

Special Needs Jungle Autumn 2020 COVID-19 & SEND Education Survey

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Executive Summary

This autumn SEND survey was designed to find out whether children and young people with SEND had their provision back in the first half of the 2020 autumn term.

When we launched the survey, we knew from what parents had told us that not only did a large percentage of children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) not have their provision back, but a sizeable number had not been able to return to school at all in September 2020.

We also heard from some parents that their child's return had been managed brilliantly and how grateful they were to their school and teachers for their extraordinary efforts.

While our report was being prepared, schools went into a second major closure/restriction in early 2021. Although many more children have been attending, the numbers for those with EHCPs seem to hover around 36% at time of writing.

However, we want to use this report positively. We have included recommendations at each stage. In the final section we have included some thoughts from parents about what would have helped ensure a better transition back to school.

We found:

- Nearly two-thirds of parents and carers who have children with EHCPs reported that their child's legally binding provision had not been fully restored in the first half of the autumn term.
- Fewer than one in five parents explicitly confirmed that all provision in their child's EHCP had been fully restored most of the rest weren't sure.
- The shortfall was greatest in therapies normally delivered by NHS staff. Direct speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and hydrotherapy were all areas where parents were most likely to report that no Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) provision had been restored.
- The situation is even worse for children and young people with SEND who don't have an EHCP. Only 8% of parents and carers with children on SEN Support confirmed that all of the SEND provision their child had prior to the spring lockdown in 2020 was now back in place.
 Almost three quarters of these parents and carers reported that some or all of their child's SEND support had been withdrawn not just therapies, but also large quantities of teaching assistant support.

RISK ASSESSMENTS & RETURN TO SCHOOL

 Schools and local authorities were encouraged to continue conducting risk assessments and involving families in the risk assessment process. Only 18% of surveyed parents and carers were aware that their child **had been given a risk assessment** to guide their return to school or college - and **only 9%** of parents and carers described themselves as **'fully involved' in this process**. Many parents who were aware of the risk assessment reported that they were given no input into it.

• Just over a third (36%) of parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed with the survey statement "the school or college has involved me fully in helping my child back" - slightly more (41%) agreed or strongly disagreed.

ATTENDANCE

- 80% of parents and carers of children with SEND reported (in September and October) that
 their child was back in school or college with a strong majority back full-time. 12% reported
 that their child was not back at school or college, and 8% reported that they had no
 placement to send their child back to.
- By comparison, Department for Education data indicates that attendance rates for all pupils in state schools averaged 88% in September and October¹.
- There were many reasons why these 12% of children weren't back at school: some (particularly special school pupils) were extremely medically vulnerable or had medical needs (such as requiring Aerosol Generating Procedures) that couldn't be met in school. Other families were self-isolating due to suspected / actual COVID exposure or had children who were too anxious to attend school; others reported that their child's return to school had failed due to unmet need.
- Respondent parents and carers who had children or young people with SEND at home rather than in their normal placement were given several options to characterise the education that their child was getting. From these options, these parents reported most often that their child was receiving no education at all. Fewer than 10% of this group reported receiving and using online teaching from school; take-up of Oak Academy or other online platforms was even lower. Where parents in this category were delivering education, most were likely to report either that they were doing bits and pieces when they could, or that they were following a home-created curriculum.

ANXIETY

 In the spring 2020 lockdown, SEND parents reported an even split in their children's anxiety levels. Whilst many children's anxiety levels had increased under lockdown, a similar number's anxiety levels had actually decreased - in many cases, because school-related stresses had disappeared.

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak-23-march-2020-to-4-january-2021 (data accessed 15th January 2021)

The return to school in September painted a different picture, with anxiety on the increase.
 Over half of surveyed SEND parents and carers with a child who already suffered from anxiety reported that their child had become more anxious since being back in school.

EXCLUSIONS & BEHAVIOUR

- One in five parents / carers reported that their child's school or college had changed behaviour policies in response to COVID-19. The most commonly reported change was policy over mask wearing.
- Only 9% of the parents that reported this change were concerned that these behaviour policy changes would put their child at greater risk of exclusion.

CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

- 8% of children had no place to go back to
- Almost a quarter of parents whose children were not in school at all said they were not accessing any education at all
- Very few were using Oak Academy
- Some were funding a private tutor themselves for learning they should have bene getting at school.
- Only 11% were accessing remote teaching from a school

WORKING WITH PARENTS FOR TRANSITION BACK

- A larger percentage of parents said their child/young person's school had not involved them in the return to school in September than had involved them.
- Of those that had good communication, those with children in specialist provision were more likely to say they had experienced good involvement with school
- The most common comment received in answer to the question about support in place for transition was, "nothing"

SEND TRANSPORT

• A third of responding parents and carers said that their child or young person normally used local authority-funded transport to get to school or college, usually a taxi or bus. Most of these children and young people were still using the same LA-funded transport method in September - but only one in six of this group reported that additional social distancing measures had been put in place on this type of transport.

WHAT WORKED, OR WOULD HAVE WORKED

- Parents overwhelmingly identified good communication as the most important thing they would had received or would have wanted more of from their child's school
- Good/Better planning for children with SEND before term started was also very important to parents
- And of course, ensuring the provision in an EHCP was in place before term started (or at all) was of paramount importance.

We hope this report may help to ensure all children, whether they have the protection of an EHCP or they are on SEN Support, are welcomed back in with full support in place after February half-term, or whenever full re-opening takes place.

Tania Tirraoro, Renata Blower, Matt Keer

February 2021

Recommendations

We have included recommendations for each section of this document. This is done with the aim that when it comes to full return to school in 2021 after the winter lockdown period the mistakes that were made in 2020 will be avoided.

We are including just some of the recommendations here. While there are many, none are especially difficult to put into place with forethought, will, and an inclusion mindset.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REINTEGRATION TO SCHOOL:

- Schools should start planning as early as possible, from a position of being inclusive and welcoming to every student. If additional resources are needed to ensure this happens for children with complex needs, the head teacher should speak to the local authority ahead of time.
- 2. Schools should endeavour to publish both on their website and in a printed format, how they are ensuring a safe environment and what contingency plans are for an outbreak.
- 3. Children with SEND are more likely to have lost skills and been unable to access remote learning. Early reviews of EHCPs should be considered to take account of lost learning.
- 4. If schools are carrying our asymptomatic/lateral flow testing on pupils, work with the parents of children who may find this difficult, to see how (and whether) this can be carried out. Disabled children often have extreme sensory sensitivities. It must not be used as a reason to exclude a child with SEND from school (as per current guidelines)
- 5. For children/young people in transition years, particular care should be taken to assess changes to their needs which should be passed to their new school. Schools should be prepared to allow incoming or prospective students to visit in the summer term and have video calls with new teachers if it isn't possible to visit.
- 6. Catch-up and tutoring programmes should focus on children with SEND who are likely to have lost more learning and skills and will take longer to regain them.
- 7. Before full reopening in Spring 2021, there must be meaningful engagement with families and schools so that any additional resources and support required to facilitate safe attendance can be put in place. Full and detailed contingency plans must be put in place for those children and young people who are not able to attend so that they can access education in a way that works for them and their families.

RISK ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Schools should avoid framing disabled children as a "risk". Working with families, they should create an updated "Return to School Transition Plan" for those children who have

- not been in school in the spring term. Many of these children will not, in fact, have been in school for almost a year.
- 9. The return plan should include how the child's identified needs will be met, taking into account existing EHCPs, health plans or support plans.
- 10. School leaders must ensure their staff are aware of the most up-to-date government advice.

TRANSPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11. Planning for transport should be started well in advance. If a child has transport in their EHCP, it should be considered as part of the 'return to school' plan, including whether changes need to be made to allow distancing.
- 12. A child's needs may have changed during a long period where they may have been indoors and isolated so some may now need a change to transport and local authorities (LAs) should be sympathetic to this.
- 13. Mandatory testing of all transport personnel until their COVID vaccinations are completed.

BEHAVIOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14. Any changes to behaviour policies should comply with the Equality Act 2010
- 15. Schools should consider and understand potential reasons behind a deterioration in behaviour such as anxiety or family bereavement.

RESTARTING STATUTORY PROVISIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16. Schools should be aware that Section 42 of the Children and Families Act is fully in force and should be followed.
- 17. Relevant staff should refamiliarise themselves with the contents of a child's EHCP or support plan and ensure provisions are in place.
- 18. Speak to the parents of disabled children to understand how they have been affected by lockdown, even if they have been in school. If needs have grown significantly, it may be necessary for an early review of the EHCP, including new assessments e.g., speech and language, occupational therapy and educational psychology, as needed, to increase support.
- 19. Non-teaching support staff should be made aware of any issues stemming from a child's needs that may be present at break or lunch times.
- 20. If any issue puts a child's support at risk, action should be taken to avoid a loss of support. For example, seek support from the local authority or Designated Clinical /Medical Officer

21. If in doubt about the best way to communicate with a parent- ask them.

RESTARTING SEN SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 22. While many of the recommendations for those with EHCPs also work for SEND Support pupils, the SENCO should ensure that families know their child is actually on the SEN register and is invited to be actively involved as a partner in their support.
- 23. Assess, Plan, Do, Review plans should be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- 24. Consider arranging assessments with relevant experts, such as an educational psychologist, Speech Therapist, or counsellor. Consider if an EHC needs assessment is now needed. Other children may now require short or longer time SEN Support if their emerging needs have been missed while not at school.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING ANXIETY:

- 25. There should be no fines for non-attendance if a child cannot attend because of anxiety.
- 26. Flexible timetables should be considered at the request of the parent/carer
- 27. Schools could prepare "back to school" graphics, and social stories, including tips for coping with anxiety, using resources from Young Minds and similar.
- 28. Schools should consider implementing mindfulness or meditation sessions
- 29. School should consider creating a safe space in school for pupils to go to if they are overwhelmed

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL CO-PRODUCTION:

- 30. Even before you have a confirmed return date, speak to parents and to the children/ young people themselves, to ask where sticking points may arise and what might work to mitigate them. Plan to put these accommodations in place in good time.
- 31. If creating a "welcome back" pack, consider the specific needs of children with SEND. Such as visual or easy-read versions and videos. What works for children with SEND works for all children.
- 32. Send timetables home early. Arrange an appointment for a video call with parent and child to see if they have any questions or worries. Offer a prompt sheet, for example, "What are you excited/worried/unsure about?" to help frame the chat or use suitable visuals.
- 33. Arrange for children with SEND who haven't been in school to start a day early or have a half-day visit to help them get settled.
- 34. Continue good home-school communications so you can see if stressors at school that may not seem a problem, are being acted out at home.

- 35. If there are new staff members, send pictures home of each one with their names and a cheery message from them. Send pictures or video of any new classrooms or spaces. Parents are vital partners in supporting this.
- 36. If a child or parent voices a concern *take it seriously*, even if you consider it a trivial matter. It might be to you; it isn't to them.
- 37. If your ideas or your plan has worked well, share them with other teachers and schools!

FOR GOVERNMENT WE RECOMMEND:

- 1. Reconfigure and consolidating all guidance in to one, categorised, body of information.
- 2. Include a "search this guidance" facility
- 3. Present the guidance in a more visually appealing way, for example with one front page with the categories in coloured boxes for browsing. There is no need to tell people who guidance is for; this stops people reading it when they might need some of the information inside.
- 4. Clearly identify new information in an "updates news feed" category, listing what has been added and removed.
- 5. The SEND Review must designate a much-needed uplift to the notional SEND budget so schools can provide resources for needs emerging or increasing because of COVID. If these are needs not addressed urgently, with funding to match, it will likely lead to a considerable rise in the number of EHCP applications. This uplift should be protected for use only for SEND resources and expert input to avoid it being used elsewhere within the school as simply an additional pot of money.
- 6. Consider creating criteria for some children with SEND or who have been unwell to repeat a school year if they and their family requests this.
- 7. Allow children with SEND to keep their EHCPS for an additional year after the age of 25, and extending supported internships and training.
- 8. Additionally, although it was not within the scope of this survey, we feel it is important that young people with SEND aged 18–25 who are at university, should not be forgotten. Many higher education students with disabilities have not been able to participate fully in online learning. We believe the government should consider funding an additional year of their current course and Disabled Students' Allowance, at no cost to the student, if required. Disabled students who would qualify for Limited Capability to Work should also be allowed to apply for Universal Credit while they are studying. For many disabled students, whose mental and physical health have suffered in the last year, this may be the only way they can finish their studies and reach their potential.

About Special Needs Jungle

Special Needs Jungle (SNJ) is a volunteer-created and run blog/website, creating easy-to-understand resources, articles, and information about special educational needs, disabilities (SEND), and health conditions. We help parents/carers of children with SEND to navigate the education, social care, and health systems. It's also aimed at improving the understanding of these complicated systems and their legal context for anyone working with disabled children and their families.

As parents of children with SEND us, we know how vital it is for families to have the correct information, so they can advocate effectively for their children. It's our mission to "cut through the jungle", deconstructing SEND news, law, and resources clearly, to families and those who support them.

To do this, we use accessible language and colourful visuals delivered in a clear, lively, and human style. It's our goal to inspire, educate, and empower people to advocate confidently and secure the support needed for families to live the best life they can.

Special Needs Jungle has been at the heart of the SEND community for almost 12 years. As well as living within it ourselves, we have had a unique insight into the effects government policies and procedures have had on parents and their children. The coronavirus has, undoubtedly, affected everyone in unprecedented ways, none more so than parents of children with additional needs and disabilities. Despite the specific challenges that lockdown brought this community, very little guidance or support was made available to them. Special Needs Jungle responded by becoming an invaluable resource providing advice, information, guidance, and resources to help keep the SEND community informed about how the rapidly changing policies would impact their families and children.

Having an active and engaged community of almost 40,000 strong on Facebook alone, gives us a direct insight into a wide range of concerns families have faced over the past few months.

Special Needs Jungle has produced this survey to help ensure the true experiences of families of children with SEND during the pandemic are captured.

Introduction

It may seem, in early 2021, like old news to talk about the situation for children and young people going back to school in the autumn of 2020. But some of these children did not get to go back to school last September and as we write, have been out of school for 10 months. Other disabled children have not been to a school for even longer because they did not have a school to go back to.

This report is actually published at a very opportune moment – as we are once again in a lockdown with most children forced to learn remotely. This time, more children are allowed to be in school and, unlike the first lockdown, their rights to SEND provision under section 42 of the 2014 Children & Families Act are still in force, technically, if not in actuality.

So, we are using this review of what happened to disabled children and young people last September, to make recommendations to help schools welcome back every pupil and student when they return in 2021. We want to help ensure their support – whether statutory or not – is back in place on day one.

While children with EHCPs were again allowed to attend, and many more have, just as many are at home. Some, parents have told us, have been receiving excellent support while some once again, feel they have been abandoned. This is unacceptable. The government's apparent concern about children with SEND missing school is especially hard to hear for parents whose children have been out of school for a very long time because of a lack of suitable placements.

First, we would like to pay tribute to every teacher, every school support staff member, every health professional, every voluntary organisation worker, every volunteer and every council staff member, who has worked in difficult and exhausting circumstances over the last year to support disabled children, young people and their families. Both of our surveys have shown how much families appreciate the help they have received. They have especially appreciated it when someone goes beyond takes a moment to ask how they're doing, to offer a thoughtful gesture or a caring word.

It is difficult to write a report that is critical of some aspects of teaching practice when every teacher has faced such a difficult working environment because of the pandemic, has worked the hardest they have ever done and may have suffered illness or loss themselves. This report is not about any individual or any particular school. It is about the experience of children who were already suffering disproportionate exclusion from education before the pandemic, and their families.

SEPTEMBER 2020

Last September, as most children were excitedly returning to "covid-secure" classrooms, our SEND Community Alliance (SCA) collaborative was dismayed to hear from parents that some disabled children were not permitted to return to their classrooms. For others, only a part-time timetable was offered. The reasons given for this was "safety" or because their needs could not be provided for, despite the removal of easements to their Children and Families Act that has been in place since April.

Our previous survey, published in July 2020, looked at the support children with disabilities had received during lockdown. We found two-thirds of parents surveyed reporting that the education of their child or young person with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) had suffered because of lockdown.

After hearing from parents in early September we, and SCA, felt it was important to find out what was happening on a wider scale with SEND education in England in the autumn term.

The survey first opened for responses two weeks after the start of the autumn term. At the time the survey was released, we were already aware that, in particular, many children who rely on Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs) such as those with tracheostomies or needing suction, had not been permitted to return to their educational settings. Schools cited concerns over potential droplet transmission and space needed for safe AGP assistance as the reason to prevent their return. Either way, this amounts to discrimination of this group of children, especially as many had not been given replacement online learning that matched the education the other children in their class were getting in school.

We have heard from parents of unlawful daily practice in schools with provision not available, continued use of risk assessments as a barrier to return, lack of teaching assistant support because they are in another 'bubble' and a lack of support for transition to new settings.

Conversely, we also heard of brilliant practice by some schools despite limited resources. We heard of teachers working incredibly hard to welcome back their disabled pupils and of working closely with parents to ensure a smooth return. So, it can be done, and we hope these schools will share their expertise widely.

Survey aims

The aim of this survey was to highlight the experiences of children with SEND following the start of the new school year in the Autumn of 2020.

The survey was open to parents of disabled children and young people between the ages of 0-25 years across the United Kingdom.

While there have been various surveys of children's experiences during the pandemic, only a few have specifically looked at the experiences of children with SEND. These surveys have generally been short and designed to measure one specific issue that families might be facing. While some of these have been useful 'temperature checking' tools, SNJ believed that a more in-depth analysis was needed to ensure that government, local authorities and educators were aware of the reality of the situations that families have found themselves in, the impact this has had and what lessons we can learn from listening to lived experiences.

Unfortunately, our survey analysis was delayed for unavoidable reasons. By the time we were finalising it the country had plunged back into another lockdown. We decided to re-focus the survey to use our data to make recommendations for going back to school, which we felt would be more useful.

Methodology

This survey was conducted by Special Needs Jungle (SNJ) to answer the questions, 'Does your child have all their SEND provision back?' and 'What has your family's experience been this term?'

It was designed to capture the experiences of families who have children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) on their return to education in the autumn term of 2020, which was approximately five months into the Coronavirus pandemic.' These are children who present with a wide range of different needs and who attend a variety of educational settings. The survey has been designed to try and capture information from families that highlight factors that may have had an influence on their child's experience of education during the Autumn term in 2020.

The survey utilised an online survey tool and ran from 16th September to 31st October 2020, open to all families who identified themselves as caring for a child or young person with SEND in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Key areas of concern were sourced using a variety of methods, including, but not limited to, working with partner organisations, our various social media channels, speaking to other parent carers and email correspondents.

The survey was designed primarily as a multiple-choice questionnaire, encompassing a wide range of possible responses to each question. Some questions allowed for only one possible answer to be selected out of the options available, while others allowed for multiple options to be selected with an option for "other" when appropriate.

Recognising the value in capturing both qualitative and quantitative data, the survey also included multiple opportunities for participants to include further information or answer some questions in optional open text boxes². This allowed the survey to capture a wider understanding of families' experiences.

We recognise that many factors contribute to a child's experience of education. Our survey therefore cross references children's experiences based not only on their area of need, but also their educational setting, year group, level of educational support and geographic location. The questions were also constructed to allow for factors that might unduly influence participants' responses. for example, issues with educational provision which existed before the pandemic.

Participants were given the option to name the local authority that they are in but were not asked for any other identifying information. This decision was made to both ensure GDPR compliance, and to allow participants to answer freely without concern about their anonymity. Respondents were given the option to submit their email address at the end of the survey in order to sign up to our mailing list.

The survey settings enabled parents to take the survey more than once if they had more than one child or young person with SEND. We used IP addresses to ensure any multiple respondents were not exact duplicates. This information could not be used to identify individual participants and will not be retained after the conclusion of the analysis. To promote the survey, we relied on organic and a small amount of paid social media, our contacts and our own website. More than 1100 people participated.

Limitations of the survey

The data produced provides a view of respondents' experiences during a six-week time period. Families' experiences may have been different depending on whether they took part in the survey at the beginning of the term or after their school had been given the opportunity to settle into the new school year. It does not claim to be representative of all families' experiences. Participation also depended on access to the internet to both learn about and complete the survey.

Limitations on participation also included other surveys in operation and the fact that the survey questions were comparatively detailed, which meant some responses were started but not finished. However, we felt that we would gain more useful information from a detailed survey, even though we would potentially gain more responses from a shorter one.

2 We have lightly edited some of the comments to redact detail that could be potentially identifying and to expand some of the acronyms – these edits are in square brackets. For some comments, we have removed background detail for the sake of brevity. Where we have done this, edits are shown with three full-stops either side of the edit.

Context for Government Guidance

For most of the first lockdown, the Government used the Coronavirus Act to relax some key statutory duties around SEND – including the duty on local authorities to make and arrange SEND provision specified in EHCPs. By the start of the autumn term, these duties were back in place – but the restoration of legal rights appears to have made little difference at ground level.

In our previous report, we looked back at how government guidance had evolved since the start of the first lockdown. Guidance has been changed so often since then, it's not practically possible to repeat this exercise. While notes are issues with each update to say generally what has been updated, it is not highlighted in the text, so a line-by-line comparison is needed to see what has been amended.

However, it is clear that as of September 2020, ALL children were expected to be back in school full-time. The only exception to this, said government guidance, would be a small number of extremely clinically-vulnerable children who had been told by their consultant not to return to school.

As we have repeatedly seen however, what the government says and what happens "on the ground" are two very different things. This is never truer than when it comes to children who require aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) such as those with tracheostomies or who require suctioning. We became aware that a large percentage of these children had not been allowed³ to return to school.

Schools were also confused because most of the detail about children with EHCPs was in separate guidance for mainstream schools.⁴

Government guidance for AGPs was covered in the document "Safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings including the use of PPE." However, it failed to recognise the concerns of schools about the space, PPE availability and trained staff required. Schools were concerned that these children – should they happen to have asymptomatic COVID-19 – could pose a transmission risk. Detailed guidance on AGPs was only issued after the October half-term holiday⁶, by which time many schools were already experiencing partial closures or "bubbles" being told to self-isolate.

³ https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/scandal-children-complex-needs-not-welcome-back-school/

 $^{4\} https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/coronavirus-guidance-what-mainstream-settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children/settings-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-disabled-children-should-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensure-the-inclusion-of-do-to-ensu$

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe#how-should-i-care-for-young-children-or-children-with-special-educational-needs-who-do-not-understand-why-they-must-stay-apart-or-who-ignore-distancing-guidelines

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-chi

About the respondents

We ran the survey for most of the first half-term. It wasn't just seeking information about back to school, but about the availability of SEND provision as a whole in the autumn of 2020. We didn't expect as many responses as our first survey because this was a longer, more in-depth survey. Also, because there were other surveys circulating, which would impact on response numbers, even though they were not necessarily seeking the same information. We had asked other groups and charities for their input into the survey so we would capture information about a wide range of children and young people.

We received 1107 responses from UK families. In this survey, we allowed for responses from all home nations, but the vast majority of respondents were from England. We did not receive enough responses (27) from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland to conduct reliable analysis. 53 respondents did not provide a location.

The English responses were broadly representative of the SEND population across the country. We had responses from 138 of England's 151 local authority areas; within these, the South-East & East of England were slightly over-represented in survey responses, whilst, London, the Midlands & the Yorkshire and Humber regions were slightly under-represented.

How representative is the survey?

It stands to reason that the parents who take part in surveys like ours have access to technology, are engaged with their children's special educational needs and support, and who have likely experienced difficulties in getting help that have meant they have become interested in SEND in general.

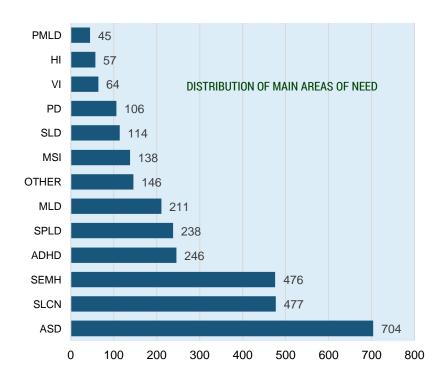
We know that parents who are not engaged with websites like ours or children's disability charities in general, are often those who know least about the SEND system. This means these families rely on the knowledge and interest in SEND of their child's school, teachers and SENCO, and the willingness of their local authority to follow the law.

This means the survey is unlikely to have reached many families whose children do not have the support they need because they don't know they need it (or who accept being told their child, "doesn't meet criteria"). It is our experience that when parents like these do find out about the local or online SEND community, they become much more knowledgeable about and active in pursuing their child's rights and engaged with SEND.

We are also unlikely to have reached parents whose child has had statutory support from a young age and or who have never had to fight for support. This group of parents are likely to be far fewer in number than the previous group. Furthermore, we are also less likely to have reached many parents whose children are on SEN Support who have not been very involved with their interventions – most probably because the school hasn't followed the SEND Code of Practice. We know from other research, e.g., "Omnibus Survey of Parents and Carers: Wave 6", as featured in a 2020 SNJ article⁷ that many parents don't even know their child is on any level of support in school, something that shouldn't ever happen.

Main area of SEND

- Most respondents listed several main areas of need, indicating that their children had a range of co-morbidities, complicating their condition and the support needed.
- More than two-thirds of respondents listed an autism spectrum condition/disorder as a main area of need.
- There was a wide range of needs listed as 'other' for example, anxiety, genetic disorders, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, and complex medical needs.



NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

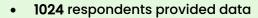
ACRONYM EXPLAINER

- PMLD: Profound & multiple learning disabilities
- HI: Hearing Impairment
- VI: Vision Impairment
- PD: Physical Disabilities
- SLD: Severe Learning Disabilities
- MSI: Multi-Sensory Impairment
- MLD: Moderate Learning Difficulties
- SPLD: Speech and language difficulties
- ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- SEMH: Social, Emotional & Mental Health
- SLCN: Speech, Language & Communication Needs
- ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorders

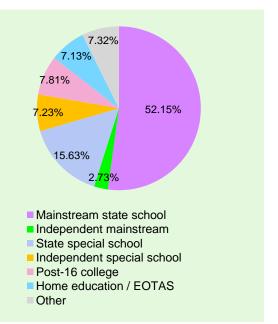
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Type of educational setting

Most parents who responded had children or young people with SEND in mainstream school. A very small number of these mainstream pupils belonged to mainstream SEND units or resource bases. Just under a quarter of respondents had children or young people in special schools, and 73 described their children as either in home education, or as receiving Education Other Than At School (EOTAS). Several respondents who described provision as 'Other' had no current setting or provision for their child.

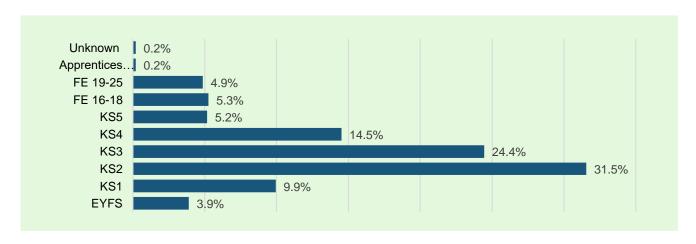


- **52% in mainstream settings** (including units & resource bases)
- 23% in state or independent / nonmaintained special schools – smaller proportion than previous survey
- 73 in home education or EOTAS higher than previous survey
- Several who responded 'other' had no current setting or provision for their children & young people

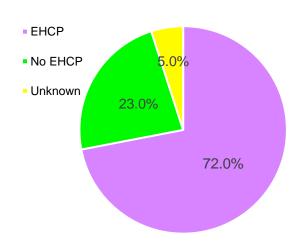


AGE OF RESPONDENTS' CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

- 1027 respondents provided data
- Spread of children and young people (children and young people) of compulsory school age generally reflects distribution of school-age SEND population
- · Primary slightly over-represented
- KS4 & KS5 slightly over-represented

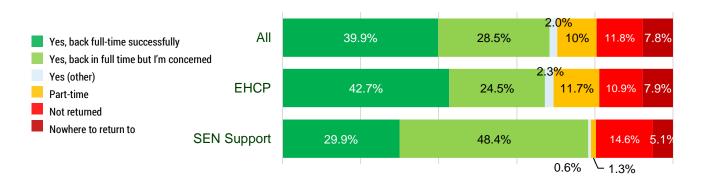


LEVEL OF SUPPORT



- 1024 respondents provided data
- More than 70% of respondents' children and young people had an EHCP – far higher than national SEND population
- 74 of the 236 children and young people who did not have an EHCP were in an EHC needs assessment process – either applying, or appealing LA decisions
- 11 respondents said their children and young people received no SEN support at all

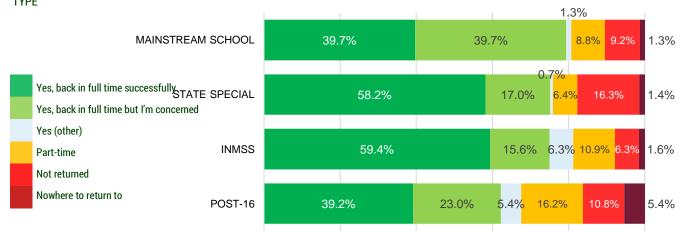
Has your child gone back to an educational setting this term?



IS YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON BACK IN SCHOOL/COLLEGE THIS TERM?

- 897 respondents provided data
- 80% of children or young people were back in their setting most were back full-time
- 12% were not back in their setting, for variety of reasons
- 8% had no school or college setting to return to
- Levels of parental concern higher under SEN Support vs EHCP
- Almost 90% of pupils returned to mainstream settings
- 16% not back at state special: pupil refusal & parental decision main reasons
- Lower proportion of full-time (i.e., pre-COVID schedule) returners in post-16 slightly greater use of part-time learning than in other settings

HAS YOUR CHILD/YOUNG PERSON GONE BACK TO AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING: SCHOOL TYPE



In all, 80% of parents and carers who answered this question reported that their child or young person with SEND was in an education setting in the early autumn. These responses included those from families whose kids didn't have a school or college placement to return to. Looking purely at those who had a school or college placement prior to lockdown, 87% were back in an education setting in the autumn term.

By comparison, Department for Education data shows that attendance rates at state schools for all pupils (SEND and non-SEND) averaged 88% during the period of this survey.

The percentage of CYP with SEND who returned to a placement in early autumn was slightly higher in mainstream (90%) and independent / non-maintained special schools (92%) than in state special (82%) or post-16 placements (84%).

Although attendance figures given by survey respondents appeared to track national attendance data, the survey threw up significant caveats:

- One in ten parents and carers reported that their child had returned to their placement on a part-time, rather than a full-time basis. For post-16 placements, one in six parents reported return on a part-time basis.
- 40% of respondents reported that their child had successfully resumed education in a setting on a full-time basis. A further 29% of respondents reported that although their child was back full-time, they had concerns about how their child's return to education was going.
- Levels of reported parental concern with return to full-time education were higher in mainstream settings than in specialist settings. They were also higher for parents and carers with children on SEN Support compared against children and young people with EHCPs.

- 12% of all respondents stated that their child or young person with SEND had not returned to an education setting in the first half of the autumn term. Parents and carers gave a variety of reasons why their child had not returned. The most common reasons given were:
 - the placement's inability or unwillingness to meet their child's SEN, under current conditions or otherwise.
 - o the clinical vulnerability of the child to COVID-19.

Recommendations for going back to school

- If children are expected to be back in school, this means ALL children, including children with SEND. They are not optional because of their disabilities. Schools should start from a position of being inclusive and welcoming to every student.
- Schools should endeavour to publish both on their website and in a printed format, how they are ensuring a safe environment and that contingency plans are for an outbreak.
- Update EHCPs/support plans to take into account of lost learning. Children with SEND are
 more likely to have lost skills and been unable to access remote learning.
- If schools are concerned that they may have difficulty supporting children with complex medical needs, such as those who require aerosol generating procedures, they should speak to their local authority outlining the additional resources they may need to be provided.
- If schools are carrying our asymptomatic testing, work with the child's parents to see how (and whether) this can be carried out. Disabled children often have extreme sensory sensitivities. It must not be used as a reason to exclude a child with SEND from school.

In addition to sending home lots of information and a back-to-school video for my child (so useful!!), they have made sure that my child is in a familiar class with friends and staff he loves. They have worked lots on hygiene habits and made it all calm and fun.

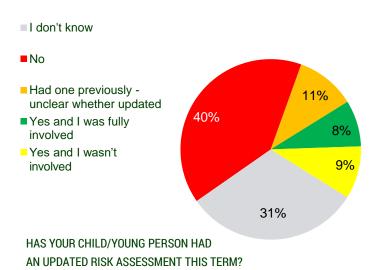
In July they gave out timetables and let us know expected plans for September including sending a video for the students to explain and talk about how they may be feeling etc. Two weeks before term started, they did the same, they spent most of the first week in every new lesson explaining what was going to be happening, they maintain a very predictable routine, all staff have been very welcoming and supportive, the organisation around the school is running smoothly, staff at all times are calm and friendly

In the summer, all children were tasked with creating a piece of work to tell their new teacher about themselves. The school provided the usually transition book for moving to new class, this year made available to all students not just SEN. Staff pen portraits & a map of class locations were provided in July when children were told their teacher for the following year. Teachers also spoke to each child either face-to-face if they were in school or via phone if still home learning before the summer holiday.

Provided detailed videos for each year group showing entrances, where to line up etc all explained by head teacher· Invited SEN children for a 15-minute refamiliarisation visit to meet teacher & classroom on one the INSET days immediately before starting back· Some year groups were moved so that children remained in the same classroom they had previously been in the year before to help keep familiarity· A teacher also moved up (but swapped classes - two-form intake school) with each of the younger groups to help continuity and familiarity· Overall, amazingly well thought out and I cannot fault the school in all their attempts·

Risk Assessments update

In our previous survey, almost 75% of families said their child had not, as far as they were aware, had a risk assessment to facilitate their child with SEND being in school. The current guidance says a risk assessment should not be used to filter attendance at school.



- 891 respondents provided data
- 18% knew that their child or young person had had a risk assessment about returning to their placement (158/891)
- Only 74 of these 158 described themselves as "fully involved" in the risk assessment the other 84 said they were not involved
- 733 respondents said either that their child had never had a risk assessment (358) or that they did not know one way or another whether there had been a risk assessment in September (375)

My son has gone back but there was no risk assessment that I know of put in place. He's dropped off at the gate & picked up with limited contact with his support workers. He has a communication book but hardly anything is written in it. I had to contact the SENCO regarding outside agencies coming in to see him & whether he could be reassessed. I'm very worried about the process of reviewing secondary schools as I've had hardly any information on the process.

There has been no risk assessment done for his needs and the school procedures for Covid-19 and before the summer I had an email when the school opened that they were under no compulsion to meet EHCP needs in accordance with the change in law-I am yet to have a response to see if anything has changed in regard to the risk assessment or if they are willing to send me any of the changes that have happened in school to help with my son's anxiety.

A full risk assessment was carried out however it has been apparent during the first term back that the information and actions suggested have not been followed and consequently has been a "tick box" exercise.

Son can't access school due to his AGP· No care plans, Health assessments, no risk assessments have been done as I was told they wanted to get the less problematic students back first and then school and nursing would look into getting him back into education·

School risk assessments say each child must be 1:1 constantly due to COVID so all pupils are part time to accommodate this.

Our school has been brilliant with support, communication and planning.

School prepared [the risk assessment] · I went to a meeting, we went through it · I then asked for a further couple of points to be added which were included

When I asked, I was told FE colleges didn't have to do one

I was consulted regarding Risk Assessment which was agreed but is not followed. My child raised concerns which were disregarded.

It was a fight to get the first risk assessment done and keep my son in school during lockdown. I did get the opportunity to contribute to it, but I haven't seen the completed document and have heard absolutely nothing about any updates to the risk assessment.

Requiring AGP oral suction, local authority stating current guidelines are unclear surrounding oral suction and trying to seek clarity.

School completed a full school risk assessment and shared it by email. Also feel fully supported by school in terms of my daughter's [attendance]

He didn't have a risk assessment but was told it would be better if he didn't attend school from mid-March June & July as he was in Year 6

NOT updated to include any info from EHCP or transitioning back after long absence!

We have a health plan being drawn up, updated the IEP and one page profile. School has updated its whole school risk assessments

Has the process of risk assessments improved?

It is apparent that the application of appropriate risk assessments for children with SEND are as patchy as they were earlier in the year. There has been conflicting and changing advice from government, so it is unsurprising that schools are confused. Updated advice was published over the summer, underlining that the purpose of a risk assessment for a child with an EHCP was to facilitate safe inclusion.

It is hard to say how prevalent any unlawful practice continues to be, where risk assessments are used actively to prevent disabled children from returning to school. However, it is clear that some schools, even in this most recent lockdown, are deciding that some children's needs are too difficult to manage in school under COVID-secure arrangements. This is particularly the case for children who require suctioning and tracheostomy care, who have been routinely told they cannot attend. Special Needs Jungle wrote about this in June 2020⁹.

Risk assessment recommendations

- Schools should avoid framing disabled children as a "risk". They should work with families
 of children with SEND to create an updated "Return to School Transition Plan" for those
 children who have not been in school in the spring term. Many of these children will not, in
 fact, have been in school for almost a year.
- A return plan should include how the child's identified needs will be met, taking into account existing EHCPs, health plans or support plans.
- In line with government guidance, parents should be key partners in creating and updating a return transition plan. Ask the parent how they feel most comfortable doing this.
- Avoid the temptation to "tell" the parent how it's going to work.
- School leaders must ensure their staff are aware of the most up-to-date government advice.
- If leaders feel their school will have difficulty financing adjustments to ensure the safe return of all pupils, they must speak to their local authority in good time.
- Mainstream schools could consider partnering with a local special school that remained fully open during lockdown, to gather learning for being inclusive and COVID-secure for all pupils.

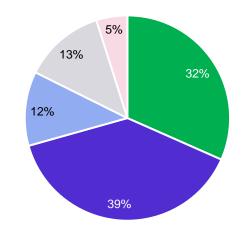
SEND Transport

 265 (32%) of 838 respondents have children/young people who are eligible for Local Authority-funded transport to their setting, mostly via taxi or bus.

Of those:

- 165 used the same mode of transport as before the pandemic. Only 26 of the 165 now had additional social distancing measures in place
- 62 had changed their transport mode, with some being transported by parents
- Two reported that their child's transport had been withdrawn & they couldn't attend school as a result

DOES YOUR CHILD QUALIFY FOR LA-FUNDED TRANSPORT?



Yes No Not Sure Not Applicable Other

Transport has not been included in the risk assessment process when it is clearly a critical control point. Bubbles are not maintained in the taxi and pupils are in close proximity. For the majority of students who catch a bus, extra buses have been provided to allow for social distancing but pupils unable to access 'mainstream' methods of transport are not afforded the same safety measure.

The school has shortened his school day by an hour. The reason they have given is cleaning and transport issues.

I'm not happy that he's missing 5 hours of education a week, after 6 months of no formal education.

SEND transport dangerous, 1 PA and 7 profoundly disabled children·

Not all provision available, kids locked in classrooms with makeshift fenced off outdoor play areas with nothing in them due to bubbles which they ignore on transport.

No social distancing methods put in place, in fact the student numbers have increased to the bus's full capacity of 8, which we're deeply concerned and cross about given the increase of COVID cases. The council seem to be able to pick and choose what laws they follow or don't, as the case maybe!

Transport is good she has LA special needs transport with same staff & pupils. Very happy with them

given he was starting today we were still sorting out transport yesterday

Very happy this service has continued with the same staff and routine which has really help his return.

No transport required as he's not allowed in school

My previous experiences with my LA and SEND have largely been fraught, but school transport is actually one area where it's been virtually pain free to set up, and it seems to be working well· I am happy so far, and so is my child·

"We were working towards independent travel on public transport, but this has now collapsed due to Covid·

Although the only measures are masks worn my escort. The 3 children are exempt from wearing mask and cannot socially distance as there is not space. It is far from ideal and they are in different bubbles at school

Although the only measures are masks worn my escort. The 3 children are exempt from wearing mask and cannot socially distance as there is not space. It is far from ideal and they are in different bubbles at school

Initially it was a problem - there was a letter with incorrect times sent to us (pick up 30 minutes school started) otherwise no communication and no means to get in contact with the department. I found out by chance that on the first day my child would be taken to school but not returned home. I felt it was a massive oversight to not communicate to parents that their child could be stranded at school, especially in a local lockdown area so even emergency contacts would be unable to collect in most cases.

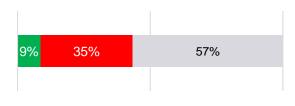
Transport Recommendations

- If a child has transport in their EHCP, it should be considered as part of the 'return to school' plan, including whether changes need to be made to allow distancing.
- A child's needs may have changed during a long period where they may have been indoors and isolated. This needs to be considered when thinking about how they get to school.
- Consideration for transport should be given well in advance to allow time for arrangements to be made, including regular testing for any staff not yet fully vaccinated.

Has the behaviour policy changed?

- 21% (150 of 720) of respondents stated that their child's school or college had changed behaviour policy in response to COVID-19
- There were very few responses describing what had changed – the most common change gave students permission to wear a mask
- 13 of these 150 respondents believed that the behaviour policy change might put their child at greater risk of exclusion

ARE YOU CONCERNED THE CHANGES TO POLICY MAY PUT YOUR CHILD AT RISK OF EXCLUSION?





School accepts that many of children cannot socially distance.

Tried to exclude child over behaviour associated with his needs.

Still use sanctions and rewards which don't help us, but are putting in adjustments to try and help my child

The website has not changed, it is supposed to be reviewed in September 2020. There has been no communication regarding reasonable adjustments for children with SEND

Parents had expressed concerns that schools would use the excuse of COVID to change behaviour policies to allow exclusions for children who could not effectively socially distance, or those whose behaviour could lead to spitting or similar. Schools must adhere to the Equality Act 2010 and employ reasonable adjustments for children with SEND.

However, respondents to this question have found little evidence of this, although many did know if the policy had been changed or not. Most changes were to do with wearing masks in communal areas, although some parents were still concerned that their children may be at greater risk of being excluded by changes made.

Behaviour Recommendations

- Any changes to behaviour policies should comply with the Equality Act 2010.
- Children with behaviour challenges or autism may react unpredictably to COVID changes, or a child may have been bereaved. Schools should consider and understand potential reasons behind a deterioration in behaviour.
- Schools should be imaginative when thinking about inclusion, never forgetting to co-production.

Provision in EHCPs - Is It All Back in Place?

Overall, 63% of families said their child wasn't getting the support and therapy detailed in their child's EHCP. What is especially concerning, is the sizeable percentage of children in each category whose parents reported that the provision in their child's EHC Plan had never been delivered. We believe this is something that should be investigated at a national level. If funds have been provided within an EHCP for an intervention that hasn't been carried out, what has happened to the money? If it hasn't been provided because of lack of therapists or staff, this is also a serious issue.

If you add these figures to those where children have had no provision returned, this is a large number of children not getting the therapy they are entitled to. For hydrotherapy for example, this comes to 75%, for Occupational Therapy (OT) 45%, for therapist delivered Speech & Language Therapy (SLT), 44% and for SLT delivered by a teaching assistant, 35%. This is simply unacceptable.

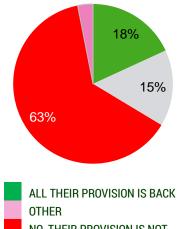
We have deliberately included these in the graphs, although reported in a separate category, rather than separating them from support that had been delivered previously, the survey is about SEND provision as a whole in the first half of the autumn term, and we think it's vital to include. If it's in an EHCP, a child or young person should be receiving it.

No matter how good an EHCP looks on paper, if the provision within it isn't being delivered, the plan is worthless and unlawful. Parents in this position should speak to their school, case officer or an SEN advice service. If they have no success, then judicial review proceedings should be considered.

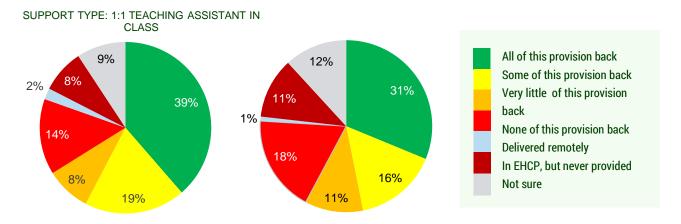
Another issue is the percentage of parents who said they didn't know if provision was back in place. This is of concern as the SEND system is supposed to be one of co-production. Parents of children with SEND and their child's teachers are supposed to be in regular communication. The pandemic has meant that face to face contact with parents has often been eliminated as parents are not allowed into school buildings. In our first report we saw that many parents heard nothing from their child's school during lockdown and this lack of communication in some quarters seems to have continued.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS AN EHCP, ARE ALL THEIR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS, INCLUDING THERAPIES, BACK IN PLACE AS THEY WERE BEFORE LOCKDOWN?

3%



- OTHER
 NO, THEIR PROVISION IS NOT
 BACK
 NOT SURE
- 450 parents and carers responded
- Less than one in five (82/450) said yes
- Nearly two-thirds (286/450) said no
- 16% (70/450) weren't sure
- 131 parents & carers also said that all the provision in their child's EHCP wasn't in place even before lockdown
- Just 2 of the 131 said that all EHCP provision had now been put in place



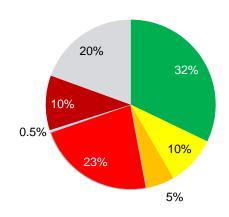
SUPPORT TYPE: 1:1 TEACHING ASSISTANT OUTSIDE CLASS

As you can see from the graphs, only around a third of parents said their child's 1:1 teaching assistant-led support was all back in place (39% for in-class, 31% for 1:1 outside class). Almost a quarter said that very little or no provision was back in place. 14% of parents of children who had 1:1 in-class in their EHCP said it was not back at all, while 18% said teaching assistant (TA) 1:1 outside of class was not back at all.

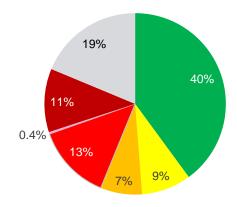
This may be because of the way bubbles have been set up, meaning teaching assistants are leading other bubbles instead of carrying out their previous roles. While this may be practical for the school, if a child's EHCP specifies the use of a TA, then this adjustment is unlawful.

It may also be because of teacher absences through illness or having to self-isolate. If this is the case, the school should backfill with supply teachers. The funding available by an EHCP that the school receives hasn't changed. Therefore, if the school finds itself with additional costs, it is down to the local authority to provide this.

For TA-led groups, there was a similar picture with 40% in-class all back, with 20% saying only a small amount or none was back. For similar work outside class, only 32% said their support was all back while 28% said none or very little back in place.



SUPPORT TYPE: TA-LED SMALL GROUP WORK, OUTSIDE CLASS



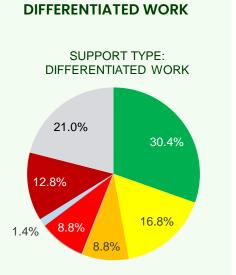
SUPPORT TYPE: TA-LED SMALL GROUP WORK, IN CLASS

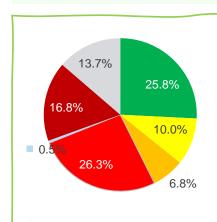
One of the easiest and most basic methods of support to put in place, should be **differentiated work**. Yet we saw in our earlier report, a vast number of children with SEND went without this during the first lockdown which severely impacted their ability to access learning.

We know that some schools did a fantastic job of ensuring differentiated support was delivered, so we know it is completely possible.

Yet even in the autumn term, when all schools were back, only 30% of parents said their children with EHCPs work had been properly differentiated.

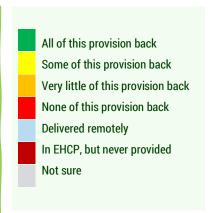
17.6% said differentiation of their child's work either still wasn't back or very little was.



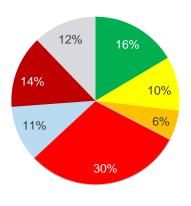


NURTURE GROUPS

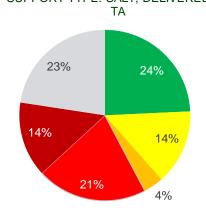
A relatively small number of children have access to nurture groups, and these are usually children who have the greatest emotional needs. So, it's concerning that over a quarter have not received it since they returned to school at all.



Support Type: Therapies in EHCPs

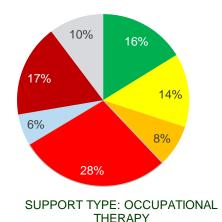


SUPPORT TYPE: SALT, DELIVERED BY THERAPIST

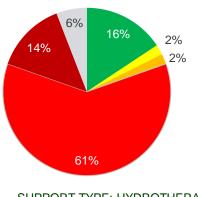


Anecdotally, we have heard that many therapists are not being allowed back into schools, which is something that is not reflected in SUPPORT TYPE: SALT, DELIVERED BY national guidance.

We can see that for 11% of children who had speech and language therapy delivered by a qualified therapist in their EHCP, therapy has moved online. But 30% have received none at all, with a further 6% saying their child has received very little. Just 16% say this therapy is all back.







SUPPORT TYPE: HYDROTHERAPY

For children who had therapy delivered by a TA, almost a quarter had it fully restored with a further 14% having some of it back. However, another quarter had either no, or very little speech and language therapy restored.

While the actual numbers were smaller, children who need hydrotherapy have overwhelmingly not had it back with 61% of parents reporting no therapy at all in the first part of the autumn term.

Occupational therapy has similarly suffered with 28% of children who have this in their EHCP not getting it back. Just 16% of children received either all of their provision of either type of therapy

They have taken away all of his provisions 23 hours 1:1

My daughter spent time in a colocated special school, and this no longer happens

Counselling is but speech and language and OT I do not think are restarting.

Nothing in my child's EHCP has been started since September 2020

My child has never had any of the provisions in her EHCP, despite it being in place for 4 years because she is unable to attend school Most activities that involve leaving school grounds not taking place so some learning of independence skills not taking place.

Physio and Speech aren't available· Neither is her 1·1 support· SaLT provision training for staff was never put in place in reception, so she went a whole year without staff trained in communication skill, told by SENDCO in July 2020 that training would commence in September 2020 by Zoom, now told that no training available due to staff shortages I am considering making a complaint to the LA, as I've been patient enough and reasonable endeavours duty ended:

The school assure me they are working on it, but it is a work in progress and despite my asking, they are not very transparent about what is and isn't in place·

Waiting to hear from CAMHS. But all other provision back to normal after half term (specialist teaching team)

Support at playtimes is harder as they previously had a facility for children who need support throughout the school to play together in a supported way / with sand / games / playdoh etc· This is now not possible because of bubbles· Staff are working hard to help her try and join in with play in bubble with fewer shared resources, but this still doesn't work as well as previous provision·

They are not all in place but they are keeping my child safe and I feel that this should be their priority. School are making sure safety is first and they are meeting my child's educational needs as much as possible without putting him or others at risk.

No hydrotherapy in place· Community visits etc not being done·

Sensory circuits and communication group have both stopped

SLT and OT are virtual

Better than before lockdown!

He is getting virtually nothing mainly due to social distancing required between staff and students. Also, no outside agencies currently allowed on premises e.g., school nurse

We have yet to restart attachment /sensory therapy· It doesn't work virtually

SaLT refusing to go into school· No assessment been done in a year!! Specialist teacher refusing to go into school either·

No therapists have visited yet and he desperately needs a full ed psych review for transition EHCP to small mainstream secondary

They weren't in place before lockdown, never mind after

My son has not received any one-to-one support within a classroom, and he is not capable of keeping up with work and gets punished

My daughter's teacher and TA have been absolutely amazing at settling her into her new class. Her PE leader and coach have also been involved in making her needs met and allowing her to be included safely. I cannot fault the team at her mainstream school this year.

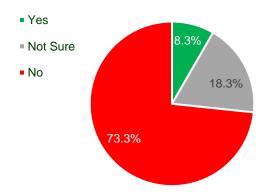
Restarting Statutory Provisions Recommendations:

- Schools should ensure that all staff have read the relevant guidance (even though this can be difficult with the speed of changes) and ensure they are in compliance.
- Schools should be aware that Section 42 of the Children and Families Act is fully in force and should be followed.
- Relevant staff should be conversant with the contents of a child's EHCP or support plan and regularly review it to ensure provisions are being put in place.
- The SENCO and class teacher should have a meeting with the child's parents to understand how they have been affected by lockdown, even if they have been in school. If needs have grown significantly, it may be necessary for an early review of the EHCP to increase support, including new assessments e.g., speech and language, occupational therapy and educational psychology, as needed, to increase support. If an LA is concerned about including additional support in an EHCP, it could be termed "COVID-Intensive Support" for a specific period, which can be extended if needed in the next annual review. The point of it being included in an EHCP, is to ensure that it "must" happen and has some measure of accountability (however small)
- Schools should develop secure systems to ensure provision needs are shared between relevant staff members. Non-teaching support staff should be made aware of any issues stemming from a child's needs that may be present at break or lunch times.
- If a need for social distancing puts a child's support at risk, every effort should be made to seek a solution to avoid the support not being delivered. For example, seek support from the local authority, DCMO (NHS Liaison for SEND) or Clinical Commissioning Group is a health issue, or the Department for Education itself.
- Schools should find innovative ways to communicate with families, depending on the family's circumstances. There are a number of good practice examples on the gov.uk Department for Education site, as well as nasen and other sites. If in doubt – ask how the family wants to be communicated with.

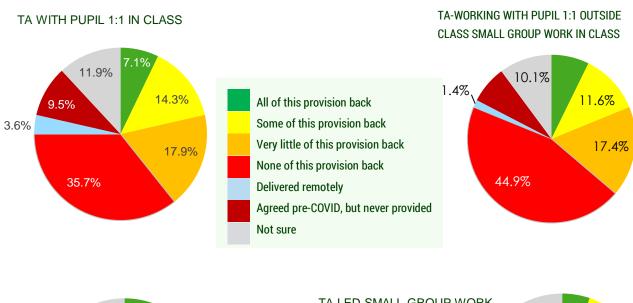
Is Provision for learners on SEN Support All Back in Place?

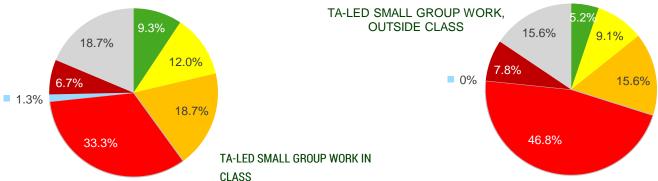
- 120 parents responded
- Only 8% of parents & carers in this category said that all of their child's prior SEN support was back in place
- A further 18% of parents & carers weren't sure
- A further 62 parents & carers said that their child did not have the SEN support that they needed prior to coronavirus

IF YOUR CHILD DOES NOT HAVE AN EHCP, ARE ALL THEIR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS, INCLUDING THERAPIES, BACK IN PLACE AS THEY WERE BEFORE LOCKDOWN?



Provision under SEN Support: TA Delivered



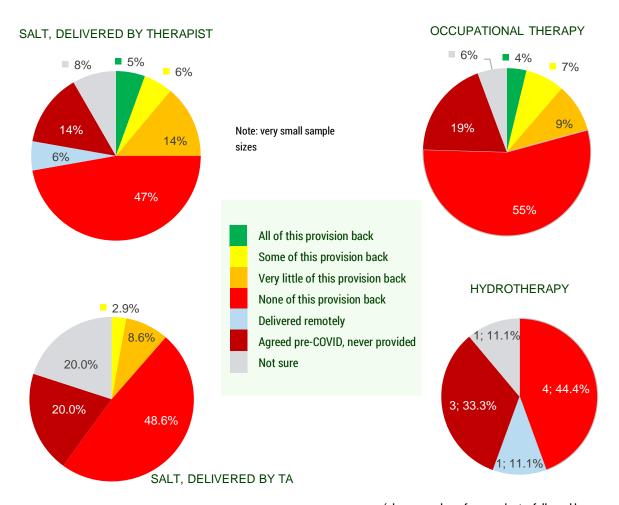


The large chunks of red tell a stark story. While children with an EHCP may have missed out on a lot of support, those without a plan have been hardest hit. Just a small fraction of children had their provision restored by the end of the first half of the autumn term. Once again, we see parents whose children have been promised provision that never materialised and again, many parents simply don't know what's happening to their child's support inside school.

Here we also see a higher rate of provision delivered remotely, which indicates that some children have either had to isolate or have not been allowed back to school.

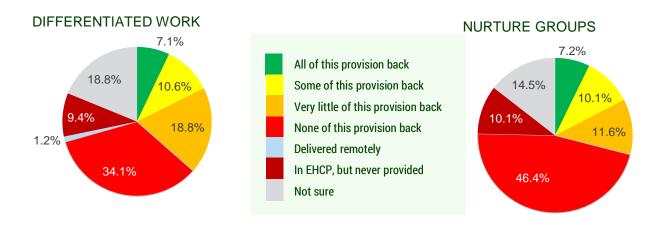
While it is true that these are based on smaller numbers, we have no reason to believe that there are large swathes of children on SEN Support who are getting better support. If anything, parents who, if anything, parents who take surveys such as this are more likely to be engaged with and knowledgeable about their child's provision. We know from the government's own figures ¹⁰ that many parents do not even know their child is on the SEN register, despite it being a requirement that this is the case.

SEN Support provision: Therapies



(above: number of respondents, followed by percentage)

Other SEN Support Provision

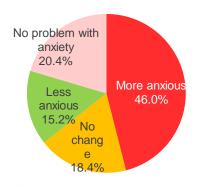


Restarting SEN Support Recommendations:

- Many of the recommendations for children with EHCPs above, are the same for children with SEN Support plans or individual health plans.
- Schools should ensure that every parent of a child on SEN Support is aware they are on the SEN Register and is invited to be actively involved as a partner in their support.
- Schools should meet or otherwise communicate with the parents of all children on SEN
 Support to assess how their needs have changed during this extended period out of school.
- Assess, Plan, Do, Review plans should be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- If a child's needs have increased or they have lost significant learning, schools should consider arranging assessments with relevant experts, such as an educational psychologist, Speech and Language Therapist, or counsellor.
- If the child's needs have increased, schools should speak to the parent about whether it would be appropriate to request a statutory assessment for an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Anxiety & Return to School

- 631 responses
- 336 responded that their child had experienced <u>increased</u> anxiety since returning to school
- 111 responded that their child's anxiety levels had <u>decreased</u> on return
- 134 reported no change in their child's anxiety levels since returning to school



In some ways, lockdown normalised him not going to school but his anxiety rocketed with uncertainty around not having a school to go back to:

The anxiety he has is not so much due to Covid rules as it is about the changes to the provision and education in timetable, and no music provision as singing is considered too high risk.

My son suffers from anxiety so any change he finds hard to deal with, he has been very unusually quiet, and a bit withdrawn since going back to school, not wanting to socialise much. He regressed with his speech during the 6 months of lockdown.

Over lockdown she was diagnosed with severe anxiety. School have offered a buddy to assist to help her back in but have yet to find a buddy or fulfil their promises. Daughter not confident she won't feel extremely anxious in school

Our previous survey found a split between an increase and decrease in anxiety. However, this time around, it's clear that going back to school made children much more anxious. Worries included fears for themselves about potentially catching COVID-19, about and their support or placement, about wearing masks, the changes they would find at school because of Coronavirus, and fears for their family.

My child is suffering with extreme anxiety, he will not leave the house, he has become completely mute since reintroducing the idea of going back to school in the summer holidays. His social story from school escalated his behaviour and he has refused to go to school.

Contact from school was left to the last week before going back, days even. This caused a huge amount of anxiety too.

New high levels of anxiety No support from College Threats of being kicked off his named provision course.

School are being very understanding and supportive. They have made it clear they are happy to go at her pace, and approach is to make her feel safe and offer a very gradual transition.

My son has EOTAS. He has had some of his provision during lockdown via Zoom but, due to his severe anxiety, he won't see anyone face-to-face due to the fear of catching CV-19.

Some of his provision stopped· Riding with RDA hasn't restarted because of being unable to do so safely, with his level of need· OT-led Life skills stopped & hasn't restarted due to my son's anxiety of CV-19 & not wanting anyone in the house· We can't start including further provision due to my son's anxiety·

A mixture of being back in the college, remote learning and I am having to fight for support to be put in place, has been left without support some days already leading to distress, anxiety and meltdowns.

Anxiety has increased New subjects, teachers, rooms My child's school hasn't prepared them or acted on my suggestions how they could prepare

Recommendations for managing anxiety:

- Anxiety is a common feature of some conditions but even so, it depends very much on the
 individual child and their needs. However, in general, many children will be experiencing
 heightened anxiety as a result of COVID, especially if they have been directly impacted
 within their family. Therefore, good communication is vital with parents/carers and with
 children and young people themselves. This should be started even before a confirmed
 back-to-school date.
- Schools can prepare "back to school" graphics, including tips for coping with anxiety.
- Schools should consider implementing mindfulness or meditation sessions as part of the school day.
- Teachers should implement strategies to ease anxiety and consider employing social stories for children who need them.

Back to school collaboration with parents

- 36% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the school had fully involved them in helping their child back to school or college
- 41% agreed or strongly disagreed
- Respondents with children in special schools were more likely to agree with this statement than those with children in mainstream or post-16 settings
- The most common comment received in answer to the question about support in place for transition was, "nothing"

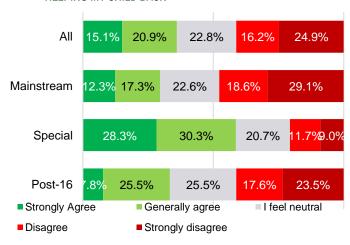
We had a physical tour of the school in July with a member of the pastoral support team and were in contact with school prior to start of term about making sure our daughter understood who she could go to if she needed help, could leave the classroom if she needed to when overwhelmed and about anxiety of arriving. Asked for meeting with SENCO but this didn't happen initially. As soon as she was unable to attend after first day, school have been extremely supportive. We are in almost daily contact with the SENCO and trying to engage daughter. Reduced timetable offered and no pressure

I've been made to feel like I've been irrational & unreasonable requesting meeting the Head, SENCO & class teacher regarding my daughter's needs. I've been ignored several times now when I've asked if her provision is back in place as absolute duty regarding EHCPs is fully reinstated. I'm a teacher myself and I've had meetings with parents after school. The schools lack of cooperation and inconsistency compared to my own school is very frustrating.

being put on her or us about attendance.

They have tried. They did gradual part time to full time integration over 2 weeks (not that my son wanted this, he wanted to be with his friends). They have visual timetables & regular breaks worked into it. However, he doesn't have a 'safe space' that feels safe, he reports that the Senior Leadership Team are following him around and his class size has increased since he has returned, which was already an issue as his reports and even his rubbish EHCP states he needs small groups and small class sizes.

"THE SCHOOL / COLLEGE HAVE INVOLVED ME FULLY IN HELPING MY CHILD BACK"

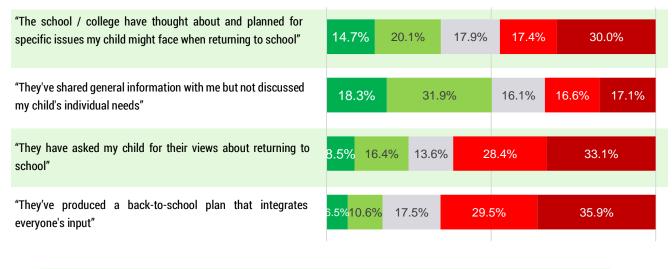


Very little. The risk assessment has basically been ignored. As parents we specifically asked for actions to be followed to allow our child to cope with the return to school. However, it's apparent the document has been ignored. We had to send copious e-mails & insist on a meeting with relevant staff. The stress this caused us as parents and the stress our child has encountered has been immense. We're feeling it's almost like we don't have an EHCP. The school seem to have forgotten they're funded to support our child.

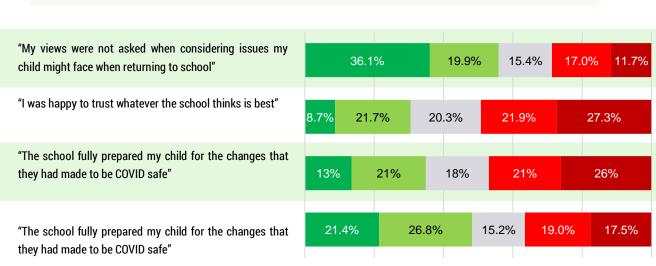
Nothing at all No transition, no adjustments

A 10-minute walk-through the classroom the day before school started and an emailed social story. We had to jump up and down about loss of nurture group breakfast and lunch (for quiet spaces). Breakfast nurture is now alone in the corridor outside his classroom. Furious. Ear defenders & lunch in the hall now means he doesn't eat... Hygiene issues a real problem from a sensory point of view. Little to no help because staff would have to PPE....

The irony is the school referred me to CAMHS before the end of summer term for advice on how to manage my child's anxiety in anticipation/ preparation for going back to school. An anxiety intervention was decided and I've been working over the summer with a child wellbeing practitioner. All was going well until school started. The programme recommends collaboration between parents & school but I'm the only one involved in this part. I have had no collaboration at all."







In July, they gave out timetables and let us know expected plans for September, including sending a video for the students to talk about how they may be feeling. Two weeks before term started, they did the same. They spent most of the first week in every new lesson explaining what was going to be happening and keep a very predictable routine. All staff are very welcoming & supportive, organisation around the school is running smoothly, staff at all times are calm & friendly.

Transition meeting in July, regular contact throughout lockdown with SENCO· Opportunity to meet & speak to new Year 6 teacher via Zoom·Risk assessment in place around social distancing, bubble rules· Given booklet with visuals·

This is the first time I feel that a school understands my child's needs and listens to me as a parent. My suggestions are listened to and taken on board. I feel that by us co-working together made the transition a lot smoother. This year was a huge transition, and my child has done amazing.

My child's key worker arranged to meet her each day to discuss her concerns. This has worked very well. Before lockdown she attended a group before school for pupils with anxiety but it's no longer possible to hold it. Her key worker recognised that this would be difficult for her so arranged a 1-1 instead. I was going to bring this up as a concern, but school beat me to it which was very reassuring.

Nothing, despite my asking. We were told SEN plans were not legal requirements, so they are not following them due to COVID guidelines. They haven't replied to my emails or returned phone calls regarding my concerns.

He is new to the school, so all staff involved with my child have made sure they are very familiar with his EHCP· They are very keen to communicate with us as parents and regularly do so· Most of all they value my son's opinion and listen to him·

Recommendations for back-to-school co-production

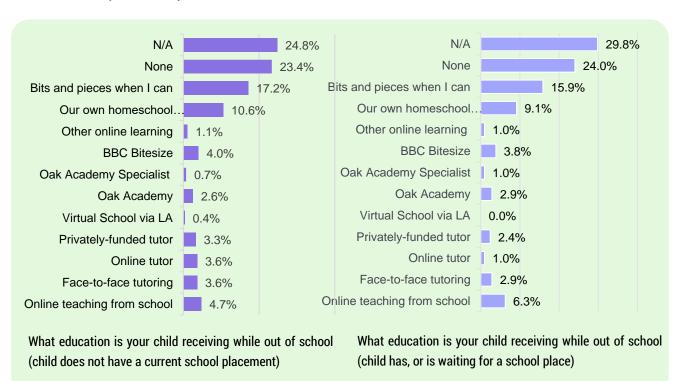
We think this is perhaps the most important section of the report because parents and their disabled children and young people will soon be facing the same situation after the early 2021 lockdown.

We hope some of the experiences of these parents can be considered by schools that may not have had such a successful re-integration.

- Start early. Even before you have a confirmed return date, speak to parents and to the children/ young people themselves, to ask where sticking points may arise and what might work to mitigate them. Plan to put these accommodations in place in good time.
- If creating a "welcome back" pack, consider the specific needs of children with SEND.
 Consider making more visual or easy-read versions and videos, including addressing potential anxiety points.
- Send timetables or visual information home in good time. Arrange a video call with parent and child to see if they have any questions or worries. To help frame Before the call, send a prompt sheet for example, "What are you excited/worried/unsure about?" to help frame the chat, or ask them to draw a picture of how they're feeling.
- Ensure all members of staff likely to come into contact with the child knows what these accommodations are and how to support each child.
- Arrange for children with SEND who haven't been in school to start a day early to help them get settled. Monitor to see how they are coping, being aware of potential masking behaviours. After each week, review progress with parents and other staff members
- Continue good home-school communications so you can see if stressors at school that may not seem a problem, are being acted out at home.
- If there are new staff members, send pictures home of each one with their names and a cheery message from them. Send pictures or video of any new classrooms or spaces.
- If a child or parent voices a concern *take it seriously*, even if you consider it a trivial matter. It might be to you; it isn't to them.
- Re-familiarise yourself with the provisions in children's EHCPs or support plans. Discuss with the SENCO any potential issues. Reassure parents that provisions will be in place, and if there will be any changes.
- If your ideas or your plan has worked well, share them with other teachers and schools!

If your child is not in school at all, what education are they receiving?

- 181 respondents multiple options could be selected
- 137 of the 181 respondents said their children had a school / college placement, or were awaiting a placement – their responses are on the right
- Only a small percentage were using Oak Academy
- Almost a quarter responded "none"



Only able to access online learning through standard app/website and homework set· I have asked for homework/resources but have had no

We are currently waiting for school to commission online tutoring

Online learning websites school uses, only briefly looked at OAK so far

Private Cookery tutor· Zoom social tutor· RDA· Numeracy-literacy tutor· Music club· £225/week·

The LA are now allegedly going to provide a tutor for 6 hours a week.

while waiting for timetable to be sorted we have home-schooled while in communication with some teachers about work, to try and keep up.

LA Funded bespoke Social Curriculum (2 1:1 part time teachers)using AET framework

It is very difficult to home school & manage fighting for his education & manage the house & look after other family members needs

- Many children were "waiting" for provision to be organised long after most children were back in school.
- Parents were paying out of their own pockets for private tutors for teaching that should be provided by school
- Just 11% of those with no school were given remote learning from their own placement

What worked & what would have helped

Our final section is less about numbers and more about the value of working with families. How do you know what works for families of children, or what would have made their experiences better? The answer, of course, is to ask. Which is what we did. Although many parents answered that nothing had worked well, we hope these comments from those parents who did have some good help prove inspiring and useful.

What support worked well for your family?

The whole school communication about Covid regulations has been good and we feel reassured as a family that they are doing the absolute most that they can to make the pupils and staff safe.

The videos showing the school as it now looked were good

Placed him in a class with extra support and other children with similar disabilities.

They are talking to the students and constantly reassuring them that they can talk to any teacher if they have any questions.

- Lots of communication and information
- Listening and acting on what has been heard about what would help
- Flexibility over what is being learned and when
- Thinking about what helps each individual child with SEND, rather than expecting them to fit
 in with the rest of the class.
- Using social stories and visual prompts and timetable
- Using videos to show changes ahead of time
- Spend time getting the children used to being back in school rather than rushing back into a timetable
- Letting the children with SEND back in early to have a look around while the school is quiet
- Keeping the main support staff consistently the same, thinking about the needs of the children they are there to support rather than using them as a convenient resource.
- Having school leaders who are knowledgeable and interested in SEND
- If needed for the child's best interests, a part-time transition back to school timetable for the first week.
- Understanding that the mental health needs of children with SEND and the way they present may be different in children with SEND
- Changing the uniform to make it easier for children with SEND
- Kindness

College seem to have thought out bubbles etc and now seem to have more consistent keyworkers, this seems to make him more settled as it is a worker he likes. It makes it easier for communication with home as more as same person responds to communication book each day.

Before, he was with different workers each day so unable to build up relationships and communication often got lost."

I emailed them what wasn't being done and what needed to change, and they put it in place the next day, so they have been prompt and easily approachable when I have needed to speak to them. They have benefits of being a small school and staff, but then with training and absence, this then becomes a big problem because there's no staff to support my son.

They've given social stories about cleaning hands, social distancing & masks. The parent support advisor is amazing with a social story after my dad died. Until now they've been reasonable but covid is being used an excuse to be dreadful and not give support.

The school have been excellent in all respects following the return of pupils, following a very detailed risk assessment with immediate changes as necessary due to on-going situation.

We are confident with the Headteacher's handling & good practice within the school·

Tune with the school pet· Breaks and a quiet area if needed not just for my child but for the whole bubble and my son likes that others are having things like this too·

Adopting whole school/whole class practices to include everyone and meet his needs, e·g·, Traffic Lights: putting a small traffic light on the corner of everyone's desk that indicates if they can do the work, if they can carry on but need help or if they need urgent help, which means the teacher/TA can help individuals without disturbing everyone else and encourages him to work independently without help where he can· Providing us with a social story about all the things that would be same/different, so he was used to the ideas of spaced-out desks/hand sanitising stations/lunch at desk etc, before he went back· Agreeing to do a phased return if needed but be flexible (he hasn't needed it yet) and agreeing a joint communication strategy which has worked really well

Communicated prior to the return to school· SENCO has tried hard to ensure all therapies in place· OT still not done as previous one left at end of last term and LA not helped· Year bubbles sticking to rooms and teachers moving rooms instead has helped reduce anxiety· Also, staggered starts/lunches

I like the book to write comments in which allows me to see what my son has done during the day

Lots of information and good communication

The school spent the first two weeks with the children off-timetable, to help with the transition back into full-time education. This worked well for my son and I'll be suggesting they do this at the start of every new term.

They produced a document with pictures to explain what was going to be different. The school's questionnaire, sent to each family, about their child's needs and experience since lockdown was a great initiative. Each child also is having a full therapy review. The PTA set up an online chat group, which has been fabulous for getting information and support. The school has been amazing about communicating, with regular newsletters from the head and frequent email from the primary deputy head and the class teacher. The school set up specific email addresses, monitored seven days a week, to field questions and concerns.

I have been encouraged by the care and thought given to my son's transition to his new senior school - they have gone above and beyond making adaptations needed and every thought has been given to the current Covid situation with good practical outcomes for my child. Nothing is prevented from happening, he is able to participate in a full academic and sporting programme along with his peer group.

The school shared the plan for the return to school really early, so there was plenty of time to ask questions.

They listened to both myself and my son - and acted on his worries to support him. They've built up a friendship for him. For the first time ever, my son is happy to be at school.

What support would have worked well for your family?

A number of parents answered that their school had done everything possible and given the circumstances, they had done their best. Some said their schools had been "brilliant", and "fantastic" and their children had clearly had good experiences.

However, those parents whose children had not benefited from the support they needed had clear ideas for what might have worked better.

More flexibility about curriculum. Use of youth worker or engagement tutor.

More communication before the start of school to prepare my child and have the support in place without having to fight for everything Remote contact with previous class teacher during lockdown; Remote class meeting with new teacher/TA; Pictures on school website with changes to school; Visual timetable of his school day; Discussion about how the EHCP will be delivered.

- The most common theme was good communication and in plenty of time
- Using human ways of passing on information such as videos from the head and relevant staff rather than lots of text-based letters
- Better plans for children and young people starting new placements such as pre-visits and video calls.
- Communicating a "back-up plan" for if staff have to self-isolate
- Having children with anxiety and autism back for half a day before school began to help them re-familiarise themselves with the school
- Planning for all children, not just bolting on something for children with SEND
- Making changes more gradual, taking into account the needs of all children, not just the neuro-typical ones.
- Direct contact from the SENCo to ensure all staff have meeting the child are briefed
- Efforts to review EHCPs and ensure the provision in them is in place for the child's return.
- For local authorities and schools to have understood and adhered to the return to school guidance and to the Children and Families Act.
- Using risk assessments to support the child to attend school rather than a tool for keeping them at home
- Making contact with families of children with SEND well ahead of an expected return to plan for a safe re-entry, taking needs into account
- Better planning for SEND transport from the local authority to ensure routes, escorts and suitable vehicles were available.

They could have listened to me and put these strategies in place proactively for the start of term, I didn't ask for anything she didn't have in place before lockdown. They could also have provided extra transition support on top of what they did for everyone.

Transport should have been included in the return to school plans. The transport arrangements where my son is collected at 7:30am and deposited outside of the school before it opens, is not an ideal situation, with school starting at 8:50am. There are two new students that will be picked up by his taxi next week, so I am concerned about how long his journey will be and the impact of 'travel' on a child who has conditions that cause fatigue and affect his ability to concentrate.

Thinking more about his needs when designing the general COVID adjustments for school· His arrival and departure are significantly affected as is his toileting· I feel I have to accept this else they will say they can't meet his needs and he can't be in school which he (and I and his father) desperately need to have some respite after 6 months with no break from caring·

I would have liked them to have had an end of Summer socially distances picnic or park meet so that they felt they were going back to a cohesive group.

Having my child and others with ASD and anxiety back for half a day would have helped a great deal, for them to see the one-way systems and provisions in place.

A clearer plan for children with SEN in terms of this is what school is doing, this has changed, this hasn't, this we are not sure but will find out, and this may happen, and if it does, we do so and so, etc. Autistic people need clear instructions no matter how unlikely these instructions would be followed. Though the school did send out mindfulness and other wellbeing advice.

Knowing at some point that staff may have to self-isolate, having a back-up plan would have been a really good idea, as now, after only a week-and-a-half of 1:1 TA he is now back without one and on his own to cope with the daily school life. This means that his behaviour at home is now reverting back to how it was as we had seen an improvement with him having a TA.

If school had spoken to us and set out what would be in place, done a risk assessment, made her feel as though they actually wanted her there and were willing to work with her, the anxiety about returning might not be so entrenched.

Meetings could have been held to ask about our experiences during time away from school and make a rough plan of how to establish what extra support might be needed by my child.

The LA could have organised transport more than two days before term:

The Local Authority should have listened to my child's voice much, much sooner. He said from the very beginning that he could not access online learning and wanted a fresh start at a new school. He was ignored and when he could not access with the LA's attempts at online learning - totally unsupported and only addressing academic catch up - they again tried to lay blame at his door suggesting that he was in some way not willing to engage.

Distinguish her needs from others. Everything has been about the greater good and those who are different have been expected to get on with it. Also, allow my son to do a course other than the one he's completed already.

Contact with us, discussion of expectations due to restrictions and bubbles. The school should have updated its behavioural policy to include reasonable adjustments for SEND pupils. Daily updates on their progress, so any difficulties could be acted upon immediately.

No different Bubbles in transport

Conclusion

By the time the autumn term 2020 began, the statutory duties to make and arrange SEN provision in EHCPs had been fully restored. However, it is clear there has been a widespread failure to implement provision or to ensure children and young people with SEND receive the support to which they are entitled and which, in many cases, has been hard fought-for by parents.

Both our summer 2020 and this survey have highlighted that it is very possible for schools to think of the child or young person as an individual first and meet as many needs as possible during a pandemic, whether it is a legal requirement or not.

From our results, it is apparent that where parents were happy with their child's school and its efforts to support their child pre-pandemic, they were more likely to be happy with the way they were supported during lockdown and reintegration to school. The opposite was also true. If a parent was already facing issues with the way a school helped their disabled child, lockdown and reintegration brough just more of the same

It is clear that some parents believe, with good reason, that their children's needs, and education have been pushed to one side for the convenience of the majority. In some cases, risk assessments were used to filter attendance and prevent children from returning to school. The percentage of children returning to special schools (82%) was significantly lower than for mainstream schools (89.3%) during the autumn term¹¹.

It is particularly concerning that 8% of respondents reported that they had no placement to send their child back to. It would be useful to investigate the reasons for this further and determine what effect the Covid response has had on placement allocation.

The percentage of young people returning to post-16 placements has also been low (84%) and one in six of these returned on a part-time basis. The reasons for this are unclear and require further investigation.

Failure to ensure provision is back

Successful schools used guidance as tools for inclusion, rather than barriers to a return. While there is little evidence that schools actively changed behavioural policies in the wake of COVID, there were also children who found themselves excluded within the first week of a return, or on a part-time timetable.

It is clear that there was a widespread failure to ensure that provision, whether statutory in an EHCP or as part of SEN Support, was back in place. Therapies in particular were not in place with few external therapists allowed into the school environment, despite government guidance stating that this was allowed.

The reasons for this are not so clear, whether providers themselves were not permitting therapists to go into school, or schools deciding it was not sufficiently safe to allow them in, to the detriment of the child with SEND. Some therapy was continued remotely, which worked well for some children but not for others.

There are clear inconsistencies in policies across the country and the support being provided. For example, of those who received speech and language therapy 11% moved to online delivery, but 30% received none at all and 6% very little. Only 16% of children received all of the speech and language therapy outlined in their EHCP.

Additionally, children who have already missed large amounts of therapy face an even longer wait to get it back. Often, therapy such as occupational therapy or speech and language therapy is crucial to enable a child to develop cognitive understanding or language, social skills or stamina and so they will be doubly disadvantaged by missing what is enabling them to learn.

https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/

Given that schools have been allocated funding to carry out these interventions, and there is an absolute legal duty for LAs to ensure that the provision in EHCPs is delivered, we believe the failure in delivering it should be investigated at a national level.

Teaching Assistants used elsewhere

At the most fundamental level of teaching assistant support, only around a third of parents said their child's 1:1 teaching assistant-led support was all back in place, while a quarter found very little or no provision was back in place. For many children this kind of support is vital to enable them to keep up with the pace of the class or to understand the work at all. This raised great concerns that while the education of all children will have suffered during the pandemic, those with SEND will find it most difficult to catch up without the support they need.

Children and young people on SEN support (with no EHCP), experienced a dramatic reduction in support after the return to school in the autumn term of 2020. Only 8% of parents/carers said that all of the support their child had previously been receiving was back in place. Even before the pandemic, outcomes for children on SEN support were particularly poor, so it is alarming that this group has been so acutely affected.

Little SEND provision for those left at home

For those who could not return, most received little support with education at home. Staffing shortages and the additional demands of COVID-19 planning appear to have further reduced the support available for those unable to attend in person. Fewer than 10% reported receiving and using online teaching from school. This raises concerns about the appropriateness and accessibility of online education for disabled children and young people.

As so often throughout the pandemic (and before), disabled children and young people have been an afterthought and their particular needs have not been adequately considered or addressed.

The narrative that all children were expected to attend school full-time when clearly not all were allowed to, has also contributed to a lack of contingency planning at national level. It is crucial that families and/or schools are properly resourced to support these children before schools open fully.

Before full reopening in Spring 2021, there must be meaningful engagement with families and schools so that any additional resources and support required to facilitate safe attendance can

be put in place. Full and detailed contingency plans must be put in place for those children and young people who are not able to attend so that they can access education in a way that works for them and their families.

What makes the difference?

We would like to see research into what factors make the difference between the two extremes. What is it about an individual school's profile, ethos, leadership, resilience and staff that enabled it to excel in its support of disabled children and young people during this incredibly difficult time? A big part is clearly the quality of leadership and perhaps this is something that Ofsted can look more closely at.

From our section about what would have worked well, parents did not want anything expensive or extraordinary. Better communication, more advance planning for children with SEND to ensure inclusion and more thought about how each child might differ from the average child in what they need to get back to school safely and happily. While teacher training for SEND must be improved from initial teacher training right through to school leadership level, none of what families needed here required an expert SEND knowledge. It simply required compassion, an inclusive mindset and a will to make it happen. In far too many schools, this seems to have been fallen by the wayside in the struggle to get children back to school under COVID guidelines.

Our survey has revealed a huge gap between what *should* have been happening in September and what actually happened. It confirms that the provision in statutory plans is not being delivered in most cases, and those without plans have been severely disadvantaged.

We've learned that there isn't any "secret sauce" or magic ingredient that worked to support families well. Those schools who did well in integrating all children back into school:

- Thought and planned ahead, considering the potential barriers and took steps to mitigate them.
- Closely communicated with and included the family in planning for a smooth return
- Used innovative and inexpensive measures such as use of video to record messages and clear explanations of changes to the environment.
- Above all, they were determined to be inclusive.

It does seem that schools had difficulties in following national guidelines. This has not been helped by the fact that guidance has constantly changed with updated information being difficult to isolate.

Although some action has been taken to address the gaps between rhetoric and reality, for example through issuing clearer guidance, it has been too little, too late.

We believe there is a lot that can be done to make this guidance easier to follow, more presentable, and easier to find what you are looking for. Local authorities could also do a better job at disseminating the information to both schools and to families.

What needs to happen now

We hope the government should consider all these factors when allocating catch-up funding. We are concerned that more children who may previously not have needed the support of an EHCP, may indeed now require a statutory assessment. They have not only have missed learning, but perhaps also lost some ability to learn as easily as their peers. Therefore, in our opinion, there is a very strong case for an urgent uplift in the notional SEN budget. This will allow schools to fund more intensive resources for children currently on lower levels of SEN support, to ensure needs can be met quickly. Although this funding is not for specific children, it needs to be protected for the sole use of funding additional SEND resources and expert input

Careful attention should be given to what "catch up" will look like for disabled children and young people. Not only have many missed out on therapies and education, but there also is a risk that they could be further disadvantaged by a narrow definition of catchup that does not take account of their needs and priorities. It is also vital that mental health for children with SEND is prioritised through investment in support.

Disabled children and young people have been particularly disadvantaged by lockdown and school closures. However, as we noted in our previous report, the pandemic has amplified existing problems with the SEND system and inequalities in education.

The SEND Review must take all these factors into account when considering changes and focus on the wellbeing of learners with SEND. The SEND Review must not, for any reason, seek to weaken existing legislation that protects the rights of disabled children, despite how often these laws are ignored by local authorities and schools.

It is essential the experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families are now prioritised, with considered, compassionate and effective measures taken to ensure they have an equal opportunity to recover and thrive.