The story of the pandemic through data

Katie Beynon
& Natasha Plaister

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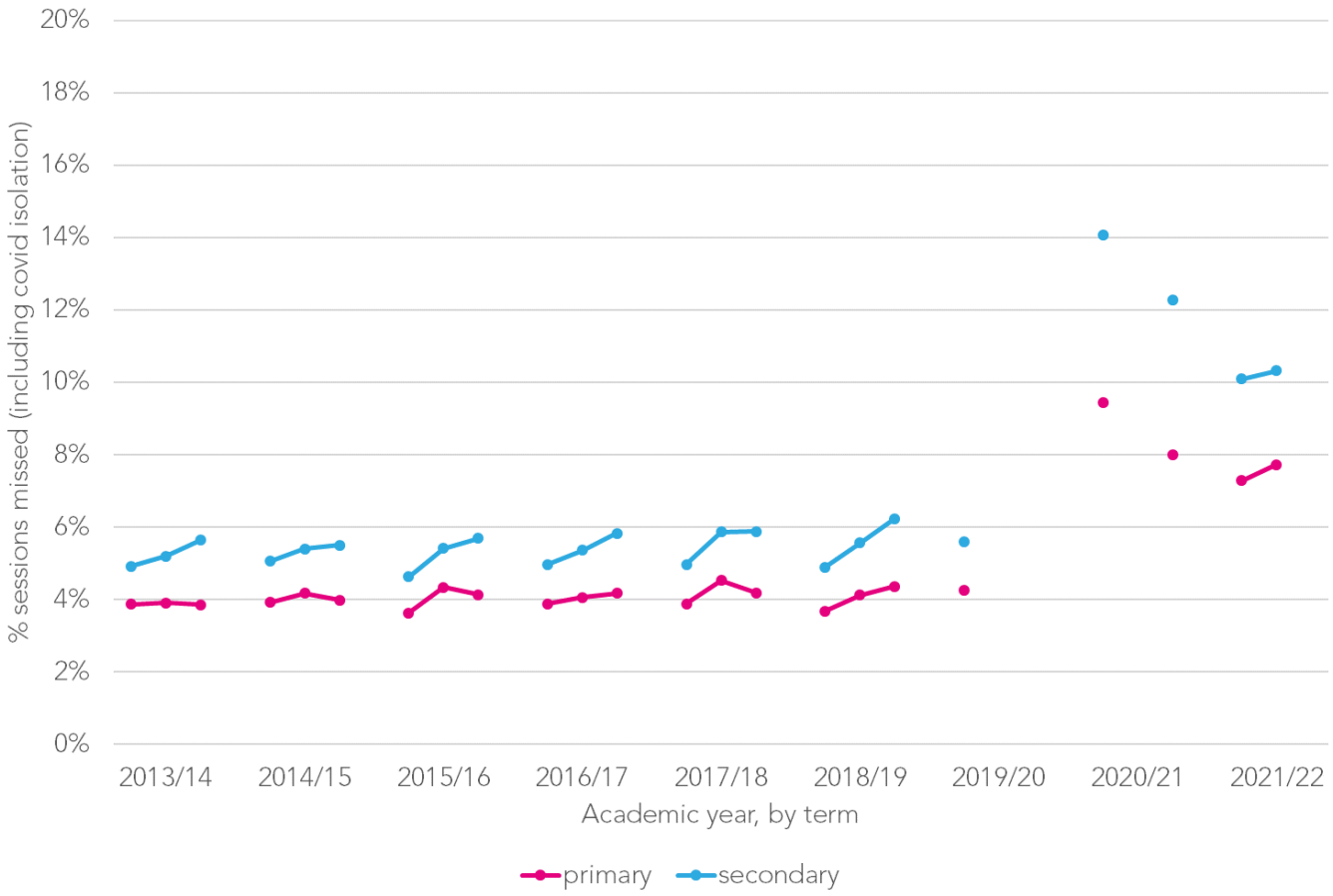
Pupil absence

Our key findings

- Still worse than pre-pandemic, particularly among vulnerable groups of pupils, but better this year than last
- Inevitably, higher absence has meant an increase in persistent absence too
- There's also been an increase in the number of pupils who've missed more school than they've attended
- Lots of pupils in this year's Year 11 cohort have missed huge amounts of school since the start of Year 10

Absence is still much higher than usual

Current rates are almost double pre-pandemic, though this year has been better than last



Sources: 13/14 to 18/19 DfE full year release, 19/20 DfE Autumn term release, 20/21 onwards FFT Attendance Tracker

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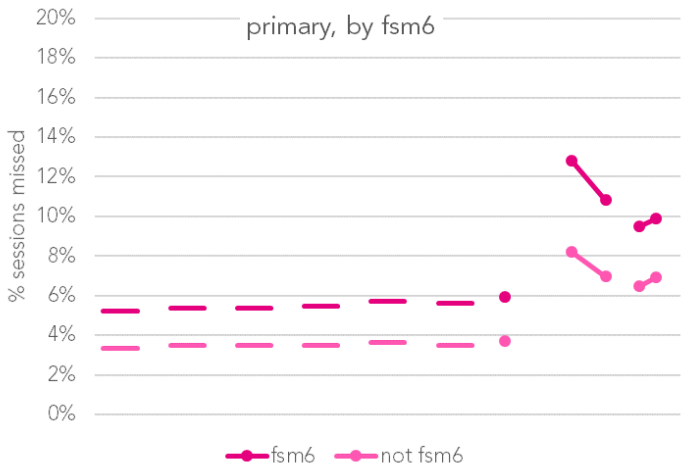
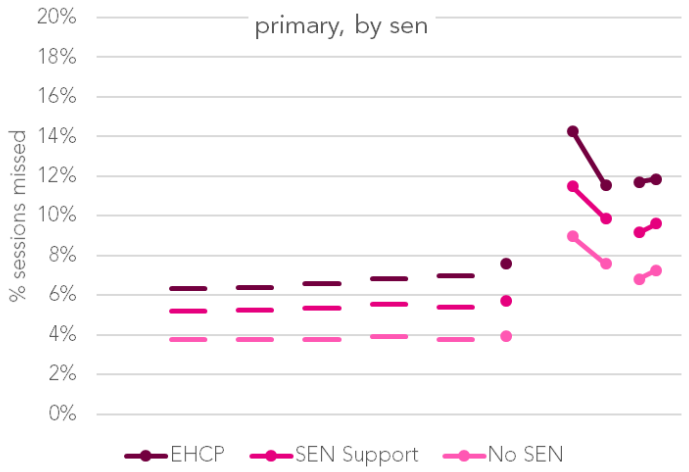
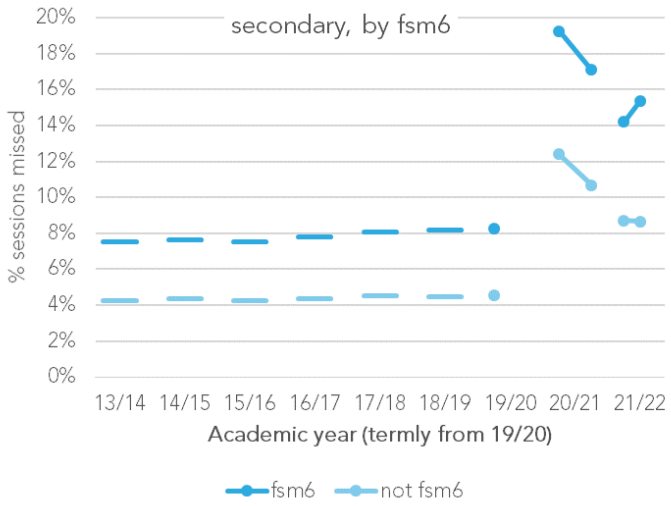
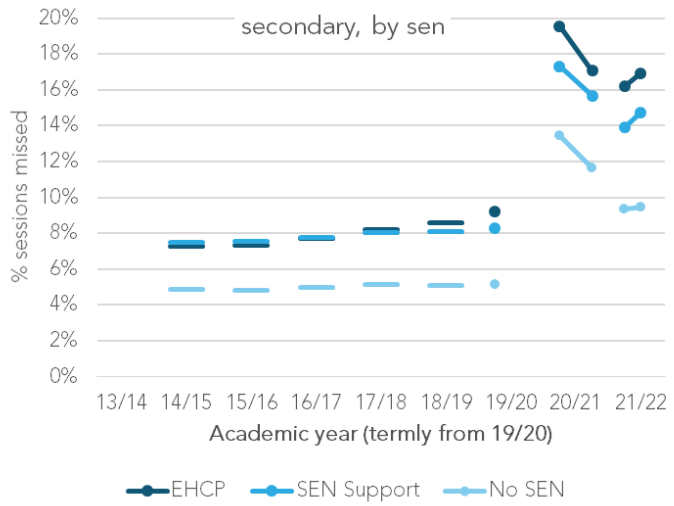
Absence is still much higher than usual

And the biggest increases have been among vulnerable groups of pupils









Sources: 13/14 to 18/19 DfE full year release, 19/20 DfE Autumn term release, 20/21 onwards FFT Attendance Tracker

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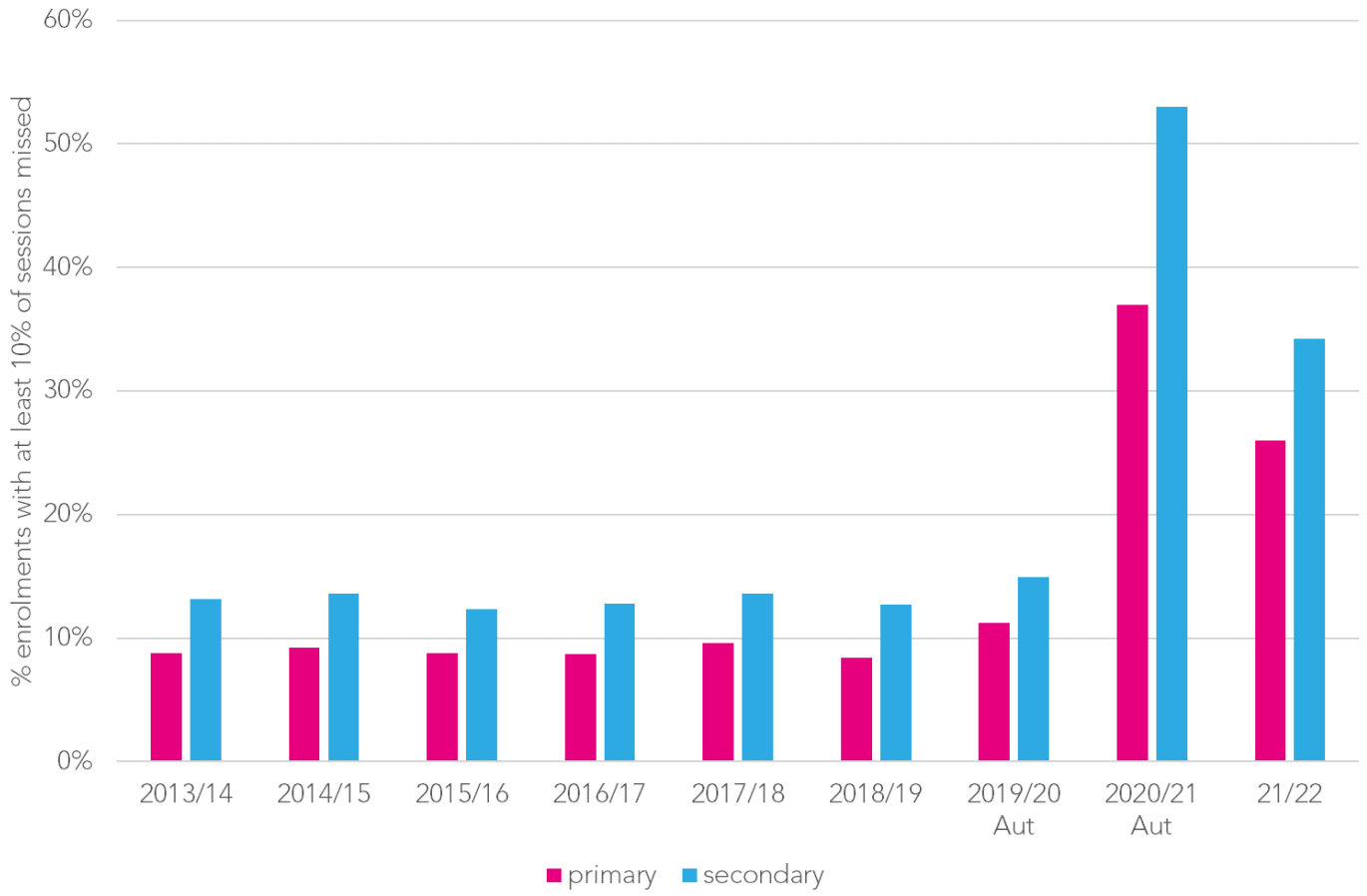
Inevitably, there's also been a big rise in "persistent absence"



Sources: 13/14 to 18/19 DfE Autumn + Spring combined release, 19/20 DfE Autumn term release, 20/21 onwards FFT Attendance Tracker

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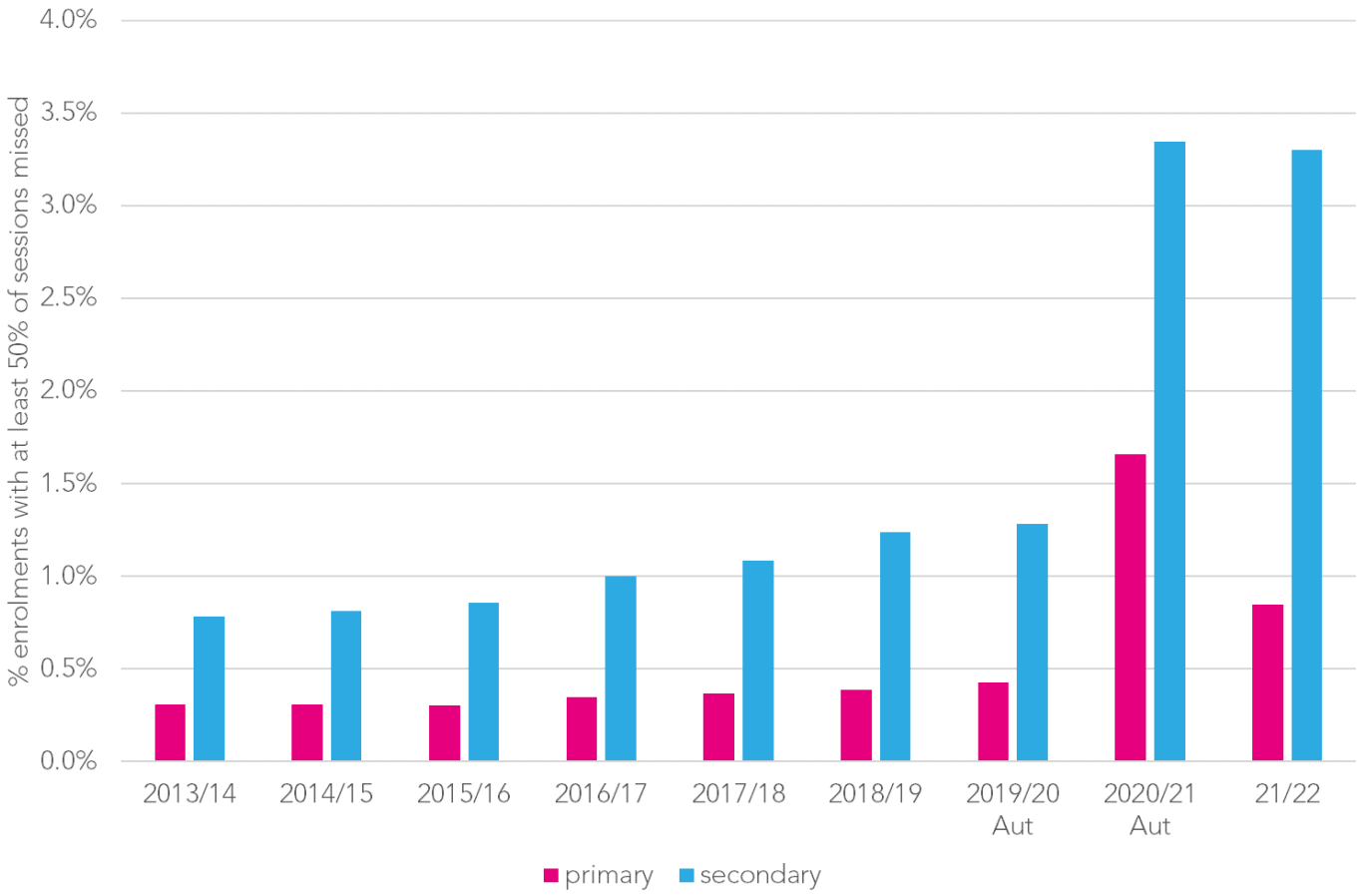
There's also been a big rise in "severe absence" - pupils absent more often than not



Sources: 13/14 to 18/19 DfE Autumn + Spring combined release, 19/20 DfE Autumn term release, 20/21 onwards FFT Attendance Tracker

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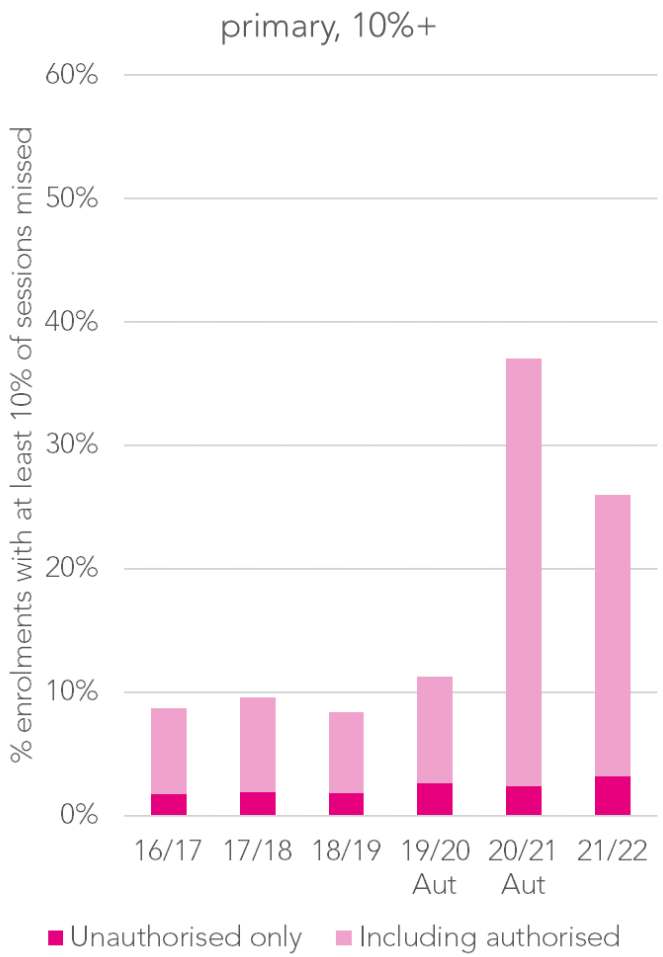
How worried should we be?

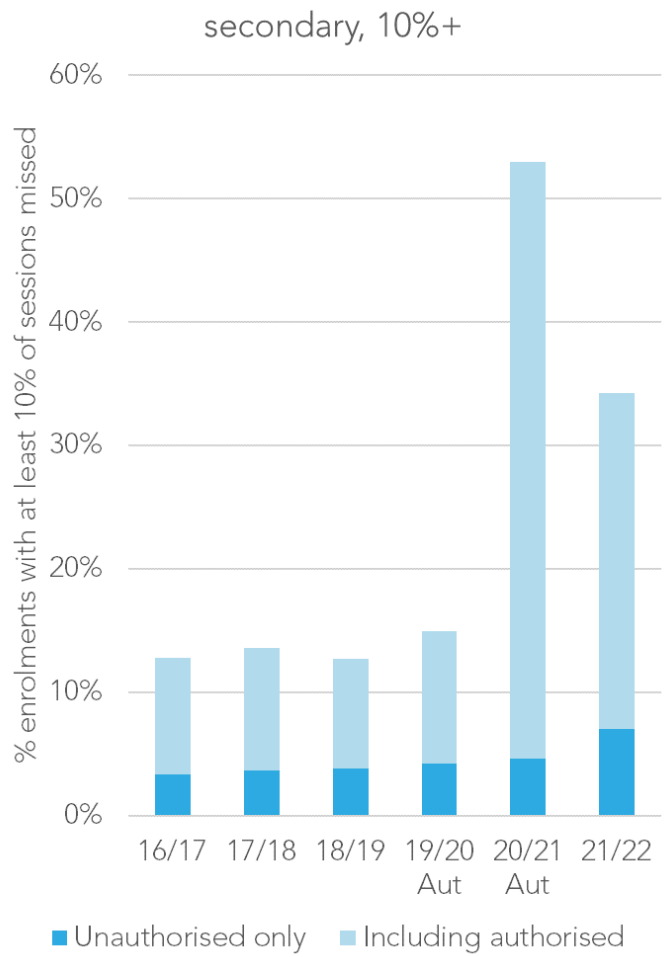
We need to look at reasons for absence

- First, see how many pupil enrolments would be classed as persistently absent and severely absent if we only included unauthorised absences
- Then see how many more there'd be if we added authorised absences

    (including covid and covid isolation)

The increase in "persistent absence" is driven by increased authorised absence





Sources: 16/17 to 18/19 DfE Autumn + Spring combined release, 19/20 DfE Autumn term release, 20/21 onwards FFT Attendance Tracker

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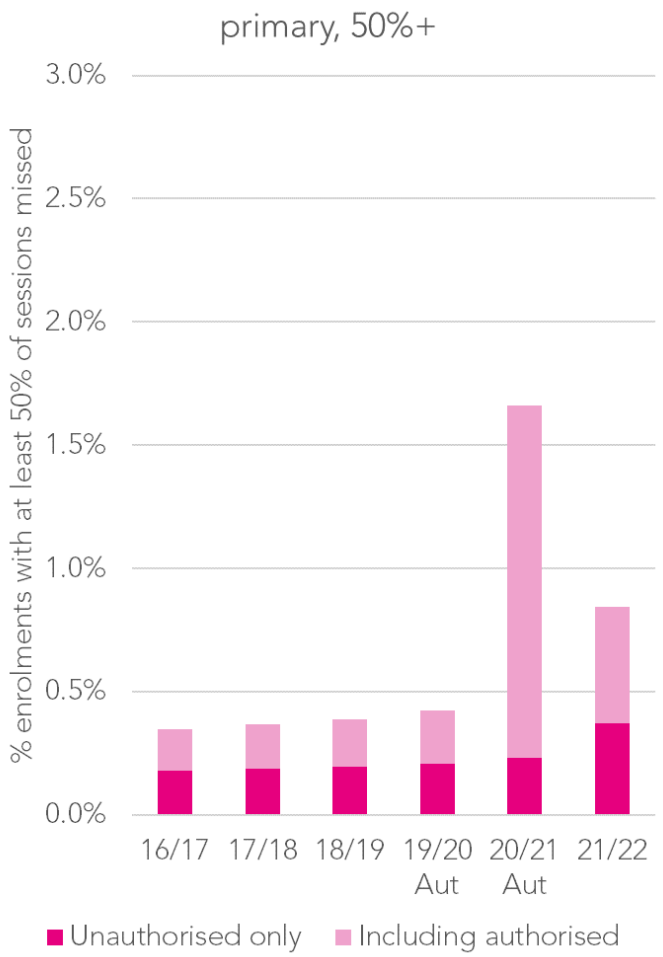
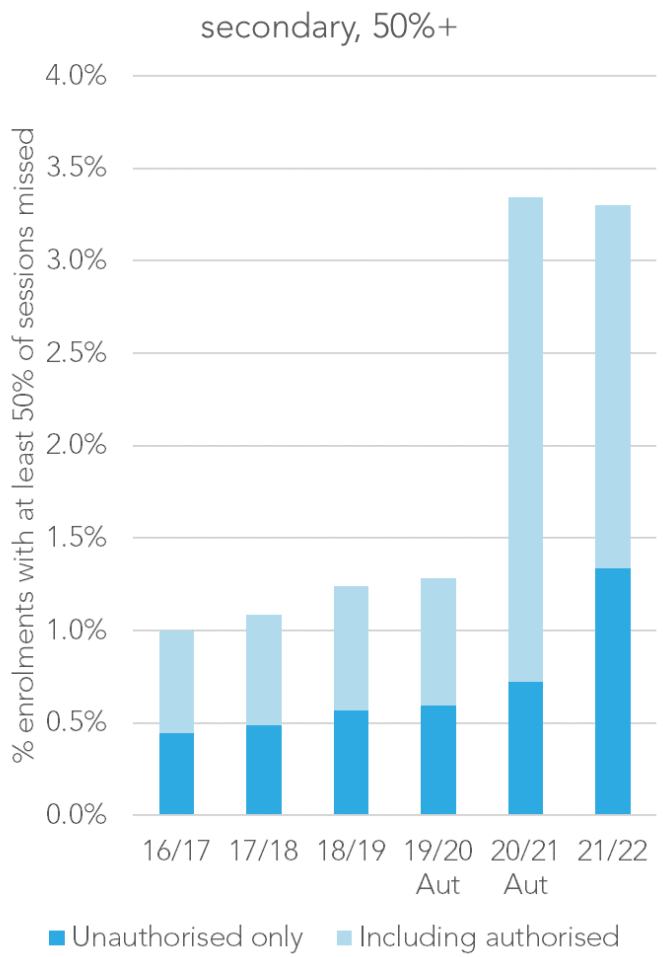
It's likely that much of the rise in persistent absence is due to pupils needing to take time off with covid

- In Autumn term, we looked at the impact of discounting the first ten days of every pupil's longest spell of absence
- We found persistent absence would drop:
  - from 25% to 8% in primary schools, and
  - from 34% to 15% in secondary schools
- For comparison, in Autumn 2019, persistent absence was:
  - 11% in primary schools, and
  - 15% in secondary schools

The increase in "severe absence" is also mostly due to authorised absence

But unauthorised absence also a factor





Sources: 16/17 to 18/19 DfE Autumn + Spring combined release, 19/20 DfE Autumn term release, 20/21 onwards FFT Attendance Tracker

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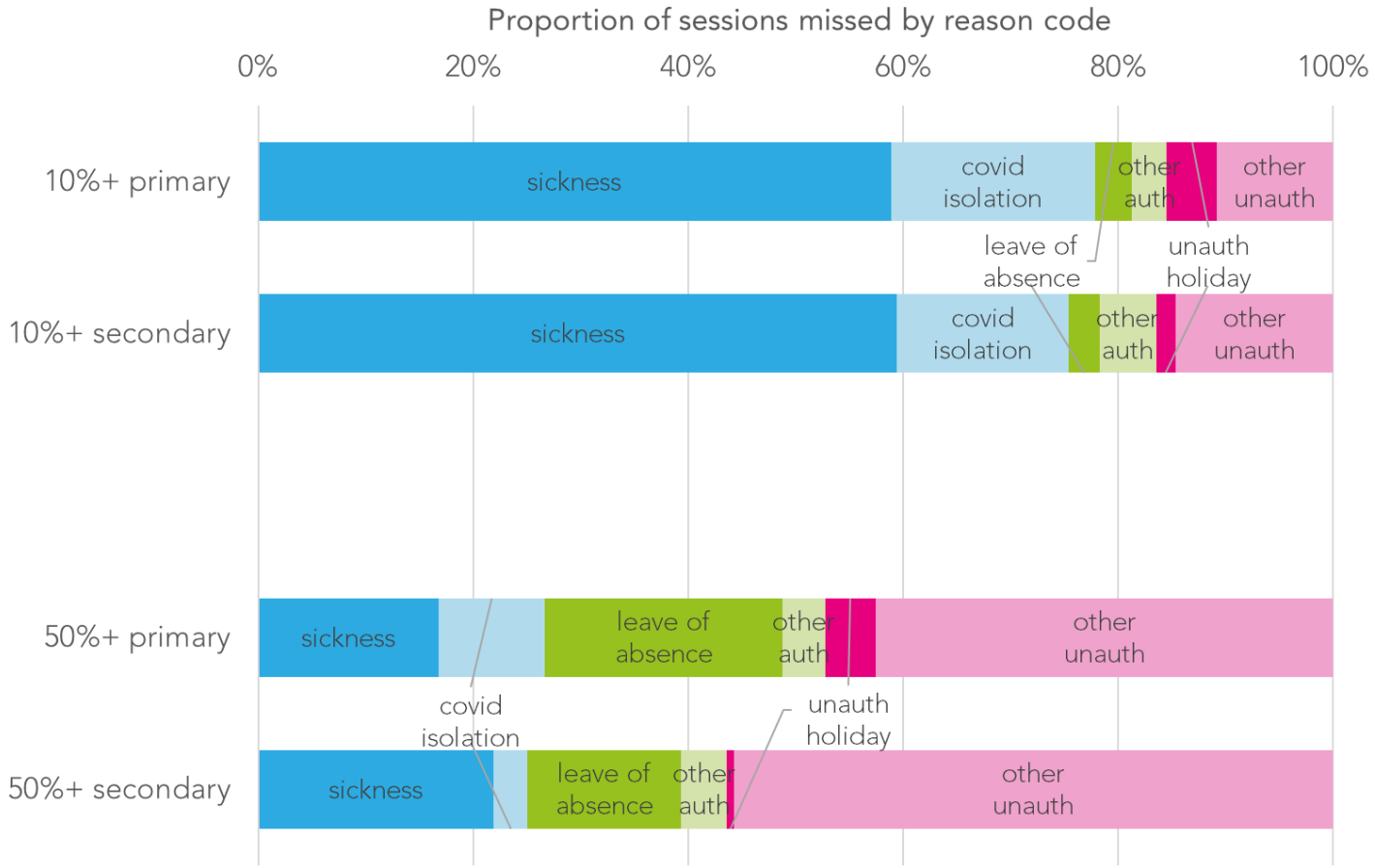
The majority of absence among persistent absentees is due to sickness. For severe absentees, it's (unspecified) unauthorised reasons.



Source: FFT Attendance Tracker

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There are some important things we don't know

- What are the reasons behind unauthorised absence, particularly for severely absent pupils?
- How much of the rise in authorised absence is directly due to covid, and how much of it is something else?
    - Only around 20% of schools are making use of DfE sickness sub-codes (and less than 5% are using them all the time)

Year 11 have missed lots of in-person teaching since the start of Year 10

Source: FFT Attendance Tracker

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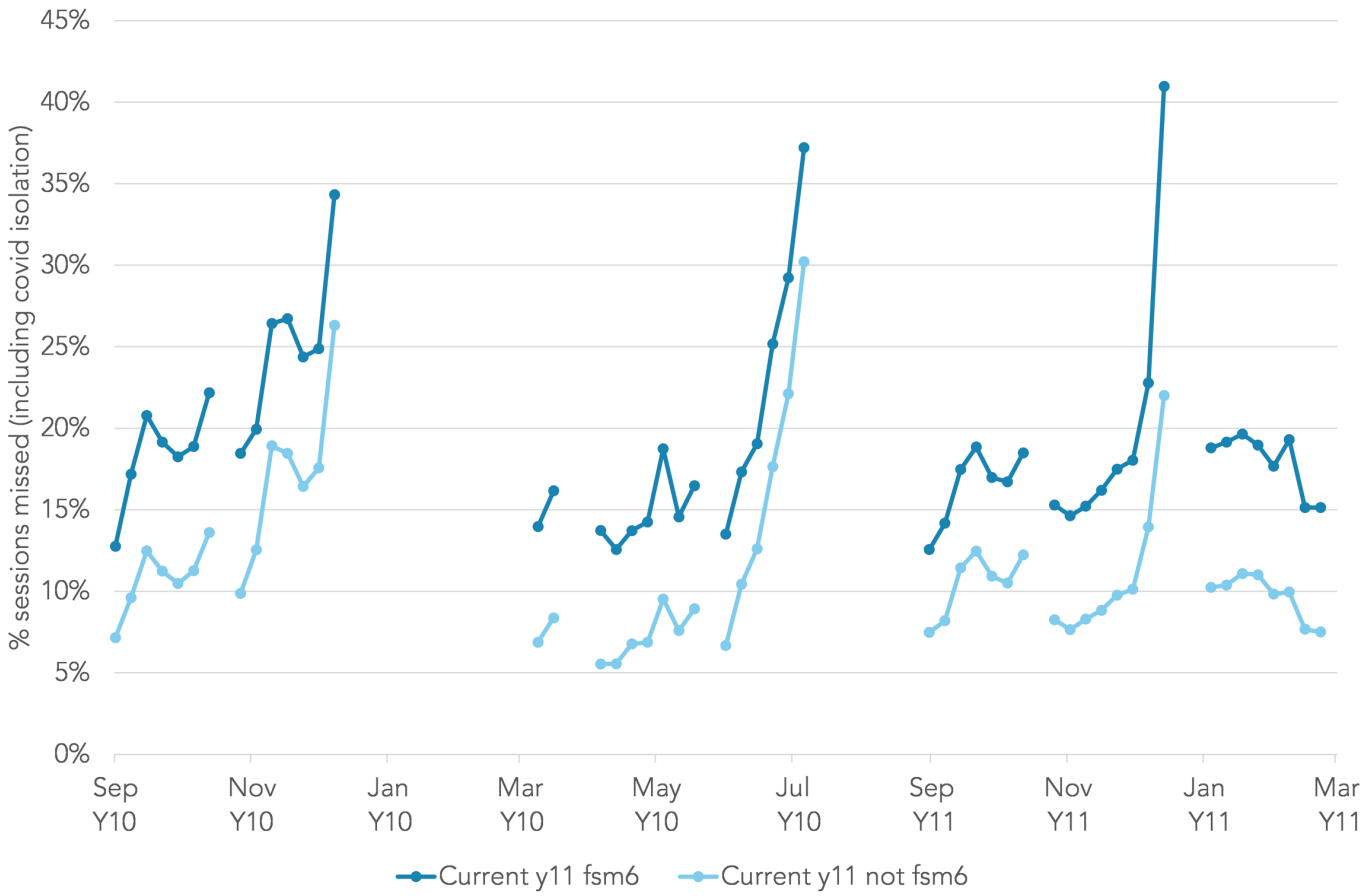
Disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 have consistently missed more



Source: FFT Attendance Tracker

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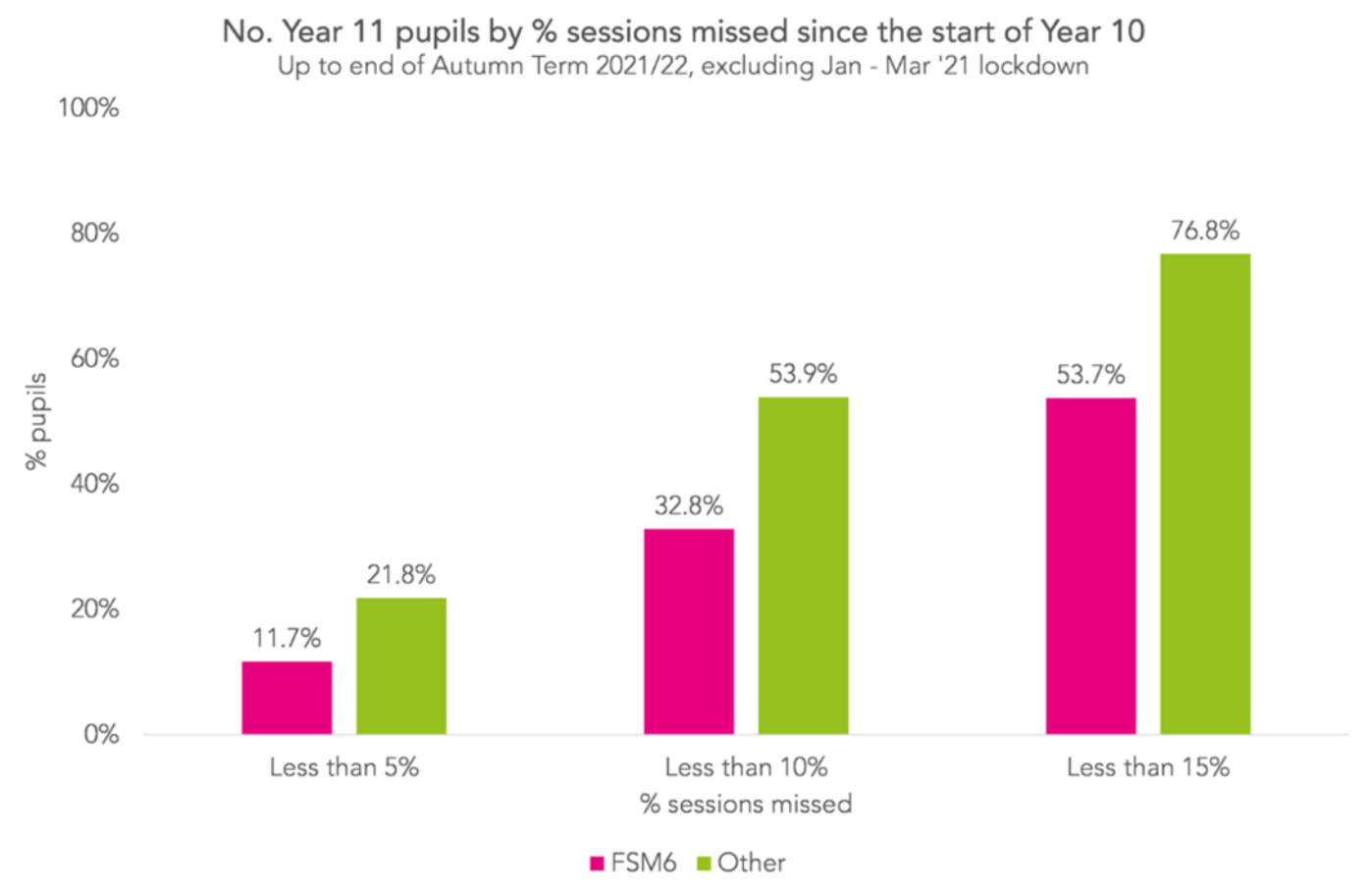
The cumulative effect is that lots of more advantaged pupils have missed relatively little…



Source: FFT Attendance Tracker via blog

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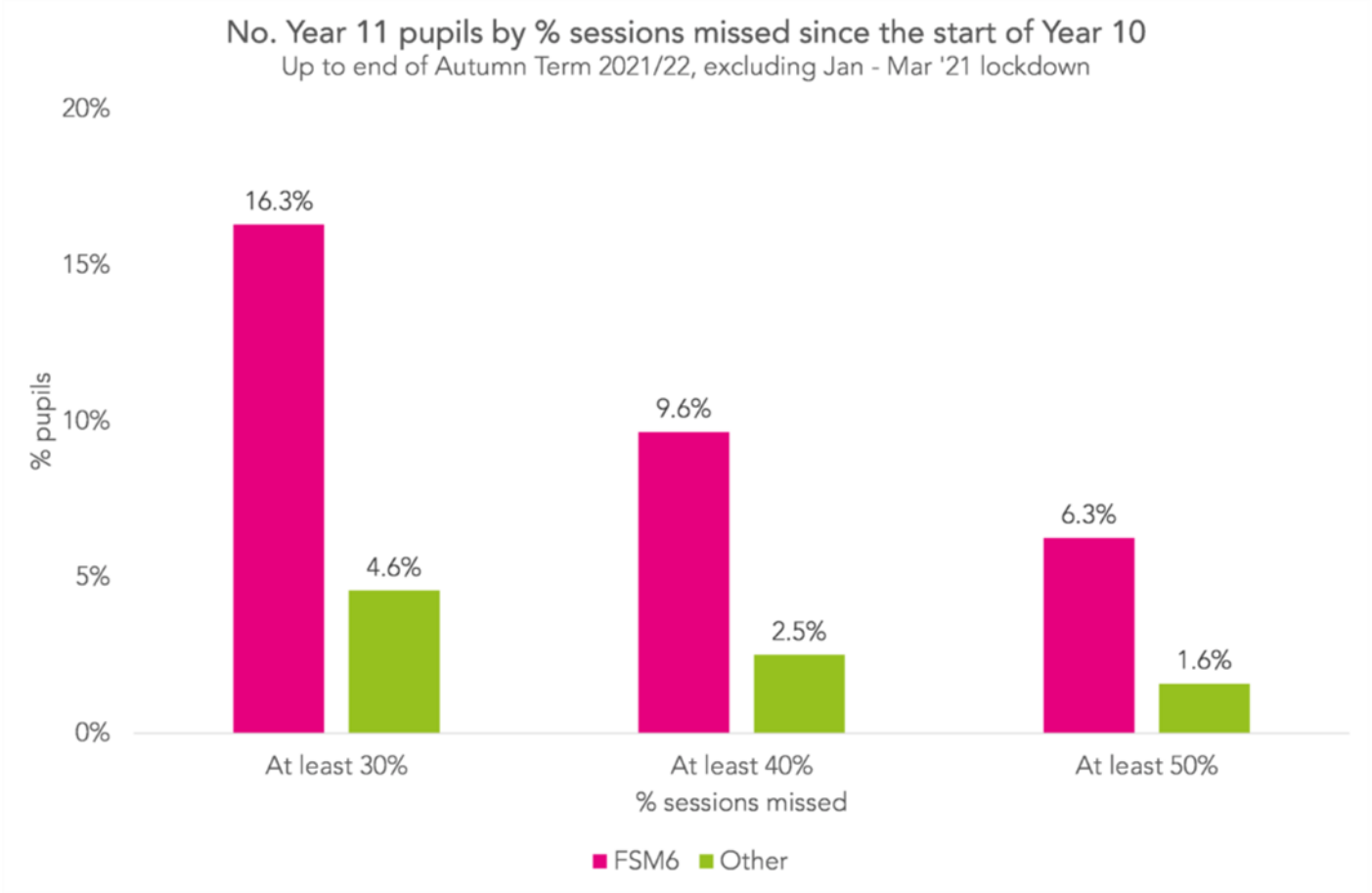
… while lots of disadvantaged pupils have missed really significant amounts



Source: FFT Attendance Tracker via blog

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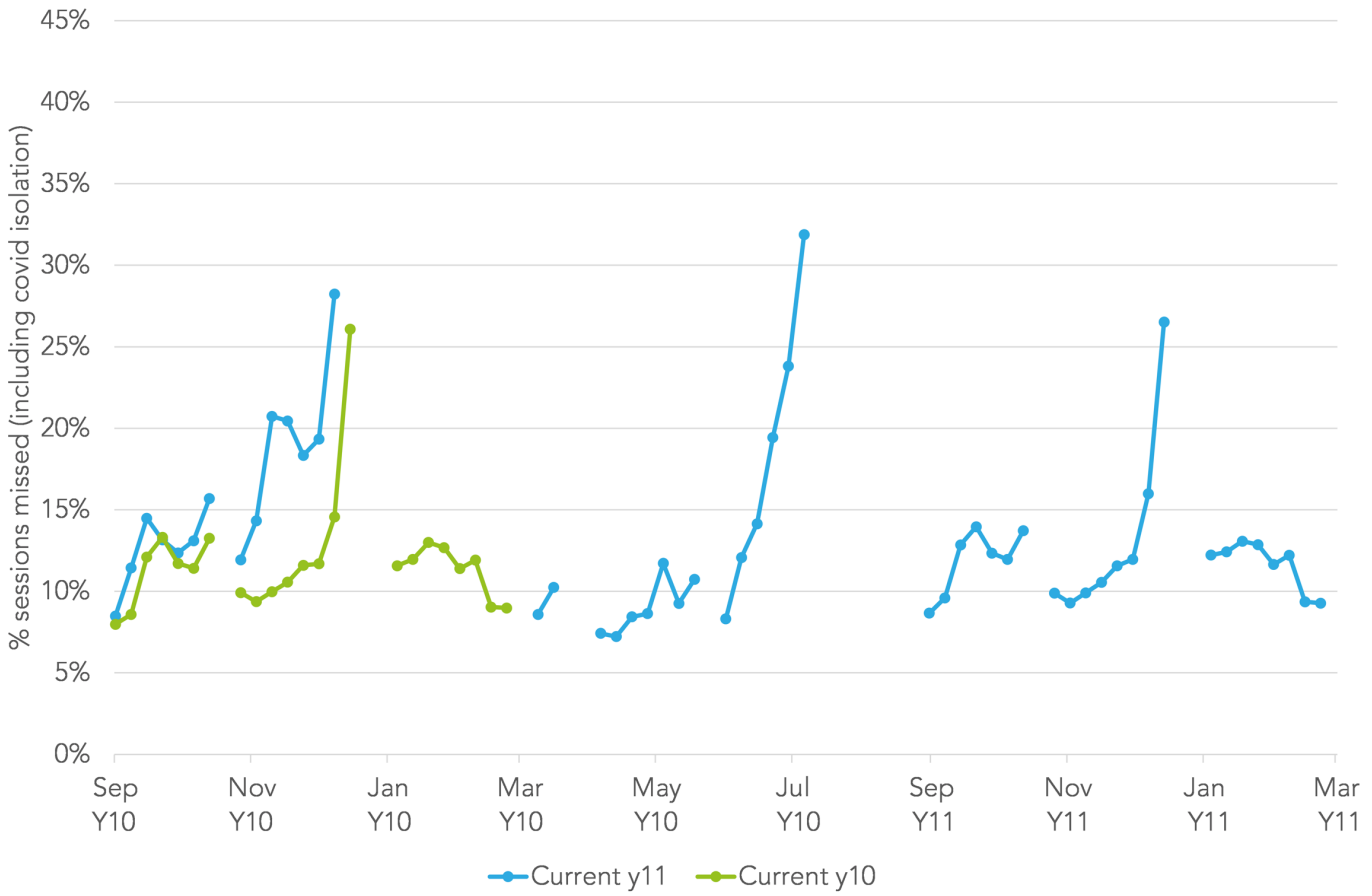
The current Year 10 have had a (relatively) more settled time of it

Crucially, no national school closures



Source: FFT Attendance Tracker

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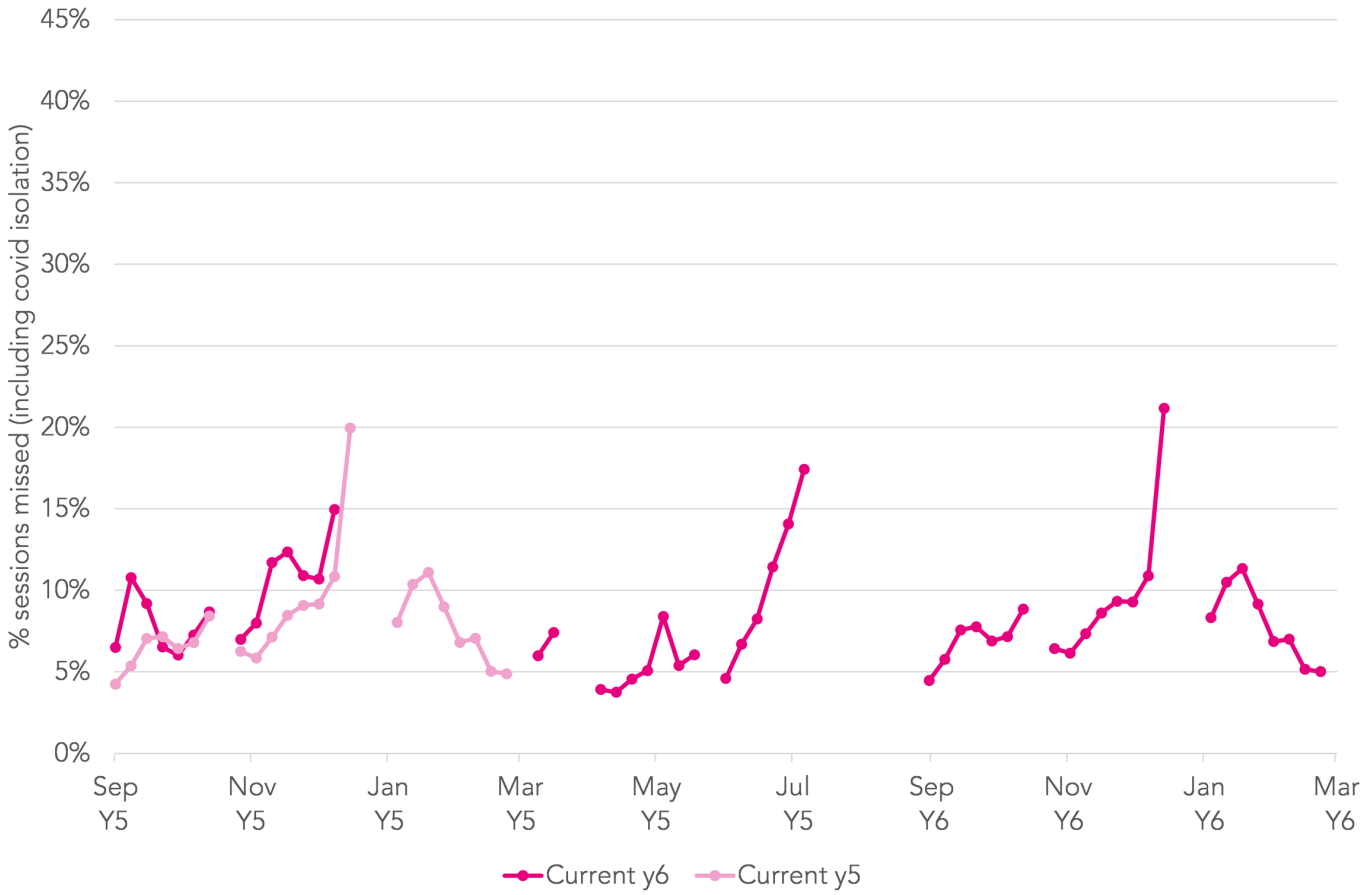
Year 5 are faring slightly better than Year 6 were this time last year

But the difference is smaller than for Years 10 & 11



Source: FFT Attendance Tracker

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Pupil absence

Our key findings

- Still worse than pre-pandemic, particularly among vulnerable groups of pupils, but better this year than last
- Inevitably, higher absence has meant an increase in persistent absence too
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- Lots of pupils in this year's Year 11 cohort have missed huge amounts of school since the start of Year 10

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The attainment gap

Gap between rich and poor pupils in England 'grows by 46% in a year'

Disadvantaged and BAME pupils lost more learning in lockdown and need urgent support, researchers say

- Coronavirus - latest updates
- See all our coronavirus coverage

A sign is placed outside a disinfected classroom at Queen's Hill primary school in Costessey, Norwich. Photograph: Joe Giddens/PA

Urgent support must be targeted at disadvantaged pupils and schools in areas of high deprivation, researchers have said, as figures reveal the gap in England between some pupils and their wealthier peers widened by 46% in

Coronavirus: Lockdown pupils are three months behind, say teachers

By Judith Burns
Education reporter

1 September 2020

Some primary school pupils in England returned to their classrooms at the beginning of June

Children in England are three months behind in their studies after lockdown, with boys and poor pupils worst hit, suggests a survey of teachers by an educational research organisation.

Attainment gap between poor pupils and their peers in England is widening

Study suggests gap in primary school is increasing due to rising levels of persistent poverty

In primary schools the attainment gap increased for the first time since 2007, up from 9.2 months of learning behind in 2018 to 9.3 a year later. Photograph: Chris Fairweather/Huw Evans/Rex/Shutterstock

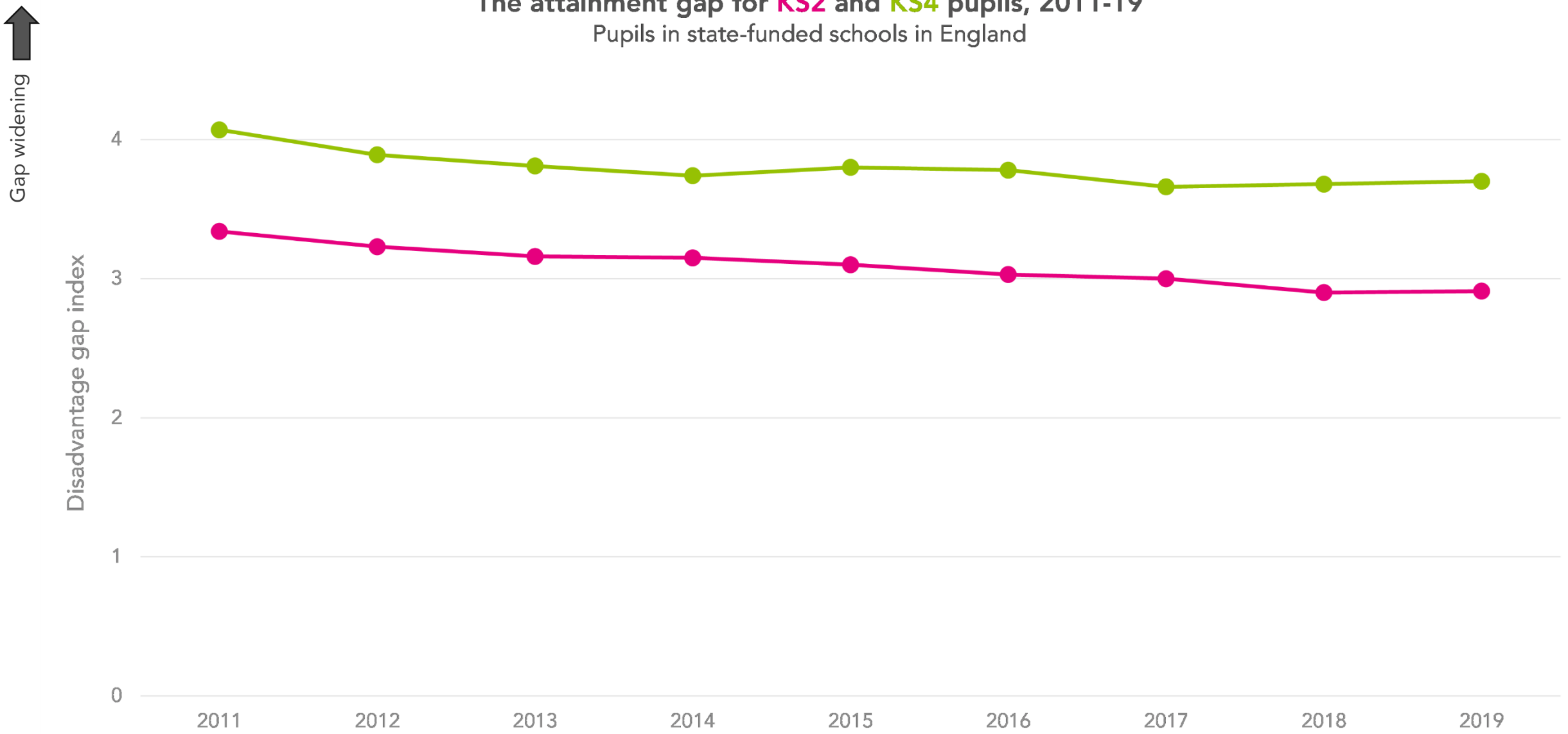
The gap between poor pupils and their wealthier classmates in England has stopped narrowing and gone into reverse for the first time in 12 years, even before the coronavirus pandemic hit, research has found.

What we'll cover

- The gap pre-pandemic
- Difficulties with measuring the gap during the pandemic
- **Our own study (with EEF and Teacher Tapp)**
- **What we found and how it compares to other similar studies**
- What we don't know (yet)

The attainment gap for KS2 and KS4 pupils, 2011-19

Pupils in state-funded schools in England



Source: Department for Education KS2 and KS4 performance data

The attainment gap in 2019

Key Stage 2	Disadvantaged pupils	Other pupils
Percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard	51%	71%
Percentage of pupils achieving a higher standard	5%	13%

Key Stage 4	Disadvantaged pupils	Other pupils
Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate	28%	45%
Percentage achieving grades 5 or above in English and maths GCSE	25%	50%

Assessment during the pandemic

2019
- KS2 SATs assessed via exams
- GCSEs and A-Levels assessed via exams

2020
- No formal assessment at primary level
- GCSEs and A-Levels graded using Centre Assessment Grades (eventually)

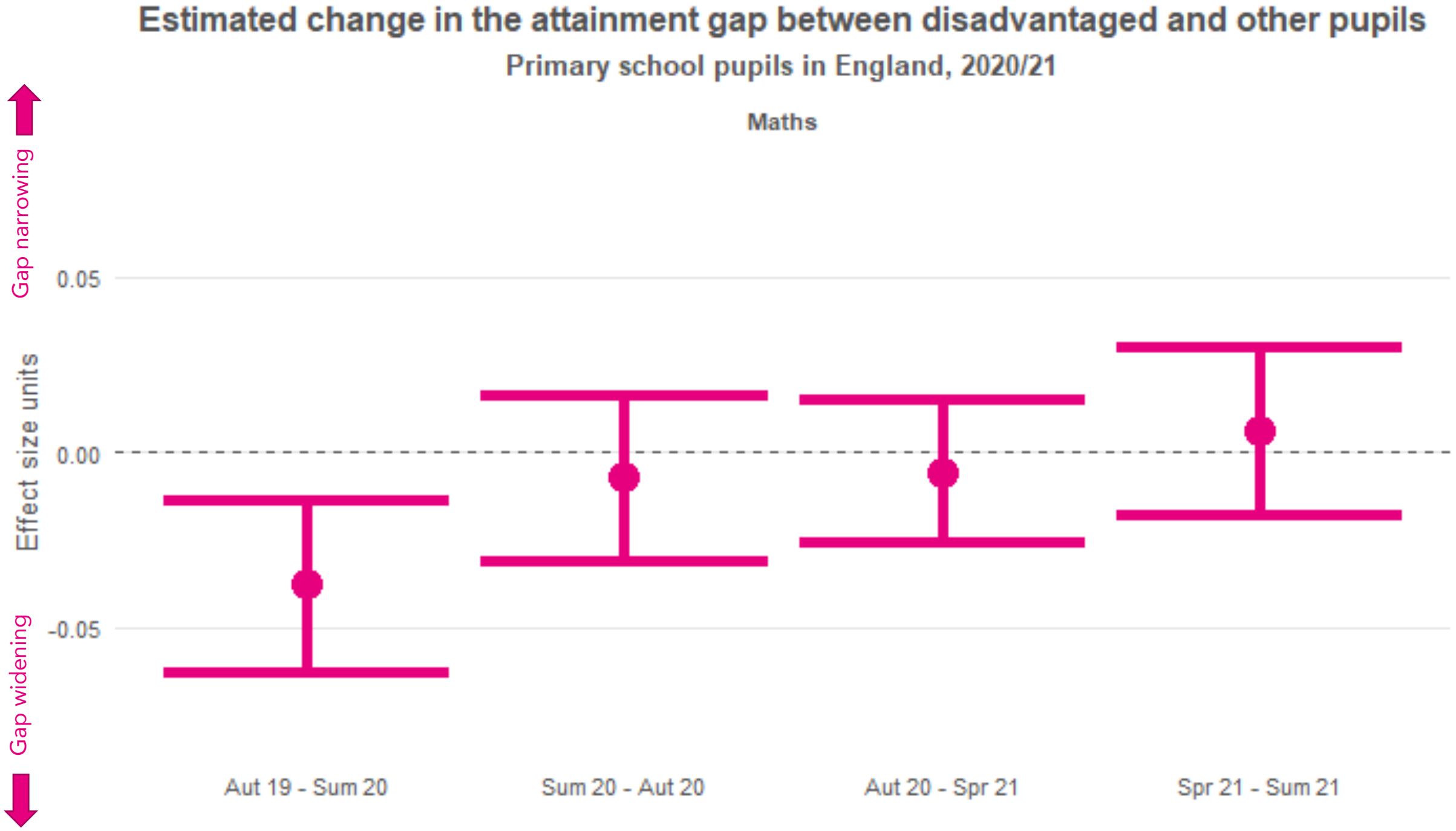
2021
- No formal assessment at primary level
- GCSEs and A-Levels graded using Teacher Assessed Grades

2022
- Reception baseline assessment introduced and KS2 SATs return
- GCSEs and A-Levels assessed via exams with additional support and 'generous' grading

2023
- Reception baseline assessment and KS2 SATs assessed via exams
- GCSEs and A-Levels assessed via exams

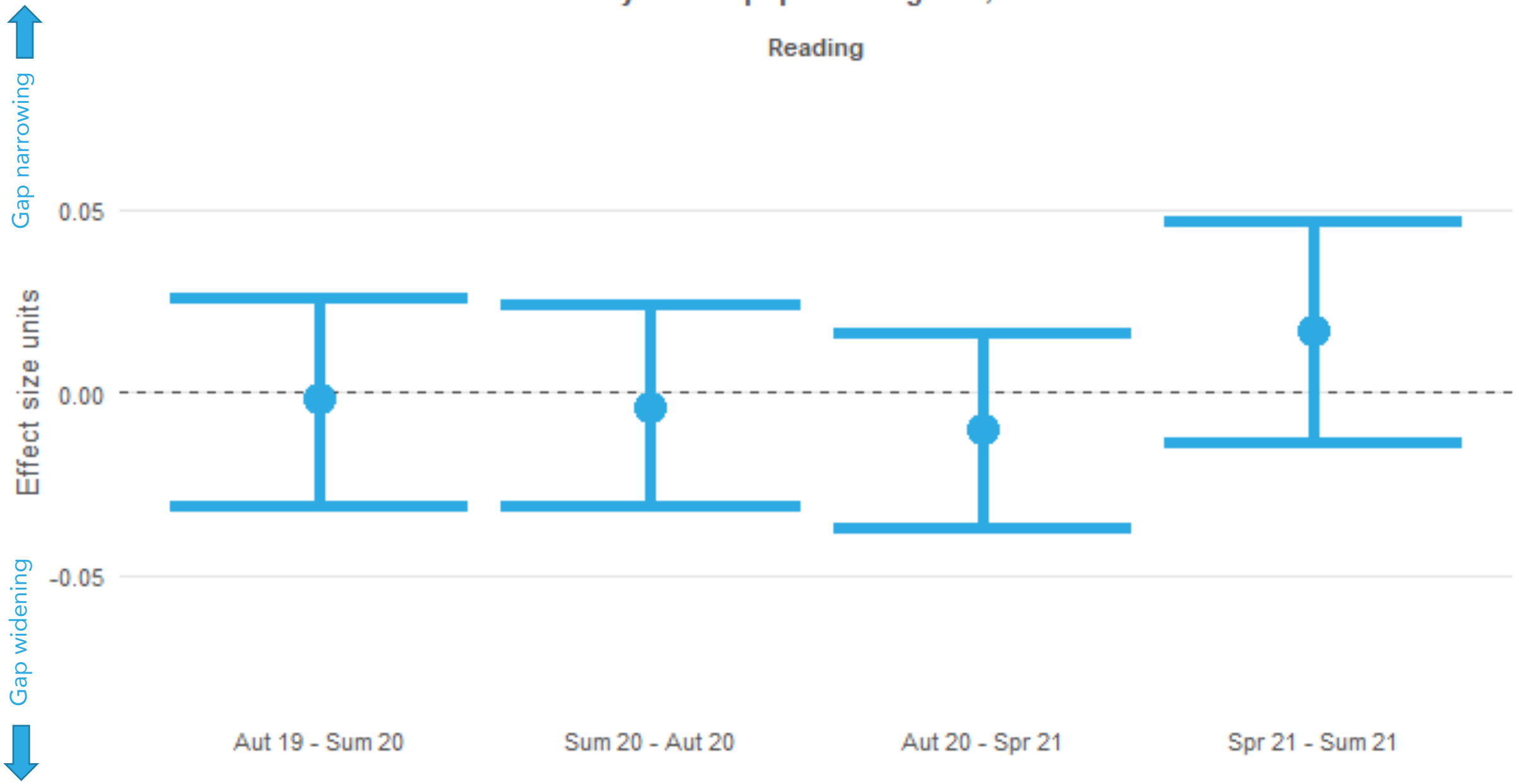
Our research

- In collaboration with the EEF (who also funded the work) and Teacher Tapp
- Data was collected via Aspire Pupil Tracking and scores in termly Rising Stars tests (PIRA / PUMA and NTS)
- Collected data from primary schools from Autumn Term 2019 up until Summer Term 2021
- Compared the disadvantage gap for primary pupils before and during the pandemic, in maths and reading


Estimated change in the attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils
Primary school pupils in England, 2020/21
Maths
Gap narrowing
Effect size units
Gap widening
0.05
0.00
-0.05
Aut 19 - Sum 20
Sum 20 - Aut 20
Aut 20 - Spr 21
Spr 21 - Sum 21

Estimated change in the attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils

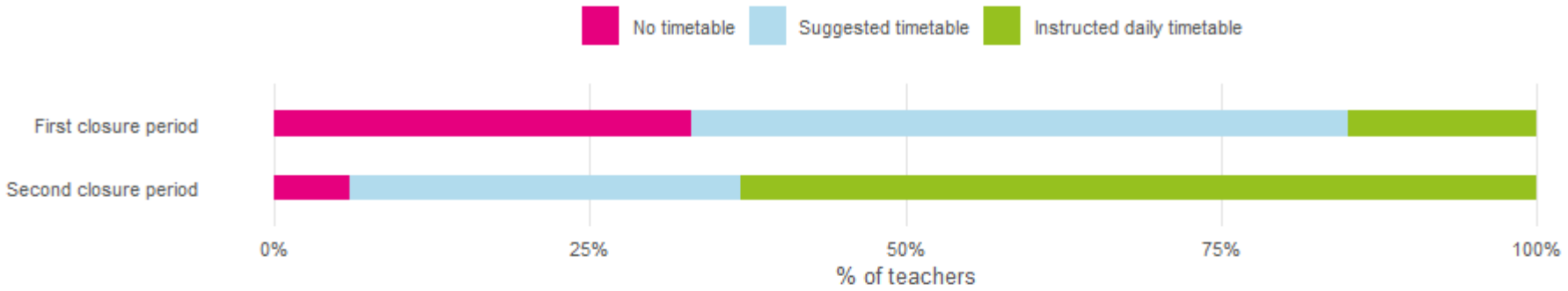
Primary school pupils in England, 2020/21



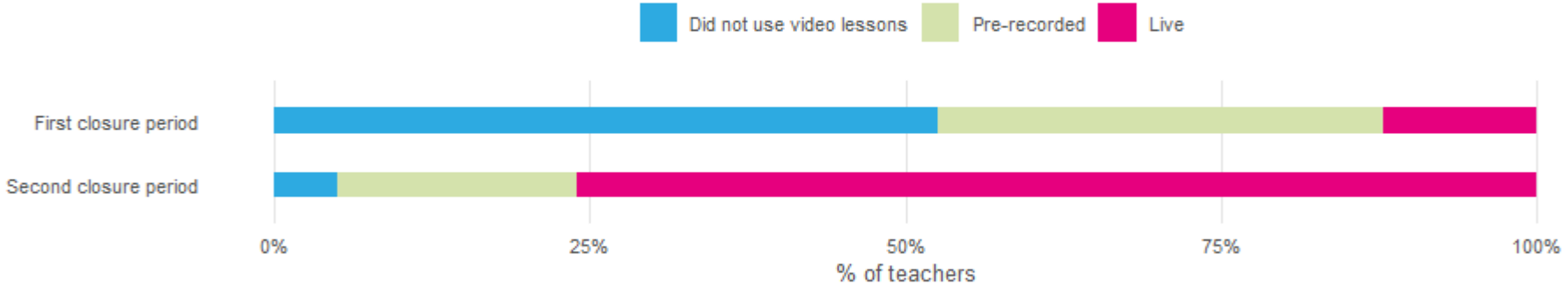
The headlines

- Between Autumn 2019 and Summer 2021, disadvantaged primary pupils fell behind by another month in maths (but not in reading).
- That's around an 11% increase, from an initial gap of around six months in Autumn 2019.
- Most of the increase happened during the period of initial (partial) school closures.
- The increase in the gap is relatively small.

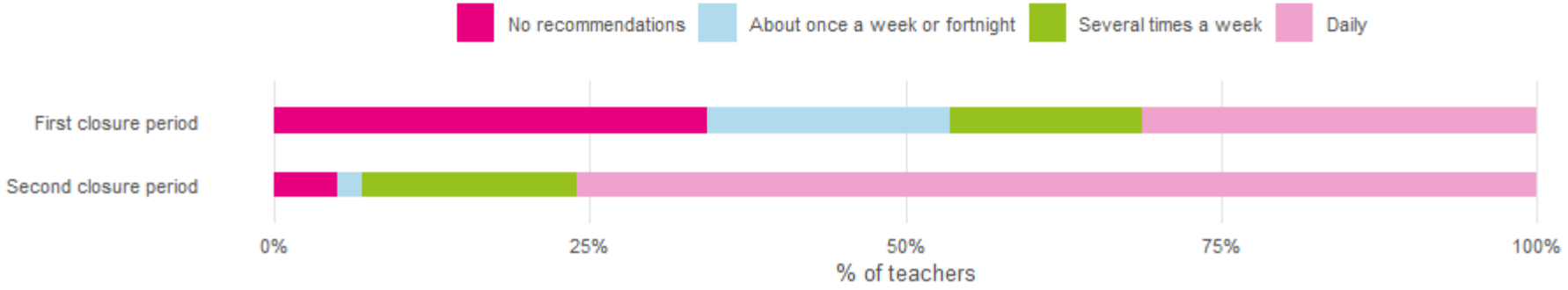
What timetabling approach did schools have?



Did teachers use pre-recorded or live video lessons?



How often did teachers expect work to be submitted?



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Other studies on the topic

Provider	Years	Period	Test	Findings
FFT / Teacher Tapp / EEF	Primary	Aut 19 – Sum 21	PIRA / PUMA and NTS assessments	Reading: no change Maths: + one month
EPI / Renaissance Learning / DfE	Primary Secondary	Aut 19 – Sum 21	STAR reading and STAR maths	(For primary) Reading: + 0.4 months Maths: + 0.5 months
NFER / EEF	1-2	Aut 19 – Sum 21	NFER standardised tests	(For Y2) Reading: + one month Maths: + two months

For an overview of all relevant research, see EEF's summary of research on the impact of the pandemic on attainment

Summing up: what we know

- The attainment gap has widened in primary school maths
- Much of the increase happened early on in the pandemic
- The gap now stands at around seven months of progress (up from around six)

Some things we don't know

- Much about the effect on the youngest pupils
- What the longer term impact of disrupted learning will be
- What will happen to the attainment gap at KS2
- Whether the adjustments to grade boundaries at GCSE / A-Level this year will mitigate increases in the gap

Thank you

- Questions? Add them to the chat
- Join the conversation on Twitter: #FFTCONF22

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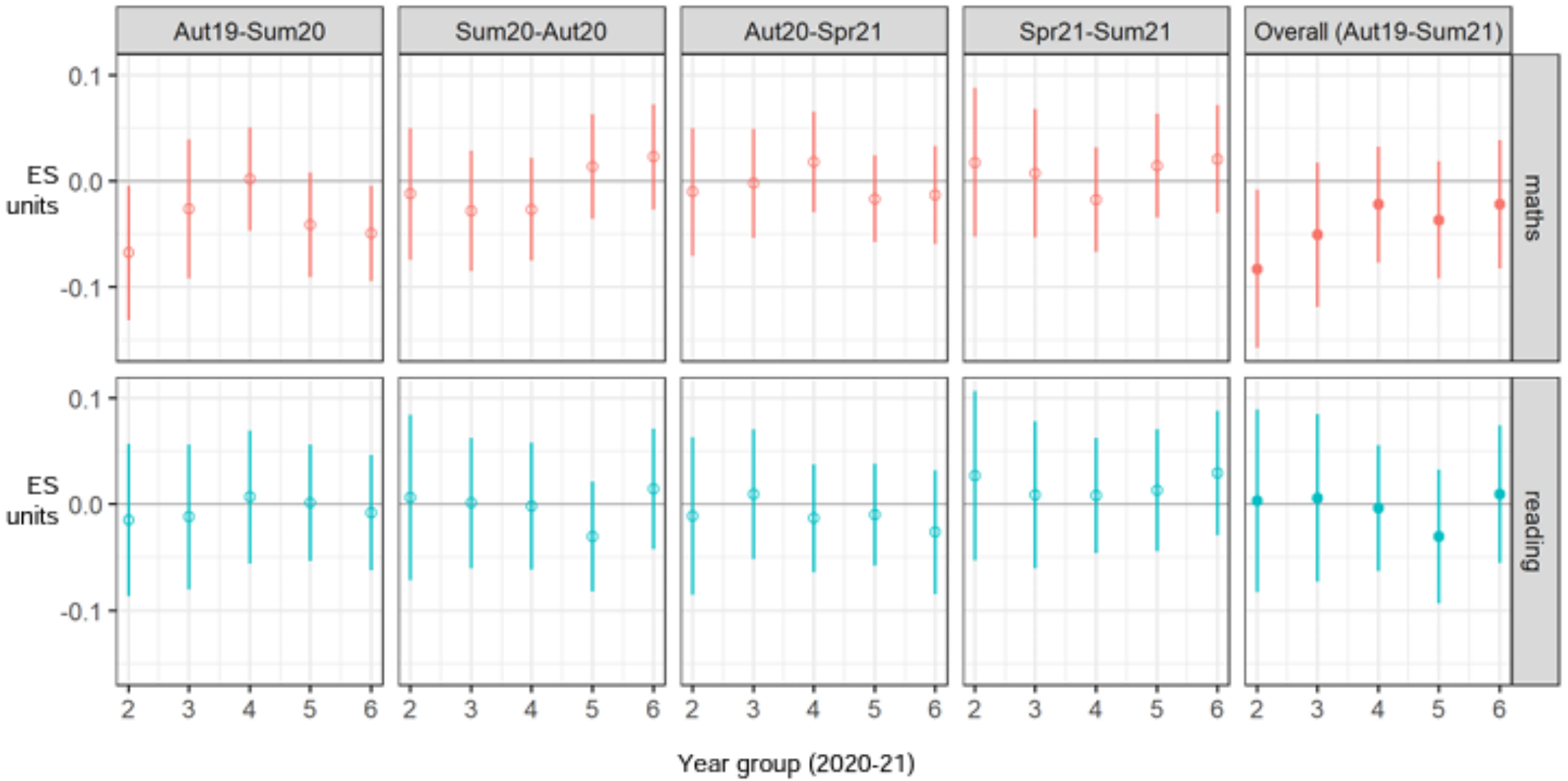
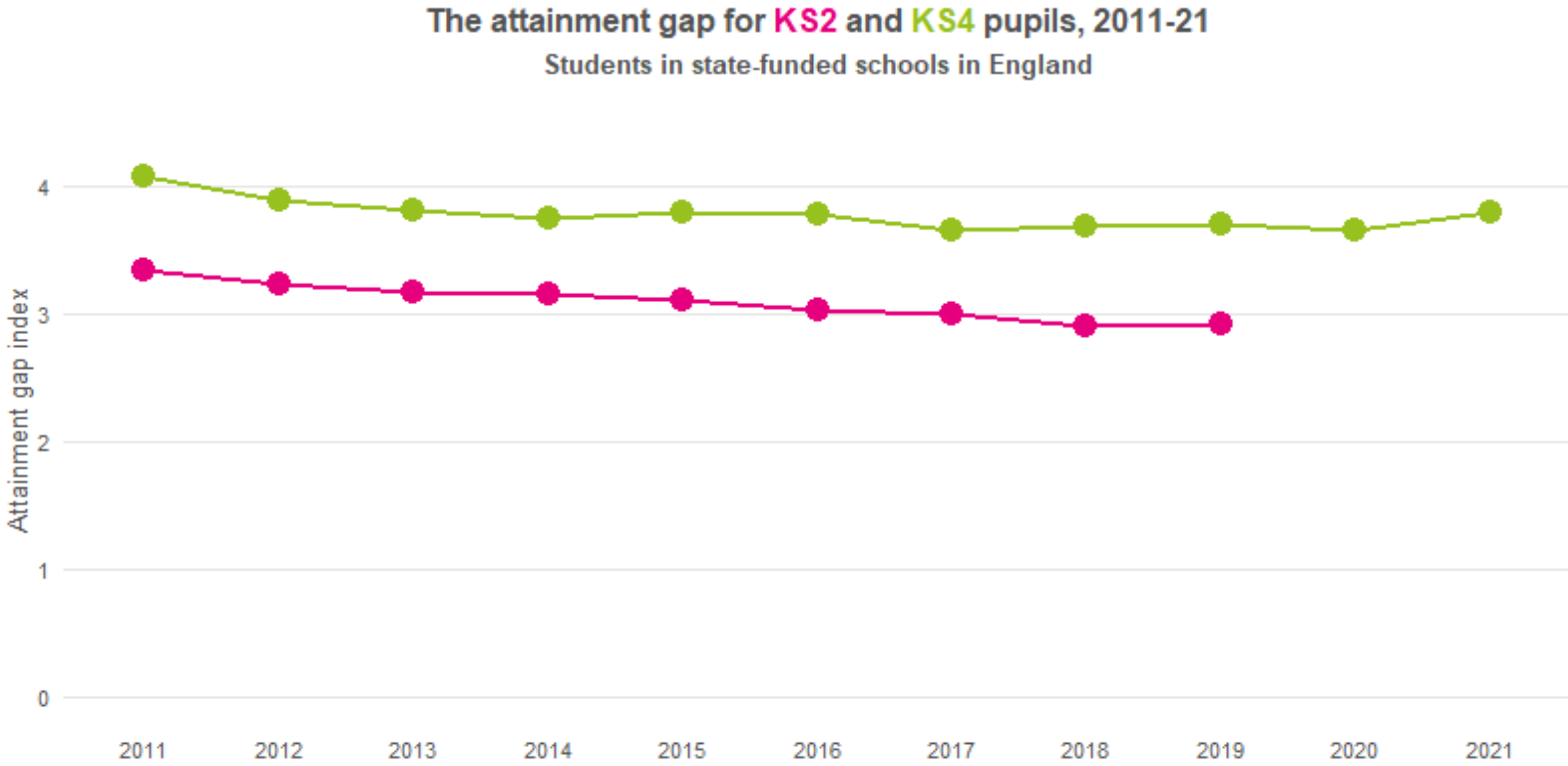
Figure 2: Results from RQ1a and RQ1b by year level




The attainment gap for KS2 and KS4 pupils, 2011-21
Students in state-funded schools in England
Attainment gap index
4
3
2
1
0
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021

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A note on measures

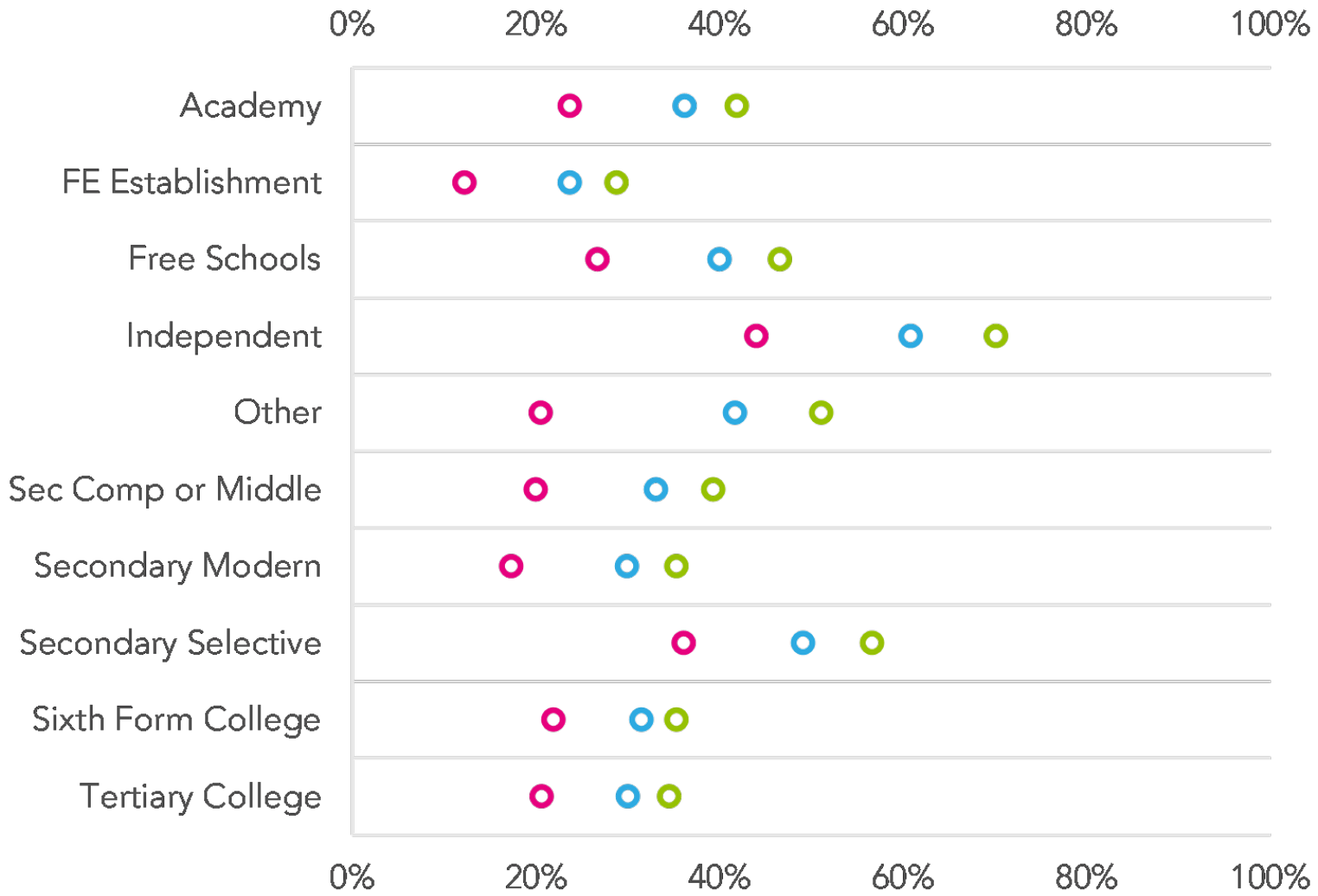
- The disadvantage gap index is used by the DfE and is based on average attainment in headline performance measures at KS2 and KS4
- It ranks all pupils in state-funded schools in England and asks whether disadvantaged pupils typically rank lower than non-disadvantaged pupils.
- This makes it more resilient to changes in grading systems over time than just looking at differences in performance measures
- This measure and measures like effect size units are often converted into months of progress using the EEF's methodology

A note on measures

- Effect size units are often used by researchers
- They are a way of measuring the overall magnitude of an effect in a way that can be compared across different studies
- But they aren't usually very easy to interpret
- Measures like effect size units and the disadvantage gap index are often converted into months of progress using guidance developed by the EEF
- This is intended to make them more accessible

A-Level results at grade A or above

All students in England, 2019, 2020 and 2021



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