



Kindred²

Research conducted by:

YouGov[®]
What the world thinks

2022 School Readiness Survey

January 2023

Introduction

This report sets out key findings from the third annual Kindred² survey of teachers' views on the scale and impact of children missing their developmental milestones in the early years of their development. In addition to the views of over 1,000 teachers, this year we have also surveyed over 1,000 parents of Reception children.

By 'school ready' we mean children being developmentally ready to access the learning and development opportunities available to them in the Reception year, where this is not due to a previously identified Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND). It refers to the full range of developmental measures, not simply a narrow measure of 'academic' attainment. We are focused on entry to Reception rather than Year 1 because we know many parents consider the start of 'school' to be the beginning of Reception.

Over
1,000
teachers and **1,000**
parents were surveyed.

SECTION 1

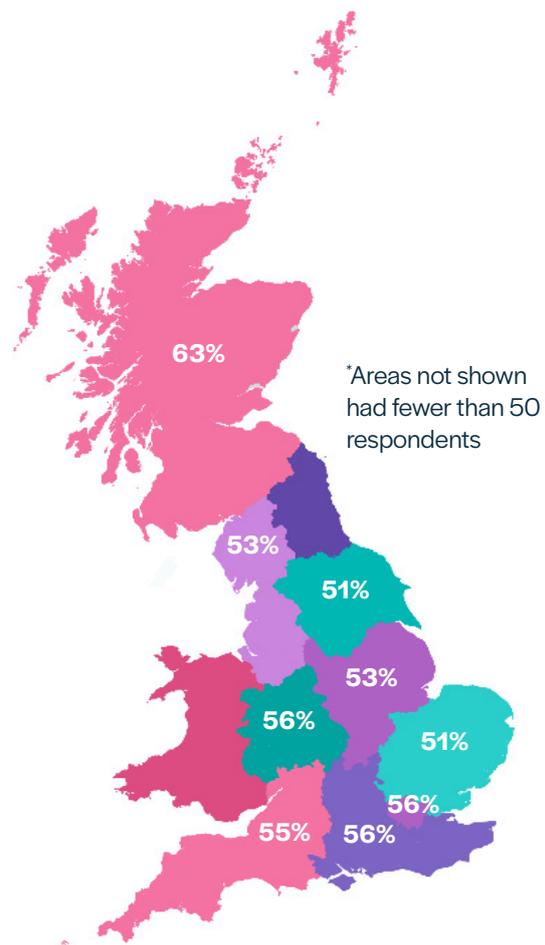
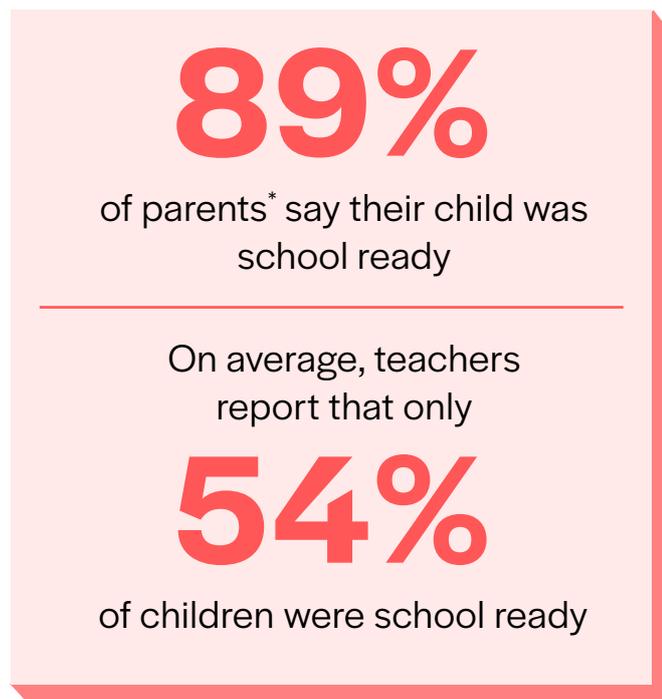
Too many children are behind before they begin their school-based education

Nine out of ten of parents* (89%) say their child was 'ready for school' in the Autumn term 2022, but teachers say it was nearer half (54%).

On average, teachers report that almost half the children in their Reception classes (46%) were not developmentally 'school ready' on entry to Reception. Teachers believe the problem of school readiness is growing, with 59% reporting that the number of children who are developmentally behind is either higher or the same this year as in previous years.

However, almost nine out of ten parents say their child was school ready based on the definition in the report, indicating a very significant difference of perception and understanding.

Teachers reported the average percentage of students who were 'school ready' UK Regions/Nations



* who expressed an opinion

There is a difference in expectations

Results from the parent survey highlight some of the discrepancies between what schools and parents expect a child to be able to do by the time they begin Reception.

We asked teachers what they thought being developmentally ready for Reception meant. Their answers were consistent and clear:

Independence, dressing, eating and toileting

Schools expect children to be sufficiently independent, able to use the toilet, dress and feed themselves and to be separate from parents.

Playing, sharing and turn-taking

Children are expected to have social skills, such as playing, taking turns and sharing,

which are important for developing friendships and engaging in learning activities.

Basic written and verbal skills

Communicating in short, full and clear sentences and verbalising needs were important developmental milestones, along with the ability to hold a pen, recognise letters and numbers, and have some familiarity with nursery rhymes.

Following simple instructions

There is an expectation that children are able to sit down and listen, follow and act on simple instructions.

Ability to concentrate

Children are expected to be able to sit down, focus and concentrate for short periods of time.

Percentage of parents who think that their child should be:

Toilet trained*

84%

Able to eat independently

82%

Able to use basic language skills (i.e. can say their name and answer questions)

81%

Able to drink from a cup with no lid

78%

Able to play or share with other children

74%

Able to jump with both feet leaving the floor at the same time

59%

Able to hold a pencil

56%

*that is, out of nappies with toileting 'mishaps' occurring occasionally rather than frequently

Many teachers believe the situation is getting worse and this is reflected in the number of children lacking some of the basic developmental skills.

Percentage of teachers who had at least one child in their class who:

Struggles to hold a pencil (last year 98%)



Does not know how to listen/respond to simple instructions (significantly higher than last year 97%)



Struggles to share with other children (last year 99%)



Does not have basic number skills (i.e. cannot count to ten) (last year 98%)



Is overly upset when away from their parents (last year 96%)



Does not have basic language skills (i.e. cannot say their name, answer questions, etc.) (last year 91%)



Is not toilet trained (last year 90%)



Is not able to eat independently (last year 88%)



SECTION 2

The school readiness problem impacts all areas of the community

Teachers were clear that the number of children who are behind before they begin their school-based education is important because of the impact it has on every child, staff member, and on school finances.

2.1 Children

Children who require significant additional support to reach their developmental milestones are unable to access the full range of opportunities in Reception year, and the implications are long-lasting.

Our qualitative research evidenced that children who are not school ready often

struggle in school settings and can feel frustrated if they feel unable to learn, which can lead to disruptive behaviour. Teachers report that limited school readiness can mean that children are unable to manage emotions, communicate their needs and have social interactions with other children. This can be upsetting, cause anxiety and limit the child's ability to form friendships.

Lack of independence, difficulty separating from parents and poor ability to concentrate can cause children to become withdrawn and harder to engage. This can impact children's experiences of the learning environment, hinder their development, leading to long-term negative effects.



'It's very hard to get children back on track and they stay 'below' throughout their time at school, despite our best efforts with intervention.'

– Teacher, London



'[Ensuring a child is developmentally ready for Reception] is the foundation of pretty much the rest of a child's school life.'

– Teacher, London

“ ‘Children often leave [year] 6 at a very low level (perhaps year 2/3 level) and then cannot cope at secondary school. They lack basic literacy skills and obviously that impacts their opportunities as they approach adulthood.’

– **Teacher, London**

“ ‘If home are supportive then we find they often catch up but there really needs to be support on both sides, otherwise the gap in learning stays the same and sometimes worsens.’

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**

The school readiness problem also affects the children who are ready for Reception because they lose out on teacher time and attention.

As a result of so many children starting behind, teachers in the focus groups reported that the quality of whole-class teaching and learning in Reception is affected.

“ ‘You try to not let it impact [the children] too much, but they are having learning time taken away whilst adults deal with behaviour/toileting etc.’

– **Senior teacher, East Midlands**

90%

of teachers say that having one or more children who are not school ready results in teachers (and 91% of teaching assistants) having to **spend more time dealing with certain children* and therefore less time with other children**

72%

said their school has to **divert more resources to early language skills**

* Over and above the usual level of personalisation expected for individual children.



‘Teachers often can’t get down to the ‘meat and potatoes’ of teaching the curriculum because they’re doing things like changing wet children, dealing with emotional outbreaks etc. Many of our Reception staff, especially this autumn term, have missed out on their lunches and thus their prep time due to supporting children who can’t feed themselves.’

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**



‘Much more time is spent sorting social issues and helping develop independence which should be time spent teaching.’

– **Senior teacher, East Midlands**



‘We can teach ... the phonics, we can teach the early maths, we can do [it] if the children are ready to learn. But actually, if children aren’t ready and able to sit down and listen and focus and have ... a level of concentration, then that’s really hard.’

– **Senior teacher, North East**

Some teachers note that limited school readiness, particularly poor development of social and emotional skills, can also impact mental and physical wellbeing.

This can have negative consequences on the learning experience and children’s ability to form friendships.



‘Long term it impacts their learning, understanding, friendships and readiness for secondary.’

– **Assistant Headteacher, South**



‘The children are withdrawn and harder to engage. Often they automatically think things will be too hard.’

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**

2.2 Staff

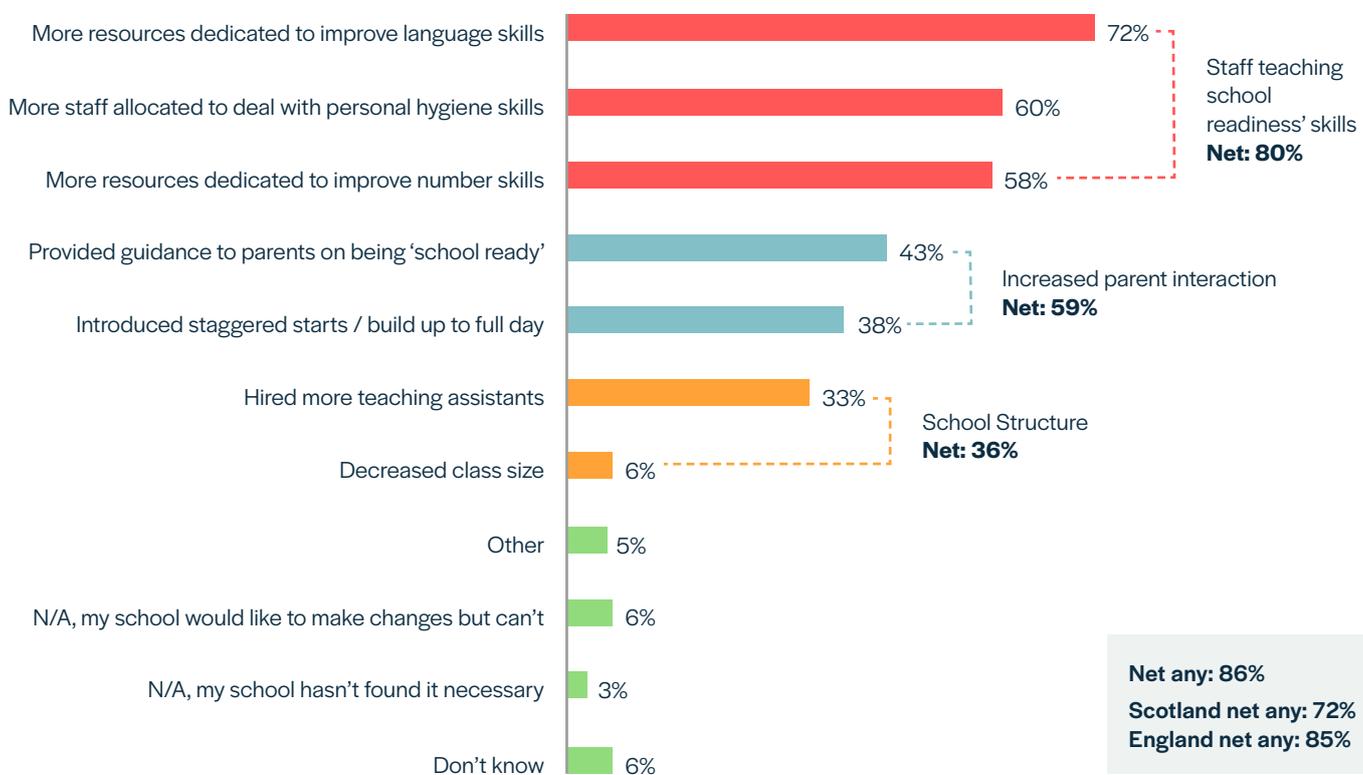
Limited school readiness has meant that schools need more staff to be able to support children to focus on basic tasks, such as toileting and dressing and addressing poor behaviour.

However, senior leaders reported that increasing the number of staff is not a feasible option for most schools. This has resulted in

teachers having less time to focus on learning, which impacts the learning of all students, as observed in the previous section.

80% of teachers report allocating resources to provide the catch-up needed by those children who are not able to access the opportunities of Reception.

Adaptations made for having children who are not school ready:



‘Adults are the most valuable but most expensive resource in schools and this is essential to support these children as effectively as we can. We simply do not have the finances to meet these needs and I feel we are failing a number of children because of these limitations.’

– **Headteacher, South**

Respondents quantified how much of their day is focused away from other priorities as a result of the challenges created by the school readiness problem (average hours per day).



80% of teachers report that they now spent a significant amount of additional time supporting the development of a range of school readiness skills.

80%
of teachers report that they are now teaching more school readiness skills such as language (72%), personal hygiene (60%) and number skills (58%)

In the focus groups, teachers made links between school readiness and staff morale and retention.

Many teachers face significant time pressures dealing with children who are not school ready, which can make it more difficult for schools to attract and retain staff.

73%

of teachers report having one or more children who are not ready increases staff stress levels, with 44% stating it was leading to reduced staff morale



‘Recruitment in general is difficult. I think behaviour is a big cause. And a lot of this comes from children not being school ready’.

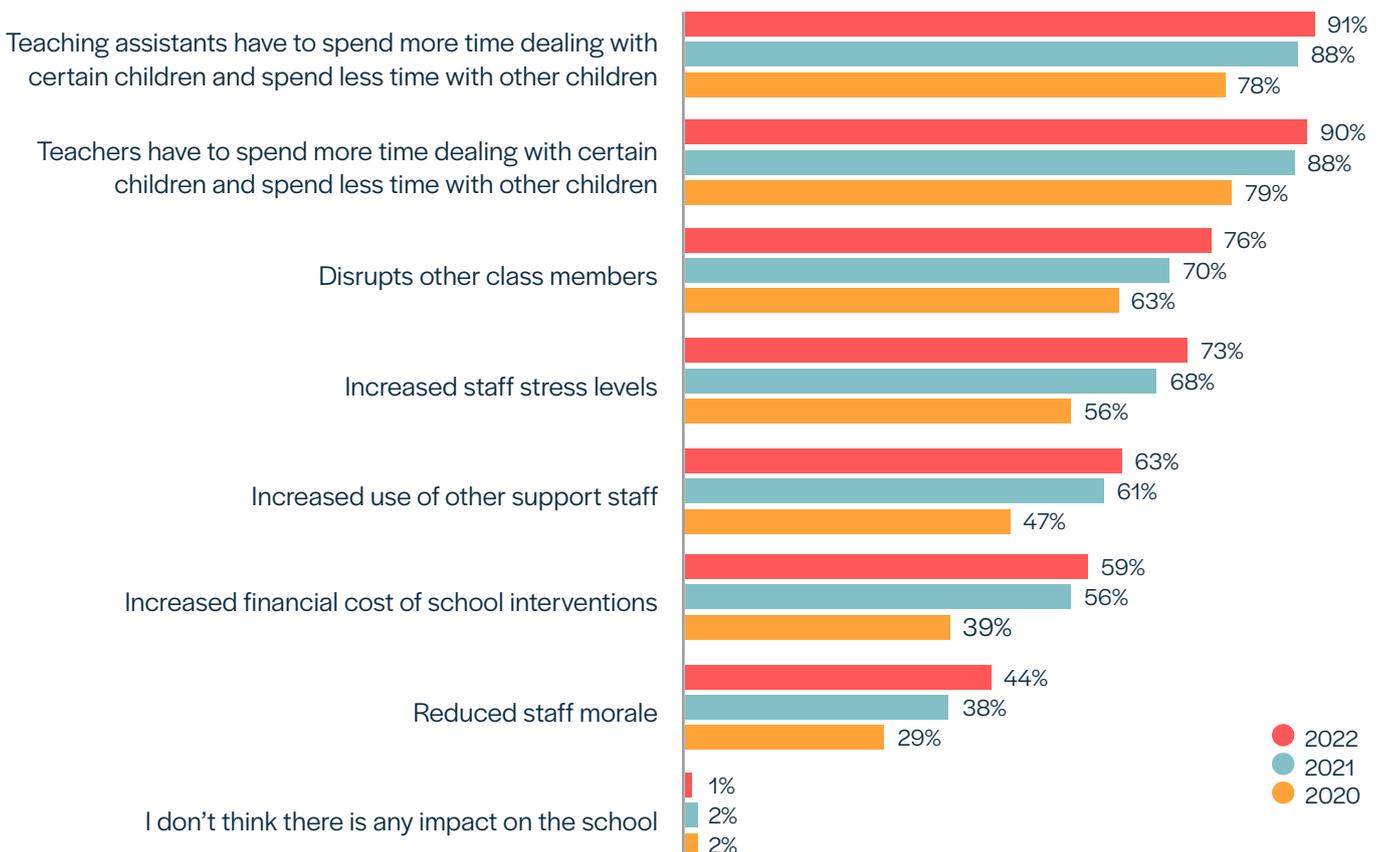
– Senior teacher, London



‘Staff in our school are being pushed to their limit at the moment. Lots of children not toilet trained means two members of staff are having to be released from classes to change a child each time they have an accident.’

– Teacher, West Midlands

Teacher’s view of the impact of not being school ready:



2.3 Cost

In addition to the limitations set on children's progress, the school readiness problem has real financial implications for schools. 59% of teachers say schools face increased financial costs due to interventions when one or more children start Reception not school ready.

Focus groups report funds need to be invested in additional staff requirements to

support children who are not school ready, along with investing in pastoral care and support workers.

Some teachers note that schools are struggling with funding, as it is often not sufficient to cover the support needs of the children.



'We have to make do with the resources we have, we cannot go out and hire extra teaching assistants because pupils don't know their numbers or can't put their own coats on. There is not more money because pupils lack readiness for Reception.'

– **Assistant Headteacher, London**



'You are just forever playing catch up, so you are starting behind ... we're in a huge deficit budget and we have got nowhere near enough staff to be able to catch the children up.'

– **Assistant Headteacher, East Midlands**

On average, teachers estimate in 2022 that the average financial cost to their school for the additional time spent supporting children who are not 'school ready' is £21,562 (in 2021 the estimate was £17,784). Senior school leaders costed this at £23,403. This is equivalent to a full-time staff member's salary.

As 99% of respondents had at least one child in their class who was not school ready, nationally this equates to almost **£450million per year**.

£21,562

the average financial cost to schools for the additional time spent supporting children who are not 'school ready'



'If there is early intervention, we effectively shouldn't need to be spending the time and money playing catch up like we are currently doing. In fact, I think we're just putting plasters over things rather than dealing with what needs to be dealt with.'

– **Headteacher, South**

SECTION 3

Why are so few children meeting their early developmental milestones?

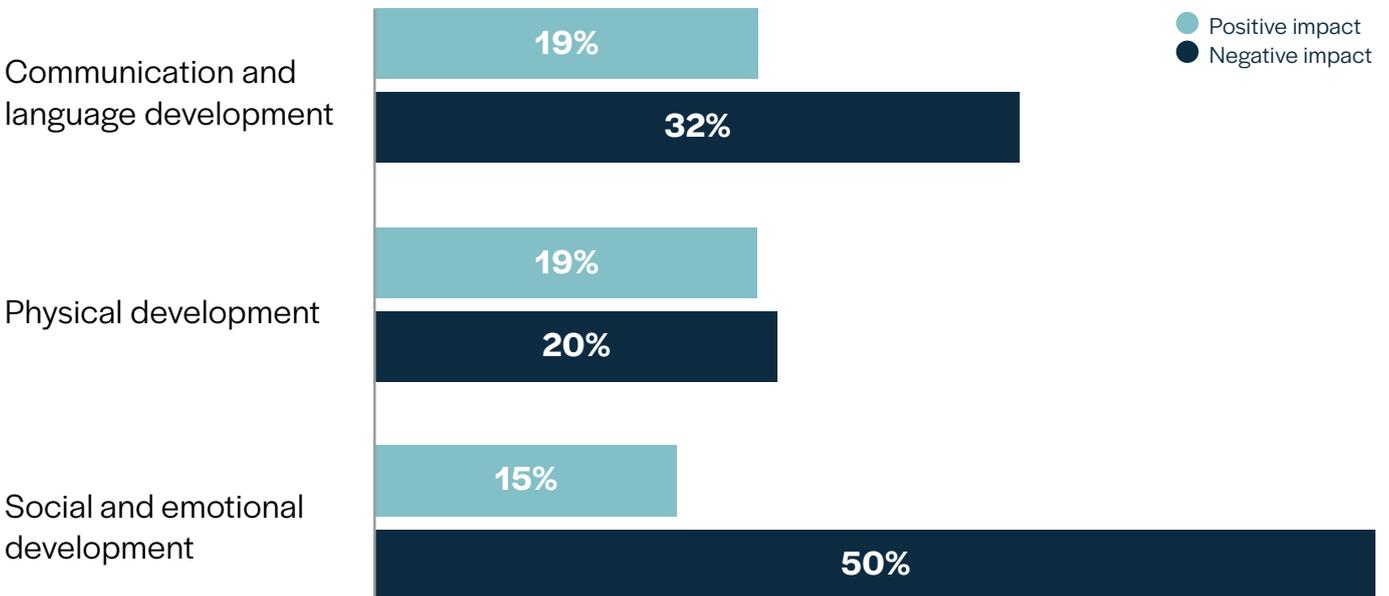
3.1 The effects of Covid are still being felt

The impact of COVID-19 on the level of school readiness is still a factor, albeit of decreasing importance. 66% of teachers surveyed believe that less time spent in nursery during lockdowns has negatively impacted the number of children who are school ready (down from 77% in 2021).

Parents' experiences of lockdown varied, reporting their children's development being impacted in different ways.

57%
of parents also identified fewer opportunities to socialise as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns as a factor resulting in children not being school ready

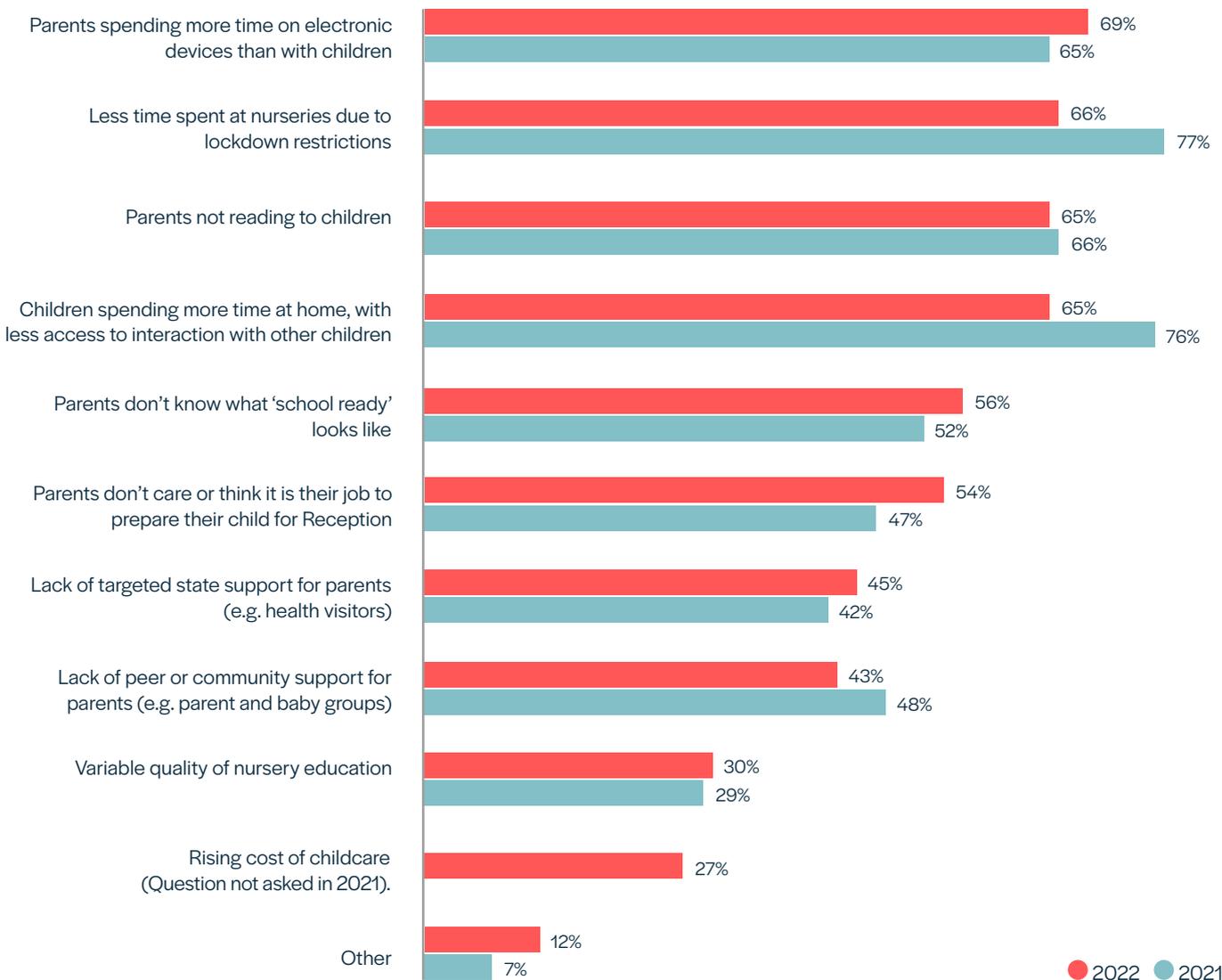
Parent's view of how lockdown impacted their child's development:



Parents also reported facing challenges at home, including financial and time pressures, which limit the time they are able to spend with their children. Teachers identified parents spending more time on electronic devices than with their children (69%) and not reading to their children (65%) as key parental behaviours in explaining the nation’s school readiness problem.

Teachers identified **parents spending more time on electronic devices than with their children (69%)** and **not reading to their children (65%)** as parental behaviours contributing to the nation’s school readiness problem

Teacher view of reasons why children are not school ready*:



* who said there was a higher proportion of pupils arriving not school ready in 2022

3.2 Parents often don't know what being ready for Reception means

Teachers noted that many parents lack understanding and knowledge about the key developmental milestones that their children are expected to reach by a certain age.

School leaders interviewed by YouGov observed that first-time parents were also more likely to lack confidence and the ability to develop essential skills in their children.

Some parents assumed that it is a school's responsibility to teach basic skills, including toileting and dressing.

95%

of teachers* said that parents need more information about what being ready for Reception means

“

'Many parents can't be expected to get children school ready if they are unsure what this means. If it was clear from day one the milestones children were expected to meet parents may take more responsibility.'

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**

“

'I really don't think parents have any idea [of the developmental milestones expected by Reception]. There is so little given to them before they start school, the most in depth information is around the two year developmental check but then there's a huge gap between that and starting school.'

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**

“

'Parents need to know what school readiness looks like and that this means that children should have a certain level of independence.'

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**

56% of teachers who had fewer school ready children in their class compared to previous years think this is due to parents being unaware of the expectations of what 'school ready' looks like.

“ ‘Helping parents understand how to get their child school ready - not just information on what they “should” be able to do.’

– Parent

“ ‘More information on when children can be encouraged to do things like toilet training, eating independently, good sleep routines.’

– Parent

“ ‘A shared criteria across private nurseries of what school readiness is so they are all being prepared to the same standard.’

– Parent

44% of parents don't find out about the developmental milestones children are expected to reach before Reception, until their child is four and two thirds (65%) don't know before the child turns three.

When it comes to being school ready, this is too late. Interviewees stated that parents must understand that achieving the expected developmental milestones starts from birth, not just when a child turns four.

44%

of parents don't find out about the developmental milestones children are expected to reach before Reception until their child is four

“ ‘Our private nursery had a comprehensive ready-for-school programme. The cost is more than our mortgage though! Didn't hear about school readiness from any other sources.’

– Parent

Parents who had not heard about the concept of 'school readiness' until this survey were four times more likely to say their child was not school ready (16%) when compared to those who were aware of school readiness from pregnancy (4%).

School leaders reported that reduced funding to children centres, nurseries and access

to face-to-face health visitors has meant that parents are not getting the support they need. This lessens their understanding of their child's progress in regards to the development of skills appropriate for their age.

3.3 Confusion about responsibility for getting children ready for school

Teachers think that ensuring school readiness is the responsibility of parents. However, they are also sending a clear message that parents need to know the right information at the right time if they are to support the development of their child in line with expectations.

In interviews, senior teachers considered skills that encourage independence,

including verbal skills, toileting, feeding and dressing themselves, are more important for school readiness than the children's ability to write and recognise letters and numbers.

“ [Ensuring a child is school ready] is the parent's responsibility as long as they have the right guidance for what school ready looks like.’

– **Assistant Headteacher, London**

As well as a lack of awareness of school readiness, in both the survey and qualitative interviews, teachers say that some parents may not consider it ‘their job’ to help their child meet the developmental milestones expected by Reception.

“ We have a child in Reception (not SEND) who cannot and will not wipe their own bottom. ‘Mum says it's the teacher's job, not mine.’”

– **Senior teacher, West Midlands**

Percentage of parents who believe that *they are wholly responsible* for their child's development of the following skills (as opposed to the schools):

60%

Toilet training*

20%

Listening/responding to simple instruction

10%

Playing/sharing with other children

40%

Independent eating

18%

Not getting overly upset when away from you/ another parent

7%

Holding a pencil

26%

Basic language skills

*that is, out of nappies with toileting ‘mishaps’ occurring occasionally rather than frequently



‘Some parents don’t recognise the importance of independence and think that you show love by doing everything for them.’

– **Senior teacher, North**



‘It is parents’ responsibility, but I think there are a lot of parents in our school who don’t realise they are doing far too much for their children. If they had clear advice, I think a lot of parents would take this on board.’

– **Teacher, South**

95%

of teachers* agree that the state has a role to play in ensuring that parents have guidance around the expectations of being school ready

Teachers were asked to grade the government’s leadership and communication around the importance of early years to the future life chances of children (grades A*-U).

72% graded the government a D or below (67% in 2021) with the most popular choice of grade being a U (35%).

It is not only teachers that think this; a significant proportion of parents agree that getting the right information is key. 37% of parents do not feel that parents are getting enough information, yet over half (55%) said that to help more children be school ready, greater information on the definition and importance of school readiness should be provided to parents.



‘School readiness is a massive priority, more needs to be done to support parents in knowing what this is and how to ensure their child is ready.’

– **Senior teacher, East Midlands**

55%

of parents say greater information on the definition and importance of school readiness should be provided to parents



‘Parents need to know what the priorities are for children at school and realise that parenting is not a teacher’s job. There needs to be a distinction between what parents should teach their children and what teachers are there to teach.’

– **Teacher, East Midlands**

3.4 The cost of living is identified as impacting children's development

95% of teachers who expressed a view believe that the cost of living crisis is going to impact school readiness next year. Parents are also reporting that this is having an impact on their ability to spend time with their children, preventing them from developing the necessary skills.

95%

of teachers* believe that the cost of living crisis is going to impact school readiness next year

“

‘I am in a school with very low pupil premium numbers - we have such a tight budget and yet we have a huge number of families now using the foodbanks and struggling to pay mortgages. These families were money rich, time poor. Now they are struggling in every area.’

– **Headteacher, South**

“

‘Lots of other pressures on parents so less time to focus on their child - job losses, money pressures etc.’

– **Senior teacher, London**

“

Parents not being able to spend much time with their children due to having to work long hours in order to provide the basics for their family due to ridiculously high cost of living and the fact that the vast majority of households in current times require two adults working full time to function/even get a mortgage. Children are missing out on family time due to this.’

– **Parent**

The cost of early childcare and education is a factor for many families

Both parents and teachers acknowledge the developmental importance of children spending time with other children. Increasing cost of nurseries and other activities make this less accessible for some parents.

For 61% of parents who pay for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*, fees have increased as a proportion of their salary during their child's pre-school education.

43% of parents identified the rising cost of ECEC as a key factor preventing school readiness. In addition, of the teachers who stated the school readiness problem had worsened in 2022, 27% said childcare cost was a key factor.

Increasing the amount of affordable ECEC places was identified as a way to improve school readiness by the greatest number of parents in our survey (61%).

43%

of parents identified the rising cost of ECEC as a key factor preventing school readiness

61%

of parents said that increasing the amount of affordable ECEC would improve school readiness

* and expressed an opinion.

SECTION 4

Additional insights from the interviews with school leaders

- Consistent and timely messages to increase public awareness of what school readiness means and additional support to parents and schools are key.
- Signposting support is crucial but the most vulnerable and in need families are the least likely to seek it out or know where to start.
- Teachers view regular face to face health visitor appointments as essential, along with any additional support and resources that might be required, including mental health support.
- The school readiness problem means schools must employ more teachers and support staff, as well as investing money in learning resources and interventions. However, schools often lack the funding to be able to provide additional support to children who are not school ready without impacting on the quality of attention and learning available to all children.
- The importance of parents and children socialising with others as part of their development was raised. Leaders note that early years settings provide an important source of accurate information for parents about the key developmental milestones their children are expected to meet at certain ages and the opportunity for children to develop a range of social, emotional, speech and language and physical skills.
- In addition, access to good quality, affordable early years education, such as children centres, nursery and pre-school, would mean that professionals are involved early and can help to ensure that time and resources are invested to support school readiness.
- A national initiative and a coordinated approach cross society is essential in helping to tackle the issues around a lack of understanding of what school readiness means. School readiness is not a problem we should be tackling at school but from birth. It would also help to ensure the consistency of messages around school expectations and key developmental milestones that children need to have reached.



‘I think there should definitely be more support and guidance out there for what is expected of parents. Some parents choose not to do things for an easy life and leave certain areas for teachers to tackle, whereas other parents genuinely don’t know what is expected.’

– **Teacher, West Midlands**



‘It would be great if there was a document saying exactly what school readiness looks like that could be shared with parents.’

– **Senior teacher, Yorkshire**



‘At the national level, there just could be better information for new parents about what will really help children in those first few years. Just a few key things that become very common knowledge.’

– **Headteacher, South**

Conclusion

Too many children are behind before they even begin their school-based education. This can have a long-term impact on their life chances. The school readiness problem impacts the progress of all children and puts huge pressure on teachers and school budgets.

A shortage of affordable, high quality ECEC is a contributing factor, and opportunities to socialise with other children and families has been restricted by the COVID-19 lockdowns. But alongside this it is evident that the respective roles of parents and carers and teachers are not well understood. Too many parents are simply unaware of the developmental steps their child needs to be making in the pre-school years of life in order to give them the best possible opportunity to engage in all the opportunities of school.

Teachers and parents are clear that there is a role for the state in providing guidance to parents on early development and school readiness and that there is, at present, a lack of clear, accessible and timely information.

Kindred² will be working with partners in the coming months on a series of recommendations and actions to address the gap identified by the YouGov research.

We need an informed national conversation about the importance of ensuring that all our children get the very best start in these critical years of their development. All our futures will be affected by the success of our youngest citizens; all of us need to play our part in supporting them and their families to flourish.

For further information about this research and the work of Kindred², please contact: info@kindredsquared.org.uk.

Methodology

Key objectives:

- To source robust evidence of the proportion of children that are considered 'school ready' by relevant teaching staff (compared to 2020 and 2021 YouGov data) and to compare with the views of parents.
- To gather information on the level of school readiness in the 2022 Reception cohort.
- To source evidence in order to generate media coverage on a) the growing need for improved support in the early years, b) the social and financial costs of not providing this support.

Teacher feedback:

Quantitative data:

- An online survey of 1043 primary practitioners, including 262 Head Teachers /Deputy Head Teachers.
- The sample was sourced from a combination of the YouGov panel (n=625) and an open survey link distributed by Kindred² (n=418).
- Fieldwork was undertaken between 28th October and 28th of November 2022.
- The results from this survey have been weighted and are representative of all primary school teachers in the UK.

Qualitative data:

- 2 text-based focus groups with teachers (90 mins)
- 15 video depths with Heads and Deputy Heads (45 mins)
- The teachers who contributed to the qualitative data were recruited from YouGov's Panel Fieldwork during November and December 2022.

Parent Feedback

Quantitative survey:

- An online survey of 1003 parents of children who started Reception in September 2022.
- 94% of children were aged between 4 years and 5 years, 2 months. 6% of children were aged 5 years and 3 months or older.
- The sample was sourced from the YouGov panel (n=1003).
- Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th October - 14th November 2022.

The surveys and interviews were conducted by YouGov. Access the full data tables for the teacher survey [here](#) and the parent survey [here](#).



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What the world thinks

Kindred²

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