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FOREWORD

Initiated in 2018, *Children's School Lives* is an exciting, longitudinal study following 4,000 children in 189 schools through their primary school years. Children's lived experiences and voices are at the heart of this research. The report, *Experiences of Remote Teaching and Learning in Ireland During the Covid-19 Pandemic (March – May 2020)*, is the second publication arising from the study and focuses on children's experiences and those of their teachers, principals and families, during the period of school closures earlier this year.

The emergence of COVID-19 in Ireland in Spring 2020 and the measures taken aimed at curtailing the spread of the virus have had a significant impact on many aspects of life and on society. The impact on the education system, especially through the closure of early childhood settings and schools and the more recent ongoing work to remain open and safe, has been far-reaching. As a longitudinal study based on a national, representative sample, *Children's School Lives* provides a unique opportunity to learn, first-hand, from children and the teachers and others who support their learning and development, about their experience of remote learning.

The report highlights the important role of education and primary schools in children's and families' lives. It also spotlights the centrality of relationships in primary education, those between children and their teacher, between teachers and parents, and relationships between teachers and school leaders. The rich, authentic voices throughout the report give us insights into the many challenges that emerged out of the need to reconfigure and reconceptualise teaching and learning in the context of a global pandemic. This saw primary schooling being relocated from a shared physical space, the classroom, to an online environment, necessitating enormous work, engagement and commitment by study participants—children, parents, teachers and school leaders—to enable teaching and learning to continue. The report also affords us glimpses of how this changed learning environment impacted, positively and negatively, on children, their families, teachers and school leaders.

The study raises interesting and important questions about education, curriculum and assessment. Does our curriculum do enough to support every child as a learner during their primary school years? How might assessment practices and particularly formative assessment, be developed further to provide more comprehensive evidence of children's learning across the curriculum? Is there learning for us, as a system, about how we can better support home/school partnerships? What does the study teach us about digital technologies and digital literacy? Is there a need to provide more practical supports for working with the curriculum, such as improved examples generated with schools and teachers? While some of these questions have immediate relevance and can assist us across the education system in planning for the months ahead as we continue to live in and work through the pandemic, they also have significance for curriculum and assessment

developments into the future. In this way, the report is timely, coinciding as it does, with the NCCA's consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* as part of the Council's high-level review of the primary curriculum. The report's findings, together with those that come from the study in the coming years, will feed directly into the NCCA's work on curriculum and assessment in early childhood and primary education.

The Council records its special thanks to the schools and families who, despite the challenging circumstances created by the pandemic, continued to give their time so generously to the study. This, in turn, enables us in the NCCA to continue to learn from their experiences. The NCCA also commends the UCD Research Team led by Professor Dympna Devine (Principal Investigator), Associate Professor Jennifer Symonds (Co-Principal Investigator) and Assistant Professor Seaneen Sloan (Co-Investigator) for adapting the study's design and methodology to enable the research to continue during the school closure period. Through studies such as these, and the reflection and learning they give rise to, we can realise the potential to benefit from an event that has been as challenging, daunting but also revealing as the pandemic. In addition and as our society moves forward in the hope of better days, this study will help tell the story of the generation of children who lived the COVID-19 experience.

Arlene Forster
Chief Executive, NCCA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nine weeks into the first Irish national lockdown in May 2020, the Children's School Lives (CSL) study captured the experiences of children and their principals, teachers, and parents, regarding remote teaching, leading, and learning. The research presented here is a sub-study of the lockdown period, that is nested within CSL which is a larger, seven-year national cohort study of primary schooling funded by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and carried out by the University College Dublin School of Education.

This mixed methods lockdown report presents a holistic integration of in-depth interviews and quantitative national survey data. Furthermore, it connects the experiences of children, parents, teachers, and principals who are part of the same school communities. The findings provide an important baseline of the preparedness of schools and families to teach and learn remotely, with implications for how the primary school system can coordinate and communicate their capacities and readiness for remote teaching and learning, to enhance any future moves to remote learning. The results also indicate how the move to remote learning impacted participants' engagement in teaching, leading, and learning from home, and their overall wellbeing.

Owing to the generous participation of those participants we are able to present a summary of findings below.

Background characteristics

- A total of 149 schools, 123 principals, 85 teachers, 418 parents, and 548 children participated in the national research.
- Surveys with teachers, parents and children drew on participants in Cohort B of the CSL study. Their views reflect the experiences of those working with/parenting children who were in 3rd class at the time of the lockdown.
- Surveys with principals drew on participants across Cohort A and Cohort B of the CSL study.
- Children were evenly mixed in gender and were mainly white Irish. Parents, teachers, and principals were predominantly female and white Irish.
- Just over a half of parents had a university qualification, around a quarter had a technical qualification or a diploma, and around a fifth had completed either secondary or primary school as their highest educational qualification. Around two thirds of parents had been in full or part-time employment before the lockdown, and a quarter of parents were eligible for a medical card.
- In-depth interviews in 12 CSL case study schools consisted of participants across Cohort A and Cohort B. Their views reflect the experiences of those working with/parenting children who were in 3rd class and Junior Infants at the time of the lockdown.
- A total of 61 interviews were conducted to include representation of all school and family types, with a subsample of children, their parents, grandparents, teachers and principals.

Digital technology

- Very few teachers or principals had a qualification in digital technology although many had undertaken continuous professional development education in digital technology in the past three years.
- Most parents, teachers and principals had not used a wide range of digital technologies for teaching and learning before the lockdown, including for example video conferencing and online education platforms.
- However, there was variation in digital technology experience across schools. Some schools were better prepared to teach remotely, having embedded digital technology use in their school cultures previously. Most principals felt their staff were competent in teaching remotely and had plans to develop their digital teaching further when children came back into schools.
- Most parents, children, teachers, and principals reported having enough computers to work on at home, although this was least frequently reported by parents.
- On average, children, parents, principals, and teachers were motivated to use digital technologies and enjoyed doing so, although digital technology motivation was lowest for school principals.
- Case study interviews emphasised concerns by principals and teachers over access by some families in their schools to digital technology.

Leading and teaching for remote schooling

- Schools continued to access support services and also reported learning from other schools during the lockdown.
- Teachers reported contacting parents about remote learning frequently during the day or the week.
- Most children were very positive about the quality of communication they received about remote learning. However adult participants (parents, teachers, and principals) were much less positive. Only around a third of parents and teachers, and a quarter of principals, agreed that they had enough information about remote teaching and learning, and that this information was clear.
- Just under half of principals agreed that they could seek advice about remote teaching and learning. Principals reported feeling overwhelmed with the advice given to them by Government stakeholders, and the stress of having to carefully manage communication with the range of stakeholders in their school communities.
- Nearly all teachers set workbook or worksheet work for children during the week, with around two thirds of teachers using an online teaching platform (e.g., Seesaw, Padlet). Just under a third of teachers used video technologies with children in their class. Teachers also described the challenges of planning lessons that would reach all children and use a range of pedagogies, in addition to concerns over GDPR.

- Teachers mainly reported teaching maths and English for the same number of hours as normal during the school day, however, they also reported teaching other subjects (including Irish) for less time than normal or not at all. Interviews confirmed an overriding concern by teachers and principals that parents would not feel pressured by the completion of remote schooling lessons.
- Most parents surveyed were satisfied with the amount of work set by teachers, but in interviews, they expressed concerns that remote learning could not replace learning at school and that their children could be falling behind.
- Most children surveyed felt that the work set was the right level of difficulty, and in interviews, children reported being happy with the pace and spread of subjects being taught.
- Nearly all children reported that their work was checked at home and that checking was predominantly done by adults in their family. There was a clear gender difference in who was helping the children with remote learning, with 95% of children reporting that their mothers helped them compared to 52% of children reporting that their fathers helped them.

Engagement in remote schooling

- Nearly all parents reported their children doing remote learning at home, however only a third helped their child with remote learning at home most days.
- The most common amount of time spent on remote learning at home, as reported by parents, was 10 – 30 minutes per day, followed by 30 minutes – 1 hour per day. Many parents felt that this was less time than the teacher expected.
- The most common barriers to remote learning, rated by parents, were children choosing not to do the work, children getting through the work faster than expected, and parents not being able to make time for children to do the work. Parents recounted experiences of working long hours themselves and struggling to get into a routine for home learning.
- Many principals reported working much longer hours than normal and described the challenges of multi tasking and managing the school in line with Government guidance.
- Teachers were more evenly split between working longer hours, shorter hours, and the same hours as normal. Teachers described connecting with their colleagues to discuss remote teaching and the challenges of remote teaching while caring for their own families at home. They also spoke about the challenges to their identities and roles as teachers given the lack of face to face connection with children.
- Around half of children did not want to do remote learning, and around a third did not like doing it, when surveyed in May. Children were mainly interested in learning PE at home, followed by English, maths and then Irish (they were asked about these four subjects only). Parents observed their children's engagement in remote learning increasing after the lockdown started, but then subsiding towards the end of the lockdown.

- Teachers spoke of their uncertainty over how parents and children were engaging with the learning material set by them but also their reluctance to follow up given concerns over pressuring them. Strategies to improve engagement were trialled, with activity-based learning deemed most effective.
- Teachers and principals expressed particular concerns over engagement of children and families in marginalised communities.
- Around half of parents did not enjoy remote learning and around half found it stressful. Parents' positive accounts of remote learning included more time to spend with children on educational and non-educational activities.
- Principals and teachers reported high levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in remote leading and teaching, indicating resilience in the challenging circumstances. However, despite their active engagement in remote teaching, some educators described remote teaching as challenging and did not always enjoy it.

Transition to remote schooling

- Around a third of principals and just under half of teachers reported having no caring responsibilities at home. Of those who had caring responsibilities, the most common responsibility was caring for a child under the age of 13-years.
- Parents and teachers recognised the challenges that parents faced trying to find the time to help their children with remote learning, when working full-time jobs and managing multiple children trying to learn at home.
- Worries about the transition to remote schooling were reported by just over half of teachers and parents, and by just under half of principals. Children mainly reported not being worried about the transition to remote schooling. Principals described constant stressors and the demands of motivating teachers and families.
- Children, parents, teachers, and principals had mixed feelings about how well they had adapted to remote schooling now that it had been occurring for nine weeks. Notably, teachers and principals felt more settled than either children or their parents. However, participants still had worries about remote schooling after the transition, with teachers and parents having the highest total proportion of worries, followed by school principals then by children.
- Most children and parents were very enthusiastic about schools re-opening. Children emphasised reconnecting with their friends and routines.
- Over half of principals did not feel prepared to re-open their school at the time of the survey, with principals describing in the interview that they needed more information and clarity over social distancing and other protective measures to be confident to re-open their schools.

Wellbeing

- Most teachers and principals felt stressed by their jobs during the lockdown, although they also felt a high degree of job satisfaction at the time of the survey.

- Principals described the stresses of constant contact with parents and teachers, and the rapid pace of adaptation.
- On average, children felt most satisfied in general with their lives during the lockdown, followed by teachers, parents, and principals. Principals had notably lower levels of life satisfaction compared to the other participant groups.
- Principals reported the value of nurturing their already positive relationships with parents and children to help with the stress of remote schooling. Similarly, parents reported the importance of family ties to help them cope with the altered home routines and demands. Parents spoke of the challenges of family life during lockdown but also the benefits of increased family time and sibling relationships. Grandparents referred to previous experiences of dealing with tuberculosis, comparing this to the current pandemic.
- The activities that children most frequently spent most time on during the day, as rated by parents, were home learning, playing games on a digital device, playing outside, watching TV, and playing with toys. Activities that were less frequent including reading for pleasure, doing arts and crafts, helping with chores, musical activity and indoor fitness.
- Principals, teachers, and parents commented on the negative impact of a lack of gardens and green spaces, and children's extended involvement in screen time.

- There were very few statistical differences in experiences of remote teaching and learning by child gender and school DEIS (low-income) status, or parent migrant status.
- Case study interviews highlighted challenges, especially, but not exclusively in DEIS schools. For communities/families in acute poverty, schools were an essential front-line service extending beyond education provision to also food and social supports.
- Principals and teachers noted the challenges of adequate support for vulnerable children including those with SEN and additional English language needs, children in direct provision and immigrant families without extended family networks.

Equality, voice, and inclusion

- Children mainly felt that their voices were heard in remote learning sometimes. Fitting with this, teachers and principals reported on average that children sometimes had a role in making decisions about remote teaching and learning.
- Just over half of children felt that they could get help if they were worried about falling behind in remote learning.
- Parents described a considerable amount of negotiation with their children about getting remote learning done, including giving children the freedom to choose when and in what order to do the schoolwork set by teachers.
- Principals and teachers expressed concerns about access to remote learning by children in their classroom/school and variation across the school was evident. Just under half reported that all/nearly all children had no difficulty. One-fifth of teachers stated that only half their class was accessing remote learning. Around a third of teachers and principals reported that around a quarter of children in their classrooms/schools were not accessing remote learning. However, many teachers and principals reported high amounts of access across classrooms and schools.
- Teachers and principals perceived that the most common barriers to parents and children accessing remote learning were a lack of digital technology in the home, followed by parent work responsibilities and a lack of parent interest and knowledge. However, parents (who in this sample were digitally literate and motivated) predominantly reported that the main barrier to their involvement in remote learning was a lack of time because of work and child-care demands.

OVERVIEW

On March 12th, 2020, primary schools in Ireland announced that children would need to stay home due to a nationwide lockdown to mitigate the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). The initial two-week lockdown extended into months, and children remained at home for the remainder of the academic school year which finished in June. This gave rise to an unprecedented extended period of remote learning, teaching, and leading in the Irish primary school system.

The Children's School Lives (CSL) national cohort study of primary schooling had begun collecting data with children on March 2nd, two weeks before the Covid-19 school closure. With the fieldwork interrupted by this, the CSL team were unable to continue collecting data in schools. During the next two months, the CSL team consulted with stakeholders in the education sector to assess whether moving to remote data generation would be feasible and ethical to ask of schools, children and their families. The decision to adapt the data generation activities to be 100% remote was taken carefully in mind of educator and stakeholder preferences.

The decision to move the study online was also informed by the significance of the potential data for informing policy and practice in Ireland and internationally. The CSL study has a unique position in Irish educational research as the only nationally representative study of primary school experiences with principal, teacher, parent, and child participants linked together by classrooms and schools. Accordingly, the results in this report provide the most interconnected and in-depth/holistic picture of the experiences of schools, children and their families during school closure in Ireland.

Participant recruitment and ethics

The invitation to participate in the school closure wave of the CSL study was emailed to principals on May 18th, 2020. Schools were assured that opting out of this particular data-gathering period would not impact on their involvement in the study in the next school year. Principals were given time to signal their preference to opt-out of further email invitations to the principal, teacher, parent, and child surveys. A total of 183 schools were contacted. Of these, 99 schools were in Cohort B (child participants in 3rd class: age 9/10 years), and 84 schools were in Cohort A (child participants in Junior Infants class: age 4/5 years). Four Cohort B schools opted out entirely, and a further three Cohort B schools opted out of either the principal or parent surveys.

Next, principals, teachers and parents who had consented to participate in the broader longitudinal CSL study (consent collected at Wave 1 in 2019) were emailed with invitations to participate in the online surveys. The child survey link was distributed to children by parents, who received the link either directly from the CSL team or from their child's teacher. All participants were asked for their consent/assent to participate in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The child survey was provided in English and Gaeilge, and the parent survey was provided in English.

Details about how the CSL team protect participant data can be found on the CSL website [www.cslstudy.ie], with all personal data being protected in line with the GDPR. Full ethical approval for the study was received from the UCD Human Ethics Committee.

Description of participants and schools

Schools

A total of 149 schools were represented in this special CSL sub-study, after the invitation was sent to the larger set of 183 CSL schools (81% response rate), with principal, teacher, parent, or child responses to the surveys. Of these, 33.6% had DEIS status, 83.9% had a Catholic ethos, and 86.6% were mixed gender. Typically, schools had either 51 – 100 children (20.1%) or 101 – 400 children (63.1%) on roll. The full set of school characteristics in total, and for cohorts A and B are displayed in Table 1 below. Further information on the full CSL methodology can be found at [www.cslstudy.ie]

TABLE 1 SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

		% in population	% in Sample	Total N	Total %	Cohort A N	Cohort A %	Cohort B N	Cohort B %
School type	Vertical school	91.5	92.3	136	91.3	55	93.2	81	90
	Junior school	2.9	2.8	4	2.7	4	6.8	0	0
	Senior school	5.6	5.0	9	6	0	0	9	10
DEIS status	Non-DEIS	77.5	64.8	99	66.4	41	69.5	58	64.4
	DEIS band 1	7.5	13.7	18	12.1	8	13.6	10	11.1
	DEIS band 2	3.5	9.3	14	9.4	6	10.2	8	8.9
	DEIS rural	11.5	12.1	18	12.1	4	6.8	14	15.6
Gender mix	Mixed gender	86.3	86.3	129	86.6	49	83.1	80	88.9
	Girls only	3.3	3.3	6	4	2	3.4	4	4.4
	Boys only	6.6	6.6	11	7.4	5	8.5	6	6.7
	Mixed junior standards	3.9	3.9	3	2	3	5.1	0	0
Language	Irish-medium	8.0	6.0	8	5.4	2	3.4	6	6.7
	English-medium	92.0	94.0	141	94.6	57	96.6	84	93.3
Ethos	Catholic	89.5	86.8	125	83.9	46	78	79	87.8
	Church of Ireland/Presbyterian	6.1	5.0	9	6.1	3	5.1	6	6.7
	Multi-denominational	3.7	7.7	15	10.1	10	16.9	5	5.6
Size	Up to 50 children	18.6	7.1	10	6.7	3	5.1	7	7.8
	51 - 100 children	22.4	21.4	30	20.1	10	16.9	20	22.2
	101 - 400 children	48.5	63.7	94	63.1	38	64.4	56	62.2
	401 or more children	10.5	7.7	15	10.1	8	13.6	7	7.8

Number and gender of participants

Cohort A and B schools were invited to the principal survey, with principal survey responses representing both groups of schools (A and B). Parent, child, and teacher surveys were administered in Cohort B schools only, following the original longitudinal data collection plan that was now adapted to 100% online data collection during school closure. Cohort A children, parents and teachers had already been surveyed in November/December 2019 at the start of the school year. For the case study data collection, principals, teachers, and parents were interviewed in Cohort A and B schools, and children were interviewed in Cohort B schools.

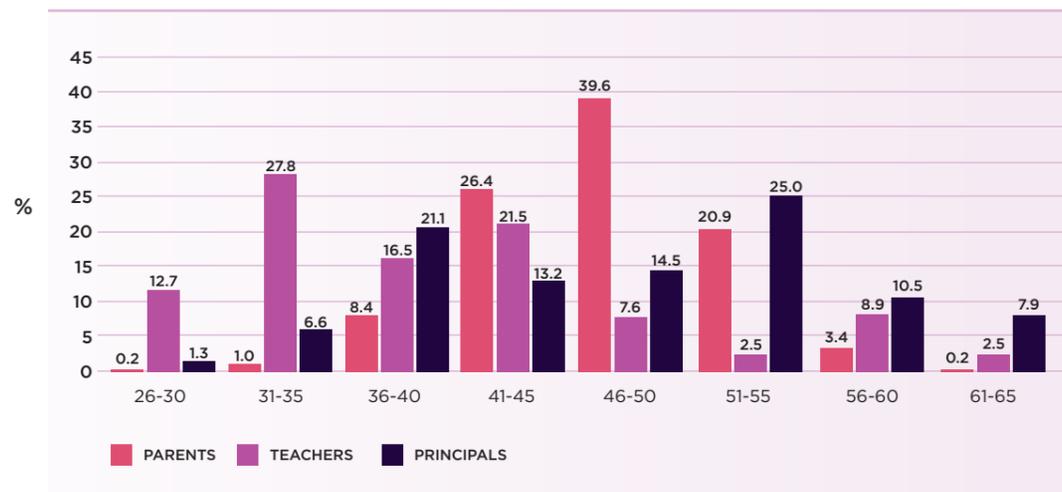
TABLE 2 PARTICIPANT NUMBER AND GENDER

PARTICIPANT GROUPS	N	% of CSL Sample	Female		Male	
			N	%	N	%
Cohort A and B principals	123	66.5	80	65.0	43	37.0
Cohort B teachers	85	62.5	68	80.0	17	20.0
Cohort B children	548	26.5	282	51.6	264	48.2
Cohort B parents	418	20.2	378	90.4	40	9.6

Age

Children's age on average was 9.1 years (SD = 0.39). The age of adult participants was measured using eight categories (see Figure 1 below). On average, parents and principals tended to be older, while teachers who responded tended to be younger. There was a wide age distribution across the parent, teacher, and principal participant groups.

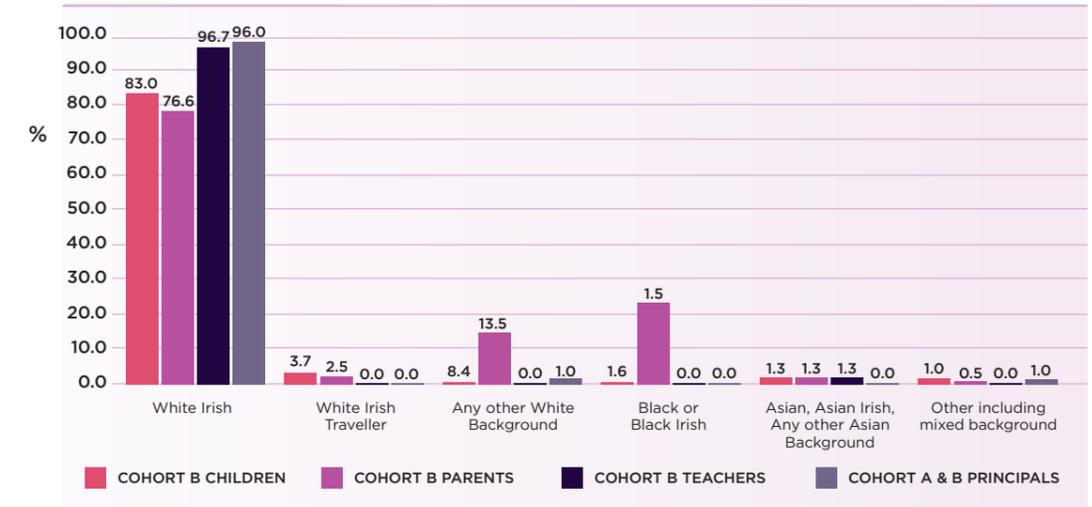
Figure 1 Parent, teacher, and principal age distribution



Ethnicity

Adult participants reported on their own ethnicity and parents reported on their children's ethnicity. The large majority of child and adult participants (were) identified as White Irish. However, a greater proportion of teachers (98.7%) and principals (98.0%) were White Irish compared to parents (79.6%) and children (83.0%). The next most prevalent ethnicity reported was 'any other White background' (predominantly Eastern European) for parents (8.4%) and children (13.5%). White Irish Travellers were represented in the sample of parents (n = 10, 2.5%) and children (n = 14, 3.7%). Black, Black Irish, Asian, Asian Irish, or any other Asian background ethnicities were reported for 11 children (2.8%), 11 parents (2.9%), 1 teacher (1.3%) and no principals.

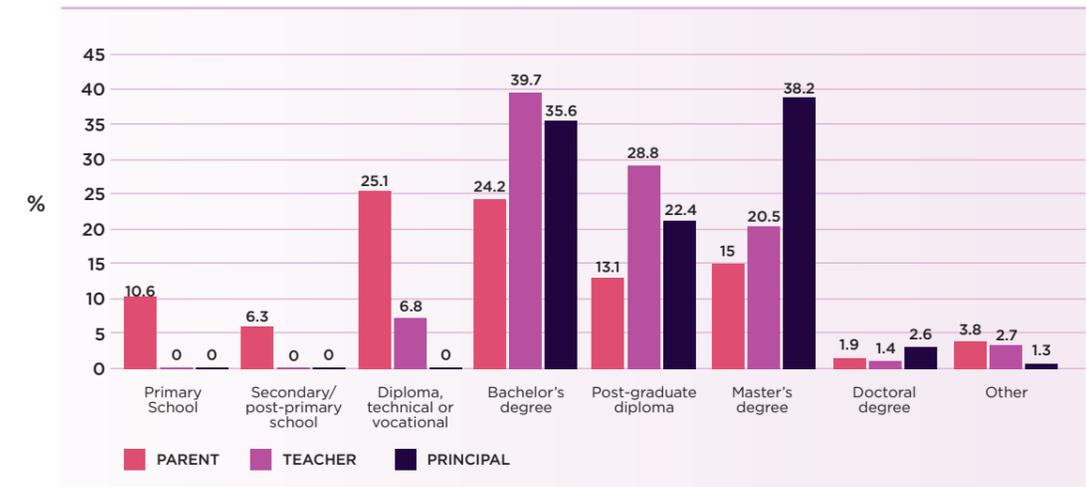
Figure 2 Participant ethnicity



Qualifications

Around half the parents responding to the survey did not have a university qualification. Of those parents, 45 (10.6%) had primary schooling as their highest qualification, 26 (6.3%) had a secondary school qualification, and 103 (25.1%) had a technical or vocational qualification. The remaining 225 parents (54.2%) had a university qualification.

Figure 3 Parent, teacher, and principal highest qualification



Parent employment and economic status

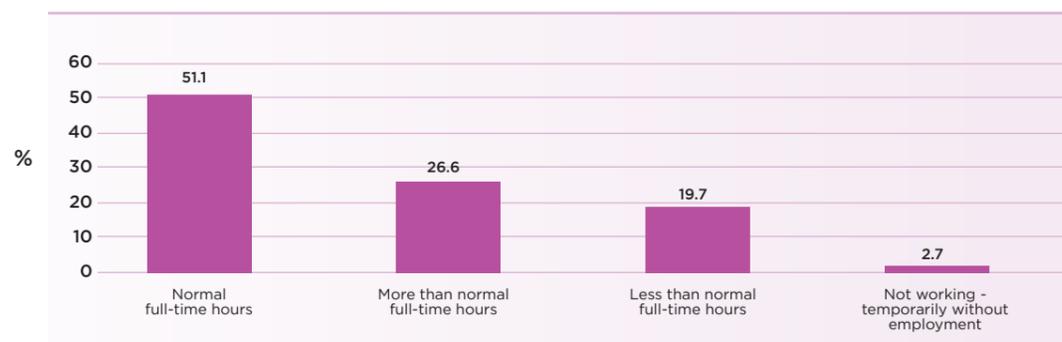
Before the pandemic, just under half of parents (44.8%) had been full-time self-employed or employed, followed by many parents (30.7%) who were part-time self-employed or employed. Around a fifth of parents (16.8%) had been looking after the home or family. There were very small numbers of parents with other self-identified employment statuses (7.6%), as displayed in Table 3. Around a quarter of parents (24%) had a medical card.

TABLE 3 PARENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS BEFORE COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURE

	N	%
Full time employed or self-employed (30+ hours per week)	187	44.8
Part time employed or self-employed (<30 hours per week)	128	30.7
Looking after the home or family	70	16.8
Student	7	1.7
Unemployed	5	1.2
On a state training scheme	1	0.2
Unable to work due to sickness or disability	8	1.9
Other	11	2.6
Total	428	100

Of those parents who reported working full time, around 51% were working their normal hours during school closure. However, 26.6% were working more hours than normal, 19.7% were working less hours than normal, and 2.7% reported being temporarily unemployed.

Figure 4 Parent working hours during Covid-19 school closure



As we will see later, the pressure of working full time created challenges for parents with respect to school closure. Case study interviews include those who were front line workers (or had partners who were front line workers). In addition, there were childcare dilemmas for parents with very young children.

Family composition

Most parents reported being married or in a civil partnership (83.4%) or living / cohabitating with their partner (7.2%). There was a small proportion of single parents (5.8%) in the sample, with fewer being divorced / separated (3.4%) or widowed (0.2%).

TABLE 4 FAMILY COMPOSITION

	N	%
Married / civil partnership	346	83.4
Living with partner / cohabiting	30	7.2
Single	24	5.8
Divorced / Separated	14	3.4
Widowed	1	0.2
Total	415	100

Case Study Schools

The study also explored in-depth the experiences of key participants of school closure during Covid-19 through the CSL Case Study Schools. These comprise 13 schools (and 15 classes), representing the full spectrum of school types in terms of size, urban/rural, DEIS status, gender and school patronage as follows:

TABLE 5 SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS OF COHORTS A AND B CASES STUDY SCHOOLS /CLASSES

Cohort A	Cohort B
All boys DEIS Catholic	All boys DEIS Catholic
All boys non DEIS Catholic	All girls non DEIS Catholic
All girls DEIS Catholic	Co-ed DEIS Catholic
All girls non DEIS Catholic	Co-ed non DEIS Catholic
Co-ed DEIS Catholic	Co-ed non DEIS Church of Ireland
Co-ed non DEIS Irish medium	Co-ed DEIS Multi-denominational
Co-ed non DEIS Multi-denominational	Co-ed non DEIS Catholic Special School
Co-ed DEIS outreach class	

Twelve of the 13 case study schools agreed to participate in this wave of data collection, including all of the schools in cohort A who had already been interviewed only three months previously as part of the overarching CSL study. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout. The total sample interviewed is provided in Table 6.

TABLE 6 SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS OF COHORTS A AND B CASES STUDY SCHOOLS /CLASSES

Principals	Teachers	Parents	Grandparents	Case study children	Total
12	14	21	7	7	61

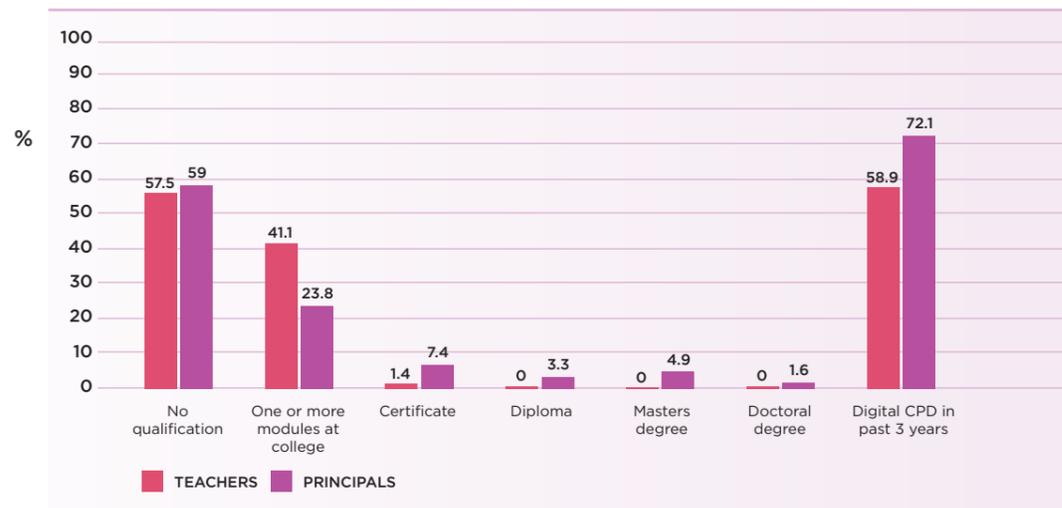
Parents, grandparents, and children interviewed drew from the case study family participants as part of the wider CSL inter-generational family study. This consists of two families from each study class (30 families in total across both cohorts). While most principals and teachers in our case study schools are represented, as with the national study data, the sample of families who participated in the sub-study was influenced by (remote) accessibility in addition to challenges resulting from the impact of Covid-19 on family life. Nonetheless, the sample has representation of all family types. Within these, remote interviewing of individual case study children proved challenging and included five children from Cohort B and two children from Cohort A. It was not possible to conduct focus group interviews with children in the case study classes.

Digital technology in homes, schools, and classrooms

Digital technology qualifications

Across principals and teachers, a large proportion reported having continued professional development education in digital technology in the past three years (principals = 72.1%, teachers = 58.9%). More teachers (41.1%) had taken a module at college on digital technology, compared to principals (23.8%). However, only one teacher (1.4%) reported a qualification in digital technology (certificate), compared to around one-fifth of principals (17.2%) who had digital technology qualifications at certificate, diploma, masters, and doctoral levels.

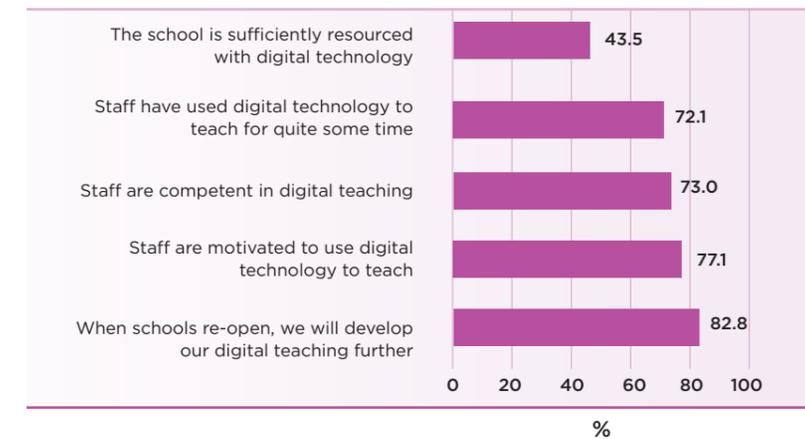
Figure 5 Digital technology qualifications and CPD



Preparedness for teaching and learning digitally

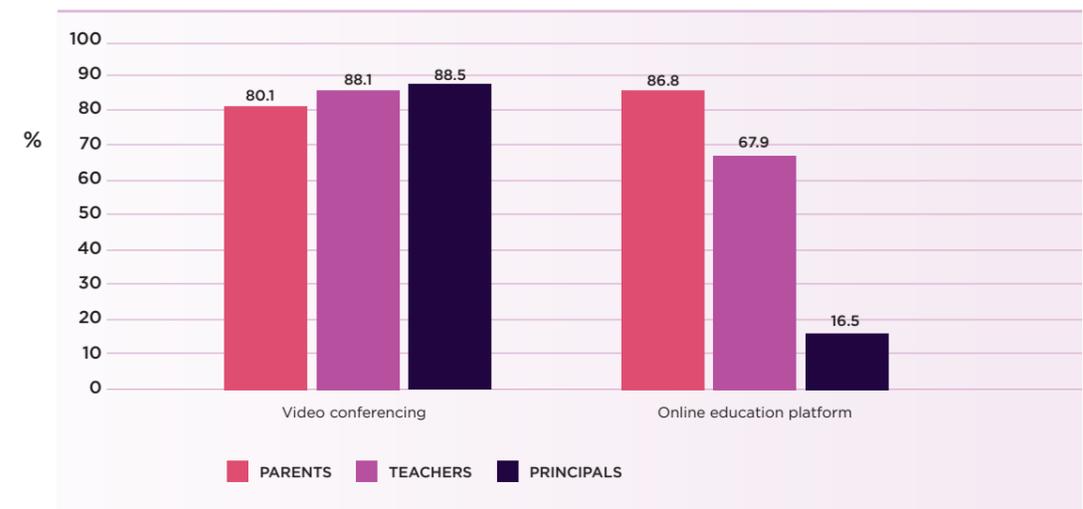
Only 43.5% of principals agreed that their school was sufficiently resourced with digital technology. However, around two-thirds reported that their staff were competent with digital technologies, had been using digital technologies for quite some time, and were motivated to use digital technology to teach. Nearly all principals (82.8%) had plans to develop their digital teaching further when schools re-opened.

Figure 6 Digital technology use in schools: per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing



Despite these reports that staff were generally prepared to use digital technology for teaching, principals and teachers reported a lack of experience of having ever used several types of digital technology useful for remote teaching and learning. This was also true of parents. Figure 7 below shows that most parents, teachers and principals had never or hardly ever used video conferencing before the school closure, and that most parents and teachers had never or hardly ever used an online educational platform (e.g., See Saw, Padlet) before school closure.

Figure 7 Use of digital technology before school closure: never or hardly ever



Case study interviews with teachers and principals highlighted a variation in prior experiences of working in this area and of the steep learning curve that was involved. Schools that had a digital strategy or structures already in place had greater resilience to cope when the school closure was announced:



I am not great with technology myself to be totally honest with you.- It was a learning curve for me definitely as well

(Teacher, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

As a school we would be quite digitally advanced in the sense that we have our iPads, we've been working on lots of iPad programmes such as Book Creator and iMovie and so on. We have a set, we have a digital strategy plan and we've been doing quite well on it.

(Principal, Rathlin, Cohort B)

The thing that I think about the whole thing was, we were given two hours' notice

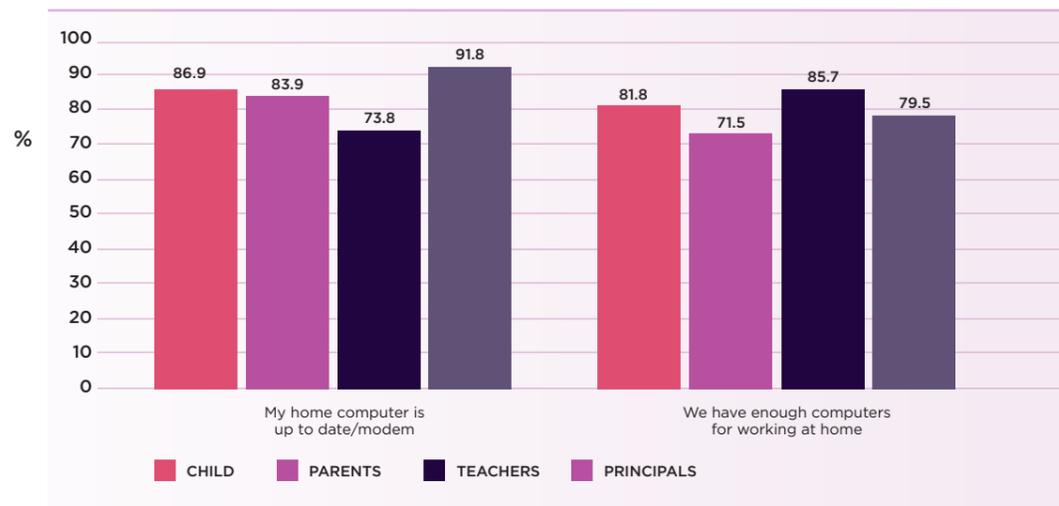
(Principal, Poolbeg, Cohort A and B)



Resources for digital teaching and learning

All participants were asked about the adequacy of computers (or tablets) in their homes for remote leading (principals), teaching (teachers), or learning (parents and children). Most participants agreed that they had enough computers for working on at home, and that these computers were up to date (children were asked if the computers 'worked well'). Just over a quarter of parents reported not having enough computers to work on.

Figure 8 Adequacy of computers at home



Children reported that they did their remote schoolwork mainly on a computer / laptop (32.2%) or on a tablet / iPad (28.8%). A smaller proportion reported doing their schoolwork on their parent's smartphone (14.9%) or on their own smartphone (3.8%).

It is important to note that these results were collected with participants who were comfortable and equipped to use digital technology to answer online surveys. The results might not be representative of the wider pool of children, parents, teachers, and principals who were recruited into the CSL nationally representative sample in 2018/19. However, this does not mean that the results represent only participants who were economically and socially advantaged. As our analysis of parental socioeconomic status, parental qualifications, and school DEIS status demonstrates, the results were reported across a range of socioeconomic conditions.

Our case study interviews highlighted some of the challenges involved, as we explore more throughout the report. Interviews highlighted concerns by principals of differences in internet access by families in their schools.



If (families) don't have internet access how can we expect them to do the work online? If they only have mobile phone data or a hotspot... an awful lot of them said that they didn't have broadband.

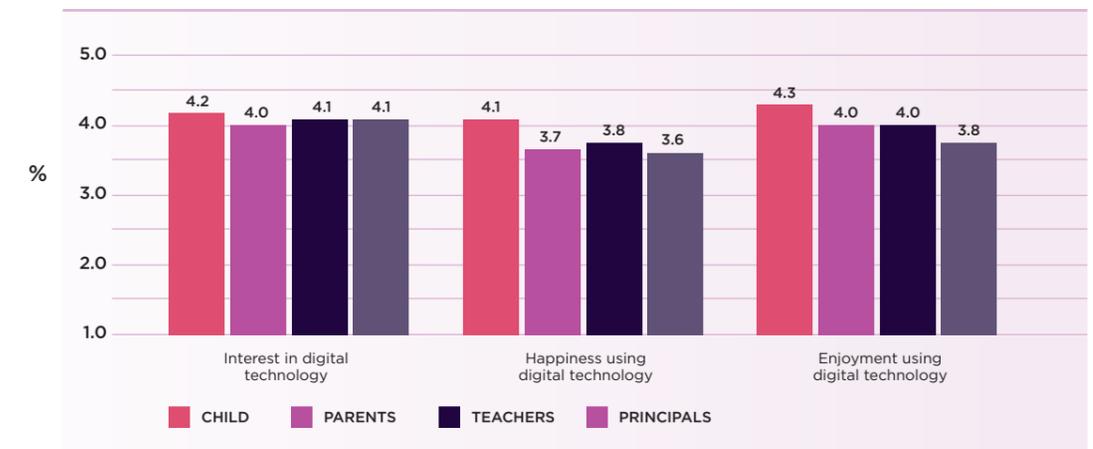
(Principal, Mizen, Cohort B)



Motivation and effort in using digital technology

All participants were asked about how often they felt interest, happiness, and enjoyment, when using digital technologies, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). On average, participants were usually interested in using digital technology. Average reports of happiness and enjoyment were lower for adults (parents, teachers, principals) compared to children, although they were still generally positive. Principals reported the lowest average happiness and enjoyment using digital technologies, compared to other participant groups.

Figure 9 Adequacy of computers at home



In the case study schools, principals and teachers spoke of the importance of maintaining contact with the children and their parents, and the creativity required in doing so using digital technology. Challenges were experienced related not only to, limitations in platforms /resources available but also the very change required in the essence of being a teacher. Colleagues were an important source of support but could also instil negative comparisons between schools:



You do have to work in your own school context and I think there's so many rumours and things going around, like 'Oh, this school got their books home. This school are doing Zoom calls.' And I always just say comparison is the thief of joy. Work with your context. Because every school is different, every family is different. And you just have to work with what you're being told to do.

(Teacher, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

I'm really not enjoying sitting behind the computer all day. It's not what we signed up for as teachers. We're not administrators, we're teachers. And the only thing, like we can't do anything unless we're sitting behind the computer at the moment. So, I'm really not enjoying that aspect of it.

(Teacher, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

Some parents are really good. They are engaging online and then when we make worksheets available and work packs available, the same parents that are engaging online are the same ones that turn up to collect the work packs. The work packs were for those who weren't engaging online or may not have a device at home or internet.

(Principal, Poolbeg, Cohort A and B)

As one of the teachers said to me in terms of staff wellbeing, she said (Principal), 'I feel I am doing a good job but it's not the job I signed up for because the perks of the job are all gone', so she said, 'for me as a teacher the main perk, the main reason I do what I do is the interaction with the children. I love being with children and that's gone, and we're trying just to reclaim it..., in fits and bursts.

(Principal, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

Children expressed few concerns or difficulties about learning online and many used it to stay in contact with friends in addition to school work:

Yeah, I play this game with them online and I'm still able to talk with them and stuff but I'm not able to see them. We don't do video calls and stuff like that because like we're able to talk to each other. So, we don't do video calls but we talk to each other.

(Case study child, Rathlin, Cohort B)



Leading and teaching for remote schooling

This section considers the challenges of leading and teaching for remote schooling and learning.

Support services

At a time of intense change, support services were vital. Interviews confirmed overall, valuable support from the IPPN (Irish Primary Principals Network), PDST (Professional Development Support Service), CPSMA (Catholic Primary School Managers Association), teachers' unions and other support networks. In addition teachers and principals commented on the importance of peer support and learning from other schools:



The PDST I find have been brilliant. They've offered a lot of online resources to teachers and staff.

(Principal, Rathlin, Cohort B)

In my own friends group, we're all in different schools, I'm lucky in that two of my friends are on Seesaw and I think one is on Google Classroom. So, I'm aware of what they're doing on it.

(Teacher, Tory, Cohort A)

And I have to say now we've got great support from the IPPN and the INTO ... The IPPN have been marvellous in saying to us look it, it's not a competition, don't feel that you have to compare with other schools. ... the most important thing is to try and reach out to families, you know.

(Principal, Fastnet, Cohort B)

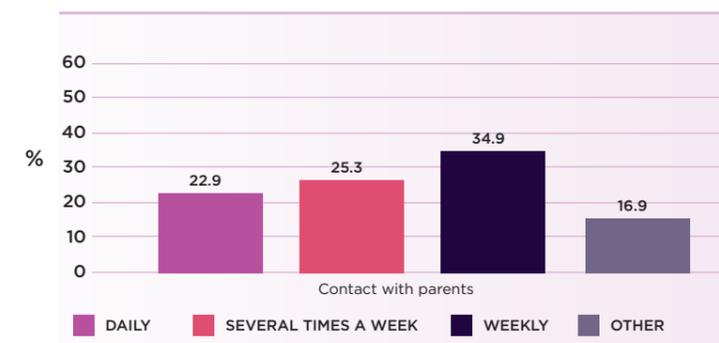


Schools also acted as a support, as a front line service for families and this is addressed in more detail in the section on equality in the report.

Communication matters

Teachers reported how frequently they contacted parents by email or phone during school closure. Teachers reported a range of other types of contact frequency – mainly regarding infrequent, 'as needed' communication with parents.

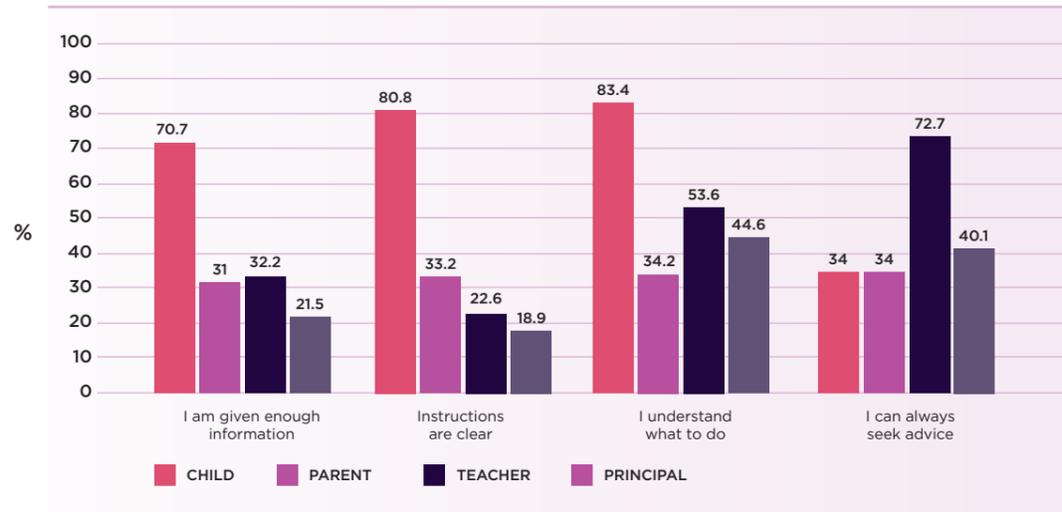
Figure 10 Teacher reported frequency of contacting parents



All participants were asked about the quality of communication about remote learning, teaching, and leading. Principals were asked how adequate communication about remote leading was from the Department of Education and other relevant authorities; teachers were asked how adequate communication about remote teaching was from principals; parents were asked how adequate communication about remote learning was from teachers; and children were asked how adequate communication about remote learning was without specifying whether teachers or parents were the people communicating with them. Children were asked three questions, whereas parents, teachers, and principals were asked four questions.

As Figure 11 below demonstrates, most children were positive about the quality of communication about remote learning, whereas far fewer adults were positive.

Figure 11 Perceived adequacy of communication about remote learning, teaching, and leading – agree or strongly agree



In particular, fewer principals had positive perceptions of the quality of communication they were receiving (about remote leading). Teachers felt most positively about being able to seek advice (72.7%). As with principals, teachers were less positive about being given enough information (32.2%), being clear about instructions (22.6%) and understanding what to do (53.6). Overall, it was parents however who seemed to be the least positive about the communication they received. While they were a little clearer than principals and teachers over instructions on what to do, they were less so about understanding what to do and seeking advice.

Case study interviews contextualise some of these findings. With respect to principals, the challenges of leadership during a time of crisis was to the fore, with a high level of leadership required to support all members of the school community. They spoke of feeling overwhelmed, never being able to do enough and a lack of clarity over appropriate protocols and practices:

“

I found it very, very difficult just kind of juggling all the balls together between looking after the staff, communicating with them; with the SNA's, the ancillary staff, the board of management, the parents and I suppose keeping everybody buoyant as much as you can. So, I realised then that I am only human and that there's only so much that you can do.

(Principal, Mizen, Cohort B)

I would feel we've had no leadership at all... The silence is deafening.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

I mean I found getting literature from the Department of Education, or from the HSE, was absolutely overwhelming, because all of those documents are about, you know, 20 pages long.

(Principal, Skellig, Cohort B)

Obviously it is a moving train and the NPHE sub-committee on education will ultimately advise and everybody else will follow but nonetheless, an absence of leadership that I think others have certainly felt very strongly about. ... But those huge levels of anxiety around what the closure has meant for schools.

(Principal, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

”

Clarity and consistency of communication within schools was a critical aspect of effective transition to remote teaching and learning. An ongoing concern was how much was enough communication and what was too much in terms of being overly intrusive or putting families under pressure, as if they were being checked upon. Teachers acknowledged that parents were acting as learning mediators and gatekeepers to the children's learning, and the limitations that could arise through lack of parental knowledge, resources or time. Teachers felt they had no way to impose any work plan, realising the situation was already quite stressful for some families. This realisation had a negative impact on several teachers, who were disheartened that the work they were doing and on-line content they were creating, was not being accessed and/or responded to by children and parents. For parents there were also challenges in adapting to this new communication framework:

“

But I literally, as long as we were all singing from the same hymn sheet ... I was so glad that the principal came around and said, 'This is exactly what you're sending home', and there was no thinking involved. It was well everybody is doing this, so.

(Teacher, Fastnet, Cohort B)

It's unrealistic to expect that untrained parents, who are running a household, minding other children, maybe working as well, should be expected to follow a curriculum that teachers are trained to do. it's just bizarre, that we feel that this is going to happen.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

It is so reassuring, and you know (teacher) is there if you need her or if you want to ask her anything if you have a problem.... She is really, really accommodating, I have to say. I couldn't praise her enough.

(Parent, Inis Cathaigh, Cohort A)

”



So, it's just when there's no teacher there to ask, and they're looking at me and I'm going, I haven't a clue, because everything has changed since I was in school.

(Parent , Poolbeg, Cohort A)

Some of the parents that came up today they were saying, 'I want this to be over, there's no routines'. I said, 'How are you finding the work?', and they said, 'It's very, very difficult'. And I said, 'You know what, no pressure, absolutely no pressure at all. If you can get it, if they can do it grand, if not it's not to be a cause of stress.

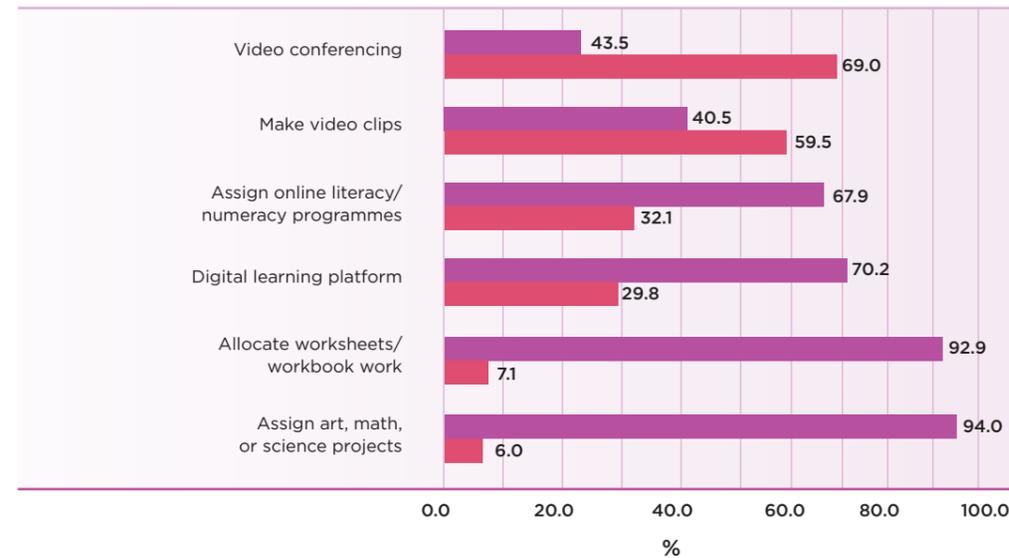
(Principal, Mizen, Cohort B)



Digital pedagogies and learning platforms

Teachers reported on the activities they did to teach their class during school closure, in the past week. In the survey of 3rd class teachers, nearly all teachers reported allocating worksheets / workbook work (92.9%) or assigning art, maths, or science projects (94%). Around two thirds (70.2%) had used a digital learning platform or assigned online literacy / numeracy programmes to the children in their classes (67.9%). Far fewer had used video technologies (video conferencing = 31.0%, video clips = 40.5%).

Figure 12 Pedagogies used with 3rd class children during school closure in the past week



In the case study interviews (across both cohorts), teachers spoke of the different technologies and platforms they used (zoom for live lessons with EAL (English as an Additional Language) children or social meetings). This required upskilling among teachers with peer-support and collaborative lesson planning a key element for those on a steep learning curve. Evident was the creation of collaborative lesson plans and sharing the work of content creation (videos, worksheets, activities, etc.) among their teams. This not only related to concerns about their own time management but also a sense of fairness so that all children in the same grade or cycle would be receiving the same content. However, teachers also recounted concerns over the use of video/zoom in terms of privacy and protection and uncertainty re appropriate protocols. In addition they spoke of the difficulty of transition to on-line communication and the intensity of planning that meant there was no boundary between 'work' and 'home':



So, I send them on videos of how to draw a flower, how to draw a crab, was this week, that was harder than usual.... So, obviously drawing, painting, colouring, all that develops all their hand muscles.... But out of everything, they nearly always sent in the art. There's always great engagement with that.

(Teacher, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

I did the plans for this week so last week it did take me the guts of kind of three days. And long days, to get it right and to find the right links.... and I'm so thankful we aren't doing it every single week, because I think you need input from other people. I feel sorry for any teacher doing it on their own.

(Teacher, Tory, Cohort A)

I think the Zoom is the most effective, we're doing it once a week. But only because the children are enjoying it. I'm not sure what else is really working, if I'm honest. I'm trying to keep all the activities really play based and fun. I actually think the parents prefer the worksheets.

(Teacher, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

From my own point of view in order to do something online like Zoom with my own class it would involve quite a lot of planning here in our house to manage my own children and you know it's a little bit invasive having people like in your house as well even though it's only through a screen so I'd be a little bit hesitant about using that.

(Teacher, Skellig, Cohort B)

We decided against zoom classes for a number of reasons. Now I know there's lots of school doing them but really it goes against all GDPR compliancy.

(Principal, Rathlin, Cohort B)

Children did not seem to have any difficulties with the use of digital platforms for remote learning, especially if they had some practice using it previously:

Our Teacher, she puts like different activities on Seesaw and then we like try to do the activity, or like take a picture of what we did for it...there's a little button saying 'activities' and I press that and then there's all the activities you can do

(Child, Rathlin, Cohort B)

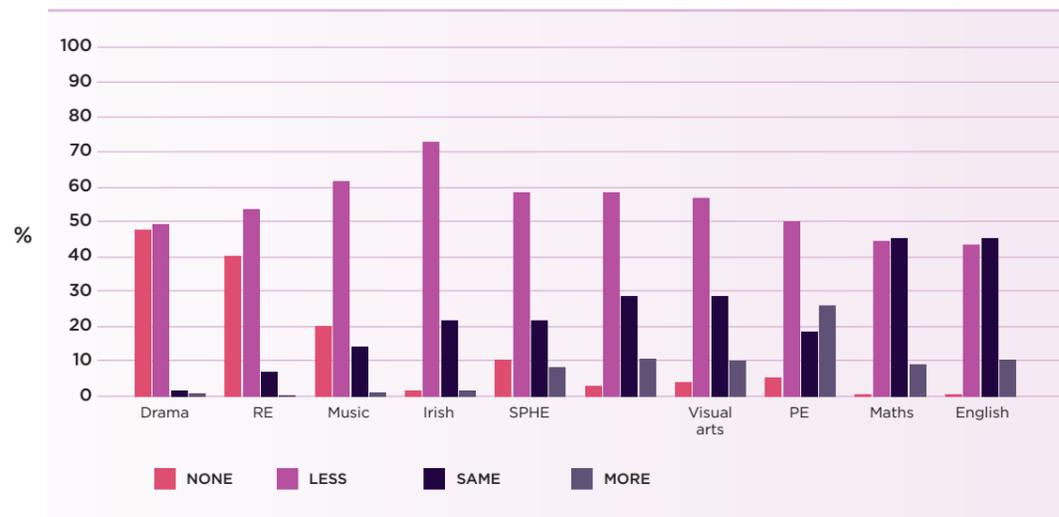


Curriculum

Teachers were asked about the number of hours they spent teaching each curriculum subject during school closure. Maths and English were typically taught for the same amount of time or more time than normal, as was physical education (PE). However, the other subjects were taught for less time than normal. Drama, RE and music were more often temporarily postponed or taught less time than normal. Although Irish was not often postponed, it was mainly taught for less time than normal, as were SPHE, SESE, and visual arts. A breakdown of results by Irish medium and English medium schools found that in Irish medium schools (N = 5), Irish was taught less often in two schools, the same amount in two schools, and more often in one school. In English medium schools, Irish was taught less often in 59 schools (74.7%), the same amount in 17 schools (21.5%), and more often in one school (1.3%).

Figure 13 shows the subjects ordered by the least amount of total time (left) to the most amount of total time (right) spent during school closure compared to normal.

Figure 13 Time spent teaching subjects in 3rd class during Covid-19 school closure



Parents were typically satisfied that the amount of work given by teachers was adequate (72.3%), with a minority of parents reporting that the work was a little less than they would like (18.6%). A very small percentage of parents reported a little more work than they would like (6.1%), or far too much work (1.1%) or far too little work (1.9%) than they would like.

In interviews, several parents appreciated having the greater involvement in their children's education due to the school closures. However many acknowledged their own limitations for teaching specific content (e.g., from phonics or letter formation to Irish and Maths). Technology provided them with greater insights into what their children were learning as it was mostly parents posting the work into the platforms (pictures or videos). However this active involvement did not necessarily translate into a better understanding of the curriculum or pedagogy. In addition parents were concerned about the lack of socialization due to the school closures and felt interaction with friends and teachers through technology were not a substitution for face-to-face interactions. Similarly, even though most parents considered

the provision of work for home learning (from weekly plans to specific activities) as adequate and relevant none of them felt it was a substitute for school learning. This was evident in the concern about children 'falling behind' expressed by parents (and teachers alike), even in the cases where children were successfully engaging with all the work plans and activities:



'I know not everybody is doing work so when they go back into school how are they all going to catch up and be at the same level'. She'll give me I'd say 60% engaged, in school its 100% ...I know for a fact she's not learning as well or as much as she would be in school and it's not much fun...That is my worry and I don't want (Study child) falling behind.

(Parent, Cashla, Cohort A)

I think at the start it was fine, it was literally like a school holiday to her and we were doing work in the evening and that was all fine. It's just the longer it's going on, the boredom is setting in, she's missing her friends. If there's work that she needs to do and I don't know how to do it, like do you know what I mean as well? There's stuff I actually don't even know how to do myself.

(Parent, Mizen, Cohort B)

He misses his teacher. And because it's not in his class, and it's his mammy doing it with him, it's sort of, this is 'homework'. I don't need to be doing this. Or this is Friday, we don't do homework on Fridays

(Parent, Poolbeg, Cohort B)

Reiterating their concern that parents would not feel unduly pressured by school related demands, principals and teachers recounted their efforts to reassure parents:

The principal... and he's very Gaeilge orientated. But he said not to be putting the parents under that pressure [learning Irish].

(Teacher, Ballagh, Cohort A)

And I say that to parents as well you know you cannot replicate the classroom, the dynamism of your own class, the engagement of the teacher, the engagement the children have with each other with their teacher, you know with everything else that goes on so nobody is expecting you to replicate that.

(Principal, Tory, Cohort A)

Now the in-school management team decided that the best thing to do would be to try and keep a fairly uniform approach across our school and to try and keep in with the other schools in the area ... So we decided we'd keep it to the three core subjects and that we would send home a few pages in you know reading zone, do a few pages of this Irish book, do a few pages maths, do a few pages and if you wanted to add in a few links or something like that we could.

(Teacher, Skelligs, Cohort B)

I'm trying to keep all the activities play based and fun. I actually think the parents prefer the worksheets. There is no way to assess children's engagement or what strategy is working...and sometimes I'll send home a task and they'll really catch onto it. Like last week I asked them to build a house using sticks and Blu Tak and I got loads of photos and children really engaged with that. The week before I asked them to build a boat using a plastic bottle and I had no interaction at all - all about recycling material at home. But I don't see a trend in what's working

(Teacher, Broadhaven, Cohort A)



Children mainly reported finding the work set by teachers just about right (87.3%) in terms of difficulty and ease. Small proportions of children felt the work set was too easy (5.3%) or too hard (7.4%). Most children seemed happy with the pace of remote learning and talked about how they were doing less maths, English and Irish:



So I need to do English, maths, a bit more English or a bit more maths. You know the things that are at the top of the timetable. Like each day you have to do two

(Child, Rathlin, Cohort B)

I think I am doing less work and I don't do as much homework as I do in school

(Child, Fastnet, Cohort B)

I just get...I get to do walks more often

(Child, Tuskar, Cohort B)



Children interviewed also recounted their willingness to engage with home learning activities and digital learning platforms. In addition, open ended responses in the child questionnaires revealed the variety of positives and negatives about remote learning with ability to learn at one's own pace, as well as, doing less work than in school among the 'best' things noted, while worst things related to inability of parents to explain things and the lack of contact with friends:

TABLE 7 COHORT B CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF REMOTE LEARNING

Best things	Worst things
<i>It's decent. At first it was a little hard to get onto it, but now we've got the hang of it</i> (Child, Case Study, Tuskar)	<i>My mom can't explain Irish to me</i> (Child, Survey Response)
<i>You don't have to wait for other people to finish their work before going onto the next topic</i> (Child, Survey Response)	<i>Maths and Irish. When mammy gets angry</i> (Child, Survey Response)
<i>You can do the work at your own pace</i> (Child, Survey Response)	<i>It's hard to settle to maths and written work at home</i> (Child, Survey Response)
<i>There is not as much of work as actual school</i> (Child, Survey Response)	<i>It's boring and I want to see my teacher and friends</i> (Child, Survey Response)
<i>Spending time with family, more time to focus on subjects that interests me the most</i> (Child, Survey Response)	<i>I don't have as much help as I usually do at school</i> (Child, Case Study, Rathlin)

Feedback and assessment

Nearly all children reported that someone checked their work at home (98.4%). Typically, the person checking their work was a parent (96.7%), followed by their teacher (59.3%). A small proportion of children reported their work being checked by a sibling (10.4%) or another adult (5.1%). As noted previously, for principals and teachers this was a sensitive area in terms of striking the balance between checking in and checking up:



But I suppose I'd love more feedback from the parents ... I would love to know 'Do you want it the night before?' Like, none of them have asked for it, so I haven't done it. But I nearly want that input, that you know 'Are you happy?' 'Is it manageable?'

(Teacher, Tory, Cohort A).

So, there's only so many times you can say, 'And feel free to send them on, I'd love to see the work', because at the end of the day, it isn't mandatory and no parent has to do the work with their children. So, it's kind of a battle between please, I'd love to see what they're doing, but also, I don't know what's going on in your household at the moment and I don't want to be adding stress.

(Teacher, Cashla, Cohort A)

But then I'd hate for them to be thinking am I checking in on them or I think that they're not... if they haven't submitted work or something, that's why I'm ringing.

(Teacher, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

I was insistent all along, I said and even in my message to parents, this is not a facility for us to be watching what you're doing, this is only for you to look for guidance or to show us what you're doing and that's all it is and it's a communication tool between us both...

(Principal, Tory, Cohort A)

Parents were positive about feedback they did receive and the importance of work being corrected:

Both schools have kind of done their best like to keep us up to date and hand them out homework every week, sending out corrections

(Parent, Poolbeg, Cohort A)

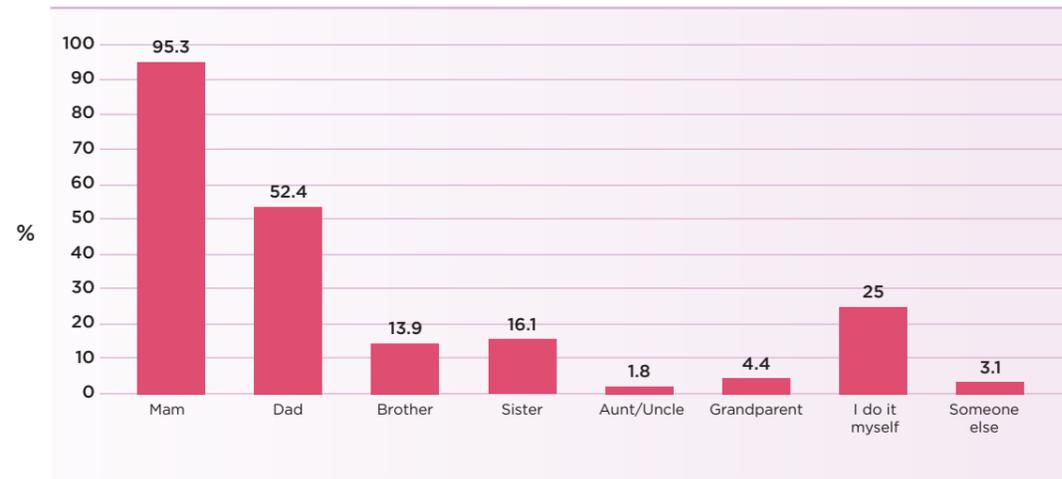
I think it is the fact that we know that we are sending the homework on to her [teacher] and that he is going to get a reply from her. That is definitely what keeps him going.

(Parent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)



Children also reported on the people who helped them with remote learning at home (Figure 14). Nearly all children were helped by their mother (95.3%) whereas only around half of children were helped by their father (52.4%) despite both genders of parents most likely being at home during school closure. Around a quarter of children reported doing their schoolwork independently without anyone helping them.

Figure 14 Who helps me with remote learning at home (child)



Interviews with children in the case study schools confirmed how they missed both their teachers and friends and most referred to help from siblings and parents with their schoolwork.



Sometimes with my maths my Dad corrects them, and sometimes with my writing my Mum corrects them

(Case study child 1, Rathlin)

I get up early with [names child] and we do the home schooling as much as we can before she loses her attention span.

(Parent, Tory, Cohort A)

My mum is doing the maths with me

(Case study child 2, Rathlin)

I have to push it. He knows when he's done his... So, it kind of moderates him. He is not allowed outside until he has done his work and on some days it can take us three hours to finish everything.

(Parent, Ballagh, Cohort A)

Well one thing that she absolutely hates and she's probably going to tell you that, it's maths. She is struggling with numbers and you know like even yesterday her older brother was trying to explain to her, she was like, come on pick it up, she doesn't like it at all but you know I'm completely on the ball with her in that sense because I used to hate maths.

(Parent, Fastnet, Cohort B)



Engagement in remote schooling

The following section discusses the results of engagement in remote teaching, leading, and learning, which we refer to as 'remote schooling'.

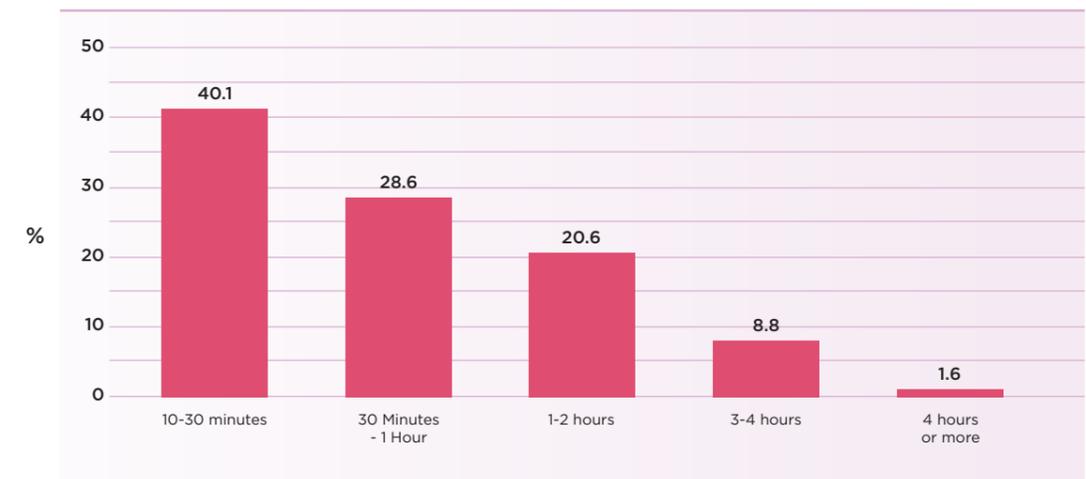
Participation in remote learning

Nearly all parents reported that their child was doing remote learning at home (94.8%) with only a tiny proportion of parents opting out of their child doing remote learning (4.0%), or reporting that the school had not given them work to do at home (1.2%).

Around a third of parents reported helping their child with remote learning most days (35.0%), with around another third reporting not helping most days (27.6%) and around another third being undecided (37.4%).

Many parents (40.1%) reported that their child did between 10 and 30 minutes of remote learning per day, with a further 28.6% reporting that their child did between 30 minutes and 1 hour per day (Figure 15).

Figure 15 Parent report of 3rd class child time spent on remote learning



This amount of time spent on home learning was what around half of parents felt the teacher expected of their child (53.1%). However, many parents (40.1%) also felt it was a little less work than the teacher expected. Only 6.9% of parents reported that their child did more work than the teacher expected of them.



I think he's still keeping up well with all the school learning. I mean if this lockdown goes say for three years, I still think that my kids will be fine.

(Parent, Ballagh, Cohort A)

...kids benefit a lot from a routine. And I think as much as we try to kind of keep a routine it's not, it's not as structured as it would be if they were at school. So you know, that's a bit harder, you know?

(Parent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

It's been very stressful, I have to say.

(Parent, Mizen, Cohort B)

But last week I shared a timetable of just like 20 minutes per kind of English, Irish, Maths and one other activity a day. And the parents were like '... that was really helpful.' So, even I suppose the simple things that we would do like structuring the day or how long you're spending on an activity. Maybe they just don't... like, maybe they think they need to sit there for six hours with their child and get them to do work, which we know just isn't practical and definitely not at home.

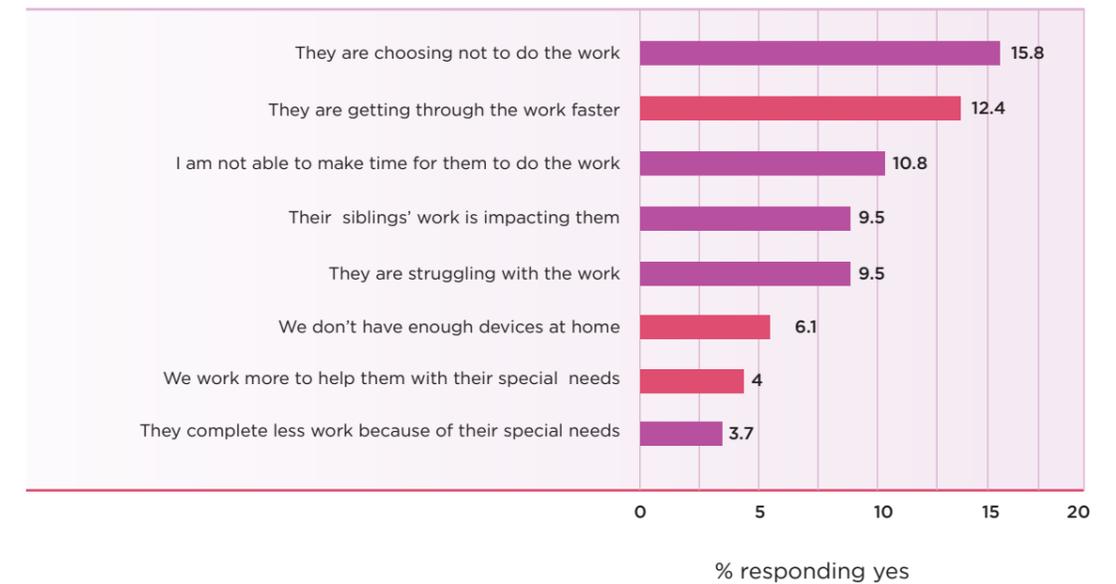
(Broadhaven, Teacher, Cohort A)



Parents also reported why their child did less or more work than was expected (Figure 16). Regarding children doing less work than expected, the most common reason reported was the child choosing not to do the work, followed by the parent not having enough time to help their child with the work. Parents also reported that the children were struggling with the work and that the child's siblings work was negatively impacting the child's ability to work at home. In addition, a small percentage of parents indicated that they did not have enough digital devices (computers, tablets, laptops) to sufficiently support children's learning.

Interviews with children in the case study schools confirmed how they missed both their teachers and friends and most referred to help from siblings and parents with their schoolwork. Parental capacity to support their children was key as some developed a set routine and were able to purchase additional resources such as books and learning apps to keep engagement. For children doing more work than expected, the most common reason was the child getting through the work faster (reiterating the children's open ended comments on the questionnaires about working to their own pace), followed by the parent working more with their children who had special educational needs.

Figure 16 Reasons for child working less or more than teacher expects



It was very stressful for the first few weeks. It has calmed down now. We are getting into a little routine now. But the first few weeks were tough. Then we were coming home, and I was late coming home from work and then we had to try and get stuck into the homework every evening which was tough. It was tough for the first few weeks because there was all that stress on top of everything.

(Parent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

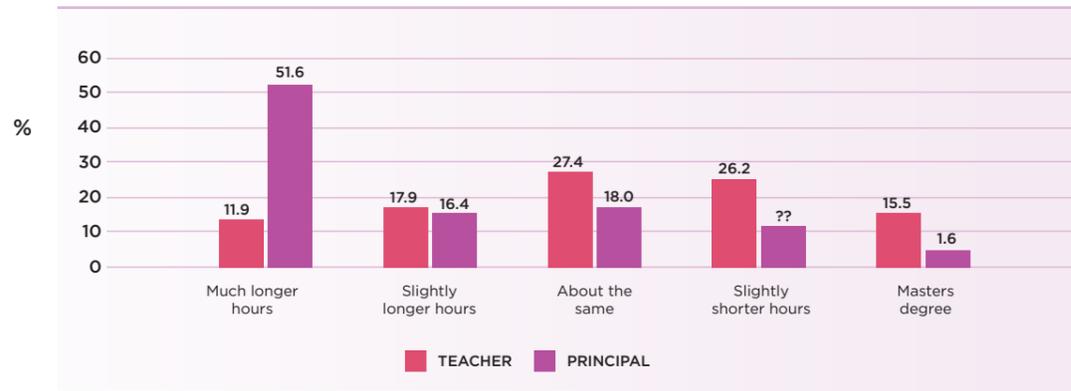
It is too much of a drain on parents for long term education and also not all parents are qualified to teach the children long term. A lot of parents can't handle the situation. Parents who have gone through the educational system fully themselves ... it is much easier for them to cope.

(Grandparent, Inis Cathaigh, Cohort A)

Participation in remote learning

Teachers and principals were asked whether they were working more or less often than normal during school closure (Figure 17). Teachers were relatively evenly split across whether they worked for more or less time than normal, with the trend being towards shorter hours. However, principals typically reported working much longer hours than normal, or slightly longer hours than normal, reiterating comments earlier in relation to principals feeling overwhelmed by the burden of expectations on them.

Figure 17 Teacher and principal hours worked during school closure relative to normally



In-depth interviews with principals and teachers (especially those with younger children) highlighted the challenges of multi-tasking, and an increase in the breadth and depth of their work. For principals especially, the personal impact raised issues related to work load and leadership challenges. Team work and collaboration was deemed central:



So it's just there's a sense of shifting sands all the time. You feel you're taking care of something that's been put in front of you to be addressed and then all of a sudden there's something else, ... I suppose health and safety is taking over completely ... what would normally be a focus on the curriculum

(Principal, Skellig, Cohort B)

I'm not observing the same kind of boundaries that I would have before because I'm trying to home school my own kids in the morning and then feed them and then organise a few things about the house and then I try and settle down and do schoolwork but I kind of feel you have one eye on the emails all the time.

(Teacher, Skellig, Cohort B)

Like, I will be keeping up doing the policies and looking at stuff, and all the admin side of it, but from the actual teaching, you're removed from that... I suppose that's where your concern always is: will it be enough, what we're doing?

(Principal, Tuskar, Cohort B)

In junior infants alone, the three of us, we meet nearly every day to talk about what went well, what didn't work, what we think we might need to adapt... So, we're very consistent in what's going on in every class. And definitely I think that's standing to us.

(Teacher, Tory, Cohort A)



Emotional experiences of remote schooling

A third of children (35.5%) did not like remote learning, and a slightly higher percentage (42.7%) did not want to do remote learning. A smaller proportion of children liked remote learning (30.6%) and wanted to do it (21.0%). Their open ended comments on the questionnaires highlight their ambiguity:



It is VERY boring and my parents are not good teachers and it is usually very long

(Child, Cohort B, national study)

I miss my friends and my teacher. Being at home is fun but it is not the same as school and I wish we could go back. Teacher always did cool things with us

(Child, Cohort B, national study)



Just under half of parents did not enjoy doing remote learning with their child (48.2%), with a smaller proportion of parents enjoying remote learning (16.3%). Despite these low levels of enjoyment, 49.2% of parents were not stressed by doing home learning with their child, and a minority of parents (21.9%) reported feeling stressed by it. This pattern shows the potential for parents to have mixed emotional experiences of remote learning with their child.

Figure 18 Child and parent positive emotions towards remote learning

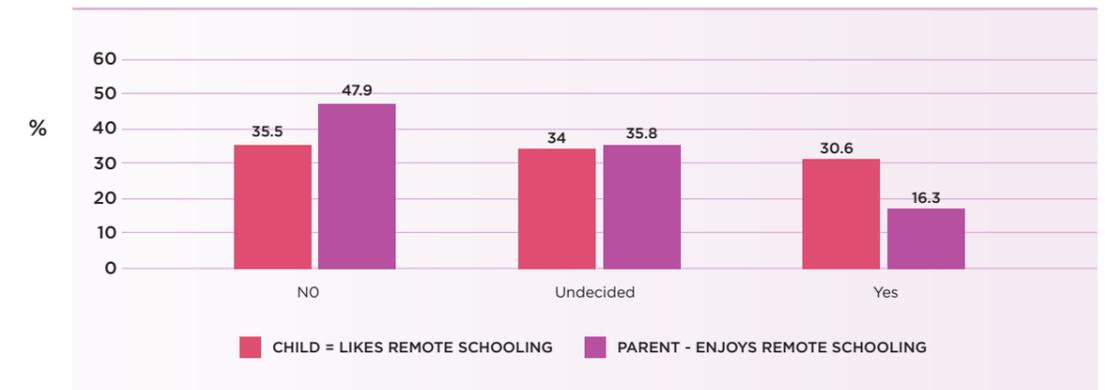
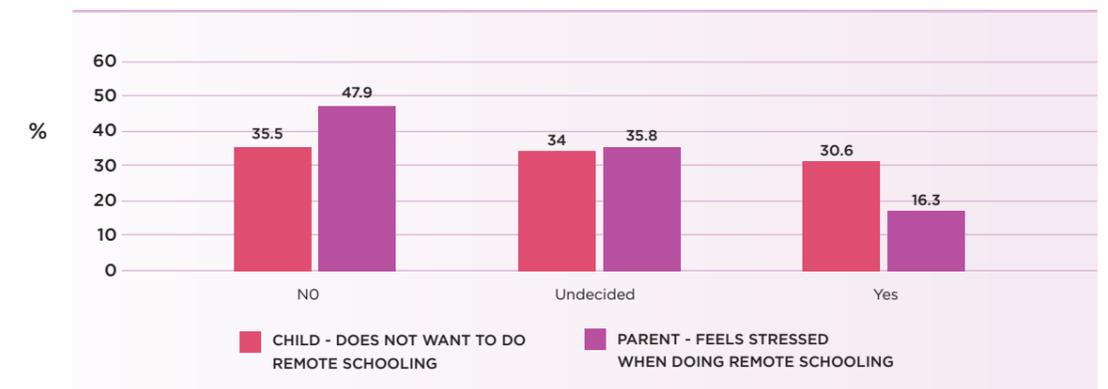


Figure 19 Child and parent negative emotions towards remote learning



Some of this ambiguity was reflected in the positive benefits of increased family time now that schools were closed. This provided a greater opportunity for parents to see how their children were learning, including outdoors:



So very hands-on learning. And he needs that, he needs to be in contact with nature and being outside, those kind of things in the school. I mean, it's not my ideal, because I think there is some part, a social part that, especially during lockdown ... But other than that... I have seen him actually flourishing, and he's now reading, where he was struggling before.

(Parent, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

We're going out cycling. That's not something we would have done before because (Study child) wouldn't have been able to cycle, ...now we can go on a nice cycle together. So, that's helping me, even though it's not at my pace it's just getting out of the house.

(Parent, Cashla, Cohort A)

And my daughter is very athletic, so we enjoy that, we go to the local basketball court or play tennis on the green, that sort of thing.

(Parent, Tory, Cohort A)



Concerns expressed related to a lack of time, confidence and capacity to engage fully with their children's learning needs.



And then so many parents are so vulnerable at this time, like, they could do with some sort of online support if you needed it. Because I find myself even some days just going to my room and just crying my eyes out because I just feel like I'm getting nowhere.

(Parent, Mizen, Cohort B).

...the home schooling is a little bit challenging. It's not that she is not able to cope with it. She does it but she doesn't enjoy it because she would enjoy classroom environment much more. And she compares it all the time.

(Parent, Tuskar, Cohort B)

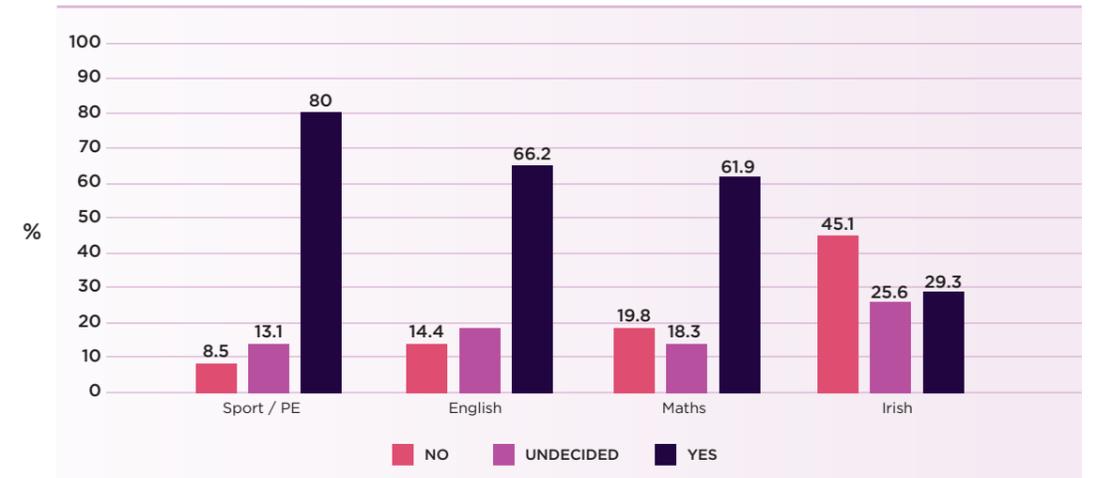
You see, like a lot of my [names daughter] issues with learning would be because I'm in work, I obviously have to stay in work, my job wasn't shut. And I'm working from home and I'm doing college from home. So, a lot of [names daughter] learning is down to me not being able to find that time.

(Parent, Mizen, Cohort B)



Children rated their interest in learning Sport/PE, English, Maths, and Irish, at home. They were most interested in learning sports or physical education (PE) at home, followed by English, and maths (Figure 20). Around a half of the children were not interested in learning Irish at home, while around a third of children were interested in learning Irish at home.

Figure 20 Children's interest in learning subjects at home



Case study interviews highlighted how these patterns translated into 'waves' of engagement by children in their learning, in addition to parent's own capacities to work with them. For teachers, this created a double bind in terms of trying to engage parents in remote learning to ensure children engaged. Parents spoke of little engagement at the outset of school closure, followed by greater input when schools were closed for the longer term, followed by a decrease. Equality issues arose here that are more substantively referred to in the final section of the report.



We are looking at 50% in some classes. We are looking at other classes where there might be as low as 30%, parents engaging. We have spent a fortune on postage stamps [sending material].

(Principal, Poolbeg, Cohort A and B)

I certainly have one or two children who are engaging with some parts of the weekly learning guide and not engaging with other parts..... you have family circumstances colliding with kind of teacher expectations and then context around availability and access to technology and so on which make it very complex for it to be the same experience for everyone.

(Principal, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

So, I would say the junior end has engaged extremely well, and this often happens where you'll have your junior infants parents are really enthusiastic, and they want to do the best. And then as it goes up, and it's left more to the [children] themselves, sometimes it tapers off.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

Then we set up our weekly Zooms and then interest increased again, they really enjoyed seeing one another. But now we're finding it dip off again.

(Teacher, Broadhaven, Cohort A)



Teachers and principals reported on their levels of engagement with remote teaching and learning respectively. Their vigour (energy) for working (3 questions), dedication to their work (3 questions), and absorption in their work (3 questions), were assessed on a scale of 1 = almost never to 6 = always. Figure 21 displays the average levels of vigour, dedication, and absorption in work across teachers and principals. The results show that in general, teachers and principals felt engaged in their work 'often', and that there was very little difference between teachers and principals in their levels of engagement. Although, as discussed earlier in the case study data, some teachers found the move to remote learning difficult to enjoy, nonetheless, the majority of the teachers across the larger sample were highly engaged in their work – suggesting that enjoyment and the type of engagement measured here are not mutually exclusive. This is also suggestive of high levels of professional commitment among our sample.

Figure 21 Teacher and principal engagement in remote teaching/leading

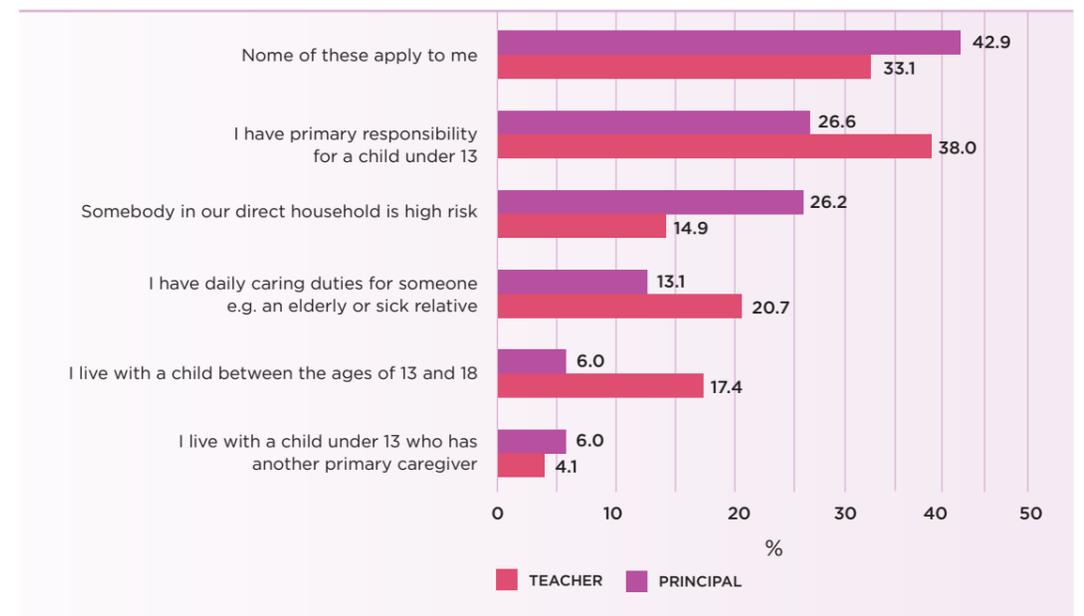


Transition to remote schooling

Home contexts

Teachers and principals were asked about the caring responsibilities they might have at home, which could have impacted their ability to teach and lead remotely (Figure 22). Reflecting the age profiles of our respondents, around 57% of teachers and 27% of principals reported having no caring responsibility. The most common caring responsibility for teachers and principals was having primary responsibility for a child under the age of 13 years at home. The second most common responsibility for teachers was living with someone in the household who was at high risk of contracting Covid-19, and for principals, again given their older age profile, was caring for an elderly or sick relative.

Figure 22 Teacher and principal caring responsibilities at home



Case study interviews revealed the contradictions and challenges for teachers, principals and parents, in managing multiple caring roles.



I found it very stressful. Very, very stressful. I have kids myself. So, it's kind of been full on, and so I'd say I'm tired, drained, kind of getting sick of it. How are we going to do six more weeks of this? And like I say, the fact that I have kids doing homework.

(Teacher, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

I've loads of parents that are still working. And when they come home from work they're trying to do a bit with the girls. That's so hard. I don't know how they'll manage that. Like, fair play to all them as well.

(Teacher, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

So, we're kind of worried at the same time, because both of us are working at the same time, (frontline workers) ... So it's good that the school actually is providing a video, or they're messaging all these parents on what to do with the children while they're at home like, you know? So, parents like us are trying our best to do it ourselves?

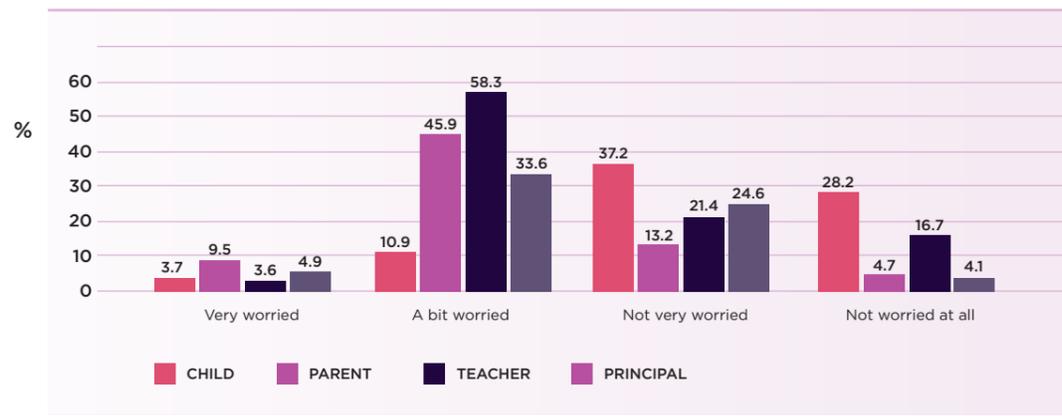
(Parent, Cashla, Cohort A)



Transition anxiety and school closure

Participants were asked whether they were worried about remote learning, teaching, or leading (remote schooling), now that they had been doing it for a while (approximately nine weeks). This question assessed any persistent worries that they might have had. Most children reported not being very worried or not being worried at all (65.4%). When comparing this result to the combined reports of being a bit worried or very worried, many teachers (61.9%) and parents (55.4%) reported being worried after nine weeks, with principals (38.5%) less so.

Figure 23 Transition anxiety of children, parents, teachers, and principals



The unprecedented circumstances created by the school closure meant that the way forward was often unknown and this created a ‘nervous energy’ for everyone involved in the transition. Clear communication lines within and from schools provided a critical lifeline for participants.



I felt there was even myself, there was a kind of a, how will I put it, a kind of a nervous energy that you didn't really know what you were supposed to be doing ...

(Principal, Tory, Cohort A)

I just thought you know, in the early days... I just thought the personal word and the personal contact would be the most important thing, you know... and the kids were looking forward from week to week for the next phone call from the Múinteoir, you know.

(Principal, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

So it was quite a burden, you know, having to look after them and the sort of basic household, I could probably do a little bit of work through Zoom and different classes and different things that you know I would be able to do, but it just wasn't worth it.

(Parent, Fastnet, Cohort B)

The nearest thing I remember was when I was a young child, I remember them talking about TB. But I never experienced anything like Covid-19, or anything that you had to put the same preventive issues into, anything that you had to put the same effort into. There never has been anything like this in my lifetime.

(Grandparent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

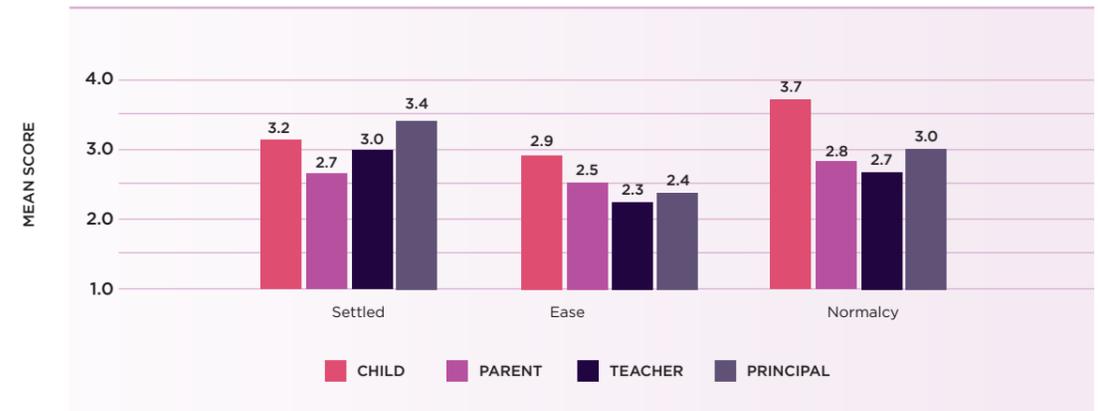


Adaptation to remote schooling

Just as many participants were still worried about remote schooling, they were also not adjusting to remote schooling very easily. Participants were asked how they had settled into remote learning / teaching / leading, how easy or difficult it was to get used to remote schooling, and how used to remote schooling they felt now (‘normalcy’). Their answers were measured using five options for each question (e.g., answer option 1 = it still feels completely new, to answer option 5 = I am completely used to it).

On average, adult and child participants reported being unsure (answer option 3) about how well they had settled into remote schooling, with parents tending to say that they had not settled in very well (answer option 2). Also, on average, participants reported that it had been difficult (answer option 2) to get used to remote schooling, with principals and teachers reporting the lowest levels of ease. Although children were more likely to report feeling quite used to remote schooling (answer option 4), adult participants reported on average being unsure or it still feeling a little new (answer options 3 and 2). Together, these results indicate that even nine weeks into remote schooling, child and adult participants were still adjusting and that the transition had been on average, a difficult one.

Figure 24 Transition to remote schooling



Case study interviews highlight some of the challenges of adjustment to the changed context. Principals’ worried about teaching staff and their capacity to transition to ‘remote learning’, cope with their own family situations as well as the impact on the children and their families. Principals also spoke of the constant emphasis on motivating, encouraging and validating that was required to sustain engagement, keeping visibility with parents while also conscious of negative social media and feeling overwhelmed by emails.



So, I suppose as the leader, you're trying to make sure that everyone's okay in it, that you're not over-stressing them (teachers) or stressing them unnecessarily, but yet, the children have to remain the main focus.

(Principal, Tuskar, Cohort B)

I will never adapt to it, I'll never adapt to it, no. ... I dislike everything about it, being honest with you, I just don't know, I think teachers have great patience.

(Parent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)



“

I think at first it was kind of a novelty but now I want structure back in my life. ...I am okay, I am still working which is great. I just go to work in the mornings and then come home.

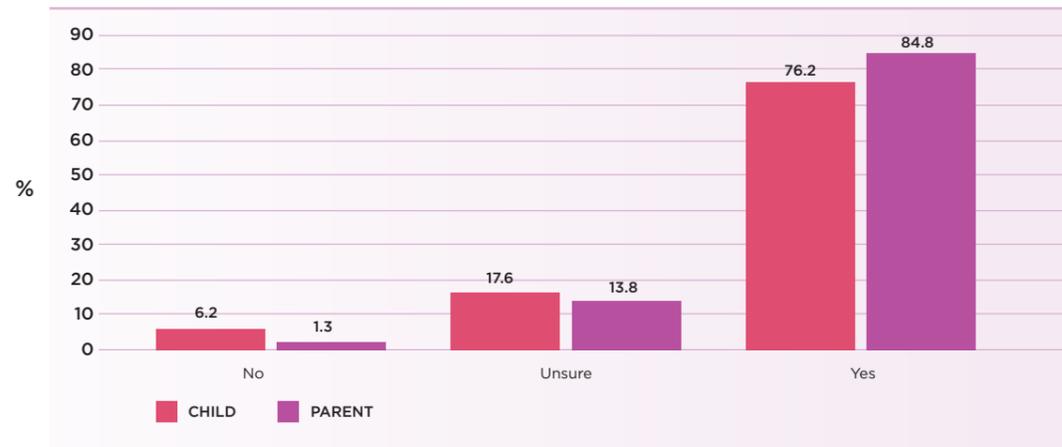
(Parent, Poolbeg, Cohort B)

”

School re-opening

The study was conducted nine weeks into school closure and in a period of continuing lack of clarity about when they would re-open. Unsurprisingly, children and parents were extremely positive about schools re-opening, with the majority of both groups looking forward to when it would happen (Figure 25).

Figure 25 Child and parents looking forward to schools re-opening



Children talked about what they missed about being in school:

“

I miss my friends. I miss... I miss... what's it called? [Afterschool] - every time after school on Friday I used to go to my afterschool, well not really an afterschool but, and on Friday we used to do like a little movie night.

(Case study child, Rathlin, Cohort B)

I feel a bit annoyed because I'd have to do a lot more work but I'd feel happy because I'd get to see my friends again and stuff.

(Case study child, Rathlin, Cohort B)

”

“

I don't really know...probably that - I don't really have anything hard

(Case study child, Fastnet)

There is not a proper time schedule... I think it is a bit bad because now everyone is off schedule

(Case study child Mizen)

It's just the subjects we usually don't do too often, we do more now and they're the subjects I don't really like

(Case study child Tuskar)

A case study grandparent reflected common views thus:

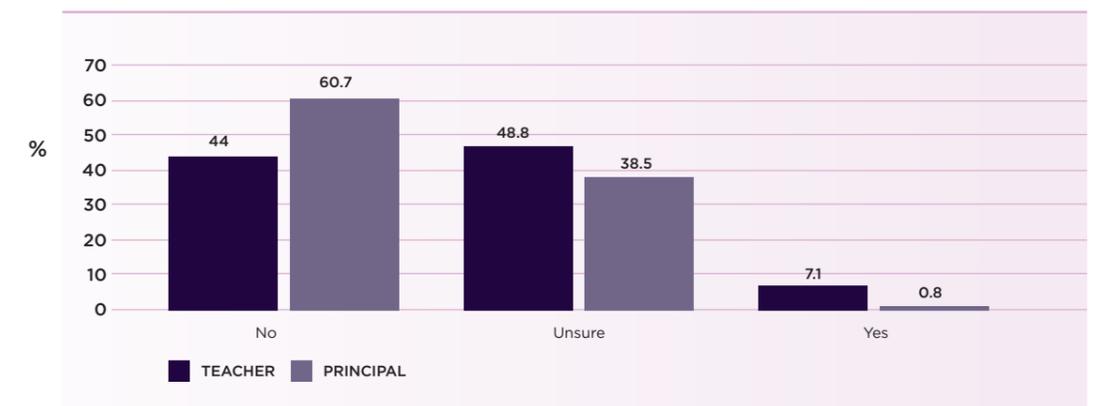
They are much better in school, absolutely. Even if they were only to get to it for two days a week or something, I still think they are better. Even if it wasn't a full week, like two and a half days or whatever is definitely better overall, in every way. They love going to school. They love their teacher and all that. It is what kids do. It is particularly hard I think on the sixth class now. I really feel sorry for them.

(Grandparent, Tory, Cohort A)

”

This was in a context however, of principals and teachers not feeling very prepared to re-open schools, with just under half of principals and teachers feeling prepared for re-opening (Figure 26).

Figure 26 Teacher and principal feelings of preparedness for schools re-opening



Case study data highlighted how principals especially, were navigating uncertainties in relation to school re-opening.

“

I feel schools, we have been given loads of freedom and no guidance. ... the curriculum is overloaded, it is not going to be possible to deliver all of it, and catch people up.... So, something has to give.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)



How are we going to do social distancing? I mean, we've classes of 30 plus. ... I do feel that if we got some broad guidelines from the Department that we could sort of distil it down for our own school and our own situations... At the minute you're planning in a vacuum.

(Principal, Fastnet, Cohort B)

But as it gets closer, now it seems kind of scary to imagine. ... it is frightening to think how do you stop two kids hugging when they see their friend for the first time? It does open up a whole world that we've not been in before. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it.

(Teacher, Cashla, Cohort A)

"In terms of like the two-metre distance, taking regular breaks and all that. We appreciate that but I would be hugely disappointed if there's a block [on] return to school. ...because we're putting ourselves at risk every day and like we would feel that, you know, our children's lives and education should not be halted."

(Parents, Tory, Cohort A)

It is going to be very different for those little fellows walking into a school and having had a hundred and twenty per cent time at home with Mum and Dad.

(Parent, Ballagh, Cohort A)

It's frightening. We went in today and the teachers all have facemasks and gloves, this is the new norm, it's actually frightening. Can you imagine a junior infant coming in and seeing that?

(Parent, Mizen, Cohort B)



Wellbeing during Covid-19 school closure

Stress and burnout

Teachers and principals reported mixed feelings about their jobs during school closure, with respect to stress and job satisfaction. Nearly all teachers and principals reported feeling stressed by their jobs, with around half of principals feeling stressed frequently or always, and around half of teachers feeling stressed sometimes (Figure 27). At the same time, most principals and teachers reported always feeling satisfied in their jobs, with the majority of both feeling satisfied frequently or always (Figure 28).

Figure 27 Teacher and principal job stress

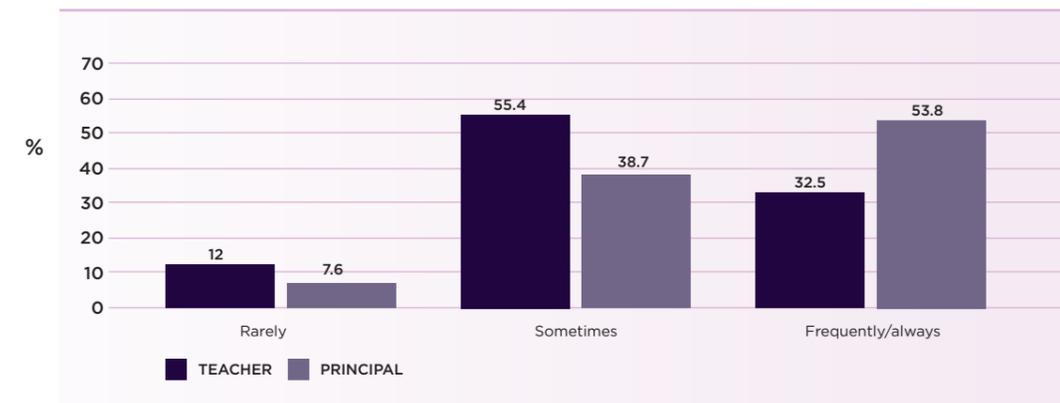
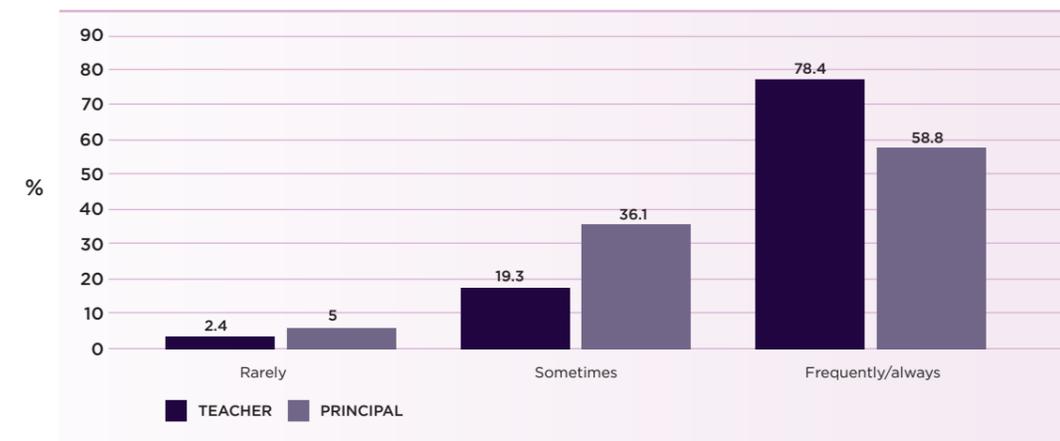


Figure 28 Teacher and principal job satisfaction



Teachers and principals were also asked about their emotional exhaustion with working, which is a component of work burnout. They were asked whether they felt emotionally drained from working, fatigued when they got up on workdays, and strained when working with children / staff all day. The answer options ranged from almost never (1) to always (6). On average, teachers and principals reported feeling emotionally exhausted rarely (answer option 2: teacher M = 2.6, SD = 0.8; principal M = 2.7, SD = 0.9), indicating that educators were generally very resilient during the transition to remote teaching and leading.

The challenges of coping with change and the resultant intensification of the role was to the forefront of principal and teacher views in the case study schools. The sense of responsibility principals especially felt, in relative isolation and often without feedback, exacerbated their feelings of stress. Health and wellbeing of staff, children and parents was a priority in addition to recognising the need to strive for some balance in their own work and family lives:



We've all had to adapt very, very quickly to a brand-new way of working, which everyone did, almost overnight.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

I'm surprised by my own reaction to it and the way it has affected me. ... I just had a dip last week and I found it very difficult a couple of days working from home thinking I'm not getting anything done, feeling very responsible for what was happening even though I couldn't have any effect on what was happening...

(Principal, Mizen, Cohort B)

Like I never have the phone, my emails are on my phone as well and I never have the phone out of my hand nearly. ...There's an element of that that's very exhausting, I think.

(Principal, Fastnet, Cohort B)

I think sometimes people forget that teachers also have their own lives, and they might have children that are also in school, they might have elderly parents that they're looking after, they might have a partner who maybe is now out of work, who is on the €350 COVID payment, you know, there's loads and loads of things that I think people sometimes forget, they just think "Oh why are teachers not teaching?"

(Teacher, Poolbeg, Cohort A)



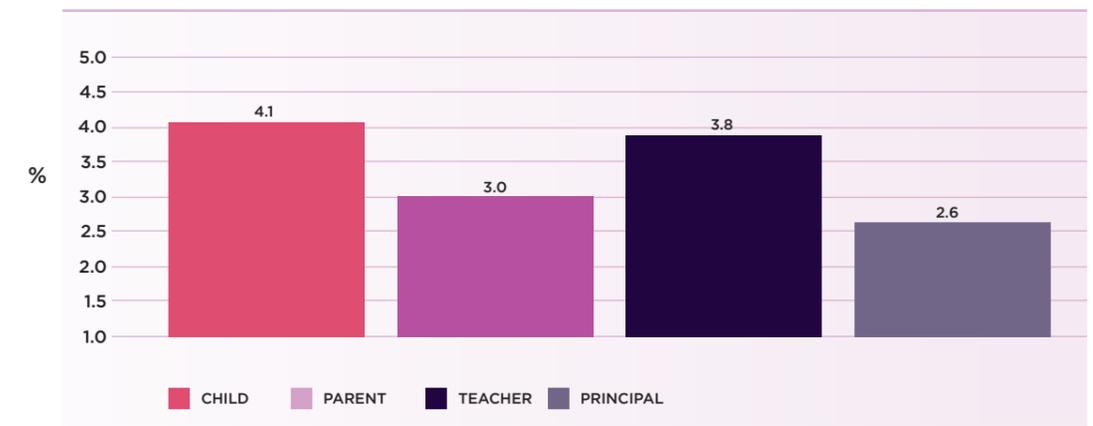
Life satisfaction

Conceptually, a person's evaluation of their life is a summative window into a complex, deeper system of wellbeing experiences (e.g., emotional functioning, motivation, sense of individual purpose and fulfilment, social support, feelings of competence and self-worth, and a person's ability to organise this system in a way that helps them feel and be well). In this sub-study, we captured participants' overarching wellbeing using a standardised measure of life-satisfaction that was suitable for use with parents, children, teachers, and principals.

All participants were asked how satisfied they were with their lives in general. Five questions assessed their feelings of their lives being close to ideal, the conditions of their lives being excellent, being happy with their lives, getting the important things they wanted in their lives, and not wanting to change their lives. Answer options ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

On average, children reported the highest levels of life satisfaction, followed by teachers. Parents, followed by principals, had much lower levels of life satisfaction on average. The difference in levels is displayed in Figure 29.

Figure 29 Life satisfaction of children, parents, teachers, and principals



Parents in CSL case study schools reported that the children, especially, those in Cohort B (third class) were missing their extended relationships and socialising; friends, other family members and teachers. For all children, use of online platforms were a useful resource to stay connected.



It does affect their wellbeing, not having friends around, I really have to be honest.

(Parent, Poolbeg, Cohort B)

I've WhatsApp, she's on WhatsApp and we do contact one another and she'd send me pictures and that kind of thing, you know? But I'd always, if I rang her, I would ask to speak to [name child], and [name child] would be on her shoulder waiting to get on the phone like, you know?

(Grandparent, Tuskar, Cohort B)

Yeah, just the fear that they [peers] are going to forget about him, but I am telling him they won't forget about him, that he will see them again.

(Parent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

She's been coping very well. She's very happy. She seems to be happy if she is in constant contact with her friends. ... She's online with them and we have been in a few front gardens here ... So that's helped.

(Parent, Rathlin, Cohort B)

there's this app called Houseparty and we just type the person's name for Houseparty and then you give them a friend request, and then they'll accept it, so then you can talk to each other.

(Case study child, Rathlin, Cohort B)



Positive relationships mitigate the stress associated with school closure for each participant group. Schools who already had established a specific focus on building care-based relationships with families, were well placed to deal with the challenges of the transition to remote learning and mitigate the difficulties involved in providing physical/emotional support to children and their parents.



We've done a cookery club online, where there'd be a MasterChef each week ... But those kind of things I feel a parent can teach, a parent can enjoy it, and it can be a relationship builder.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

From the SEN point of view which is where most of the children with anxiety, difficulties and so on would be really in school, they are engaging you know on a more personal level with the SEN team. Through Seesaw the teachers ...have been making phone calls. I know a few of them have a check-in online with the kids.

(Principal, Rathlin, Cohort B)

The closure also provided space for some families to strengthen family ties. Sibling relationships improved as they relied on each other for friendship and fun.



So, there's so many positive things that, because I'm not in school now at this time, I am with them, and the weather helps. And because my husband is here. So, it's great, he likes to cook so I don't have to think about dinner - when he's home, he does that. So there's all of that. You still worry about your kids as a parent, but I would definitely say I'm doing my best as a parent.

(Parent, Tuskar, Cohort B)

And for me to have gotten off the hamster wheel in work. ..., sometimes 12 o'clock, sometimes two o'clock I'm done with my work. I can tip back into it if needed but that privilege of that time. I mean for me as a parent with them. ... It's amazing.

(Parent, Rathlin, Cohort B)

So, we meet then to see what are the needs of the children and the families. That it's not related to teaching and learning per se but we'd be looking at kind of mental health, we'd be looking at any other issues, social issues you know, all that kind of stuff as to what can we do to help.

(Principal, Mizen, Cohort B)



...before this we would have relied hugely on babysitting, a bit of childcare. ...And if you told us that no, you're self-reliant now and you've none of that I wouldn't have thought we'd have coped but in actual fact it's been really lovely just the five of us.

(Parent, Tory, Cohort A)

They have to kind of just get on and I think it kind of makes them more try to kind of find stuff to do themselves, you know, more than usual like, they just have to learn to get on with each other a bit more and they do more in the house, they do more housework which is good as well.

(Parent, InisCathaigh, Cohort A)

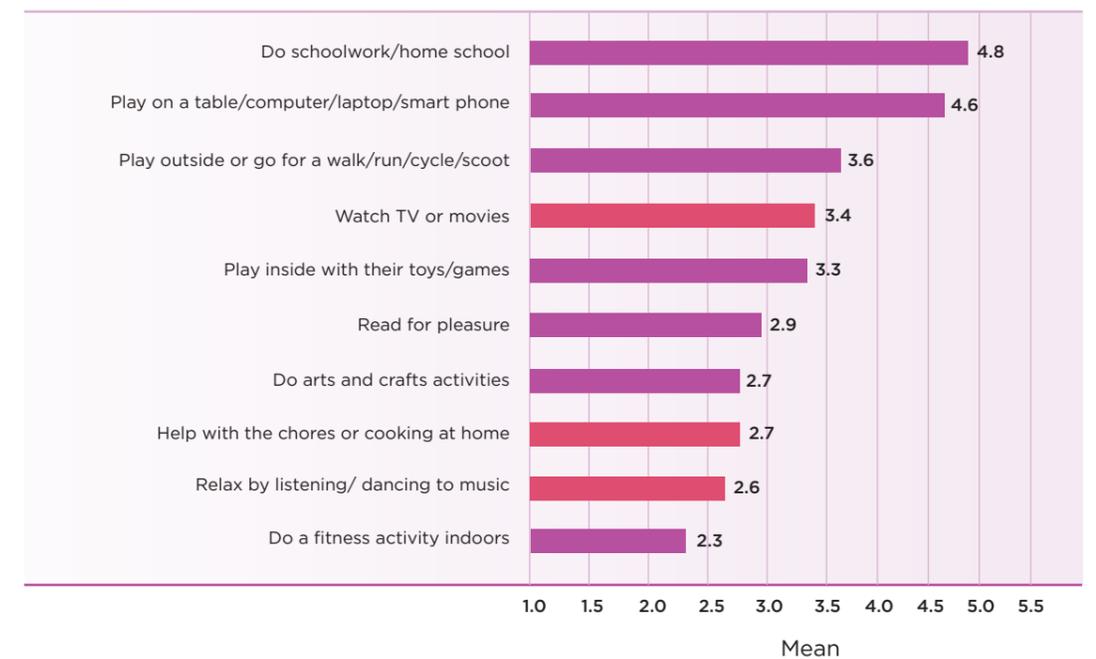


Children's activities during school closure

Parents reported on the amount of time their CSL child typically spent each weekday doing specified activities (Figure 30). The time options given were: (1) we don't do this; (2) 5 - 10 minutes; (3) 10 - 30 minutes; (4) 30 minutes - 1 hour; (5) 1 - 2 hours; (6) 3 - 4 hours; and (7) more than 4 hours.

The most frequent activities reported were home learning and playing games on a digital device (both on average were 30 minutes - 1 hour per day). Next frequent were outside activity, watching TV or movies, and playing indoors with toys (all on average were 10 - 30 minutes per day). Less frequent activities were reading for pleasure, doing arts and crafts, helping with chores, music activities, and indoor fitness (all on average 5 - 10 minutes per day).

Figure 30 Child activities on weekdays during school closure



Families in our case study interviews enjoyed the flexibility of 'remote' learning. It provided opportunities for experiential learning, acquiring new skills - cycling, being outdoors in the sunshine and interacting with nature. Case study children referred to getting to do 'walks more often' and 'playing in the park' and 'running'. At the same time, principals and teachers were concerned for the wellbeing of children who may not have access to gardens or play areas:



One woman said to me, my children are gone feral, they're outside all the time, right but I'm delighted because they're out in the garden, they've time with me and each other and she said they're not anxious or upset. And that's a feeling now I'm getting from a lot of my parents that their children are actually learning different skills, they're happy out at home, ...and a lot of parents are telling us they didn't realise how resilient their children were.

(Principal, Tory, Cohort A)

I think of the homes that have no gardens. ...and I just feel it has to be very hard... 'I would say that there are children that it has impacted negatively on, definitely, beyond a shadow of a doubt. ...They're very, very restricted and I know for a fact that it has affected them and I would say the same for families who are living in.... in flats and don't have access to gardens or that sort of thing. I think it can't be good for their wellbeing.

(Principal, Fastnet, Cohort B)



Concerns were expressed about the inevitability of extended 'screen time' and the implications for children exposed to long periods and often in appropriate material, a concern also noted by parents:



"We have spent years doing a campaign in our school of screen-free bedrooms.... So, to go from that, to go from no screens after p.m., and doing this ratio of five real world things to one half hour of screen time, you know, ... and then to go and say, okay, we've everything online, and stick a screen to you for your whole day, and expect you to do all your schoolwork from it, your socialising from it, I just feel it's wrong.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

So I was trying to keep her busy, but it is very restricted and keep her entertained without her being on the internet all the time. So, it was challenging.

(Parent, Cashla, Cohort A)



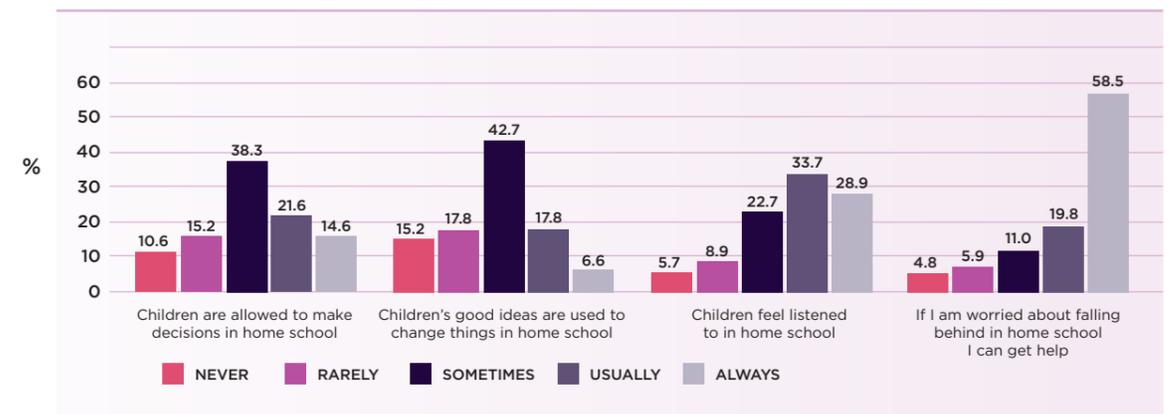
Equality, voice, and inclusion

Children's voice, rights, and participation in school

Children were asked about the extent to which their voices were included in decisions about remote learning, with questions on involvement in decision making, and being listened to (Figure 31). The answer options ranged from never (1) to always (5). On average, children felt that their voices were heard sometimes.

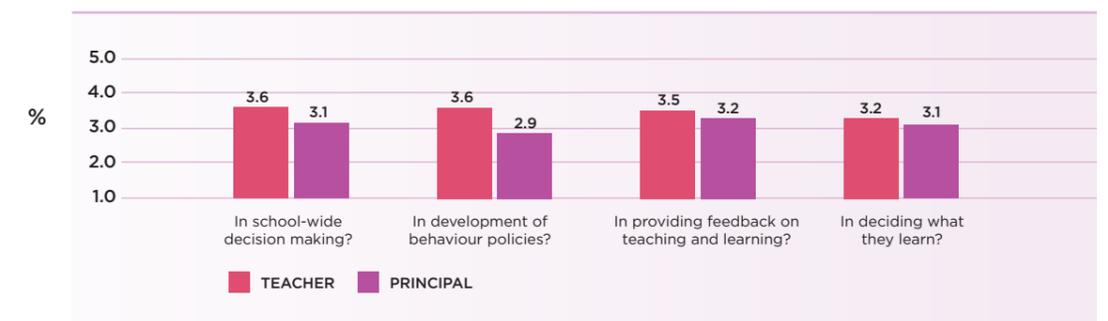
They were also asked if they could access help for remote learning (Figure 33). A little over a half of children (58.6%) said they could always ask for help.

Figure 31 Child activities on weekdays during school closure



Teachers and principals were also asked about children's voice and participation more generally in their classrooms and schools, using the same answer options of never (1) to always (5) (Figure 32). On average, matching with children's average level of response, they reported that children sometimes had a role in school wide decision making, the development of behaviour policies, in providing feedback on teaching and learning, and in deciding what they learn.

Figure 32 Teachers' reports on child voice in school



Given the central role of parents in mediating children's remote learning, case study interviews highlighted the level of negotiation involved between parents and children to ensure schoolwork was done. This must also be considered in light of the challenges noted in Figure 16 (page 37) on the reasons children did not get to complete as much work as expected:



Well, we will tell him everything he needs to do, and he gets to pick which one he wants to do first and which one he doesn't want to do. We are definitely not getting it all done. We are getting as much as we can done. We are doing what she said, concentrating on the English, the writing and the reading and all that. No, he gets to decide what he wants to do.

(Parent, Inis Cathaigh, Cohort A)

And in terms of her day, like she'll choose to pick up if she wants to do one of her worksheet, like and she'll choose what way she wants to play. Yeah, I think she gets a lot of choice.

(Parent, Tory, Cohort A)

For their part, children noted a level of freedom in their use of time, and some respite from the 'discipline' of school:

Well I usually do most of my work in my room by myself because yeah I don't really need that much help with my work...I like the work at home it's easier...you don't have to do as much

(Case study child, Rathlin, Cohort B)

I don't get into trouble for messing....

(Case study child, Rathlin, Cohort B)

I like that I get to do walks more often

(Case study child, Tuskar, Cohort B)

I don't really have to wake up that early in the mornings...and I have more time to spend with my family

(Case study child, Fastnet, Cohort B)



Equality and school closure

Schools were asked to identify levels of access / participation of children to remote learning. Just under half of teachers and principals reported that all or nearly all children in their classrooms / schools could access / participate in the remote learning activities they were providing (teachers = 46.4%; principals = 47.5%). However, there was also a large group of teachers and principals who reported that only around three quarters of children could access remote learning (teachers = 31.0%, principals = 35.2%). Around twenty per cent of teachers and ten per cent of principals reported that only around a half of their class / school was accessing remote learning.

Most teachers (67.5%) and principals (61.2%) agreed that any lack of participation in their classroom/school was because parents lacked access to digital technologies at home (Figure 33). They also agreed that parent work responsibilities, a perceived lack of parent interest, and a lack of parent knowledge about education might also be impacting the lack of participation. Fewer teachers and principals agreed that the lack of participation was because of children's special educational needs or siblings remote learning taking precedence. Challenges directly related to poverty was noted by 31% of principals, and 23% of teachers.

In comparison, only 23.6% of parents referred to a lack of technology at home as a barrier (Figure 34). This discrepancy must be understood in the context of the profile of parent respondents given their access to technology in order to participate in the survey. For parents, the majority (60.1%) reported not engaging with remote learning as much as they could be, because of time limitations due to job demands, young children, children with special educational needs, and caring responsibilities. Such concerns dovetail with the working patterns of the sample noted earlier, where 43.7% were working full-time/more than full-time during school closure (Figure 4). Around a third of parents also agreed that they did not understand how to do remote learning properly.

These findings highlight the pressure of time among our parent sample, coupled with a lack of understanding over how to do remote learning properly. They dovetail with the concerns expressed by principals and teachers of placing undue stress/pressure on parents to complete remote learning with the children.

Figure 33 Teacher and principal perceptions of barriers to remote learning

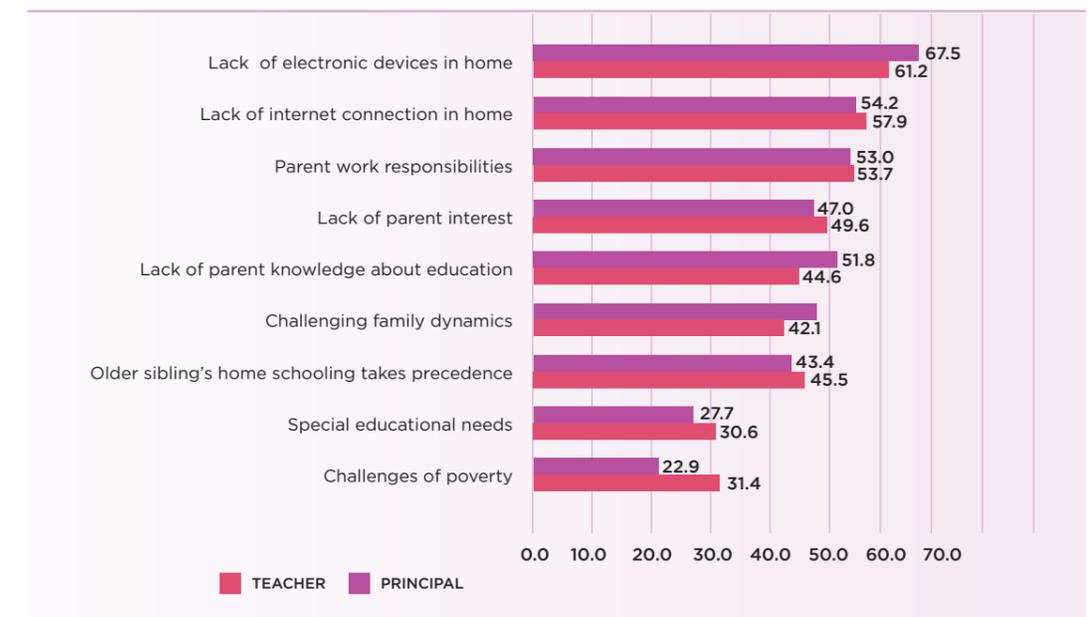
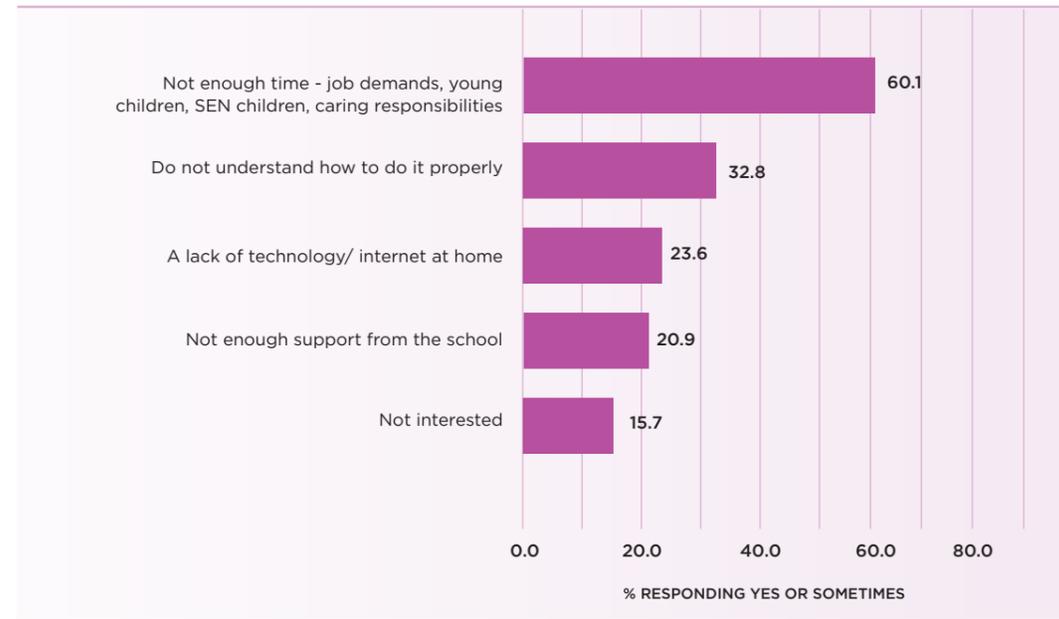


Figure 34 Parent perceptions of barriers to remote learning



Inequalities and differences in school closure experiences:

DEIS, Gender, and Migrant families

In the national study, a selection of variables were tested for whether there were any statistically significant differences between participants who attended DEIS / non-DEIS schools, children of different genders (girls N = 284, boys N = 264) and families who were migrants with English as a second language (non-English language migrants N = 57, other families N = 323).

For the DEIS / non-DEIS comparison, the participants included parents (DEIS N = 85, non-DEIS N = 295), teachers (DEIS N = 35, non-DEIS N = 49), and principals (DEIS N = 41, non-DEIS N = 80).

Differences existed in remote learning engagement, teacher's perceptions of parents' barriers to remote learning, and children's activities. Girls had marginally higher remote learning engagement than boys (Girls M = 2.88, SD = 1.01, Boys M = 2.69, SD = 1.09; $t = 2.13$, $p = .03$), and played with toys more (Girls M = 3.47 (1.26), Boys M = 3.21 (1.34); $t = 2.04$, $p = .04$).

More teachers in DEIS schools perceived that parents were inhibited from participating in remote learning because they lacked digital devices at home (DEIS Yes = 27, No = 7; Non-DEIS Yes = 29, No = 20; Chi Square = 3.74, $p = 0.05$). Finally, parents of children in DEIS schools reported that their children spent less time daily reading for pleasure (DEIS M = 2.60, SD = .92; Non-DEIS M = 2.94, SD = 1.03; $t = 2.76$, $p = 0.006$).

Case study interviews provide an in-depth account of realities on the ground. They contextualise the perceptions of teachers and parents about the communities of their schools and classrooms, especially in terms of variations in access to and participation in digital learning. Principals, especially, but not exclusively, those in DEIS schools, reported significant concerns about access to technology by families. A key issue was often sufficient access to a number of digital devices, as well as parent's own competence with on-line learning. Parents in such instances expressed their preferences for printed material which some of our schools went to extra efforts to provide:



And especially with two of them being in secondary school, because they've so many different subjects to get through, a lot of them are PowerPoints, and we've one laptop between the four of them. So, it can be a little bit challenging.

(Parent, Poolbeg, Cohort A)

I think it should be work packs. Now, they're saying it's the price of the work packs to send out and that so I actually... the teacher rang there a couple of weeks ago and I said the exact same thing that we were finding it hard online. That we would rather it in front of us or if they could send and be a printable version that I could have.

(Parent, Mizen, Cohort B)

The technology and the loss of it has also been a barrier, one of our families, I knew that they had a lot of tech in the family but it was tech purchased in a hurry of low quality, you know, a phone that doesn't keep battery life...or else as one girl said to me 'My laptop isn't working, I need more' the laptop that she got for her birthday in January. So, that has been a big issue for sure.

(Principal, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

We've one housing estate that's very disadvantaged and almost all of those have gotten packs out and they would be the sort of families who'd say 'oh God, I don't know the first thing about a website, I don't know how to get into that'.

(Principal, Fastnet, Cohort B)



In addition to providing remote learning, schools also served as a front line support service to families in acute poverty. This emerged especially strongly with principals in DEIS schools:



I just have to say to you', (parent) said, 'it is awesome', and that's the word she used because it's not often you hear that around here. 'It is awesome what you are doing in the school', she said, 'and to have the food delivered to my house by [names teacher], I cannot get over that', and she shook her head and she said, 'what is happening with this country', she said, 'it is absolutely wonderful and thank you'.

(Principal, Mizen, Cohort B)

So, I think, even though in some ways teachers have reached out, maybe beyond what... well, in many ways, beyond what we would have done before, in terms of forming relationships with home. So, from a DEIS context, that's an amazing achievement, that's wonderful, that the trust has built up massively. The parents have been really, really thankful and positive, which is, in itself, affirming to the teacher, when they ring.

(Principal, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

So, we're a community hub now and we have teachers doing social care work, knocking on doors and meeting families in their front gardens doing human face-to-face check ins. It's only manageable I think for someone like me as school principal because I'm not doing it on my own.

(Principal, Cashla, Cohort A)

They deliver food to anyone who wanted to sign up, they send out a food parcel. They've also done frozen; they've done dinners that you can freeze. So, anyone who might be struggling and it's all you know, behind the scenes so nobody knows who else is getting it..., you go privately... they do look out for everybody, I feel.

(Parent, Cashla, Cohort A)

This frontline role was embedded in an ethos of care, which emerged strongly in the narratives of principals and teachers especially, but not exclusively, in the DEIS case study schools:

“

And we're definitely doing that, but we're doing more and then we've also got, there's another bit of essential service which is social care.

(Principal, Cashla, Cohort A)

Yeah, the biggest thing is the care in our area, the care, ensuring that they are getting on well. That's the main thing, and then academics can come after that.

(Teacher, Mizen, Cohort B)

And especially with our student body, you know, a lot of them would come from disadvantaged backgrounds and like school might be their happiest time of the day for a lot of those children because home life might be a little bit tough and I think that the parents are, like absolutely trying their best.

(Teacher, Fastnet, Cohort B)

Engagement was also influenced by different family circumstances. The increased role for parents in their children's learning had positive and negative aspects from an equality perspective. It was positive in that it encouraged greater parental engagement from parents that were not previously involved in their child's learning. This was a double edged sword when parents lacked the capacity to engage. Teachers in case study schools reported less engagement from especially vulnerable children, e.g. children living in direct provision centres, from migrant families who may have little external/family support/resources and children in families struggling with addiction issues.

“

To be honest, engagement hasn't been huge. I think initially I got four parents connected and then it was a matter of trying to call the parents to see could I get them connected. So that was a bit of a challenge in itself. I was calling from a private number, so it was hard to get through to some of the parents. Then some numbers were disconnected, and some numbers were different.

(Teacher, Mizen, Cohort B)

We would have a few children who would be homeless or maybe living in hotels, or emergency accommodation so I can only imagine how stressful that is, especially on a small child, it must be really, really hard for them. So all those things would have huge implications for kids coming back in September, ... our main priority really will be to make sure that the kids can be happy, and they settle in well, and they adjust back to routine, and things like that, and that'll take time.

(Teacher, Poolbeg, Cohort A)

The specific challenges of working with children with special educational needs (SEN) was also referred to both in terms of struggles in working with such children remotely and the efforts to overcome these:

“

Because I just... you see a lot of children can work independently, but (Study child) really can't. There are certain tasks that she can do independently, but she really needs somebody sitting with her to get the most out of her learning.

(Parent, Rathlin, Cohort B)

And on some days, it goes really well, so many in half an hour we are done with all work. Sometimes he just doesn't have patience and I don't have patience either, because I'm wasting my time. So, I call him back in an hour and we try to finish again.

(Parent, Ballagh, Cohort A)

Principals and teachers expressed particular concerns about the inequalities that arise with lengthy school closure, although also noted how, with appropriate support, some children could thrive:

“

And I think the other inequality is the SEN children, I think they're really, really struggling at the moment. Well, it depends, I guess, on the severity of the needs ... I have a child in my class with severe special needs and I know his family are under enormous pressure at the moment with him at home.

(Teacher, Ballagh, Cohort A)

Well, definitely the children with special needs, I feel they will have...definitely their progress will be affected, I'm quite sure about that.

(Principal, Tuskar, Cohort B)

Children with special needs, it's so hard on the parents. Like, so hard. Like, at home 24/7, then trying to teach. It's in such a confined space. Their routine is out the window from what they were used to. Now, at this stage a lot of them have built up their own total routines, which is great to hear, and they're telling you what they do and their little timetables. Lots of them have written out when they do art in the week, when they do their writing in the week, when they do their sounds, which is fantastic. But that's really hard on any child, you know, any child with ASD or that loves their routine, that's really difficult.

(Teacher, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

In terms of children with special needs, I think some of the children with special needs are quite happy to be at home now and have the pressure off them to perform in a classroom. I have one guy who has assistive technology and we organised for him to get his laptop along with WordShark and NumberShark and he's very happy at home learning and going through those, he takes his breaks and all that whenever he wants.

(Teacher, Skelligs, Cohort B)

For children from immigrant communities there were particular challenges around communication with some parents, and engagement remotely with subjects such as Irish:

The ones that I think in my class that are going to suffer the most are the EAL students. Because the parents are really struggling with the correspondence. ... I have got one letter already from a parents, ... an email, you know, from Google Translate, and she was just apologising for not getting the work done or if the work was not done properly. Because she couldn't understand the instructions for the work. So, I think that's really, really hard.

(Teacher, Ballagh, Cohort A)

Oh, the other thing I want to add about the challenges for example Irish, because we don't know any Irish at all, we do know English, so we can help him with that, but we don't know any Irish Parent.

(Teacher, Broadhaven, Cohort A)

Some of the parents, they wouldn't have very fluent English, they don't understand what I'm saying so they just put me straight on to [the phone to] the child. Which is no problem too because I love chatting to the girls...Whereas I suppose when you have a really easy language... if you've no barriers, that's never a problem.

(Teacher, Ardnakinna, Cohort A)

Even I was thinking of the little kids in my class who have EAL, English as an additional language, and I was only thinking, they'd come so far in the six months and they only hear English in school, so are they going to come back now in September and have lost all that English?

(Teacher, Poolbeg, Cohort A)



Conclusion

At the height of the first Irish national lockdown in May 2020, the majority of schools involved in the nationally representative cohort study of primary schooling - Children's School Lives - participated in a special sub-study about remote teaching, leading, and learning. This mixed methods study yielded powerful comparisons between the experiences of children in Third Class and Junior Infants, their parents, teachers, and principals.

The overarching finding was that schools engaged in a remarkable effort to manage and sustain remote teaching and learning in challenging and extraordinary circumstances. Most principals were working longer hours than normal, as were many teachers. Teachers were mainly in frequent contact with parents and set a range of work although there was an over-reliance on worksheets and considerably less use of video technologies. Teachers also reported spending far less time on teaching art, music, drama, physical education, SESE (science, history, geography), religion, and Irish - and the same amount of time or more time teaching English and maths. Both principals and teachers often felt stressed by this changed work context but remained highly engaged and professionally committed. They missed working face to face with children and emphasised the centrality of these relationships to their professional identities.

Parents and children were also making a significant effort to engage in remote learning, although children's lack of motivation to learn remotely, and competing demands on parents' time, were especially evident. Parents who responded to the parent survey clearly had access to digital technology resources. Although nearly all in the sample were involved in remote learning and comfortable using digital technology, only a third of parents regularly helped their children, with a lack of time reported as the most common barrier. Children and parents were generally satisfied with the amount and challenge of work set by teachers, although many reported doing less work than was expected of them. Mainly mothers helped children with remote learning, and participated in this sub-study, demonstrating a clear gender bias in involvement in children's remote educational experiences. A very positive finding was parents' enjoyment of spending more time with their children, with the high frequency of outdoor activities reported during their child's day mapping well with children's reports of enjoying physical education at home.

Adapting to the transition to remote teaching and learning was easier for some schools and families than for others, with children, their parents, teachers, and principals being relatively mixed on whether they had adjusted well to the change. There was a general enthusiasm for schools to re-open, although, at the time of the sub-study, most principals felt unprepared due to a lack of clarity about how to manage protective measures against the virus. In general, principals appeared most negatively impacted by the transition, given their multiple pressures of communicating between services, State agencies, teachers, and parents, with the added responsibility of caring for others at home.

The study highlights the centrality of schools to children's everyday lives, in addition, to the key role principals and teachers played as a frontline service to local communities in need during a period of national emergency. However, substantive equality concerns arise. The experience of remote schooling was not uniform among children and their families. Neither was provision of remote learning uniform among schools. All were on a steep learning curve. Parents, teachers, and principals were worried about the long-term consequences for most children, but especially those who were 'hard to reach' and/or living in already challenging circumstances. Also present, was the time bind for parents (especially mothers as noted) in juggling both work and schooling, and the particular challenges for parents who did not know how to help their children.

This sub-study, although informative, raises questions about teaching and learning during the lockdown. Over time CSL will track the longer-term impact on children's academic achievement and wellbeing. Clear questions arise in relation to the digital divide for children and families in challenging circumstances, alongside the provision of timely, appropriate, and targeted supports to all schools and families, in addition, to teacher education for digital learning. A refocusing on the particular challenges and supports for school leadership in a context of profound change is also warranted. There are further implications for the curriculum, where time restrictions can influence teachers' decisions about what to teach and how often, during a national crisis. To avoid narrowing the range of knowledge and competencies that children are learning due to time and modality restrictions, a modified version of the curriculum with some degree of subject overlap and blending may prove valuable for future challenging times. The focus of future-directed efforts should be not only on realising children's rights to education but also on realising the rights of all children to have a balanced and rich experience of that education be it from home or in school.

Message of thanks....

The CSL team would like to thank all the schools, teachers, parents, and children who participated so generously through the online surveys and interviews about their experiences of remote leading, teaching, and learning.

