

Parent views from the education pandemic front-line

Annual Parent Survey 2020

October 2020

Introduction

This is our sixth Annual Parent Survey, a yearly snapshot of the experiences, attitudes and priorities of parents in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This report looks at six key policy areas: parent consultation at school, the parent voice, parent participation in schools, financial contribution to schools, mental health and well-being and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This has been a year like no other because of the pandemic. School closures took effect from 20 March 2020 and all exams for the year were cancelled. There has been a gradual re-opening of schools to selected year groups from the beginning of June and the majority of children have returned to full-time education from the beginning of the academic year 2020/21.

Many children have had more than five months out of education and clearly parents' experiences with their children's education are not comparable with previous years. For our core benchmarking questions, we have asked parents to answer as best they could for the period before all schools closed in March 2020. However trend data needs to be interpreted in the context of the survey taking place during a period of substantial upheaval, when home-based learning was the norm.

Methodology

The research was conducted online by fieldwork agency Dynata between 25 May-18 June 2020. There were 1,500 interviews in total with parents from England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200), who have at least one child aged 4-18 attending state school. The survey is representative of the parent population by gender, age and social grade. Sub-samples in Wales and Northern Ireland were boosted to achieve a large enough base of respondents to compare findings across the three regions of England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

This report also draws upon Parentkind's three coronavirus-specific online polls conducted via social media in March, May and July 2020 to capture parent concerns and opinions in real time.

About Parentkind

As well as being the leading membership organisation for Parent Teacher Associations for over 60 years across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we are advocates for parent voice. Our role is to ensure that all parents can participate in education and have their voices heard so that education across the nations can benefit all children in all schools and society as a whole. This means we have a wealth of experience with schools of all sizes and types and the communities they serve.

We are the bridge between homes and schools.

- We marry research with first-rate practice that has been proven to work.
- We make sure that the voice of parents is heard in education.
- We represent parent views and interests in discussions with education authorities, agencies, central government and all other interested parties and bodies.
- We work with partners and stakeholders, researchers, teachers, parents, administrators, community partners and others, on parental participation.
- We identify and promote examples of high quality parent-school partnerships and provide resources to support parent participation in education at school and at home.

See more at www.parentkind.org.uk

Key findings

Policy area	What we found	What needs to happen
Parent consultation at school	<p>We are encouraged to see a rise in the proportion of parents who feel listened by their school but there is still a gap between the number of parents who want a say and who feel heard.</p> <p>This year more parents feel their school takes action on their feedback and lets them have a say on decisions that affect their child's education. This may be linked to more parents raising issues this year.</p> <p>However, there is still room for improvement on both areas, and almost half of parents would like their child's school to be more accountable to parents.</p>	<p>Parents are consulted to ensure they all have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on matters affecting the education of their children, and to ensure the potential impact of changes in school policies on families are understood.</p>
Parent voice	<p>There is a gap between the proportion of parents who want a say and who feel listened at government and local level, although more parents feel heard in 2020 than 2019.</p> <p>Around half want a say at government and Local Authority/Education Authority/Multi-Academy Trust board level. However only three in ten feel that government listens to parents and four in ten that their Local Authority/Education Authority/Multi-Academy Trust does.</p> <p>Given the current challenges that parents and their children face, it is more important than ever that parents have a voice.</p>	<p>There is a clear mandated responsibility for MATs, local government, and national government organisations to ensure parents are consulted on matters affecting the education of their children, that is reflected in education policy, education guidance and is overseen by regulatory bodies.</p>
Parent participation in schools	<p>Most parents want to play an active role in their child's education. We have seen an increase in levels of involvement and three in ten say they would like even more involvement once schools reopen.</p> <p>While six in ten parents felt confident supporting their child's learning during school closures, around two in ten did not. However it is encouraging to see that many parents feel schools are doing a good job in supporting learning.</p>	<p>Adoption of parental participation approaches as set out in Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent Friendly schools.</p> <p>Guidance, tools and approaches for parents to support their child's learning at home which were used during school closures. These are a blend of communication, technological tools and information resources.</p>

	When asked what information they would like to have in the event of further school closures, parents are most likely to mention guidance on how to best support learning at home.	
Financial contribution to schools	Around a third of parents are making donations to their school, up from 2019 following a fall that year. The parents who are the most financially disadvantaged are donating the most – parents eligible for free school meals are giving an average of £12.90 a month compared to £8.95 among parents who are not eligible. Parents with a child with SEND also give more than average.	Further research needs to be undertaken to fully understand what these donations are being used for and why the most financial disadvantaged parents are donating the most. Schools consult parents to fully understand the parent perspective along with the impact funding decisions and requests have on the families within their school community.
Mental health and well-being	<p>Most parents are worried about the long-term mental health impacts of school closures and social distancing measures. We have consistently found that mental health and well-being is a concern for parents and it again tops the list of issues parents are worried about.</p> <p>Parents are less likely to report that their child has experienced most of the specific mental health issues we ask them about compared to 2018 (when the question was last asked). This is particularly the case for issues such as exam stress which are more directly linked to school settings.</p> <p>However, the prevalence of all issues is still too high. It is particularly disturbing to see around one in twenty parents – at the primary, secondary and further phases of education – reporting that their child has experienced eating disorders and/or substance abuse.</p> <p>It is also very concerning that parents who are eligible for free school meals are much more likely to say their child has experienced the different mental health and well-being issues. This highlights the vulnerability of financially disadvantaged children to mental health impacts, social challenges and risky behaviours and the need for strong mental health support and pastoral care services in schools.</p> <p>Parents want to see more funding for mental health and their top priorities are professional support through</p>	<p>Designated point of contact within the school leadership team for parents concerned about their child's mental health.</p> <p>Parents want to see more funding for mental health and their top priorities are professional support through counselling services and mental health support workers embedded in schools</p> <p>Broader package of action to embed mental health and wellbeing in different aspects of school life, through changes to initial teacher training, what is taught to pupils in personal, social, health and economic education and relationships education and support to schools in engaging pupils, parents and carers.</p>

	counselling services and mental health support workers embedded in schools.	
<p>Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)</p>	<p>Parents with a child with SEND often have a magnified school experience. They have greater levels of engagement and are more likely to want even more involvement. They have a stronger demand for a voice at all levels and have a stronger perception that they are heard. This is doubtless linked to their greater levels of contact with schools.</p> <p>Parents of a child with SEND are more likely to report their child experiencing mental health issues and the priority they give to child mental health is higher than other parents. Their top priority for additional funding is, as one would expect, for SEND. However, other parents gave SEND a lower priority than in 2019; areas such as school trips, which children have missed out on, are more likely to be chosen. This highlights the importance of making the case for SEND provision to the wider school community.</p> <p>Parents of children with SEND have seen a major negative impact on the education provision their child has received during school closures, as well as a substantial reduction in meeting the criteria set out in their EHCPs, or have faced substantial delay in receiving an EHCP. Further information here (SEND Survey link)</p>	<p>Additional support and provision for parents with a child with SEND to support their child's learning especially at home which will require ongoing two-way communication encompassing policymakers, school leaders and parents.</p>

Parent consultation at school

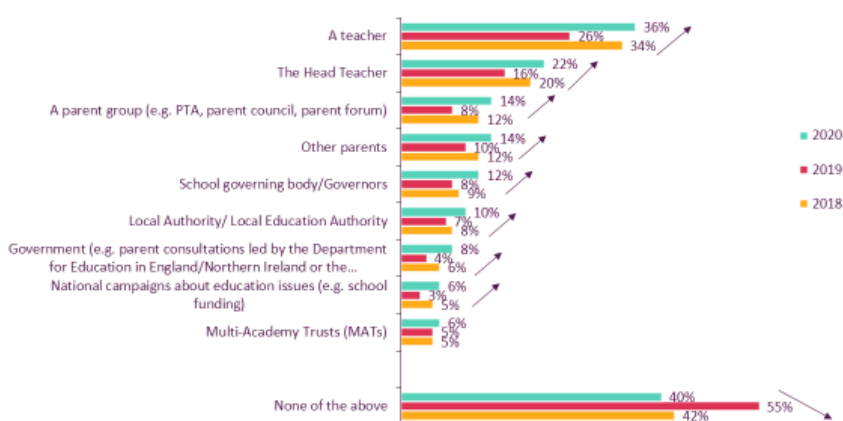
Most parents want to be heard but not all feel that their school is listening.

Overall, 75% of parents agree that they want to a say in their child’s education at school level, consistent with what we have found in previous years. Over a quarter (28%) strongly agree. Parents eligible for free school meals are more likely to feel strongly about this, with 34% strongly agreeing, compared to 26% of parents who are not eligible for free school meals.

However the proportion of parents who feel heard is lower. Three-fifths (59%) agree that their child’s school listens to parents on what they want for their children’s education, with 17% strongly agreeing. Although there is a gap between how many parents want a say and feel listened to, it is smaller than we saw in 2019, thanks to a nine point increase in the number of parents feeling heard.

Parents from BAME backgrounds (24% compared to 16% of White parents) plus those eligible for free school meals (27% compared to 15% of parents who are not) are more likely to strongly agree that their child’s school listens. Levels are also higher among parents aged 18-34 (25% compared with less than a fifth of parents aged over 35).

Parents are more likely this year to have raised issues or contributed feedback about their child’s education. In 2019, 55% had not raised any issues over the past year, compared to only 40% in 2020. The pandemic and school closures are one probable reason for this rise. Parents are most likely to raise issues within the school itself, notably with teachers and head teachers (we discuss channels outside the school in the next section of this report).



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

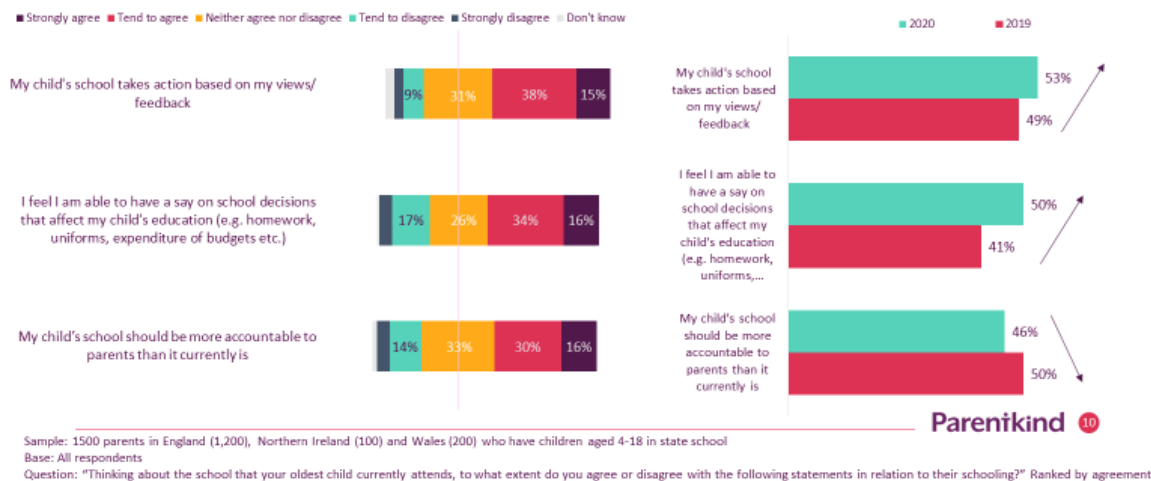
Question: "Over the past year, have you raised issues and/or contributed ideas/feedback about your child's school and education with any of the following? Please select all that apply"

Some groups of parents are more likely than others to have raised issues and feedback:

- Parents aged 18-34 (only 31% have not). They are also more likely to have raised issues with a parent group (19%).
- Parents from a BAME background (29% have not compared to 42% of non-BAME parents). They are more likely to have contacted a parent group (22% vs 13% of White parents)
- Parents with eligibility for free school meals (29% compared to 43% of parents who are not eligible). They are more likely to have raised issues with the head teacher (29% vs 21%) and school governors (16% vs 11%).
- Parents of C2DE social grade (45% compared to 36% of ABC1 parents).

As well as more parents raising issues, there has also been a rise in the proportion of parents who feel that their child’s school acts on their feedback and lets them have a say on decisions that affect their child’s education. Just under half feel their child’s school should be more accountable to parents, a fall on last year. These positive shifts

may well be due to how schools have dealt with parents' queries and concerns during the pandemic. However there is still room for improvement. Significant minorities disagree that they are able to have a say on school decisions (23%) and that the school acts on its views and feedback (13%).

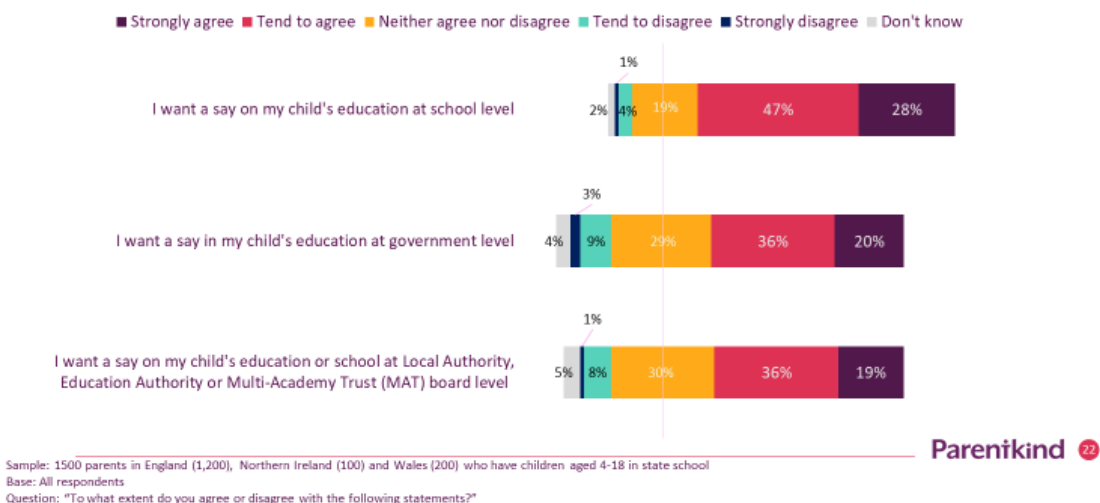


Women are more likely to strongly agree that their child's school acts on their feedback (17% compared to 13% of men) but men are more likely to think that their child's school should be more accountable (48% vs 43%).

Parents eligible for free school meals are more likely to strongly agree that their child's school takes action (24% compared to 13% of parents who are not eligible) and that they feel able to have a say (27% vs 13%). However they are also more likely to strongly feel that schools should be more accountable (26% vs 13%).

Parent voice

Parents are less likely to say they want a say in education at government or Local Authority/Education Authority/Multi-Academy Trust board level compared to school level. However a majority would still like to have a say at both levels. Around a third are neutral or do not know.



Parents from a BAME background feel more strongly about wanting a say at government level (30% strongly agree compared to 19% of White parents) and to agree overall at LA/EA/MAT level (69% vs 53%).

Most parents do not feel listened to by government or at LA/EA/MAT level, although the picture is more positive than last year. Parents are as likely to disagree as agree that they are listened to by government, with a third doing so in each instance. However, as with schools, these figures are an improvement on 2019, when only 27% felt

heard at LA/EA/MAT level and 23% at government level. It may be the greater spotlight on parents' attitudes and opinions due to school closures has increased their sense of being listened to and their priorities valued.



Younger parents are more likely to strongly agree that parents are listened to at both government and LA/EA/MAT level (17% in both instances compared with less than one in ten of those 35 and older). This is also the case for parents from BAME backgrounds. Almost a fifth (17%) strongly agree at government level compared to 8% of White parents and 15% at LA/EA/MAT level (vs 10% of White parents). Parents eligible for free school meals are twice as likely as parents who are not too strongly agree at government level (18% vs 7%) and LA/EA/MAT level (16% vs 8% of non-eligible parents).

As we saw in the previous section, few parents use mechanisms beyond their school to raise issues about their child's education. Over the past year, 10% have approached the Local Authority or Local Education Authority, 8% the government (e.g. through a consultation) and 6% Multi-Academy Trusts, while 6% have contributed in some way to national campaigns about education issues. Although these levels are low, in all cases other than Multi-Academy Trusts they are higher than last year.

The same groups of parents who are more likely to strongly feel that their school listens and to have raised issues in the past year are more likely to use feedback mechanisms beyond the school.

- BAME parents are more likely than White parents to raise issues with their Local Authority/Local Education Authority (15% vs 10%), through government channels (14% vs 8%) and to engage with national campaigns (11% vs 6%).
- Parents aged 18-34 are more likely to raise issues with government (16%) and Multi-Academy Trusts (12%) and engage with national campaigns (13%).
- Parents eligible for free school meals are more likely to raise issues with government (18% compared to 6% of parents who are not eligible), Local Authorities and Local Education Authorities (18% vs 8%) and Multi-Academy Trusts (10% vs 6%). They are also more likely to engage with national campaigns (9% vs 6%).

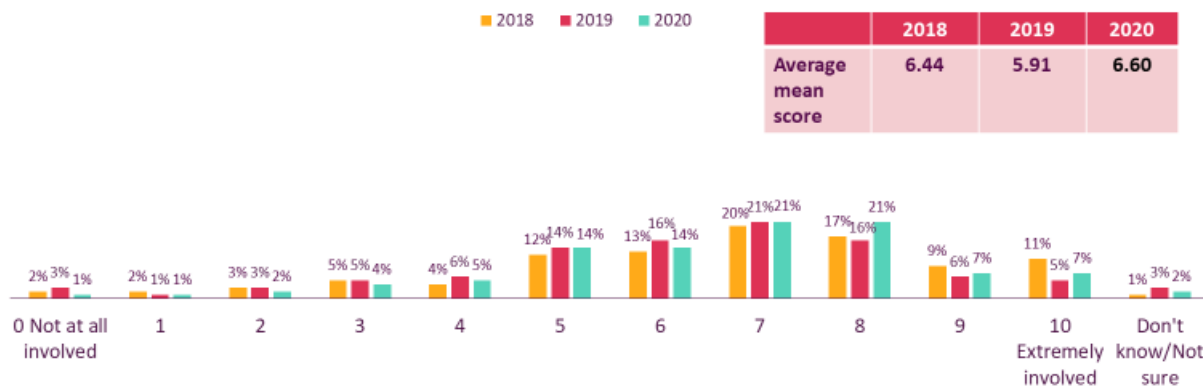
Parent participation in schools

Parents want to be involved in their child's education. The great majority, 86% in total, say they want to play an active role in their child's education. Almost half (44%) strongly agree with this. A similar proportion (84%) agree 'I would describe myself as supportive of my child's school'.

Women are more likely than men to strongly feel they want to play an active role in their child's education (48% vs 40%) and that they are supportive of their child's school (42% vs 37%). Parents eligible for free school meals are more likely to strongly agree than parents who are not that they want an active role (51% vs 43%). However,

families who are not eligible for free school means are more likely to say they are supportive of their child's school (85% vs 79%).

Parents' overall sense of involvement in their child's education has risen this year, following a decline in 2019. The highest proportion of responses fall between 7 and 8, showing a strong overall picture of parent engagement. Very few do not feel involved at all.

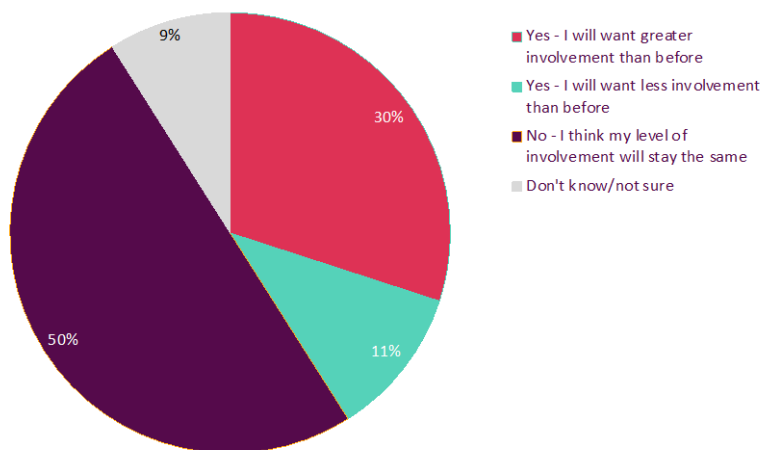


Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: "Overall, how involved do you feel in your child's school and education? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 is 'Extremely involved' and 0 is 'Not at all involved'"

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Parents' overall sense of involvement with their child's school and education is significantly higher among younger parents, ABCIs, those from Northern Ireland, primary parents, and parents from BAME backgrounds. It is also significantly higher among parents with children at local authority-maintained schools (6.95 for stand-alone schools and 6.93 for federations), compared to those at academies (6.30 for stand-alone academies and 6.38 for multi-academy trusts).

We asked parents if they wanted greater involvement in their child's school and education once schools reopen – and three in ten say they do. This is despite levels of involvement, as we have seen, already being high.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: Earlier on we asked you to rate how involved you felt in your child's school and education... When schools return to normal do you think your level of involvement will change compared to before?

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The groups of parents who are already more likely to be engaged are also more likely to want greater involvement in the future. So almost half of parents from BAME backgrounds (45%), or who's child is eligible for free school meals (45%) or who are aged 18-34 (also 45%) want greater involvement. This is also the case for parents in ABCI social grades (33% vs 27% of C2DE parents) and parents of primary school children (36%).

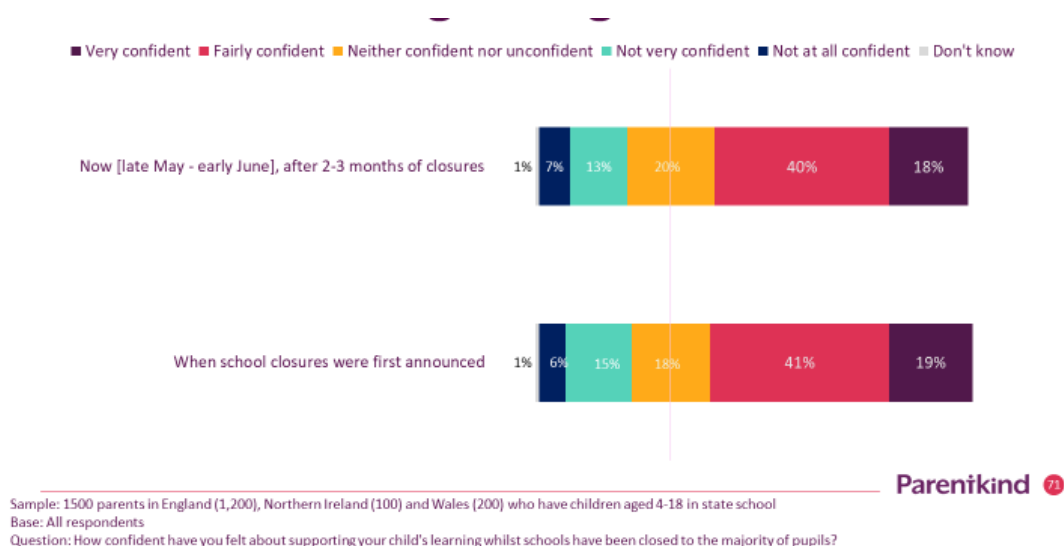
BAME parents and parents eligible for free school meals are also more likely to say they want *less* involvement with their child’s education when schools reopen, as are men and parents of just one child. This may be a reflection of the challenges of home schooling, as well as the much lower levels of ambivalence or neutrality among BAME parents than the wider parent community. As the chart above illustrates, half of parents as a whole say they want the same level of involvement compared to only 32% of BAME parents and 32% of parents eligible for free school meals.

Among parents who want greater involvement, there were a wide variety of answers and general comments when we asked them to elaborate. The most common themes are simply expecting to be involved more (24%), to have more involvement with the school and staff (9%), to do more home learning (7%) and to engage over how their child would catch up on missed schooling (6%).

Supporting learning at home

School closures put enormous pressure on parents to support their children’s learning. We found that six in ten parents felt confident about doing so, with no difference in levels of confidence between May/June when the fieldwork took place (after 2-3 months of closures) and when school closures were first announced. These figures are consistent with our two coronavirus surveys which went out to parents via social media in March and May.

The May survey found that 62% of parents said they felt very or quite confident about being able to support their child’s learning at home¹, while in May the figure was 65%.² At both points in time, 19% said they felt very confident, similar to the figures below. Overall this suggests a reliable level of parent confidence in supporting learning, with around two in ten feeling unconfident and a similar proportion neutral.



One exception to the pattern of confidence being consistent across different time points is among BAME parents. When school closures were first announced, 27% report feeling very confident compared to 17% of White parents. This fell to 20%, suggesting some BAME parents experienced a drop-off in confidence as lockdown progressed.

There are two groups of parents who felt more confident supporting learning during school closures. Parents with three or more children are more likely to report being very confident about supporting learning (24% both initially and then 2-3 months later), compared to 16-18% of parenting smaller households. It could be that parents with more children are simply more accustomed to managing higher levels of competing demands on a daily basis.

¹ <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Research/Coronavirus-Parent-Survey>
² <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Research/Coronavirus-Parent-Survey-2>

The other group is parents with free school meal eligibility who are more likely to report being very confident at both time points (27% when first announced and 23% now) compared to parents without eligibility (16% in both instances).

Most parents think that their child’s school provides the help they need to support their child’s learning, and the proportion has increased since 2019. This rise may be linked to the support provided during school closures. The May wave of our coronavirus survey found that 82% were satisfied with home learning support from their school, while 16% were dissatisfied.

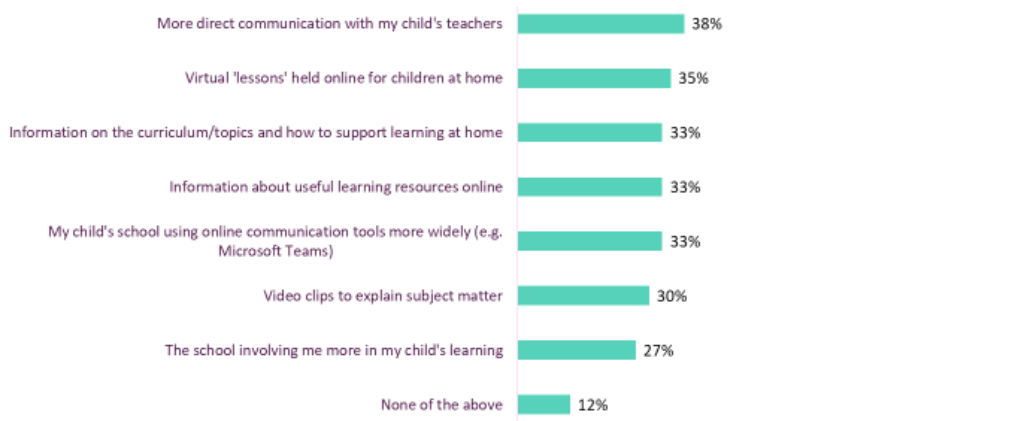


Women are more likely to strongly agree their child’s school provides the help they need to support learning (30% compared with 23% of men), as are parents eligible for free school meals (39% vs 28% who are not eligible).

School closures have led to innovations in the approaches and tools schools have used to support children’s education at home. However the availability and utilisation of these tools has been patchy at best, given the different resources of both schools and families. For instance our July coronavirus survey showed that 29% of children did not have access to a laptop/PC with internet access during school hours, while 32% had to share a laptop/PC with internet access with another person during school hours.

In our July coronavirus survey, we found that almost seven in ten (68%) said they would like to see the government provide minimum standards of home learning provision that all schools would be expected to meet, showing a clear need for equipping parents for whatever role they may need to play in supporting their child’s education. In order to understand parent priorities for the future, we asked which new tools and approaches parents would like to see expanded when schools return to normal.

Most of the tools/approaches asked about are chosen by around a third of parents, suggesting that communication, technological tools and information resources all have a part to play. More direct communications with their child’s teacher comes top. Virtual lessons, online communication tools and video clips all attract similar levels of support, similar to information on the curriculum and information on useful learning resources online.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: The period of school closures and supported learning at home has brought enormous challenges, [however] some schools have been able to use new tools, technologies, or approaches in order to adapt during this crisis. Would you like to see any of the following expanded when schools return to normal?

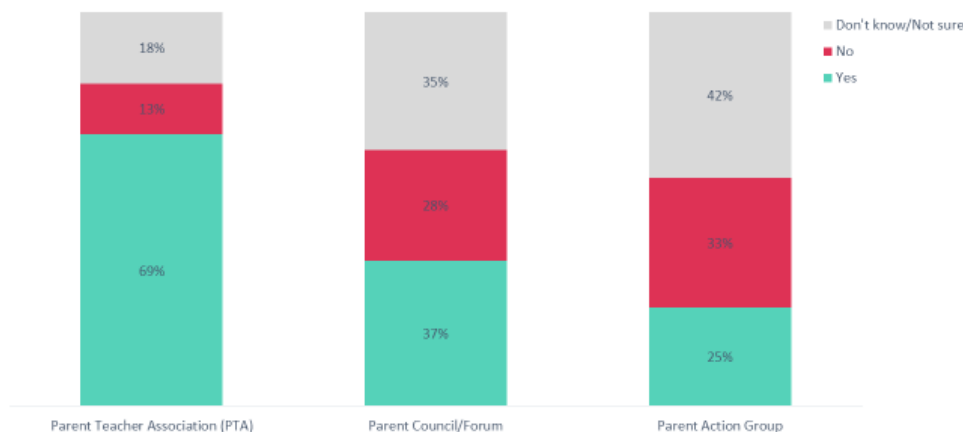
Online communication tools are, as we might expect, more popular with secondary school (34%) and further education parents (40%) than primary school parents (28%).

There are also differences in priority according to ethnicity and social class:

- Parents from BAME backgrounds are more interested in the use of video clips to explain subject matter (38% compared with 29% of White parents), as well as being slightly likelier to want online communication tools and information about online learning resources.
- ABC1 parents are likelier than C2DE parents to want more information on curriculum topics (35% vs 30%) and also for their child's school to use more online communication tools such as MS teams (37% vs 28%). C2DE parents are meanwhile likelier to select none of the above (15% vs 9% of ABC1 parents).

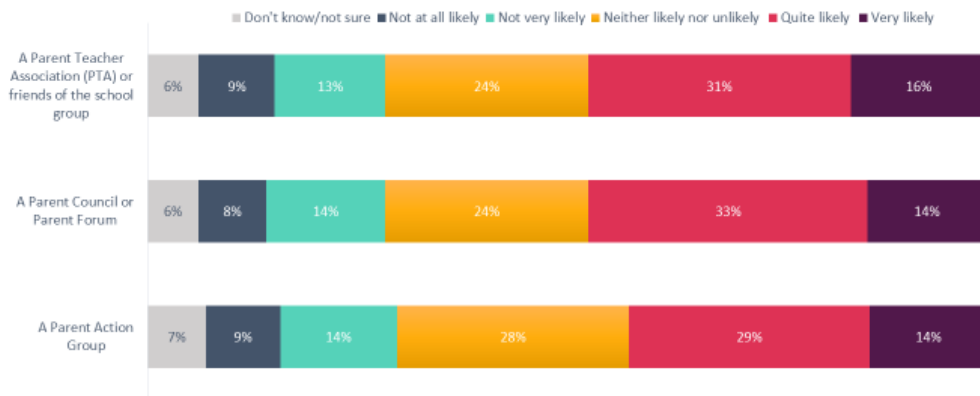
Parent groups

Parents were asked about parent groups at their child's school (so this measures parent knowledge of such a group at their child's school – not verification that it exists). The figures are significantly higher for Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) than other groups, which attract a high proportion of 'don't knows.' While PTA awareness this year remains fairly consistent with previous years, there is a significant rise in awareness of both Parent Councils and Parent Action Groups in 2020 compared with 2019, when awareness stood at 31% and 18% respectively.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: "As far as you know, does your child's school have any of the following parent groups?"

Around half of parents are receptive to getting involved with parent groups, with scores consistent across the different types of group asked about. Around a quarter say they would be unlikely to do so.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents

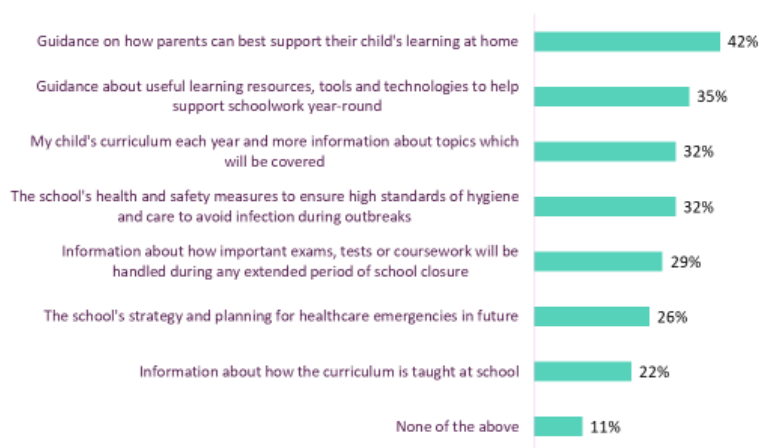
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Question: "How likely would you be to get involved with the following groups if they are (or were to become) active in your child's school?" Ranked by likelihood of future involvement

The groups of parents who are more likely both to raise issues and to feel heard are also more likely to want to be involved. Younger parents, those from BAME backgrounds and parents eligible for free school meals appear to be particularly open to involvement.

Effective-two way communication

We asked parents what they would like to know more about in the case of future school closures. Guidance on how to best support learning at home came top. Around a third would like guidance on resources to support schoolwork year-round and their child's curriculum. With periods of home-based learning all too likely over the next school year, this underscores the importance of schools being supported to set out expectations and resources for home learning in the months ahead.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents

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Question: Looking back at the challenges that have come up during school closures, which of the following areas would you wish to know more about in case a similar situation were to arise in the future?

Parents' needs differ by school phase. As we would expect, the likelihood of wanting information about exams, tests and coursework climbs significantly with school phase, from 19% of primary parents, to 32% of secondary parents and 45% of parents with a child in further education. Secondary and further education parents are also more likely than primary school parents to focus on information about health and safety measures, at 34% and 36% respectively, compared with 28% of primary parents. Conversely, primary school parents are more likely to want information about their child's curriculum (36% compared to 30% of secondary school parents and 27% of further education parents). This is probably related to the greater level of hands-on support younger children typically need from parents when learning at home.

Social grade also had some influence on parent need, with ABC1 parents more likely than C2DE parents to want to know about how the curriculum is taught in schools (26% vs 17%). C2DE parents are more likely to want information about the school's health and safety measures (35% vs 30%). For parents with free school meal eligibility, health and safety information is the top area to provide information on at 39% (compared with 31% of non-eligible parents).

Parents from BAME backgrounds are more likely to want information about exams and testing (36% compared with 29% of White parents) and rank this as their joint top need with guidance on home learning. This suggests a particularly strong concern for attainment outcomes among some parents in these ethnic groups.

Financial contribution to schools

Many parents support their child's school financially. Around half (44%) have been asked to donate and over a third (37%) have actually done so. These are both increases on 2019, which saw a fall compared to 2018.

Parents who make a donation give, on average, £10.00 a month. This is a rise from £8.15 in 2019, while still below the average £11.35 recorded in 2018. A quarter donating (27%) give between £10-30 a month and 7% more than £30 a month.

As we found last year, parents eligible for free school meals and whose child has SEND give more on average.

	Average monthly contribution
Free school meals eligibility	
Parents eligible	£12.90
Parents not eligible	£8.95
Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	
Parents with a child with SEND	£14.95
Parents who do not have a child with SEND	£8.75

Other groups who report giving higher sums per month are younger parents, men, ABC1s and Londoners.

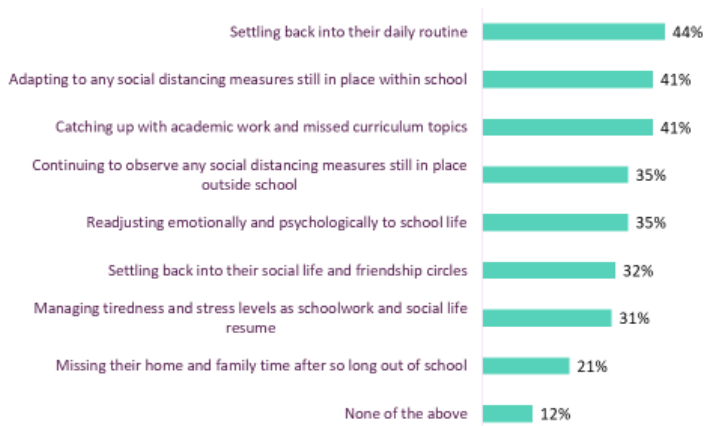
Over half of parents (53%) say they are aware of where donations to the school fund are being spent this year, a return to 2018 levels of awareness following a fall in 2019.

Mental health and well-being

The impact of the pandemic

Mental health and well-being have taken centre stage during the pandemic. Three in ten (30%) parents in our July coronavirus survey rated their child's mental health as their number one concern about school closures (well above their concerns about their child catching Covid-19 itself at 19%).

In our annual survey, we asked parents what concerns they had about their children readjusting to school life. Settling back into their daily routine is the top answer but around a third are worried about the emotional and psychological adjustment to school life, settling back into social life and managing tiredness/stress levels.



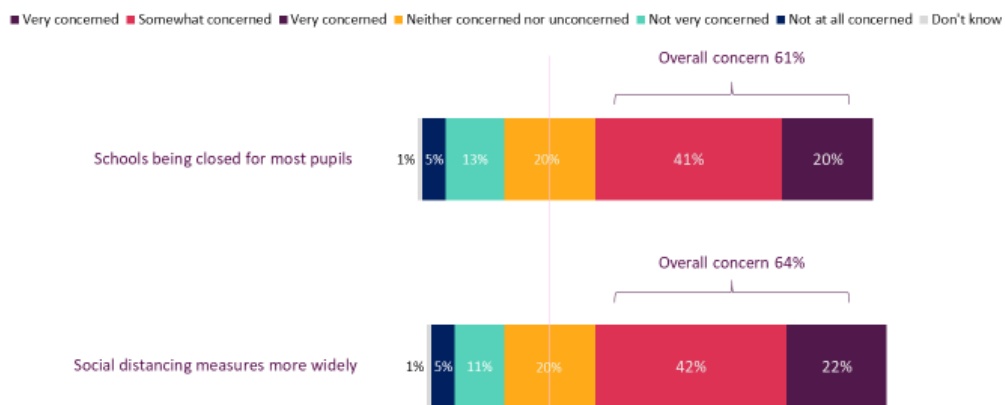
Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

Question: Thinking about how children will readjust once schools do reopen, are you concerned about how your child will cope with any of the following aspects of school life?

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Primary school parents are more likely to be concerned about their child missing home (29% compared with only 17% of secondary parents and 14% of further education parents). Parents eligible for free school meals have higher levels of concern about managing tiredness and stress (37% vs 30% of non-eligible parents) and missing home and family (26% vs 19%). Mothers have higher levels of concern than fathers on several issues, including well-being issues (readjusting emotionally and psychologically at 40% vs 30% and managing tiredness and stress at 35% vs 27%).

Looking further into the future, six in ten parents are concerned about the longer term impact on their children's mental health of schools being closed and social distancing measures.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: Overall, how concerned are you about the longer term impact of the following on your child's mental health?

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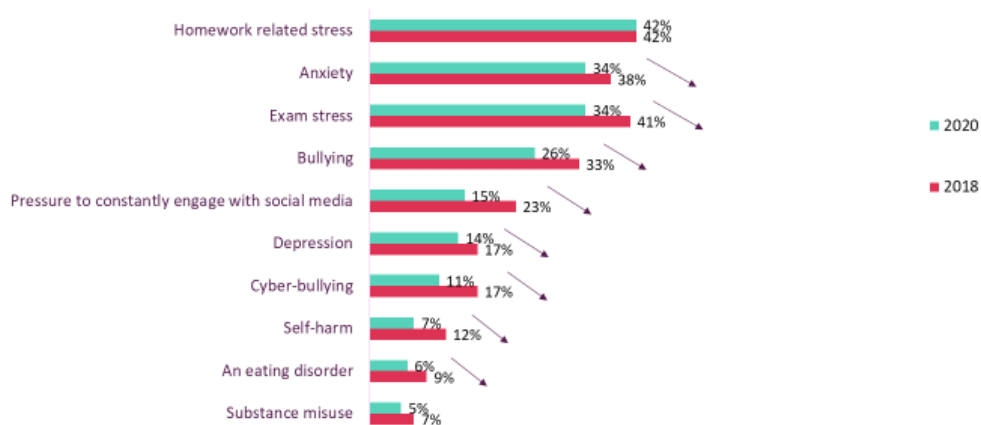
Concern is higher among the following groups:

- Parents from BAME backgrounds are more likely to be very concerned about the impact of school closures (27% vs 19% of White parents) and to be concerned about the impact of social distancing measures (71% vs 63% of White parents).
- Parents eligible for free school meals are more likely to be concerned about the impact of social distancing (69% vs 63% of parents not eligible, 33% very concerned vs 19%).
- Mothers had higher levels of concern about the mental health impacts of both school closures (64% vs 57% of fathers) and social distancing (66% vs 61% of fathers).
- Younger parents more likely to be very concerned about the impacts of social distancing measures on their child (27% compared with 18-21% across older age groups) whilst primary school parents had higher overall levels of concern about this than parents of older children.

Experiences of mental health issues

Mental health has long been a concern for parents, even before the pandemic. As was the case in 2018, emotional well-being and mental health topped the list of concerns we asked parents about. Half (47%) are concerned about this aspect of their child’s school experience, with 17% very concerned.

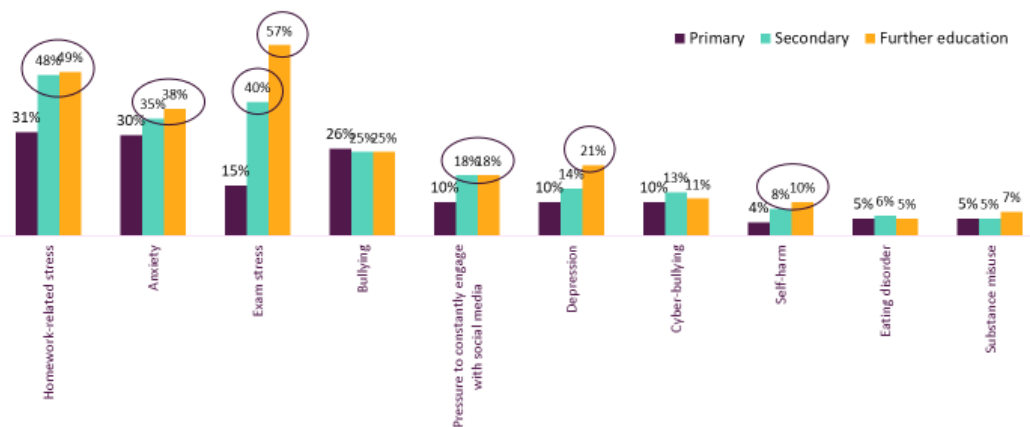
Homework-related stress remains the most common issue that parents report their children experiencing either at school or directly as a result of something that happened there. On all other issues, we see a decline compared to 2018 when this question was last asked. The falls are bigger for issues more directly linked to school settings, such as exam stress and bullying. Broader mental health conditions, like anxiety and depression, see more modest reported declines compared to 2018.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: Has your child ever experienced any of the following, either at school or directly as a result of something that happened at school? Please answer, as best you can, for your experiences before... March 2020.

Some of the issues experienced vary by age. Homework-related stress and exam stress are more widely reported among parents of children in secondary and further education. These parents are also more likely to say their child is experiencing anxiety, pressure to engage with social media, depression and self-harm. These differences reflect their child’s stage of life and wider exposure to social and academic pressures.

However, bullying, eating disorders and substance abuse are found across all educational stages. Around one in twenty parents of children in primary, secondary and further education report their child experiencing eating disorders and substance abuse, while around one in four say their child has experienced bullying.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents by social grade: Primary (539), Secondary (684), Further ed (271)
 Question: Has your child ever experienced any of the following, either at school or directly as a result of something that happened at school? Please answer, as best you can, for your experiences before... March 2020.

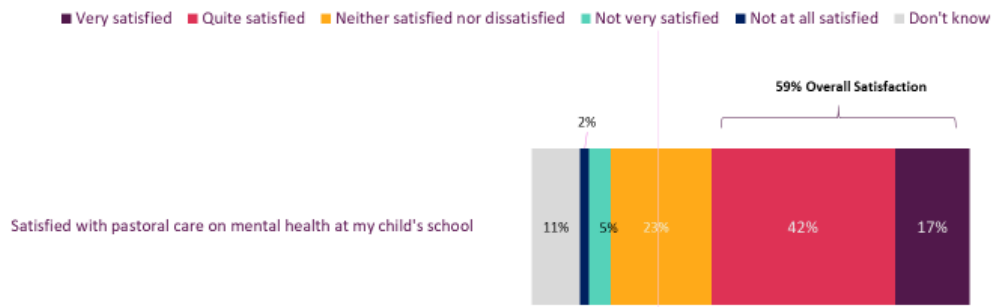
With the exception of exam stress, parents eligible for free school meals are more likely than parents who are not to report all of the issues asked about. Over half of parents (52%) who are eligible for FSM say their child has experienced homework stress (compared with 40% of non-eligible parents), while 44% say they have experienced anxiety (vs 32%) and 25% have had depression (vs 11%). Over a third (36%) report bullying, compared with less than a quarter (23%) of other parents and the incidence of cyber-bullying is also higher at 18% compared to 9% of other parents.

When it comes to the most acute issues, one in ten parents eligible for free school meals say their child has self-harmed or had an eating disorder and 8% have had substance misuse issues (compared to 4-5% of non-eligible parents across these three issues). These figures highlight the greater vulnerability of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to mental health impacts, social challenges within their peer group, and their higher risk of harmful patterns of behaviour.

There are also some differences by ethnicity, with White parents more likely to report that their child has experienced anxiety (35% compared with 25% of BAME parents) and bullying (26% compared with 20%). BAME parents are more likely to mention their child's experience of eating disorders (10% compared with 5%) and substance misuse (9% compared with 5%).

Pastoral care at school

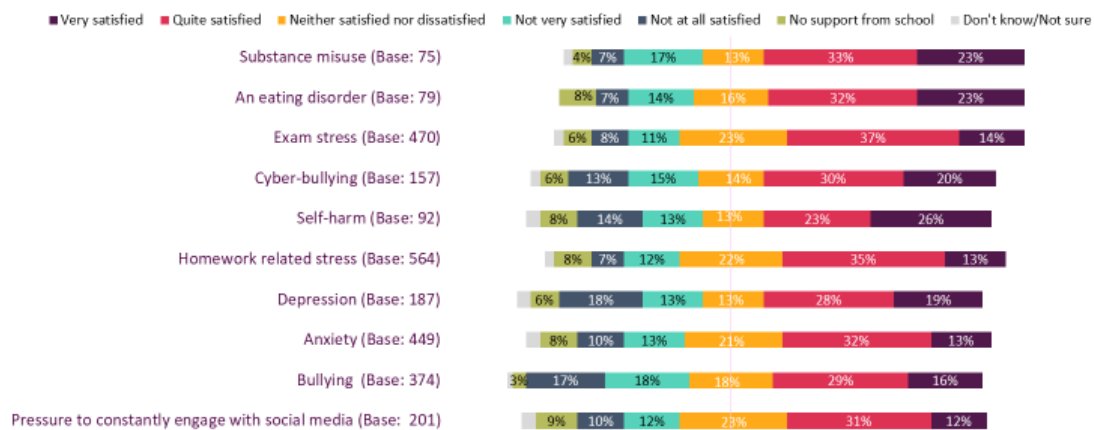
Most parents are satisfied with the pastoral care on mental health issues provided at their child's school. However, there is a small minority who are dissatisfied (7%) and larger proportions of parents who are either neutral or unable to answer, suggesting that there is room for improvement.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: How satisfied are you with the pastoral care on mental health issues at your child's school? Please answer, as best you can, for your experiences before... March 2020.

Satisfaction levels are higher among fathers than mothers (62% vs 54%) and parents eligible for free school meals are likelier than those without to report that they are very satisfied with pastoral care (25% vs 14%).

Parents whose children have experienced specific mental health issues were asked how satisfied they are with the support provided by schools. Just over half are satisfied with school support on the most acute issues, substance misuse (56%) and eating disorders at (55%). In contrast, less than half are satisfied with school support for broader mental issues such as depression (47%) and anxiety (45%), as well as peer-group related social problems such as bullying (45%) and social media pressure (43%).



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: 387 respondents, all whose child had experience of the prompted mental health issue.
 Question: How satisfied were you with the support offered by your child's school in relation to each of these issues?

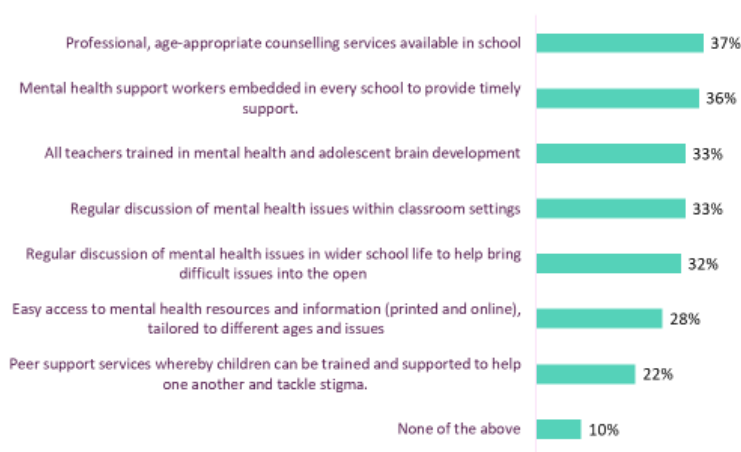
A significant minority of affected parents express strong dissatisfaction with school support for depression (18%), bullying (17%), self-harm (14%) and cyber-bullying (13%), while the highest levels of neutrality (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) are reported across exam stress, social media pressure and homework stress, and anxiety.

Parents would like to see more funding for mental health services. Child mental health services are the fourth-placed priority among parents for any additional school funding, only coming behind learning resources, school trips and IT equipment. Furthermore, our third coronavirus survey in July found that mental well-being was parents' top priority for schools to focus on when their child returned at 70%; well above the 57% who wanted a focus on curriculum learning.

As we have found previously, support for prioritising mental health services for additional funding increases with school phase, rising from 31% of primary parents, to 40% of secondary parents and 47% of further education parents.

Parents eligible for school meals place mental health services as their top priority, with 48% selecting this, compared to 36% of parents who are not eligible. They are also more likely to value pastoral services (26% vs 20%), while being less likely to prioritise the top choices for non-eligible parents, learning resources and IT equipment. C2DE parents rank mental health services in third place at 43% compared to sixth place at 33% among ABCIs. Women are more likely than men to prioritise child mental health services (44% vs 31%) and pastoral care (24% vs 19%).

Parents were asked to select up to three priorities in relation to mental health support. The top answers are professional support through counselling services and mental health support workers embedded in every school to provide timely support. Teacher training in mental health and regular discussions of mental health in the classroom and wider school life are not far behind though, chosen by around a third.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: Thinking about the support and knowledge which could be available to support children's mental health and wellbeing in school, which of the following would you like to see prioritised? Please select up to 3.

Parentkind

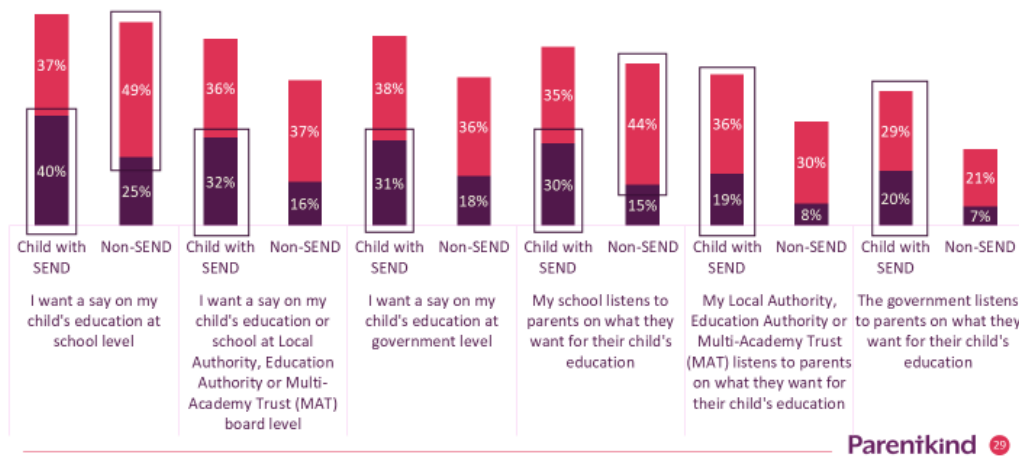
White parents are more likely than BAME parents to prioritise regular classroom discussion of mental health issue, while BAME parents are more likely to back peer support services for children to help one another.

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Almost a fifth of parents (18%) describe their child as having special education needs or disabilities: of these 9% reported 'Yes – we have an Education Health or Care (EHC) plan', 5% agreed 'Yes – we have a SEN support plan', and a further 4% said 'Yes – we are discussing SEN/SEND concerns with my child's school'. A further 5% did not know or preferred not to answer.

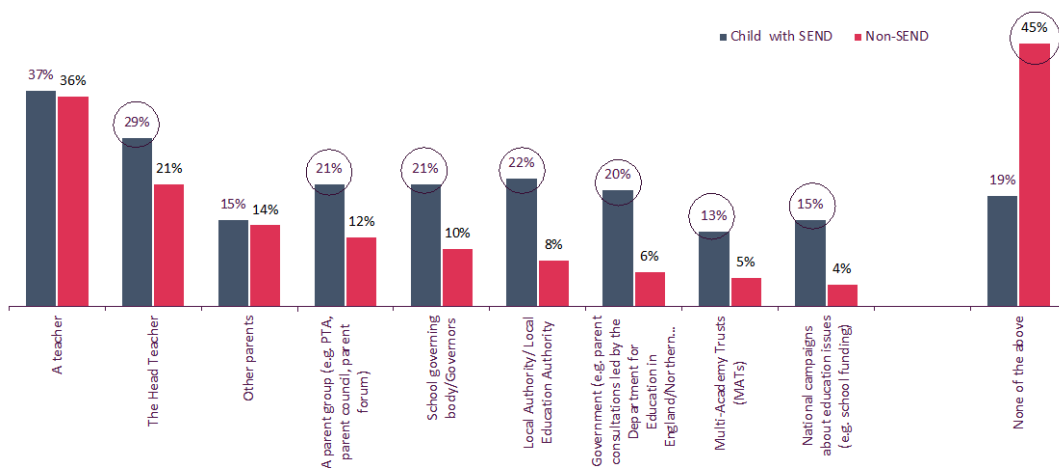
SEND parents consultation, voice and participation

The school experience is magnified for parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). They are more likely to strongly want a say in their child's education at the school, government and LA level. As well as having a stronger demand for a voice, they also have a stronger perception that parents are being listened to at all levels.



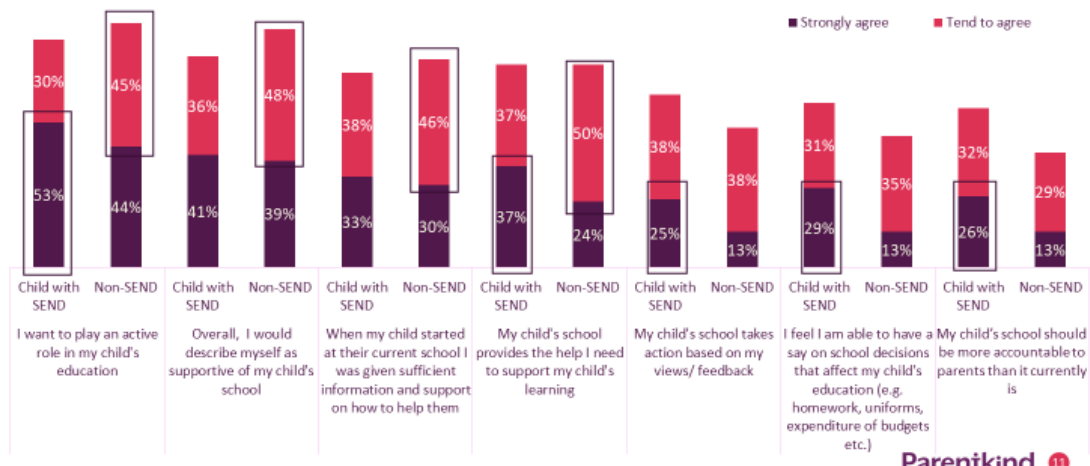
Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents by experience of SEND: Child with SEND (261), Non-SEND (1161)
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

One of the reasons for this may be that parents with a child with SEND have a higher degree of contact with schools and other bodies. Only 19% said they had not raised issues over the last year, in contrast with 45% of parents who do not have a child with SEND. While levels of discussion with teachers and other parents are not influenced by SEND experience, all other communications channels are significantly more likely to have been used by parents of children with SEND.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents by experience of SEND: Child with SEND (261), Non-SEND (1161)
 Question: "Over the past year, have you raised issues and/or contributed ideas/feedback about your child's school and education with any of the following? Please select all that apply"

Parents of children with SEND report higher levels of involvement with their child's education (6.98 mean score vs 6.55 for parents of children without SEND). They are more likely to strongly want to play an active role in their child's education (53% compared to 44% of non-SEND parents) and are twice as likely to strongly feel that their child's school should be more accountable to parents (26% vs 13%). However they are less likely to describe themselves as supportive of their child's school (77% vs 87% of non-SEND parents). However, as we have seen in Section 4 of this report, SEND parents donate more money per month to their schools than non-SEND parents.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents by experience of SEND: Child with SEND (261), Non-SEND (1161)
 Question: "Thinking about the school that your oldest child currently attends, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

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Parents of a child with SEND are also more open to involvement with parent groups, with over half saying they would be likely to get involved. The figures are 59% vs 46% for PTAs, 58% vs 45% for Parent Councils and 53% vs 40% for Parent Action Groups.

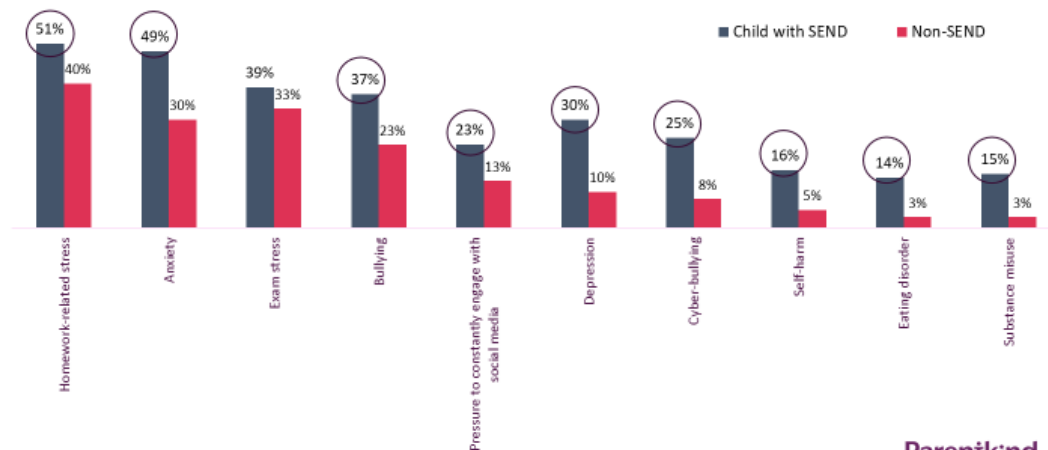
Parents of a child with SEND are significantly more likely to want to be more involved with their learning following school closures (33% compared with 25% of non-SEND parents). They are also more likely to want less involvement with their child's education, which may reflect the pressures arising from home schooling during school closures.

In the event that schools close again, parents with a child with SEND are more likely to prioritise health and safety information (38% compared with 31% of non-SEND parents) and less likely to prioritise exam information (23% compared with 31% of non-SEND parents).

Mental health and well-being

Parents with a child with SEND are less likely to strongly agree that their child is happy at school (34% compared with 41% of non-SEND parents). However they are significantly more likely to strongly agree that bullying is dealt with fairly by their child's school (31% strongly agreed compared with 23% of non-SEND parents).

SEND parents are more likely to be concerned about emotional well-being mental health issues – 31% of SEND parents are very concerned and another 32% somewhat concerned about emotional well-being and mental health issues at school compared with 13% of no-SEND parents very concerned and 29% somewhat concerned. This is doubtless related to the fact that parents of a child with SEND are more likely to report their child experiencing all the mental health issues we asked about. Half have experienced homework-related stress and anxiety, over a third bullying, three in ten depression and a quarter cyber-bullying and pressure to engage with social media. For the most serious issues, around one in seven report that their child has self-harmed, has had substance misuse issues or experienced an eating disorder. This highlights the additional challenges faced by children with SEND when it comes to mental health conditions and harmful behaviours arising because of, or alongside, their school experiences.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents by experience of SEND: Child with SEND (261), Non-SEND (1161) Question: Has your child ever experienced any of the following, either at school or directly as a result of something that happened at school? Please answer, as best you can, for your experiences before... March 2020.

However SEND parents are more likely to be very satisfied with pastoral care (27% compared to 15% of non-SEND parents).

Parents of children with SEND are particularly concerned about the impact of tiredness/stress once their child returns to school following school closures, ranking this as third in their list of concerns (it is second bottom among the sample as a whole). Two-fifths (39%) are concerned compared to 30% of non-SEND parents. Similarly, 30% are worried about their child missing home compared to 19% of non-SEND parents.

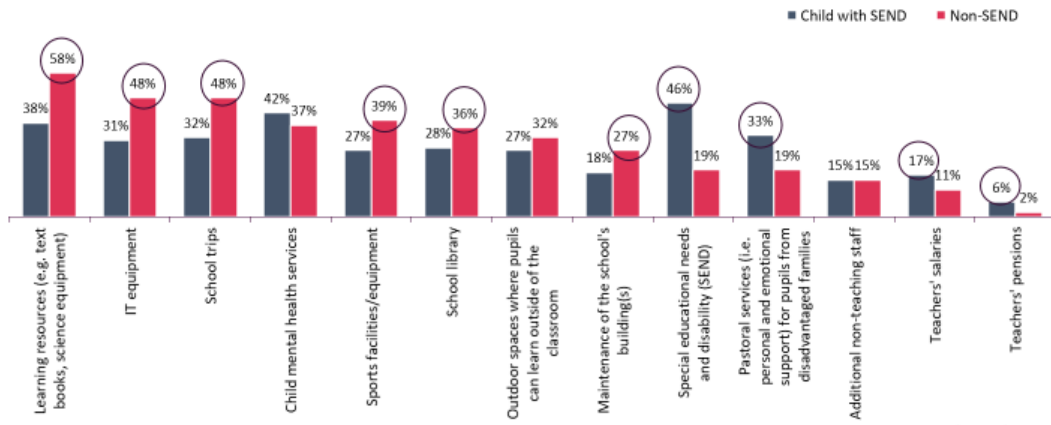
Parents with a child with SEND are more likely to be concerned about the long-term mental health impacts of school closures (68% vs 60% of non-SEND parents) and social distancing (70% vs 63%).

Funding SEND

Among parents as a whole, there is a drop in prioritisation of additional funding for SEND from sixth to eight place, down from 34% to 23%. It may be the case that the period of school closures has made parents more likely to prioritise things they feel their child has missed out on such as school trips (up from 36% to 44%) and the school library (up from 29% to 34%).

However some groups of parents are more likely to want additional funding to be prioritised for SEND; C2DEs (27% vs 20% of ABC1s), women (26% vs 21% of men) and parents eligible for free school meals (32% vs 21%).

Parents of a child with SEND understandably prioritise this area for additional spending above all else, ranking child mental health next in second place. These parents are also more likely than parents without their experience to value pastoral services. They are also more likely to prioritise teacher salaries and pensions, perhaps due to higher levels of interaction and support from teaching staff for many in this group.



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents by experience of SEND: Child with SEND (261), Non-SEND (1161)
 Question: If more funding was made available to your child's school in your opinion how should it be spent? From the list below please select up to 5 things you would like to see the money being spent on

Parents whose child has these additional needs at school are much less likely than parents in the wider sample to prioritise spending on mainstream areas such as learning resources, IT and the library, as well as trips and sports expenditure. This suggests these families' experience of school may require strong SEND and pastoral supports to be in place as a pre-requisite to other educational priorities. This reinforces how crucial SEND support continues to be, regardless of the funding environment, and suggests a need for its importance to be communicated more effectively at school level and above in light of the decreased importance attached to it among the wider parent community this year.