

We need money to solve the problems we face but left an...

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The Guardian

Gap between rich and poor pupils 'widens 46% in a year'

Richard Adams
Education editor

Urgent support must be targeted at disadvantaged pupils and schools in areas of high deprivation, researchers have said, as new figures reveal the gap between some pupils and their wealthier peers widened by 46% in a school year severely disrupted by the coronavirus lockdown.

As the new term begins for most pupils in England and Wales, the authoritative study by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), based on interviews with more than 3,000 teachers and heads at about 2,000 schools, revealed that disadvantaged and black and minority ethnic (BAME) children had gone backwards compared with their better-off peers since March.

While the average learning lost was about three months for all pupils, according to teachers, more than half of pupils at schools in the most deprived areas lost four months or more, compared with just 15% of those in the least deprived areas.

And while just 1% of pupils in the wealthiest areas were estimated to have lost six months in effective learning to the lockdown, in the poorest areas more than six times as many were affected as badly.

The NFER estimated that the worst-hit secondary schools in England faced an average cost of more than £200,000 in additional staff, cleaning and IT spending for reopening and preparation for potential lockdowns, and £286,000 for primary schools.

The research found that, based on estimates supplied by teachers, the learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had increased by 46% since the previous year.

But it said that 46% was "likely to be an underestimate" if differences between schools were included. It also found that nearly half of pupils need intensive catch-up support to make up lost ground. And boys appeared to have been worse off and left further behind than girls, on average.

Angela Davies, NFER's chief factual scientist, said: "There remains a range of factors for teachers and schools, which means catch-up should be seen as part of the ongoing process of learning recovery, for most pupils, rather than as a quick turnaround solution. It is clear additional

▲ Marcus Rashford (left) MPs, food poverty was contributing to social unrest

Rashford's new goal: to tackle UK food poverty

Archie Bland

In a letter to MPs, Rashford has revealed that major brands from Aldi and Tesco to Debenhams and Kellogg's have joined him in forming a group called the Child Food Poverty Task Force and has set out three major new policy goals, with a rallying cry for lasting change. The England international, forced by injury to withdraw from the latest international squad yesterday, has also written directly to Boris Johnson.

"Food poverty is contributing to social unrest," he told MPs, reflecting on a series of recent meetings with families in need of the same support he courted as a child.

He described "watching a young boy keeping it together whilst his mother sobbed alongside him, feeling like he has to step up to protect his family and alleviate some of that misery. He was 9 years old."

"I know that feeling," he wrote. "I remember th...

Triple threat to justice system, lawyers warn

Oliver Bowcott
Judicialiciary

The criminal justice system faces the triple threat of a shortage of defence lawyers, financial shock as farleigh aid from the government ends, and a mass delay to trials due to Covid-19.

With judges postponing trials as far ahead as 2022 and some refusing to reward suspects in custody when time limits are repeatedly breached, pressure is mounting on the Ministry of Justice (MJ) to open more emergency courtrooms during the crisis.

Even before coronavirus hit, struck, the failure to raise

What it makes clear is that some face hunger as a result of increasing poverty in the UK.

Whilst others face literal injustice.

And yet more face social injustice as a result of educational disparities.

And all because of a background of a health system that is still not coping.

But what is the government discussing? They are talking about which very marginal tax rate increases to make, which discussion is anyway (I am quite sure) just a softening up exercise for the claim to be made that there are no acceptable tax increases and so we must have austerity instead.

Our state is failing. The programme with this aim, first put in place by Cameron and Osborne, is now beginning to succeed. The most basic delivery of services is now becoming hard, if not impossible, in the face of demand. And the planned response is, I have no doubt, to make further cuts, even as we face economic meltdown.

And yet this is a country rich in resources.

Everyone could be well fed in this country.

The people to make our courts, schools, healthcare and so much more could be found. They are in this country, now. Many are doing jobs that add little value to society right now because that's the way we organise our economy. We refuse to value what is important to our wellbeing. And the result is hunger, injustice, inequality and failing health.

Which is because we believe that we can only have health care, justice and so much else as mere by product of whatever it might be that the private sector wishes to persuade some to buy even though they really do not need it, whilst refusing to accept that some needs go wholly unfulfilled, we end up with this dire situation.

The pretence that tax pays for public services comes with a cost attached.

The pretence that tax creates injustice for the wealthy that requires that the state be kept small has massive consequences.

The claim that there is such a thing as taxpayers' money and that it is limited in supply imposes rationing on those with greatest need.

And these claims are all fallacies. They are myths propagated by a few to pretend we cannot deliver what is really required in our society.

Despite which many on the left buy into this belief that the state is constrained by a shortage of money from the private sector. Labour did under Corbyn. It still is under Starmer. They too carry responsibility then with their claims that 'Everything is fully costed' as the world's of many collapse around them.

No wonder I get angry with those who say there isn't enough money when the thing needed to start solving these problems is currently available in almost limitless supply, cost free, given the current state of the economy.

When are we going to accept that fact, for fact it is?