lack of access to computers and other technological devices. This means a considerable investment by the state.

In addition to unequal distribution of technological resources, international studies have also indicated that children living in less advantaged families often lack a quiet place to study. Lancker and Parolin (2020) note that children from lower-income households are likely to struggle to complete homework and online courses because of their precarious housing situations. Interventions, here, need more imagination and may need the involvement of community facilities to make available existing spaces for educational activities. Furthermore, disadvantaged families often

have a more limited number of books and other educational materials available in the home that could assist home learning (Williams et al., 2018). Inequalities in support and resources between families are reflected in the amount and quality of work received back by teachers.

Further differentiation can be observed between schools and the resources available to them. As schools are nested in communities, the extent of, and approach to, distance education varied by social class. In Ireland, children of parents with lower levels of education were significantly less likely to report receiving resources from their teacher, use educational apps and use a specific educational TV hub (Doyle, 2020). In the UK, students in private schools were much more likely to have daily online classes and access to online videoconferencing with teachers (Andrew et al., 2020; Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). Even in state schools, higher-income parents were more likely than low-income parents to indicate that their children received active help from the school (Andrew et al., 2020; Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). Abrupt transfer to online teaching has also unveiled variation between teachers regarding their skills and confidence in providing online learning opportunities (Mohan et al., 2020). In Ireland, there has been a variation between schools with more disadvantaged student intakes and other schools in access to digital devices, and differences between urban and rural areas in the availability of high-speed broadband (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Mohan et al., 2020), trends that are likely mirrored in other jurisdictions. In Ireland, challenges in delivering remote teaching were also reported by principals in schools for children with additional educational needs (Burke & Dempsey, 2020). It has been argued that in the case of prolonged online education, the digital divide is likely to widen between disadvantaged and better-off schools and families (Eyles et al., 2020). To ensure that COVID-19 does not exacerbate educational inequalities further, it is important that resources be put in place to support all families, especially targeting more vulnerable groups.

Complementary Educational Activities

While many emerging studies focus on curriculum-centred learning, less attention has been paid to the broader role of schools in complementary educational activities. In Ireland, Smyth (2020) notes that schools are an important arena for access to cultural activities within and outside the curriculum, especially in secondary schools, many of which offer music or drama classes during after-school hours. The author notes that by 17 years of age, the strong emphasis in disadvantaged schools on providing extracurricular cultural activities appears to have eliminated the gap with more socially mixed schools in participation in structured activities; this also seems to have led to this group of young people having a more positive view of the value of their education in enhancing their appreciation of art and culture (Smyth, 2020). Given the relationship between cultural participation and academic development (DiMaggio, 1982), it is likely that school closures will have contributed to an increasing gap in informal as well as formal learning. However, considering the greater reliance of middle-class parents on structured organized activities, which have been curtailed during the COVID-19-related restrictions, the gap between disadvantaged and more advantaged groups, resulting from participation in these activities, may have narrowed somewhat (DiMaggio, 1982).

In addition, school is a key domain for engaging in physical activity, providing Physical Education (PE) in the curriculum as well as extracurricular sport. At secondary level in Ireland, almost all (99%) young people attended a school where team sports were offered as an extracurricular activity, while 82% were in schools where individual sports were offered (Nolan & Smyth, 2020). School closure and the suspension of structured sports activities are likely to have had a significant impact on activity levels among children and young people and accelerate pre-existing patterns of drop-out from sport during adolescence, particularly among teenage girls (Lunn et al., 2013). Finally, schools are also an important source of food for children, providing breakfasts and lunches. Free school meals are often the only source of warm food for disadvantaged students. Recognizing the importance of this support, many schools in the UK and Ireland endeavoured to provide food even during the lockdown. According to Mohan et al. (2020), most Irish secondary schools with a disadvantaged intake made arrangements to provide free meals for their students.

How to Avoid a Long-Term 'Scarring' Effect on Children and Young People?

The impact of the pandemic has already proved more protracted than anticipated, with many countries experiencing more than one wave of school closures and other restrictions. Research on children's experience of traumatic events, like natural disasters, indicates long-lasting effects on their educational outcomes and psychological well-being, with such effects evident even for very young children (Abramson et al., 2010; Fujiwara et al., 2017; Sacerdote, 2012). The prolonged disruption of schooling is, therefore, likely to have a long-term negative effect on students' educational outcomes (OECD, 2020a). Due to repeated school closures, many young people may experience disengagement from learning and a decline in their educational aspirations even when schools reopen (OECD, 2020a). Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in Ireland (2020) indicated that 46% of those in households with dependent children were 'extremely' or 'very' concerned about the pandemic's interruption of their children's education, and a further 43% were 'somewhat concerned'. Levels of 'extreme' concern were more than twice as high among those living in the most disadvantaged areas. Recent findings also indicate that more than four in ten (41%) parents in Ireland with children in primary school and 46% of respondents with children in secondary schools reported that enforced school closures had a 'major' or 'moderate' negative impact on their child's learning (CSO, 2020b). In a study by Bray et al. (2020), based on over 1,000 respondents from 15 schools, 4 out of 5 secondary school students (aged between 12–13 and 17–18) reported that their workload increased during school closures, and they experienced increased levels of stress in managing this. The students surveyed also reported lower scores on a well-being measure (the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)) in 2020 compared to 2019 (Bray et al., 2020). School closure will also have affected access to additional support provided through schools, including literacy/numeracy supports, learning supports and supports for those for whom English is a second language.

There is now growing interest in understanding the full impact of school closures on children and young people. There have been attempts to evaluate the extent of short-term learning loss in some countries (see Maldonado & De Witte, 2020, in Belgium;

Rose et al., 2021 in England; Engzell et al., 2021, in the Netherlands), but the longterm impact of the pandemic on learning remains uncertain (OECD, 2020a). Empirical research undertaken to date indicates limited discourse on possible measures that could be used in helping in narrowing the 'learning divide' between students. These measures need to differ between primary and secondary schools, as well as being responsive the extent of disengagement experienced by different groups of students. In order to tackle educational inequality and the 'learning divide', the provision of additional resources, although expensive, is essential in encouraging re-engagement, and ultimately educational attainment, among young people. Recognizing this, different jurisdictions have put in place initiatives to provide additional resources. For example, the English¹ and Dutch governments have introduced tutoring programmes designed to provide resources for small group tuition and other tailored supports, and in Ireland, summer programmes were provided to support children with severe and profound intellectual disabilities and those with ASDs. This increased expenditure should be set against the considerable societal costs of early school leaving, academic underperformance and limited life-chances and quality of life among young people.

Indirect Impact of COVID-19-Related Measures on the Well-Being of Children and Young People

While many studies have focused on schools, teaching and learning at the time of the pandemic, it is essential to consider the broader context in which the lives of children and young people are unfolding. There are many factors that are likely to indirectly impact on the lives of young people and may contribute towards school disengagement and overall well-being. For example, the social cost of parental unemployment; its impact on the health and psychological well-being on family life; time pressures brought about working from home and homeschooling of children; connectedness with other family members; the family lives of front-line workers; and neglect and abuse, all are likely to impact on the lives of children and young people with possible detrimental results.

The outbreak of COVID-19 is likely to have caused stress and anxiety for many people. Newly emerged research has indicated that work and related economic challenges are perceived as the most frequent source of stress for parents (Waite et al., 2020). In addition to job losses, an unprecedented number of individuals are now working remotely. Although working from home may be a positive option, the situation can cause stress and conflict, as parents combine a number of conflicting demands on their time (Markowska-Manista & Zakrezewska-Oledzka, 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020). Barron and Emmet (2020b) note that parents of children with SEN being schooled at home are concerned about the regression of their child's behaviour and social skills during the isolation period, which is likely to influence their own stress levels. Levels of parental stress (individual and dyadic) have been found to act as an important mediator of circumstances on children's emotional and behavioural difficulties (Spinelli et al., 2020). The restrictions have been found to be linked to changes in the behaviour of children, including difficulty concentrating, feelings of boredom, irritability, restlessness, nervousness, loneliness, uneasiness and worries (Orgilés et al., 2020). While young people may enjoy spending time at home, they also can, at the same time, suffer from increased anxiety, with especially high rates of anxiety and trauma among the children of key workers, as demonstrated by a study in the UK (Levita, 2020). Economic stress, difficult relationships, and reduced or non-existent support structures may even culminate in increased violence within relationships, having an adverse impact on young people, as demonstrated by the increase in contacts with emergency child helplines (Larkins et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020). The situation is all the more grave, considering that opportunities to spot signs or hear about children's experiences have diminished, compounded by the lack of outside oversight in terms of access to professionals such as teachers, general practitioners, health visitors, and social and youth workers (Humphreys et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020).

The situation is also difficult for children and young people who are distanced from their friends due to the closure of schools and early-years facilities as well as leisure facilities. The resulting lack of direct contact outside home means that young people are deprived of opportunities to engage in normal childhood activities, and face-to-face contacts with friends, grandparents and relatives (Barron & Emmett, 2020a; Egan, 2020; Foróige, 2020). This may be particularly difficult for very young children who may not understand the change in their routines. In an Irish study, parents reported difficulties around their children's bedtime routines, tantrums or outbursts from their children, and more fighting with siblings (Fleming & O'Hora, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

Today's youth is likely to pay a considerable price for the measures adopted by various jurisdictions as a response to the COVID-19 virus. First, their educational opportunities and attainment are affected by lockdown, with variable access to the resources and supports needed for home learning; the resulting learning loss may have long-term negative effects on the education and future life-chances of children and young people. Second, resulting employment loss has disproportionately affected young people to date (OECD, 2020b), and ongoing labour market disruption is likely to considerably impact on the options available to young people leaving school. The crisis has laid bare the already stark inequalities in educational attainment that are a feature of many countries.

This article reflects on the potential consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic control measures for young people's lives, with a particular emphasis on education. The suddenness of the situation resulted in the emergence of numerous studies across different jurisdictions that drew on volunteer samples. While easy to set up and providing quick results, volunteer bias is an issue, and the results cannot be generalized to the population as a whole. However, there is now a growing use of representative surveys, including dedicated surveys of respondents from the birth cohort studies. The bulk of existing research on the effect of COVID-19 measures on education is based on single countries. Perhaps now is an opportune time to consider a comparative research agenda that could consider the impact of cross-country differences in the nature of lockdown measures, periods of school closures and resumption across educational settings.

A review of studies that emerged after the first wave of the pandemic seems to indicate that rather than utilizing the current situation to initiate a chance to tackle existing social inequalities in education and exploring ways to reduce the gap between students in learning losses and educational engagement, the current debates tend to narrowly focus on more technical aspects, like online learning and opening and reopening of the schools, with less discussion about compensatory measures to re-engage students, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds and with additional educational needs. The latter are more likely than other students to have difficulty in accessing online teaching and may have regressed considerably during school closures. In order to re-engage students, both short- and long-term measures are needed that go beyond the pre-existing approaches adopted by schools. Additional learning supports will be crucial to make up for the (differential) learning loss experienced by students, with individual and small group tuition emerging as the most effective supports from previous research (CEPEO, 2020). For younger children, play-based learning will be an important component of re-engaging them in education and addressing the learning gap (CEPEO, 2020). Research, to date, on the engagement of disadvantaged youth also points towards the importance of direct engagement and trust between teachers and students (Smyth et al., 2019). Particular supports will be required to assist children and young people with SEN and other vulnerable groups to reintegrate into schools. The provision of such supports, especially one-to-one and small group tuition, will require the allocation of substantial resources in the coming years.

Relatively little recognition is given, to date, to the environments children are living in, and how these impact on their education, social lives and well-being, that is, considering the 'whole child'. This is short-sighted, as in order to build supports for children and young people, there is a need for national debate that looks at the range of factors that affect children's lives. In this context, inter-agency cooperation and connectedness between schools, families and various child support agencies are essential.

The current situation has a potential to prompt deeper reflection about learning continuation for all students under potential future school disruptions. Rather than focusing on 'what is not done', it would be helpful to focus on alternative approaches to supporting students and their families through this challenging situation. In order to address the 'learning divide', it is important to move towards more of an imaginative approach to teaching and learning, reigniting connectedness with learning. Indeed, some sources have pointed towards the innovation in education prompted by the school closures, whereby jurisdictions have utilized a number of different methods in reaching out to students, including targeted TV programmes, interactive apps and various online platforms (Drane et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

That being said, investment in what is now being considered as essential resources—Internet and related technologies—do matter. Considerable efforts have been made by different countries to tackle the 'digital divide' by working towards better Internet connectivity; equipping disadvantaged students and schools with hardware; and setting up hotlines for teachers and students seeking technical support (see Drane et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Schools need resources to rebuild the loss in learning, especially to address the needs of students who have disengaged over the past year. Investment is also needed to support the 'catch-up' of students who have fallen behind. In the UK, the governments have put in place various supports for this purpose, including a general catch-up premium and the National Tutoring Programme targeted at more disadvantaged pupils (England);

additional teachers and extra support staff (Scotland); the Engage Programme (NI); the Accelerated Learning Programme and targeted support for exam year students (Wales)—although there are calls for greater investment, considering the extent of the challenge ahead (Sibieta & Cottell, 2021).

Considering the duration of interrupted schooling and related anxiety and depression among some children and young people, there is now also a growing recognition of the role of mental health supports in relation to school adjustment. While all children have been affected by the school closures, lockdown measures and social distancing, some may also have experienced traumatic events, including illness or loss of a relative to the virus.

Furthermore, in order to make a real difference, various policymakers (education, employment, welfare, etc.) need close cooperation. Supporting the well-being of students who have become disengaged from education, who may have suffered abuse, neglect, bereavement or other issues during this difficult time through school pastoral, counselling and other channels is important. It is important to recognize that the pandemic and the related measures affect people differently—they are related to class, gender, age and other factors. The governments must prioritize support for vulnerable groups that may find it more challenging to 'pull their lives back together' as they transition back into school and for the period ahead.

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Note

1. Young people in England are set to benefit from a £1 billion COVID 'catch-up' package to directly tackle the impact of lost teaching time.

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