

Parents and children's experiences of school closures – early survey findings 13 May 2020

On May 1 2020, the [UK Cost of the School Day](#) project launched two surveys aiming to understand how families across the UK are experiencing school closures, particularly when living on low incomes. Through hearing directly from children and families, we plan to identify what support from schools and local authorities is proving useful, and what more could be done to help during this time. We created two surveys: one for [parents and carers](#), and the other for [children and young people](#). As of May 12, we've heard from over 1,000 parents and carers and around 400 children and young people.

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

- **Money worries:** so far, over half the parents and carers who responded to the survey said they were moderately to extremely concerned about money
- **Access to resources:** we've been hearing from parents and children about the obstacles faced when trying to learn from home, including lack of resources such as laptops, stationery, or a printer. Most parents have had to spend money on resources to support their children's learning.
- **Emotional impact:** parents and children have been telling us about the negative impact of school closures on their wellbeing and mental health, with over half of parents agreeing that their children are finding it very difficult not being at school, and parents themselves reporting extreme stress and pressure when it comes to home learning. Some parents told us that check-ins from school staff and conversations with other parents have helped.

We will be sharing further qualitative data alongside quantitative results and analysis in the coming weeks, after the surveys close. Below, we share a few examples from the responses we've received so far.

What things people say are really helping right now

- Parents and children have told us that they value **good communication from schools**, and appreciate regular contact with teaching staff through phone calls or online.

"It's not necessarily the resources, it's been the phone calls and offer of any support that I have found the most helpful." (Dad, Glasgow)

"Work is set weekly on the facebook page, but as we don't have access to a printer, the teacher has printed them off and dropped them to our house." (Mum, Shropshire)

"The school sends assembly and messages to mum to check we are OK. My teacher sends me learning and positive messages that cheer me up." (Girl, 7, Angus)

- There is a strong desire from parents and children to be able to keep in touch with school and their peers **visually and verbally**.

“More social interaction with teachers and peers. Everything is so impersonal with on line learning. It’s a one size fits all.” (Girl, 13, East Renfrewshire)

“More virtual classes to see my class mates and to be able to ask questions and feel more normal.” (Boy, 13, Highland)

- Many parents have said that school sending **daily tasks** has been useful to give them structure, and pupils have spoken positively about some of the work assigned.

“My daughter’s teachers provide a learning “menu” each week, with all the subjects broken down with activities listed. There is no pressure to complete everything at all. This understanding of how difficult it is has been really useful.” (Mum, Orkney)

“[My teacher] gave me lots of work to do at home that is lots of fun and learns me lots to.” (Boy, 8, Glasgow)

- Many parents said they found it useful to **have laptops or tablets lent to pupils by their school**. Other physical resources such as home learning packs, notebooks and stationery were also mentioned as being welcome.

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

- However, there were **mixed feelings among parents about online learning and resources**, with some parents finding them very useful, while others found them overwhelming.

What things are causing families additional stress

- **Lack of access to IT resources** came up a lot in both the parents and children surveys:

“All learning has been IT – I have 2 children and myself requiring laptop use, only 2 laptops, only 1 has windows, so has been a fair juggle.” (Mum, Inverness)

“[I would like] more personal interaction. Not everything online as we only have one tablet and have to share with my sister.” (Girl, 10, Glasgow)

- Most children and young people who completed our survey told us that they **missed seeing their friends at school**. Some primary school pupils expressed a desire for school to help them keep in touch with their friends and classmates during school closures.

“I wish that the school would set up a system so that we can Facetime or Skype our classmates.” (Girl, 10, Glasgow)

“I would like a big long FaceTime call with my class.” (Girl, 6, Perth)

- **Overall financial pressure** was a recurring theme in parents and carers’ responses. Many have said that they are in need of support but are not entitled to it.

“I have received nothing from the school to advise me whether p1 p2 and p3 children are able to get food vouchers. We are on no benefits but it would help greatly just now.” (Mum of 3, Glasgow)

- Some parents feel like there are **too many assignments** being set by schools and unrealistic expectations of what pupils should learn and achieve at home:

*"I'm currently working full time from home and trying to home school. I don't have much time to spend on it and the assignments were coming thick and fast and we were falling behind and I feel like I'm failing and causing extra stress."
(Single mum, Northampton)*

- Families often face **complex issues** where a variety of different barriers combine to make the experience of lockdown extremely difficult. A single mum, who said she was extremely concerned about money and her family finances at the moment, told us:

"Small flat, no space, no time due to work, old broken laptop and no money to fix it, don't want to borrow school one because we have behavioural problems and it will get broken" (Mum, Dumfries)

What families want and need from the schemes to replace free school meals

- Many parents were not aware of support with food costs available from their school, or said that it did not apply to their family. However, rising food costs do appear to be an issue of concern to many parents:

"My food costs have increased significantly over this period and it is hard to budget." (Mum, West Lothian)

- There were mixed responses among the parents who completed the survey about supermarket voucher schemes:

"Initially thought I was not entitled to vouchers so was pleasantly surprised when I received email and grateful for the help. I have not had an issue with the system or redeeming them" (Mum, London)

*"I appreciate the farmfoods card in theory however is untenable due to distance to the shop. It is too far to visit and they do not deliver."
(Single mum, Glasgow)*

- Cash payments were viewed positively by those who receive them:

*"The cash payment has been good due to child being fussy eater."
(Mum, Renfrewshire).*

"The money for my eldest daughter has really helped although I have had to receive food hampers couple of times from the food bank" (Mum, Dundee)

*"The extra money has really helped as I didn't have the budget for the extra food the kids need without the free school meal each day. It allows me to choose things that I know my children will eat in sandwiches. It also still allows me to buy fruit for them which I normally wouldn't buy as they eat it at school."
(Mum, Angus)*

What do parents need schools to do to help children settle back in?

Parents want schools to reopen when it's safe and they want enough notice to plan for it. Most want school focus to be on nurture and wellbeing rather than attainment and want schools to know what an adjustment returning will be for children. Some of the things parents and carers have been mentioning are:

- **Emotional support**, ensuring children feel safe, aren't overwhelmed and have the chance to talk. Reassurance, time and patience, play
- Phased returns, smaller classes, **easing back in**
- **Continuity** as far as possible with teachers and peers
- **Extra help 'catching up'**, and a recognition that children and young people are having different experiences of school closures, and receive varying degrees of support with learning
- Support with transitions for children and for questions parents may have
- Support to start up routines and structure again
- **Lots of contact and information in advance** to help them prepare

"They will need to be able to revisit the work they are completing at home as some parents are able to support children and some are having to work, support for mental health re anxiety around the current situation." (Mum, Merseyside)

"The first term back needs to focus on nurture. Everything has changed for our children. They are anxious and frightened, even with all the support around them." (Mum, Angus)

"Consider a wider range of educational subjects than the curriculum provides presently and give them a hug." (Dad, Glasgow)

"Very low academic expectations ... focus on the social emotional experiences of returning to large groups after many months of only being with family, and managing anxiety." (Parent, Cardiff)