STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
A College of Queen's University Belfast

Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement

NORTHERN IRELAND SURVEY OF PARENTS/CARERS ON

HOME-SCHOOLING

DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

2021

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Executive Summary[1,2]

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has once again forced the vast majority of parents/carers of school-aged children in Northern Ireland to engage in responsibility for 'home-schooling', with this second extended period of home learning extending from January to March/April 2021, with the exception of vulnerable children, the children of key workers and children attending special schools. In May 2020, the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU) at Stranmillis University College, Belfast, published its first report on *Home-Schooling in Northern Ireland During the COVID-19 Crisis* (Walsh et al., 2020) which highlighted the often very different experiences of children and young people during the first six weeks of the first lockdown. Our report highlighted how home-schooling exacerbated existing inequalities: for instance, we found that less well-educated parents felt less confident in supporting their children's learning; we heard of particular frustrations expressed by working parents, especially key workers; and we learnt that digital poverty was presenting a challenge to many families with limited access to devices, printers and broadband.

As we entered the second period of extended home-schooling, the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement launched its follow-up online survey which remained open from 9th-22nd February 2021. The survey had 2002 usable responses, which included data for a total of 3668 individual children. Responses came from every part of Northern Ireland, exclusively via the web form hosted on Smart Survey.

Summary of Key Findings from 2021 Survey:

1. Home-schooling favours children with better-educated parents who (as in 2020) felt more confident in their home-schooling role, and were more likely to play an active role in supporting their child's learning.

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[2] Requests for access to the survey data should be addressed to creu@stran.ac.uk

2. Digital accessibility at home is strongly related to household income: although there was a slight increase from 2020 in the number of digital devices available to children, and a reduction in the percentage of parents reporting that they had no printer (18% in 2021, compared to 23% in 2020), children from households in the lowest income band were three times more likely to have no printer than children from households in the highest income band (30% vs 11%) and their parents/carers were considerably more likely to feel that the costs of printing (in terms of paper and ink) prevented them from using their printer (25% vs 3%). Children from low-income homes were also more likely to have to share a digital device and/or wait to be able to go online, and were less likely to report fast internet speeds. The geographical analysis also revealed that internet connectivity was worst in rural areas.

3. Parental experiences varied considerably. Once again the vast majority (96%) of respondents were female and there is a strongly gendered division of labour within most households in the sample, with women much more likely to be in the home, whether working or not, and responsible for child-care and home-schooling to a much greater degree than their male partners. Overall findings suggest that children spent longer on home-schooling activities in 2021 than in 2020, while those parents who reported finding time for home-schooling a challenge were most likely to be juggling work and home-schooling commitments, working either outside or inside the home. Additional questions explored the impact of home-schooling on parental mental health and highlighted that overall almost 80% of parents reported a negative impact on their own mental health and wellbeing, with the most acute impact felt by parents who were working from home. Additionally, 67% of parents reported a negative impact on their physical health and wellbeing.

4. The impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, social skills, and behaviour was much more negative in 2021 than during the first lockdown of 2020. The majority of parents/carers felt that the current lockdown/school closures had resulted in their child/ren's mental health and wellbeing becoming 'worse' or 'much worse' (51% in 2021 vs 31% in 2020). While 20% of parents in 2020 felt that their child's mental health had become 'better' or 'much better', by 2021 this figure had fallen to just 7%. The more negative experiences in 2021 can also be seen in relation to parent/carers' estimation of the impact of lockdown on their child's social skills (49% 'worse' or 'much worse' in 2021 vs 29% in 2020), and level of behaviour (35% 'worse' or 'much worse'

in 2021 vs 29% in 2020). In the current survey we also asked parents/carers about the impact on their child's *physical* health and wellbeing and found that 47% felt that this was now 'worse' or 'much worse' than pre-lockdown with only 8% believing that it was 'better' or 'much better'. Reported outcomes were worse for all factors for those from low-income homes. The survey did reveal, encouragingly, that where schools placed importance or high importance on nurture, safety and well-being (according to parents/carers) this had a highly significant, positive, impact on reported levels of motivation, mental health and wellbeing, social skills, and physical health and wellbeing, compared to those schools who were not reported to value these approaches. Only a third (33%) of parents indicated that they were in favour of their child repeating the 2020/21 year due to the impact of school closures, with 54% opposed to the idea and 13% unsure. Parents of primary aged children were on the whole more likely to be in favour of their child repeating the school year than post-primary aged children, with the exception of the parents of P7 children where less than a quarter (24%) were in favour of their child repeating the year.

5. Most parents/carers were happy with both the quality and the quantity of learning resources provided by their children's schools. Almost two-thirds (65%) of parents felt that the quality of learning resources was better or much better than during the first lockdown, whilst 6% claimed that the provision was worse. The same majority (65%) were happy with the quantity of resources, an increase of 3% since the 2020 survey.

6. The number of parents who report that their child's school engages in some live online teaching has doubled since 2020, from 24% to almost 50%, while the number of schools not engaging at all in live online teaching has fallen from 77% to just over 50%. This is a significant shift, and represents a positive response to the most common recommendation given by parents in the May 2020 survey and in this survey. Nonetheless, this study has shown that the provision of live online teaching is still not universal, and is significantly skewed towards older, post-primary pupils and especially those attending voluntary grammar schools and Irish medium schools.

7. There are widely divergent experiences, as might be expected, depending on the age and year group of the children. There were particular issues to emerge in respect of our youngest children who spent least time engaged in formal home-schooling activities and least time being taught live online. Their parents often reported that their

children were missing opportunities to play and to be outside, but there are indications from the data that opportunities during lockdown to engage in play and in outdoor learning were associated with higher levels of motivation, mental health and physical health and wellbeing.

8. There was a focus on disrupted assessment for many parents. For instance, for parents of pupils in years 6-8, there was a strong focus on the transfer tests, including fear and anxiety expressed by parents of the current P6 cohort faced with the uncertainty of what might happen next year; anger and frustration by parents of the current P7 cohort whose year had been dominated by the postponement and eventual cancellation of the transfer tests, with a feeling among a majority that contingency assessment methods ought to have been planned earlier; and among year 8 parents a belief that their children had missed out on the normal preparation for transition to post-primary schools and that some were not adjusting as well as might have been expected as a result. For many parents of pupils in years 12-14, there was again a sense of frustration that the revised methods of assessment could disadvantage their children's future.

In conclusion, findings confirm continued inequities of digital access (in terms of devices and broadband access), varying levels of parental confidence in home-schooling, considerable pressures faced by parents as they juggled work and home-schooling commitments, and resulting negative consequences for children's learning and development as well as their mental and physical health and wellbeing. However, there are also some positive outcomes which emerge too: parents are generally happy with both the quality and quantity of learning resources provided by their children's schools, and there has been a considerable increase in the extent of live online teaching, especially for older pupils, as a result of months of investment and upskilling by the teaching profession. Moreover, there is encouragement that where schools are engaging in pastoral support, this is having a positive impact, according to parents, on their children's levels of motivation, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, and physical health and wellbeing.

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Chapter 1. Context and Review of the Literature

If 2020 was a remarkable year for education in Northern Ireland, 2021 has so far been similarly out of the ordinary. Our previous report (Walsh et al., 2020) was written at a time when, with the exception of the children of key workers and those deemed most vulnerable, the vast majority of children and young people across the UK found themselves at home rather than in their more customary learning environments at pre-school, school, college or university. Schooling did resume at the start of the 2020/21 academic year. But as we publish this report, we are in the midst of a second phased return to formal educational settings during a further prolonged period of lockdown, even though the nature and timing of this return varies between the four UK nations. In Northern Ireland, pre-school pupils and years 1-3 returned to school on 8th March, with years 4-7 and 12-14 returning on 22nd March 2021. Years 8 to 11 will follow suit immediately after the Easter break on 12th April. In contrast to the first lockdown (March-June 2020), special schools in Northern Ireland remained open to pupils from January to March 2021.

The experience of supporting the learning of children and young people at home during the course of the past year has presented families with many new opportunities and experiences, but also with challenges. One of the most problematic aspects has been the balancing of work and wider family caring commitments with childcare and supporting home learning. In particular, parents and carers in Northern Ireland argued that the scope of the Key Worker scheme was restrictive (Stewart, 2020) and in early June 2020, the definition of key workers was extended to afford childcare to a wider range of families. Although levels of contact between schools and families were reported to be high (Ulster University, 2020), the period of home-schooling in the first lockdown was marked by burnout among many parents, especially parents of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). There were significant differences between families in terms of internet connectivity and digital access, and the potential impact of increased digital activity and pupil exposure to screens became a matter of concern (McDaid, 2020).

In terms of engagement with learning, levels of parental support and pupil engagement differed significantly between families (ETI, 2020). During the lockdown of Spring and early Summer 2020, research carried out by Ulster University revealed that the

confidence of parents in supporting curricular learning varied between subject areas. For example, parents of primary children were less confident in supporting learning in the Arts than PE, and in post-primary parents were less confident in supporting learning in Modern Languages and Music than English Language, while parents of children in special schools were less confident in supporting numeracy (Ulster University, 2020).

In summer 2020, many families in post-primary schools were affected by developments in the awarding of grades in public examinations. The GCE AS and A level grades were calculated by CCEA, issuing predicted grades generated by teacher ranking. It emerged that more than one third of estimated grades allocated by teachers to Sixth Form students were lowered when the final results were released. Concerns were raised about standardisation and the transparency of the algorithm used to generate the results, but later in the summer, in what was regarded as something of a U-turn, pupils were ultimately awarded the higher of either the teacher predicted or standardised grade (BBCNI, 2020). Universities in Northern Ireland offered students guaranteed places, while some seventy schools ran summer classes for their pupils.

At the outset of Summer 2020, looking ahead to a new school year, The Department of Education (DENI) circulated advice and guidance to schools on curriculum planning for the 2020/21 academic year (DENI, 23rd June 2020). This circular highlighted the flexibility that the teaching profession had demonstrated in adapting to the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, and suggested that moving forward schools might consider how to 'tailor and adapt delivery of the curriculum to support recovery as pupils return to the school environment' (DENI, 2020, p.2). Schools would have freedom, within the minimum requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC), to decide what children should learn in their particular time and place. Depending on medical and scientific advice, the Department envisaged a blended approach to learning, with some children learning in-school on a part-time only basis. Blended learning was defined in this instance as 'An approach to education whereby schools will combine classroom based teaching and learning methods within school, with a range of remote learning in order to deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum' (DENI, 2020, p.3).

The circular acknowledged that some parents and pupils might experience anxiety about 'missed curriculum content and knowledge during the period of school closures' (DENI, 2020, p. 5), although the importance of fostering positive mental health and wellbeing was emphasised in the guidance. Specifically, there was a caution against using language that might exacerbate such concerns. Any return to school should focus, then, on the reestablishment of routines and safe behaviours, and on collaboration and confidence building. Opportunity should be given for pupils to rebuild friendships and share their experiences, as well as focusing on re-engaging with learning skills. In terms of pedagogy, the guidance advocated 'flipped learning', while important variables such as access to devices and connectivity, staff capacity, and family support in learning were all acknowledged. Schools were required to consider 1) what they might teach in-school and remotely; 2) how to maintain curriculum breadth and enrichment with less school time; 3) what contact time should be provided by subject at post-primary.

While schools in England began to admit some pupils again in early June, in Northern Ireland Education Minister Peter Weir advocated a phased return to school in August, involving a blended approach, and teaching and learning in protective bubbles.

However social distancing requirements of 1 metre proved to be a challenge for many school principals trying to manage practicalities. An article published in *The Guardian* just ahead of the school restart in Northern Ireland captured something of the strangeness of things: 'There will be no singing, no indoor PE, and no parents will be allowed past the school gates at certain schools in Northern Ireland' (McDonald, 2020). Parents were expected to play their part in minimising the spread of Covid-19 in schools, and guidance leaflets outlining ways to do this were published in September 2020 by the Department of Education and translated into 14 languages (DENI, 2020). Many young people were pleased to get back to a degree of normality with a return to school life, even if face masks and distancing were now required.

However, the reopening of mainstream schools in August was accompanied by an incidence of positive Covid-19 cases in a number of schools (a total of 88 positive cases in the first two weeks). For many, pupil absence and school closures due to the spread of Covid-19 hampered a return to previous routines. Almost one in ten pupils did not attend during the first week, and there was a view among some teaching unions

that schools had been left to navigate the challenges of safety risks with insufficient support (Meredith, 2020). In October, schools closed for a period of two weeks incorporating the half-term holiday, while parental concerns around the transfer test and children with SEN continued to grow. By this stage, over 2,000 positive Covid-19 cases had been recorded in schools. They were instructed in early November to hold PE classes outside. Parents continued to express anxiety about children acting as spreaders of the virus, especially with the approach of family gatherings, however small, over the Christmas break, and the risk of having to self-isolate. Although the expectation was that schools in Northern Ireland were set to reopen again after the Christmas holidays as usual, an announcement was made in December of plans to move some groups of pupils to remote learning in the New Year. In the event, mainstream schools remained closed at the start of 2021, although in this second period of lockdown, special schools would remain open to all their pupils (Purdy, 2021).

In August 2020 Parenting NI had reported that opinions among parents about transfer procedures from primary to post-primary education were both deeply divided and strongly held (Parenting NI, 2020). Throughout the course of the Autumn, concerns about the process had intensified. Many questioned the wisdom of continuing with the tests after months of home learning over lockdown and the disruption of conventional forms of education in 2020 (Harris et al., 2021). An increasing number of selective post-primary schools began to withdraw from the transfer process and call for the cancellation of the tests. The belief that existing inequalities were likely to increase following the pandemic informed public debate about academic selection, already a source of contention in terms of education in the region. Moreover, mental health and wellbeing were identified as key priorities for children and young people moving forward, with organisations such as Barnardo's Northern Ireland advocating for government to prioritise and invest in young people's recovery (Barnardo's 2020). Announcements were made of additional government investment in nurture units (Northern Ireland Executive, 2020) and in teaching provision to help disadvantaged learners after lockdown. In the end, the transfer tests were postponed and ultimately cancelled in early January (Stewart, 2021).

As the second prolonged period of home learning in Northern Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic reaches a conclusion, there is for many families a sense of relief and

excitement, mixed with a certain degree of apprehension. Perhaps one of the most important lessons that being apart has taught us over the past year is the value of being together (Jones, 2021). The weeks and months that lie ahead will be an important time of readjustment for many children and young people, and their parents, carers and teachers in Northern Ireland, as we seek to rebuild relationships, and regather our communities of learning (McMullen, 2021).

Conscious of the very different circumstances of this second extended period of home learning (featuring lockdown 'fatigue' and winter weather but with more time for schools to prepare and more public optimism as the vaccine programme began) the CREU team at Stranmillis felt that a second home-schooling survey would be important to shed light on the reality of parents' experiences second time around. Had the inequalities we discovered in the 2020 survey diminished or been further exacerbated? Had online teaching methods changed for the better as a result of teachers' efforts to upskill themselves? Were better educated parents still more confident and spending more time home-schooling than less well-educated parents? Was there still evidence of digital poverty, in terms of devices, printers and broadband? Were there still geographical inequalities across Northern Ireland? Had children settled back into home-schooling, or had motivation levels fallen? Had parents' and children's emotional health and well-being suffered, and if so, in what ways? How was their physical health and well-being? How did the experiences of our youngest learners differ from older children? In a year dominated by debate over transfer tests, how did the parents of year 7 parents feel about what had happened, and were parents of year 6 children confident that lessons could be learnt from 2020-21 to support their children as they looked ahead to post-primary transfer arrangements next year? How did parents of year 12-14 pupils feel about the prospect of teacher-assessed grades in 2021?

Questions such as these, and many more besides, prompted this second, follow-on survey of parental experiences of home-schooling during the covid-19 pandemic, an analysis of which is offered below.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1 Ethics

This study was guided by the ethical principles and protocols of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) which represents the tenets of best ethical practice in educational research. From the outset, the research was planned with an ethic of respect for all people involved in, or touched, by the study. Ethical approval for the research study was granted by the Research and Scholarship Committee of Stranmillis University College, Belfast in early February 2021.

2.2 Methods

For the purposes of garnering a wide range of parents' perspectives on home-schooling in the 2020/2021 lockdown due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, a quantitative approach was adopted employing an online survey for data collection. The questionnaire was set out in the following sections:

1. About you and your household
2. Your eldest child (with opportunities to respond for further children)
3. Health, well-being, and curriculum
4. Challenges experienced and support required

A variety of response option formats was utilised including dichotomous, checklist and scaled responses. Some open-ended responses were also included to allow respondents the opportunity to provide more in-depth responses about their multiple realities of the home-schooling experience.

As outlined above, an initial survey of parents' and carers' experiences of home-schooling during the first lockdown due to Covid-19 in 2020 was carried out and reported on in May 2020. This follow-on survey aimed to investigate similarities and differences in parents'/carers' perspectives between the two lockdowns and, therefore, it was important to have similar questions in the two surveys but also to have new questions to investigate some issues which have arisen since the first lockdown ended.

Before public distribution, a pilot study of the survey was carried out with parents of pre-school and school-aged children. Their responses and comments made in relation to the content and layout of the survey were then used to refine the questionnaire to reduce respondent burden, clarify questions and enhance the response rate.

2.3 Procedure and Participants

The survey was advertised on the social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter from 9th February and was available for a period of 14 days, until 22nd February 2021.

The survey was also sent to schools on a College mailing list with a request for it to be forwarded to parents and carers. There were 894 schools on this mailing list including nursery, primary and post-primary schools.

The survey had 2002 usable responses (compared to 2035 responses in the 2020 sample), and included data for a total of 3668 individual children. Responses came from every part of Northern Ireland (see Map 1), exclusively via the web form hosted on Smart Survey.

2.4 Analysis

Univariate analysis has been performed on the quantitative and simple qualitative data, to look for overall trends, which has informed the construction of a concept map of relationships between variables. Geographical data has been mapped using QGIS to identify broad geographical patterns for comparison with findings from 2020.

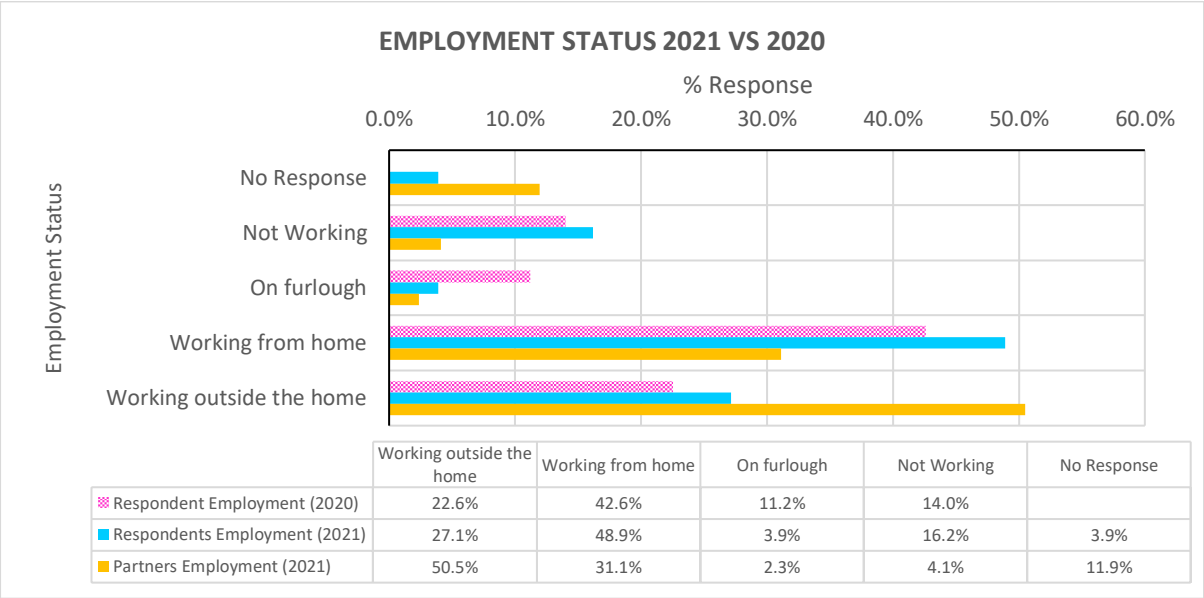
Content analysis was carried out on responses from the open-ended questions to code the data and provide a quantitative count of the codes to allow for reporting of common issues.

Chapter 3. Survey Demographics

3.1 Household Demographics

The 2021 survey response rate was n=2002, and the respondent sample consisted of 96% female and 4% male parents/carers.

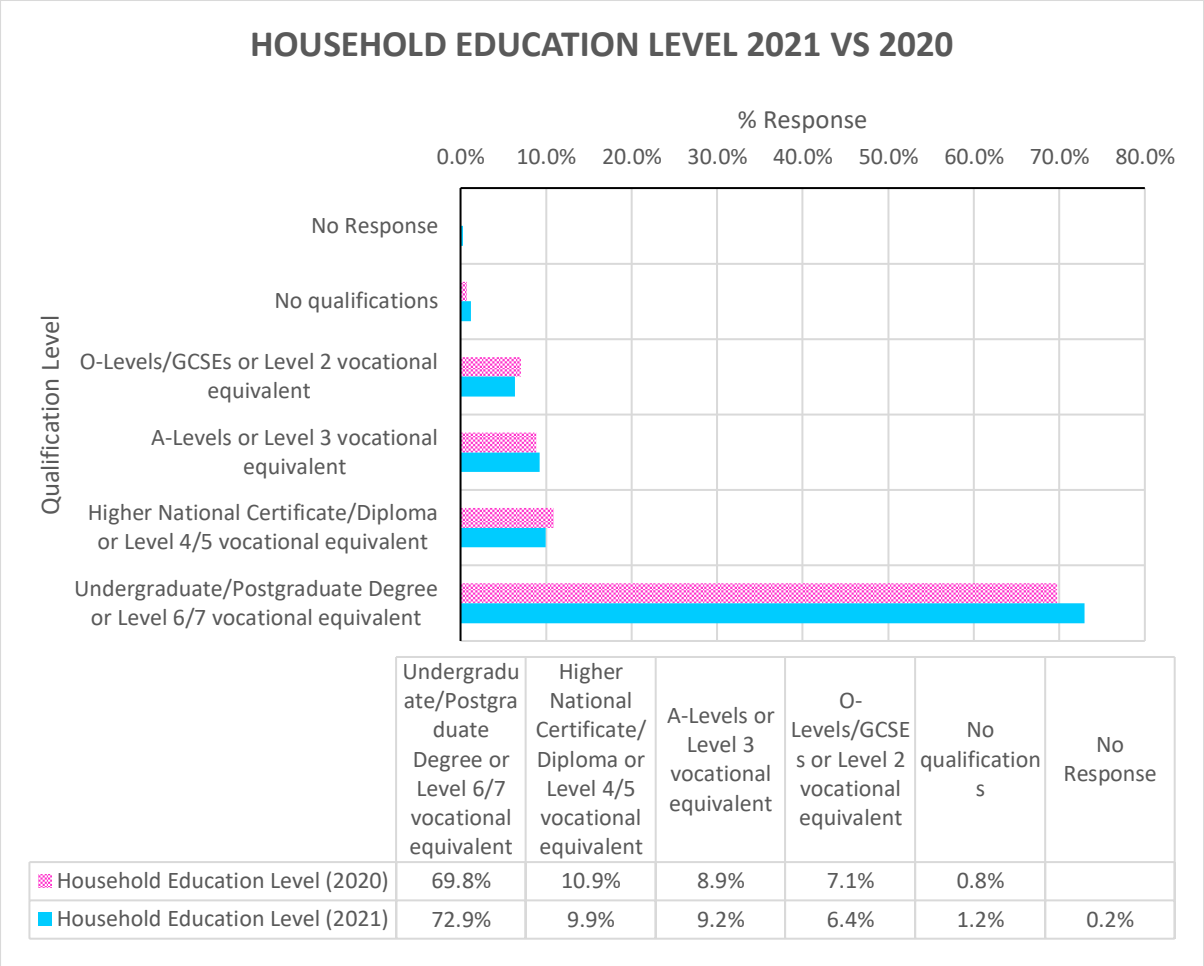
The employment status of respondents and their partners in 2021 is shown in Figure 1. This differs from the 2020 survey, as respondents were only asked for their *own* employment status in the previous survey. However, for comparison, the 2020 responses for respondent employment status are shown alongside the responses for respondents in 2021. The majority of respondents are working from home (49%, n=979), a 6% increase from 2020 or, are working from outside the home (27%, n=540), a 4% increase from 2020. The percentage of respondents on furlough (4%, n=78) has decreased by 7% compared with the 2020 survey, whilst the percentage of respondents not working (16%, n=324) has increased by 2%. This data tells us two important things about the sample: firstly, that parents/carers are under increased pressure either through work or unemployment, when compared with the 2020 lockdown; and secondly, that there is strongly gendered division of labour within most households that makes women far more likely to be in the home, whether working or not, and responsible for childcare and home-schooling to a greater degree than their partners.



	Working outside the home	Working from home	On furlough	Not Working	No Response
Respondent Employment (2020)	22.6%	42.6%	11.2%	14.0%	
Respondents Employment (2021)	27.1%	48.9%	3.9%	16.2%	3.9%
Partners Employment (2021)	50.5%	31.1%	2.3%	4.1%	11.9%

Figure 1: Employment status 2021 compared with 2020

Responses for highest household education level for the 2021 survey are shown in Figure 2, with responses for the 2020 survey for comparison. As with 2020, the majority of the sample (~70%), report having an undergraduate degree or above.

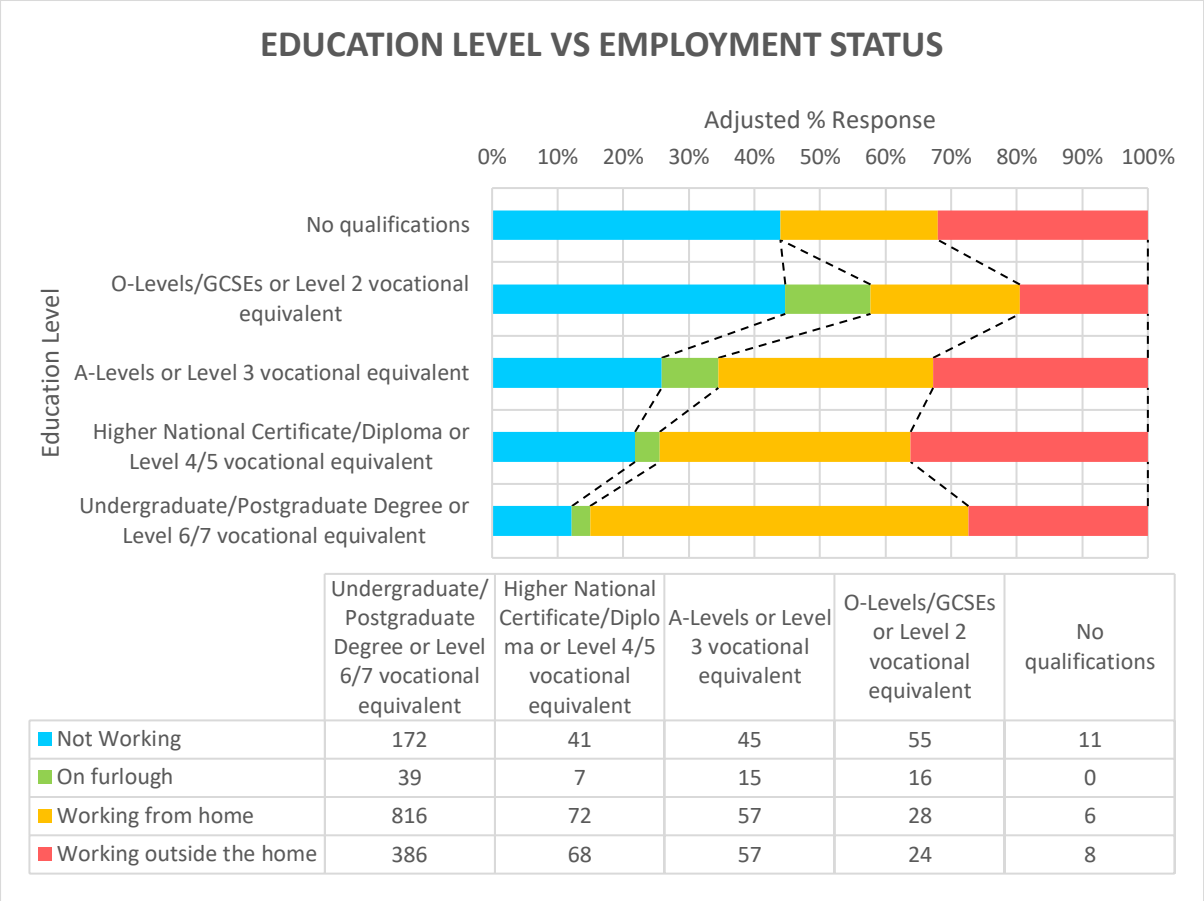


	Undergraduate/Postgraduate Degree or Level 6/7 vocational equivalent	Higher National Certificate/ Diploma or Level 4/5 vocational equivalent	A-Levels or Level 3 vocational equivalent	O-Levels/GCSEs or Level 2 vocational equivalent	No qualifications	No Response
Household Education Level (2020)	69.8%	10.9%	8.9%	7.1%	0.8%	
Household Education Level (2021)	72.9%	9.9%	9.2%	6.4%	1.2%	0.2%

Figure 2: Household education level 2021 compared with 2020

Highest household education level and employment status were compared as shown in Figure 3. There is an increased likelihood of not working with decreasing level of education. For example, Level 6/7 (12%, n=172), Level 4/5 (22%, n=41), Level 3 (26%, n=45), Level 2 (45%, n=55), and those with no qualifications (44%, n=11) respectively. Similarly, there is an increasing likelihood of being on furlough with decreasing level of education, with those with no qualifications returning no one (0%) on furlough. For example, Level 6/7 (3% n=39), Level 4/5 (4% n=7), Level 3 (9% n=15), and Level 2 (13% n=16). These percentages are also reflective of the decrease in number of people on furlough in 2021. Contrary to that, there is increasing likelihood of working from home with increasing education level. For example, Level 6/7 (58% n=816), Level 4/5 (38% n=72), Level 3 (33% n=57), Level 2 (23% n=28), and those with no

qualifications (24% n=6) respectively. There appears to be no particular relationship between education level and working outside the home which varies inconsistently across education levels as illustrated.



	Undergraduate/ Postgraduate Degree or Level 6/7 vocational equivalent	Higher National Certificate/Diploma or Level 4/5 vocational equivalent	A-Levels or Level 3 vocational equivalent	O-Levels/GCSEs or Level 2 vocational equivalent	No qualifications
Not Working	172	41	45	55	11
On furlough	39	7	15	16	0
Working from home	816	72	57	28	6
Working outside the home	386	68	57	24	8

Figure 3: Education level compared with employment status

The responses for combined household income are shown in Figure 4. As illustrated, the largest represented category is £50,000 to £80,000 (30% n=602), closely followed by £30,000 to £50,000 (29% n=583), then £15,000 to £30,000 (18% n=356), more than £80,000 (16% n=312), and under £15,000 (7% n=131) respectively. This indicates that our sample might contain a higher proportion of high-earning households than the general population.

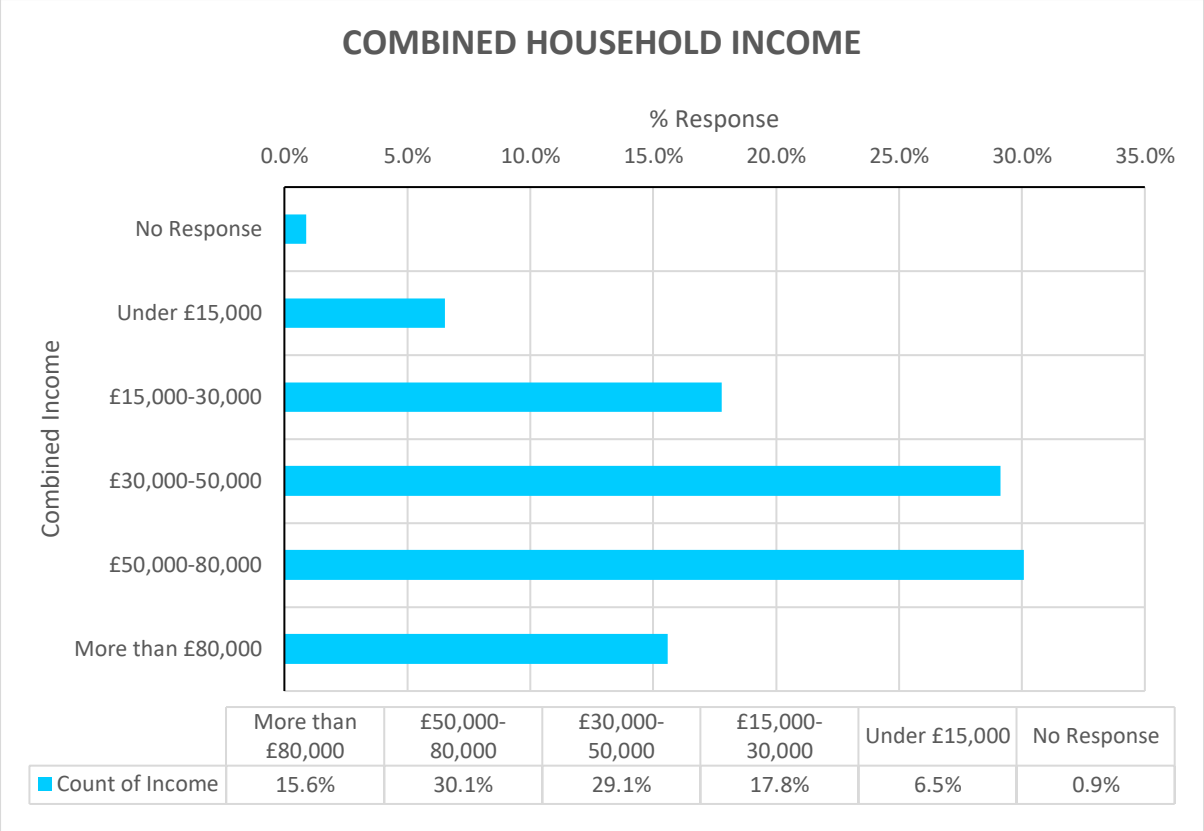
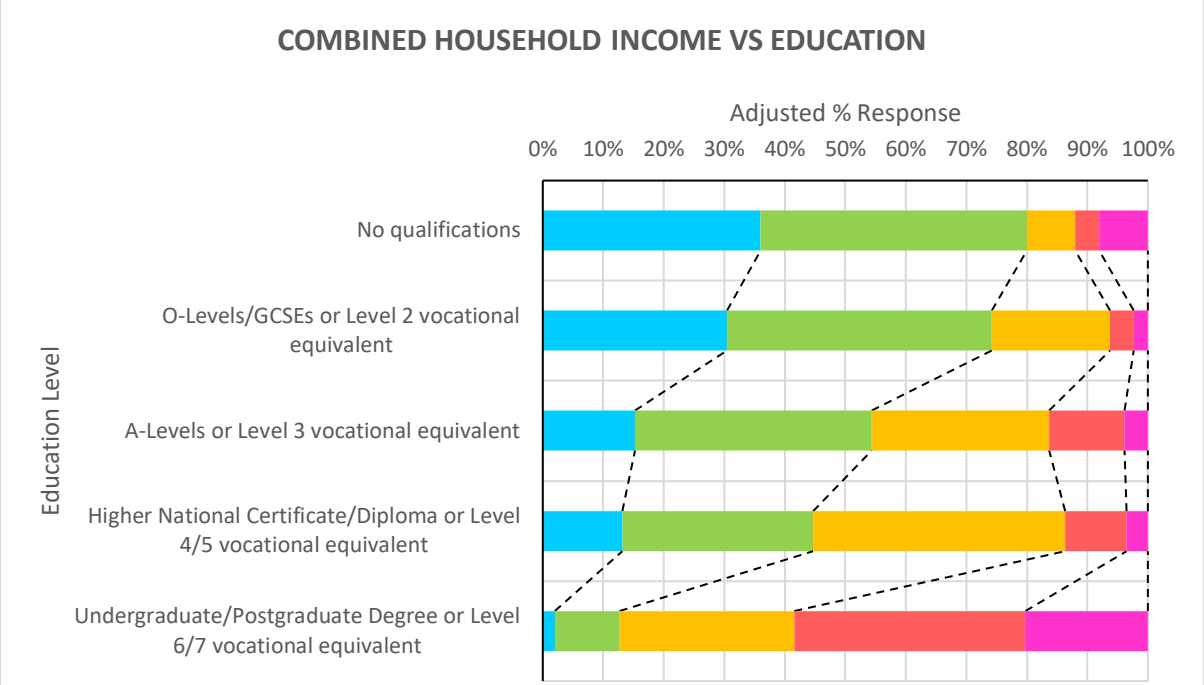


Figure 4: Combined household income

For a more complete picture, combined household income was compared with highest household education level to ascertain any relationship between these two variables (Figure 5). Respondents with lower education levels are more likely to have an income within the lowest category of under £15,000 (36%, n=9), or an income within the £15,000 to £30,000 category (44%, n=11). Those with higher education levels are more likely to have an income within the £30,000 to £50,000 and £50,000 to £80,000 categories. However, those falling within the £80,000 category are more inconsistent with respect to education level with this income level appearing to be an outlier in respect to the other income categories.

In summary, within the survey sample those with the higher education levels were most likely to be working from home, in addition to the likelihood of earning more. Those at lower education levels were more likely to be furloughed or not working and more likely to earn less.



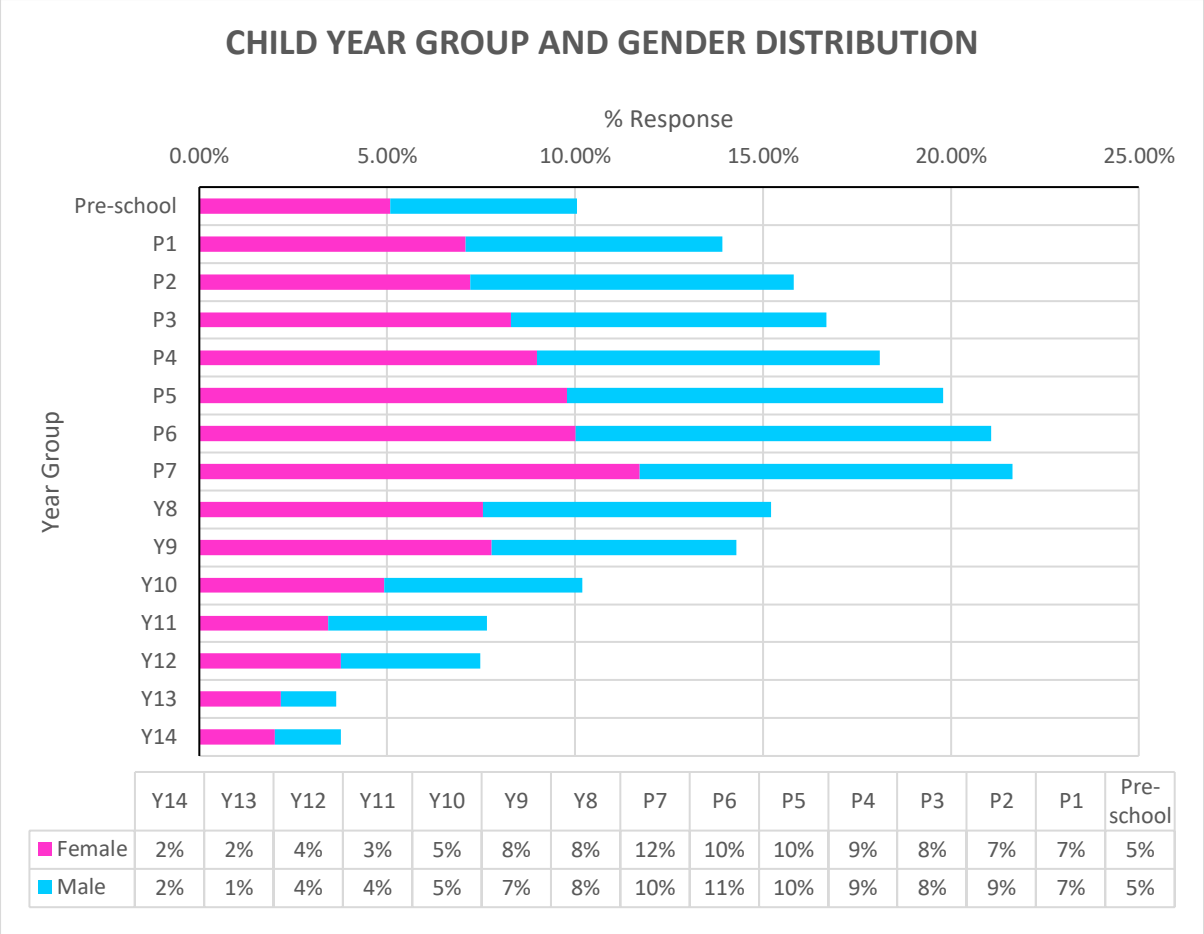
	Undergraduate/Postgraduate Degree or Level 6/7 vocational equivalent	Higher National Certificate/Diploma or Level 4/5 vocational equivalent	A-Levels or Level 3 vocational equivalent	O-Levels/GCSEs or Level 2 vocational equivalent	No qualifications
Under £15,000	29	26	28	39	9
£15,000-30,000	155	62	72	56	11
£30,000-50,000	418	82	54	25	2
£50,000-80,000	553	20	23	5	1
More than £80,000	293	7	7	3	2

Figure 5: Combined household income compared with education

3.2 Child Demographics

The survey contained data pertaining to 3665 children, from pre-school through to year 14, with data for approximately 1.8 children per respondent. Of these children, 91% were learning at home, and 9% were attending school.

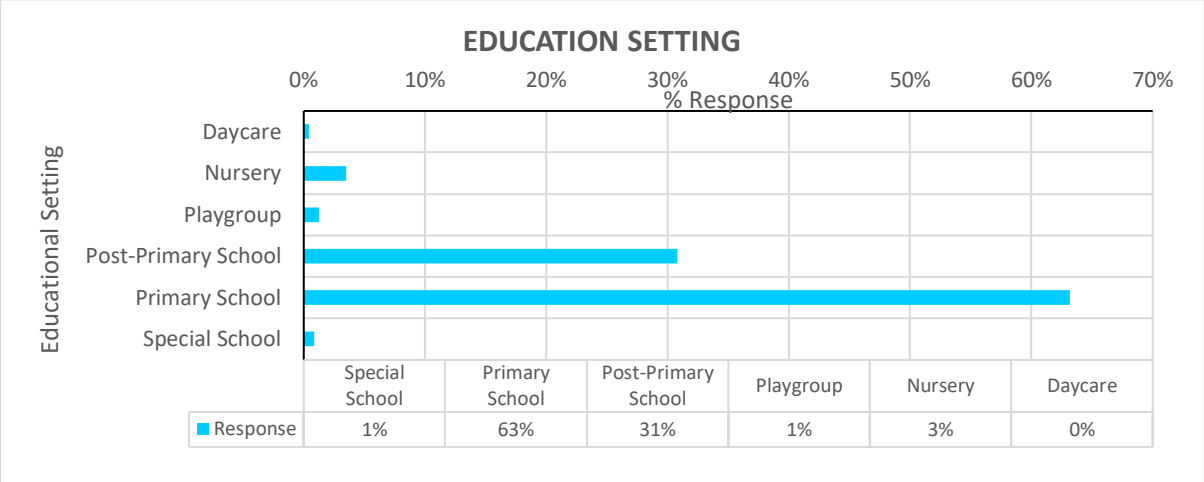
The distribution of gender with year group is shown in Figure 6. As illustrated, all year groups from pre-school through to year 14 are accounted for in the sample, and gender is approximately equally proportioned across all year groups. The highest proportion of the sample is from the P7 year group (22%, 12% female and 10% male). The lowest represented year groups are the upper years of post-primary school.



	Y14	Y13	Y12	Y11	Y10	Y9	Y8	P7	P6	P5	P4	P3	P2	P1	Pre-school
Female	2%	2%	4%	3%	5%	8%	8%	12%	10%	10%	9%	8%	7%	7%	5%
Male	2%	1%	4%	4%	5%	7%	8%	10%	11%	10%	9%	8%	9%	7%	5%

Figure 6: Child year group and gender distribution

The largest represented educational settings in the sample are primary school (63%) and post-primary (31%) respectively (Figure 7). Nursery makes up 3% of the sample, followed by playgroup and special school with 1% each respectively. The daycare representation within the sample is negligible, rounding to 0%.



	Special School	Primary School	Post-Primary School	Playgroup	Nursery	Daycare
Response	1%	63%	31%	1%	3%	0%

Figure 7: Educational setting

Similarly to the 2020 survey, the highest represented education setting management type in the sample is controlled (33%), followed by maintained (21%), voluntary grammar (15%), integrated (12%), voluntary/private pre-school (2%), and Irish medium (1%) respectively (Figure 8). 16% were unsure.

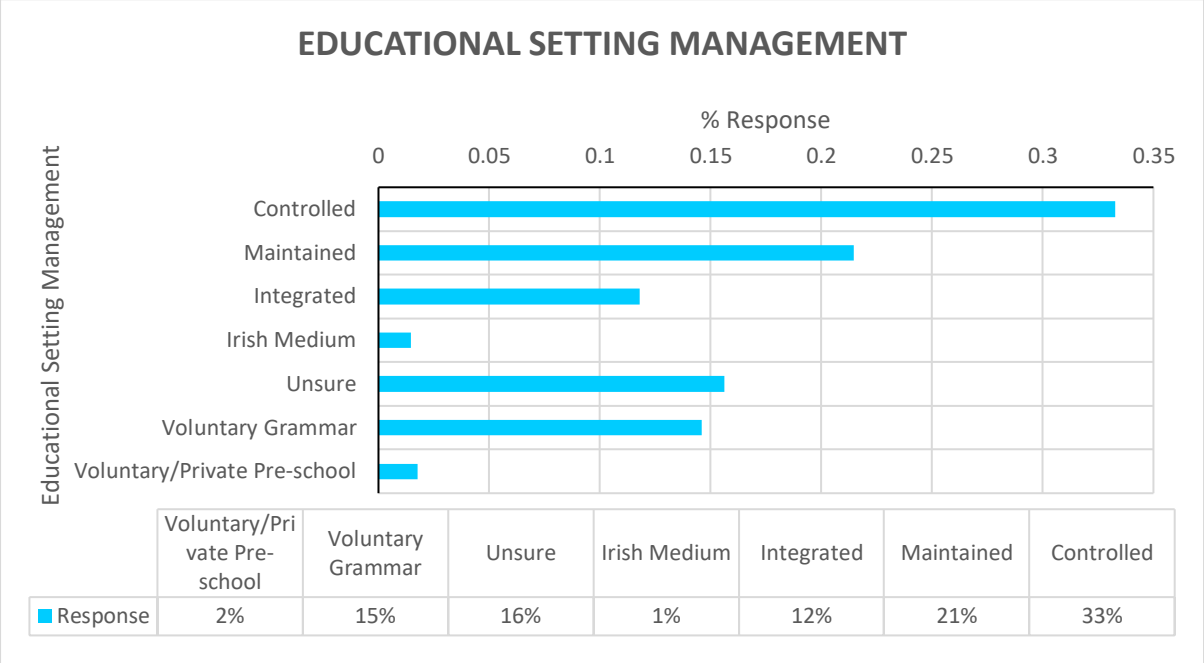
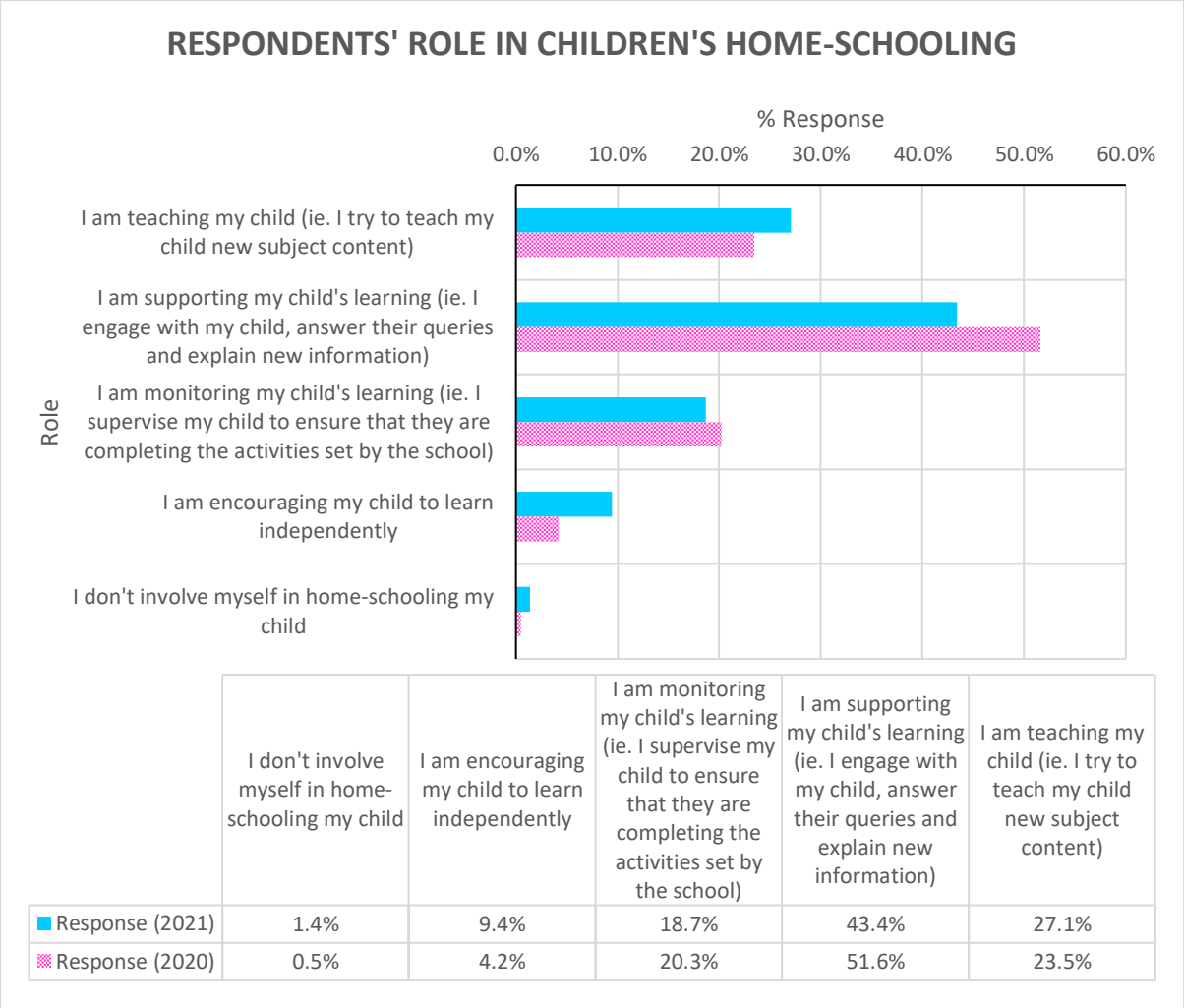


Figure 8: Educational setting management type

Chapter 4. The Home-Schooling Experience

4.1 Respondents' Home-Schooling Experience

Respondents' role in home-schooling for both the 2020 and 2021 survey is shown in Figure 9. As illustrated, there is a similar pattern of results in 2021 as with the 2021 survey. However, there is a small increase in the number of respondents actively teaching their child (27%, +3%). There is a decrease in number of respondents supporting their child's learning (43%, -9%), and monitoring their child's learning (19%, -1%). There is also an increase in number of respondents encouraging their child to learn independently (9%, +5%), and not involving themselves in home-schooling (1%, +1%).



	I don't involve myself in home-schooling my child	I am encouraging my child to learn independently	I am monitoring my child's learning (ie. I supervise my child to ensure that they are completing the activities set by the school)	I am supporting my child's learning (ie. I engage with my child, answer their queries and explain new information)	I am teaching my child (ie. I try to teach my child new subject content)
Response (2021)	1.4%	9.4%	18.7%	43.4%	27.1%
Response (2020)	0.5%	4.2%	20.3%	51.6%	23.5%

Figure 9: Respondents' role in children's home-schooling

Respondents were asked to rate their confidence in managing home-schooling (Figure 10). The results showed a wide distribution of responses across the options.

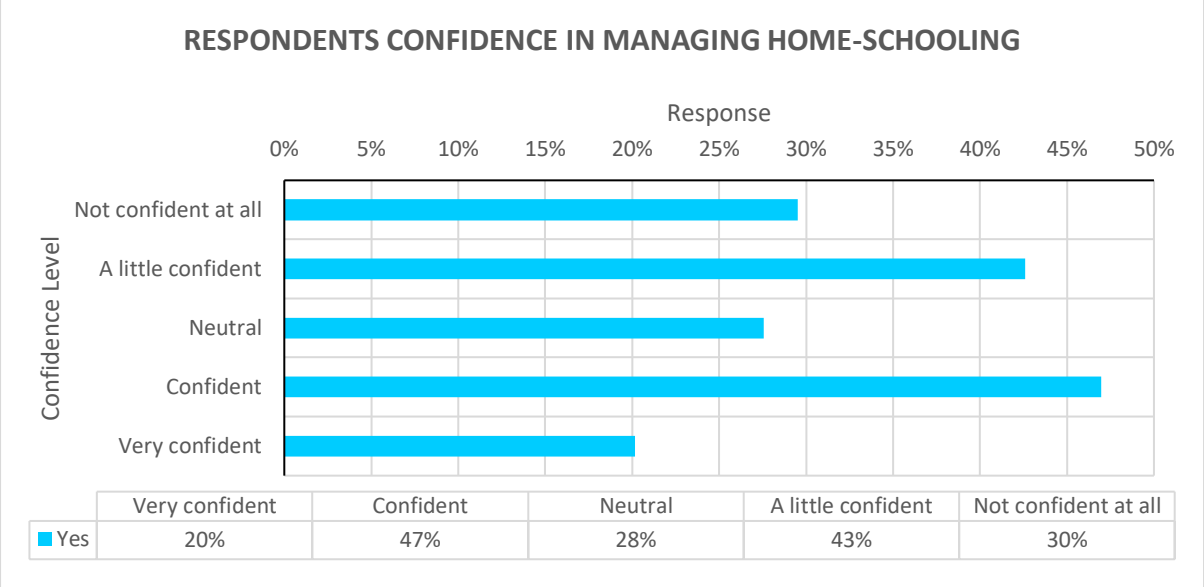


Figure 10: Respondents' confidence in managing home-schooling

In Figure 11, respondents' confidence in managing home-schooling is shown to increase with highest level of education in the household.

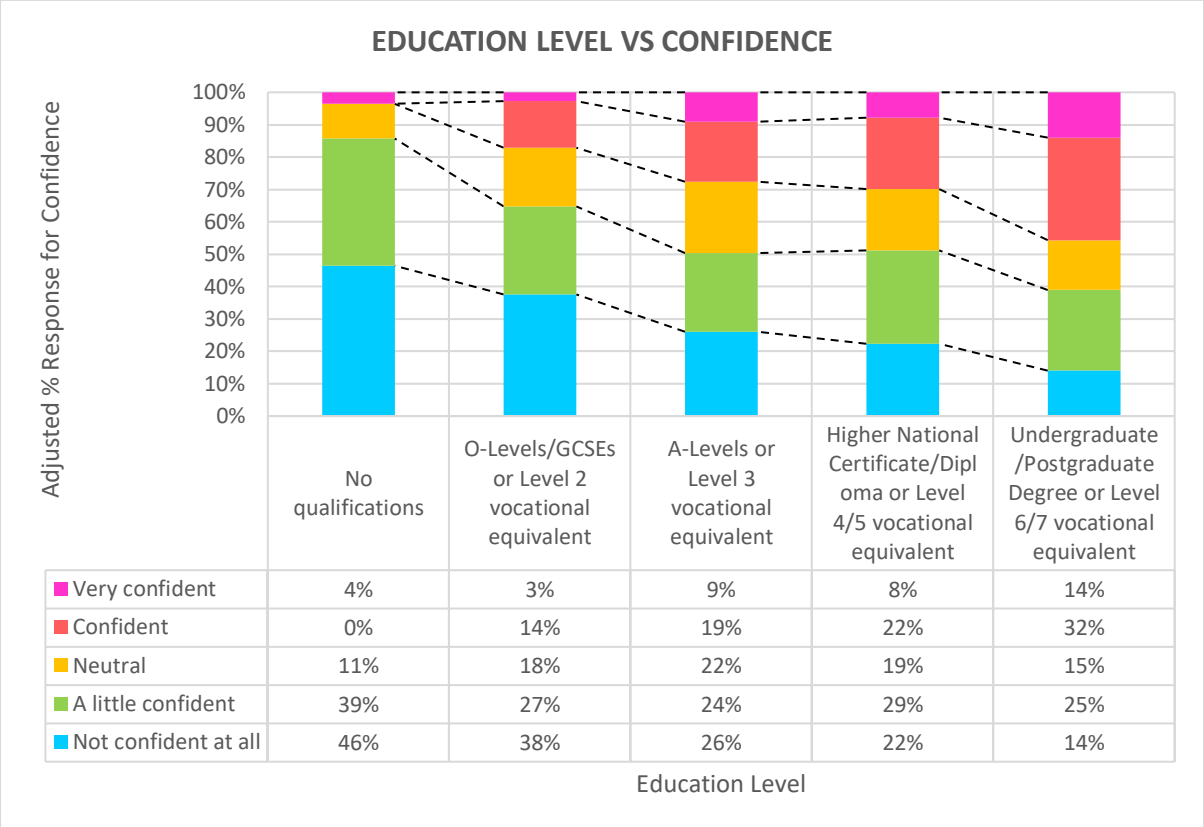
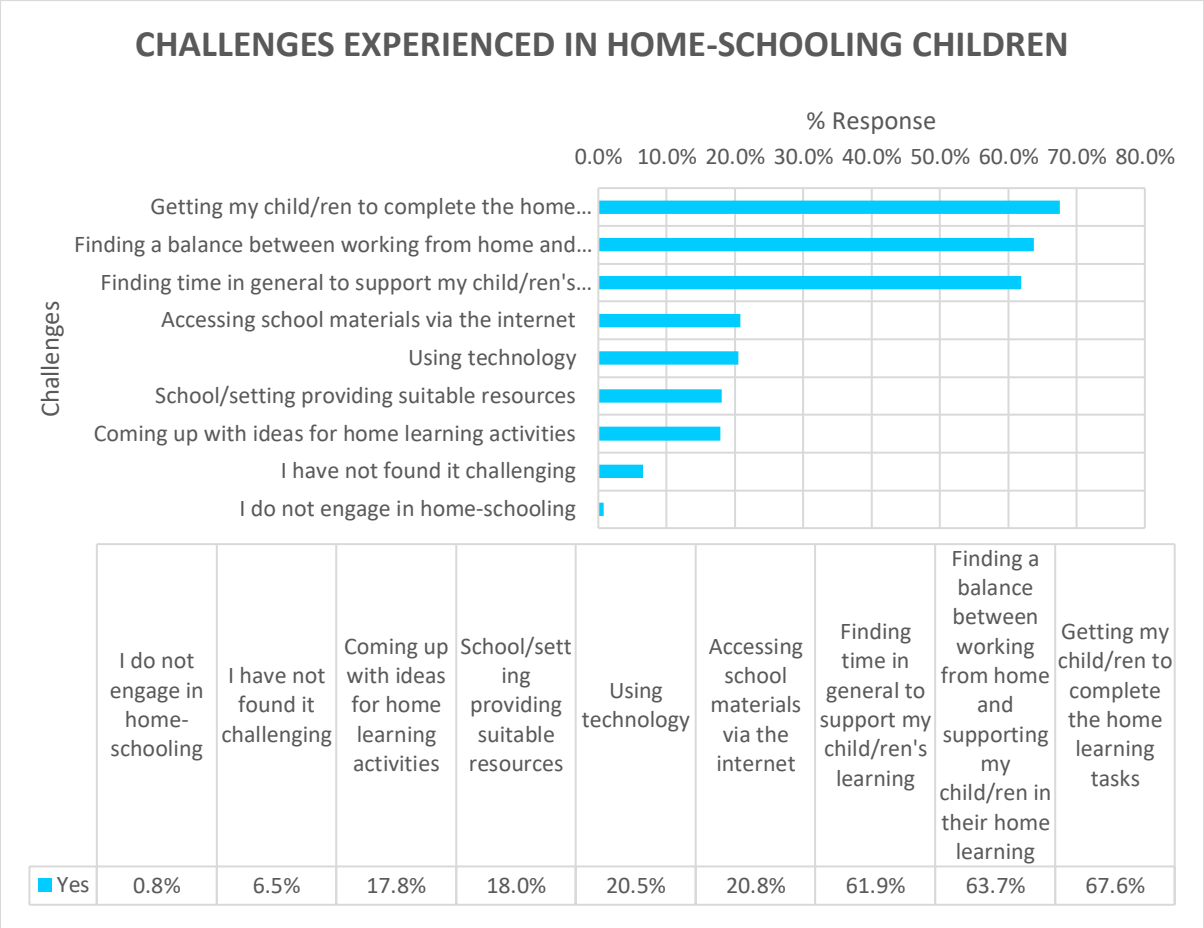


Figure 11: Education level compared with confidence

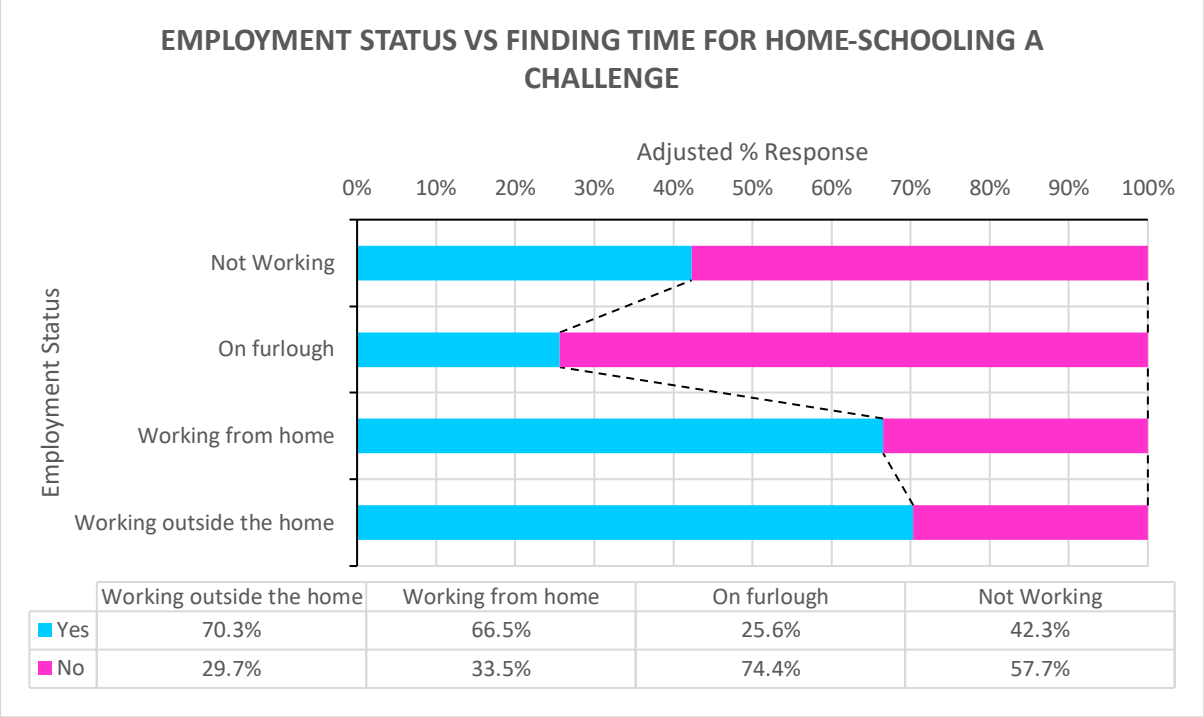
Respondents were asked about the challenges they experience in home-schooling their children. The responses are shown in Figure 12 below. The most significant challenge is getting children to complete home learning tasks (68%), followed by finding a balance with working at home (64%), finding time in general (62%), accessing school materials via the internet (21%), using technology (21%), school/setting providing suitable resources (18%), coming up with ideas for home learning activities (18%), not finding home-schooling challenging (7%), and those who do not engage in home-schooling (1%).



	I do not engage in home-schooling	I have not found it challenging	Coming up with ideas for home learning activities	School/setting providing suitable resources	Using technology	Accessing school materials via the internet	Finding time in general to support my child/ren's learning	Finding a balance between working from home and supporting my child/ren in their home learning	Getting my child/ren to complete the home learning tasks
Yes	0.8%	6.5%	17.8%	18.0%	20.5%	20.8%	61.9%	63.7%	67.6%

Figure 12: Challenges experienced in home-schooling

In Figure 13, respondents' employment status is compared with the responses for finding time for home-schooling challenging to further probe the impact of employment on engaging in home-schooling. As shown, those on furlough are least likely to find time a challenging aspect of home-schooling (26%), followed by those who are not working (42%). However, respondents who are working from outside the home (70%), and from home (67%), are finding time a significant challenge.

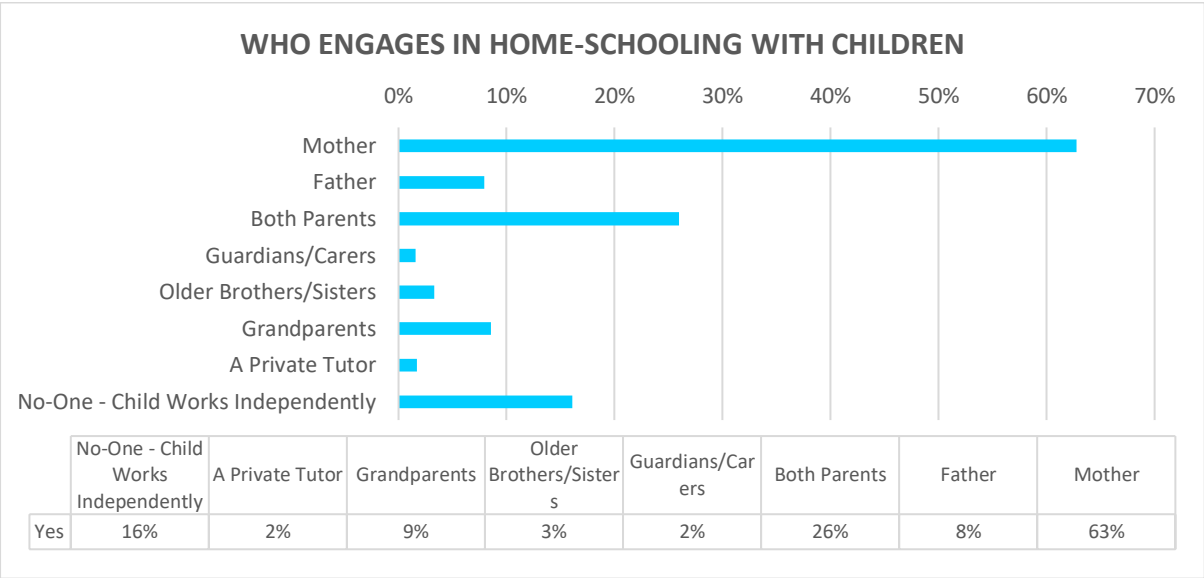


	Working outside the home	Working from home	On furlough	Not Working
Yes	70.3%	66.5%	25.6%	42.3%
No	29.7%	33.5%	74.4%	57.7%

Figure 13: Employment status compared with finding time for home-schooling

4.2 Children's Home-Schooling Experience

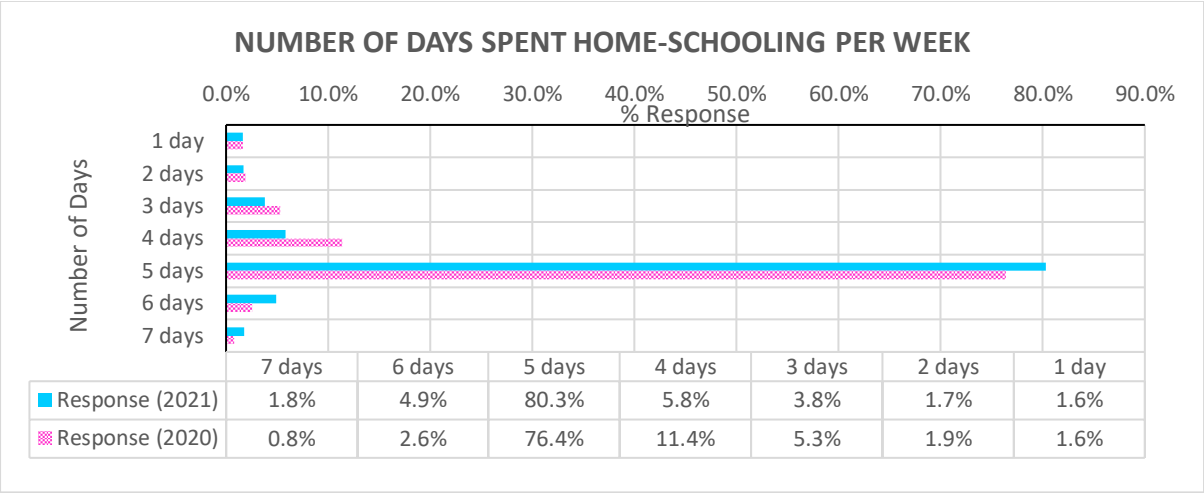
Figure 14 shows the responses for people who engage in home-schooling with children. Respondents were allowed to select multiple options. The mother is the predominant result (n=2097, 63% of respondents), followed by both parents (n=868), child works independently (n=538), grandparents (n=286), the father (n=265), older brothers and sisters (n=111), a private tutor (n=56), and guardians/carers (n=53).



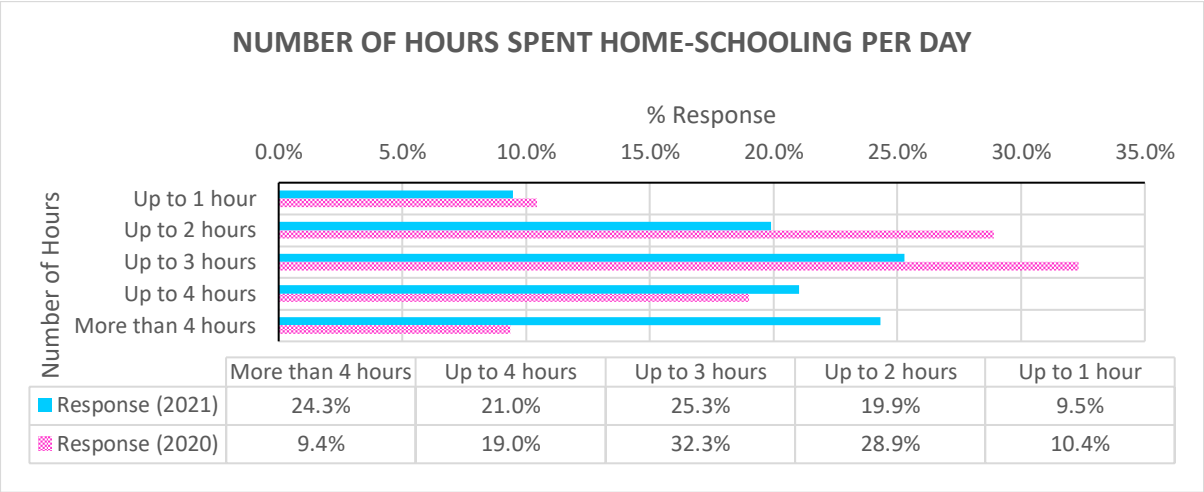
	No-One - Child Works Independently	A Private Tutor	Grandparents	Older Brothers/Sisters	Guardians/Carers	Both Parents	Father	Mother
Yes	16%	2%	9%	3%	2%	26%	8%	63%

Figure 14: Who engages in home-schooling with children

The number of days spent per week on home-schooling for both 2020 and 2021 surveys are presented in Figure 15. The predominant number of days is 5 days (80%), an increase of 4% from 2020. The responses for the greater number of days i.e. 5, 6 and 7 days has increased in 2021, whereas the response for the lower number of days i.e. 1, 2, 3 and 4 days has generally decreased. The second chart shows the number of hours per day spent home-schooling in both 2020 and 2021. There is a high distribution of responses across all options. However, as for number of days, the responses for the higher number of hours i.e. up to 4 hours and more than 4 hours have increased in 2021, +2% and +15% respectively, and the responses for the lower number of hours i.e. up to 1 hour, up to 2 hours and up to 3 hours have all decreased in 2021, -1%, -9% and -7% respectively. Children, therefore, appear to be spending more days, and hours on home-schooling in 2021 compared with 2020.



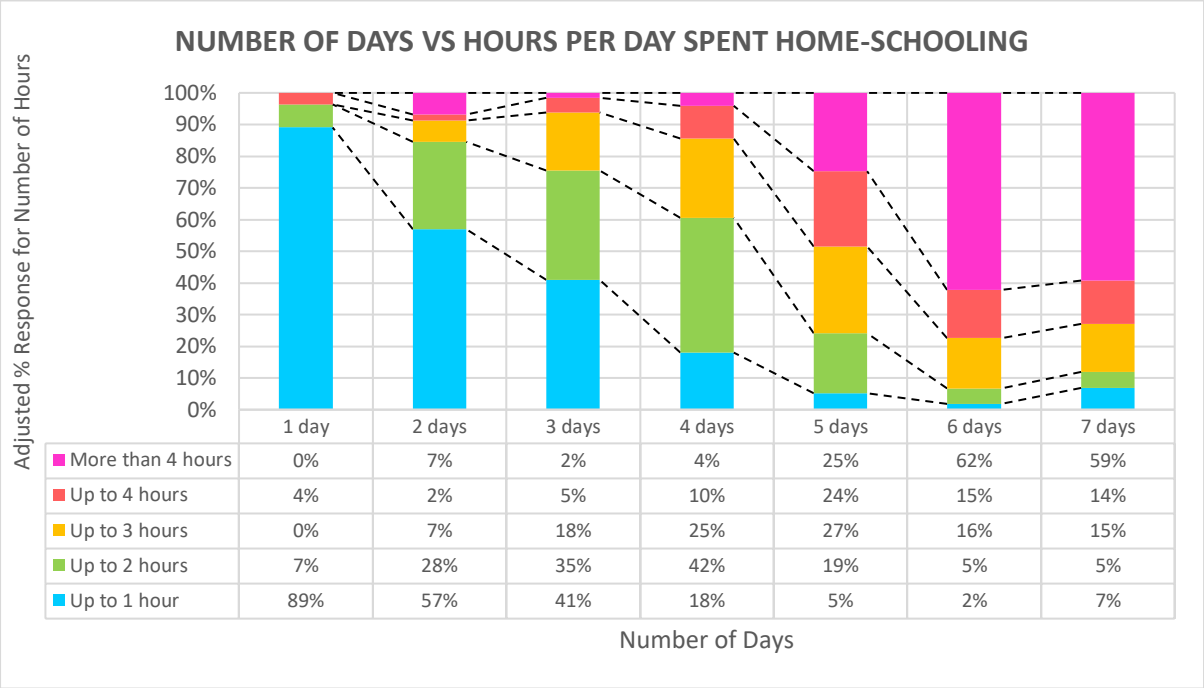
	7 days	6 days	5 days	4 days	3 days	2 days	1 day
Response (2021)	1.8%	4.9%	80.3%	5.8%	3.8%	1.7%	1.6%
Response (2020)	0.8%	2.6%	76.4%	11.4%	5.3%	1.9%	1.6%



	More than 4 hours	Up to 4 hours	Up to 3 hours	Up to 2 hours	Up to 1 hour
Response (2021)	24.3%	21.0%	25.3%	19.9%	9.5%
Response (2020)	9.4%	19.0%	32.3%	28.9%	10.4%

Figure 15: Days / hours spent home-schooling

The increased number of days and hours is confirmed in Figure 16 which shows the number of days versus the number of hours. It appears that those who report spending more days per week are also more likely to report spending more hours per day. 59% of those who spend 7 days per week are also spending more than 4 hours per day compared with those who spend only 1 day per week with 89% spending up to 1 hour.



	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
More than 4 hours	0%	7%	2%	4%	25%	62%	59%
Up to 4 hours	4%	2%	5%	10%	24%	15%	14%
Up to 3 hours	0%	7%	18%	25%	27%	16%	15%
Up to 2 hours	7%	28%	35%	42%	19%	5%	5%
Up to 1 hour	89%	57%	41%	18%	5%	2%	7%

Figure 16: Days / hours spent home-schooling compared

Comparing combined household income with number of days as shown in Figure 17, highlights the fact that irrespective of income, most respondents' children are spending 5 days per week on home-schooling, with under £15,000 (68%), £15,000 - £30,000 (77%), £30,000 - £50,000 (80%), £50,000 - £80,000 (84%), and more than £80,000 (82%). However, this does generally increase with increasing income. This increase is best reflected in the increasing percentages for 4, 3, 2 and 1 days with decreasing income. For example, the combined percentage for 4, 3, 2 and 1 days for those whose income is under £15,000 is 25%, compared with 20% for £15,000 - £30,000, 12% for £30,000 - £50,000, 9% for £50,000 - £80,000, and 9% for more than £80,000.

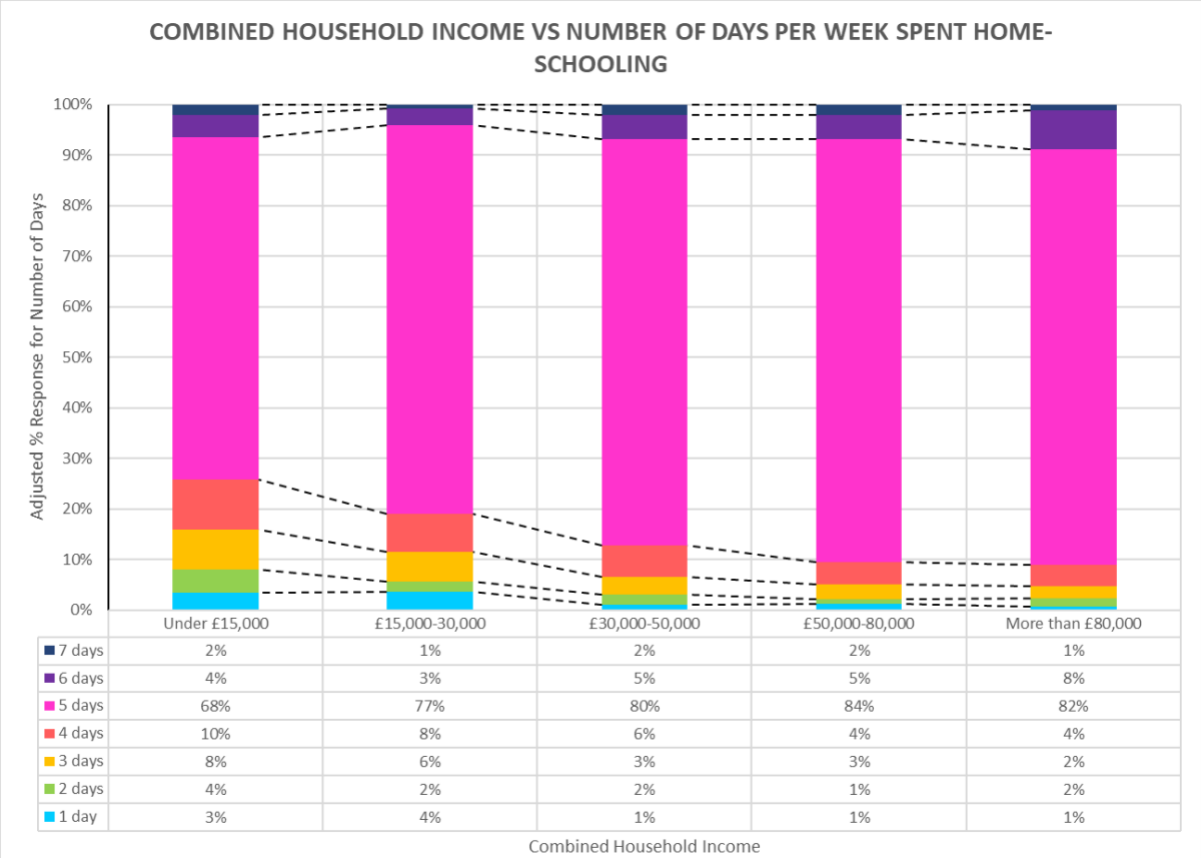


Figure 17: Combined household income compared with days/week home-schooling

Probing further and comparing number of hours per day with combined household income (Figure 18) shows how there are similar rates of those home-schooling for 2, 3 and 4 hours per day across all income categories. However, there are increasing rates of children studying 1 hour per day with decreasing income and decreasing rates of those studying for more than 4 hours with decreasing income. For example, with income under £15,000, 16% spend 1 hour and 17% spend more than 4 hours, compared with income of more than £80,000, where 7% spend 1 hour and 29% spend more than 4 hours.

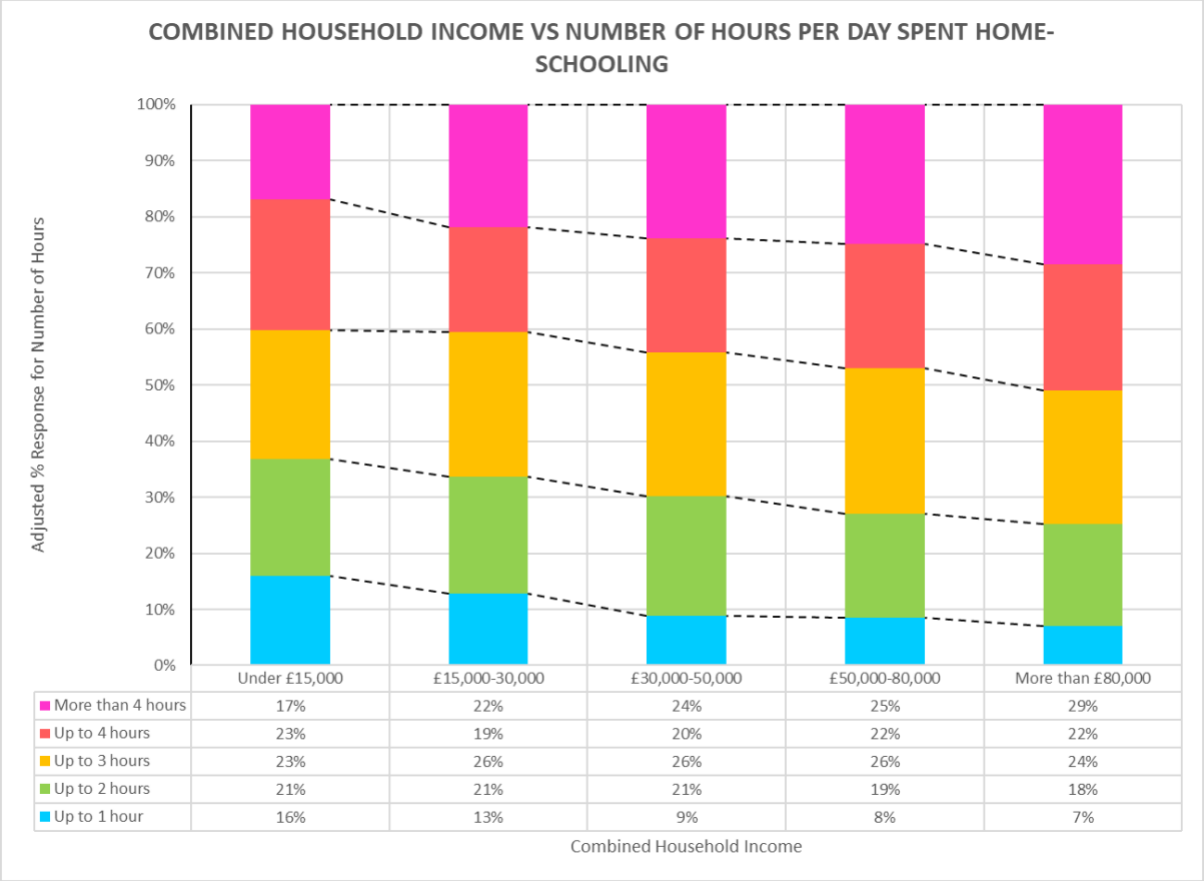


Figure 18: Combined household income compared with hours/day home-schooling

Respondents were asked if the range of subjects (curricular learning areas) with which children are engaging in is broader and more balanced than before the start of the pandemic. The responses are illustrated in Figure 19 below. The predominant response is ‘neither agree nor disagree’ (35%), followed by ‘disagree’ (31%), and ‘strongly disagree’ (21%) thus, accounting for 52% of the sample. Only 9% agreed and 3% strongly agreed with the statement, accounting for 12% of the sample.

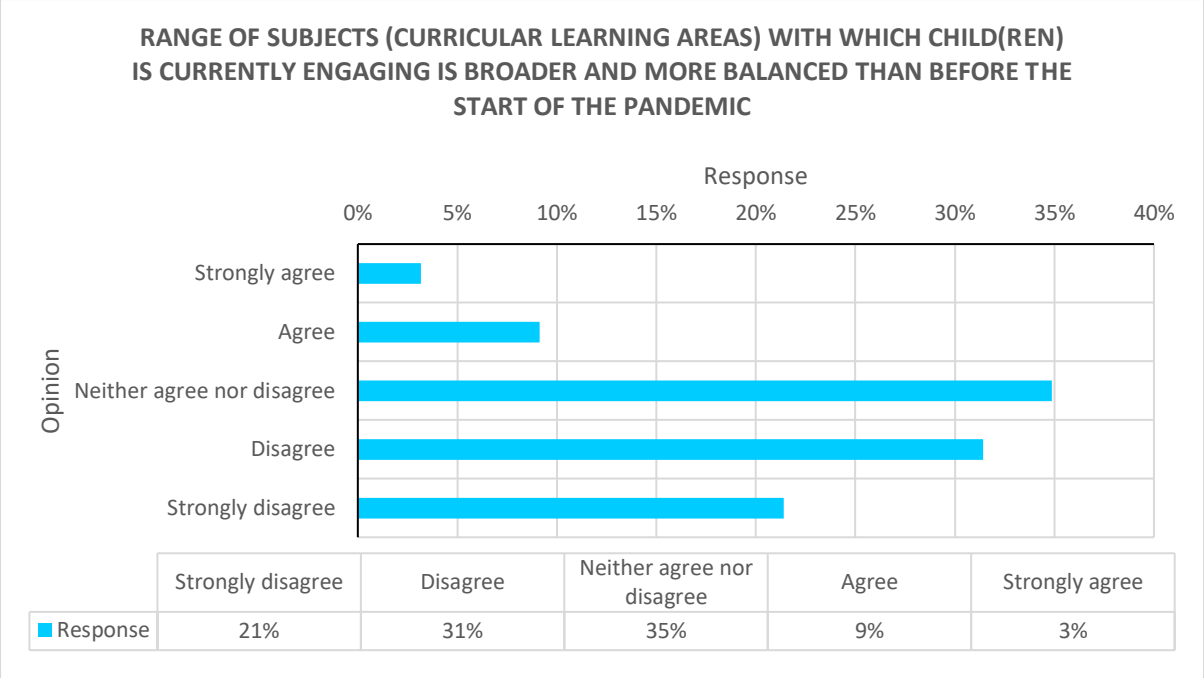


Figure 19: Change in breadth of curriculum

Respondents were also asked if their children prefer learning at home or at school. The results for 2020 and 2021 are shown in Figure 20. Over three-quarters of the sample (76%) prefer learning at school, an increase of 13% from 2020. Those who prefer learning at home account for 9% (-5%), and for both home and school, 15% (-8%).

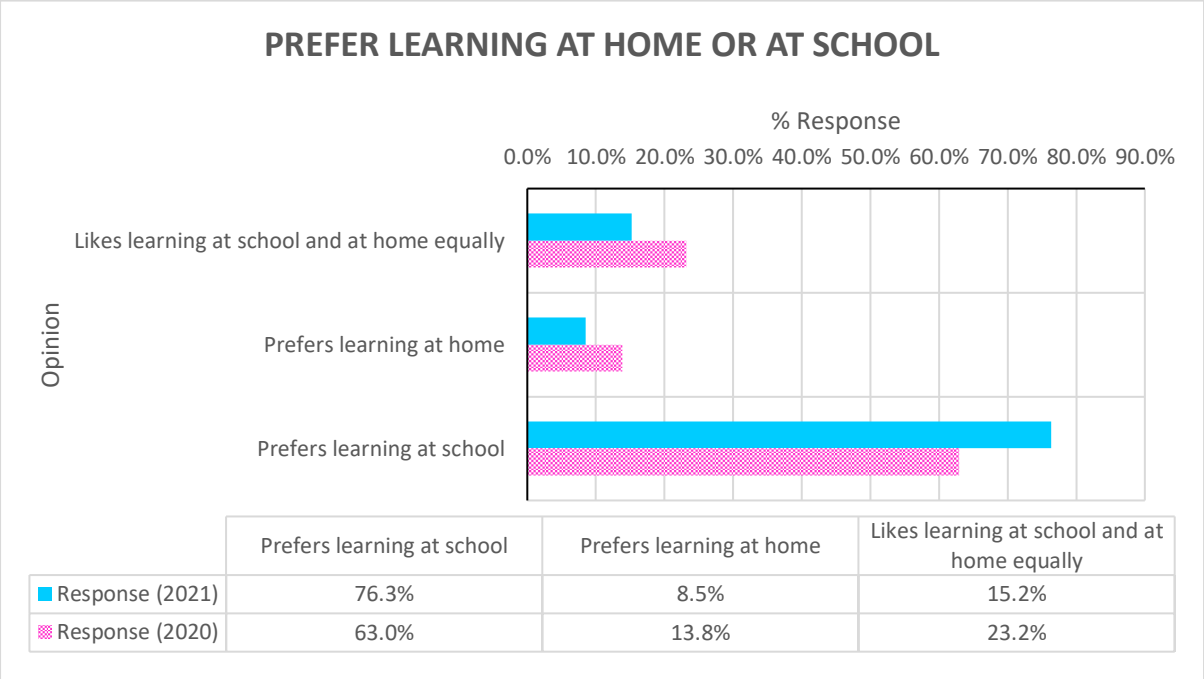
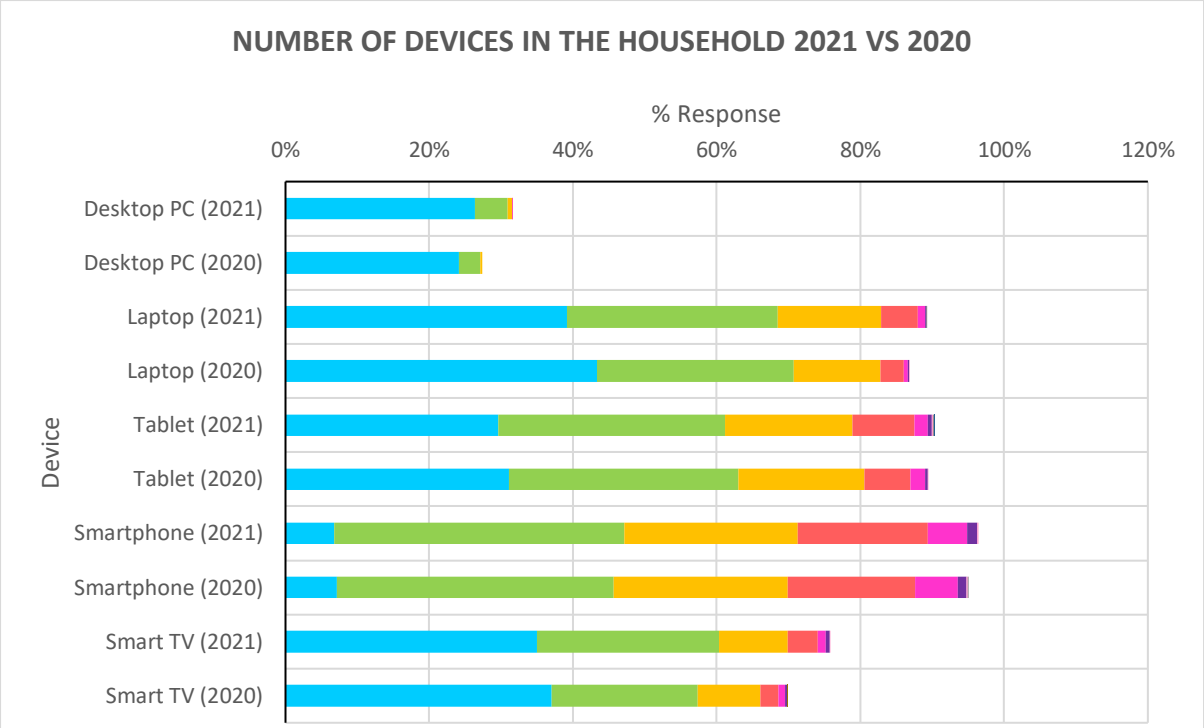


Figure 20: Child prefer learning 'at home' or 'at school' 2021 compared with 2020

Chapter 5. Household Digital Accessibility

5.1 Devices

The number of devices in the home in 2021 for the respondents is shown in Figure 21, including comparison with number of devices in 2020. As illustrated, there appears to be a slight increase in number of devices in 2021 compared with 2020.



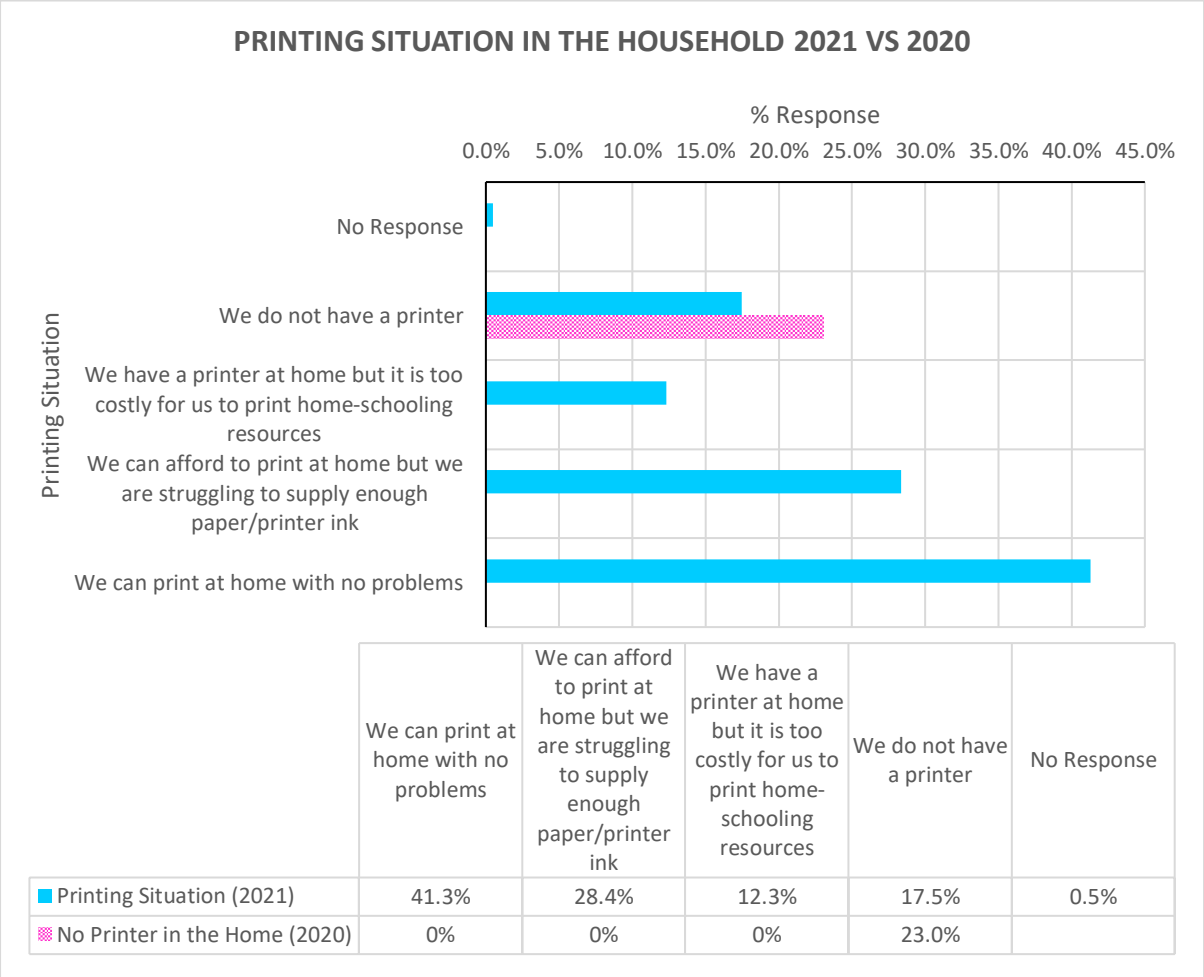
	Smart TV (2020)	Smart TV (2021)	Smartphone (2020)	Smartphone (2021)	Tablet (2020)	Tablet (2021)	Laptop (2020)	Laptop (2021)	Desktop PC (2020)	Desktop PC (2021)
1	37%	35%	7%	7%	31%	30%	43%	39%	24%	26%
2	20%	25%	38%	40%	32%	32%	27%	29%	3%	5%
3	9%	10%	24%	24%	18%	18%	12%	14%	0%	1%
4	3%	4%	18%	18%	6%	9%	3%	5%	0%	0%
5	1%	1%	6%	5%	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%
6	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
7	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
8	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
10	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 21: Number of household digital devices 2021 compared with 2020

Further analysis revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the higher the combined family income, the more likely households were to own one or more desktop PCs, laptops, tablets, smartphones or smart TVs.

5.2 Printing

The printing situation in the household is illustrated in Figure 22. In 2020, the survey asked participants if they have, or did not have a printer in the home. However, the 2021 survey, informed by the prior survey results, expanded the 'we have a printer' option into three more probing options as shown, but continued to include 'we do not have a printer' as before. Thus, the latter is compared with the 2020 response. 41% of the sample can print at home with no problems; 28% can afford to print but are struggling to supply enough paper/printer ink; 12% have a printer but it is too costly for them to print home-schooling resources; 18% of respondents do not have a printer. This is however, a decrease of 5% compared with 2020.

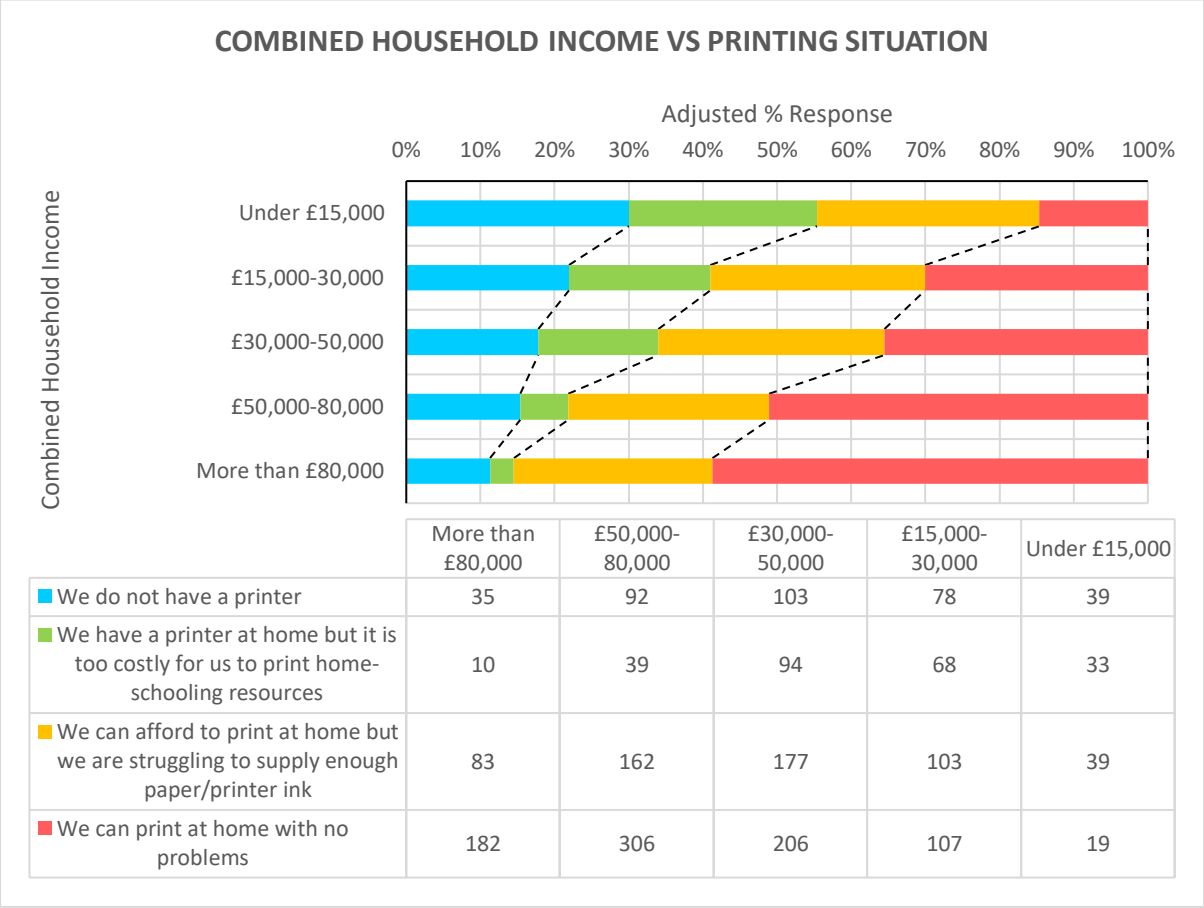


	We can print at home with no problems	We can afford to print at home but we are struggling to supply enough paper/printer ink	We have a printer at home but it is too costly for us to print home-schooling resources	We do not have a printer	No Response
Printing Situation (2021)	41.3%	28.4%	12.3%	17.5%	0.5%
No Printer in the Home (2020)	0%	0%	0%	23.0%	

Figure 22: Printing situation in the household 2021 compared with 2020

To further analyse the printing situation in the household, combined household income was compared with the printing situation as shown in Figure 23. As shown, there are respondents at all income levels who do not have a printer. However, the likelihood of

not having a printer increases with decreasing income level, with 30% of respondents whose income is under £15,000 having no printer compared with 11% of respondents whose income is more than £80,000. Likewise, there are respondents at all income levels who have a printer but find printing too costly. Though, the likelihood of this being the case also increases with decreasing income level with 25% of respondents whose income is £15,000 or less in this situation, compared with 3% of respondents whose income is more than £80,000. The struggle to supply paper/ink is approximately consistent across all income levels (27 – 31%) highlighting that this is a universal issue for many respondents irrespective of income. The ability to print at home with no problems also appears to increase substantially with increasing income with only 15% of respondents whose income is under £15,000 in this situation, compared with 59% of respondents whose income is more than £80,000, representing a significant difference. However, 30% of those who earn £15,000 to £30,000, or double the lower income category, are able to print without problems indicating a noticeable disparity across these income categories.

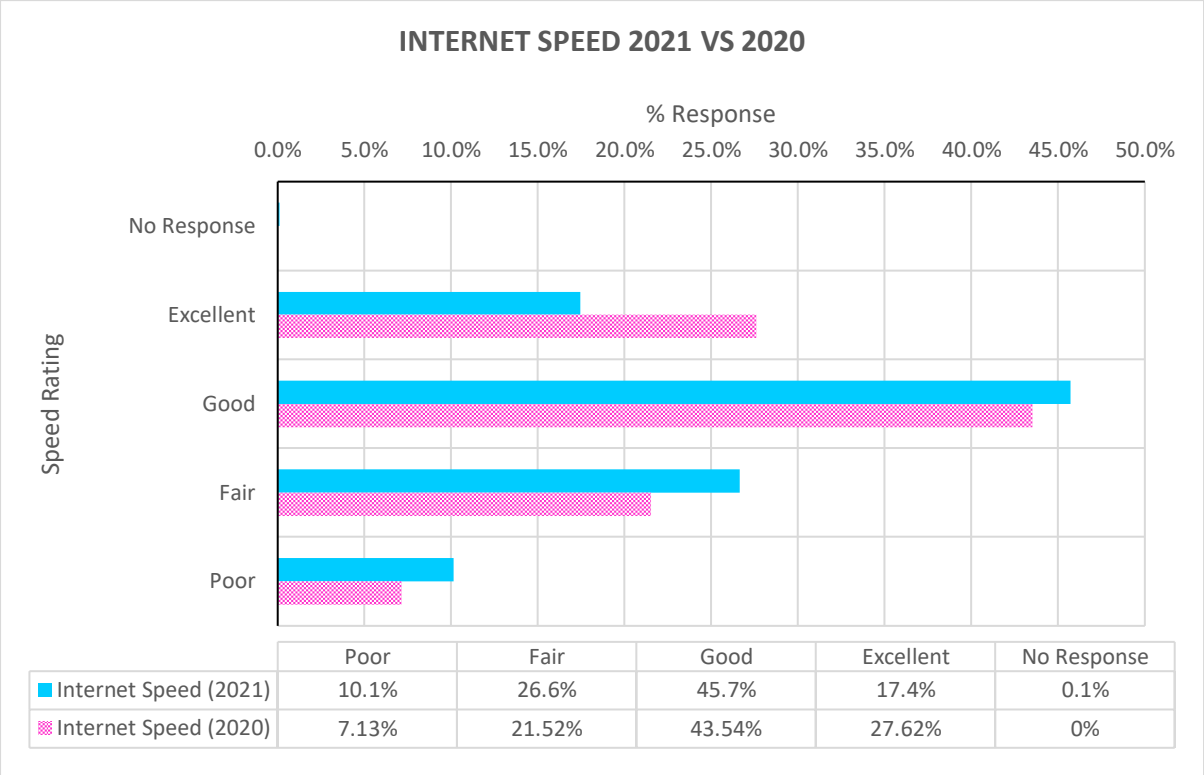


	More than £80,000	£50,000-80,000	£30,000-50,000	£15,000-30,000	Under £15,000
We do not have a printer	35	92	103	78	39
We have a printer at home but it is too costly for us to print home-schooling resources	10	39	94	68	33
We can afford to print at home but we are struggling to supply enough paper/printer ink	83	162	177	103	39
We can print at home with no problems	182	306	206	107	19

Figure 23: Combined household income compared with printing situation

5.3 Internet and Access to Online Resources

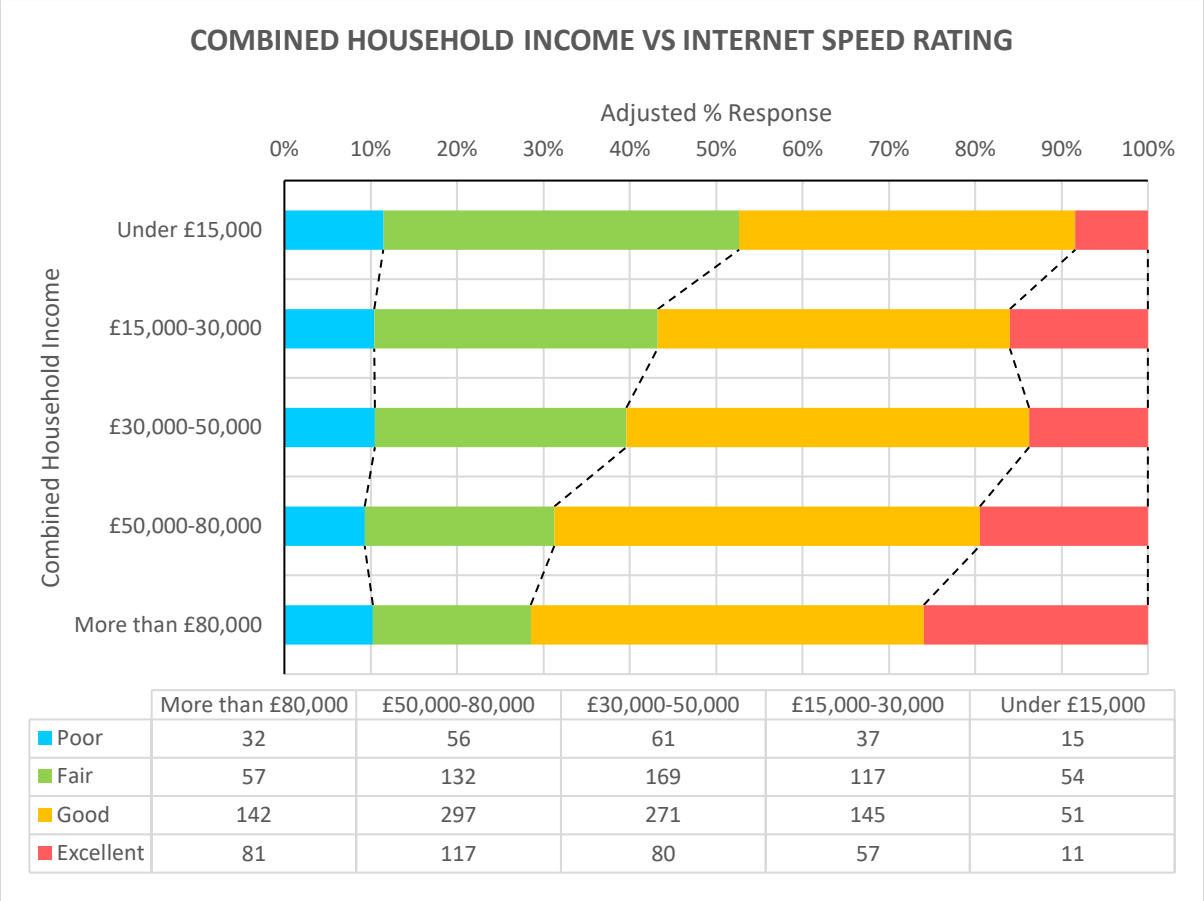
In 2020, the previous survey asked participants to rate their internet speed. The 2021 survey also asked participants to rate their internet speed. The 2020 and 2021 responses are compared in Figure 24. In 2021, 17% of respondents rated their internet speed as excellent compared with 28% in 2020, a decrease of 11%. 46% rated their speed as good compared with 44% in 2020, an increase of 2%, and 27% rated their speed as fair, compared with 22% in 2020, an increase of 5%. However, 10% rated their internet speed as poor, an increase of 3% compared with 2020.



	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	No Response
Internet Speed (2021)	10.1%	26.6%	45.7%	17.4%	0.1%
Internet Speed (2020)	7.13%	21.52%	43.54%	27.62%	0%

Figure 24: Internet speed 2021 compared with 2020

There is an approximately consistent level of 'poor' internet speed across all income categories (8 to 12%) as shown in Figure 25. The likelihood of having a 'fair' internet speed increases with decreasing income level with 41% of respondents whose income is under £15,000 having 'fair' internet speed compared with only 18% of respondents whose income is more than £80,000. Interestingly, respondents with higher income levels appear to have a higher likelihood of faster internet speeds. The combined 'good' and 'excellent' internet speed responses for respondents with income under £15,000 is 47%. For respondents whose income is more than £80,000, the combined response is 72%.



	More than £80,000	£50,000-80,000	£30,000-50,000	£15,000-30,000	Under £15,000
Poor	32	56	61	37	15
Fair	57	132	169	117	54
Good	142	297	271	145	51
Excellent	81	117	80	57	11

Figure 25: Combined household income compared with internet speed rating

Respondents were also asked in both 2020 and 2021 surveys about the ability to access online materials. A comparison of the 2020 and 2021 survey responses is shown in Figure 26. The results for both 2020 and 2021 surveys follow a similar trend. The majority 56% of respondents in 2021 indicate that their children always use their personal devices to access online materials compared with 54% in 2020, an increase of 2%. 29% of respondents indicate that their children sometimes have to share devices or wait to access online materials, compared with 32% in 2020, a decrease of 3%. 14% of respondents indicate that their children often have to share devices or wait, compared with 17% in 2020, a decrease of 3%. Only 1.3% rarely have access due to a lack of equipment, the same as for 2020.

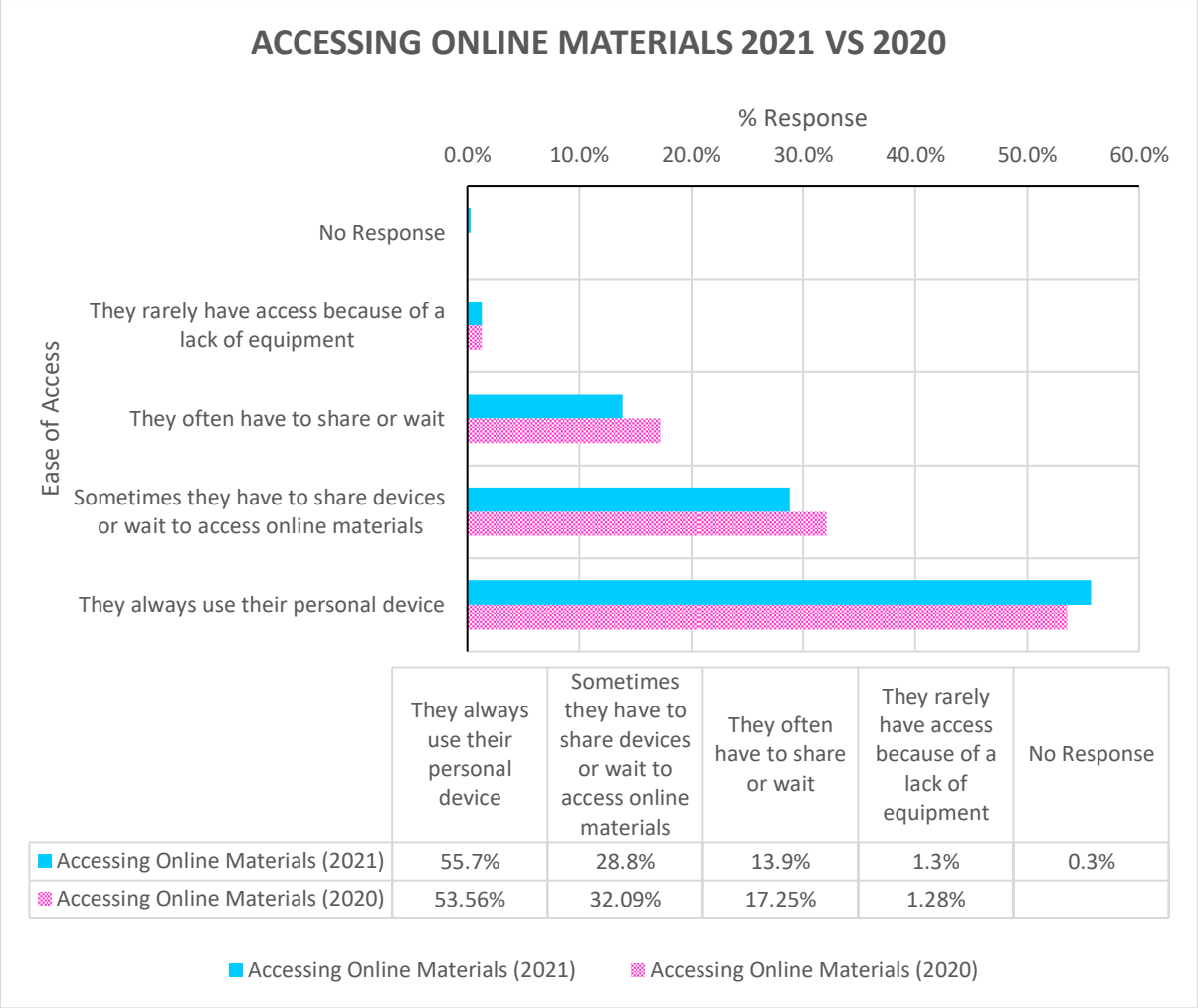
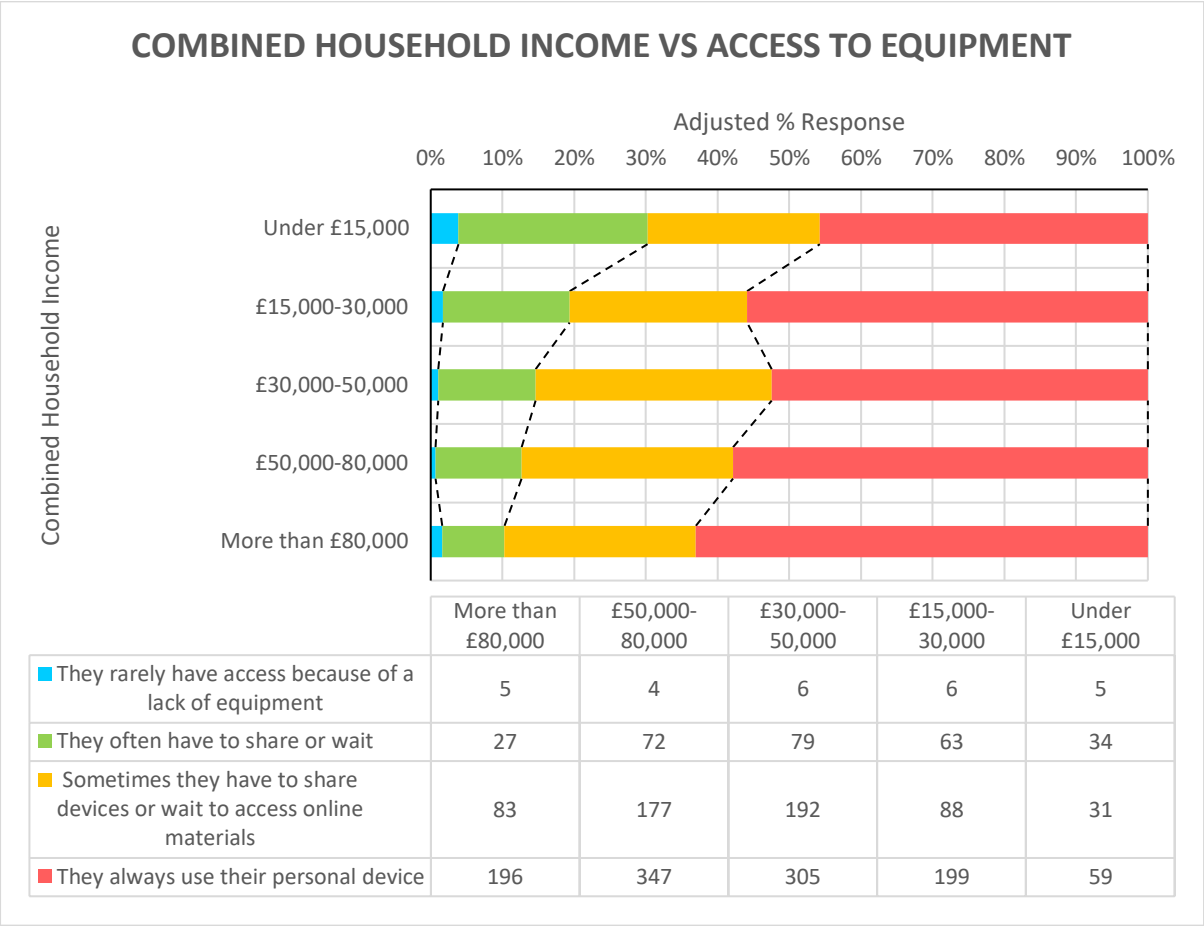


Figure 26: Accessing online materials 2021 compared with 2020

Combined household income was compared with access to equipment/online materials (Figure 27). As shown, respondents who selected that their children rarely have access because of a lack of equipment make up a very small portion of the sample as expected, and varies inconsistently with respect to income, with more than £80,000 (2%), £50,000 - £80,000 (1%), £30,000 - £50,000 (1%), £15,000 - £30,000 (2%), and under £15,000 (4%). Respondents who selected that their children often have to share or wait increases in likelihood with decreasing income, with more than £80,000 (9%), £50,000 - £80,000 (12%), £30,000 - £50,000 (14%), £15,000 - £30,000 (18%), and under £15,000 (26%). The number of respondents who selected that their children sometimes have to share devices or wait also varies inconsistently across the income categories. However, respondents whose income is under £15,000, show that their children are least likely to sometimes share or wait (24%). The same goes for respondents who selected that their children always use their own devices, with under

£15,000 (46%) compared with £15,000 - £30,000 (56%), £30,000 - £50,000 (52%), £50,000 - £80,000 (58%), and more than £80,000 (63%).



	More than £80,000	£50,000-80,000	£30,000-50,000	£15,000-30,000	Under £15,000
They rarely have access because of a lack of equipment	5	4	6	6	5
They often have to share or wait	27	72	79	63	34
Sometimes they have to share devices or wait to access online materials	83	177	192	88	31
They always use their personal device	196	347	305	199	59

Figure 27: Combined household income compared with access to equipment

As previously discussed, the likelihood of having suitable internet speed quality also appears to decrease with decreasing income. Thus, Figure 28 highlights the variation of speed quality with respondents who find accessing school materials via the internet challenging. There is a degree of relationship between a large portion of the sample who selected yes for this response and the quality of their internet speed, with the percentage of responses increasing as internet speed quality decreases. In other words, 38% of respondents with poor speed responded that they find accessing materials challenging compared with 27% with fair speed, 17% with good speed, and 12% with excellent speed. However, across the board, there are greater percentages of respondents answering no with respect to finding accessing materials online versus

answering yes indicating that this is not a universal problem impacting the entire sample.

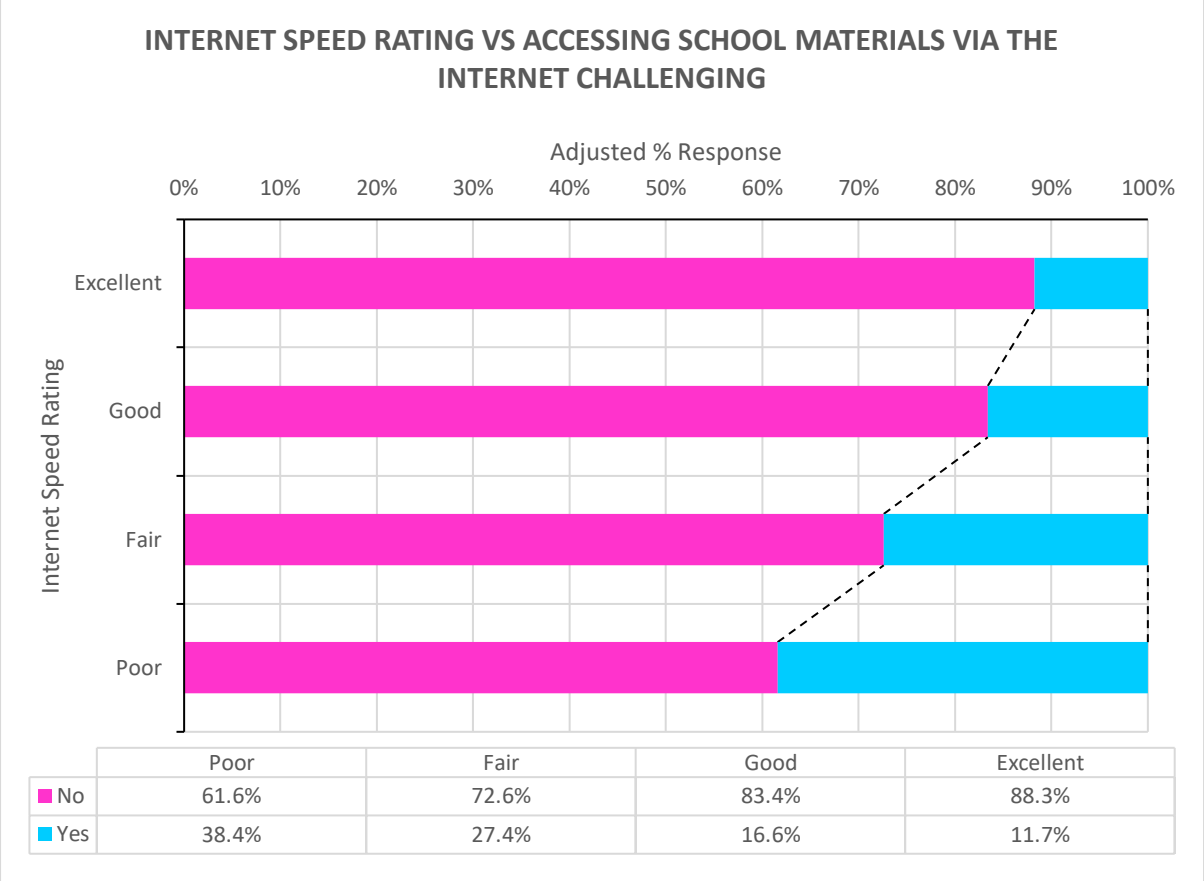
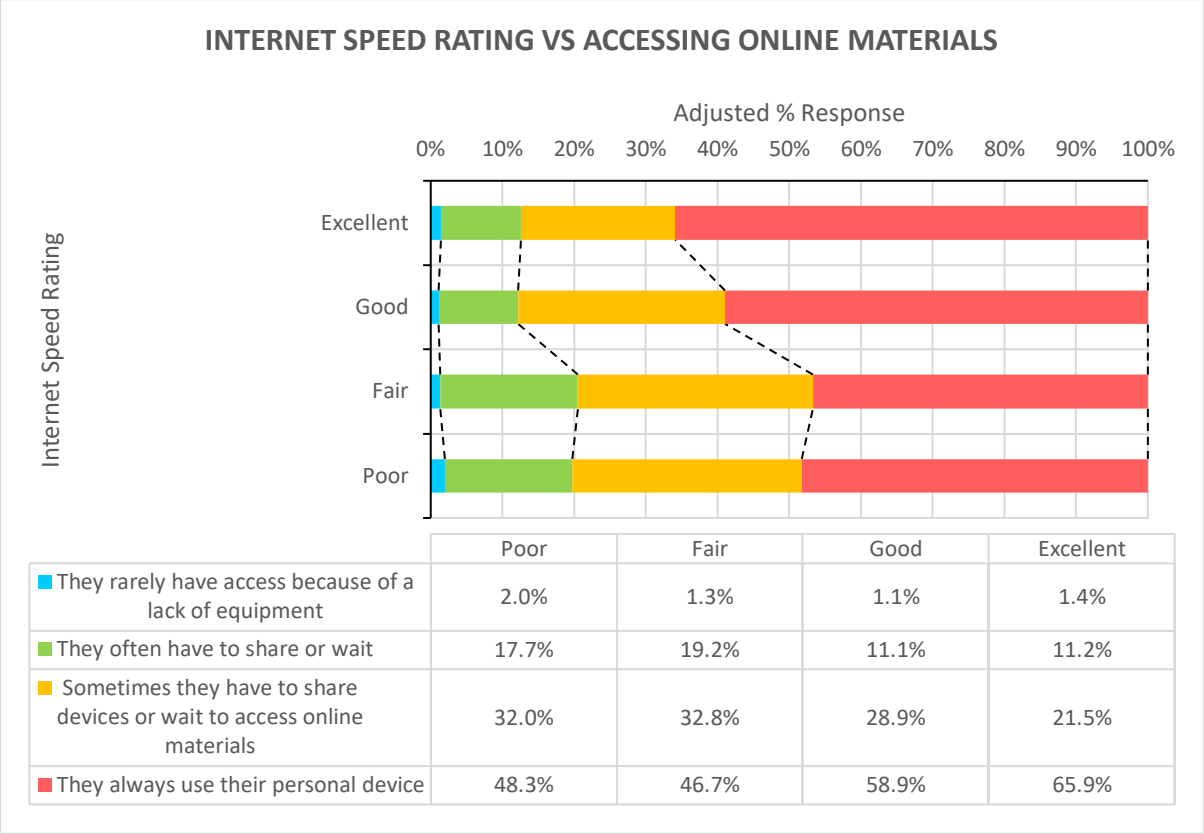


Figure 28: Internet speed rating compared with accessing school materials online

However, in probing this issue further, internet speed was compared with access to devices and online materials. As shown in Figure 29, those with lower likelihood of being able to always use their own devices, sometimes having to share or wait, or often having to share or wait, also generally corresponds with reducing internet speed quality. For example, 48% of those with poor internet speed and 46% of those with fair internet speed are always able to access their own devices, compared with 66% of those with excellent internet speed and 59% with good internet speed. Likewise, 32% of respondents whose children sometimes share or wait corresponds with poor speed, and 33% with fair speed, compared with only 21% for excellent speed and 29% for good speed. 18% of respondents whose children often have to wait, or share corresponds with poor internet speed and 19% with fair speed, compared with only 11% for those with excellent internet speed and 11% with good internet speed. There appears to be two marginally different categories of internet speed and device

accessibility namely, 1) those with poor and fair internet speed and marginally lower likelihood of device and online materials accessibility, and 2) those with good and excellent internet speed and marginally higher likelihood of device and online materials accessibility.



	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
They rarely have access because of a lack of equipment	2.0%	1.3%	1.1%	1.4%
They often have to share or wait	17.7%	19.2%	11.1%	11.2%
Sometimes they have to share devices or wait to access online materials	32.0%	32.8%	28.9%	21.5%
They always use their personal device	48.3%	46.7%	58.9%	65.9%

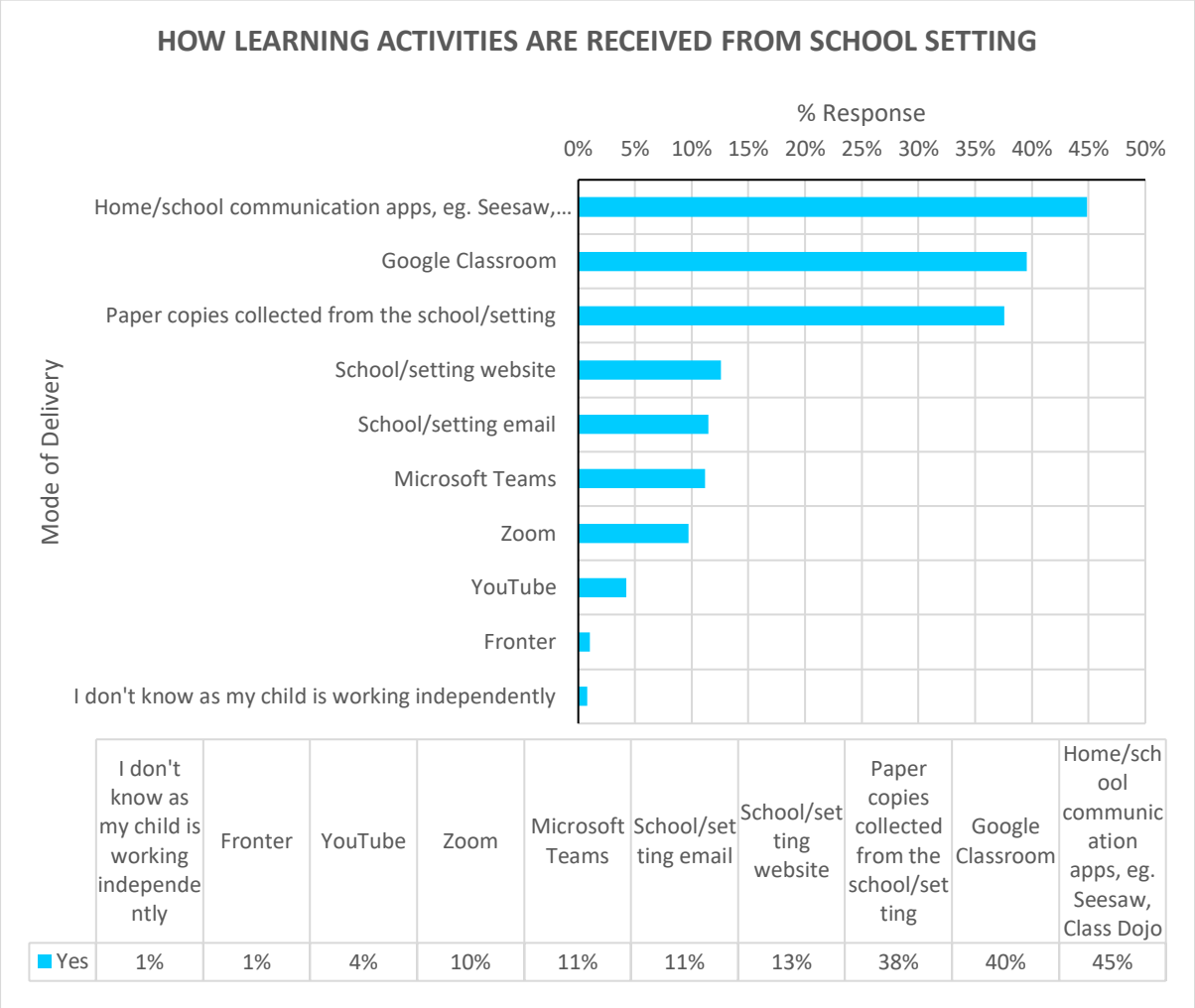
Figure 29: Internet speed rating compared with accessing online materials

So, as respondents' income decreases, they face a situation with fewer devices, difficulties with printing or inability to print at all, increased likelihood of lower internet quality, and difficulties with accessing devices and online materials. Those whose income is under £15,000 are particularly vulnerable to these issues, made worse by increased likelihood of being unemployed, lacking confidence, and taking a less active role in home-schooling as previously discussed.

Chapter 6. Home-Schooling Activities and Resources

6.1 Activities and Resources Provided by the School

Figure 30 shows participant responses for how learning activities are provided from the school setting. The most common method is home/school communication apps (45%), followed by Google classroom (40%), paper copies from the school/setting (38%), school/setting website (13%), school/setting email (11%), Microsoft Teams (11%), Zoom (10%), YouTube (4%), and Fronter (1%) respectively. 1% of respondents didn't know as their child works independently.



	I don't know as my child is working independently	Fronter	YouTube	Zoom	Microsoft Teams	School/setting email	School/setting website	Paper copies collected from the school/setting	Google Classroom	Home/school communication apps, eg. Seesaw, Class Dojo
Yes	1%	1%	4%	10%	11%	11%	13%	38%	40%	45%

Figure 30: How learning activities are received from school setting

Figure 31 shows responses for the quality of resources compared with the previous lockdown. The highest response was for better (39%), followed by about the same (30%), much better (26%), worse (3%), and much worse (3%). Therefore, in total, 65%

of respondents indicated improved quality, with only 6% indicating a deterioration in quality.

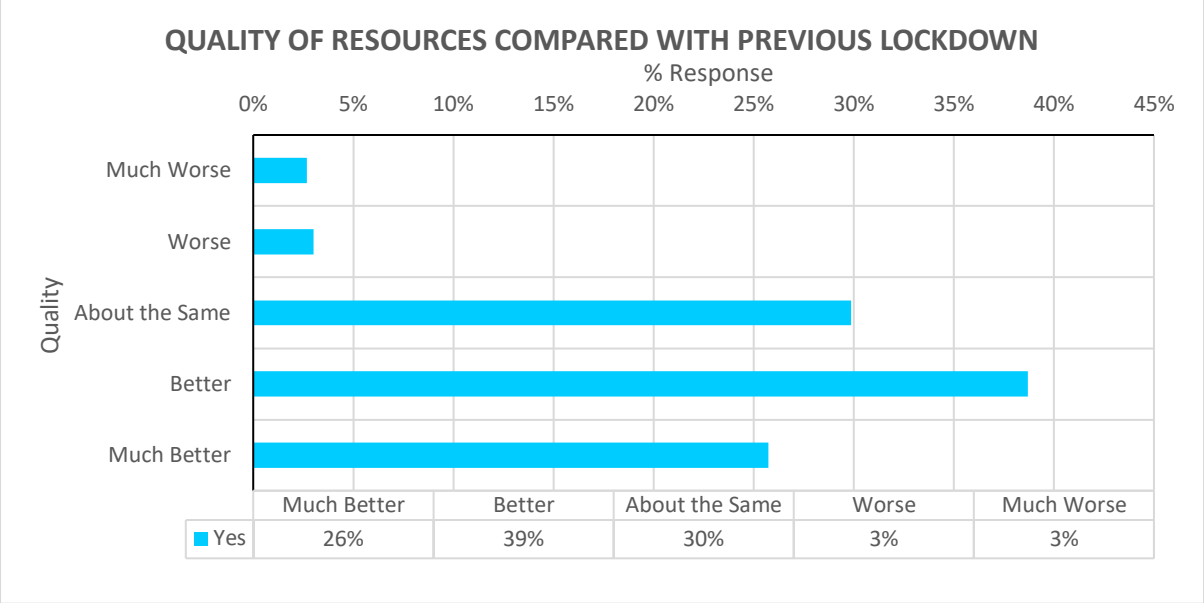


Figure 31: Quality of resources compared with previous lockdown

Figure 32 presents the responses for whether respondents want more or fewer activities from the school/setting for both the 2020 and 2021 surveys for comparison. Both years yielded similar patterns of results. The largest portion of respondents indicated that they want neither more nor fewer resources (65%), an increase of 3% from 2020. 21% indicated that they want more resources, a decrease of 4% from 2020, and 14% indicated that they want fewer resources, an increase of 1% from 2020.

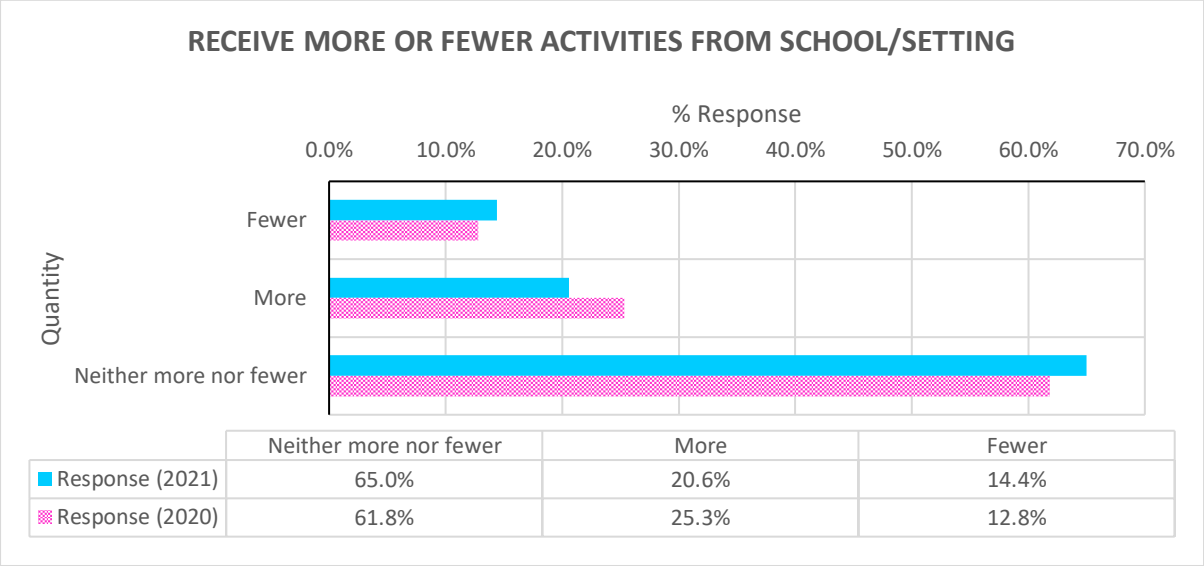


Figure 32: Receive more or fewer activities from school/setting

Thus, the majority of respondents are happy with the quality of resources provided by the school/setting, indicating it is the same or improved since the previous lockdown, and the majority are happy with the quantity of resources.

6.2 Other Activities and Resources

Respondents were asked about activities/resources their children use other than those provided by the school. The responses are shown in Figure 33. The most common is life skills (52%), followed by books (48%), websites and online materials (40%), arts and crafts (39%), outdoor learning (32%), computer apps (31%), TV programmes (31%), play resources (29%), workbooks/worksheets (29%), computer games (15%), audio books (10%), online private tutoring for the core curriculum (5%), and online private tutoring beyond the core school curriculum (4%).

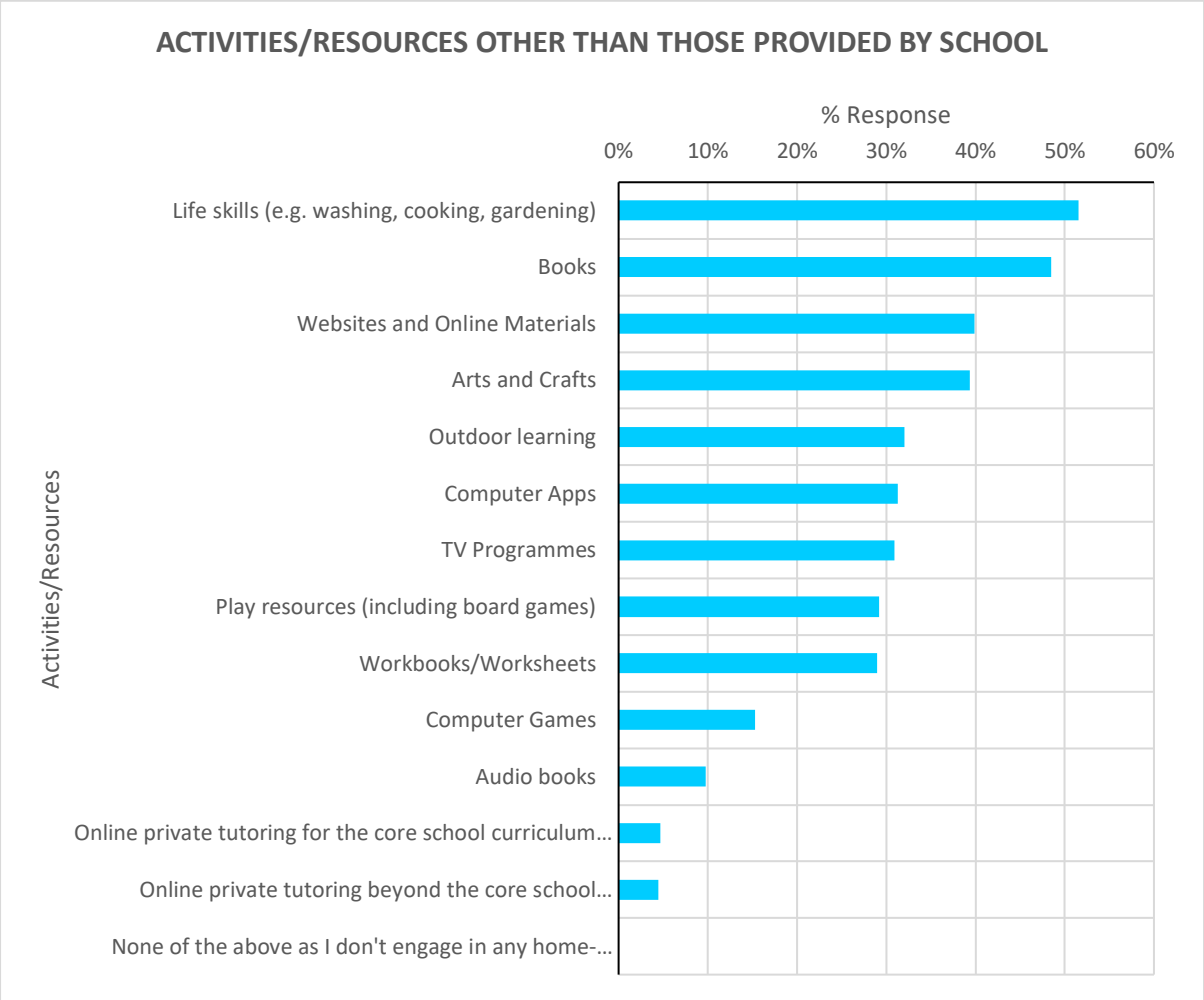


Figure 33: Activities/resources other than those provided by school

Chapter 7. Parent/Carer and Pupil Wellbeing

7.1 Parent/Carer Wellbeing

Respondents were asked how school closures/lockdown had impacted their mental and physical health and wellbeing. As shown in Figure 34, 79.5% of respondents (n= 1590) reported a negative or very negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Only 5% (n=77) reported a positive or very positive impact and 15.5% (n=313) reported no impact.

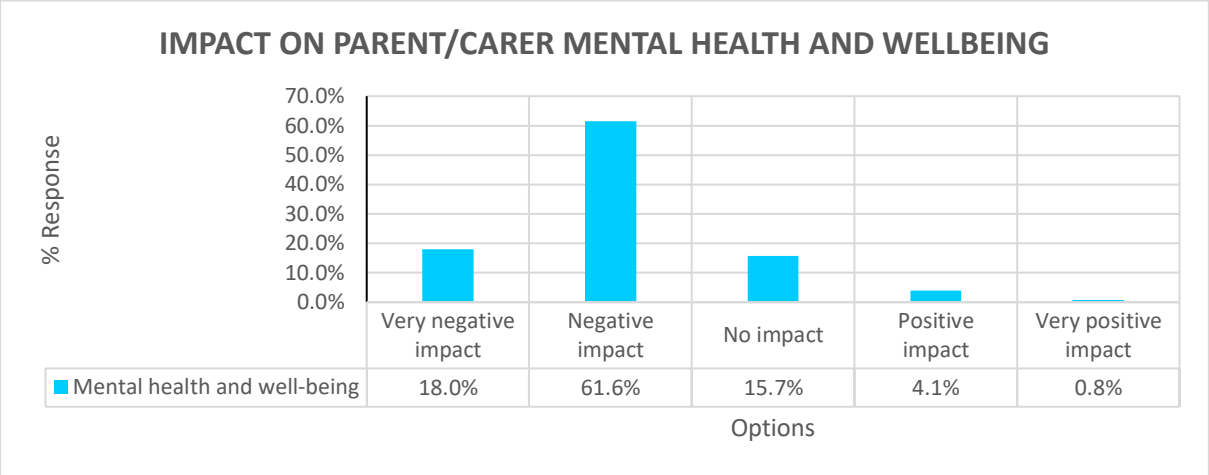


Figure 34: Impact on parent/carer mental health and wellbeing

Figure 35 shows that 67% of respondents (n= 1335) reported a negative or very negative impact on their physical health and wellbeing, 7% (n=144) reported a positive or very positive impact and 26% (n=516) reported no impact.

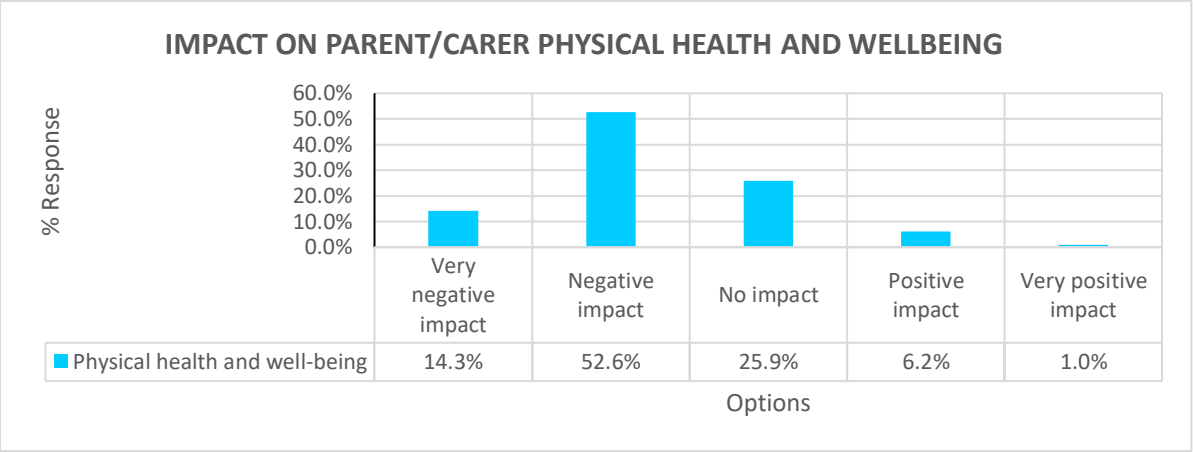


Figure 35: Impact on Parent/Carer Physical Health and Wellbeing

A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant relationship between combined household income and reported impact on parent/carer mental health [27.078, df=16, p=0.041], but no significant relationship with reported physical health [15.869, df=16, p=0.462] between combined household incomes. Interestingly, the worst impact (lowest mean scores) for both physical and mental health were reported in the 'Under £15,000' and in the 'Over £80,000' groups. However, as Figure 36 illustrates, the majority of parents/carers have been negatively impacted across all income groups.

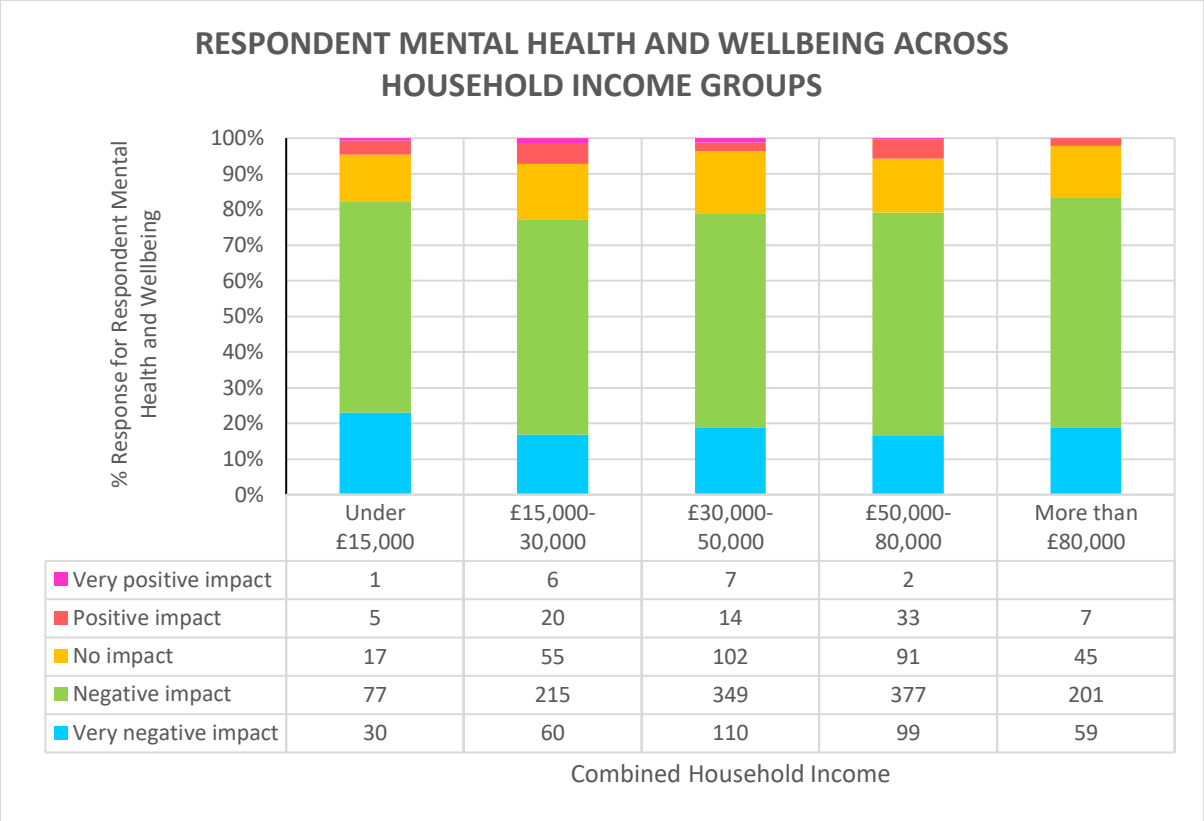


Figure 36: Respondent mental health and wellbeing across household income groups

Figure 37 shows that reported mental health impacts changed little depending on parent/carer employment status, with the vast majority in each category reporting 'negative' or 'very negative' impacts.

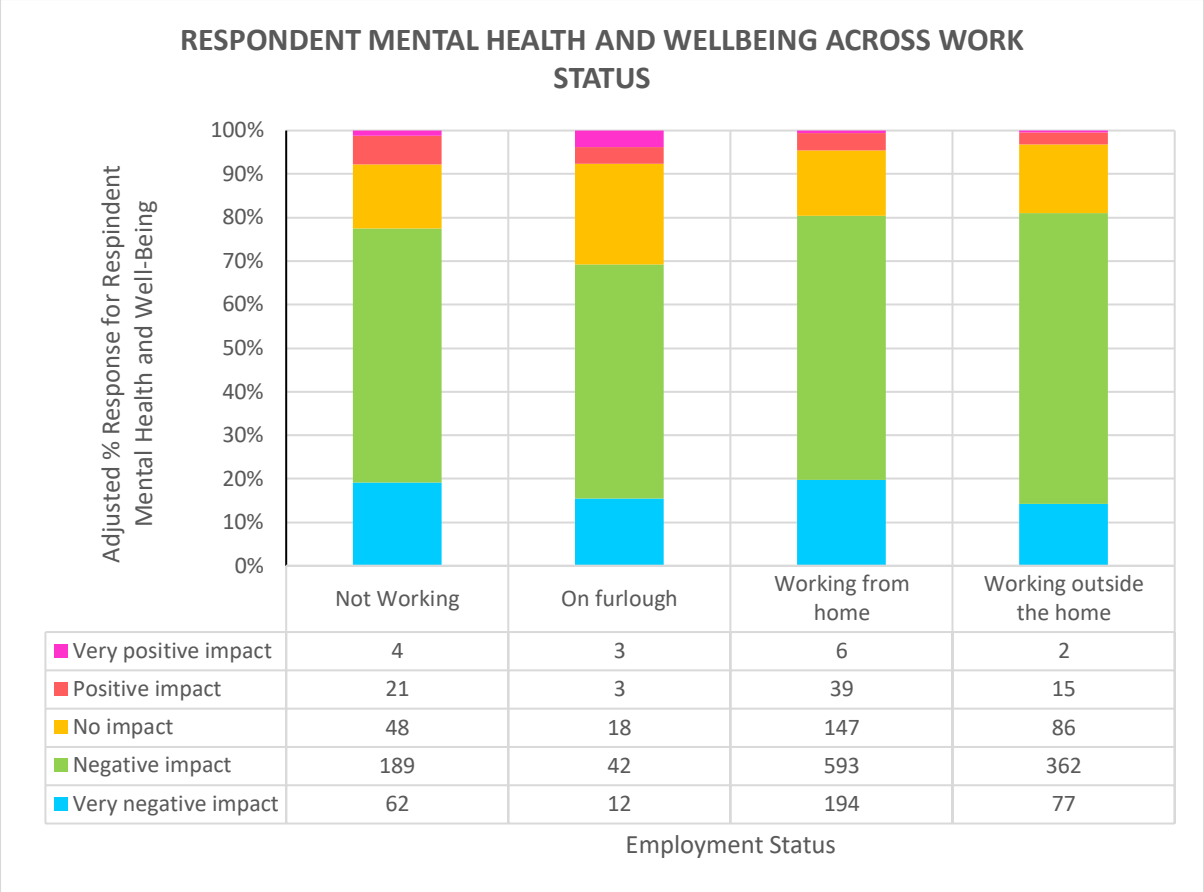


Figure 37: Respondent mental health and wellbeing across work status

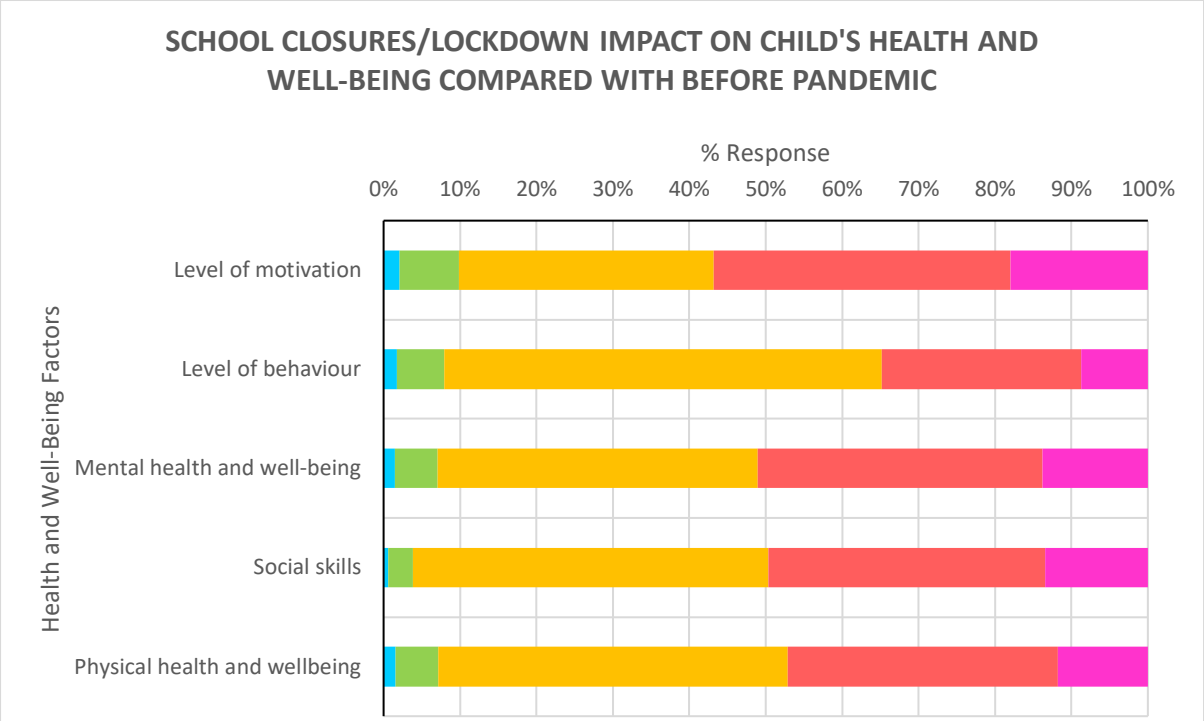
7.2 Pupil Wellbeing

As shown in Figure 38, many parents/carers felt that the current lockdown/school closures had resulted in their child/ren's health and wellbeing being worse or much worse in terms of mental health (n=1865, 51%), social skills (n=1814, 49%), physical health and wellbeing (n=1720, 47%), and level of behaviour (n=1271, 35%). There were no significant gender differences across any of these factors.

Chi-square tests for independence demonstrated a significant relationship between combined household income and reported level of motivation [31.028, df=16, p=0.013], behaviour [73.458, df=16, p<0.001], mental health and wellbeing [35.494, df=16, p=0.003], and social skills [61.130, df=16, p<0.001]. Reported outcomes were worse for all factors for those from low-income homes.

Further chi-square tests also demonstrated significant variation between different types of school for reported level of motivation [98.891, df=20, p<0.001], behaviour [90.248, df=20, p<0.001], and physical health and wellbeing [100.995, df=20,

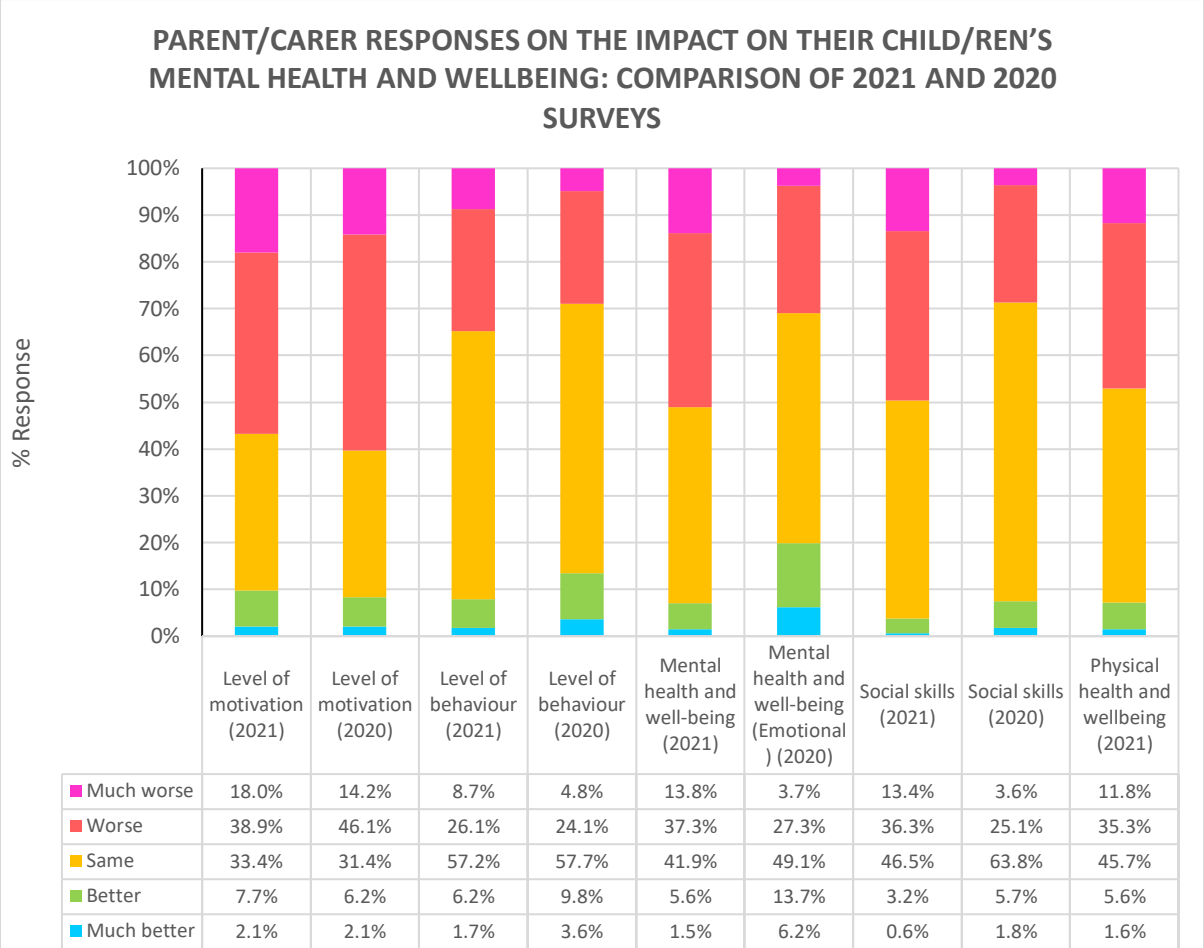
p<0.001]. A comparison of mean scores indicated that worse outcomes were reported for pupils in special schools and primary schools, than for pupils in post-primary and pre-school.



	Physical health and wellbeing	Social skills	Mental health and well-being	Level of behaviour	Level of motivation
Much better	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Better	6%	3%	6%	6%	8%
Same	46%	47%	42%	57%	33%
Worse	35%	36%	37%	26%	39%
Much worse	12%	13%	14%	9%	18%

Figure 38: Impact of lockdown on children's mental health and wellbeing

Figure 39 compares the current findings with those reported in 2020. More parent/carers rated their child/ren's wellbeing as worse or much worse for mental health (51% v 31% in 2020), social skills (50% v 29% in 2020), and behaviour (35% v 29% in 2020). The impact of school closures/lockdown on children's motivation was felt to be worse or much worse by 60% of parents/carers in 2020 and by 57% from the current study. The impact of the lockdown on children's physical health was not asked in the 2020 study.



	Level of motivation (2021)	Level of motivation (2020)	Level of behaviour (2021)	Level of behaviour (2020)	Mental health and well-being (2021)	Mental health and well-being (Emotional) (2020)	Social skills (2021)	Social skills (2020)	Physical health and wellbeing (2021)
Much worse	18.0%	14.2%	8.7%	4.8%	13.8%	3.7%	13.4%	3.6%	11.8%
Worse	38.9%	46.1%	26.1%	24.1%	37.3%	27.3%	36.3%	25.1%	35.3%
Same	33.4%	31.4%	57.2%	57.7%	41.9%	49.1%	46.5%	63.8%	45.7%
Better	7.7%	6.2%	6.2%	9.8%	5.6%	13.7%	3.2%	5.7%	5.6%
Much better	2.1%	2.1%	1.7%	3.6%	1.5%	6.2%	0.6%	1.8%	1.6%

Figure 39: Impact of lockdown on children's mental health and wellbeing: comparison of 2021 and 2020

Figure 40 shows that more than half of the parents/carers of children in upper primary and post-primary schools felt that their children's mental health was worse or much worse: Primary P5-P7 (n=621, 54%), Post-Primary Yr8-Yr10 (n=387, 52%), Post-Primary Yr11-12 (n=143, 51%) and Post-Primary Yr13-Yr14 (n=73, 54%). While still concerning, the mental health impact appeared less severe among younger children, with parents rating this as 'worse' or 'much worse' for 49% of Primary P1-P4 (n=576) and 33% of Pre-school (n=60). It should be kept in mind however that younger children are less able to describe how they feel and an impact on emotional wellbeing is more likely to be communicated through their behaviour or somatic symptoms.

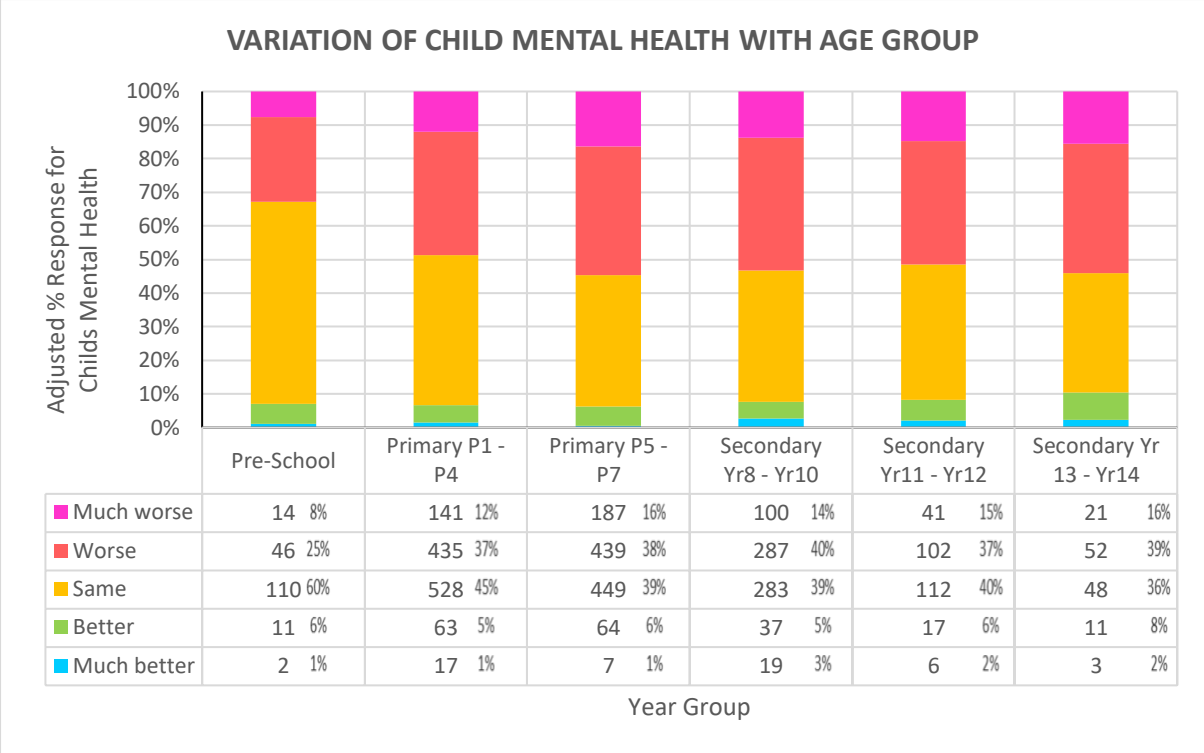


Figure 40: Variation of child mental health with age group

7.3 School Support Provided

The most common responses in relation to support provided by schools were guidance on supporting mental health and wellbeing (n=1746, 48%), guidance on physical wellbeing and the need to keep active (n=1607, 44%) and regular emails from Principals/Teachers (n=1522, 41.5%). Other types of pastoral support included personal contact e.g. by telephone, Zoom, Teams etc. (n=832, 23%), emotional wellbeing lessons for children (n=692, 19%), online opportunities for their children to safely stay connected to their peers (n=526, 14%) and links/referrals to other external support services (n=858, 23%). A small number of parents/carers felt that the schools provided counselling (n=192, 5%) and a small number were unsure about the supports provided (n=203, 5.5%). See Figure 41 for more detail.

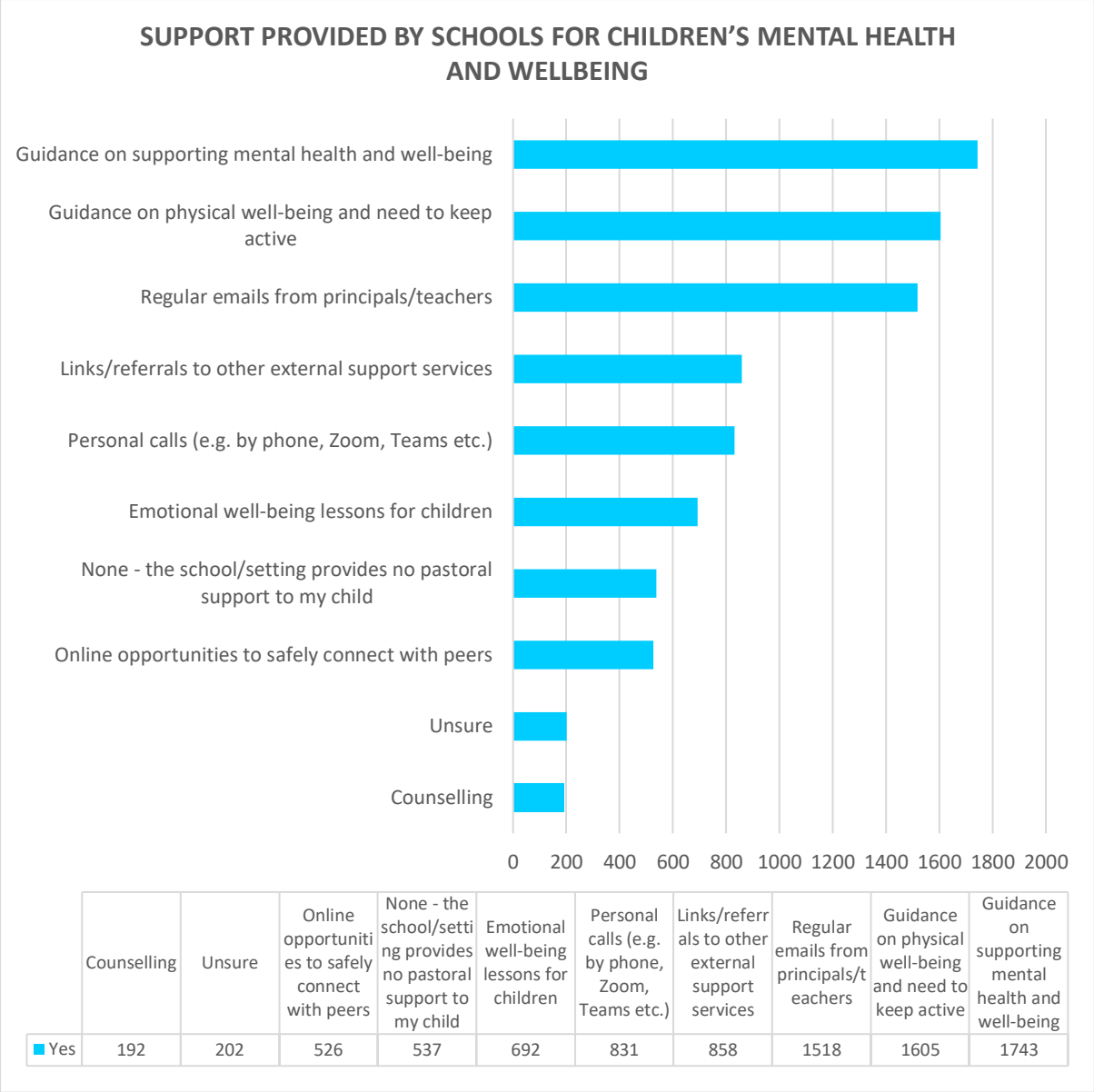


Figure 41: Support provided by schools for children's mental health and wellbeing

As displayed in Figures 42 and 43 overleaf, the vast majority of parents/carers felt that their child/ren's school placed importance on nurture, safety and well-being. Primary, special and pre-school settings were more likely to place importance on nurture, safety and wellbeing in the eyes of parents/carers, with a chi-square test confirming a statistically significant relationship [58.171, df=25, $p<0.001$].

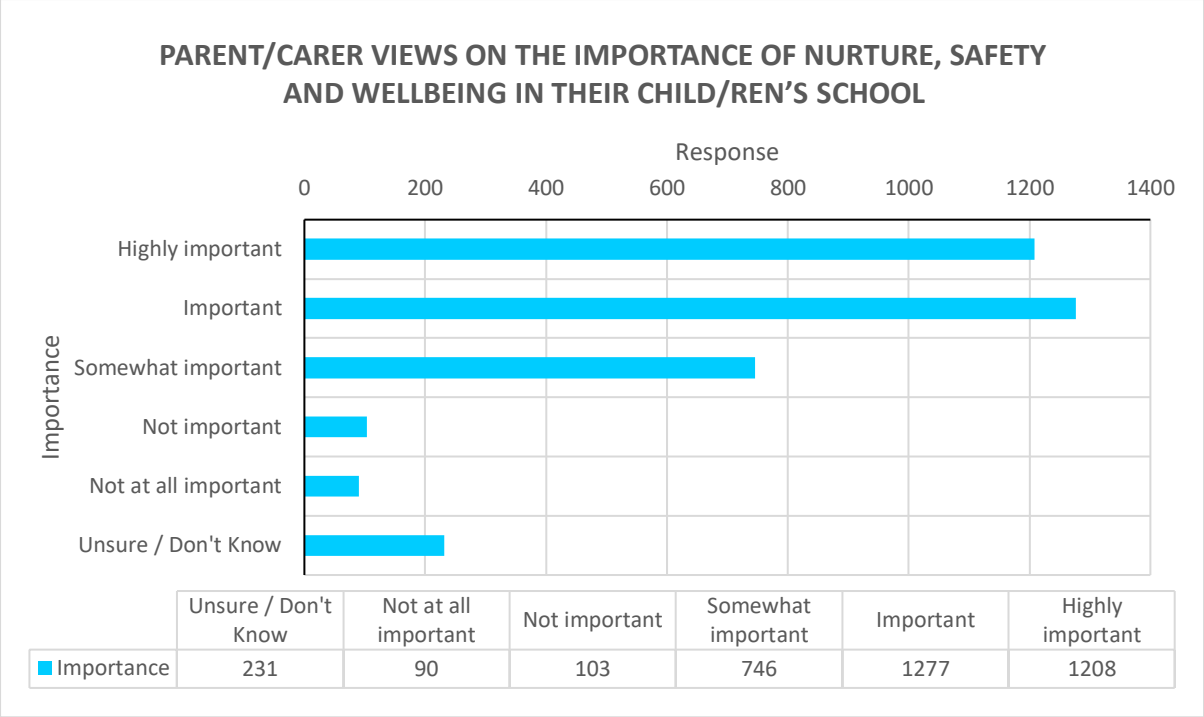


Figure 42: Nurture, safety and wellbeing in schools

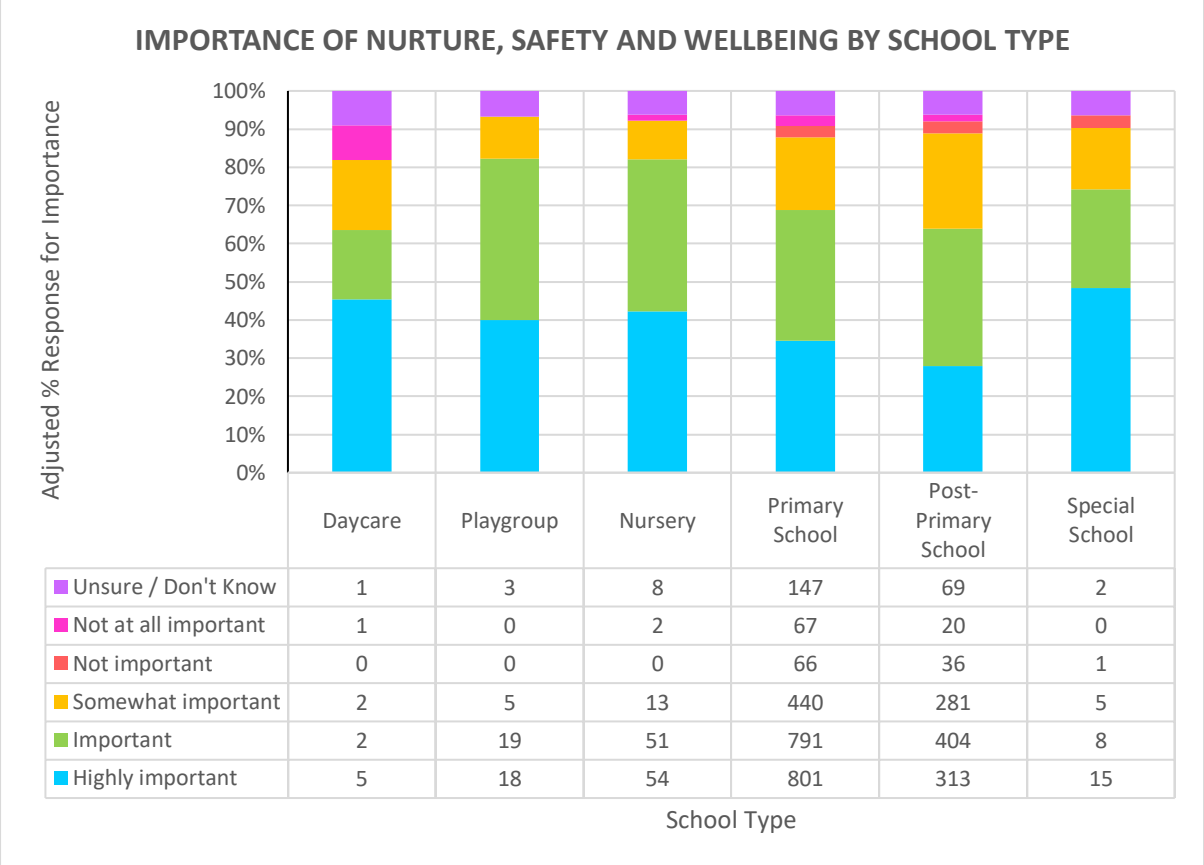
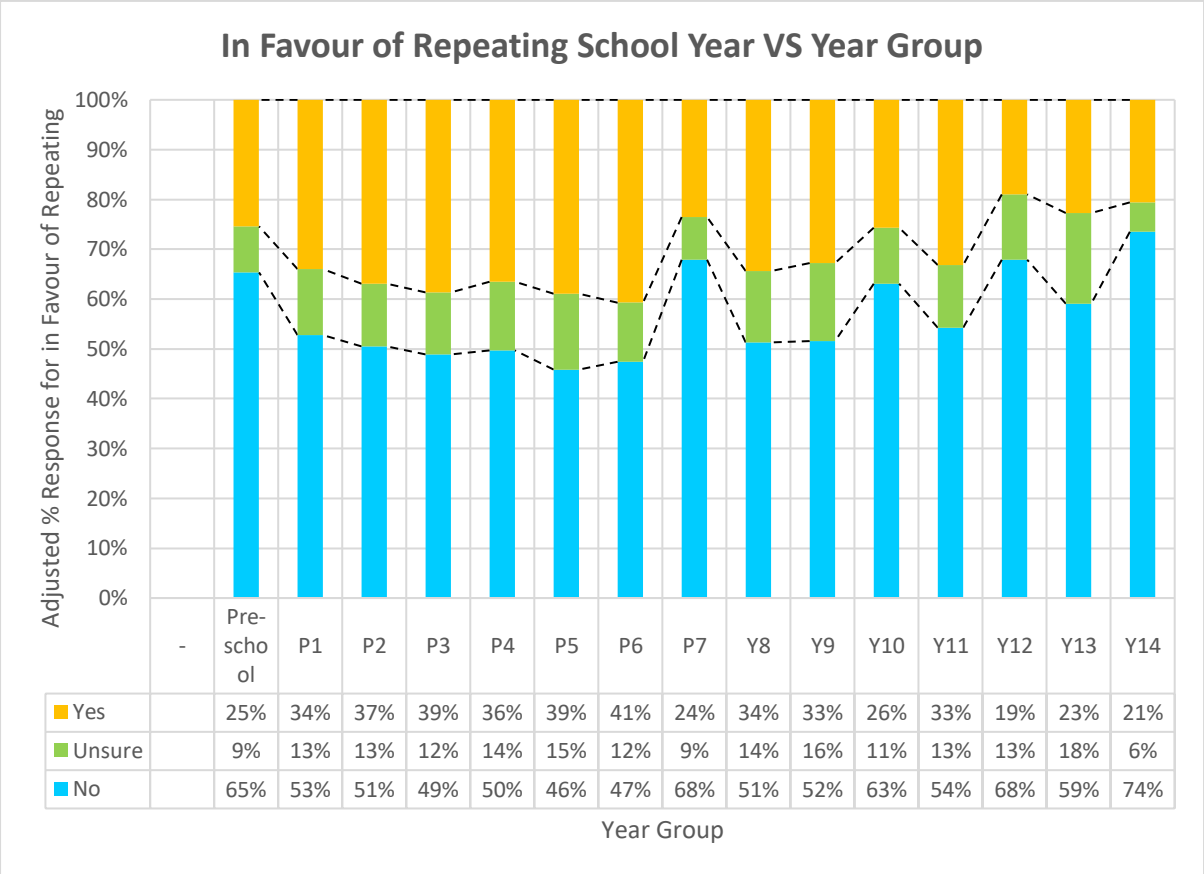


Figure 43: Importance of nurture, safety and wellbeing across school setting management types

Where schools did place importance or high importance on nurture, safety and well-being according to parents/carers, this had a highly statistically significant relationship with reported levels of motivation [175.846, df=20, p<0.001], behaviour [115.073, df=20, p<0.001], mental health and wellbeing [201.008, df=20, p<0.001] and social skills [227.330, df=20, p<0.001] , and physical health and wellbeing [168.540, df=20, p<0.001], compared to those schools who were not reported to value these approaches. This indicates that, in the perceptions of parents/carers, schools investing in nurture, safety and well-being are having positive impacts with their pupils in these domains.

Within this section of the survey, respondents were asked whether they would be “in favour of your child repeating the 2020/21 year due to the impact of school closures”. Overall, parents/carers were not in favour for 54% of individual children, in favour for 33%, and unsure for 13%. As figure 44 below indicates, there is a subtle contrast between primary and post-primary, with parents/carers pupils on the cusp of transition (pre-school, P7, Y12 and Y14) least likely to advocate repeating a year.



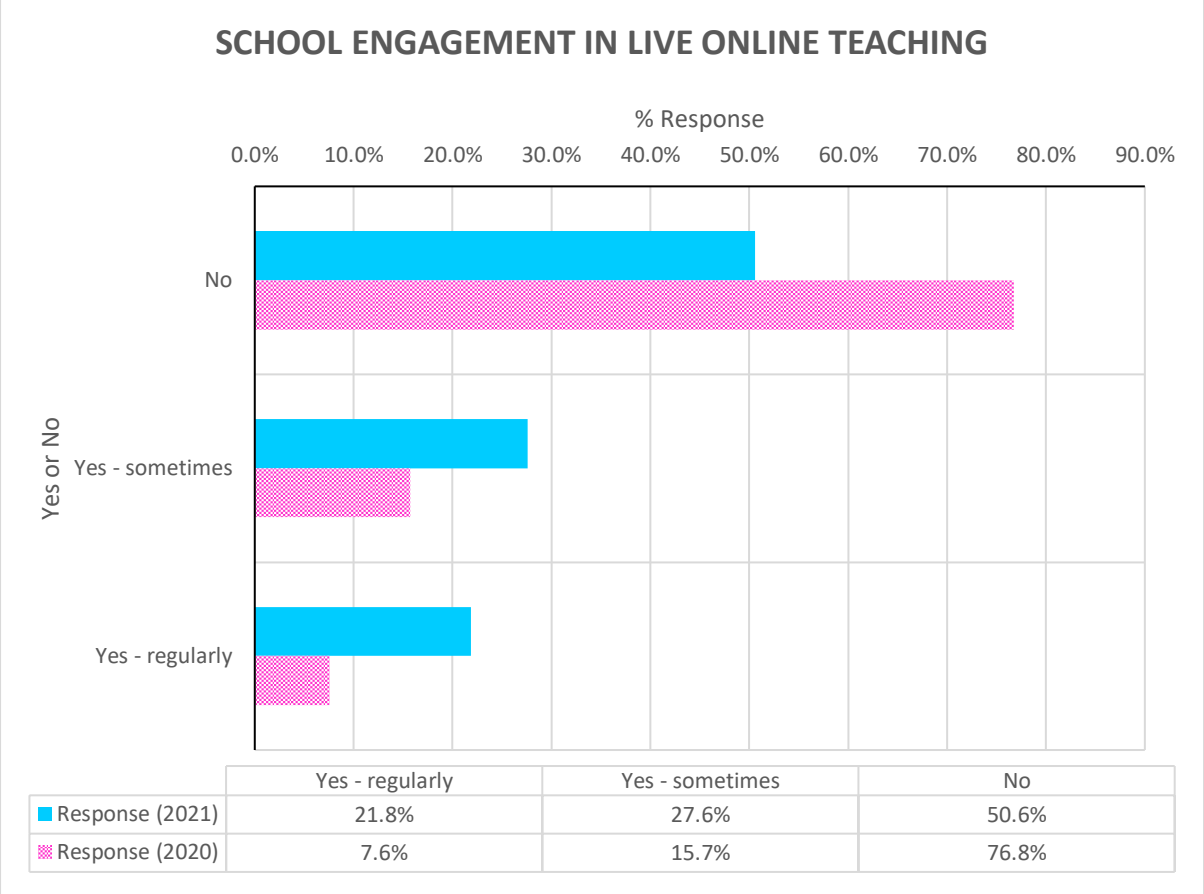
	-	Pre-school	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Y14
Yes		25%	34%	37%	39%	36%	39%	41%	24%	34%	33%	26%	33%	19%	23%	21%
Unsure		9%	13%	13%	12%	14%	15%	12%	9%	14%	16%	11%	13%	13%	18%	6%
No		65%	53%	51%	49%	50%	46%	47%	68%	51%	52%	63%	54%	68%	59%	74%

Figure 44: Parents/Carers in favour of repeating the school year by year group

Chapter 8. Live Online Teaching

8.1 School Provision of Live Teaching

As shown in Figure 45, just over 50% of respondents indicated that their children's school does not engage in live online teaching, a decrease of 26% from 2020. Consequently, 28% of respondents indicated that their children's school sometimes engages in live online teaching, an increase of 12% from 2020, and 22% indicated that their children's school regularly engages in live online teaching, an increase of 14% from 2020. Thus, schools utilising live teaching to some extent accounts for just under 50% of the sample, compared with 24% in 2020. Therefore, the percentage of schools engaging in live online teaching has doubled since 2020, and the percentage of schools not engaging in live online teaching has reduced by a third.



	Yes - regularly	Yes - sometimes	No
Response (2021)	21.8%	27.6%	50.6%
Response (2020)	7.6%	15.7%	76.8%

Figure 45: School engagement in live online teaching

In comparing live online teaching provision with year group, it is clear to see that provision decreases as year group, or age, decreases (Figure 46). Pre-school shows

8% *regular* and 19% *sometimes* provision. Primary 1 to 4 shows 12% *regular* and 17% *sometimes* provision, and primary 5 – 7 shows 15% *regular* and 23% *sometimes* provision. However, there is a noticeable increase in provision at post-primary school level with years 8 – 10 showing 35% *regular* and 44% *sometimes* provision, and with years 11 – 12 showing 49% *regular* and 40% *sometimes* provision. Year 13 – 14 shows the greatest amount of live online teaching provision with 46% *regular* and 48% *sometimes* provision of live teaching.

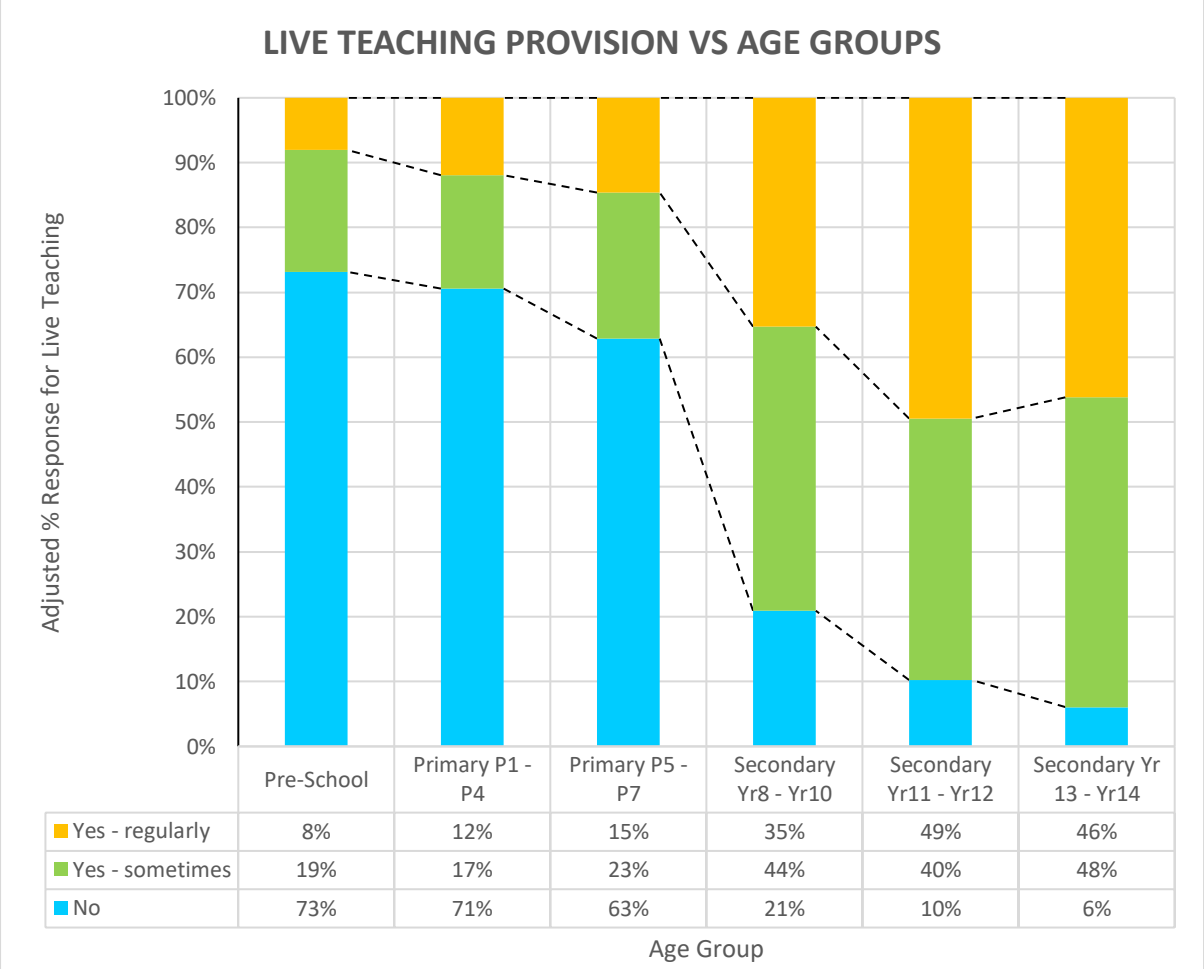


Figure 46: Live teaching provision compared with age groups

Likewise, there is noticeable difference of live online teaching provision across school settings (Figure 47). These are, ranked in order of magnitude, voluntary grammar (52% regular, 42% sometimes), Irish medium (48% regular, 14% sometimes), voluntary/private pre-school (27% regular, 22% sometimes), integrated (18% regular, 26% sometimes), maintained (18% regular, 26% sometimes), and controlled (14% regular, 24% sometimes). Although the number of pupils in the Irish Medium category

is small (n=50) this is an interesting and encouraging result, reflecting perhaps the recognised importance of providing live language exposure to children, who may not have Irish speakers in the home to replicate the language-rich immersion environment of school.

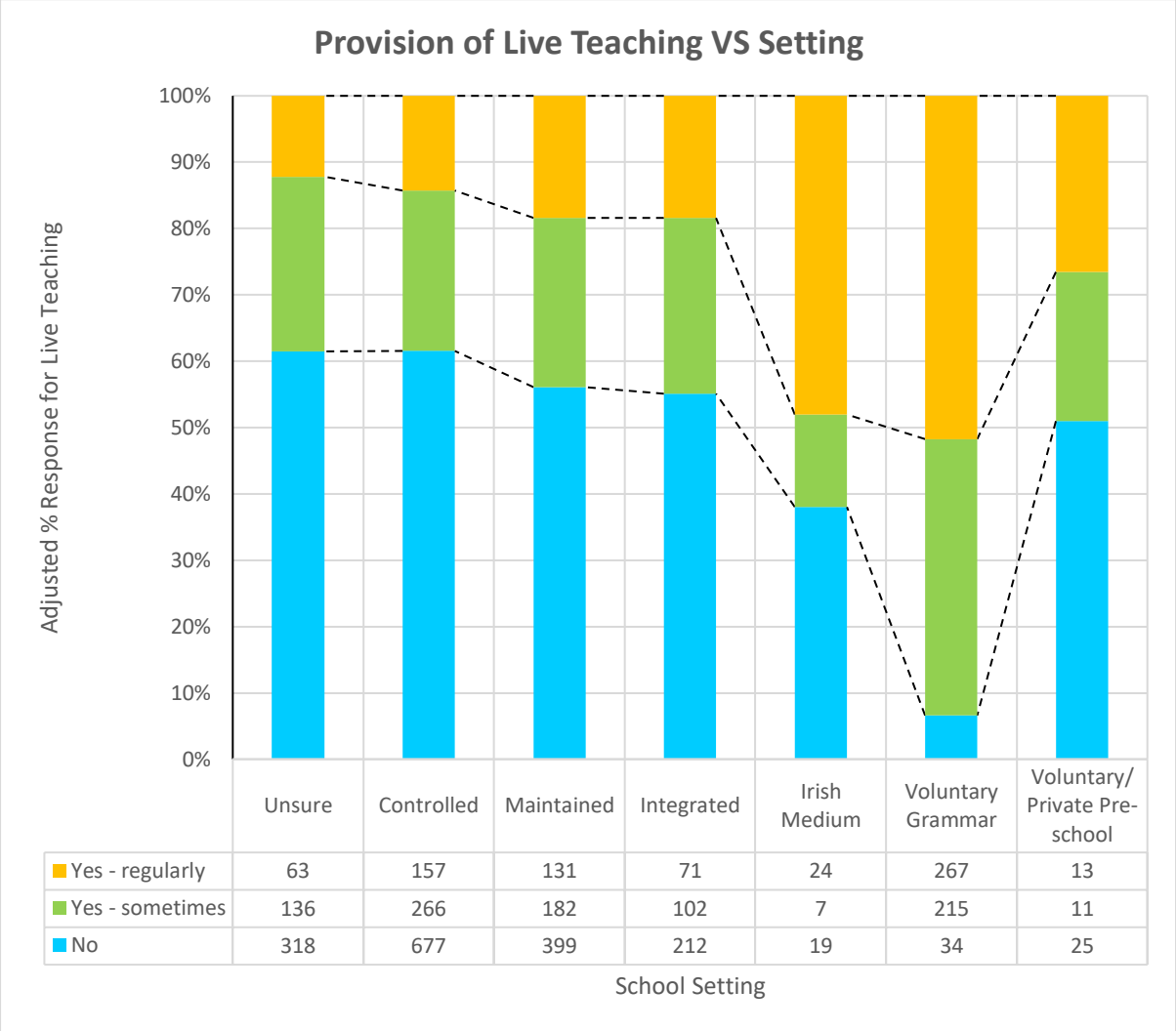


Figure 47: Live teaching provision compared with school setting management

8.2 Provision of Live Teaching and Child Health and Well-Being

Child motivation was compared with live online teaching provision as shown in Figure 48. Respondents whose children are showing 'much better' and 'better' levels of motivation show a higher likelihood of regular live online teaching, with 51% and 28% respectively, and provision sometimes, with 22% and 31% respectively. There is a clear pattern that shows that the provision of live online teaching appears to correlate with improved motivation amongst pupils.

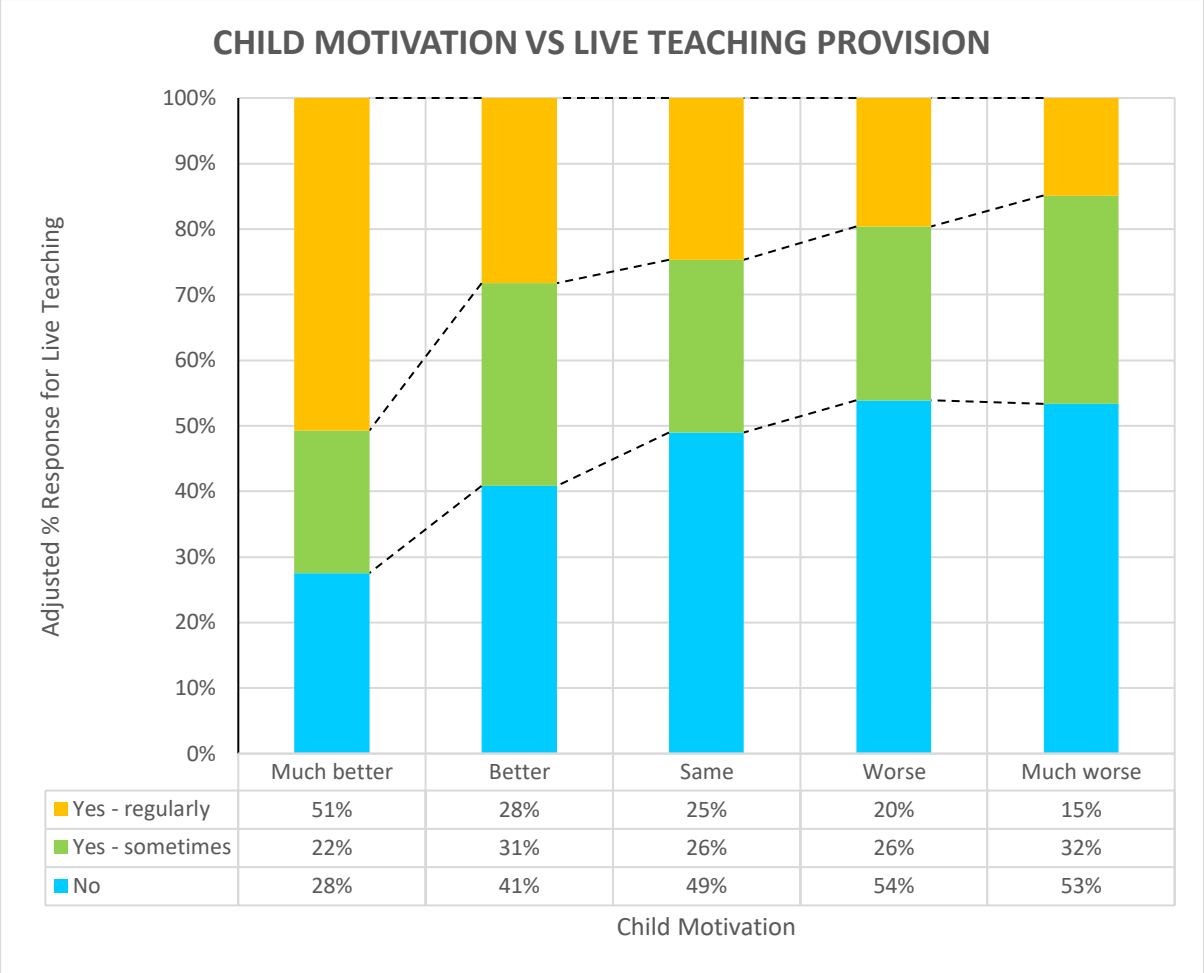


Figure 48: Child motivation compared with live teaching provision

Figure 49 shows a similar degree of positive relationship between provision of live online teaching and rates of same or improved child behaviour. Respondents whose children are showing 'much better' and 'better' behaviour experience higher levels of live online teaching provision, 'regular' at 35% and 26% respectively, and 'sometimes' at 30% and 25% respectively. For children whose behaviour has remained the same, their live teaching provision was 'regular' (25%) or 'sometimes' (28%). Also, for children whose behaviour has become 'worse' or 'much worse', their 'regular' live teaching provision rates were 15% and 14% respectively, and 'sometimes' provision 27% and 30% respectively. Therefore, when totalling 'regular' and 'sometimes' responses for each level of behaviour, they generally increase with increasing levels of behaviour. In other words, the results suggest a link between better behaviour and the prevalence of live online teaching.

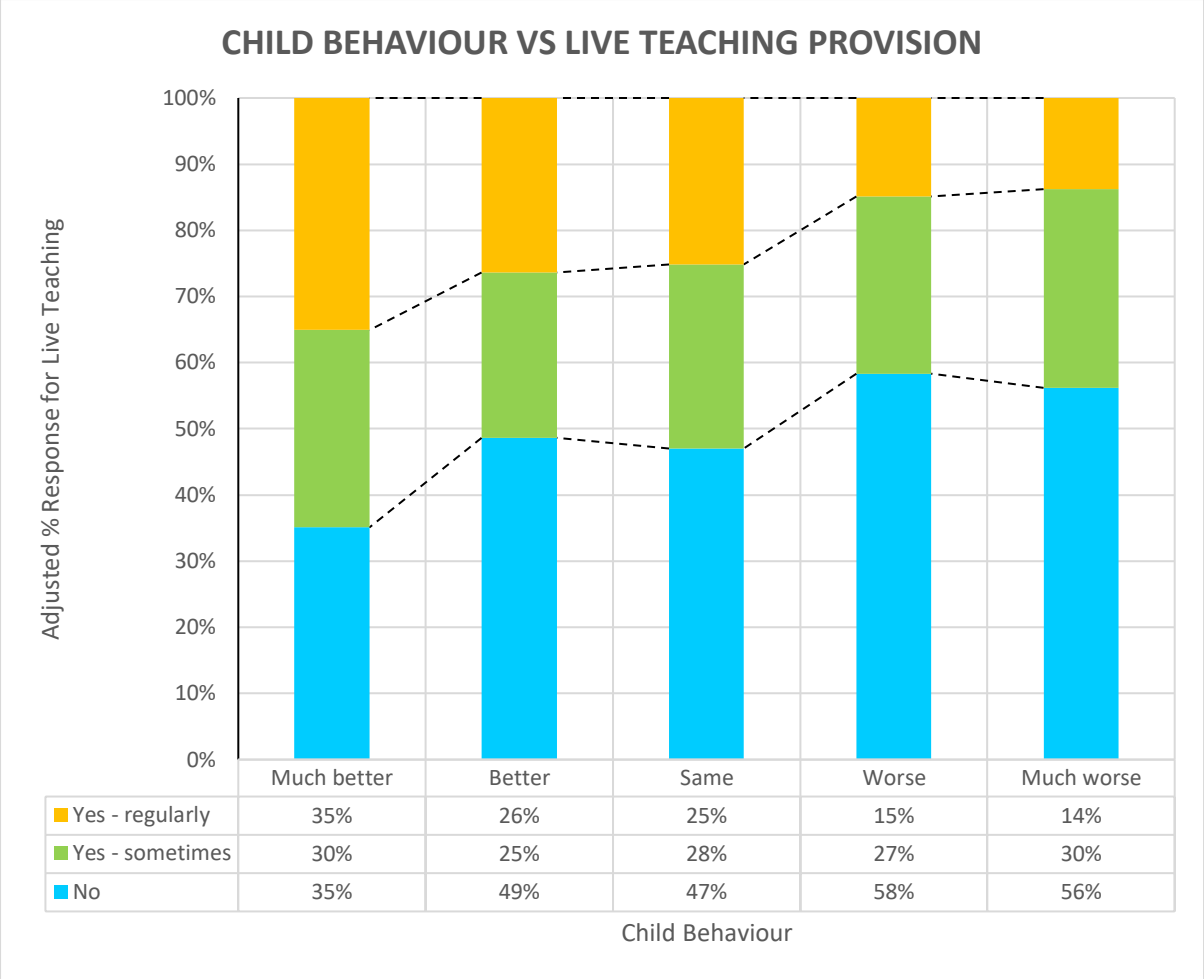


Figure 49: Child behaviour compared with live teaching provision

Figure 50 shows a similar degree of positive relationship between provision of live online teaching and rates of same or improved child mental health and well-being. Respondents whose children are showing 'much better' and 'better' mental health and well-being experience higher levels of live online teaching provision, 'regular' at 40% and 24% respectively, and 'sometimes' at 23% and 34% respectively. For children whose mental health and well-being is thought to have remained the same, they received 'regular' provision at 24% and provision 'sometimes' at 26%. Also, for children who have become worse or much worse, they received 'regular' provision at 21% and 16% respectively, and provision 'sometimes' at 29% and 28% respectively. Therefore, when totalling 'regular' and 'sometimes' responses for each level of mental health and well-being, they generally increase with increasing levels of mental health and well-being, suggesting a positive link between live online teaching and child mental health and well-being.

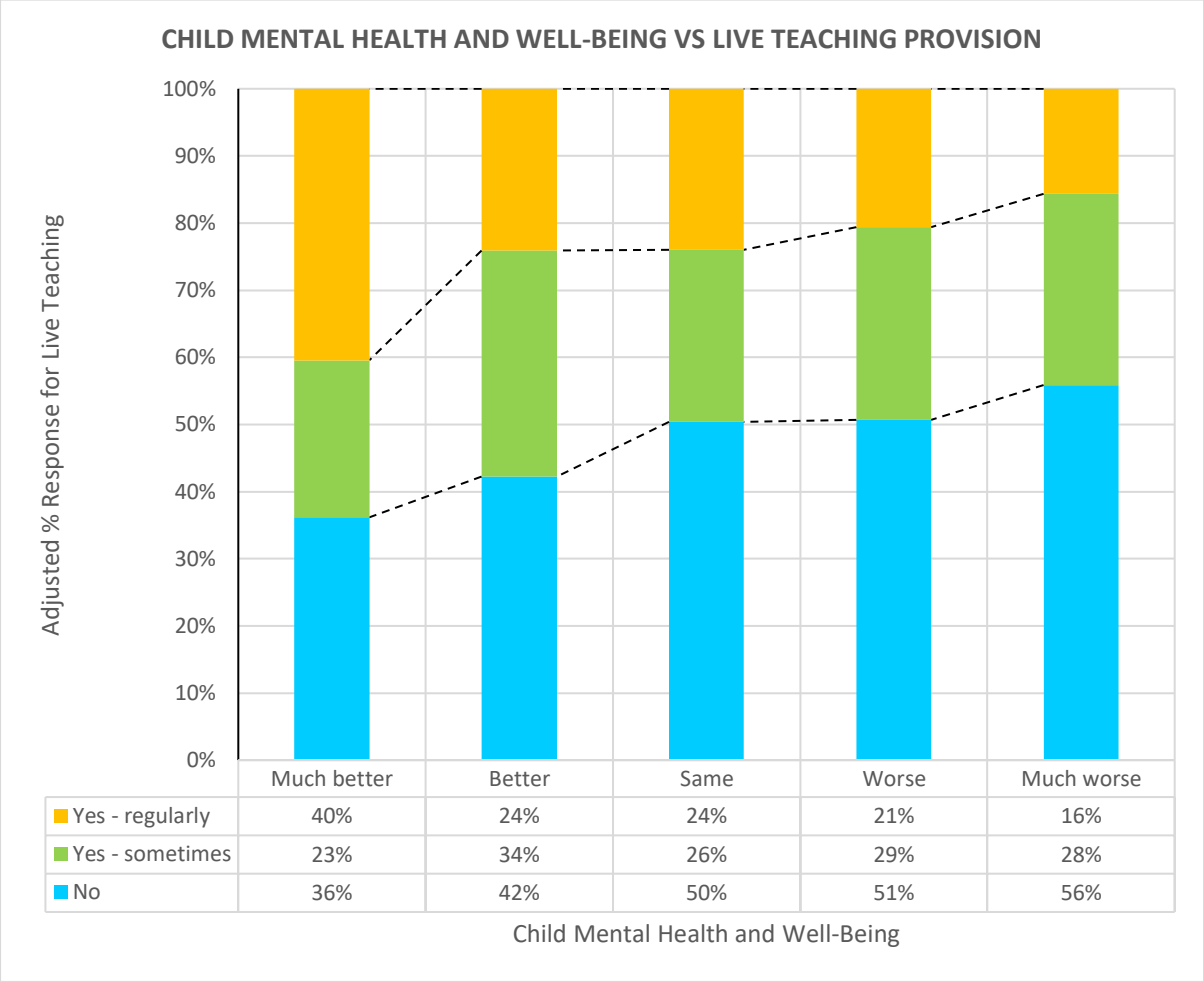


Figure 50: Child mental health and well-being compared with live teaching provision

Figure 51 also shows a similar degree of positive relationship between provision of live online teaching and rates of same or improved child social skills. Respondents whose children are showing 'much better' and 'better' social skills experience higher levels of live online teaching provision, 'regular' at 44% and 32% respectively, and 'sometimes' at 17% and 29% respectively. For children whose social skills are reported to have remained the same, they received 'regular' provision at 23% and provision 'sometimes' at 27%. Also, for children whose social skills are reported to have become worse or much worse, they received 'regular' provision at 21% and 16% respectively, and provision 'sometimes' at 28% and 27% respectively. Therefore, when totalling 'regular' and 'sometimes' responses for each level of social skills, they generally increase with increasing levels of social skills.

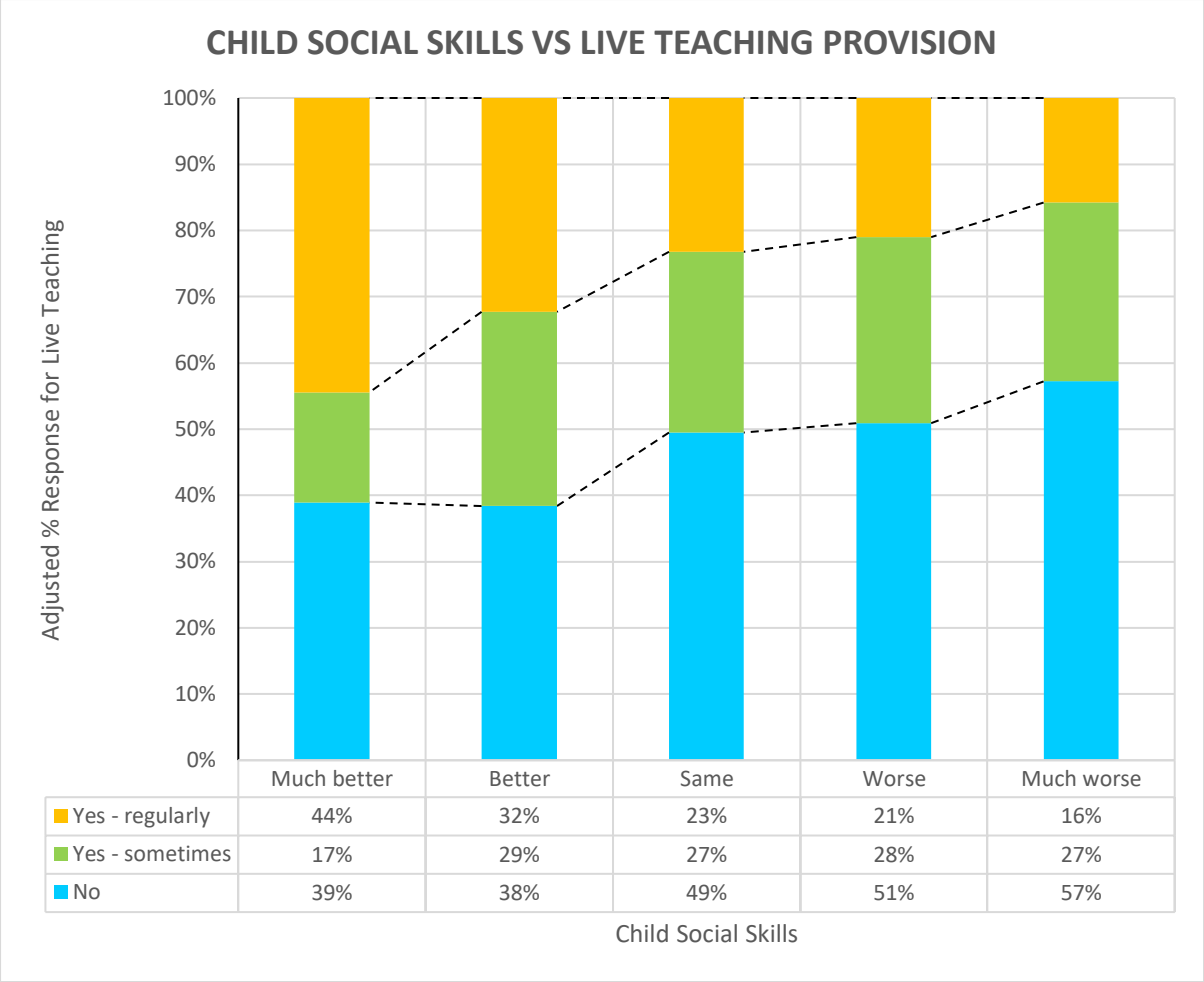


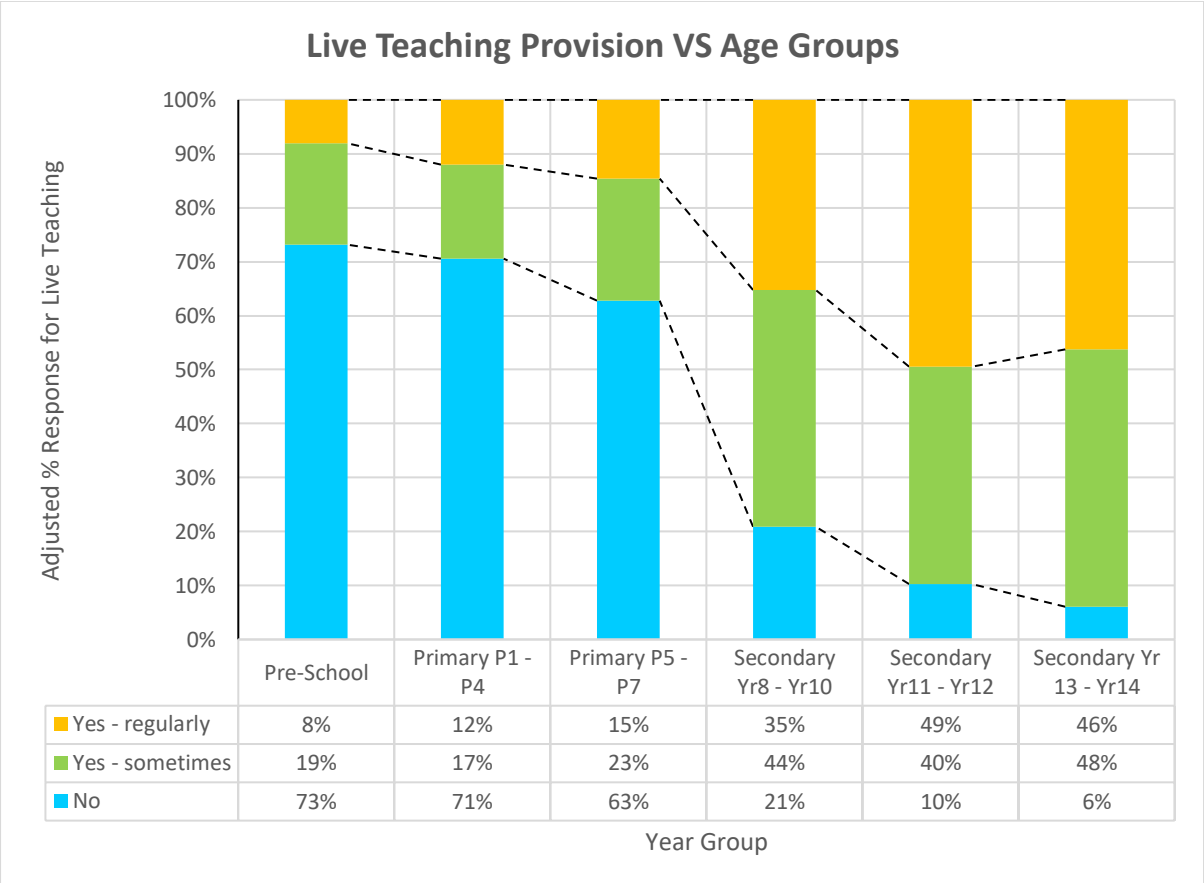
Figure 51: Child social skills compared with live teaching provision

Chapter 9. Early Years, Play and Outdoor Learning

This section of the report highlights those key findings and trends from the dataset regarding young children in pre-school and Foundation Stage (FS) classes.

9.1 Early Years

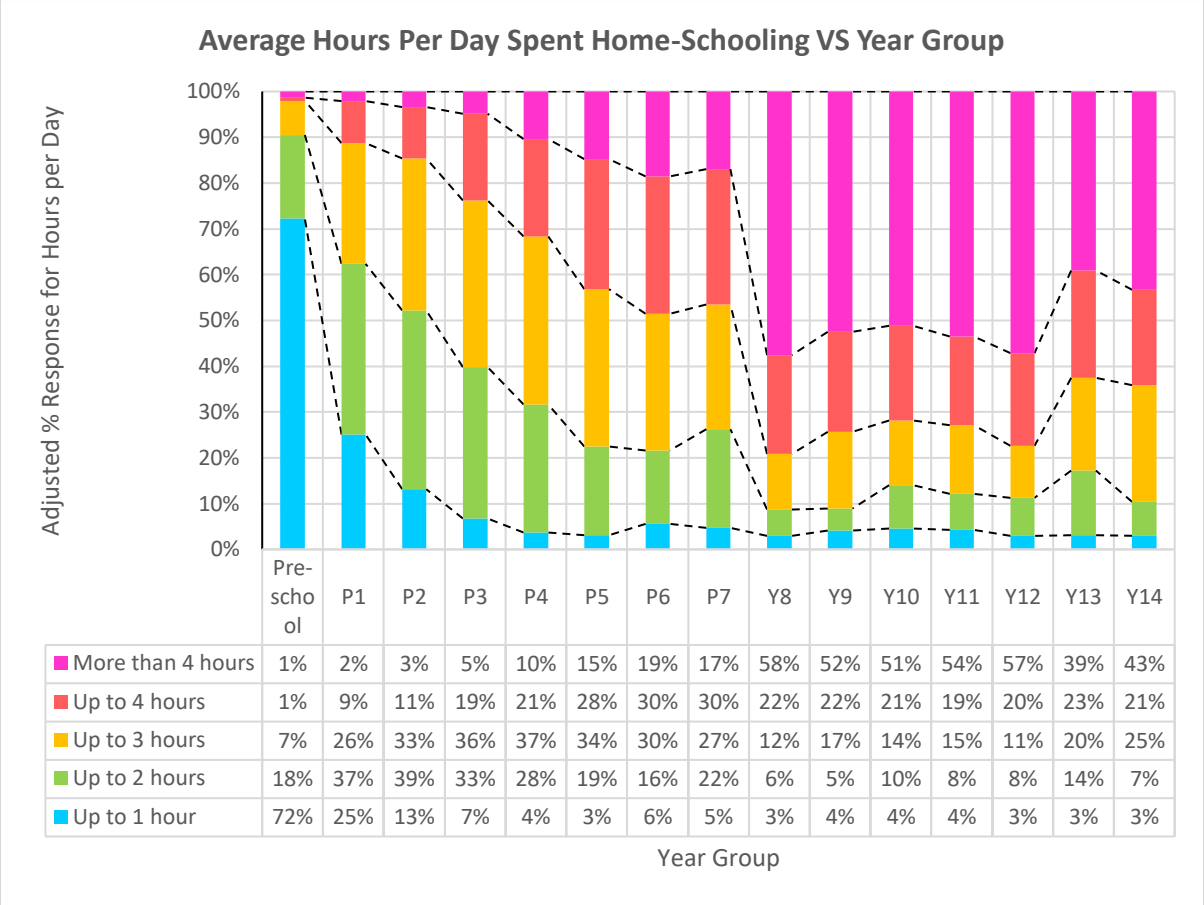
Respondents were asked about the level of live teaching provision their children received. As demonstrated below, the amount of live teaching provision was much less in pre-school and FS classes, with 73% of pre-school parents/carers and 71% of parents/carers with children in Years 1-4, reporting that their children did not participate in any live teaching.



	Pre-School	Primary P1 - P4	Primary P5 - P7	Secondary Yr8 - Yr10	Secondary Yr11 - Yr12	Secondary Yr 13 - Yr14
Yes - regularly	8%	12%	15%	35%	49%	46%
Yes - sometimes	19%	17%	23%	44%	40%	48%
No	73%	71%	63%	21%	10%	6%

Figure 52: Live teaching provision compared with school age groups

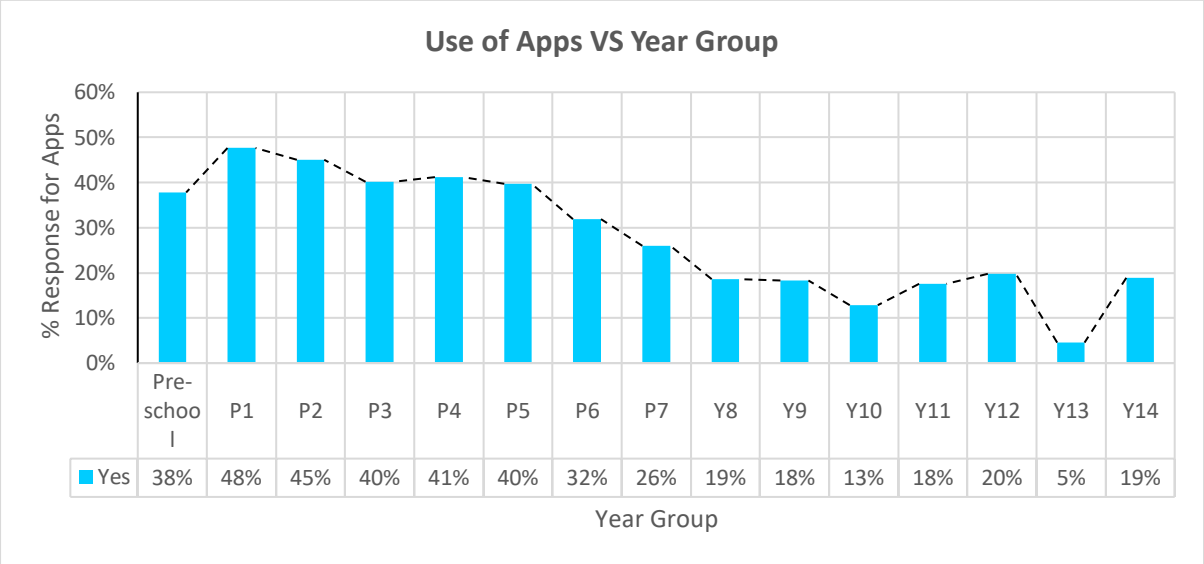
Figure 53 below shows that children in the youngest year groups (pre-school and Foundation Stage) spent the least amount of time on home-schooling activities.



	Pre-school	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Y14
More than 4 hours	1%	2%	3%	5%	10%	15%	19%	17%	58%	52%	51%	54%	57%	39%	43%
Up to 4 hours	1%	9%	11%	19%	21%	28%	30%	30%	22%	22%	21%	19%	20%	23%	21%
Up to 3 hours	7%	26%	33%	36%	37%	34%	30%	27%	12%	17%	14%	15%	11%	20%	25%
Up to 2 hours	18%	37%	39%	33%	28%	19%	16%	22%	6%	5%	10%	8%	8%	14%	7%
Up to 1 hour	72%	25%	13%	7%	4%	3%	6%	5%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%

Figure 53: Hours per day spent home-schooling by year group

Rather than engaging in live teaching sessions, younger children, according to their parents/carers, made greater use of computer apps such as Seesaw than their older counterparts, as shown below:



	Pre-school	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Y14
Yes	38%	48%	45%	40%	41%	40%	32%	26%	19%	18%	13%	18%	20%	5%	19%

Figure 54: Use of apps by year group

Children in the primary year groups tended to make greater use of workbooks and worksheets for home-schooling purposes, than those in post-primary classrooms.

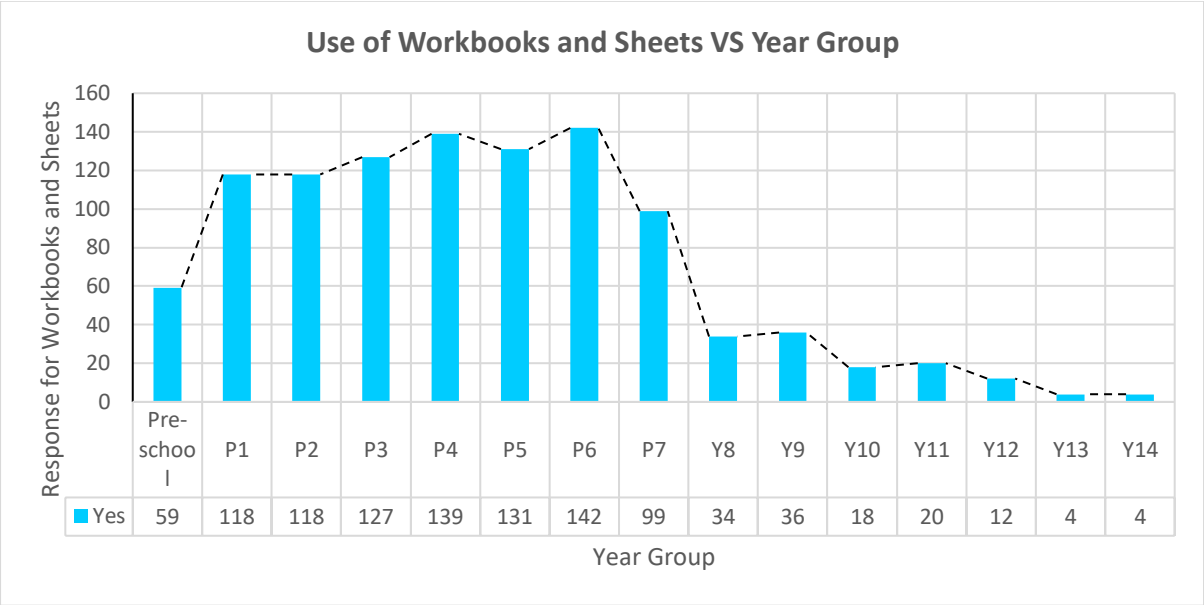


Figure 55: Use of workbooks and sheets by year group

There was also a marked decrease reported in the use of arts and craft activities as children got older, with the majority of parents/carers of children in pre-school (71%) and FS classes (P1: 62% and P2: 58%) reporting that their children participated in these creative experiences.

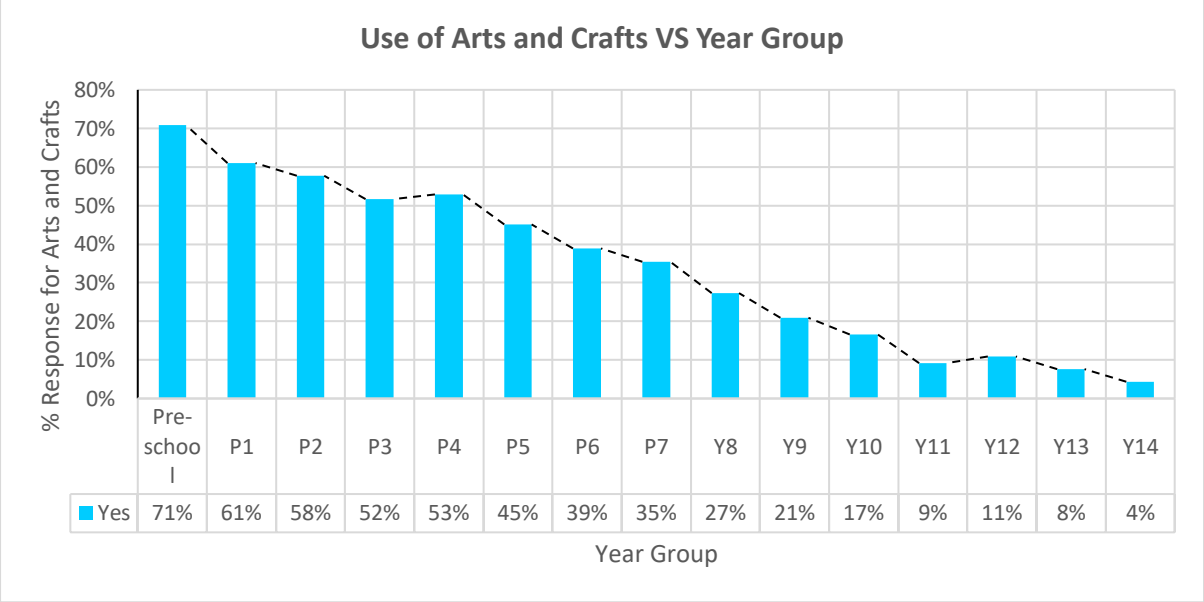


Figure 56: Use of arts and crafts by year group

Younger children also appeared more likely to participate in outdoor learning experiences during the second lockdown, as shown below:

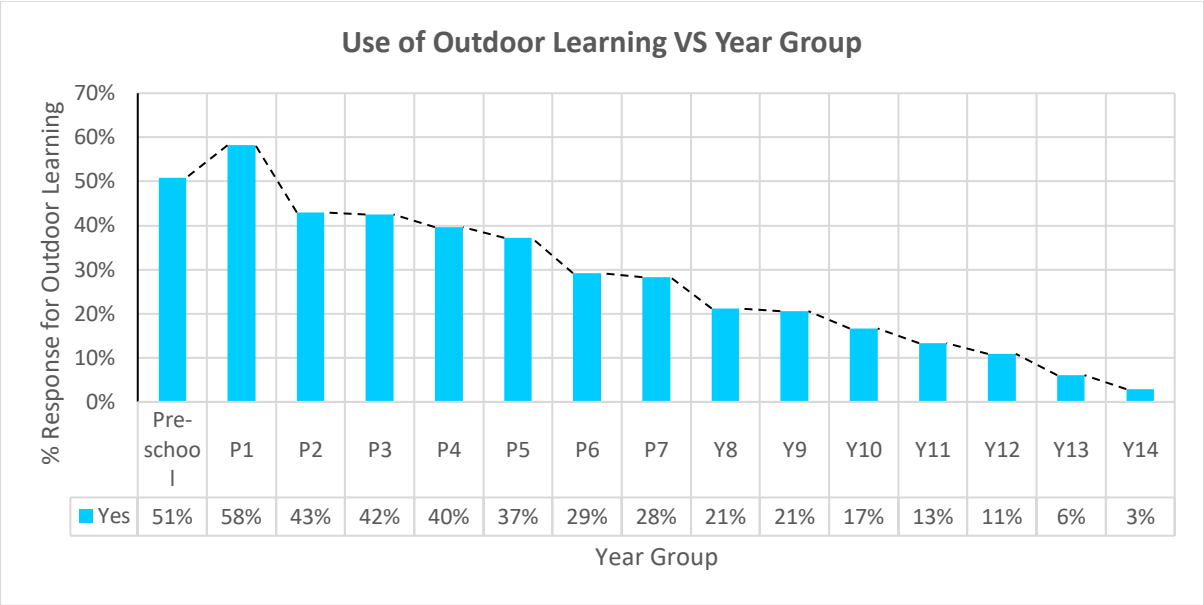


Figure 57: Outdoor learning by year group

Play was also a more popular activity with younger children, according to their parents/carers, with the highest percentage of those enjoying in play and play related experiences in pre-school and Year 1.

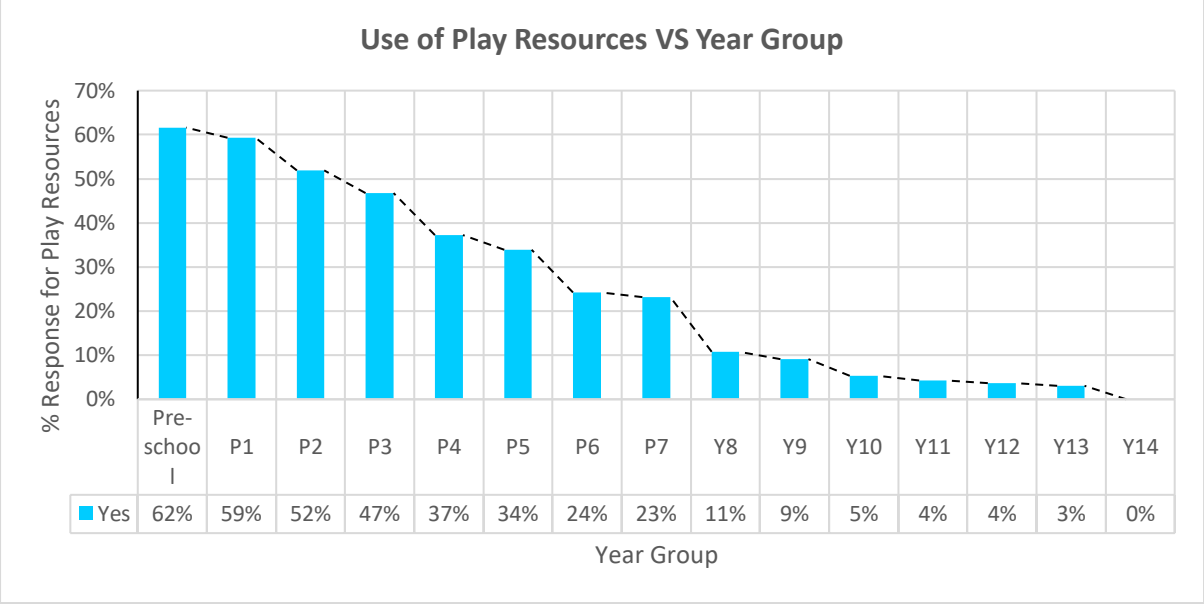


Figure 58: Use of play resources by year group

9.2 Outdoor Learning

Some interesting relationships came to the fore regarding those parents/carers who reported that their children participated in outdoor learning (OL) activities and their associated levels of motivation, social skills and physical and mental health. Those parents/carers who indicated that their children engaged in OL activities, were less likely to rate their children's level of motivation, social skills, physical and mental health as worse than pre-Covid-19. A chi-square test of independence confirms the significance of the relationship between OL and motivation [40.252, df=4, $p<0.001$]. Similar findings were also revealed for engagement/non engagement in OL activities and levels of social skills [chi-square 36.862, df=4, $p<0.001$], levels of physical health and well-being [chi-square 86.849, df=4, $p<0.001$], mental health and wellbeing [chi-square 41.096, df=4, $p<0.001$]. As reported OL activities decreased with age, these effects may be explained to an extent by age-related factors.

9.3 Play Activities

Statistical analysis of the dataset also revealed similar relationships between children's engagement in play activities and their reported levels of motivation, social skills and physical and mental health and well-being. A positive relationship between children's engagement in play activities and their reported levels of motivation was shown to be statistically significant [35.180, df=4, $p<0.001$]. Similar findings were also revealed for engagement/non-engagement in play activities and levels of social skills [chi-square 13.615, df=4, $p=0.009$], levels of physical health and well-being [chi-square 81.220, df=4, $p<0.001$], mental health and wellbeing [chi-square 35.763, df=4, $p<0.001$]. As above, reported play activities decreased with age, and so these effects may be explained to an extent by age-related factors.

9.4 Qualitative Comments

Parents of children in Nursery and Foundation Stage (children aged 3 to 6) reported they found it difficult to provide the play experiences they felt were important for their children as part of home-schooling:

> *It requires some effort on my behalf as a parent especially with the younger child to think of ideas to promote learning through play and to provide lots of practical learning-based activities.*

> *My daughter has missed a lot of the play-based learning that comes with being in P1-interest corners, dressing up etc.*

For many of these parents, this lack of play during the period of home-schooling was due to the absence of other children of a similar age. Therefore, they believed that the social opportunities of playing with peers was missed during the home-schooling phase:

> *I can see that [my child] is missing social interaction and play with other children.*

> *It is the social interaction that my child is missing out on with her peers that is most concerning (she is an only child). Sharing, turn taking, playing cooperatively. The many opportunities that can't be taught at home.*

> *Role play and social interaction is so important for young children which they can't get from a home-schooling environment.*

For some parents, the importance of play for their children was very closely associated with enjoyment and being young. There was an acknowledgement of the importance of the phase of being a child, with play as an important element of this, and school being the setting which supports this childhood phase:

> *Just wish my children can enjoy being back at school, acting like children, playing, carefree and having fun.*

> *School provided a safe and sheltered environment and a chance to play with other children and enjoy being young.*

It was interesting that some parents recognised some schools' attempts to engage children playfully on-line during home schooling:

> *Pupils have a zoom once a week and play games e.g. phonics bingo, number bingo*

> *[My child's school has been] getting groups of kids together on Zoom for well-being play*

Some parents went further and organised their own virtual play opportunities in an attempt to recreate those missed play opportunities with other children:

> *We also have online play dates with her friends including planned meals together and bedtime stories.*

Parents also recognised the importance of outdoor play and activities for children in the early years as part of home schooling activities. However, these seemed to be initiated by parents rather than schools:

> *I have discussed with the teacher how some days she cannot sit still so we do practical activities instead of worksheets and upload evidence of that. We can take our learning outdoors.*

> *Both my children have an outdoor space to avail of and parents who encourage them being outdoors*

However parents recognized the limitations of being able to take time playing outdoors. It was suggested that home-schooling was more organized during this second lockdown resulting in fewer opportunities for outdoor play:

> *This lockdown has been more about trying to keep going as much a normal as possible unlike the last where a lot of time was spent outside.*

Another parent presented the challenges of working with older children during home schooling as limiting outdoor opportunities for younger siblings:

> *It also limits the outside activities I can do with my younger children as I cannot leave him alone to go for a walk during school hours.*

Chapter 10. Attitudes and Experiences of Parents of P7 Children

10.1 Quantitative Results

Of the 2002 parents who responded to the survey overall, 397 identified as parents of children in P7, thus representing the single biggest year group in the study. Of these 397 parents, 72% (n=286) had entered their child for the transfer tests during the current academic year (2020-2021). When the results are analysed further by combined household income, a very clear pattern emerges (see Figure 59 below) with a strong statistically significant relationship between household income and the likelihood of their P7 child being entered for the transfer test [chi-square: 45.169, df=4, p<0.001]: less than half of the P7 children (45%) from the lowest income band (under £15,000) were entered compared to 92% of those in the highest income band (more than £80,000).

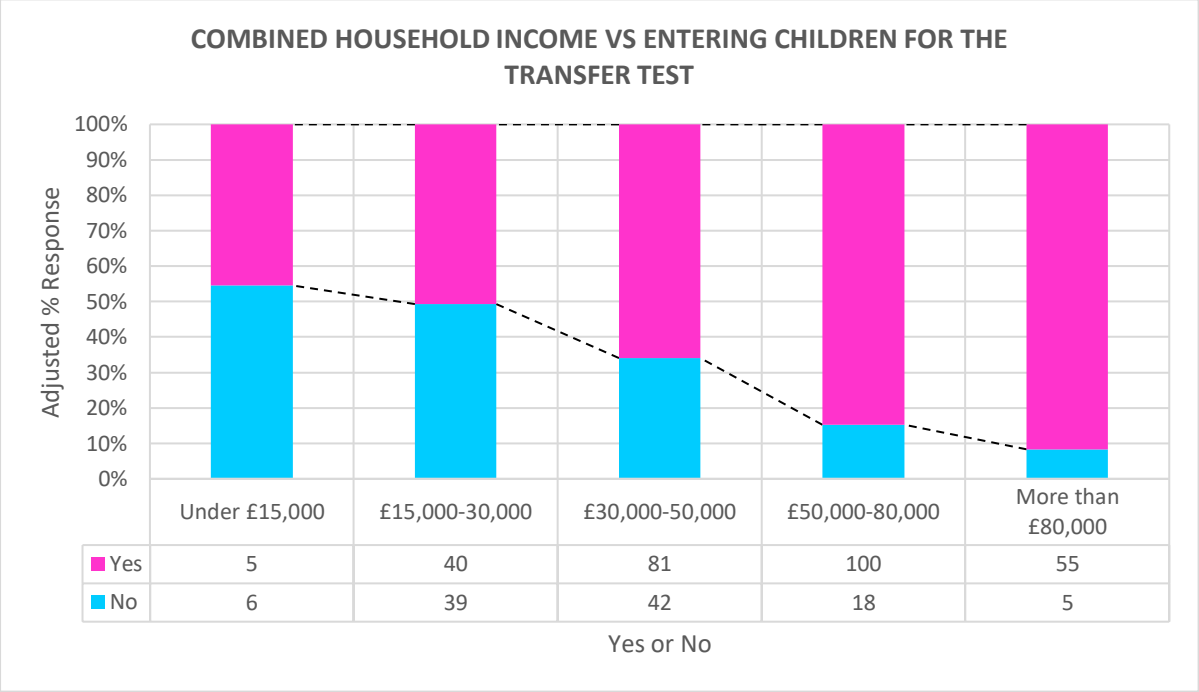


Figure 59: Combined household income compared with transfer test entry

Q32 asked P7 parents to choose from a list of statements to indicate their opinion on the cancellation of the transfer tests 2020-2021. Almost two-thirds of parents (65%, n=258) chose the following statement: “The transfer tests this year should have been cancelled at the start of the school year with alternative contingency plans drawn up

at that point". Less than one third (29%, n=114) felt however that "The transfer tests should have taken place as normal regardless of the pandemic". A very small number of parents held other opinions, such as that the tests should have taken place in January (4%, n=17), that it was right to cancel the tests in November and February (1%, n=4) and that the test should not have been cancelled in February (0.3%, n=2).

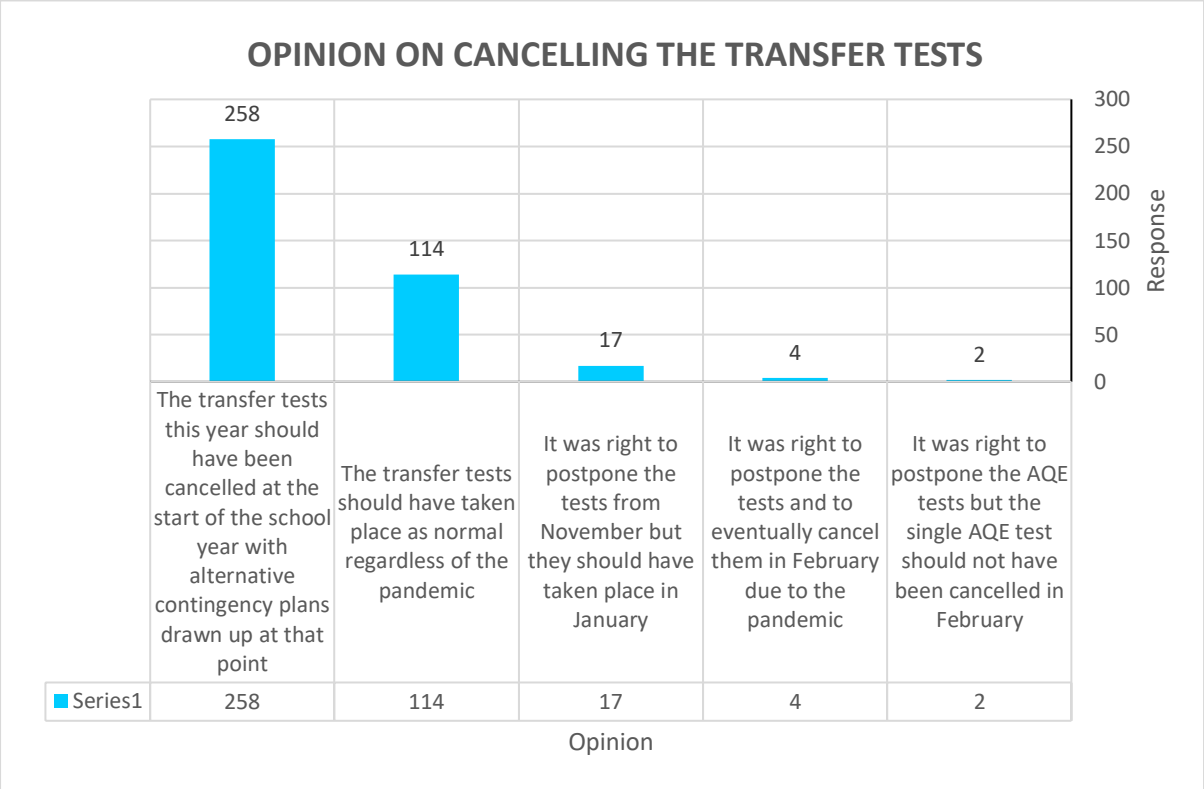


Figure 60: Opinion on cancelling the transfer tests

When the results are analysed further by combined household income, an interesting pattern emerges, where over a third (34%) of the wealthiest parents were of the opinion that the transfer tests should have taken place as normal, regardless of the pandemic, compared to just 9% of the parents in the lowest income band and 23% in the second lowest income band. The small amount of data for the three least popular choices makes conducting a chi-square test of independence impossible, but if these variables are removed from the analysis, the test does not show a significant relationship between combined household income and opinion on cancelling the transfer tests [5.488, df=20, p=0.359]

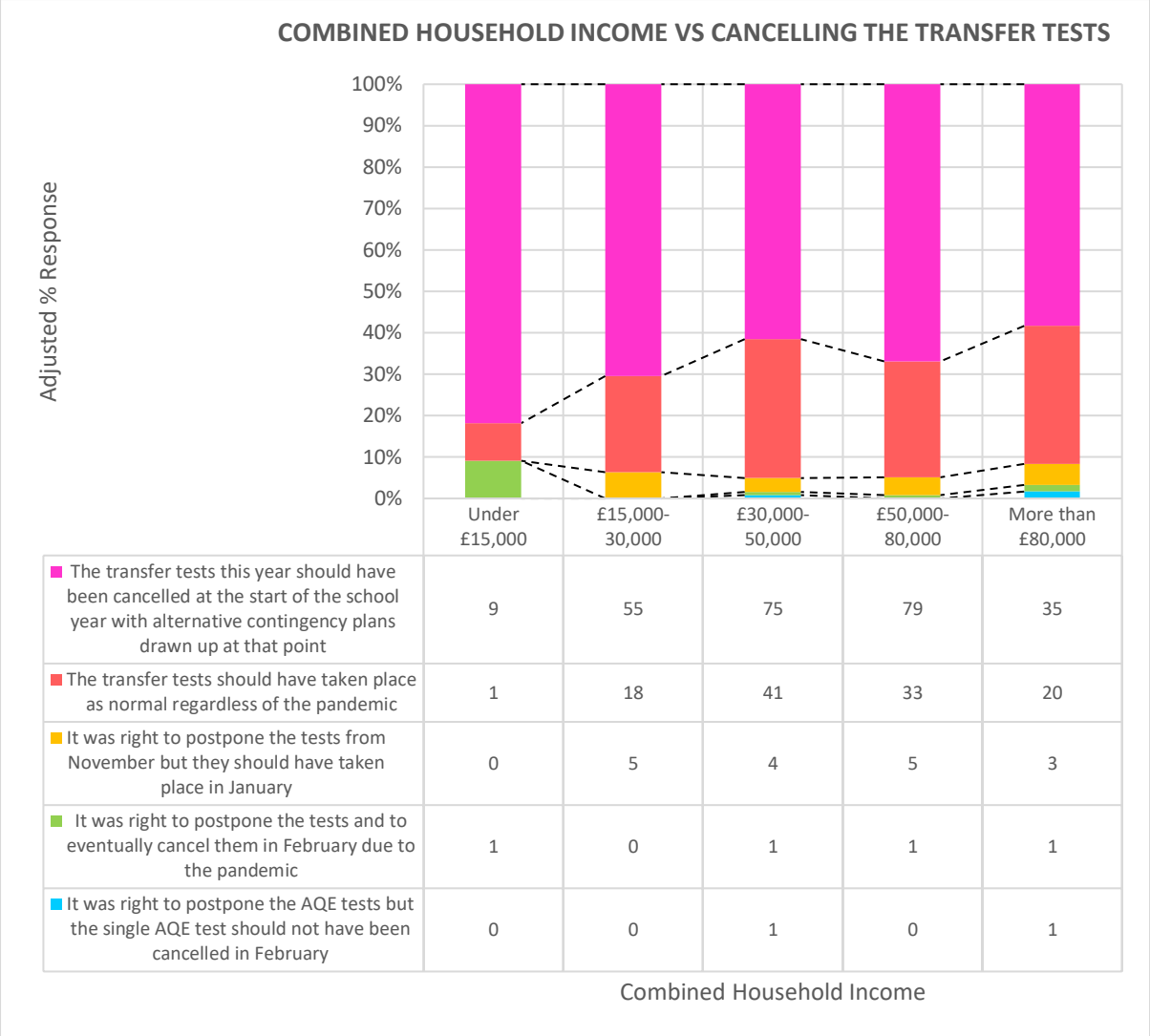


Figure 61: Combined household income compared with cancelling the transfer tests

Q33 invited P7 parents to comment on the suggestion that preparation for transfer tests might have skewed the balance of teaching over the past year, with a tendency to focus on literacy and numeracy (which are assessed in the transfer tests) at the expense of the full range of Areas of Learning in the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum (CCEA, 2007). The results confirm that a majority of parents (54%, n=213) did feel that their child's education had been overly focused on literacy and numeracy (30%, n=117 'strongly agree'; 24%, n=96 'agree'), while only one in six parents (17%) disagreed with the statement (4%, n=16 'strongly disagree'; 13%, n=50 'disagree')

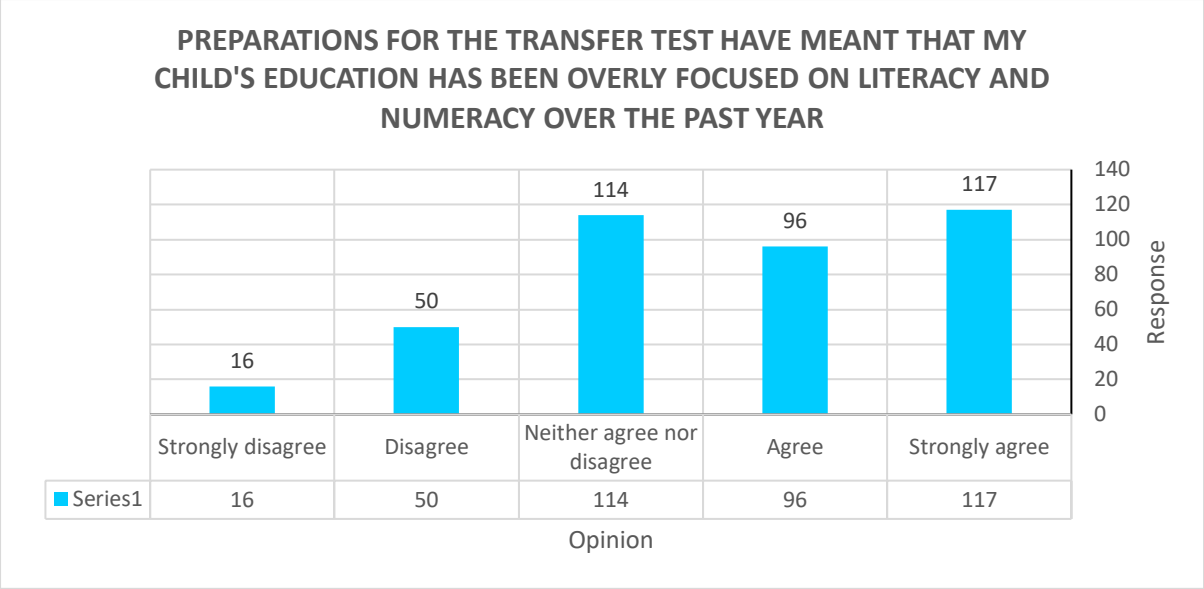


Figure 62: Effect of preparations for the transfer test on curriculum

P7 parents were also asked whether they felt that the cancellation of this year's transfer tests would have a positive or negative impact on their child's future. The most common response was 'neutral' (48%, n=189) suggesting that parents felt the cancellation of the tests would have *neither* a positive *nor* a negative impact on their child's future. Where parents did however give an opinion, they were much more likely to indicate that the impact would be negative: 45% (n=175) felt that there would be a negative or very negative impact on their child's future, while only 7% (n=26) thought that there would be a positive or very positive impact on their child's future.

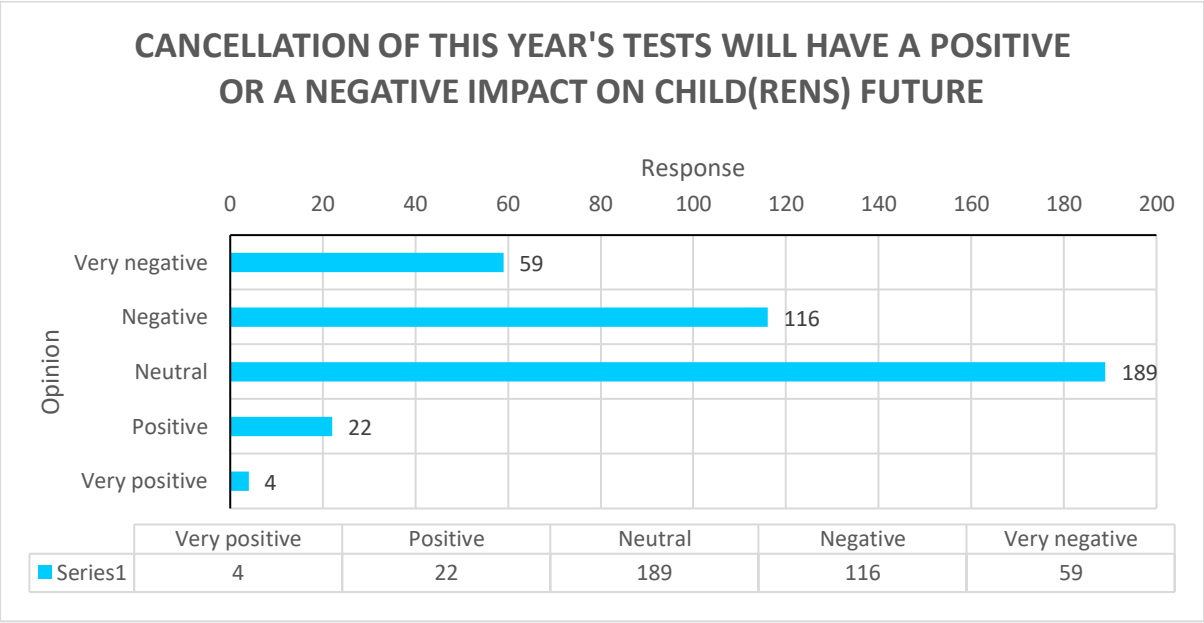


Figure 63: Impact on children's futures of cancellation of transfer tests

10.2 Qualitative Comments

When the answers to the final open-ended question (Q: *Have you any further comments to add regarding the home-schooling process?)* were analysed, a small number (n=18) made reference to transfer tests or AQE. Of these, the majority were parents of current P6 children who expressed concern at the prospect of their children sitting transfer tests in the 2021-2022 school year after a year of disrupted learning and two extended periods of home-schooling. There was a strong sense of frustration that P6 children would be ill-prepared for such tests, that home-schooling was no replacement for in-school preparation, and that there was a responsibility on government to provide clarity as soon as possible regarding transfer arrangements for this cohort of children:

> *P6 kids are not equipped to do the transfer this year. They have not had the required teaching to do what is expected.*
>
> *This situation is ruining our children's future. They have effectively lost over a years consistent schooling now. It is time to repeat the year for all children. The government should be ashamed of themselves that yet again our children are being made to pay the price for this pandemic. My daughter is dyslexic and it's alarming that all support has been removed from her for over a year, and in less than 10 months she will be expected to sit the AQE test. The government need to get a grip on this situation fast.*
>
> *Huge negative is having a p6 and thinking of her having to go back to school, having lost so much, and straight into AQE/GL grind. She's a top student, but they've had enough pressure to contend with.*
>
> *My son is in P6 and his academic ability, confidence and wellbeing has suffered so much due to missed face to face schooling that it is beyond reason to expect him to prepare for and sit the transfer test in November. Working parents do not have the time or skills to support preparation for AQE and the pressure on parents to try to close the gap is immense.*

I feel very strongly that an early decision should be made regarding transfer arrangements for 22/23. The disruption to schooling for current P6s has been immeasurable. Setting aside pros and cons of the unregulated tests, it is wholly unreasonable to expect the 'usual' processes to pertain and for these tests to proceed. The decision was made too late for everyone in 21/22, let's not make the same mistake for these pupils. Give everyone proper time to prepare for new arrangements.

Another series of comments related to the current uncertainty around transfer for the current P7 children whose transfer tests had been postponed and then cancelled. While there was a sizeable majority (see above) who would have preferred the tests to be cancelled at the start of the year and alternative arrangements agreed at that stage, most of the comments from P7 parents referred to their concerns that their children might not achieve a place at a grammar school as a result of the non-academic criteria published following the cancellation of the single postponed AQE test in February. The blame was levelled at the Minister, grammar schools and AQE:

Transfer tests: as a P7 parent I feel that the transfer tests were handled very poorly by the grammar schools and the Education Minister alike… I believe that requiring children to prepare for academic transfer during the pandemic, for a test that was likely never to sit, was immoral. The way in which the AQE in particular handled the situation in January was dreadful. In my opinion, the staggered communications and the setting of a single test constituted a child welfare issue… I feel terribly for children who worked for 12 months for this test to face a late cancellation with no prospect of a grammar place. The grammars who participated in this process through the associative bodies should be hanging their heads in shame at this mishandling of this process. Instead, they seem to be planning the same cycle of stress and failure for the current P6.

She was due to sit both transfer tests and had worked very hard for almost a year to prepare.. she was so disappointed and upset they were cancelled. She's an eldest child and the admission criteria for

all grammars favours siblings so it's possible after all the hardwork that she may not get a place in grammar- if this happens it will be devastating for her as she's really smart achieving 90-100% in her practice papers. I don't want her to have to repeat the school year for learning reasons but to give her a fair chance at getting into grammar.

Several parents referred specifically to the negative impact that the uncertainty, postponement and eventual cancellation of the transfer tests has had on their P7 children. There were no parental comments that said anything positive about the impact of the past year:

In addition, our P7 daughter is unlikely to recover from the mental toll this year has brought - mostly due to the incompetence of our government and certain organisations to pull the plug on the transfer tests back in May 2020 and how they treated these poor children.

It's been very hard to get a P7 boy to have any motivation to do the work since the AQE was cancelled. He had lost his trust in adults now when we say something "has" to be done.

Chapter 11. Attitudes and Experiences of Parents of Year 8, 12, 13 & 14 Children

11.1 Preparedness for Year 8

Of the 2002 parents who responded to the survey overall, 280 identified as parents of children in Year 8, who commenced their first year of post-primary education in September 2020.

Q36 asked the Year 8 parents to reflect on how well prepared they thought their children had been to undertake the process of transfer. Given the fact that primary schools were closed (except for vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers) until the end of June 2020 due to Covid-19, many of the 2019-2020 P7 cohort lost out on the normal face-to-face activities that would surround the process of their transfer from one school to another – a process which many parents viewed as a significant milestone or 'a rite of passage'. In addition, these same children then moved into a totally new learning environment which also suffered significant disruption with periods of self-isolation for many pupils, bubbles and year groups. Not surprisingly perhaps, almost three-fifths of the parents who responded to this particular question (59%, n=167) reported they thought their child was either 'poorly prepared' (40%, n=109) or 'very poorly prepared' (21%, n=58) to make the transition from primary to second level education whereas only a relatively small number (16%, n=46) felt that they were 'well-prepared' or 'very well-prepared' to make this important transition. In fact, only 2.5% of parents who responded to the questionnaire (n = 7) felt that their child had been 'very well prepared' for transition.

The extent of disruption is reflected in a comment reported by the parent of a Year 8 child: "Year 8 didn't have the opportunity to attend familiarisation when transferring from P7, thrown into new school, disrupted by several isolation periods in first term due to positive cases."

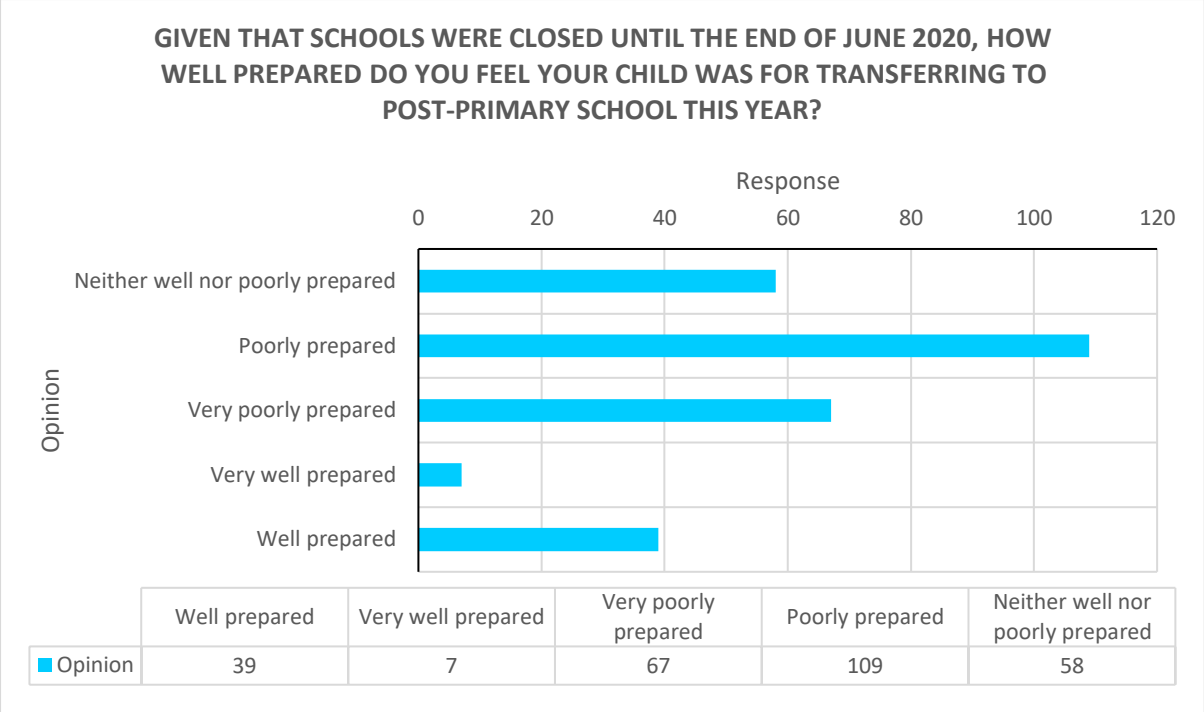


Figure 64: Children's preparedness for transferring to post-primary school

Further examination of the data would appear to suggest that parents with lower combined household incomes perceive their children to be less well prepared for transfer to post-primary schools than those from higher income households. 82% of the parents from the lowest income band (<£15k) considered their child to be 'very poorly prepared' or 'poorly prepared' in comparison to those from the highest income band (>£80k) where the respective figure was 52%. It would appear that the larger the combined household income, the better the child was able to cope with learning following transition from primary to post-primary. There could be many reasons for this, for example, parents with a higher level of household income are possibly more willing, and more able to invest in their child's education. Such investment may be demonstrated directly through their personal engagement in the home-schooling process of their child, they may have careers which enable them to have the flexibility to devote time to the home-schooling of their child, and/or their own personal level of education, knowledge and experience may make them better placed to offer the help, support and encouragement required. Alternatively, wealthier parents may have sufficient resources at their disposal to enable them to procure and engagement the services of a private tutor to support their child's learning, a form of support which low-income parents would not be in a position to afford.

The following comments from parents seek to serve to highlight the significant differences that can exist "*My husband and I are capable of teaching our children but many parents are not in this position*" and yet for others "*Working single parents cannot manage it*".

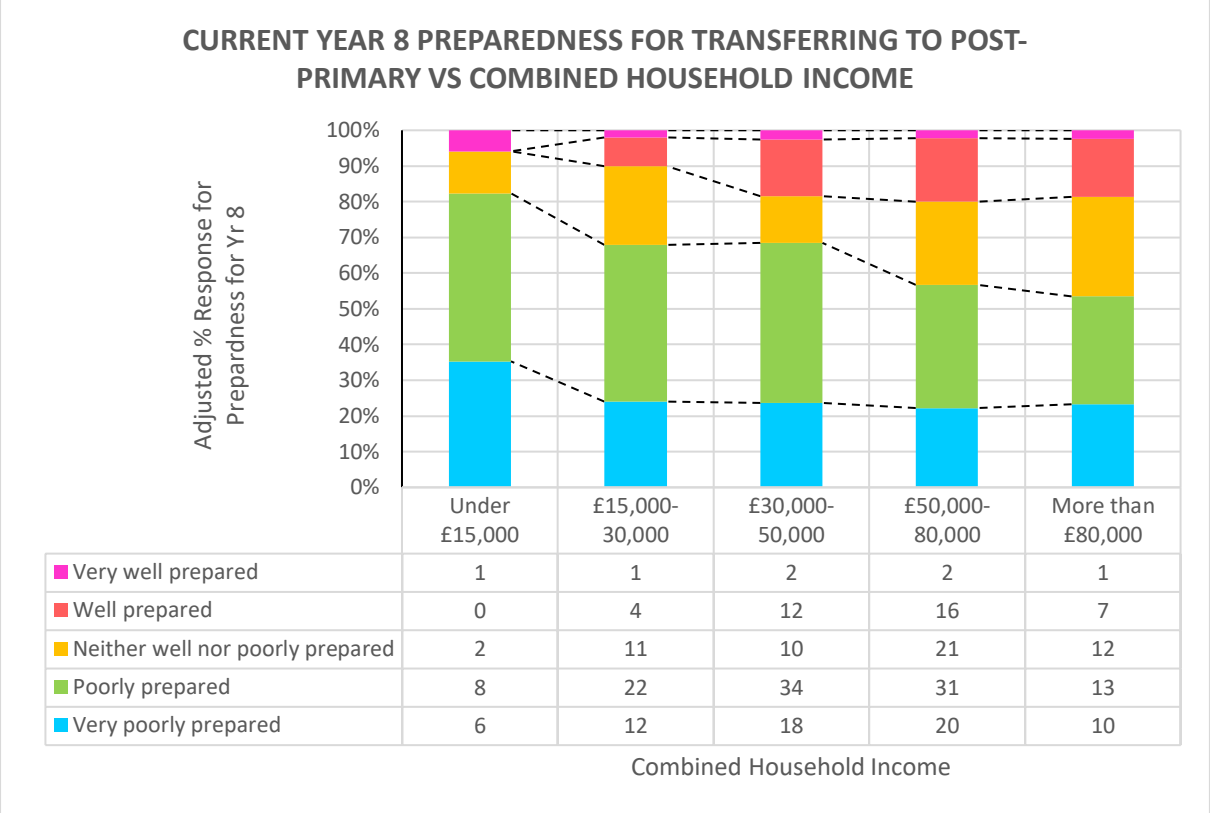


Figure 65: Year 8 preparedness for transfer compared with combined household income

11.2 Coping in Year 8

Q37 invited current Year 8 parents to comment on how well they thought their child was coping with their learning, given the disruption they had experienced both during the final stages of their P7 education and in the process of moving into the first year of their post-primary education in a new school setting. This particular transition carries with it many challenges for those young people for example the need to establish new friendships, the challenge of working within a new learning environment, and also dealing with new teachers. It is recognised that the challenges encountered in any normal year have been made more pronounced due to the impact of Covid-19. It is interesting that 60% (n=167) of the respondents felt that, despite the significant

challenges involved, their child was either coping 'well' or 'very well' with their learning in the new environment. However, it is somewhat concerning to note that close to a quarter of the parents (22%, n=65) were concerned that their child was coping either 'poorly' (15%, n=43) or 'very poorly' (8%, n=22) with their learning. These figures perhaps highlight the breadth of experience of year 8 pupils, including those who are quite resilient and are able to cope and handle uncertainty well but also those who have found the process of transition more challenging.

One of the parents commented on the positive impact that the current circumstances might potentially produce "Look how brilliantly the vast majority of young people have developed new skills and coped with major life changes. They will be the flexible and resilient employees of the future".

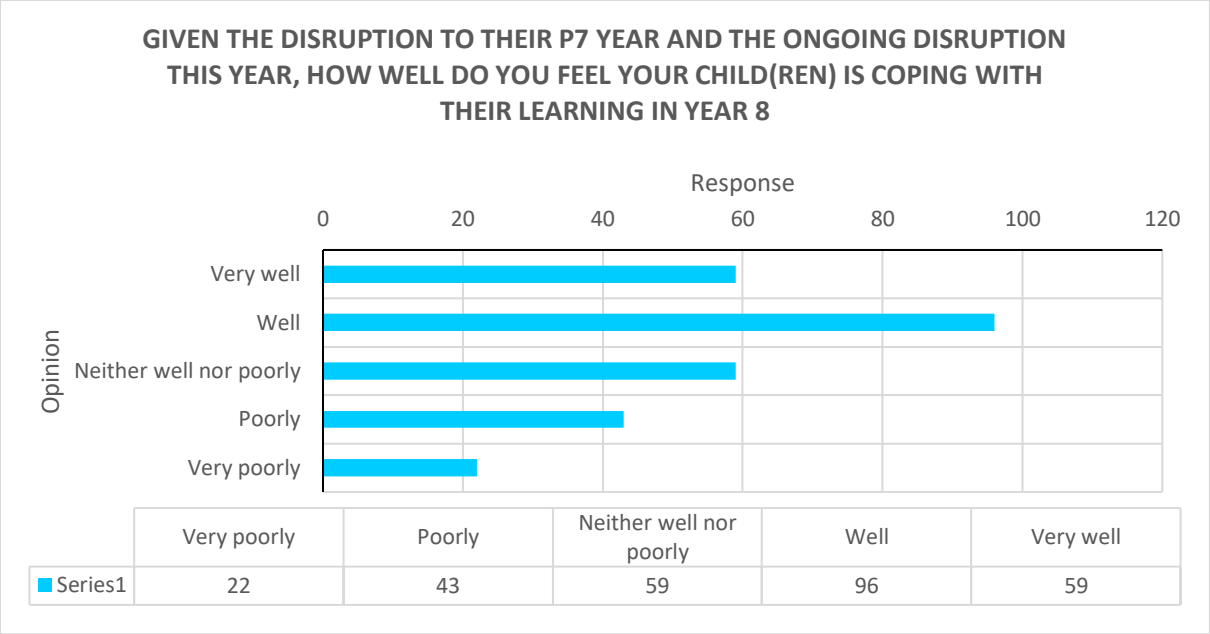


Figure 66: Children's perceived ability to cope with their learning in year 8

One parent expressed this in the following manner "Understand that not all parents have the same home-schooling opportunity due to work - have reasonable expectations around completion of schoolwork".

However, the data would appear to suggest that the children from lower income backgrounds were actually coping less well with learning in their new school environment. Interestingly, it would appear, that as combined household income increased so too did parental perception of the young person's ability to cope with the learning taking place. With a combined household income of less that £15K the

confidence level (coping well or very well with learning) was around 30%. Increasingly as the combined household income increased so too did confidence in learning for example £15K - £30K = 52%; £30K - £50K = 58%; £50K - £80K = 59%; and £80K+ = 60%.

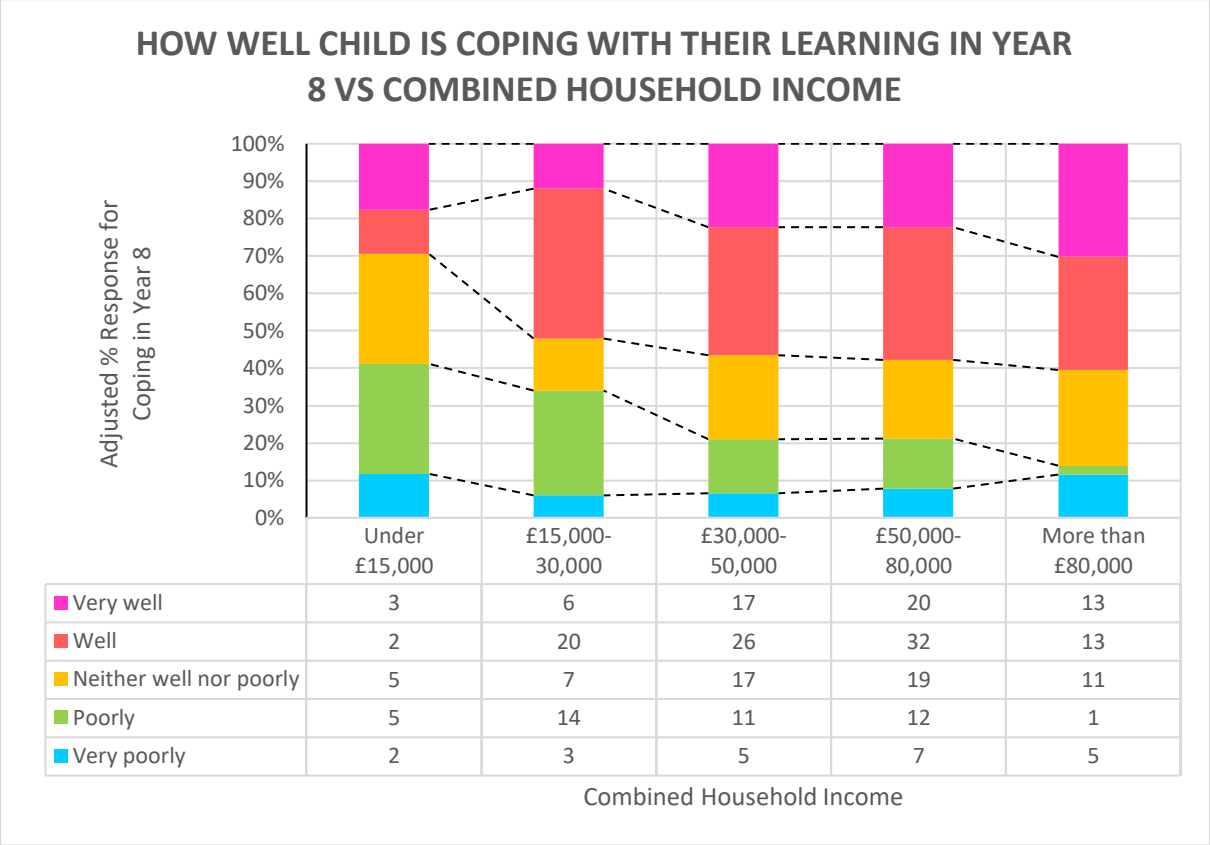


Figure 67: Children's coping with learning in year 8 vs combined household income

11.3 Cancellation of Year 12, 13 and 14 Exams and their Future

In Q39 the focus moved to the parents of Year 12, 13 & 14 pupils who were invited to reflect on the impact that the cancellation of their examination would have upon the perceived future of their young person. Only 11% (n=30) of respondents suggested that it would have a positive impact on future prospects. However, 52% (n=140) of the parents appeared concerned that the process of examination cancellation would have either a 'negative' or a 'very negative' impact upon their child's future prospects (10%, n=26, 'very negative'; 42%, n=114, 'negative').

This issue is highlighted in a comment raised by the parent of young person in Year 14 “I worry that my son will be negatively impacted when he returns to school and is required to complete the same exams next year as pupils whose schools taught them via on-line classes, during this current lockdown. . . His GCSE courses were not completed and I am highly concerned that his will be AS courses will now not be completed, now that AS exams are cancelled.”

One of the parents expressed very starkly their concerns about the uncertainty that young people have experienced as a result of the uncertainty around public examinations with a particular reference to GCSEs “*This caused my child so much anxiety to the point I thought it's only a GCSE certificate that I would like sitting on my dresser, not a death certificate.*”

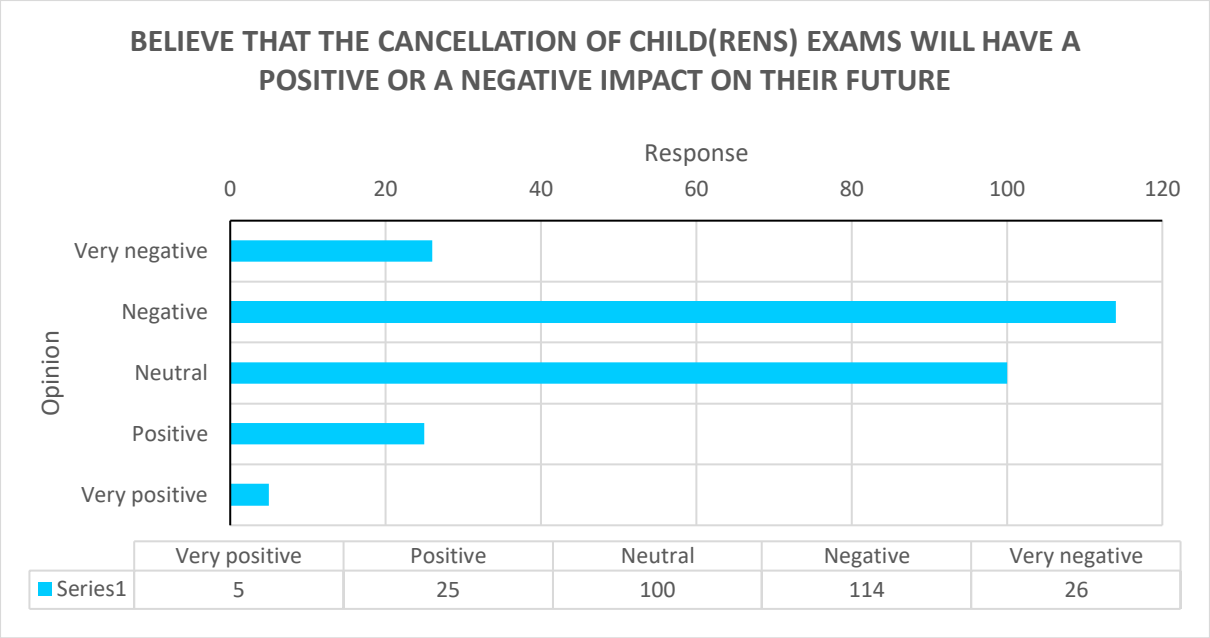


Figure 68: Perceived impacts on children’s futures of exam cancellations

Further exploration of the data would suggest that the impact of the cancellation examinations in Year 12, 13 and 14 is a concern, and in particular for those parents with a high combined household income. Approximately 70% of parents with a combined household income of more than £80k felt that the cancellation of their child’s examinations would have a ‘negative’ or ‘very negative’ impact on their future. It is possible that high-income parents are more aware of the value and the importance of education and that they equate good education with good results, and that these are based on the completion of formal examinations. The cancellation of formal public

examination could be viewed by some as being a diminution of academic standards with the potential to negatively impact the future prospects of those involved.

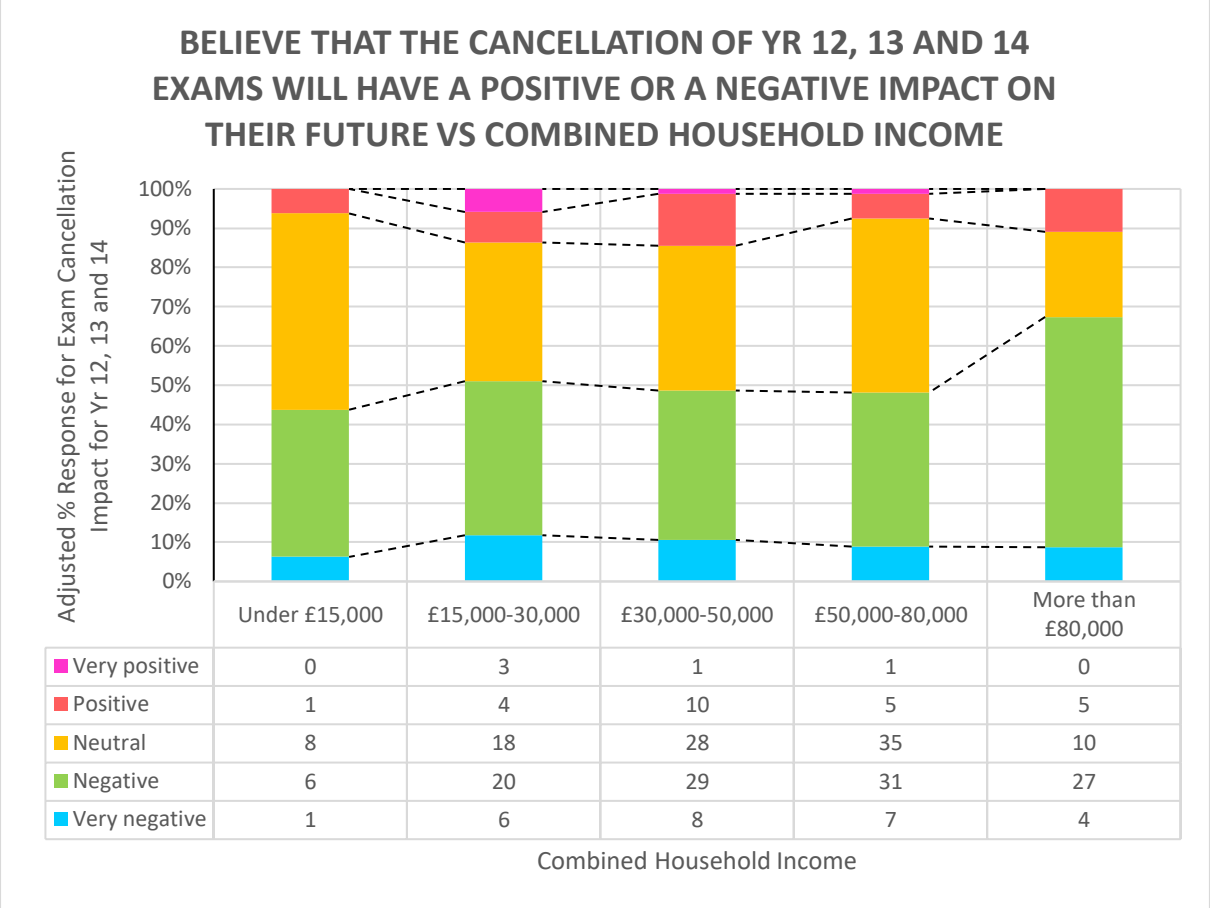


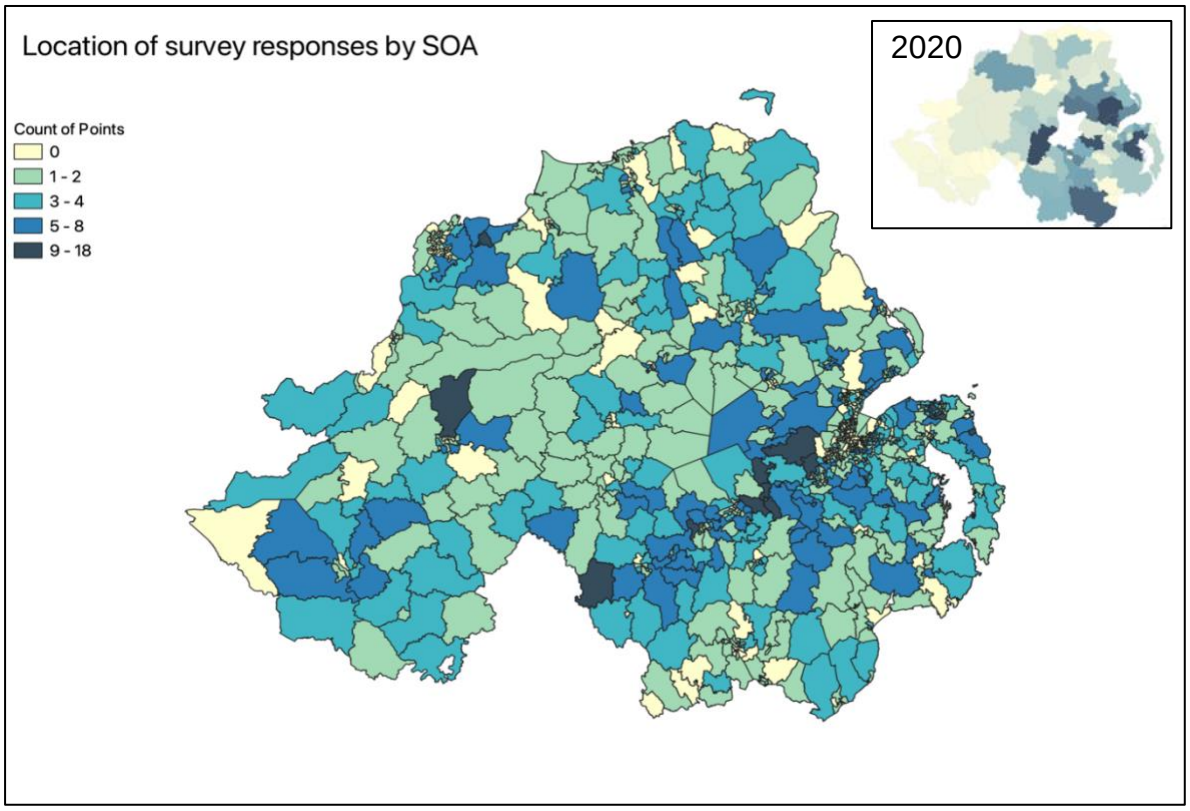
Figure 69: Perceived impacts on children's futures of exam cancellations compared with combined household income

Overall, the data would suggest that few believed the cancellation of the formal examinations at Key Stage 4 and 5 had a positive impact on the futures of the young people with a 11% (positive and very positive combined) and this was irrespective of the total combined household income.

Furthermore, there were no significant differences in responses to any of these key issues of preparedness to transfer from one school stage to another, to pupil engagement in learning, or with regards to future prospects when analysed by school type.

Chapter 12. Geographical Analysis

Improving on the quality of data gathered for the 2020 CREU home-schooling survey, the 2021 survey asked respondents to provide a full postcode, allowing for more accurate geographical analysis in three key ways. Firstly, neighbourhood-level locational data allows us to locate respondents within NISRA-defined Super Output Areas (SOAs) and therefore match them with Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 data. Secondly, such finer detail allows for a more nuanced analysis of data from rural parts of Northern Ireland. Lastly, more precise locational data points rather than area references allow for the possibility of using more sophisticated forms of GIS, such as interpolation. For the following analysis, we used the software package QGIS.



Map 1: Location of survey responses by Super Output Area for the 2021 Home-schooling Survey, with 2020 map of respondents by postcode area inserted for comparison

Map 1 shows the overall number of responses received by SOA, with the equivalent map from the last report inserted for comparison. This is helpful context when considering the overall findings from the survey. In comparison with last year's survey, there are considerably more respondents from the western counties. Responses were

received from almost every one of the 890 SOAs across Northern Ireland, and largely match the province's population distribution, meaning that the sample can be considered to be largely representative in terms of geographical distribution.

On the other hand, when matched with NIMDM data, the sample appears to be skewed towards less deprived SOAs, as demonstrated in figure 70:

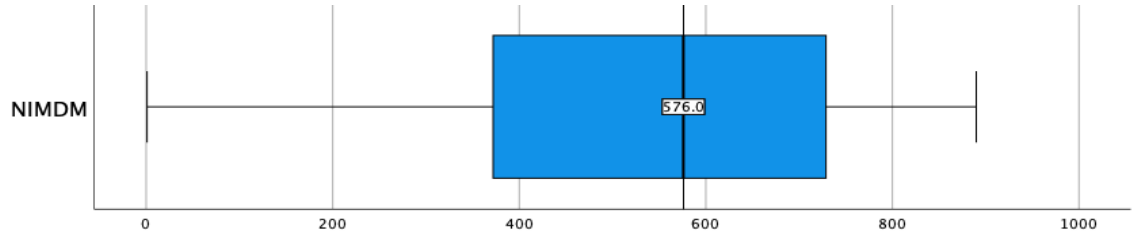
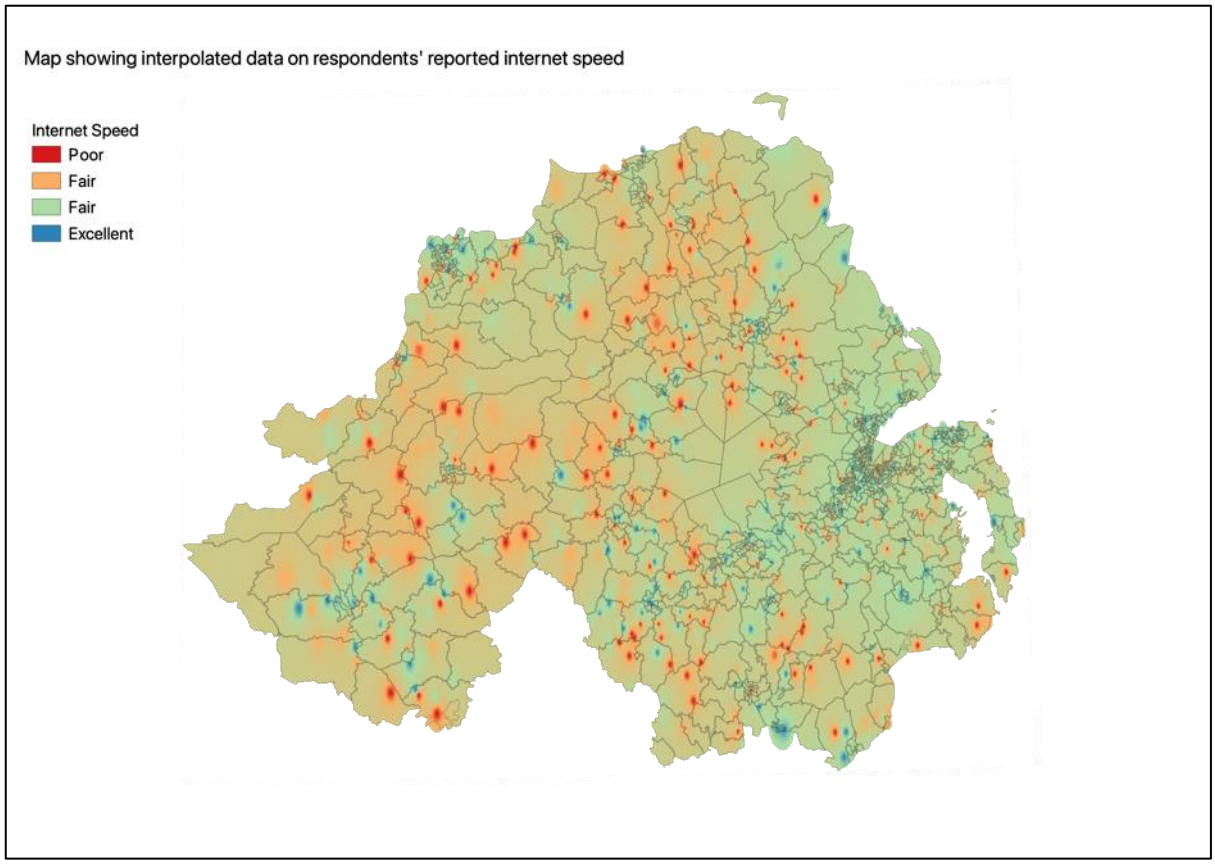


Figure 70: Box and whisker diagram demonstrating the spread of survey respondents by NIMDM ranking

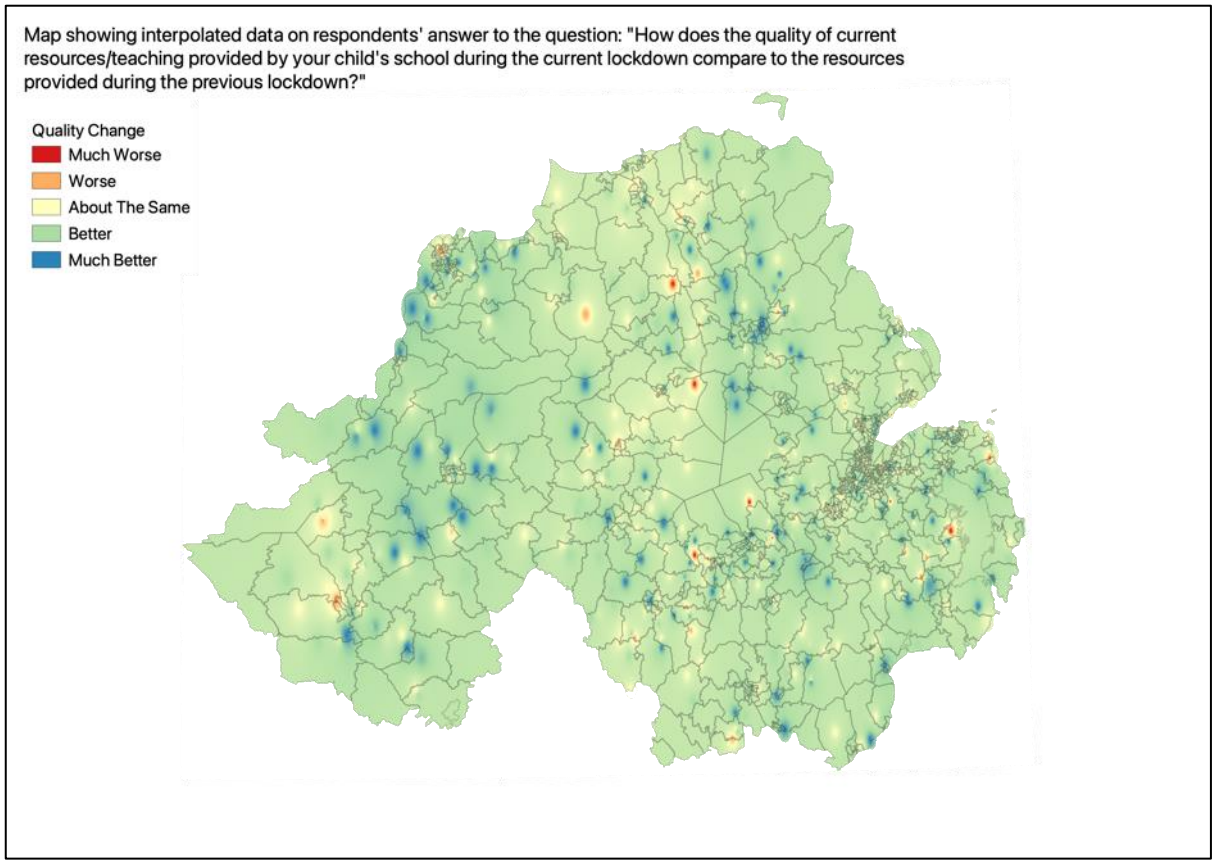
By locating respondents within SOAs, we were able to find each respondent's NIMDM ranking for their local area. The boxplot below (figure 1) demonstrates the spread of survey respondents by NIMDM ranking, and indicates that our sample average (median of 576) is likely to be less deprived than the Northern Ireland average (median of 445).

In order to identify areas in which access to online learning is most limited by poor internet connections, we took respondents' reported internet speeds, assigned these responses a numerical value, and interpolated the data to produce a province-wide map. Map 2 shows these results, with red areas representing poorer internet connections and blue areas representing better internet connections. As with the 2020 report's analysis, there is no strong geographical pattern to this data, but rural areas appear, unsurprisingly, to have worse reported internet connections.



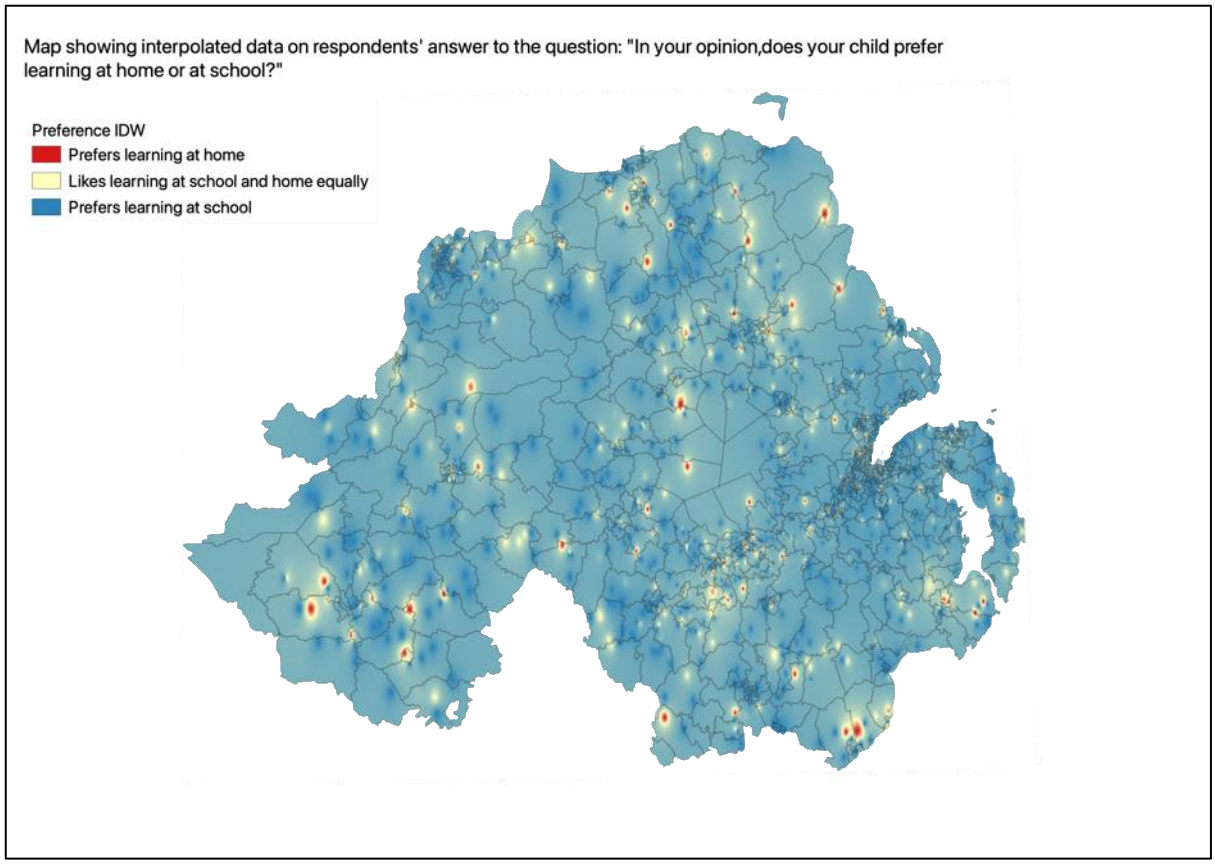
Map 2: Interpolated data on respondents' reported internet speed

Using the same method of interpolation, we took respondents' answer to the question "How does the quality of resources/teaching provided by your child's school during the current lockdown compare to the resources provided during the previous lockdown" and produced map 3. Encouragingly, the map indicates that for the vast majority of areas, parents/carers reported an increase in quality of resources and teaching, in both rural and urban areas.



Map 3: Interpolated data on respondents' reported quality of schools' home learning provision compared with the 2020 lockdown

Data from the 2020 survey suggested that parents/carers in rural locations might be less unanimous than parents/carers in urban areas in reporting that their child(ren) preferred learning at school to learning at home. Using the same method as the maps above, we produced map 4 to establish whether this pattern was identifiable within the 2021 data. Whilst the vast majority of the map is coloured blue, suggesting a predominance of parents/carers across Northern Ireland believing their child(ren) preferred learning at school to learning at home, the few points of red on the map do appear to be more common in rural areas than in urban areas.



Map 4: Interpolated data on respondents' opinion on whether their child(ren) prefer(s) learning at home or at school

The maps above demonstrate the value of analysing this data for geographical trends and represent first steps in doing so. They aim to shed light on some of the geographical inequalities that exist in parents/carers' current experience of coronavirus shut-down home-schooling in Northern Ireland, and to provide a point of comparison with the data from last year's survey.

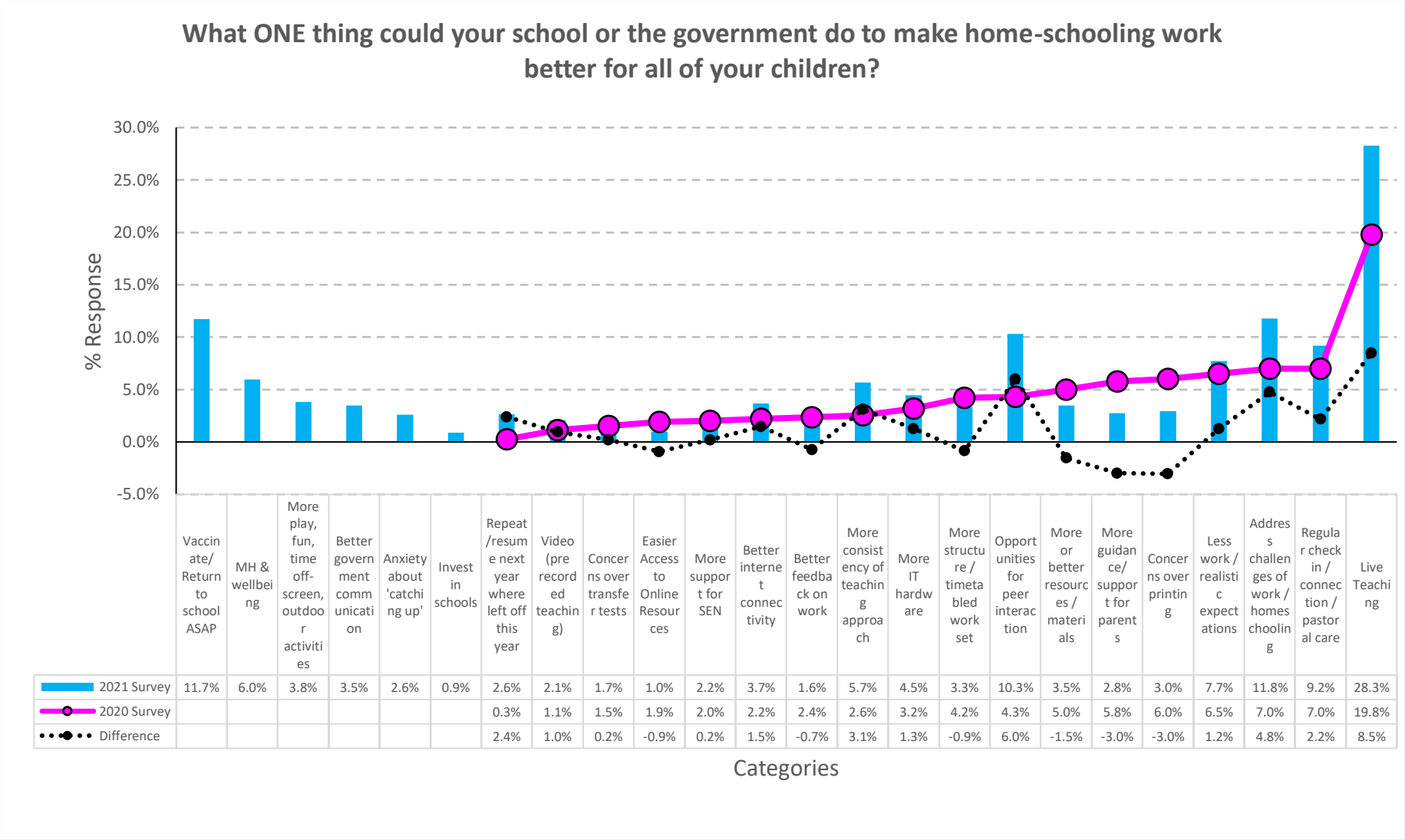
Chapter 13. Parent/Carer recommendations for school and government policy

The final, open, question of the survey asked respondents “What ONE thing could your school or the government do to make home-schooling work better for all of your children?” The same question was asked in the 2020 survey. The research team used the codes generated from the analysis of the 2020 survey to generate a comparable, quantified representation of responses, and included some significant new codes.

As demonstrated in the figure below, there appears to be a significant increase in parents asking for live teaching, connection and opportunities for peer interaction since last year’s survey, with 28.3% of survey respondents calling for more live teaching. This could indicate an increasing normalisation of online sociability and working across society, combined with a keenly felt lack of social interaction for school-age children after months of school closure. The other area with a large increase is ‘address challenges of working / home-schooling’, with 11.8% of respondents calling for support from schools, employers, and the government for parents/carers who are both expected to fulfil both the obligations of work and of home-schooling.

The new codes also reveal some interesting trends. Clearly, a significant proportion of parents/carers wanted schools to reopen as soon as possible, with 11.7% of respondents writing this even though it wasn’t the focus of the question asked. Many of these responses were accompanied with the assessment that for them ‘home-schooling was impossible’ or ‘didn’t work’, and so nothing could be done to improve it, and were particularly common amongst respondents identifying the challenges of working and home-schooling simultaneously. Concern for mental health and wellbeing, along with calls for more play, time off-screen, and outdoor activities also appear to be significant new concerns in response to this question.

The areas where codes were less frequent relate to the quantity and quality of resources and guidance for home-schooling parents, and concerns over printing. This may indicate that improvements in policy and provision in these areas have occurred in the past year.



	Vaccinate/ Return to school ASAP	MH & wellbeing	More play, fun, time off-screen, outdoor activities	Better government communication	Anxiety about 'catching up'	Invest in schools	Repeat/resume next year where left off this year	Video (pre recorded teaching)	Concerns over transfer tests	Easier Access to Online Resources	More support for SEN	Better internet connectivity	Better feedback on work	More consistency of teaching approach	More IT hardware	More structure / timetabled work set	Opportunities for peer interaction	More or better resources / materials	More guidance/ support for parents	Concerns over printing	Less work / realistic expectations	Address challenges of work / homeschooling	Regular check in / connection / pastoral care	Live Teaching
2021 Survey	11.7%	6.0%	3.8%	3.5%	2.6%	0.9%	2.6%	2.1%	1.7%	1.0%	2.2%	3.7%	1.6%	5.7%	4.5%	3.3%	10.3%	3.5%	2.8%	3.0%	7.7%	11.8%	9.2%	28.3%
2020 Survey							0.3%	1.1%	1.5%	1.9%	2.0%	2.2%	2.4%	2.6%	3.2%	4.2%	4.3%	5.0%	5.8%	6.0%	6.5%	7.0%	7.0%	19.8%
Difference							2.4%	1.0%	0.2%	-0.9%	0.2%	1.5%	-0.7%	3.1%	1.3%	-0.9%	6.0%	-1.5%	-3.0%	-3.0%	1.2%	4.8%	2.2%	8.5%

Figure 71: Summary of coded parent/carer recommendations for school or government policy

Chapter 14. Discussion/Conclusion

The detailed results presented in Chapter 3-13, both quantitative and qualitative, reveal a broad range of experiences and responses among the 2002 parents/carers (in relation to 3668 children) who completed the online survey. The survey explored their experiences during the second extended period of home-schooling (the survey was open 9-22 February 2021) which has once again transformed home-schooling from a planned deliberate choice to educate at home taken by a small number of parents into an enforced requirement for the vast majority of children aged 3-18, excluding vulnerable children, the children of key workers, and children attending special schools, which remained open during this period (unlike during the first lockdown March-June 2020).

Every effort has been made by the research team to analyse the considerable data set as quickly and efficiently as possible, in order to inform school leaders, education policy makers and employers about the impact that this second extended lockdown has had on children and young people, but also on their parents/carers. In so doing, it is hoped that the report's findings will have a significant and positive impact on the return to school which began for pre-school and years 1-3 on 8th March, was extended to years 4-7 and 12-14 on 22nd March and will be completed when years 8-11 return to school on 12th April. In publishing our report expeditiously to maximize its impact on children's lives, it is acknowledged that there remains the potential for much more comprehensive analysis, and it is our intention to carry out this additional data analysis in the coming weeks and months. It is further noted that a limitation of the survey, as last time, is the fact that it cannot claim to be representative in terms of parents' social background: for instance, the postcodes of respondents reveal that the sample is skewed towards less deprived SOAs (see chapter 12) and the educational qualifications and annual household income figures for the sample are above average (see chapter 3). Moreover, it is acknowledged that the online survey could have presented barriers to some parents through lack of digital access (lack of device or broadband access), language barriers (we did not explore particular issues for newcomer pupils and/or migrant/refugee families), literacy difficulties (the survey inevitably required high levels of literacy to understand the questions), and of course busyness and lack of time (we estimated from the pilot survey that it would take

respondents 15-30 minutes to complete, depending on how many children they had). Given the public health and travel restrictions in place in February 2021, as well as time and budgetary pressures, it was simply not possible to print paper copies and distribute them to disadvantaged communities which were consequently underrepresented in the sample. There is some encouragement, however, that the sample was largely representative by geographical distribution across Northern Ireland (and more so than the 2020 sample).

Notwithstanding these caveats, the survey has once again highlighted a number of very significant findings:

First, as in 2020, the survey has revealed the advantage gained by the children of parents with higher levels of educational qualifications who felt more confident in their home-schooling role, and were more likely to play an active role by trying to teach their child(ren) new content or answering their queries and explaining new information, rather than simply checking that they were completing the set tasks or encouraging them to work on their own.

Second, the findings highlight how digital accessibility at home is strongly related to household income: although there was a slight increase from 2020 in the number of digital devices available to children, and a reduction in the percentage of parents reporting that they had no printer (18% in 2021, compared to 23% in 2020), children from households in the lowest income band were three times more likely to have no printer than children from households in the highest income band (30% vs 11%) and their parents/carers were considerably more likely to feel that the costs of printing (in terms of paper and ink) prevented them from using their printer (25% vs 3%). Children from low-income homes were also more likely to have to share a digital device and/or wait to be able to go online, and their parents/carers were less likely to report fast internet speeds. The geographical analysis also revealed that internet connectivity was worst in rural areas. It could be concluded therefore that children from low-income households in rural areas are most disadvantaged in terms of digital accessibility.

Third, our study has shown a wide divergence of parental experience during this second extended period of home-schooling. Once again the vast majority (96%) of respondents were female but through the responses to questions about their employment status and that of their partner, it was clear that there is a strongly

gendered division of labour within most households in the sample, with women much more likely to be in the home, whether working or not, and responsible for child-care and home-schooling to a greater degree than their male partners. Overall findings suggest that children spent longer on home-schooling activities in 2021 than in 2020, while those parents who reported finding time for home-schooling a challenge were most likely to be juggling work and home-schooling commitments, working either outside or inside the home. Additional questions explored the impact of home-schooling on parental mental and physical health (see chapter 7) and highlighted that overall almost 80% and 67% (respectively) of parents reported a negative impact on their own mental and physical health and wellbeing, with the most acute impact felt by parents who were working from home. It can be concluded that parents/carers working from home and attending to their children's home-schooling activities were most likely to experience a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Fourth, the survey highlights that the impact on children's mental health and wellbeing, social skills, and behaviour was much more negative in 2021 than during the first lockdown of 2020. The majority of parents/carers felt that the current lockdown/school closures had resulted in their child/ren's mental health and wellbeing becoming 'worse' or 'much worse' (51% in 2021 vs 31% in 2020). While 20% of parents in 2020 felt that their child's mental health had become 'better' or 'much better', by 2021 this figure had fallen to just 7%. The more negative experiences in 2021 can also be seen in relation to parent/carers' estimation of the impact of lockdown on their child's social skills (49% 'worse' or 'much worse' in 2021 vs 29% in 2020), and level of behaviour (35% 'worse' or 'much worse' in 2021 vs 29% in 2020). In the current survey we also asked parents/carers about the impact on their child's *physical* health and wellbeing and found that 47% felt that this was now 'worse' or 'much worse' than pre-lockdown with only 8% believing that it was 'better' or 'much better'. Reported outcomes were worse for all factors for those from low-income homes. Many of the open-ended comments by parents/carers illustrate the serious impact that almost a year of disrupted schooling and lockdown restrictions were having, and confirmed (often forcefully) that their children urgently needed to get back to school to restore opportunities for social interaction, learning and enjoyment.

> *My children need to return to school for both their mental health and my own. Schools should be encouraging reopening.*

Less work for my children in year 8 and 10 so they had time to do activities away from screens that would help their physical and mental wellbeing.

There is NOTHING to replace the value of a child being in a physical school setting. PRIMARY SCHOOL AND PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN need to be back in the classrooms for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the child.

This negative impact is further illustrated by the fact that a much higher percentage of parents in this survey (76%) felt that their children preferred learning at school rather than at home, compared to in 2020 (63%). The survey did reveal, encouragingly, that where schools placed importance or high importance on nurture, safety and well-being (according to parents) this had a very positive impact on reported levels of motivation, mental health and wellbeing, social skills, and physical health and wellbeing, compared to those schools who were not reported to value these approaches. Parents were also asked whether they would be in favour of their child repeating the 2020/21 year due to the impact of school closures. Overall, parents/carers were not in favour for 54%, unsure for 13%, but in favour for 33% of individual children. Parents of primary aged children were on the whole more likely to be in favour of their child repeating the school year than post-primary aged children, with the exception of the parents of P7 children where less than a quarter (24%) were in favour of their child repeating the year.

Fifth, this study has confirmed that parents were broadly happy with both the quality and the quantity of learning resources provided by their children's schools. Almost two-thirds (65%) of parents felt that the quality of learning resources was better or much better than during the first lockdown, with only 6% claiming that the provision was worse. The same majority (65%) were happy with the quantity of resources, an increase of 3% since the 2020 survey.

Sixth, the number of parents who report that their child's school engages in some live online teaching has doubled since 2020, from 24% to almost 50%, while the number of schools not engaging at all in live online teaching has fallen from 77% to just over 50%. This is a significant shift, and represents a positive response to the most common recommendation given by parents in the May 2020 survey and in this survey (see

chapter 13) that they wanted more live teaching and/or interaction with the class teacher and their child's peers. This is undoubtedly the result of a considerable and commendable upskilling of the teaching profession over the past 12 months, and perhaps too, a relaxation of some of the initial concerns raised by the teaching unions (and reported in our 2020 report) about the potential risks to their members from engaging in live teaching sessions with children. Nonetheless, this study has shown that the provision of live online teaching is still not universal, and is significantly skewed towards older, post-primary pupils and especially those attending voluntary grammar schools and those in the Irish Medium sector. Although the number of pupils in the Irish Medium category is small (n=50) this is an interesting and encouraging result, reflecting perhaps the recognised importance of providing live language exposure to children, who may not have Irish speakers in the home to replicate the language-rich immersion environment of school. Further analysis has also suggested a positive association between the provision of live online teaching and children's levels of motivation, behaviour, social skills and mental health.

Seventh, the survey reveals that there are widely divergent experiences, as might be expected, depending on the age and year group of the children. There were particular issues to emerge in respect of our youngest children who spent least time engaged in formal home-schooling activities and least time being taught live online. Their parents often reported that their children were missing opportunities to play and to be outside, but there are indications from the data that opportunities during lockdown to engage in play and in outdoor learning were associated with higher levels of motivation, mental health and physical health and wellbeing.

Eighth, there was a focus on disrupted assessment for many parents. For instance, for parents of pupils in years 6-8, there was a strong focus on the transfer tests, including fear and anxiety expressed by parents of the current P6 cohort faced with the uncertainty of what might happen next year; anger and frustration by parents of the current P7 cohort whose year had been dominated by the postponement and eventual cancellation of the transfer tests, and a feeling among a majority that contingency assessment methods ought to have been planned earlier; and a sense among parents of year 8 pupils that their children had missed out on the normal preparation for transition to post-primary schools and that some were not adjusting as well as might have been expected as a result. Open-ended questions provided an

opportunity for many parents to voice their frustration which was often levelled at the Education Minister, AQE and grammar schools.

> *Transfer tests: as a P7 parent I feel that the transfer tests were handled very poorly by the grammar schools and the Education Minister alike… I believe that requiring children to prepare for academic transfer during the pandemic, for a test that was likely never to sit, was immoral. The way in which the AQE in particular handled the situation in January was dreadful. In my opinion, the staggered communications and the setting of a single test constituted a child welfare issue… I feel terribly for children who worked for 12 months for this test to face a late cancellation with no prospect of a grammar place. The grammars who participated in this process through the associative bodies should be hanging their heads in shame at this mishandling of this process. Instead, they seem to be planning the same cycle of stress and failure for the current P6.*

For parents of pupils in years 12-14, there was again a sense of frustration that the revised methods of assessment could disadvantage their children's future. In analysing these responses further by level of household income, it was found that higher income parents were more likely to feel that this year's transfer tests should have gone ahead regardless of the public health guidance, were more likely to feel that their year 8 children had coped well with transition to post-primary school, and were more likely to believe that the disruption to year 12-14 assessment would have a negative impact on their child(ren)'s future.

14.1 Conclusion

There is little doubt that this second extended period of home-schooling through the winter months of January and February has presented a wide range of challenges to parents, children and teachers alike. The findings from our initial analysis confirm continued inequities of digital access (in terms of devices and broadband access), varying levels of parental confidence in home-schooling, considerable pressures faced by parents as they juggled work and home-schooling commitments, and resulting negative consequences for children's learning and development as well as their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Once again, children from wealthier homes with better-educated parents are more likely to have better digital access to their learning resources, are more likely to have the confident support of their parents to hand, and are more likely to have transitioned well to post-primary school. There seems little doubt that this second period of home-schooling, like the first, has further exacerbated existing inequalities in our education system and in our society more generally.

However, there are also some positive outcomes which emerge too: parents are generally happy with both the quality and quantity of learning resources provided by their children's schools, and there has been a considerable increase in the extent of live online teaching, especially for older pupils, as a result of months of investment and upskilling by the teaching profession. Moreover, there is encouragement that where schools are engaging in pastoral support, this is having a positive impact, according to parents, on their children's levels of motivation, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, and physical health and wellbeing.

While our focus quite rightly is on the children and young people who have experienced so many forms of loss over the past 12 months, and who will need encouragement and support as they return to school and re-engage with their friends, let us not forget the parents/carers themselves. As children resume face-to-face learning once more in March and April 2021, it is clear that parents will be enormously relieved, but will also be exhausted in many cases after weeks of juggling both home-schooling and working either at home or outside the home, and this is something which employers must take into account as they too seek to support their employees. As one parent expressed it:

> *Homeschooling does not work with 2 full time working parents. Our children need to go back to school and interact with their peers and be made first priority by their teacher. Unlike at home where we are juggling so many balls to keep our jobs and schooling going. Unless the government is prepared to pay me my salary to quit my job and teach my own kids full time!*

Parents (and we know that in most cases it is the mums who have borne the heaviest burden) are to be commended for the efforts they have made in very challenging circumstances, for they are (in the main) not trained educators and have had to learn

fast, negotiating unfamiliar learning platforms, trying to motivate their children, struggling to understand subjects they never thought they would ever need to teach, and trying to find time to run their house and attend to their own mental and physical health. One parent neatly expressed the feelings of her peers as follows:

> *"I am not a teacher. I don't want to be a teacher. Trying to teach my children round the kitchen table, who are at different stages needing different levels of parental input is like visiting the seventh circle of hell!!!! Why was this ever even considered possible??"*

Of course this mum is absolutely right, and so home-schooling parents/carers, just like their children, deserve to be congratulated for what they have achieved against all the odds during this second, and hopefully, final extended period of home-schooling in Northern Ireland.

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