



## Evidence from Action Tutoring, 27 May 2020

### House of Commons Education Select Committee inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

#### Summary of evidence

School closures are disproportionately impacting the learning and wellbeing of disadvantaged pupils – harming their future life chances. The absence of education, and other means of support at home, like private tutoring, will simply push them further behind.

Research has shown how passing English and maths GCSEs in particular is linked to better outcomes in further education, training and employment. However, pupils classified as disadvantaged are already far less likely than others to achieve this benchmark and school closures will widen this gap.

Tutoring is a highly effective way of boosting the learning and confidence of pupils and Action Tutoring has developed an impactful, low-cost model which makes this more widely available.

The diversity of the charity sector is an asset relied on by many families. However, COVID-19 has halted the delivery and threatened the financial sustainability of many charities, including Action Tutoring. Rapidly adapting to changing circumstances to continue serving their beneficiaries has been complex and costly.

With adequate financial support and a larger volunteer workforce, the charity sector will be ready to adapt and help schools support disadvantaged pupils make up for lost time in the classroom.

#### Recommendations

- 1** Provide additional funding to schools in addition to Pupil Premium funding, for catch-up programmes for disadvantaged pupils next academic year – especially those moving into secondary school, or sitting national exams in the summer. We recommend this is provided over multiple years, if we are to ensure pupils can progress successfully into further education, employment or training.
- 2** Consider what adjustments need to be made to national exams next summer – especially the grade boundaries – to account for lost learning time. Disadvantaged pupils must be protected and the attainment gap should not be allowed to widen any further than a reasonable variation compared with recent years.



**3** Ensure all pupils have the equipment and access to technology they need at home to support remote learning, if required again.

**4** Develop a national campaign, in collaboration with charities, encouraging more of the public to volunteer their time and skills in the effort to help pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds catch up on lost learning.

**5** Extend financial support to charities serving disadvantaged pupils, so these organisations can adapt their delivery and meet the changing needs of pupils and schools.

## About Action Tutoring

Action Tutoring is an education charity, established in 2012, delivering English and maths tuition to young people facing socio-economic disadvantage. It operates through partnerships with schools located in eight UK cities,<sup>1</sup> recruiting and training high quality volunteers as tutors.

There is strong evidence that tutoring is an effective intervention, with an intense programme of one-to-one tuition adding as much as five months' progress to a young person's schooling.<sup>2</sup> In London over 40% of pupils have a private tutor and nationally the figure is 27%.<sup>3</sup> However, tutoring is expensive, easily £30 an hour or more. Action Tutoring aims to make the benefits of this support

available to those who would not otherwise be able to afford tutoring, to redress this imbalance.

**Action Tutoring's programme offers strong and measurable impact for disadvantaged pupils at low cost.** In the last academic year, the number of Action Tutoring pupils meeting the national standard in their tutored subject at Key Stage 2 and GCSE exceeded the national average for disadvantaged pupils, despite those entered for the programme being considered at risk of not achieving this marker. More details are available in the latest Action Tutoring impact report.<sup>4</sup>

**There is a gap in academic attainment between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent peers.** It opens before they start school and widens throughout their education. In the most recent data available, only 44% of young people on free school meals achieved a grade 4 in both English and maths GCSEs compared to 71% of all other pupils.<sup>5</sup> The rate for those achieving grade 5 and above in these subjects – an increasingly important measures – is even lower, with just 24.7% of disadvantaged pupils reaching this level last year.<sup>6</sup> These pupils aren't less able, they simply have less access to the tools and resources that will help them to reach their potential.

Action Tutoring aims to ensure that no child's life chances are limited by their socio-economic

<sup>1</sup> Birmingham, Brighton and wider Sussex, Bristol, Liverpool and the Wirral, London, Nottingham, Sheffield and Newcastle.

<sup>2</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition/>, accessed May 2020

<sup>3</sup> The Sutton Trust, <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/private-tuition-polling-2019/>, September 2019

<sup>4</sup> Action Tutoring, <https://actiontutoring.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Action-Tutoring-Impact-Report-2018-2019-v5.pdf>, April 2020

<sup>5</sup> UK Government, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/676596/SFR01\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676596/SFR01_2018.pdf), January 2018

<sup>6</sup> UK Government, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/863815/2019\\_KS4\\_revised\\_text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/863815/2019_KS4_revised_text.pdf), February 2020



background. It mobilises volunteer maths and English tutors to support pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, to close this gap.

Action Tutoring produces carefully tailored and structured tutoring resources and provides a team of Programme Coordinators to manage the relationships with schools, engage pupils and monitor the quality of the volunteer tutors.

Volunteers undergo screening, training and an enhanced DBS check before entering schools

**Last academic year, Action Tutoring had 1,151 volunteer tutors from a wide range of backgrounds**

– from university and retired individuals to those in full-time or part-time employment. These volunteers supported over 2,500 disadvantaged pupils and worked in partnership with 84 primary and secondary state schools in England. 87% of pupils Action Tutoring worked with in that year were eligible for the government's Pupil Premium funding. Upon joining the programme, pupils were all identified by their school as at risk of missing out on national standards in English or maths at the end of primary or secondary school.

**Action Tutoring is working to connect volunteer tutors and pupils safely online and will need to increase its volunteer workforce.** With a small marketing team and budget, the charity already attracts 1,000s of volunteer applications each year. There is now potential to reach an even wider supporter base with online volunteering options. To meet the increased need of pupils, the charity will need to intensify its volunteer recruitment efforts going forward.

## Detailed evidence

### 1. The impact of COVID-19 on the capacity of children's services to support vulnerable children and young people.

1.1 There is a network of charities, centred on schools, supporting disadvantaged pupils' wellbeing and helping them reach their potential. The pandemic has severely disrupted the ability of organisations within this network, including charities like Action Tutoring, to provide valuable academic and pastoral support to pupils – both now and in the future.

1.2 School leaders often use tutoring as part of a wider approach to supporting pupils eligible for the government's Pupil Premium grant. Other elements might include breakfast clubs, mentoring and enrichment after-school activities. In many cases, schools partner with external organisations to deliver this provision, including charities like Action Tutoring.

1.3 Charities are working hard to adapt so that children and young people are not left unsupported. The pandemic forced Action Tutoring to stop its tutoring programmes as it was no longer possible, or safe, for volunteers to travel into schools. Rapidly adapting for online delivery of tutoring sessions whilst keeping safeguarding and impact front and centre has been complex and costly for Action Tutoring and many other education charities.

1.4 In addition to the operational impact, the financial impact of the pandemic on the



charity sector has been significant. Delivery has slowed or stopped, fundraising events have been cancelled and there is greater competition for limited funding sources. If charities are to adapt effectively, and meet increased need in schools in future, they need financial support to weather the crisis.

1.5 Whilst schools may open to more pupils relatively soon, it could be some time before it is safe for them to open up to external organisations, such as Action Tutoring and similar charities, offering enrichment and support. These education providers need to survive and find additional resources to adapt their delivery. That way, pupils will benefit from a variety of provisions while the country recovers from the pandemic.

1.6 In addition to concerns for pupils, schools are managing the health impacts of the crisis on their staff. School staff face uncertainty and a drastically different working environment, struggling to reach their most vulnerable pupils and continue teaching as normal. Schools may be unsure how they are expected to keep staff and pupils safe and maintain social distancing when physical classrooms reopen. This will also be a serious consideration for Action Tutoring as to when it can safely bring volunteers back into schools. The health and wellbeing impact on school staff will affect the resilience of the sector mitigating the long-term impacts of the crisis on pupils' learning.

## 2. The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment.

2.1 Action Tutoring focuses its support on maths and English, as basic skills and qualifications in these subjects are a passport to future opportunities. Recent research by the charity Impetus has shown how passing English and maths GCSEs in particular is linked to better outcomes in further education, training and employment.<sup>7</sup>

2.2 Pupils classified as disadvantaged are already far less likely than others to achieve this benchmark, with much lower national pass rates in English and maths GCSE than young people from more affluent families.<sup>8</sup> In recent years progress closing this gap, to a point where a child's background no longer determines what they can achieve at school, has halted.<sup>9</sup>

2.3 With weekly tutoring support, Action Tutoring pupils can make significant progress in their final year of primary or secondary school, improving their SATs scores or GCSE maths and English grades. An evaluation by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research suggested that pupils who attended at least seven Action Tutoring sessions could make half a grade extra progress compared to

<sup>7</sup> Impetus, <https://impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Research-Briefing-9-The-impact-of-English-and-maths.pdf>, April 2020

<sup>8</sup> UK Government, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/s>

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<sup>9</sup> Education Policy Institute, <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EPI-Annual-Report-2019.pdf>, July 2019



their peers.<sup>10</sup> The Education Endowment Foundation has also found that an intense programme of tutoring can add up to five months' academic progress.<sup>11</sup> These gains are significant considering that schools might expect pupils to make an average of one grade's progress in an academic year.

2.4 Because of school closures, Action Tutoring pupils have missed out on several weeks, or even months, of support which would have consolidated prior learning and boosted their readiness for exams. The effort put in during the crucial final weeks of Year 6 and Year 11 could have improved their marks above what might have been predicted at the beginning of the year.

2.5 A submission to Ofqual by Impetus, with contributions from Action Tutoring and other peer charities, warns that the current proposals for calculating grades this summer may not lead to fair outcomes for disadvantaged young people. Some evidence suggests pupils from certain groups, including lower socio-economic backgrounds, may be unfairly disadvantaged in how predicted grades are calculated. These pupils may also struggle to delay their plans in order to sit exams in the autumn, and are less likely to have the support they need to fulfil their potential in these papers after the extended gap in their learning.<sup>12</sup>

2.6 These months without regular access to learning and support will also have consequences for pupils sitting exams next academic year. The loss of learning across the cohort will be a complicated picture for schools to assess once pupils are back in the classroom. Unless Year 5 and Year 10 disadvantaged pupils are given catch-up support in 2020–21, their SAT and GCSE performance is likely to suffer, harming their future learning and the opportunities available to them.

### 3. Support for pupils and families during closures, including the consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning.

3.1 Action Tutoring reaches children and young people solely through its partner schools. For safeguarding reasons, contact between volunteer tutors and pupils takes place once a week in a classroom setting. School closures in March ended all direct contact between Action Tutoring and its pupils.

3.2 Feedback from teachers connected with Action Tutoring suggests that school approaches to remote learning vary widely. Engagement levels among pupils also vary. Even where technology is not a barrier, some

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Lucchino, National Institute of Economic and Social Research, [https://actiontutoring.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/action\\_tutoring\\_impact\\_evaluation.pdf](https://actiontutoring.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/action_tutoring_impact_evaluation.pdf), March 2016

<sup>11</sup> Education Endowment Foundation, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence->

[summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition/](https://actiontutoring.org.uk/summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition/), accessed May 2020

<sup>12</sup> Impetus, <https://impetus.org.uk/grading-assessment-covid-19>, April 2020



children and young people may well not have the resilience, discipline or structure at home to study effectively. Teachers spend time attempting to reach and motivate those pupils not adequately engaged in remote learning.

3.3 Schools know the children and young people they support extremely well. As well as teaching, school staff have an important role in keeping them safe and monitoring their wellbeing when they see their pupils each day – a role they cannot fulfil as effectively in a remote learning setup.

3.4 As described in paragraph 2.3 above, Action Tutoring pupils have already missed out on several weeks and months of valuable tutoring, which would consolidate learning and boost confidence and exam readiness.

3.5 Action Tutoring is now working hard to launch sessions online, as its pupils need their tutors' support more than ever. Moving operations online whilst safeguarding pupils and maintaining the quality of delivery is complicated and incurs additional costs at a time when the charity's income has suffered. Financial support must be available to charities adapting their delivery so they can safely support pupils in the changed education landscape, even after schools have reopened.

## 4. The financial implications of closures for providers (including higher education and independent training providers), pupils and families.

4.1 As outlined in paragraph 1.4, many education charities that would usually support disadvantaged pupils have lost income because of the crisis, due to being unable to deliver their services, and the financial impacts and uncertainty are likely to continue particularly for future fundraising in the pressured economy. For Action Tutoring this loss of income has come through a) no summer term delivery, with income from schools accounting for 40% of its revenue and b) the loss of fundraising income from events such as the Hackney Half Marathon and London 10k.

4.2 The diversity of the charity sector is an asset relied on by many families. If charities are to survive, adapt, and meet increased need in future, they need financial support to weather the crisis.

4.3 Action Tutoring has heard from some school partners how the crisis is impacting some families' finances. More children and young people are likely to qualify for free school meals as a result of COVID-19, especially if economic recovery is slow.



## 5. The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need).

5.1 School closures will have an impact on all pupils' learning. The scale of impact will depend on individual pupils' attitudes towards remote learning, how the approach differs between schools, and the home learning environment. However, evidence suggests school closures will disproportionately impact the learning and wellbeing of disadvantaged pupils.<sup>13</sup> A survey of 4,000 parents by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that pupils from the most affluent families will have had more than seven full school days' worth of extra learning by June. The loss of learning for disadvantaged pupils by comparison could have significant long-term effects.<sup>14</sup>

5.2 Whilst pupils classified as disadvantaged are not a homogenous group, some factors that might hinder their academic progress in normal times have been exacerbated by the current crisis. For example, many families:

5.2.1 Usually rely on schools to provide children with nutritious food to support learning and physical wellbeing.

5.2.2 Do not have the resources to create a stimulating learning environment at home over this period, including access to books and learning materials.

5.2.3 Are more likely to live in poor quality or overcrowded housing, which can negatively affect mental and physical health of children as well as creating a barrier to effective study.

5.2.4 Have less access to computers and internet at home.<sup>15</sup>

5.3 Crucially, even where technology is accessible, there are other hurdles to cross before pupils can learn effectively: sharing technology with many other members of the household; lacking a quiet place to concentrate; or missing the structure, guidance and regulation provided in the classroom that would usually motivate pupils to study.

5.4 In addition to the barriers to learning listed above, pupils' mental health may worsen because of the crisis. School closures have created instability and a loss of routine. Some pupils may also be exposed to higher stress levels at home – for example, if income or job security has been threatened – affecting their

<sup>13</sup> The Sutton Trust, <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Impact-Brief-School-Shutdown.pdf>, April 2020

<sup>14</sup> Alison Andrew et al., <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14848>, May 2020

<sup>15</sup> Whitney Crenna-Jennings, <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EPI-Annual-Report-2018-Lit-review.pdf>, July 2018



mental and physical health and hindering their learning.

5.5 When pupils return to school, they will need support adjusting to the change. As well as helping them to catch up on lost time and manage uneven gaps in learning across the cohort, teachers may have to cope with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds being less ready to learn for the reasons given above. They may also need to support pupils managing grief, regardless of background.

5.6 Charities like Action Tutoring have an excellent track record of helping pupils make additional progress alongside classroom learning – and helping boost pupils' confidence and engagement in the subject. If the charities receive adequate financial protection to weather the pandemic, and the government helps to promote volunteering among the public to boost the volunteer workforce and match increased need, the sector will be ready to adapt and help schools make up for lost time in the classroom for disadvantaged pupils.

