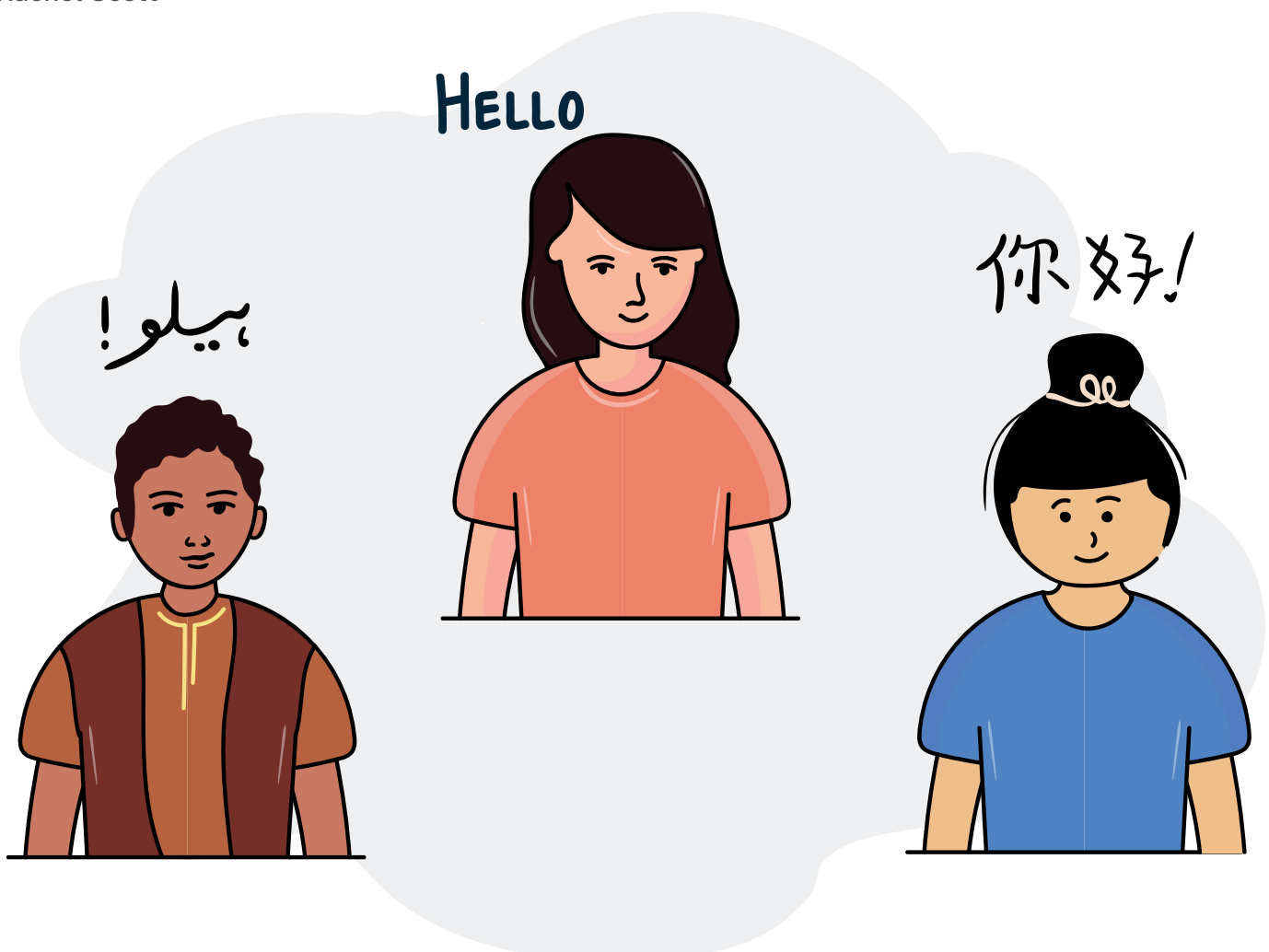


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# Language and learning loss: The evidence on children who use English as an Additional Language

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## About The Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, we aim to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged through language.

The Foundation works in four key areas:

- **The EAL Programme aims to improve the educational outcomes of children who use English as an Additional Language in the UK to benefit the individual child and society as a whole. The Foundation works in partnership with a range of organisations across the education system to provide training and resources in order to build capacity, develop and evaluate models of good practice, and provide thought leadership.**
- **The ESOL Programme is a new pilot programme to improve outcomes for adults and young people aged 16 to 25, and migrant workers, including refugees and asylum seekers, who use English as a second or additional language. The programme will include investment in projects and partnerships which improve outcomes for ESOL learners.**
- **The Criminal Justice Programme seeks to break down the language barrier to accessing justice and rehabilitation for individuals in contact with the criminal justice system for whom English is an Additional Language. In 2017 the Foundation developed a long-term strategy for its work in the sector, with a focus on both victims and offenders of crime. The Foundation works through interventions in research, policy, practice and service support.**
- **Language for Results International is The Bell Foundation's new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer for the international school sector. It has been informed by evidence and developed by experts in language education to provide a comprehensive set of training, resources and tools for international schools.**

## Contents

<b>1. Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Key findings</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Key recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5. The dataset</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Evidence of regression in English language learning</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7. Hesitant to speak: How school closures impacted EAL learners' confidence</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>8. Children left behind: Remote learning for pupils who use EAL</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>9. The role of the family or care giver in learning during lockdowns</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>10. EAL and disadvantage</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>11. The challenge for pupils who use EAL in secondary school</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>12. The role of peers</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>13. Conclusion</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Annex</b>	<b>20</b>

Please Note: The quotations throughout this document are taken from the National Foundation for Educational Research Teacher Omnibus Survey Spring 2021 (NFER, 2021). The views expressed are those of teachers and not necessarily those of The Bell Foundation. The vocabulary used in quotations may not be the preferred terminology of The Bell Foundation.

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## 1. Executive Summary

*Children where English is not spoken at home have struggled to access the curriculum. The younger they are, the greater the regression, as EYFS and KS1 children are struggling to read and write as well as they did before Covid 19 [...]*

Senior leader, primary school, North West/Merseyside

*We have observed a significant and tangible loss in learning in the majority of our pupils where English is an additional language. A major factor in this is the inability of parents to support their children effectively due to barriers over accessing resources and technology as a direct result of language barriers.*

Senior leader, primary school, South East

From March 2020 when schools across England closed to most pupils, many pupils who use English as an Additional Language (EAL)<sup>1</sup>, and particularly those new to English or at the early stages of English acquisition, experienced both learning loss and language learning loss.

The EAL cohort is heterogeneous as it includes, for example, an advanced bilingual child of a high-income family, and a refugee with no prior education living in a deprived area. This means that statements about this group of learners based on aggregate data have the potential to mislead, since EAL learners include high-performing advanced bilingual pupils from families where education is highly valued and children with significant support needs with limited language and literacy in their first language as well as in English.

Research has found that EAL pupils' proficiency in English explains as much as 22 per cent of the variation in EAL pupils' achievement compared to the typical three to four per cent that can be statistically explained by gender, free school meal status and ethnicity (Strand and Hessel, 2018). Given the strong correlation between English language proficiency and educational attainment (Strand and Hessel, 2018; Strand and Lindorff, 2020), the importance of addressing language loss and supporting pupils and teachers to do this should be an essential feature of catch up and recovery plans.

In January 2021, schools in England were closed for a second time to most pupils, and children in England lost over six months of classroom time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst some parents were able to provide educational support in their home language, for many EAL pupils, without modelling of academic English in the classroom, and with reduced exposure to English from both adults and peers, their ability to access the curriculum and home learning is likely to have been limited. In response to anecdotal evidence of English language loss in pupils who use EAL, The Bell Foundation commissioned research to gain a deeper understanding of the extent and nature of language learning loss in the EAL cohort.

This report draws on a representative sample of qualitative responses of teachers' observation of language loss in pupils who use EAL.

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1. A pupil is recorded to have English as an additional language if they are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English. This measure is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration (Department for Education, 2019).

## 2. Methodology

This report draws on teachers' perceptions based on their observations of pupils' interactions, work and behaviour in class, collected through the National Foundation for Educational Research Teacher Omnibus Survey Spring 2021 (NFER, 2021)<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose is to identify and understand the extent and nature of English language learning loss for pupils who use EAL across the four skill areas: listening, reading, writing and speaking (r/w/l/s). Within that aim the research identifies further specific sub-questions:

- How does language learning loss manifest in the classroom?
- How have pupils using EAL fared in general learning impact (i.e. not language specific loss) and how does that compare to their English-speaking peers?

The survey was administered in March 2021, shortly after schools re-opened. The responses therefore draw on both observations from the autumn term (following the first school closure) and from the return of all pupils from March 2021 (following the second closure).

### The survey questions were:

#### Closed question:

1. Following school closures, have you noticed a negative impact (learning loss) for pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the following English language skill areas? Listening, Writing, Speaking, Reading, None or Do Not Know.

#### Open-ended questions:

2. If you have observed any learning loss in English language skills for pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) please describe your observations, giving specific examples where possible.
3. Thinking of learning in general, how does school closure impact EAL pupils in comparison to those pupils for whom English is their first language?



2. Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey - NFER <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/key-topics-expertise/teacher-voice-omnibus-survey/>

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### 3. Key findings

- Of teachers who were able to report on the impact to pupils who use EAL, teachers were more than twice as likely to report a negative impact on the English language skills of pupils (69%), than no impact (31%), following the disruption to education caused by Covid-19.
- Of teachers who were able to report on the impact on the English language skills of pupils who use EAL, 74% of primary teachers and 59% of secondary teachers reported observations of language loss in one or more language skill areas.
- Of the secondary school teachers who reported a negative impact on the language learning of their pupils, over one in five (22%) reported that their pupils who use EAL had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class.
- Of the primary school teachers who reported a negative impact on the language learning of their pupils nearly one in six (15%) reported that their pupils using EAL had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class.
- According to teachers, the family's proficiency in English had a significant impact on the language and learning loss of pupils who use EAL. This was particularly pronounced in the primary school sector where 25% of teachers who reported loss cited the ability of the family to support home learning as a factor.
- One in twelve teachers reporting language and learning loss in pupils using EAL thought that they had been explicitly disadvantaged compared to their English-speaking peers due to the challenges of remote learning.



## 4. Key recommendations

### For the Department of Education

- As proficiency in English is the major factor influencing the educational achievement and the degree of support a pupil using EAL may require during and after the education recovery phase, the Department for Education (DfE), in line with the devolved nations and other countries, should introduce a statutory requirement for schools in England to assess and record (for their internal monitoring purposes) pupils' levels of proficiency in English using the DfE's previously-used five-point assessment scale. The five-point scale was introduced temporarily in England for two years and is currently in operation in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The reintroduction of proficiency scales would also support teachers in identifying pupils most in need of language support.

### For teacher educators and CPD providers

- Initial Teacher Education providers should ensure that their new curricula based on the generic ITT Core Content Framework includes content on how to promote the rapid academic and social linguistic development of pupils using EAL who have been adversely affected by language loss.
- As the Early Career Framework (ECF) promotes 'quality teaching for all' with no consideration for the needs of specific groups, there is currently a risk that the distinctive language learning loss experienced by many pupils who use EAL may be rendered invisible within a generic framework, leaving a generation of entrants to the profession ill-equipped to support these disadvantaged learners appropriately through the recovery phase. Materials for early career teachers and their mentors should include guidance on increasing exposure to a broad range of models of spoken and written English, promoting level-appropriate oracy skills (listening and speaking) leading to increased confidence and fluency, and strategies for adapting teaching to support all pupils, and particularly those who are new to English and at the early stage of language acquisition. This would have wider benefits for all pupils, particularly those pupils who live in households where they are not exposed to a broad range of models of spoken and written English.
- Guidance and training for National Tutoring Programme trainers should include a focus on EAL to ensure that tutors are equipped with the skills they need to support the catch-up of disadvantaged pupils who use EAL.
- Technology can be used effectively with pupils who use EAL to enhance learning in the classroom, to provide additional exposure to models of spoken and written English, to facilitate recall and retrieval practice, and to provide individual bespoke feedback to consolidate and accelerate learning through blended and remote provision. However, careful consideration is needed as to how it is integrated and where it will be most effectively used to ensure it does not detract from or serve as a substitute for quality teaching and learning.



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## For schools

- New arrivals and pupils nearing high-stakes examinations and assessments (such as those enrolled for the 2021 autumn series or in 2022) will require targeted language support to catch up lost language learning and to ensure they have a fair and equitable opportunity to express their subject content knowledge through the medium of English.
- In school, training that focuses on the contribution that multilingual parents can make to their children's education will help maximise parents' impact. To ensure that parents who do not have English as their first language are able to access materials for home learning in order to support their children's education, teachers will need support and guidance on how to facilitate this.
- Pupils who use EAL will also benefit from wider opportunities to learn and develop vocabulary including sport, drama, artistic pursuits and play.
- Pastoral care providers in schools should be aware of the increased risk of social isolation if pupils who use EAL have lost confidence to speak to their peers and within the classroom.

## 5. The dataset

The survey sample from the Spring 2021 Teacher Omnibus Survey (NFER, 2021) collected responses from 1,535 practising teachers and includes teachers from 1,349 schools which are nationally representative of school-level factors, including geographical region and school type. The findings below are based on teachers who provided substantive answers,<sup>3</sup> which gives a sample size of 751. From the 751 substantive responses, 491 are from primary schools and 260 are from secondary schools. 518 of those 751 teachers who felt able to comment on the language loss of EAL pupils reported a loss (365 of whom were from primary schools and 153 from secondary schools).

The responses to the closed question regarding language loss (Q1) were analysed by school phase (primary and secondary) and geographic region (see Section 6: Evidence of regression in English language learning). The responses to the open-ended questions<sup>4</sup> were thematically analysed to draw out the common patterns that teachers observed in pupils who use EAL as a result of disruptions to teaching and learning caused by Covid-19. These include the impact on confidence, the role of family or care givers in pupil learning during lockdown, the challenges of remote learning for pupils who use EAL, the link between EAL and disadvantage, the challenge for pupils in secondary schools and the role of peers. Throughout the report, each section is prefaced with a selection of quotes sourced from surveyed teachers in different regions and in different school phases.

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3. For further details on the dataset please see the annex. Substantive answers refer to respondents who were able to respond to the questions and does not include respondents who selected do not know, submitted no response or who are missing data.

4. Open-ended questions:

- If you have observed any learning loss in English language skills for pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) please describe your observations giving specific examples where possible
- Thinking of learning in general, how does school closure impact EAL pupils in comparison to those pupils for whom English is their first language?

## 6. Evidence of regression in English language learning

*A lot of my pupils haven't spoken or heard much English during lockdown. Some of them are now finding it difficult to access the curriculum and have needed pre-teaching intervention of vocab that will be used in lessons.*

Classroom teacher, primary school, West Midlands

*Some pupils are more withdrawn, and some whose first language is not English have not returned to school yet. They are being followed up. We have a group of students who are learning English in Y8 - these pupils have gone backwards about 10 weeks in their understanding of English.*

Senior leader, secondary school, Yorkshire and the Humber

Teachers were more than twice as likely to report a negative impact on the English language skills of pupils who use EAL than to report no impact. Table 1 shows that over two thirds (69%) of teachers across primary and secondary schools reported a negative impact on the English language skills of pupils who use EAL following the disruption to education caused by Covid-19, compared to only 31% who reported there were no language losses in pupils who use EAL.

**Table 1: Reported loss on language (NFER, 2021) [N=751]<sup>5</sup>**

Language skill impact	Number	%
One language skill impacted	123	16%
Two language skills impacted	120	16%
Three language skills impacted	108	14%
Four language skills impacted	167	22%
One or more language skills impacted	518	69%
No impact on language skill	233	31%

Across all schools who participated in the survey, 54% of teachers reported a language loss in the writing skills of pupils who use EAL, 50% observed a loss in speaking skills, 41% observed a loss in reading skills and 36% in listening skills. Figure 1 below illustrates the spread of responses across the four skill areas broken down by school phase. It is to be expected that primary schools would be more likely to report a negative impact in language learning than secondary schools, as previous research has shown that primary schools have a greater proportion of pupils in the acquiring English phase<sup>6</sup> (49% at the end of KS1) than secondary schools (15% at KS4) and therefore at risk of language learning loss (Strand and Hessel, 2018). However, while the figure below shows a greater proportion of primary school teachers reporting EAL learner language loss (26% said none, 74% said one or more skills showing a loss), the proportion in secondary schools is still notable and of concern (41% said none, 59% said one or more skills showing a loss).

5. The four language skill areas are reading, writing, speaking and listening.

6. 'Acquiring English' refers to pupils in English proficiency bands A-C using the five-point scale formerly used by the DfE. Pupils at bands A-C will need support to access the curriculum and are at risk of underachieving compared to their English-speaking peers (Strand and Hessel, 2018; Strand and Lindorff, 2020).

**Figure 1: Observed impact on English language learning in pupils who use EAL primary vs secondary (NFER, 2021) [N=751]**

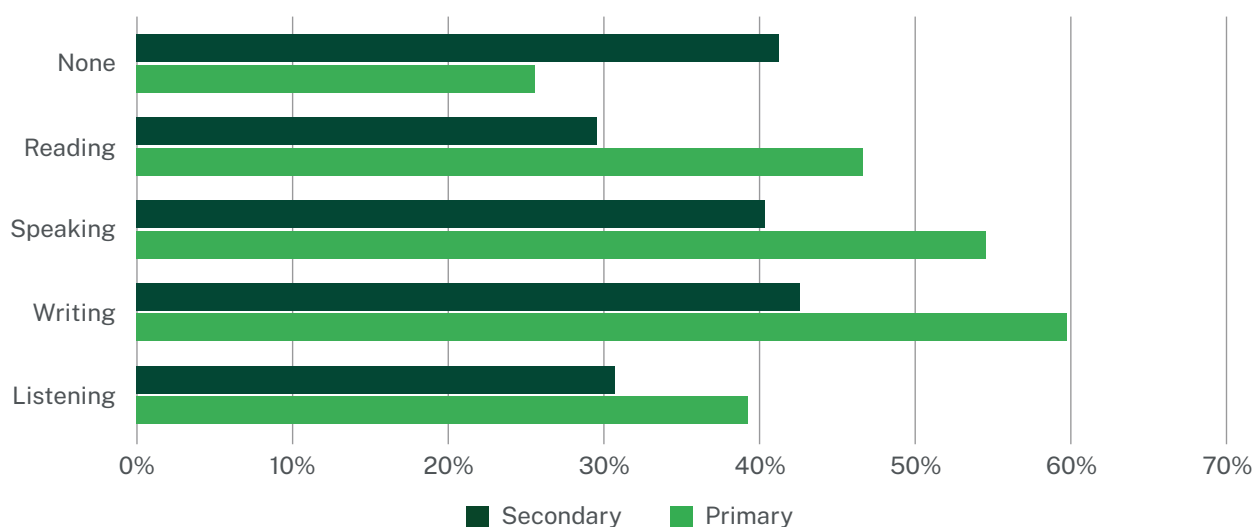


Figure 2 shows the proportion of primary school respondents by region who reported a language loss, or no language loss. Across all regions, schools are more likely to report a loss than no loss, with the greatest difference in London and the South East.

**Figure 2: Primary schools reporting language loss or no language loss by region (NFER, 2021) [N=491]**

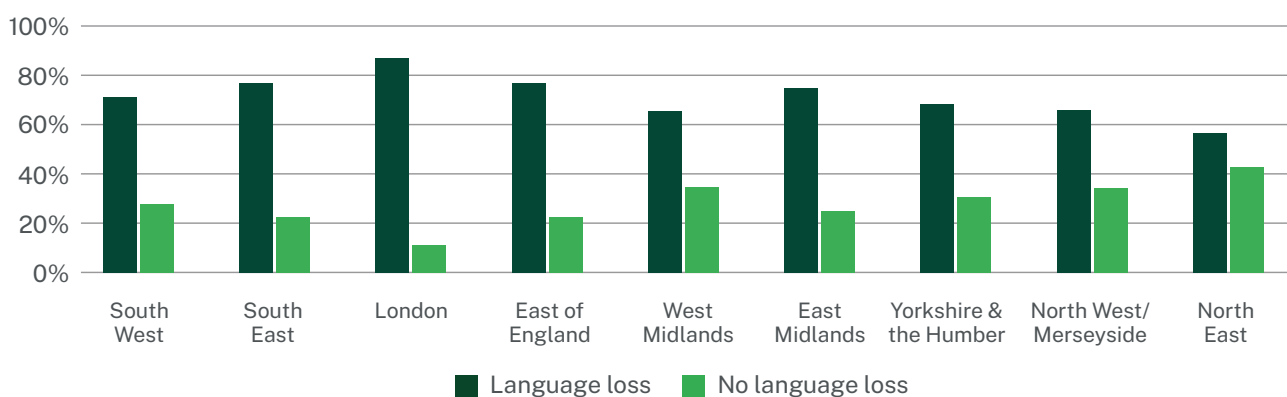
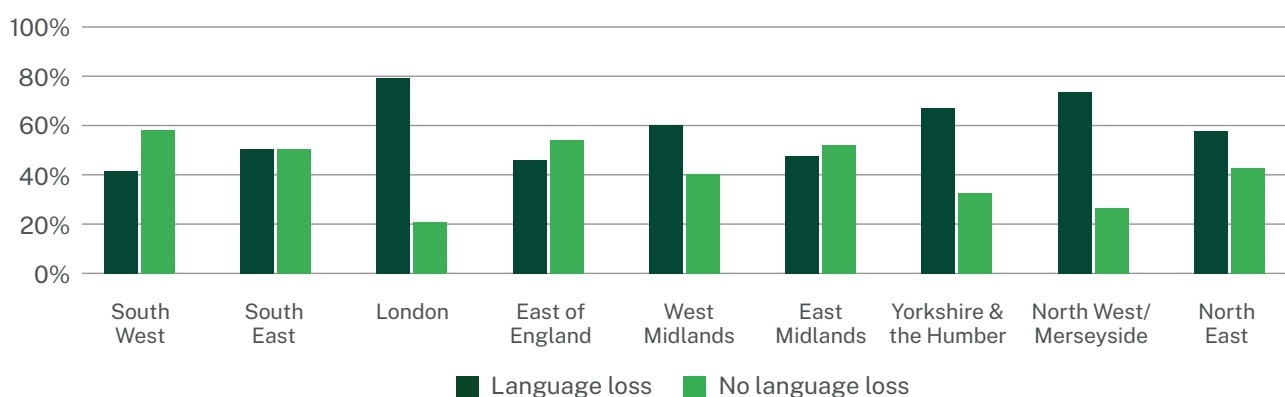


Figure 3 shows the proportion of secondary school respondents by region who reported a language loss, or no language loss. London, Yorkshire and the Humber and North West/Merseyside are still far more likely to report a loss than no loss. However, in the East of England, the South West and the East Midlands secondary school teachers are more likely to report no language loss. This could be due to higher proportions of pupils in secondary schools having reached proficiency in English (Strand and Hessel, 2018).

**Figure 3: Secondary schools reporting language loss or no language loss by region (NFER, 2021) [N=260]**



## 7. Hesitant to speak: How school closures impacted EAL learners' confidence

*These children have arrived back at school, very quiet and subdued, they have lost a lot of the vocabulary they were learning and some that they were confident with and are lacking in confidence to speak.*

Senior leader, primary school, East Midlands

*Students find it harder to start talking in English again as they haven't really practiced speaking it in months. Can affect their confidence, as students that were once confident to answer questions in class are a bit more shy and reserved in case they say the wrong thing.*

Classroom teacher, secondary school, London

Of the teachers who reported a negative impact on the language learning of their pupils who use EAL, over one in five (22%) secondary teachers reported that pupils had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class. Nearly one in six (15%) primary school teachers reported that pupils who use EAL had lost confidence to speak to their peers or in class.

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It is reasonable to speculate that the lower rates in primary school may be because primary school is an environment where all pupils, those who use EAL or those whose first language is English, are learning English. However, it may also reflect a higher susceptibility to self-consciousness in teenagers, and the higher demands of language in the secondary school curriculum. It will be important for the pastoral care providers in secondary schools to be aware of the increased risk for social isolation for pupils who use EAL.

## 8. Children left behind: Remote learning for pupils who use EAL



*They have been less likely to access online provision due to the fact their parents are unable to help them. They are left behind.*

Classroom teacher, primary school, West Midlands



*There is also the difference that EAL students wouldn't have been able to have access to support during lessons or individual support from small class teaching of EAL students together by a specialist who [...] speaks the home language.*

Classroom teacher, secondary school, South West



Of the teachers who reported a language or learning loss in pupils who use EAL, one in twelve reported that pupils who use EAL were explicitly disadvantaged by online learning compared to their English-speaking peers. Out of all respondents only three teachers thought that online learning provided pupils who use EAL with an advantage through access to translations, subtitles or the ability to pause and re-watch videos.

More work needs to be done to ensure that teachers are provided with training in using technology effectively with EAL learners. The survey identified that 24 schools opted to invite pupils who use EAL into school in response to concerns that remote learning could not meet their needs and that they were at risk of being left behind.



*EAL children in the first lockdown were the children least likely to complete home learning and therefore, they were among those invited to go back to school in small bubbles during the latest lockdown.*

Classroom teacher, primary school, East of England



## 9. The role of the family or caregiver in learning during lockdowns

*Some parents are less able to support children if English is not their first language, and therefore some children cannot access all the learning opportunities — in reception we rely on parental support to some extent.*

Classroom teacher, primary school, South West

*Parents of EAL pupils find the learning more difficult to understand. We have had less engagement with this group. Also the parents of the EAL children we have work more and work shifts so have less time to support their children and have been more difficult to communicate with through phone calls (due to language and availability).*

Classroom teacher, primary school, South East

For teachers who reported an impact on the language loss of pupils who use EAL, the pupils' families' ability to support the home learning due to language barriers was frequently cited as having had an impact on learning and language loss.<sup>7</sup> The role of family was perceived to be more significant by teachers surveyed in the outcomes of primary school pupils. During lockdown parents of primary school aged pupils were usually required to provide more support than parents of secondary aged pupils, due to age-related differences and independent learning capabilities.

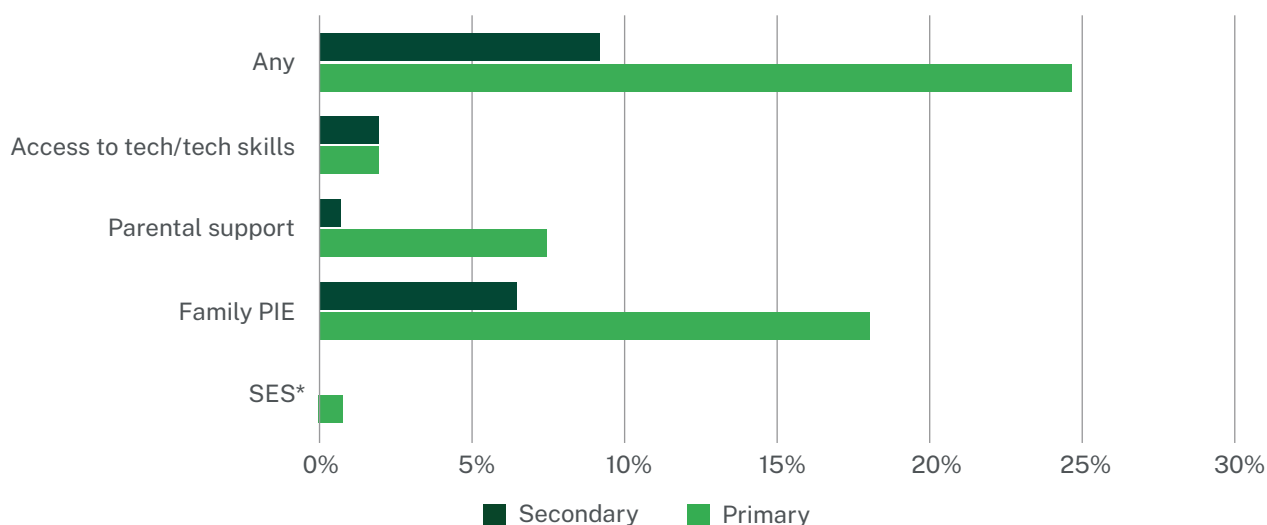
Families having access to technology or the technological skills to access online learning, the family speaking another language at home, the ability to support learning generally, and the socio-economic status of the family were linked, by teachers, to the learning and language loss of pupils who use EAL. Figure 4 below shows the teachers' perception of the role of family in learning by school phase. Amongst primary school teachers reporting a negative impact on the learning of pupils using EAL, 25% cited the barriers for families in supporting learning as impacting loss. Amongst secondary teachers the figure drops to 9%.

Across both phases it is the proficiency in English (PIE) of the family that is perceived to have had the most marked impact. Indeed, one classroom teacher from a primary school in London noted:

*EAL children struggled to access virtual school. EMAG school resources have been depleted so drastically in last few years [...] children have no support in school either. No community language courses mean EAL parents [are] unable to offer any support at home.*

7. Family' here was the term commonly used by teachers but refers to the person(s) responsible for caregiving during lockdown and could include one parent, two parents, siblings, extended family or other caregivers.

**Figure 4: Family-related barriers for language or learning loss, secondary vs primary (NFER, 2021) [N=518]**



\* 0% of secondary teachers said that it was the family's low socio-economic status (SES) that they thought contributed to the language loss

Whilst teachers cited the role that the proficiency in English of the family played in the language and learning loss experienced by pupils who use EAL it is interesting to note that the pupil's emerging proficiency in English was not frequently cited. Of all teachers who reported a loss, 15% attributed it to the family's proficiency in English (18% in primary schools, and 7% in secondary schools) but only 1% cited the pupil's proficiency in English as a factor. This is unexpected given the link between a pupil's proficiency in English and the pupil's ability to access the curriculum and achieve. The findings could suggest that parents were considered 'in loco teachers' and the expectation was on parents to bridge the language gap for pupils in the way that teachers and teaching assistants do in the classroom. Teachers are both proficient in English and in pedagogy; for parents who are new to English or in the early stages of acquisition of English, taking on this role of mediator of a curriculum taught through the medium of English may not have been possible.

It is interesting to note that high fluency in English was, however, cited by 18 respondents as the reason why some pupils using EAL had not experienced language or learning loss:

*I have not observed this in my school. All children with EAL in my school are sufficiently competent in English for the time away not to have had more or less affect than for others.*

**Classroom teacher, primary school, East England**

## 10. EAL and disadvantage

*EAL pupils often responded in a similar way to pupils who could be labelled as disadvantaged.*

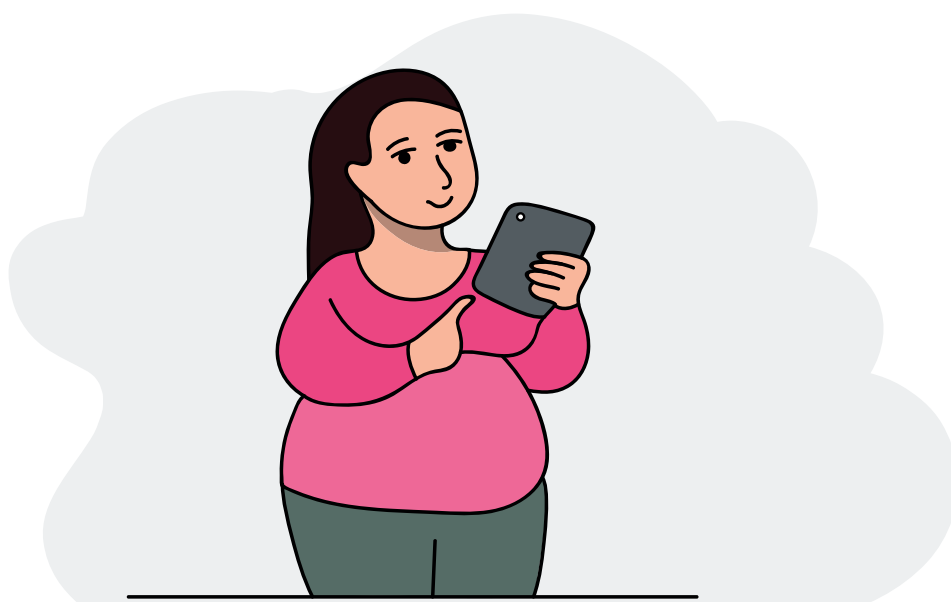
Senior leader, primary school, South East

*Similar to those living in disadvantage. Less opportunities to practice oracy skills.*

Senior leader, primary school, North West/Merseyside

According to a DfE analysis of 2018 National Pupil Database (NPD) data, 25% of pupils who use EAL are ‘disadvantaged’,<sup>8</sup> which is a slightly higher proportion than pupils whose first language is English (at 24%). Rates of Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement are identical amongst the EAL cohort to their English-speaking peers at 14% (DfE, 2020). Overall, 19% of all disadvantaged pupils will use EAL and 19% of all FSM pupils will use EAL (DfE, 2020). Furthermore, as noted above, 41% of children who use EAL living in the most deprived areas will be in the early stages of developing English language competence which is the group at risk of under-performing compared to their English-speaking peers; by contrast, in a less deprived area only 27% of pupils who use EAL will be at the early stage of developing language competence (DfE, 2020). So, there is an intersection of both deprivation and EAL status for a significant portion of the EAL population as there is with their first language English peers.

The responses from teachers in the survey indicate that EAL pupils – particularly those who have not reached competency in English – are in need of additional support and are at risk of underachievement. Whilst multilingualism is an asset when competency in the language of instruction is reached, pupils who are acquiring the language of instruction are at risk of underachievement (Strand, 2018). Robust assessment of EAL pupils’ proficiency in English is also necessary to identify the level of support pupils will need.



8. In this context ‘disadvantaged’ is most commonly used as meaning pupils receiving the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) however sometimes this term also includes the children of active military families as well as PPG recipients.



## 11. The challenge for pupils who use EAL in secondary school

*We have very few EAL students, but they tend to fall into one of two categories: - those with high levels of motivation & English language skills. They tend to thrive whatever happens. - a recent cohort of older (Yr 11) students who have only just joined us after arriving in the UK. They have been unable to access online learning for a complex variety of reasons and our main focus is pastoral support to help them with recent migration trauma.*

Senior leader, secondary school, South East

*Struggling with scientific language they previously had a solid grasp on.*

Classroom teacher, secondary school, North West/Merseyside

The evidence provided has shown a consistent pattern of primary school aged pupils being more greatly impacted than secondary school pupils (except in confidence to speak, where the impact was greater in secondary school aged pupils). However, it is important to note that addressing any language learning loss is particularly urgent for pupils who are new to English and at the early stages of language acquisition and who are nearing high-stakes examinations or assessments. For example, those who are (or were) near GCSEs will not have the time to 'recover' language learning loss and this may impact life outcomes including further and higher education opportunities and employment opportunities.<sup>9</sup> As noted in previously published research, late arrivals (those who are still acquiring English at secondary level) are at greater risk of underachievement (Hutchinson, 2018; Strand and Hessel, 2018). Late arrivals, as well as being late to begin the acquisition of English necessary to succeed, have now lost six months (or more) of classroom time and the opportunity to be exposed to academic and social English.

In addition to the risk to new arrivals, teachers raised concerns regarding subject-specific terminology which is often required in high stakes exams. Primary school teachers also commented on the loss of subject-specific language including in STEM subjects, geography and history.

9. Primary school aged pupils nearing SATs may also not have time to recover lost language which may have implications for progress analysis, league tables and where secondary schools use results for setting/streaming.

## 12. The role of peers

*The lack of a role model to speak English [...] has meant the children have now reverted to single word answers. The lack of play with children speaking English has made the return to school difficult socially, meaning the children rely on physical responses rather than explaining how they think or feel.*

Classroom teacher, primary school, South West

*EAL students have less opportunities to converse in English, both in lesson and, perhaps more crucially, out of lessons with their peers.*

Classroom teacher, secondary school, South East

The social restrictions due to Covid-19 are likely to impact most children, including those who use English as their first language. However, for children who use EAL, their peers play an additional role: supporting the development of their English language skills. It is interesting to note that a small proportion of teachers who reported language or learning loss in pupils specifically flagged the lack of peer interaction (4% of primary respondents, 7% for secondary) as a factor in the loss.

## 13. Conclusion

Across the country there was a clear pattern of English language loss observed by school teachers in both primary and secondary phases. Many pupils at the early stages of English language acquisition did not have opportunities to hear, speak or read in English during school closures. Whilst the primary school teachers were more likely to identify a language loss in their pupils, the limited time left in school for recovery, and the proximity to high-stakes examinations is of particular relevance for secondary pupils. Pastoral concerns were also raised regarding the negative impact on the confidence of pupils using EAL to socially integrate and participate in the classroom. Of all respondents, only five thought that pupils who use EAL had actually fared better than the pupils who speak English as their first language, again typically citing high proficiency in the pupils and/or families. The findings demonstrate a need for catch up and recovery plans to take into consideration the English language learning loss, in addition to general learning loss for pupils who use EAL.

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## Annex

### The Dataset

The survey sample from the Spring 2021 Teacher Omnibus Survey (NFER, 2021) collected responses from 1,535 practising teachers and includes teachers from 1,349 schools which are nationally representative of school-level factors including geographical region and school type. The sample of primary schools was nationally representative of Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, however, the secondary schools with the highest rates of FSM eligibility were underrepresented in the sample.<sup>10</sup> This will mean that the findings are likely to be conservative estimates of impact on pupils using EAL in the secondary sector, as there is a link between the proportion of pupils acquiring English and neighbourhood deprivation (as measured by IDACI). In 2018, 41% of pupils who use EAL living in the most deprived areas were acquiring English compared to 27% of pupils who use EAL living in the least deprived areas (DfE, 2020). Schools with the highest rates of FSM eligibility would therefore have a greater proportion of pupils still acquiring English and a greater risk of English language learning loss than schools with lower rates of FSM eligibility.

### Limitations of the dataset

In 2016, the Department for Education introduced a requirement for schools to annually assess the proficiency in English of pupils who use EAL. This requirement brought England into alignment with Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland who annually assess pupils for proficiency in English. The statutory requirement was then removed in England in 2018 and proficiency in English data for EAL learners have not been collected nationally since 2019. This means there is no national assessment data available to measure the English language loss due to Covid-19, nor to track the recovery of English language learning of pupils who use EAL. Local assessment data may be available where schools, Academy Trusts or Local Authorities chose to assess EAL learners' proficiency in English. For a nationally representative sample, it is necessary to draw on teacher observation and teacher judgement noting the limitations of teacher observations versus formal assessment.

### Proportions of EAL pupils: Do Not Know and No Responses

As the research questions explicitly require teacher observation of pupils who use EAL, it is important to note that despite national EAL pupil proportions of 21.3% in primary school and 17.1% in secondary school level, 59% of schools do not have any pupils who use EAL (TALIS, 2018). Therefore, findings of national samples must be analysed with this in mind. The regional disparity in the proportion of pupils using EAL has been well documented. For example, in the North East only 8% of pupils use EAL, whilst the figure rises to 49% in London (DfE, 2020). Within regions, the variation between schools is also significant (Strand et al., 2015). A nationally representative sample, such as the NFER Teacher Omnibus panel, contains a significant number of respondents who will not have observations of pupils who use EAL in their classroom. In the verbatim responses to the open-ended questions 62 (8%) teachers raised this point.

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10. Data used in analysis for this report were not weighted for the secondary school or combined samples using FSM eligibility data. As the sample of substantive responses in the highest band of FSM-eligible secondary schools was small, weighting would have risked over-representing views which may not be an accurate representation of their entire demographic group.

The first question in the survey is used to filter out those teachers from schools who have too few or no pupils using EAL on which to base meaningful observations. In Question 1 teachers were given the option of selecting an English skill area (reading, writing, listening or speaking) that had been negatively impacted from lockdown, selecting 'none' if there had been no negative impact, or selecting 'do not know/not sure'. It is reasonable to assume that respondents who selected 'do not know/not sure' are likely to have too few or no pupils on which to base observations. 770 out of 1,535 respondents selected 'do not know/not sure'. This is half of the total sample size which is broadly consistent with the data above regarding the proportion of schools in England with few or no pupils using EAL. To further test the validity of this assumption the two subsequent open-ended questions were cross referenced against respondents who selected 'do not know/not sure' in Question 1. Typically, respondents either made no further comment, or explicitly noted that they had no or too few pupils using EAL to comment. A very small number of respondents (29 respondents or 4%) noted that it was too early to judge language loss. The proportion of teachers who felt able to comment versus those who did not has been broken down by geographic region (Figure 5 below): the teal columns indicate teachers who felt able to comment (stating a loss or no loss) and the green columns indicate teachers who were not able to comment on the impact on pupils who use EAL. Again, this broadly confirms the assumption that respondents selecting 'do not know' are likely to have too few or no pupils who use EAL on whom to base observations. In areas of high EAL pupil proportions (such as London) teachers were more likely to comment on the impact on pupils who use EAL than not, whereas teachers in the North East were less likely to be able to comment on the impact on pupils who use EAL.

**Figure 5: The proportion of teachers able to comment on language loss (loss or no loss) vs teachers unable to comment (do not know/ not sure) by geographic region (NFER, 2021) [N=1535]**



The findings are based on teachers who do provide substantive answers which gives a sample size of 751 (after removing the 'do not knows' a further 14 answers were missing – with respondents having given no response at all). From the 751 substantive responses 491 are from primary schools and 260 are from secondary schools. 518 of those 751 teachers who felt able to comment on the language loss of EAL pupils reported a loss (365 of whom were from primary schools and 153 from secondary schools).

## Additional analysis

Figure 6 shows whether primary school teachers observed a language learning loss, no language learning loss or did not know, by region. Across all regions teachers were more likely to report a loss than no loss, with the greatest difference in London, the South East and the East of England.

**Figure 6: Primary schools reporting loss, no loss or do not know by region (NFER, 2021)**  
[N=803]<sup>11</sup>

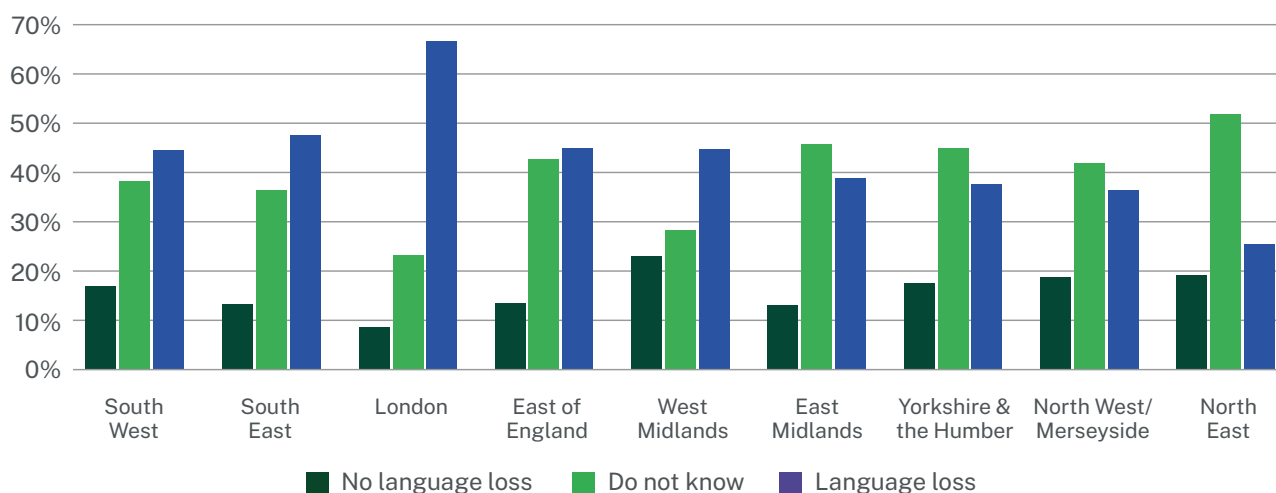
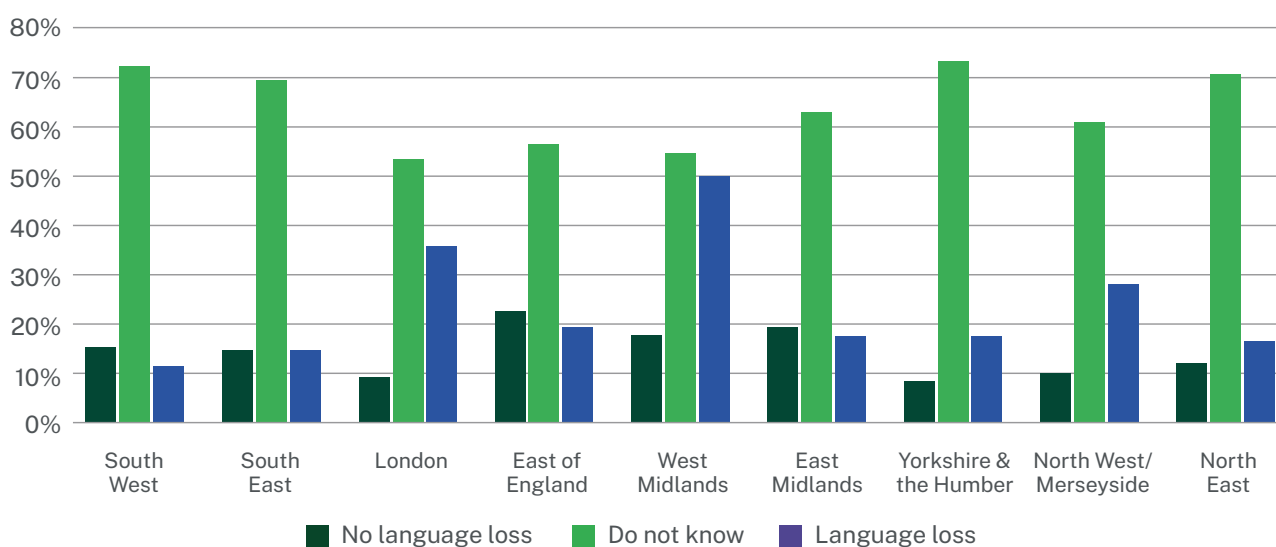


Figure 7 shows the same breakdown for secondary schools. Across all geographic regions the proportion of schools who do not know is significantly higher. This could be due to fewer pupils who use EAL in secondary schools still acquiring English, or could indicate that secondary teachers, who, unlike most primary school teachers, do not work exclusively with one class of students and therefore may have less certainty about the impact on the language loss of pupils who they may only see for a few lessons a week.

**Figure 7: Secondary schools reporting loss, no loss or do not know by region [N=718]**



11. Out of the 1,535 respondents 14 were missing: no response at all.

Many school teachers observed that multiple English language skill areas had been impacted by the disruption to education caused by Covid-19. The tables below illustrate whether teachers observed a negative impact in one, two, three or four English language skill areas, and the total proportion who reported a negative impact (i.e. one or more skill impacted) rather than no impact by school phase. Of primary school teachers who felt able to comment on the language learning of pupils using EAL, 74% reported a loss in one or more areas. Of secondary school teachers who felt able to comment on the language learning of pupils who use EAL, 59% reported a loss in one or more areas.

**Table 2: English language skill impact: primary [N=491]**

Primary school: negative impact on language of pupils who speak EAL	Number	%	
One language skill impacted	78	16%	
Two language skills impacted	79	16%	
Three language skills impacted	86	18%	
Four language skills impacted	122	25%	
One or more language skills impacted	365	74%	
No impact on language skill	126	26%	

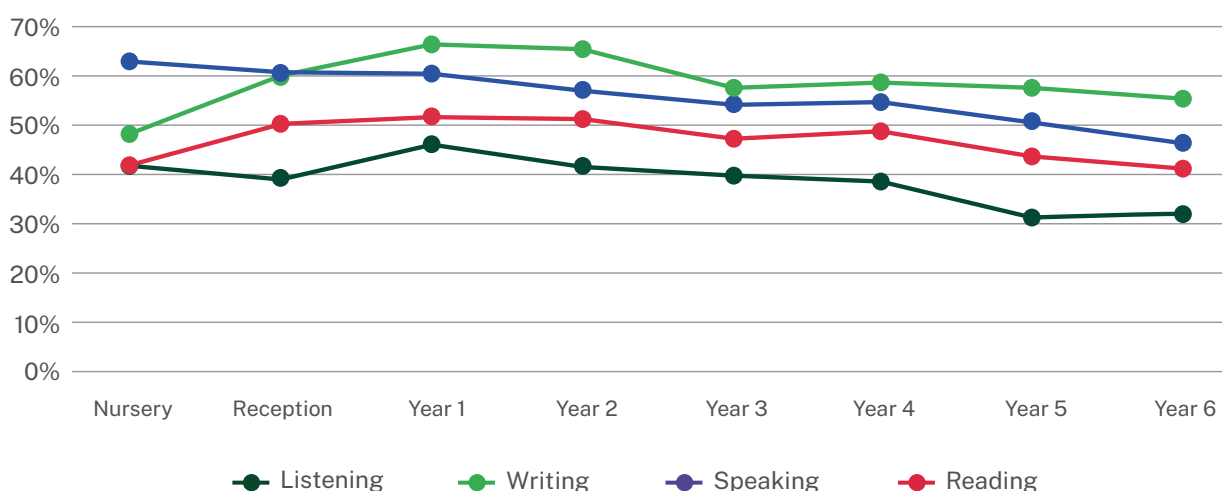
**Table 3: English language skill impact: secondary [N=260]**

Secondary school: negative impact on language of pupils who speak EAL	Number	%	
One language skill impacted	45	17%	
Two language skills impacted	41	16%	
Three language skills impacted	22	8%	
Four language skills impacted	45	17%	
One or more language skills impacted	153	59%	
No impact on language skill	107	41%	

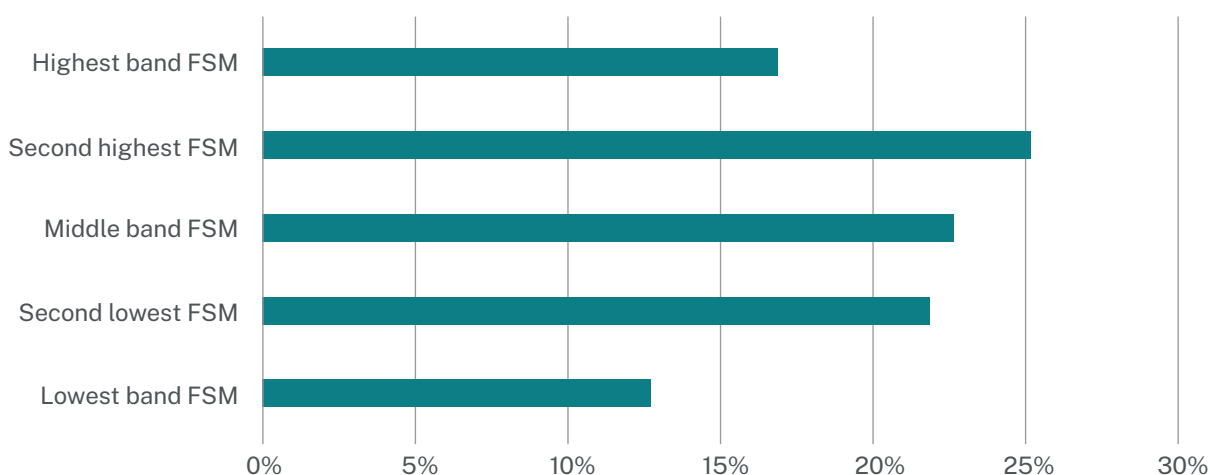
Figure 8 shows the proportion of primary school teachers who were able to comment on the language loss of pupils they had observed, by year group.<sup>12</sup> In secondary schools, teachers typically taught across multiple year groups, which makes breaking down the data by year group in secondary schools unreliable. The trajectory of the primary school data does show a slight reduction in loss as the pupils age (except initially in writing and reading which is to be expected as those skills are not acquired until later). However, the decline in loss is gradual and loss is still substantial in Year 6, so additional support will be needed in recovery throughout KS2 and beyond.

12. It should be noted that the majority of primary school respondents taught only one year group, however some teachers taught two or more year groups. This could have a small impact on the findings as teachers who teach multiple year groups could be referring to pupils from any year group that they teach.



**Figure 8: English language skill impact by primary school year group (NFER, 2021) [N=491]**

The data were also analysed by school level Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility. Figure 9 shows how reported language loss was distributed by school level FSM eligibility. As noted previously, the survey underrepresented the highest band of FSM eligibility for secondary schools so the findings for that band may be less reliable. The remaining bands show a correlation between the likelihood of a school reporting a loss in the English language learning of pupils who use EAL and the rate of FSM eligibility in the school. This may be due to higher rates of low proficiency in English in areas of high deprivation, and/or may reflect the parents' ability to support language acquisition in the home linked to higher socio-economic status.

**Figure 9: How was language loss reporting distributed by school level FSM eligibility (NFER, 2021) [N=513]<sup>13</sup>**

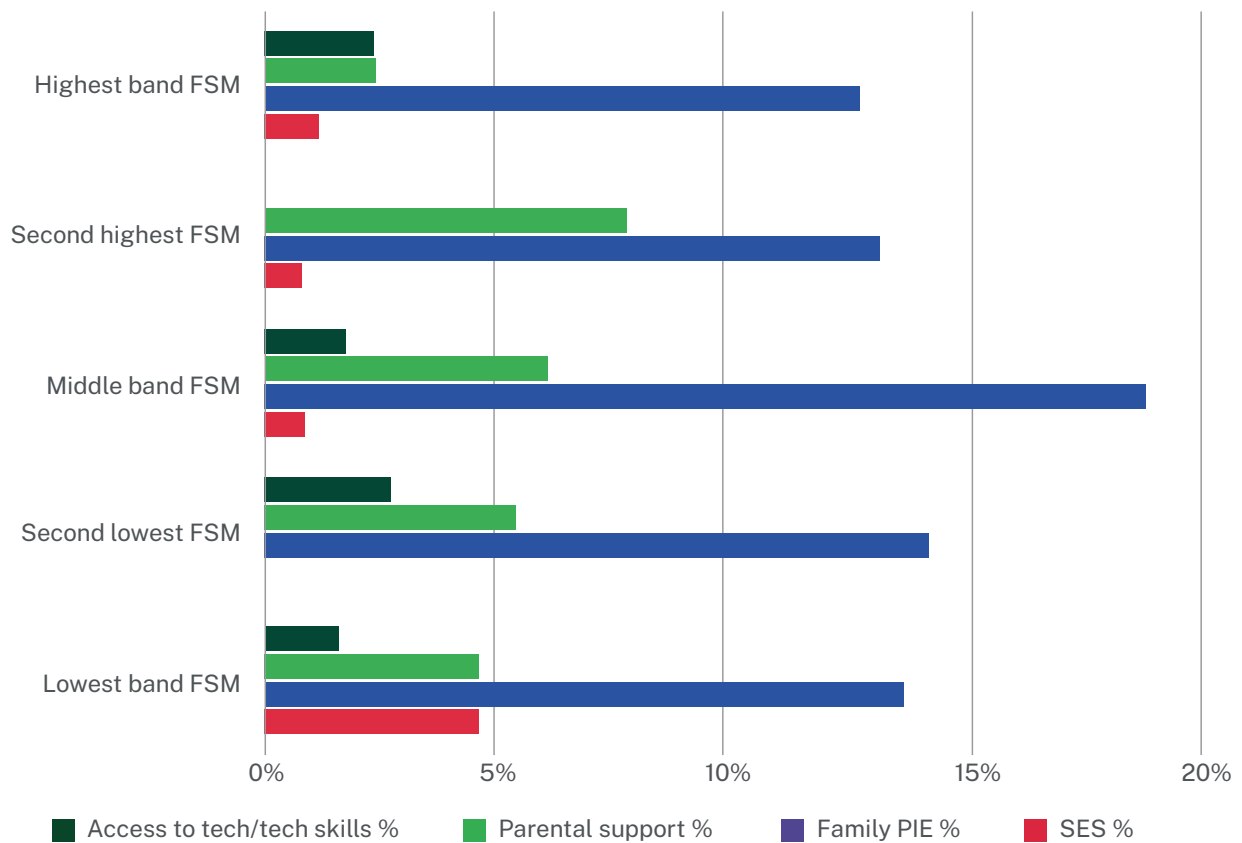
The data were analysed by school level FSM eligibility to identify any links between the role of the family in learning. Figure 10 demonstrates the teachers perceived role of family<sup>14</sup> by school level FSM. The impact of family proficiency in English was notable across all FSM eligibility bands.

13. Five schools who reported a loss did not have FSM eligibility data.

14. 'Family' here was the term commonly used by teachers but refers to the person(s) responsible for caregiving during lockdown and could include one parent, two parents, siblings, extended family or other caregivers.



**Figure 10: Family factors influencing language and learning loss by school level FSM eligibility (NFER, 2021) [n=513]**



Schools in the lowest band of FSM eligibility were most likely to say that there was no language loss in their pupils using EAL (22%). By comparison, across the remaining schools 12%-14% reported that there was no language loss.

## Coding framework

The following frameworks were used to code and categorise the responses to the two open-ended questions (Q2 and Q3). The frameworks were drafted independently from the coder. Each response could receive up to four codes. A sample of both datasets (Q2 and Q3) was tested to measure intercoder reliability.

**Table 4: Question 2 coding frame**

Category	Code	
Learning loss mentioned	01	Writing skill loss
	02	Speaking skill loss
	03	Reading skill loss
	04	Listening skill loss
	05	Loss in confidence
	07	Other (NEC)
W/S/R/L specifics	10	Loss in grammar/sentence structure
	11	Other writing loss
	12	Reluctance to speak
	13	Other speaking loss (e.g. accent/pronunciation)
	14	Loss in phonic skills
	15	Other reading issue
	16	Attention/focus/concentration loss
	17	Vocabulary/spelling (incl. loss of subject language)
	18	Loss in comprehension
Reasons for or qualifications regarding learning loss	20	Lack of practice and/or support at home due to parental language or due to peer absence
	21	Other reason for language loss
	27	Variation of language loss amongst EAL pupils, cannot generalise
	28	No language loss due to parental/child motivation
Concerns about evidence/observations	30	Too soon to judge loss/impact
	31	No measurement possible
	32	Explicit mention that observation is based on one or a small number of EAL pupils
	33	Not clear if loss will last long term
	34	All EAL pupils attended school
No substantive response/ response not possible	91	No response
	92	None (NEC)
	93	No EAL pupils in class/school
	94	Explicit mention that there was no language loss for EAL pupils
	98	Not sure/do not know
	99	Not applicable

**Table 5: Question 3 coding frame**

Category	Code	
How school closures impact pupils (general)	01	Lack of exposure to and/or practice with reading/writing skills
	02	Lack of practice using spoken English; lack of access to English speakers at school
	03	Lack of communication with peers
	04	Worse impact for EAL than FLE (unspecified) (NEC)
	05	Online learning disadvantages EAL more than FLE
	06	Advantages of online learning for EAL (translation etc)
	07	Impact on non language skills e.g. social skills, basic skills
	08	More non participation/non engagement for EAL
	09	Other general impact (NEC)
	10	EAL pupils were less impacted than FLE
How school closure impacted skill outcomes	11	Regression in language skill (general/unspecified)
	12	Lack of progress/improvement in skills (general/unspecified)
	13	Impact differs between skill type (r/w/l/s)
	14	Impact differs by pupil age
	15	Loss of confidence
	16	No generalisable difference between EAL and FLE, instead variations in subgroups
	17	Variations of impact for EAL (NEC)
	19	Other impact (NEC)
	20	Impact differs by proficiency (low PIE: high impact, high PIE: low or no impact)
Family factors influencing impact	21	Socio-economic circumstances e.g. FSM
	22	Parent/family English proficiency
	23	Parental support for learning
	24	Access to technology/ technological skills at home
Concerns about evidence/observations	30	Too soon to judge
	31	No measurement possible
	32	Explicit mention that observation is based on one or a small number of EAL pupils
	33	Too few FLE to make comparison
	34	Some/all EAL pupils classified as vulnerable/key worker and invited into school
	91	No response
No substantive response/ response not possible	92	None (NEC)
	93	No or too few EAL children in school/class
	98	Do not know/not sure
	99	Not applicable

