



Kindred²

School Readiness Survey

February 2024

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Introduction

Our fourth annual school readiness* survey sets out perceptions of the scale and impact of children missing their early developmental milestones.

The report investigates the subject from both parent and teacher** perspectives, illustrating how parental awareness, perceptions and understanding shapes school readiness levels.

To understand what school readiness looks like in the September 2023 Reception cohort, we conducted focus groups and surveyed over 1,000 teachers and 1,000 parents of Reception children.

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

*By 'school ready' we mean children being developmentally ready to access the learning and development opportunities available to them in Reception, where this is not due to a previously identified Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND). Most SEND diagnoses are not undertaken until after children start school, complicating the collection of data in a universal survey of this kind.

School readiness refers to the full range of developmental measures and milestones, 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 this to be the start of 'school'.

**Disclaimer about the term 'teacher' - when we use the term 'teacher' we are referring to all primary school staff that completed the survey. That includes 491 primary school teachers, 68 Reception teachers, 66 members of primary school senior leadership teams, and 368 teaching assistants. A full breakdown of the sample can be seen on page 35.

Key findings

Teachers say the school readiness problem is getting worse

- **50%** of teachers say the problem is worse than in September 2022.

Too many children are behind before they begin Reception...

- Teachers say **37%** of children are unable to listen and respond to basic instructions, and **37%** are unable to dress independently. **90%** say at least one child in their class is not toilet trained. **46%** of children are unable to sit still and **38%** find it hard to play/share with other children.

...and every child loses out; 2.5 hours of teacher time is lost each day

- **9 in 10** teachers say this impacts the rest of the class.
- Teachers are using learning time to manage the challenges of children who are not school ready. For instance, **46%** of teachers say they have to allocate more time for dealing with personal care and hygiene issues.

Schools are having to change, and it's stressful

- **93%** of teachers say their school is increasing or reallocating resources to manage the school readiness issue.
- Teachers are impacted by school readiness with **58%** reporting stress levels are up and **28%** saying staff morale is down.

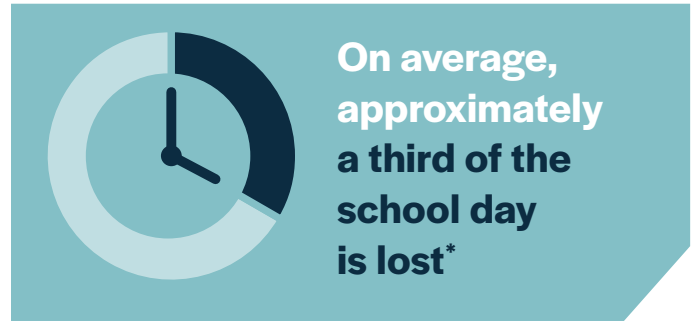


Parents don't know what they don't know...

- **43%** of parents hadn't heard of the idea of school readiness and the connection to developmental milestones before their child was 4.
- **51%** of teachers and **49%** of parents think that some children started school not ready because parents are unaware of the expectations of school readiness.
- Only **50%** of parents think that they are solely responsible for toilet training.
- **53%** of teachers and **54%** parents say lack of school readiness is caused by parents not thinking it's their job to prepare their child for school.

...and need more help, earlier

- **22%** of parents say they've never had a visit from a Health Visitor. The majority (**63%**) had between 0-2 health visitor appointments, although in the North East this falls to **47%** and in Wales this was only **31%**.
- Over two thirds (**69%**) of school staff think parents should receive more guidance to help them understand their child's development.
- Around half of parents think more access to affordable (**54%**) and high quality (**45%**) childcare would improve school readiness.



*According to findings of TQ11: Hours per day: On a typical school day, how much of your full working day, if any, is diverted from other priorities if there is a child/children in a Reception class who start(s) not school ready? Please write in an estimate below of the number of hours per day. BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2023. Based on average school day of 7 hours.

Perceptions of school readiness in 2023

1.1 The state of school readiness

Teachers say more children are starting school without the basic skills they need to learn.

Half (50%) of teachers report a rise in children who are not school ready compared to September 2022. A further third (31%) say the situation is about the same.

50%

of teachers report the school readiness problem is getting worse



Over the last 20 years... we've noticed a change in the children - the children at entry points from when they come into Reception are not as school ready as they were when I first started."

– **Teacher**

Teachers say at least a quarter of children in their class lack school readiness skills. **25%** don't have basic language skills and 39% can't hold a pencil.

Teachers say

37%

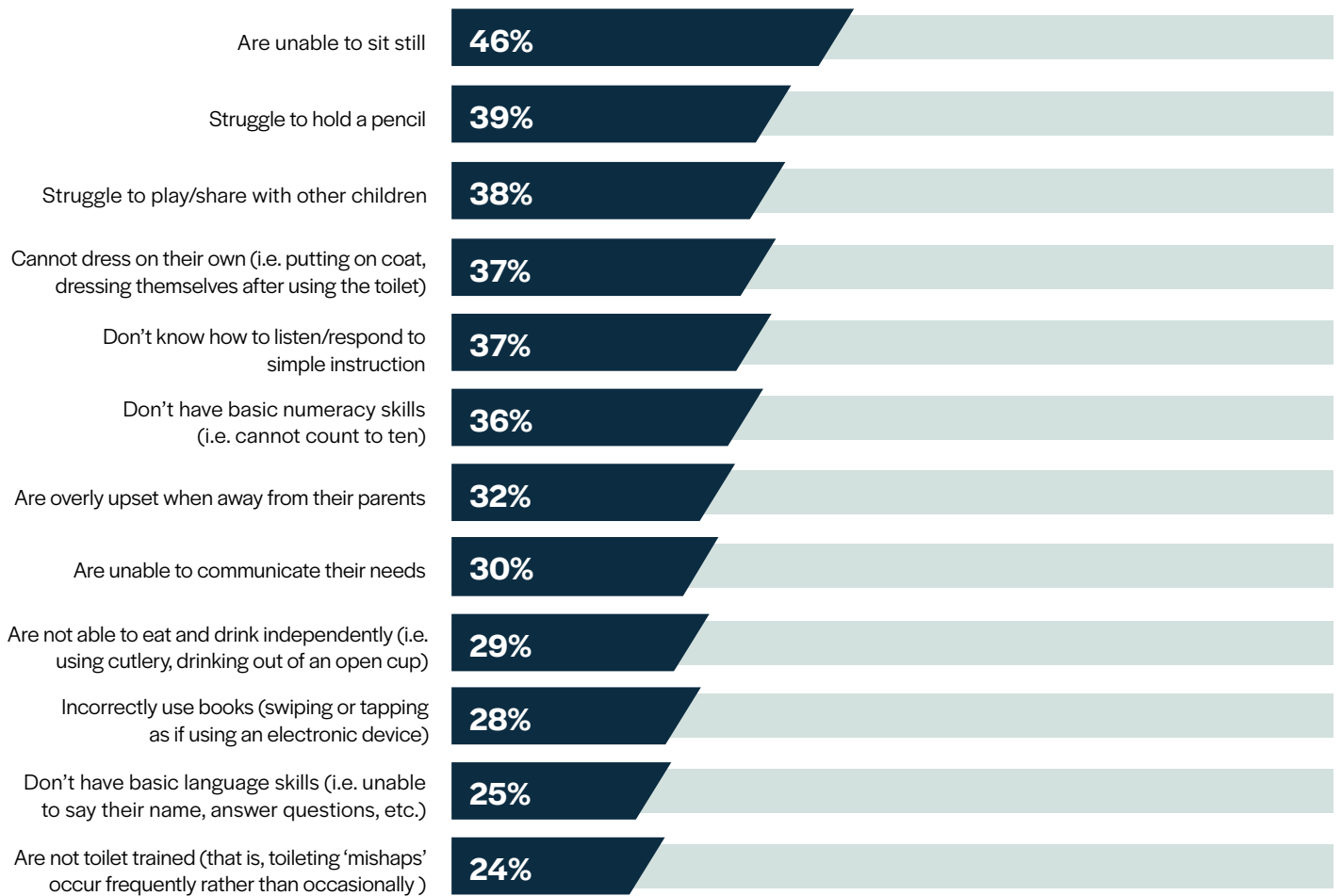
of children in their Reception class cannot dress independently

Teachers say

24%

of children in their Reception class are not toilet trained

Figure 1: Proportion of Reception children that cannot do each of the reported skills according to teachers



Q2. Thinking about the following behaviours, what percentage of children starting in Reception in your 2023 class (teaching staff)/in a typical 2023 class (non-teaching staff). BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2023.

There is a mismatch in understanding about child development. Overall, nine out of ten of parents (91%) say their child was ready for school when they started Reception in September 2023, however teachers report that over a third of children (35%) were not ready by their standards.

9/10
parents say
 their child was ready for school

Figure 2: Percentage of teachers who had at least one child in their class who:

Skill/behaviour	Percentage of sample
Are unable to sit still	97%
Don't know how to listen/respond to simple instruction	96%
Are overly upset when away from their parents	96%
Struggle to play/share with other children	96%
Struggle to hold a pencil	95%
Don't have basic numeracy skills (i.e. cannot count to ten)	95%
Cannot dress on their own (i.e. putting on coat, dressing themselves after using the toilet)	94%
Are unable to communicate their needs	93%
Are not toilet trained (that is, toileting 'mishaps' occur frequently rather than occasionally)	90%
Don't have basic language skills (i.e. unable to say their name, answer questions, etc.)	90%
Are not able to eat and drink independently (i.e. using cutlery, drinking out of an open cup)	89%
Incorrectly use books (swiping or tapping as if using an electronic device)	82%

Q2. Thinking about the following behaviours, what percentage of children starting in Reception in your 2023 class (teaching staff)/in a typical 2023 class (non-teaching staff). BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2023. Teachers who selected more than 0%.

In focus group discussions, teachers say this is not a new problem, but part of a longer term trend resulting in schools diverting considerable resources to help children catch up. And it's getting worse.

1.2 What do teachers mean by being school ready?

Across four years of school readiness research, teachers have been clear and consistent in what they think being developmentally ready for Reception means.

Independence: dressing, eating and toileting

Schools expect children to be sufficiently independent, able to use the toilet, dress and feed themselves and to be able to cope with being away from their 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 are identified as 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

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.

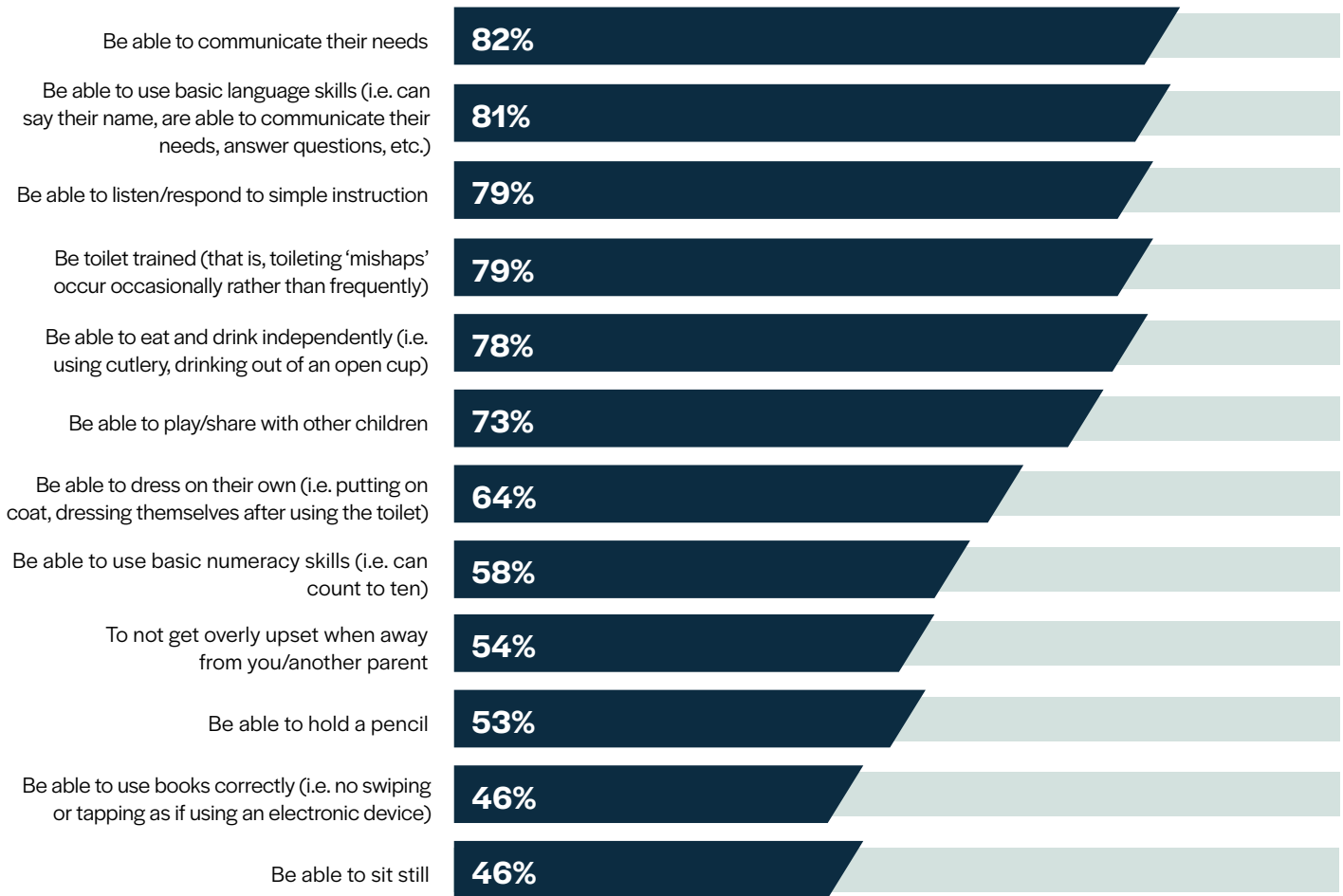


We really need children to come to school and be independent, able to share, ask for help and actually be confident enough to come to us and say “I’ve had an accident,” or “I don’t know where to find this.”

– Teacher

1.3 What do parents mean by being school ready?

Figure 2: Percentage of parents who think that their child should be able to do the following when they start Reception



PQ7. Which, if any, of the following do you think a child should be able to do when they start Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October 2023, n=1037.

Parents are often unaware that children need a broad range of skills to help them access the full range of learning and development opportunities in Reception. Survey and focus group data suggests this lack of awareness is a key driver in the level of school readiness.

“ I had no idea what level academically he should be for his age, going in...”
– Parent

Parents tend to describe the emotional development aspect of school readiness in both focus group discussions and surveys: the child's desire and excitement at going to school; their ability to cope with parental separation; and their ability to play and share with other children.



For me, the idea of school ready is basically being emotionally ready, being independent.”



Being school ready is like when the child wakes up at 8am and then he's [ready] straight away. He'll go and brush his teeth and change his clothes, eat breakfast, school uniform on, be near the door to go out.”



Having the confidence to interact with other children around the same age group... having that social interaction.”

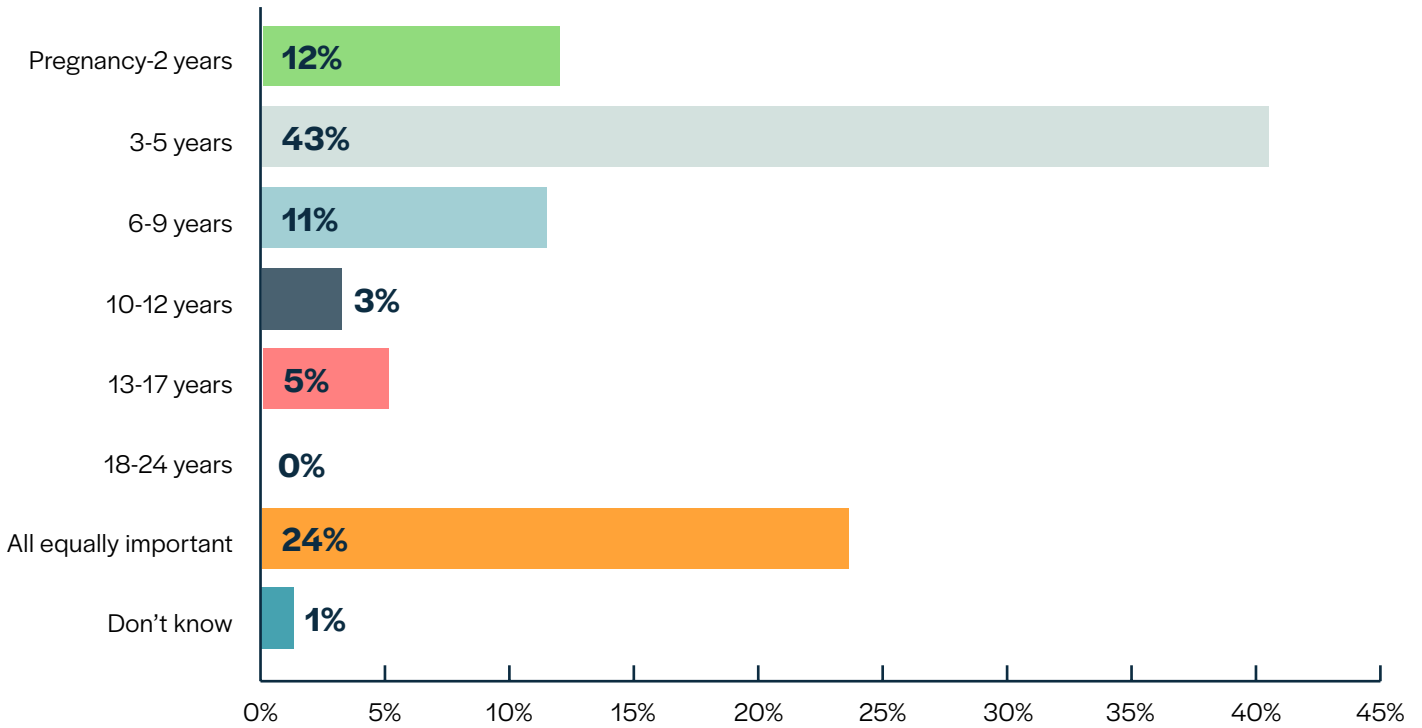


To me, it's things like they're ready to be away from their main caregiver, and they're able to do things like toilet independently, put their coat on and off, eat... they're ready to be there and do like, a certain amount of things for themselves independently and ready to learn, I suppose.”



I think they need to be able to eat independently in the sense that they need to be able to ingest food, but I don't think they need to be completely confident and capable...as long as they can eat food with their hands, I think that's fine for Reception.”

Figure 3: Parents understanding of which development phase has the most impact on a child's future life



PQ2. Development phase with the most impact on a child's future life. BASE: All respondents (parents): October 2023, n=1037

When asked which developmental phase has the most impact on a child's future life, 55% of parents correctly identified pregnancy to five years as being the most critical. A quarter of parents (24%) think all phases from pregnancy to 24 years are equally important.

45%
of parents are unaware that the early years have the most impact on a child's future life

1.4 Responsibility

Teachers and parents were asked who they thought was responsible for a child’s development of certain skills using the scale below to assign responsibility to schools or parents.

For almost all skills tested, parents assume at least some responsibility sits with schools. With toilet training, half (50%) of parents think some of the responsibility lies elsewhere, including with schools.



[There is] a definite shift from collaborative ‘working in partnership’ to very much a split in learning... I’d say that the shift has definitely gone from being 60% school / 40% home to 80% school / 20% home.”

– Teacher



Figure 4: Percentage of teachers and parents who believe that parents are completely responsible for a child’s development of the following skills:

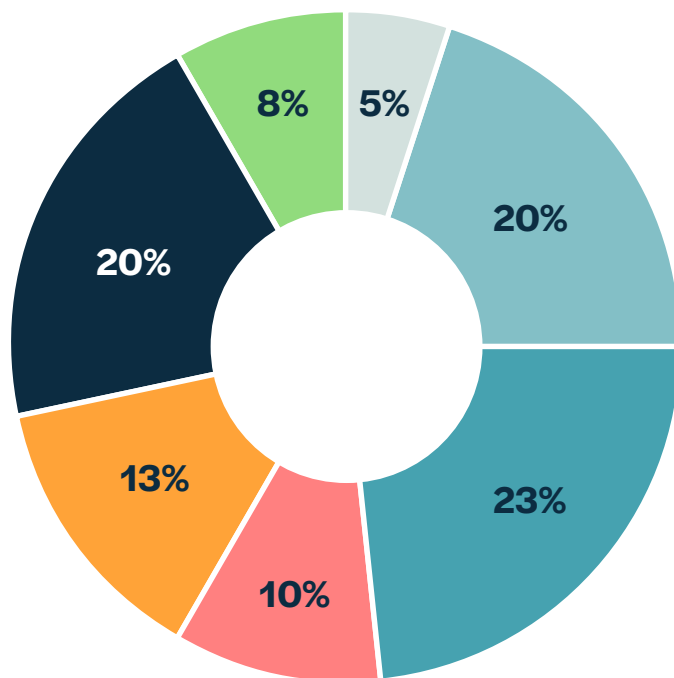
Skill/behaviour	Parent	Teachers
Ability to communicate their needs	26%	17%
Ability to sit still	12%	8%
Ability to use books (no swiping or tapping as if using an electronic device)	16%	16%
Basic language skills (i.e. saying their name, able to communicate their needs, answering questions, etc.)	23%	26%
Basic numeracy skills (i.e. counting to ten)	12%	6%
Holding a pencil	9%	5%
Independent dressing (i.e. putting on a coat, dressing themselves after using the toilet)	40%	40%
Independent eating and drinking (i.e. using cutlery, drinking out of an open cup)	36%	39%
Listening/responding to simple instruction	17%	12%
Not getting overly upset when away from you/another parent	18%	9%
Playing/sharing with other children	13%	9%
Toilet training (that is, toileting ‘mishaps’ occur frequently rather than occasionally)	50%	57%

TQ6. Who do you think is most responsible for a child’s development of each of the following skills? BASE: ‘Completely parents’ (school staff): October 2023, n=1026. PQ8. Summary Table: Who do you think is most responsible for a child’s development of each of the following skills? BASE: ‘Completely parents’ (parents): October 2023, n=1037.

1.5 Too little, too late: the information gap

72% of parents say they know what school readiness is, but 43% also say they were unaware of the full range of skills within school readiness before their child turned four. This information is available too late to support the developmental milestones underpinning school readiness.

Figure 5: As a parent, when did you hear about school readiness as concept that included developmental milestones?



- During pregnancy
- When I had a child aged 0-2
- When I had a child aged 3
- When I had a child aged 4
- When I had a child starting in Reception
- Never - I have not previously heard of the concept of 'school-readiness' as defined in this survey
- Don't know / can't remember

PQ11. Now think back to the previous questions and all the aspects of 'school-readiness' they covered (cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills). Before today, had you heard of the concept 'school-readiness' as defined in this survey? If so, when was that? BASE: All respondents (parents): October 2023, n=1037

43%

of parents say they find out about school readiness too late

Where do parents find information and advice?

Childcare professionals and experts (59%) are key sources parents would consult if they wanted to know more about preparation for Reception, followed by family and friends (50%). 70% of parents would look online for help through parenting apps, the NHS website and social media.

For parents in our focus groups, school readiness information often came from schools themselves.



We attended a parents' evening type thing at the end of the summer term. It wasn't until then that we started hearing that term and what their expectation was and then probably the few months before that our nursery was trying to gear our son up. I guess they're disconnected between the school's expectations of being school ready and my parents' expectations."

– Parent

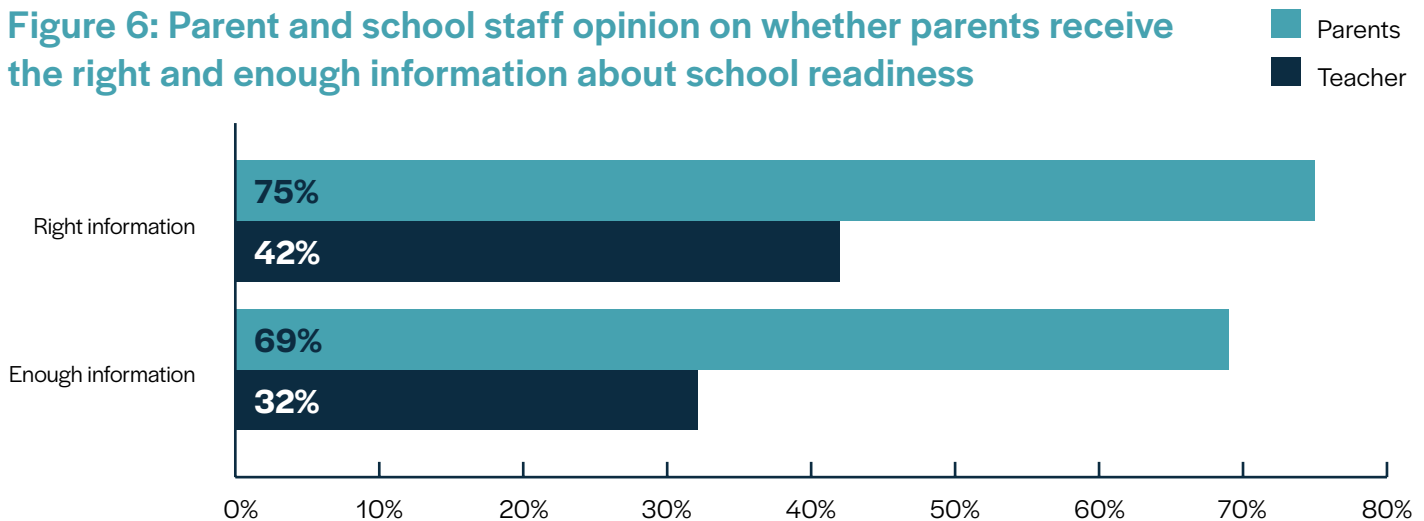


I hadn't heard of that term until five months before my child started school, so even though he can do everything that's on that list, maybe it should be brought to everyone's attention earlier than that. Just because there's always going to be a disconnect in the expectations."

– Parent

Parents and teachers rate available information very differently.

Figure 6: Parent and school staff opinion on whether parents receive the right and enough information about school readiness



PQ5a/TQ8a. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents in the UK receive the right information to help their child to be school-ready for Reception? PQ5b/TQ8b. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents in the UK receive enough information to help their child to be school-ready for Reception? BASE: All respondents - Primary school staff, n=1026; Parents, n=1037.

Teachers express concern that parents are often unaware of the link between milestones and being ready for school; the information is available too late and 69% of teachers think parents need more guidance.

Schools report that the current level of parental understanding of school readiness is limited and does not capture the full range of developmental milestones schools expect.

51% of teachers and 49% of parents

think that some children started school this year not school ready because parents are **unaware of the expectations of school readiness**



The last sort of official check in would have been age 2. And so, when they're going into school, you're not really sure what they're expected to know... we don't really know where our children sit, you know, in comparison to other children until they're in that setting."

– Parent

1.6 Patchy access to health visitors

In focus groups, parents identified a considerable gap between their child's two year health check and school home visits before Reception.

Parents were most likely to report that they had only received 1-2 visits from a health visitor before their child started school, with 22% reporting that they had never met with a health visitor.

Where parents did outline an awareness of what children need to learn before Reception, this information often came from nurseries rather than from any official channels, the content of which was reported as highly variable across settings.

22%

of parents report **never** having a health visitor appointment

63%

of parents had only **0-2 health visitor appointments** before their child started Reception

Health visitor services are patchy, and geography matters.

75% of parents living in the South East had 0-2 visits before their child started Reception compared to 47% in the North East and 31% in Wales.

31% of parents in West Midlands, 30% in the South East, 29% in the South West and 24% of London, reported receiving no visits at all.

31%

of parents living in **West Midlands** or the South East had no health visitor appointments before their child started reception

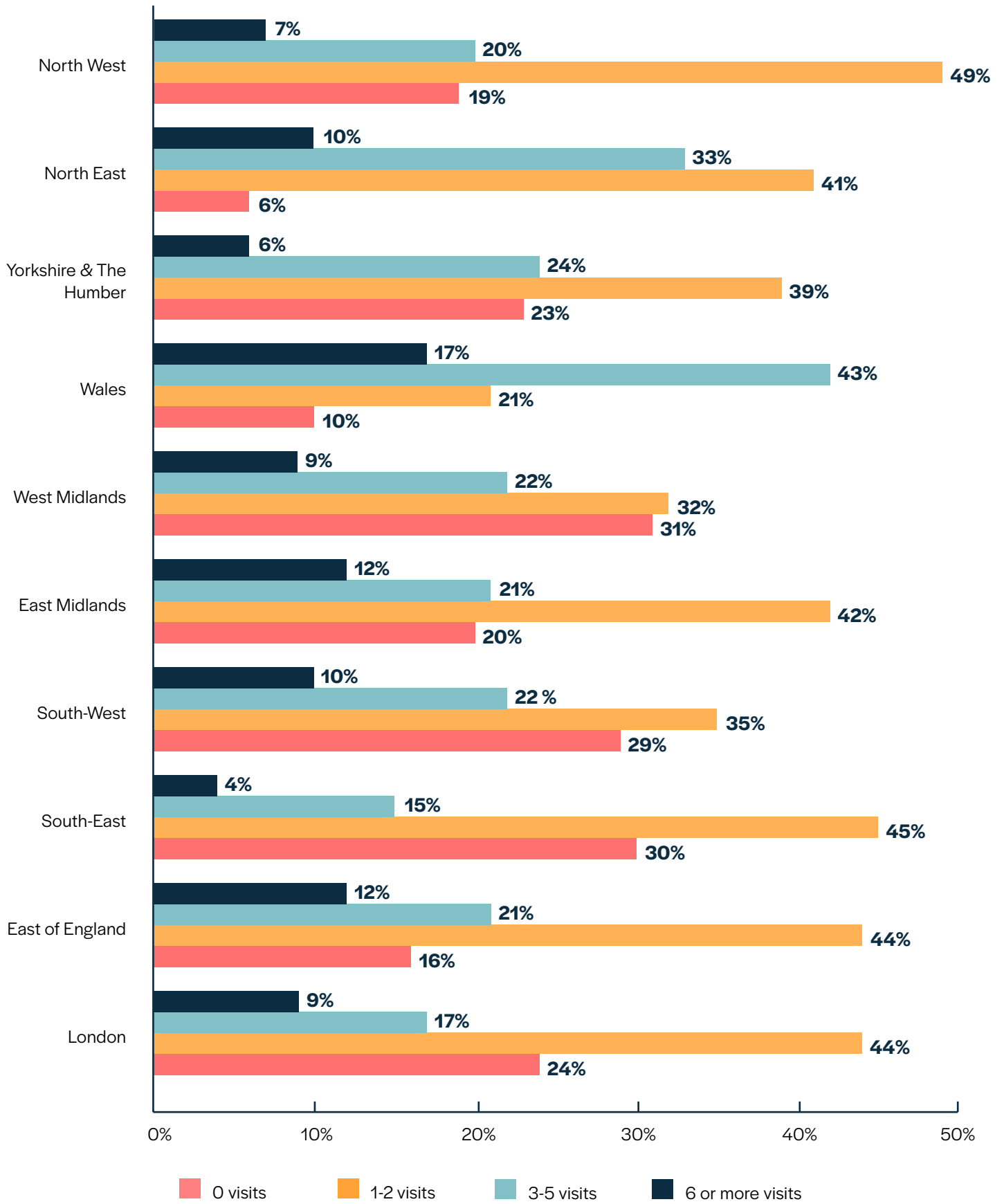
29%

of parents living in the **South West** had no health visitor appointments before their child started reception

24%

of parents living in **London** had no health visitor appointments before their child started reception

Figure 7: Number of health visitor appointments before a child started school by region



PQ15. How many visits from a health visitor have you had before your child started school? BASE: All respondents (parents): October 2023, n=1037

Impact

2.1 Lack of school readiness affects all children

Children who are behind before they begin Reception are more likely to struggle. Those requiring significant teacher support to reach their developmental milestones are more likely to be playing catch up throughout school, and the additional support these children need reduces teacher time available to the rest of the class.

In focus groups, teachers say children who are behind often struggle to manage emotions, express themselves, and connect with classmates.

This can be upsetting, cause anxiety and limit the child's ability to form friendships. Being unable to communicate their needs or keep up with their peers is frustrating and can lead to disruptive behaviour.

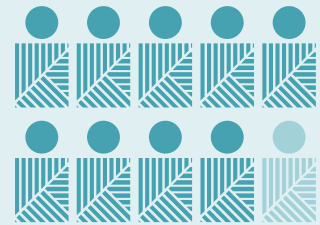
With 40% of the attainment gap at 16 evident at 5, early challenges can have long-term negative effects, impacting a child's confidence, learning trajectory, and future life chances. A lack of independence can result in embarrassment and separation anxiety can further isolate children. This may lead to children withdrawing from the class and being harder to engage. These consequences are not temporary setbacks.



**2.5 hours
per day**
of teacher time lost

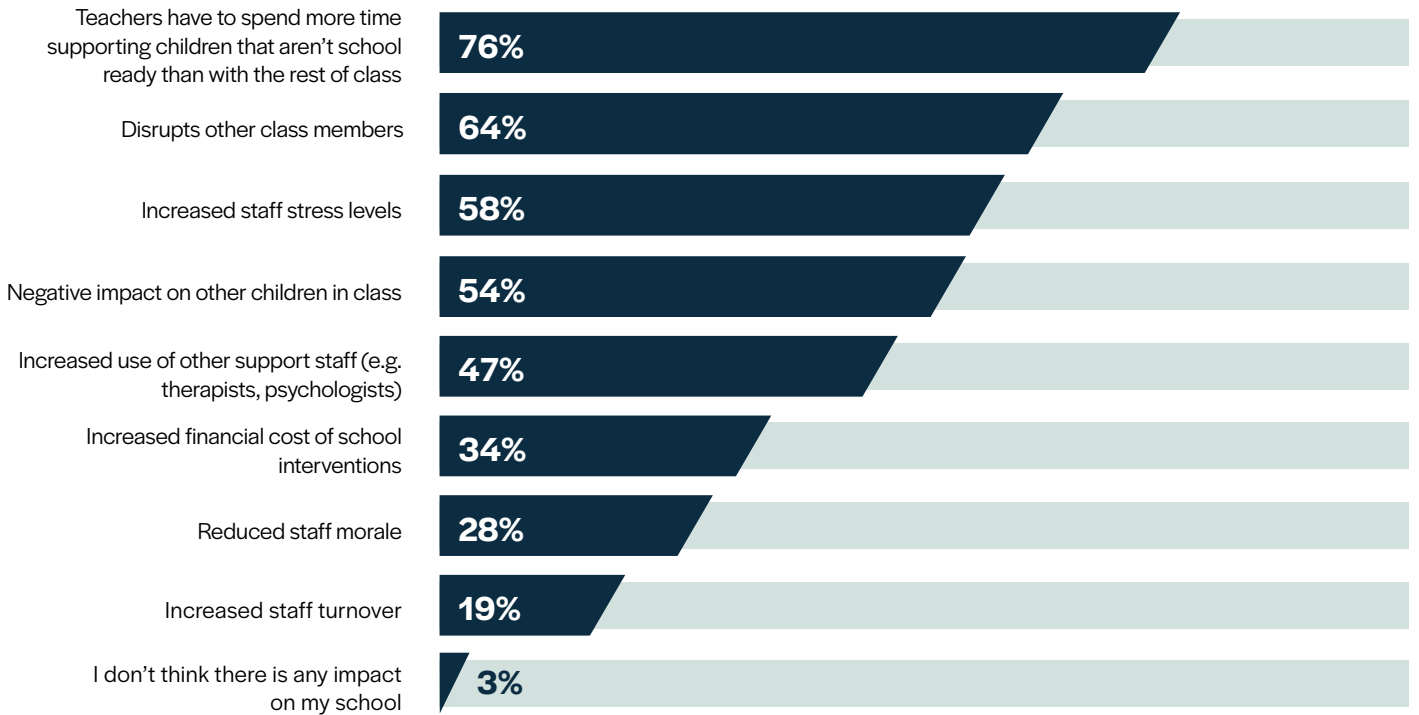


On average, approximately
**a third of the
school day is lost**



9 in 10
(90%) teachers have at
least one child in class
who is **not toilet trained**

Figure 8: The impact of children who are not ready for Reception on schools according to teachers



TQ13. In which of the following ways, if any, is your school impacted by children who are not Reception ready BASE: All respondents (primary school staff): October – November 2023, n=1026

When asked how their school was impacted by the presence of children who are not ready for Reception, 76% of teachers say they are spending more time supporting these children than with the rest of the class. 64% of teachers say a lack of school readiness disrupts other class members, and 54% say this has a negative impact on other children.

The scale of the challenge for the system is clear; almost all teachers had at least one child in their class who could not listen and respond to basic instructions (96%) and 9 in 10 have at least one child who is not toilet trained (90%).



The rest of their lives, some of them will never catch up because they weren't school ready in the beginning."

– Teacher

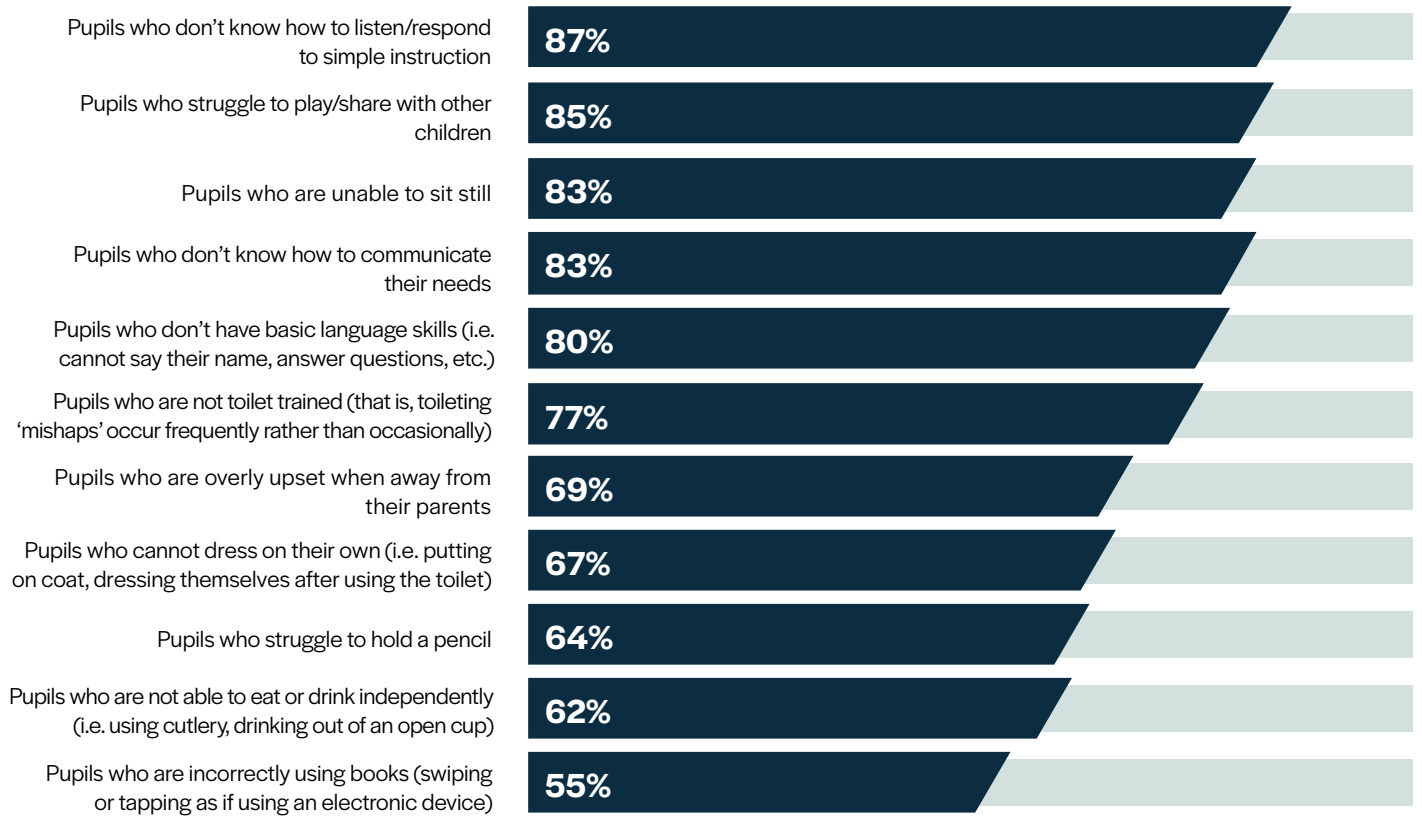


You've got to think of your own child, the embarrassment that you're putting on them ... it's cruel... it's embarrassing for some of them and you could see they're frustrated."

– Teacher

2.2 Impact of missed milestones

Figure 9: Proportion of teachers rating the impact of missing skills on the progress of class as major/moderate



TQ10. Please state the impact of each of the following has on the progress of class. BASE: All respondents (primary school staff):
October – November 2023, n=1026

The presence of a single child unable to use the toilet or unable to express themselves (also linked with other milestones like the ability to communicate needs) draws significant staff time away from the rest of the class.



It takes 2 adults as part of our safeguarding policy to sort that child out [after a toileting accident]. It could take 20 or 25 minutes. By that time, you've lost it. The thread of the day's gone."

– Teacher



Within 5 minutes of one child having an accident, two of us need to be then taken out to change the child. It completely disrupts everything, the flow of the day, the children's concentration."

– Teacher

2.3 Teachers are bridging the gap

Teachers say a lack of school readiness is contributing to substantial issues within the teaching profession. 58% of teachers say stress levels are up and morale is down as a result of the school readiness challenge.

Almost half of teachers (47%) are considering leaving their current roles, with nearly a quarter (23%) planning to do so within the next year. Teachers with a higher proportion of children who are not school ready (41% or more) are more likely to be considering leaving their role (53%).



We're not finishing our activities...we're not able to finish our sessions and we're all just chasing because of the knock-on effect."

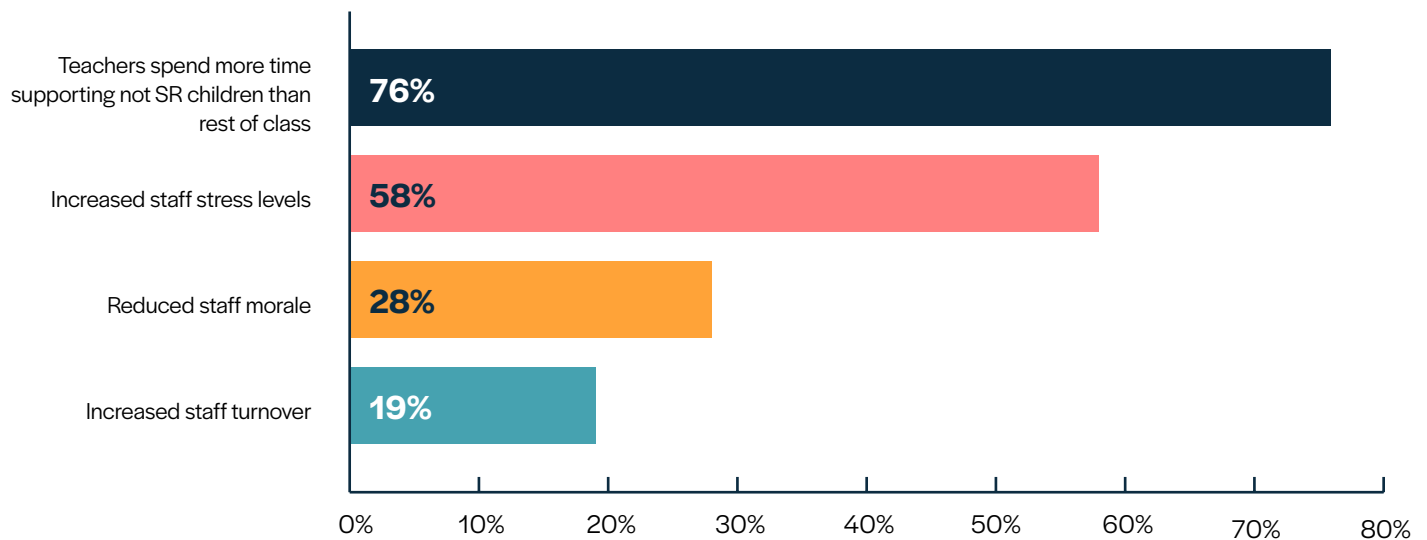
- Teacher



[Lack of school readiness] takes you away from your classroom. It takes you away from what you should be doing, setting up for your class, tidying up."

- Teacher

Figure 10: The impact on staff when children are not school ready according to teachers – reporting selected statements



TQ13. In which of the following ways, if any, is your school impacted by children who are not Reception ready? BASE: All respondents (primary school staff): October – November 2023, n=1026

2.4 Lack of school readiness is changing schools

Many teachers, particularly those working in education for more than 5 years, say that schools are doing more of what parents did in the past.

Teachers suggest that parental attitudes and lack of awareness around school readiness is driving a change in school practices.



Parents need to realise that they need to work with the school and that it is their duty to be teaching simple things - getting dressed, how to brush your teeth, toileting... some of these basic life skills.”

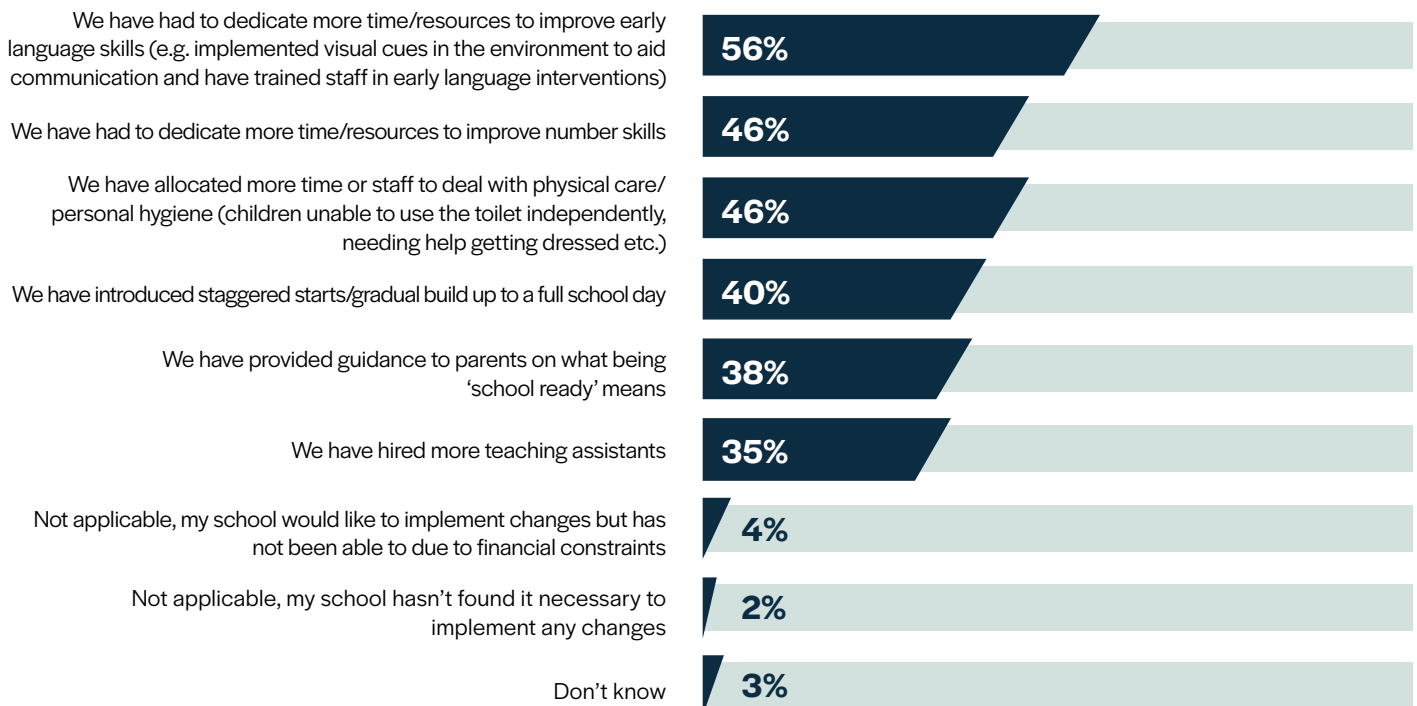
– Teacher



I feel like we’re not teaching as much in the first year now as we used to/ it’s more babysitting... teaching them basic skills... It’s like being the parent for them. You know, what they should have done at home.”

– Teacher

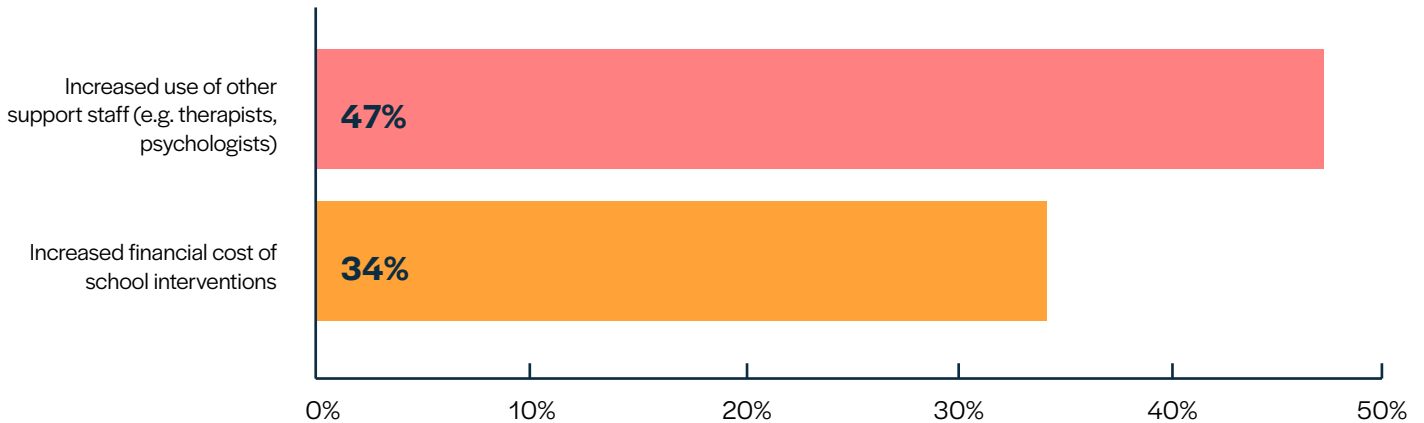
Figure 11: Adaptations schools have made as a result of the school readiness challenge according to teachers



QTQ14. Which, if any, of the following has your school implemented to adapt to children not being ready for school?
 BASE: All respondents (primary school staff): October – November 2023, n=1026

2.5 The redirection of learning resources

Figure 12: The impact on schools when children are not school ready according to teachers – reporting selected statements



TQ13. In which of the following ways, if any, is your school impacted by children who are not Reception ready? BASE: All respondents (primary school staff): October – November 2023, n=1026

34%

of teachers say that financial costs of school interventions have increased due to a lack of school readiness

93%

report their school has adapted to the level of school readiness by increasing / reallocating resources and implementing changes in staffing and daily structure

Schools are addressing the issues presented by lack of school readiness by focusing on developing the basic skills children are missing:

- Around half have needed to dedicate more time/resources to improving early language skills (56%) and number skills (46%)
- Introducing staggered starts/gradual build up to a full school day (40%)
- Hiring more teaching assistants (35%)

“

The money just isn't there and they can't afford to recruit more staff. Staff are now taking groups of children out to do catch up and interventions. You're always chasing your tail.”

– **Teacher**

2.6 Schools are providing increased guidance to parents – but timing is critical

Teachers are clear that developing the building blocks of key skills starts from birth. Interventions when a child is in, or almost in Reception, are not going to help the children who need it most.

38% of teachers say their schools now provide more guidance to parents on what being ‘school ready’ means. While schools are implementing measures to help parents, qualitative discussions showed that many teachers acknowledge these efforts are too little too late.

Teachers in focus group discussions said that a home visit the summer before or a piece of paper with a list of milestones was not an adequate substitute to parents understanding the basic building blocks of development in under 5s.

Parents in focus groups used emotive language to express the feeling of being talked ‘at’. Some parents felt they didn’t need to be told what skills were needed because that information is ‘instinctive’ as a parent.



The expectations have changed [of schools]. We can give them [parents] a piece of paper but they might not necessarily read that. And it’s normally too late. It’s normally just in July before they come in so there’s not enough time. You have to try honestly but it needs to come earlier and they need to know those expectations earlier.”

– Teacher

43%

of parents say they find out about school readiness too late

The idea of guidance around pre-school developmental milestones being available from birth was better received, as it gave parents an understanding of all the development stages of their child.



Our [child's] school held a parents' evening beforehand... I don't think you need to be bombarded with a checklist as such, just make sure they can do this and that."

– Parent



You might have absolutely no idea what the expectations are, and there might be something that you aren't doing not because you're not able to, but just because it's slipped your mind - you just had no idea that it was an expectation. So if you did have that early on, then you could start working on it early and then you're not getting a shock when you've just got the six week holidays and you know, maybe you've not potty trained or whatever it is that you've not done on that list like you would have just worked in earlier."

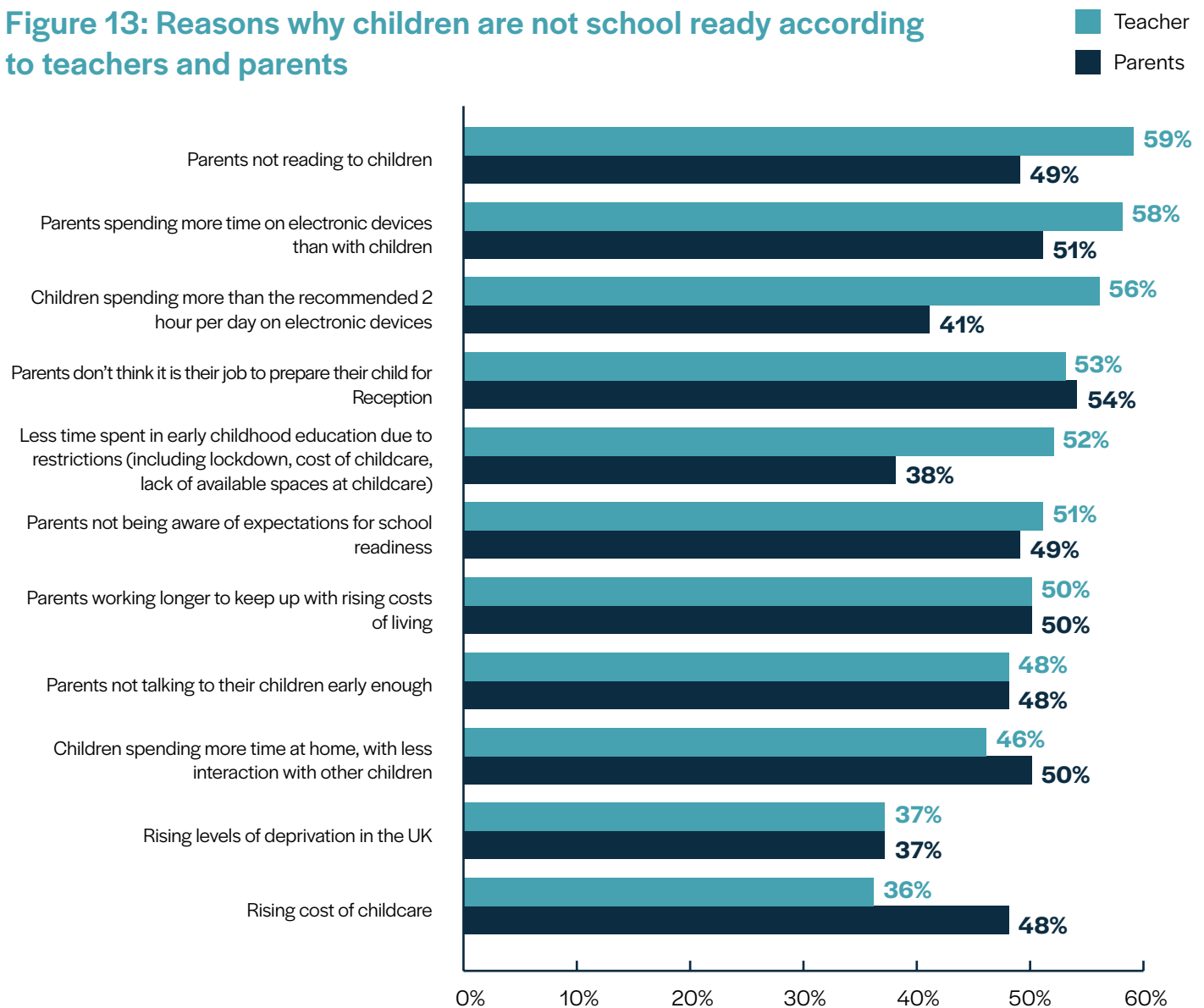
– Parent

Understanding the causes

3.1 Why aren't children ready for school?

We asked parents and teachers what they thought were the causes of children falling behind their developmental milestones. Lack of awareness, understanding of child development phases as well as other 'life pressures' on parents came up.

Figure 13: Reasons why children are not school ready according to teachers and parents



TQ5. Why do you think some children that are starting Reception in 2023 might not be ready for Reception? & PQ9. Which, if any, of the following do you think are the main factors that could result in fewer children being ready for Reception? BASE: All respondents - Primary school staff, n=1026; Parents, n=1037

53% of teachers and 54% of parents

think that some children start Reception not school ready because **parents don't think it is their job to prepare their child for school.**

59% of teachers and 49% of parents

think that some children start school not developmentally ready because **parents are not reading to their children.**



I don't think parents are reading to their children or children are even having an opportunity to colour you know, so they get skills to have to hold a pencil or a crayon, et cetera... I definitely do think technology is having a big impact... you know, ten years ago, 15 years ago, this wasn't the case."

– **Teacher**

Too much screen time?

Parents and teachers both say that parents spending more time on their electronic devices than with children (58% teachers & 51% parents) and children spending too much time on electronic devices (56% teachers & 41% parents) has a negative impact on pre-school development.

51%

of parents say that parents spending more time on devices is impacting child development



A lot of children coming to us just don't know how to take turns or sit and play... You can put a tablet or a mobile phone in front of them and they'll probably be able to show me a thing or two. But you give them a board game, a hula hoop or something like that and they don't know what to do with it."

– **Teacher**

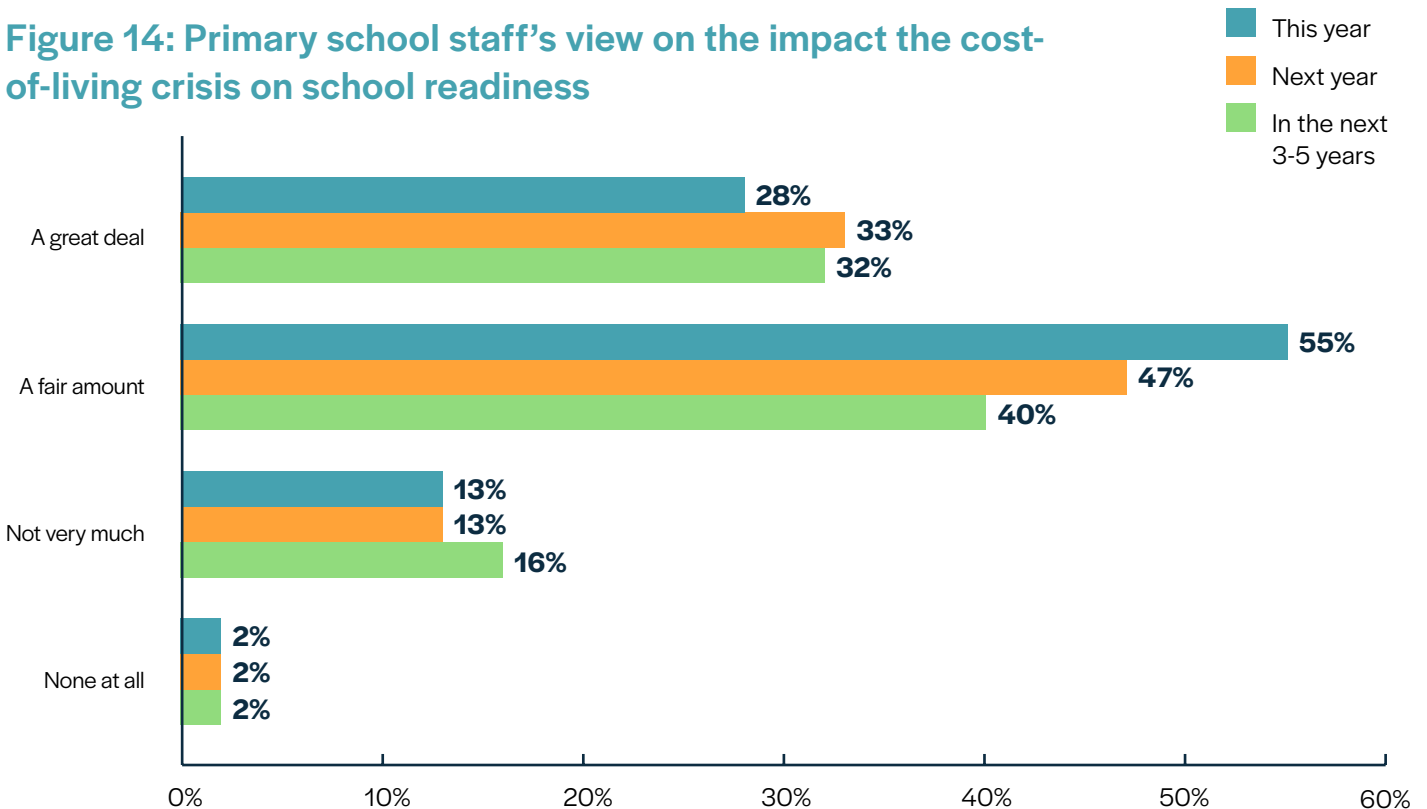
Cost of living crisis

The majority of teachers (82%) anticipate that the rising cost of living will continue to negatively affect school readiness levels in the coming years.

50%

of parents and teachers say that parents working longer hours to keep up with the rising cost of living is increasing the number of children not school ready

Figure 14: Primary school staff's view on the impact the cost-of-living crisis on school readiness



TQ16. How much impact, if any, do you think the cost-of-living crisis is going to have on school readiness? BASE: All respondents (primary school staff): October – November 2023, n=1026



Making [free childcare] available hours from two and upwards, that's going to make a massive impact. So, being able to get your child into those sorts of environments even sooner without having the dependency of needing to pay for it and spending a whole month's salary on childcare, it will really help."

– Teacher

We are still feeling the effects of the pandemic

In focus group discussions, parents and teachers say that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still being felt. Parents say that they felt their children missed out on valuable nursery time and teachers acknowledge that they see the impact of this.



They were hit with Covid in nursery. I saw a lot of them didn't start nursery and then it impacted them again in Reception. But behaviour-wise are they are our worst cohort. Their listening skills are appalling. Their basic cutting skills are appalling. Most of them can't hold a pencil properly."

– Teacher



All those starting Reception now would have spent two years of, well half their life, in lockdown and just around the people in their immediate home."

– Parent

3.2 The importance of high quality early years education

There is a consensus among parents that attending nursery is particularly important for developing school readiness skills. Benefits most frequently identified included;

1. It allows children to socialise with other children
2. Staff members teach children some of the basic skills needed for Reception
3. Nurseries provide parents with information about the expectations of Reception

Teachers and parents agree that nurseries encourage: greater interaction with other children, development of how to play and share, children to become accustomed to being away from their parents, and greater parental understanding in preparation for Reception.



The school nursery has been brilliant at preparing him for Reception. They also supported with transition, having stay-and-play dates during the summer. My son is settled in Reception and looks forward to going to school. He eats, toilets independently and can get himself dressed with minimal support. He is able to recognise his name written out.”

– Parent



Having been in school nursery she was already in the system and it was safe and familiar and just a natural continuation.”

– Parent

Teachers say **the quality** of the setting matters. The benefits of school-based nursery provision were also highlighted many teachers working in schools with a nursery attached report that they can clearly distinguish between which children were in the school’s nursery setting and which were not.



50% of my class came from the school nursery so they were brilliant. They were all school ready. They have routines in nursery. We follow lots of the same things nurseries do so it’s quite easy to slide into Reception. But the children that didn’t go to a school-based nursery didn’t necessarily have these skills. So I’d say half my class weren’t school ready.”

– Teacher

What parents think will help

Children who are behind at Reception are more likely to struggle and can face lifelong difficulties. A child's development at 22 months is a strong predictor of their attainment at 26. This research suggests that too many children are being failed before they begin.

There's no evidence that any parent wants to set their child up to struggle in school. Too often, they simply did not have the understanding and awareness to ensure their children are ready for school-based learning.

At the start of our survey, parents thought their children were ready for school. Once parents in focus group discussions were made aware of teacher expectations of school readiness, they expressed the need for clearer guidance, access to resources and increased communication from health visitors. 51% of parents want more information on the definition and importance of school readiness.

“

I think the onus is on us... because again, all the things that we're talking about in regards to being school ready, that's things that we can impart into our children, you know, from birth till you know the age of five or whenever they go to Reception.”

– Parent

“

Most parents think their children are school ready, but they're really not.”

– Parent

“

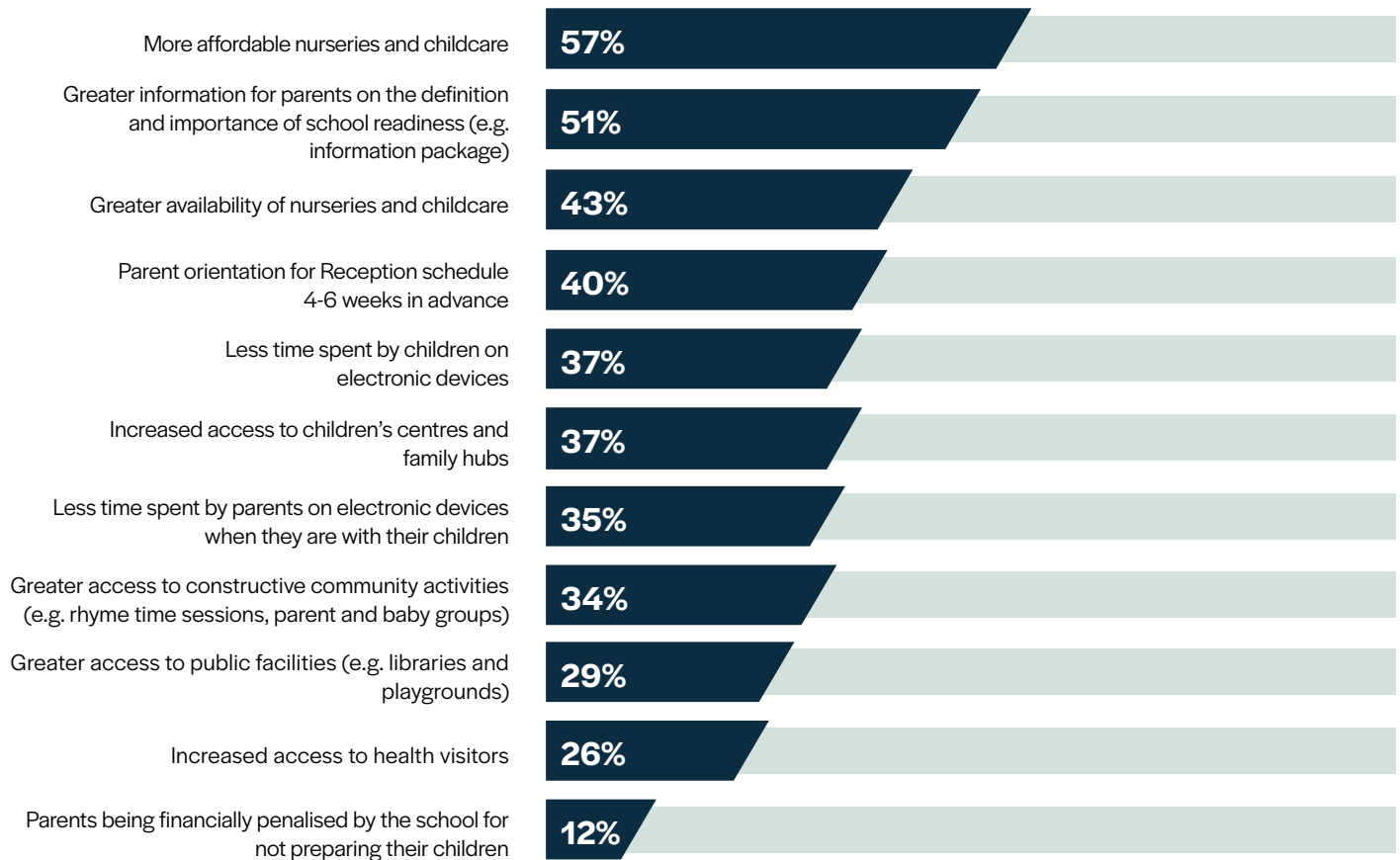
We're failing the children we're teaching.”

– Teacher

Parents also selected a range of policy and practical changes that they thought would help. Policy areas they say have the greatest potential to improve child development are: early education, childcare, access to resources and increased maternity leave.

On practical support, parents are interested in initiatives to ensure that their children are ready for Reception including parent orientation for Reception (40%), access to children’s centres and family hubs (37%) and community activities (34%).

Figure 15: Parents’ views on what would help UK parents with preparation for Reception



PQ13. Which, if any, of the following do you think would help more parents in the UK to ensure that their child is ready for Reception?
 BASE: All respondents (parents): October 2023, n=1037

On an individual level, many parents agree that it is a parent’s responsibility to get their children ready for school, however, on a systemic level it is clear that too many schools are seeing high numbers of children at Reception with significant additional needs that are not caused by SEN. This impacts all children.

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

Methodology

5.1 Research background and objectives

This report reports on the views of school readiness of primary school staff and parents of Reception children's attitudes towards school readiness. This year, we are working with a new supplier (Savanta). Building on the findings and using findings from research in previous years, we have adopted an updated and refreshed methodology.

We have broadened the scope of our research to better capture the voices of parents through focus groups and enhanced measures to understand the impact the current cost-of-living crisis and deprivation has on school readiness.

In the ever-changing landscape of education, renewed attention has been placed on applying nationally representative quotas for our sample including for school type, seniority of staff and staff composition.

While the definition of parents of Reception aged children has remained the same, we have used the latest official statistics to design representative quotas for gender of child, region, ethnicity, and social grade.

Key objectives

1. To gather robust evidence of the proportion of children that are considered not 'school ready' by relevant teaching staff and to compare with the views of parents of children entering Reception in the 2023 intake.
2. To gather detailed information about key developmental milestones of Reception aged children, relating to their incidence, impact on class progress and who is perceived as responsible for developing them.
3. To understand the reasons why children are not meeting key developmental milestones, and which policy areas have the most scope to improve school readiness.

5.2 Research methodology and sample

5.2.1. Online Computerised-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) sample: Parents of children entering Reception in the 2023 intake

Savanta conducted a 15-minute online survey of parents through their internal panel with fieldwork taking place from the 9th October to 26th October 2023, and a total of 1,037 surveys were completed.

During fieldwork, hard quotas were set on gender of child, region, ethnicity of child, socio-economic group and gender of parents. Following fieldwork, the sample was weighted to be representative of the population of parents of Reception children based on these characteristics.

Details on the sampling used can be found at <https://kinsq.org/school-readiness-survey-23-parents>.

Category	Options	Percentage of sample
Gender of child	Boy	51
	Girl	49
Region	North East	5
	North West	13
	Yorkshire and the Humber	9
	East Midlands	9
	West Midlands	10
	East of England	10
	London	15
	South East	15
	South West	9
	Wales	5
Ethnicity	White	72
	Asian or Asian British	12
	Black or Black British	6
	Multiple ethnic background	7
	Other	2
SEG	AB	25
	C1	34
	C2	20
	DE	21

5.2.2. Online (CAWI) sample: Primary school staff

Savanta conducted a 15-minute online survey of primary school staff through their internal panel with fieldwork taking place from the 27th October to 27th November 2023, and a total of 1,027 surveys were completed.

During fieldwork, hard quotas were set on gender of teacher, region and staff role (teaching staff and non-teaching staff). Following fieldwork, the sample was weighted to be representative of the population of primary school staff based on these characteristics.

Details on the sampling used can be found at <https://kinsq.org/school-readiness-survey-23-teachers>.

Category	Options	Percentage of sample
Gender of teacher	Male	14
	Female	86
Region	North East	8
	North West	11
	Yorkshire and the Humber	14
	East Midlands	4
	West Midlands	13
	East of England	15
	London	9
	South East	10
	South West	9
	Wales	5
Teacher age	18-39	53
	40-49	28
	50+	20
Seniority	Teaching staff	91
	Non-teaching staff	9

5.2.3. Online (CAWI) sample: Members of Parliament (MPs)

Savanta interviewed 100 members of parliament in the UK via an online survey between 6th September and 16th October 2023. Data were weighted to be representative of party, country, English sub-region, age, marginality, length of service and gender. Two questions were asked to Members of Parliament around the topic of school readiness.

Findings were published in a separate report in November 2023, which can be found at <https://kinsq.org/school-readiness>.

5.2.4. Cognitive testing interviews:

Savanta conducted six cognitive testing interviews with three parents and three teachers to test the accessibility of language and scales used in surveys, to ensure topics were approached with sensitivity, and evaluate the flow and structure of the two surveys. Feedback from the interviews was incorporated into the survey design.

5.2.5. Qualitative research

In addition to the surveys, Savanta conducted four online focus group discussions (90 minutes, 6-8 participants per group) with a number of audiences to complement the quantitative findings. The focus groups took place between the 11th October and 1st November 2023.

The composition of these groups was:

1. One group of primary school non-teaching staff (I.e. Senior leadership: headteacher/principal, deputy or assistant headteacher, Key Stage Leader, Head of Year)
2. One group of primary school teaching staff (I.e. Teaching staff: classroom teachers, Reception teachers, teaching assistants)
3. Two groups of parents of children who started Reception in 2023

All participants in school staff focus groups worked at state schools in England and Wales. Groups were recruited to give a good representation of gender, region, ethnicity, years of experience and deprivation level of the area the school is based in.

Participants in the parents' groups were recruited to give a good representation of age of child (aged four or five), gender of child, age of parent, gender of parent, region, ethnicity and socioeconomic grade.

5.3 Analysis

The data from the CAWI surveys have been analysed using descriptive analysis. When interpreting the figures in this report, please note that only statistically significant differences (at a 95% confidence level) are reported and that the effect of weighting is considered when significance tests are conducted.

Significant differences are highlighted in the analytical report and are relative to other directly relevant subgroups (e.g., those living in high deprivation areas vs. medium deprivation vs. low deprivation areas).

The qualitative data has been analysed using thematic textual analysis.

The surveys and interviews were conducted by Savanta. Access the full data tables for the school staff survey at <https://kinsq.org/school-readiness-survey-23-teachers> and the parent survey at <https://kinsq.org/school-readiness-survey-23-parents>.



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