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## News

**Covid-19: Chinese schools begin to re-open as parents' demands for discounted fees mount** **S**  
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## Covid-19: Chinese schools begin to re-open as parents' demands for discounted fees mount

International schools across China are starting to re-open following weeks-long widespread closures enforced by government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic – but parents' questions over lost learning time are mounting, as are demands for refunds and discounted fees.

According to ISC Research, a consultancy that has gathered feedback from international and private bilingual schools across the mainland, "most" of these institutions have prepared re-opening plans as China has launched a phased approach to getting children back in classrooms.

These include the introduction of temperature checks, enhanced cleaning and sanitising regimes, systems to manage pupil gatherings and virtual assemblies, as well as changes to school transport.

But "despite the significant efforts of teachers, students and their parents, online learning, regardless of how well it is planned and executed, cannot replicate the classroom experience", ISC Research found.

As a result, "many experiences and opportunities have been missed," the firm said, which has prompted fee-paying parents to request rebates on this year's tuition fees, or a freeze or discount on the next academic year's fees.

Some parents have suggested extending school days, delivering weekend lessons, extending the school year and offering free summer schools to enable students to catch-up, ISC Research found.

Parents with children enrolled in fee-charging schools in China join thousands of [disgruntled counterparts](#) across the world who are dissatisfied with the results of online tuition, which schools worldwide have been forced to deliver after being closed down, along with vast portions of the global economy, by the coronavirus pandemic.

UNESCO estimates that, worldwide, more than a billion learners – mostly of school age – have been affected by government-imposed closures of education centres.

According to ISC Research, some schools in China are considering granting one-off bursaries to families that have fallen into financial hot water.

The findings follow the publication of a [new study](#) by UCL, which found that the economic costs of closing schools could outweigh the “very weak” evidence supporting a policy that has been employed by dozens of countries worldwide.

School leaders in China have linked the potential financial impact of the pandemic to that which resulted from the 2008 global financial crisis, which saw “a significant reduction in demand for student places for some schools in the year following the crash”.

But ISC Research noted a potential silver lining: “Some Chinese families may be more cautious about sending their child to an overseas boarding school, preferring to keep their child with them in China, sending them to their local international or private school instead.”

As the pandemic rages on in other parts of the world, China is lifting restrictions gradually – but some remain in place amid wider measures designed to stave off a second wave of Covid-19 outbreaks.

As a result, said ISC Research, extra-curricular activities, such as school productions and sporting events, “may be missing for some time”, which has led some parents to ask for a “narrower focus” on academia upon students’ return to school.

The firm also pointed to future difficulties around staff recruitment.

“Teachers may be less willing to live so far from their home country and family, having experienced an extended period in which borders have been closed,” said ISC Research. “Schools are beginning to consider alternative options at this time.”

Schools are also bolstering their contingency plans in preparation for further disruption, the organisation found.

“There is no doubt that most schools will be giving serious consideration to their education continuity plans for the future.

“Many schools are already exploring the online platforms that work best for them, and developing systems, structures and practices to ensure that all members of their school community are well placed should there be any form of disruption to learning in the future.”