



SCHOOL'S OUT

How microschoools boost educational choice and quality

By Sophie Sandor

BRIEFING PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The UK Government's response to COVID-19 kept children out of school for the best part of a year, during which time children were offered lessons provided by teachers online and were homeschooled by parents.
- The school closures of March 2020 have led to great learning losses for children, a significant number of whom completed only between zero and one hour of school work per day whilst locked down at home. Pupil performance in both reading and mathematics amongst Year 2 pupils, for example, progressed by two months less on average.
- The level of education at home during school closures varied greatly across regions and social groups. Private school students and those not on free school meals undertook more education than state school pupils and those on free school meals.
- Some educators and parents responded by forming 'microschools' or 'pandemic pods'. These are very small schools conducted from the home of one of the pupils. They typically involve between 3 and 12 students.
- Microschools could continue to play a valuable role in education post-COVID-19. They can cater to parents' diverse preferences better than state schools. They also provide competition that drives up educational standards across the board. This would particularly help students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the people who suffer most from the shortcomings of the state school system.
- Microschools are severely hampered in the United Kingdom as a result of cumbersome school regulations. Additionally, in the absence of tax-funded education vouchers, they would financially struggle to compete with state schools for pupils from low to middle income households.
- Homeschooling is gaining in popularity, primarily because of improvements in communication technology which enable remote lessons from educators and access to a wide array of materials. Many parents who homeschool their children out of dissatisfaction with the state offering would prefer microschoooling, if only it were affordable. Similarly, the demand for private tutoring is increased by the absence of affordable alternatives to state schools.
- The regulatory liberalisation, signalled by the introduction of free schools in 2010, has not continued. Ofsted are finding a new zeal for regulating and supervising independent schools and, in certain cases, for shutting them down against the wishes of parents.

- The homeschooling experience forced on millions of parents and children offers a glimmer of hope. The experience of an alternative to inadequate state education creates political demand for more options.
- If the Government wants to increase educational choice and improve standards for disadvantaged students, they should liberalise school regulation to enable the proliferation of microschools:
 - Develop a new light-touch regulatory approach for microschools separate to current approach that limits microschools to a family home and four or fewer pupils;
 - Create a schools sandbox, modelled on the Financial Conduct Authority's regulatory sandbox, to allow entrepreneurs to experiment with a diverse array of new arrangements for schooling in a light-touch regulatory environment;
 - Introduce a 'schools voucher' scheme to ensure that parents who choose to micro-school their children are not financially worse off with respect to state-support for their children's education.

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The return of English students on the 8 March 2021 marked more than 11 months of on-and-off school closures and remote learning. Almost no face-to-face teaching, social clubs, extra-curricular activities or playground hijinks. The International Baccalaureate, A Level and GCSE exams of 2020 and 2021 were cancelled. These last two academic years have been utterly dispiriting for pupils and parents. The effects on the children's mental health, educational achievement and future incomes are yet to be fully determined. But they will certainly be large and negative.¹

School closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a huge learning gap, not only for individual children but when comparing children across socioeconomic backgrounds and regions in the UK. Children of more affluent households were more likely to receive home learning resources — and more of them — than their less advantaged counterparts and on average spent far longer each day on school work at home.² Over two million school children did between zero and one hour of school work per day whilst locked down at home.³ Pupil performance in reading and mathematics amongst Year 2 pupils progressed by two months less on average.⁴ Educational provision was also far greater on average by private schools than by state schools and the proportion of children who receive free school meals who spent four or more hours on schoolwork was 11%, compared to 19% for those not eligible.⁵

Most teachers and parents have begrudgingly accepted these events. But not all. Some responded by setting up microschoools or “pandemic pods” where small numbers of teachers and pupils could continue face-to-face education. For example, Hove Micro-School was founded in September 2020 to provide a “bespoke primary education environment, offering tailored and innovative learning for children in the Brighton and Hove area.”⁶ They have rapidly expanded, now educating over twenty children.⁷

The development of microschoools was driven by parental concern about their children's education during a time of crisis. But, even in normal circumstances, many parents are concerned about their children's education, and with good reason. The monolithic state education sector is unresponsive to the educational preferences of parents, and children end up getting a bad service from schools, especially children from poor families. Many parents would opt for the alternative offered by micro-

¹ ‘The crisis in lost learning calls for a massive national policy response’, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 1 February 2021, <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15291>

² <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14848>

³ <https://www.llakes.ac.uk/sites/default/files/67%20Francis%20Green%20Research%20Paper%20%28combined%20file%29.pdf>

⁴ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-publishes-new-research-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-partial-school-closures/>

⁵ <https://www.llakes.ac.uk/sites/default/files/67%20Francis%20Green%20Research%20Paper%20%28combined%20file%29.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.hovemicro-school.com/>

⁷ <https://www.hovemicro-school.com/post/one-year-of-hove-micro-school-what-s-next>

schools, if only regulatory impediments and the way education is funded in the UK did not mean that there are so few of these schools.

This briefing paper examines the merits of microschoools, especially in light of the lessons taught by the lockdown of schools. It describes the regulatory and funding impediments to their proliferation. If these barriers are addressed, microschoools could provide a significant number of pupils with a more suitable and higher quality education, and provide competition for other schools that lifts standards for all pupils in the UK.

EDUCATION IN THE SHADOW OF COVID-19

The UK Government, in order to limit the spread of Covid-19, adopted a strategy heavily dependent on social distancing. Since the typical school is a place where hundreds of children and dozens of adults are in close contact for seven hours a day, this policy entailed closing schools. If left open, it was believed, schools would act as conduits for the spread of the virus through the community.

Lessons were rapidly shifted online. Even for highly resourced private schools, where classes are small and all the children have computers and internet access at home, the quality of learning is generally poorer online than in-person. For state schools with large classes and many children who come from low income families, the quality of education is dramatically reduced by moving online.

Many children have effectively lost two terms of education. Moreover, external examinations — International Baccalaureate, A-Levels and GCSEs — were abandoned and replaced with school-assigned grading. Scepticism about the assigned grades caused chaos for the 2020 academic year, with many universities ignoring A-Level results and simply honouring all conditional offers, regardless of whether the conditions were met.⁸ Universities are likely to have admitted some unsuitable students. External exams were again abandoned for 2021, with universities again forced to admit students with insufficient evidence of their abilities, harming both the universities and the mismatched students.

There is also substantial psychological damage to children forced to stay at home. They cannot spend time with their friends, play sports, sing in choirs, go to dance classes, or get away from their parents. Being shut out of school and locked into their houses has driven many children to despair, and worse.⁹

COVID-19 largely poses a threat to older individuals, with limited health threat to people under the age of 20.¹⁰ This means that students, and the parents who have

⁸ 'Coronavirus: universities warned over rush to unconditional offers', FE Week, 1 March 2020, <https://feweek.co.uk/2020/03/23/coronavirus-universities-warned-over-rush-to-unconditional-offers/>

⁹ 'More than half of year 12 students report feeling worse since the start of lockdown', Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, 17 September 2020, <https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/news/local-study-more-than-half-of-year-12-students-report-feeling-worse-since-lockdown>

¹⁰ 'Clinical characteristics of children and young people admitted to hospital with covid-19 in United

been forced to take responsibility for their children's education, have hugely sacrificed in the understanding that it will benefit older individuals. This has created "transfer of welfare" from the young to the old, or further entrenched "intergenerational inequality," a familiar feature of public policy.

Most parents have quietly acquiesced in the harm caused to their children, doing what they can to help them with their online homeschooling (which is not much in the case of many parents). But some have not. Some have sent their children to microschools (or pandemic pods, as they are known when set up in response to the school lockdowns).

MICROSCHOOLS AND THEIR APPEAL

Microschools are very small schools, with around 3 to 12 students and correspondingly few teachers or lay educators. They are typically conducted from the home of one of the pupils and therefore have basic facilities, without the halls, canteens and music, theatrical and sports facilities offered by most private schools and many state schools. They are supported by tutors that offer teaching and resources for microschools. This makes microschools highly catered. They can offer anything from an education focused on traditional academic subjects and success, to Montessori and Steiner school-like educational philosophy. They are inevitably very local, drawing students who live within only a few miles of the school.

During the lockdowns, microschools or 'pandemic pods' offered face-to-face education that was otherwise not possible. They could often avoid breaking lockdown rules by way of permissible childcare arrangements. They offered a high quality service for many parents and strong education to many children. Microschools are small and private, meaning the parents of children attending these schools are treated as valued customers. And, as with valued customers more generally, the preferences of parents are catered. These schools tend to minimise the time spent on subjects (or non-subjects) that the parents believe to be a waste of time and focus instead on what parents think is important for their children — often, though not always, excellence in core academic subjects such as maths, science and languages.

This distinguishes them sharply from state schools. The public education system is funded from tax revenues directed by politicians. Accordingly, they often largely cater to the preferences of politicians, or bureaucrats, rather than the parents of the children attending the school. Only high income parents can afford to send their children to private schools after the taxes necessary to fund the state system. Parents who cannot afford this usually have a choice of only one or two state schools to which they can send their children. Under these circumstances, those who run state schools have little incentive to cater to the preference of parents or provide a high quality education to children.

Microschools have the same appeal as any private school: that is, they are not state schools. But they are also smaller, closer, more dynamic and cheaper than most prestigious private schools. This means they appeal to many people for whom prestigious private schools are not a serious option.

Despite this substantial appeal for parents and children, there are very few microschoools. This is because of a debilitating red tape created by a complex school regulatory system.

Parents send their children to state schools because they cannot afford the private alternatives. Parents are taxed to fund state schools, making the additional cost of private schools unattainable. The system is rigged in favour of state schools. This injustice could easily be undone. Rather than funding schools directly, the Government could issue parents with a voucher for education, redeemable at any school, state or private.¹¹ The voucher would be equal to the average per-pupil cost of supplying a state education, about £6,000 a year for secondary pupils.¹² This would not cover the cost of most private schools in the UK today, which cater to high income earners. But it would give low cost microschoools the ability to compete with state school competitors.

School vouchers are in operation and being explored throughout the world, most notably in the United States where, in the States in which they are available, parents have the freedom to choose a private school for their child using all or part of the public funding set aside for their child's education.

The current school funding arrangements in the UK mean that only the rich can afford to opt out of state education. Only the rich can choose between suppliers competing for their business. Far from creating a more equal society, this entrenches existing inequalities. The rich will always be able to afford better goods and services than the poor. But denying the poor consumer sovereignty is no way to improve quality. The poor get their food from the private sector, and they are largely well fed. They get 14 years of compulsory education from the state, and 18% of pupils leave school without having learned enough to pass even five GCSE or equivalent exams, or 37% of pupils on Free School Meals.¹³

The current system of educational funding is the obvious explanation of why there are so few low-cost microschoools in the UK. But it is not the only explanation. Microschoools are severely hampered by existing school regulations. While they are

¹¹ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56edde762cd9413e151ac92/t/56fac25a04426263594bc3af/1459274334774/Voucher+paper+web.pdf>

¹² 2019 Annual report on education spending in England, Institute for Fiscal Studies, <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R162-Education-spending-in-England-2019.pdf>

¹³ 'Almost one in five children left education at 18 last year without basic education', Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner, 20 September 2019, <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2019/09/20/almost-one-in-five-children-left-education-at-18-last-year-without-basic-qualifications/>

technically permissible, the regulatory barriers are so high that they are practically impossible for most.

The best way to understand these barriers is to consider what is permitted under the category of homeschooling, and what is required for regulatory compliance once the supply of education is no longer deemed homeschooling.

The law requires that children be educated from the age of five. But it does not require them to attend school. They may be homeschooled. Homeschooling is usually supervised by parents and guided by online teaching. There are no requirements for the schooling to be undertaken within the child's home or that it must only be done with siblings. Nevertheless, the law requires that the place where the teaching occurs must be the family home of one of the children taught. There is no limit on how many children may be taught in the house, provided each has a parent present. If some children do not have a parent present, then no more than four children can be educated together for more than 18 hours a week. Or, to simplify, if four or fewer children are in the family home of one of them, then they can be homeschooled together, full-time. If more than four children are involved, then they can receive no more than 18 hours of education together. Some companies, such as The Golden Circle (TGC) run such homeschooling groups in the UK.¹⁴

Provided homeschooling groups stay within these limits, they are lightly supervised by the government. Local authorities can check that the pupils are studying mathematics and English, and that the pupils are happy and healthy at home.¹⁵ But that is all. However, if group teaching goes beyond these tight domestic limits — for example, by running a group outside a family home or for more than 18 hours — then it must be registered as an independent school. After that point, the weight of the regulatory burdens becomes crushing for these small operations.

An educator who wishes to set up an independent school must convince the Department for Education (DfE) that their school meets its standards on the following matters:

- Quality of education provided
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- Premises of and accommodation at schools (which includes specific standards for toilet and washing facilities, medical accommodation, health, safety, and welfare, acoustics, lighting, water supplies and outdoor space)
- Provision of information
- Manner in which complaints are handled
- Quality of leadership in and management of schools.

¹⁴ The Golden Circle, Private Tutoring and Homeschooling, London, <https://goldencircletutors.co.uk/>

¹⁵ Elective home education, Department for Education guidance (April 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791528/EHE_guidance_for_parentsafterconsultationv2.2.pdf

Within each of these categories is an astonishingly detailed list of specific requirements.¹⁶ And satisfying the DfE that its requirements have been met is an extraordinarily arduous process. In September 2018, Professor James Tooley, a distinguished professor of education, opened a low-cost independent school — The Independent Grammar School: Durham.¹⁷ This happy day for the staff and pupils of the school followed 485 days of checks, changes and subsequent approvals by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Service and Skills (Ofsted). Tooley had the experience and resources to persevere, but many others seeking to start a new school give up in despair.

They are deterred not only by the difficulty of opening a new independent school but by the material chance that they will be shut down by Ofsted once they are up and running, even if parents remain happy to send their children to the school and pay its fees.

Again, there is an asymmetry that favours the state sector in education. Many state schools are rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted — often schools attended by children from poor families. This may embarrass the staff at the school but it presents them with no threat of losing their jobs. An inadequate state school can persist indefinitely, failing to properly educate generations of children who are effectively forced to attend it. Labour Party analysis of Ofsted data in 2018 found that the poorest pupils in England are nine times more likely than their wealthiest peers to attend a secondary school which is rated inadequate by Ofsted.¹⁸

The persistence of poor state schools is the most obvious and damaging consequence of funding and regulatory barriers to the creation of low-cost independent schools. But consequences can also be seen in the rise of homeschooling and private tutoring.

THE RISE OF HOMESCHOOLING AND PRIVATE TUTORING

The number of children who are homeschooled in Western countries has risen significantly in recent years, especially in the USA, Canada, South Africa, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Poland and Chile.¹⁹ In Germany, the Netherlands and much of Eastern Europe it has not taken off for the simple reason that it is unlawful.

¹⁶ The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/schedule>

¹⁷ ‘Low cost private school opens in Durham City Centre’, 3 October 2018, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/no-frills-private-school-founder-eyes-seven-more-north-east-sites/>

¹⁸ ‘Labour analysis find “shameful” inequality in England’s education system’, labour.org.uk 21 August 2018, <https://labour.org.uk/press/labour-analysis-finds-shameful-inequality-englands-education-system/>

¹⁹ Office of the schools adjudicator annual report, Department for Education (September 2018 to August 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/872007/OSA_Annual_Report_Sept_2018_to_Aug_2019_corrected.pdf

And in other countries, while it is legal, there is little take-up because it is considered socially unacceptable.²⁰

The increased popularity of homeschooling is partly the result of improvements in communications technology. Video conferencing allows remote teaching to nevertheless be direct and interactive. Twenty pupils and a teacher, all sitting in their own homes, can form a virtual classroom. The same technology has also increased the ease with which parents can work from home. Parents who do so no longer need schools to play their daycare role, making homeschooling an option where it previously was not.

The COVID-19 lockdowns will only accelerate this trend. Most parents have now had experience of homeschooling and overcoming all of the challenges that that entails.²¹ Eighty-seven per cent of parents report between May and June 2020 that a child in their household has been homeschooled.²² Having been forced to try homeschooling and working from home, many parents will discover that they prefer it. And it will benefit some children too. Anecdotal reports from parents and tutors suggest some children (though a minority) have learned more at home than at school.

Post-hurricane Katrina New Orleans provides an example of how options taken out of necessity can become a first choice. New Orleans' education facilities were rebuilt and restructured to meet population changes and needs in the years following the hurricane, and a number of the changes ended up sticking, notably charter schools that stepped in when their public education system was destroyed. Charter schools are publicly funded but run by independent groups. Short-term adjustments often end up having long-term consequences. For many parents and pupils, this will be the case with lockdowns and homeschooling. There are already signs that some parents are not turning back.²³

The technological advances that improve the experience of homeschooling are not, however, the only explanation for the rise of homeschooling. Many parents choose it simply because they are dissatisfied with state schools. They may prefer to send their children to a private school. But, alas, none is available at a price they can afford. The absence of tax-funded education vouchers and the regulatory barriers to establishing microschoools and other low-cost private schools thereby increase the numbers of children being homeschooled.

20 Homeschooling international status and statistics, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeschooling_international_status_and_statistics

21 'Everything I've learned from homeschooling my kids', Evening Standard, 23 March 2020, <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/how-to-homeschool-kids-tips-a4393576.html>

22 Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain: April to June 2020, Office for National Statistics, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/coronavirusandhomeschoolinggreatbritain/apriltojune2020>

23 'Covid-19 has persuaded some parents that homeschooling is better', The Economist, 27 February 2021, <https://www.economist.com/international/2021/02/22/covid-19-has-persuaded-some-parents-that-home-schooling-is-better>

Of course, some would still choose to homeschool if the barriers to microschoools were removed. But fewer would. And that would be beneficial, not because there is something inherently wrong with homeschooling, but for the simple reason that more people would be getting the option they prefer. Microschooling would also be less work for individual parents and provide better social opportunities for both children and parents.

Another option for parents dissatisfied with the education provided by the state is to supplement it with private tutoring outside of school hours. Private tutoring is lightly regulated. They need only be safe environments for the children. As a consequence, many tutoring companies have been formed over recent years. Tutor Hunt and Superprof are notable examples.^{24 25} Many parents are buying their services, and the services of independent tutors. It is estimated that 27% of secondary school-aged children in England and Wales received some private tutoring in 2019, with that figure rising to 41% for London.²⁶

As noted above, however, tutoring companies can avoid independent school regulatory burdens only if they provide pupils with less than 18 hours of teaching per week. This means that they cannot satisfy children's legal obligation to be in full-time education. In other words, they can supplement state schools but they cannot be alternatives. If not for the regulatory barriers, some private tutoring companies would surely provide full-time schooling to pupils. That is to say, they would become microschoools catering to parents with a preference for their model, which offers high quality teaching, small class sizes and a focus on core academic subjects.

ON TEACHERS AND TEACHING METHODS

The Covid-19 lockdowns forced an experiment in homeschooling for millions of families in the UK. Many parents will have discovered something well known to educators: namely, that you can understand a subject without being able to teach it.²⁷ A brilliant mathematician cannot necessarily teach maths. Teaching is a skill in itself.

But there is not a single effective teaching method. As noted above, some microschoools follow an educational philosophy, such as Steiner or Montessori, while others follow a more traditional, teacher-led model. This variation is valuable. Variation provides information about what works, what does not, and for which kinds of children. It allows for a process of trial and error through which progress can be made. It is through experimentation and competition that millions of businesses provide billions of innovative, varied and ever-improving products, yet when it

²⁴ Tutor Hunt, <https://www.tutorhunt.com/>

²⁵ Superprof, <https://www.superprof.co.uk/>

²⁶ Private tuition polling (2019), Sutton Trust, <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/private-tuition-polling-2019/>

²⁷ 'Homeschooling: I'm a maths lecturer and I had to get my children to teach me', The Guardian, 20 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/feb/20/im-a-maths-lecturer-and-i-had-to-get-my-children-to-teach-me>

comes to education we largely adopt a single model developed in the 19th century. Indeed, it is likely that different students benefit from different teaching styles and methods, meaning there is no one-size-fits-all way to educate people.

Many conservative proponents of school reform were delighted by Michael Gove's support for "traditional" teaching methods and greater academic rigour when he was Secretary of State for Education.²⁸ This helped some to overcome their scepticism about a state-controlled education system in which local experimentation is replaced by central command. But it should not have, and not only for the reasons given above. Those politicians of either the right or left who centralise power in order to "get things done" may like it when they are in government and having their way. But they inevitably come to regret it when their opponents win power and use the centralised system to get *their* things done. Conservatives who are wary of what the next Labour government might do should lament the central control of education in England. And, for the same reason, so should people who vote Labour.

THE PROSPECTS FOR MICROSCHOOLS IN THE UK

Bloomberg News recently reported that tech companies in the US are seeking to fill "what seems to be a bottomless demand" for small groups of pupils led by parents or teachers as an alternative to public education.²⁹ They are known for their very small class sizes, flexible schedules and alternative learning methods, such as outdoor "forest schools" and Montessori methods. In US states with reasonably liberal education regimes, these schools are likely to flourish (provided governments do not intervene on behalf of teachers unions which seek to restrict competition in education).

What are the prospects for school liberalisation in the UK and, hence, for micro-schools? Alas, they do not look good. The free school experience is discouraging. Free schools were an attempt to introduce innovation and competition into state-funded education. One aim of the policy, introduced in 2010, was to encourage more parents to set up schools. When Michael Gove hosted the first Free School Conference at Westminster Academy, it had to be held in the sports hall because there were so many attendees. Most of the audience comprised parent groups who wanted to set up schools.

It has proved extremely difficult to start a free school and then to keep it open. Ofsted has closed many free schools it deemed substandard, despite the continued support of the parents whose children attend. As a result, free schools cannot provide the innovation that was once hoped for, and enthusiasm for starting them has dwindled. Regulation and supervision has squeezed the life out of the free school movement.

²⁸ 'Michael Gove speaks about the importance of teaching', speech, gov.co.uk, 5 September 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/michael-gove-speaks-about-the-importance-of-teaching>

²⁹ 'Silicon Valley is jumping on the microschool bandwagon', Bloomberg CityLab, 23 July 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-23/silicon-valley-bets-big-on-microschools-and-pods>

Independent schools that, unlike free schools, receive little to no government funding are also liable to be shut down by Ofsted, even when parents remain happy with the school — something which seems to be happening with increasing frequency. The “direction of travel” is for tighter government control of education, not the liberalisation that would allow microschoools to flourish.

OPTIONS FOR REFORM

If the Government wants to increase educational choice and improve standards for disadvantaged students, they should liberalise school regulation to enable the proliferation of microschoools by developing a new light-touch regulatory approach for microschoools separate to current approach, which effectively limits microschoools to a family home and four or fewer pupils. They could also create a schools sandbox, modelled on the Financial Conduct Authority’s regulatory sandbox, to allow entrepreneurs to experiment with a diverse array of new arrangements for schooling in a light-touch regulatory environment. This could also be supported by a ‘schools voucher’ scheme to ensure that parents who choose to micro-school their children are not financially worse off with respect to state-support for their children’s education.

CONCLUSION

A proliferation of microschoools would provide many parents and pupils with an educational offering that suits them better than their current options. And the diversity and competition they could introduce to the UK’s educational sector would promote higher standards. This requires improved funding and removal of regulatory barriers.

The COVID-19 school lockdowns have shaken things up. Many more parents are likely to seek affordable alternatives to state schools, having now experienced homeschooling. Many are likely to want hybrid models, especially as they themselves adopt hybrid models of working from the office and from home. Meeting such demands will require politicians to loosen up the regulatory regime for schools.

If parental demand and the political response to it unfold in this way over the coming years, at least one good thing will have come from COVID-19 and the lockdowns.