

The National Parent Survey

2023



Listening to parents' greatest concerns

Introduction from Jason Elsom



As the largest survey of its kind, the National Parent Survey provides educators and policymakers at every level of government with unique insight into the views of parents. Our hope is that the National Parent Survey will play an important part

in ensuring the voice of parents is heard.

Parents don't feel listened to and supported

Research shows that parents who are listened to and supported help their children succeed in their education. Despite widespread recognition that this is the case, parents are often overlooked when big decisions are being made or new policies announced.

As we approach a General Election, we need to do better than the mere 14% of parents who told us that governments take their views into account. Political parties need to spell out their plans for how they would support parents for the most important job they will have.

This year's survey asks parents about issues ranging from cyberbullying, anxiety and depression, to self-harm and sexual harassment. The results provide a bleak picture when it comes to the mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by young people, with parents too often left alone to deal with them. This urgently needs to change.

Parents are worried about their children's anxiety and addiction to electronic devices

Anxiety and depression are major worries for parents, driven by exam stress and time spent on social media. This is especially true for secondary school-aged children. According to our survey, one in six teenagers have suffered from depression, with an estimated 740,000 children turning to self-harm.

The biggest worry for parents is the amount of time their children spend on electronic devices, closely followed by exam stress and the impact of social media.

Too many children are unhappy or feel unsafe at school

The pandemic has led to a surge in school-refusal. Our research sheds light on factors contributing to this, with almost a fifth of parents with secondary-aged children saying they are dissatisfied with the quality of education their child receives. Another one in five parents of secondary-aged children told us their child doesn't enjoy school, with one in seven of the same parents saying their child doesn't feel safe at school.

The cost-of-living crisis is hitting parents hard

Just over a quarter of all parents say they are struggling with the cost of sending a child to school. Parents told us they worry about cost of school uniforms, school trips and everyday costs like school lunches. The additional costs of sending a child to school happy, healthy and ready to learn needs to be addressed by schools and political parties as they draw up their manifesto plans.

What we need to do

This survey is full of data that should make us all sit up and think again about the barriers preventing children from succeeding in education and how we support parents. No parent should worry about buying school uniform or ensuring their child can eat at school.

Anxiety and depression should not be commonplace in the lives of our children. Whether it is the pressure to succeed at school or online abuse, too many children are suffering and, in some cases, hurting themselves.

Any plans put forward by those looking to run our education system need to address the mental health crisis impacting homes and schools across the nation, with solutions appropriate to the scale of the challenge.

Jason Elsom
Chief Executive, Parentkind

Nation level differences

Whilst most of the feedback from parents is similar across the UK, there are some statistically significant differences between different nations and the UK average

Northern Ireland

- More positive about the quality of education and after-school clubs
- More positive about their children feeling happy and safe
- Happier with how schools involve, listen to and communicate with parents
- Parents are more likely to support their child's learning outside school with homework and ensuring a good home studying environment
- Higher levels of concern about overall cost of school, particularly uniform costs and voluntary donations
- More concerns about exam stress, cyberbullying and time spent on electronic devices

Scotland

- Lower incidence of exam stress and homework stress
- Fewer concerns about the overall cost of education and with specific costs such as uniforms, school trips and transport
- Parents are more likely to be part of a formal parent group affiliated with the school
- Parents are less likely to support children with tests and exams directly
- More positive about support offered around careers guidance

England

- Fewer concerns around bullying
- More concerns that schools are not helping children to develop essential skills for the future

Wales

- Less satisfied with career guidance and work experience
- Less likely to be asked to donate to school funds



View all of the data online here:



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Parents – anyone in a parenting role

FSM – Free School Meals

SEN – Special Educational Needs encompassing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND - England), Additional Learning Needs (ALN - Wales), Additional Support Needs (ASN - Scotland) and SEN (Special Educational Needs – Northern Ireland)



Contact us:
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Executive summary

Parents actively engaging in their child's education is critical to their life outcome. However, family characteristics, location and individual children's needs, coupled with today's climate of school cuts and the cost-of-living crisis to name a few, can all affect the extent to which parents can actively support and engage in education. If parents are unable to support their children's learning in and out of school, then those children will not thrive through and beyond education as others might.

33%
of parents are
concerned about the
cost of sending their
child to school

27% of parents
are struggling with
the cost of sending
their child to school

School uniform, school trips
and school meals/drinks are
the top three costs parents are
most concerned about when
sending their child to school



Parents on lower
incomes and those
with more than one
child are all more
concerned about
the costs associated
with the school day

The top three concerns
parents have for their
children's mental health
and wellbeing, as well as the
top three issues affecting
children's mental health:

- 1 Anxiety
- 2 Too much time spent on electronic devices
- 3 Exam stress

Time and cost are
significant barriers to
parents being able to
support their children's
learning outside of school

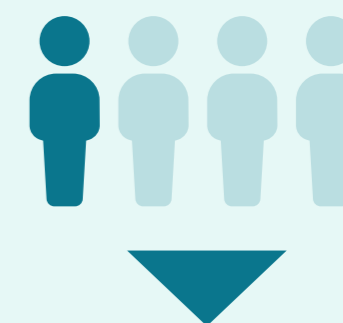


One in six
parents do not feel
they are getting
enough help from
schools to support
their child's learning
at home



One in four

parents do not feel their child has
sufficient access to IT, age-appropriate
books or arts and craft materials
outside of school. Children from
lower-income families and/or minority
ethnic parents are less likely to have
sufficient access to these



46% of these
parents listed cost
as a major factor

Parents with children on free
school meals (FSM), with a
child with special educational
needs (SEN), or who have
a disability themselves are
typically less satisfied with
the support offered to help
their child's mental health
and wellbeing concerns
compared with other parents

Q KEY FINDING

Over 2.8 million children live in households where their parents are struggling to afford the cost of sending them to school

Parents' ability to afford children's education basics

Q KEY FINDINGS

33%

of parents are concerned about the cost of sending their child to school



Parents are more likely to struggle with the cost of sending their child to school if they are on a lower income, their child is eligible for free school meals, they have a child with SEN or they have a disability themselves



60% of parents feel the cost of sending their child to school is acceptable

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing to affect many families, we were keen to understand the extent to which parents across the UK are concerned by the costs associated with their child's school. Uniform tops the list of school costs that are especially concerning to parents, closely followed by school trips and school meals and drinks. Other expenditure such as technology costs, transport to and from school, the costs of materials for specific classes (e.g. art, music or PE) and before and after-school clubs are also particularly concerning to at least one in six parents. Only 22% of parents are not concerned by any costs associated with their child being at school.

Parents with a child eligible for FSM, and those on lower incomes, are more concerned about all of these costs than those with higher incomes. Parents with more than one child are more concerned

about the costs of school uniform, school meals, materials/books for school, school trips, and before/after-school clubs. The cost of transport to and from school and technology costs are more of a concern for independent school parents than for state school parents. **Parents in Northern Ireland are more concerned about school uniform and school donation costs than parents in the rest of the UK.** Primary school parents are more concerned about before and after-school clubs and less concerned about transport costs than parents with an older child. Fewer parents in Scotland are concerned about transport costs than other parents, whilst independent school parents are far less concerned about the cost of uniforms than state school parents.

Parents' concerns in their own words

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Keeping food on the table and a roof over our heads. At the moment, with the cost-of-living crisis, it's very hard. Everything has gone up in price



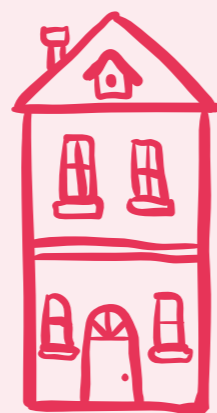
“

Being able to afford the after-school care (no after-school care offered in school) and, by extension, my ability to stay in work and provide a positive role model



“

Whether we'll be able to afford to live in the same area throughout our children's school lives, how often we'll have to move due to renting and how often that will mean changing schools



Parents' top school cost concerns



50%
Uniforms



44%
School trips



30%
School meals/drinks



19%
Technology
(e.g. computers, tablets, internet access)



16%
School extra-curricular events
(e.g. concerts, sports days)



19%
Transport to & from school



19%
Costs of materials for specific classes
(e.g. music, art, PE)



18%
Before & after-school clubs



13%
Cost of general stationery/materials



8%
Cost of voluntary donations to the school fund

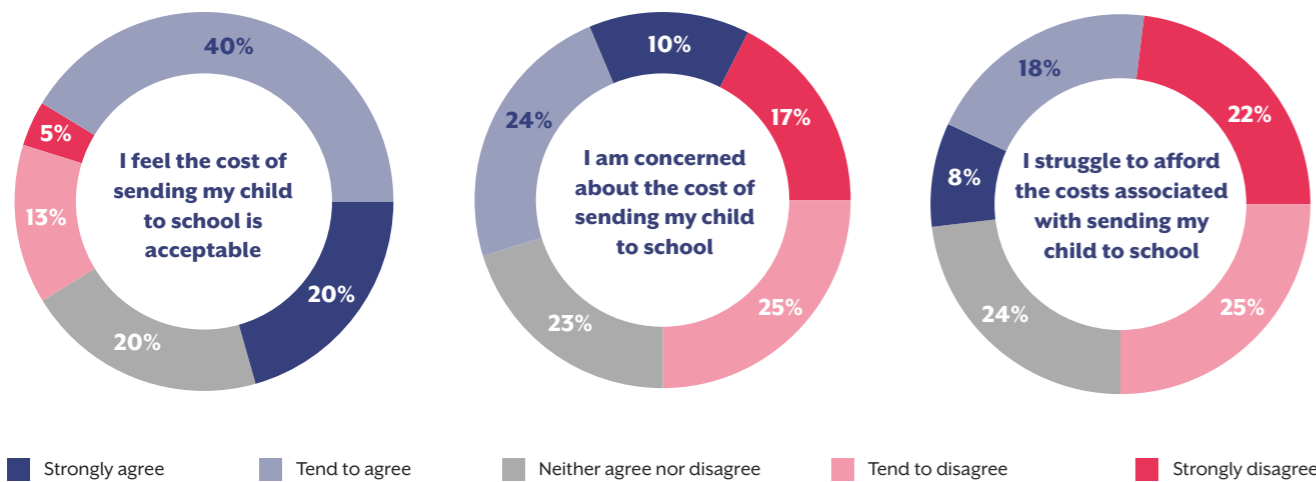


22%
None of the above

Sample: 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All UK respondents, weighted



How parents feel about the cost of sending their child to school



Base: All UK respondents (5,126), weighted

In addition to parents explicitly receiving support with free school meals (many of whom tell us they are still struggling with the cost of supporting their children's education), there are a large number of families not eligible for support who also tell us they are struggling. This is concerning given that our report identifies a number of areas where lower household income is closely correlated with additional barriers around being able to support children's education, both inside and outside of school, along with higher incidences of mental health issues amongst children.

“
The lack of financial support with rising costs make even the essentials unaffordable
 - Parent response

More likely to be concerned about the cost of school

- Parents with a child eligible for FSM
- Lower income parents
- Disabled parents
- Parents with a child at an independent school

Less likely to be concerned about the cost of school

- Higher income parents
- Parents in Scotland

More likely to be struggling with the cost of school

- Parents with a child eligible for FSM
- Lower income parents
- Disabled parents
- Parents with a child with SEN

Less likely to be struggling with the cost of school

- Higher income parents
- Parents in Scotland

“
[I'm concerned about] affording everything needed for school. We earn just over the threshold to get any help

- Parent response

In terms of practical steps schools can take to help reduce pressure on costs, school uniforms remain the top issue raised by parents and should be an area of focus. School meals were listed by almost a third of parents, and is an area where policymakers may want to consider additional support – whether expanding free school meals to a wider range of families, or providing related support such as breakfast clubs.



View all of the data online here:



KEY FINDING

Over 2.8 million children have experienced bullying; 1.6 million did not get sufficient support

Parents' concern for children's mental health and wellbeing

KEY FINDINGS



41% of children have experienced anxiety

 **35%**

of parents feel their child spends too much time on electronic devices

740,000 children have self-harmed at least once

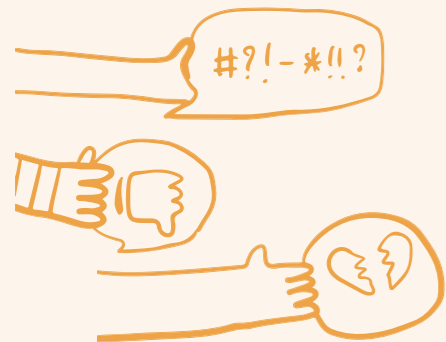


One in three secondary school children report exam or homework-related stress

The importance of child mental health has become more widely reported as the ongoing impact of the pandemic continues to take a toll on children and young people. When it comes to their own child, many parents continue to be concerned about a range of mental health and wellbeing-related issues. The amount of time their child spends on electronic devices (including phones, PCs, tablets, games consoles and TVs) tops the list, alongside anxiety.

Exam stress is third. These, plus the impact of social media and depression, are more common amongst parents with a child at secondary school/post primary or post 16, whilst primary school parents are more concerned about bullying than parents with a child in an older setting. Parents with a child eligible for FSM are more concerned about depression than those with a child not eligible. Only 13% of all parents were not concerned about any of the issues on the list.

Parents' concerns in their own words



“
That my daughter will be bullied as she gets older and others realise that she is different

“

[I worry about] the inability to access mental health services for my child, the impact of his autism being misunderstood and the appropriate teaching not being in place

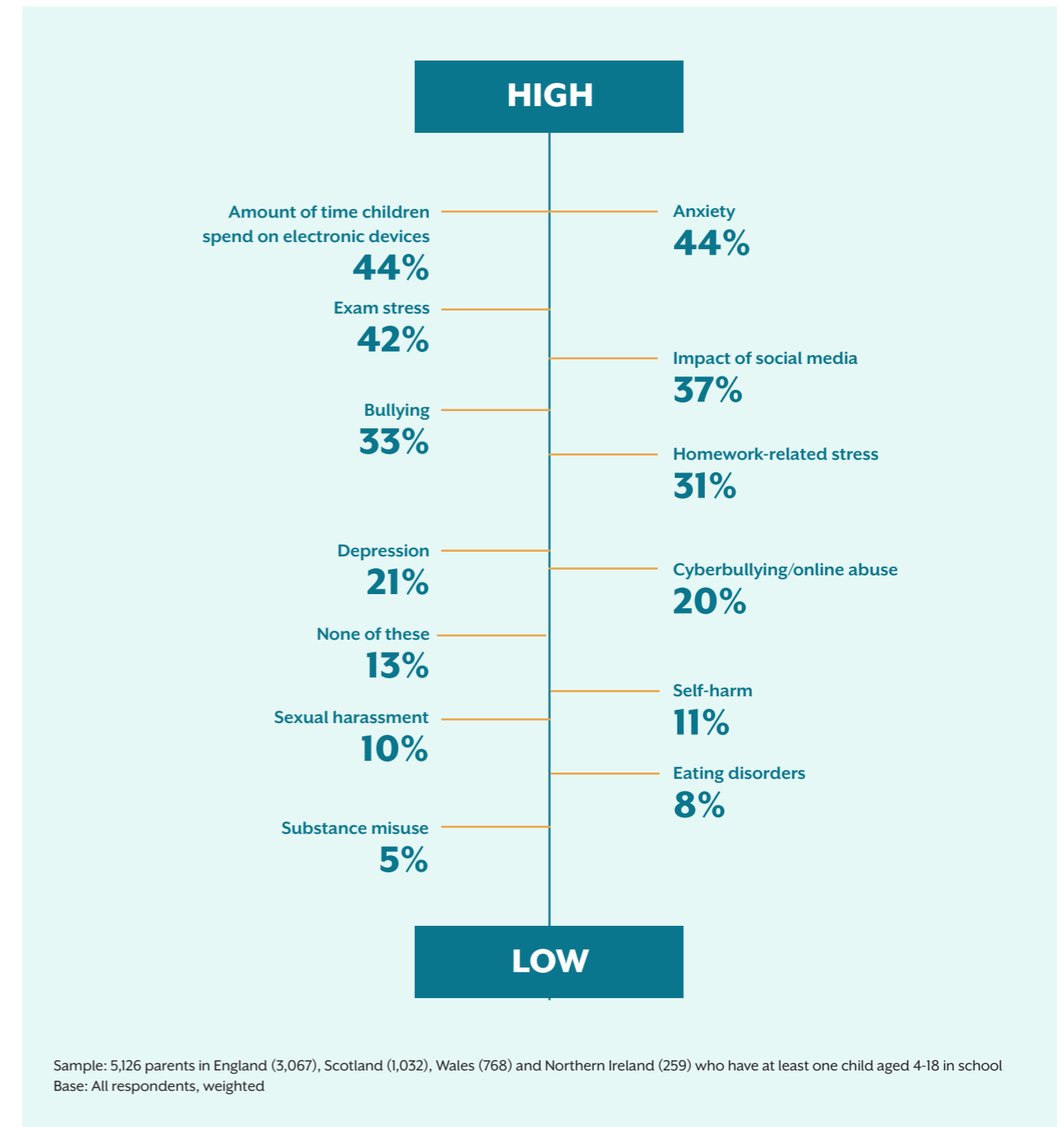


“

My child is unhappy due to bullying in school and she doesn't want to go anymore, but there's no other school near us.



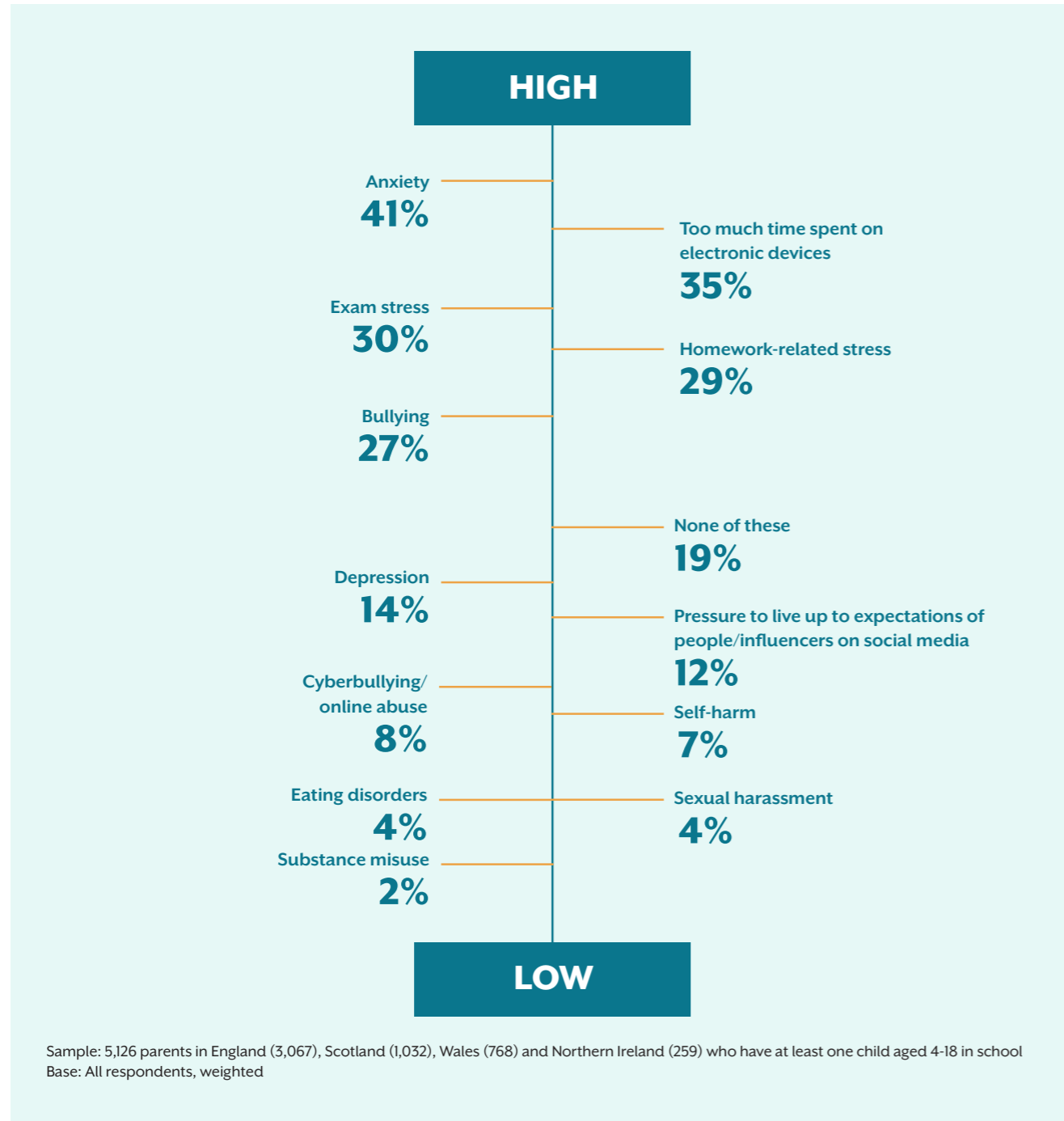
Parents' top concerns for their children's mental health and wellbeing



41% of parents say their child has experienced anxiety and 35% feel their child spends too much time on electronic devices. Exam stress and homework-related stress are reported by three in ten parents, whilst more than a quarter of parents say their child has been bullied. Secondary/post primary and post 16

parents are more likely than primary school parents to report their child experiencing anxiety, exam stress, homework stress, depression and the pressure to live up to the expectation of people/influencers on social media.

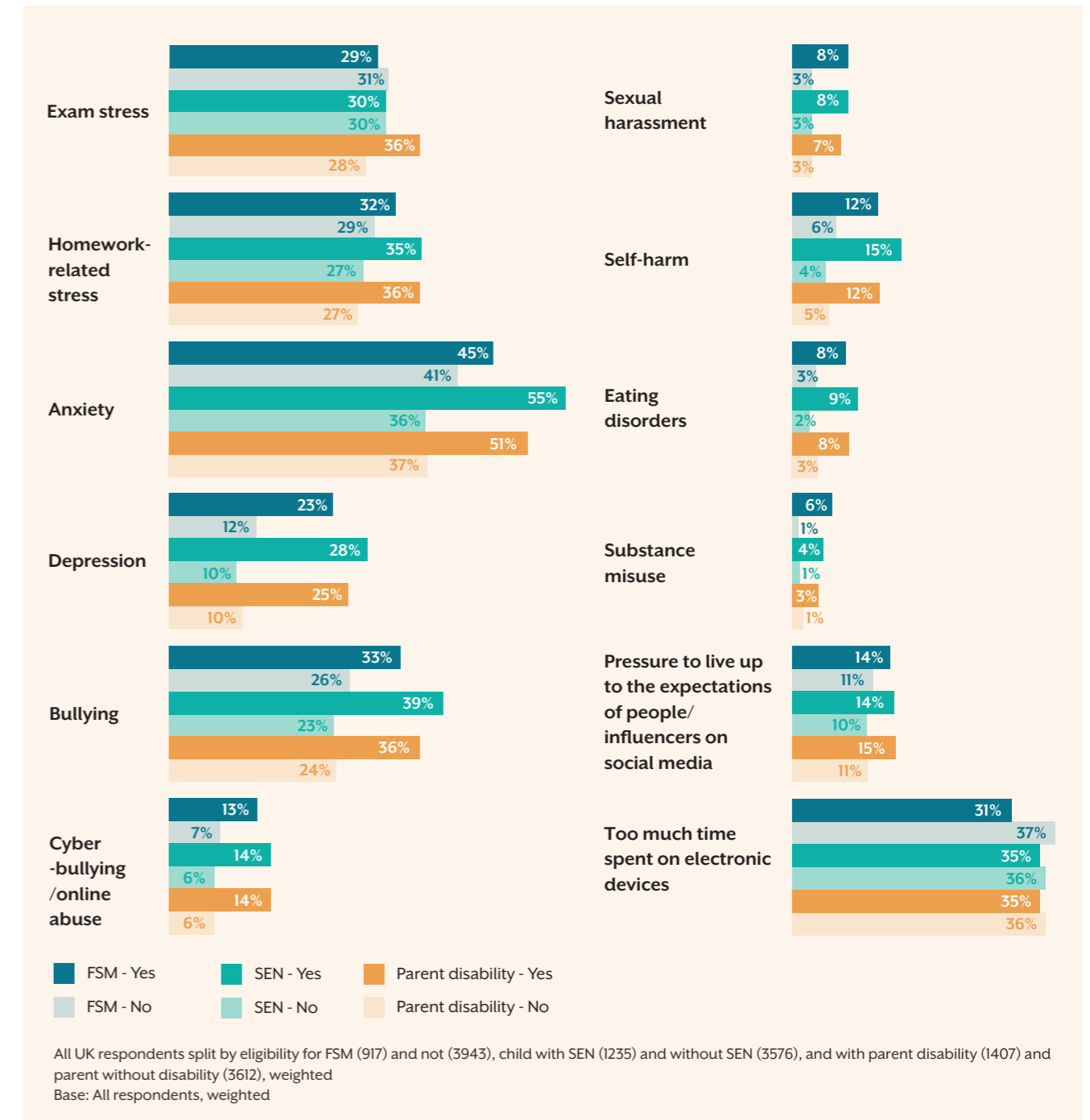
Parents identify the mental health and wellbeing issues their children have experienced



More pronounced differences emerge when breaking the data down by **free school meal eligibility, parenting a child with SEN and parent disability, which reveal a much higher incidence of almost all**

mental health conditions and pressures among the children affected, from universal experiences such as homework or anxiety through to clinical conditions such as depression and eating disorders.

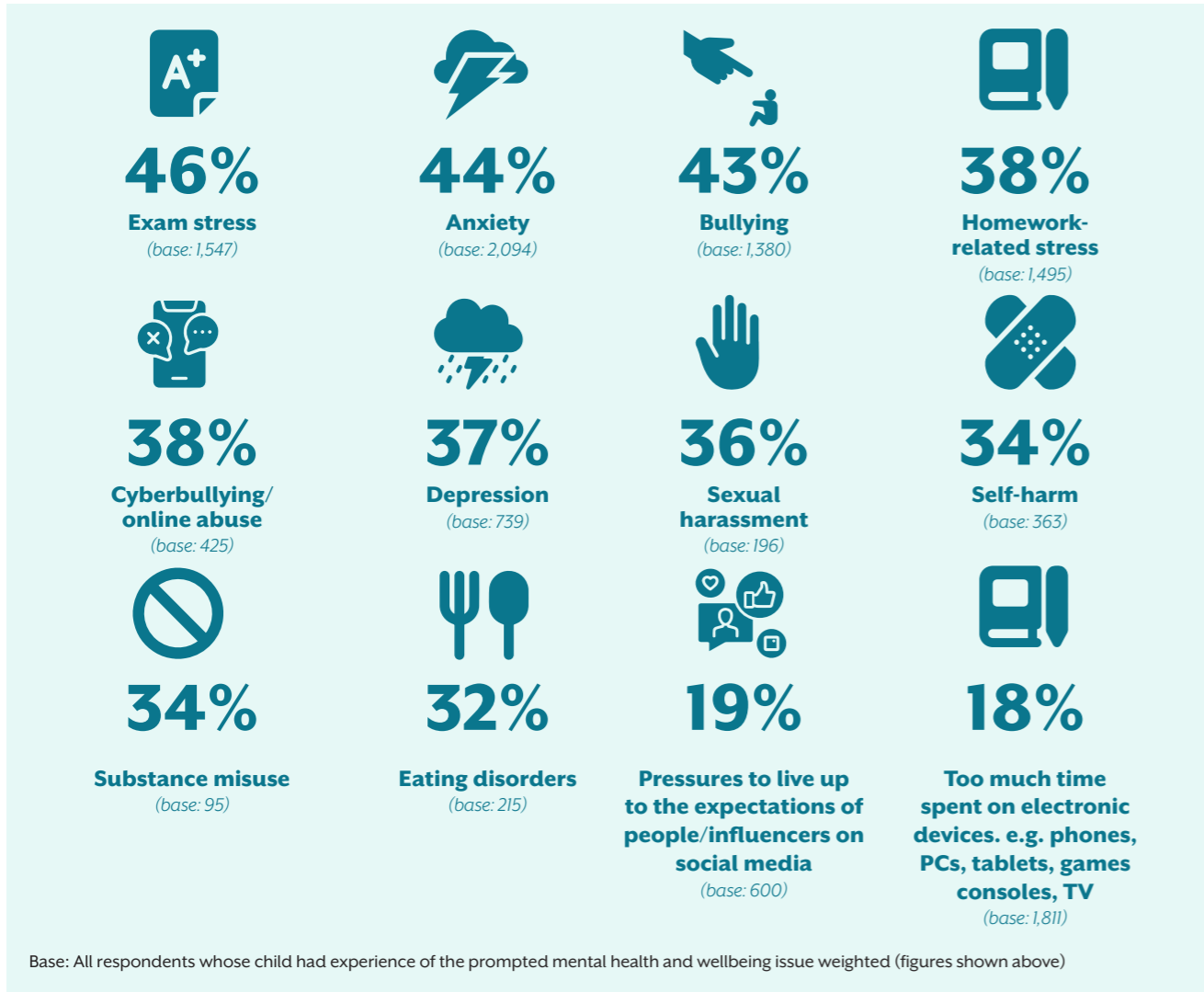
Children's mental health experiences by family characteristic



Parents' satisfaction with the support offered for these issues is mixed – support for exam stress, anxiety and bullying are rated most highly, albeit by less than half of parents whose child has experienced the issues. There is a significant proportion of parents not satisfied or stating that no support has been offered to their child on all the issues in question, **most acutely when a child is feeling the pressure to live up**

to the expectations of people/influencers on social media and/or spending too much time on electronic devices. Parents with a child in secondary/post primary or post 16 education and those from lower-income households are generally less satisfied with the support offered than primary, independent and higher income parents.


Parents' satisfaction with support offered for these issues



Parents report concerning levels of mental health issues amongst children, with anxiety having affected four in ten children and around one in three reporting exam or homework related stress. More serious mental health issues also affect a substantial number of children, with around 740,000 children having self-harmed at least once.

Across all of the types of issues raised, a significant minority of parents indicated that they received no support at all (in some cases up to 52% of parents), and amongst parents that did receive support, views were typically mixed, with half of parents not being satisfied with the level of support given to their child.

In addition to their impact on children's health and happiness, mental health issues are also correlated with a number of additional problems for children's education, such as increased disruption to learning and a greater likelihood of absenteeism. There is also the risk that problems identified at an early stage, such as bullying, may initially be indicated by lower level symptoms, such as anxiety and stress, but, if left unresolved, could escalate into more serious problems such as depression, substance abuse or self-harm. That children are facing both a lack of access to support and the support they do receive often does not meet their needs, is a deeply problematic situation.

View all of the data online here: 



KEY FINDING

Only two thirds of children enjoy learning at school

Children's experience at school

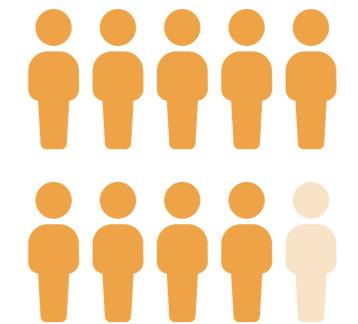
KEY FINDINGS

Three quarters of parents tell us their child feels safe at school, but only two thirds of parents in London feel their child is safe at school

49%
of parents don't have time to get involved and contribute to school



Nine in ten parents would like to get more involved in their child's school than they do currently



It is a reasonable expectation for parents to want their children to be happy and safe at school, for their children to be able to attend school ready to learn irrespective of their individual situation outside of school, and to feel that there is effective two-way communication between school and parents regarding their children's education. A clear majority of parents tell us their children feel happy and safe at school, although this drops when it comes to children enjoying school in general.

On measures relating to education in schools, most parents are happy with the quality of education being provided. Parent views are more mixed when it comes to extracurricular activities and confidence that the

school is providing all pupils with the opportunity to succeed in life. Independent schools are rated significantly higher by parents across these measures.

Most parents tell us they are happy with how the school communicates with them in general, but fewer than half of parents feel that schools act on their feedback, and over a third feel that schools should be more accountable to parents than they currently are.

Across these measures, parents in higher-income groups and parents in Northern Ireland are typically more satisfied than average. Parents on lower incomes, in receipt of free school meals, or with children who have special educational needs report less positive experiences in the round.

Parents' concerns in their own words

“

I worry that children like mine, who don't like school, will be left behind. Not all kids are academic and need other forms of work



“

My eldest child is having problems at school but support is months away

“

Having a safe environment for my child to learn and express herself without worrying about bullying and being excluded from social activities



Children's experience at school



80%

My child is happy



77%

My child feels safe at school



72%

I am happy with the quality of education my child receives from their school



71%

My child's school communicates well with the parents



68%

My child enjoys learning at school



61%

My child's school provides all pupils with the opportunity to succeed in life



60%

My child enjoys wider school life



59%

My child enjoys learning outside school



59%

My child's school offers a good range of after-school clubs and other extra-curricular activities



47%

My child's school takes action based on my views/feedback



38%

My child's school should be more accountable to parents than it currently is

Sample: 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All respondents, weighted



Parents' involvement in school



Of the many ways parents can get involved in their child's school, attending parents' evenings is the most popular, with 89% of parents having done so. Taking part in parent surveys and/or focus groups is second, followed by volunteering time and skills to their child's school. Women, parents from ethnic minority communities, those with a child at an independent school, or with a child with SEN tend to have higher levels of involvement whilst parents with a child eligible for FSM have higher levels of involvement in the formal routes than parents with a child not eligible for FSM.

Whilst involvement in other ways is less common, at least a third of parents report that they would consider being a member of different groups – whether that's one that encourages closer links with school, including fundraising (e.g. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Friends of the School group), one that discusses and influences issues affecting their child's school and education e.g. Parent Council, Parent Forum, and/or one that campaigns alongside the school on a specific issue (e.g. Parent Action Group). 32% of parents would consider being a school governor/trustee.

Time is the major barrier to parents getting involved directly in their child's school



The vast majority of parents would like to get involved with and contribute to their child's school more - fewer than one in ten parents say they are involved as much as they would like to be. A lack of time is the biggest barrier, cited by almost half of all parents, and particularly primary school parents, working parents or parents with a higher household income.

A fifth of all parents say they haven't been asked, they're unsure what skills and knowledge they could offer and/or they find the idea of getting involved intimidating. Parents with a child at secondary/post primary or post 16 education are more likely to say the school doesn't seem to want parents involved, whilst cost is more of a barrier for lower income parents. **Parents with a child eligible for FSM report a number of different responses compared to parents without a child eligible for FSM, e.g.**

- 'I don't have time' – 29% FSM vs. 54% not FSM
- 'I find the idea of getting involved intimidating' – 25% FSM vs. 19% not FSM

- 'I know I can get involved and contribute to my child's school but I am unsure how to go about it in practice' – 17% FSM vs. 9% not FSM
- 'I can't financially afford to' – 12% FSM vs. 7% not FSM.

Parents remain an untapped resource in terms of supporting schools, with one in three parents saying they would be willing to be more involved in more formal activities, such as being a school governor or a member of a PTA.

It would be possible to tap into this willingness if schools made it easier for parents to be able to do so (e.g. by directly inviting parents to volunteer and facilitating this happening), and in particular if the time commitment from parents is either limited or very flexible. Attendance at parents' evenings and parent teacher meetings is also very high; this means it could serve as a good opportunity to engage parents with advice and suggestions on how they may be able to further support their child's education outside of school.



Barriers to getting involved with and contributing to school

49%

I don't have time

22%

I haven't been asked

20%

I'm not sure what skills I would be able to offer

20%

I find the idea of getting involved intimidating

16%

I don't know how I can get involved

9%

None – I do get involved as much as I would like to

View all of the data online here:



875,000
primary school
children don't
have enough
age-appropriate
books at home

Children's experience outside school

KEY FINDINGS

2.1m
children
don't have
enough access
to sporting
or athletic
opportunities
outside of school



273,000
primary school
children read with
their parents less
than once every 6
months



One in four

parents feel their child
does not have sufficient
access to IT, age-
appropriate books, or
arts and craft materials



**Parents of 875,000
primary school
children don't feel
they're getting the
help they need from
their child's school to
support learning
at home**

Although schools are a major part of most children's education, learning is not confined to the classroom. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study found that some parental engagement activities, such as regularly eating a meal with a child, spending time talking to a child and discussing how well they are doing at school, can have a positive impact on educational attainment¹. With this in mind, parents were asked for their level of involvement with a number of ways in which they

might support their child outside school. The vast majority of parents talk to their child about their school day every day, whilst almost three quarters coach their child on issues they've been having at school and/or support with homework at least weekly. Other activities scoring highly at least weekly include discussing books or current affairs topics, ensuring the environment where their child does homework is appropriate, and doing activities as a family for fun and spending time together.

¹OECD (2015) PISA 2015 Results (Volume III) Parental involvement, student performance and satisfaction with life https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-iii/parental-involvement-student-performance-and-satisfaction-with-life_9789264273856-13-en

Parents' concerns in their own words

“

I'm a grandparent with my autistic grandson living with me. He is just starting the final year in the run up to GCSEs. He wants good grades and works hard but I've no idea what I can do to help beyond buy every revision book suggested by each subject teacher, which has cost me over £100 so far. We discuss news and what he's studying but I wish I could help more



“

Having no money to give them opportunities. Having to work all the time, so also don't have the capacity to support them with homework and reading in a positive way



“

That because I can't afford many things for my child they won't be able to experience and explore many things to help them build resilience, and strong skills, hobbies, career choices etc.



Parents' ability to support learning outside of school

	At least weekly	At least monthly	Less often	Never
Speaking to my child about their school day	91%	94%	3%	2%
Coaching them on issues they may be having at school	73%	84%	7%	4%
Supporting my child with homework	73%	83%	10%	4%
Discussing books or relevant current affairs topics	70%	80%	8%	7%
Ensuring the environment where my child does their homework is appropriate and well organised	67%	76%	9%	9%
Doing activities as a family for fun and spending time together	66%	84%	12%	2%
Reading with (and to) my child for fun	54%	63%	22%	5%
Supporting my child during tests/assessments/exams	46%	60%	16%	18%
Doing learning activities as a family outside of school (e.g. visits to museums, nature walks, etc.)	31%	61%	31%	5%

Sample: 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All UK respondents, weighted

Parents with higher household incomes are more likely to support more activities, as are parents with a child at primary school, the latter of whom, along with women, are more frequently involved in these activities. Parents with a child at an independent school are less likely to get involved in these activities with their child than parents with a child attending a state school.



Barriers limiting parents from supporting learning

25%

I don't have enough time

22%

My child doesn't want me to support them

19%

I don't have the skills/knowledge to support them

16%

There is not enough information on what I should be doing to support my child's learning at home

16%

I don't know how best to support them

12%

The cost of some of these activities

33%

None - I feel I am supporting my child as much as I would like to

Parents with a child with SEN are more likely to report higher incidence of all these barriers, except for a lack of time

Whilst a third of parents say they have the balance right, for most parents there are barriers that limit their ability to support their child's learning as much as they would like to. **A lack of time is mentioned most frequently, and more so amongst working parents and those from a higher income household.** 'My child doesn't want me to support them' is second, and 'I don't have the skills/knowledge to support them' third. **The cost of some of these activities are more of a barrier for parents with a child eligible for FSM and lower income families, whilst a lack of time is less of an issue for these groups of parents.**



We were curious to find out whether or not children have sufficient access to resources/activities such as age-appropriate books, educational games, sport, and musical instruments outside of school, whether at home or another location, particularly given the current cost-of-living pressures felt by many families. **Around one in four parents feel their child does not have sufficient access to IT, age-appropriate books, or arts and craft materials, with fewer children having sufficient access to educational games such as chess or Scrabble, sporting/athletic opportunities or musical instruments.**

Children eligible for FSM, from lower income households and/or with minority ethnic parents, are less likely to have sufficient access to these activities, whilst children with SEN are less likely to have access to educational games and/or age-appropriate books. Children attending an independent school are also less likely to have access to age-appropriate books outside school. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those with fewer age-appropriate books read less frequently with their child.

Access to activities outside school



79%

Information technology
(e.g. smartphones, tablets, laptop, PC)



77%

Age-appropriate books



73%

Art/crafting materials
(e.g. pens, crayons, paper)



60%

Educational games
(e.g. chess, Scrabble)



55%

Sporting/athletic opportunities



43%

Musical instruments

When asked what barriers limit their child's access to these resources/activities, 46% of parents said cost, rising to 57% of parents with a child eligible for FSM

Four in ten parents said their child had limited interest in these activities - higher for parents with a child at secondary/post-primary and post 16 education. Not having opportunities close by was also highlighted by more than one fifth of parents, and was higher for parents living in London as well as parents with a child with SEN.



Barriers limiting children's access to activities



Base: All respondents who identified an activity their child did not have enough access to (3790)

Parents already provide a wide range of formal and informal support for their children's learning outside school, but around one in seven feel that they don't know how best to support their child outside school and would benefit from clearer guidance from schools as to what would be most helpful to their child's development.

The survey also indicates that 2.1m children don't have enough access to sporting or athletic opportunities outside of school. According to the National Child Measurement Programme 2019, 34% of Year 6 children were classed as obese, and that child obesity rates amongst the 10% most deprived families were almost double that of the 10% least deprived. With physical activity being one of the three core

elements of maintaining a healthy weight, a lack of suitable sporting and athletic opportunities outside of school is likely a contributing factor to why childhood obesity rates have been challenging to bring under control.

In addition, we found that 875,000 primary school children do not have access to enough age-appropriate books at home. This is likely to be having a knock-on effect on literacy and developing reading levels, as well as impacting parents' ability to support their child in reading at home. This is particularly true for lower-income families, where 57% of families receiving free school meals indicated that cost was a major barrier in supporting their child's education outside of school.



“

I'm concerned about not having the right work-life balance to have much time/input in my child's life as I would like. Being a working parent limits the activities I can do with my child and their opportunities for activities and socialising outside of school

View all of the data online here:



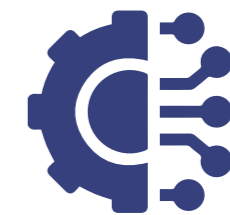
KEY FINDING

One in three parents are concerned that their child's school is not preparing their child for the future job market

How schools prepare children for the future

KEY FINDINGS

900,000 secondary school children are not getting access to useful or relevant work experience



Most parents believe that digital skills should be given equal

importance alongside reading, writing and maths as a core part of the school curriculum

More than **50%** of parents feel their child's school should do more to nurture non-academic pupils



25% of parents raise concerns about their children not receiving access to useful and relevant work experience

As noted by the Department for Education, the purpose of education is not only about introducing young people “to the best that has been thought and said, and instilling in them a love of knowledge and culture for their own sake. But education is also about the practical business of ensuring that young people receive the preparation they need to secure a good job and a fulfilling career, and have the resilience and moral character to overcome challenges and succeed.”² Do parents believe this is happening?

The majority of parents say their child's school helps them to develop essential skills that are useful

to their future success such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork and working to deadlines, and supports their child's personal development by teaching life skills, e.g. self-confidence, and the ability to cope with setbacks. Agreement was higher amongst primary school parents, parents with a child at an independent school, those from Northern Ireland and those without a child eligible for FSM or without SEN. This was also the case when asked whether their child's school teaches a curriculum that meets their child's needs and aspirations.

²See The purpose of education - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-purpose-of-education>)

Parents' concerns in their own words

“

As my son is not very academic I worry what will happen as he reaches the end of his college education as there are not many jobs in our area at present



“

Job security and proper guidance from school career leaders, finding out just what children would like as a career and guiding them down the road they would like



“

That future employment prospects are changing rapidly and at too fast a pace for schools to keep up



Parents' expectations of their child's future



71%

Digital skills should be given equal importance, alongside reading, writing and maths as a core part of the school curriculum



68%

My child's school helps my child to develop essential skills that are useful to their future success. (e.g. critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, working to deadlines)



59%

My child's school supports my child's personal development by teaching life skills (e.g. self-confidence, the ability to cope with setbacks etc.)



56%

My child's school teaches a curriculum that meets my child's needs and aspirations



55%

My child's school should do more to nurture non-academic pupils to develop practical and technical skills



48%

My child's career prospects will be better than my own



41%

My child will have a better standard of living than me



31%

I am concerned that my child's school is not preparing my child for the future job market

Sample: 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All respondents, weighted

More than half of parents feel their child's school should do more to nurture non-academic pupils to develop practical and technical skills, with higher agreement from parents with three or more children, with a child at a state school, with a child eligible for FSM or with SEN. Parents in Northern Ireland with a child at an independent school, with a child eligible for FSM, without SEN or from an ethnic minority are more likely to say their child's career prospects will be better than their own. Those parents with at least three children, with a child in post 16 education, eligible for FSM, with SEN or from an ethnic minority are more likely to be concerned that their child's school is not preparing their child for the future job market. Parents with a child at an independent school are much more likely to disagree with this statement

than parents whose child attends a state school (49% vs. 32%). Looking specifically at feedback on careers guidance and work experience amongst parents with a child at secondary/post primary school or sixth form/further education, it is fair to say that only a minority of parents actively disagree that their child's school gives guidance on career options and offers support to prepare for university/college or job applications, or provides access to useful/relevant work experience. However, there is certainly room for improvement in these areas, with fewer than 50% of parents agreeing with any of these statements. Parents with a child in post 16 education, in an independent school or in London are more positive, and parents in Wales less positive.

School support



48%

Gives guidance on what skills/qualifications are needed to pursue different career options



47%

Gives support to prepare for university/college applications (e.g. support with application forms etc.)



46%

Explores a broad range of career possibilities



40%

Gives support to prepare for future job applications (e.g. CV preparation, interview preparation etc.)



37%

Provides access to useful/relevant work experience

Sample: 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All respondents whose child is in secondary/post primary or post 16/FE (3196)

Although parents are generally positive about the education being provided in schools, there are greater levels of concern around how schools are preparing children for the future, particularly in terms of the future job market. There is clearly an opportunity for schools to review the support they provide around advice for future careers and opportunities to develop skills that would be relevant in addition to academic choices; particularly for less academic career routes, and in providing greater opportunities for the development of digital skills.

A related element is that almost a quarter of parents raise concerns about their children not receiving access to useful and relevant work experience. Again, this is particularly an issue for older children looking to pursue a path directly into work rather than immediately going on to further education.



View all of the data online here:



Q KEY FINDING

Only 14% of parents feel that the government listens to what they want for their child's education


Parental involvement in schools

Q KEY FINDINGS

Parents with a child eligible for FSM and/or with SEN are more likely to be asked to donate to their child's school fund, and donate more each month, than parents with a child not eligible for FSM or without SEN

Parents are much more likely to feel involved in their child's education at primary school rather than secondary school

Parental engagement matters. Evidence shows that parental participation in education benefits all children in all schools and society as a whole. A key element of this is the extent to which parents feel involved by those responsible for their child's education. The majority of parents are interested in having a say in their

42% 
of parents feel listened to by their child's school



Parents with higher incomes and those sending their children to independent schools tend to feel more actively involved in their children's education, and their children typically reach higher levels of educational attainment

children's education at all levels of decision-making but interest is strongest when it comes to their child's school. However, in general parents are not happy with the extent to which they feel their voice is listened to in decision-making - particularly when it comes to decisions being made at government level.

Parents' concerns in their own words

“

My child not getting the support they need to do well



“

I have to constantly tell my child's school where they struggle and I get ignored

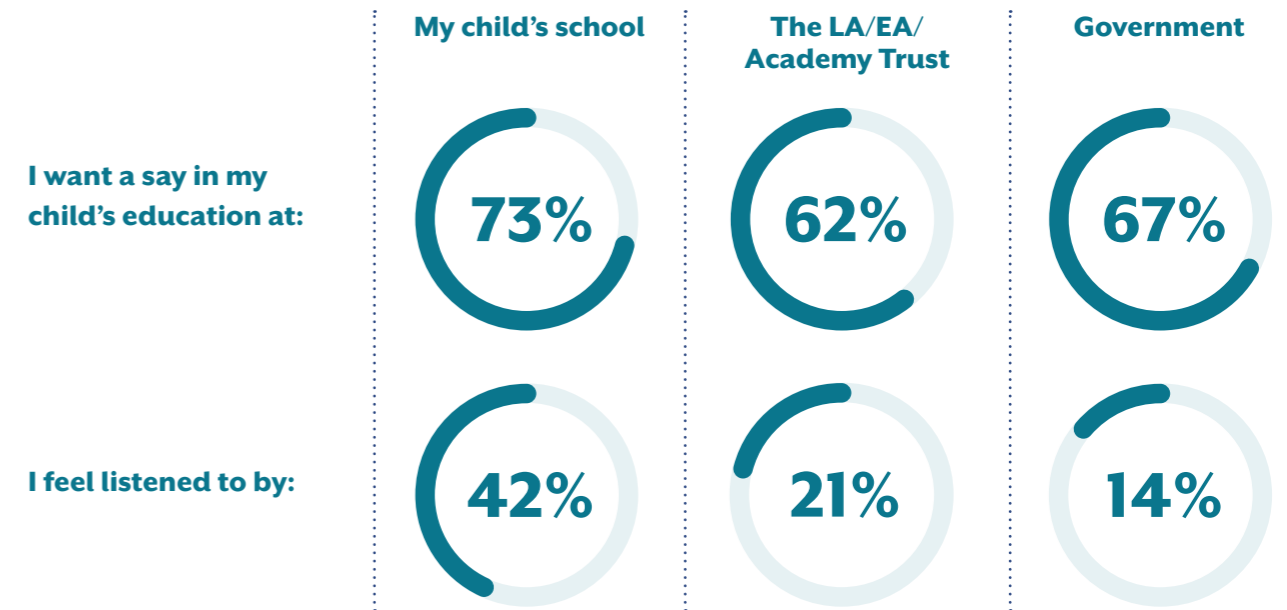


“

(I'm worried) that my son won't have sufficient support for his needs



Parental engagement with Government, Local Authority/Multi-Academy Trust & School

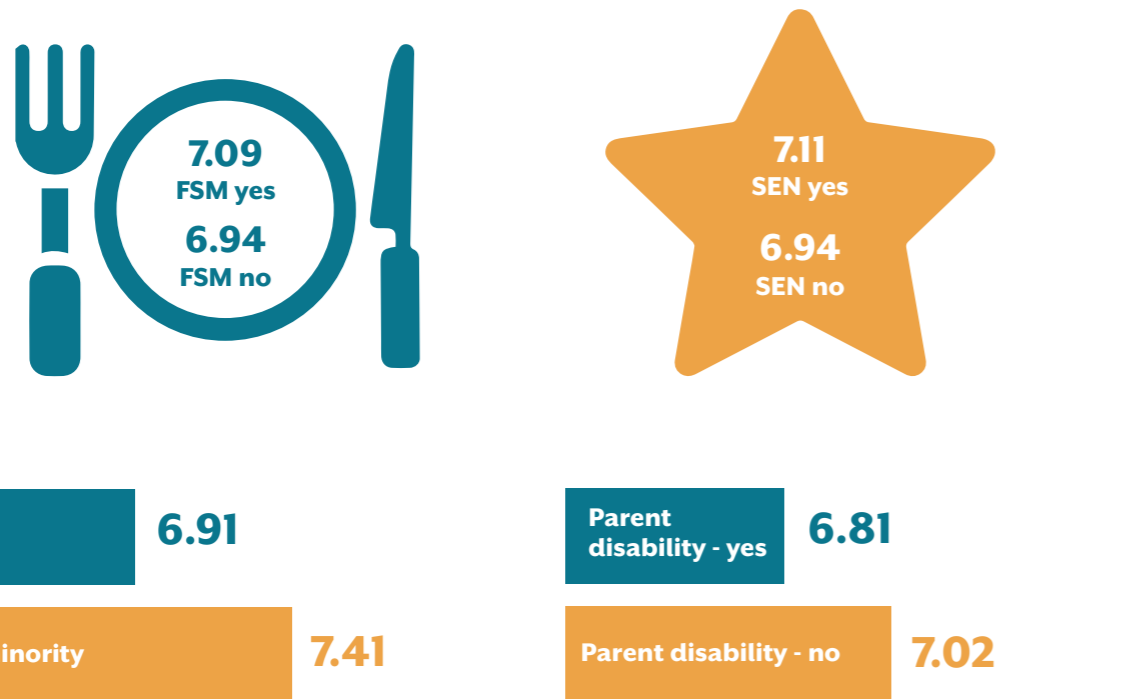


Sample: 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school
Base: All UK respondents, weighted

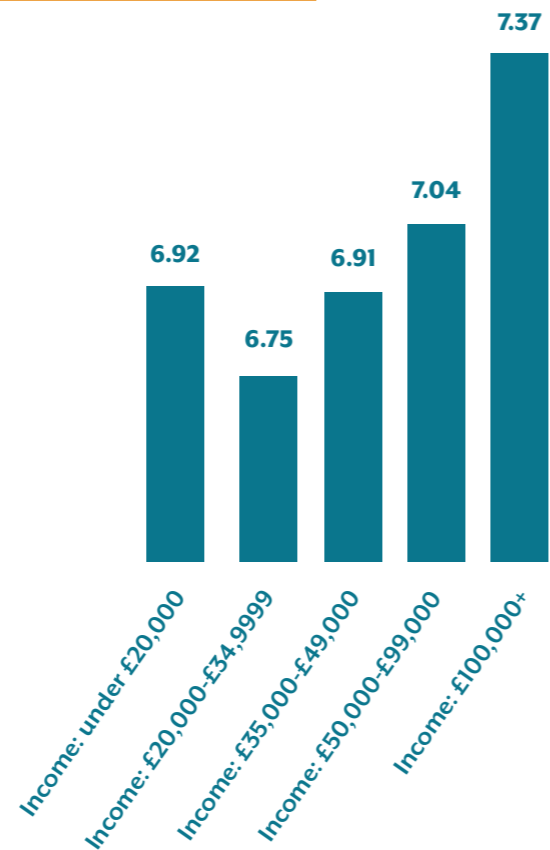


Involvement in children's education

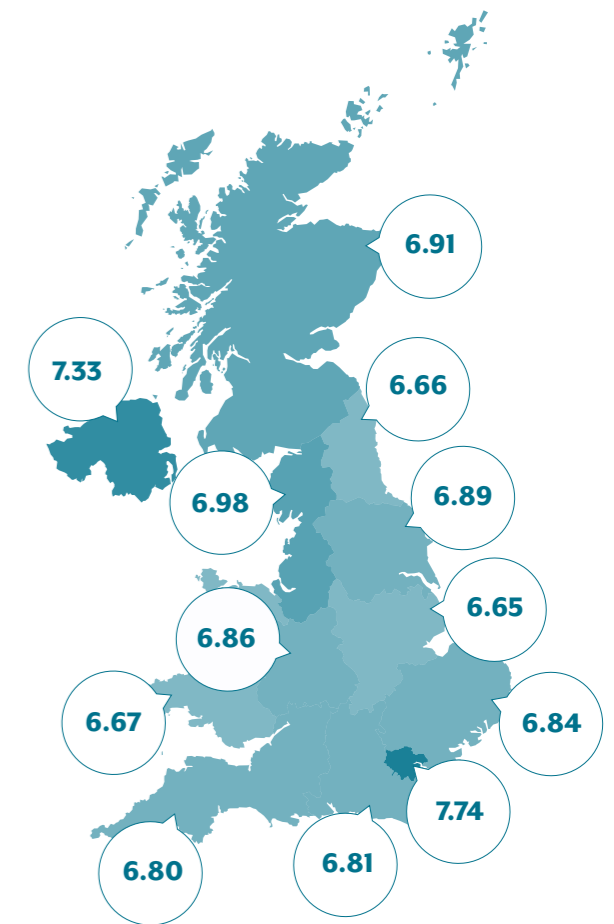
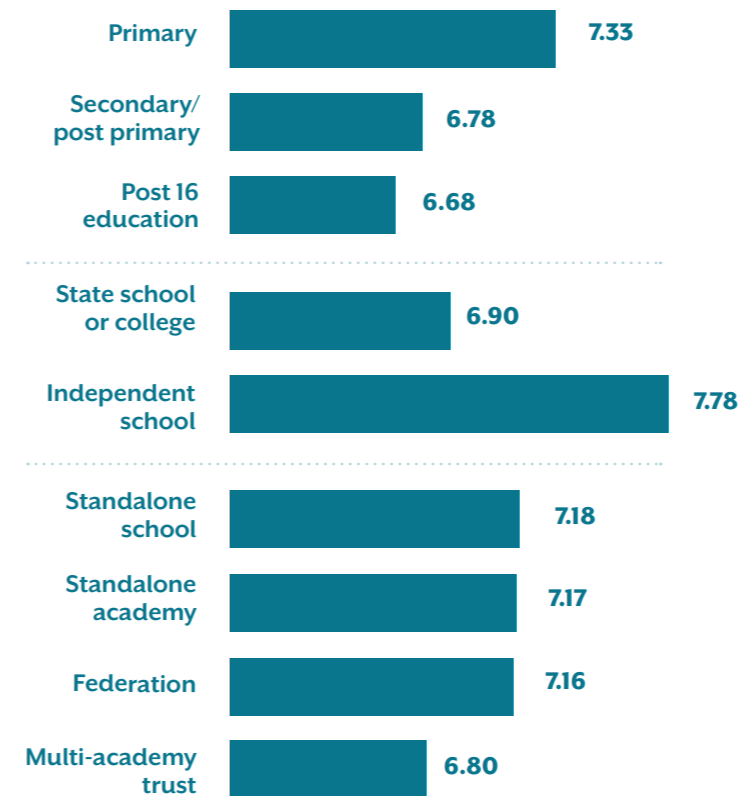
Parents were asked to describe their level of overall involvement in their child's education on a scale of 0-10, where 10 is "Extremely involved" and 0 is "Not at all involved". Across all parents in the UK, the mean average score for involvement was 6.96, but levels of engagement vary substantially across different family situations, types of school and geographic location.



Parents' sense of involvement with their child's education is significantly higher amongst parents in London and Northern Ireland, younger parents, primary school parents, independent school parents, parents from minority ethnic backgrounds and those in the highest income households. It is also higher amongst those living in England and Northern Ireland compared to Wales, and lower amongst parents whose children attend schools that are part of a multi-academy trust. Parents from minority ethnic backgrounds and those on higher incomes are more likely to feel involved in their children's education. Parents of children with SEN and parents of children in receipt of free school meals were slightly more likely to feel involved in their children's education, with fathers and disabled parents feeling slightly less involved.



Involvement by school type



Parents with children at independent schools or at primary school level are more likely to be involved in their children's education, whereas parents of children of schools in multi-academy trusts are less likely to feel involved. Parents' sense of involvement with their child's education is significantly higher amongst parents in London and Northern Ireland, and notably lower in Wales, North East England and the East Midlands.

Parents from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with children at independent schools or at primary school level are more likely to agree that their child's school listens to their views. Parents were less likely to agree that they felt listened to if their children were in receipt of free school meals, or where their child's school was part of a multi-academy trust. Secondary schools also tended to be seen as less likely to listen to parents' views.

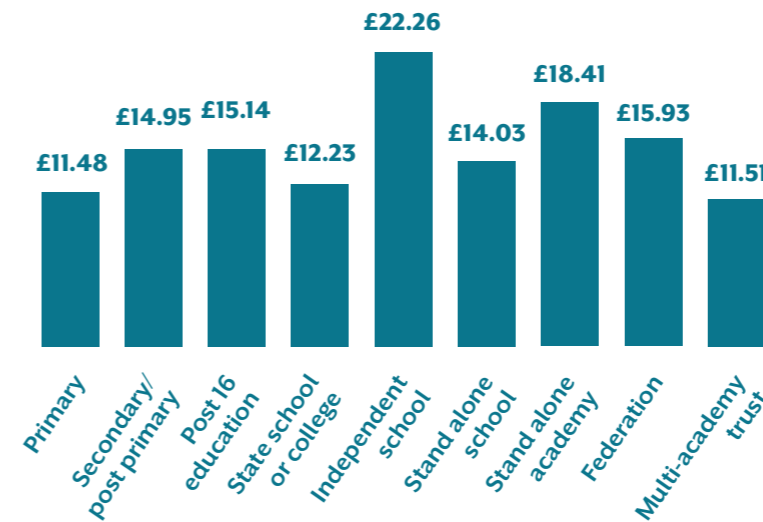
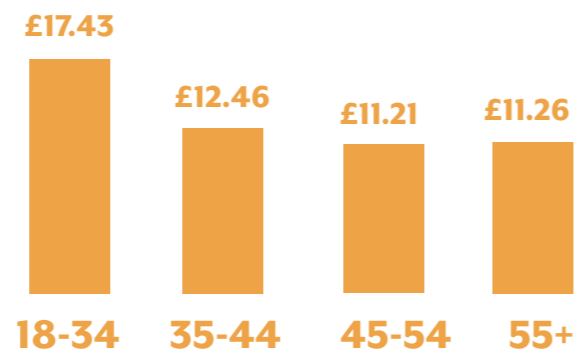
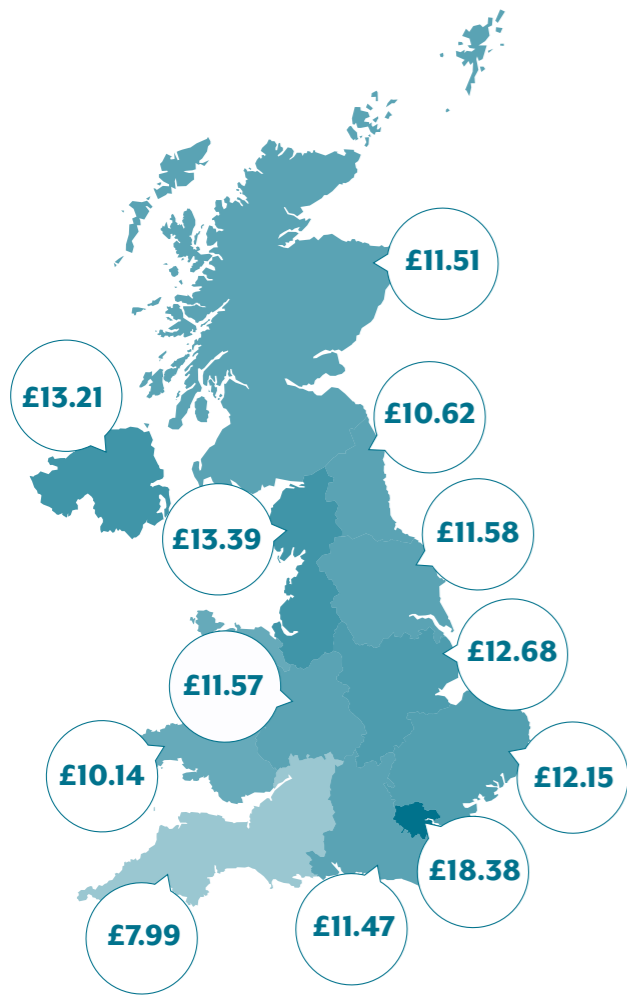
Separate research by Breining (et al) in 2015 indicates that income inequality tends to reflect an underlying inequality in educational achievement, and Currie and Stabile in 2003 demonstrated that parents' socioeconomic status has a long-term link to educational attainment and later life success. This suggests a self-reinforcing effect may be in play; that parents of higher incomes are better placed to support their children's educational development which, in turn, leads to those children attaining a higher level of education on average, which perpetuates the socioeconomic divide. While greater attendance at university and improved access to apprenticeships may have helped lessen this trend to some extent, opportunities for educational development amongst remaining school leavers.

Some schools ask parents for a regular voluntary financial contribution to the cost of running the school, often known as a 'donation to the school fund' – this is different to a donation to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). 38% of UK parents have been asked by their child's school for such a donation. However, results vary quite significantly amongst different demographics, with parents far more likely to be asked in Northern Ireland (70%), London (61%), at an independent school (51%), with a child eligible for FSM (50%) or with a child with SEN (50%). Parents in Scotland (23%) and Wales (25%) are least likely to be asked.

A quarter of all parents regularly donate to their child's school fund, with the average donation of those contributing £13.44 per month. There are some large variations between parents, with men, younger parents, those in London, with a child at an independent school, at a standalone academy, with a child eligible for FSM, with a child with SEN or on the highest income donating more each month.



School donations



Base: All respondents who currently donate to their child's school fund (1,262)

Methodology and sample demographics

The National Parent Survey was conducted online by YouGov. The fieldwork took place 5th-26th June 2023 amongst 5,126 parents in England (3,067), Scotland (1,032), Wales (768) and Northern Ireland (259) who have at least one child aged 4-18 in school. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK parents aged 18+. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov PLC. Analysis and reporting was carried out by Parentkind. For this wave, the entire sample was increased to a minimum of 5,000 from a previous count of 3,750, extending the sample size in Wales and including Scotland for the first time. Given the changes to the sample size and composition, comparisons with previous years' Parentkind Annual Parent Survey data are not possible. Unless otherwise noted, all percentages on the charts/graphics are rounded to the nearest whole number.

between 0.5 and 2.5 percentage points for the whole sample. The exact margin of error varies with the proportion considered. This means that, for instance, if according to the survey 28% of respondents strongly agree that they would like to have a say on their children's education at school level, in reality the proportion is likely to be between 25.5% and 30.5% (i.e. the margin of error would be +/-2.5%). Statistically significant differences in results for particular demographic sub-groups are mentioned in the report.

Pupil numbers

Where we've made reference to pupil numbers in the report, these have been estimated using information on the total number of primary, secondary or all pupils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

These figures relate to academic year 2022/23 for England and Northern Ireland, calendar year 2022 for Scotland and as at Feb 2023 for Wales. Where for example, 20% of all parents reported that their child had experienced a particular issue, we have assumed that this would be true for 20% of all pupils.

Margin of error

As the survey is not polling the entire population of parents in the UK, but rather a sample of the population, results are subject to a margin of error which is estimated to be

Demographics

Please note totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Gender - Are you?

Male	50%
Female	50%

Age - What is your age?

18-34	17%
35-44	36%
45-54	34%
55+	13%

Nation/region - Where do you live?

England	84%
South East	16%
London	16%
North West	13%
East of England	11%

West Midlands	10%
Yorkshire & the Humber	10%
South West	10%
East Midlands	9%
North East	5%
Scotland	8%
Wales	5%
Northern Ireland	3%

Number of children in household - How many children are you the parent/guardian of in total (i.e. of any ages, including children aged 18 or over)?

1	43%
2	42%
3+	15%

Parent disability - yes

£15.78

Parent disability - no

£12.29



View all of the data online here:



School phase - Which one of the following phases of education does your oldest child in school currently attend?

Primary	37%
Secondary/post primary	43%
Further education (sixth form/college etc.)	20%

School type - Which type of school does your child attend?

State school	93%
Independent/private school	7%

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - Would you describe your oldest child as having any special educational needs or disabilities (SEN)?

Yes	24%
• we have an EHC/a statement of SEN/an ALN/an ASN	12%
• we are discussing SEN/ALN/ASN concerns with my child's school	12%
No	70%
Don't know/not sure	5%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Parent disability - Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

Yes	27%
• a lot	12%
• a little	16%
No	70%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Eligibility for Free School Meals - Are you claiming any benefits which mean that your child is eligible for free school meals?

Yes	18%
No	77%
Don't know/not sure	4%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Ethnicity - What ethnic group best describes you?

White	88%
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	82%
Irish	1%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	<1%
Any other White background	4%
Ethnic minority	9%
White and Black Caribbean	1%
White and Black African	<1%
White and Asian	1%
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	<1%
Indian	2%
Pakistani	1%
Bangladeshi	1%
Chinese	<1%
Any other Asian background	<1%
African	1%
Caribbean	<1%
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	<1%
Arab	<1%
Any other ethnic group	<1%
Prefer not to answer	4%

Household income - What is your gross household income?

Under £20,000	12%
£20,000 - £34,999	19%
£35,000 - £49,999	17%
£50,000 - £99,999	28%
£100,000+	10%
Prefer not to say	14%

About Parentkind

As a national federated charity, Parentkind gives those with a parenting role a voice in education.

We invest substantial resources in representing parent views on their child's learning to local, regional, and national governments and agencies. Evidence tells us that parental participation in education benefits all children in all schools and society as a whole.

Parentkind's network of 12,800 Parent Teacher Associations mobilises over 100,000 volunteer fundraisers to raise in excess of £120 million annually to fund vital equipment and services for our schools.



Contact us:

policy@parentkind.org

Registered charity number 1072833

View all of
the data
online here:

