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Kindred² – School Readiness

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Report content

- Objectives and method
- School readiness: expectations, responsibility & Covid-19
- Impacts of school readiness
- What could be done to improve school readiness?
- Conclusions and recommendations

Background, sample and method

Method



Qualitative approach

YouGov conducted 2 text-based online focus groups (1.5 hrs duration) with teachers / SLTs with school readiness responsibility, as well as 8 teledepths interviews (30 – 45 mins duration) with Head's / Deputy Head's. All were recruited from YouGov's online panel.



Sample specification:

- All work in primary schools / KS1
- All to have responsibility and knowledge of school readiness for KS1 pupils
- Mix of attitudes towards and experiences of school readiness
- Mix of age and gender
- Mix of locations of school – region, urban / rural, type and size
- Mix of Ofsted rating and number of pupil premium grants offered

Quantitative approach

YouGov delivered a quantitative survey of 528 early years and primary school teaching professionals. The survey was delivered through the YouGov Teacher Track survey which delivers a representative sample of teaching professionals from senior leaders through to frontline teachers.

The achieved sample provided coverage across different job roles and types of schools.

Variable	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Senior leader	194	205
Teacher	334	384
LA schools	312	351
Academy	127	148
Private	73	69

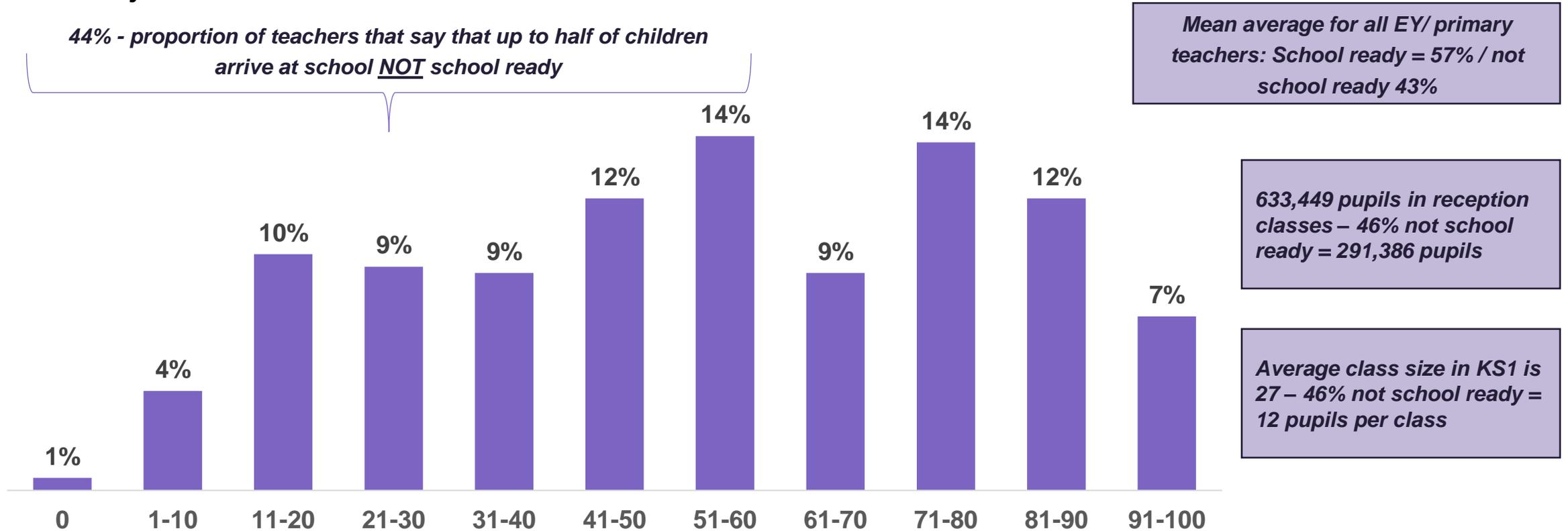
School readiness: expectations, responsibility & Covid-19

Children are expected to have a base level of social, emotional, physical, fine motor, language, self-help and cognitive skill / ability when starting reception

Dress and toilet themselves	Know their name, count to 10, basic letter recognition	Can listen, answer questions and sit still in a group	Can share / take turns	Can separate from parents and follow instructions
<p><i>“I would expect them to be able to dress themselves, go to the toilet themselves, basic pencil grasp and utensil skills”</i> Yorkshire and the Humber, Town & fringe, FG</p>	<p><i>“They’ve got some concept of language, rhyming, songs, know the numbers 1-10 – basic numeracy and phonics”</i> Scotland, Rural, Depth</p>	<p><i>“Listening and attention skills are required for much of what's expected on arrival in Year R”</i> South East, Rural, FG</p>	<p><i>“It is important that they have basic social skills: taking turns, playing 'nicely'. Toilet trained and an ability to concentrate.”</i> London, Urban, FG</p>	<p><i>“Able to separate from parents, follow safety related instructions, listen to others”</i> North West, Rural, FG</p>
<p><i>“Academic readiness, social readiness, physically being ready, emotional readiness – the time to say goodbye to mum and dad”</i> East Midlands, Urban, Depth</p>	<p><i>“Basic letter and number recognition, basic vocabulary, ability to distinguish between home and school environment”</i> London, Urban, FG</p>	<p><i>“Be able to sit and listen in a group setting for more than 5 minutes. Being able to hold a conversation”</i> East Midlands, Town & Fringe, Depth</p>	<p><i>“In terms of behaviour, being able to interact with other children, say hello to the adults, listen for short periods of time, follow instructions”</i> East of England, Town & fringe, FG</p>	<p><i>“They should have some independence re. self-care skills – able to use the toilet & wash hands, put on own coat and shoes, follow simple classroom routines”</i> North West, Town & fringe, FG</p>

Overall, on average KS1 teachers* report that 54% of children that arrived at school to start in reception/ primary 1 this year were school ready – leaving 46% of children who are NOT school ready

What proportion of children that arrived at your school to start in reception/ primary 1 this year (2020) would you say are 'school ready'?



Four in ten teachers say that more than half of reception children don't know how to listen properly or struggle to hold a pencil

Proportion of teachers reporting that more than half (51%+) of children starting in reception/ primary 1 at your school in 2020...

98% of teachers report having at least one pupil starting school who...

97% of teachers report having at least one pupil starting school who...

98% of teachers report having at least one pupil starting school who...

86% of teachers report having at least one pupil starting school who...

93% of teachers report having at least one pupil starting school who...

87% of teachers report having at least one pupil starting school who...

don't know how to listen/ respond to instruction

39%

struggle to hold a pencil

37%

struggle to play/ share with other children

29%

are not able to eat independently

15%

are overly upset when away from their parents

8%

are not toilet trained

9%

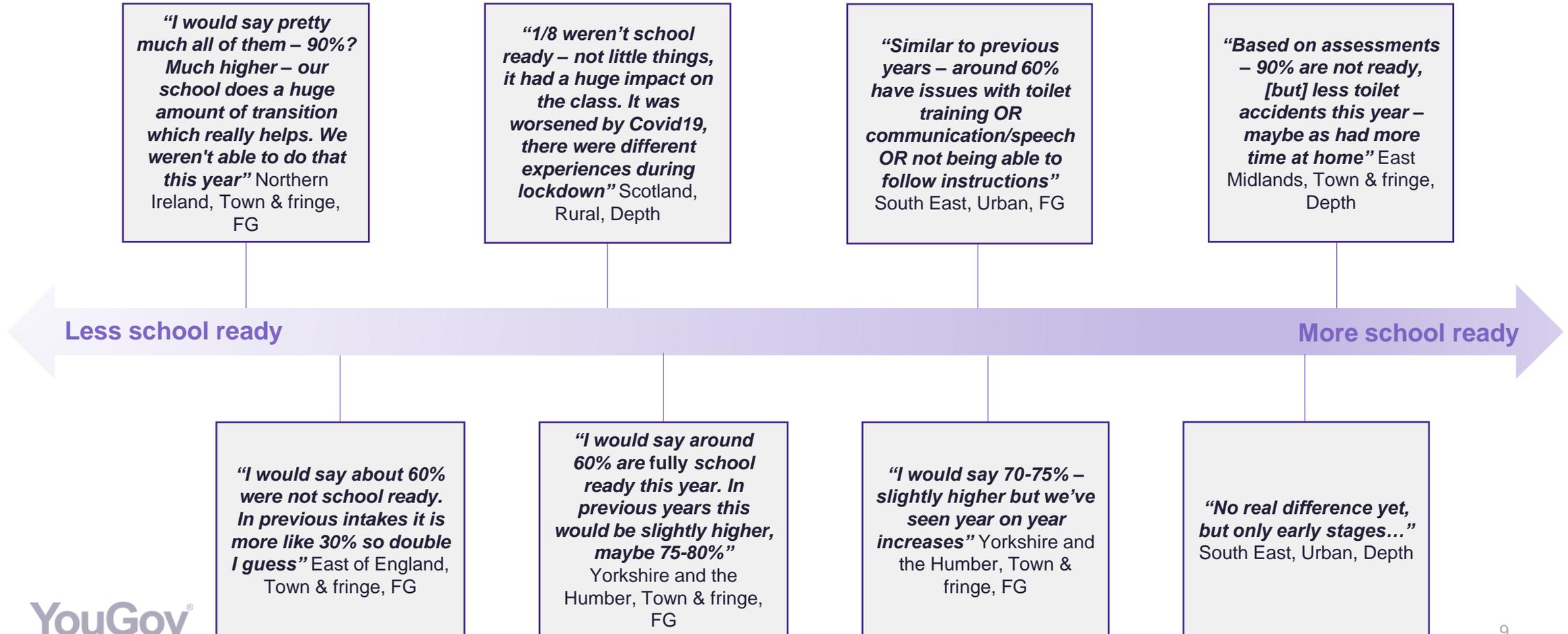


54% of teachers report that less than half of children have basic number skills

35% of teachers report that less than half of children have basic language skills

The proportion of student school readiness in 2020 compared to previous years has decreased for many in the qualitative sample. Whilst a small number reported it is similar to previous years or is too early to tell

However, a few had seen more time at home resulting in better social readiness (e.g. toilet training, number of words)



SLTs with a high proportion of pupils who are not school ready shared emotive and challenging examples in the interviews

“A lot (60% and is growing) are not used to eating at a table and using a knife and fork. Lots of finger food in front of the TV at home” East Anglia, Rural, Depth

“They have poor speech and language skills – this year there is a jarring difference as they have missed 4 months in nursery. A backslide in speech has a negative impact on how we get through our phonics program. Some kids can’t pronounce their own names.” North, Town & fringe, Depth

“80% are not ready – it goes up every year by 5%. But Covid has impacted it another 5%, especially if both parents have been working full time and children were just ‘managed’.” East Midlands, Urban, Depth

“Some have speech issues as parents are using TV and iPads as babysitters. They can’t count and don’t know nursery rhymes.” North, Rural, Depth

“Have 14 in reception, 3 kids have soiling issues, need 2 members of staff on it, need parents to bring in pants etc. Kids are behind, are bottom wiping and teaching them table manners and speech and language to get them to the stage where other kids are at when they’re 3.” North, Town & fringe, Depth

“They have had less time in nursery so don’t know their colors, can’t listen, recognize their name, know a sound... They can’t all sit in a group and listen for 5 minutes.” South East, Urban, FG

The reduced time children spend in nurseries or with parents is seen as the key reasons for any increase in the levels of children NOT being school ready

*This research shows that the number of pupils starting in reception in 2020 not school ready has increased to **46%*****



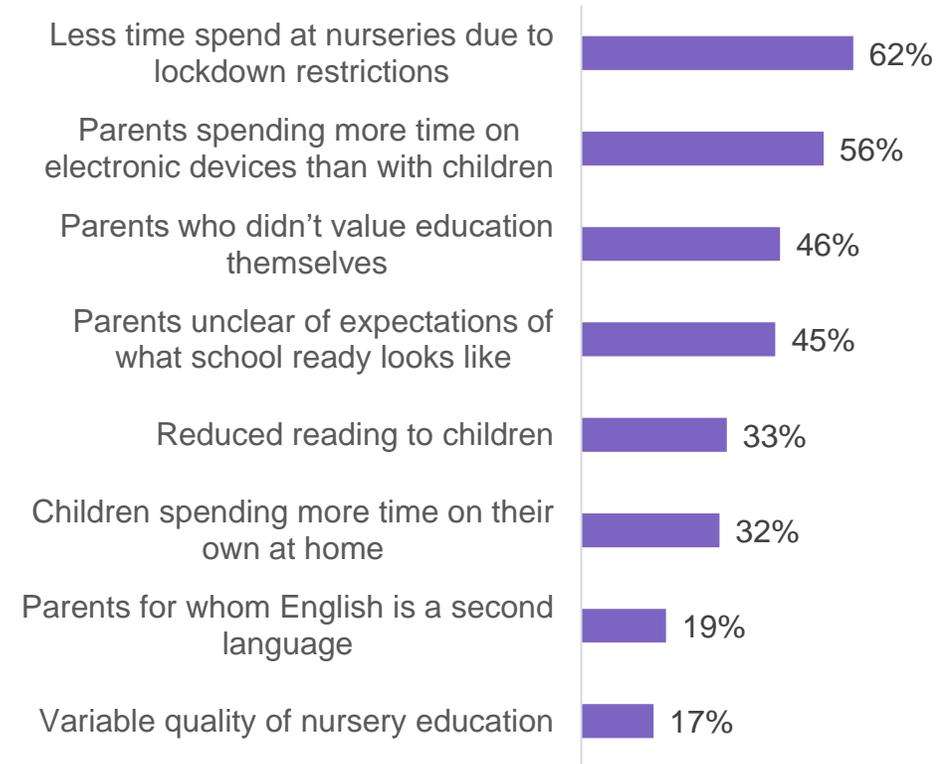
*Reflecting on the 2019/20 school year education professionals reported that on average **35%** were not ready when they started in reception**



*Ipsos: School Readiness Survey September 2020

**YouGov: Teacher Track Survey October 2020 – KS1 teachers (n=195)

Top reasons why levels of NOT being school ready are higher



Base: All early years and primary school teachers who said proportion not school ready is higher n=112

Many reported that lockdown had impacted school readiness - as children were less likely to be in nursery interacting and learning basic academic skills

- **Lockdown has impacted children's school readiness for many**
 - Many feel that more attention is given to emotional wellbeing and nurturing this year by teachers, as many pupils face more separation anxiety from parents, and are less independent
 - The lack of interaction with other children / not attending nursery has affected social skills for many
 - Some pupils missed out on vital pre-school development; the final nursery term is important for reception preparation (e.g. learning phonics, names, numbers)
 - Overall, there is a widened gap between children, depending on lockdown experiences
- **Covid19 has also impacted communication with parents**
 - Some schools providing open days, home visits or play sessions for parents pre-September to set out expectations of school readiness and welcome families have not been possible;
 - Whilst efforts have been made to do this online, there is varied engagement from parents
 - This has also prevented relationships between parents to form, which can make it harder when issues arise
 - Parents working more or suffering from poor mental health during lockdown has meant some pupils are less school ready as they have not been read to or / and spent too much time in front of devices;
 - However, some children have arrived more prepared from additional parent time (e.g. more reading and communication)

“Kids have come to school and they’ve been isolated for 4-5 months. The core of the early year’s curriculum is socializing, learning through play – ripped away from them this year” East Midlands, Urban, Depth

“The children in Year R have missed out on important transition from pre-school. There were not the vital meetings held for parents in the summer term explaining what school readiness looks like” South East, Rural, FG

Qualitative research identified that home challenges and parental expectations of schools are important reasons for children not arriving 'school ready'



Home challenges were selected as a top reason why children might come to school unprepared

These potential challenges include parents having other children to look after, not speaking English, assuming schools will teach certain skills, a lack of (tech) resources, difficult family relationships, neglect, or allowing too much child screen time. Some respondents mention that particularly with SEN children, parents are unsure how to support learning



Parental assumptions that certain skills will be taught in school were also reasons for limited school readiness

Many suggest these assumptions include teaching of basic skills, such as toileting or dressing. Academic learning is also assumed to be entirely the school's responsibility, rather than a joint home /school effort, and learning is often thought to not be consolidated at home



In this sample, parents are viewed as ultimately responsible for ensuring their child is school ready

The role of parents is seen as important to the early social, emotional and physical development of children. However, some respondents acknowledge that some parents may not be capable to support their children, and agree that there should be access to local services and guidance to better prepare their children for school

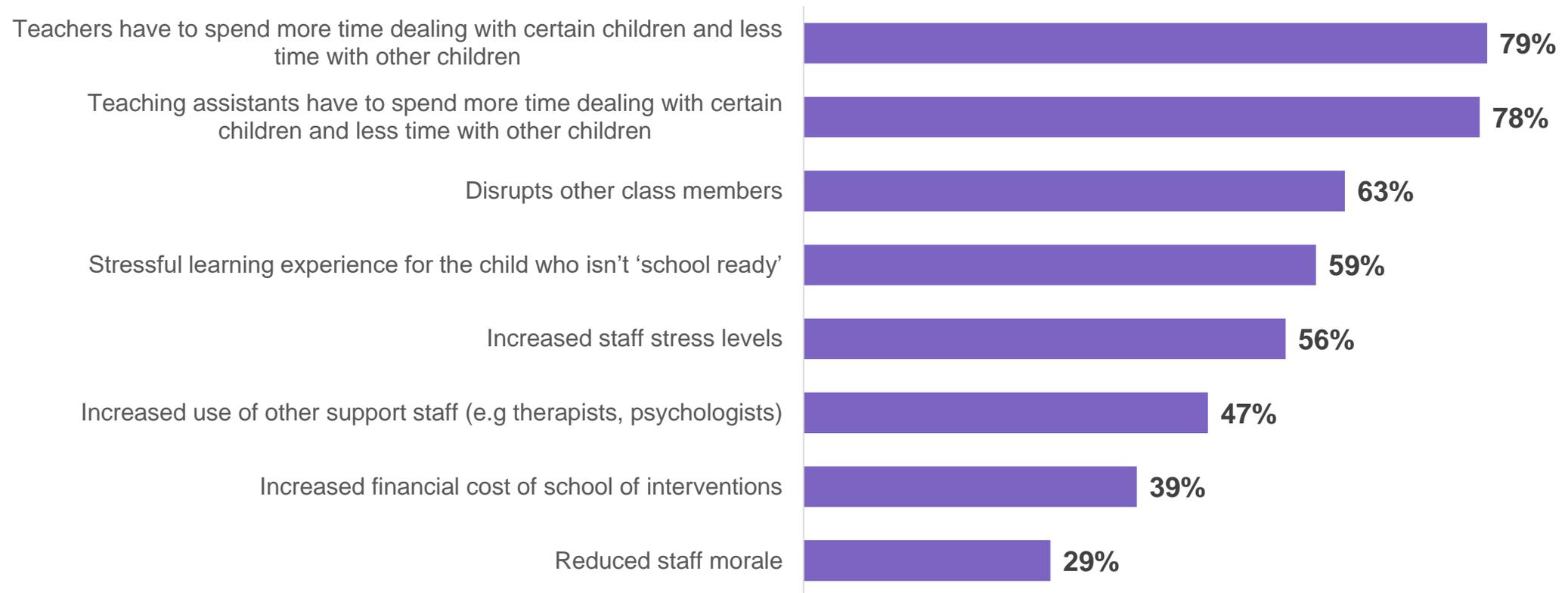
Lack of Nursey time

There is general agreement that nursery and pre-school experiences benefit children and result in them becoming more 'school ready' at reception. Introductions to basic skills, language and communication help children to learn relevant skills and prepare pupils for school settings

Impacts of school readiness

Having children that are NOT school ready has impacts upon the time teachers and teaching assistants have to spend with other children

Which of the following, if any, are impacts upon a school of having one or more children who are not 'school ready'?



The qualitative research found that a lot of time is spent on supporting non-‘school ready’ students and on non-academic tasks (e.g. cleaning soiled children, dressing children)

Impacts to specific teacher / TA duties

- Many suggest that teacher time is being spent on developing emotional and self-help readiness, including toileting and nurturing, which distracts from teaching time of school ready pupils
- Varied levels of school readiness often means *more* staff are needed to support the different abilities of pupils. Most respondents agree that additional phonics, language and reading groups or 1-to-1 support provided to pupils who are not ‘school ready’ prevents staff resources (TAs) from being used across the classroom
- These factors increase stress and workloads of teachers to ensure both pastoral and academic needs of pupils are being met

Covid19 has meant that more teacher time is being spent on hand-washing and ensuring ‘bubbles’ are kept separate

“Nurture groups with TA, 1:1 TA time, SALT sessions, additional phonics interventions, additional reading for those not read with by a parent, nappy-changing/soiling clean up”

East Midlands, Urban, FG

Impacts to time

- All agree that staff time is divided between providing emotional support to pupils, and ensuring educational progress is maintained
- Many staff use lunchtimes, mornings, and after school time to support less ‘school ready’ children – this includes providing breakfast, targeted interventions, and parent-teacher meetings
- This has a knock-on effect to personal staff time; lesson planning and ‘down-time’ is limited due to the focus on these pupils throughout the school day
- A number mentioned this also affects other students in the class, as staff time is prioritised to non-‘school ready’ children

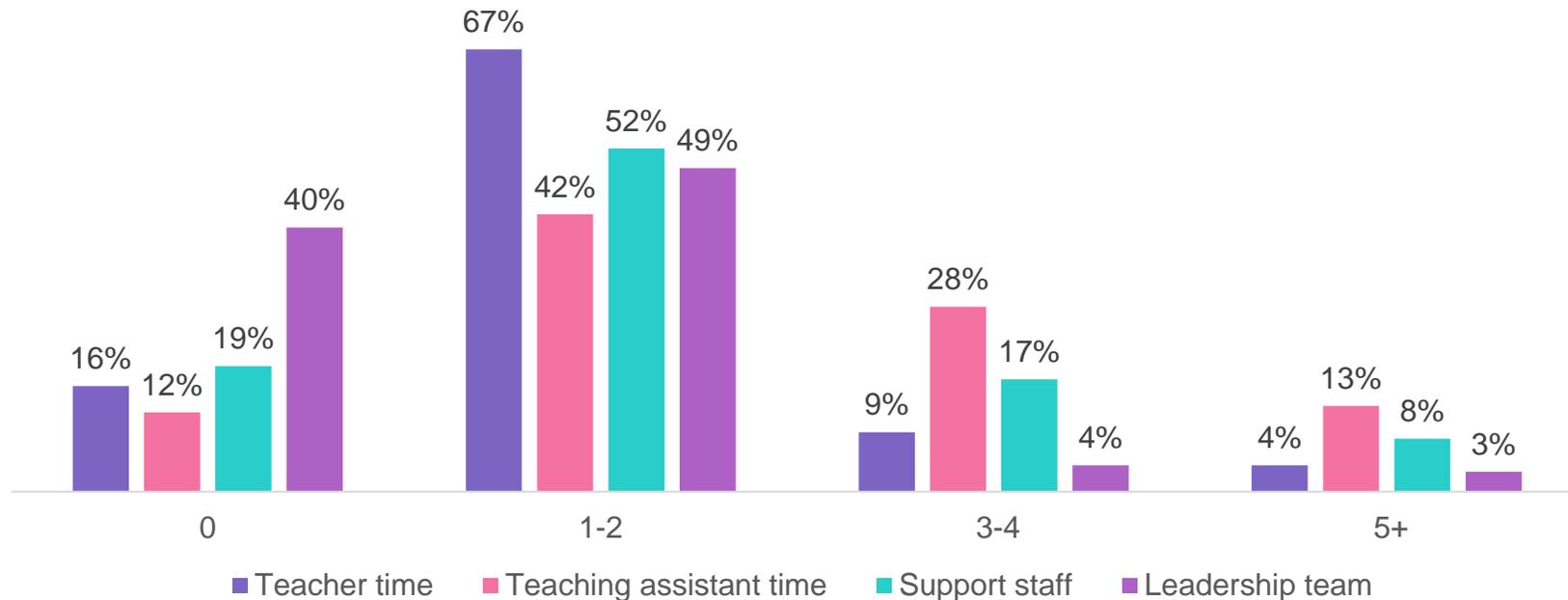
Due to Covid19, time spent supporting parents (to support their children) is limited due to social distancing measures

“Time taken by staff to make phone calls (attendance); change nappies; support children at break time; time after school with parents; time taken to plan and deliver Speech and Language / fine motor interventions” South East, Urban,

FG

Across all job roles teachers most commonly estimate that between 1 and 2 hours time is lost in each school day if there is a child/ children in a reception/ primary 1 class that start at school not ready and able to learn

In an average school day how much actual staff time is lost from other priorities if there is a child/ children in a reception/ primary 1 class that start at school not ready and able to learn?



Median number of reported hours lost each day by job role:

Teacher = 1 hour
Teaching assistant = 2 hours
Support staff = 2 hours
Leadership team 1 hour

The qualitative research found that staff time in a number of schools is spent assisting children who are not toilet-wise instead of teaching all

“A lot of TA time is taken up dealing with things like changes of clothes due to toileting accidents, or settling a distressed child” East of England, Town & fringe, FG

“Children that aren’t ready toilet-wise, that takes up a lot of time, if they can’t do their buttons themselves, or their trousers up” Scotland, Rural, Depth

“We need to fund increased staff ratios in early years, particularly to deal with toileting, small group communication/language interventions”
North West, Town & fringe, FG

“Some children who aren’t fully toilet trained are having to change their clothes 2 or 3 times a day - that’s a lot of time out of class, and other children start to notice as well” East of England, Town & fringe, FG

“A couple are not toilet trained – does draw on teachers’ time. I have to help! I go in and help clean up a child. Secretary may help. It is not ideal. It’s expensive time – me cleaning up etc.”
East of England, Rural, Depth

“Teachers / TAs duties are taken up by supporting children e.g. with toileting (nappy changes), language and communication skills groups” South East, Urban, FG

In a school year teachers report they could be losing around 195 hours teaching time and teaching assistants 390 hours time because of teaching children who are NOT school ready

Job role	Median hours lost per day	Hours lost per week*	Hours lost per term*	Hours lost per school year*
Teacher	1	5	65	195
Teaching assistant	2	10	130	390
Support staff	2	10	130	390
Leadership team	1	5	65	195

- 5 days in a week
- 13 weeks in a term
- 39 weeks in a year

Calculating the economic impact of time lost across job roles because children are NOT school ready

Job role	Average annual salary	Average weekly hours worked in school	Average hourly pay	Hours lost per school year	Monetary cost of annual hours lost per teacher	Estimated total cost across all reception classes 100% of classes have pupils not school ready	Estimated total cost across all reception classes 90% of classes have pupils not school ready	Estimated total cost across all reception classes 85% of classes have pupils not school ready
Teacher	£39,400	37.5	£26.94	195	£5,250	£123m	£110m	£104m
Teaching assistant	£17,250	36	£12.28	390	£4,790	£112m	£101m	£95m
Leadership team	£50,900	42	£31.07	195	£6,060	£102m (calculation based upon number of schools)	£91m (calculation based upon number of schools)	£86m (calculation based upon number of schools)

In England in 2020 there were:

- 221,153 nursery and primary school teachers in state funded schools
- 16,769 primary schools
- 633,449 pupils in reception classes
- Average class size in KS1 was 27
- Gives an estimated number of 23,400 reception classes

Teachers themselves estimate that the annual cost to their school of receiving children who are NOT school ready is £9,300

Financial impacts of non-school readiness include costs of additional support staff and learning resources, plus personal costs for some

“We’ve had to buy things like wobble seats, so the cost of that and other additional resources is about £200”

Scotland, Rural, Depth

“[A] big extra cost is for more support staff and external agencies to support those children who are not ready. However, there is little money available to match what is needed”

London, Urban, FG

“Because of limited school readiness we have the ‘child and parent support worker’. Her wage is quite a substantial part of our budget – we pay about £28,000”

Yorkshire and the Humber, Town & fringe, Depth

“We pick up children quite often. There are three of us that pay ourselves so that we’ve got insurance on our cars for business. I think I pay about an extra £50 a year”

Yorkshire and the Humber, Town & fringe, Depth

“The most obvious financial impact is paying additional staff salaries. SALT therapist is £100/week for half a day. Educational Psychologist is £450 per referral”

South East, Urban, FG

“My colleagues and I often buy food for breakfasts and spare uniform for children out of our own pocket”

Yorkshire and the Humber, Town & fringe, FG

“We’ve subscribed to lots of resources to aid learning. Easily thousands of pounds of additional support from extra intervention materials”

South East, Town & Fringe, FG

“Really can’t put an exact financial figure on this, but I would say at least a couple of teaching assistants would not be needed if school readiness were not an issue”

South West, Town & Fringe, FG

Limited school readiness in Early Years impacts the student and other classmates – both now and beyond reception

Impacts to the student

- Most feel that student confidence and overall wellbeing is impacted by not being 'school ready'. Pupils can feel socially isolated from peers, or embarrassed, if they're not able to achieve the same as others
- This frustration and lack of self-understanding is often thought to present itself in misbehaviour
- Additionally, emotional needs due to not being 'school ready' can hold children back from fulfilling their academic potential
- Some state these factors contributing to negative school experiences can cause pupils to find school difficult to cope with

“It’s difficult for them to access the learning, they feel the anxiety and a lot of mine develop a fixed mindset of not being able to do/engage with the learning” South West, Urban, FG

Impacts to other classmates

- Other classmates are often thought to be overlooked – they are not given the benefit of TA support in class, as attention is given to those pupils not 'school ready'
- Teacher time spent trying to engage the non-'school ready' students impacts on the learning of others; learning opportunities are not maximised for those school ready, and they can sometimes become bored or misbehave
- A few respondents suggest school ready pupils might also become upset or frightened at disruptive behaviour of non-'school-ready' children, impacting their learning experience

“It takes time away from their classmates. The TA / teacher has to spend time managing behaviour, getting children to engage. Less time to challenge other children who can get overlooked”
East of England, Town & fringe, FG

Impacts beyond reception years

- Most agree that learning experiences of early years stays with pupils throughout their school experience
- For non-'school ready' pupils, this can impact self-esteem long-term; some suggest a mindset of not being able to achieve as well as peers can develop amongst these children
- Many acknowledge that this can lead to gaps widening between peers. For non-'school ready' children who struggle to catch up, it may lead to behavioural and engagement problems

“Once children realise the gap between themselves and their peers (often in KS2) self-esteem and engagement issues sometimes increase”
North West, Rural, FG

Equal school readiness amongst all pupils would allow more time for effective teaching, and better allocation of resources

- **Teaching time and staffing costs would be impacted positively by increased school readiness**
 - Respondents agree that teachers would be able to focus on delivering productive lessons as time would not be spent dealing with emotional needs and behaviour of non-‘school ready’ pupils
 - As pupils move through the school, less intervention and extra support would be required; this would reduce staff costs as less TAs would be needed
- **This would allow *all* students to benefit from additional support**
 - Middle-achieving and quieter children (who might usually be overlooked) would be better supported to reach their potential with freed up attention from TAs
 - Some suggested that saved staffing costs could be spent on improving learning resources (e.g. more outdoor facilities)
- **Improved staff wellbeing was also mentioned**
 - Many feel that better motivation and increased teacher time would contribute to improved morale and mental health among staff

“We’d be able to teach our children the curriculum they’re supposed to be accessing. More adults in school supporting teaching and learning and not dealing with school readiness”

East Midlands, Urban, Depth

“I think the biggest impact would be on learning, and just the culture across the school – a much more enthusiastic and motivated mind set”

East of England, Town & fringe, FG

What could be done to improve school readiness?

Respondents were shown a list of possible government initiatives and selected the most beneficial to improving school readiness...

All of the initiatives were seen to be beneficial, especially number 3, followed by 1, 4 and 5

- 1. Better targeting of services to those families facing greatest challenges**
2. Educating school children about the importance of early years on later life outcomes
-  **3. Improved support or information to parents**
- 4. Improving training of staff in early years settings**
- 5. Joining up early years services better**
6. Streamlining access to services for families of under 5s

Improved guidance to parents about what it means to be ‘school ready’ and better targeting were the most called for government initiatives

- **All agreed that parents need simple, practical guidance on what it means for their child to be school ready, and why it is important**
 - Parental understanding of what is expected at KS1 needs to be increased as not all are aware (e.g. parents not knowing their child should be able to listen in a group)
 - Guidance needs highlight the benefits of being school ready and what role parents can play (e.g. read to their children)
 - Many believe that the government should run a nationwide campaign on school readiness to raise knowledge levels
 - Such a campaign should be multi-channelled (leaflets, TV adverts and parenting classes) so as to reach a wide range of parents
- **Additionally, many argued for better targeting of services to those families facing the greatest challenges**
 - Parents with poor mental health, low literacy / numeracy skills, those who struggle with the English language and those living in poverty are viewed to be the most in need, especially since the decrease in Sure Start Centres and the Covid-19 pandemic

“These parents would probably engage better with a video, possible even celebrity endorsed” East of England, Urban, FG

“I think support for parents is the first port of call. It starts at home and if it is done right, then they will flourish at school.” South East, Urban, FG

Improved training of staff in early years and better joining up of early years services would also be beneficial

- **Improved training of staff in early years is called for**
 - ‘Training’ when unpicked tended to mean more ‘support’ for KS1 teachers in the form of emotional support and resources (TAs, volunteers and teaching aids)
 - Emotional support for staff is key - as it is recognised that working with a large number of children who are not school ready can be stressful and upsetting for teachers, as well as time consuming
 - To provide increased support and training, SLTs argued for more funding
- **Early years’ services need to be better joined up so developmental issues (e.g. with speech and language) are picked up pre-KS1**
 - If issues are picked up by health visitors, CAMHS and nurseries pre-KS1, children are more likely to get effective support – if not identified until they are in primary school it can take months or even years to get the support due to the long waiting lists
 - SLTs especially, noted that nursery’s have varying levels of quality and do not all provide data on children’s development, which can mean teachers are not aware what their cohort’s school readiness is likely to be before term starts
 - In order for services to be better joined up, it was argued that more funding needs to be made available

“If parents are known to Children’s Services prior to starting school, they often have access to support. It’s the ones who don’t meet criteria who are not identified as needing help. Pre-schools play a huge role in this” South East, Rural, FG

“We need more consistency across nursery’s e.g. private vs LA. We get better quality data from LA nursery’s than private ones” East Midlands, Urban, Depth

Conclusions and recommendations

Key takeaways

- On average early years and primary school teachers report that 43% of pupils arriving at their school are NOT school ready
- In terms of specific behaviours the largest areas of concern are around children not knowing how to listen properly or struggling to hold a pencil – with four in ten reporting that over half of children behave like that
- 54% of teachers report that over half of children arriving at school do not have basic number skills
- Reduced time children spend in nurseries or parents being distracted by electronic devices are seen as the key reasons for any increase in the levels of children NOT being school ready
- There are significant impacts upon staff time of teaching children who are NOT school ready. In a school year teachers report they could be losing around 195 hours teaching time and teaching assistants 390 hours time because of teaching children who are NOT school ready.
- The financial implications of lost time can equate to c.£4k per teacher per year
- Improved guidance to parents about what it means to be ‘school ready’ and better targeting were the most called for government initiatives in the qualitative research.

November 2020

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