

Parents and children's experiences of school closures – latest survey findings 20 May 2020

On 1 May 2020, the [UK Cost of the School Day](#) project launched two surveys aiming to understand how families across the UK are experiencing school closures, particularly when living on low incomes. Through hearing directly from children and families, we plan to identify what support from schools and local authorities is proving useful, and what more could be done to help during this time. We created two surveys: one for [parents and carers](#), and the other for [children and young people](#). As of 19 May, we've heard from over 2,500 parents and carers and over 1,200 children and young people.

While our survey will remain open until later in May, we're already starting to see some themes emerging from the responses we've been getting:

- **Resources for learning:** one of the common barriers mentioned by parents and carers is the lack of resources for learning at home, including digital devices, printers and stationery. We're also hearing about some of the positive solutions that schools are putting in place to help families with learning.
- **Pupil and family wellbeing:** beyond learning, families are struggling with isolation and wellbeing, and would like more support and reassurances from schools.
- **Financial support:** families are facing increasing financial pressures and often struggle to find information about financial support options.
- **Support with food costs:** families on low incomes have found free school meal provision extremely important during school closures to help with additional costs. Cash payments were by far the preferred option, with many parents describing difficulties with vouchers.
- **When schools reopen:** children and young people are most looking forward to seeing their friends and teachers, and parents want the primary focus of schools to be on emotional support and wellbeing.

In this document, we share some early insights from the responses we've received so far. We will be sharing our full findings in June with qualitative and quantitative data and analysis. We also intend to run a webinar series to share these findings. Please [contact us](#) if you'd like to sign up.

1. Resources for learning

- Many parents and carers have told us their children **don't have the resources they need** to take part in learning at home. Frequently missing items include devices suitable for online work, printers, stationery and craft materials. Many report having to share devices among family members, and making do with phones and tablets to access online content. Families under financial pressure are paying for a range of resources normally provided by school.

"The problem is we have 1 laptops and its 3 of us and I'm using the laptop for my assignments, so 1 gadget is not enough for the boys, laptops/tablets are missing. Sharing one laptop it hard for them because they have a lot of work to do and I as mother have also assignments to do so it's hard." (Mum, Bexley)

*"[What's missing is] space to work, laptops/tablets. 1 between 3. They have to stagger their work time to use the laptop. Hard to concentrate in a small space with staggered learning times."
(Mum, Pontyclun)*

"The children need to print work at home. Sadly I cannot afford the printer ink." (Parent, Hampshire)

- Parents say that not having appropriate resources is limiting children and young people's ability to engage with learning, especially online. They describe **frustration, anxiety, boredom, lack of motivation and struggle to focus** and many worry about 'falling behind' or 'not keeping up'.

"My child is losing out on work due to no internet access at home. My child is becoming an unmotivated child. As a single mum am trying to encourage her alone." (Mum, Liverpool)

"I share the desk top with my brother for his homework too. He is in primary school. I miss my laptop from school because I am dyslexic & it helps me more. I miss my teachers because they can help me better, especially when I'm not confident in what I'm doing. I miss my friends a lot." (Girl, 12, Inverness)

- Parents and carers report feeling the **need to be present to help their children with learning**, but struggling due to too many responsibilities, particularly having to work or having to care for other children or family members.

"I'm worried about my eldest because she has been getting extra support from staff at school for her writing and I'm struggling to keep her up to date as my husband is still working and I have other younger kids and she will be going in to secondary after the holidays" (Mum, Dundee)

"My son has special educational needs and I am working full time this has had a significant impact on his education." (Mum, Harlow)

What is currently helping with engagement and learning?

Many schools are doing fantastic work to overcome the difficulties described by families on low incomes.

- Parents and children say that good **regular communication** with school and teachers is key to feeling included and motivated. This includes things like daily check-ins, messages on platforms like Seesaw, phone calls to check in, ease of contact with teachers and timely feedback on work completed. We've heard from a lot of parents and children that they **appreciate verbal and visual interaction with school**, and that they would like more of it.

"Every week my teachers they printed all my home work for me. So I just go and pick it up. It is because at home we don't have internet and I don't have laptop to do my work. They are always phone my mum to see if I'm ok. Thank you for checking if I'm ok or I need anything. I cant wait to see you all." (Girl, 6, London)

"Weekly phone calls have helped my son stay connected with his teacher. Class Dojo is really keeping my son motivated especially the encouraging comments from his teacher." (Mum, Cambridge)

- Many schools have been providing pupils and families with some of the resources they're missing at home. Parents say that this helps their children to engage with learning. For example, many parents said they found it useful to **have laptops or tablets lent to pupils by their school**. Other physical resources such as home learning packs, notebooks and stationery were also mentioned as being welcome.

"My own laptop is old, not enough memory space once I discussed this issue with teacher I have been loaned a school laptop and a table so she has decent work area." (Mum, London)

What else do families say would help with learning?

- Consistently asking families what they have access to and what they require to learn at home.
- **Visual and verbal contact with teachers and friends** – both for learning and for social contact. This was the thing most frequently requested by children and young people, with primary school pupils in particular expressing a desire for school to help them keep in touch with their friends and classmates.

"[I would like] video lessons from my teacher. Virtual classroom with my friends." (Boy, 11, Neath Port Talbot)

"I would like a big long FaceTime call with my class." (Girl, 6, Highland)

- Some parents highlighted the need for **extra contact and support for learning and transitions**, especially for children with additional support needs.

"Would have liked someone to be in touch with me and how I can support the kids. [When they return to school, they need] a good transition plan especially as they have special needs. Needs to be as normal as possible." (Mum of 3, Wrexham)

- Understanding that some families are feeling **overwhelmed and under pressure with workload**.

"One computer too share. The little one bothers the big one. No printer. They can't do it without guidance and I'm working from home, under a lot of pressure, [can't] do two things at once." (Mum, Ceredigion)

2. Pupil and family wellbeing

- Families have expressed a desire for more pastoral support from their schools, with parents telling us they would like **support with wellbeing and isolation**, not just learning. Many parents would like **reassurances about expectations** for home learning to take some of the pressure off.

*"[I would like] more communication and **positive messages**"*
(Mum, Bristol)

*"As parents it is **very overwhelming** especially when trying to home school and work from home at the same time. I know I have felt **isolated** and had very low moments where everything I am doing is not to my usual standard. **Guilt is a real issue.**"* (Mum, Coventry)

*"It has felt really confusing knowing **what I should be expecting of my children** and how school will feel about us not doing all the work."* (Mum, Tameside)

*"It would be nice if the teacher could **check in with us**, a phone call from her teacher would really boost my daughter. Also I would benefit from a ten minute chat to discuss my worries about home learning."* (Mum, Dacorum)

- Children and parents emphasised the importance of being able to see friends' faces and having social contact, with group chats and video calls frequently mentioned or requested.

"[I would like] support to keep connection with school and friends during normal school hours"
(Girl, 14, Glasgow)

"we could be able to be in contact with the people who we can talk about our feelings too" (Girl, 12, Edinburgh)

3. Financial Support

- Many families are **feeling worried about money**, with concern ranging from moderate to extreme. However, lots of families say they haven't been provided with any information about accessing support, and many of those who looked for information found it quite difficult. Families have been trying to make do but are often struggling with new financial circumstances.

"I received nothing from council or housing association. I initially felt quite forgotten about, only couple of my neighbours asked if we were ok."
(Mum, London)

"No idea what am Truly entitled too."
(Mum, Liverpool, who indicated she was 'extremely concerned' about money)

- Families who received updates or sign-posting to resources and information from their schools say this has been helpful.

"School help with advice as much as they can and have put me in touch with other services to help me." (Mum, Wandsworth)

4. Support with food costs for families on low incomes

Worries about food can affect children and young people's ability to engage with learning whether at home or school. Alternative provision of free school meals is currently being delivered to families in a range of ways.

- In particular, parents spoke positively about **payments into bank accounts** as a method of delivering support, saying that this was accessible and offered flexibility, choice and value as they could spend it in any shop. Most of those not currently receiving the entitlement in this way indicated that cash payments would be **their preferred option**.

*"Money in the bank is much easier as i have 2 autistic children with restrictive diets. Collecting a packed lunch wouldn't work as they wouldn't eat the things provided. **The money means i can get the foods they will eat from which ever shop sells it.** The food bank deliveries, which come to my house, feed my and the 5 year old and they provide the staples for me to make healthy dinners. There are lots of things the older two will eat as well."* (Mum of 3, Neath Port Talbot)

*"It means I can **transfer the money directly** to the person who is doing our shopping."* (Mum, Swansea, explaining why cash payments work 'extremely well' for her.)

*"Well the lunch money does really help but doesn't go far with 5 children I often go without and have just the 1 meal a day but **it's allowed me to get them food so I can keep up with other financial commitments.**"* (Mum of 5, Angus)

*"**Cash payments takes the embarrassing factor out of it**, we don't need to queue for food bags or receive vouchers, we don't feel ashamed for needing help this way."*
(Mum, Angus).

- Many families have told us that they are struggling with **increased financial pressures** but are **not entitled to any support**.

*"**Shopping really expensive now I have more meals to budget for.** Normally my infant gets free school meals., but I'm not entitled to the vouchers."* (Mum, Cheltenham)

*"Were struggling as husband is a key worker and I have been made furloughed on only 80% this has took a massive hit on us as kids are eating more with being at home. **Struggling to pay all credit card bills etc with zero support as not entitled to it.**"* (Mum, Dundee)

- We have heard from a number of parents receiving vouchers to replace free school meals about some of the **challenges related to voucher schemes**. We've also heard examples of **schools stepping in** where there have been issues.

"Edenred vouchers have been difficult to redeem, school is helping to sort this out. In meantime school have been arranging food box's for all the families which have been a life saver for us." (Mum, London)

*"vouchers don't work. **embarrassing**. need top up." (Mum, Brighton and Hove)*

"The problem is that the vouchers have an expiry date and it's not everything that I need is in those specified supermarkets. So cash will be much better." (Mum, Bexley)

*"Due to me being Type 1 diabetic and needing to shield it's hard to be able to use the vouchers because **you cannot use them online**. Would have been a lot more helpful if they could have been used online. I am grateful for the help but unfortunately I have not been able to use mine yet." (Mum of 3, Coventry)*

"I'm not regularly getting the email codes. It is not easy to log in. Have to use the vouchers in multiples of 10. I've only had 3 weeks in total but lockdown has been longer." (Mum, Sutton)

- Where families have been able to access it, free school meal provision has been extremely important to families during this period. Many families are under heavy financial pressure and are facing increased bills, so support to alleviate food costs has been very useful; one dad in Angus told us that it '**will be a lifeline to some**'.

"As we are all at home more we are using gas and electricity more but with food vouchers it has helped me to pay them." (Mum, Rugby)

"It's been an incredible additional support that we potentially would not have coped without. Extremely grateful for it." (Mum, Stornoway)

5. What families want to see when schools reopen

Communication, nurture and support for wellbeing are the main things that families want to see when schools reopen.

Some children and young people mentioned particular subjects, clubs or support with learning when asked what they looked forward to when school resumes. However, overwhelmingly, almost every child and young person responding to the survey said that they are most looking forward to seeing their friends and their teachers.

Parents want schools to reopen when it's safe and they want enough notice to plan for it. Listed below are some of the main things parents would like to see:

- **Emotional support**, ensuring children feel safe, aren't overwhelmed and have the chance to talk about what has just happened.
- Parents want schools to provide **reassurance** and **mental health support**.
- An emphasis on **play time** was frequently mentioned.
- **Phased returns**, smaller classes, easing back in.
- **Continuity** as far as possible with teachers and peers, with many parents wanting their children to be grouped **with their friends**.

- **Extra help with learning** and **no pressure to 'catch up' right away.**
- Support to start up routines and structure again.
- Lots of contact and information in advance **to help parents prepare.**
- **Personalised support** for children and young people with additional support needs.
- **No judgement** towards families who have managed to do less home learning than others.

When asked what they need schools to do to help children settle back in after lockdown, parents told us:

"Staggered return, mental health support for children, lower targets and expectations until children are settled." (Mum, Caerphilly)

"I would like to spend more time with my son to learn and repeat the material which he passed in the lockdown." (Mum, Kettering)

"Be aware of children's nervousness around being around so many people again. Take baby steps to integrate again." (Mum, Dundee)

"Talk and explore what covid19 means for children. Fear is a big issue and before they start trying to teach! Children other maths and English this needs to be addressed otherwise children will be psychologically affected." (Mum of 3, Stockport)

"Help for my daughter to transition to high school. And for my son to have the support he needs to catch up as I say he's been very reluctant to do any work." (Mum, Angus)

"Focus on play, physical activity and emotional well-being first. Gradually work towards full academic timetable. Ensure teachers and staff are ok, safe, supported etc as children will pick up on their anxiety and fears." (Mum, Manchester)