Kindred²

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School Readiness Survey 2025

Research conducted by:

Savanta

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Key findings

The number of children starting Reception 'school ready' has declined significantly since 2024. Teachers say 37% of the 2025 class were not school ready.

The impact is felt by every child in the class, with, on average, **2.4 hours** of teaching time lost each day due to catch-up needs, more than half of which **(1.4 hours)** is spent supporting toileting alone.

2.4 hours
of teaching time is lost each day due to catch-up needs.

1.4 hours
of teaching time is lost each day due to a lack of toilet training.

Primary school staff report that growing numbers of children are struggling with life skills such as being toilet trained, emotional regulation, and having basic language skills.

- **26%** starting Reception were not toilet trained (up from 24% in 2023 and 2024), rising to **36%** in the North East, even though **86%** of parents say toilet training is mainly their responsibility. **22%** do not think a child needs to be toilet trained by the time they start Reception
- **28%** were reported by primary school staff to be unable to eat and drink independently (up from 26% last year), and **25%** are struggling with basic language skills (up from 23% last year).
- **32%** of children are reported to become overly upset when away from parents and **28%** of parents say they are not confident supporting the development of this independence.
- School readiness inequalities appear to be widening, with sharper declines reported in the North East, West Midlands, North West and London.

65% of Reception Teachers report boys to be developmentally less ready than girls, particularly in communication and emotional regulation.

Despite this, **88%** of parents say their child is ready for school and **35%** believe their child is more ready than most, highlighting a persistent gap between parental confidence and classroom experience.

The impact of primary school staff having to spend more time supporting children who are not ready to fully embrace the opportunities of the Reception year curriculum is growing, with measurable impacts on teaching time, budgets and morale.

Seven in ten staff **(70%)** say pupils who are not toilet trained have a moderate or major impact on class progress, and **56%** of staff believe half or fewer of these children go on to achieve a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception year.

- School readiness pressures are contributing to workforce strain, with **55%** of staff reporting increased stress, **28%** lower morale, and **19%** higher staff turnover.
- **39%** of primary school staff cite identified or suspected SEND as a major contributor to lack of school readiness, intensifying pressure on already stretched school resources.
- Parents and staff identify rising family pressures as key drivers, with **49%** of parents and **44%** of primary school staff citing parents are working longer hours linked to the cost of living as a factor reducing readiness.

7 in 10

staff say pupils who are not toilet trained have a moderate or major impact on class progress.

- While awareness of 'school readiness' has increased to **76%** of parents, **18%** have never heard of the concept and **14%** first encounter guidance just before Reception. **25%** of parents are now seeking advice on social media and **15%** are using AI tools.

There is clear demand for earlier, practical support, with **94%** of parents calling for national guidance on 'school readiness' and **84%** wanting this information before their child turns four.

Introduction

Our sixth annual school readiness* report once again sets out perceptions of the scale and impact of children missing their early developmental milestones. The report investigates the subject from both parent and primary school staff 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 2025 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).

**This year we are using the term 'primary school staff' to cover the full range of primary school teachers, Reception Teachers, members of primary school senior leadership teams, and Teaching Assistants who completed the survey. A full breakdown of the sample can be seen on page 38.

01 The state of school readiness

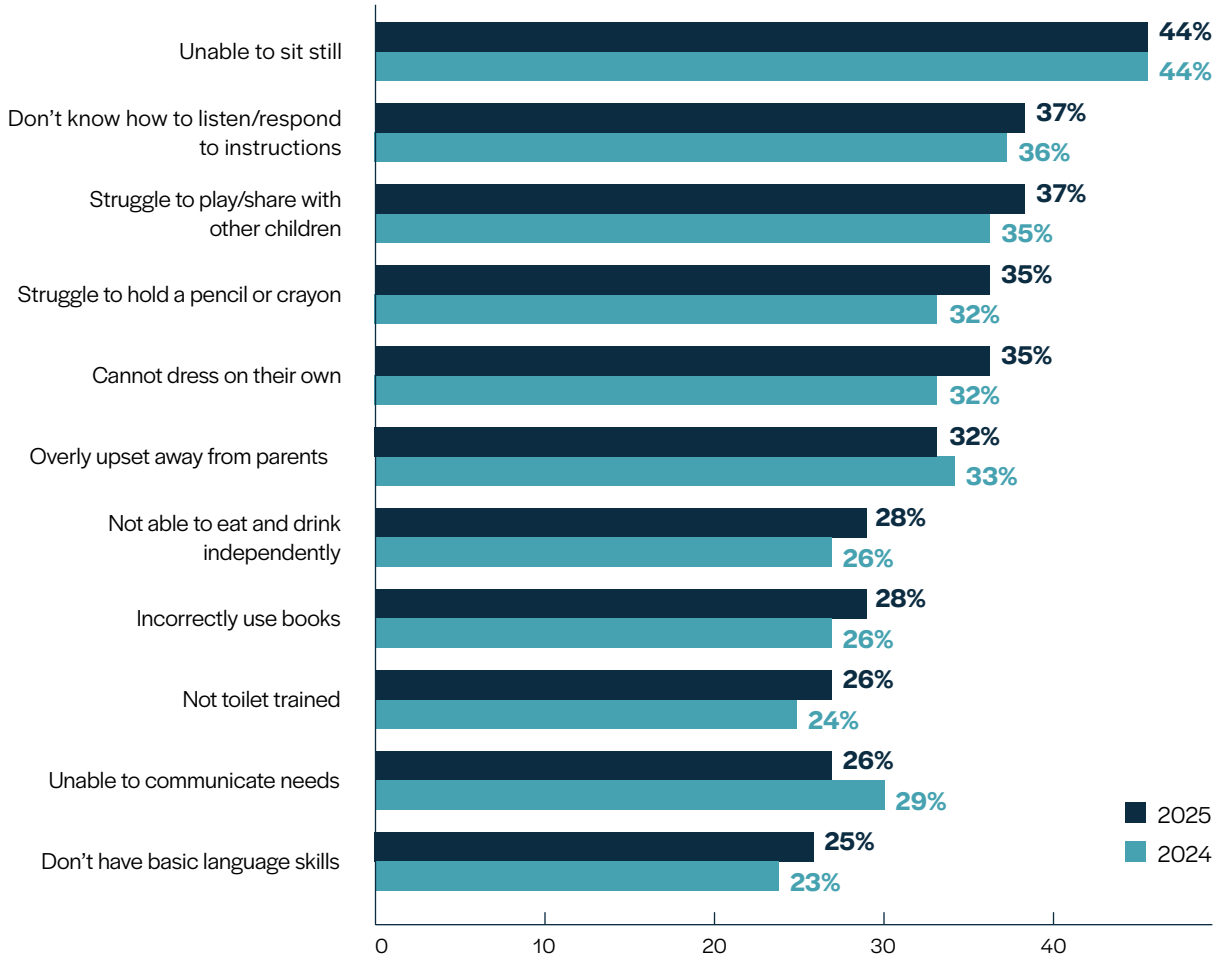
1.1 Fewer children are 'ready' for school

This year, staff report that on average, 37% of children joining Reception are not school ready, an increase from 33% in 2024.

A lack of independence is growing: 26% of children are not toilet trained (up from 24% last year) and 28% cannot feed themselves and drink independently (up from 26%).

Primary school staff say that 25% (up from 23%) struggle with basic language skills (e.g., saying their name, answering simple questions) although fewer children are starting school unable to communicate their needs (26% down from 29%).

Figure 1: Proportion of Reception children that struggle with each of the reported skills according to primary school staff



"TQ2. Summary Table: Thinking about the following behaviours, what percentage of children starting in Reception in your 2025 class (teaching staff)/ in a typical 2025 class (non-teaching staff). BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076"

For primary school staff, the school readiness challenge is intensifying. More than half (52%) of primary school staff say the proportion of children not school ready this year has increased (50% in 2023, 49% in 2024) while 12% think it has decreased.

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

> **“It’s definitely getting worse. If you go back ten years you wouldn’t have had children coming into Reception who needed toilet training and now it’s almost the expectation that schools will do it.”**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **“It feels like the world is too much for them coming in. Whereas quite a few years ago, a decade ago, it wasn’t too bad.”**
>
> – Reception Teacher

1.2 Parental confidence remains high

Most parents (88%) say their child is ready to start Reception (10% say their child is not ready, 2% don’t know) although confidence is down slightly on 2023 estimations, when 91% of parents felt their child to be developmentally ready for Reception.

One third (35%) of parents believe their child is more ready than most to start Reception. A smaller group (7%) recognise their child may be less ready, while over half (58%) say their child’s school readiness is about the same as most children.

Staff report that almost one third (32%) of children in an average Reception class get overly upset when away from their parents.

The percentage of parents who say that a child should be able to ‘not get overly upset when away from you/another parent’ has declined significantly year-on-year from 54% in 2023 to 41% in 2025.

35%
of parents believe their child is more ready than most to start Reception.

58%
say their child’s school readiness is about the same as most children.

7%
recognise their child may be less ready.

Emotional self-regulation is a concern reported by primary school staff.

> **“I’m finding this year more than ever I’m having to teach perseverance with activities like, if you don’t get something right the first time, you don’t just throw it or get angry…. We’re finding that they’re a lot more impatient and quick to anger… In my current class, I’ve never seen anything like this emotional dysregulation.”**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **“If you have a child that does emotionally regulate and is attentive and you know, has an awareness and dare I say it, respect, they’re in the minority.”**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

1.3 More children are starting school who are not toilet trained

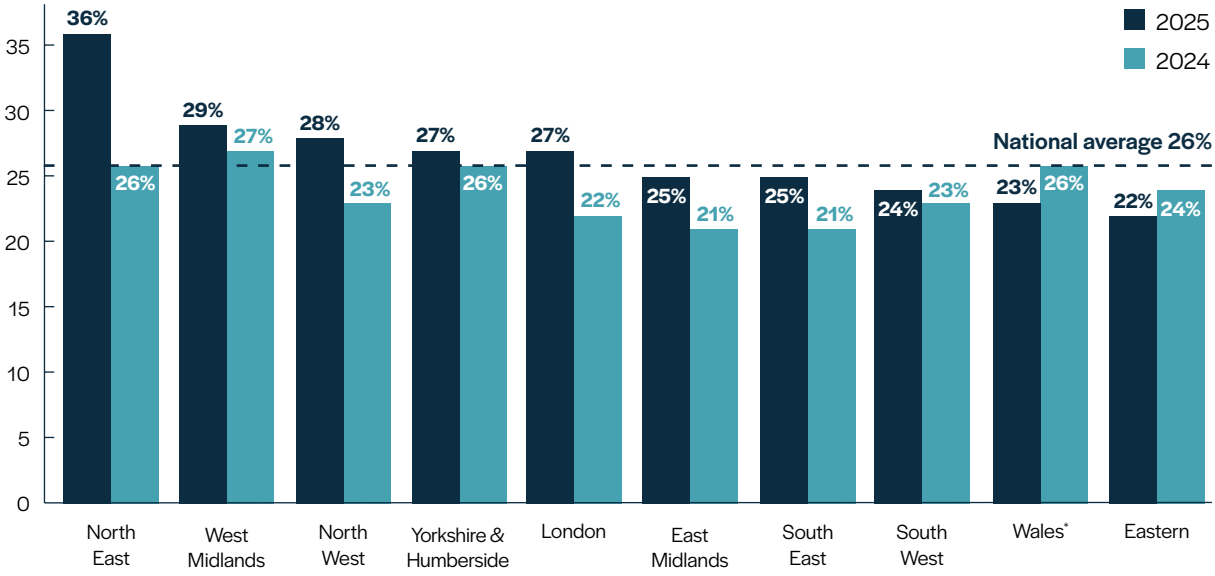
26% of children are not toilet trained when they start Reception, up from 24% in 2023 and 2024. In the North East, staff report that over a third (36%) of children starting Reception are not toilet trained.

Staff report that

36%

of children starting Reception in the North East are not toilet trained.

Figure 2: Proportion of Reception children that are not toilet trained, according to primary school staff, by region



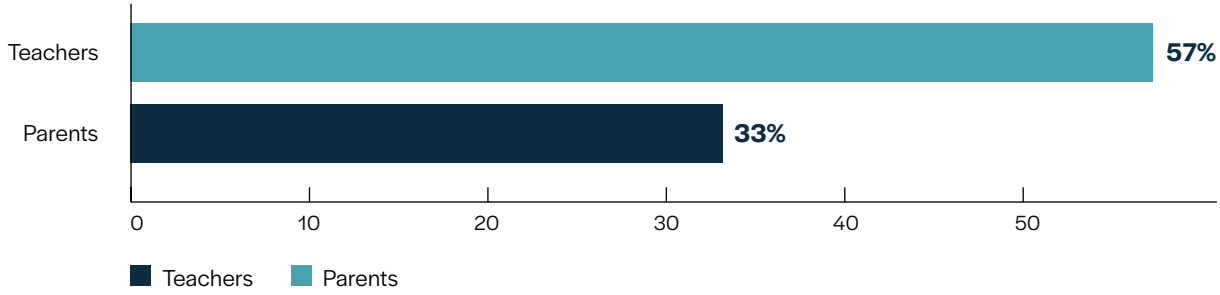
*TQ2_1. Thinking about the following behaviours, what percentage of children starting in Reception in your 2025 class (teaching staff)/in a typical 2025 class (non-teaching staff) - selected ‘Are not toilet trained (that is, toileting ‘mishaps’ occur frequently rather than occasionally)’. BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076. Regions marked with * had an unweighted base size of less than 50.*

**Wales data to be treated as indicative only due to unweighted base size of less than 50 (47).*

Parents (86%) and primary school staff (87%) agree that teaching toilet training is completely or mostly the responsibility of parents.

Over half (57%) of primary school staff believe that parents should not be allowed to send children who are not toilet trained to Reception class. A third of parents (33%) believe that parents should not be allowed to send children who are not toilet trained to Reception class.

Figure 3: Proportion of parents and primary school staff that believe that parents should NOT be allowed to send children who are not toilet trained to Reception class



TW3Q11/PW2Q11. Do you think parents should be allowed to send children who are not toilet trained to Reception class at Primary school? This refers only to children who have no related medical diagnosis such as a bowel or bladder condition. BASE: All Primary school staff, n=1076; Parents, n=1004, October-November 2025

Some parents don't think it matters

More than one in five (22%) parents do not think a child needs to be toilet trained by the time they start Reception.

> **I guess they're all their own person and they just get there when they get there, don't they?"**
>
> – Mother of a 5-year-old boy

> **He's the kind of kid that doesn't like using the toilet somewhere else except his home. So, every day coming back from nursery he's not using the toilet there."**
>
> – Mother of a 4-year-old boy

> **I think the support is there, it's just not being accessed."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

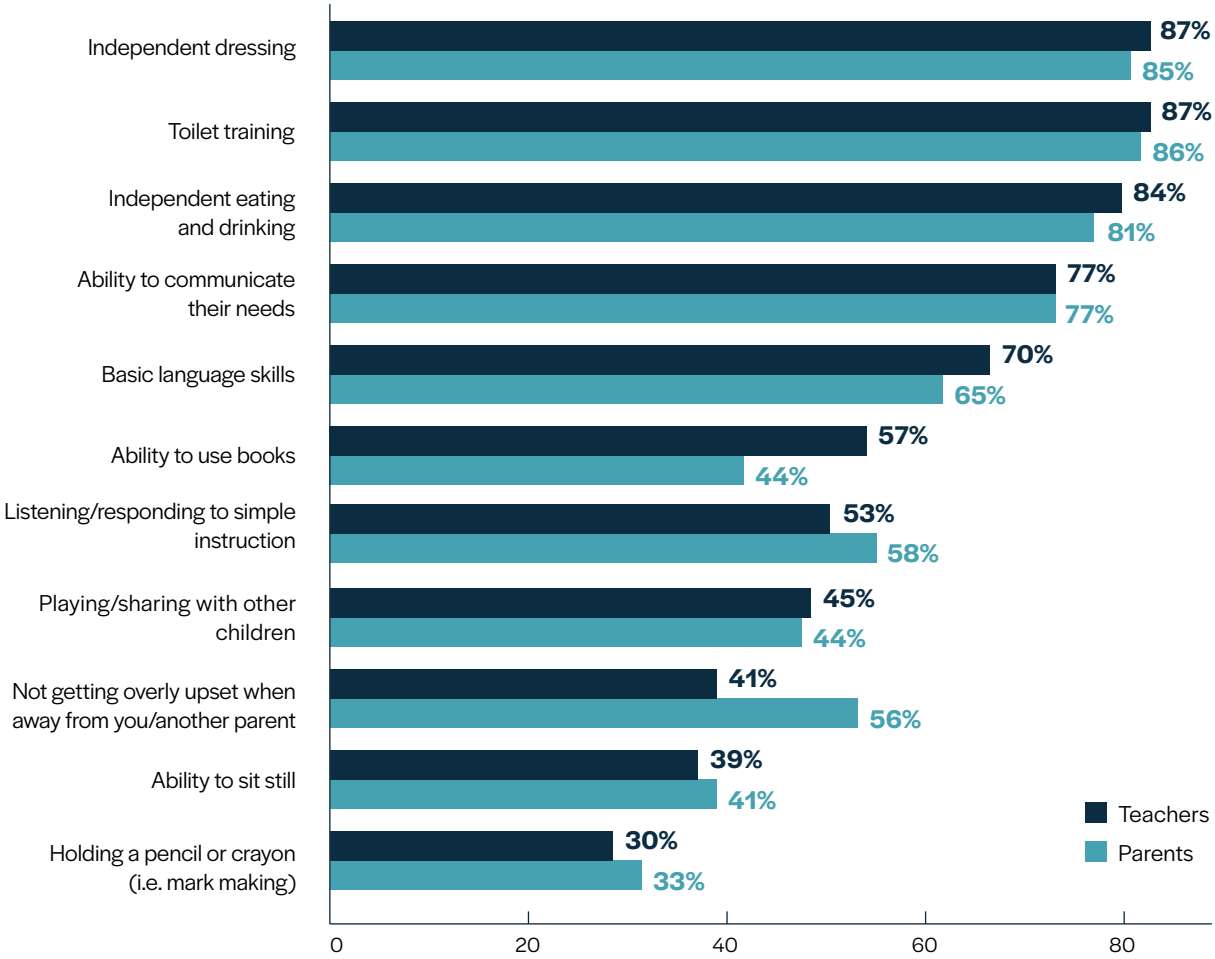
> **We'll have 10 parents...we go through a presentation, show examples. You see some parents that are like 'I could be somewhere else right now'."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

1.4 Views on responsibility differ

The survey data and qualitative discussions show a clear gap in how parents and primary school staff see responsibility for school readiness.

Primary school staff increasingly say that a child's ability to communicate their needs is the parents' responsibility (64% in 2024, increasing to 77% in 2025). Parents also increasingly recognise communication as their responsibility (70% in 2024, increasing to 77% in 2025). But fewer parents think helping their child "sit still" is their job (48% in 2024, decreasing to 41% in 2025).

Figure 4: Proportion of parents and teachers who say it's the parent's responsibility for their child's development on the following skills:



TQ6 & PQ8. Summary Table: Who do you think is most responsible for a child's development of each of the following skills? BASE: All Primary school staff, n=1076; Parents, n=1004, October-November 2025

Some primary school staff report that parents tend to hand over responsibility for basic self-care, emotional regulation, and motor skills to the school.

> **I think parents don't think it's their job to prepare the child for Reception. I think they're very happy to give that to someone else. You know, someone else will potty train my child."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **With toilet training. I think people [believe] the school will do it. Whereas in previous years we haven't had to."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **I think kids are tougher than people think, and if you just walk away and let the teachers handle it, that's often the best way."**
>
> – Father of 4-year-old boy

Parents generally acknowledge a high degree of responsibility, but many parents do not believe these skills are required by the start of Reception.

Independent eating and drinking

81%

of parents say that it is their responsibility to teach children to eat and drink independently, but only 75% of parents say children should be able to do this upon entering Reception.

Toilet training

86%

of parents say this is mainly a parental responsibility, but only 78% think children should be able to do this on entering Reception.

Independent dressing

85%

of parents say it is mostly their responsibility, but just 54% think children should be able to do this by the start of Reception.

Holding a pencil or crayon (mark-making)

33%

Only a third of parents believe that this is mostly their responsibility, yet 60% think a child should be able to do this by the start of Reception.

> **[There's been a] change in parental attitudes... they're literally just going, 'you do it'. I'm not doing it. It's your job. And I've not noticed it as much as I have in recent years."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

More parents reported low confidence in supporting emotional separation than any other skill, with 28% saying they were not confident helping their child 'not get overly upset when away from a parent'.

> **You can't tell a child not to be upset if they're suddenly away from you for six hours a day when they're used to only having you and it's their first time. So for me that's not an essential [skill for children to have before starting Reception] at all."**
>
> – Mother of a 4-year-old boy

> **I think trying to teach them not to be upset when they're away from you is a hard one. Obviously, you can't teach that."**
>
> – Mother of a 4-year-old boy

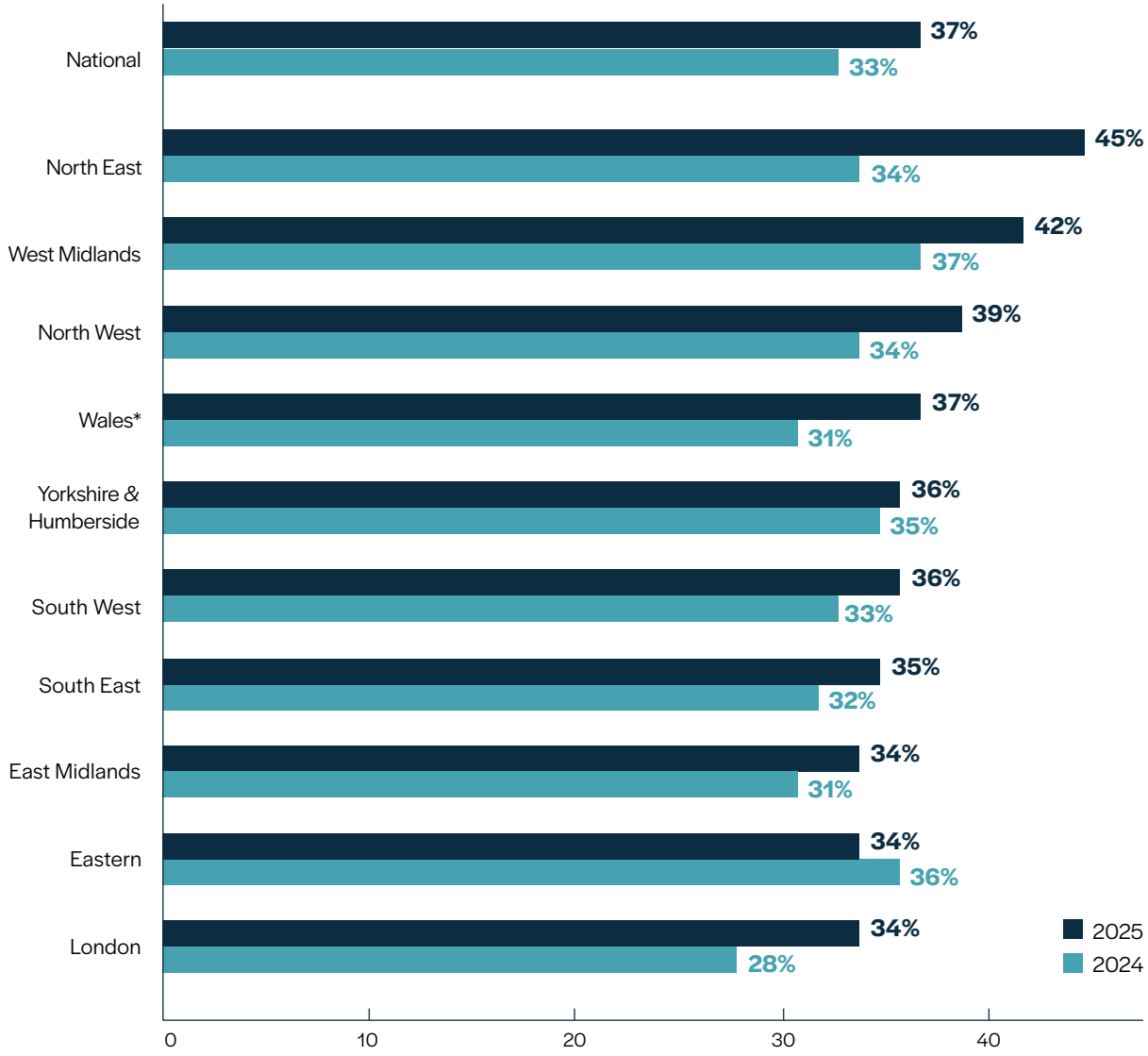
> **You can't put a stamp on that one [not getting upset when away from parents] because obviously every child is different and every circumstance is different as well."**
>
> – Mother of a 4-year-old boy

1.5 The differences between regions are widening

Considerable variations in levels of school readiness are reported across the country. While the overall picture of school readiness is worsening at a national level, this is driven by a few regions (NE/WM/NW/London) where the biggest year-on-year changes are reported. Other regions, such as the Eastern have seen positive signs of improvement since 2024.

**Wales data to be treated as indicative only due to unweighted base size of less than 50 (47)*

Figure 5: Proportion of children that arrive in Reception not school ready, according to primary school staff, by region:



*TQ3. Thinking about the behaviours in the previous question, what percentage of children arrived in Reception this year NOT school ready? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076. Regions marked with * had an unweighted base size of less than 50.*

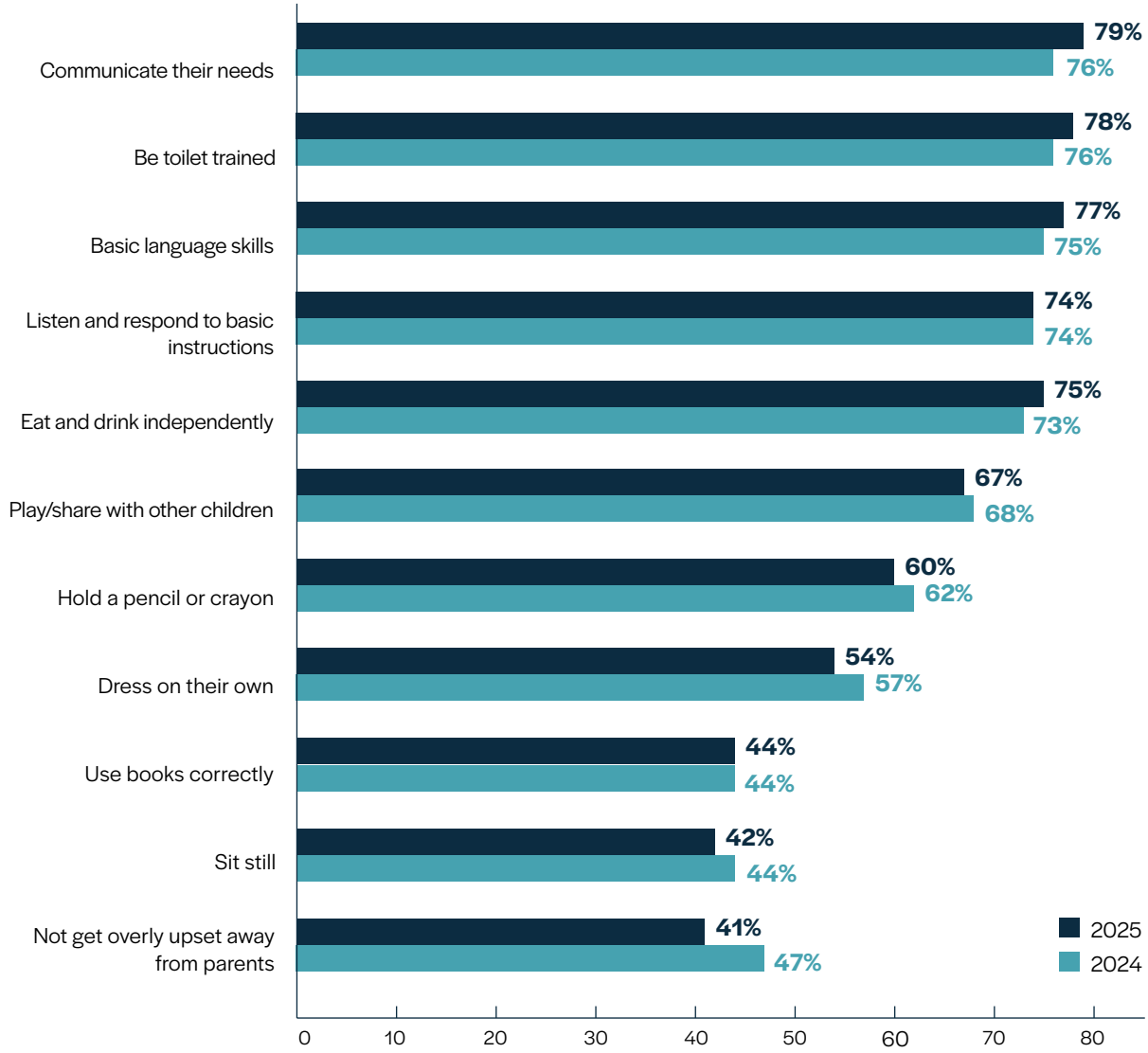
1.6 Awareness of school readiness is growing

Awareness of 'school readiness' among parents has increased, rising from 72% in 2023 and 2024 to 76% in 2025, while the proportion who had heard about it before their child started Reception also grew from 58% (2024) to 62% (2025).

76%
of parents surveyed were aware of 'school readiness', rising from 72% in 2024.

Fewer parents now expect their children to achieve skills such as independence, communication, and emotional regulation before school.

Figure 6: Proportion of parents that believe a child should be able to do each of the reported skills when they start Reception, over the last two years



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-November 2025, n=1004

1.7 SEND is a growing part of the picture

9% of parents say their child has a diagnosis of SEND. 21% strongly suspect their child has SEND.

But while SEND is part of the picture, teaching staff emphasise that it also magnifies wider challenges in school readiness. 39% of primary school staff cite identified or suspected SEND as a major reason for lack of readiness.

> **The number of complex needs children that we have now is astronomical."**
>
> – Headteacher

> **SEND funding is putting a real, real pressure on schools... we are so thinly stretched."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **I think one of the biggest [issues] is proper funding for SEND pupils because that's putting a real pressure on schools. And if SEND pupils were funded properly the way that they needed to be, then schools would be able to perform a lot better and support children generally."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **SEND is one of the biggest funding challenges."**
>
> – Headteacher

Some teachers expressed concern that parents' identification of a suspected SEND can reduce progress.

> **The parents have just decided their child's got special educational needs whether they have or they haven't and therefore there's nothing they can do about any of the issues. So the language delays, the toileting, whatever else... they've pinned it down to SEND, which might not even be true, but it almost then absolves them of any responsibility to do anything about it."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

1.8 Boys develop later, especially in communication and language

More than half (54%) of primary school staff say more boys are generally developmentally behind girls, whilst 6% say girls are behind boys, and a third (35%) saying no significant difference. Differences in communication and language skills are the most pronounced:

Communication and language

58%

of primary school staff say boys are generally behind girls, **8%** of girls are generally behind.

Emotional regulation

46%

of primary school staff say boys are generally behind girls, **19%** of girls are generally behind.

Independence and self-care

46%

of primary school staff say boys are generally behind girls, **8%** of girls are generally behind.

Social interaction and sharing

38%

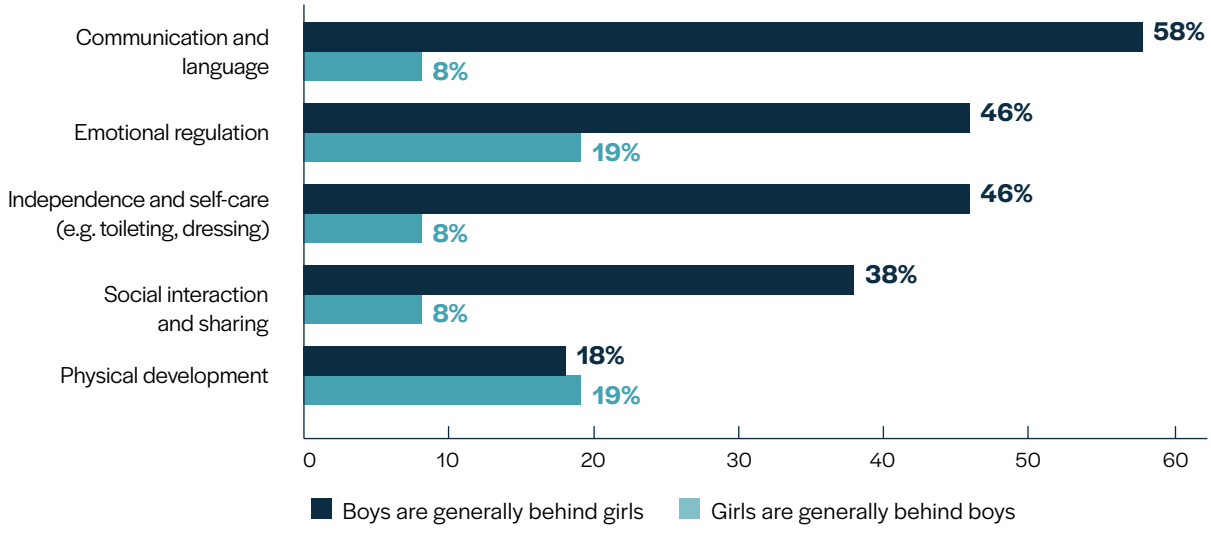
of primary school staff say boys are generally behind girls, **8%** of girls are generally behind.

Physical development

18%

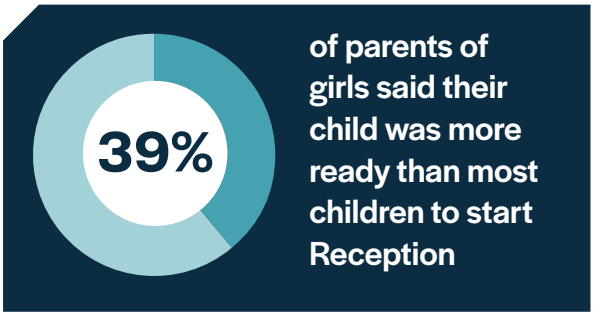
of primary school staff say boys are generally behind girls, **19%** of girls are generally behind.

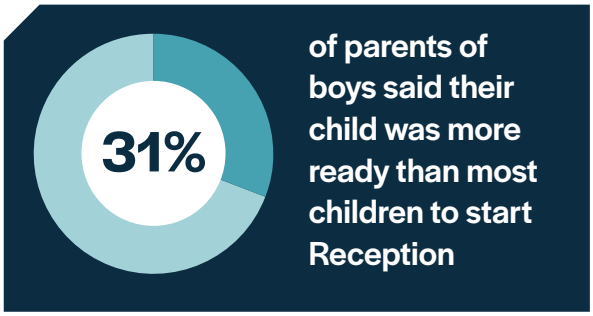
Figure 7: Proportion of primary school staff that report boys or girls are behind



TW3Q8. Summary Table: For which of the following behaviours, if any, do you think there a difference in the level of school readiness between boys and girls in a Reception intake? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076

More parents of girls believe their child is more ready than most to start Reception.

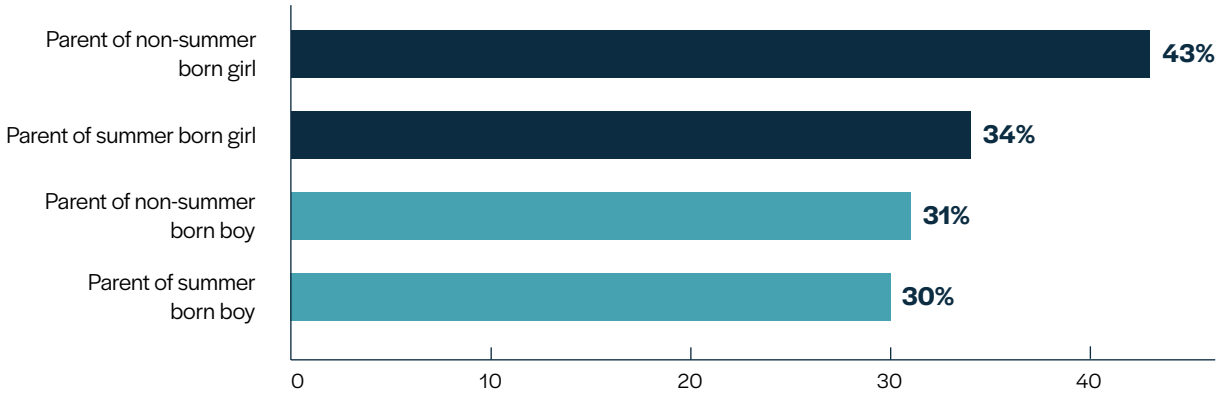




> **A lot of the girls were school ready. Whereas the boys, at the beginning especially, had two seconds of concentration."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

The age of the child is also a factor; parents of an autumn/winter born girl were significantly more likely to say their child was more ready than most children (43%) compared to summer-born girls (34%), non-summer born boys (31%) and summer-born boys (30%).

Figure 8: Proportion of parents that said their child was more ready than most children, by gender of child



PW3Q2. Thinking about your own child, compared to other children, how ready do you feel they are to start Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004

These differences between boys and girls translate into differences reported in some parenting behaviours.

There were examples of adapting expectations downward for boys: prolonging nappy use and doing tasks for them longer than necessary.

> **A lot of my parents overcompensate for their boy's lack of interest in things like reading and writing."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **A lot of the boys have been mollycoddled or mothered... They're carried and that kind of thing. And really babied before they're brought into school."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

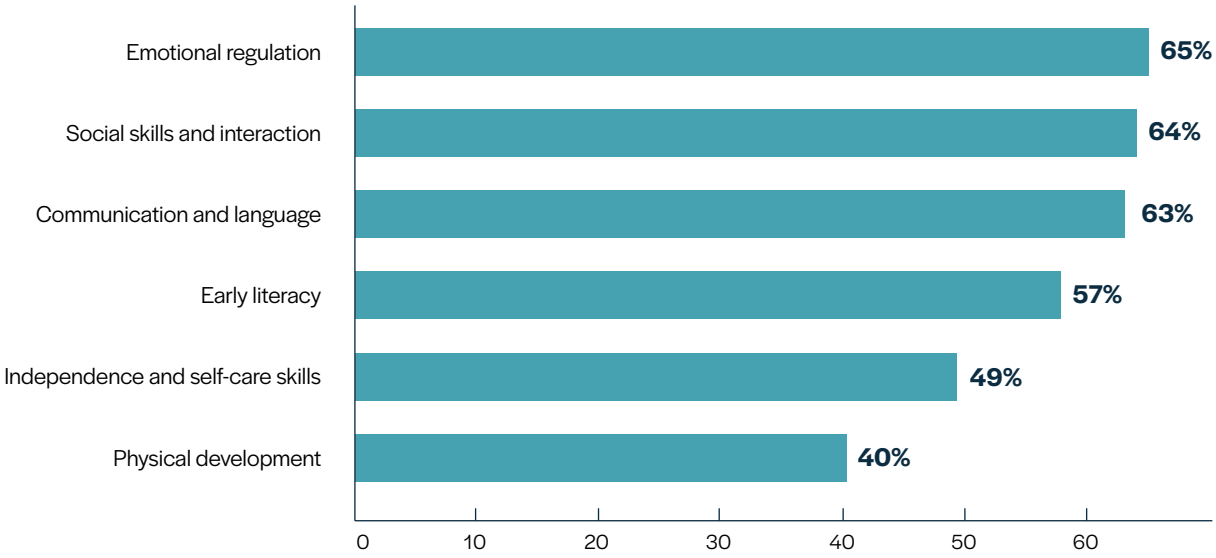
> **Boys are slower [to learn] and... there's always that [aspect of] 'I'd rather play than go for a wee'. They're more prone to accidents and I know that's kind of like across the board."**
>
> – Mother of a 4-year-old boy

02 Impact

2.1 Teachers are losing more teaching time

Primary school staff estimate that children are missing out on **2.4 hours** of daily class teaching time due to the catch-up needs of children who are not ready for Reception, up from **2.1 hours** in 2024.

Figure 9: Proportion of primary school staff that report most time is spent in the following areas



TW3Q10. Which of the following areas do you spend the most time supporting your class with? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076

The impact of the few who are developmentally behind is felt by all the children in the class.

> **"After a certain period of time you do expect them to get to know the routines. [...] But because there are pockets of children that are just not able to do that easily, it just means that you have to keep stopping and starting again... and that just takes up a lot more time than it should."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

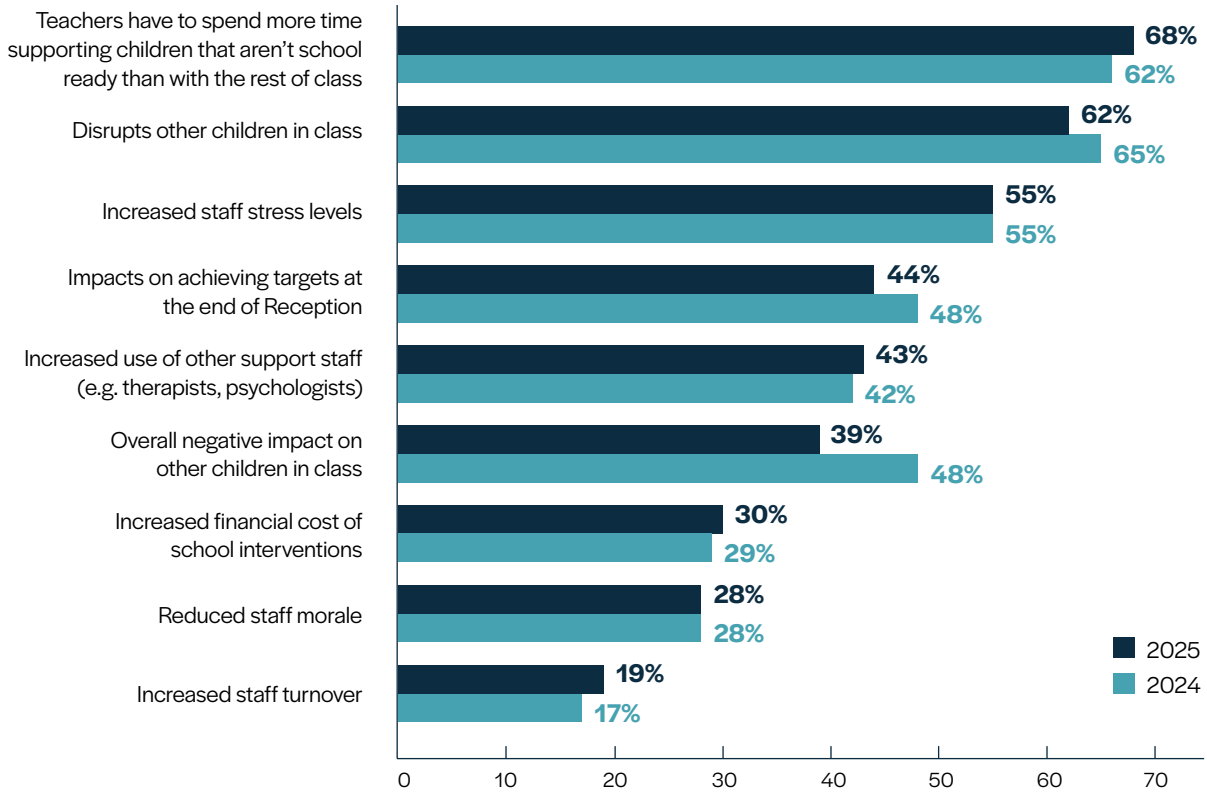
> **All of this not being school ready has a really big impact and just delays our lessons, and we can't teach the routines that we need to teach because everything has to stop and then start again and then stop and then start again."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **The first half term for us for the last few years is just written off for actual learning. [It's] learning to put their coats on and off, learning to sit down and listen to a story, toileting and showing them how to play. We can't sit down with a focused task because... they constantly need that adult supervision."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

68% of primary school staff report more time being spent supporting children who aren't ready than with the rest of the class.

Dedicated efforts to improve early language skills (46%) and physical care/personal hygiene (43%) are the most common steps taken by schools to adapt to children not being ready for Reception.

Figure 10: Proportion of primary school staff who say their school has been impacted in the following ways by children who are not school ready



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 2025, n=1076, October-November 2024, n=1034

> **In a class of 30, when you have children who are behind, and they're not able to concentrate on a larger group, then it's just, it's very difficult for them to then catch up unless they have targeted support."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

2.2 Toileting is a significant drain on resources and impediment to children's progress

Staff say that, on average, toilet training is taking up 1.4 hours of each school day. This accounts for more than half of the lost time each day amongst primary school staff due to a lack of school readiness (2.4 hours).

Seven out of ten staff say pupils with no SEND who are not toilet trained have a major (32%) or moderate (38%) impact on the progress of the class.

> **It has a serious impact on learning time because if... one needs a nappy change or one's wet themselves, everything has to stop... All of this not being school ready has a really big impact and just delays our lessons and we can't teach the routines that we need to teach because everything has to stop and then start again and then stop and then start again."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

2.3 The impact on children can last beyond Reception

Most primary school staff (56%) say that among children who start school not toilet-trained, half or fewer are likely to achieve a Good Level of Development. Only 38% say that most of these children do.

> **I'm just thinking about the previous Year Ones over the last few years, and they don't really catch up with their peers who were school ready."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **Some of them can catch up quite rapidly and we were almost shocked. But then other ones, it does seem to be a trajectory that they then follow all the way through school."**
>
> – Headteacher

> **The gap just widens, doesn't it? If they start off really behind then it's very, very hard to then, you know, completely catch them up."**
>
> – Primary Teacher

Diverting staff to support the provision of basic care in Reception creates knock-on effects throughout the rest of the school.

> **If you take one member of staff to go and help in Reception for whatever reason... then another class or another area or something else is then missing one less person. It just has that domino effect where all the different areas are affected."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

2.4 The additional workload impacts staff

Over a quarter (28%) of staff report that working with Reception children who are not school ready directly lowers staff morale. Nearly one in five (19%) say it is contributing to increased staff turnover and 55% report an increase in staff stress levels.

28%
of staff report that working with Reception children who are not school ready directly lowers staff morale.

> **"We also find it [school readiness] just really affects staff morale. Staff are just so stretched anyway, and this just stretches them even more and it creates quite an atmosphere and is completely understandable. Staff sicknesses for us is really quite high at the moment. And I really believe that that's because everyone is just so stretched and so exhausted."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

03 Causes

3.1 The rising cost of living identified as a barrier to school readiness

The rising cost of living is the barrier to school readiness most often identified by parents, linking financial challenges to school readiness.

Around half of parents (49%) and 44% of primary school staff say that parents working longer hours, driven by the increased cost of living, is contributing to fewer children being ready for Reception.

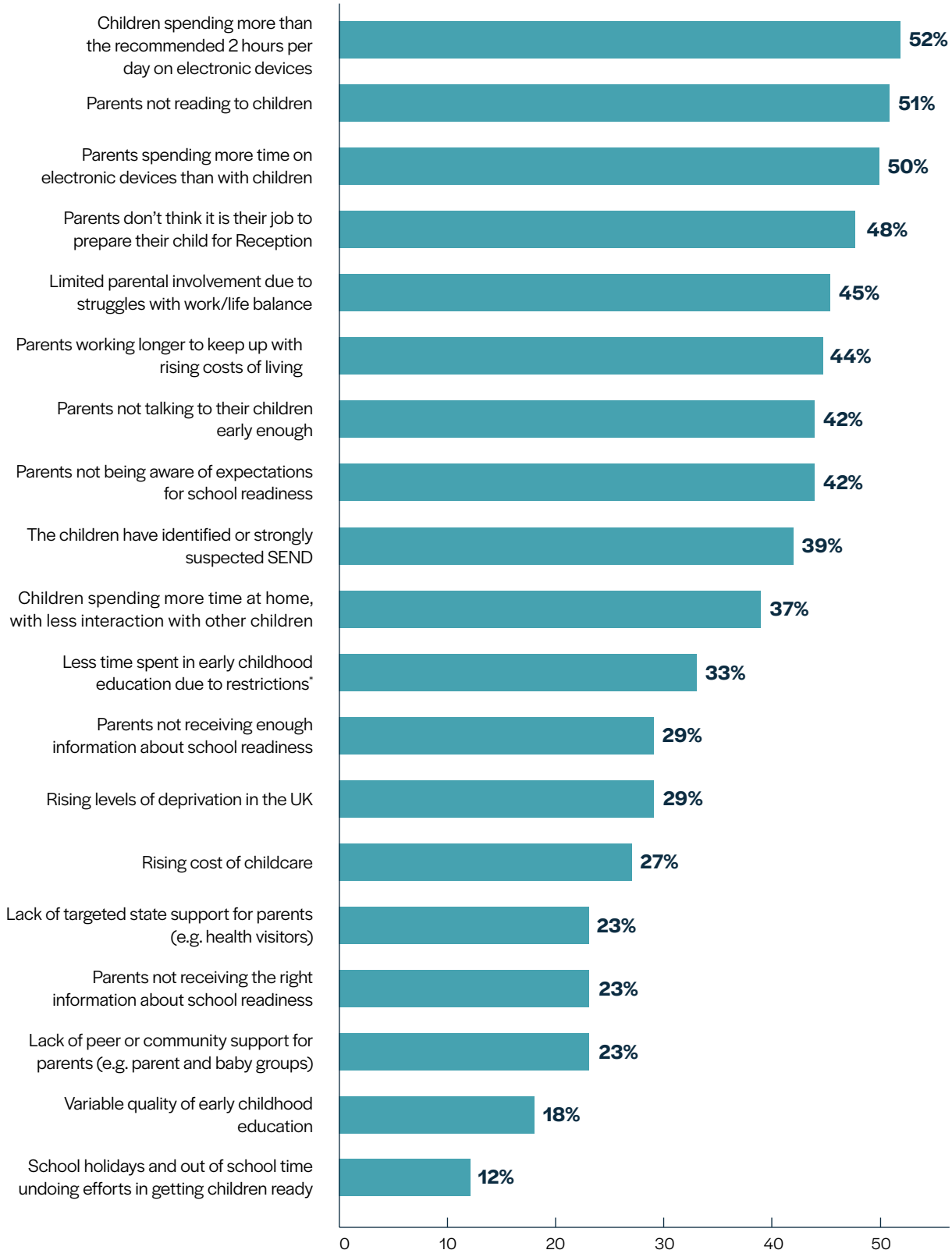
> **These children are in a 7:30am and being picked up at 6pm... I think, well, that's why you don't read, that's why you don't do your homework, that's why you don't know these things... because your parents are having to work every hour under the sun."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

Parents and primary school staff identify rising deprivation as a barrier (30% of parents, 29% of primary school staff).

> **I think the poverty gap has got wider as well. There's more disadvantaged families and I think that's having a massive impact as well."**
>
> – Class Teacher (Senior Lead)

> **Life is more expensive now, whatever level you're at. We've got families [with] steady jobs where they earn well, but they're finding it hard and they're very openly saying that they're finding life a lot harder now."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

Figure 11: Proportion of primary school staff that selected the following options as factors that could result in fewer children being ready for reception:



TQ5. Why do you think some children that are starting Reception in 2025 might not be ready for Reception? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076

**Less time spent in early childhood education due to restrictions (including lockdown, cost of childcare, lack of available spaces at childcare)*

3.2 Lack of parent knowledge and understanding

Half (50%) of parents say the early years (ages 0-5) have the most impact on future life, consistent with previous research data. But many primary school staff continue to report a lack of parental knowledge and understanding as a significant issue.

> **We've had parents turn up for our nursery or school saying I didn't know you had to talk to your babies, I didn't know you had to sing nursery rhymes..."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

> **[Parents] don't know what's normal, they don't know what they should be doing."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **You have to refer to research and look for the things by yourself, there is no support around, to be honest."**
>
> – Father of a 5-year-old girl

> **I don't think it's essential that they know how to hold a pen... they kind of pick it up in literally a matter of days."**
>
> – Mother of 5-year-old girl

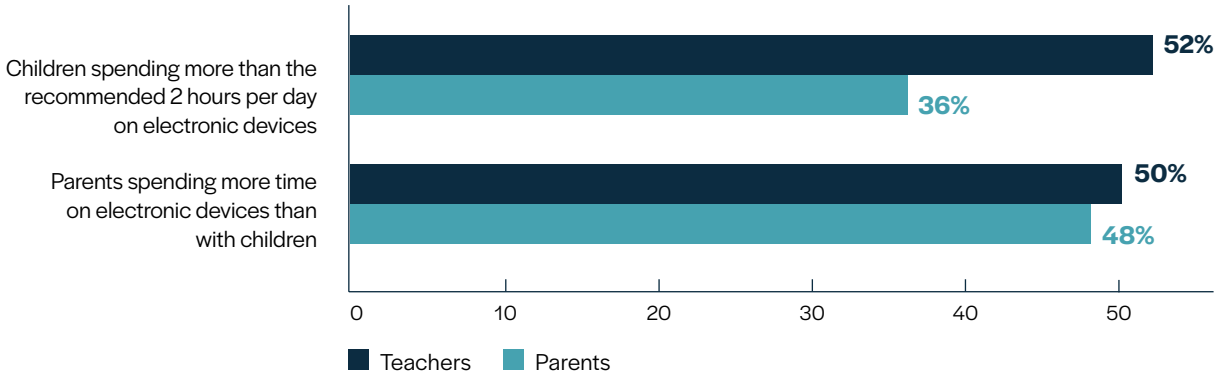
Yet 70% of parents agree that it is clear what is expected of children at the start of Reception; 27% of these say they strongly agree. This was reflected in qualitative discussions.

> **I didn't overly seek any information [about school readiness] out. I could see just from their development at the nursery that they were kind of there."**
>
> – Father of 4-year-old boy

3.3 Screens are a worry for primary school staff, less so for parents

Primary school staff attribute children's use of electronic devices as the single biggest factor impacting on school readiness (52%, down from 54% in 2024). In contrast, only a third (36%) of parents agree that children are spending too much time on screens – a drop of 7 percentage points from 43% in 2024.

Figure 12: Proportion of teachers and parents that say device usage could result in fewer children being ready for Reception



TQ5. Why do you think some children that are starting Reception in 2025 might not be ready for Reception? - Selected electronic device options. BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076

PQ9. Which, if any, of the following do you think are the main factors that could result in fewer children being ready for Reception? - Selected electronic device options. BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004

> **We live in a tech world, so they've got to get used to tech somehow."**
> – Mother of 4-year-old girl

> **[My child] turns into a psycho if you take [his tablet] off him."**
> – Father of 4-year-old boy

> **YouTube shorts. The video is changing every few seconds. Obviously, I'm thinking of [my child's] attention span and it really, really worries me."**
> – Mother of 5-year-old boy

> **But my daughter swipes the TV across. I'm like, no, honey, it doesn't work like that."**
> – Mother of 4-year-old boy

3.4 Primary school staff are more worried about levels of early reading time than parents

Half (51%) of primary school staff say not reading to children contributes to a lack of school readiness (the second most common survey response) compared to 40% of parents (and the sixth most chosen cause).

> **Reading is so key for language and understanding, you can learn so much through stories."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

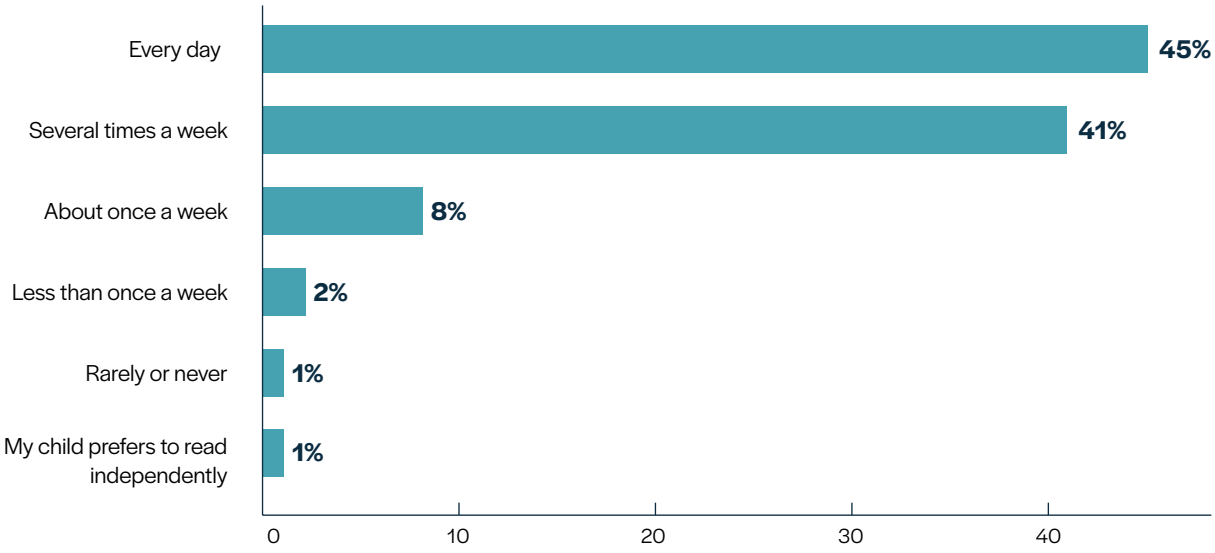
> **Taking an interest in stories [is a basic expectation of children entering Reception], so when it is story time, if they're sitting down, they are listening and looking."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

44% of parents believe that children should be able to use books correctly upon entering Reception (not swiping or tapping as with electronic devices) although teachers report that 28% of children cannot.

95% of parents say their child is read to at least weekly; 45% saying reading is daily.

44%
of parents believe that children should be able to use books correctly on entering Reception.

Figure 13: Proportion of parents that report how often their child is read to:



PW3Q8. How often is your child read to? This can be by you or another adult. BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004

Parents who have sought school readiness information on social media are less likely to say children should be able to use books properly (40%) compared to those who have not sought information on social media (46%).

Many parents recognise the importance of reading to their child's development.

> **Each day I make sure I try to do an hour [of reading]... so between 6:30 to 7:30 we wind down. That's our story time, our chill time and then bed."**
>
> – Mother of 5-year-old girl

> **We try and do an hour before bedtime. We'll colour or read or do a game. Something that's not screen-focused."**
>
> – Mother of a 5-year-old boy

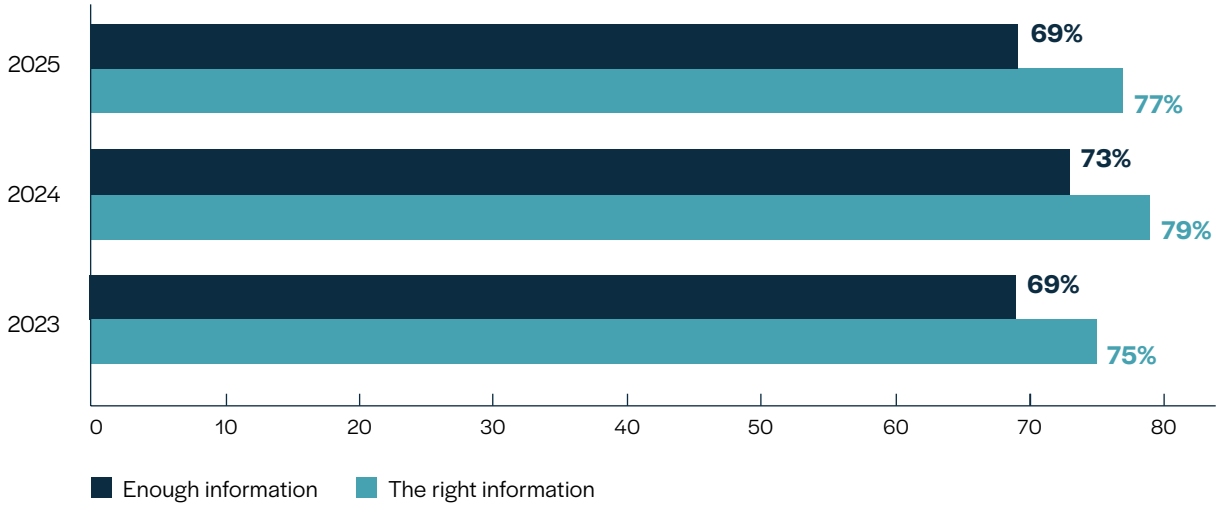
3.5 Information is too little too late, or too much

The proportion of parents first hearing about school readiness before Reception has risen slightly (62%, up from 59% in 2024), with a significant minority (14%) encountering guidance just before the start of Reception term. 18% report never having heard of the concept at all.

> **It is literally like the day or two before they start. It's not much time..."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

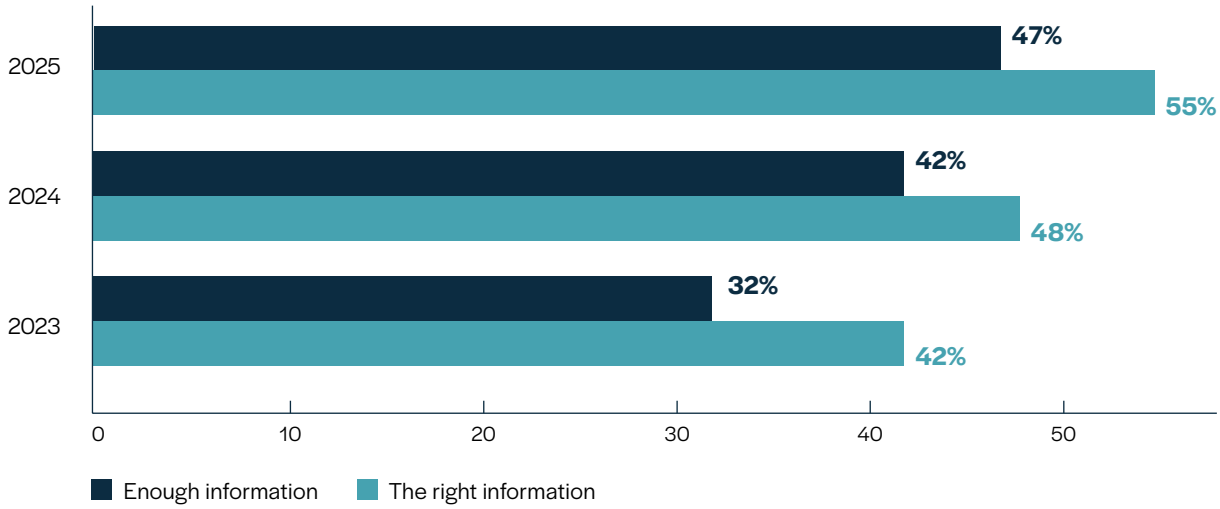
Three quarters (77%) of parents feel they receive the right information to prepare their child, compared to just over half (55%) of staff who say parents receive the right information.

Figure 14: Proportion of parents who agree that they receive enough/the right information for their child to be school ready:



PQ5 & PQ5_New. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you received the right/enough information to help your child to be ready for Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004, October-November 2024, n=1009, October-November 2023, n=1037

Figure 15: Proportion of primary school staff who agree that parents in the UK receive enough/the right information to help their child to be school ready:



TQ8a & TQ8b. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents in the UK receive the right/enough information to help their child to be school-ready for Reception? BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025, n=1076, October-November 2024, n=1034, October-November 2023, n=1026

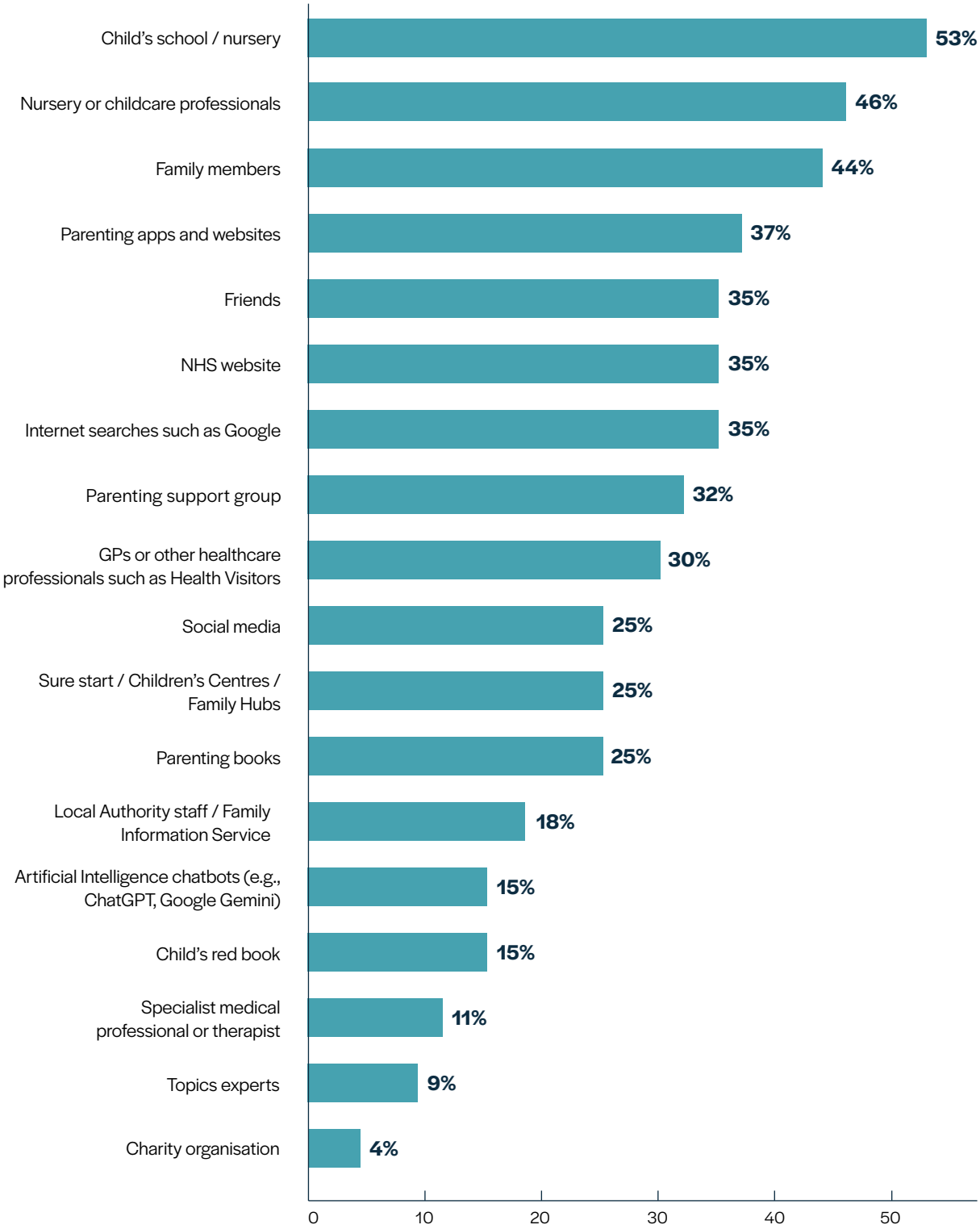
Seven in ten (69%) – a drop from 73% in 2024 – parents say they get "enough" information to help their child be ready for Reception – compared to 47% of primary school staff who believe there's sufficient information available to parents.

> **"As a parent you're always going to think your kid's ready."**
> – Father of a 4-year-old girl

Awareness is slowly growing, diversification of information sources

Awareness of the term 'school readiness' amongst parents has increased, with 76% now familiar with the concept (up from 72% in 2023 and 2024). 18% report being unfamiliar with the term (down from 22% in 2024).

Figure 16: Proportion of parents who would use the following sources to seek information on school readiness

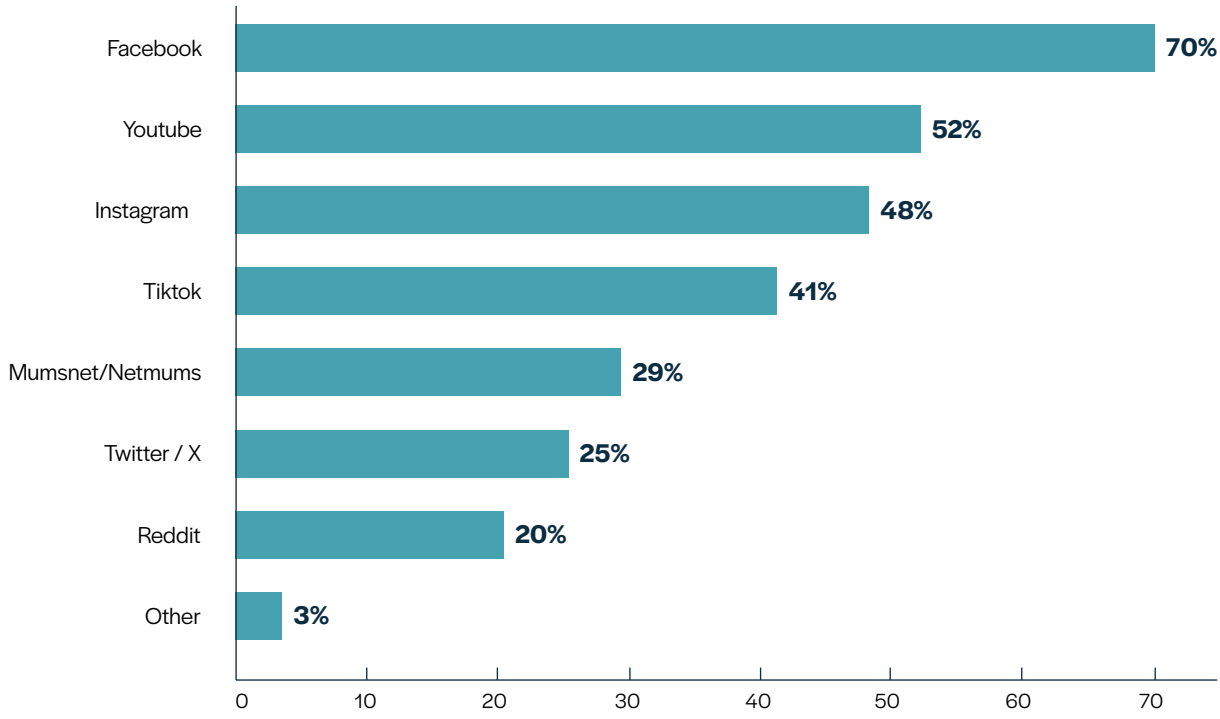


PQ12. If you personally wanted to know more about preparing for school readiness from birth, where, if anywhere, would you seek information, support or advice? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004

Survey data shows that a quarter (25%) of parents actively seek school readiness guidance via social networks (significantly higher than 21% in 2024 and 20% in 2023). 15% use AI tools like ChatGPT or Gemini.

Within that group, 70% use Facebook, 52% YouTube, 48% Instagram, and 41% TikTok to find information, support, or advice. A smaller proportion use online forums like Mumsnet/Netmums (29%) and Reddit (20%).

Figure 17: Proportion of parents who would use the following social media networks to seek information on school readiness



PW3Q6. Which social media networks do you use to seek information, support or advice about school readiness? BASE: Parents who use social media to look for information/advice: October-November 2025, n=252

Primary school staff recognise this shift but raise concerns about the quality and reliability of online content.

> **For many people, what you see on social media is the truth. And unfortunately, that's the generation that we're in where people get their news through social media...things are misrepresented."**
>
> – Headteacher

Despite the rise in digital sources, traditional channels remain most important. 53% (unchanged from 2024) rely on nursery or childcare professionals (46%, down from 50% in 2024), and family members (44%, up from 41% in 2024) for school readiness support.

> **We've got a lot of parents not letting health visitors in... we've seen parents hiding and twitching their curtains even though I've rang before and booked a home visit."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

> **It's about having that expectation of parents as well, so that the parents are prepared for school as well, not just the children, that there's a readiness from the parents as well."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **I think it's like information overload, personally."**
>
> – Mother of a 5-year-old girl

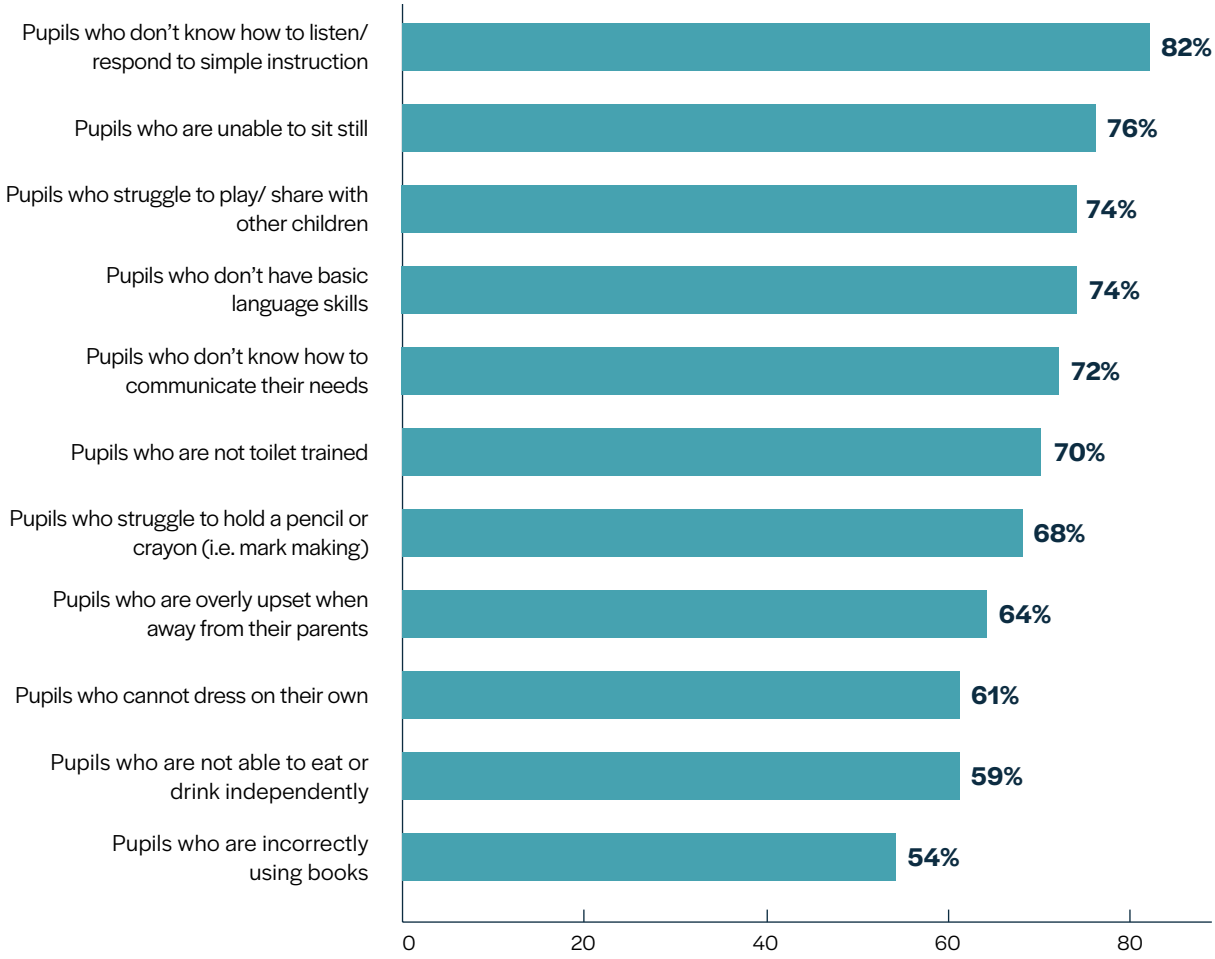
3.6 Confusion over responsibility, linked to low confidence

A child's ability to sit still highlights a clear mismatch between parental views and classroom impact. While 41% of parents believe teaching a child to sit still for a short while is mainly a parental role (and only 13% say it is completely the parents' responsibility), 76% of primary school staff report that pupils' inability to sit still has a moderate-to-major impact on the classroom.

Sitting still is also the second most common skill parents feel least confident teaching (27%).

76%
of primary school staff report that pupils' inability to sit still for a short while has a moderate to major impact on the classroom.

Figure 18: Proportion of primary school staff that reporting that the following has a moderate to major impact on the progress of the class



TQ10. Summary Table: Please state the impact that each of the following has on the progress of a class. BASE: All primary school staff: October-November 2025

Most parents (86%) accept responsibility for ensuring their child is toilet trained before starting school, with 15% saying they lack confidence teaching the skill. Despite this, 26% of children are reported to start school without being toilet trained, and 70% of primary school staff report a moderate -to-major impact on the classroom when children arrive in nappies or having frequent accidents.

Over a quarter of parents (28%) say they aren't confident helping their child not becoming overly upset when apart from them, and around two-thirds of primary school staff (64%) report that a lack of this skill causes at least moderate disruption to a class.

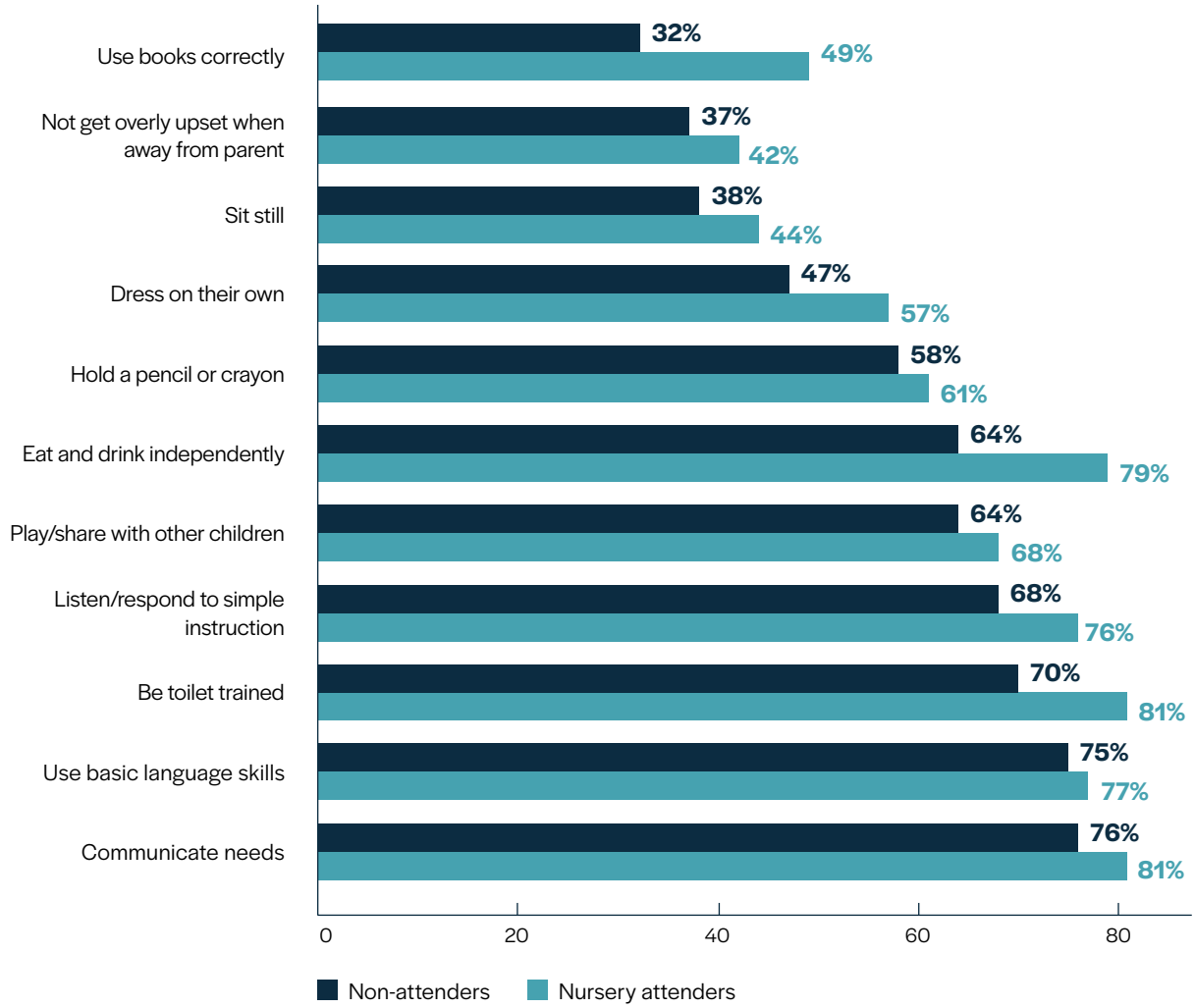
86%
of parents accept responsibility for ensuring their child is toilet trained before starting school.

15%
of parents say they lack confidence teaching toilet training.

3.7 The impact of access to nursery settings

Parents were asked which, if any, of the following skills they think a child starting Reception should be able to do, revealing the higher expectations of those with children attending nursery.

Figure 19: Proportion of parents that believe a child should be able to do each of the reported skills when they start Reception, comparing those who attended nursery and those who did not



PQ6. 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-November 2025, n=1004

Qualitative feedback from parents and staff underscores the pronounced difference that experience in a nursery setting makes – not just academically, but in social, emotional, and independence skills.

> **He was in a nursery attached to the school... they started teaching phonetics beforehand. So, he was fine."**
>
> – Father to a 4-year-old boy

> **When my little girl started preschool, there was such a shift."**
> – Mother to a 5-year-old girl

> **Of my 30 children, the 25 who came from school nursery had the routines set in; the newcomers showed a big difference - it's like night and day."**
> – Reception Teacher

> **Part-time nursery children are less ready than full-time."**
> – Reception Teacher

Yet, cost, availability, and loss of services following COVID continue to limit families' access to early years provision:

> **We've got real deprivation – families cannot afford those services."**
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **Lots of services that were available before COVID are no longer easily available."**
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **We actually opened our own nursery which we've self-funded."**
> – Deputy Headteacher

04 What parents say they need

4.1 Earlier information

94% of parents think it is important that parents receive national guidance on school readiness.

84% of parents and 90% of primary school staff want information about school readiness before children are age 4.

> **I feel like they give you a red book and it's got all the stuff up until they hit school. But no one ever asks you again past the sixth week post birth. No one ever kind of checks in again or you don't really look at the book after that at all. You might go in and they weigh them and then all of a sudden you've got school readiness."**
>
> – Mother of a 4-year-old boy

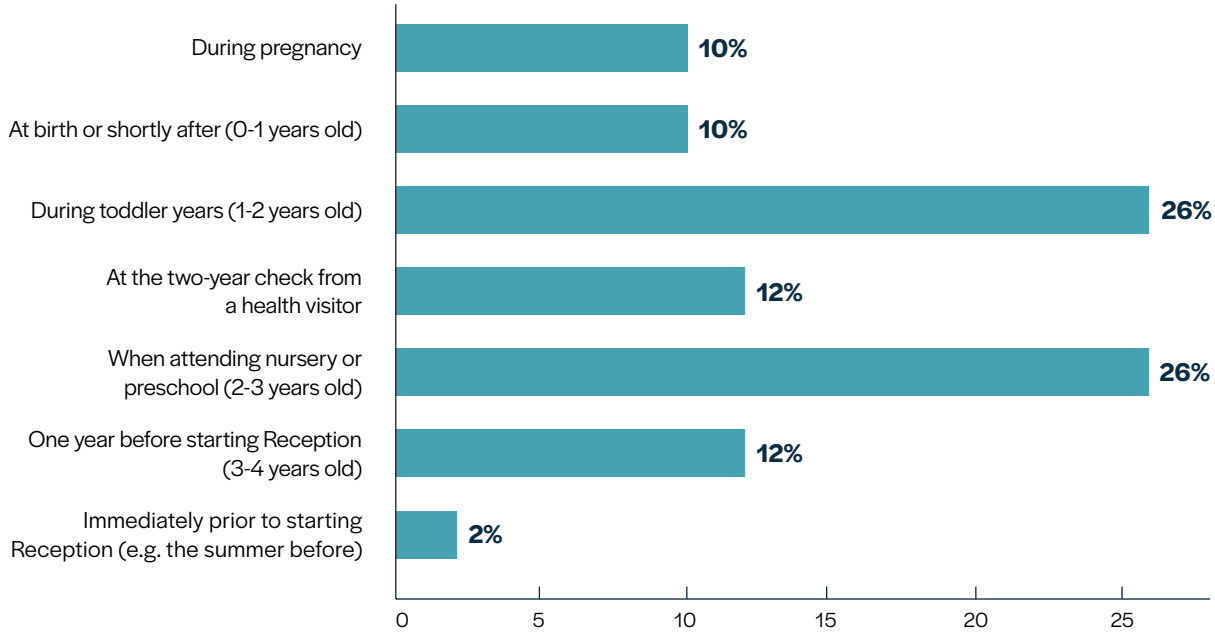
More than a quarter (26%) of parents would prefer to receive guidance during the toddler years (1–2 years old), 26% during nursery/preschool (2–3 years), and just 12% in the year before school.

> **Parents don't realise that their children's hands have to actually develop the muscles in order to eventually hold the pen properly... If a child is able to begin to feed themselves, or pick things up, try and put their socks on, all those things are strengthening their muscles, and that's what they need to eventually hold the pen properly."**
>
> – Teaching Assistant

Primary school staff closely align: 30% favour guidance in the toddler years, 24% at nursery/preschool, and 21% see the two-year health visitor check as a critical opportunity.

> **School readiness starts on day one when you have the child."**
>
> – Headteacher

Figure 20: Proportion of parents who selected the following as the best time to receive information about expected skills and behaviours for school readiness



PW3Q3. When do you think is the best time for parents to first receive information about the expected skills and behaviours children are expected to have by the time they start Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004

76% of parents say better access to practical, timely support* would help prepare their child for school – a slight decrease since 2023.

**By support, we mean:*

- *- Increased access to health visitors*
- *- Increased access to children's centres and family hubs*
- *- Greater access to low cost or free public facilities*
- *- Greater availability of nurseries and childcare*
- *- Greater access to constructive community activities*

> **"Maybe kind of getting that information to parents when the child turns three, so that they have an expectation of what they've got to get ready for."**
>
> – Mother to a 5-year-old girl

> **"It needs to be a lot earlier, like even before two—and then constant reminders to parents, definitely before they start."**
>
> – Reception Teacher

> **When you apply to the school for the Reception... if you get the information at that time from school... which are the things they are looking for... I think that would be really helpful."**
>
> – Father of a 5-year-old girl

4.2 Parents say they need more access to support

The number of parents saying they would benefit from free/low cost local facilities has risen from 29% to 37%. More access to health visitors is also a growing identified need, with 30% citing this (up from 26% in 2023).

The number of parents saying they would benefit from free/low cost local facilities has risen to

37%

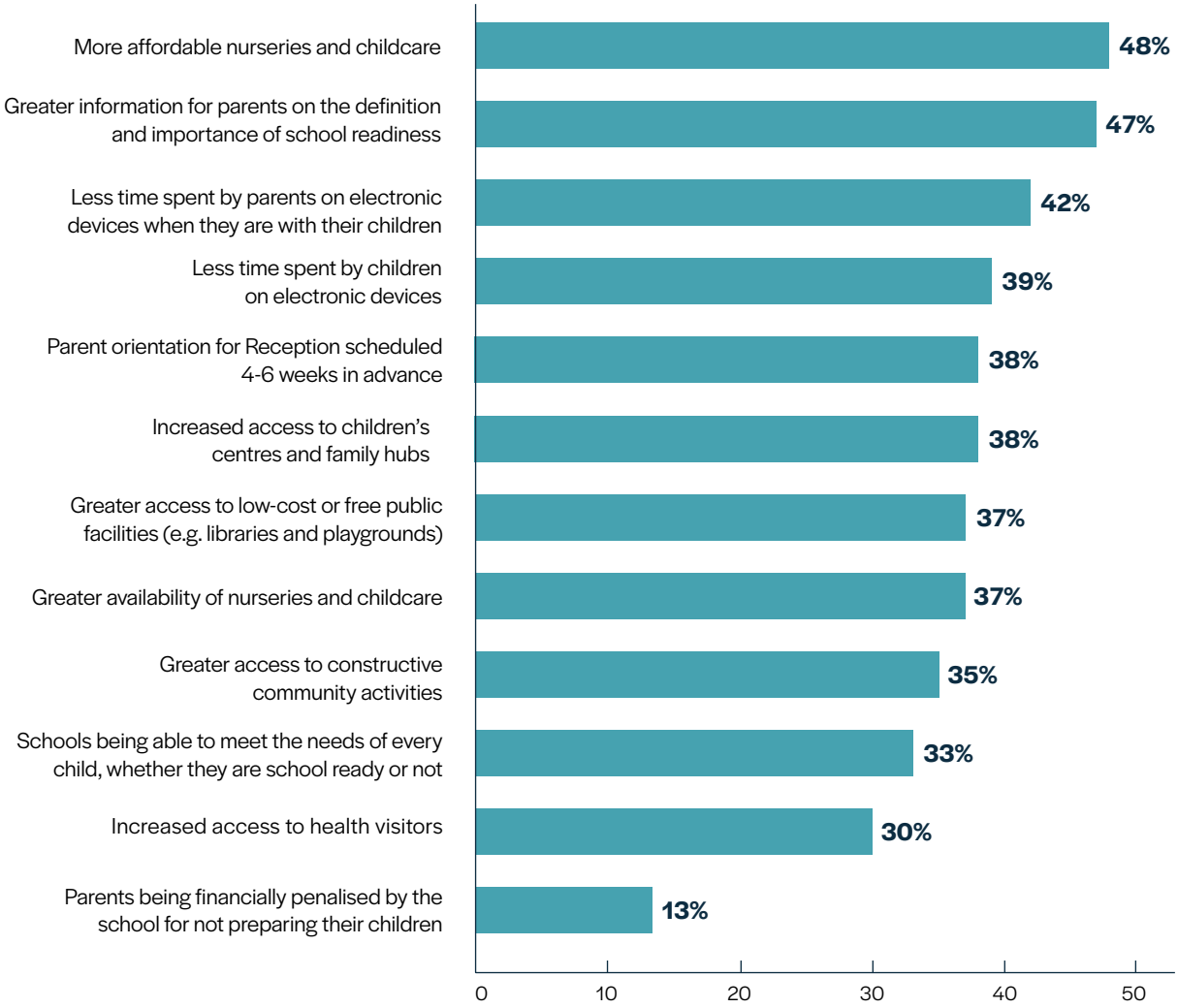
> **Children's centres... were closed down. That created a massive gap."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **[Over the past] 10-15 year period there has been a real decline in services that are available that would support parents with those expectations and support with those developmental milestones in terms of getting children ready for nursery."**
>
> – Deputy Headteacher

> **I always felt I was chasing my health visitor... And then after a certain age... they're just gone. We've got a family hub which is where I took my boy for toddler groups and that's now extended to support families up to 19. I think that's amazing and I think that's [the type of support we need] more of."**
>
> – Mother of a 5-year-old boy

Affordable childcare remains the top resource identified at 48%, but this has fallen from 57% in 2023, which may reflect increased Government funding of childcare places.

Figure 21: Proportion of parents who think the following would help more parents in the UK to ensure their child is ready for Reception



PW3Q3. When do you think is the best time for parents to first receive information about the expected skills and behaviours children are expected to have by the time they start Reception? BASE: All respondents (parents): October-November 2025, n=1004

References were also made to the lack of checks in the mid early years. In focus groups, primary school staff and parents talked about challenges associated with the two year check, with the result that nationally, many children's development is going unchecked at age two.

> **"I think that the two-year-old check shouldn't be optional."**
> – Teaching Assistant

> **I went looking for the ASQs (Ages and Stages Questionnaire)... it was hard to find."**
>
> – Mother to a 4-year-old boy

4.3 Reducing screen time

42% of parents say that parents need to spend less time on devices when with their children (up from 35% in 2023), and 39% are concerned about time spent by children on electronic devices

Primary school staff perception does not align; as mentioned in 3.3, 50% of primary school staff agree that parental screen use is a barrier, down 8 percentage points since 2023.

42%
of parents say that parents need to spend less time on devices when with their children.

> **We tend to do maximum 25 minutes at a time, and they can have that one before school, one after school. But I always say to them a screen is a screen no matter how small."**
>
> – Mother to a 4-year-old boy

Since last year...

In response to last year's survey, Kindred Squared have worked with leading experts in the early years sector to develop a single definition, welcomed by Government, of the life skills children need to thrive when they are **Starting Reception**.

We encourage all professionals working with young children to share this free resource with families.

The Potty Training Guide was launched by the same coalition of experts in December 2025, and was welcomed by both the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson and Health Secretary Wes Streeting. Both are free to early years setting, schools and parents and can be downloaded **here**.

Annex: Methodology

Research background and objectives

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

Key objectives are:

- 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 parent of children entering Reception in the 2025 intake.
- 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.
- 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

Online (CAWI) sample: Parents of children entering Reception in the 2025 intake

Savanta conducted a 15-minute online survey of parents through their internal panel with fieldwork taking place from 15th October to 17th November 2025. A total of 1,004 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 on the next page.

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	73
	Mixed	7
	Asian or Asian British	12
	Black or Black British	6
	Other	2
SEG	ABC1	59
	C2DE	41

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 28th October to 17th November 2025, and a total of 1,076 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 primary school staff based on these characteristics. Details on the sampling used can be found below.

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

Cognitive testing interviews

Savanta conducted six 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. Three primary school teaching staff, comprising of a female Teaching Assistant, a male Assistant Headteacher and female Reception Teacher.
2. Three parents of children who enrolled in Reception in 2025.

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 3rd November and 6th November 2025.

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.

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 2025.

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**.

Research conducted by:

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