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School Readiness
Survey

January 2025

Contents

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Key findings

Too many children are behind before they start Reception

- In the 2024 Reception cohort, teachers report over a third (**36%**) of children struggle to play / share with other children, **34%** don't know how to listen or respond to simple instruction, and a quarter (**25%**) are not toilet trained.

Teachers say the school readiness problem is getting worse

- **49%** of teachers say the school readiness problem is worse than in September 2023. A third (**33%**) say it's about the same.

- ...and every child loses out; **on average, 2.4 hours of teacher time is lost every day**.

Parents lack a clear understanding

- **90%** of parents thought their child was ready for school in September 2024, while teachers indicate that 1 in 3 children (**33%**) were not school ready.

- Less than half (**44%**) of parents think children should know how to use books and only 3 in 4 (**76%**) selected toilet training as something a child should be able to do before starting Reception.

...and some don't think it's their job

- Almost half (**49%**) parents and **45%** of teachers say children are not ready because parents don't think it's their job to get children ready for Reception.

- A quarter of parents (**26%**) think it's completely their responsibility to teach children how to say their name and just under half (**48%**) of parents think it's completely their responsibility to ensure their children are toilet trained.

- Fewer than 1 in 5 parents (**18%**) think they are solely responsible for teaching their children to listen to/respond to simple instructions.

The role of screen time

- Over half (**54%**) of teachers and **43%** parents highlight children spending too much time on electronic devices as a factor in children not being school ready.

- **54%** of teachers and **49%** of parents said parents spending more time on electronic devices than with children was a contributing factor.

The role of gender

- Teachers report a significant difference between the school readiness of boys and girls. **54%** of teachers say that boys are less ready for Reception than girls, compared to just **3%** who say girls are less school ready than boys.

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Parents lack key information and support

- 2 in 5 parents (**41%**) hadn't heard about school readiness before their child joined Reception in 2024. More than 1 in 5 (**21%**) hadn't heard of school readiness before taking our survey.

- Less than half (**48%**) of teachers think that parents are getting the right information, and **42%** think parents get enough information.

- 1 in 5 (**21%**) parents said they'd had no visits at all from health visitors by the time their child started Reception.

Schools are struggling to adapt

- **50%** of school staff have had to allocate more time/resources to improve early language skills and **44%** provided dedicated intervention staff to support children who are not school ready.

- More teachers this year (**47%**) tell us that they are adapting to the school readiness problem by providing parents with information on what being school ready means, compared to last year (**38%**).

The long-term implications

Two thirds of teachers (**65%**) and **58%** of parents agree that not being ready for school when starting Reception could have long term impacts on a child's success in later life.

What needs to change?

- Almost half (**45%**) of teachers think parents should be more aware of their role in preparing their child for Reception.

- A majority of teachers (**82%**) say that the government should provide more funding to help children be school ready.

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Introduction

Our fifth annual school readiness* report 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.

School readiness refers to the full range of developmental measures and milestones, rather than 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'.

To understand what school readiness looks like in the September 2024 Reception cohort, we conducted focus groups and surveyed over 1,000 teachers and 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 Reception, where this is not due to a previously identified Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND).

**Disclaimer about the term 'teacher' - when we use the term 'teacher' we are referring to all teachers that completed the survey. That includes 445 primary school teachers, 68 Reception Teachers, 75 members of primary school senior leadership teams, and 428 Teaching Assistants. A full breakdown of the sample can be seen on page 38.

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Perceptions of school readiness in 2024

1.1 The extent of the problem

Five years on from our first report on school readiness, teachers tell us that significant numbers of children are starting school behind before they begin.

This continues to impact children, teachers and schools across the education system, storing up long-term problems for society and the economy.

According to teachers, in an average class of the 2024 Reception cohort:

45% of children are unable to sit still.

34% don't respond to simple instructions.

36% have difficulty playing or sharing with peers.

25% are not toilet trained.

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

Are unable to sit still	45%
Struggle to play/share with other children	36%
Are overly upset when away from their parents	34%
Don't know how to listen/ respond to simple instruction	34%
Struggle to hold a pencil or crayon	32%
Cannot dress on their own	32%
Don't have basic numeracy skills	32%
Are unable to communicate their needs	30%
Incorrectly use books	28%
Are not able to eat and drink independently	27%
Are not toilet trained	25%
Don't have basic language skills	25%

Thinking about the following behaviours, what percentage of children starting in Reception in your 2024 class (teaching staff)/ in a typical 2024 class (non-teaching staff). BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034

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A third of children are behind when they start school

Teachers report that a third (33%) of children who started Reception in 2024 were not school ready. This is the same number who fail to achieve a Good Level of Development each year, indicating that the Reception year is not closing the development gap.

Despite often remarkable efforts of schools and teachers, many children struggle to catch up.

2.4 hours

The average teaching time per day that teachers spend supporting children to catch-up.

Teachers report cases of children not meeting a range of their developmental milestones.

> **We've had a lot of delayed walkers. Their movements are quite clumsy, dropping things, unable to climb a staircase."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher, North-West

> **They can't communicate their wants, needs, or emotions, then you're faced with emotional dysregulation, and you can't meet their needs because you don't know what they are."**
>
> – Headteacher, North-West

> **I've got 2 children [in my class] who physically cannot sit on the carpet. They don't have core strength. And when I went to visit one of the girls in July, she'd never been to a nursery, she'd been sat in a corner sofa on an iPad so she hasn't developed her core strength and it's really affecting her whole development."**
>
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

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1.2 Many teachers say the problem is getting worse

Almost half (49%) of teachers tell us that the level of school readiness is worse than last year. A further third (33%) say the situation is about the same.

> **I think the toilet thing [amount of children arriving not toilet trained]...has been more noticeable certainly in these last couple of years."**
> – Teaching Assistant, West Midlands

> **I've been teaching about 15 years in Reception—it's a lot of those independent skills that would be the big thing for me. The children are just coming in, and it's like... they're just standing there waiting for you to do it. I don't remember it being as bad as this."**
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

1.3 Parents' perceptions vs teacher reality

There is a continuing gulf between parent and teacher perceptions of the problem.

90%
of **parents** believe their child is ready for school.

33%
of children are reported as not school ready by **teachers**.

76%
of parents thought that a child should be toilet trained before starting Reception.

44%
of parents think children should know how to use books correctly*.

*by which we mean turning pages of a picture book rather than tapping or swiping the cover

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Parental awareness of key developmental milestones has declined since last year.
Parents in 2024 were less likely to think their children should be able to meet key developmental milestones such as being toilet trained (76% in 2024 vs 79% in 2023), being able to communicate their needs (76% vs 82% in 2023), and listening/responding to instructions (74% vs 79% in 2023).

Figure 2: Percentage of parents who think that their child should be able to do the following when they start Reception, over time
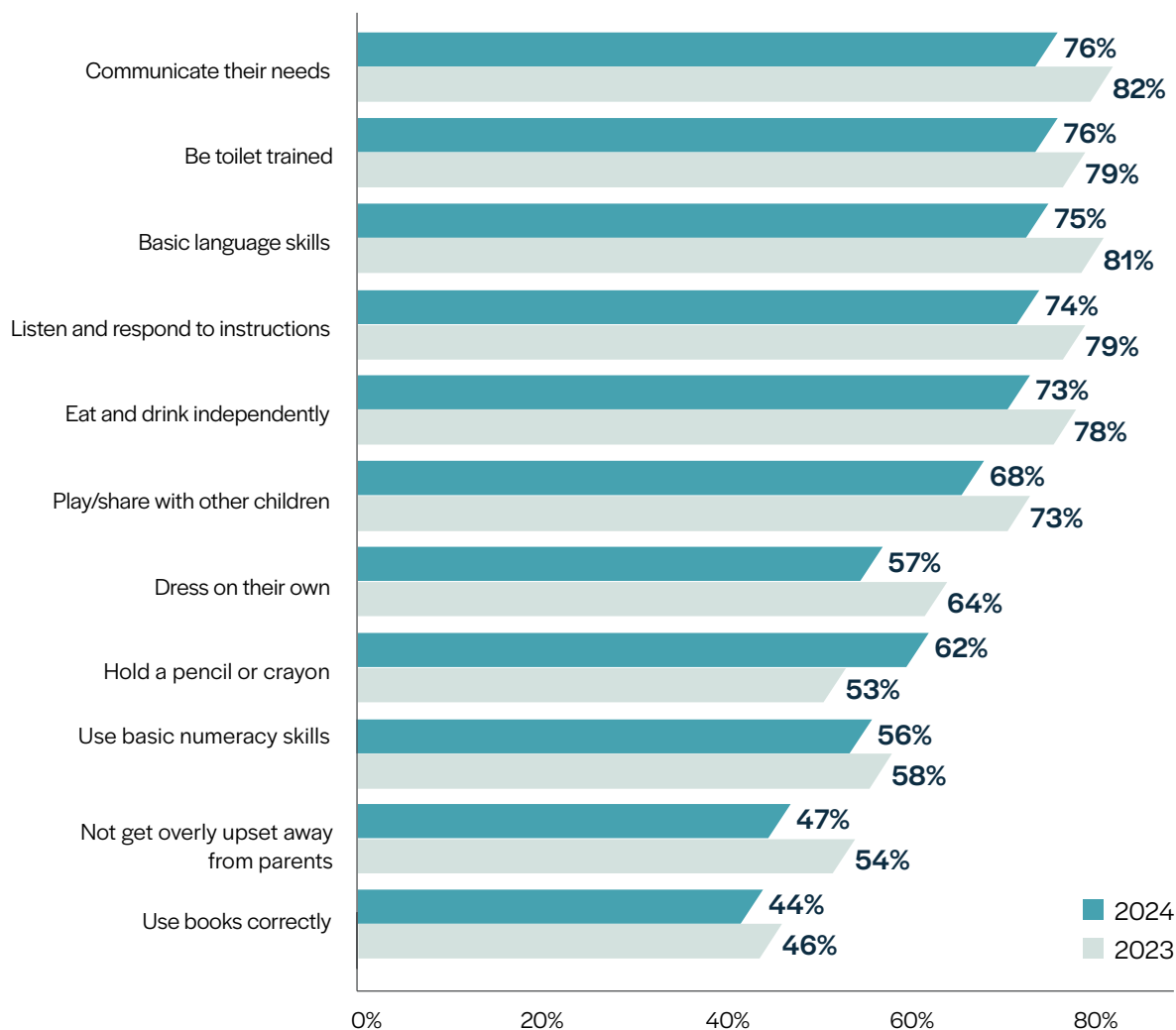
PQ7. Which, if any, of the following do you think a child should be able to do when they start Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October 2023, n=1037. October-November 2024, n=1009.

Fewer than a fifth (17%) of parents thought that children should be able to perform all of the above skills. The only skill that **more** parents think a child should develop before joining Reception, compared to 2023, is being able to hold a pencil/crayon (62% vs 53% in 2023).

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Why aren't children ready for school?

We asked **teachers** why children weren't meeting their developmental milestones. The top 3 reasons chosen by teachers relate to parenting and screen time:

54%
said it was because parents are spending more time on electronic devices than with children.

54%
thought it was because children are spending more than the recommended 2 hours per day* on electronic devices.

52%
said it was because parents are not reading enough to their children.

When we asked **parents** why children might not be ready for school, they chose differently:

51%
of parents think it is because parents are working longer hours to keep up with the rising costs of living.

49%
of parents say it is because parents do not think it is their job to prepare their child for Reception.

49%
of parents think children aren't ready because parents are spending more time on electronic devices than with children.

For babies over the age of 2, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend no more than an hour of screen time a day. This remains the recommendation up to the age of 4. The NHS advises no more than 2 hours a day even for older children.

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Figure 3: Factors that could result in fewer children being ready for Reception, according to parents and teachers

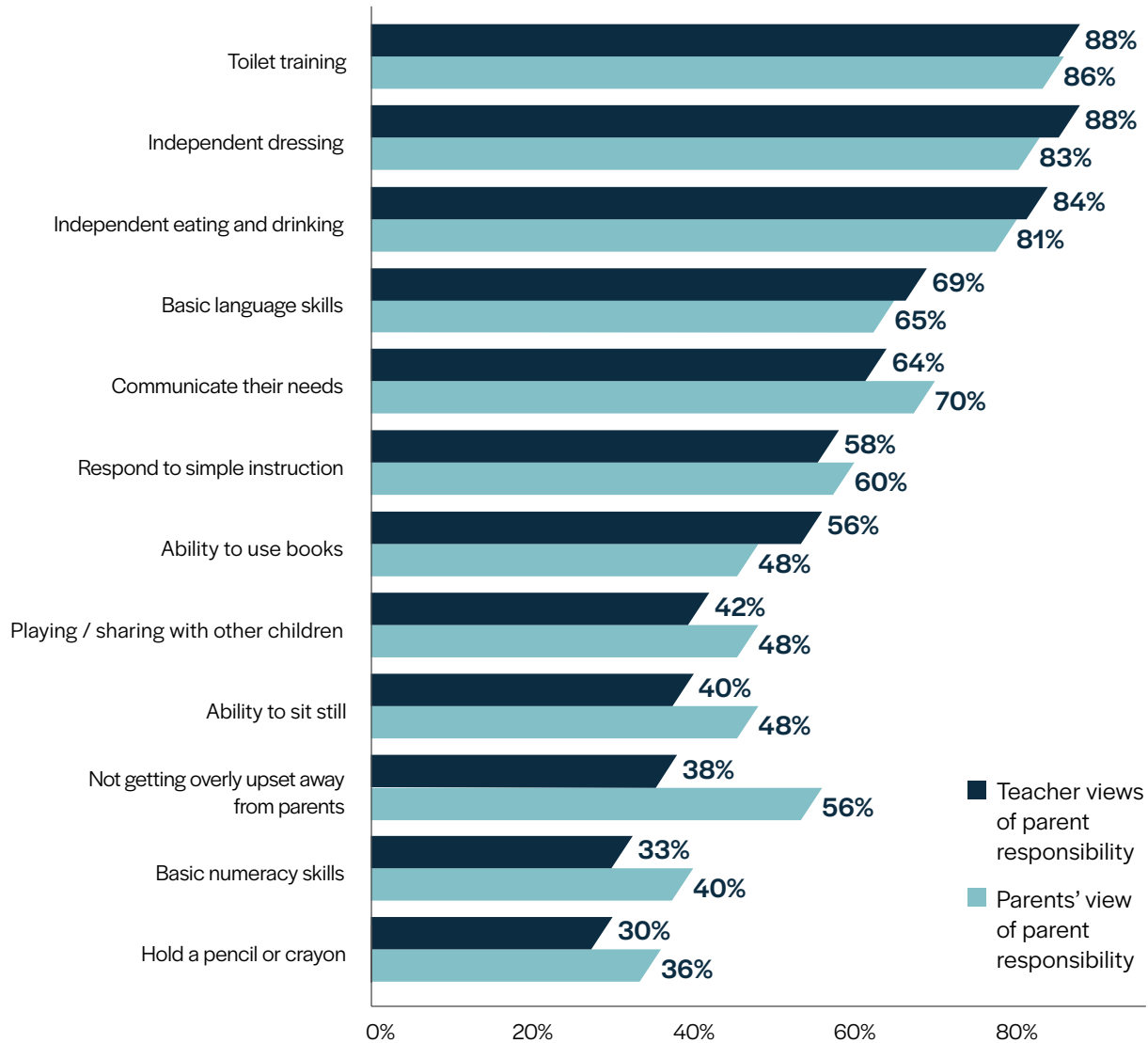| Factor	Parents	Teachers
Parents working longer hours to keep up with rising costs of living	51%	46%
Parents not thinking it is their job to prepare their child for Reception	49%	45%
Parents spending more time on electronic devices than with children	49%	54%
Parents not being aware of expectations for school readiness	46%	40%
Parents not talking to their children early enough	44%	38%
Children spending more than the recommended 2 hour per day on electronic devices	43%	54%
Rising cost of childcare	42%	34%
Parents not reading to children	42%	52%
Children spending more time at home, with less interaction with other children	39%	39%
Rising levels of deprivation in the UK	31%	35%
Lack of peer or community support for parents	30%	23%
Less time spent in early childhood education due to lockdown restrictions	30%	39%
Lack of targeted state support for parents	26%	20%
Variable quality of early childhood education	23%	18%

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 (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009. TQ5. Q5. Why do you think some children that are starting Reception in 2024 might not be ready for Reception? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034

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2.1 Some parents don't think it's their job...

We asked parents and teachers who they thought was responsible for making sure children meet key developmental milestones before they start school:

Figure 4: Percentage of teachers and parents who believe that <u>parents are responsible</u> for a child's development of the following skills:

Skill	Teacher views	Parents' view
Toilet training	88%	86%
Independent dressing	88%	83%
Independent eating and drinking	84%	81%
Basic language skills	69%	65%
Communicate their needs	64%	70%
Respond to simple instruction	58%	60%
Ability to use books	56%	48%
Playing / sharing with other children	42%	48%
Ability to sit still	40%	48%
Not getting overly upset away from parents	38%	56%
Basic numeracy skills	33%	40%
Hold a pencil or crayon	30%	36%

■ Teacher views of parent responsibility

■ Parents' view of parent responsibility

PQ8: Summary Table: Who do you think is most responsible for a child's development of each of the following skills? BASE: NET:Parents ('Completely parents' & 'Mostly parents'): All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034. TQ6.: Summary Table: Who do you think is most responsible for a child's development of each of the following skills? BASE: NET:Parents ('Completely parents' & 'Mostly parents'): parents: October-November 2024, n=1009.

> **I think I took my child's lead on how she felt about it rather than [how I felt]."**
>
> – Parent, North West

> **I just went with the flow. If [the nursery] told me there was anything for me to worry about, then I would look into it."**
>
> – Parent, South-East

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2.2 ...and are unconcerned by the impact

Almost half (48%) of **parents** are not concerned if teachers have to spend their teaching time helping pupils with toilet training. More than 3 in 5 parents are not worried if teachers have to teach other children how to play/share (63%) or sit still (62%).

Parental age seems to play a role in expectations around the role of schools:

51%

of parents aged 18-34 thought it was the school's responsibility to teach their child key developmental skills, compared to 40% of parents aged 35+.

In focus groups, teachers say that some parents expect schools to teach skills that should have been developed before their child started Reception.

> **They might know what school readiness is, but they will openly just say, oh, no, he's not ready. He can't do that. And he can't do that. But the school will sort it."**
>
> – Headteacher, North-West

> **Even when [parents] do know what the expectations are, they're fully aware their child's not there, but they may not have the resources, the knowledge, or the motivation to do anything about it anyway."**
>
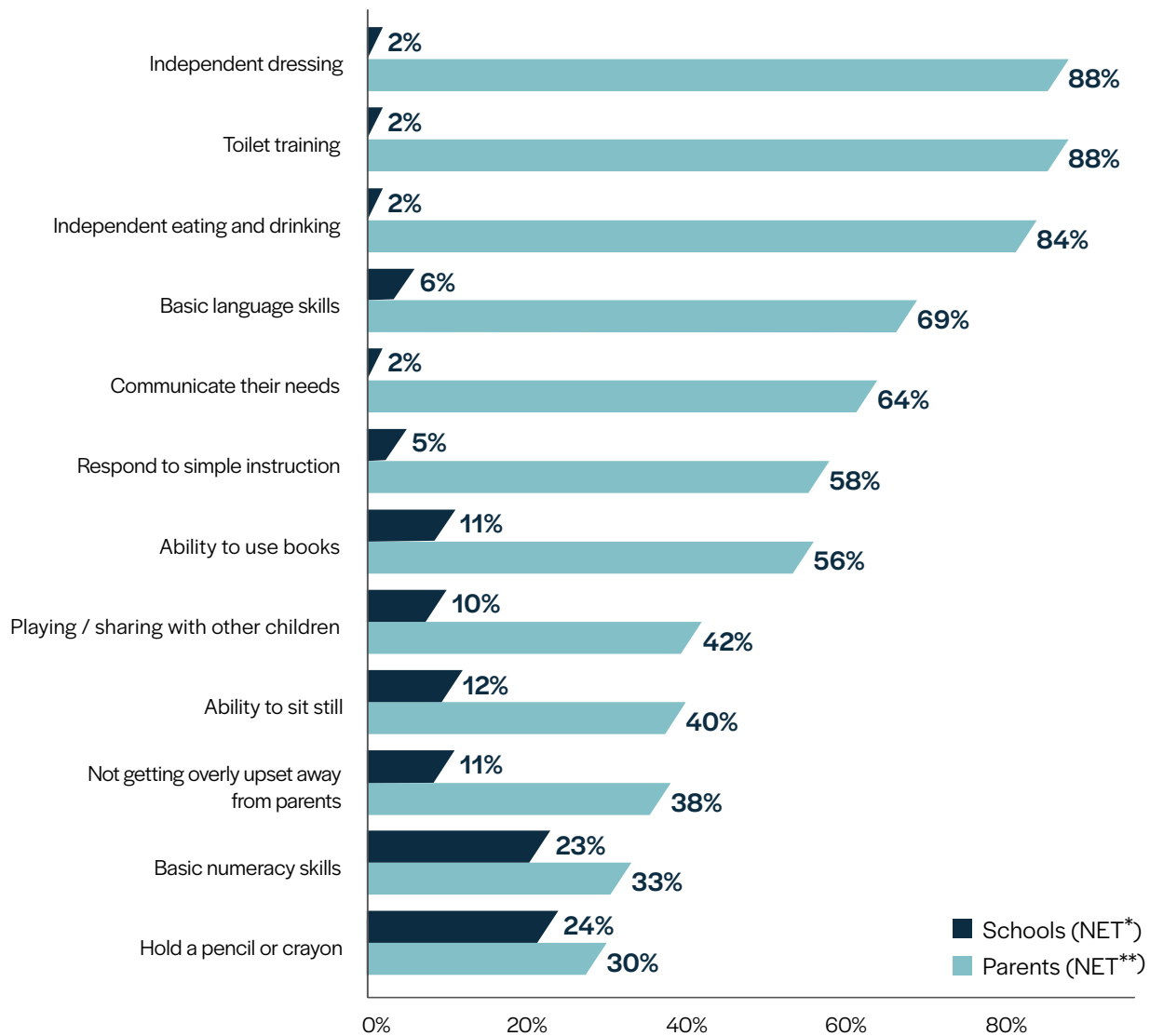> – Headteacher, North-West

> **It's common sense that you wouldn't send your child who's 4 to school without being able to go to the toilet."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher, North-West

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Teachers think parents are responsible for making sure children meet their developmental milestones, rather than schools.

Figure 5: Who is most responsible for a child's development of the following skills, according to teachers

Skill	Schools (NET*)	Parents (NET**)
Independent dressing	2%	88%
Toilet training	2%	88%
Independent eating and drinking	2%	84%
Basic language skills	6%	69%
Communicate their needs	2%	64%
Respond to simple instruction	5%	58%
Ability to use books	11%	56%
Playing / sharing with other children	10%	42%
Ability to sit still	12%	40%
Not getting overly upset away from parents	11%	38%
Basic numeracy skills	23%	33%
Hold a pencil or crayon	24%	30%

*The combined responses of 'Mostly school' & 'Completely school'

** The combined responses of 'Mostly parents' & 'Completely parents'

TQ6: Summary Table: Who do you think is most responsible for a child's development of each of the following skills? BASE: 'NET: School' ('Mostly school' & 'Completely school') & 'NET: Parents' ('Mostly parents' & 'Completely parents'): October-November 2024, n=1034.

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2.3 Too much screen time

Teachers and parents are concerned about the impact of screen time on school readiness.

54% of teachers and 49% of parents said **parents** spending more time on electronic devices than with children contributed to children not being school ready.

54% of teachers and 43% of parents said **children** spending more than the recommended 2 hours a day* on screens was a contributing factor.

In focus groups, **parents** had mixed opinions on the use of handheld electronic devices.

> **Mobile phones, tablets, technology. I think it's played a big factor in the fact that children are nowhere near as ready as they were years ago. Technology for me is a big factor."**
> – Teaching Assistant, North-West

> **When it's home time, you just see parents on their phone... They are just not interested. You know, the amount of times I've seen children so happy and excited wanting to tell their mum and dad, 'Look what I've made!' They're just not interested and it just makes you feel so sad for the child."**
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

> **I'm not a fan of a lot of screen time, but I can also see the inevitable direction where humanity is headed towards. You cannot expect a child not to know how to operate an iPad, or any sort of tablet or TV nowadays."**
> – Parent, South-East

> **It's a bit scary how intelligent and how much these children know nowadays with regards to screen time. As long as it's for educational purposes, it's great - it can teach them a lot. We just need to keep the balance."**
> – Parent, South-East

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Teachers and parents have different views on how much time children should spend on screens each day, in spite of guidance to the contrary:

Figure 6: The appropriate amount of time (in minutes) for children to spend on hand-held electronic devices, according to teachers and parents and recommendation of the World Health Organisation

Age	Parents*	Teachers*	Recommended by WHO*
Less than 1 year old	32 minutes per day	11 minutes per day	No screen time
1-2 years old	57 minutes per day	26 minutes per day	No screen time
3-4 years old	93 minutes per day	50 minutes per day	No more than 60 minutes per day
5+ years old	141 minutes per day	92 minutes per day	No more than 120 minutes per day

The World Health Organisation (WHO) uses different age brackets to the above table, and proposes no screen time for babies up to 2 years old, and no more than one hour for babies 2-4 years old.

TW2Q2. Summary Table: In your opinion, how many minutes per day do you think is an appropriate amount of time for children of different ages to spend using an electronic device, e.g. tablet or mobile phone? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034. PW2Q6. Summary : In your opinion, how many minutes per day do you think is an appropriate amount of time for children of different ages to spend using a hand-held electronic device, such as a tablet or mobile phone? (e.g., time spent actively engaged on the device) BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009.

This difference between parents and teachers is skewed in part by a small proportion of parents who think very high amounts of screen time are appropriate:

13%
of parents think 100 or more minutes of screen time per day is acceptable for a child aged 1-2.

6%
of parents think that more than 200 minutes is acceptable for a child aged 1-2.

When asked to comment on screen time, **parents** focus on their children's proficiency and enjoyment of technology, rather than any issues it might cause with their development:

> **He watches YouTube, he knows how to use tablets and everything, he knows how to put the TV on. He teaches me even if I don't know how to do something. I don't even know how to use his laptop."**
>
> – Parent, South-East

> **Because my son's got siblings, he was entertained with the tablet and the TV and sometimes I just let them get on with it because it was easier for me as well."**
>
> – Parent, South-East

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Teachers in our focus groups expressed strong concerns around overuse of screen time. These focused on several key areas:

- The negative effects on children engaging with non-educational or inappropriate content.

- Parents spending excessive time on screens, reducing meaningful interactions with their child.

- Screens being a poor substitute for constructive activities like reading or learning through play.

> **[Children] haven't got the age-appropriate attention span. It's like they've never been expected to attend to anything apart from maybe a device or a TV."**
> – Headteacher, North-West

> **Children [in Reception] [are]saying 'trash' and 'vacation' and stuff like that. It shows you that they're picking up the language from online, they're not picking up language in a social environment. They're just receptively being spoon-fed this language as opposed to engaging with it in any way and using Americanisms just shows it."**
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

While some **parents** in focus group discussions agree that screen time is problematic, others feel it can be beneficial:

> **With regards to screen time, I'm not a fan, but we all do that and you know, so long as it's for educational purposes, it's great, it can teach them a lot. There's lots of content that's specifically designed to educate children on different topics, it's great. We just need to keep the balance."**
> – Parent, South-East

> **It's a balance, isn't it of different things? Obviously different play-based activities and then screens as well. They can also have the benefits. But too much can be not so good."**
> – Parent, North-West

> **When [my child's] behaviour was getting a bit wild, we put a lock on it. So now they can't just freely access YouTube when they want."**
> – Parent, North-West

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2.4 Limited access to health visitors

Health visitors play a crucial role in disseminating information related to developmental milestones. Government guidelines stipulate that all families with babies should receive five mandated health visitor reviews before their child turns 2 and a half years old. In reality, access to health visitors remains patchy.

21%
of parents in our survey reported no visits at all.

63%
of parents said they'd had up to 2 visits.

> **I think health visitors should play a role in giving you information about school readiness, but I don't think we had anything from the health visitor with regards to that at all."**
> – Parent, Wales

> **[We didn't have visits from health visitors] - they used to phone up and just ask how everything was going on, but it was more for my older children."**
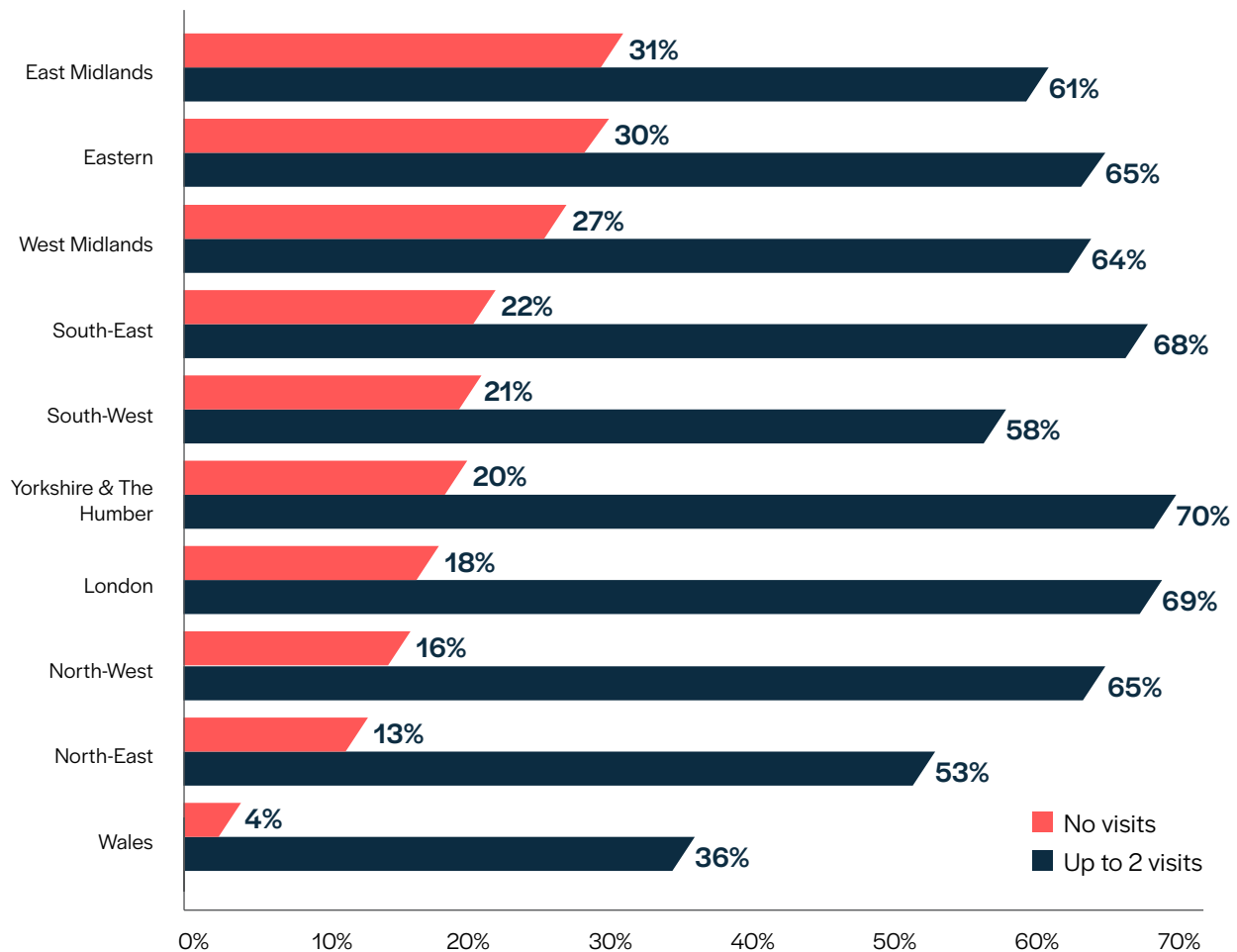> – Parent, South-East

> **"I think we just had one [visit] when my daughter turned 1."**
> – Parent, Wales

70% of parents living in Yorkshire and The Humber said they had up to 2 visits before their child started Reception, compared to 53% in the North-East and 36% in Wales.

31% of parents in the East Midlands, 30% in the East of England, 27% in the West Midlands and 18% in London reported no visits at all.

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

Region	No visits	Up to 2 visits
East Midlands	31%	61%
Eastern	30%	65%
West Midlands	27%	64%
South-East	22%	68%
South-West	21%	58%
Yorkshire & The Humber	20%	70%
London	18%	69%
North-West	16%	65%
North-East	13%	53%
Wales	4%	36%

PQ15. How many visits from a health visitor have you had before your child started school? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009

Both parents and teachers identify lack of access to health visitors as a factor impacting school readiness. In focus groups, **teachers** expressed concern about the limited access to health visitors during the early, most critical years of child development.

> **We've got a major health visitor crisis where we are. So, children aren't being seen. I don't know if it's the same across the country, but children aren't being seen by health visitors here from 1 years until 4. So, children are coming in with no speech, unable to toilet at all."**
>
> – Teacher, Wales

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> "I feel as though when a baby's born, you've got health visitors coming. And my guess is I think they come after the baby's 1 1/2 years old, 2 years old, that all stops. So the issue we've got is this gap when the child is from 2 till 4... We're missing something there, and then, lo and behold, the child's 4 years old. They're in Reception and they're behind."
>
> – Teaching Assistant, North-West

2.5 Parents are under pressure

Teachers and parents draw a link between the ongoing cost of living crisis and family life, including child development:

83%
of teachers believe the cost of living crisis will have a significant impact on school readiness this year. 80% anticipate a similar impact next year.

77%
think this impact will still be felt in the next 3-5 years (up from 75% in 2023).

> "Parents are busy working and I don't think they're actually spending a lot of quality time with the children having those basic play skills and conversations."
>
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

> "Let's be fair... putting them on an iPad is an easy win. The children like it. It doesn't cost anything apart from the iPad. The parents can't afford for them to go out and experience the world as much as possibly previous years."
>
> – School Leader, East Midlands

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2.6 Perceptions of lockdown

We know from **previous years' research** that the school readiness problem predates covid, and that lockdowns exacerbated existing inequalities. In our 2023 school readiness survey, **52%** of teachers and **38%** of parents thought that less time spent in early childhood education due to lockdown restrictions was a factor that could result in fewer children being ready for Reception. This fell to **39%** of teachers and **30%** of parents this year.

Figure 8: Parents and teachers that selected 'less time spent in early childhood education due to lockdown restrictions' as factor influencing school readiness
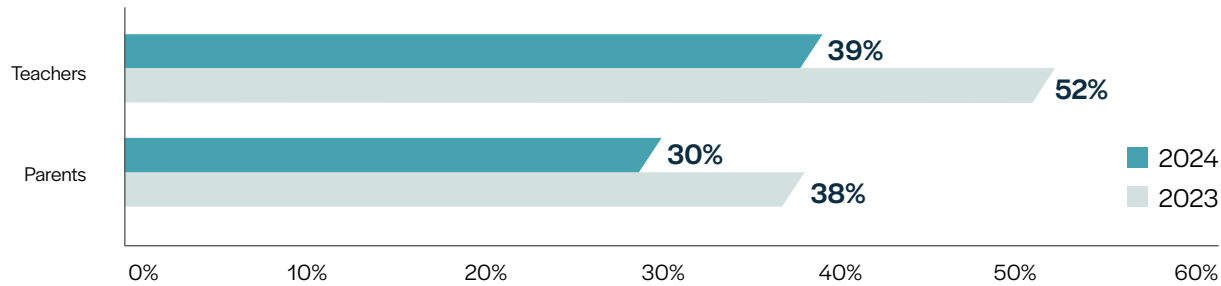
PQ9. Which, if any, of the following do you think are the main factors that could result in fewer children being ready for Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009.

TQ5. Why do you think some children that are starting Reception in 2024 might not be ready for Reception? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034.

In focus groups, some parents still felt their children had missed out on exposure to important social dynamics in pre-school settings:

> **It's the social dynamics for the kids being able to engage with other children. Because you're not really mixing with anyone outside your bubble."**
> – Parent, North-West

Teachers in focus groups agreed covid posed serious challenges for many parents, however for some teachers the "covid baby" explanation was starting to feel like an 'excuse':

> **There's only so long you can blame covid for that. I'm sorry, but a lot of it comes down to parenting as well."**
> – Senior Leader, East Midlands

For teachers, the enduring impact of covid related more to macro factors such as the closing of essential services and the ingraining of detrimental habits (such as an over-reliance on screen time), rather than specific challenges faced by parents or children.

> **Covid has played a big factor in this and even before that Sure Start centres...have just been closing down. That's had a major impact."**
> – Teaching Assistant, North-West

> **I've definitely seen a change since covid for our Reception children that are coming in ...they're having a lot of screen time and I'm really seeing the impact of that."**
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

2.7 The role of gender

Teachers report a significant difference between the school readiness of boys and girls. 54% of teachers say that boys are less school ready than girls, compared to just 3% who say girls are less school ready than boys.

Figure 9: Proportion of children ready for school by gender, according to teachers

54% Yes, **boys are generally less school ready** than girls.

3% Yes, **girls are generally less school ready** than boys.
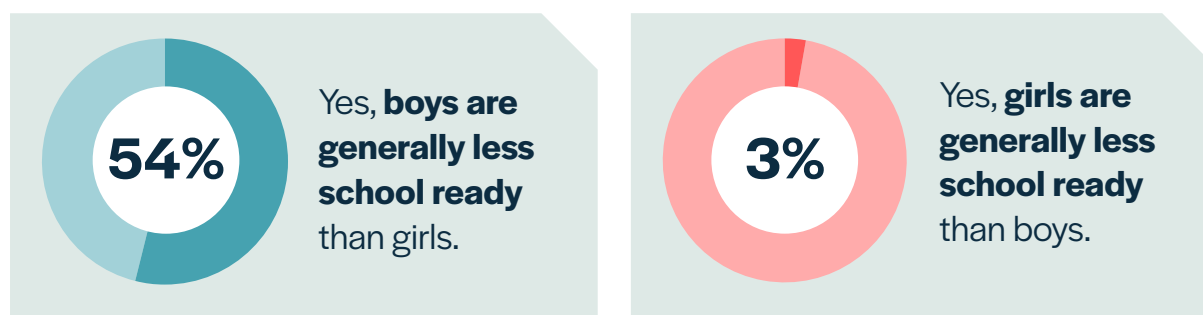
W2Q4. Have you noticed a difference in the levels of school readiness between boys and girls in Reception intakes? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034

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> **Summer born boys are always the ones you worry about having a class full of because they are the least prepared for school."**
>
> – Senior Leader, South-East

> **I think I'm seeing a lot more, especially in Key Stage 1, some of our boys with really low self-esteem."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher, North-West

While parents of both boys and girls roughly agree on the appropriate levels of screen time for 0-2 year olds, parents of boys aged 3-5 chose higher upper limits for daily screen time use. For parents of boys aged 5+, 151 mins daily was considered appropriate, while for parents of girls the same age it was 131 mins daily.

Figure 10: The appropriate amount of time for children to spend on hand-held electronic devices, by gender of child, according to parents

Age	Parents of boys	Parents of girls
Less than 1 year old	32 minutes per day	32 minutes per day
1-2 years old	60 minutes per day	53 minutes per day
3-4 years old	101 minutes per day	85 minutes per day
5+ years old	151 minutes per day	131 minutes per day

PW2Q6. Summary : In your opinion, how many minutes per day do you think is an appropriate amount of time for children of different ages to spend using a hand-held electronic device, such as a tablet or mobile phone? (e.g., time spent actively engaged on the device) BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009.

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Impact on the school ecosystem

Across **5 years of school readiness research**, teachers have been clear about the long-term impact on the school ecosystem of children without key skills. This year is no different.

3.1 Individual children

4 in 5 teachers (80%) and 65% of parents believe that starting school behind has a long-term impact on a **child's academic attainment.** Teachers in focus groups are clear that those children not ready in Reception are generally those still struggling by the end of Year 1, and by the time they leave at the end of Year 6.

> **Children that have come in that can't go to the toilet or can't speak to other children are very unlikely to catch up by the end of the year."**
>
> – Reception Teacher, Wales

> **The children who are behind in Reception are behind by Year 6. The biggest thing is speech and language. Those children who are behind on speech and language, it affects their writing. That's going to knock on to Year 6 and the SATs."**
>
> – Reception Teacher, North-West

4 in 5
(80%) of **teachers** think a child not being ready for school at the start of Reception will impact a child's academic attainment.

2 in 3
(65%) of **parents** think a child not being ready for school at the start of Reception will impact a child's academic attainment.

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65% of teachers (vs 58% of parents) also believe that not being school ready has a long-term impact on a **child's success in later life**.

> **The children that we've got that weren't school ready are one day going to be our society - our carers, nurses, doctors. If they don't get the basics earlier on, they're never going to be ready for later life."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher, North-West

> **I think they're having a negative experience of schooling and that's from the beginning. So their Reception experience won't be as positive as it could be because they're not ready. And then that's something they carry with them. It's hard to turn that around again, that impact on self-esteem and engagement."**
>
> – Headteacher, North-West

> **For those children as they get older, they notice that they're different, and it affects their self-esteem."**
>
> – Senior Leader, East Midlands

Figure 11: The percentages of parents and teachers that said not being ready for school would have long term impacts on the following:
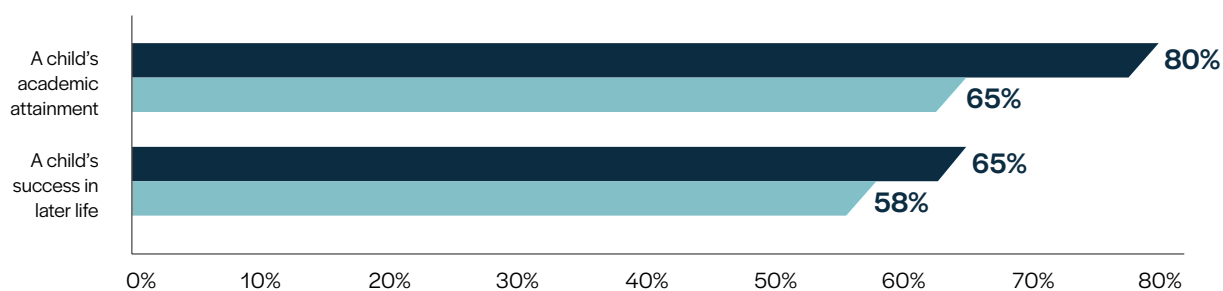
W2Q2NEWW4x. A child's academic attainment: To what extent do you agree or disagree that not being ready for school when starting Reception could have long term impacts on each of the following. BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034.

PW2Q4_NEW. Summary : To what extent do you agree or disagree that not being ready for school when starting Reception could have long term impacts on each of the following. BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009.

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Younger parents are more likely to agree that being ready for school has a long term impact on a child's success in later life. They are also more likely to assign greater responsibility to school for ensuring their children meet their developmental milestones.

69%

of parents aged 18-34 agreed that not being ready for school has a long-term impact on academic attainment, compared to 59% of parents aged 35+.

61%

of parents aged 18-34 agreed that not being ready for school has a long term impact on a child's success in later life, compared to 54% of parents aged 35+.

Figure 12: The percentages of parents, by age, that said not being ready for school would have long term impacts on the following
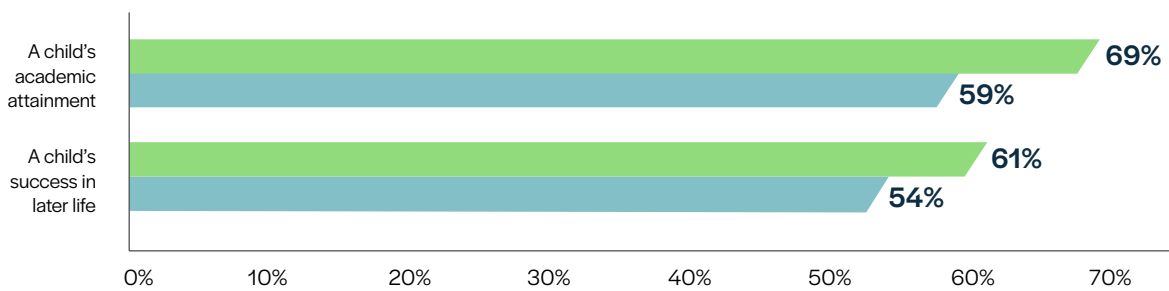
PW2Q4_NEW. Summary : To what extent do you agree or disagree that not being ready for school when starting Reception could have long term impacts on each of the following. BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009.

■ Ages 18-34
■ Ages 35+

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3.2 The rest of the class

84% of teachers say that children lacking key skills has a moderate or major impact on the progress of the class.

Figure 13: The percentage of teachers that said the following skills had a major / moderate impact on the progress of the class

Skill	Percentage
Pupils who don't know how to listen / respond to simple instruction	84%
Pupils who are unable to sit still	80%
Pupils who don't know how to communicate their needs	80%
Pupils who struggle to play/ share with other children	77%
Pupils who don't have basic language skills	74%
Pupils who don't have basic numeracy skills	70%
Pupils who are not toilet trained	70%
Pupils who struggle to hold a pencil or crayon	64%
Pupils who are overly upset when away from their parents	64%
Pupils who cannot dress on their own	61%
Pupils who are not able to eat or drink independently	55%
Pupils who are incorrectly using books	53%

PW2Q4_NEW. Summary : To what extent do you agree or disagree that not being ready for school when starting Reception could have long term impacts on each of the following. BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2024, n=1009.
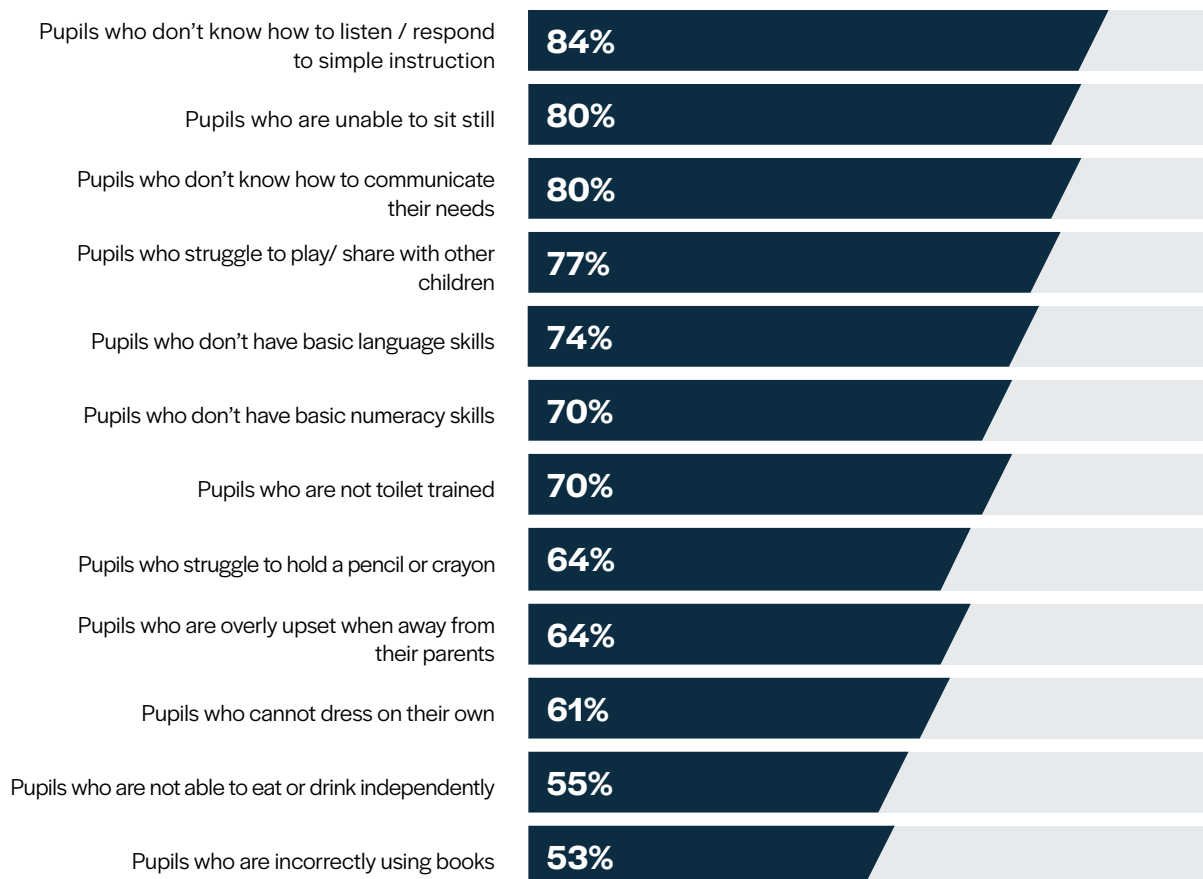
During focus group discussions, we asked them to identify which skills had the biggest impact:

> **So much of my day was just spent cleaning up or prompting that child to go to the toilet...And that lost time I could be giving to the other 20 children in the class. It has a negative impact on the rest of the children there."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant, North-West

> **You see 1 child that won't line up, and then the following day, all of a sudden you've got 2 children that won't. And then it has that sort of ripple effect."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant, North-West

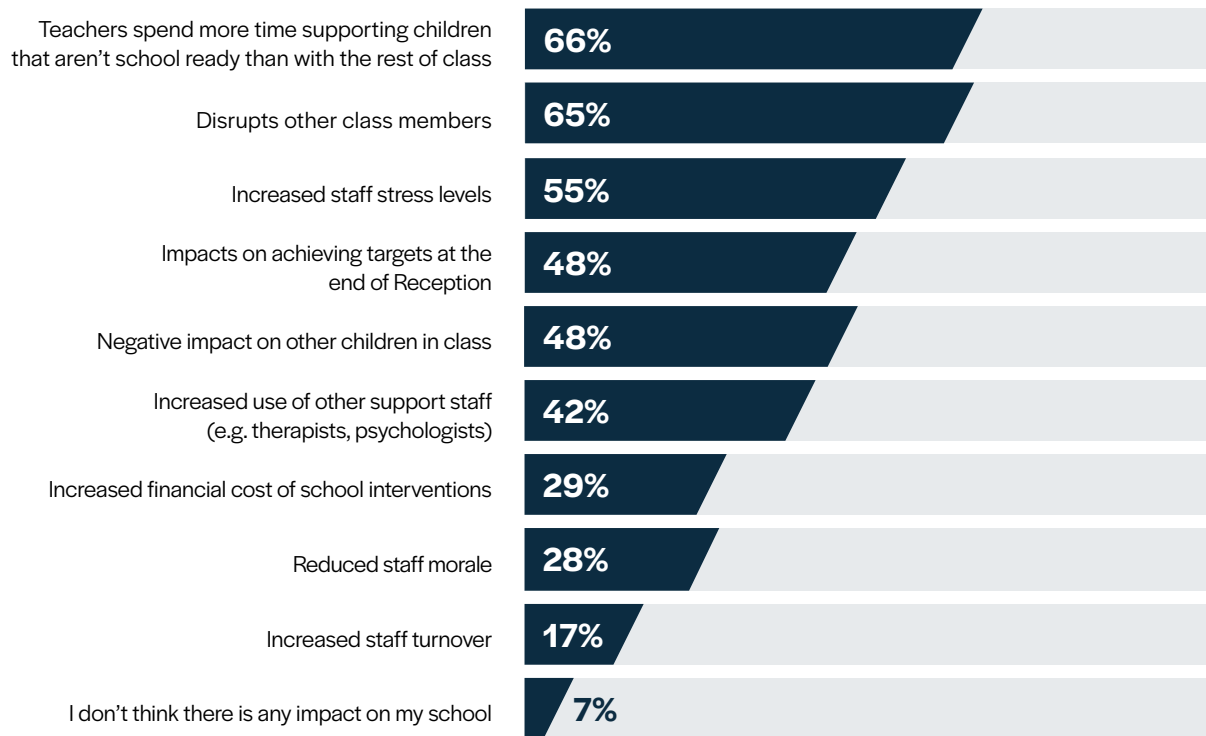Kindred²

3.3 Teachers

> **I feel like for the first half term, I'm putting out little fires everywhere rather than teaching."**
> – Teaching Assistant, North-West

We asked teachers about the impact of children arriving at Reception lacking key skills. 66% of teachers said they spent more time supporting children who aren't school ready than teaching the rest of the class, and 65% of teachers said it disrupted other class members. Just under half (48%) of teachers said it had a negative impact on the rest of the class, and the same number said it would impact their targets at the end of Reception.

Figure 14: The impact of children who are not ready for Reception on schools, according to teachers

Teachers spend more time supporting children that aren't school ready than with the rest of class	66%
Disrupts other class members	65%
Increased staff stress levels	55%
Impacts on achieving targets at the end of Reception	48%
Negative impact on other children in class	48%
Increased use of other support staff (e.g. therapists, psychologists)	42%
Increased financial cost of school interventions	29%
Reduced staff morale	28%
Increased staff turnover	17%
I don't think there is any impact on my school	7%

TQ13. In which of the following ways, if any, is your school impacted by children who are not Reception ready? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034

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During focus groups, senior leaders spoke about the impact this had on the staffing retention crisis as well as the impact across the school:

> **Staff feel like they've trained for a specific role, they've applied for a specific job and they've come in and it's not what they're doing."**
> – Headteacher, North-West

> **Staff will just go. They'll say, 'I'm here to teach them…not to toilet train them.'"**
> – Deputy Headteacher, North-West

3.4 Schools

Schools are having to make changes to meet the needs of children who are not ready:

50%
of school staff have had to dedicate more time/ resources to improve early language skills.

45%
of schools have allocated more time or staff to deal with physical care/ personal hygiene.

29%
of schools have had to spend more money on interventions.

47%
of school staff say they've implemented measures to adapt to children not being ready for school.

44%
of teachers say their school has had to provide more dedicated intervention staff to support children who are not ready for school.

> **A significant portion of my teaching this year has been spent supporting children who aren't school ready."**
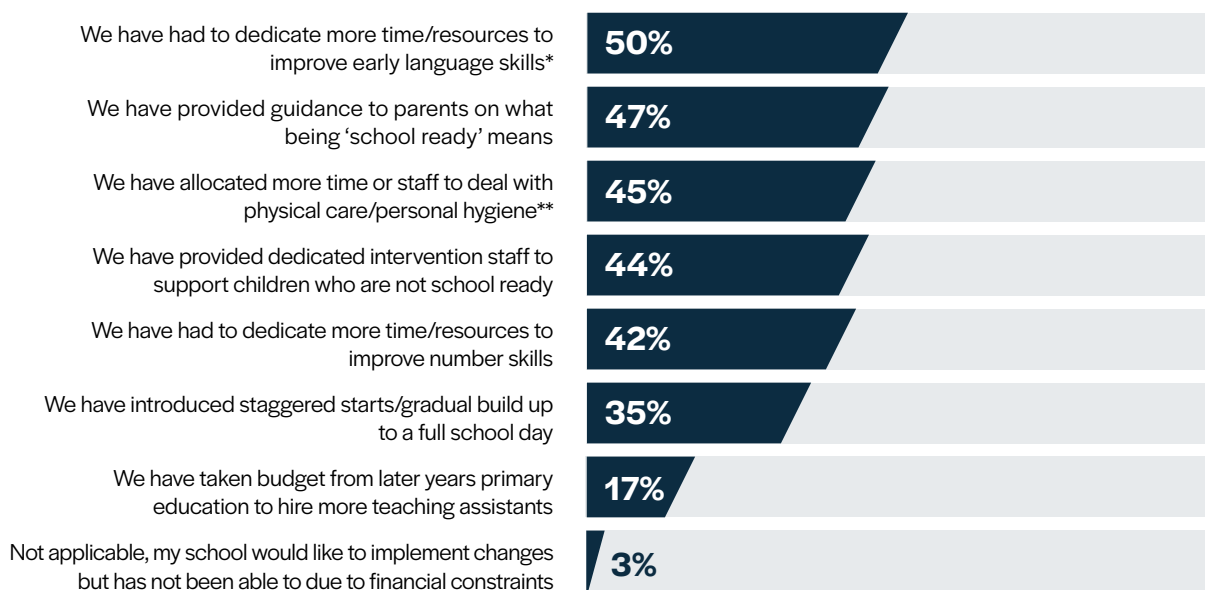> – Reception Teacher, North-West

> **You're robbing Peter to pay Paul - it impacts the other year groups, and it's interrupting learning everywhere."**
> – Deputy Headteacher, North-West

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Figure 15: Adaptations that schools have made as a result of the school readiness challenge, according to teachers

|	
We have had to dedicate more time/resources to improve early language skills*	50%
We have provided guidance to parents on what being 'school ready' means	47%
We have allocated more time or staff to deal with physical care/personal hygiene**	45%
We have provided dedicated intervention staff to support children who are not school ready	44%
We have had to dedicate more time/resources to improve number skills	42%
We have introduced staggered starts/gradual build up to a full school day	35%
We have taken budget from later years primary education to hire more teaching assistants	17%
Not applicable, my school would like to implement changes but has not been able to due to financial constraints	3%

TQ14. Which, if any, of the following has your school implemented to adapt to children not being ready for school? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034

*E.g. implemented visual cues in the environment to aid communication and have trained staff in early language interventions

**Children unable to use the toilet independently, needing help getting dressed etc

The majority of teachers (82%) agree that the government should provide more funding to help children be school ready by the time they start Reception.

Figure 16: Teacher opinion on whether the government should provide more funding to help children be school ready

Agree	82%
Disagree	5%

0%　20%　40%　60%　80%　100%
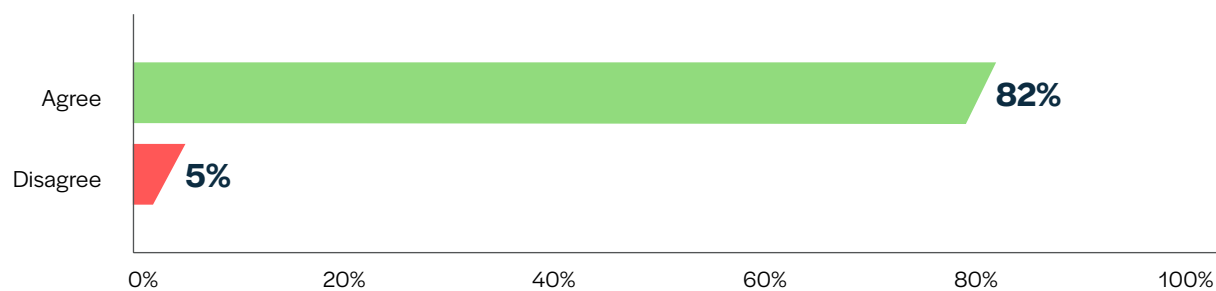
TW2Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the government should provide more funding to help children be school-ready by the time they start Reception? BASE: Primary school staff: October-November 2024, n=1034

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Role of information

4.1 Some parents are unaware of school readiness

Almost half (48%) of parents believe that greater information about school readiness would help them get their child ready, highlighting an issue around awareness.

41%
of parents hadn't heard about school readiness before their child joined Reception in 2024.

22%
of parents had not heard of the concept of school readiness before taking the survey.

> **It would have been helpful [to receive information on school readiness], because if my daughter hadn't been at nursery, I would have been none the wiser."**
>
> Parent, North West

> **No, that's the first time I've ever seen any type of definition of school readiness. To be honest, it's pretty common sense in terms of what the expectation is."**
>
> Parent, North West

4.2 Parents think they get the right guidance – but teachers disagree

79% of parents and 48% of teachers think that parents get the **right** information to help get them ready for school. 73% of parents and 42% of teachers think parents are getting **enough** information.

Figure 17: Parent and teacher opinion on whether parents receive the right and enough information about school readiness

Teachers ■
Parents ■

The right information	Teachers 48% / Parents 79%
Enough information	Teachers 42% / Parents 73%
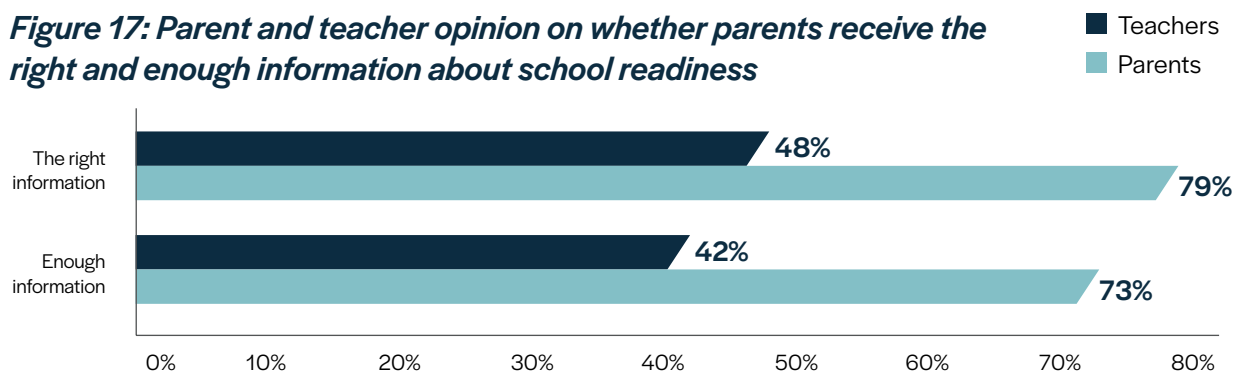
PQ5a/TQ8a. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents in the UK receive the right information to help their child to be school ready for Reception? PQ5b/TQ8b. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents in the UK receive enough information to help their child to be school ready for Reception? BASE: All Primary school staff, n=1034; Parents, n=1009.

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4.3 Parents think they get effective information – but teachers disagree

Parents are much more likely than teachers to think guidance on **key milestones** is effective (78% vs 63%). Parents are also more likely than teachers to think guidance on **school readiness** was effective (73% vs 53%).

Figure 18: Parent and teacher opinion on the effectiveness of government guidance on key developmental milestones

Parents	**78%**
Teachers	**63%**

W2Q6x2/TW2Q6. Summary Table: How effective do you think government guidance of the following is? BASE: NET:Effective ('Very effective' & 'Somewhat effective'): All Primary school staff, n=1034; Parents, n=1009.

Figure 19: Parent and teacher opinion on the effectiveness of government guidance on school readiness

Parents	**73%**
Teachers	**53%**

W2Q6x2/TW2Q6. Summary Table: How effective do you think government guidance of the following is? BASE: NET:Effective ('Very effective' & 'Somewhat effective'): All Primary school staff, n=1034; Parents, n=1009.

4.4 The parent-teacher disconnect

Parents tend to emphasise their child's emotional preparedness for starting school rather than their developmental milestones.

> **It was actually when we were on the long holiday, he was always asking when are we going back to school? When are we going back to school? So, he was ready."**
>
> – Parent comment collected from survey

> **My child has been excited to start Reception. Ever since birth, she's a bright person and always wants to spread joy. I believe she will be very open to the idea of making friends."**
>
> – Parent comment collected from survey

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> **Reception is to prepare them for Key Stage 1... to get everyone at the same level so that they're then able to take on Year 1 confidently."**
>
> – Parent, South East
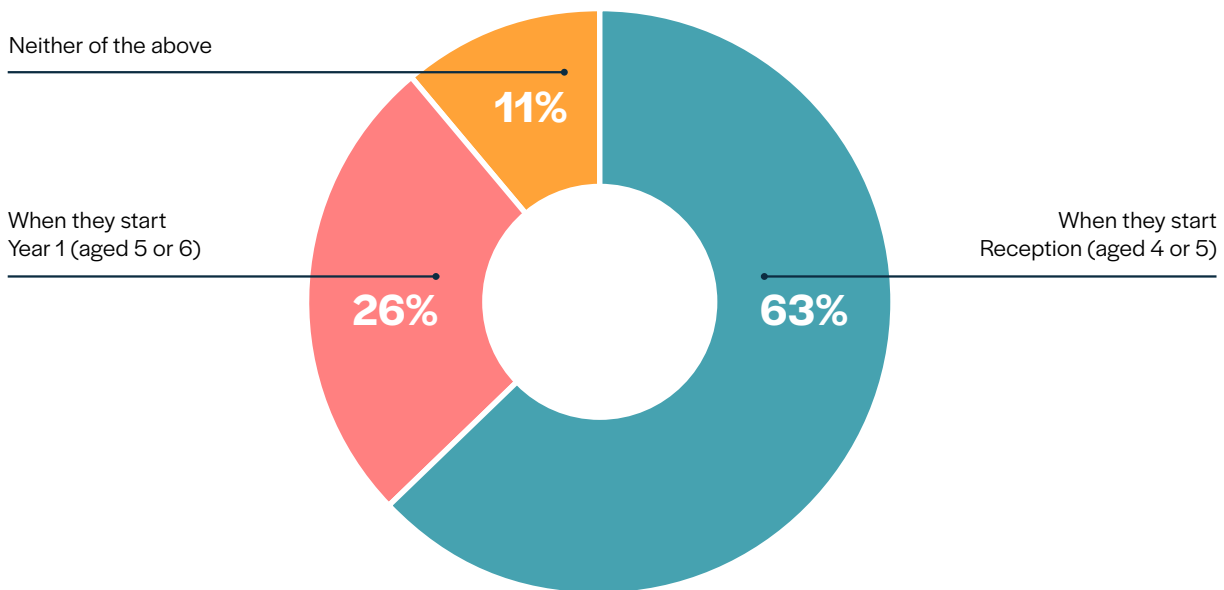
But teachers are clear on one thing...

> **[Children] should be ready by the time they see us [in Reception]... When [the child] walks through the door in Reception, it's not our job to get them ready."**
>
> – Senior Leader, East Midlands

4.5 Public perceptions of school readiness

Recent announcements by the Government have set a target for children being 'school-ready' at the end of Reception, when children have already been in school for a year. To test understanding of this distinction, we carried out a separate survey of over 2,000 members of the general public asking what they consider to be their child's first day at school.

Figure 20: The general public perception of when is a child's 'first day of school'

Neither of the above — 11%

When they start Year 1 (aged 5 or 6) — 26%

When they start Reception (aged 4 or 5) — 63%

KindredW237Q1. Which of the following do you consider to be a child's first day at school? BASE: All respondents (general public): December 2024, n=2338

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We also asked the general public what skills they believe a child should have by the time they start Reception. The results were lower than those of the surveyed parents.

Figure 21: General public perceptions of what a child should be able to do before they start Reception

Skill	Percentage
Use the toilet independently including washing and drying their hands	66%
Listen to/follow simple instructions	66%
Play with other children	62%
Recognise their name	60%
Good hygiene habits: can wash hands, brush hair, clean teeth with supervision	60%
Basic table manners	57%
Be comfortable being away from parents for longer periods	57%
Sit and focus for short periods of time	57%
Know how to turn the pages of a book	50%
Dress independently	50%
Engage with a grown up and speak clearly enough so they can be understood	48%
Make marks intentionally	45%
Understanding and managing their behaviour	38%
Don't know	6%
None of the above	2%

OQ1. To be ready to start Reception, which, if any, of the following do you think a child should be able to do? BASE: All respondents (general public): December 2024, n=2288

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Methodology

Research background and objectives

This report monitors teachers and parents of Reception children's attitudes towards school readiness.

Key objectives are:

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 2024 intake.

2. To gather detailed information about key behavioural milestones of Reception-aged children, both related to their incidence, impact on class progress and perceived responsibility in teaching them.

3. To understand the reasons why so many children are not meeting key developmental milestones, and which policy areas have the most scope to improve school readiness.

Research methodology and sample

1.1. Online (CAWI) sample: Parents of children entering Reception in the 2024 intake

Savanta conducted a 15-minute online survey of parents through their internal panel with fieldwork taking place from 7th October to 6th November 2024. A total of 1,009 surveys were completed.

During fieldwork, hard quotas were set on gender of child, region, ethnicity of child and socio-economic group. 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 below.

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Category	Options	% 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
	Mixed	7
	Asian or Asian British	12
	Black or Black British	6
	Other	2
SEG	AB	25
	C1	34
	C2	20
	DE	21

1.2. Online (CAWI) sample: Teachers

Savanta conducted a 15-minute online survey of teachers through their internal panel with fieldwork taking place from 15th October to 6th November 2024, and a total of 1,034 surveys were completed.

During fieldwork, soft quotas were set on gender of staff member, region and staff role (teaching staff and non-teaching staff). Following fieldwork, the sample was weighted to be representative of the population of teachers based on these characteristics. Details on the sampling used can be found below.

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Category	Options	% of sample
Gender of teacher	Male	14
	Female	86
Region	East Midlands	8
	East of England	11
	London	14
	North East	4
	North West	13
	South East	15
	South West	9
	West Midlands	10
	Yorkshire and the Humber	9
	Wales	5
Seniority	Teaching staff	91
	Non-teaching staff	9

Cognitive testing interviews

Savanta conducted 6 cognitive testing interviews with parents and teaching staff to test the accessibility of language and scales used in surveys, ensure topics were approached with sensitivity, and to evaluate the flow and structure of the two surveys. Feedback from the interviews was incorporated into the survey design.

The composition of interviewees was:

1. 3 primary school teaching staff, comprising of a female teaching assistant, a male Assistant Headteacher, and a female Reception Teacher.

2. 3 parents of children who enrolled in Reception in 2023.

Qualitative research

In addition to the surveys, Savanta conducted four online focus group discussions (90 minutes, 6-8 participants per group) with several audiences to complement the quantitative findings.

The focus groups took place between 11th November and 14th November 2024.

The composition of these groups was:

3. 1 group of primary school non-teaching staff (I.e. Senior leadership: Headteacher/Principal, Deputy or Assistant Headteacher, Key Stage Leader, Head of Year).

4. 1 group of primary school teaching staff (I.e. Teaching staff: Classroom Teachers, Reception Teachers, Teaching Assistants).

5. 2 groups of parents of children who started Reception in 2024.

6. Savanta interviewed 2,227 UK adults aged 18+ online between 12th and 15th April 2024 using its omnibus platform. Data was weighted to be representative of the UK by age, sex, region and social grade.

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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., age of parents 18-34 and 35+).

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 **here** and the parent survey **here**.

Alternatively, please visit **https://kinsq.org/2024-data** to view all data tables.

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Research conducted by:

Savanta: