



School closures and coronavirus - Parent Survey

March 2020

1. Summary

- Many parents are very worried about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their child's education. Almost a quarter (24%) are extremely worried. Parents in Northern Ireland more worried than parents in England or Wales.
- In general, primary school parents are slightly less concerned than secondary/post primary parents. The only variation is that parents of Year 6 children are slightly more worried than Year 7 parents. Parents with a child in Year 3 are least worried whilst, perhaps unsurprisingly, parents of children in Year 11 are most worried.
- Parents' biggest concerns cover a range of themes including their child falling behind or missing out on the learning that should be happening at school, exams being cancelled, lack of socialisation and the health of loved ones.
- Parents think the coronavirus pandemic will affect their children's education in different ways. In terms of how, themes as similar to parents' overall concerns, that is, that their children will be missing out on their education, that they will fall behind, the effect on exams, the fact that their children are unable to socialise, a lack of routine, concerns about transitioning to secondary school, as well as going back to school after a long break, and low motivation levels for some children to work at home. 17% of parents feel the pandemic will not affect their child's education.
- Less than one in five parents (19%) feel very confident to support their child's learning at home. Another 43% are quite confident. Almost a quarter (22%) are neither confident nor unconfident and 15% are not at all confident. Parents with children in Year 6 or Year 12 are most confident.
- 93% of parents said their child's school has shared details of arrangements for learning at home during school closures, 7% said they hadn't.
- Asked about the effect school closures might have on parents, rather than their children, almost half the parents (49%) mentioned work. In many cases parents were referring to having to juggle everything but many parents also expressed financial concerns at not being able to work with children at home or the worry of losing their jobs. Higher levels of stress, worry and mental health were mentioned by 14% of parents.
- This said, 11% feel that school closures will have no, or very little, impact and 7% think the impact will be a positive one.

2. Methodology

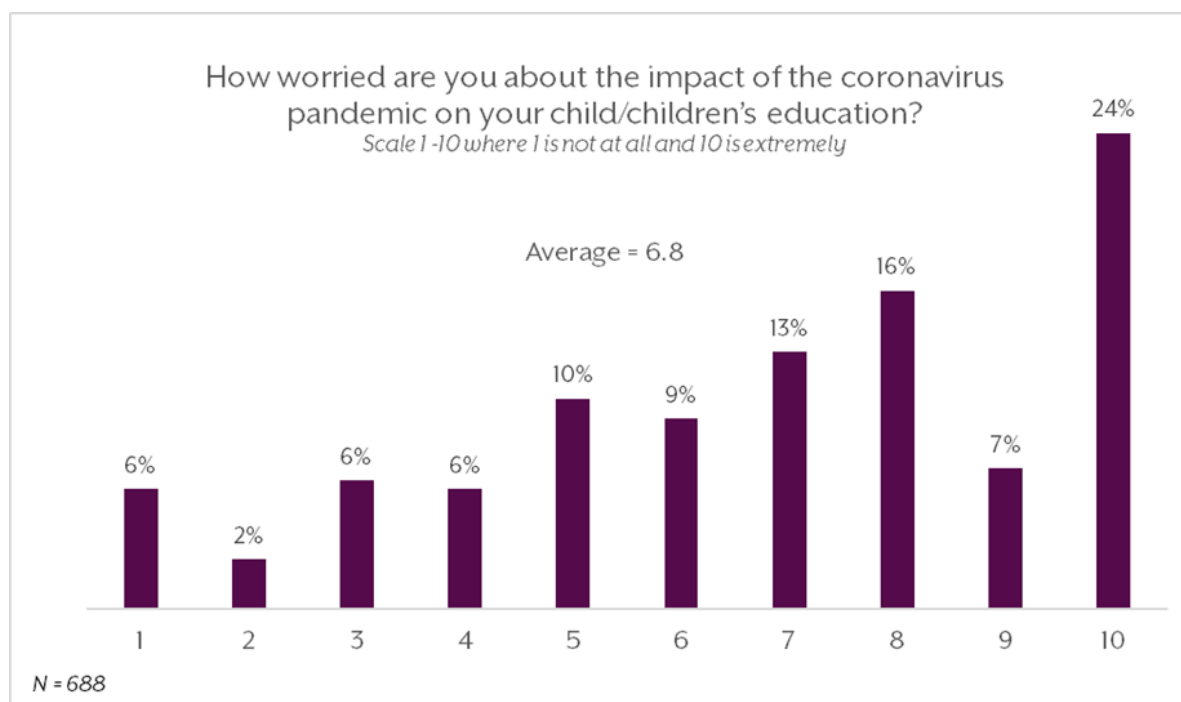
A short online survey, promoted to parents of school age children via social media, was active between 3pm on Wednesday 18th March and 10am on Monday 23rd March. 691 parents, representing 1181 pupils, completed the survey. 85% of respondents were based in England, 8% in Wales and 7% in Northern Ireland.

Please note that percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

3. Findings

Qu 1 How worried are you about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on your child/children's education?

Figure 1

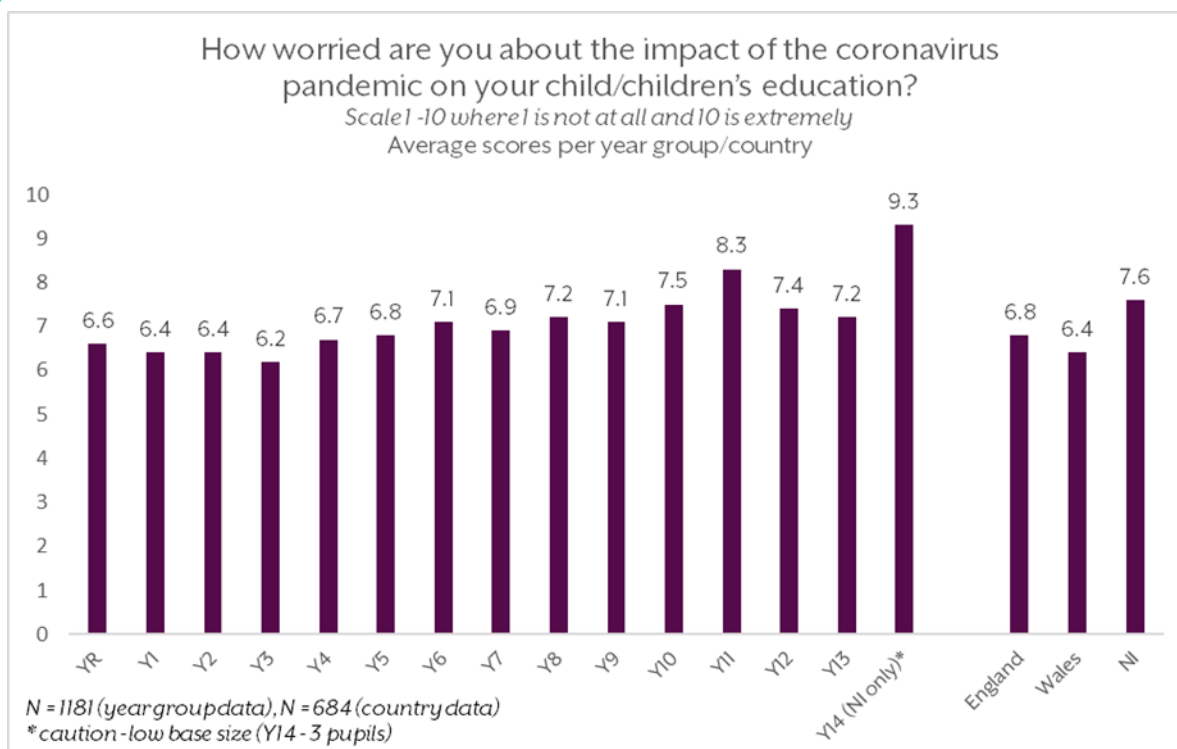


We asked parents how worried they were about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their child/children's education, on a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 was not at all and 10 was extremely worried. As Figure 1 shows, overall, the vast majority parents are worried about the impact of the pandemic on their child's education. More parents gave the highest score, indicating that they are extremely worried, than any other score (24%). Across all parents, the average score was 6.8.

There was some variation between the different year groups (Figure 2 overleaf). In general, primary school parents are slightly less concerned than secondary/post primary parents. The only variation is that parents of Year 6 children are slightly more worried than Year 7 parents. Parents with a child in Year 3 are least worried (average of 6.2) whilst, perhaps unsurprisingly, parents of children in Year 11 are most worried (average of 8.3) (excluding parents of the 3 Year 14 pupils in NI due to very low numbers in this year group).

Interestingly, there was also some variation between the 3 countries' results with parents in Northern Ireland more worried about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their child/children's education (7.6) than parents in England (6.8) or Wales (6.4).

Figure 2



Q2 What's your biggest concern?

Next we asked parents to tell us their biggest concern. Many themes came out of the 627 free text responses.

A quarter of parents said their biggest concern was either their child/children **falling behind** (13%) or **missing out** on the learning that should be happening at school (12%).

"Loss of education, lack of preparation for next year, missing key elements of the curriculum with no room to catch up in already crowded curriculum..."

"Falling behind, missing something important that I can't teach and not being able to catch up."

The next biggest concern was exams – 11% of parents told us this was their biggest concern. For Year 11 parents the figure was 81% and Year 13s 76%.

"My eldest not getting the GCSEs he's worked hard for. Getting judged on mock results that weren't his best effort."

"That my year 13 son's A Levels have been cancelled and what will happen about his university offers."

For more than one in 10 parents (11%) the lack of socialisation and their child not being able to see their friends was their biggest concern.

“The lack of social interaction with friends will have an effect on the general well-being.”

“Socialising with friends, as this is just as important as academics.”

8% of parents said their biggest concern was health related, rather than anything directly associated with school.

“My children’s health outweighs any worry I have about their education.”

“Social distancing not being taken seriously enough, and family members dying.”

Other themes mentioned by more than 3% of parents include feeling ill equipped to support their children’s learning at home (5%), the uncertainty of how long the situation will go on for (4%) and having to juggle work and home schooling (3%).

Q3 How do you think the coronavirus pandemic will affect your child/children’s education?

We asked parents how they thought the coronavirus pandemic would affect their child/children’s education. Again, we asked for unprompted responses to this question which were then grouped into themes. 617 parents answered this question.

Whilst 5% of parents said they weren’t sure, more than three quarters (77%) said the pandemic would affect their child’s education to a greater or lesser extent.

More than one in 10 parents (11%) believe the effect will be significant.

“If the school is closed long term her education is seriously going to suffer as she won’t get the knowledge she needs and is used to [getting].”

“A lot - they will be missing important parts of the curriculum.”

“If the grades are not what my daughter was aiming for she will be devastated and may change her education route.”

“She will be really behind and find it hard to get back into learning.”

“It’s going to affect high school kids a lot more than primary. I seriously have major concerns for my daughter’s education. She had really started to thrive and hit her stride. This could send her backwards.”

Most parents said there would be some impact. In terms of how, themes were similar to parents’ overall concerns, that is, that their children would be missing out on their education, that they would fall behind, the effect on exams and the fact that their children were unable to socialise.

"I think they will likely fall behind on their in year targets and not be pushed by their peers."

"They will miss parts of the curricula and will have 'holes' in their learning/education."

"I'm worried she'll miss things like learning to tell the time, fractions. Also we won't cover a broad syllabus at home. We might keep up with basics such as literacy and maths but not much else."

"Never sitting an exam and never being part of the usual leaving activities."

"The school seems pretty set up with the education side it's the social and interaction and sports that will be missing that's just as important as lesson time."

A lack of routine, concerns about transitioning to secondary school, as well as going back to school after a long break, and low motivation levels for some children to work at home were also mentioned by several parents.

"I think he will end up losing confidence in his capabilities and he will end up feeling like he can't meet demands of his teachers when he returns. I feel a lot of children and parents alike will struggle with this sudden change where there has been no transition period, especially from going from a world of confusion and frustration on lockdown, quarantined at home, to suddenly returning to school to be told they're not returning to the classroom where they were settled, but will be returning to the next year group in to a teaching pattern they are not familiar with."

"I know it seems really superficial all things considered but my middle child is very upset to miss all the things primary 7 get to do in the last term of their last year. She had just got a part in the school play, was involved in the junior entrepreneurs challenge, confirmation, P7 school trip, leavers hoodies.... All the things her older sister got to do. After working so hard to get through transfer test she is just gutted."

"Lack of daily structure, isolation from peers and teachers, boredom, unable to self-motivate. I have a teenage boy who doesn't self-motivate well!"

Notably, more than one in six parents (17%) feel that the pandemic will not affect their child's education.

"I don't think it will impact as every other child at the same stage has had the same interruption."

"I don't think it will he will be doing all activities that he has been given plus lots of life skills, cooking, cleaning, helping in the garden."

"I think the teacher has provided great resources, I personally don't think this will have a major impact on my child as he's only in year 1."

Q4 To what extent do you feel able to support your child/children with their learning at home when schools close?

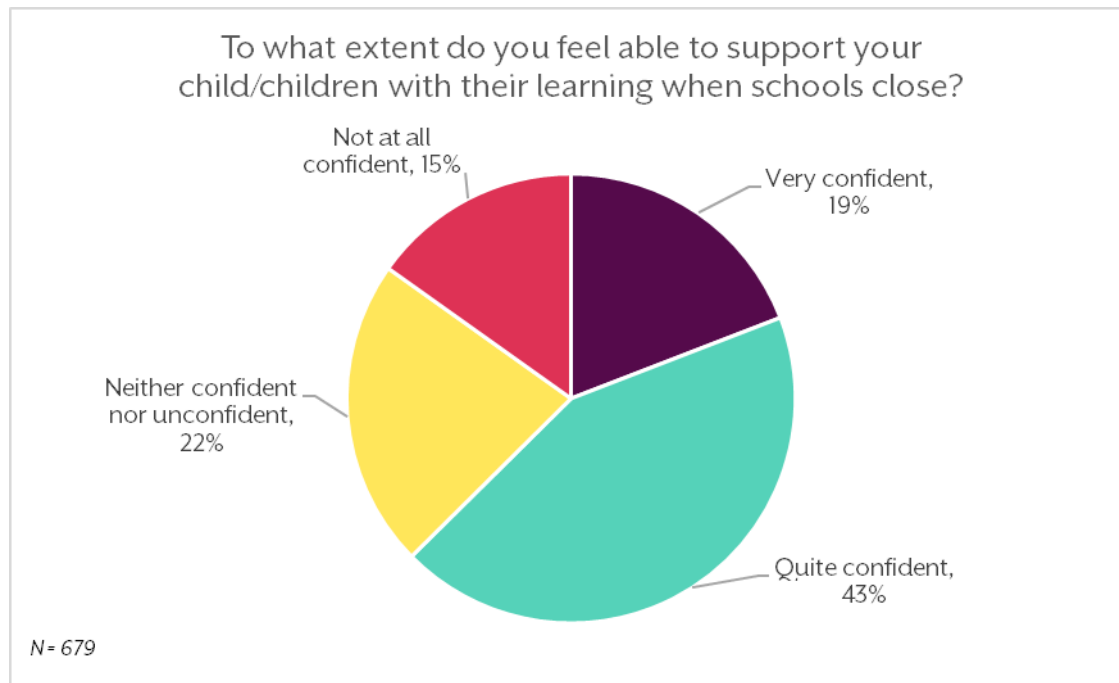
We asked parents to tell us the extent to which they feel able to support their child/children with their learning when schools close. The results are shown in Figure 3 overleaf.

Overall, less than one in five parents (19%) feel very confident to support their child's learning. Another 43% are quite confident. Almost a quarter (22%) are neither confident nor unconfident and 15% are not at all confident.

Parents with children in Year 6 or Year 12 are most confident, with two thirds of parents (67%) either very confident or quite confident to support their child's learning with schools closed. Conversely, parents with children in Year 13 are the least confident with more than a quarter (26%) not at all confident.

Parents in Northern Ireland are less confident than their counterparts in England or Wales (only 45% of NI parents are either very confident or quite confident to support their child's learning compared with 64% in England and 57% in Wales).

Figure 3



Q5 Has your child/children's school(s) shared any details of arrangements for learning at home during school closures?

We also asked parents whether their child's school had shared any details of arrangements for learning at home during school closures. Across the whole sample, 80% of parents said their child's school had, and 20% said they hadn't. However, it is worth noting that if we just look at those responses completed by parents after schools closed on Friday 20th March 93% of parents reported receiving details of arrangements for learning at home, and 7% had not.

Q6 What impact do you think school closures will have on you as a parent?

Lastly, we wanted to find out the effect school closures might have on parents, rather than their children. Again, this was a free text response. 628 parents answered this question.

Almost half the parents (49%) mentioned work. In many cases parents were referring to having to juggle everything.

"We both work full time, so work will be incredibly difficult."

"Will make it harder to deliver on work and as a parent - both are going to get compromised..."

"Fall behind on my work, having to work through the night to get it done and miss out on sleep etc. Lack of routine and potential to be out of work."

"Very stressful as I have to work too and don't want them to miss out so it's going to be a real juggling act."

"Absolutely terrible. I work for an American company and do lots of conference calls. I am working from home now but with two children at home all day this is going to be very difficult."

"A lot [of impact]. I am required to work to help the key workers. My son is ASD and is really struggling to accept I have to work. Then I need to help him to do his school work also."

For others it was specifically about finances – 46 parents mentioned the financial impact:

"As a single, self-employed parent, I am no longer able to work and this will severely affect my ability to financially support us."

"I won't be able to go to work whilst looking after kids."

"Money issues as we won't be able to work."

One in seven parents (14%) referred to higher levels of stress, worry and mental health.

"It's very stressful, I'm not sure how well we will cope with home schooling three children of such different abilities."

"It will affect my mental health and my confidence plus put a strain on our relationship."

"It's going to be a big impact on me as a parent. It's going to be a struggle to get the children to work every day and therefore cause arguments and stress. I also will need to work from home and this is going to be impossible to do along with teaching my children and making sure they exercise. The situation is impossible and depressing."

"I am concerned for my mental health. It is a lot for parents to juggle."

"More stress I think, I love my children so much but everyone is worried and we just don't know what is happening. Add in the change and upset to their routine, their worries, fears and uncertainties and then add in spending a lot of indoor time together and it's a recipe for real mental health impact on us all."

30 parents spoke about the impact on their children rather than themselves directly – including their children's (lack of) motivation, health, and isolation:

"They'll struggle and stress about the school work rather than just do what they need to do to get through this."

"As a full time working parent, the closure will have an impact of frustration, sadness for my child who is not able to learn in an environment he is supposed to, lack of child interaction and social time."

"Worry as to what he is losing out on not being in the classroom and getting him back on track when he eventually goes back to school. Lack of motivation whilst he is off and also when he goes back."

Several parents are concerned about not being able to support their child effectively:

"Enormous worry and pressure as to whether you're doing things correctly and enough!"

"Will I be able to support my child and can I educate her in the right way?"

And the thought of having to stay indoors was mentioned by a handful of parents:

"Huge, especially if we are stopped from going out. Being inside with children for any length of time will be extremely tough."

However, just over one in ten (11%) said they would have no, or very little, impact.

"Not a lot as they can stay at home by themselves while I go to work as they are 14 and 15 years old."

"No impact on me personally, I just hope I can do as good a job as the teachers do."

"Hopefully none I'll try and enjoy this and not get stressed that's the plan."

Finally, 7% of parents said they thought the school closures would have a positive impact:

"Home schooling was not something I ever planned to do. However, as I am now unemployed, I hope it will bring us closer as a family. I also hope to learn things I missed out on at school - alongside the children."

"Getting a greater bond with my children and having family time learning together."

"Hopefully make me a better parent and get to know my kids again."