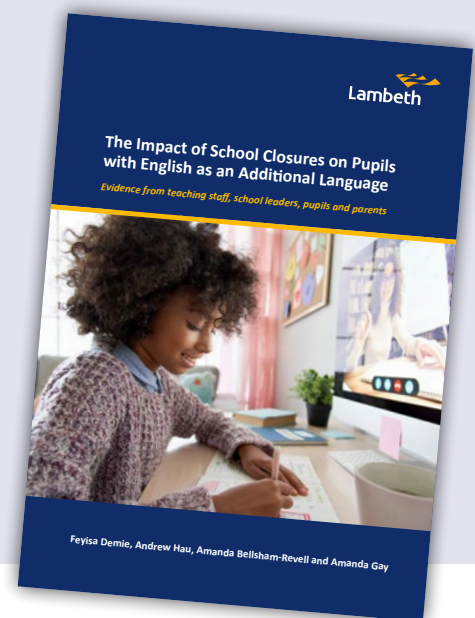


# The Impact of School Closures on Pupils with English as an Additional Language

## RESEARCH BRIEF

A new report “**The Impact of School Closures on Pupils with English as an Additional Language**” based on recent surveys of teaching staff, school leaders, pupils and parents found that EAL learners have experienced language loss in addition to learning loss during school closures. The surveys show that the pandemic has created significant disruption to EAL learners’ education and suggest that they are being increasingly left behind by their peers with over 75% of school staff reporting that school closures have had a negative impact on pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). It also confirms that students find it harder to start using and talking in English again, being unable to practice speaking during the closures. There are a number of key messages to come out of this study and the main findings of the surveys are summarised below:



### Teaching staff and school leaders survey

Respondents to the teaching and leadership survey gave the following views:

- 85% of school leaders felt that the learning needs and support for non-fluent EAL learners were greater than that for other pupils during school closures and 83% of teaching staff felt that it had been challenging to effectively support EAL learners during school closures.
- 88% of school leaders said their non-fluent EAL learners required extra provision to access the curriculum during school closures.
- 54% of teaching staff felt that their EAL learners engaged with the learning hosted online. Almost the same percentage stated that their families engaged effectively with home learning.
- 62% of leaders and 66% of teaching staff believed that Covid safe arrangements in the classroom (e.g. seating arrangements) impacted EAL learners more than their non-EAL peers.
- 69% of school leaders said that the impact of school closures on curriculum learning was greater for non-fluent EAL learners than their classmates and 49% of teaching staff felt there had been a negative impact on EAL pupils’ curriculum learning.
- 71% of school leaders stated that their non-fluent EAL learners had shown no English development or progression since lockdown and 59% of teaching staff thought there had been a negative impact on EAL pupil’s development in English.
- 75% of teaching staff were concerned about a long-term educational impact for EAL learners and 92% of leaders recognised the importance of establishing a plan and making additional provision for non-fluent learners.

Overwhelmingly, teaching staff said they found home teaching of EAL learners challenging, in terms of enabling access to learning platforms, ensuring learners understood the content and tasks in the lessons, as well as developing their English proficiency. Pupils with EAL found it harder to start talking in English again as they hadn’t practiced speaking during school closures.

Key comments from the teaching staff and school leadership surveys described concerns including:

*“All children have regressed both in education and in their ability to speak English”  
(Classroom Teacher, Early Years)*

*“Most of my pupils were engaging and participating but have found writing particularly challenging. It has been more challenging to provide them with support and guide them to the right places” (Classroom Teacher, Primary School)*

*“I think we will need to carefully re-assess EYFS moving into Year 1 and 2 and will notice a much higher number of pupils who will stay at stage A and B for longer.” (SENDCo, Primary School)*

*“One Portuguese student burst into tears as he had forgotten all the English language he had been taught.” (HLTA, Primary School)*

*“Students were keen to learn, but had made little to no progress during lockdown 1 and over the Summer” (EAL Coordinator, Secondary School)*

*“Some of the children in the earlier stages of English acquisition have found the virtual learning difficult to access which has led to misconceptions which are hard to address when not in the classroom. If children have struggled and also have limited or no support at home, then this will have impacted on their progress, especially if you compare them to their non-EAL peers.” (Assistant Headteacher, Primary School)*

*“Teachers’ ability to support children with EAL restricted. Other supportive learning opportunities restricted due to limits on staff cross over and lockdowns” (Headteacher/Principal, Primary School)*

*“Students who were learning English revert to the starting point of speaking home language as they were not in an environment to improve their English language” (Assistant Headteacher, Secondary School)*

## Parent and pupil survey

The overall evidence from the parent and pupil surveys showed that:

- Only one in four (25%) of parents reported that they spoke mainly English at home.
- 70% of parents read with their child during school closures, of which 47% read to their child in English and 39% in their home language (some of whom read with their child in both languages)
- 94% of families had home internet access, with 5% sometimes or never having internet access.
- 88% of parents responded that their child could access a computer at home. 12% indicated that their child sometimes or never had access to a computer when needed, rising to 18% for families with three or more children.
- 87% of parents felt their child needed help understanding the work sent home during school closures, with 47% stating that help was needed most of the time or always. This rose to 61% for families with the lowest levels of English proficiency.
- Younger pupils needed more help, with 81% at KS1 needing help most of the time or always.
- Only 36% of parents responded that someone was able to help their child understand the work at home. The majority noted that they could help only sometimes (35%) or never (29%).
- Only half (51%) of parents felt that teachers from school helped their child understand the work sent home.

- Almost half (48%) of respondents stated that their child had not ever received any help in English.
- 78% of all EAL learner respondents said they needed help to complete their work at home. This was higher for primary pupils (83%) than secondary (31%).
- 80% of pupils reported that their school helped them to understand the work sent home. However, one in five (20%) were not given help.
- One in three (34%) pupils were not helped by someone in the family because they could not/ did not understand the work.
- Half (49%) of pupils thought learning at home helped their English, whereas 82% noted an improvement in their home language.
- Half (49%) of pupils felt that school is harder now they have returned.

Parents and EAL learners who found home-schooling difficult, describing their experiences said:

*“Very concerned about the academic development of my children for not having sufficient means to assist them in their learning, and the difficulty of communicating...my English is not very good.” (Parent of EAL learner)*

*“Very bad because my child did not improve her learning. I can’t help too much because my English is not good enough.” (Parent of EAL learner)*

*“My brother has felt more frustrated since he wants to learn English being locked up but I have not been able to teach quickly” (Sister of EAL learner)*

*“ ‘Most people speak Polish at home’. The pupil also complained that there was ‘not enough time to get all the information’, meaning that they couldn’t complete all the work that they were given.” (EAL learner, Primary School)*

*“I don’t like it at all because , I don’t see anybody or talk. Was very sad.” (EAL learner, Secondary School)*

## Summary

Overall, the main findings of the teaching staff, school leaders, parents and pupil surveys confirm Covid has created significant disruption to EAL learners’ education and suggest that not only has their English proficiency fallen behind, but that the achievement gap will have widened. It indicates that the Covid pandemic has had a significant negative impact on EAL learners relative to their peers.

Since returning to school, respondents have assessed proficiency in English and have reported a negative impact across all four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening for pupils not yet fluent in English. Stage A beginner pupils have been most affected, with 75–80% respondents reporting a negative-highly negative impact. Stage B learners were somewhat less affected, with 65–75% respondents reporting a negative impact.

The key evidence from the surveys also identified some of the main reasons for the negative impact on education and the English proficiency of pupils with EAL. These included:

- less support in improving English proficiency during lockdown.
- missing access to small group lessons and one-to-one support in school.
- less access to technology for online learning.
- lack of parent English language skills to support learning at home.
- lack of targeted government funding to support EAL pupils.

The schools taking part in the surveys used a range of strategies to support EAL pupils including:

- Activity sheets/materials sent home
- Translation of materials into different languages
- Visual resources
- Small group and 1:1 intervention with EAL lead/coordinator
- Extra teaching support on a group basis
- Identifying new to English learners as vulnerable and attending school
- Use of EAL digital learning platforms/software
- Allocating home language speaking teaching staff to specific pupils
- Targeting pupils and issuing learning packs to supplement live lessons
- Phone calls home and telephone support with a staff member fluent in their language
- Online English language materials/activities
- Use of translators

Finally, the study also argues that many pupils at the early stages of English language acquisition did not have opportunities to hear, speak or read in English during school closures, resulting in a clear pattern of English language loss observed by teachers in both primary and secondary phases. This is further supported by Department for Education (2020) research that found in reading, pupils with English as an additional language experienced a learning loss of approximately 2.3 months for secondary aged pupils, compared to an average learning loss in secondary reading of around 1.7 months, reinforcing the challenges that schools face in supporting our EAL learners during catch-up.

## Recommendations

The recommendations from this study are that:

- EAL learners are an extremely diverse group, encompassing the full range of English language proficiency, from new to English to fluent. It is important to identify and recognise that it is “non-fluent in English” EAL learners who face the greatest challenges and require significant educational support and should be represented as a disadvantaged group in national policy-making and performance and data analyses.
- Improving English proficiency that was lost during school closures is key to raising the achievement of pupils with EAL. Evidence from EEF research shows that high quality one-to-one and small group tutoring could lead to four to five months of progress for pupils. There is therefore a need for well-focussed catch-up and recovery plans to take into consideration the English language learning loss, in addition to general learning loss for pupils.
- The training for National Tutoring Programme trainers should ensure that tutors are equipped with the skills they need to support the catch-up of pupils with EAL.
- The DfE should provide schools with guidance on undertaking consistent assessment, moderation and recording of proficiency in English levels to monitor the progress of EAL pupils and the impact of targeted support.

## Notes for editors:

1. The research was carried out by Feyisa Demie, Andrew Hau, Amanda Bellsham-Revell, Amanda Gay.
2. Details of the findings are published in a research report entitled ‘**The Impact of School Closures on Pupils with English as an Additional Language**’. Download the PDF: [The Impact of School Closures on Pupils with English as an Additional Language \(lambeth.gov.uk\)](https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/research-reports)  
Visit our website: <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/rsu/research-reports>
3. For further information please contact: Feyisa Demie, Schools’ Research and Statistics, Education and Learning, Lambeth LA E-mail: [fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:fdemie@lambeth.gov.uk) **15 February 2022**