COSMO

COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities Study

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COSMO Technical Note 1

Differences by ethnicity in young people's educational experiences and wellbeing in the aftermath of COVID–19

Jake Anders, Alice De Gennaro, Xin Shao & James Yarde

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Young people's education experiences have been significantly disrupted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the extent of this disruption has differed significantly depending upon individuals' characteristics, including gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity. In this note, we focus on the last of these, documenting differences in young people's experiences by their ethnic background using data from Wave 1 of the COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities study (COSMO).

Data and analysis

This note uses data from COSMO Wave 1 linked with the Department for Education's National Pupil Database. COSMO participants are a stratified, clustered probability sample of young people who were in Year 11 in academic year 2020/21, who then participated in the Wave 1 survey in academic year 2021/22, along with a main parent respondent. Weights are applied to the analysis to account for over-sampling of harder-to-reach groups and initial non-response by young people (where analysis is based on a young person report) or young people and their parents (where analysis is based on a parental report). Unweighted counts underlying analysis are reported (reported in notes to graphs for overall count, but see supplementary files for these broken down by category.

Table 1. Percentage of sample in each ethnic group

Ethnic Group	Percentage
White	76%
Mixed/Multiple	5%
Asian	11%
Black	6%
Other	2%
Total	100%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=10,089.

Aspects of this analysis use administrative data from the Department for Education (DfE)'s National Pupil Database (NPD), where consent was gained for this linkage (73% of young people), with additional weighting carried out to ensure (insofar as is possible) representativeness of analysis using linked administrative data. This work was produced using statistical data from the DfE processed in the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Secure Research Service (SRS). The use of the DfE statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the DfE or ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets, which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

Our analyses all look at percentages or means of the sample across a range of outcome measures, stratified by their ethnic background based on the major ethnic group variable available in the NPD pupil-level census dataset. Specifically, we look across the following outcome measures:

- Bullying
- Those at risk of concerns about wellbeing as measured by GHQ-12

- Change in academic motivation
- Self-harm, including with suicidal intent
- Receipt of private tutoring (prior to and during pandemic)
- Sharing devices in lockdown learning (lockdown 1 and 3)
- Having a suitable device for lockdown learning (lockdown 1 and 3)
- Suitable study space for lockdown learning (lockdown 1 and 3)
- Uptake of 3+ remote lessons per week (lockdown 1 and 3)
- Average hours worked in lockdown learning (lockdown 1 and 3)
- Parental confidence in supporting learning
- University aspirations
- University entry expectations among those likely to apply
- Vocational qualifications currently taking and planned in future
- Catch up perceptions
- Fallen behind peers perceptions
- Change of career and education plans
- Receipt of information, advice and guidance
- Residual school days missed due to COVID-19
- Offers of individual/small group tutoring, in-person classes, and online classes for catch up purposes, and the take up of these

Results

We begin by looking at reporting bullying by ethnic group (Figure 1), finding considerably higher rates among white respondents than among those in an ethnic minority, which are all at a relatively similar level.
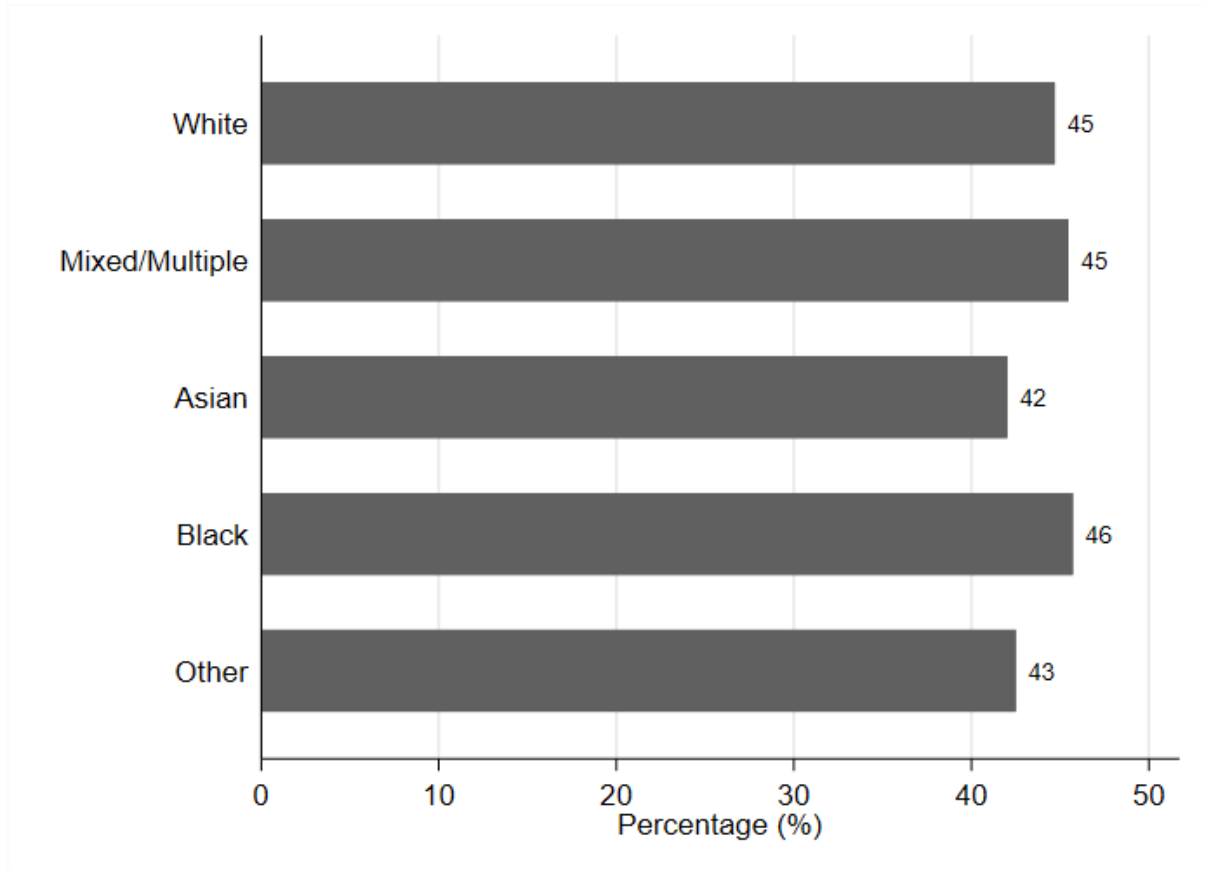
Figure 1. Young person reported having been bullied by ethnic group
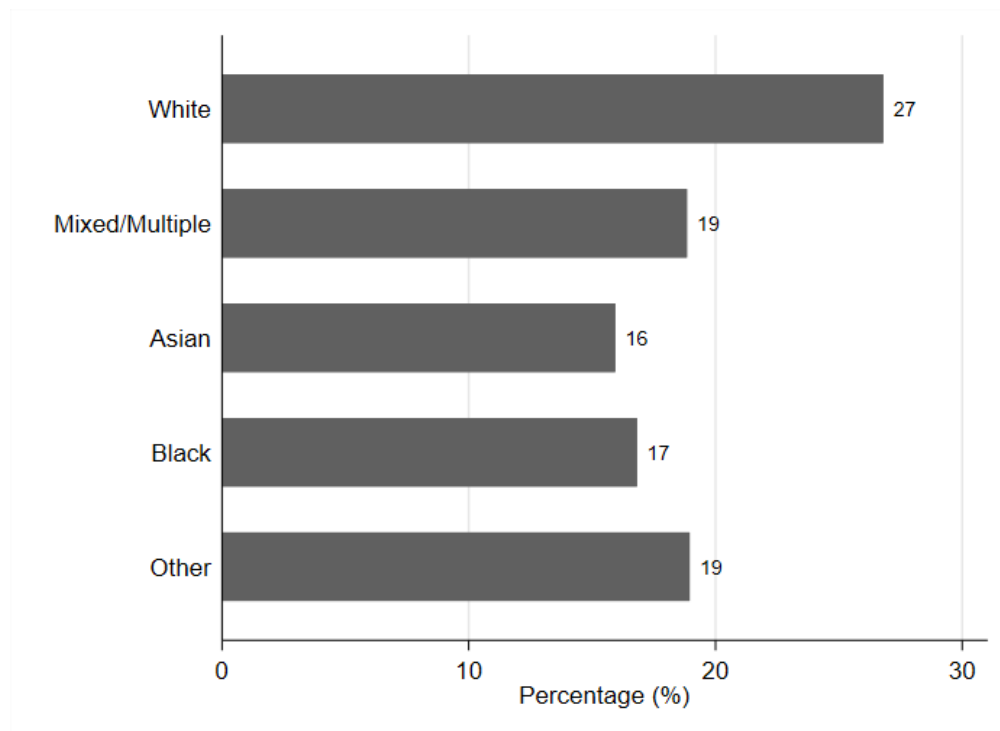
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=8,835

Turning next to young people's wellbeing, we look at the proportion of young people at increased risk of poor mental health outcomes, as indicated by having a score on the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) above a clinically-defined threshold. According to Figure 2, there are minimal patterns of this indicator of poor mental health by ethnicity.

Figure 2. Percentage of young people reporting being above GHQ cutoff suggesting increased risk of poor mental health by ethnic group

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,692.

Potentially relatedly to their mental health and wellbeing, young people reported changes in their academic motivation as a result of the pandemic (Figure 3). There are not large differences in the proportion of young people reporting being less academically motivated by ethnicity, but young black people are more likely than others to have reported an increased academic motivation as a result of this time.
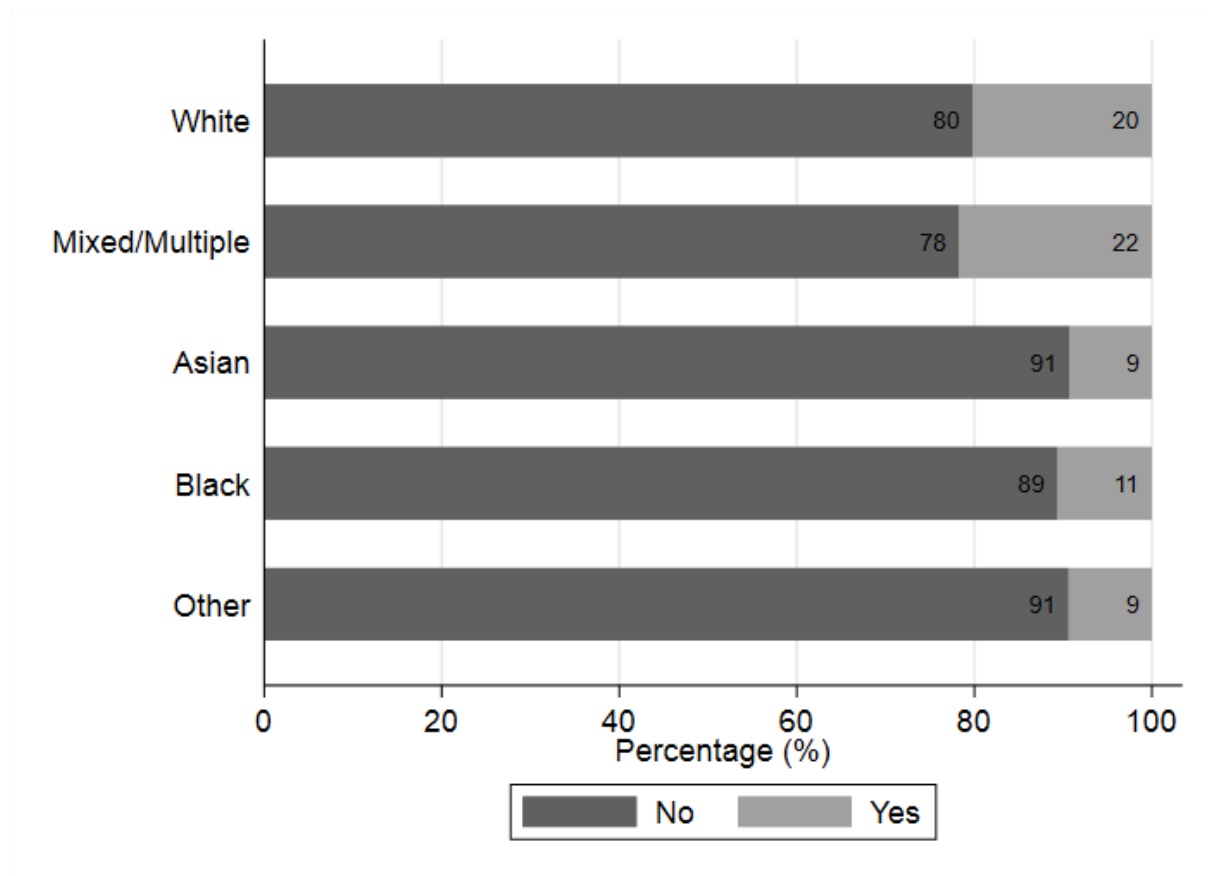
Figure 3. Young person's change in academic motivation due to pandemic by ethnic group
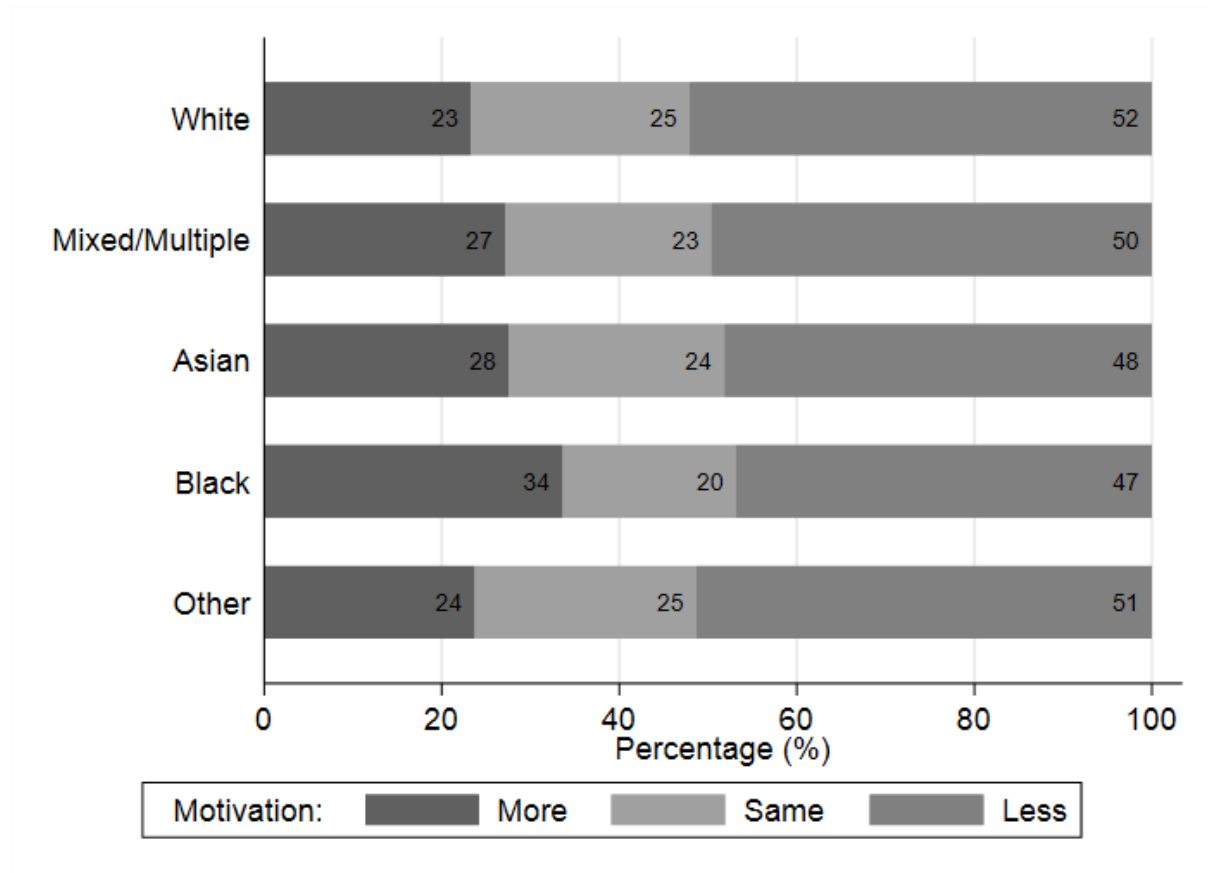
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,753.

Where young people are at risk of poor wellbeing this is also linked to behaviour such as self-harming (Figure 4), including with suicidal intent (Figure 5). These are somewhat higher among those from white and mixed/multiple backgrounds, compared to other ethnic groups.

Figure 4. Young person's reported self-harm by ethnic group

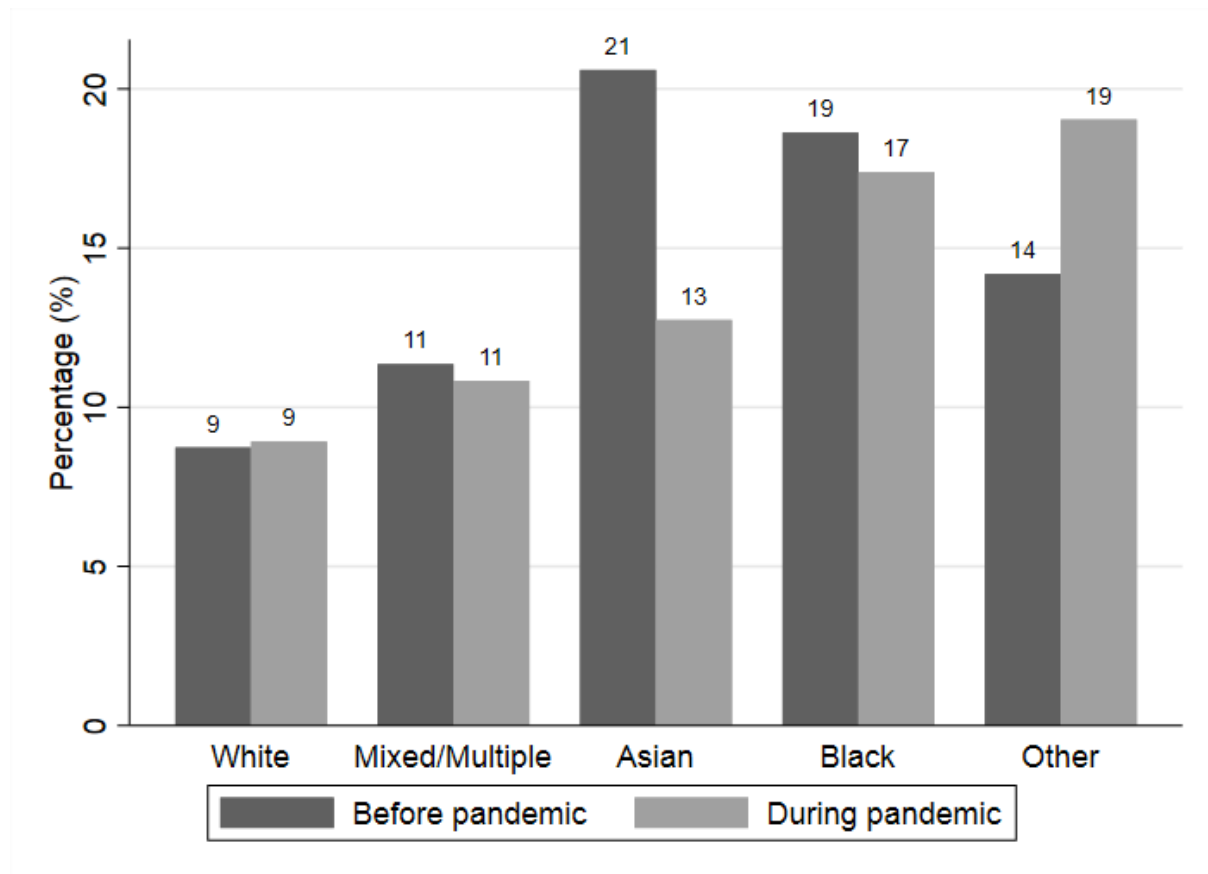Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,370.

Figure 5. Young person's reported self-harm with suicidal intent by ethnic group
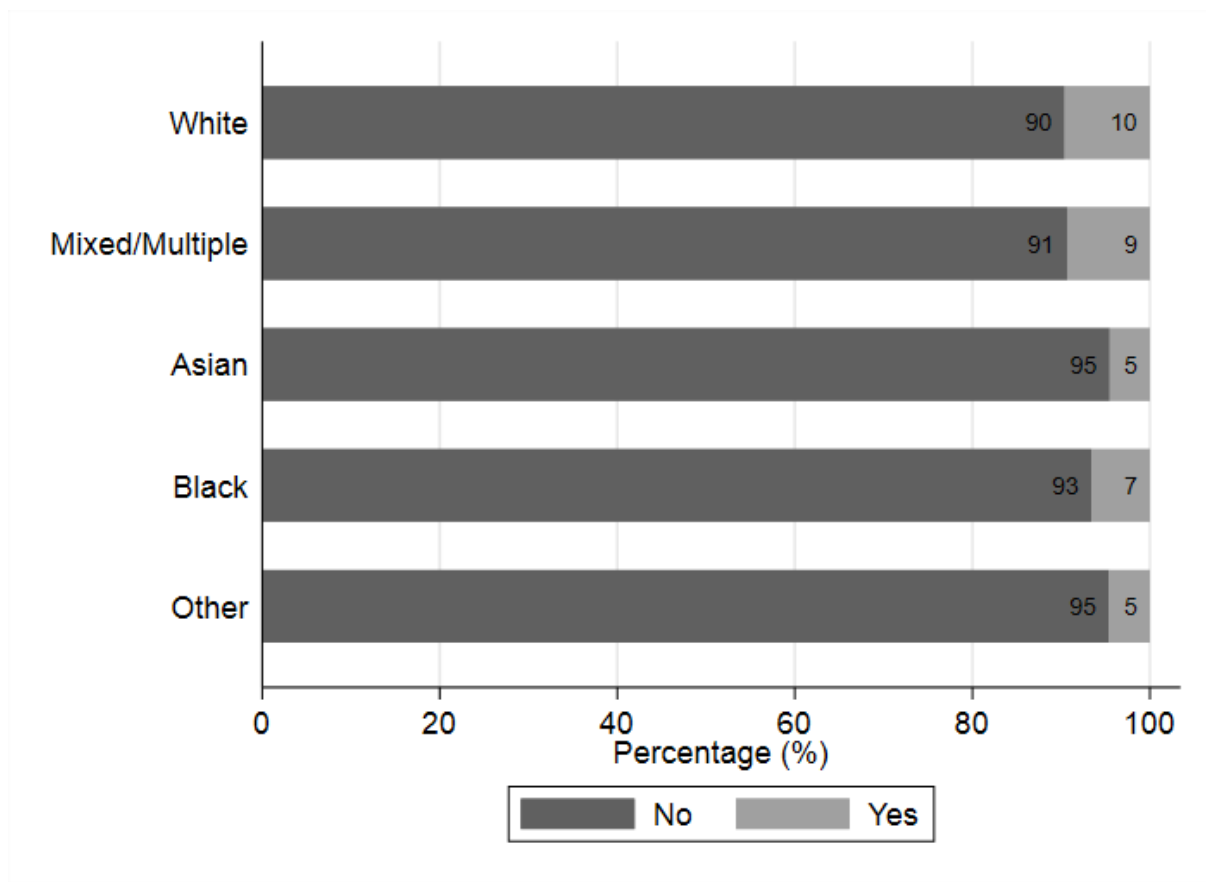
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,333.

Moving to education-focussed outcomes, we consider differences in private tutoring before and during the pandemic (Figure 6). There were substantial differences in tutoring before the pandemic, with those from Asian backgrounds and to a slightly lesser extent those from Black backgrounds being more likely to engage in private tutoring during this period. During the pandemic this shifted somewhat, with young people from Asian backgrounds reducing their engagement with private tutoring, leading to a much smaller gap between them and those from White backgrounds (although some difference is still present); those from Black backgrounds reduced use of private tutoring much less, while those from White backgrounds did not report adjusting their tutoring usage much at all.

Figure 6. Young person's receipt of private tutoring by ethnic group

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=7,415.

Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, especially Black backgrounds, were more likely to report having to share devices in order to access remote learning during COVID-19 lockdowns (Figure 7). This was reduced significantly between the two lockdowns in which schools closed physically to most pupils – Lockdown 1 (summer 2020) and Lockdown 3 (winter 2021) – however ethnic group differences remained. That said, there was much less evidence of differences in those reporting some kind of access to a suitable device at all by ethnicity (Table 2).

Figure 7. Whether young person had to share devices used to access remote learning in lockdown by ethnic group
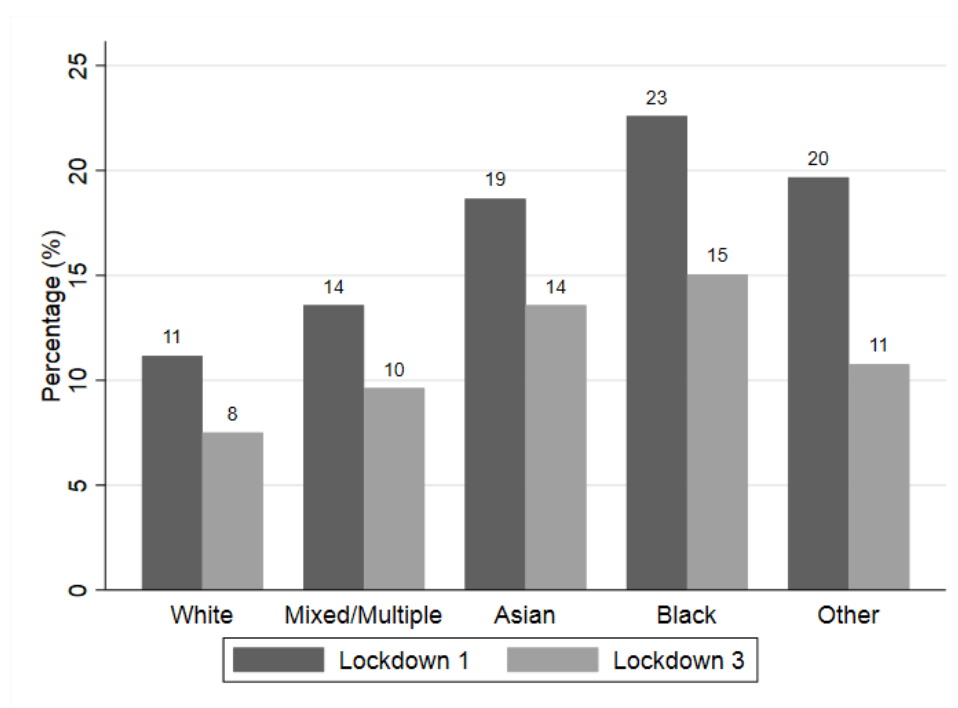
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=10,086.

Table 2. Proportion of young people who reported having a suitable device for remote learning by ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Lockdown 1, yes, had a suitable device	Lockdown 1, could only access online work via a mobile phone	Lockdown 1, no access to any device	Lockdown 3, had a suitable device	Lockdown 3, could only access online work	Lockdown 3 no access to any device
White	87%	10%	3%	91%	7%	2%
Mixed	86%	12%	3%	89%	9%	3%
Asian	87%	10%	3%	90%	7%	3%
Black	84%	12%	4%	89%	7%	4%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,858. Ethnicity group "Other" has been suppressed for statistical disclosure control reasons.

Looked at slightly more broadly, there was an ethnic group gradient in those who felt they did not have a suitable place to study when doing remote learning, which showed little sign of improving between Lockdowns 1 and 3 (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of young people who reported having suitable study space by ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Lockdown 1		Lockdown 2	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
White	84%	16%	85%	15%
Mixed	81%	19%	83%	17%
Asian	78%	22%	81%	19%
Black	76%	24%	79%	21%
Other	75%	25%	79%	21%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=10,086.

Potentially based on these inequalities in circumstances from which they were able to access remote learning, we next turn to uptake of remote classes during the pandemic. We consider these in Figure 8 for Lockdown 1 and Figure 9 for Lockdown 3, focussing on whether or not young people reported receiving three or more remote lessons per week. This increased overall between Lockdown 1 and Lockdown 3, but particularly for those in ethnic minority groups.

Figure 8. Percentage uptake of 3+ remote lessons per week in Lockdown 1 by ethnicity
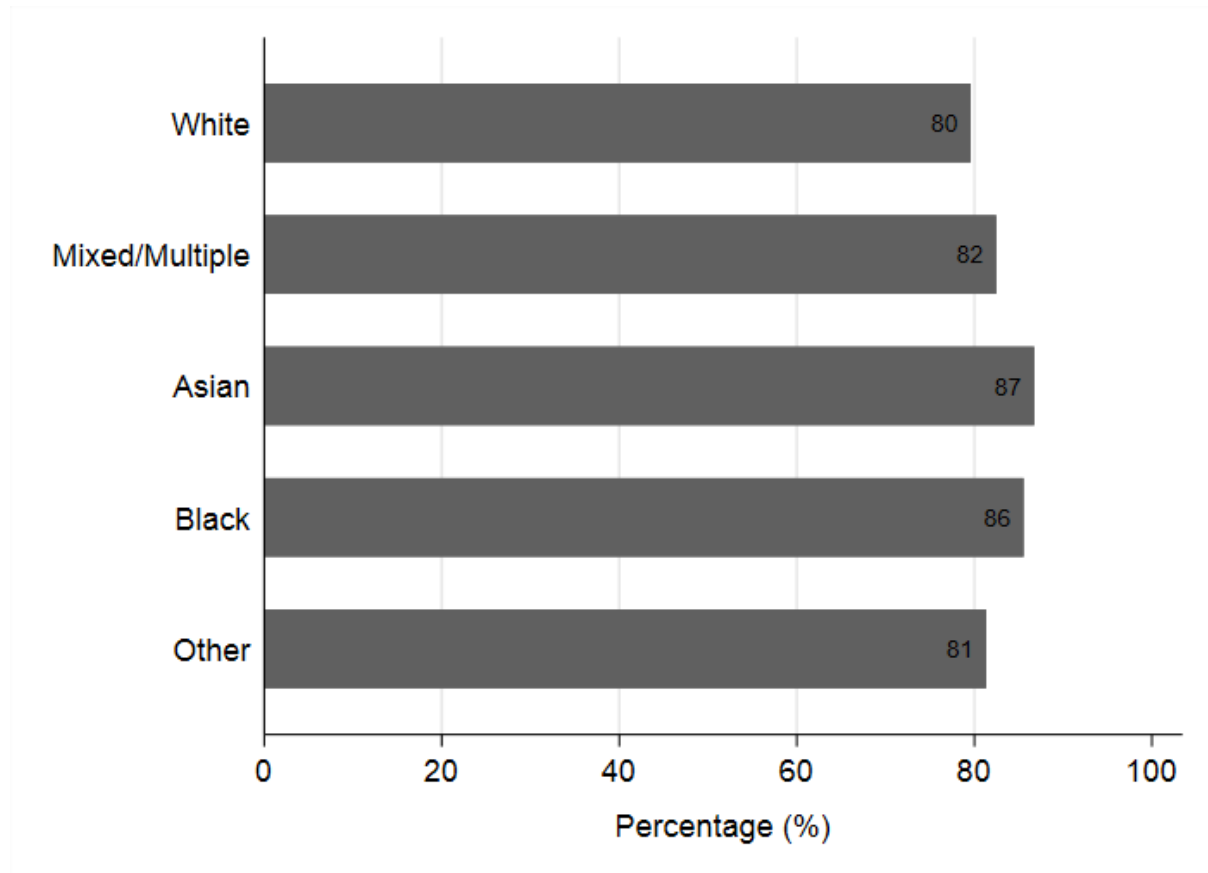
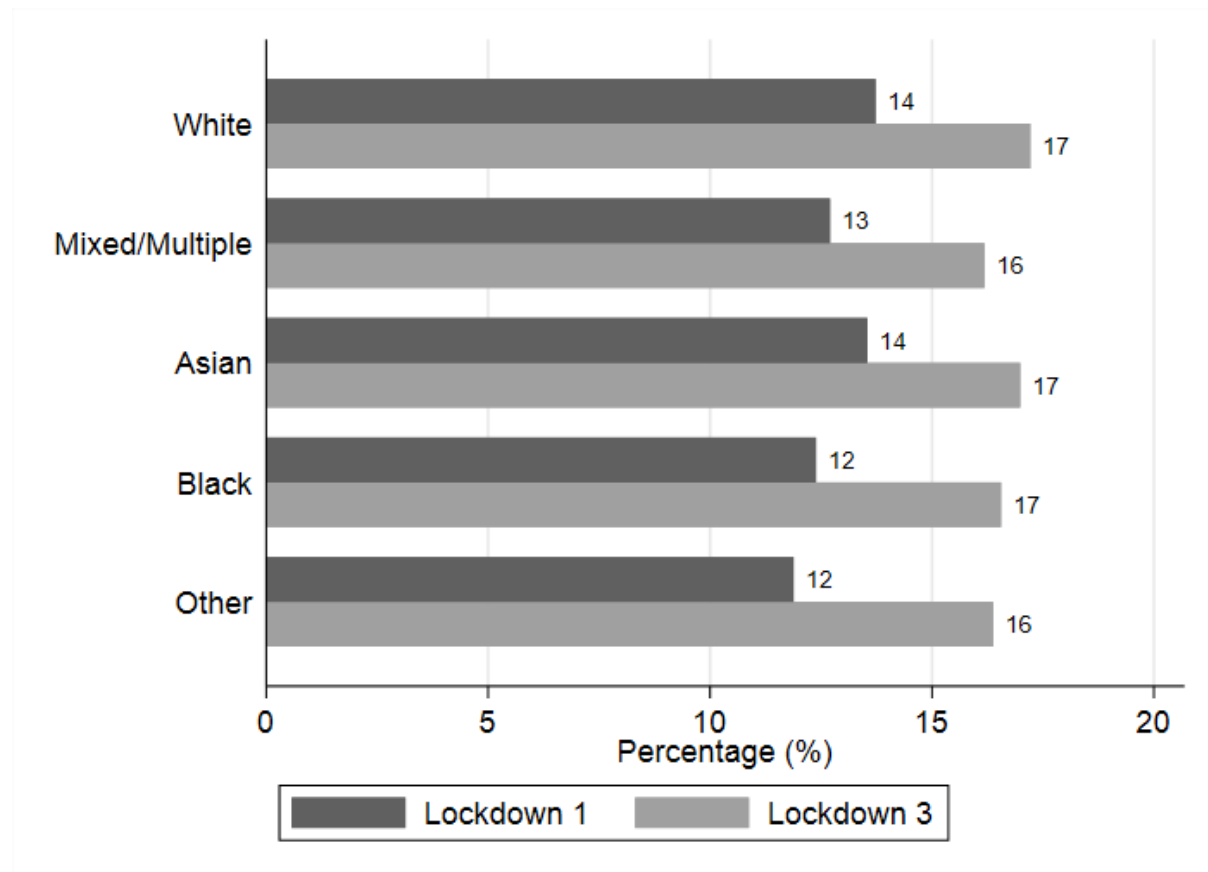Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=5,553.

Figure 9. Percentage uptake of 3+ remote lessons during Lockdown 3 by ethnicity
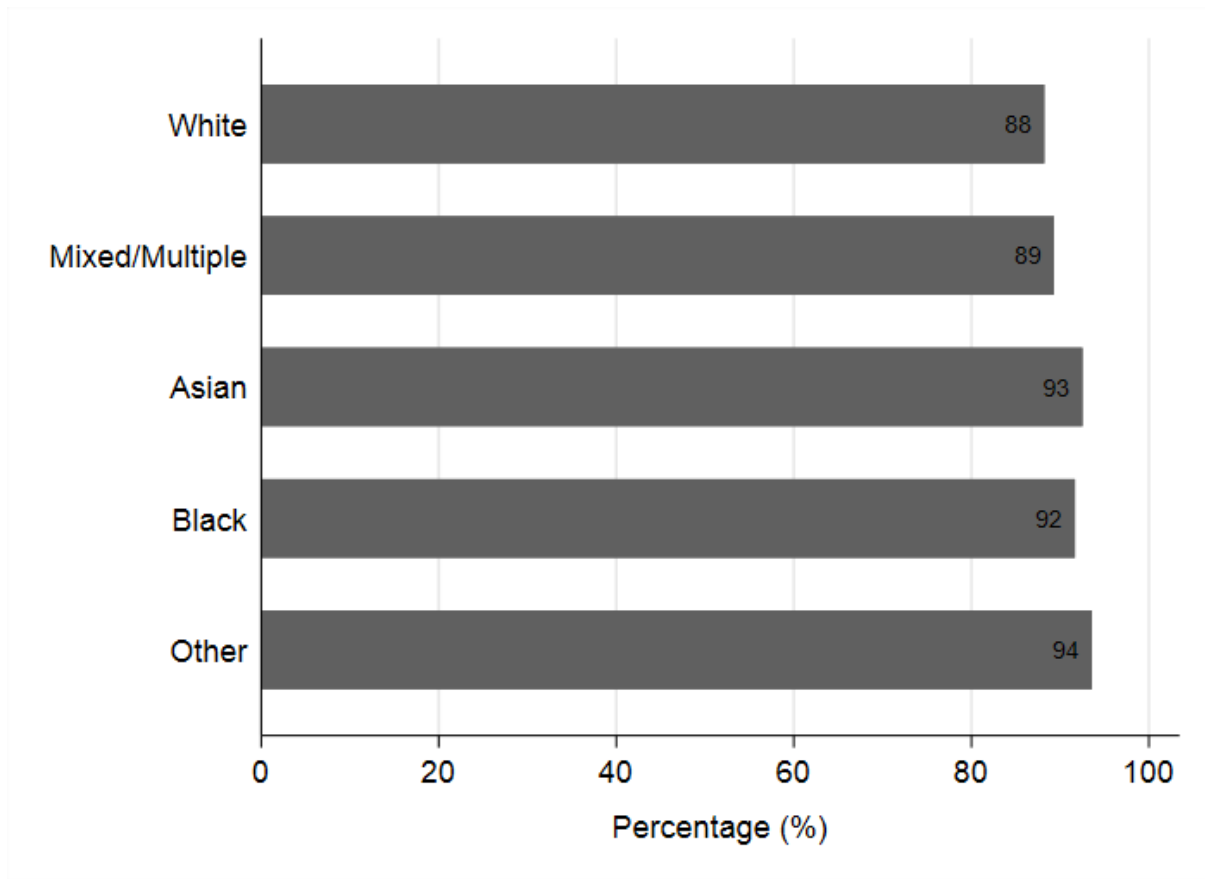
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non−response. N=7,976.

There was little variation by ethnic group in the average number of hours per week young people reported doing school work (Figure 10), although this increased for everyone between lockdowns 1 and 3.

Figure 10. Average hours per week young person reported doing school work in lockdowns 1 and 3 by ethnic group

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=8,949.

Parents of young White people were more likely to express lack of confidence in supporting young people during remote learning (Figure 11), while parents of young Black people were particularly likely agree that they were able to support their child in this learning. Parental confidence has been shown as important in itself in supporting children's learning.

Figure 11. Parental confidence in supporting young people's lockdown learning by ethnic group
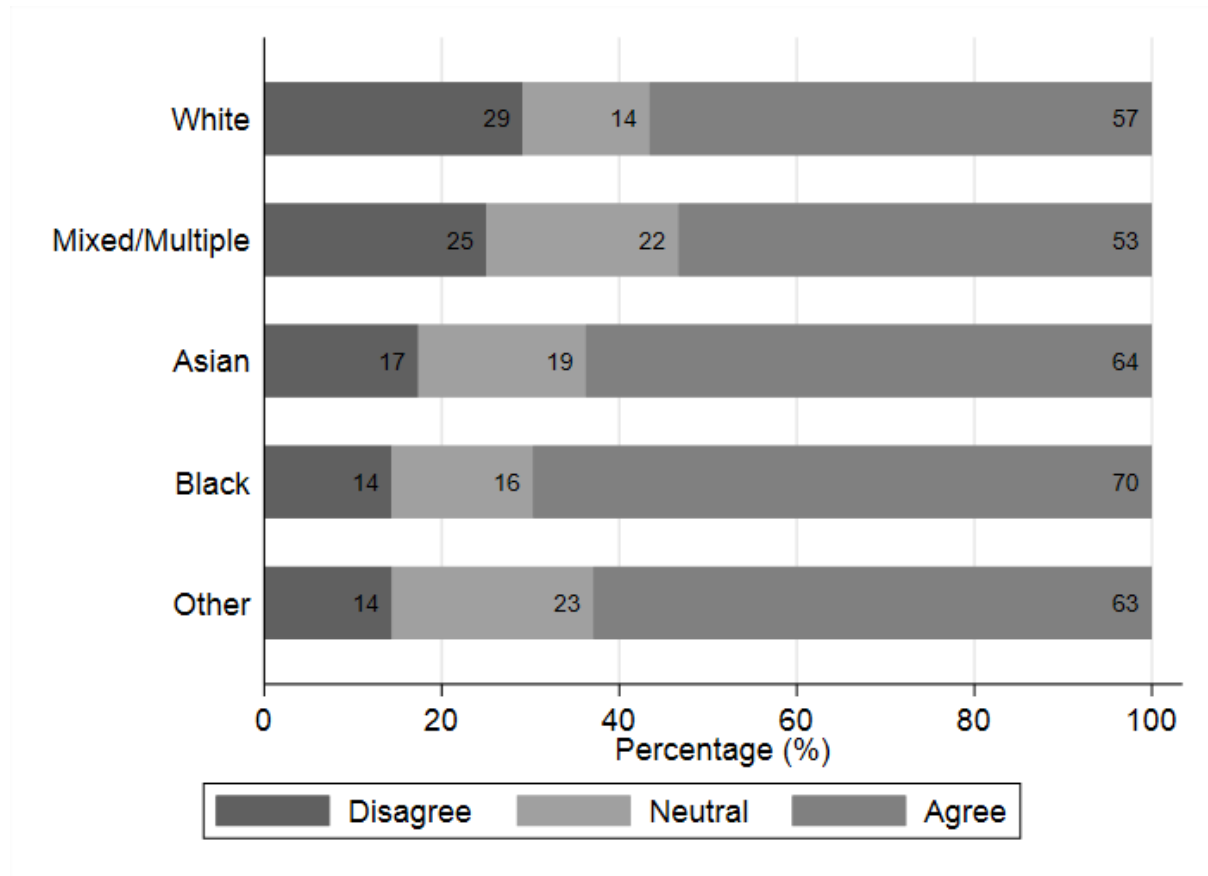
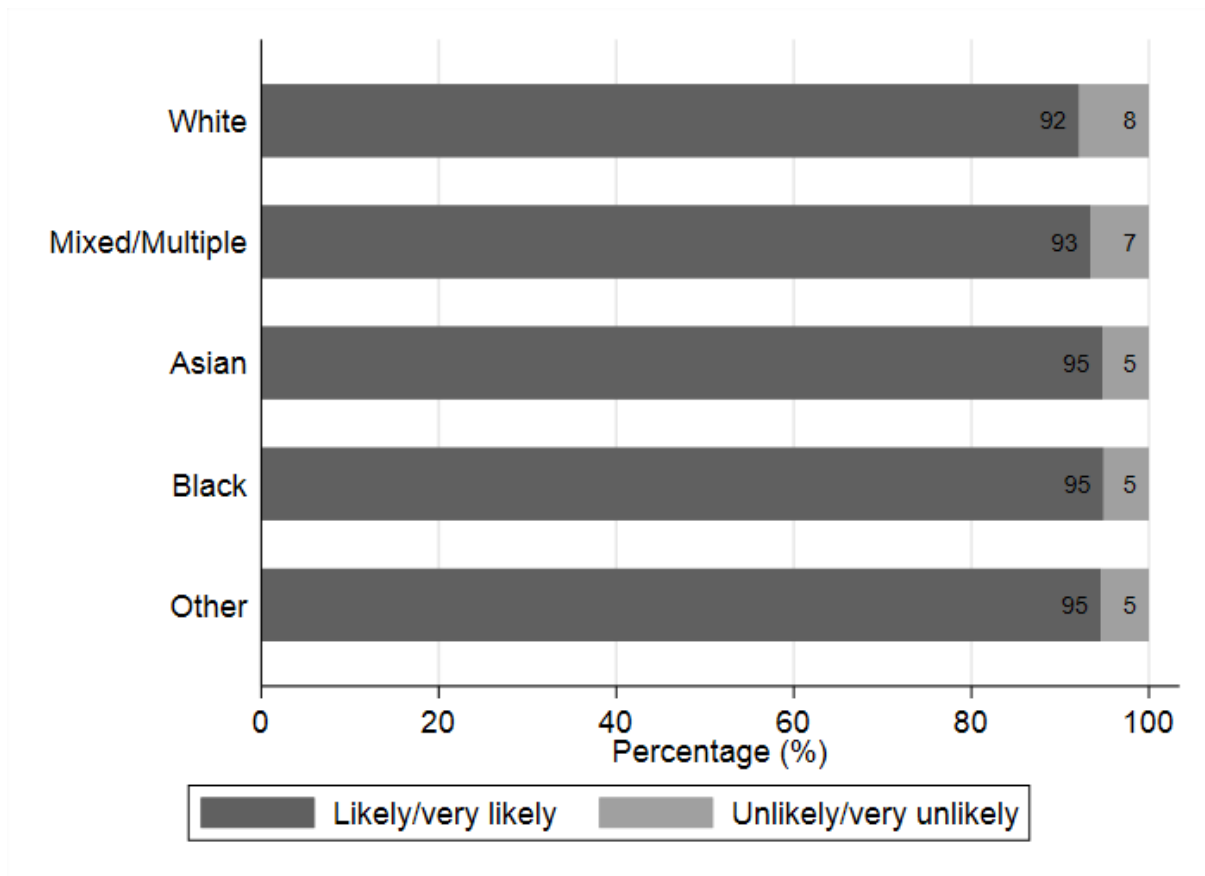Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non–response. N=7,168.

Turning to university applications (Figure 12), we again find a substantial difference by ethnicity, with White young people considerably less likely to say they plan to apply to university than those from ethnic minority groups; those who have been recorded as having mixed/multiple ethnic identities are somewhere between the two. Building on this, among those who said that they are likely to apply to university, we also consider the proportion who think that it is likely that they will get in (Figure 13). Here, the gaps are much smaller (albeit against a lower baseline level), suggesting this confidence about university entry is not in itself an aspect that compounds ethnic inequalities.

Figure 12. Young person reported being likely to apply to university by ethnic group
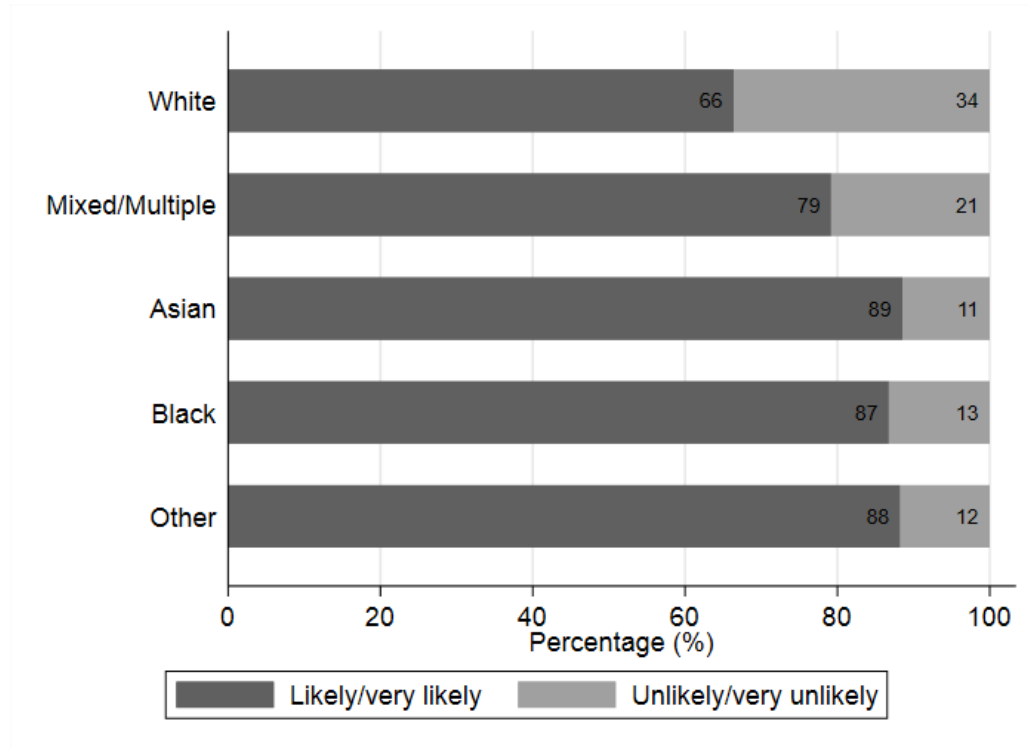
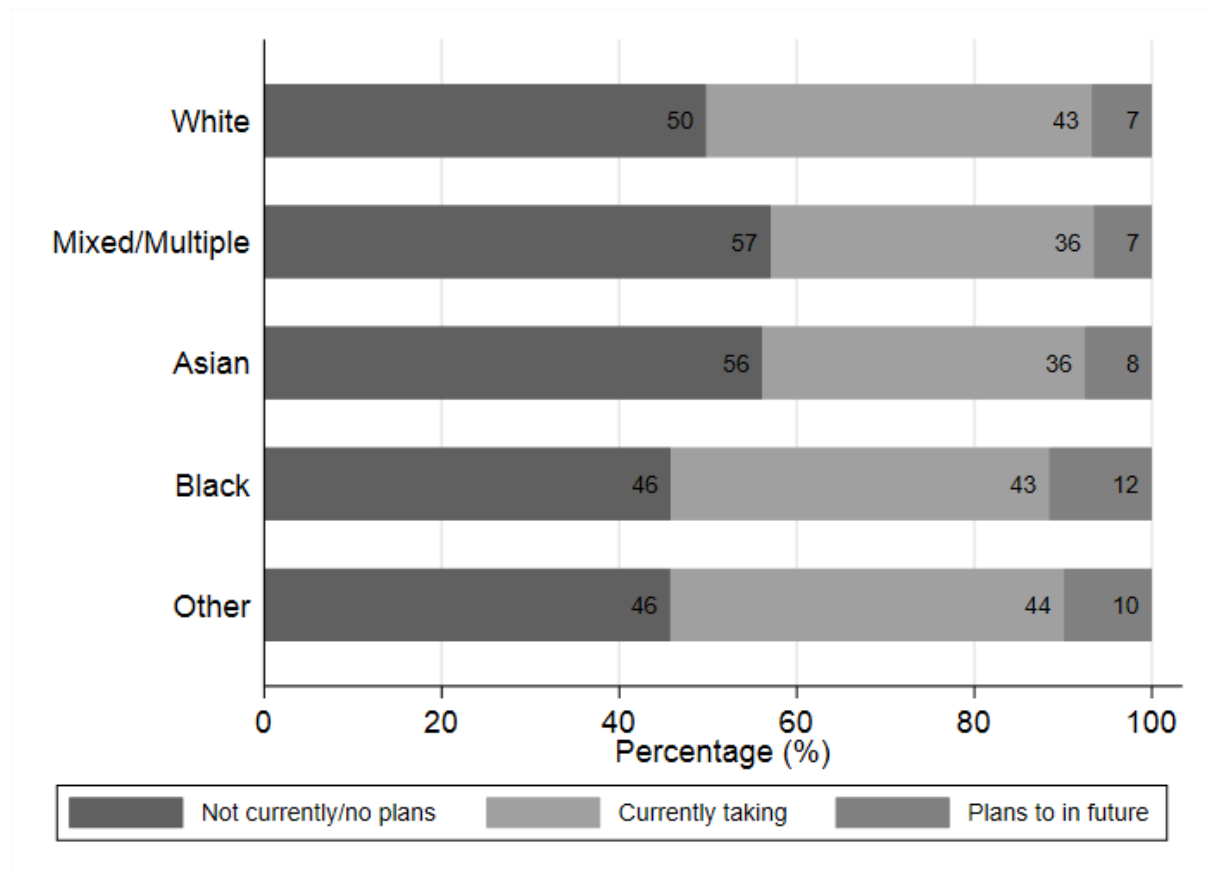Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,501.

Figure 13. Young person reported thinking they are likely to get into university by ethnic group

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. Only includes respondents who reported being likely to apply to university. N=6,351

Away from academic education, we see that those from mixed/multiple or Asian ethnic backgrounds are least likely to report participating in any vocational qualifications (Figure 14), while those from Black or Other backgrounds are most likely to be considering them in future, although this is still small numbers other than those who are already on some kind of vocational pathway.

Figure 14. Young person's reported plans to study for a vocational qualification by ethnic group

There is no clear-cut pattern by ethnicity regarding the proportion of young people who feel they have been able to catch up with learning that was disrupted by COVID-19 (Figure 15), however, those from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to be concerned that they have fallen behind their classmates due to this disruption (Figure 16).

Figure 15. Percentage agreeing that they have been able to catch up with learning disrupted by the pandemic by ethnicity
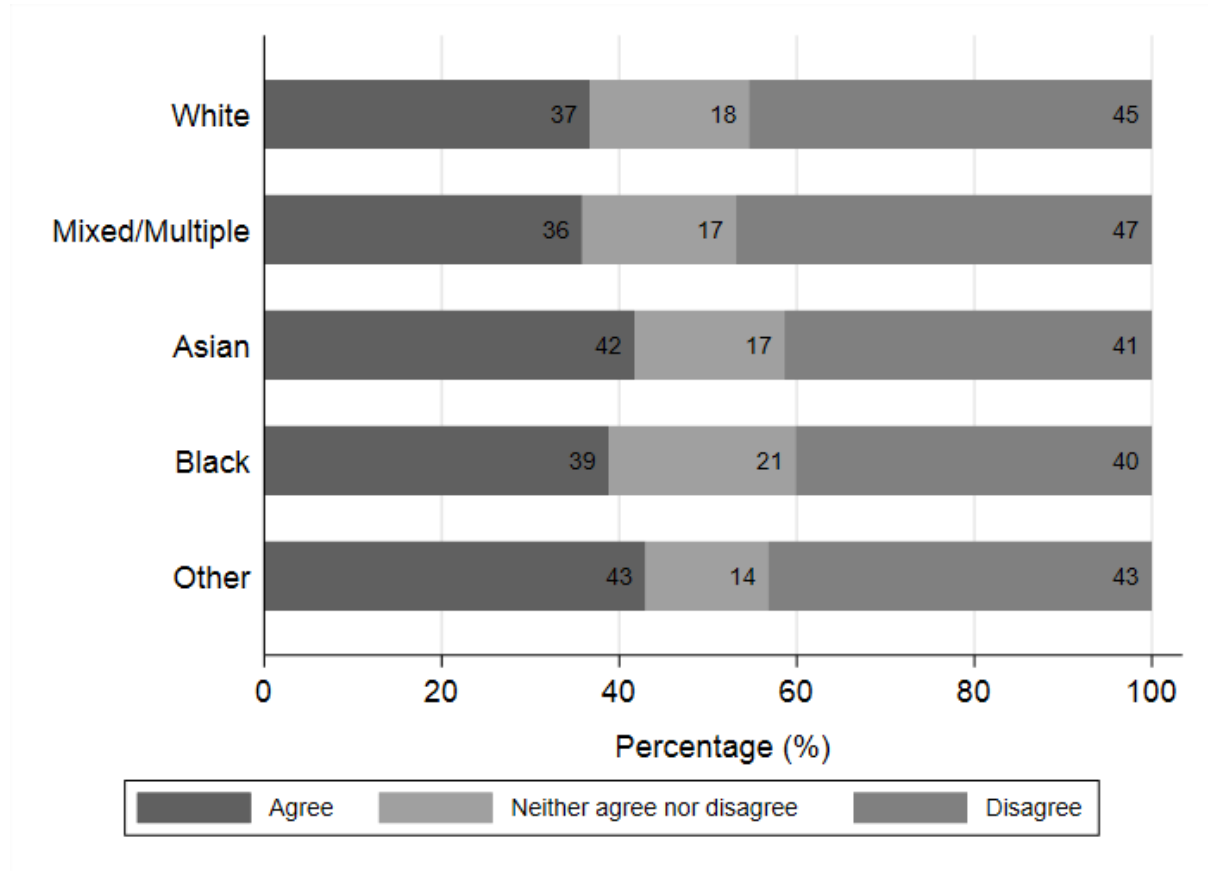
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,876.

Figure 16. Percentage expressing concern that they have fallen behind their classmates as a result of the disruption to their learning caused by the pandemic by ethnicity
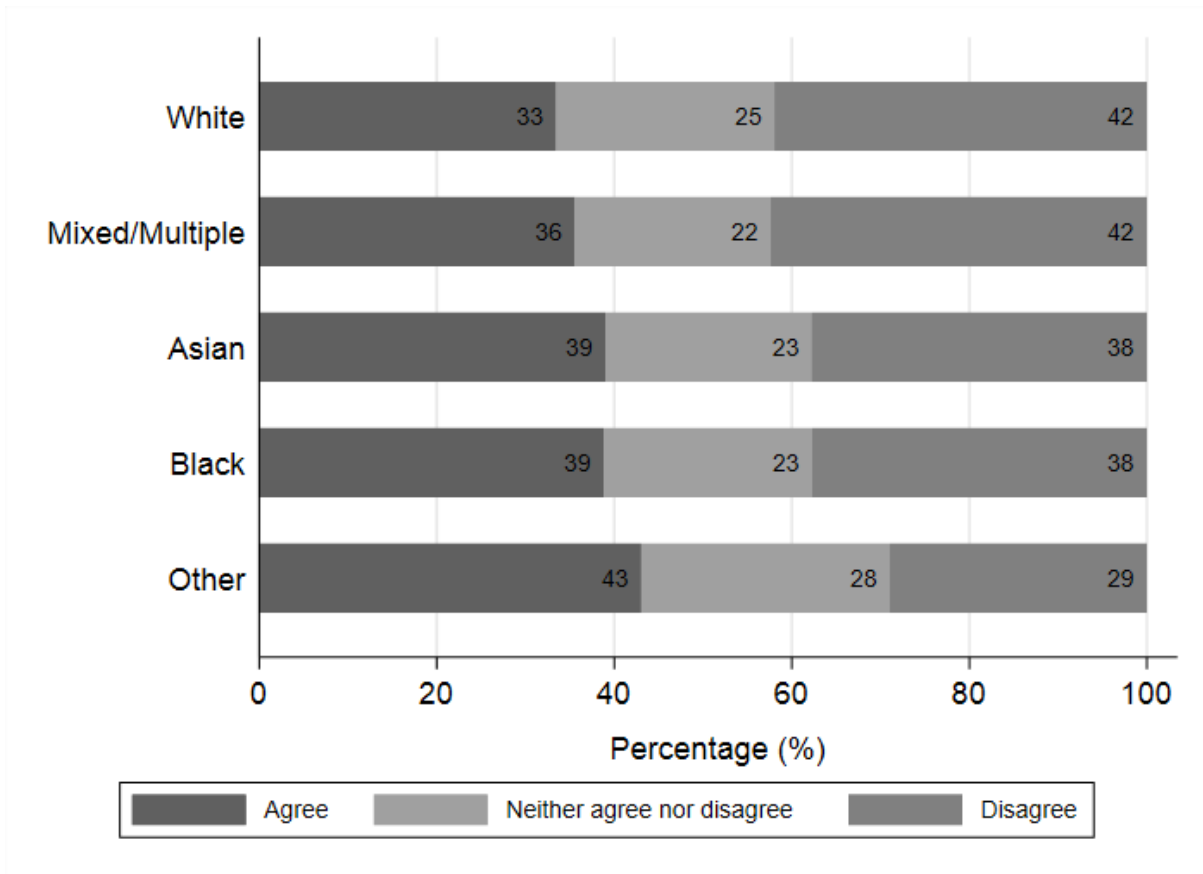
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=9,832.

Young people also reported changing their career plans (Figure 17) and education plans (Figure 18) as a result of the impacts of COVID-19, particularly among those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Figure 17. Percentage reporting that they had changed their career plans as a result of COVID-19 by ethnicity
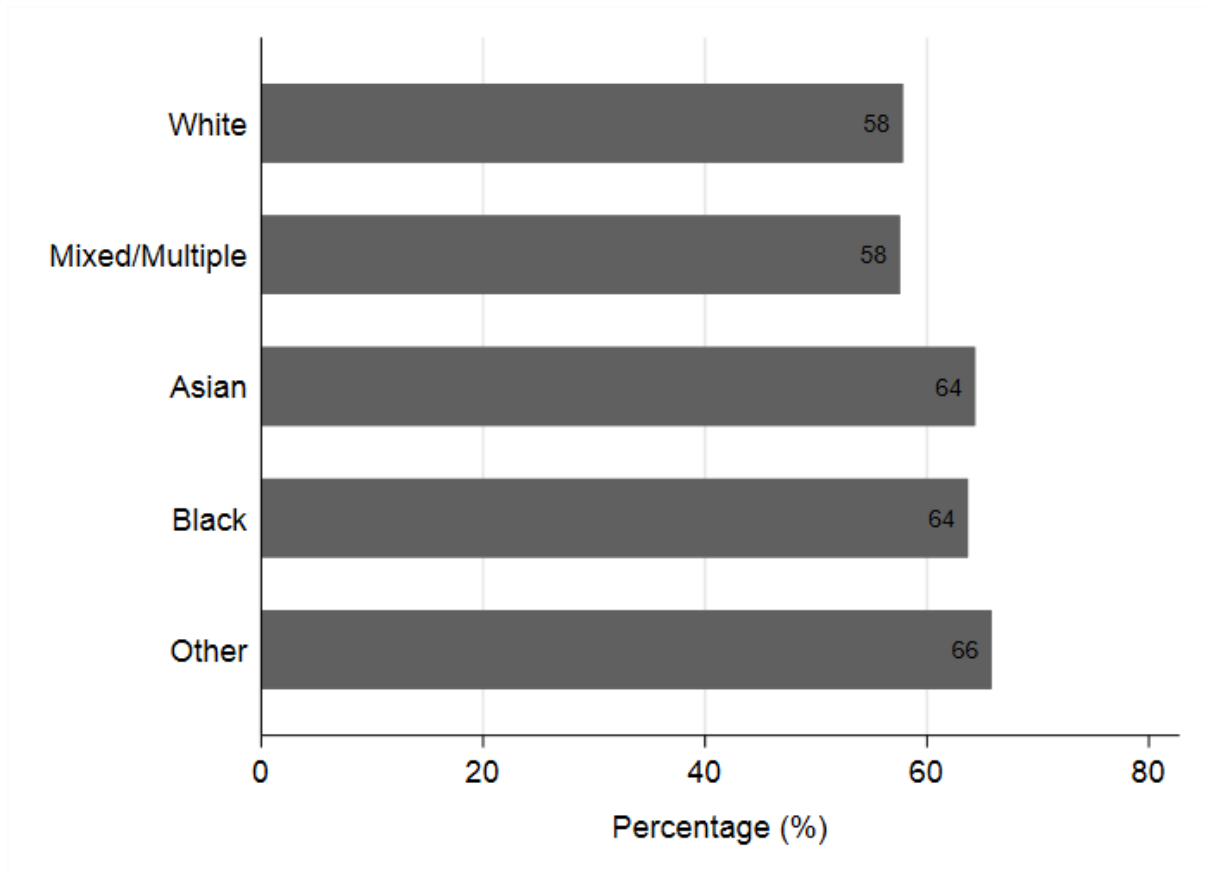
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=8,675.

Figure 18. Percentage reporting that they had changed their education plans as a result of COVID–19 by ethnicity
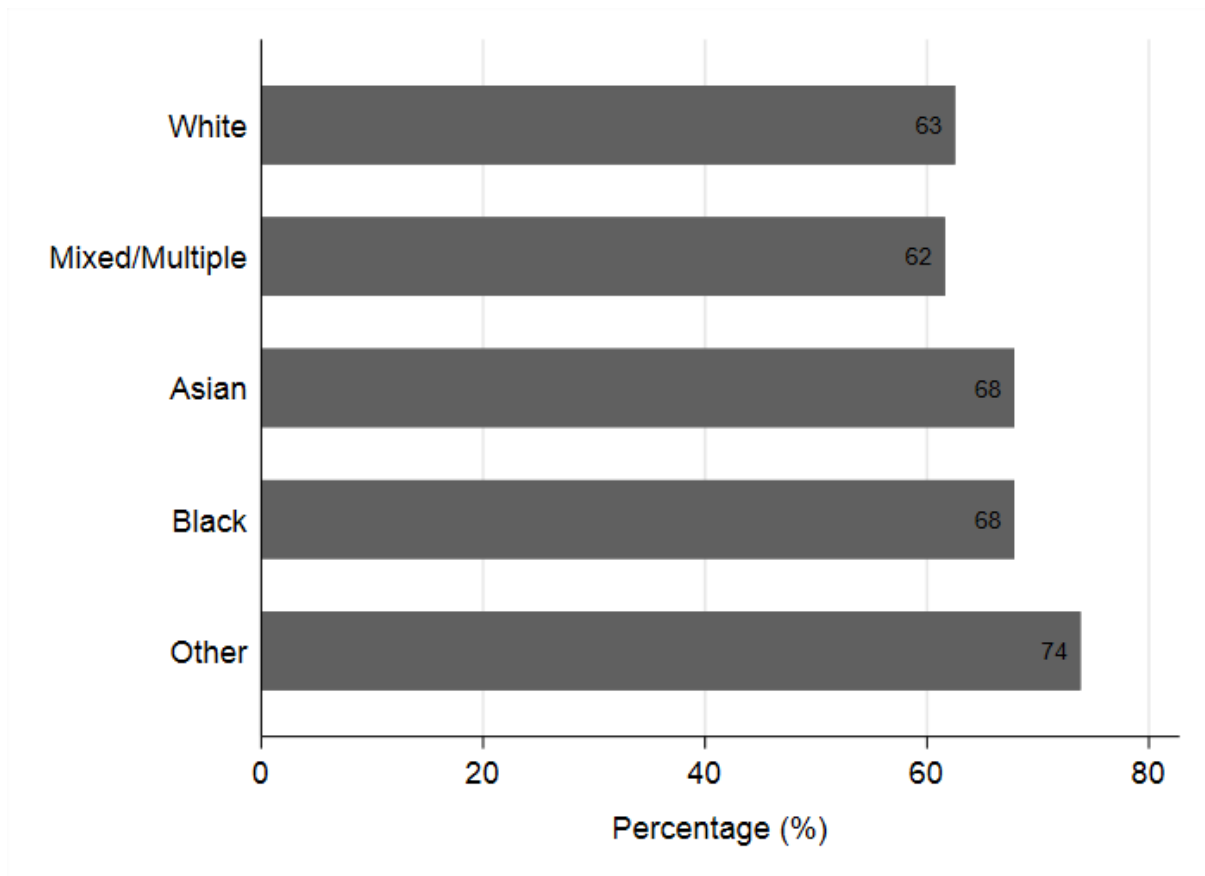
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non–response. N=9,001.

There has been concern that the pandemic also caused disruption to pupils receiving information advice and guidance. There are signs of a small ethnicity gradient in access to information advice and guidance (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Proportion of pupils reporting having received information, advice and guidance about their future plans by ethnicity
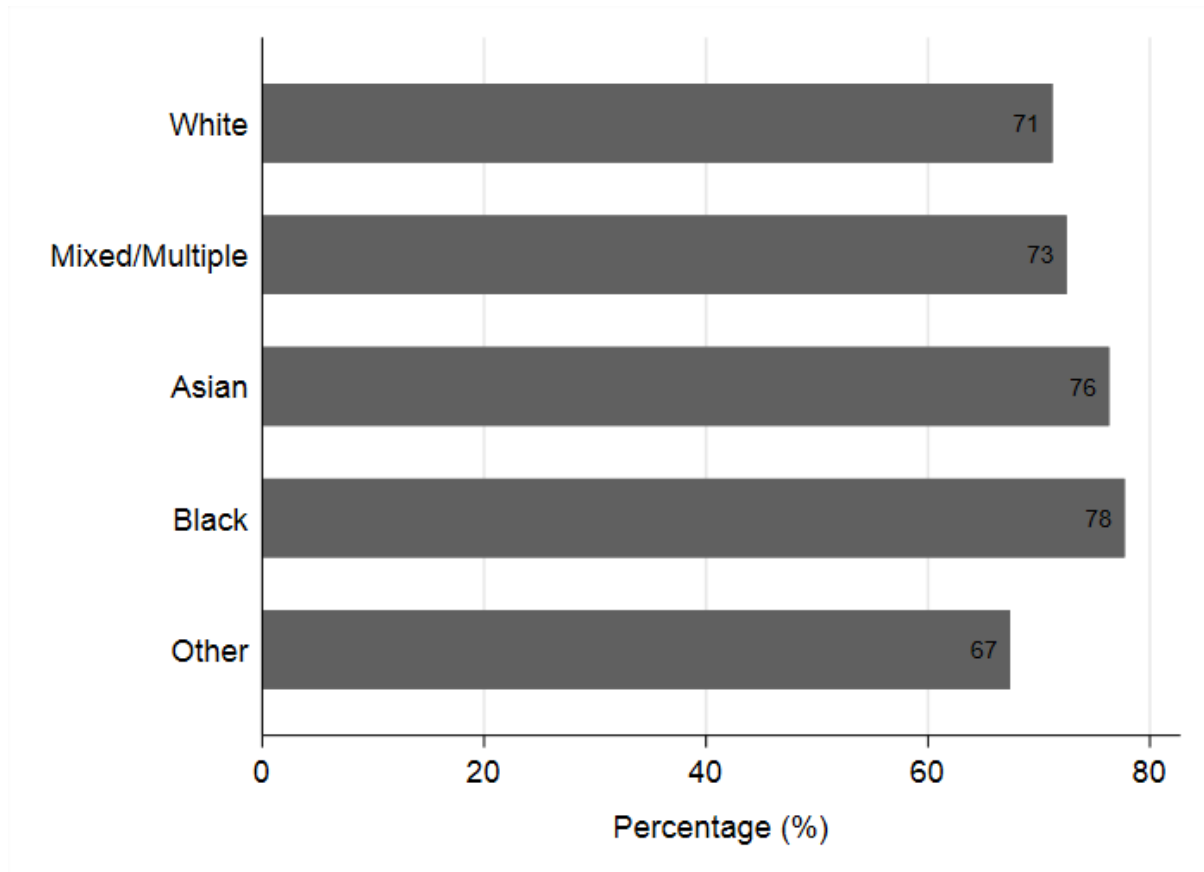
Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N=10,086.

Even after schools had re-opened there was significant residual disruption to schooling in academic year 2021-22, for example due to teacher absence or other staff shortages. However, this does not show substantial variation by ethnicity (Table 4).

Table 4 Number of days of school missed due to Covid, by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Less than 20 days missed	20+ days missed
White	82%	18%
Mixed	82%	18%
Asian	81%	19%
Black	82%	18%
Other	84%	16%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N= 5,038.

In order to mitigate this disruption, many schools offered individual and/or small group tutoring (Table 5). This was particularly taken up by those from Black backgrounds, while it was quite consistent in terms of patterns of offering and take up across all other ethnic groups. There was also a similar pattern in terms of take up of additional in-person classes or support (Table 6) and take up of additional online classes (Table 7).

Table 5 Individual and/or group tutoring offered and taken up by ethnicity

Ethnicity	No tutoring offered	Any tutoring offered, not taken	Any tutoring taken up
White	60%	15%	25%
Mixed	63%	14%	23%
Asian	60%	15%	25%
Black	49%	12%	39%
Other	60%	14%	26%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N= 8,480.

Table 6 Offered additional in-person classes or support (on top of the usual), by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Offered and taken up	Offered, not taken up	Not offered
White	25%	19%	56%
Mixed	24%	17%	58%
Asian	28%	16%	55%
Black	35%	17%	48%
Other	29%	20%	51%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N= 8,945.

Table 7 Whether school offered additional online classes, by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Offered and taken up	Offered, not taken up	Not offered
White	29%	20%	52%
Mixed	31%	19%	51%
Asian	38%	16%	46%
Black	42%	17%	41%
Other	31%	20%	48%

Notes. Analysis is weighted to account for sampling design and non-response. N= 8,972.

Conclusion

This note has documented significant inequalities in the pandemic experiences and subsequent educational outcomes of young people depending upon their ethnic background. This highlights the importance of and need for consideration of such ethnic inequalities in policy and practice responses to the pandemic.

Sample and methods

The data for this briefing note come from Wave 1 of the COVID Social Mobility & Opportunities (COSMO) study. COSMO is based on a probability sample drawn from the Department for Education's National Pupil Database (plus additional recruitment from pupils at private schools), with clustering within schools (for practicality reasons) and over-sampling of certain groups using stratification.

Our analysis in this briefing note is primarily based on descriptive statistics reporting averages, distributions and differences between groups. Analyses use weights to take into account the over-sampling inherent in the study design, as well as initial non-response by young people and, where relevant, their parents. Differences are only highlighted where these are found to be statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level. Statistical inference testing reported and/or used in such decisions accounts for the clustering and stratification in the study design.

While our full sample of young people has N=12,828 the parents of participants were not as likely to respond, reducing analyses involving parents to at most N=9,330. As noted above, young person and parental non-response have been modelled separately, with different weights to ensure (insofar as is possible) representativeness of our analysis sample to the intended population. Item-level non-response also results in some further variation to the analysis sample, which is minimised within analyses to ensure consistency. Analyses of some groups, for example those who attended special schools or who identify as non-binary/in another way, have not been able to be reported due to small sample sizes.

This analysis uses administrative data from the Department for Education (DfE)'s National Pupil Database (NPD), where consent was gained for this linkage (73% of young people), with additional weighting carried out to ensure (insofar as is possible) representativeness of analysis using linked administrative data. This work was produced using statistical data from the DfE processed in the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Secure Research Service (SRS). The use of the DfE statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the DfE or ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets, which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.