

Catch22 submission to the Education Committee: The impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services inquiry

Below please find evidence particularly focused on the following aspects of your inquiry:

- Support for pupils and families during closures.
- The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need).

About Catch22

Catch22 is a social business: a non-profit business driven by a social mission. For more than 200 years, we have worked across the UK to deliver better outcomes for young people and their families, wherever they face disadvantage. Last year we worked with 110,000 people, through 1,700 staff and volunteers in over 100 locations. Catch22's services for young people and families include children's social care, apprenticeships and employability programmes, justice and rehabilitation services, gangs intervention work, emotional wellbeing, substance misuse programmes and alternative provision education.

Our vision is a strong society where everyone has a good place to live, a purpose and good people around them. We exist to ensure these are achievable for everyone, no matter what their background.

We deliver alternative education through our own network of seven alternative provision and special SEMH academies as part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and five independent alternative provision schools. Catch22 works with learners who benefit from small, supportive alternative education provision. The children we work with are likely to be in the care of the state, to have grown up in poverty, to have a special educational need, or to suffer recognised mental health problems. Our first task when learners come to us, is to ensure they feel like they are in a safe place with supportive people around them, putting them in the right mind-set to realise and achieve their potential.

We support students to progress quickly and to succeed in sustained education or employment. Our high quality teaching and learning is focused on building effective relationships, enabling the students to build social skills and achieve meaningful qualifications. Our curriculum fosters pupils' enjoyment of learning and facilitates success.

Pupils respond well to developing a range of skills, including extra-curricular activities, which aid the development of social skills, team spirit and communication.

For the purpose of this inquiry we have focused on our alternative provision education, but could provide further evidence across children's social care and apprenticeships, if required.

Catch22's experience of the impact of COVID-19 in our schools

With the majority of pupils out of their classrooms, many parents or carers juggling work, family and supporting home learning, and teachers switching to digital delivery and daily 'safe and well' phone calls, the transformation we have had to undertake is an urgent response to an urgent moment.

Throughout the Covid-19 challenge our alternative provision and SEMH special schools have remained open to vulnerable children and the children of key workers and our school leaders and staff have gone above and beyond in continuing to make a provision and provide support to our pupils.

Our overriding mantra being... *'if we can do so safely then we will'* and our 'unlock plans' for schools aligned with our three key conditions:

- Staff must be confident that they are safe.
- School leaders must be confident in the arrangements they put in place adhere to the government guidance.
- Parents and pupils must be confident enough in our arrangements so pupils attend.

For our pupils the difficulties and disadvantages of life in lockdown are all the more stark. Some children are living in challenging home situations, some are unable to access the technology needed for home learning and some are struggling with their mental

health and wellbeing. The post Covid-19 consequences are significant as the performance gap is widening, access and equality is decreasing.

Thoughts of parents/carers and young people

We have been conducting an online survey with both parents/carers and our young people during lockdown to understand more about their thoughts and feelings on the support they are receiving. As part of this survey we asked them about how supportive they felt the school contact had been, as well as other services they might be accessing outside of the school. The survey is still open with results updating daily, but currently 84% of parents/carers said that contact from the schools had been supportive during this period, but 62% said that their child had not been supported by other services during this time, and 61% said that support from other agencies had not been useful. We know that strong relationships are crucial in supporting vulnerable young people and their families, something we have continued to focus on providing as much as possible during this time. The ability to have our schools open for vulnerable young people at this time has clearly continued to have a positive impact.

The transformation in education due to Covid-19 does seem to be having some real positives – legacy changes that we want to retain when things return to some degree of normality:

Home/School Relationships

There has been a genuine strengthening of relationships across the board, partly due to sense of ‘we’re all in this together’.

Creative approaches to the delivery of our on-site and home learning offer have developed quickly across the schools to meet the individual needs of pupils. Some school staff and parents have ‘teamed up’ using evidence-based programmes to target activities and support in meeting the emotional needs of their child. Feedback from pupils and parents is overwhelmingly positive and the personalised communications are ensuring effective sightlines on the safety and welfare of pupils and families.

This has transformed the need to prioritise therapeutic as well as academic education in support of achieving meaningful qualifications, sustained positive destinations and better social outcomes.

Sector partnership working and collaboration

Despite the obvious challenges, system changes (such as engagement with local authorities, support from Department for Education and cooperation between providers) has accelerated significantly and for the better.

The shared moral purpose of school and system leaders has resulted in genuine collaboration and partnership working between school leaders across the different phases (primary, secondary, special, AP) and sectors (academy, maintained, independent).

The sector voice is talking and listening and responding proactively and professionally. School leaders, MAT CEOs, local authorities, regional schools commissioners, DfE, professional associations. This 'teaming-up' has further strengthened professional relationships, respect and understanding for leading our schools through adversity in this urgent moment.

This unified system leadership and joined-up sector voice is a significant positive legacy and will stand schools in good stead – a pure force for improvement.

As we start to emerge from lockdown, and schools being to reopen fully, the post Covid-19 challenge to all of us will be to act on closing the vulnerable performance gap by sustaining the best elements from the last few months:

Catch22 post Covid-19 Alternative Provision Recommendations:

1. Give teachers the ability to prioritise therapeutic as well as an academic approach to education, in support of achieving meaningful qualifications, sustained positive destinations and better social outcomes for vulnerable young people or those with special educational needs.

2. Continue to drive the unification of sector leadership and provide opportunities to do so, strengthening relationships across the board, from mainstream and AP, as well as other local agencies working with vulnerable young people.
3. Develop a clear plan for digital inclusion for those students currently without access to technology for home learning. Many of the young people we work with are already at a significant disadvantage in life, and access to digital and technology should not be one of the additional barriers they face.

Catch22 welcomes the opportunity to provide more detail and evidence on request.

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