

Statistical bulletin

# COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, England: pandemic response measures in schools: January to February 2022

Analysis of coronavirus (COVID-19) findings on face coverings and remote learning from the Schools Infection Survey's headteacher, parent and pupil questionnaires. The survey is jointly led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK Health Security Agency and the Office for National Statistics.

Contact:  
Andrea Lacey, Samantha Toon,  
Dylan Stocker, Ben Ford  
[schools.infection.survey@ons.gov.uk](mailto:schools.infection.survey@ons.gov.uk)  
+44 1633 651663

Release date:  
3 May 2022

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Face coverings](#)
3. [Remote learning](#)
4. [COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, questionnaire data](#)
5. [Collaboration](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Measuring the data](#)
8. [Strengths and limitations](#)
9. [Related links](#)

# 1 . Main points

- After the government recommendation for secondary school pupils to wear face coverings in lessons was removed on 20 January 2022, the proportion of pupils reporting that they always wore face coverings in lessons was 50%, compared to 80% beforehand.
- Headteachers (61%) and pupils (70%) in secondary schools said that wearing face coverings in school definitely or probably should be made mandatory; in contrast 97% of primary school headteachers said that face coverings definitely or probably should not be made mandatory.
- Secondary school pupils absent from school because of a coronavirus (COVID-19)-related reason during the autumn term spent longer on remote learning (3.4 hours on average) than primary school pupils (2.5 hours on average).
- The parents of 42% of primary school pupils and 38% of secondary school pupils who had learnt remotely felt their child found remote learning "difficult" or "very difficult".
- "Struggling with motivation" was the main barrier to learning at home reported by primary school children's parents (39%), secondary school children's parents (44%) and secondary school pupils themselves (55%).
- Teachers' biggest concern about providing remote education was a lack of engagement from pupils (69% in primary and 74% in secondary).

Where differences between groups exist, confidence intervals provided in datasets should be used to assess [statistical significance](#). The word "significantly" is used to highlight differences that have been found to be statistically significant.

## 2 . Face coverings

Government recommendations on face coverings in England changed during the collection period. The recommendation for face coverings to be worn in secondary school classrooms was removed on 20 January 2022 and the requirement for them to be worn in communal areas in secondary schools was removed on 27 January 2022.

Local authorities may have provided their own public health advice including guidance on face coverings, with some areas potentially continuing the recommendation of wearing them in schools beyond 20 January 2022.

There has never been a recommendation for primary school pupils to wear face coverings.

Requirements to wear a face covering in public indoor settings in England, such as shops and public transport, were also removed on 27 January. This bulletin covers data collected between 18 January and 11 February 2022.

The definition of face covering can be found in the [glossary](#).

## Attitudes to face coverings

Attitudes to face coverings varied considerably between primary and secondary school headteachers. At the time of collection, 61% of secondary school headteachers said that face coverings "definitely" or "probably" should be mandatory in secondary schools.

In contrast, 97% of primary school headteachers said that face coverings "definitely" or "probably" should not be made mandatory.

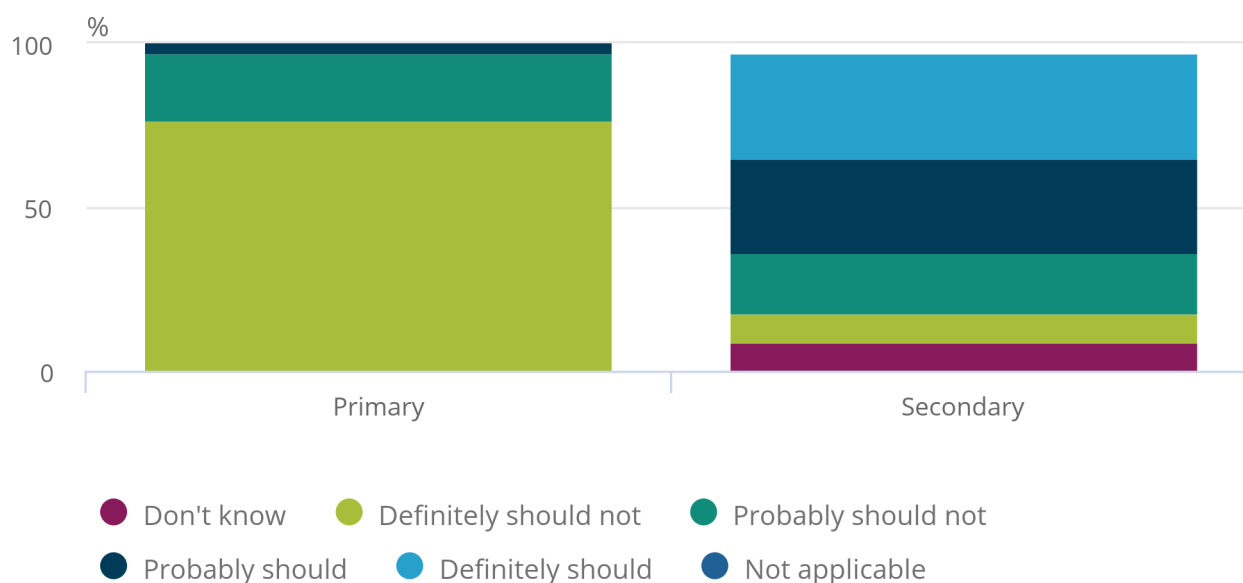
Headteacher data referenced throughout this article are unweighted as sample sizes are small. This means the data are representative of the schools who responded but not necessarily of the entire school population in England.

### Figure 1: Most secondary school headteachers thought that face coverings should be mandatory in their schools, while primary school headteachers did not

Opinions of primary and secondary headteachers on whether the wearing of face coverings should be mandatory in schools of their type, England, 2022

Figure 1: Most secondary school headteachers thought that face coverings should be mandatory in their schools, while primary school headteachers did not

Opinions of primary and secondary headteachers on whether the wearing of face coverings should be mandatory in schools of their type, England, 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

#### Notes:

1. Question; Do you think primary/secondary schools should or should not make pupils wear masks while attending school, unless they are exempt?
2. Base; Primary school headteachers, n = 91 from headteacher questionnaire
3. Base; Secondary school headteachers, n = 34 from headteacher questionnaire
4. Please note that data from headteachers are unweighted.
5. Data for not applicable category has been suppressed due to sample sizes.

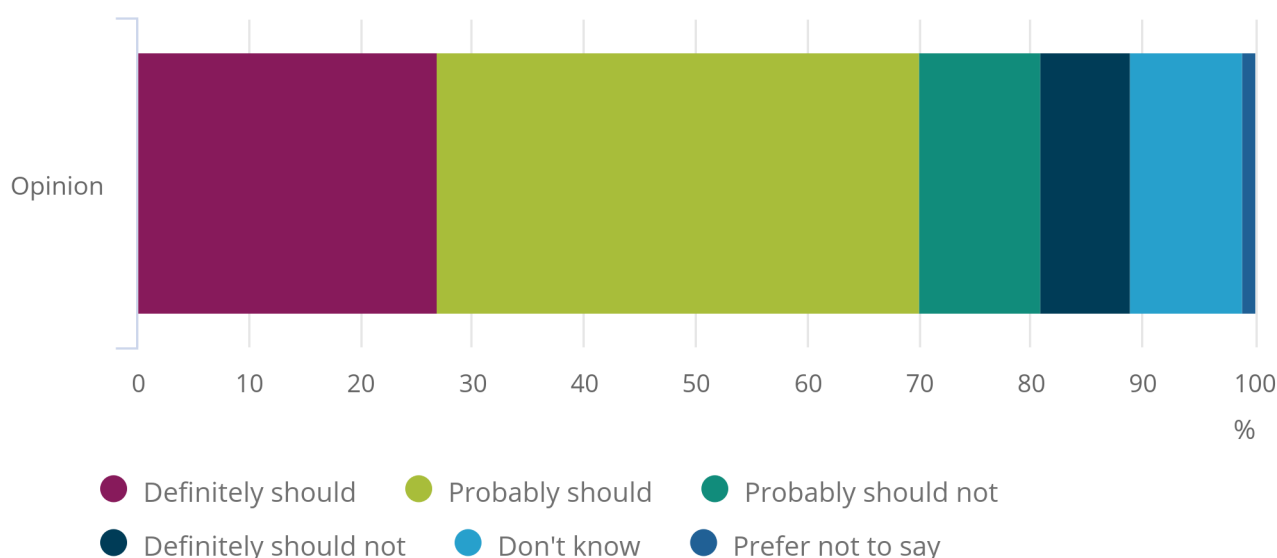
Secondary school pupils (years 7 to 13) echo their teachers' opinions, with 70% stating that face coverings should "definitely" or "probably" be made mandatory in secondary schools.

## Figure 2: Most secondary school pupils thought that face coverings should be mandatory in secondary schools

Opinions of secondary school pupils on whether the wearing of face coverings should be mandatory in secondary schools, England, January to February 2022

### Figure 2: Most secondary school pupils thought that face coverings should be mandatory in secondary schools

Opinions of secondary school pupils on whether the wearing of face coverings should be mandatory in secondary schools, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

#### Notes:

1. Question: Do you think secondary schools should or should not make pupils wear masks while attending school, unless they are exempt?
2. Base: Secondary school pupils (years 7 to 13), n = 2,481 from pupil questionnaire.

Both primary school and secondary school headteachers in the study agreed that wearing face coverings made communication (78% and 74% respectively) and learning (74% and 71% respectively) more difficult.

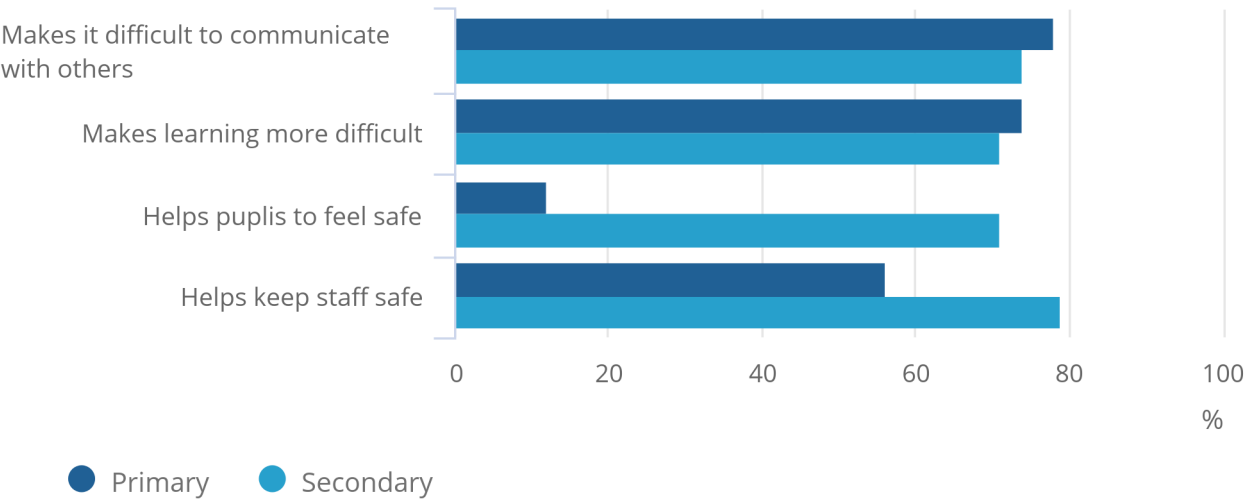
Over 7 in 10 (71%) secondary school headteachers agreed that face coverings helped pupils to feel safe, compared with 12% of primary school headteachers. Among primary school headteachers, 70% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. More secondary school than primary school headteachers also agreed that face coverings helped to keep staff safe (79% compared with 56%).

**Figure 3: Primary school headteachers in the study were less likely than secondary school headteachers to agree that wearing face coverings helps pupils and staff to feel safe**

Proportions of primary and secondary headteachers agreeing to various statements on the wearing of face coverings, England, January to February 2022

Figure 3: Primary school headteachers in the study were less likely than secondary school headteachers to agree that wearing face coverings helps pupils and staff to feel safe

Proportions of primary and secondary headteachers agreeing to various statements on the wearing of face coverings, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

Notes:

1. Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? Pupils wearing a mask/face covering... [figures are net of 'strongly agree' and 'agree']
2. Base: Primary school headteachers, n = 91 from headteacher questionnaire
3. Base: Secondary school headteachers, n = 34 from headteacher questionnaire
4. Please note that headteacher data are unweighted.

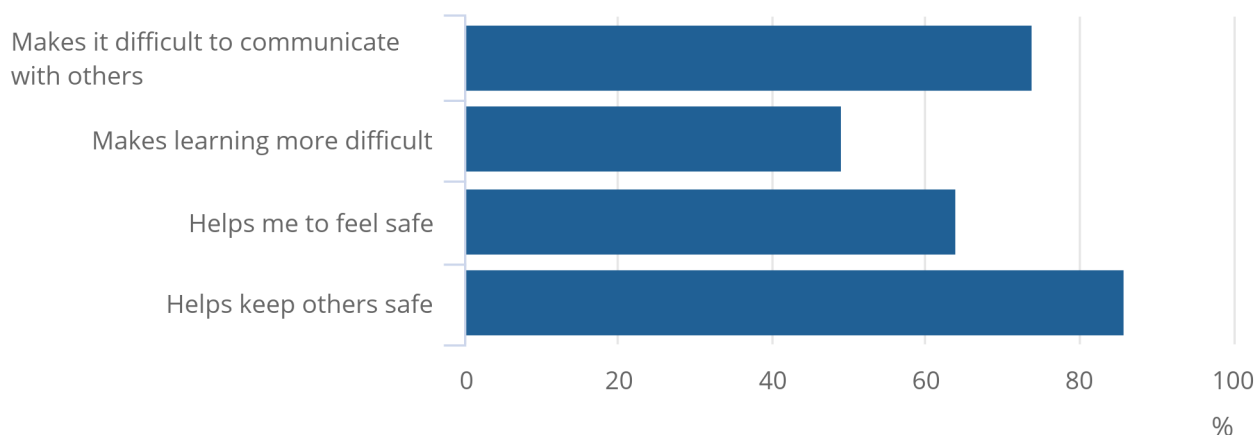
Similarly, most secondary school pupils said that face coverings made it difficult to communicate with others (74%). About half (49%) agreed that they made learning more difficult. Most reported that face coverings helped them to feel safe (64%). Nearly 9 in 10 (86%) agreed that face coverings helped to keep others safe.

#### Figure 4: Most secondary school pupils agreed that wearing face coverings helped keep themselves and others safe

Figures of secondary school pupils “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” with statements on face coverings, England, January to February 2022

### Figure 4: Most secondary school pupils agreed that wearing face coverings helped keep themselves and others safe

Figures of secondary school pupils “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” with statements on face coverings, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

#### Notes:

1. Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following? Wearing a mask/face covering...
2. Figures are total of “strongly agree” and “agree” response categories.
3. Base: Secondary school pupils (years 7 to 13) who answered this question, n = 2,474 from pupil questionnaire

There were similarities between opinions of pupils and their parents. Among secondary school pupils (years 7 to 11) whose parent agreed that face coverings help to keep others safe, 91% also agreed with this statement, compared with 40% of those whose parent did not agree. Parent opinions and comparisons between pupil and parent opinions can be found in our accompanying [Schools Infection Survey datasets](#).

## Use of face coverings inside and outside of school settings

One in five (21%) secondary school headteachers in the study reported implementing the use of face coverings inside classrooms, despite no government recommendation being in place at the time of collection.

Half (50%) of secondary schools reported implementing face coverings in corridors and communal areas. The national requirement to wear face coverings in corridors was removed during the data collection period, so school policies would likely be shifting at this time.

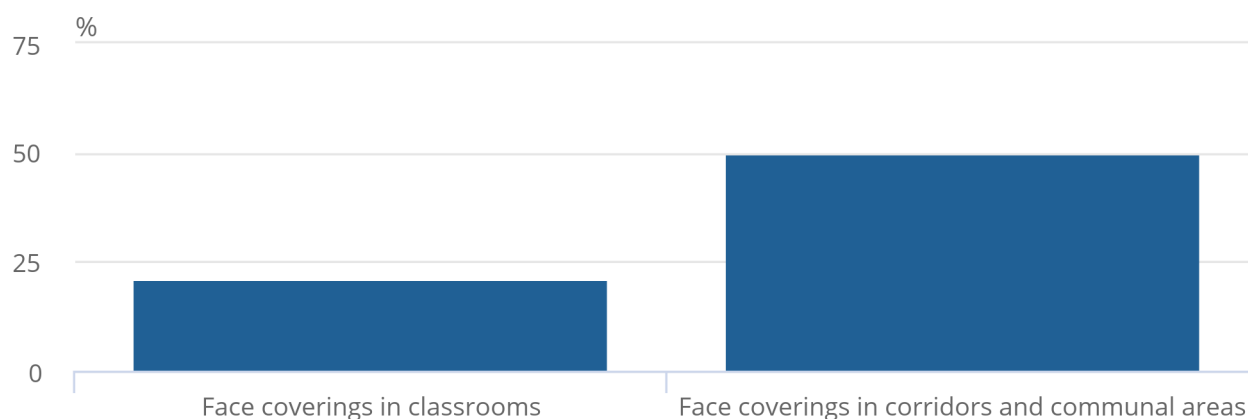
There was very little implementation of the use of face coverings by pupils in primary schools, as pupils aged under 11 years have always been exempt from government policy relating to face coverings.

### Figure 5: Secondary schools had varied implementation of using face coverings in their school

Implementation of face coverings policies in secondary schools, England, January to February 2022

#### Figure 5: Secondary schools had varied implementation of using face coverings in their school

Implementation of face coverings policies in secondary schools, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

#### Notes:

1. Question: Which of the following infection preventive measures are being implemented at your school? [Pupils wear facemasks or face coverings in the classroom] [Pupils wear facemasks or face coverings in corridors or communal areas]
2. Figures are the total "implemented" responses.
3. Base: Headteachers of secondary schools, n = 34.
4. Please note that headteacher data is unweighted.

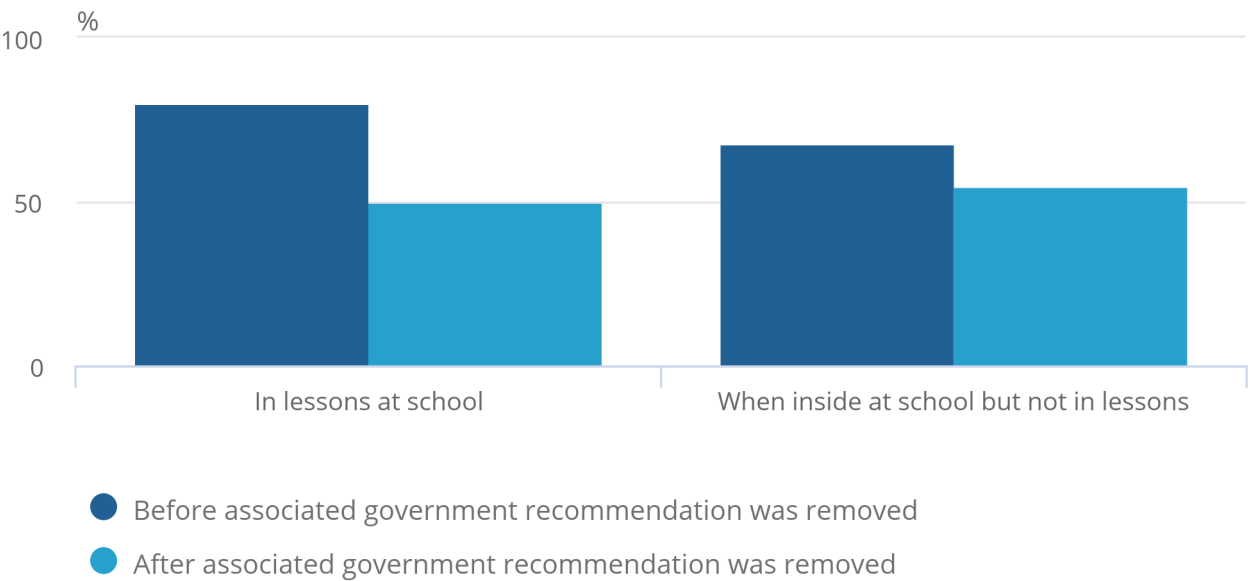
Despite face coverings not being a requirement for the majority of the data collection period, 65% of secondary school pupils reported “always” wearing face coverings when in school corridors or communal areas and 61% reported “always” wearing them in lessons. After government recommendations were removed, fewer pupils said they “always” wore face coverings in lessons (50%) or in corridors or communal areas (55%) than before restrictions were removed (80% and 68% respectively).

**Figure 6: Over half of secondary school pupils continued to wear face coverings after the recommendation to wear them was removed**

Secondary school pupils "always" wearing face coverings in schools before and after government recommendation changes, England, January to February 2022

Figure 6: Over half of secondary school pupils continued to wear face coverings after the recommendation to wear them was removed

Secondary school pupils “always” wearing face coverings in schools before and after government recommendation changes, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

Notes:

1. Question: How often, if at all, do you wear your mask/face covering in the below circumstances? [In lessons at school] [When inside at school but not in lessons]
2. Base: Secondary school pupils (years 7 to 13) who were not exempt from wearing face coverings and who answered this question, n=2,339 from pupil questionnaire.
3. The government recommendation for face coverings to be worn in classrooms in England was removed on 20 January 2022 and the recommendation for face coverings to be worn in corridors and communal areas on 27 January 2022.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of those who use a school bus or public transport to get to and from school said that they “always” wear a face covering while using this transport.

Of secondary school pupils who responded after restrictions were removed on 27 January, 60% “always” wore face coverings in shops and 32% “always” wore them in crowded outdoor spaces. Only 7% reported “always” wearing face coverings to meet people indoors or while walking along a quiet street.

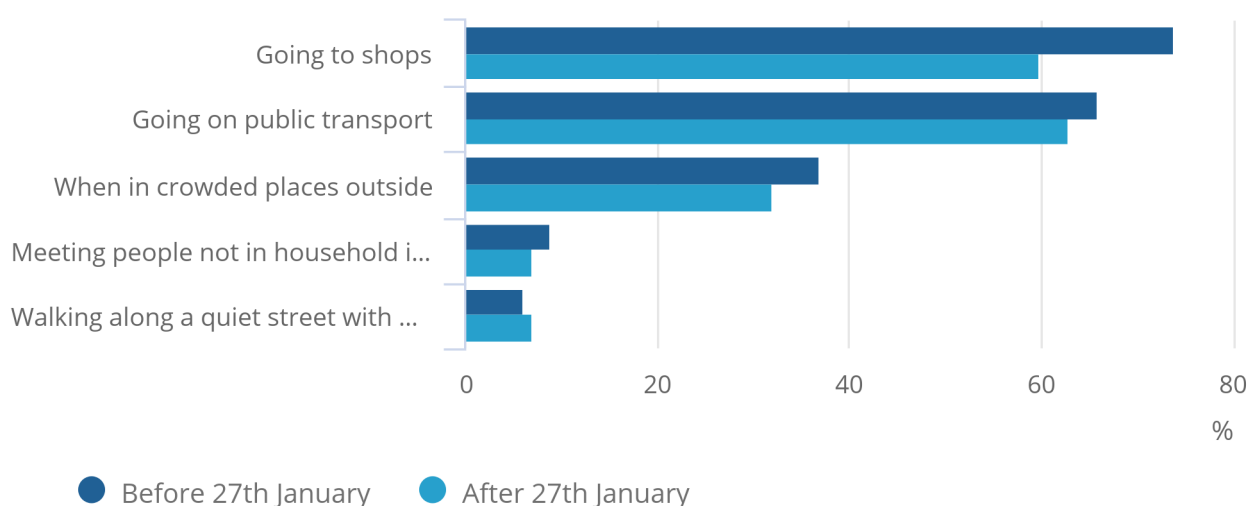


**Figure 7: The proportion of secondary school pupils “always” wearing face masks outside school varied by setting**

Secondary school pupils self-reporting on their use of face coverings outside schools, England, January to February 2022

**Figure 7: The proportion of secondary school pupils “always” wearing face masks outside school varied by setting**

Secondary school pupils self-reporting on their use of face coverings outside schools, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

**Notes:**

1. Secondary school pupils (years 7 to 13) who were not exempt from wearing face coverings, n = 1,846 and 499 for before and after 27 January 2022, from pupil questionnaire.
2. Question: Outside of when you are in or travelling to school/college, how often do you wear a mask or face covering on any of the following occasions?

Parents were also asked about the use of face coverings by their secondary school-aged children inside and outside school. Results were similar to the pupils' self-reported figures and can be found in our accompanying [Schools Infection Survey datasets](#).

### 3 . Remote learning

Secondary school pupils in years 7 to 13 and parents of primary school pupils and secondary school pupils in years 7 to 11 were asked questions about their, or their child's, experiences with remote learning during the autumn term of the 2021 to 2022 academic year if they had been absent because of coronavirus (COVID-19) reasons. Throughout this period, there were no national requirements for restricted attendance in school and schools were required by law to provide a remote education for pupils who were absent because of a COVID-19-related issue, for example, self-isolation.

Of those sampled, 42% of primary school pupils' parents and 38% of secondary school pupils' parents said their child had been physically absent from school in the autumn term because of a coronavirus-related issue. Similarly, 39% of secondary school pupils sampled said they had been absent from school during this period. We do not know if those absent from school had mild or no symptoms or whether they were too ill to learn remotely.

#### Time spent learning remotely

Within the primary schools sampled, 36% of headteachers expected Key Stage 1 pupils (years 1 to 2) to study for up to 3 hours a day while physically absent from school and 40% of headteachers expected Key Stage 2 pupils (years 3 to 6) to study for up to 4 hours a day.

Within secondary schools, 62% of headteachers expected pupils in Key Stage 3 and 4 (years 7 to 11) to study for up to 5 hours a day. This is in line with [guidance provided to schools for remote learning](#).

Parents of secondary school pupils reported their child learnt remotely for an average of 3.4 hours a day when absent from school because of coronavirus reasons, compared with an average of 2.5 hours for primary school pupils.

## Remote-learning methods

Delivering work via online learning platforms for pupils studying from home was the most common method for delivering remote learning used by both primary school headteachers (86%) and secondary school headteachers (79%).

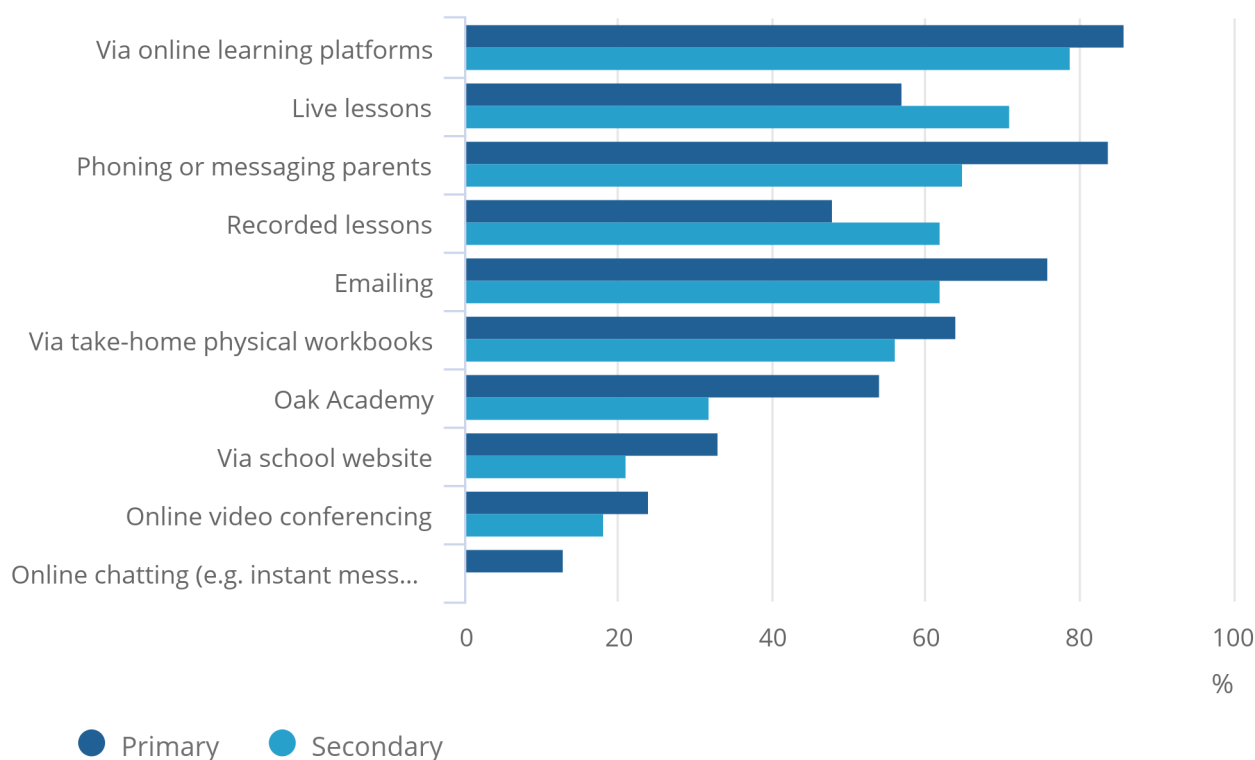
More secondary school than primary school headteachers said they delivered work remotely via either live (71% compared with 57%) or recorded (62% compared with 48%) lessons.

**Figure 8: Delivering work via online learning platforms was the most common method schools in the study used to aid remote learning**

Methods that primary and secondary headteachers used to deliver work for pupils learning at home, England, January to February 2022

## Figure 8: Delivering work via online learning platforms was the most common method schools in the study used to aid remote learning

Methods that primary and secondary headteachers used to deliver work for pupils learning at home, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

### Notes:

1. Question: Have you used any of the following methods to deliver work for your pupils learning at home due to coronavirus (COVID-19)?
2. Base: all headteachers, n = 91 (primary), n = 34 (secondary).
3. Some values for secondary schools have been suppressed due to small sample sizes.
4. Responses to “don’t know” and “other” have been excluded as results were suppressed because of low counts.
5. Figures presented are unweighted.

Over half of secondary school pupils said being given online worksheets or activities (62%) and having lessons over video call (55%) were the most helpful methods of remote teaching.



## Barriers to remote learning

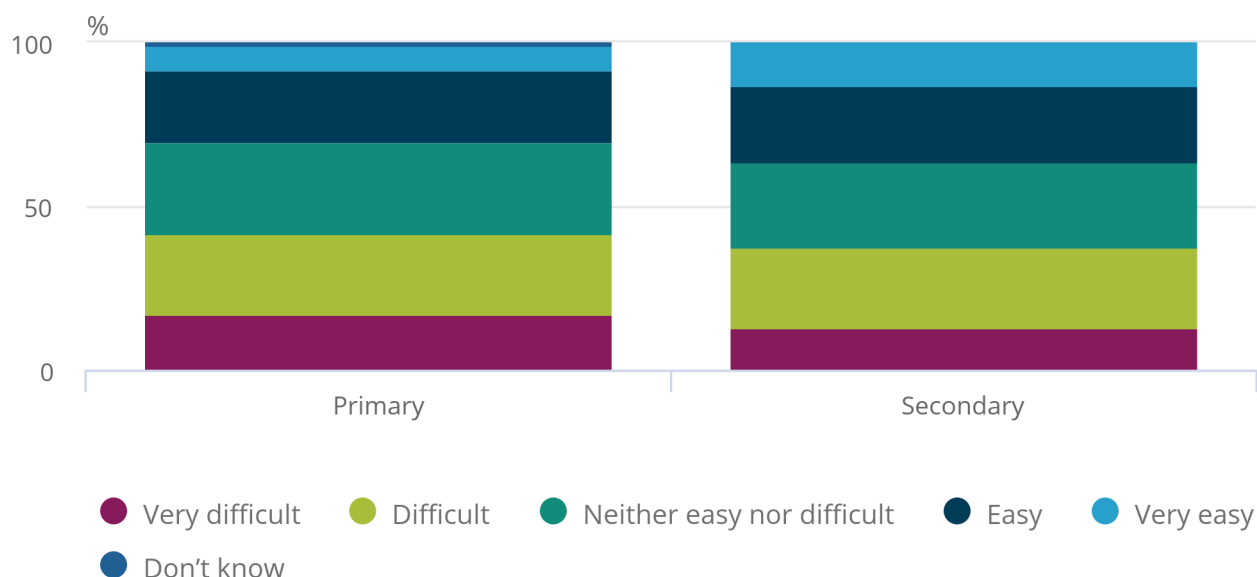
For primary school pupils who had been set remote learning during the autumn term, 42% had found learning remotely either "difficult" or "very difficult" according to their parents (Figure 9). This was similar for secondary school pupils (38%).

**Figure 9: More primary school children's parents said their child found remote learning difficult**

Opinions of parents of primary and secondary school pupils about difficulty of remote learning, England, January to February 2022

Figure 9: More primary school children's parents said their child found remote learning difficult

Opinions of parents of primary and secondary school pupils about difficulty of remote learning, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

### Notes:

1. Question: How easy or difficult has [child's first name] found remote/home learning?
2. Base: Primary school pupils who have been absent because of COVID-19 reasons and were set remote learning, n = 1,472 from parent survey.
3. Base: Secondary school pupils who have been absent because of COVID-19 reasons and were set remote learning, n = 1,195 from parent survey.

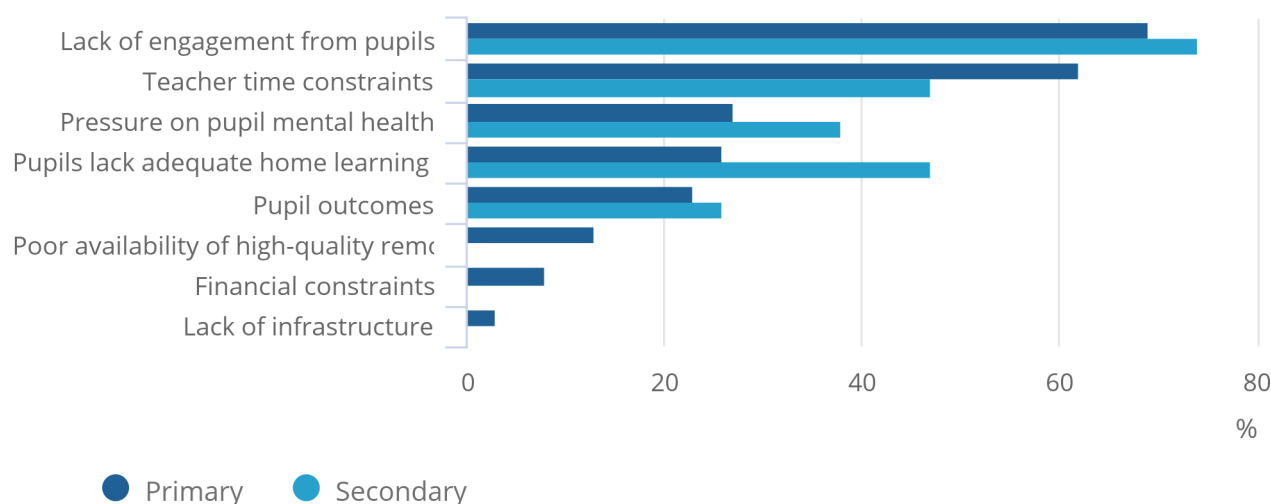
Nearly all primary school headteachers (93%) and secondary school headteachers (91%) expressed at least one concern with providing remote teaching for pupils who are unable to attend school during the autumn term (Figure 10). The lack of engagement from pupils was the most frequent concern for both primary school (69%) and secondary school (74%) headteachers. We do not measure within classroom engagement levels, so we do not know whether engagement is a barrier to in-person learning too.

**Figure 10: Headteachers in the study said lack of pupil engagement was their biggest concern about delivering remote learning**

Concerns of headteachers in primary and secondary schools about providing remote education, England, January to February 2022

## Figure 10: Headteachers in the study said lack of pupil engagement was their biggest concern about delivering remote learning

Concerns of headteachers in primary and secondary schools about providing remote education, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

### Notes:

1. Question: Which, if any, of these specific concerns do you have about providing remote education for pupils who are unable to attend school?
2. Base: all headteachers, n = 91 (primary), n = 34 (secondary).
3. Some values for secondary schools have been suppressed due to small sample sizes.
4. Figures presented are unweighted.

Most secondary school pupils (58%) said they had experienced at least one struggle when learning from home.

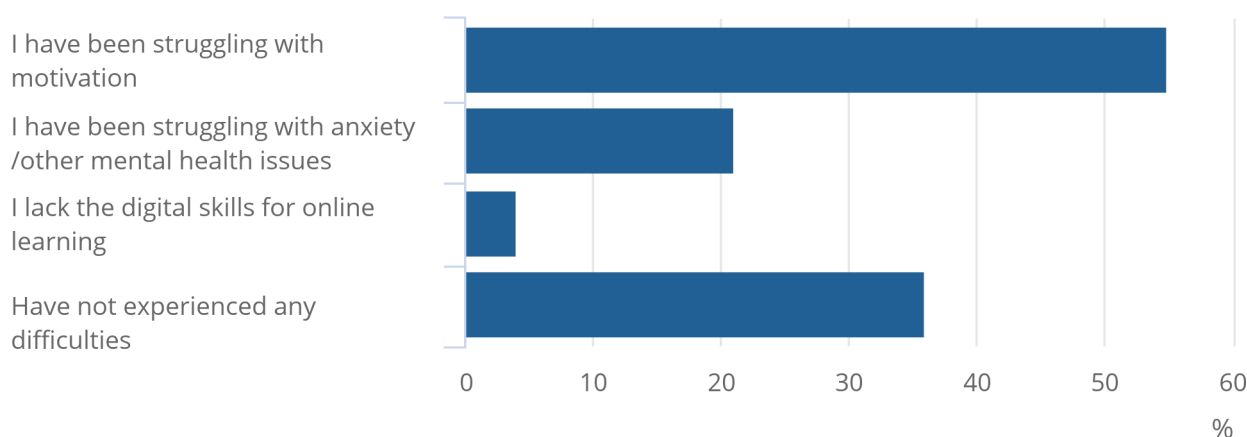
Of these, the most common response was that pupils struggled with motivation (55%). This reflects the concern of headteachers around the lack of engagement from pupils when providing remote learning. Just over a third (36%) of secondary school pupils said they had not been experiencing any difficulties while learning remotely.

## Figure 11: Struggling with motivation was the most frequent issue for secondary school pupils learning remotely

Opinions of secondary school pupils about struggles with home learning, England, January to February 2022

### Figure 11: Struggling with motivation was the most frequent issue for secondary school pupils learning remotely

Opinions of secondary school pupils about struggles with home learning, England, January to February 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey

#### Notes:

1. Question: Which, if any, of the following caused you to struggle with your home learning?
2. Base: Pupils who have been absent because of COVID-19 reasons and were set remote learning (years 7 to 13), n=872.

Of those provided with remote learning, 62% of primary school pupils' parents and 61% of secondary school pupils' parents said their child had faced at least one barrier that made it difficult for them to learn remotely.

The main barrier reported by parents of primary school pupils (39%) and parents of secondary school pupils (44%) was that their child lacked motivation when learning remotely. Full analysis of barriers to remote learning can be found in our accompanying Schools Infection Survey datasets.

#### More about coronavirus

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- [Explore the latest coronavirus data and analysis](#) from the ONS and other sources.
- View [all coronavirus data](#).
- Find out how we are [working safely in our studies and surveys](#).



## 4 . COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, questionnaire data

[COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, face coverings and remote learning, England](#)

Dataset | Released 3 May 2022

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on young people and schools, including analysis of face coverings and remote learning, and breakdowns by age and sex where possible. Indicators from the Schools Infection Survey.

## 5 . Collaboration

LONDON  
SCHOOL of  
HYGIENE  
& TROPICAL  
MEDICINE



UK Health  
Security  
Agency

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools Infection Survey analysis was produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in collaboration with our research partners at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and UK Health Security Agency. Of note are:

- Shamez Ladhani - UK Health Security Agency: Consultant Epidemiologist and Study Chief Investigator
- Georgina Ireland - UK Health Security Agency: Senior Scientist
- Patrick Nguipdop-Djomo - London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: Associate Professor of Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Study Co-Principal Investigator
- Punam Mangtani - London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: Professor of Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Study Co-Principal Investigator

## 6 . Glossary

### Primary school pupils

Primary school pupils are those in year groups Reception to Year 6. These year groups cover pupils aged 4 to 11 years.

### Secondary school pupils

Secondary school pupils are those in year groups Year 7 to Year 13. These year groups cover pupils aged 11 to 18 years.

## Headteachers

The headteacher questionnaire is filled out by either the headteacher of a participating school in the Schools Infection Survey (SIS) or a nominated member of school staff. The results are based on responses collected from headteachers, assistant or deputy headteachers, leadership team members, and other staff (for example, personal assistant, business administrator and office staff). We refer to the base of the results as "headteachers" even if the questionnaire was completed by someone else.

## Face coverings

Face covering is the term used by the UK government to describe a piece of material that can be secured around the face to cover the nose and mouth. It does not have to be a medically graded mask. Face coverings can reduce the risk against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, reducing the spread of droplets and aerosols carrying coronavirus.

## Remote learning

Remote learning covers all activities that pupils and teachers use to stay connected with classroom activities, while a pupil is not physically present at school. At the time of this research, remote learning was only used when individual pupils were required to stay at home because of coronavirus reasons.

# 7 . Measuring the data

Data presented in this bulletin are from Round 2 of the COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey (SIS) during the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Data from the parent and pupil questionnaires are weighted to population totals for pupils in England. Headteacher questionnaire data are unweighted because of small sample sizes.

Our [methodology article](#) provides further information about response rates, survey design, how we process data and estimation methods.

Reference period

Coverage dates for each survey are:

- 18 January to 9 February 2022 for the pupil and parent questionnaire
- 26 January to 11 February 2022 for the headteacher questionnaire

Response rates

The estimated response rates are:

- 44% for the pupil questionnaire where 2,482 pupils responded from 5,634 eligible participants registered
- 64% for the parent questionnaire where parents responded on behalf of 7,010 children from 10,979 eligible children registered
- 76% for the headteacher questionnaire where 125 headteachers or delegated authority responded on behalf of 165 registered schools

Response rates are dependent on people voluntarily completing the questionnaire, which may introduce respondent bias. As such, pupils and/or parents who are digitally excluded may be more likely to have difficulties with remote learning and may be underestimated in the sample.

## 8 . Strengths and limitations

Please refer to the [Strengths and limitations section](#) of our previous bulletin.

## 9 . Related links

[COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, England: attitudes to vaccines and preventative measures, November to December 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 1 February 2022

Initial insights from the first round of questionnaire data collected as part of the Schools Infection Survey. Topics cover vaccine sentiment, ventilation in schools and preventative measures implemented in schools.

[COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, England: mental health and long COVID, November to December 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 28 February 2022

Analysis of COVID-19 findings on mental health and long COVID from the Schools Infection Survey's headteacher, parent and pupil questionnaires.