

**PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON  
THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION**



**NPC**

SUPPORTING PARENTS  
SUPPORTING CHILDREN

# NPC Vision

The National Parents Council want to see an Ireland where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential

# NPC Mission

The National Parents Council exists to ensure that all parents are supported and empowered to become effective partners in their children's education. NPC will work to increase the capacity and capability of the education sector, to achieve true partnership and deliver better outcomes for all children and young people.

# Values

**NPC knows that when parents and schools work together, children do better. Therefore, NPC believes that in order to achieve this parents must feel:**

**Engaged: Parents must be actively engaged in the education of their children.**

**Supported: Parents' involvement in children's education must be supported by the attitudes, beliefs and practices of all members of the school and broader education community.**

**Partners: Parents must be viewed as partners in facilitating children's learning and be supported in this role by the school and broader education community.**

**Valued: Parents should be viewed as full partners in the decisions that affect their children and their family.**

**Welcomed: Parents should be welcome in the school, and their support and assistance sought as a valuable resource to support children's education in the school.**

**Connected: All communication and dialogue with parents must be regular, open, two-way and meaningful.**

# National Parents Council

## Key Activities

### **SERVICE DELIVERY**

**NPC's services are developed to empower parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.**

### **HELPLINE**

**The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen and give information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children.**

### **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level.**

### **WEBSITE**

**The NPC's website [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie) aims to provide parents with information regarding education at early years, primary and post primary levels.**

### **ADVOCACY**

**NPC engages in awareness-raising activities and campaigning and lobbying at a national level on the objectives of its Strategic Plan.**

### **REPRESENTING PARENTS**

**NPC represents the voice of parents through representation on external bodies and other mediums. NPC consults with parents and brings parents' views to bear on education policy.**

### **BUILDING PARTICIPATION**

**NPC builds participation strategies and activities to ensure parents and children are an integral part of the work of NPC.**

# Structure of the Report

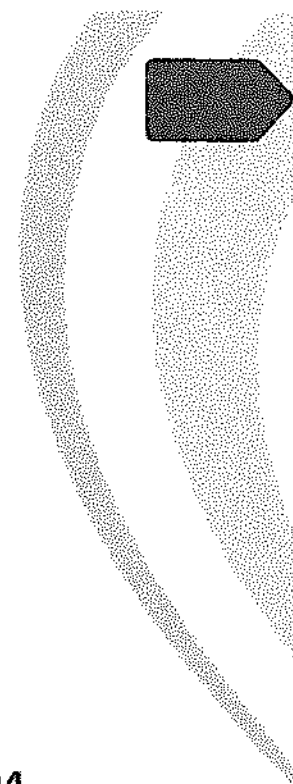
This report is organised into six sections.

- Section 1 presents the overall analysis and results of the survey, combining responses from all school types.
- Sections 2–6 provide a more detailed breakdown, focusing on specific educational settings:
  - Early Years
  - Primary
  - Post-Primary
  - Special Schools
  - Special Classes within Mainstream Schools

The decision to separate findings by school type stems from clear differences identified in parents' experiences across these settings during the pandemic. By presenting the data in this way, we aim to give a fuller picture and ensure that the voices of parents from each context are represented.

At the same time, the overall analysis remains available in Section 1 for readers who wish to view the combined results alongside the detailed breakdowns.

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## SECTION 1

**OVERALL PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON  
THE LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19  
ON THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION**

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes to children's education. Schools closed, learning moved online, and social rules affected families. To learn more about the longer-term effects, the National Parents Council (NPC) asked parents about their children's experiences during and after the pandemic. The goal was to understand how students were affected in their learning, friendships, and feelings, and where more support may be needed.

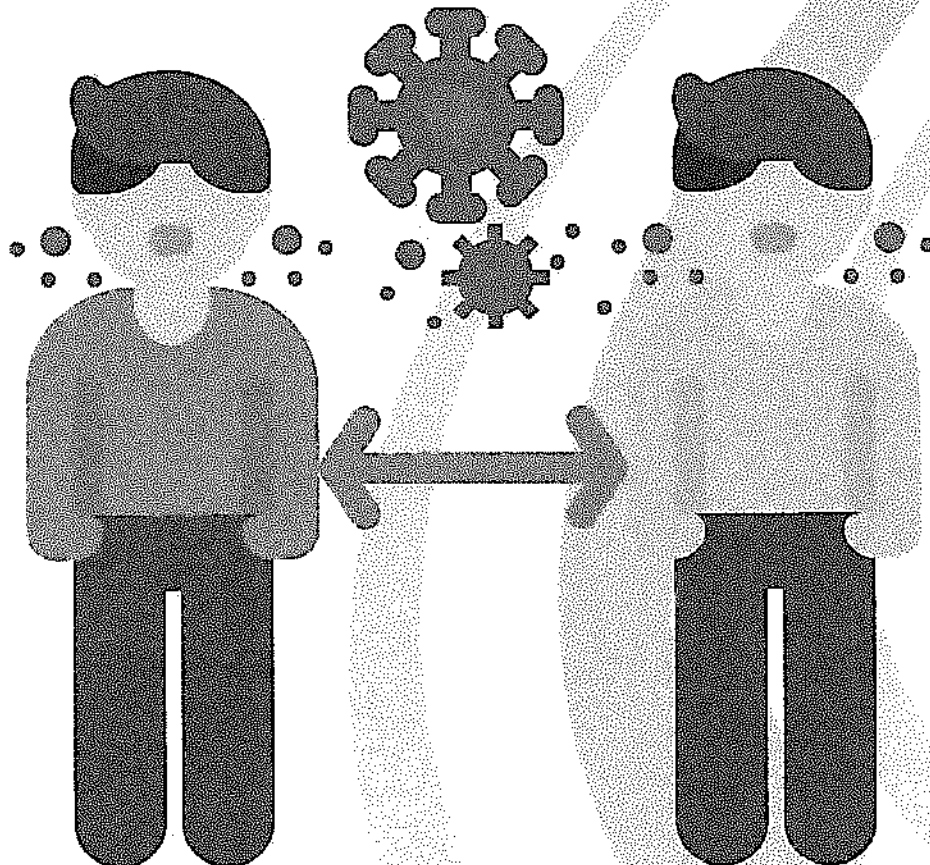
Parents were invited to share their point of view through a consultation that included both structured and open-ended questions. This helped what kind of schools children went to, what problems they faced, and how well schools supported their learning. Parents also shared views on remote learning, school communication, and what should could be done differently if something like this happens again.

The findings presented here are based on the results of a survey conducted by the NPC during June - August 2025. The survey was sent to the NPC data base of parents of children in early years, primary, and post-primary, special schools, and special classes in mainstream schools. The survey was open from 20 of June 2025 till the 15 of August 2025. During this time, a total of (811) parents completed the survey. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey will be shared in this section.

# Surveys

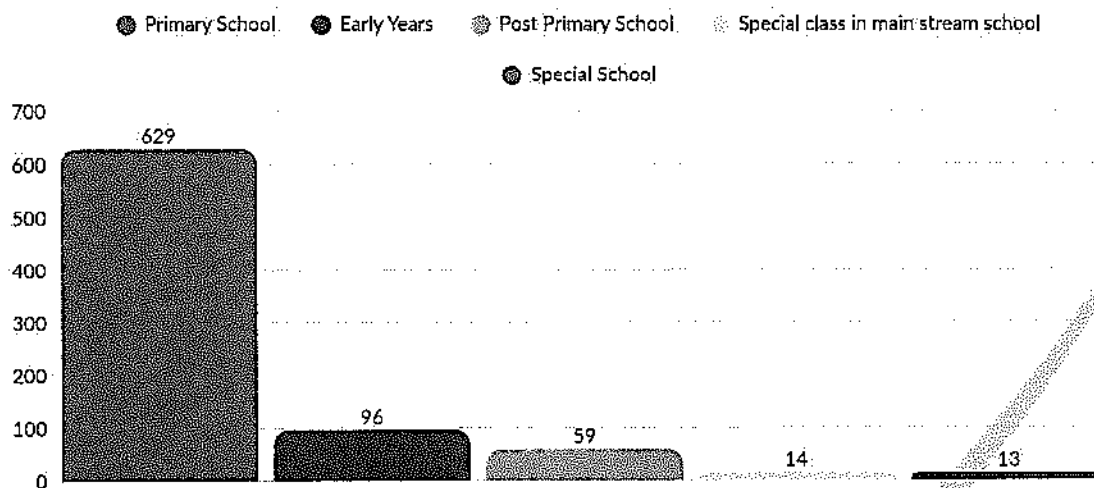
A survey titled Covid-19 was sent to parents to collect feedback. The survey asked a number of questions to find out how parents felt about their children's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and any current lasting effects.

It included a mix of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. This gave parents the opportunity to choose answers that suited their views and also share extra thoughts. Parents were also asked to tell us how well schools supported their child's learning needs. The main results of the survey, including key points and parents' opinions, will be shared in this section.



# Survey Findings

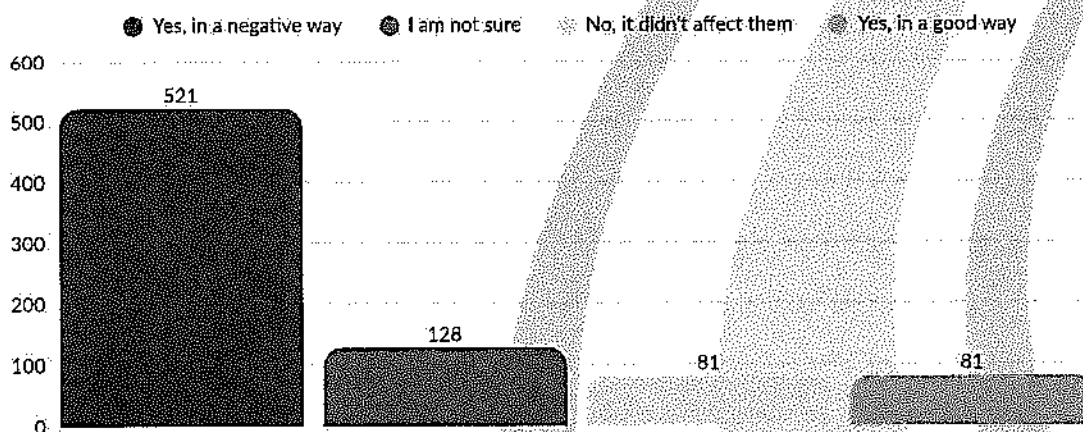
When parents were asked about the type of educational setting their child attended during the COVID-19 pandemic, only a small number of children attended special classes in mainstream schools and special schools. The majority of parents reported that their child was in a primary school setting, while fewer children were in early years or post-primary settings (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1)

What type of education setting did your child attend during the COVID-19 period?

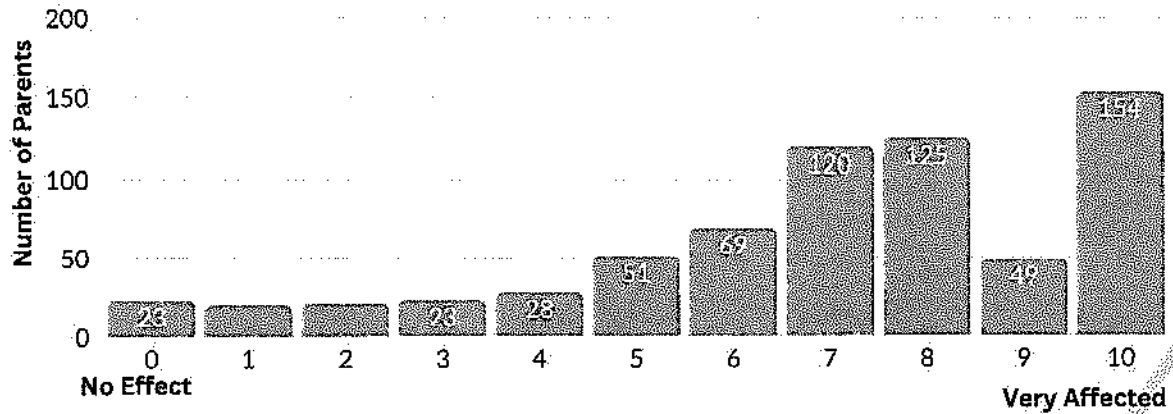
When asked whether school closures during the pandemic affected their child, the majority of parents reported a negative impact. A smaller group were unsure, while an equal number of parents said the closures had no impact or had a positive effect (see Figure 2).



(Figure 2)

Did school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affect your child?

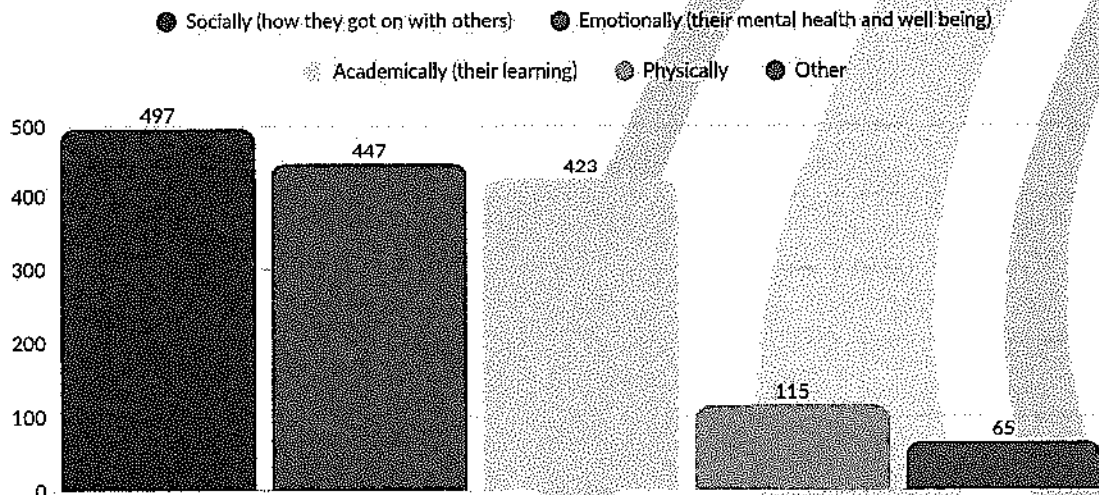
Parents were asked to rate the extent to which school closures affected their child. Most responses were between 7 and 10, indicating a strong impact. Fewer parents gave moderate scores between 4 and 6, while a smaller number rated the effect between 0 and 3 (see Figure 3).



(Figure 3)

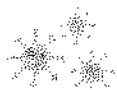
To what extent did the school closures affect your child?

When parents were asked how school closures affected their child, parents most commonly selected social, emotional, and academic impacts. Physical effects and other types of impact were mentioned less frequently (see Figure 4).



(Figure 4)

How did the school closures affect your child, did it affect them? (select as many as you need)

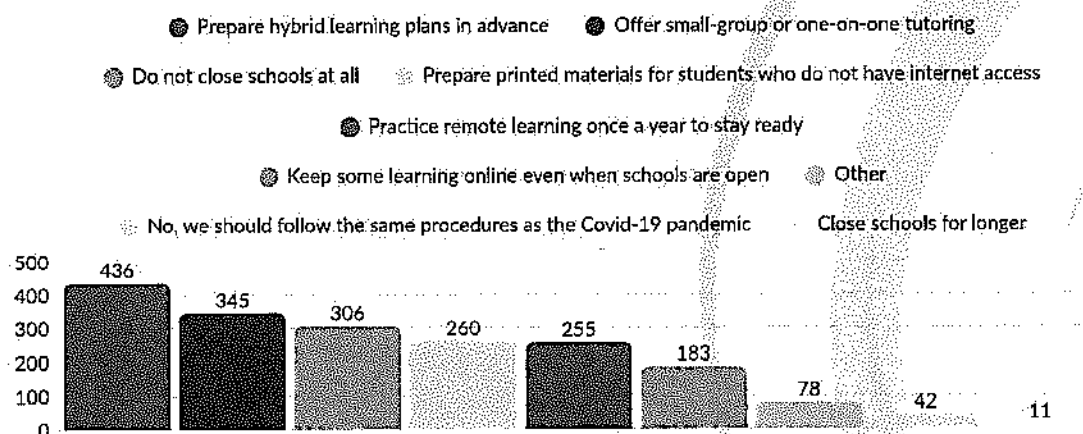


Parents shared a wide range of experiences about how school closures affected their children. While some said their children were not much affected or were too young to notice, others described more serious impacts. Many parents reported academic challenges, including falling behind in learning, poor standards of online education (or none at all), and delays in identifying learning needs. Emotional and social effects were also common, with children missing their friends, feeling lonely, or developing anxieties about social interaction and hygiene. Some children showed behavioural changes or physical effects, while others refused to return to school.

A few families found positive aspects in the closures, such as spending quality time together, relief from bullying, or a break from a rigid curriculum that did not suit their child's needs. Parents also mentioned the difficulty of balancing work and supporting their children's learning, especially during the first lockdown.

This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

When parents were asked what should be done differently if a similar event happened in the future, they suggested a variety of approaches. The most popular options included preparing hybrid learning plans in advance, providing small-group or one-on-one tutoring, and avoiding school closures. Many parents also recommended providing printed materials for students without internet access and practising remote learning each year to stay prepared. A few parents supported keeping some learning online when schools are open, and only a small number favoured following the same procedures as during the Covid-19 pandemic or extending school closures (see Figure 5).



(Figure 5)  
If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? (Select all that apply)

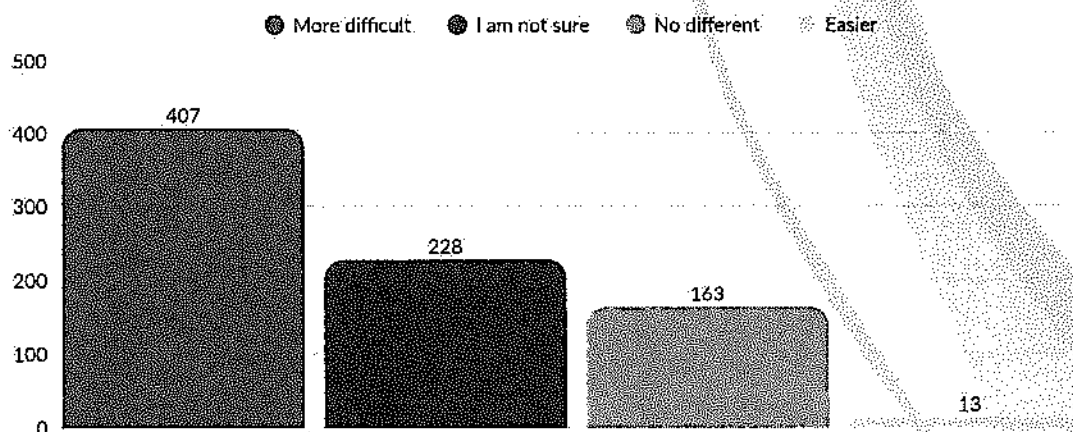
Parents shared a variety of thoughtful and sometimes passionate ideas about how education could be carried out differently in future emergencies. Some felt that the pandemic response did not pay enough attention to children with additional needs, noting that Ireland was slow to prioritise their return to school compared with other countries. Others highlighted the need for consistent plans across schools, as experiences varied widely – some schools provided excellent support, while others offered very little contact or guidance.

A few parents suggested regular training for teachers in IT and digital tools to ensure readiness. Others recommended making remote learning more interactive and social, including activities such as storytelling, chatting, and supervised group work. There were also suggestions for outdoor learning spaces, shorter school hours with blended learning models, and improved communication between schools and families.

Some parents expressed frustration with fear-based messaging during COVID-19, saying it caused anxiety and confusion for children. Others noted the need for support hubs for parents and children, access to age-appropriate educational videos, and more flexible approaches to the curriculum that go beyond core subjects. A few proposed national repositories of best practices for teachers and more frequent parent-teacher meetings to monitor progress.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

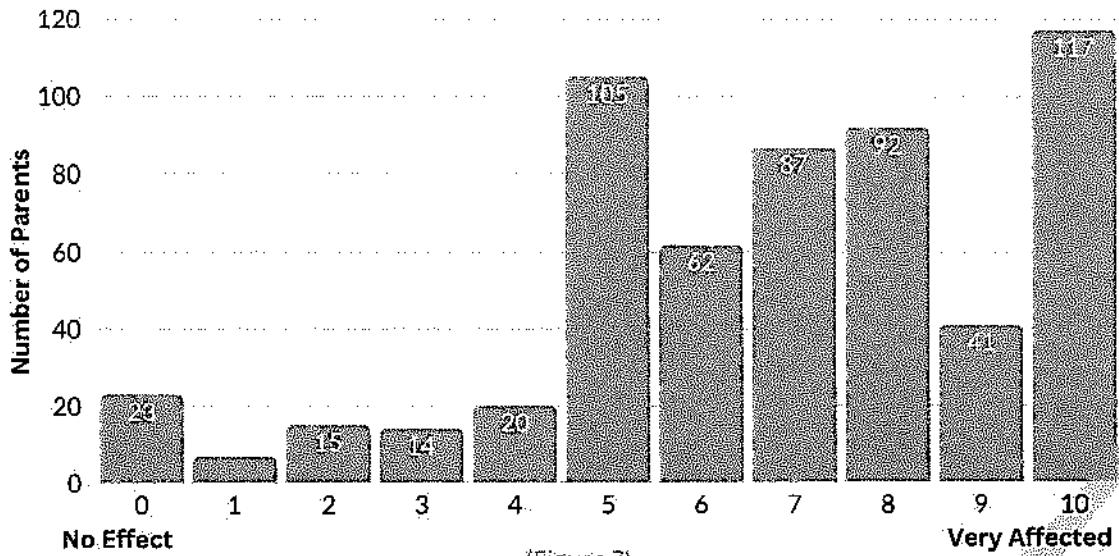
**When** parents were asked whether school closures made it more difficult for their child to move to the next stage in their educational journey, nearly half of parents said the transition was more difficult. The remaining parents said that they were unsure or the closures made no difference (see Figure 6).



(Figure 6)

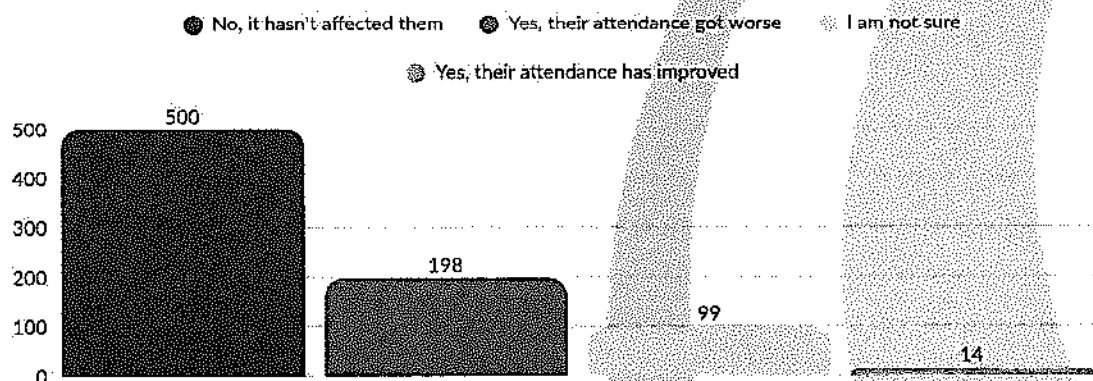
A transition is when a child moves from one school setting to another: Do you think school closures made your child's transition?

Parents were asked to rate the impact of school closures on their child's transition between school settings. The majority gave a high rating (7-10), indicating a strong effect. A smaller group gave a moderate score (4-6), and the fewest rated the effect as low (0-3) (see Figure 7).



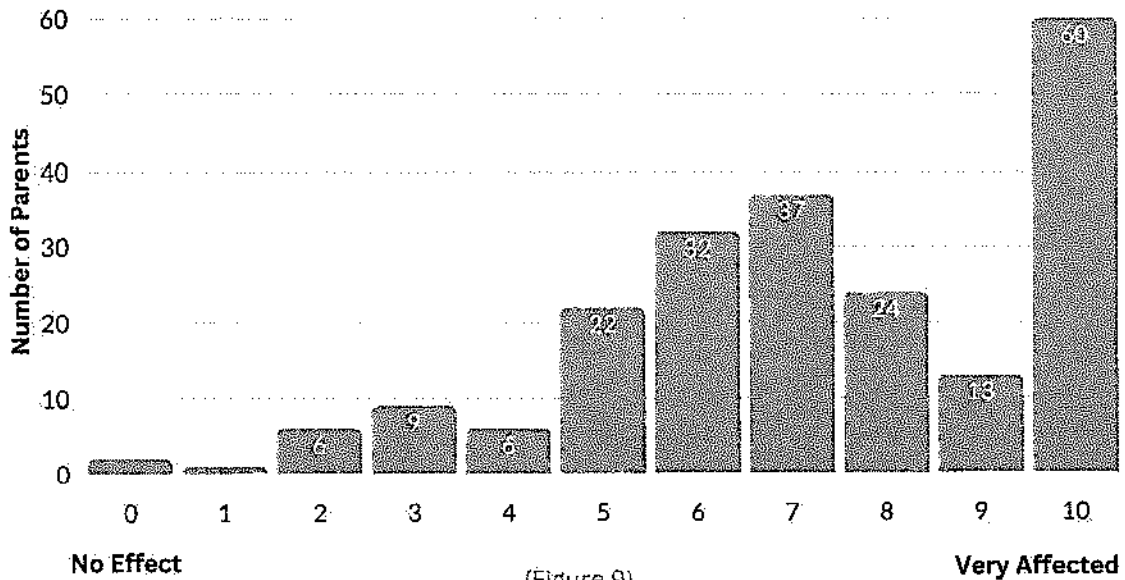
(Figure 7)  
To what extent do you think school closures affected your child's transition?

When parents were asked whether their child's current school attendance had been affected by COVID-19 closures, most parents said it had not. A Number of parents reported a decline in attendance, while others said they were unsure or saw improvements (see Figure 8).



(Figure 8)  
Do you think your child's current attendance at school is affected by school closures during COVID-19?

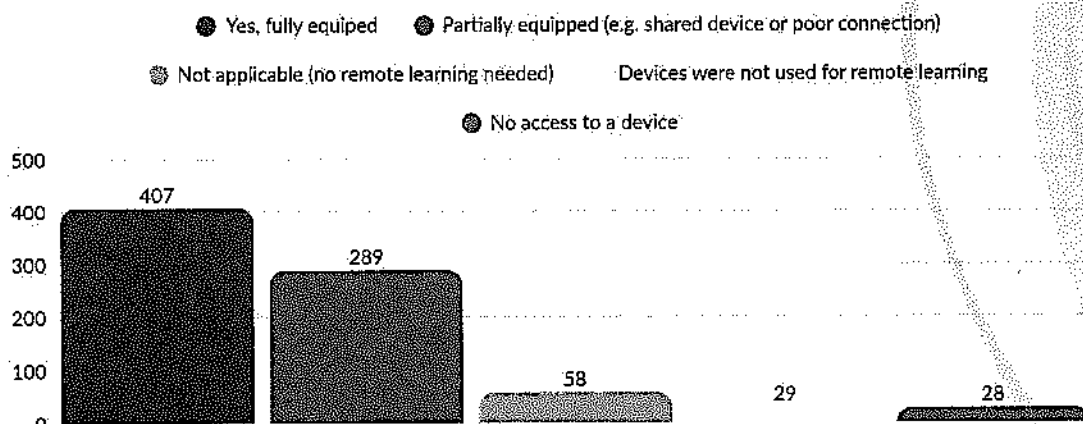
**Parents** were asked to rate the extent of COVID-19 school closures on their child's current attendance. The majority of parents who chose to answer this optional question gave mid-range ratings (5–7), indicating a moderate effect. A smaller number of parents gave high ratings (8–10), and the smallest group gave low scores (0–4) (see Figure 9).



(Figure 9)

To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during Covid-19?

**When** parents were asked whether their child had access to a device and internet for remote learning, most parents said their child was either fully or partially equipped. A small number reported no access, or that no devices were used for learning (see Figure 10).

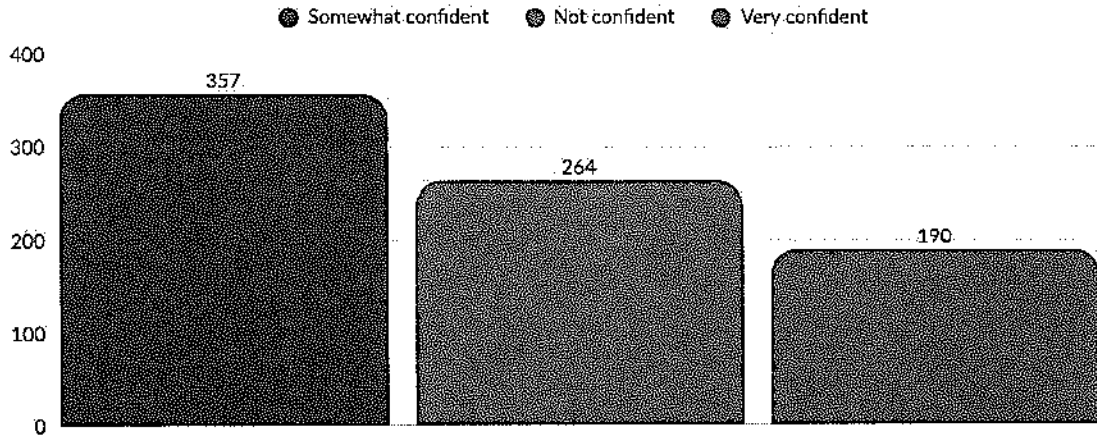


(Figure 10)

When schools were closed during COVID-19, did your child have access to a device and internet for remote learning (if applicable)?



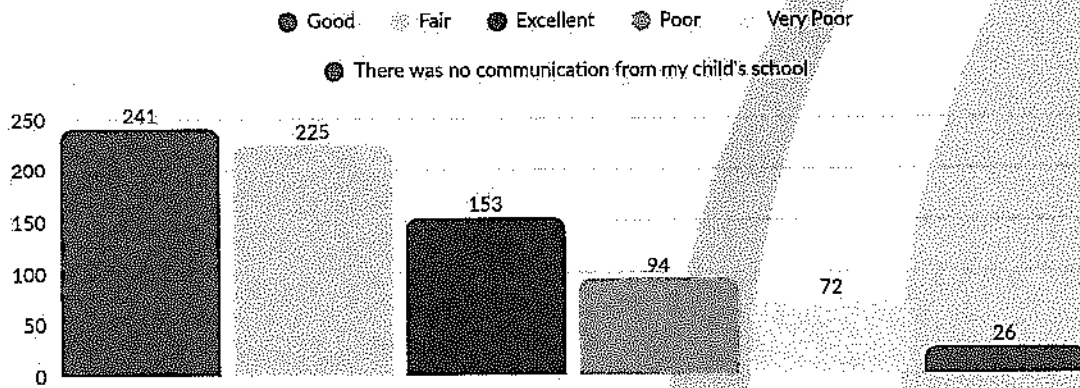
When parents were asked how confident they felt supporting their child's learning at home during school closures, nearly half said they felt somewhat confident. Fewer reported feeling either not confident or very confident (see Figure 11).



(Figure 11)

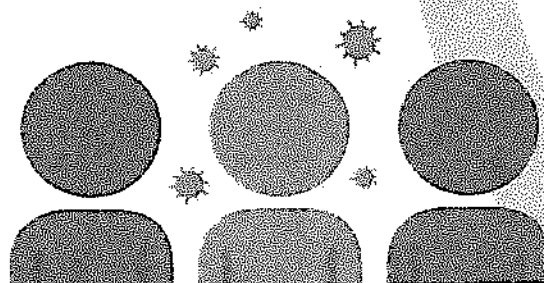
How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?

When parents were asked to rate communication from their child's school during closures, most parents rated it as good or fair. Smaller numbers of parents rated it as excellent, poor, or very poor, with a few saying there was no communication at all (see Figure 12).

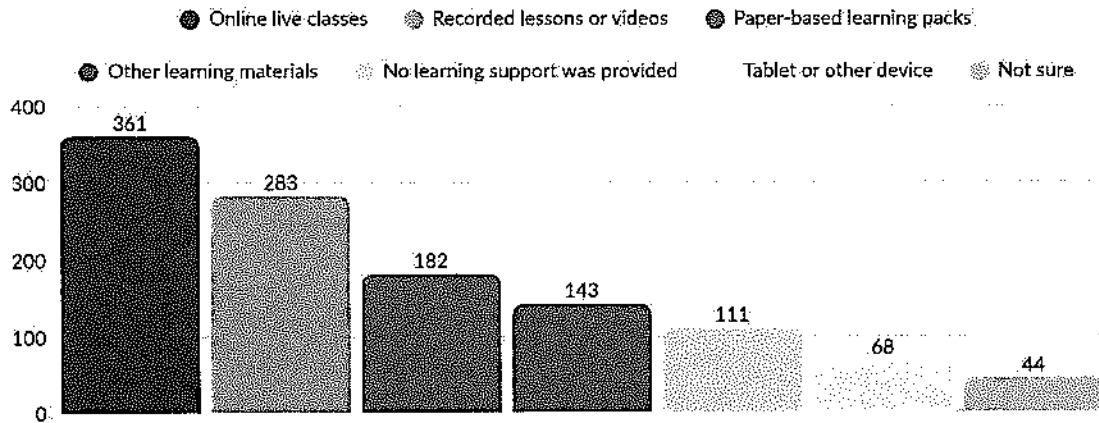


(Figure 12)

How would you rate the communication from your child's school during school closures?



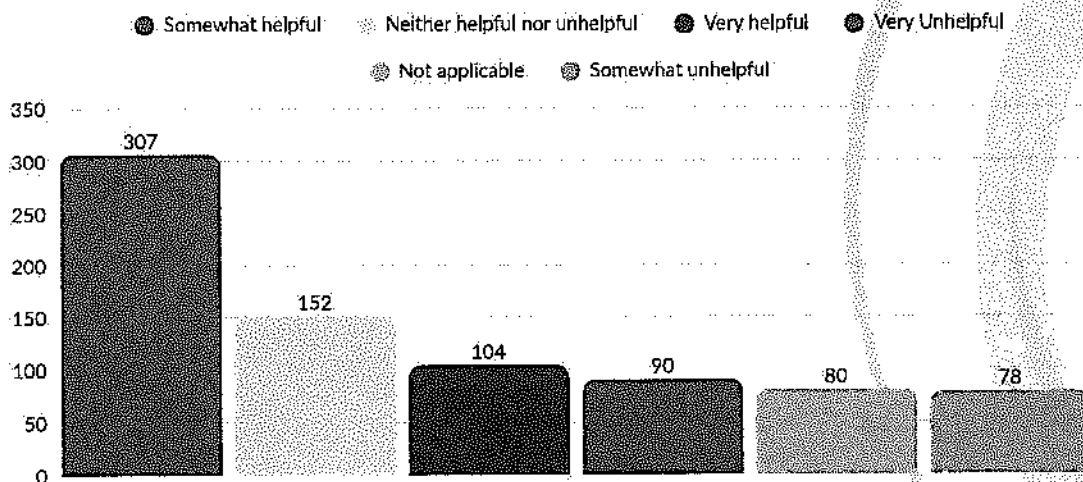
When parents were asked what kind of learning materials or support their child received during school closures, the most common response was online live classes, followed by recorded lessons or videos. Paper-based learning packs were also widely used. Few parents mentioned other types of learning materials, and even fewer said their child received a device or no support at all. A small number were unsure what was provided (see Figure 13).



(Figure 13)

What type of learning materials or support was provided during closures? (Select all that apply)

When parents were asked how helpful their child found the materials and support provided during closures, most parents rated them as somewhat or very helpful. Fewer said they were unhelpful or had no strong opinion. Some indicated the materials were not applicable to their child (see Figure 14).

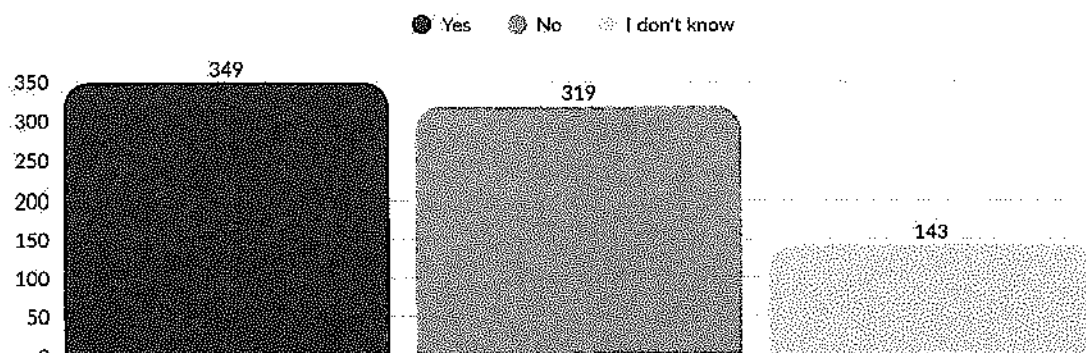


(Figure 14)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?



**Parents** were asked whether they believed the government made the right decision regarding mask use in schools during COVID-19. Responses were divided, with slightly more agreeing with the decision than disagreeing. Others were unsure (see Figure 15).



(Figure 15)

During COVID-19 there was a requirement to wear masks in schools some of the time. Do you think the government made the correct decision regarding the use of masks in schools during COVID-19?

Following parents' responses on whether the government made the right decision about mask use in schools during COVID-19, they were invited to explain their views in more detail. Their responses revealed a wide range of experiences and opinions. Some parents supported the decision, saying masks helped protect vulnerable children, staff, and family members, and enabled schools to remain open. They valued the sense of social responsibility and safety it created, particularly in classrooms with immunocompromised students. A few also noted that their children adapted well and understood why mask-wearing was important.

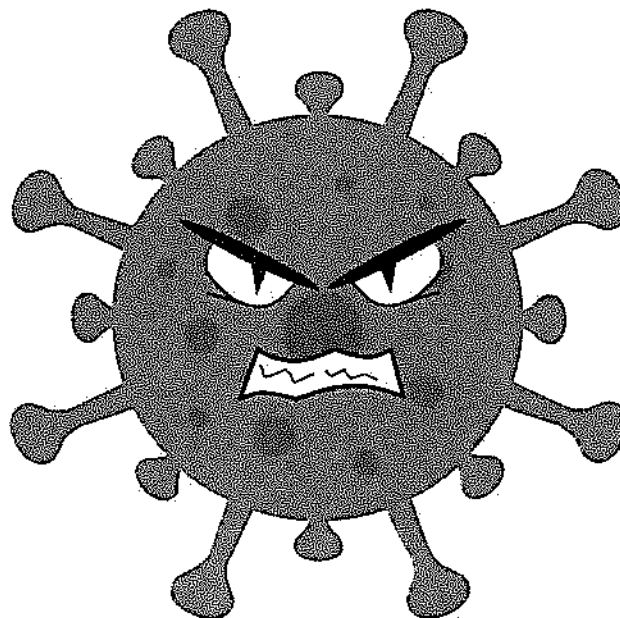
However, many parents raised concerns about the negative effects of mask-wearing on children's wellbeing. Common issues included increased anxiety, difficulty breathing, and discomfort, particularly for children with sensory issues, asthma, or additional needs. Parents felt masks interfered with learning, especially for younger children who rely on facial expressions to develop language, social skills, and emotional understanding. Some said masks led to social withdrawal, fear, and long-term emotional effects, with children still struggling to reconnect with peers or feel safe in school.

Others were strongly opposed to the mandate, questioning the scientific evidence behind it and expressing frustration about inconsistent enforcement and poor communication around exemptions. Some felt the policy was politically driven rather than child-centred, and a few described it as traumatic or damaging to their children's development. Parents of children with special educational needs were particularly concerned, saying that mask-wearing added to existing challenges and that schools were often unprepared to support these students during closures.



Overall, while some parents felt the government acted appropriately given the circumstances, many believed the mask policy lacked nuance and failed to consider the diverse needs of children. The responses show a deep emotional impact and highlight the need for more thoughtful, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches in any future public health emergencies.

*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.*



# Suggestions and Open Space for Parents' Views



The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems around the world, and in Ireland, parents were deeply affected by the government's decisions on school closures, remote learning, and the overall handling of education during this crisis. Their views reflect a complex and emotional picture, marked by both appreciation and frustration, along with a strong desire for better preparation in the future.

## **Mixed Reactions to Government Decisions**

Some parents supported the government's cautious approach, recognising the uncertainty and fear that defined the early stages of the pandemic. They appreciated the effort to protect vulnerable children and families and accepted that decisions were made with limited information. A few parents said their children benefited from being at home, especially those who did well with one-to-one attention or who found school environments overwhelming. These parents also praised teachers who adapted quickly and helped maintain a sense of routine and connection.

Most parents, however, were critical. Many felt education was not prioritised and that children were treated as an afterthought. They described the long school closures as highly disruptive, with lasting effects on children's learning, social development, and emotional wellbeing. Some children are still experiencing anxiety, school refusal, and learning gaps years later. Parents argued that schools should have remained open, particularly when other parts of society continued to function, and they felt closures were out of proportion to the actual risks for children.

## **Impact on Children and Families**

Parents spoke in detail about the emotional impact on children. Many described rising anxiety, behavioural regression, and difficulties settling back into school life. Children missed important milestones, social experiences, and the daily structure that school provides. For families with children who have additional needs, the effects were even more severe. The loss of routine and specialist support caused major setbacks, with some children now needing interventions such as therapy and medication.



Parents of children with disabilities and neurodivergent conditions felt especially let down. They explained that their children lost access to essential supports, and that the closure of special schools and the absence of tailored online learning were particularly damaging. Several said their children regressed badly during this period and are still affected today.

### **Challenges for Parents and Frontline Workers**

The heavy burden on parents was a recurring theme. Many struggled to balance full-time work with home learning, often without proper support or resources. Some had to give up their jobs, while others faced mental health difficulties. Parents felt unsupported and overwhelmed, particularly when schools offered only minimal contact or expected them to take on teaching roles without training or tools.

For frontline workers, the pressure was even greater, as they had to keep working while also managing their children's education from home. Parents also spoke about the emotional strain of trying to create stability for their children while dealing with their own fears and responsibilities. Some described the experience as traumatic, with long-lasting effects on family life and mental health.

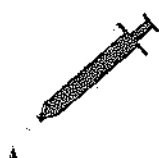
### **Inconsistencies and Inequalities Across Schools**

Another major concern was the inconsistency of how schools responded. Some schools provided daily online classes and structured support, while others relied on worksheets or occasional check-ins. This difference was viewed by parents to be unfair. Parents called for a more consistent national approach, with clear expectations and accountability, to ensure all children receive fair and adequate education during emergencies.

Parents also pointed out that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were hit harder. A lack of devices, internet access, and quiet learning spaces meant that remote learning was almost impossible for some families. Parents urged the government to improve infrastructure and support to make education more equal in future crises.

### **Recommendations for Future Planning**

Looking ahead, parents called on the government to develop strong contingency plans for future disruptions. They suggested hybrid learning models, more training for teachers in digital tools, and greater investment in technology. They also stressed the importance of keeping schools open wherever possible, given their crucial role not only in education but also in children's overall wellbeing and development.



Parents emphasised the need for clearer communication, inclusive strategies for children with additional needs, and better support for families without internet or devices. They suggested schools should be equipped with flexible learning options, clear protocols, and resources to help children recover both academically and emotionally.

### **Overall Reflection**

Parents' responses provide a vivid picture of the challenges faced during the pandemic. While some acknowledged the government's efforts, most expressed concern and called for meaningful change. The pandemic exposed serious weaknesses in educational planning and support, and parents want lessons to be learned. Their message is clear: children must never again be left behind in times of crisis. Parents' voices highlight the urgent need for a more resilient, inclusive, and fair education system—one that can respond swiftly and compassionately to future challenges.

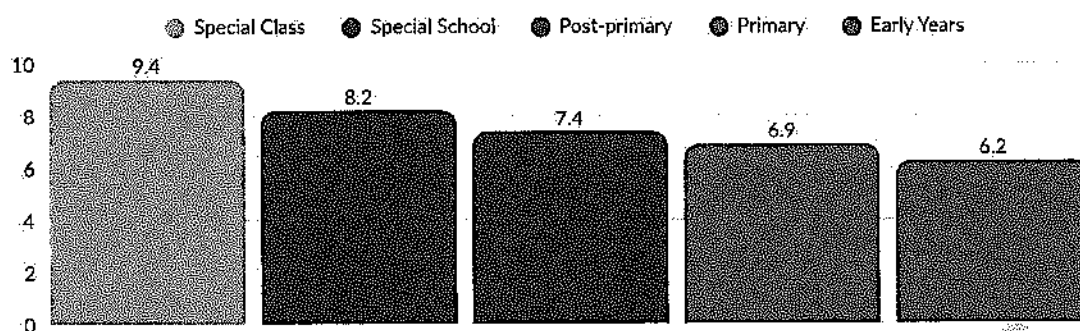
This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

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# Analysis of Answers Across Different Educational Settings

A closer analysis of the different school settings showed us that school closures affected children differently depending on their school setting. In order to make meaningful comparisons we scored the answer to the question regarding disruption out of 10 and checked to see if there was a statistically significant difference. Parents of children in special classes reported the highest level of disruption, with an average score of (9.4) out of 10. This was much higher than all other groups and was the only statistically significant difference found. Parents of children in special schools also reported a strong impact (8.2), followed by those in post-primary (7.4) and primary schools (6.9). The lowest impact was reported for children in early years education, with an average score of (6.2). These results show that children with additional needs, especially those in special classes, were hit hardest by the school closures (see Figure 16).

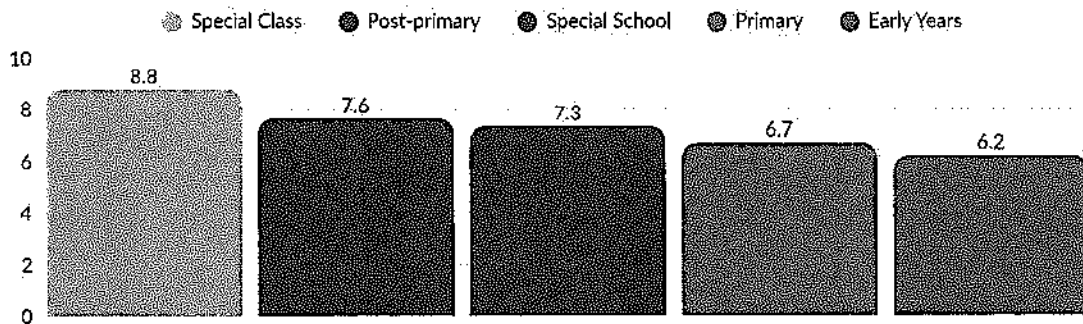


(Figure 16)

To what extent did school closures affect your child?

Parents reported varying levels of impact from school closures on their child's transition, depending on the educational setting. Children in special classes were most affected, with an average score of 9, followed by those in post-primary settings (8). Parents of children in primary and special schools reported a moderate impact (both scoring 7), while those in early years settings noted the lowest impact (6). The only statistically significant difference was between early years and special classes, suggesting that children in special classes faced the greatest challenges in transitioning during school closures.

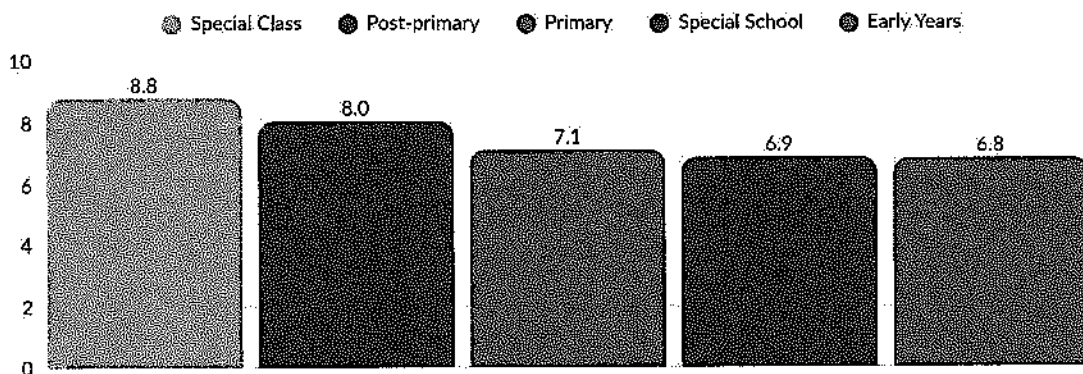




(Figure 17)

To what extent do you think school closures affected your child's transition?

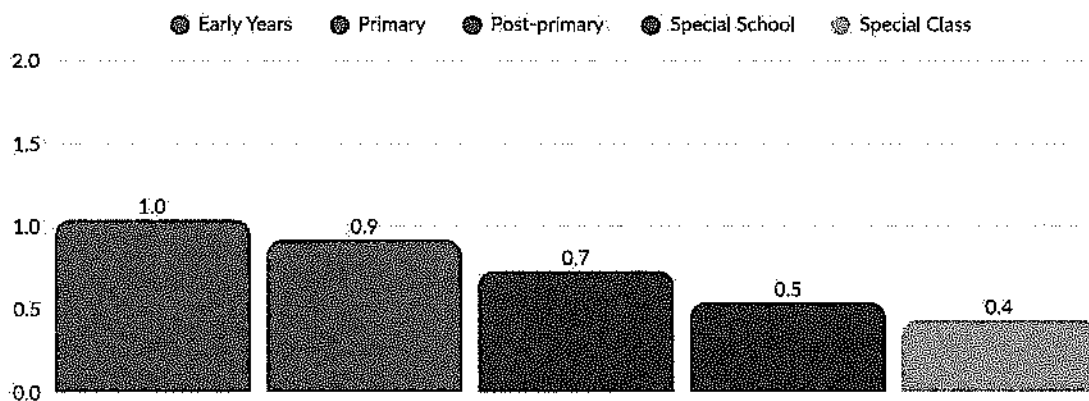
When we analysed the responses from parents who reported The greatest impact was observed among children in special classes, with an average score of 8.8 on a 0–10 scale. This was followed by post-primary (8.0), primary (7.1), special schools (6.9), and early years (6.8). While these scores suggest that attendance was broadly affected, no statistically significant differences were found between school types, indicating that the impact was felt across the board regardless of setting (see Figure 18)



(Figure 18)

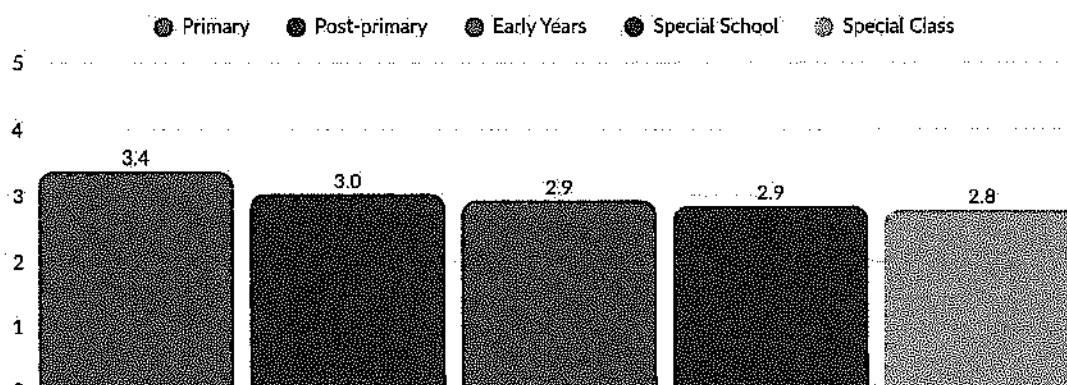
To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during COVID-19?

Confidence in supporting children’s learning at home during school closures was generally low across all educational settings, with responses measured on a 0–2 scale. Parents of early years children reported the highest confidence (1.0), followed by those in primary settings (0.9). Confidence dropped among parents of post-primary students (0.7), and was lowest among those with children in special schools (0.5) and special classes (0.4). Despite these differences, the results were not statistically significant, indicating that many parents, regardless of setting, faced challenges in supporting home learning (see Figure 19).



(Figure 19)  
How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?

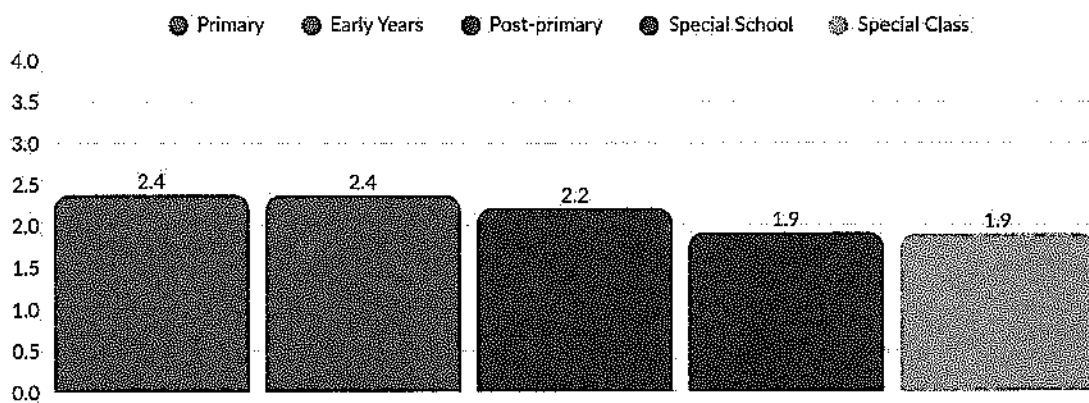
Parents gave modest ratings for communication from their child’s school during COVID-19 closures, with responses measured on a 0–5 scale. The highest average score came from primary school parents (3.4), followed by post-primary (3.0), early years (2.9), and special schools (2.9). The lowest rating was reported by parents of children in special classes (2.8). While these scores suggest there is room for improvement in how schools communicated during closures, no statistically significant differences were found between the groups (see Figure 20).



(Figure 20)  
How would you rate the communication from your child's school during school closures?



Parents rated the materials and support provided during school closures as only somewhat helpful, with responses measured on a 0–4 scale. The highest ratings came from parents of children in primary and early years settings (both scoring 2.4), followed by post-primary (2.2). Parents of children in special schools and special classes reported the lowest levels of helpfulness (both scoring 1.9). Although these differences suggest variation in perceived usefulness, they were not statistically significant, indicating a general need to improve the relevance and effectiveness of support across all settings (see Figure 21).



(Figure 21)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?



## Impact of School Closures Across Educational Settings

In question four of the survey, parents were asked How did the school closures affect your child? Across all types of education, one common theme was the loss of routine. Whether in Early Years, Primary, Post Primary, or specialised settings, children suddenly lost the structure that school provides. Social isolation was another shared experience, though its effects varied. All groups missed their peers, but the consequences ranged from mild frustration to severe behavioural regression. Emotional strain—seen as anxiety, boredom, or withdrawal—was present everywhere, though the intensity differed. Families also reported some unexpected positives, such as closer family bonds, though these were much more common in some groups than others.

The differences between settings stood out clearly. For children in Early Years, school closures had little academic impact since formal learning had only just begun. The main challenges were social and emotional, such as adjusting to life outside the home or fear of masks and distancing. At the same time, this group saw the most positive outcomes, with parents noting valuable bonding and greater independence—benefits rarely reported by older children.

Primary school children faced a more complex reality. Academic concerns became central, with some children thriving thanks to strong parental support while others fell behind due to limited online provision or lack of capacity at home. Social isolation was significant, and emotional issues such as boredom, frustration, and school refusal began to appear. For children with additional needs, closures made things worse by delaying assessments and widening developmental gaps.

In Post Primary settings, experiences shifted sharply. While a small number of students benefited academically, many disengaged, often linked to mental health struggles. Missing key developmental milestones, such as those often provided in Transition Year activities, was particularly difficult at this stage. Social experiences were mixed: some teenagers missed their peers intensely, while others—especially those with social anxiety—welcomed the break. Mental health was the dominant issue, with some students unable to return to in-person learning even after restrictions lifted.

Children in Special Classes were especially affected by the loss of routine and structured interaction. Parents told us predictability is crucial for these students, and its absence often triggered distress and, in some cases, obsessive or repetitive behaviours. This behavioural dimension was largely absent in mainstream settings, highlighting the greater vulnerability of this group.



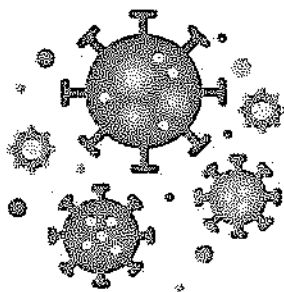
Finally, children in Special Schools experienced the most negative outcomes. Unlike other groups, where some positives were found, almost all impacts here were adverse. Behavioural regression was common, and the loss of intensive, individualised support—impossible to replicate at home—made these children the most at risk of long-term setbacks.

In short, while all children shared the experience of disrupted routines and isolation, the severity and nature of the impact varied. Early Years were least affected academically and sometimes gained socially within the family. Primary students faced mixed academic progress with growing emotional challenges. Post Primary students struggled most with mental health and disengagement. Children in Special Classes and Special Schools bore the greatest burden, with behavioural regression and developmental loss that mainstream groups did not face.

### **Lessons for Future Pandemics: What Should Be Done Differently in Education**

In question five of the survey, If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? Across Early Years, Primary, Post Primary, Special Classes, and Special Schools, parents agreed that far better preparation is needed if another pandemic or similar emergency occurs. They called strongly for clear and consistent strategies from the Department of Education, with practical guidance for both schools and families. Parents also wanted to see some form of educational continuity maintained—whether through online learning, hybrid models, or small in-person groups—so that children are not left without support. Another point raised across all groups was the importance of social connection. Parents felt that keeping children connected with peers and teachers is just as vital as academic work, since it helps reduce feelings of isolation. Above all, there was a recognition that one-size-fits-all solutions do not work, and that flexibility is essential to meet the diverse needs of children.

Despite these shared themes, priorities differed depending on the setting. Parents of young children in Early Years stressed that online learning was simply unsuitable at this stage. They preferred approaches that would minimise closures altogether or provide play-based activities rather than formal lessons. Where closures could not be avoided, they asked that they be short, well-communicated, and not dominated by rigid online schedules.



In Primary schools, parents were more critical of the response. They pointed to inconsistent teacher engagement and felt there was too much reliance on parents to manage learning. Many wanted structured online classes with real-time teacher interaction, instead of schools only assigning worksheets. A strong theme was the need for teacher training in digital tools, as gaps in IT skills were seen as a major weakness. Parents suggested hybrid learning, small group sessions, and national standards to make sure all schools deliver education consistently.

For Post Primary students, the emphasis was on making better use of technology. Some parents reported that online learning worked well for older children, especially in schools already equipped with devices. They argued that this option should remain available and called for best practices to be gathered and built into teacher training. At the same time, they stressed the need to tackle digital inequality, since not all families had access to reliable devices or internet connections.

Parents of children in Special Classes were clear that closures should not apply to this group, as the loss of routine and specialised support was especially damaging. They argued that in-person learning should be prioritised for these children wherever possible, or that tailored alternatives should be provided for those unable to engage online.

Finally, parents of children in Special Schools highlighted the severe impact of prolonged closures and the uncertainty of repeated stop-start reopening. They recommended catch-up programmes during the summer to address lost time, as well as regular practice with remote learning to ensure readiness if closures happen again. However, they emphasised that in-person education must remain the priority, given how much these children depend on intensive, face-to-face support.



## Parental Perspectives on Mask Mandates in Schools During COVID-19

During COVID-19 there was a requirement to wear masks in schools some of the time. Parents were asked if the government made the correct decision regarding the use of masks in schools during COVID-19? Across all school settings, parents were divided on the government's decision to require masks in schools. A common thread was the tension between protecting public health and supporting children's development. Many parents accepted that masks were a necessary step to help keep schools open and protect vulnerable people. Others, however, focused on the harm they felt masks caused to children's learning, communication, and emotional wellbeing. Practical concerns were also widespread, with parents doubting whether children could wear masks correctly and questioning whether the policy was truly effective. Looking ahead, there was broad agreement that any future measures should be more flexible and take account of children's age, stage of development, and additional needs.

As for the key differences between the educational settings, the way masks affected children varied depending on their school stage. Among parents of children in Early Years and Primary settings, the strongest concerns were about communication and emotional development. They emphasised that young children rely heavily on seeing faces to learn speech and social skills, and masks got in the way of this. Some parents also said masks were frightening or overwhelming for their children, making school feel stressful rather than safe.

At Post Primary level, views were more mixed. Some parents supported masks as necessary for keeping schools open, while others felt they created barriers to socialising and building friendships. The main concerns here were not about speech development but about the social and psychological toll of wearing masks for long periods.

For children in Special Classes and Special Schools, the impact was described as especially damaging. Parents explained that many of these children rely on lip-reading, need clear facial cues, or have sensory sensitivities that make mask-wearing particularly difficult. Some described the policy as "cruel" or "harmful," especially when schools did not allow exemptions. Parents in these settings also raised concerns about fairness, arguing that a single, blanket policy ignored the unique needs of children with disabilities.



## Parental Perspectives on Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

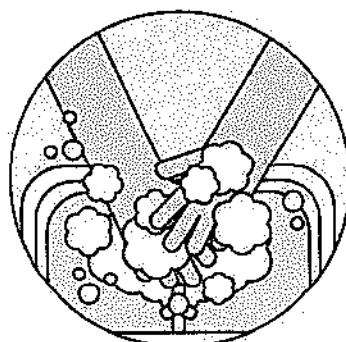
The open-ended responses from parents across different school settings give a powerful picture of what families went through during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the details of their experiences varied, several strong themes came through again and again.

The biggest issue for many parents was the closure of schools. They often described these closures as lasting too long and, in some cases, being unnecessary—especially as the pandemic went on. Parents felt the closures placed heavy pressure on families, disrupted children’s learning, and did not properly account for children’s wider developmental and emotional needs. Some parents recognised that the situation was complicated and that caution was needed, but there was a common feeling that decisions lacked balance and forward planning.

Remote learning was another major theme. Parents said it was inconsistent and often ineffective. Many felt it placed too much responsibility on families, especially at primary level, where parents often had to step into the role of teacher without enough guidance. The quality of online learning varied widely between schools—and even between teachers in the same school—which left families feeling unsupported and unequal. While some older, more independent students managed reasonably well, for many families remote learning was a source of stress, conflict, and falling behind academically.

Parents also highlighted the emotional and social toll of the pandemic. They described children becoming more anxious, refusing school, or losing social and communication skills. Many felt that children’s mental health was overlooked in both school and government responses, and that the long-term effects were not being taken seriously. This was especially damaging for children with additional needs, who lost not only their routines but also access to therapies and specialist supports.

Another theme was inconsistency in how schools responded. Some schools adapted quickly and provided regular online classes, while others offered very little. Parents described a system that felt fragmented, with no clear national standards. This inconsistency left families frustrated and, in many cases, feeling on their own.



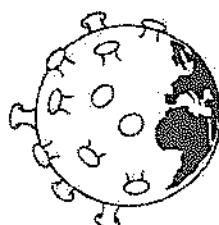
When reflecting on government decisions, parents' views ranged from understanding to deeply critical. Some accepted that the situation was unprecedented and that decisions were made under pressure. Others felt strongly that children were not prioritised, and that the government failed to guarantee a minimum level of education during closures. Parents called for better preparedness, clearer communication, and fairer support for all children if something like this happens again.

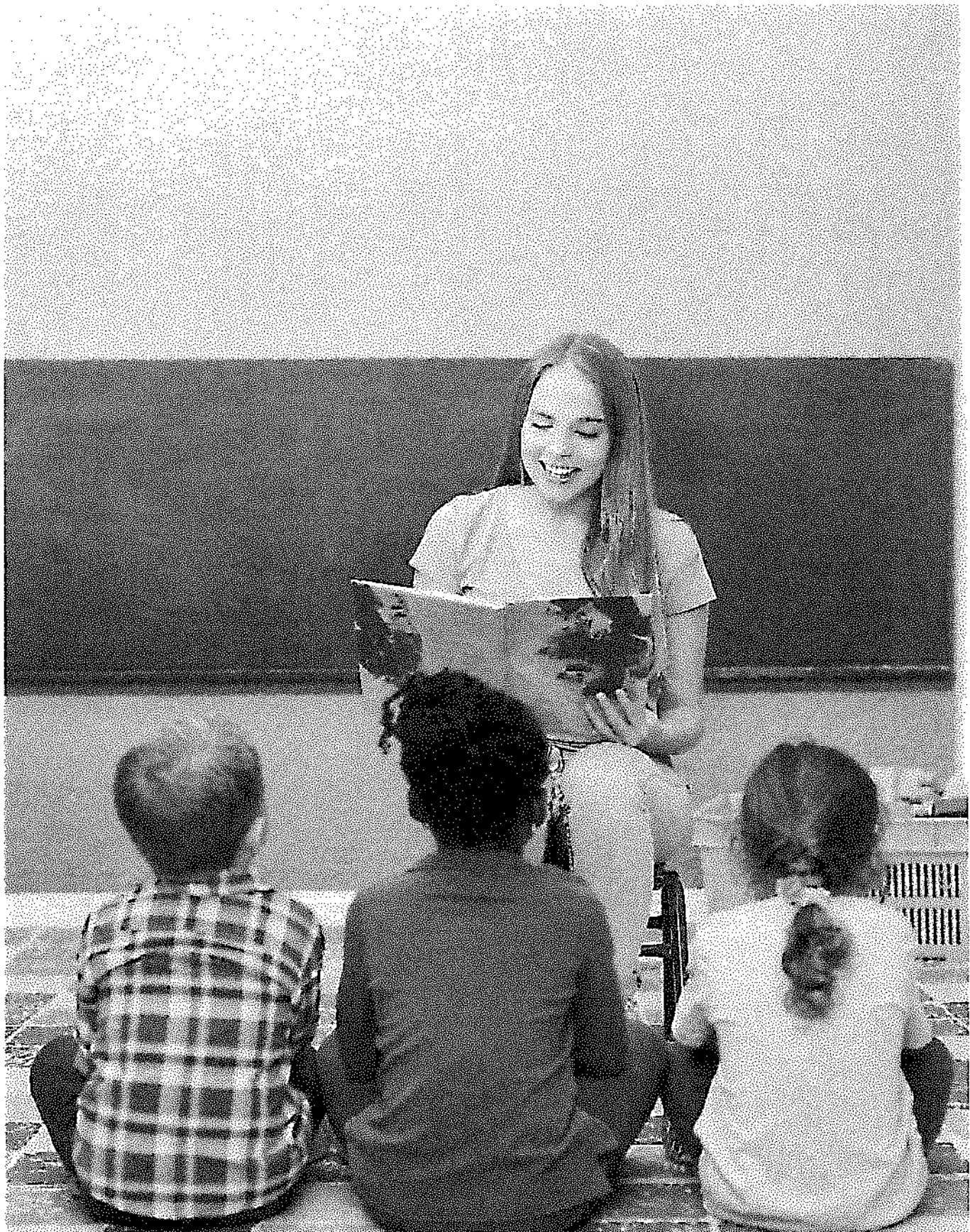
The impact of closures also looked very different depending on children's age and school type. In early years settings, some parents were more accepting, saying their children were too young to fully understand what was happening. Still, some questioned whether closures were proportionate, given how important early socialisation is for young children. In primary schools, the weight of remote learning was most keenly felt. Parents described being stretched thin by the demands of both work and home-schooling, often without enough support. Many saw their children fall behind academically—particularly in reading and writing—and noticed rising levels of stress, frustration, and social withdrawal.

For post-primary students, parents noted that older children could work more independently, but they still faced difficulties. Motivation often dropped, state exams added pressure, and many students struggled emotionally. Some parents suggested that more flexible learning options should be built into the system, recognising that not every teenager learns best in a traditional classroom.

The most severe and lasting impacts were reported by parents of children in special schools and special classes. For these families, school is more than just education—it is also therapy, structure, and vital social contact. Losing these supports caused serious regression in some children, with emotional and behavioural consequences that, for some, remain years later. Remote learning was largely unworkable, and many parents described feeling completely abandoned, left to cope with their children's complex needs alone. The feeling of being forgotten by both schools and government came through strongly and painfully in these accounts.

In conclusion, while all parents understood that the pandemic posed extraordinary challenges, their experiences were shaped by the particular needs and contexts of their children. The responses highlight the need for future planning to be more inclusive, consistent, and centred on children's needs. Above all, they show how important it is to listen to families—especially those with the most vulnerable children—when designing policies and supports for times of crisis.





## SECTION 2

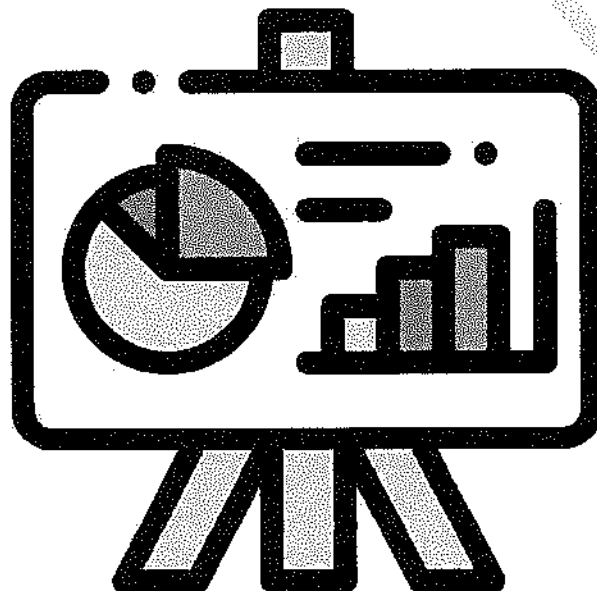
# PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION - EARLY YEARS

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes to children's education. Early years (EY) settings closed, and there was little support for children at this stage of their learning journey. To learn more about the longer-term effects, the NPC asked parents about their children's experiences during and after the pandemic. The goal was to understand how children were affected in their learning, friendships, and feelings, and where more support may be needed.

Parents were invited to share their point of view through a consultation that included both structured and open-ended questions. This helped us understand what problems they faced, and how well EY setting supported their learning. Parents also shared views on remote learning supports, school communication, and what should could be done differently if something like this happens again.

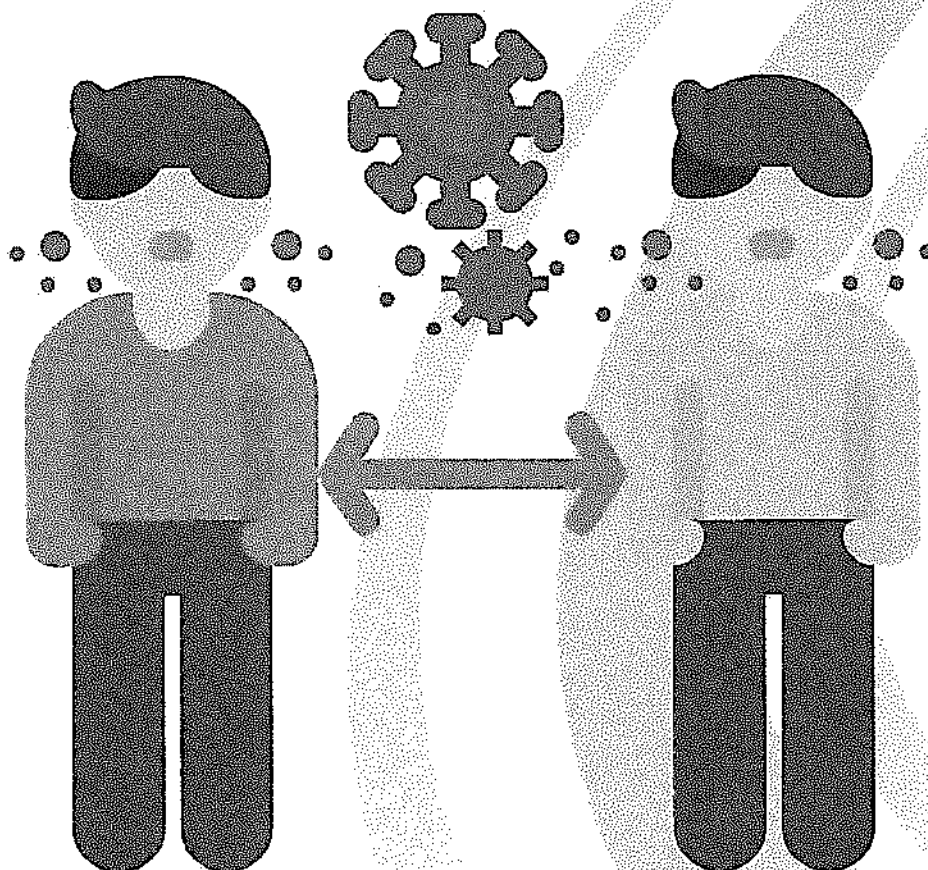
The findings presented here are based on the results of a survey conducted by the NPC during June - August 2025. The survey was sent to the NPC data base of parents of children in EY who had consented to receive such e mails. The survey was open from 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 till the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. During this time, a total of (96) parents completed the survey. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey will be shared in this section.



# Surveys

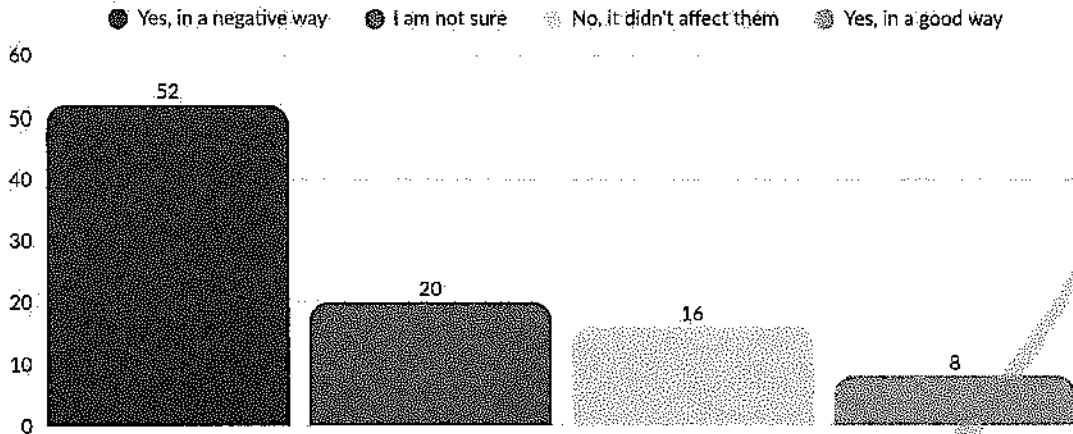
A survey titled Covid-19 was sent to parents to collect feedback. The survey asked a number of questions to find out how parents felt about their children's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and any current lasting effects.

It included a mix of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. This gave parents the opportunity to choose answers that suited their views and also share extra thoughts. Parents were also asked to think about how well EY setting supported their child's learning needs. The main results of the survey, including key points and parents' opinions, will be shared in this section.



# Survey Findings

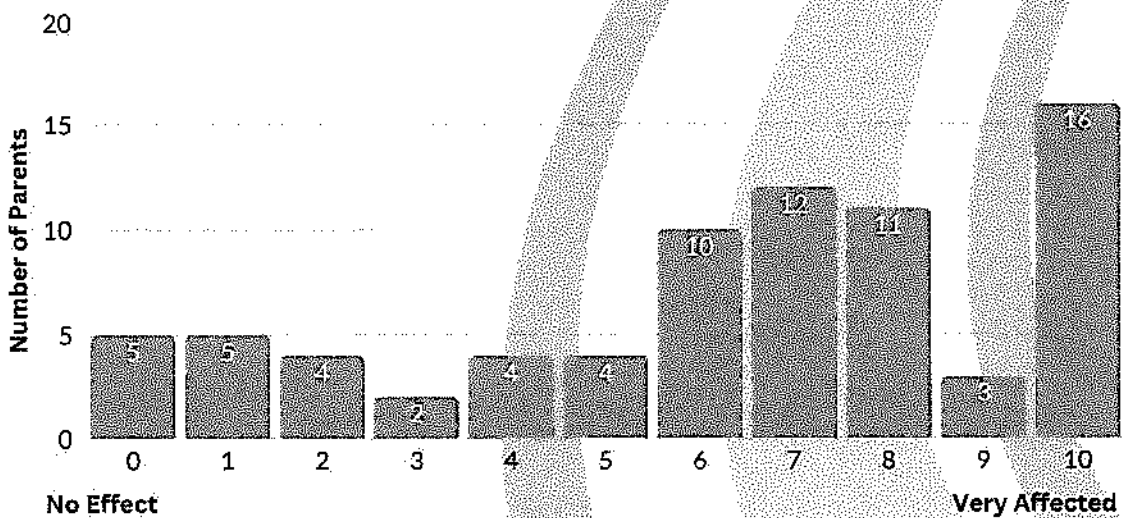
**When** asked whether EY settings closures during the pandemic affected their child, most parents reported a negative impact. Smaller numbers said they were unsure, felt the closures had no impact, or believed they had a positive effect (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1)

Did EY settings closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affect your child?

**Parents** were asked to rate the extent to which EY setting closures affected their child. Most responses were between 7 and 10, indicating a strong impact. Few parents gave moderate scores between 4 and 6, while a smaller number rated the effect between 0 and 3 (see Figure 2).

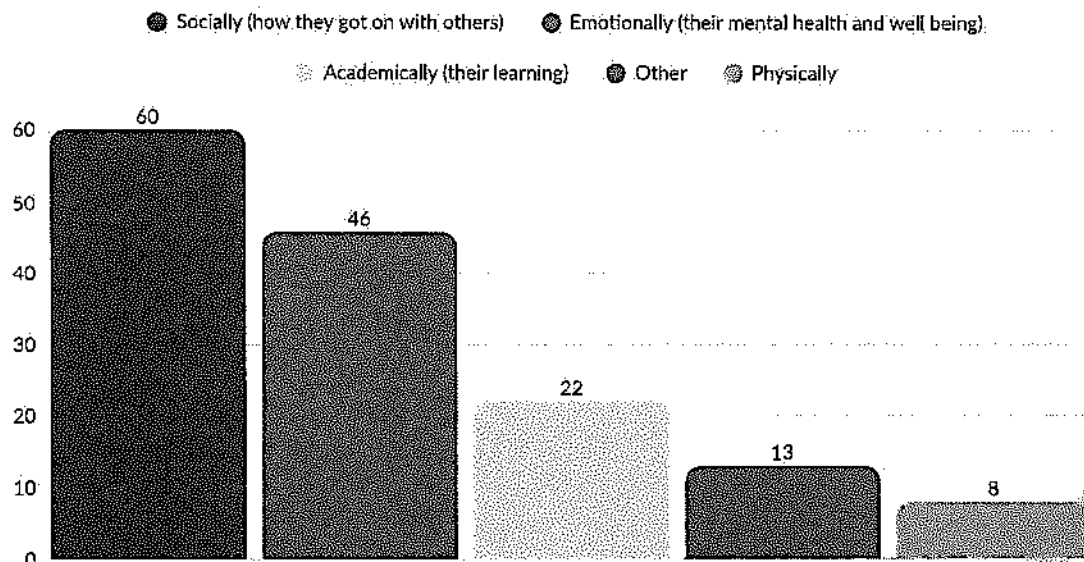


(Figure 2)

To what extent did the EY settings closures affect your child?



When parents were asked how EY setting closures affected their child, parents most commonly selected social, emotional, and academic impacts. Physical effects and other types of impact were mentioned less frequently (see Figure 3).

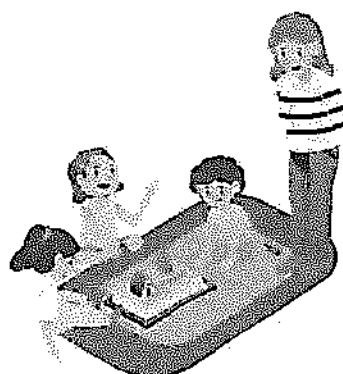


(Figure 3)

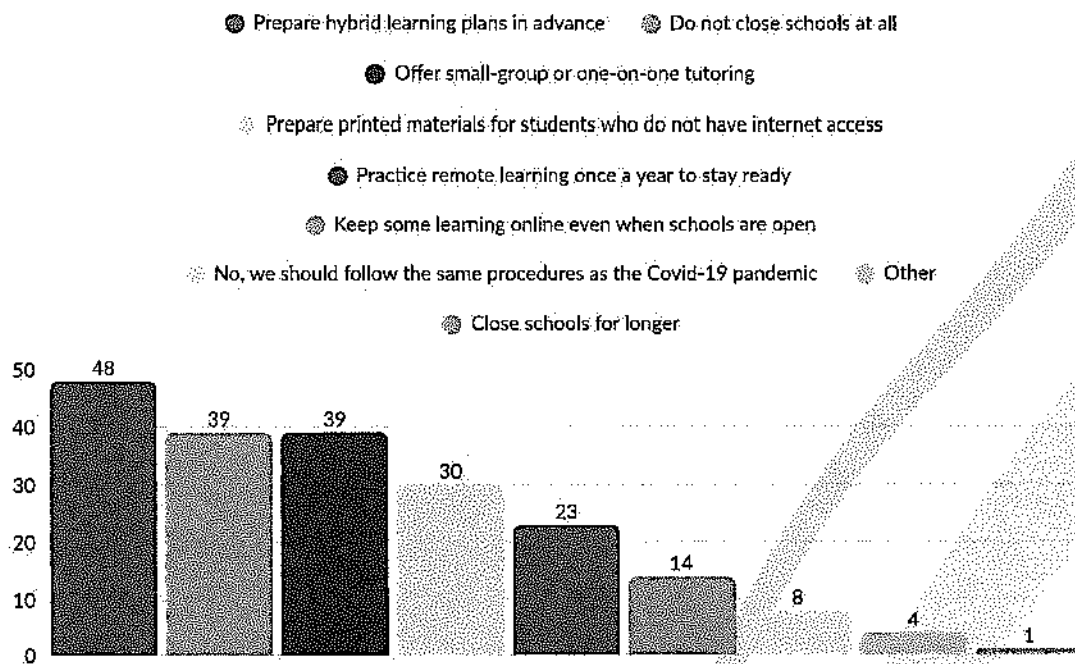
How did the EY settings closures affect your child, did it affect them? (select as many as you need)

Some parents chose “Other” to describe how EY setting closures affected their children. A few said their children were not really affected, while a small number noticed stronger impacts, like delays in starting primary school, trouble adjusting to a new school environment, or changes in social development. One parent said their child became scared of masks and social distancing, which made it harder for them to feel close and affectionate. Another parent pointed out a positive side: the extra time allowed for independent play and more family bonding.

\*This is a summary of the parents’ voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



When parents were asked what should be done differently if a similar event occurred in the future, they suggested a range of approaches. Many said it would help not to close EY setting at all. A few parents felt we should do the same as during the Covid-19 pandemic or close EY setting for longer (see Figure 4).

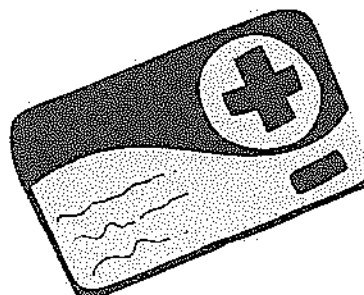


(Figure 4)

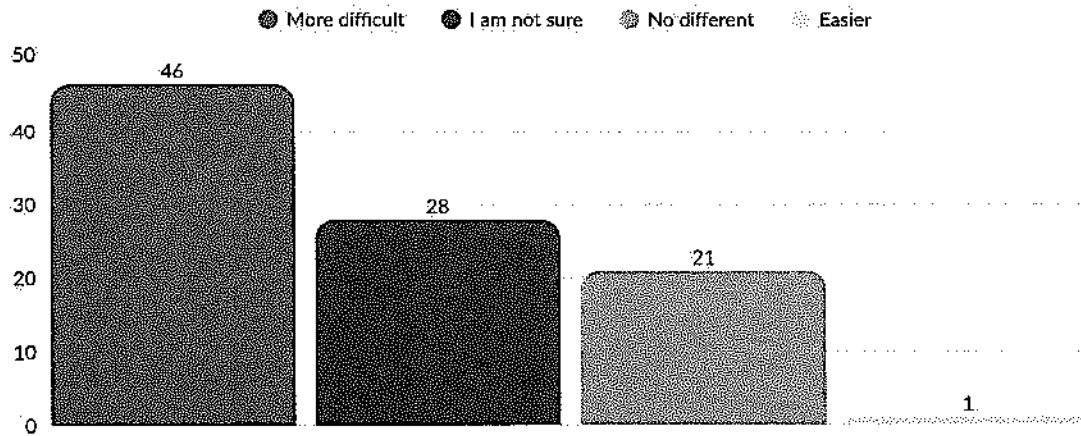
If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? (Select all that apply)

Three parents chose "Other" and shared their thoughts. One suggested that EY setting responses should depend on the type of emergency – for example, while closures may have been appropriate early in the COVID-19 pandemic, they might not be necessary in the future. They emphasised the need for flexible, ready-to-implement plans rather than rigid lesson structures. Another parent supported a tailored approach based on children's age, and a third noted that online learning is ineffective for very young children.

This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



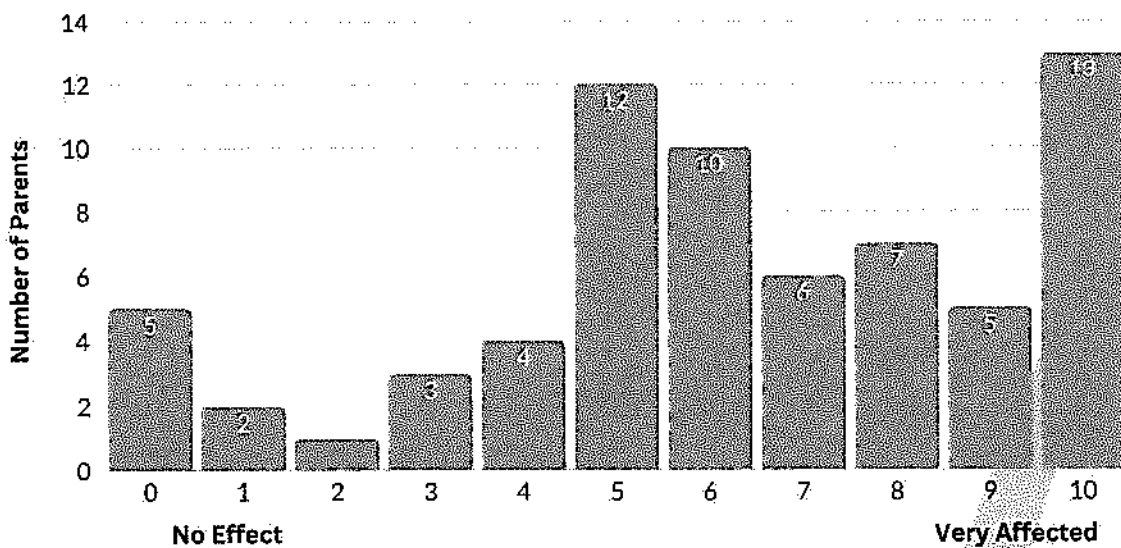
When parents were asked whether EY setting closures made it more difficult for their child to move to the next stage in their educational journey, the majority of parents said the transition was more difficult. The remaining parents said that they were unsure or the closures made no difference (see Figure 5).



(Figure 5)

A transition is when a child moves from one school setting to another. Do you think school closures made your child's transition?

Parents were asked to rate the impact of EY setting closures on their child's transition between school settings. The majority gave a high rating (7–10), indicating a strong effect. A smaller group gave a moderate score (4–6), and the fewest rated the effect as low (0–3) (see Figure 6).

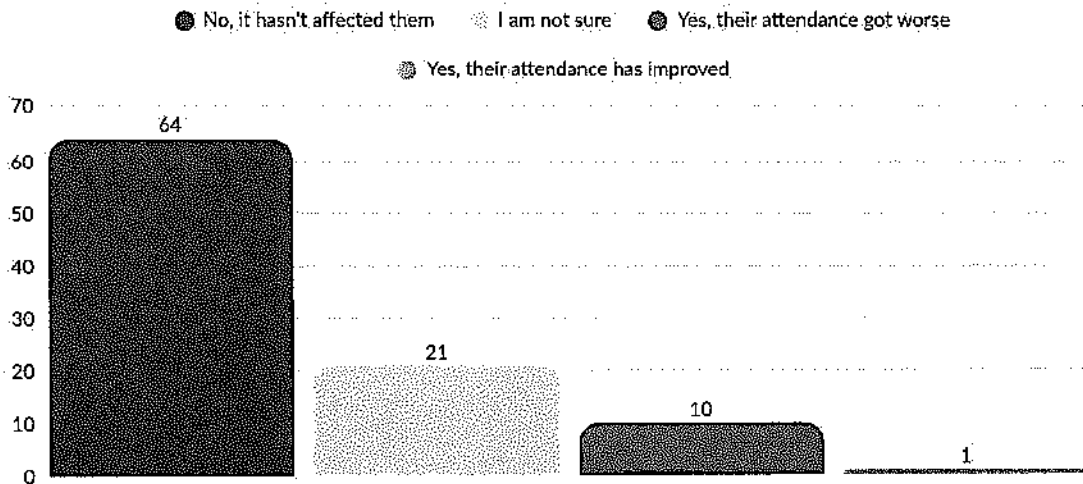


(Figure 6)

To what extent do you think EY settings closures affected your child's transition?



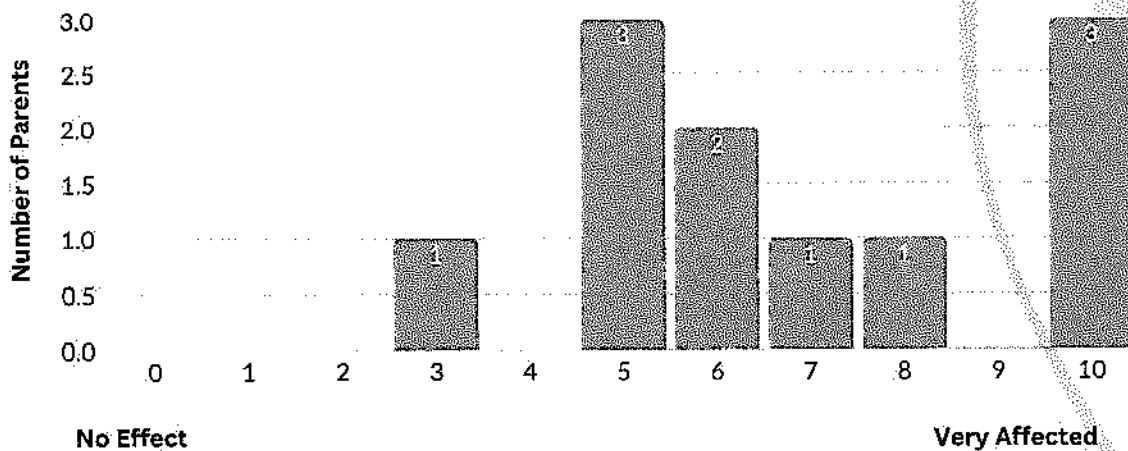
When parents were asked whether their child's current school attendance had been affected by COVID-19 closures, most parents said it had not. A number of parents were unsure, while others reported a decline in attendance. Only one parent saw improvements (see Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

Do you think your child's current attendance at school is affected by school closures during COVID-19?

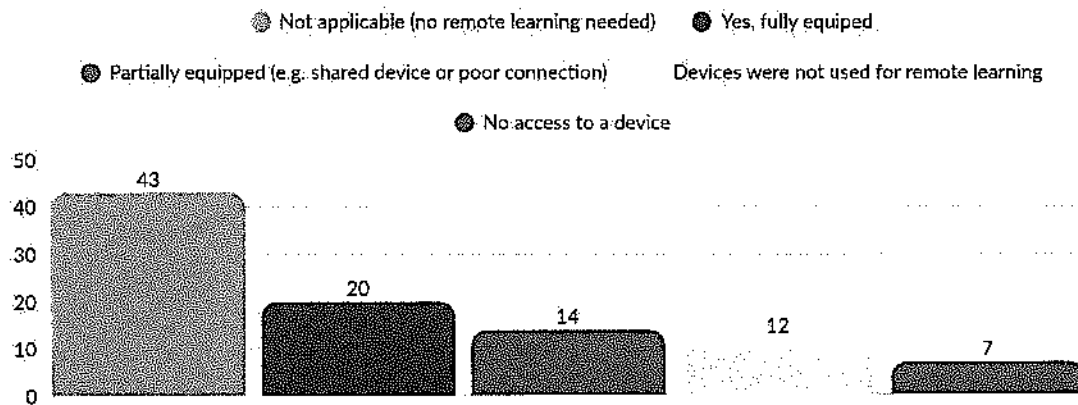
Parents were asked to rate the extent of COVID-19 EY setting closures on their child's current attendance. The most common ratings were in the moderate range (4-7), followed by high ratings (8-10). Low ratings (0-3) were the least frequent (see Figure 8).



(Figure 8)

To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during Covid-19?

When parents were asked whether their child had access to a device and internet for remote learning, most said no remote learning was needed or their child was either fully or partially equipped. A small number reported that no devices were used for remote learning or that their child had no access (see Figure 9).

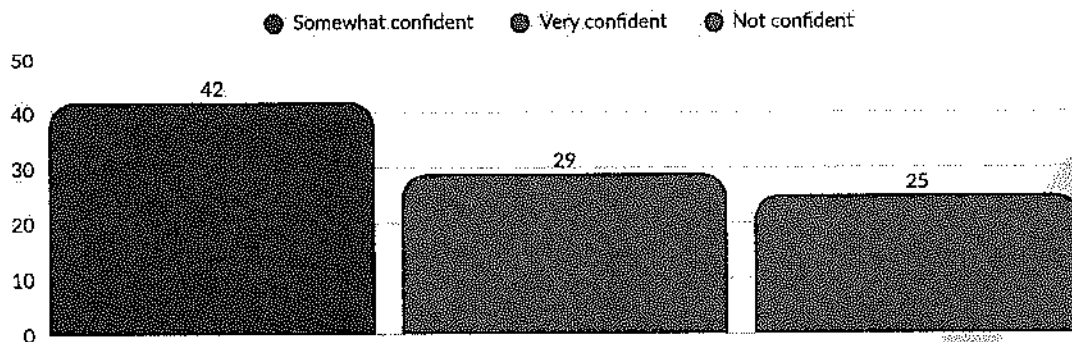


(Figure 9)

When schools were closed during COVID-19, did your child have access to a device and internet for remote learning (if applicable)?



When parents were asked how confident they felt supporting their child's learning at home during EY setting closures, most said they were either somewhat confident or very confident. A smaller number said they felt not confident (see Figure 10).

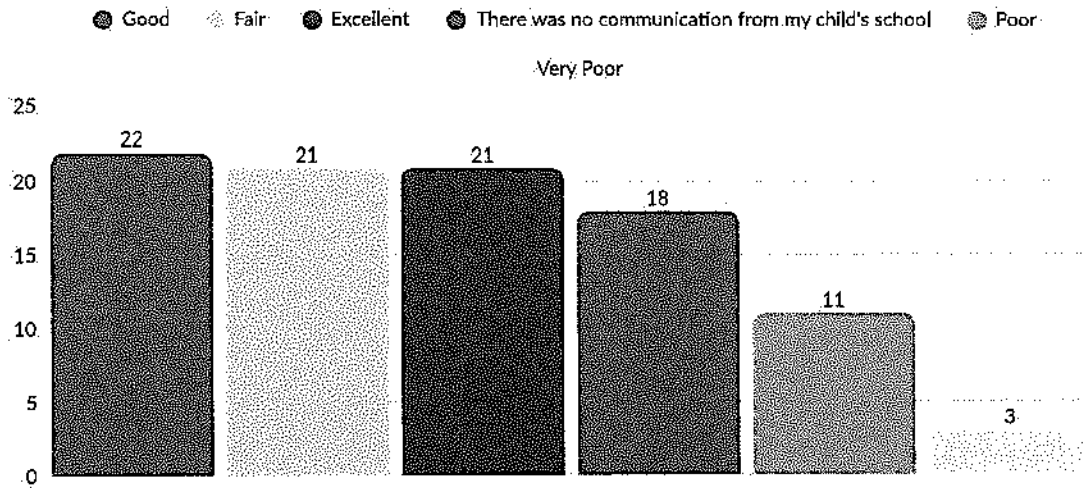


(Figure 10)

How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?



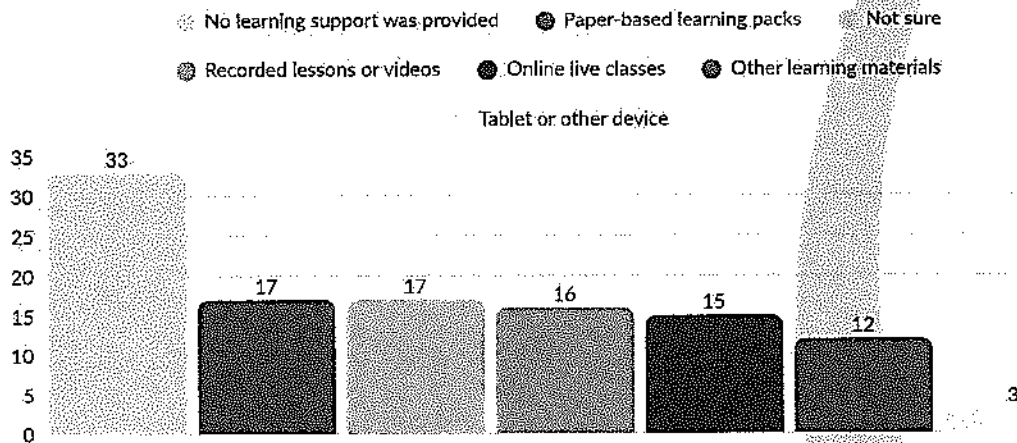
When parents were asked to rate communication from their child's EY setting during closures, most rated it as good, excellent, or fair. A smaller number said there was no communication at all, while fewer rated it as poor or very poor (see Figure 11).



(Figure 11)

How would you rate the communication from your child's EY settings during school closures?

When parents were asked what kind of learning materials or support their child received during EY setting closures, the most common response was that no learning support was provided. Many parents were unsure or mentioned receiving paper-based learning packs. Some children received recorded lessons or videos and online live classes, while a few parents said their child had access to other learning materials (see Figure 12).

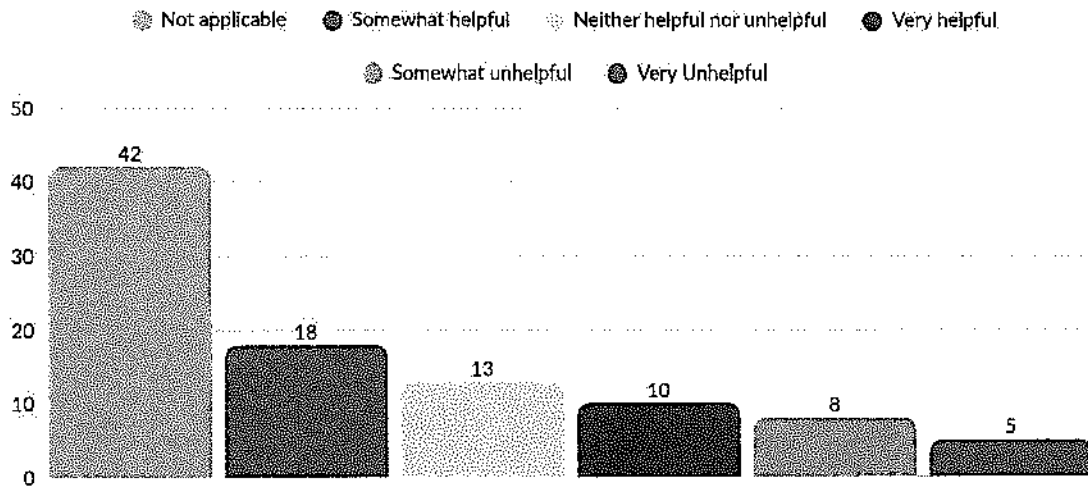


(Figure 12)

What type of learning materials or support was provided during closures? (Select all that apply)

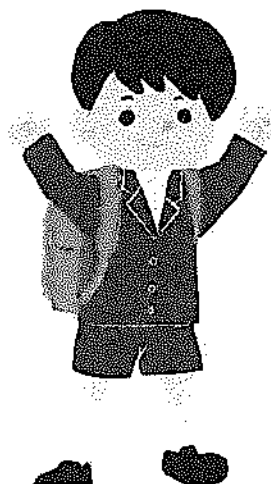


**When** parents were asked how helpful their child found the materials and support provided during EY setting closures, most thought they were not applicable to their child. Others felt they were somewhat helpful, while a smaller number described the materials as neither helpful nor unhelpful. Fewer parents rated them as very helpful, somewhat unhelpful, or very unhelpful (see Figure 13).



(Figure 13)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?



## Section 2 Conclusion

This section shows that the COVID-19 pandemic affected children's learning, wellbeing, and development in many different ways. Most parents described big challenges, particularly with social skills, emotional health, and educational progress. But some parents also noticed positives, such as closer family relationships and children becoming more independent.

For most families, EY setting closures were harmful—especially during important transitions, like starting primary school or moving up a stage. Yet a smaller number of parents said the impact was minimal or even positive, showing that experiences varied widely.

Access to online learning was uneven. Many families said they received little or no material, while others managed well and felt able to support their child's learning at home.

Looking ahead, parents strongly want EY settings to be better prepared for future crises. They suggested having flexible hybrid learning plans, improving communication with families, making sure all children have fair access to resources, and treating EY setting as essential services. Parents of children with additional needs were especially clear that more support is urgently needed, as long delays for services are still common.

Overall, the findings reflect a wide range of parental experiences. These voices point to the need for future planning that puts children's education, wellbeing, and social development at the centre, so no child is left behind in times of disruption.



A black and white photograph of a young girl with her head resting on her hand, looking down at an open book. The image has a grainy, halftone texture. The girl's eyes are closed or looking down, and her expression is contemplative. The book is open in front of her, and the text is overlaid on the bottom portion of the image.

**SECTION 3**

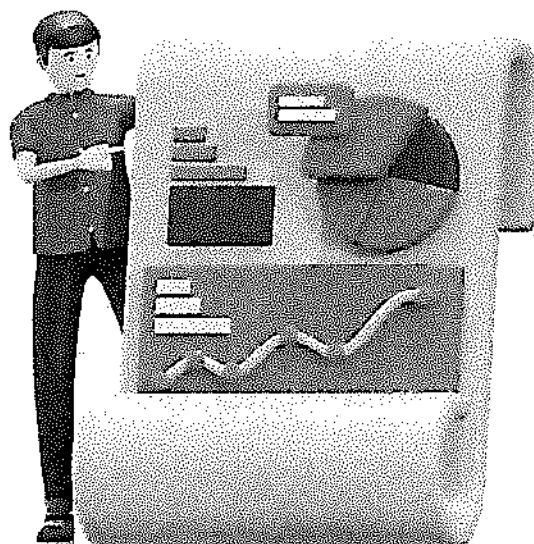
**PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON  
THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION -  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes to children's education. Schools closed, learning moved online, and social rules affected families. To learn more about the longer-term effects, the NPC asked parents about their children's experiences during and after the pandemic. The goal was to understand how students were affected in their learning, friendships, and feelings, and where more support may be needed.

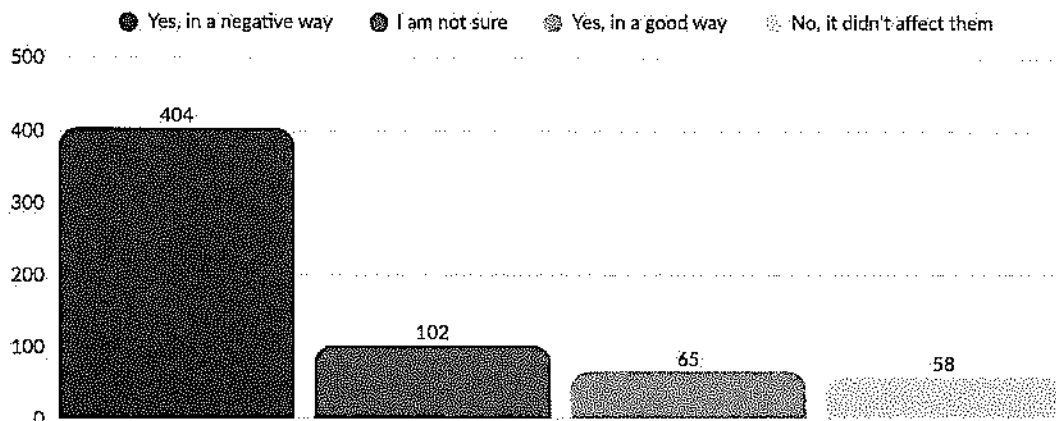
Parents were invited to share their point of view through a consultation that included both structured and open-ended questions. This helped us understand what problems they faced, and how well schools supported their learning. Parents also shared views on remote learning, school communication, and what should could be done differently if something like this happens again.

The findings presented here are based on the results of a survey conducted by the NPC during June - August 2025. The survey was sent to the NPC data base of parents of children in primary schools. The survey was open from 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 till the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. During this time, a total of (629) parents completed the survey. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey will be shared in this section.



# Survey Findings

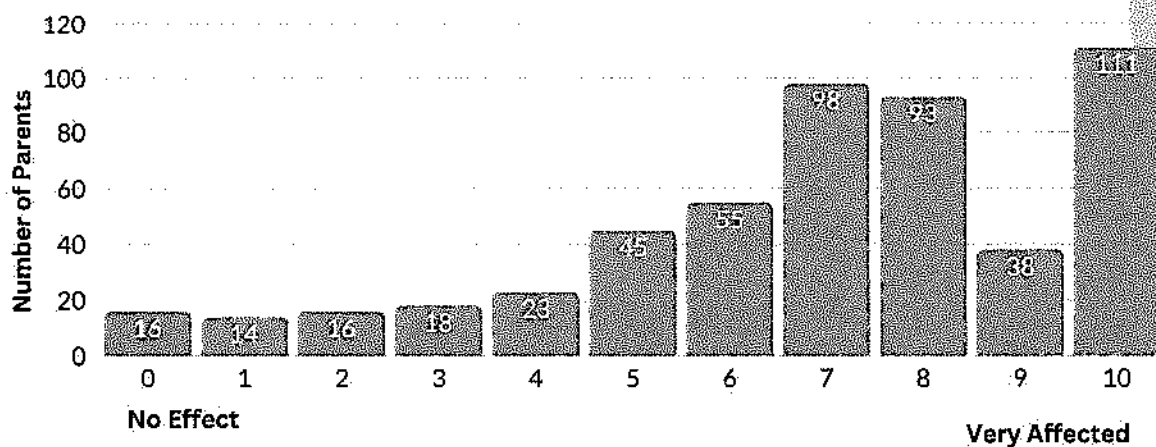
**When** asked whether school closures during the pandemic affected their child, the majority of parents reported a negative impact. A smaller group were unsure, while few parents said the closures were beneficial or had no impact (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1)

Did school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affect your child?

**Parents** were asked to rate the extent to which school closures affected their child. Most responses were between 7 and 10, indicating a strong impact. Few parents gave moderate scores between 4 and 6, while a smaller number rated the effect between 0 and 3 (see Figure 2).

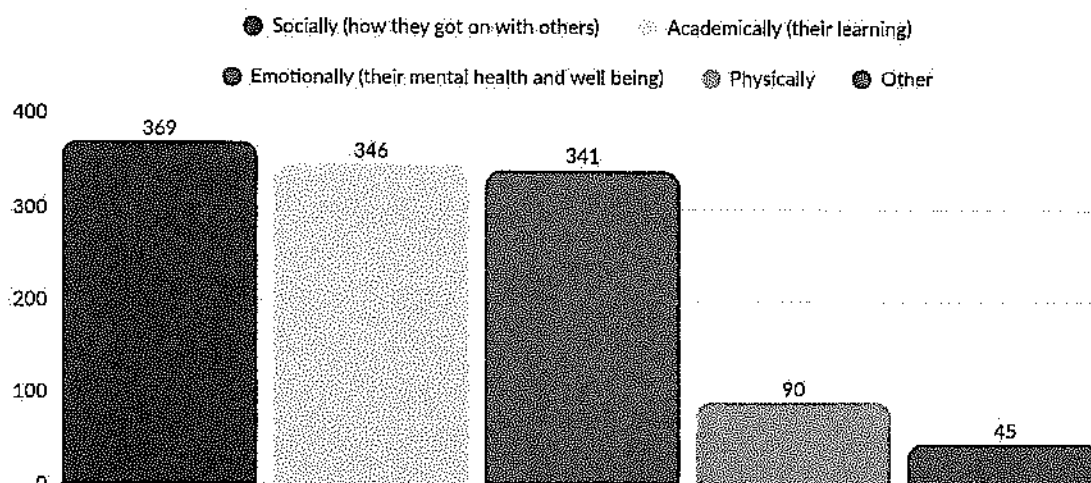


(Figure 2)

To what extent did the school closures affect your child?



**When** parents were asked how school closures affected their child, parents most commonly selected social, academic, and emotional impacts. Physical effects and other types of impact were mentioned less frequently (see Figure 3).



(Figure 3)  
How did the school closures affect your child, did it affect them? (select as many as you need)

Parents shared a wide range of experiences about how school closures affected their children. Some reported little or no impact, particularly for very young children, those transitioning into post-primary school, or those naturally suited to a quieter pace of life. A number of families highlighted positive outcomes: children who stayed socially connected through online games or local peers, opportunities for outdoor play and neighbourly interaction, and in some cases, relief from bullying or rigid routines. For others, the closures offered valuable family time, with siblings bonding more closely and one family noting the opportunity to share their faith more deeply.

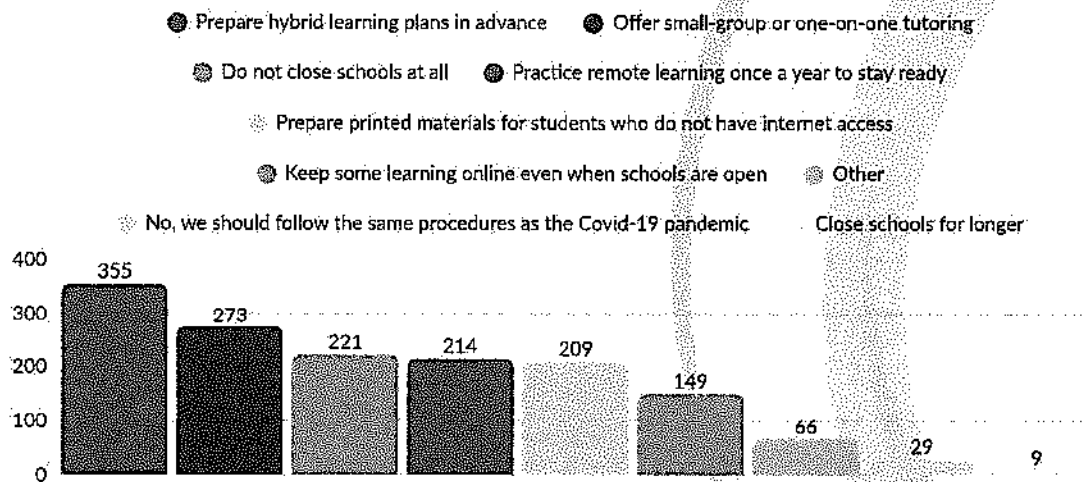
For many, however, the experience was more mixed. Parents described mild challenges such as boredom, disconnection from school, and missing friends. Some children experienced loneliness where school provision was limited or inconsistent, requiring parents to step in to provide structure and support. Balancing work and academic support proved especially difficult for some families, with children falling behind peers. In certain cases, the lack of teacher interaction meant that additional learning needs, such as dyslexia or neurodevelopmental differences, went unrecognised until later and became more pronounced over time.

More serious difficulties were also reported. Some children developed school refusal, anxiety around social interaction, or ongoing academic struggles, including poor handwriting and spelling difficulties.

Missed milestones such as first communion preparation or the traditional end-of-year experiences in sixth class were also a source of disappointment. While some schools provided meaningful support during closures, others relied heavily on worksheets and homework, which parents felt did not adequately meet children’s needs. Despite these challenges, many families worked hard to support their children at home, with varying degrees of success.

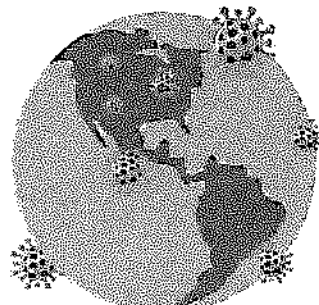
<sup>1</sup>This is a summary of the parents’ voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

When parents were asked what should be done differently if a similar event occurred in the future, they suggested a range of approaches. The most popular options included preparing hybrid learning plans in advance, offering small-group or one-on-one tutoring, and avoiding school closures altogether. Many parents also recommended practising remote learning annually to stay prepared and providing printed materials for students without internet access. Few parents supported keeping some learning online when schools are open, and only a small number favoured following the same procedures as during the Covid-19 pandemic or extending school closures (see Figure 4).



(Figure 4)

If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? (Select all that apply)



Parents offered a wide range of reflections and suggestions on how education could be better managed during future emergencies. Many felt the response to COVID-19 was disproportionate and poorly planned, particularly for children with additional needs such as dyslexia and ADHD. Several parents expressed frustration that Ireland was slow to prioritise these children's return to school compared with other countries, and that the closures highlighted how heavily society relies on schools for broader services such as therapy and meals.

A recurring concern was the lack of consistency across schools. While some schools provided strong support and regular interaction, others offered minimal contact, leaving parents to manage education largely on their own.

This inconsistency led some families to change schools altogether. Parents called for a national or standardised approach to remote learning, with clear expectations for teacher engagement and lesson delivery. Many stressed that simply assigning homework was not sufficient, and that teaching should have continued in some form, even if online.

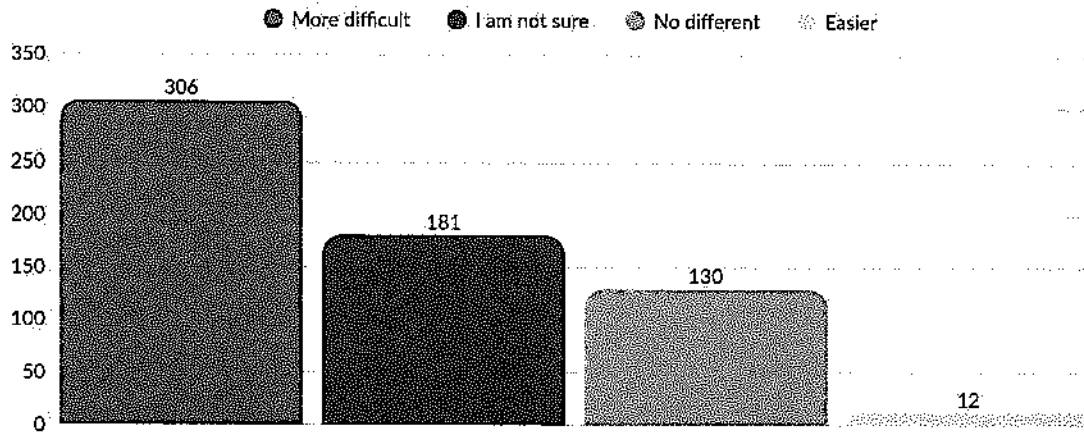
Suggestions for improvement included more interactive and social online learning, such as storytelling, group chats, and supervised activities to help children maintain connections with peers. Some proposed blended models with reduced school hours or partial reopening, while others recommended outdoor learning spaces and air filtration systems to make in-person education safer. There were also calls for better IT training for teachers, more support for parents who are not tech-savvy, and the creation of support hubs with age-appropriate educational resources.

Parents emphasised the need for flexibility and preparedness, suggesting that the Department of Education develop a menu of response options that schools could deploy quickly. They also highlighted the importance of regular parent-teacher meetings, consistent communication, and prioritising in-person contact for younger children and exam years. Some advocated for printed materials and one-to-one or small group tutoring, while others stressed the need to maintain routine and structure, particularly for autistic children.

While a small number of parents expressed extreme views or distrust toward public health measures, the majority focused on practical ways to improve the educational experience during crises. Overall, the feedback underscores a strong desire for more thoughtful planning, equitable support, and a child-centred approach in any future emergency.

\* This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

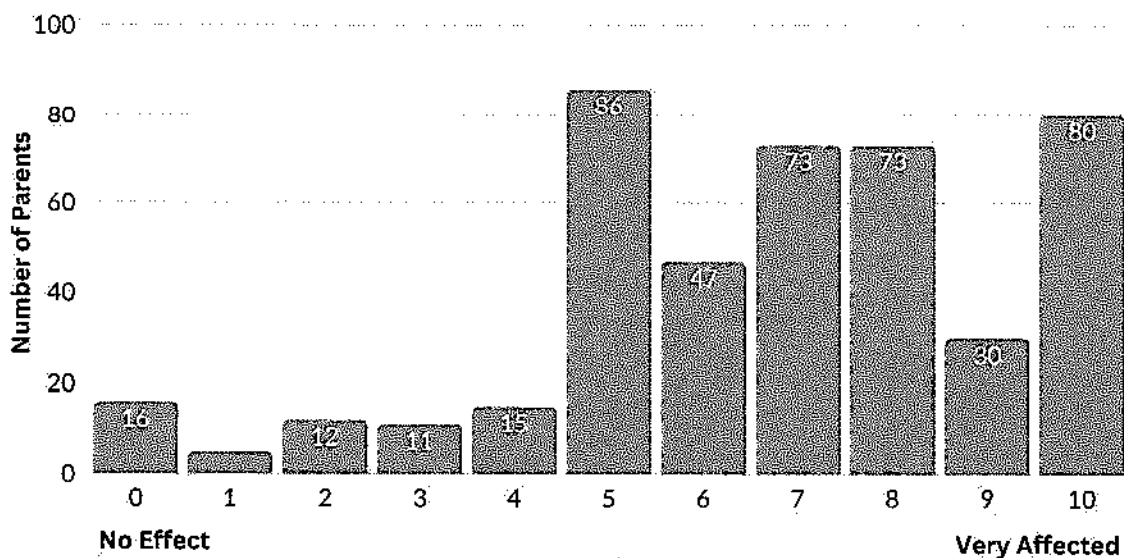
When parents were asked whether school closures made it more difficult for their child to move to the next stage in their educational journey, nearly half of parents said the transition was more difficult. The remaining parents said that they were unsure, the closures made no difference, or easier (see Figure 5).



(Figure 5)

A transition is when a child moves from one school setting to another. Do you think school closures made your child's transition?

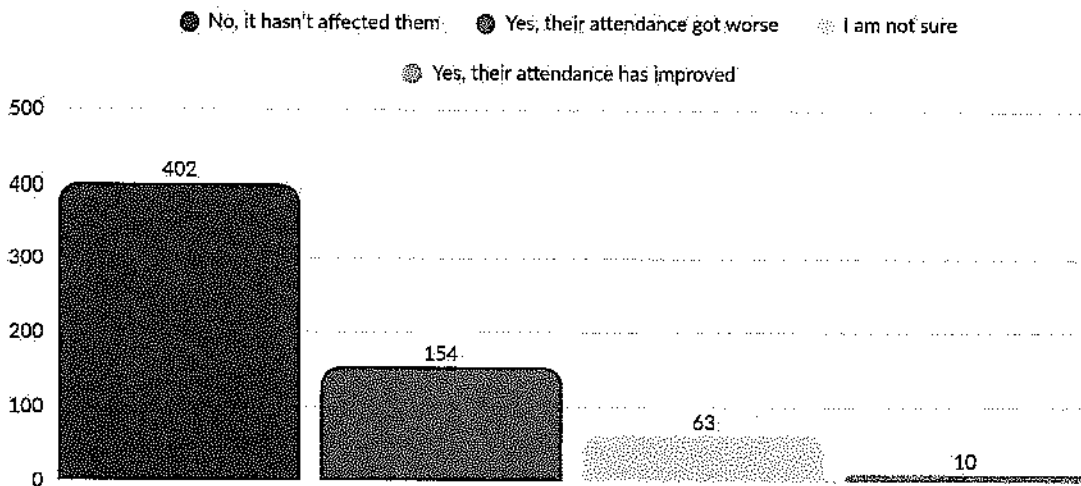
Parents were asked to rate the impact of school closures on their child's transition between school settings. The majority gave a high rating (7–10), indicating a strong effect. A smaller group gave a moderate score (4–6), and the fewest rated the effect as low (0–3) (see Figure 6).



(Figure 6)

To what extent do you think school closures affected your child's transition?

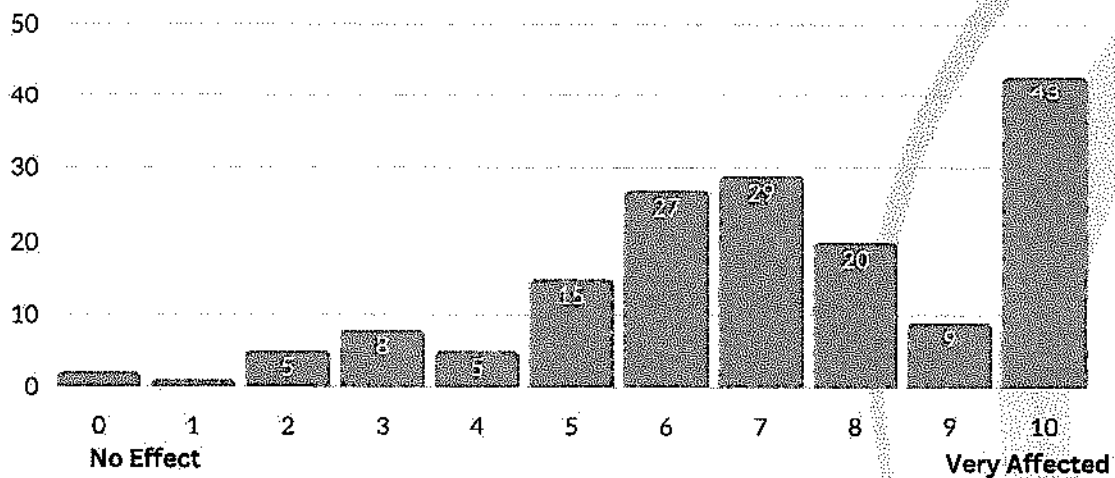
When parents were asked whether their child's current school attendance had been affected by COVID-19 closures, most parents said it had not. A Number of parents reported a decline in attendance, while others said they were unsure or saw improvements (see Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

Do you think your child's current attendance at school is affected by school closures during COVID-19?

Parents were asked to rate the extent of COVID-19 school closures on their child's current attendance. The majority of parents gave mid-range ratings (8–10), indicating a moderate effect. A smaller number of parents gave high ratings (5–7), and the smallest group gave low scores (0–4) (see Figure 8).

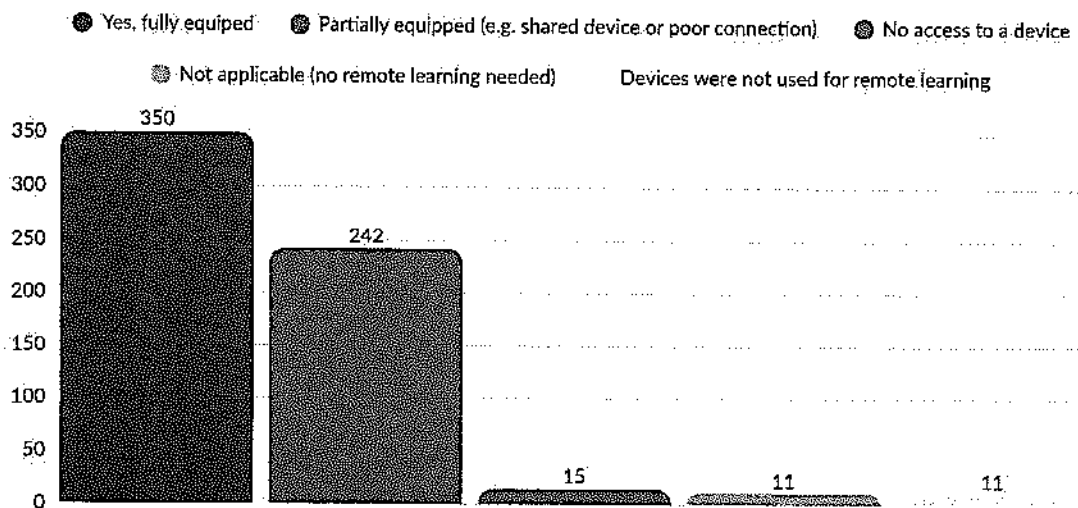


(Figure 8)

To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during Covid-19?



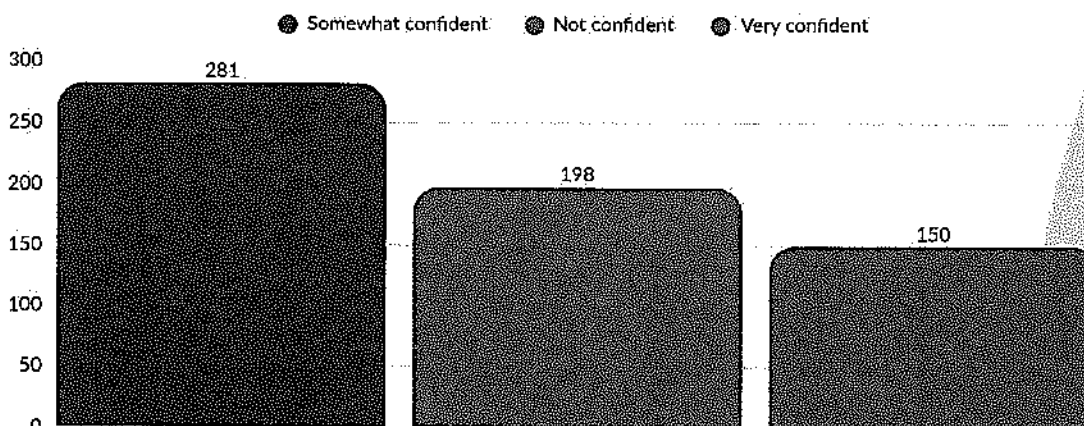
When parents were asked whether their child had access to a device and internet for remote learning, most said their child was either fully or partially equipped. A small number reported no access, no remote learning needed, or that no devices were used for learning (see Figure 9).



(Figure 9)

When schools were closed during COVID-19, did your child have access to a device and internet for remote learning (if applicable)?

When parents were asked how confident they felt supporting their child's learning at home during school closures, the majority of parents said they felt somewhat confident. A smaller number of parents reported feeling either not confident or very confident (see Figure 10).

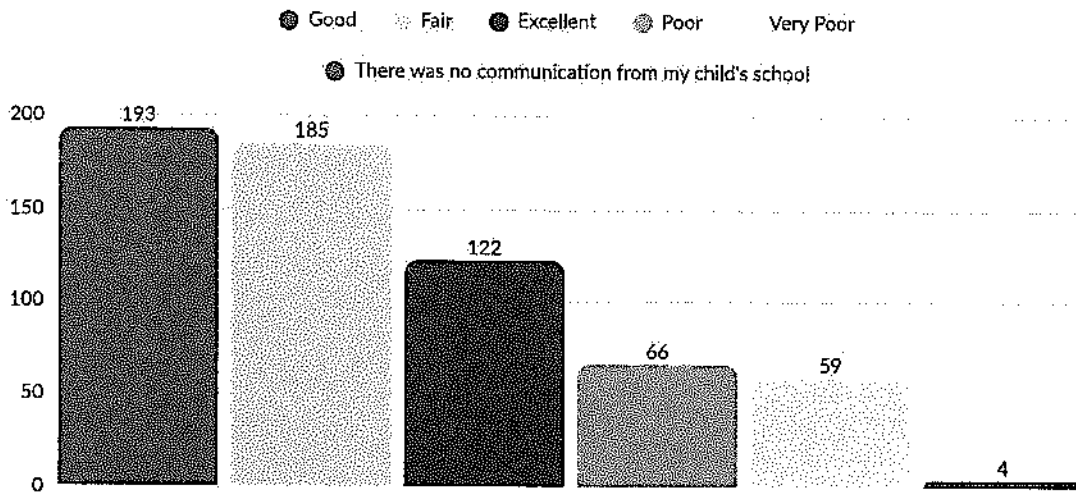


(Figure 10)

How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?



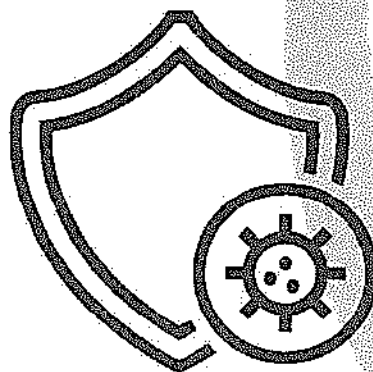
**When** parents were asked to rate communication from their child's school during closures, most parents rated it as good or fair. Smaller number of parents rated it as excellent, poor, or very poor, with a few saying there was no communication at all (see Figure 11).

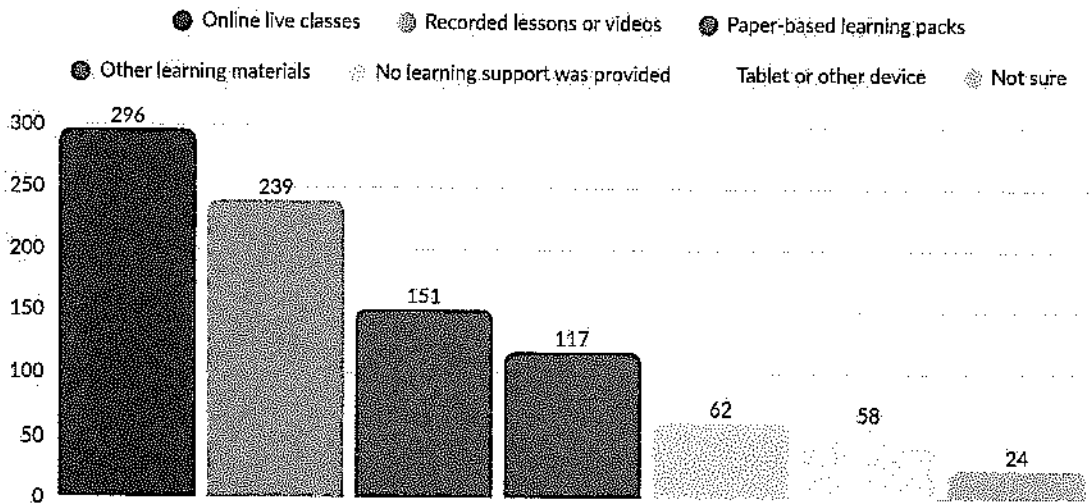


(Figure 11)

How would you rate the communication from your child's school during school closures?

**When** parents were asked what kind of learning materials or support their child received during school closures, the most common response was online live classes, followed by recorded lessons or videos. Paper-based learning packs were also widely used. Few parents mentioned other types of learning materials, and other small number of parents said their child received a device or no support at all. A small number were unsure what was provided (see Figure 12).

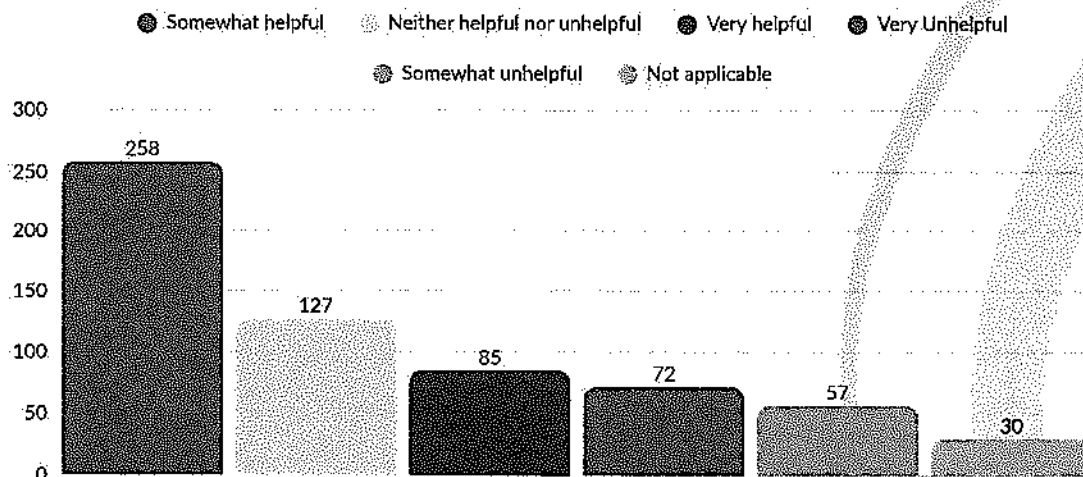




(Figure 12)

What type of learning materials or support was provided during closures? (Select all that apply)

When parents were asked how helpful their child found the materials and support provided during closures, the most common response was that they were somewhat helpful. Many parents also felt neutral, while a smaller group described the resources as very helpful. Few parents viewed them as unhelpful, and a small number said the materials were not applicable to their child (see Figure 13).

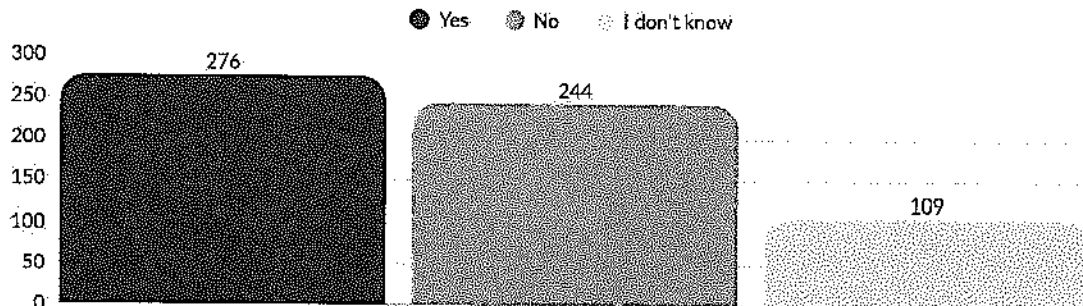


(Figure 13)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?



**Parents** were asked whether they believed the government made the right decision regarding mask use in schools during COVID-19. Responses were divided, with slightly more agreeing with the decision than disagreeing. Others were unsure (see Figure 14).



(Figure 14)

During COVID-19 there was a requirement to wear masks in schools some of the time. Do you think the government made the correct decision regarding the use of masks in schools during COVID-19?

Following parents' responses on whether the government made the right decision about mask use in schools during COVID-19, they were invited to explain their views in more detail. Their comments revealed a wide spectrum of experiences, emotions, and perspectives shaped by children's individual needs, school responses, and wider societal impacts.

Some parents supported the mask mandate, seeing it as a necessary public health measure to protect vulnerable children, staff, and family members. They valued the sense of social responsibility it encouraged and felt it helped keep schools open. A few noted that their children adapted well to wearing masks, particularly when it was presented as a way to protect others. In classrooms with immunocompromised students, masks were viewed as an essential safeguard. Some parents also highlighted the role of hygiene education, saying that masks helped children understand infection control.

However, many parents expressed deep concerns about the negative impact of masks on children's wellbeing. Reported issues included difficulty breathing, discomfort, and increased anxiety—particularly for children with sensory sensitivities, asthma, or neurodivergent conditions. Parents said masks disrupted learning, especially for younger children who rely on facial expressions to develop language, social skills, and emotional understanding. Several described how masks contributed to social withdrawal, fear, and long-term emotional distress, with some children still struggling to reconnect with peers or feel safe in school.

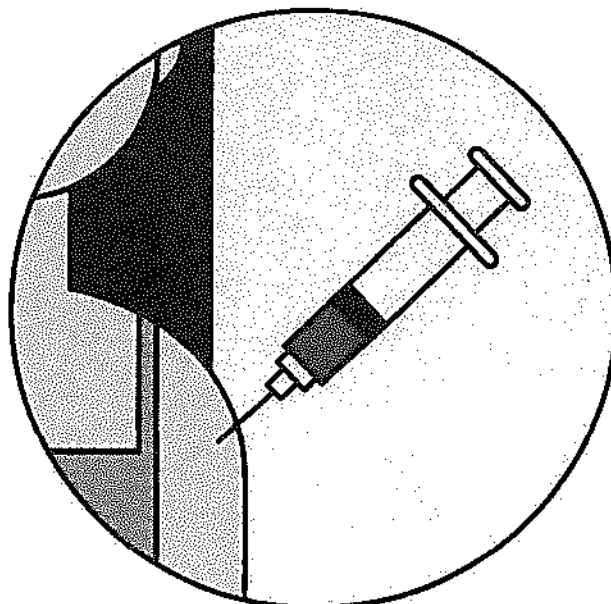


Parents of children with additional needs were especially critical, saying that mask-wearing and school closures compounded existing challenges. Many felt their children were excluded or unsupported, and that schools were unprepared to meet their needs during the pandemic. Some described traumatic experiences, including bullying, isolation, and regression in social and academic development.

Others questioned the scientific basis for the mandate, citing studies they believed showed masks were ineffective or harmful. They voiced frustration about inconsistent enforcement, poor communication, and what they saw as a lack of empathy from schools. Some felt the policy was politically motivated rather than child-centred, and a few described it as damaging to their children's development and mental health.

Overall, while some parents acknowledged that the government acted in good faith given the uncertainty at the time, many believed the mask policy lacked nuance and failed to take account of the diverse needs of children. The responses reflect the depth of emotional impact and highlight the importance of inclusive, evidence-based, and child-focused approaches in any future public health emergencies.

\* This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



# Suggestions and Open Space for Parents' Views

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruption to education systems worldwide. In Ireland, parents were deeply affected by government decisions on school closures, remote learning, and educational support. Their responses reveal a complex and emotional landscape—marked by both understanding and frustration—and a strong call for greater preparedness in the future.

## **Mixed Reactions to Government Decisions**

Some parents supported the government's cautious approach, particularly in the early stages when little was known about the virus. They appreciated efforts to protect vulnerable families and recognised that decisions were made under immense pressure. A few praised teachers and schools that adapted quickly, maintained regular contact, and provided structure, helping children feel safe and supported.

However, the majority were critical. Many felt education was not prioritised and that children were sidelined in decision-making. They described school closures as disproportionate and damaging, with long-term effects on academic progress, social development, and emotional wellbeing. Parents argued that schools should have remained open, especially when other sectors continued to operate, and that decisions lacked nuance and failed to reflect children's diverse needs.

## **Impact on Children and Families**

Parents spoke extensively about the toll on children. Many described heightened anxiety, social withdrawal, and regression in learning and behaviour. Key milestones and peer interactions were lost, and the absence of school structure made reintegration difficult. For children with additional needs, the impact was particularly severe. The loss of routine and specialist support led to significant setbacks, with some requiring therapy, medication, or additional interventions. Parents of neurodivergent and disabled children felt especially abandoned, citing inaccessible online provision and a lack of tailored support.

## **Challenges for Parents and Frontline Workers**

The burden on families was a recurring theme. Many struggled to balance full-time work with home learning, often without adequate resources or guidance. Some left their jobs, while others experienced burnout and mental health difficulties. Parents felt unsupported, particularly when schools offered only minimal engagement and expected them to assume teaching roles without training.

Frontline workers faced greater pressure, juggling essential jobs alongside childcare and education responsibilities. Several described the experience as traumatic, with lasting effects on family wellbeing. Parents also highlighted the particular challenges for single-parent households and families without access to technology or quiet learning spaces.

### **Inconsistencies and Inequalities Across Schools**

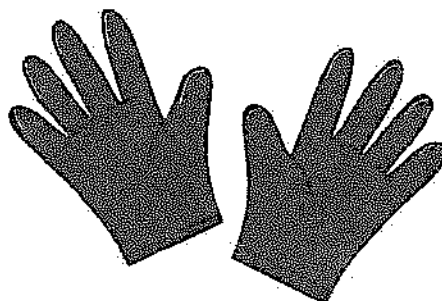
Another major concern was the inconsistency of how schools responded. Some schools provided daily online classes and structured support, while others relied on worksheets or occasional check-ins.. Parents called for a more consistent national approach, with clear expectations and accountability, to ensure all children receive fair and adequate education during emergencies.

Parents also pointed out that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were hit harder. A lack of devices, internet access, and quiet learning spaces meant that remote learning was almost impossible for some families. Parents urged the government to improve infrastructure and support to make education more equal in future crises.

### **Recommendations for Future Planning**

Looking ahead, parents strongly emphasised the need for robust contingency planning that places children's wellbeing and education at the centre. Suggestions included hybrid learning models that can be activated quickly, standardised platforms, and training for teachers to ensure consistency nationwide. Many stressed the importance of daily contact between teachers and students to preserve routine and connection.

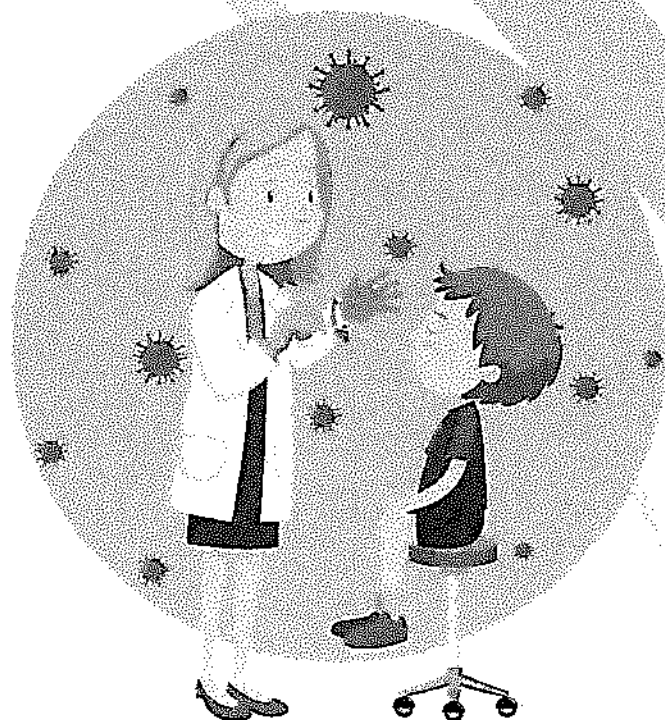
Inclusive strategies were seen as essential, with tailored provision for children with additional needs and continued access to therapeutic and support services. Parents also called for clearer communication from government and schools, with transparent guidance and realistic expectations. Schools, they argued, should be equipped with the necessary technology, flexible learning options, and resources to support children's academic recovery and emotional resilience. Above all, parents urged that schools remain open wherever possible, recognising their central role in children's development, mental health, and social stability.



## Overall Reflection

Parents' voices paint a vivid picture of the challenges faced during the pandemic. While some acknowledged the government's efforts, most expressed concern and called for meaningful change. The crisis exposed serious gaps in educational planning and support, and parents want to see lessons learned. Their message is clear: children must never again be left behind in times of crisis. A resilient, inclusive, and equitable education system is essential—not only for academic success but also for the emotional and social development of every child.

\*This summary captures the key themes raised by parents; please refer to the appendix for full responses.



## Section 3 Conclusion

The findings in this section show how strongly the pandemic affected children's education, friendships, and wellbeing. While some families managed well, many parents described long-term challenges, especially around children's mental health, loss of social connections, and keeping up with learning.

Parents also highlighted unequal access to technology and learning supports, with some children falling behind more than others. Those with special educational needs, disabilities, or neurodivergence were especially at risk, and their families reported higher levels of stress and regression. Views on measures such as masks and restrictions were mixed: some valued them for safety, while others felt they created extra barriers and anxiety for children.

Looking ahead, parents want schools and policymakers to be better prepared. They asked for clear and consistent communication, fairer support for vulnerable learners, and flexible systems such as hybrid learning that can be used when needed. Parents' experiences during COVID-19 offer important lessons to ensure that, in any future emergency, children's education, social development, and emotional health are protected.



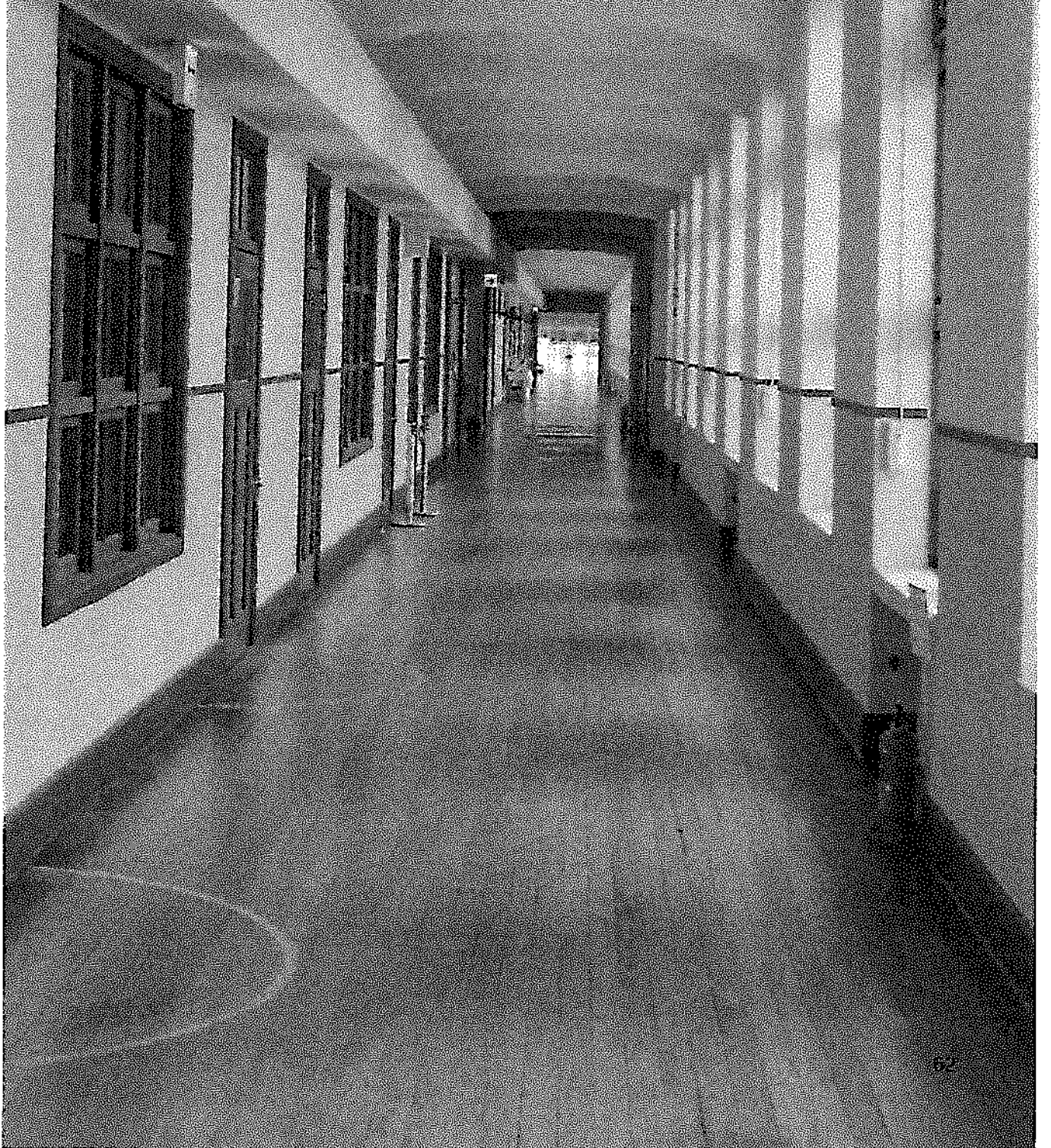


**NPC**

SUPPORTING PARENTS  
SUPPORTING CHILDREN

## **SECTION 4**

# **PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION - POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL**



# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes to children's education. Schools closed, learning moved online, and social rules affected families. To learn more about the longer-term effects, the National Parents Council (NPC) asked parents about their children's experiences during and after the pandemic. The goal was to understand how students were affected in their learning, friendships, and feelings, and where more support may be needed.

Parents were invited to share their point of view through a consultation that included both structured and open-ended questions. We asked what kind of schools children went to, what problems they faced, and how well schools supported their learning. Parents were also asked to share their views on remote learning, school communication, and what should be done differently if something like this happens again.

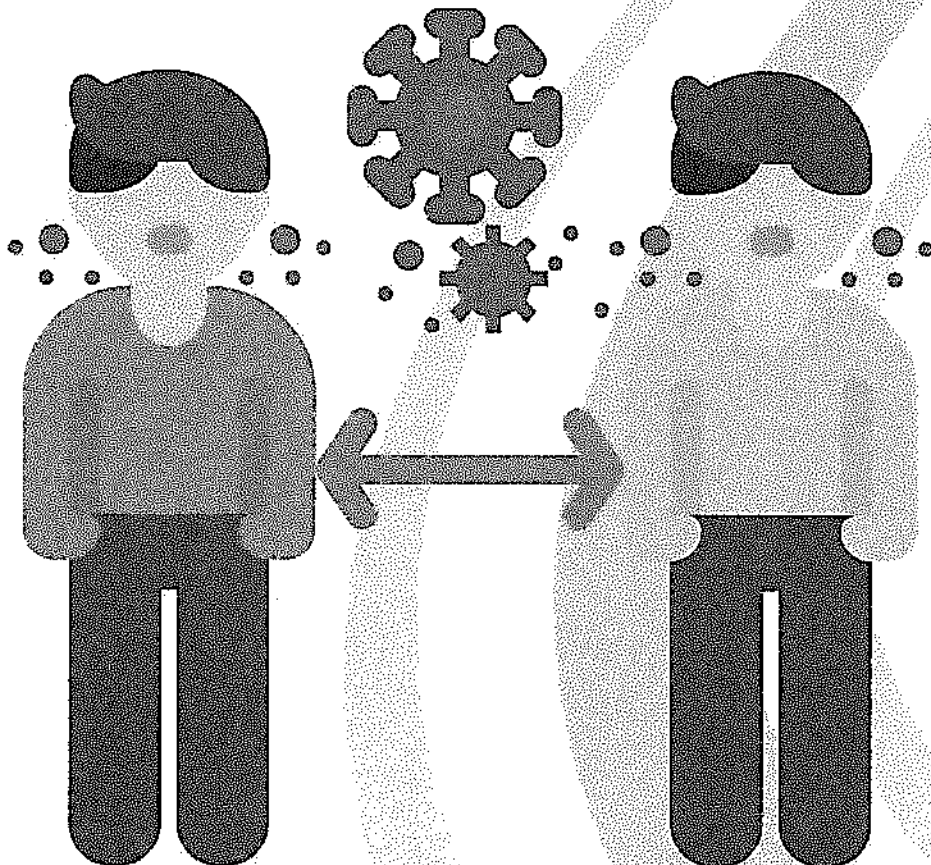
The findings presented here are based on the results of a survey conducted by the NPC during June - August 2025. The survey was sent to the NPC data base of parents of children in post-primary schools who had consented to receive such e mails. The survey was open from 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 till the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. During this time, a total of (59) parents completed the survey. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey will be shared in this section.



# Surveys

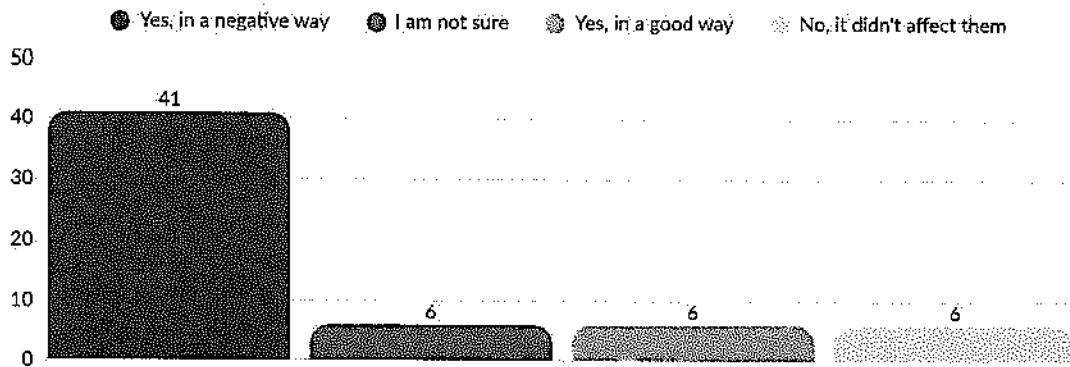
A survey titled Covid-19 was sent to parents to collect feedback. The survey asked a number of questions to find out how parents felt about their children's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and any current lasting effects.

It included a mix of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. This gave parents the opportunity to choose answers that suited their views and also share extra thoughts. Parents were also asked to think about how well schools supported their child's learning needs. The main results of the survey, including key points and parents' opinions, will be shared in this section.



# Survey Findings

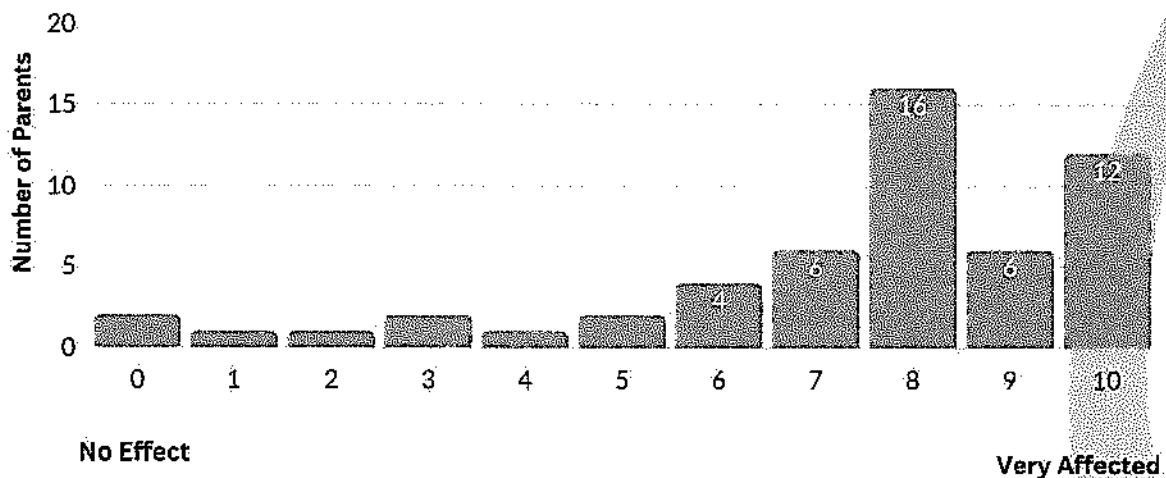
**When** asked whether school closures during the pandemic affected their child, most parents reported a negative impact. The remaining responses were evenly split among those who felt the closures had a positive effect, those who believed they had no impact, and those who were unsure (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1)

Did school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affect your child?

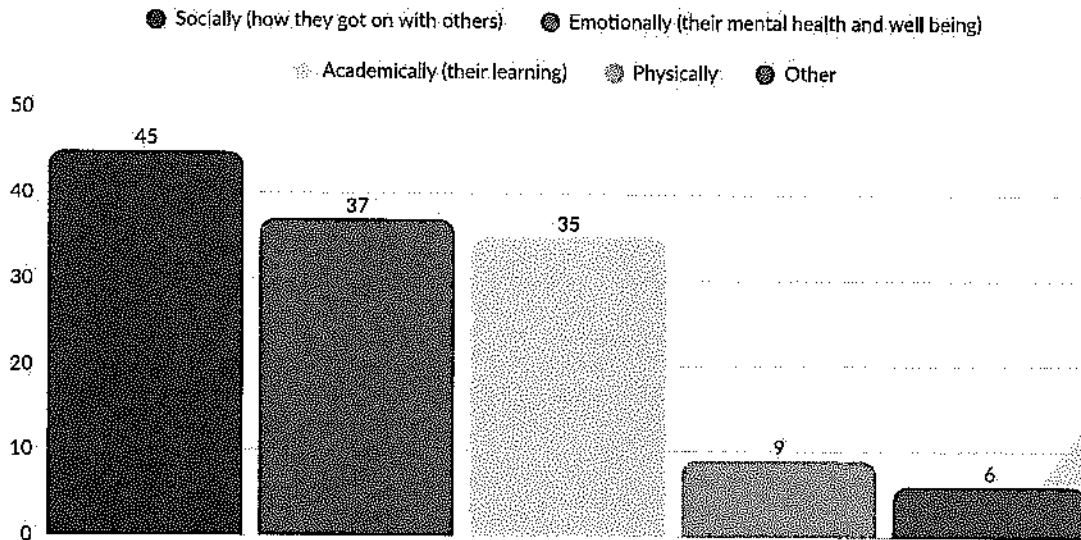
**Parents** were asked to rate the extent to which school closures affected their child. Most responses were between 7 and 10, indicating a strong impact. Few parents gave moderate scores between 4 and 6, while a smaller number rated the effect between 0 and 3 (see Figure 2).



(Figure 2)

To what extent did the school closures affect your child?

When parents were asked how school closures affected their child, parents most commonly selected social, emotional, and academic impacts. Physical effects and other types of impact were mentioned less frequently (see Figure 3).

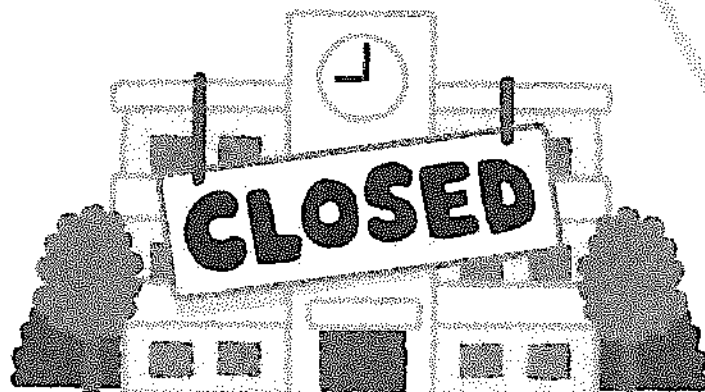


(Figure 3)

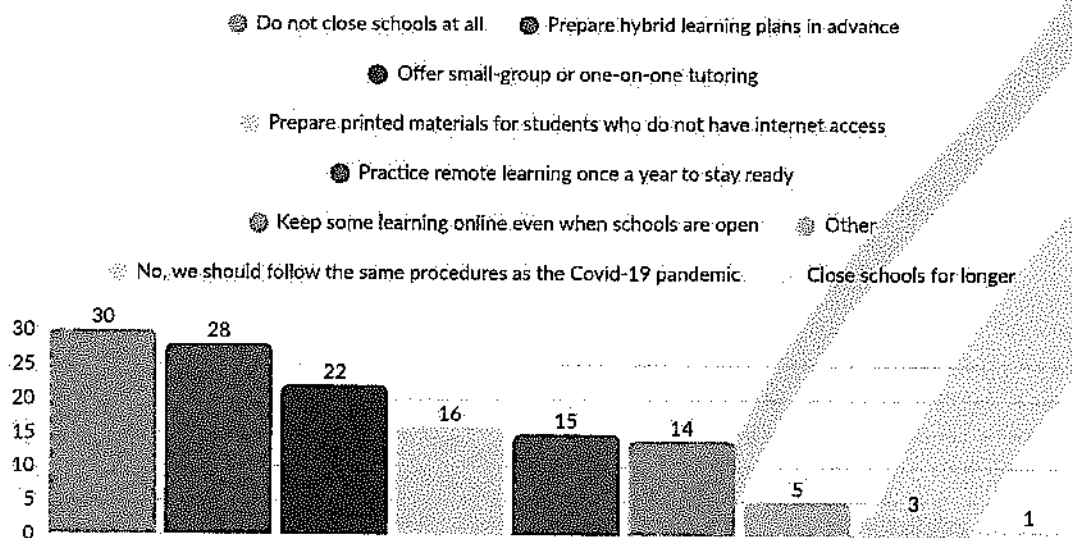
How did the school closures affect your child, did it affect them? (select as many as you need)

Parents shared further insights into how school closures affected their children. One parent described mixed effects, saying that while closures had some academic benefits, their child faced lasting difficulties and did not return to school because of mental health challenges. Another parent had the opposite experience, noting that their child had struggled in the school environment but found remote learning more suitable. A different parent felt the closures limited their child's personal development, as they missed out on important transition year activities.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



When parents were asked what should be done differently if a similar event occurred in the future, they suggested a range of approaches. The most common suggestion was not to close schools at all. Many also said it would help to have hybrid learning plans ready in advance and to offer small-group or one-to-one tutoring. Others recommended giving printed materials to students without internet access and practising remote learning once a year to stay prepared. A smaller number thought some learning should stay online even when schools are open. Few parents felt we should do the same as during the Covid-19 pandemic or close schools for longer (see Figure 4).

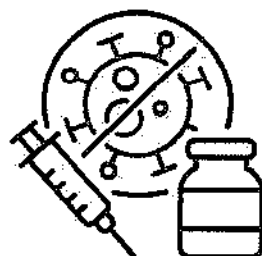


(Figure 4)

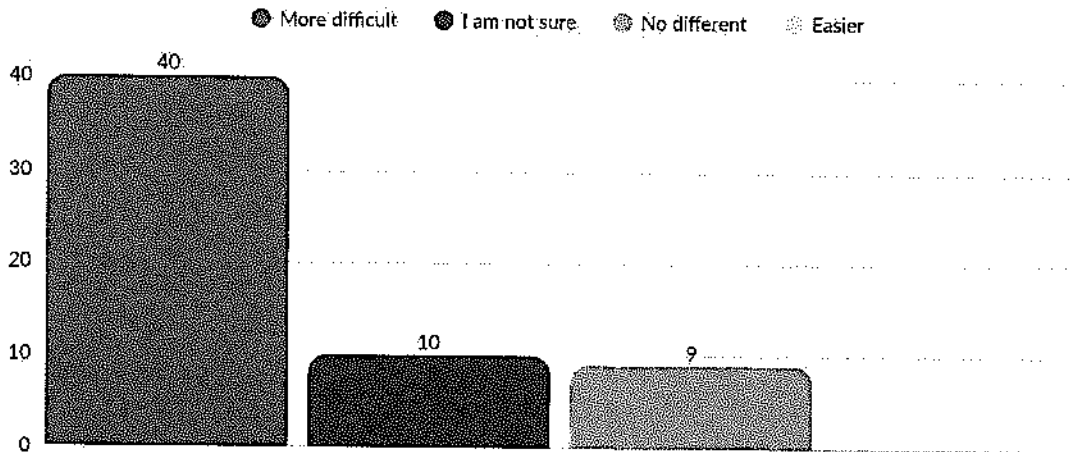
If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? (Select all that apply)

Parents who chose 'Other' shared a range of thoughtful suggestions. Some said that online learning had worked really well for certain children and should remain an option, especially in schools that already use iPads or similar technology. They felt it was important to make sure all children had properly covered the curriculum after the disruption. Parents also suggested that teachers should have access to a collection of good examples and techniques for teaching, and that this should be included in teacher training. However, they also pointed out that not every family has access to good internet, so any future plans for online learning need to take this into account.

This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



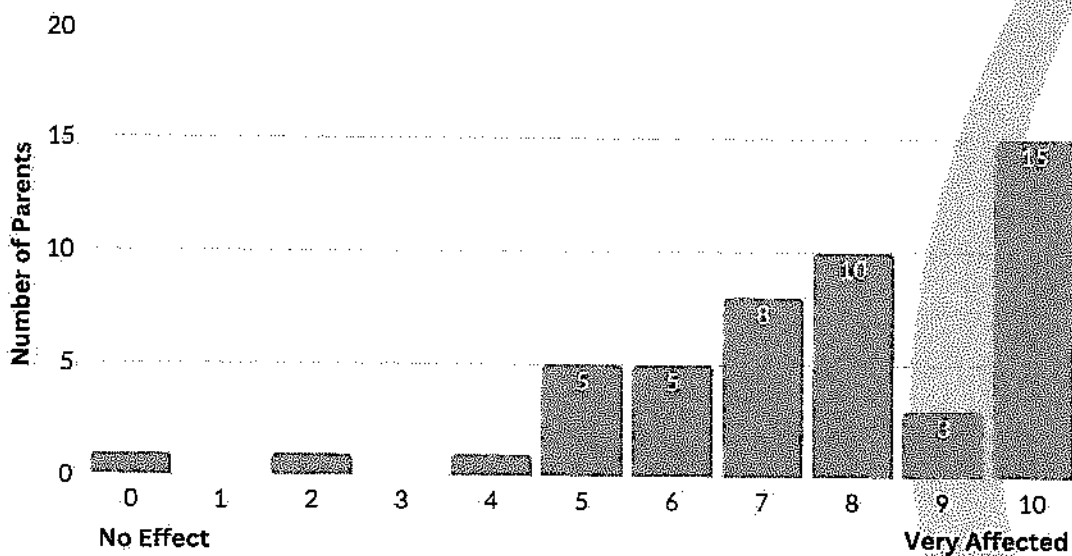
When parents were asked whether school closures made it more difficult for their child to move to the next stage in their educational journey, the majority of parents said the transition was more difficult. The remaining parents said that they were unsure or the closures made no difference (see Figure 5).



(Figure 5)

A transition is when a child moves from one school setting to another. Do you think school closures made your child's transition?

Parents were asked to rate the impact of school closures on their child's transition between school settings. The majority gave a high rating (7–10), indicating a strong effect. A smaller group gave a moderate score (4–6), and the few parents rated the effect as low (0–3) (see Figure 6).

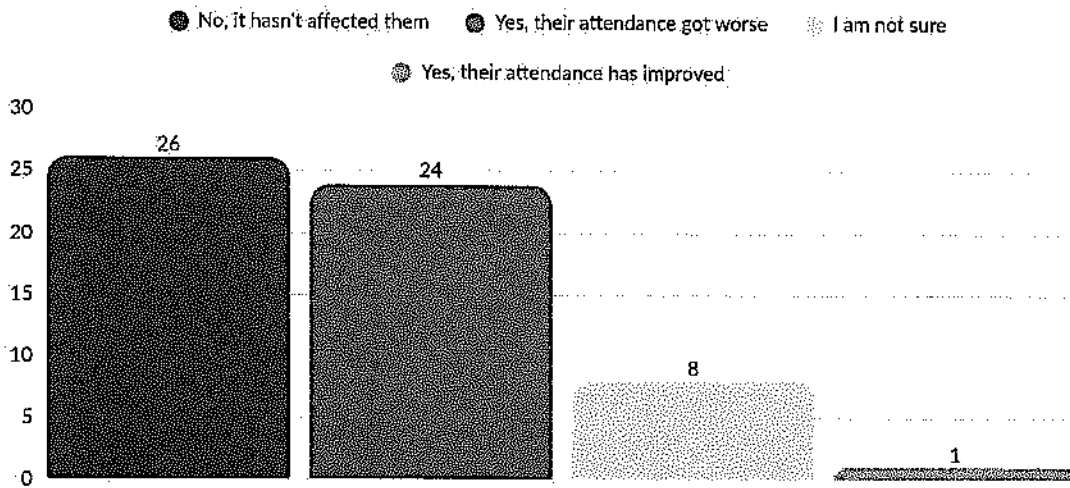


(Figure 6)

To what extent do you think school closures affected your child's transition?



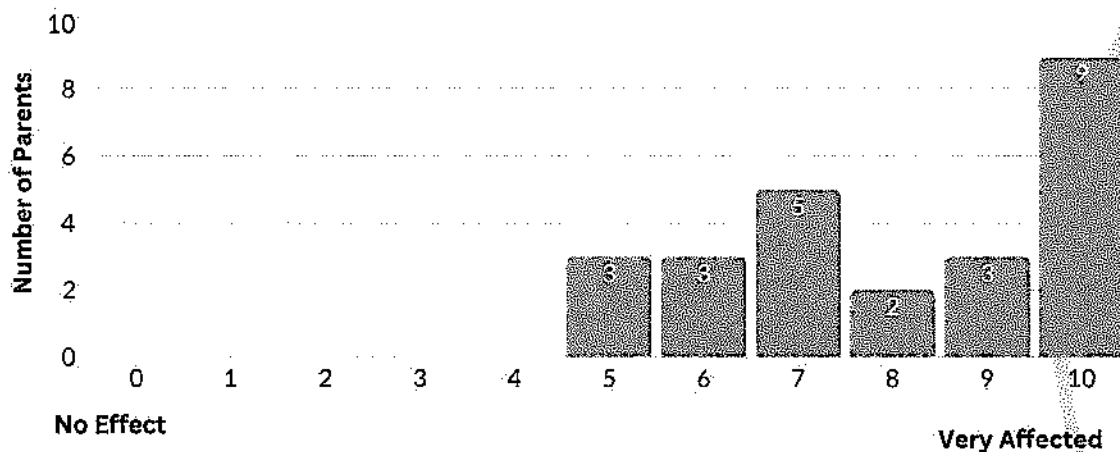
When parents were asked whether their child's current school attendance had been affected by COVID-19 closures, most parents said it had not. A number of parents reported a decline in attendance, while others said they were unsure or saw improvements (see Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

Do you think your child's current attendance at school is affected by school closures during COVID-19?

Parents were asked to rate the extent of COVID-19 school closures on their child's current attendance. The majority of parents gave mid-range ratings (8–10), indicating a moderate effect. A smaller number of parents gave high ratings (5–7) (see Figure 8).

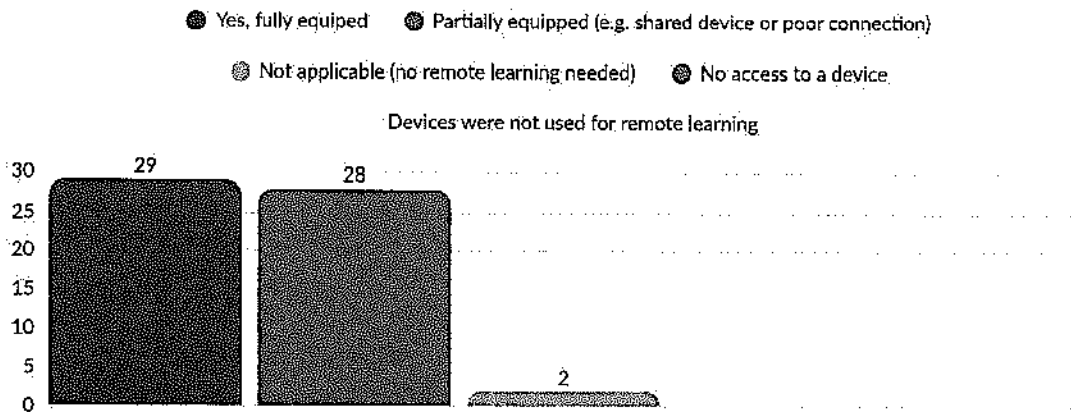


(Figure 8)

To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during Covid-19?



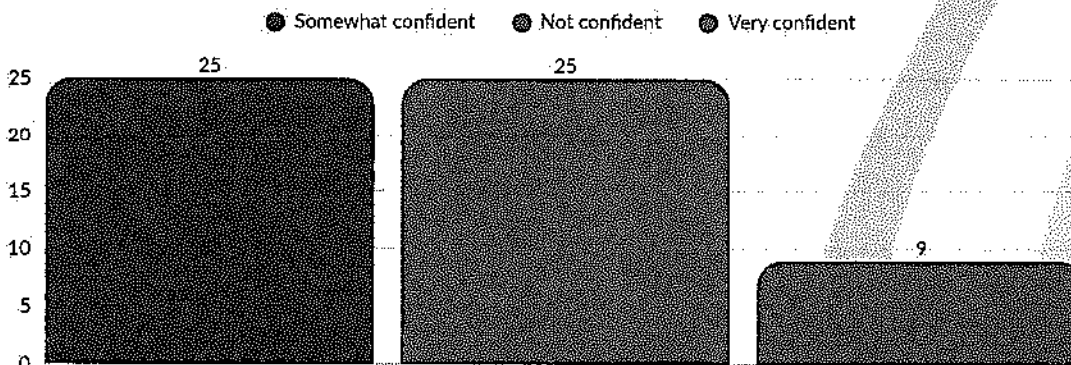
When parents were asked whether their child had access to a device and internet for remote learning, most said their child was either fully or partially equipped. A small number reported no devices were used for remote learning (see Figure 9).



(Figure 9)

When schools were closed during COVID-19, did your child have access to a device and internet for remote learning (if applicable)?

When parents were asked how confident they felt supporting their child's learning at home during school closures, most said they were either somewhat confident or not confident. A smaller number said they felt very confident (see Figure 10).

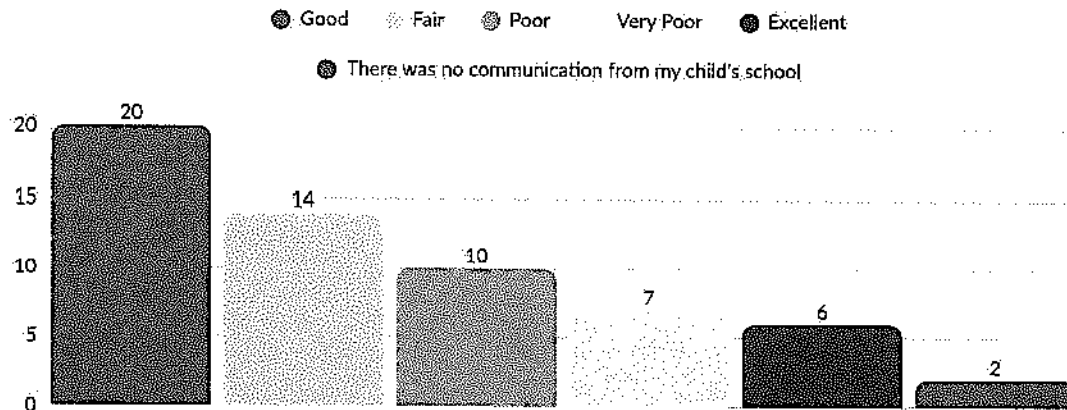


(Figure 10)

How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?



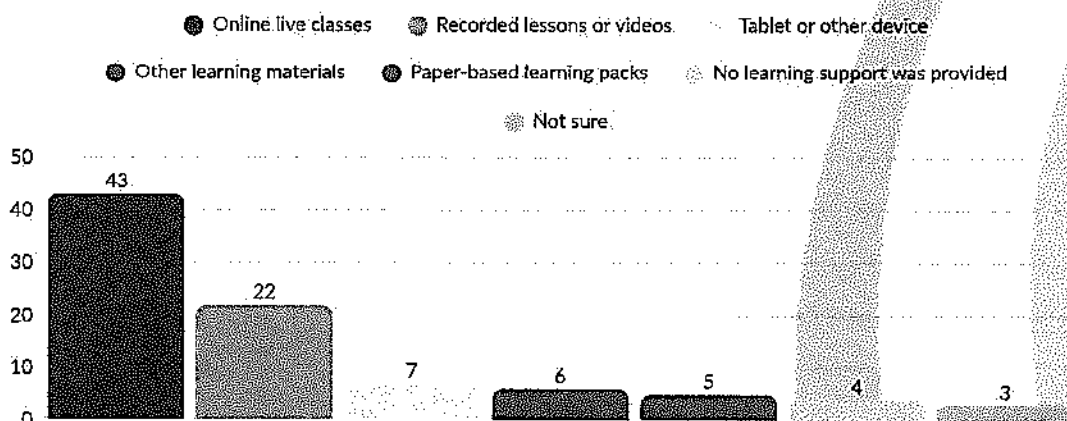
When parents were asked to rate communication from their child's school during closures, most parents rated it as good or fair. Smaller number of parents rated it as poor, very poor, or excellent with a few saying there was no communication at all (see Figure 11).



(Figure 11)

How would you rate the communication from your child's school during school closures?

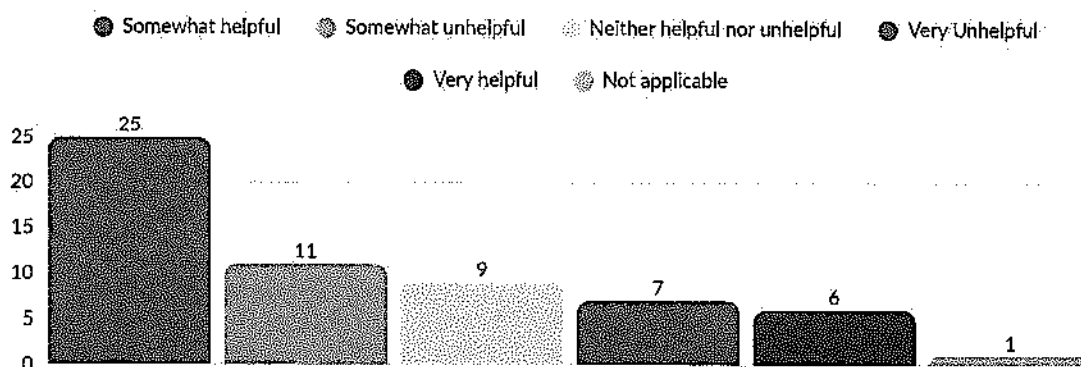
When parents were asked what kind of learning materials or support their child received during school closures, the most common response was online live classes. Many also mentioned recorded lessons or videos. Tablets or other devices were used by some children, and a few parents said their child received other learning materials or paper-based packs. A small number said no learning support was provided, and a few were unsure what was given (see Figure 12).



(Figure 12)

What type of learning materials or support was provided during closures? (Select all that apply)

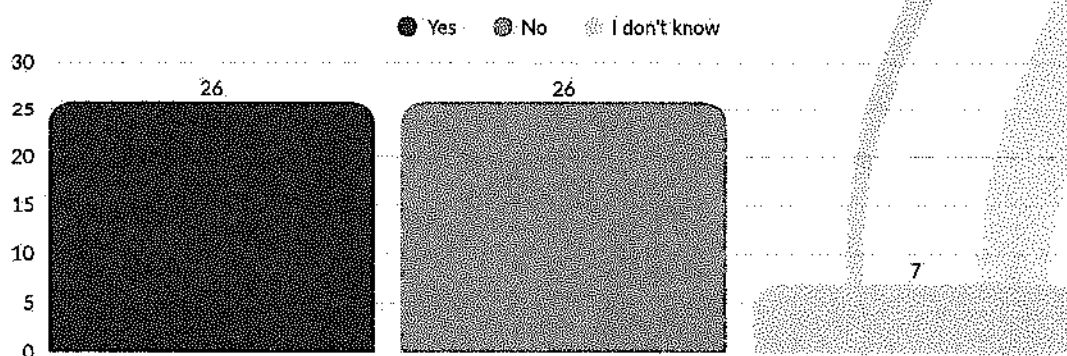
When parents were asked how helpful their child found the materials and support provided during school closures, most said they were somewhat helpful. Others felt they were either somewhat unhelpful or neither helpful nor unhelpful. A smaller number described the materials as very helpful or very unhelpful. Only one parent said the materials were not applicable to their child (see Figure 13).



(Figure 13)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?

Parents were asked whether they believed the government made the right decision about mask use in schools during COVID-19. Responses were evenly split between those who agreed and those who disagreed. A smaller number of parents said they did not know (see Figure 14).



(Figure 14)

During COVID-19 there was a requirement to wear masks in schools some of the time. Do you think the government made the correct decision regarding the use of masks in schools during COVID-19?



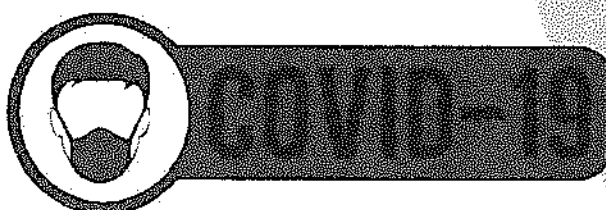
Parents who selected 'Other' shared a wide range of views shaped by their children's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many felt that post-primary schools were unprepared for online learning, and noted that years later some teachers still do not use platforms such as Microsoft Teams. Parents emphasised that all teachers should be equipped and expected to use digital tools to ensure continuity in the event of future disruptions. Several described masks in classrooms as uncomfortable and distracting, particularly for younger students and those with skin sensitivities or additional needs. Cold classrooms—with windows open, heating switched off, and restrictions on wearing jackets—were also said to affect concentration and learning.

Some parents expressed strong opposition to the government's approach, describing it as a breach of rights and criticising the fear and pressure placed on children. Others felt that rules were unclear and inconsistently applied across schools, which created confusion and distress. The lack of reliable internet in rural areas was also highlighted as a major barrier to learning. Also, one parent reported serious social impacts during the pandemic, including instances where that parent believed student suicides were linked to the stress and uncertainty surrounding exams and prolonged isolation.

Parents also reflected on the emotional toll of mask-wearing and school closures. While some acknowledged that masks were necessary to protect others, many described them as isolating and harmful to children's wellbeing. Starting secondary school during the pandemic was seen as particularly difficult, with calls for additional supports such as counselling, small group classes, and confidence-building workshops.

Several parents said their children struggled to make friends while wearing masks, and some even changed schools in order to reconnect with peers. Others reported that their children never saw their teachers' faces, which they felt undermined communication and learning. Strong concerns were raised about how mask exemptions were handled, with some children—despite medical documentation—being denied access to school unless they complied.

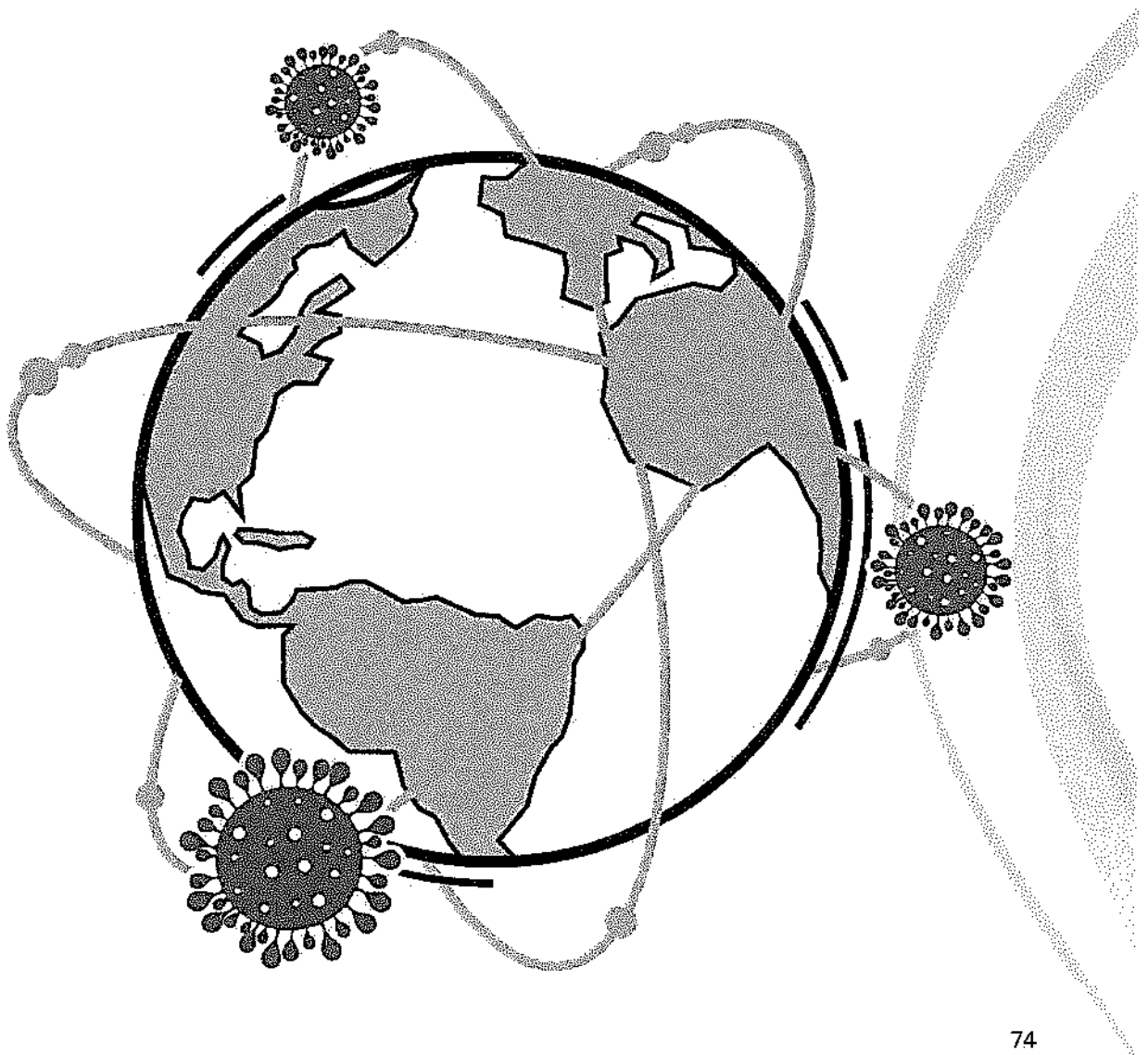
Parents also criticised the lack of consistency in school responses, with some principals saying they could not require teachers to deliver online lessons due to contractual restrictions. This led to frustration, particularly where students fell behind and the impact was reflected in their Leaving Certificate results.



Not all experiences were negative: some parents shared positive reflections on online learning, saying it reduced stress and suited their children well. However, others described serious impacts, including the development of issues and the absence of promised supports to help students catch up.

Overall, the feedback reflects a strong need for clearer policies, better support systems, and more inclusive approaches to future emergency planning.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



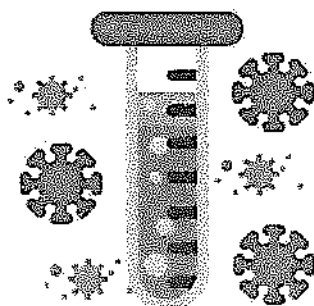
# Suggestions and Open Space for Parents' Views

Parents offered a wide range of reflections on the government's handling of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many acknowledged the unprecedented nature of the crisis and the difficulty of making decisions in real time. Some felt the government made the right choices under the circumstances, particularly in prioritising public health. A small number praised schools that adapted quickly and provided strong support, maintaining communication and structure that helped students feel secure.

However, the majority of responses conveyed concern, frustration, and disappointment. Parents described the experience as deeply stressful, particularly for families with children in key exam years. Many felt that Leaving Certificate students were not adequately supported and missed out on important milestones. In some cases, children disengaged from education altogether and never fully returned, leading to long-term impacts on academic progress, mental health, and social development. The transition into secondary school was also described as especially challenging, with some students struggling to settle and connect.

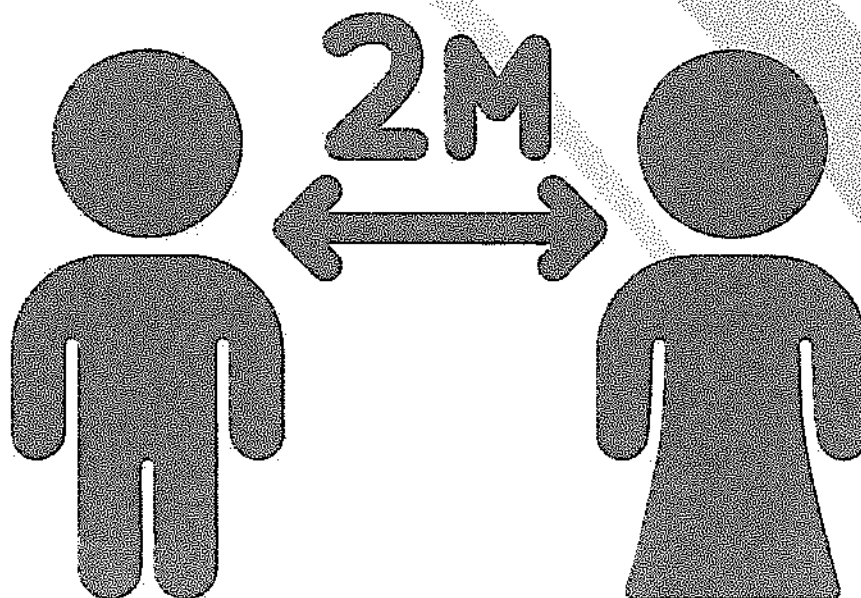
A recurring theme was the lack of consistency and planning across schools. While some schools offered structured online learning, others provided little more than worksheets or irregular contact. Parents called for a more coordinated national approach, with clear expectations, hybrid learning options, and stronger digital infrastructure. Several highlighted the need for live-streamed lessons, particularly in iPad-based schools, to support students unable to attend in person. Others emphasised that poor internet access in rural areas made remote learning nearly impossible for some families.

Parents also raised serious concerns about the emotional and social toll of restrictions. Many felt that an overemphasis on disease prevention came at the expense of children's wellbeing. They described isolation, missed opportunities in sport and social life, and a loss of confidence and connection. Some shared distressing accounts of school management enforcing distancing rules in ways they felt were excessive or harmful. Others spoke of the trauma of losing loved ones and the wider impact of grief and uncertainty on family life.



While a minority supported the government's cautious approach, most parents felt that children were not prioritised and that the long-term consequences were underestimated. Many called for more tailored support for students who fell behind, particularly those with additional needs or mental health challenges. Parents also urged the government to prioritise keeping schools open in any future crisis, supported by flexible learning models, improved communication, and stronger supports for families and frontline workers.

\*This summary captures the key themes raised by parents; please refer to the appendix for full responses.



## Section 4 Conclusion

The findings in this section show how strongly the pandemic affected children's education at post primary level. While some families managed well, many parents described long-term challenges, especially around children's mental health, loss of social connections, and keeping up with learning.

Parents also highlighted unequal access to technology and learning supports, with some children falling behind more than others. Those with special educational needs, disabilities, or neurodivergence were especially at risk, and their families reported higher levels of stress and regression. Views on measures such as masks and restrictions were mixed: some valued them for safety, while others felt they created extra barriers and anxiety for children.

Looking ahead, parents want schools and policymakers to be better prepared. They asked for clear and consistent communication, fairer support for vulnerable learners, and flexible systems such as hybrid learning that can be used when needed. Parents' experiences during COVID-19 offer important lessons to ensure that, in any future emergency, children's education, social development, and emotional health are protected.





NPC

NATIONAL PARENT COUNCIL



## SECTION 5

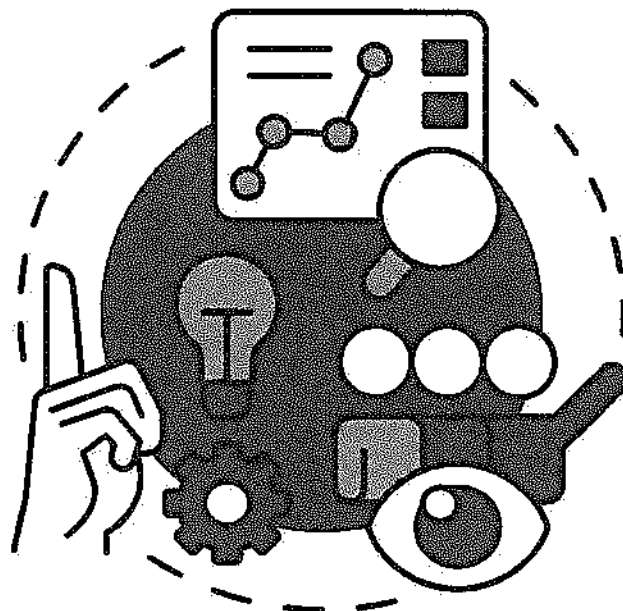
**PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON  
THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION -  
SPECIAL SCHOOL**

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes to children's education. Schools closed, learning moved online, and social rules affected families. To learn more about the longer-term effects, the National Parents Council (NPC) asked parents about their children's experiences during and after the pandemic. The goal was to understand how students were affected in their learning, friendships, and feelings, and where more support may be needed.

Parents were invited to share their point of view through a consultation that included both structured and open-ended questions. This helped us understand, what problems they faced, and how well schools supported their learning. Parents also shared views on remote learning, school communication, and what should could be done differently if something like this happens again.

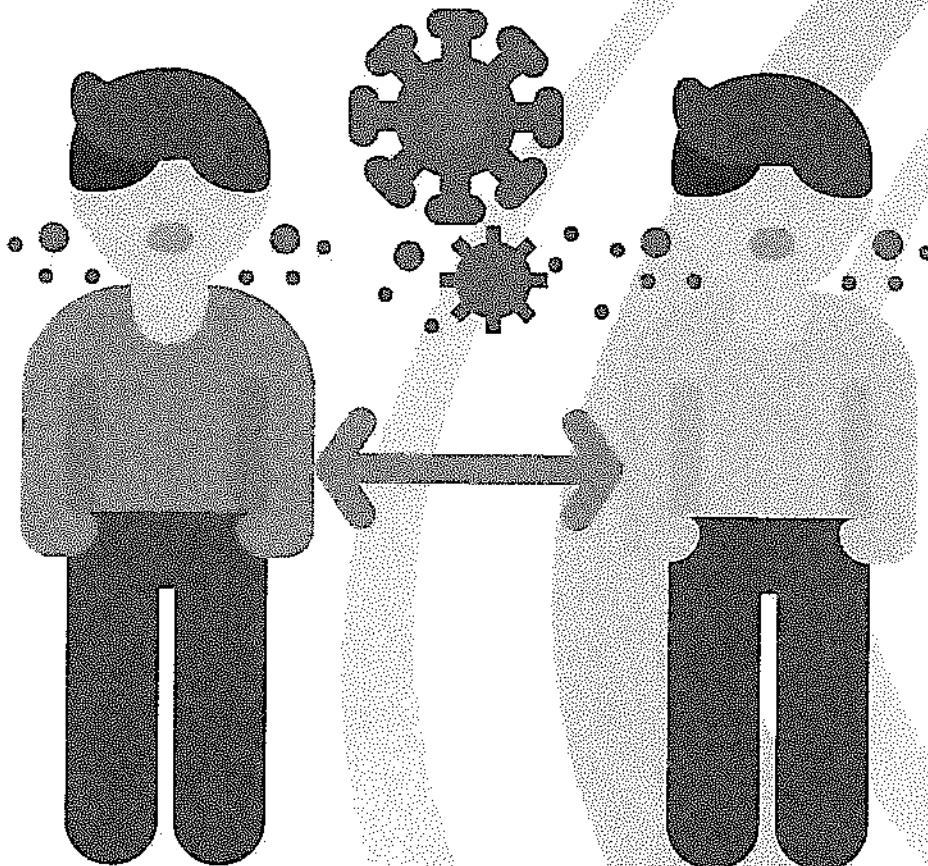
The findings presented here are based on the results of a survey conducted by the NPC during June - August 2025. The survey was sent to the NPC data base of parents of children in special schools. The survey was open from 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 till the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. During this time, a total of (13) parents completed the survey. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey will be shared in this section.



# Surveys

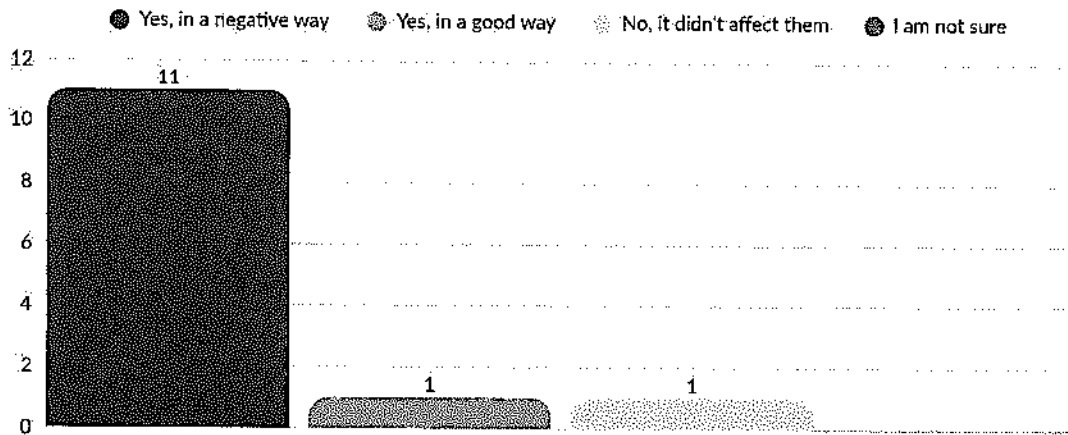
A survey titled Covid-19 was sent to parents to collect feedback. The survey asked a number of questions to find out how parents felt about their children's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and any current lasting effects.

It included a mix of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. This gave parents the opportunity to choose answers that suited their views and also share extra thoughts. Parents were also asked to think about how well schools supported their child's learning needs. The main results of the survey, including key points and parents' opinions, will be shared in this section.



# Survey Findings

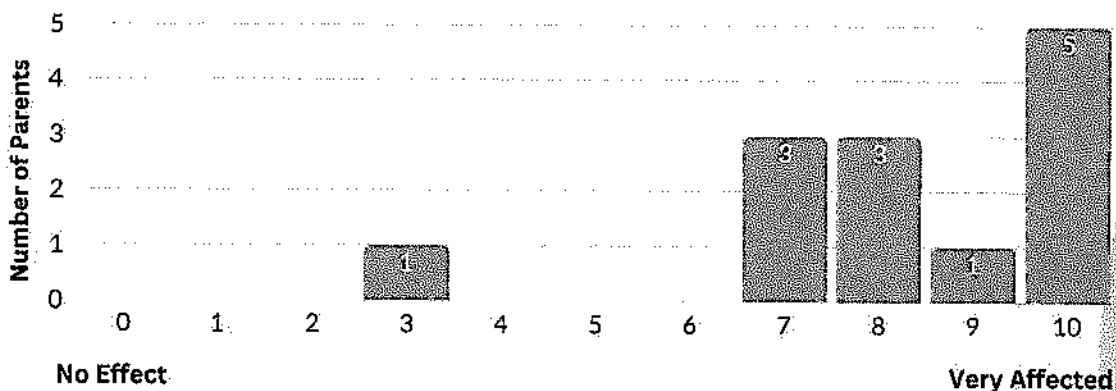
When asked whether school closures during the pandemic affected their child, the majority of parents reported a negative impact. One parents each selected a positive effect or no effect, while no parents were unsure (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1)

Did school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affect your child?

Parents were asked to rate the extent to which school closures affected their child. Most responses were between 7 and 10, indicating a strong impact. Just one parent reported a weak impact (between 0 and 3) (see Figure 2).

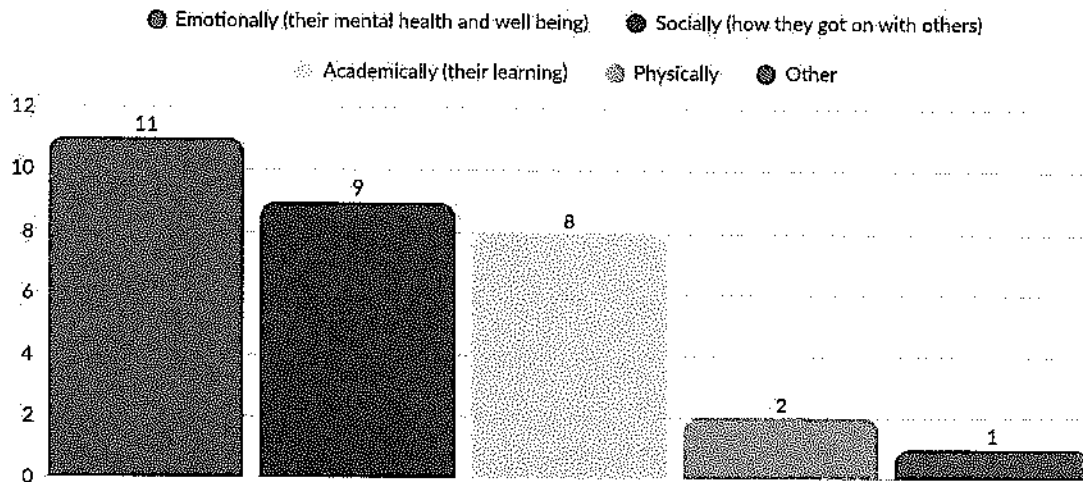


(Figure 2)

To what extent did the school closures affect your child?



When parents were asked how school closures affected their child, parents most commonly selected emotional, social, and academic impacts. Physical effects and other types of impact were mentioned less frequently (see Figure 3).

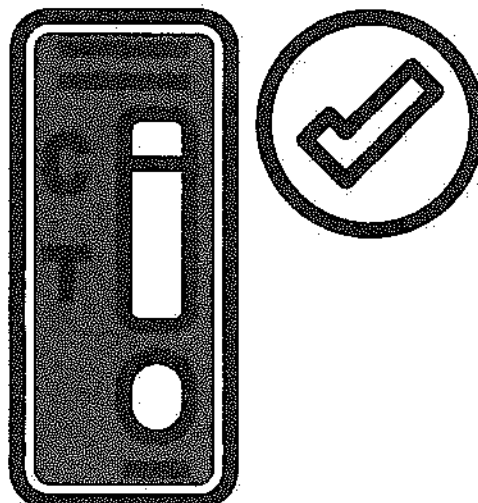


(Figure 3)

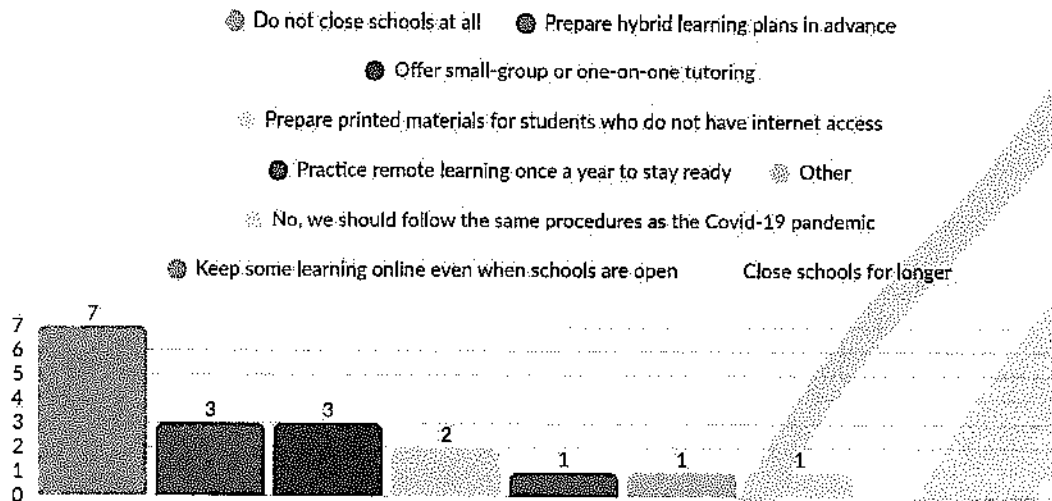
How did the school closures affect your child, did it affect them? (select as many as you need)

One parent selected that their children was impacted in a way that was other to the options given within the survey. This parent noted behavioural impacts for their child, mentioning that they saw a “regression in behaviour” in them.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



When parents were asked what should be done differently if something like COVID-19 happened again, they suggested a variety of ideas. The most common answer was that schools should stay open and not close at all. Other suggestions included having hybrid learning plans ready in advance, providing small-group or one-to-one tutoring, and preparing printed materials for students who do not have internet access. A few parents chose practising remote learning once a year, following the same procedures as during COVID-19, or another option (see Figure 4).



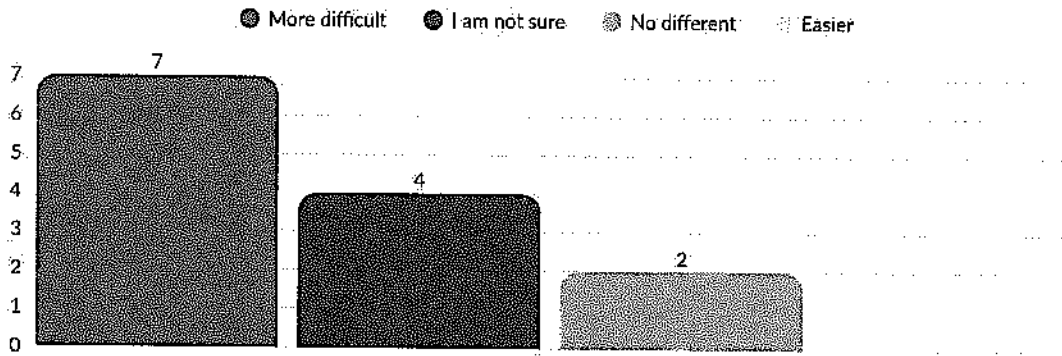
(Figure 4)

If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? (Select all that apply)

One parent mentioned that the main issue was the “stop/start” that occurred in terms of schools opening and closing over the period after the initial school closures. This parent also believed that time missed in school should have been made up for over the summer.

This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

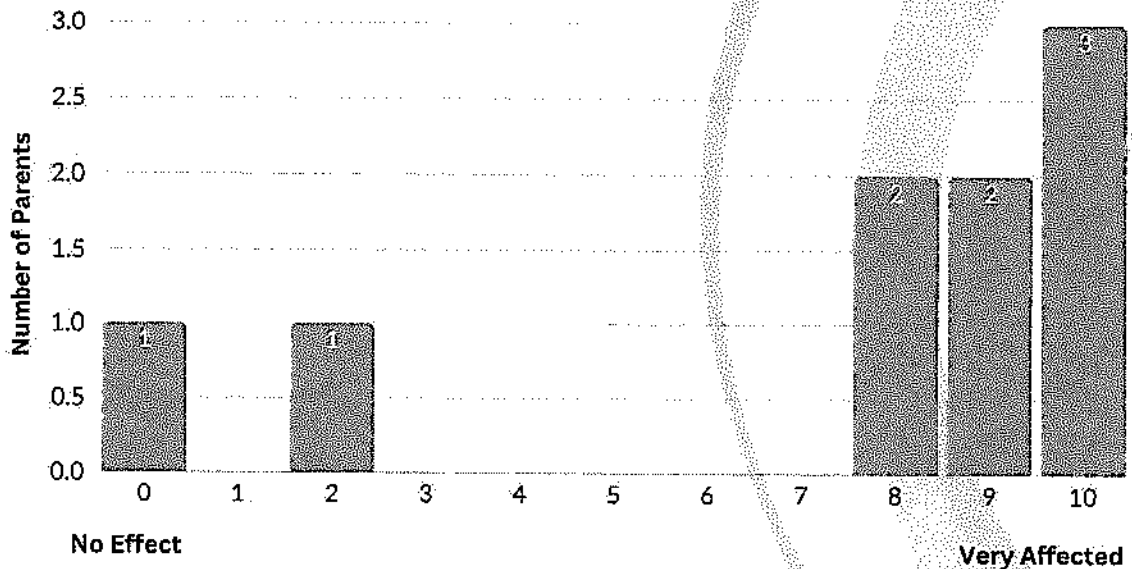
When parents were asked whether school closures made it more difficult for their child to move to the next stage in their educational journey, over half of parents said the transition was more difficult. The remaining parents said that they were unsure or that the closures made no difference - no parents felt that closures made the transition easier (see Figure 5).



(Figure 5)

A transition is when a child moves from one school setting to another. Do you think school closures made your child's transition?

Parents were asked to rate the impact of school closures on their child's transition between school settings. The majority gave a high rating (7–10), indicating a strong effect. A smaller group gave a low score (0–3) (see Figure 6).

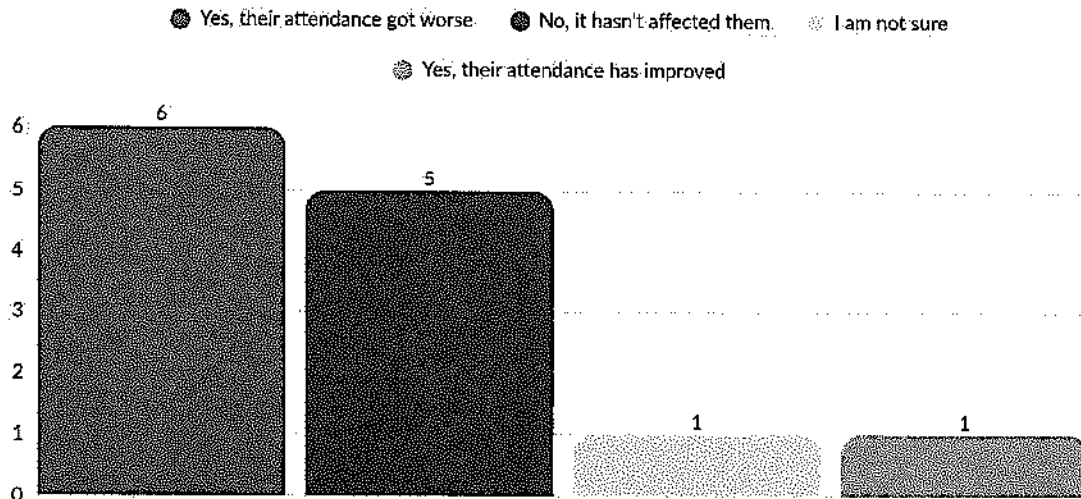


(Figure 6)

To what extent do you think school closures affected your child's transition?



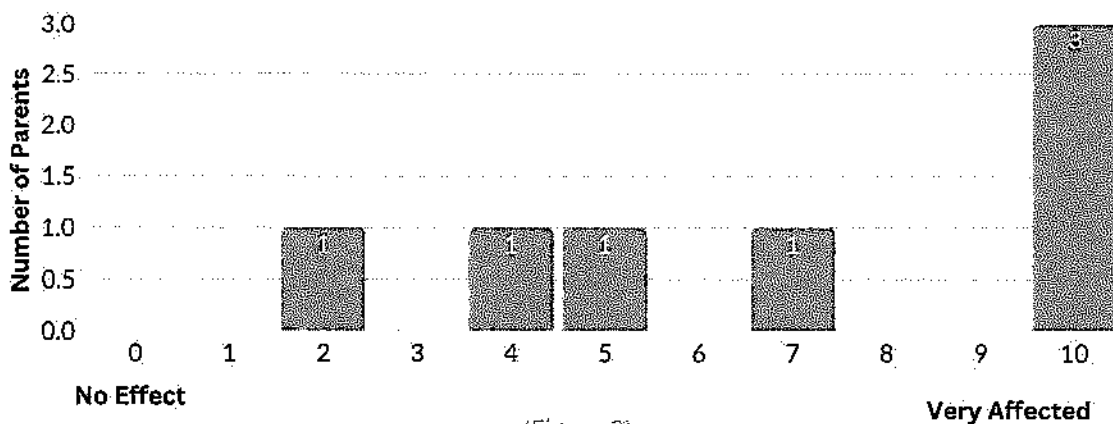
When parents were asked whether their child's current school attendance had been affected by COVID-19 closures, parents most commonly reported that it has gotten worse, closely followed by no reported change. One parent was unsure and one parents selected that their child's attendance had improved (see Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

Do you think your child's current attendance at school is affected by school closures during COVID-19?

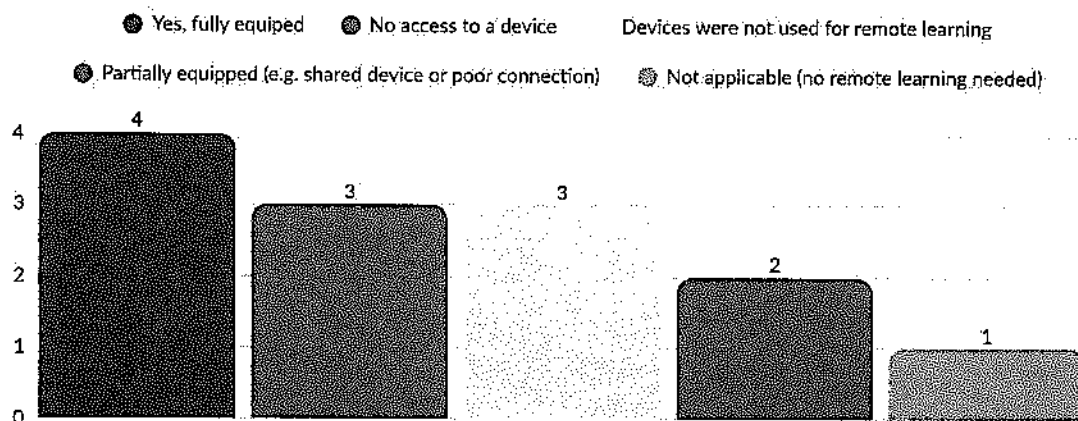
Parents were asked to rate the extent of COVID-19 school closures on their child's current attendance. The majority of parents gave upper-range ratings (7-10), indicating a high effect. A smaller number of parents gave moderate ratings (4-6), and just one parent gave a low score (0-3) (see Figure 8).



(Figure 8)

To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during Covid-19?

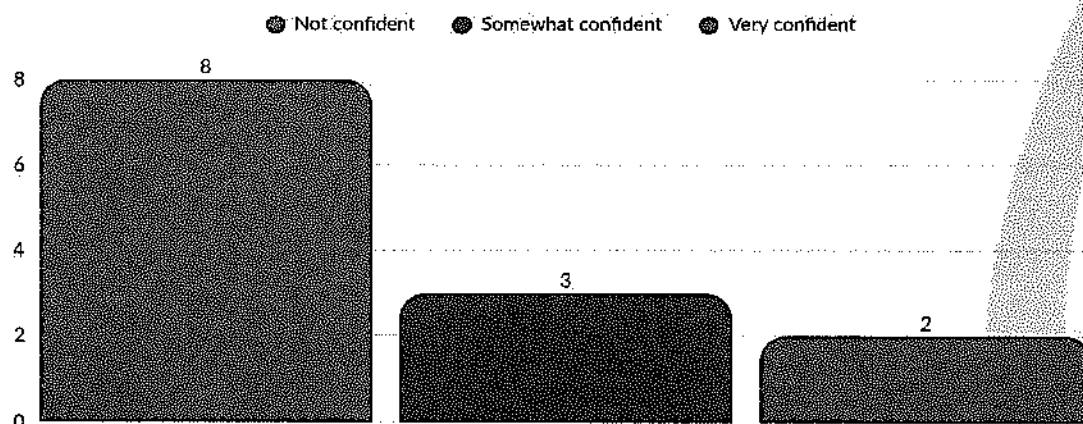
**When** parents were asked whether their child had access to a device and internet for remote learning, the most common response was that their child was fully equipped. Smaller numbers said their child had no access to a device, that devices were not used for learning, or that they were only partially equipped. One parent said remote learning was not needed (see Figure 9).



(Figure 9)

When schools were closed during COVID-19, did your child have access to a device and internet for remote learning (if applicable)?

**When** parents were asked how confident they felt supporting their child's learning at home during school closures, the majority of parents said they were not confident. A smaller number of parents reported feeling either somewhat confident or very confident (see Figure 10).

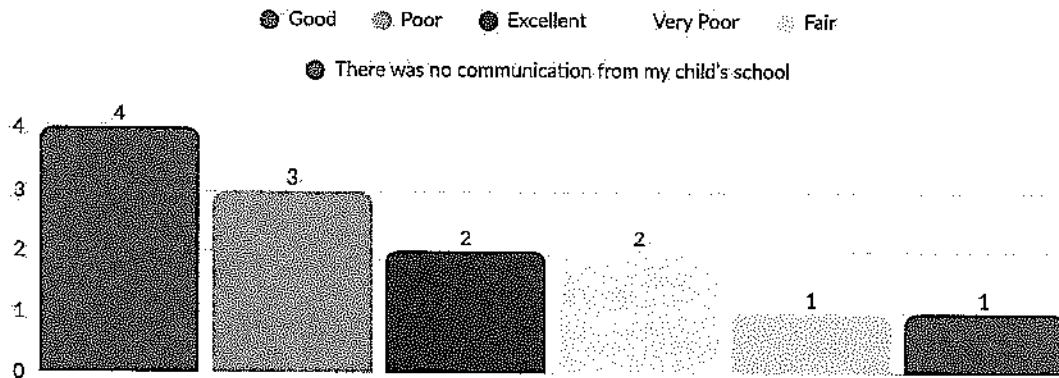


(Figure 10)

How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?



When parents were asked to rate communication from their child's school during closures, the most common response was that communication was good, followed by poor. Smaller numbers of parents rated it as excellent or very poor, and just one parent each said that communication was fair or there was no communication at all (see Figure 11).

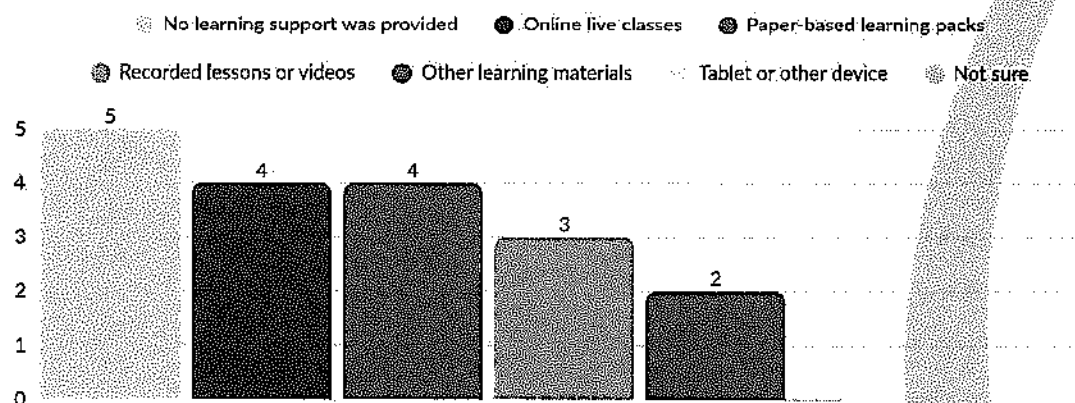


(Figure 11)

How would you rate the communication from your child's school during school closures?



When parents were asked what kind of learning materials or support their child received during school closures, the most common response was that no learning support was provided. Online live classes and paper-based learning packs were also mentioned, followed by recorded lessons. A few parents referred to other types of learning materials. No parents said their child received a tablet or device, and none were unsure about what was provided (see Figure 12).

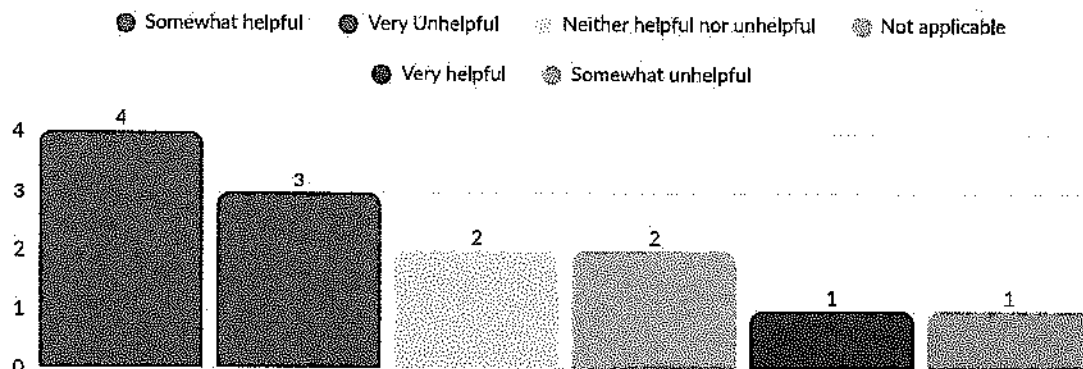


(Figure 12)

What type of learning materials or support was provided during closures? (Select all that apply)



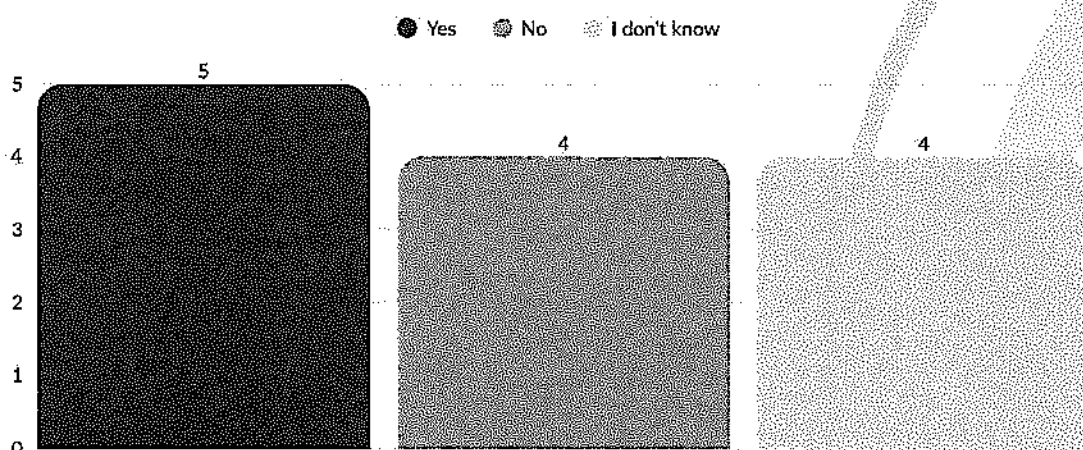
When parents were asked how helpful their child found the materials and support provided during closures, the most common response was that they were somewhat helpful. Multiple parents also felt it was neutral, very unhelpful, or not applicable. Just one parent each viewed them as very helpful and somewhat unhelpful (see Figure 13).



(Figure 13)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?

Parents were asked whether they believed the government made the right decision regarding mask use in schools during COVID-19. Responses were divided, with slightly more agreeing with the decision than disagreeing. Others were unsure (see Figure 14).



(Figure 14)

During COVID-19 there was a requirement to wear masks in schools some of the time. Do you think the government made the correct decision regarding the use of masks in schools during COVID-19?



Following parents' responses on whether the government made the right decision about mask use in schools during COVID-19, they were invited to explain their views in more detail. Several parents said there should have been different rules for children in special schools. They pointed out that masks were especially difficult for children with sensory issues or language delays. One parent suggested that only staff in special schools should have worn masks, while another felt that teachers in special schools should have received the COVID-19 vaccine earlier.

Other parents were more critical of masks. One said they were completely unnecessary and made it harder for children to learn and interact with others. In contrast, another parent strongly supported masks, especially in special schools where more vulnerable children attend.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



# Suggestions and Open Space for Parents' Views

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruption to schools everywhere. In Ireland, parents of children in special schools were strongly affected by government decisions on school closures, online learning, and educational support. Their responses show a mix of understanding and frustration, and a clear call for better planning for the future.

## **Impact of School Closures on Children in Special Schools**

Many parents were very concerned about the negative effects of school closures on their children's learning, development, and wellbeing. Children in special schools often rely on routine, structure, and face-to-face support. Losing these suddenly caused serious setbacks for some children.

Parents described a wide range of impacts, including more anxiety, behavioural problems, and emotional distress. For some children, these changes led to long-term difficulties. Others were able to recover after schools reopened, but it took a lot of effort.

Parents also felt that online learning was not suitable for children with complex needs. Many said that learning at home could not replace the structured, individual support they get in school. Some parents reported feeling isolated and unsupported during this period.

## **Mixed Views on Government Response**

Parents had different opinions about how the government handled education during the pandemic. Some understood that the situation was unprecedented and decisions were made under pressure. They felt early actions were aimed at protecting public health.

Other parents were unhappy, especially with the long periods of school closures and what they saw as a lack of careful planning. They felt that while early closures might have been needed, later closures could have been handled better, particularly for children in special schools.

## **Concerns About Fairness**

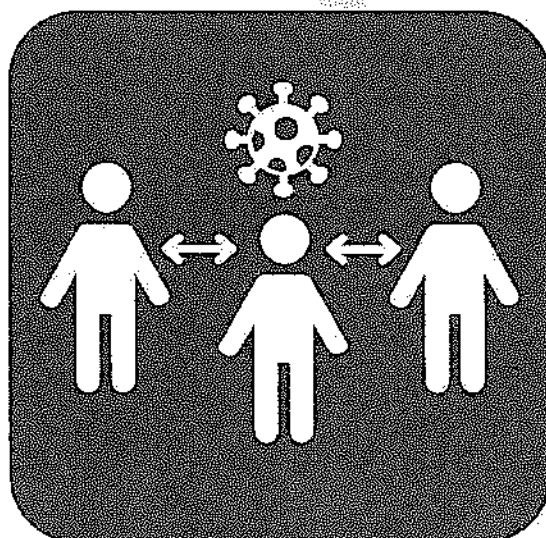
Some parents felt special schools were treated unfairly compared to mainstream schools. For example, students in mainstream schools could sometimes finish their education at 19, but students in special schools had to leave at 18. This seemed unfair, especially since children in special schools lost a lot of learning time during closures.

## Support for Children and Families

Parents also said there was not enough support for children and families during and after closures. Some felt that counselling or family support services could have helped reduce the stress and impact of isolation. The lack of these resources left families feeling overwhelmed and unsupported.

Many parents thought the government should have planned a clear way to help children catch up once schools reopened. Some felt their children were permanently behind in their learning. A few suggested that an extra year of school could have helped make up for the lost time.

This summary captures the key themes raised by parents; please refer to the appendix for full responses.



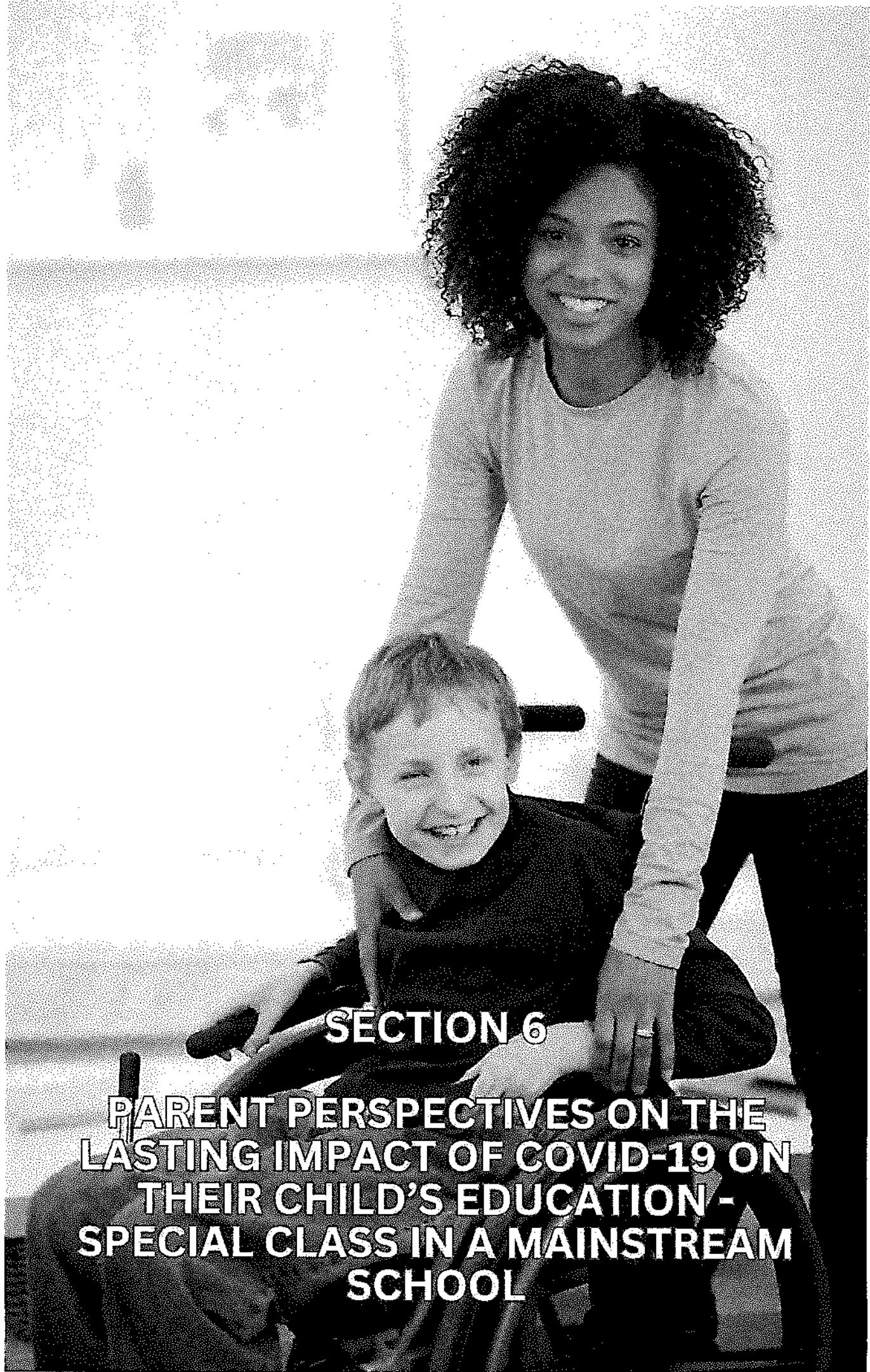
## Section 5 Conclusion

The findings in this section show how strongly the pandemic affected the education, friendships, and wellbeing of children in special schools. While some families managed well, many parents described long-term challenges, especially around children's mental health, loss of social connections, and keeping up with learning.

Parents also highlighted unequal access to technology and learning supports, with some children falling behind more than others. Those with special educational needs, disabilities, or neurodivergence were especially at risk, and their families reported higher levels of stress and regression. Views on measures such as masks and restrictions were mixed: some valued them for safety, while others felt they created extra barriers and anxiety for children.

Looking ahead, parents want schools and policymakers to be better prepared. They asked for clear and consistent communication, fairer support for vulnerable learners, and flexible systems such as hybrid learning that can be used when needed. Parents' experiences during COVID-19 offer important lessons to ensure that, in any future emergency, children's education, social development, and emotional health are protected.





**SECTION 6**

**PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON  
THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION -  
SPECIAL CLASS IN A MAINSTREAM  
SCHOOL**

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes to children's education. Schools closed, learning moved online, and social rules affected families. To learn more about the longer-term effects, the National Parents Council (NPC) asked parents about their children's experiences during and after the pandemic. The goal was to understand how students were affected in their learning, friendships, and feelings, and where more support may be needed.

Parents were invited to share their point of view through a consultation that included both structured and open-ended questions. This helped us understand what problems they faced, and how well schools supported their learning. Parents also shared views on remote learning, school communication, and what should could be done differently if something like this happens again.

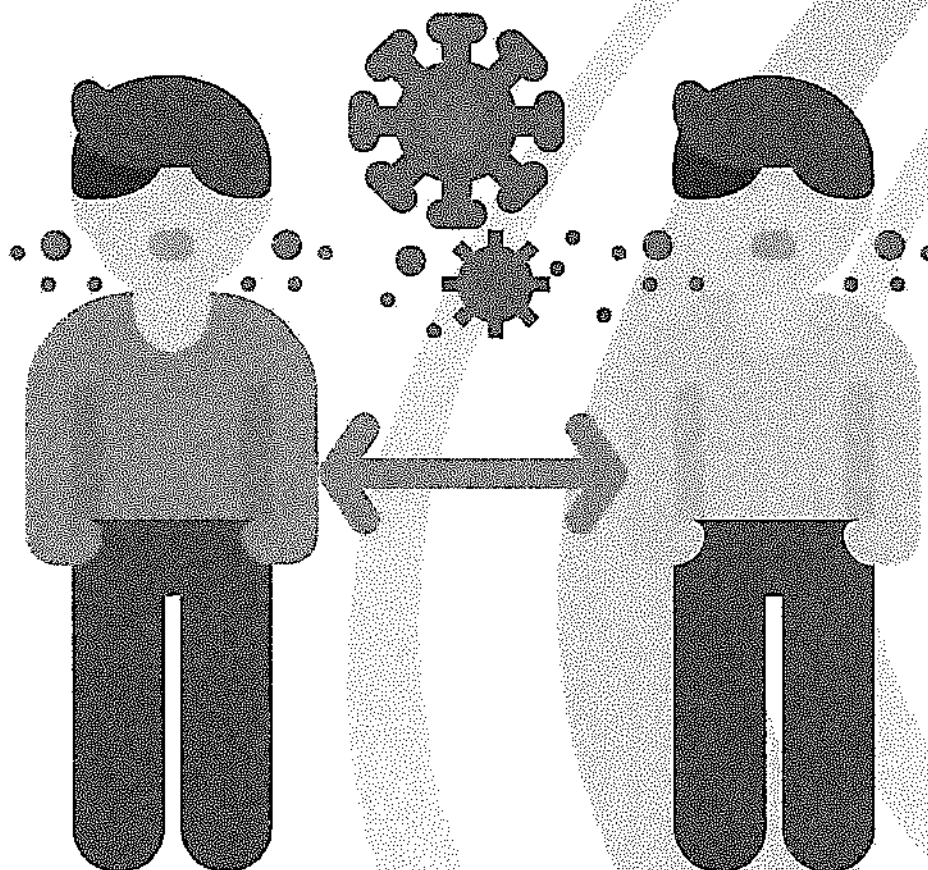
The findings presented here are based on the results of a survey conducted by the NPC during June - August 2025. The survey was sent to the NPC data base of parents of children in special classes in mainstream schools. The survey was open from 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2025 till the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. During this time, a total of (14) parents completed the survey. The opinions of all parents who took part in the survey will be shared in this section.



# Surveys

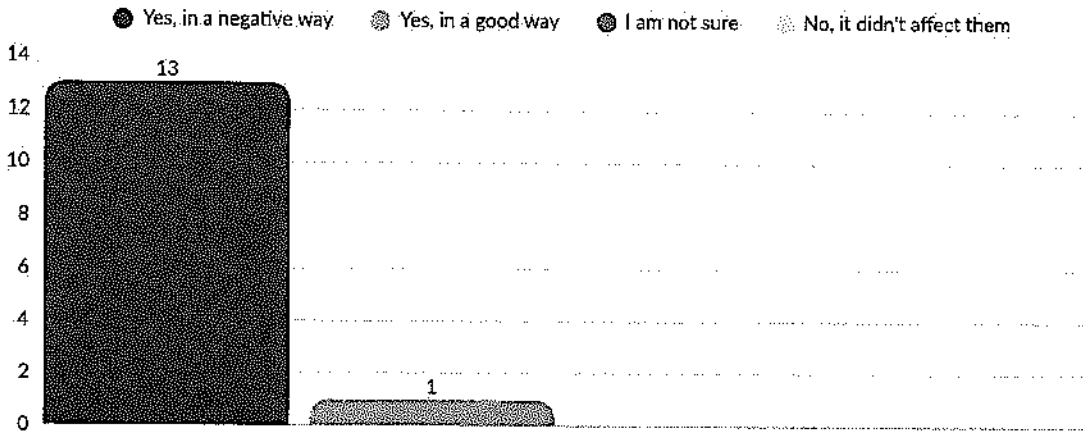
A survey titled Covid-19 was sent to parents to collect feedback. The survey asked a number of questions to find out how parents felt about their children's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic, and any current lasting effects.

It included a mix of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. This gave parents the opportunity to choose answers that suited their views and also share extra thoughts. Parents were also asked to think about how well schools supported their child's learning needs. The main results of the survey, including key points and parents' opinions, will be shared in this section.



# Survey Findings

When asked whether school closures during the pandemic affected their child, the majority of parents reported a negative impact. One parent said the closures were beneficial for their child (see Figure 1).

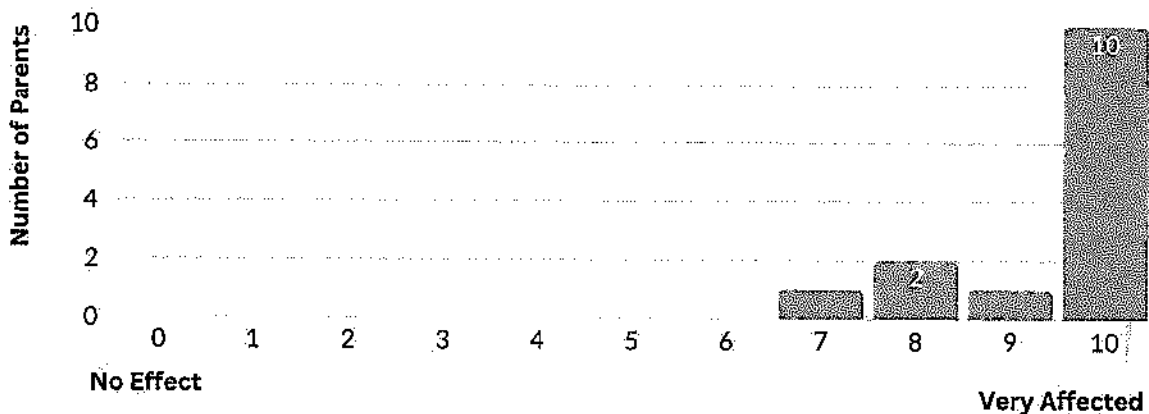


(Figure 1)

Did school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affect your child?

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Parents were asked to rate the extent to which school closures affected their child. All responses were between 7 and 10, indicating a consistently strong impact. (see Figure 2).

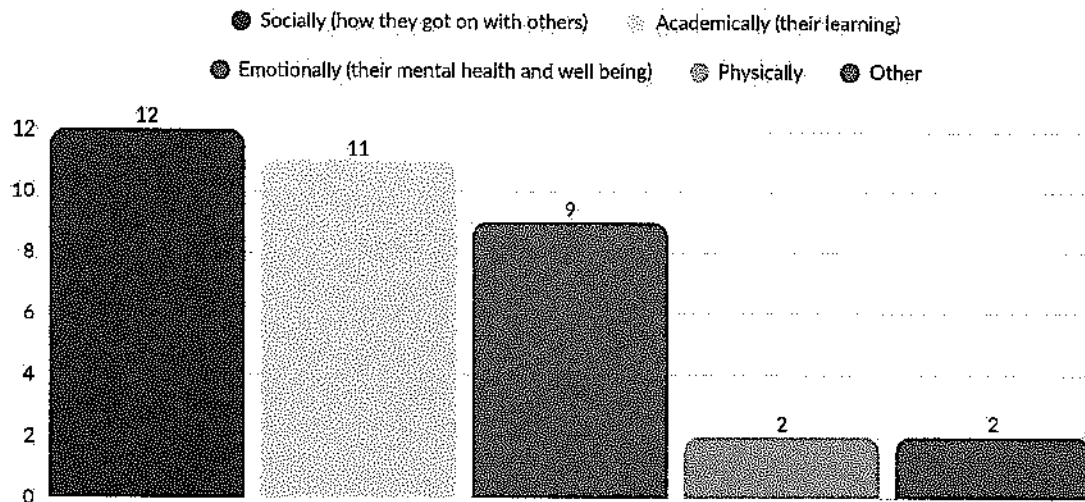


(Figure 2)

To what extent did the school closures affect your child?



When parents were asked how school closures affected their child, parents most commonly selected social, academic, and emotional impacts. Physical effects and other types of impact were mentioned less frequently (see Figure 3).



(Figure 3)

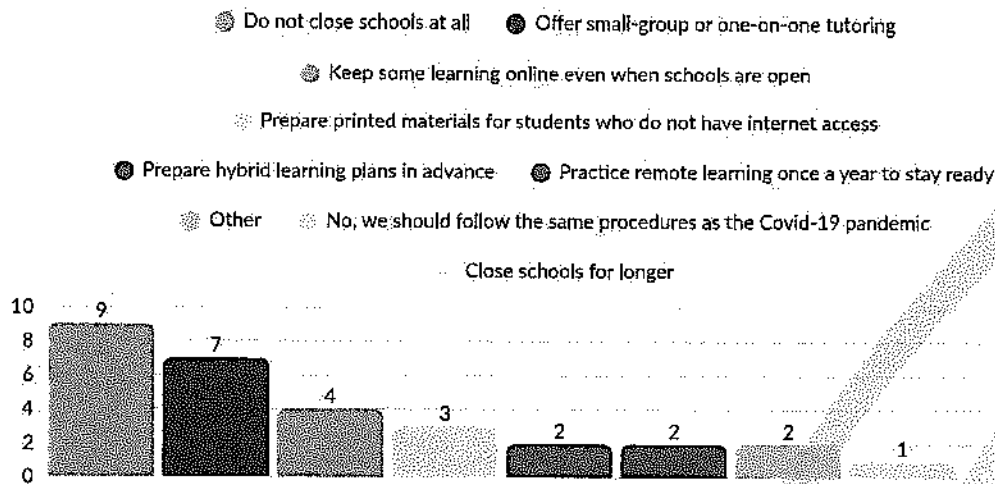
How did the school closures affect your child, did it affect them? (select as many as you need)

Some parents shared different ways that school closures affected their children. One parent said their child found it hard to cope without the usual school routine and really missed spending time with other kids. Another parent explained that the closures made their child's OCD behaviours worse.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



When parents were asked what should be done differently if a similar event happened again, the most popular suggestions were to avoid closing schools and to offer small-group or one-to-one tutoring. Some parents also recommended keeping some learning online even when schools are open, providing printed materials for students without internet access, and preparing hybrid learning plans in advance. A few suggested practising remote learning once a year or had other ideas. Only one parent felt the same approach used during the Covid-19 pandemic should be followed, and no one supported longer school closures (see Figure 4).



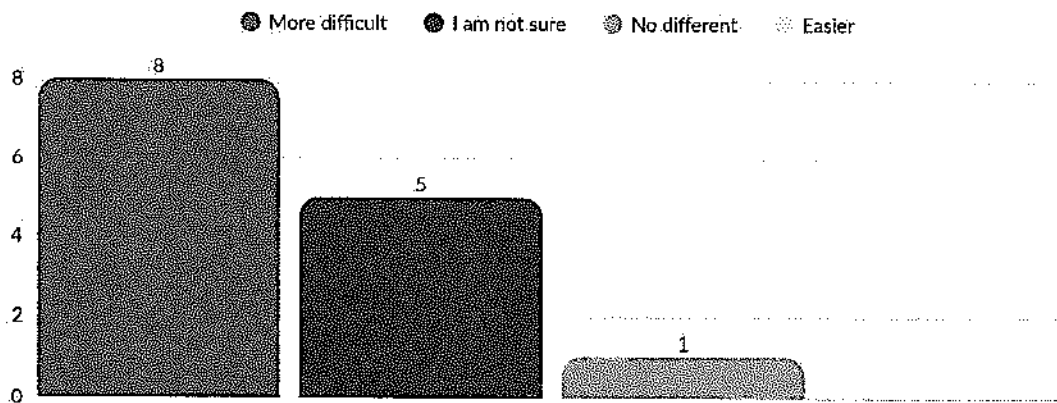
(Figure 4)

If there was another pandemic or similar event, should we do differently with regard to education? (Select all that apply)

Parents of children in special classes said that more tailored supports would be helpful. One parent felt strongly that schools should stay open for children with additional needs. Another suggested that special arrangements should be made for children who cannot take part in online learning.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.

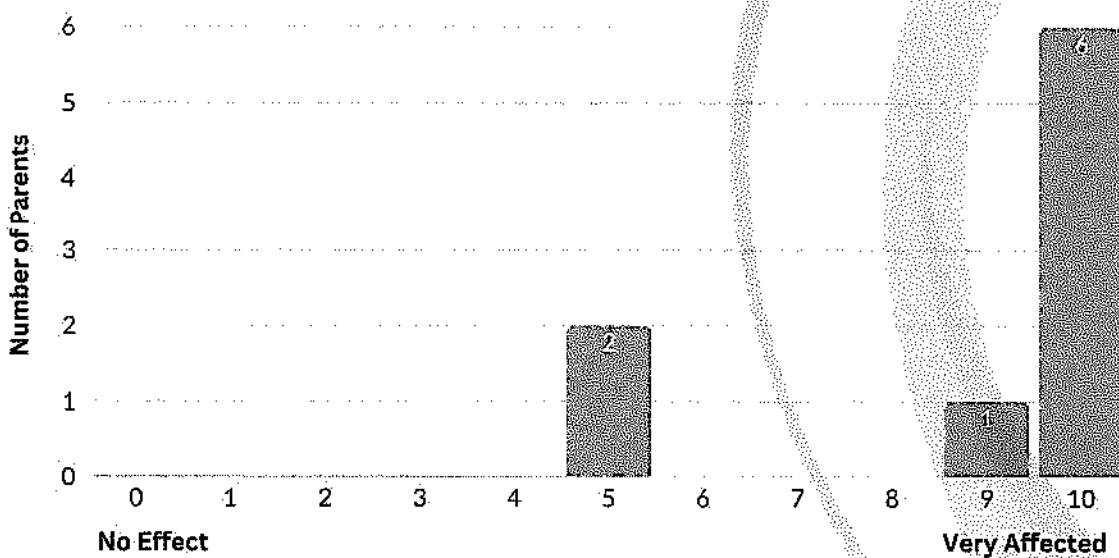
When parents were asked whether school closures made it more difficult for their child to move to the next stage in their educational journey, over half of parents said the transition was more difficult. Most of the remaining parents said that they were unsure, while just one said the closures made no difference. No parents reported that closures made the transition easier (see Figure 5).



(Figure 5)

A transition is when a child moves from one school setting to another. Do you think school closures made your child's transition?

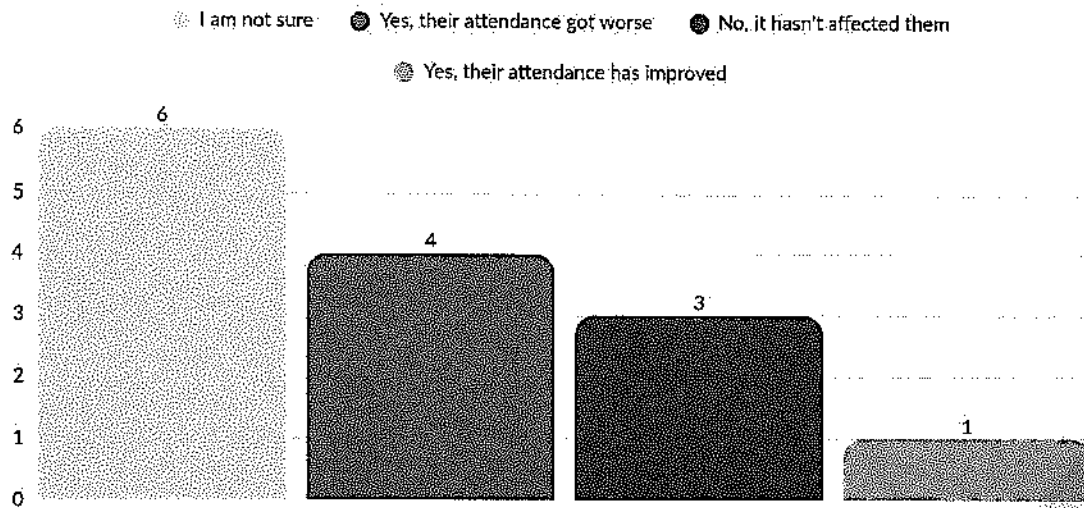
**Parents** were asked to rate the impact of school closures on their child's transition between school settings. The majority gave a high rating (7–10), indicating a strong effect. Two parents gave a moderate score (4–6), while no parents rated the effect as low (0–3) (see Figure 6).



(Figure 6)

To what extent do you think school closures affected your child's transition?

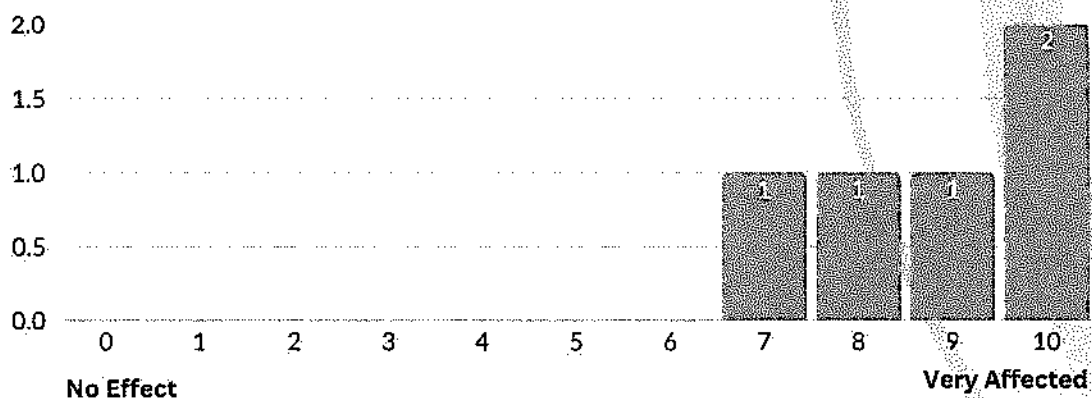
When parents were asked whether their child's current school attendance had been affected by COVID-19 closures, most parents were unsure. Some parents reported attendance being declining or unaffected, while just one parent reported seeing improvements (see Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

Do you think your child's current attendance at school is affected by school closures during COVID-19?

Parents were asked to rate the extent of COVID-19 school closures on their child's current attendance. All parents gave high-range ratings (7-10), indicating a strong effect (see Figure 8).

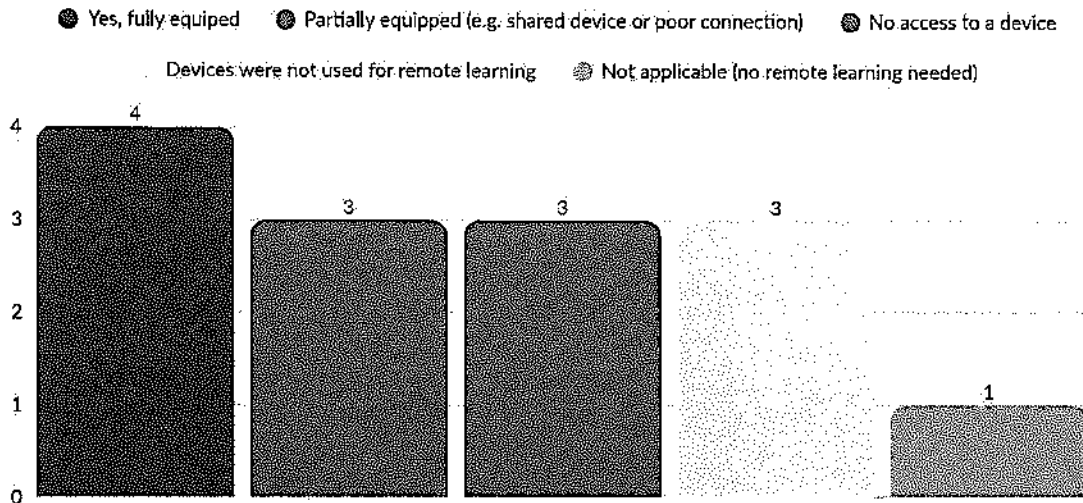


(Figure 8)

To what extent has your child's current attendance at school been affected by school closures during Covid-19?



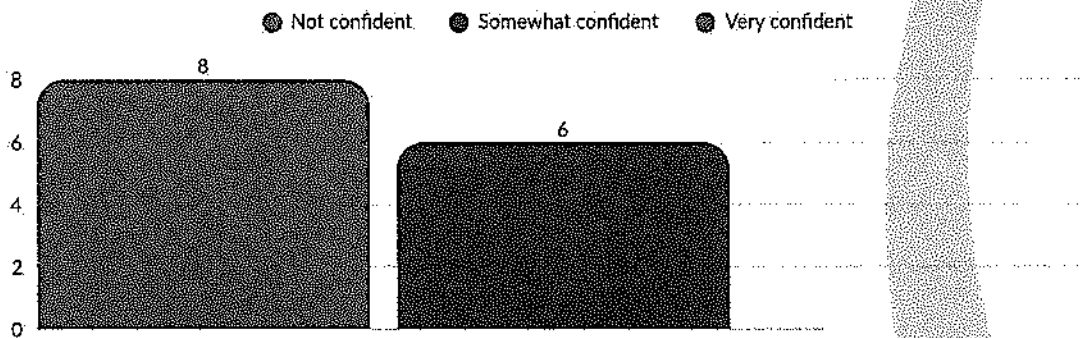
**When** parents were asked whether their child had access to a device and internet for remote learning, half said their child was either fully or partially equipped. A few parents said their child had no access to a device or that devices were not used for remote learning. One parent said remote learning was not needed (see Figure 9).



(Figure 9)

When schools were closed during COVID-19, did your child have access to a device and internet for remote learning (if applicable)?

**When** parents were asked how confident they felt supporting their child's learning at home during school closures, the majority of parents said they were not confident. The remaining parents reported feeling somewhat confident, while no parents felt very confident (see Figure 10).

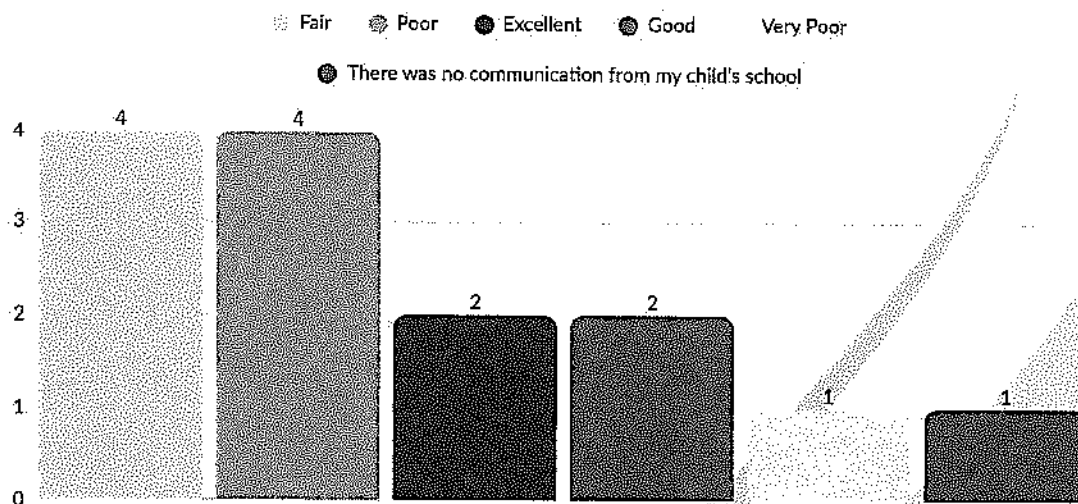


(Figure 10)

How confident did you feel supporting your child's learning at home?



**When** parents were asked to rate communication from their child's school during closures, most parents rated it as fair or poor. A smaller number of parents rated it as excellent or good, while one rated it as very poor and one reported that there was no communication from their child's school (see Figure 11).

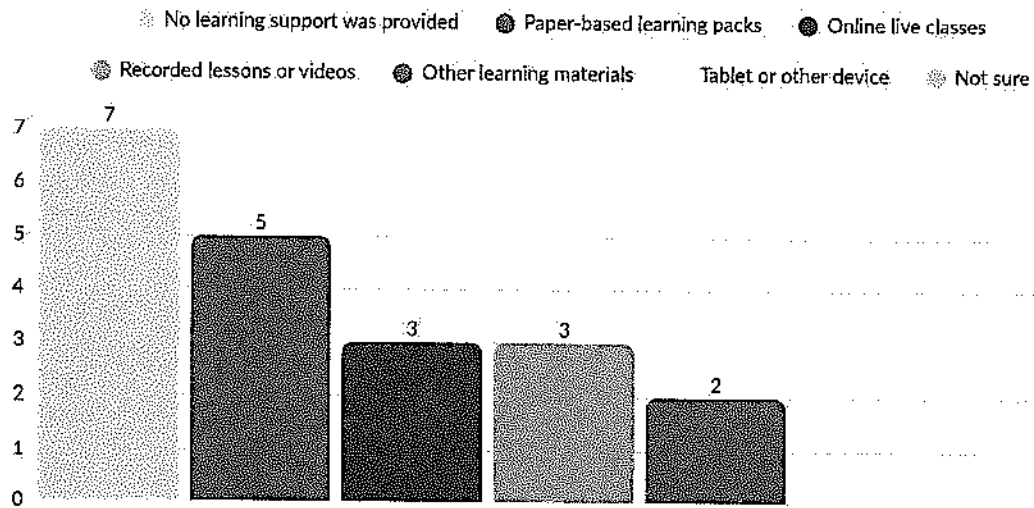


(Figure 11)

How would you rate the communication from your child's school during school closures?

**When** parents were asked what kind of learning materials or support their child received during school closures, the most common response was no learning support, followed by paper-based learning packs. Online live classes and recorded lessons were also somewhat commonly used. Few parents mentioned other types of learning materials, while no parents were unsure or reported receiving a tablet or other device (see Figure 12).

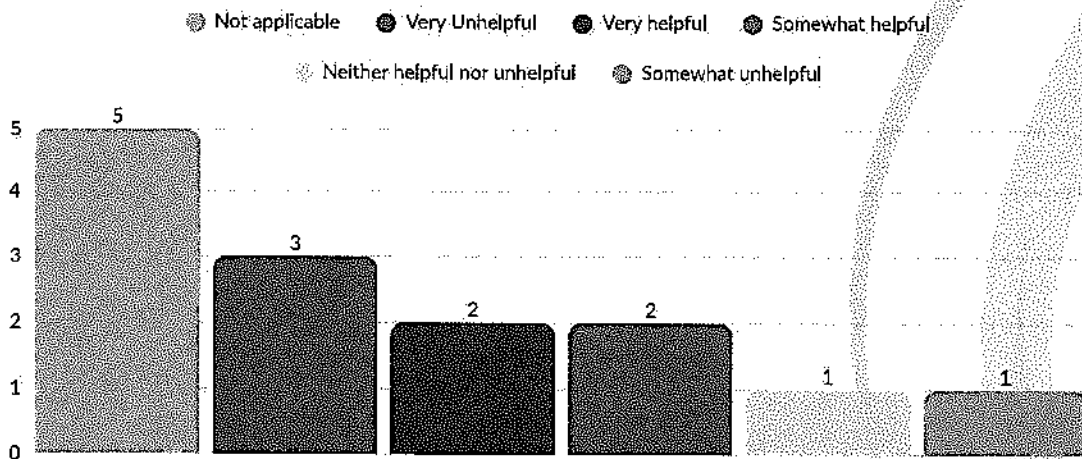




(Figure 12)

What type of learning materials or support was provided during closures? (Select all that apply)

**When** parents were asked how helpful their child found the materials and support provided during closures, the most common response was that this was not applicable to their child, this was followed by parents reporting that it was very unhelpful. Some parents felt that the materials their child received was very or somewhat helpful. Few parents described the support they received as neutral or somewhat unhelpful (see Figure 13).

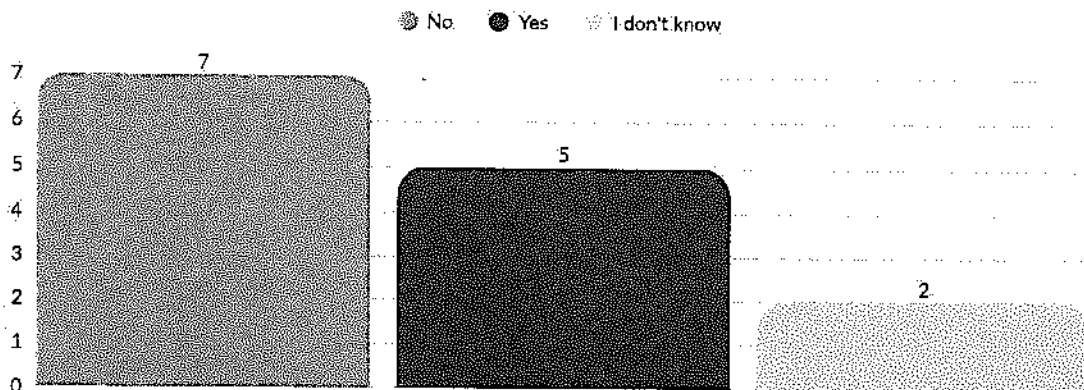


(Figure 13)

How helpful did your child find the materials and support provided?



**Parents** were asked whether they believed the government made the right decision regarding mask use in schools during COVID-19. Responses were divided, with slightly more disagreeing with the decision than agreeing. Others were unsure (see Figure 14).



(Figure 14)

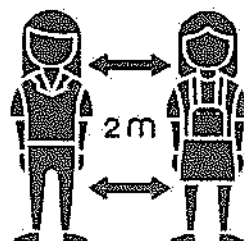
During COVID-19 there was a requirement to wear masks in schools some of the time. Do you think the government made the correct decision regarding the use of masks in schools during COVID-19?

When asked whether the government made the right decision about masks in schools, parents of children in special classes shared a range of views shaped by their children's needs, how schools responded, and the wider situation.

Many parents were critical. They felt that masks and school closures made existing challenges worse, leaving their children excluded or without proper support. Parents also felt schools were not ready to meet the needs of children in special classes during the pandemic.

Some questioned whether masks were really necessary and whether the government had properly weighed the risks and benefits for children with additional needs. They expressed frustration that the policy was too rigid and lacked flexibility for these children.

\*This is a summary of the parents' voices; please refer to the appendix for full answers.



# Suggestions and Open Space for Parents' Views

The COVID-19 pandemic caused huge disruption to schools everywhere. In Ireland, parents of children in special classes were hit especially hard by government decisions about school closures, online learning, and support. Their comments show a mix of understanding and frustration, and a strong call to make sure this does not happen again.

## **Feeling Forgotten**

Many parents said they felt abandoned or ignored during the pandemic. They believed their children were overlooked when decisions were made and left without the help they needed. Some felt their child's education was not prioritised, and that the extra needs of children in special classes were not taken into account.

While some parents recognised that schools did their best under difficult circumstances, many felt that children in special education were treated as less important during the pandemic.

## **Strong Opposition to School Closures for Special Classes**

Parents were very unhappy about the closures of special classes. Many said that closing schools caused more harm than good. They suggested that special measures should have been put in place so children could continue attending in person safely. Some parents thought smaller class sizes or better planning could have allowed schools to stay open. Parents felt that not considering these options caused preventable problems for their children.

## **Inappropriateness and Ineffectiveness of Remote Learning**

Most parents agreed that online learning did not work well for children with special needs. Many children were unable to focus or take part properly using online platforms. Parents described difficulties such as confusion with technology, lack of engagement, and emotional stress from learning at home.

Parents said remote learning was stressful and upsetting for both children and families. Some reported that their children became more frustrated, had more emotional outbursts, and lost their usual routines. Families often felt isolated and unsupported.



## **Long-Term Emotional, Social, and Family Effects**

Many parents said that school closures caused long-lasting emotional and social problems. Some reported that even five years later, their families were still feeling the effects. Children lost connections with friends and now struggle to make new social relationships.

The stress affected the whole family. Parents described lasting effects on their own mental health and on family relationships. Many families said they are still trying to rebuild routines and recover from the emotional impact of closures. This shows that the effects of school closures went far beyond education, leaving lasting scars.

## **Loss of Support Services**

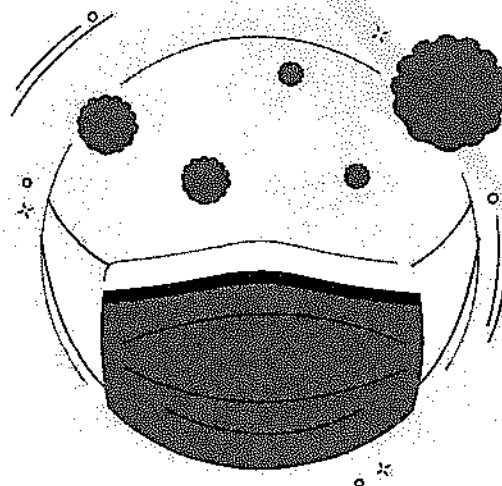
Parents also mentioned losing key support services during the pandemic, such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, and counselling. Children who relied on these services fell behind, both academically and developmentally.

Some parents suggested that these services could have been provided online in some way. Without this support, children not only missed school learning but also lost important help for their overall development.

## **Concerns About Government Decisions**

Some parents questioned the government's rules during COVID-19. They felt the restrictions were too harsh or unnecessary. Many thought that decisions were made too quickly and without enough consideration for children in special education.

\*This summary captures the key themes raised by parents; please refer to the appendix for full responses.



## Section 6 Conclusion

The findings in this section show how strongly the pandemic affected children in special classes. While the challenges of this period were widely felt, many parents of children in special classes appeared to have a heightened sense of being overlooked in government decisions surrounding school closures, remote learning, and access to support.

Parents highlighted particular frustration with the closure of special classes and the shift to online learning, which most parents said did not work for their child. Parents described the experience as isolating and distressing, and their children as struggling both emotionally and academically. The loss of support services, such as therapy and counselling, was described as causing further setbacks.

Looking ahead, parents want schools and policymakers to be better prepared. They asked for clear and consistent communication, fairer support for vulnerable learners, and flexible systems such as hybrid learning that can be used when needed. Parents' experiences during COVID-19 offer important lessons to ensure that, in any future emergency, children's education, social development, and emotional health are protected.



# Report Conclusion

The findings in this report show how strongly the pandemic affected children's education, friendships, and wellbeing. While some families managed well, many parents described long-term challenges, especially around children's mental health, loss of social connections, and keeping up with learning.

Parents also highlighted unequal access to technology and learning supports, with some children falling behind more than others. Those with special educational needs, disabilities, or neurodivergence were especially at risk, and their families reported higher levels of stress and regression. Views on measures such as masks and restrictions were mixed: some valued them for safety, while others felt they created extra barriers and anxiety for children.

Looking ahead, parents want schools and policymakers to be better prepared. They asked for clear and consistent communication, fairer support for vulnerable learners, and flexible systems such as hybrid learning that can be used when needed. Parents' experiences during COVID-19 offer important lessons to ensure that, in any future emergency, children's education, social development, and emotional health are protected.



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# Appendix

