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INTERIM
SUMMARY
REPORT 2

Caregiver experiences of facilitating home learning for reception children during the Spring 2020 lockdown

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ickle

Impact of Covid on Key Learning and Education

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Project title: The impact of COVID-19 related school closures on foundation skills in reception children.

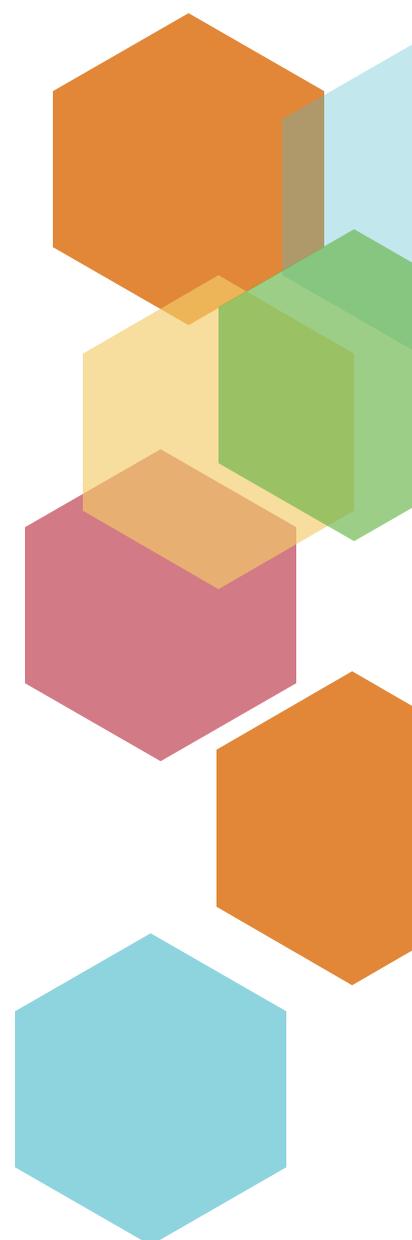
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the home learning experiences of children in reception, during the Spring 2020 lockdown, which began on 23rd March 2020. Through an online survey of 190 caregivers and parents of children in 9 schools in Leeds, UK, we have explored the home learning that families were able to do, the barriers they faced, and their views of school support during that time. This report also explores how variations in resources in the home environment relate to the socioeconomic status (SES) of families.

We found substantial variations in all the aspects of home learning which we investigated. Our data also highlighted the negative impact of known inequalities such as level of disadvantage, as well as new inequalities such as the availability of adult supervision. This is crucial for informing policy in the event of future lockdowns, and when planning how to support families and remediate the impacts of school disruptions.

THE IMPACT OF COVID ON KEY LEARNING AND EDUCATION (ICKLE) PROJECT

ICKLE is a 12-month project, funded by the UKRI/ESRC, which began in September 2020. The project is investigating the impact of COVID-19 school disruption on reception-aged children learning key foundation skills for later academic success. The project uses a retrospective longitudinal design, with data provided by schools and caregivers, to investigate the factors that have moderated and mediated pupil progress.

Full project details can be found at <https://ickle.leeds.ac.uk/>.



**Note* There are 10 schools taking part in the ICKLE project. However, one of these schools opted not to distribute the survey to parents and caregivers, since the large majority did not use English as their first language, and there was too great a range of home languages to translate the questionnaire.

Introduction

In Spring 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in England were closed to all children except those of critical workers or those classed as vulnerable. Caregivers were asked to facilitate children's learning at home, while managing their other domestic and professional responsibilities. This transition was disruptive for schoolchildren of all ages, but for reception children - who had been in compulsory education for just six months and who often rely on close and continuous supervision - home learning presented significant challenges. This report scrutinises how learning and support resources were taken up by families of reception children, and provides a picture of the impact of the school disruption on the learning of young children from diverse backgrounds.

The report compares novel data with the findings of several other published surveys of parents' experiences of home learning during the first national lockdown in Spring 2020. Most of these reports use large samples spanning the primary and secondary years, and do not separate out different age groups when summarising their findings.

For example:

- Researchers at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Institute of Education (IoE) analysed data from an online survey of 4,157 parents of 4–15 year-olds in England (Andrew et al., 2020a, 2020b).
- The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) used existing cohort data from parents of over 4,000 primary- and secondary-school-aged children to monitor the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on families (Eivers et al., 2020).

Although these large data sets are valuable, the specific experiences of children beginning formal schooling are not easily separable. In this report, we focus on the caregivers of reception children. Note that in this report we use the term 'home learning' specifically in relation to the curriculum-based activities specified by school; we recognise that a considerable amount of informal learning also took place outside these activities.



What did we do?

Study sample

Between October and December 2020, 190 caregivers (92% mothers, 8% fathers), whose children attended 9 socioeconomically diverse schools in Leeds, provided us with information about their experiences of facilitating home learning in Spring 2020.

SCHOOL CODE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	IDACI AVERAGE		% EAL	% FSM	% SEN	SCHOOL SIZE
			NATIONAL AVERAGE 2019/20	21	17	14	281
1	26	.06		5	0	5	343
2	36	.12		5	10	10	475
3	37	.19		5	10	15	461
5	4	.35		5	45	20	234
6	15	.42		40	40	20	407
8	3	.13		5	20	15	332
9	12	.35		35	30	20	230
10	21	.09		55	10	15	448
11	36	.07		5	5	10	448

Figure 1: Schools in the ICKLE project (n=9) compared with national average data 2019/20.

EAL = English as an Additional Language; FSM = Free School Meals; SEN = Special Educational Needs

As a measure of SES, we used English Indices of Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) scores, based on the postcode of the family home (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019).

IDACI measures the proportion of children aged 0 – 15 who live in income-deprived households for each of the 32,844 neighbourhoods in England.



Figure 2: Percentage of caregivers in the ICKLE project (n=190) assigned to low, medium and high IDACI bands.

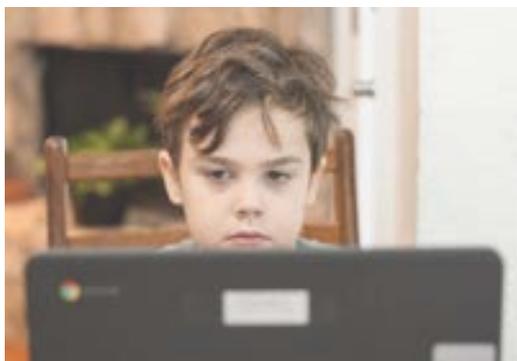
We used the IDACI rank (where 1 indicates the area with the highest proportion of children living in low-income houses, and 32,844 indicates the lowest proportion) to create three bands, with neighbourhoods ranked in the lowest third (1 – 10,948) assigned to a 'low' category, those in the middle third (10,949 – 20,197) assigned 'middle', and those in the highest third (20,198 – 32,944) assigned 'high'.

What did we do?

Data collection

Caregivers were invited to complete an online survey, in return for which they were offered a £10 Amazon voucher.

The survey comprised 22 questions which were analysed quantitatively, and a final open field for respondents to share anything else they wanted to tell us about their child's home learning experience.



The survey focused on:

a) resources in the home, i.e. access to technology, study space, and availability of adult supervision;

and

b) the amount of time in a typical day children spent on activities in four key Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum areas: Literacy (which we have split into reading, writing and phonics), Mathematics, Communication & Language, and Personal, social & emotional development (PSED).



See Appendix 1 for the full survey.

What did we find?

Home learning routines

98% of respondents did some home learning during the first lockdown period, with 60% of these having a learning routine (of various forms), and the remainder taking each day as it came.

While structure was important for some families

I felt supported by school as they provided a timetable to follow

others found flexibility suited their circumstances.

some days we did lots of 'work' but on other days we might have...just played

maintaining a regular daily schedule was impossible

The majority of respondents who did not have a routine were from the lowest income group (47%), compared to 26% and 27% of respondents from the medium and high-income groups, respectively.

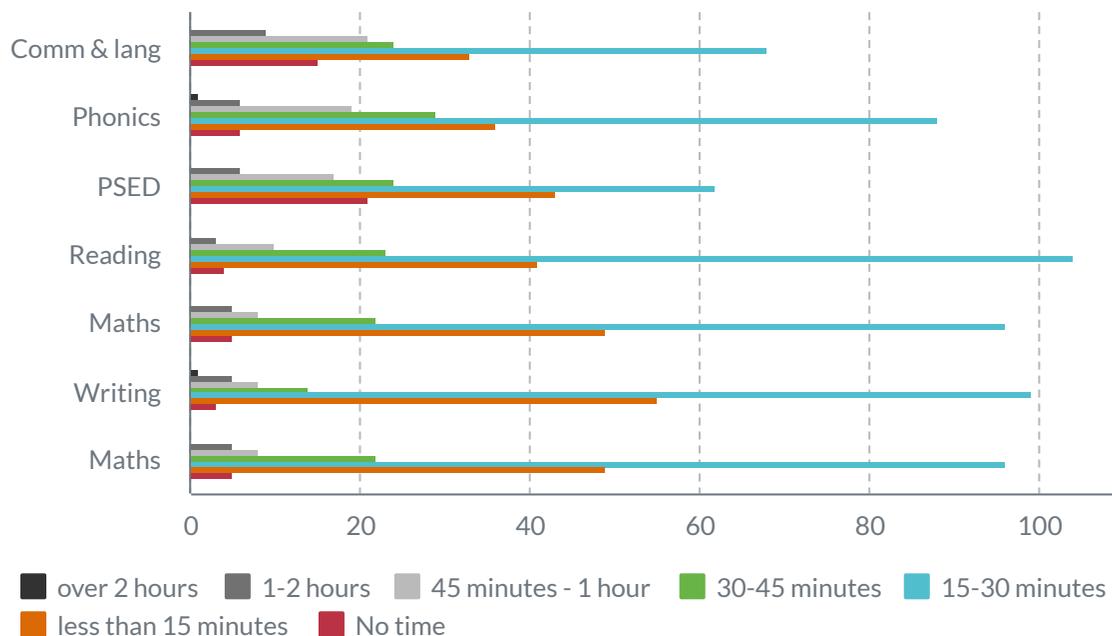


Figure 3: Percentage of participants reporting amounts of time spent on each curriculum area per day, ranked by descending average (n=185).

There were only small differences between the amounts of time spent on each curriculum area per day. The average time spent on each area was between one and 30 minutes. This was highest for language and communication (defined as activities to help children express themselves and understand other people e.g., storytelling, role playing, giving, and following instruction) at around 30 minutes per day. The average time spent was lowest for writing (defined as writing letter shapes, simple words such as the child's own name, or simple sentences which can be read by the child and others) at less than 15 minutes per day.

What did we find?

Home learning routines

Our data did not show a relationship between SES and time spent on home learning. However, qualitative comments provide insights into some of the reasons why families engaged in less home learning. Many caregivers reported being unable to engage in home learning as much as they would have liked, due to challenging family circumstances, such as having to work, study, or care simultaneously for children of different ages, including babies.

Although none of the qualitative comments suggested that caregivers were unhappy with the balance of key activities, some caregivers found it difficult to complete all the tasks set by the school, and some made comments which suggested that they felt guilty about this.

we did crafts [...]; lots of walks and talking [sic] about what we saw. She is read to every day. I felt this was more productive than formal teaching esp in these stressful times. Her mental health took priority

our main priorities were ensuring her emotional and physical wellbeing rather than her academic progress

Motivation was a key factor impacting home learning. Caregivers commented on the difficulty of motivating their children to engage in home learning.

it was difficult to put enough time into home schooling around work and also difficult to motivate XX to want to do school work at home when he would rather watch the TV)

some days were easier than others in terms of XX's enthusiasm for learning

Young children's attentional capacity also likely impacted on their motivation and concentration.

we broke the home learning down into two 45mins sessions due to the attention span of a 5yr being quite limited

What did we find?

Home learning resources

Of those children who did some home learning, 96% of the young children in our sample had full or shared access to an electronic device/devices that could be used for learning, which is slightly higher than the proportions reported from larger-scale samples. Only 7 of the 185 respondents to this question had no access to a device; the majority of these (5/7) were from the low SES group.

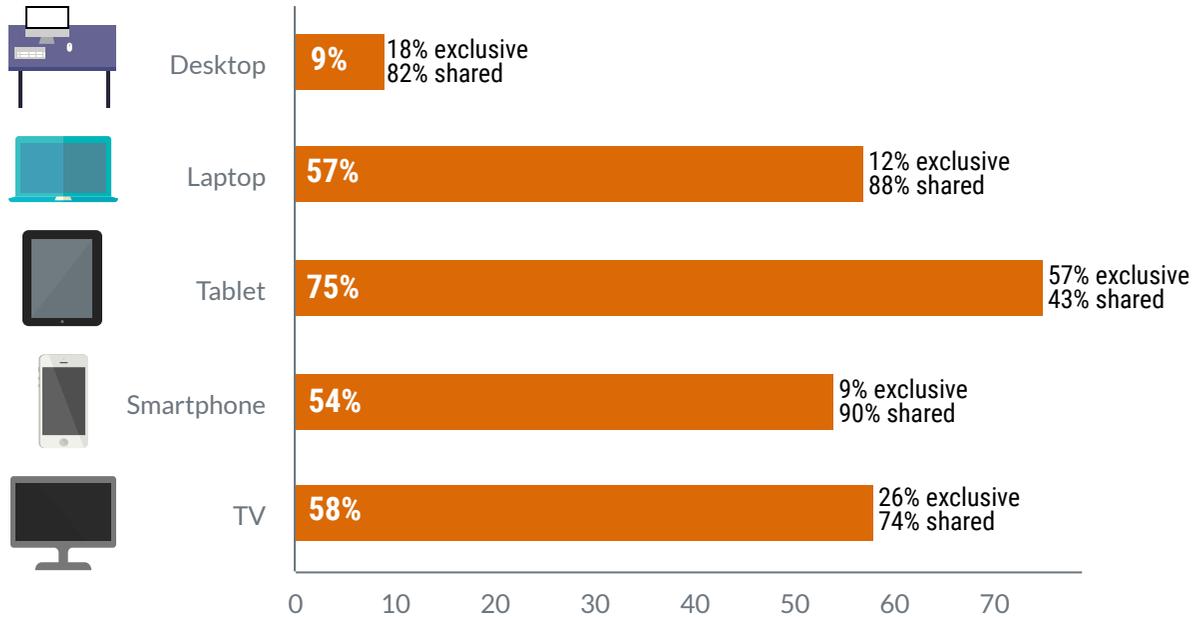


Figure 3: Percentage of children with access to specified electronic devices for home learning (n=190).

Of the children without access to a laptop (n=82), almost half (48%) were from the low SES group, and of the children with exclusive access to a laptop (n=13), almost half (46%) were from the high SES group.

Of the children without access to a TV (n=80) almost half (48%) were from the low SES group, and of the children with exclusive access to a TV (n=29), almost half (41%) were from the high SES group.

Shared access was reported as a source of frustration for some.

with twins it wasn't easy due to the demand from both of them on one laptop

Several respondents commented on the challenge of printing resources sent by school. 36% of our sample had no access to a printer; almost half of these respondents (47%) came from the low SES group, compared with 18% and 35% from the mid and high SES groups respectively. Home delivery of work was appreciated.

we managed to complete a few printed worksheets that School delivered to our door

most work was posted digitally on Class Dojo, and without access to a printer we couldn't access these

What did we find?

Home learning resources

93% of our sample of reception-aged children had a space in which to do home learning activities, 5% had only part-time access, and 2% had none.

Over half of the children with part-time access (5/9) were from the high SES group. This could be due to parents working at home. This finding contrasts with data from other reports showing that almost 60% of primary school students in the least well-off families did not have access to their own dedicated study space, compared to 35% in the most well-off families (Andrew et al., 2020a).



When in school, young children's learning is supported by teachers and teaching assistants; an adult facilitator is key. **In 80% of the families in our sample, an adult was available to supervise home learning, with 20% reporting some part-time availability.** This aligns with data from The Sutton Trust, who report that children under 7 years mostly or entirely worked under parental supervision (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). The same report cites little evidence of SES differences on this measure. Likewise, we did not find a clear association with SES: 40% and 37% of children with adult supervision were from low and high SES groups respectively, with 23% from the middle-income group. However, the largest proportion of children with only part-time supervision were from low SES families (45%).

Different family members helped to supervise home learning, but a higher proportion of respondents (95%) reported this being the mother, compared to 46% the father (often in addition to the mother), 12% older and 7% grandparents.

Many families referred to 'we' in the open comments, indicating shared responsibility, often tag-teaming as one then another caregiver worked. In families where one caregiver was not working and thus did more of the home schooling (e.g. had a stay-at-home-caregiver role, was furloughed or on leave), this was often the mother.



What did we find?

School communication and provision

Caregiver comments revealed communication to be a key factor in supporting engagement with home learning. They expressed the importance of a member of school staff, preferably the child's own teacher, making individual contact with the child at home, e.g. via phone or virtual letter. Caregivers felt it kept the connection going and reported that their children loved it. Conversely, a caregiver who only received one phone call from the school during the period linked their feeling of being 'very alone' with the lack of school contact. Another remarked on inconsistencies.

we were really pleased with school communication with parents: it was sensible and regular

communications from School were very patchy during this time

There were frequent comments about the types of materials provided by schools. Families engaged with a wide variety of materials, e.g. online reading, Google Classroom work (including mathematics, reading, writing, and PSHE), printable worksheets, videos recorded by teachers, and phonics games on tablet devices. One caregiver remarked that she would have liked more live lessons. Learning alone was reported as challenging for children who thrive on working as part of a group, or who feel pressured under individual focus. The competitive edge of being with other children was missing for some.

Caregivers held a wide variety of views about resources. For example, materials from the same school were praised by one caregiver but criticised by another for being difficult to engage with. Another school was commended for **"being proactive with setting work"** by one caregiver but criticised by two others for giving **"little guidance with tasks"** and, in another comment, **"not very much was provided by the school at all."** What felt supportive to one family may be inadequate for another.

Provision rated highly by one caregiver

teachers were great in setting work

was criticised by another for requiring too much preparation time.

I simply didn't have time to do the 'prep' with a newborn and a toddler. Instead I did my own thing

Some caregivers found the provision too generic and therefore not useful for their child.

What did we find?

School communication and provision

Feedback from a child's teacher was received positively for its motivating effect.

feedback was really important to spur her on to do more work the following week

we had much more feedback from teachers than I ordinarily would have... They were so encouraging

Conversely, some caregivers remarked on the lack of personal feedback.

I think a video message of her teacher's feedback to her work would have been much more powerful

Some caregivers mentioned difficulties around the move to online reading books.



we struggled to get him to read a book online for a little while. He liked to read an actual book

it would have been helpful if more reading books were sent home (we had one), there was access online but he wouldn't engage with that

I was concerned about the lack of reading materials available for my child. I was worried he would fall behind due to a lack of access to books

What did we find?

School communication and provision

Some caregivers were able to improvise around school provision. Many liked the resources they found independently, e.g. Joe Wicks PE and BBC Bitesize.

we chose to take our own approach to their learning and catered to what we felt their individual needs were not the generic learning materials that were being sent from school

Some caregivers found value in learning 'life' skills rather than 'school' skills.

She learnt to recognize and count coins

they developed and learnt lots of useful new life skills-baking, gardening, painting, problem solving building drawers using screwdriver

X learnt to ride her bike without stabilizers



One respondent mentioned the special educational needs (SEN) of their child, saying that they felt unsupported:

"Child has SEND issues - we had to work up to around 45 minutes per day on formal educational activities, plus tablet use and informal learning (i.e., discussions during walks). At the beginning we could not manage more than 2 minutes at a time due to constant meltdowns/anxiety regarding the huge, sudden change of routine. We had no help or support regarding this from school, paediatrician, health visitor or any other outside agency and felt completely alone."

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

How much home learning were families able to do?

Overall, we saw broad, positive engagement with home learning during the first lockdown. This was schools' and families' first experience of school disruption, and it was unclear how long the situation would last. Schools lacked guidance in what types of materials to provide, and systems had not yet been fully established for setting and receiving children's work.

As the responsibility for supporting learning shifted from school to home, caregivers were required to navigate new IT systems, educational concepts, and their children's ability to engage. Given this context, it is unsurprising that families' own circumstances typically determined their learning routines. While these circumstances included caregiver availability and children's motivation, they were also impacted by SES; almost half of the children in our sample who did not have a learning routine came from the low SES group. SES also affected access to learning technology: low SES families were disproportionately represented in the group with no access to a laptop or a printer. This finding echoes the significant SES differences evidenced in larger-scale surveys (e.g. Cullinane and Montacute, 2020; Eivers et al., 2020) and shows that SES is a factor even in very young children's home learning.

The curriculum area with the highest average time devoted to it was language and communication, at around 30 minutes per day. This was despite our school survey data (presented in Interim Summary Report 1) showing this to be the area with the lowest proportion of resources provided by schools, suggesting that caregivers were sourcing their own materials and activities for language. The area with the lowest average time spent - less than 15 minutes per day - was writing. This is likely to reflect the young age of the children. In contrast to other, larger-scale surveys (Andrew et al. 2020a, 2020b), we did not find that time spent learning was related to SES or income levels.

To what extent were caregivers available to supervise home learning?

In 80% of the families in our sample, an adult was available to supervise home learning. A further 20% reported some part-time availability, and the largest proportion of this group were in the low SES group. The importance of adult supervision of learning with such young children was summed up by one respondent, who said, **"there is realistically very little home learning a five-year-old can do independently."** This is echoed by ONS data on the effect of parents' limited time to support children with their learning, which showed that nearly half of parents whose only or eldest child was 5-10 years old gave this as one of the reasons their child was struggling, compared with 1 in 10 for those whose only or eldest child was aged 16-18 (Williams et al., 2020).

Many of the caregivers in our sample experienced competing demands on their time, from work and looking after other children. Families in which two parents were working and looking after multiple children were typically time-poor :

"from March to May my child did little to no home learning as both parents were juggling working from home with childcare. From June to August I took ten weeks' unpaid leave from work in order to focus on the children and catching them up with schooling, which I think we managed by the time the schools reopened in September."

The demands of looking after younger children have also been reported by Williams et al. (2020); 77% of parents (home schooling primary or secondary pupils) said that their child was struggling to learn at home, the figure rising to 86% for parents who had another child aged 0-4 in the house. In our sample of families, mothers were most likely to supervise home learning.

Our data reveal that lockdown created a new inequality among the time-poor, since time is central to success in facilitating the home learning of a five-year-old who needs constant supervision.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Overall, our quantitative data give a broadly positive view of home schooling, with most children being supervised to learn across the curriculum, using an online device, on a daily basis (though with some notable trends related to SES).

The qualitative comments, however, revealed a more challenging picture. Respondents alluded to the period as *"very tough"*, *"very hard"*, *"frustrating"*, *"stressful"*, *"a very hard time"*, *"very difficult"*, *"a nightmare"*, *"a struggle"*, *"impossible"*, and *"lonely"*.

This is consistent with other published datasets, e.g. Andrew et al., 2020a, where almost 60% of the parents of primary school children reported that they found it quite or very hard to support their children's learning at home, with the largest proportion from the middle of the income distribution (suggested to be due to both parents working and/or a lack of home learning resources).



How did families feel about the resources provided by school?

Most of the caregivers in our sample were positive about how schools responded during the first period of school disruption in Spring 2020.

This is in line with The Sutton Trust's survey of UK parents of school children in April 2020, which showed that 61% of parents of children learning at home were very or quite satisfied (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). However, there were differences in opinion, even about the same provision; clearly one size did not fit all. The heterogeneity of family life meant that even where schools created high-quality, accessible materials, they couldn't guarantee how or whether they would be used at home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings highlighted in this report, considered in relation to the school-level data reported in Interim Summary Report 1, we propose the following recommendations for schools (with the support of guidance and resources from the Department for Education) to reduce variation and inequalities in the effectiveness of home learning.

1. Support caregivers to help their children learn at home. Parents need knowledge, skills and regular support. For example, through direct contact, parents should be given information explaining why their child is being asked to complete an activity and what the intended learning outcomes are.

2. Differentiate home learning provision. Some children (e.g. those with SEND) will require modified learning outcomes. In addition, different families will be able to access and use different types of resources (online activities, worksheets, games). So, options should be provided as to different ways to meet the learning outcome.

3. Provide physical resources for learning. Young children benefit from physical resources such as books and worksheets, and these should be provided where possible.



PARALLEL REPORTS

Our first Interim Summary Report summarises the information provided by teachers regarding schools' remote learning provision in Spring 2020. <https://ickle.leeds.ac.uk/interim-report-1/>

Our third Interim Summary Report summarises pupil-level data provided by schools in Autumn 2020, examining what it says about pupil progress towards Early Years goals. <https://ickle.leeds.ac.uk/interim-report-3/>

We produced a report for the UK Parliamentary inquiry into the Department for Education's response to the COVID-19 lockdown (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2021), which synthesises the information we gathered from schools and caregivers, and offers some preliminary recommendations based on our initial findings. To access this report, please visit our website: <https://ickle.leeds.ac.uk/data-and-publications/>

WHAT ARE WE DOING NEXT?

The longitudinal nature of the ICKLE project means that we can follow the same cohort of children, about whom we have data from when they were in reception, right to the end of year 1. In the second phase of data collection, in June 2021, we have been asking schools about their provision for remote learning and in-school provision during the second significant period of school disruption, between January and early March 2021.



By following the same schools and children for 12 months, which include two periods of significant school disruption, we will be able to document precisely which aspects of provision changed, and which remained the same, between the first and the most recent national lockdowns. When comparing the two lockdown periods, we anticipate finding many differences between the type and the number of resources and activities provided by schools.

Caregiver perspectives are also being sought again, in order to gain a rich picture of the learning activities which took place at home. It will be important to see how the changes have impacted on the experiences of caregivers and children.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The full survey

Questions 1 and 2 concerned informed consent processes.

Q3 What is your name?

Q4 What is your child's name?

Q5 What is your relation to the child?

- Mother
- Father
- Other, please specify

The next questions are about your child's experience of school between March and June 2020

Q6 Was your child in school between March and June 2020 when school was open for the children of Key Workers and some other groups of children?

- Yes / No

If No, skip to Q8

Q7 How many days in a typical week did your child attend school?

- 0 / 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

Q8 Did your child return to full-time education when schools re-opened to reception children from June 1st 2020?

- Yes / No

The next questions are about home based learning activities

Q9 When schools were closed to the majority of pupils did your child do any home based learning activities?

- Yes / No

If No, skip to Q25

Q10 During the closure period did your child have access to an electronic device/devices that could be used for home based learning?

- Yes / No

If No, skip to Q18

Q11 Which device/devices? (tick all that apply)

- Desktop
- Laptop
- Tablet
- Smart phone
- TV
- Other (please specify)

Q12 Was the desktop:

- Always available to the child / Shared with parents/siblings

Q13 Was the laptop:

- Always available to the child / Shared with parents/siblings

Q14 Was the tablet:

- Always available to the child / Shared with parents/siblings

Q15 Was the smart phone:

- Always available to the child / Shared with parents/siblings

Q16 Was the TV:

- Always available to the child / Shared with parents/siblings

Q17 Was the other device/devices:

- Always available to the child / Shared with parents/siblings

Q18 During the period when schools were closed, did you have a printer to print out activities for home based learning?

- Yes / No

Q19 Did you have access to other equipment such as pencils and paper?

- Yes / No

Appendix 1 cont.

The next questions are about a typical day of home learning

Q20 Was there a space where your child could do home learning activities? (e.g. dining table, desk)

- Yes / No / Sometimes (please provide details)

Q21 Did you have a routine for home based learning?

- Yes / No

Q22 On a typical day during school closures, how much time did your child spend on the following?

Phonics (teaching children about sounds and letters e.g. practising sounds out loud, playing phonics games online, using flashcards etc)

Reading (e.g. practising reading a book at your child's reading level, discussing a story, guessing what happens next)

Writing (e.g. writing letter shapes, simple words such as the child's own name, or simple sentences which can be read by the child and others)

Maths (teaching children about numbers and sums, shapes and measuring e.g. counting objects, adding and subtracting single digits, recognising shapes and talking about time or money)

Language & communication (activities to help children express themselves and understand other people e.g. story telling, role playing, giving and following instructions etc)

Personal, social and emotional development (activities to help children manage their feelings and learn social skills e.g. talking about feelings, discussing good and bad behaviour and why we follow rules, doing yoga, mindfulness etc.)

- No time
- Less than 15 mins
- 15-30 mins
- 30-45 mins
- 45 mins - 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- Over 2 hours

Q23 Was an adult available to supervise home learning?

- Yes / No / Sometimes

If No, skip to Q25

Q24 Who supervised the home learning? (tick all that apply)

- Mother / Father / Older siblings / Grandparents / Other (please specify)

Q25 Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your child's home learning experience?

THE ICKLE TEAM



Dr Hannah Nash - Principal Investigator

Hannah is a Lecturer in the School of Psychology. Her research focuses on how children learn to read and why some children experience difficulties. As principal investigator, Hannah oversees all aspects of the ICKLE project. <https://medicinehealth.leeds.ac.uk/psychology/staff/639/dr-hannah-nash>



Dr Paula Clarke - Co-Investigator

Paula is an Associate Professor in the School of Education. Her research focuses on reading and language comprehension skills and includes the development of assessment and intervention approaches. On the ICKLE project, Paula is working on the reading progress data and the write-up and dissemination of project findings. <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/education/staff/644/dr-paula-clarke->



Dr Catherine Davies - Co-Investigator

Catherine is an Associate Professor in Language Development in the School of Languages, Cultures, and Societies. Her research focuses on the role of children's language environment in their lexical and pragmatic development. On the ICKLE project, Cat is working on the home learning environment data and the write-up and dissemination of findings. <https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/languages/staff/699/dr-catherine-davies>



Dr Matt Homer - Co-Investigator

Matt is an Associate Professor in the School of Education. He has over 15 years' experience of analysing assessment and educational data across a range of educational projects and settings. On the ICKLE project, he is mainly responsible for quantitative data analysis. <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/education/staff/475/dr-matt-homer>



Dr Rachel Mathieson - Research Fellow

Rachel is responsible for the day-to-day progress of the ICKLE project, including liaising with schools, development of research instruments, and data collection. She is also contributing to the write-up and dissemination of findings. <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/education/staff/152/dr-rachel-mathieson>



Dr Peter Hart - Research Fellow

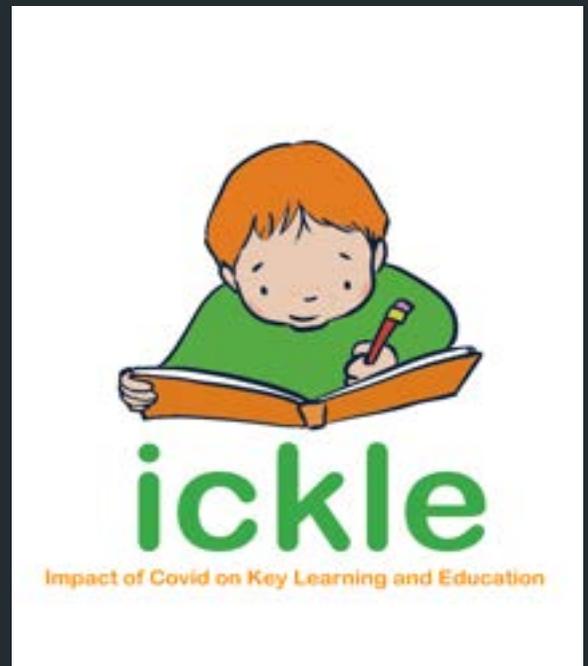
Peter is a Research Fellow in the [Centre for Inclusion, Childhood and Youth \(ICY\)](#) in the School of Education. Peter is assisting with quantitative data analysis on the ICKLE project. <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/education/staff/136/dr-peter-hart>



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