SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers – National Improvement Framework (NIF) & School Empowerment

Published: 6th November 2026

About this survey

The National Improvement Framework (NIF) sets out the Scottish Government's national priorities for improving education and closing the attainment gap, with a focus on ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Reviewed annually, the Framework helps guide improvement across Scotland's education system.

Alongside this, the Scottish Government has made a commitment to School Empowerment, with the aim of giving headteachers greater flexibility to make decisions that reflect the needs of their pupils and school communities. This includes decisions relating to learning, teaching, leadership and the use of allocated resources, while continuing to work towards national education priorities.

The Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers was invited by the Scottish Government to gather parents and carers views to help inform the ongoing development of both areas.

The engagement explored what our members believe should be prioritised to improve education in Scotland, how schools can better respond to children's individual needs, where decisions should be made, and how families can be meaningfully involved.

107 parents and carers from 29 local authority areas contributed to this survey, with two online discussion groups providing further opportunities to explore experiences, concerns and suggestions in greater depth.

This report brings together the key findings, recurring themes and suggestions emerging from the engagement, highlighting both the challenges families experiences and examples of what is working well.

What happens next?

Our full survey data , alongside reports from both focus groups, has been shared with the Scottish Government to help inform its ongoing work on the National Improvement Framework and School Empowerment.

The updated National Improvement Framework is due to be published in December, while School Empowerment is a longer-term commitment that will continue to develop. The Assembly will maintain contact with the Scottish Government to understand how parents and carers views have been considered, what has influenced the next stages and what opportunities there may be for further involvement.

A huge thank you to everyone who took part in the survey and focus groups.

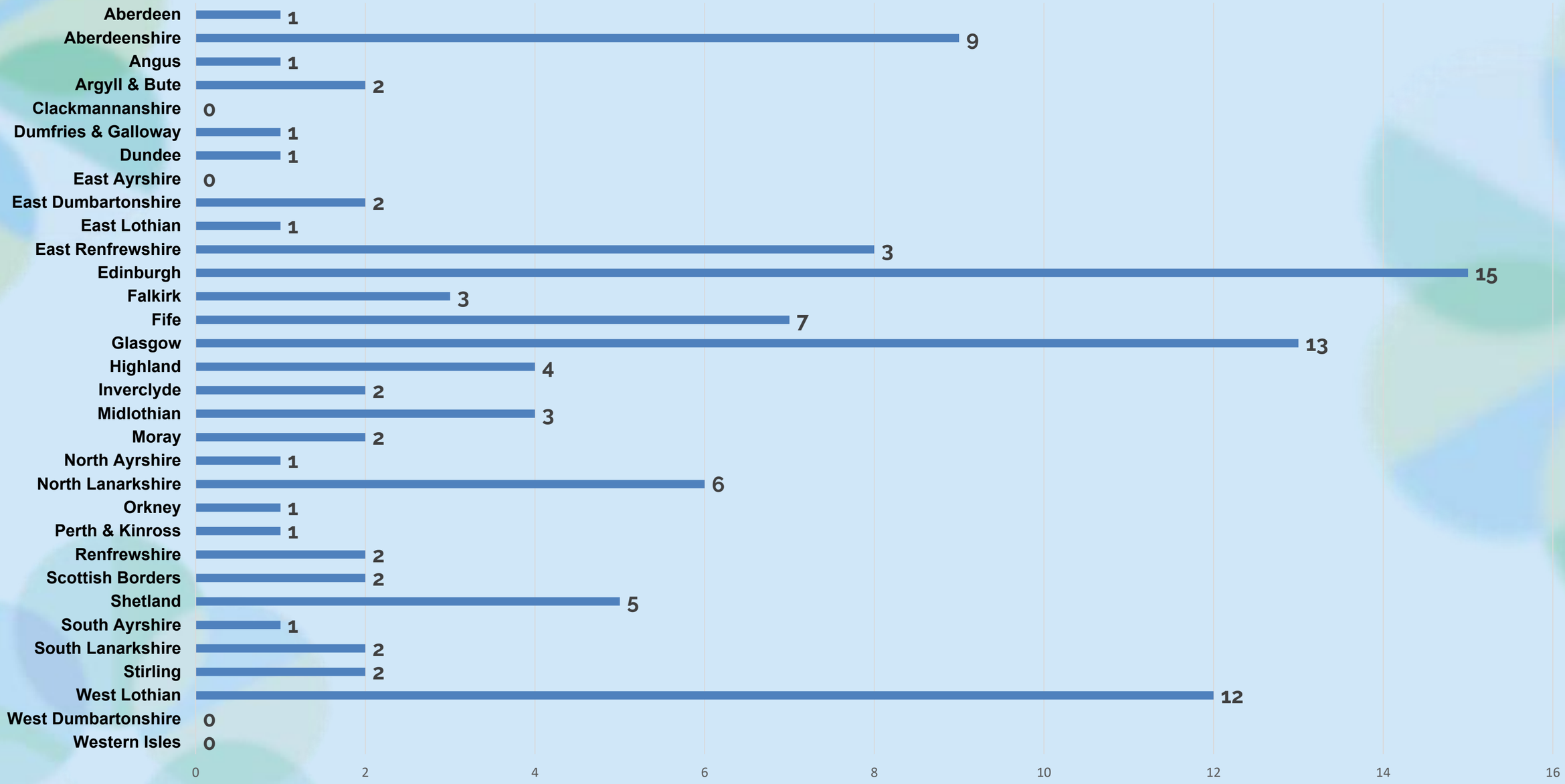
Your experiences, ideas and suggestions have brought valuable perspectives to this work, highlighting what is working well, where improvements are needed and what matters most to families.

We also recognise that some experiences are not always easy to share, and we appreciate the openness and trust shown by those who contributed. It is this mix of experiences and perspectives that makes the collective voice of parents and carers so valuable.

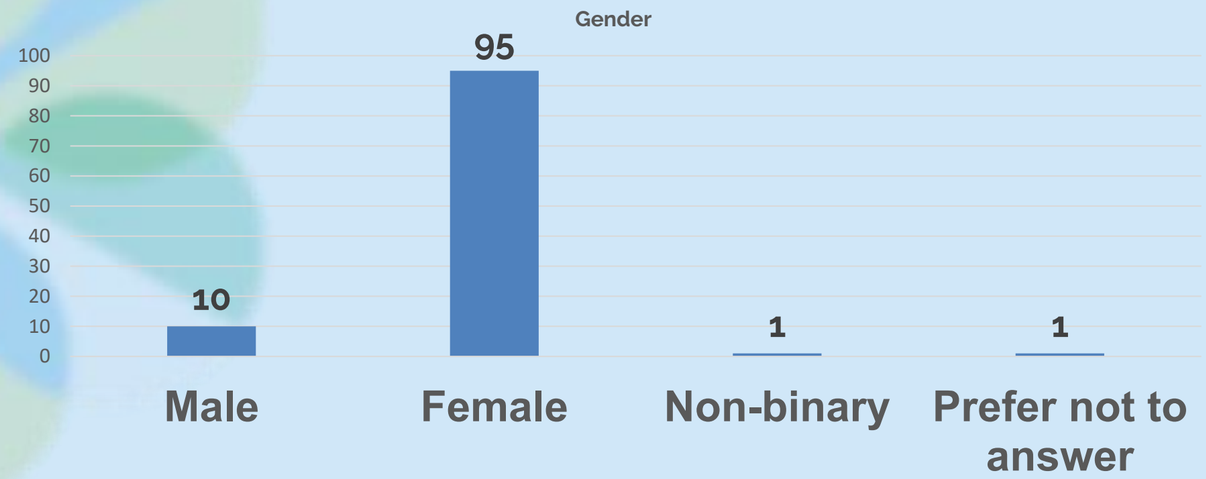
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Location of Respondents

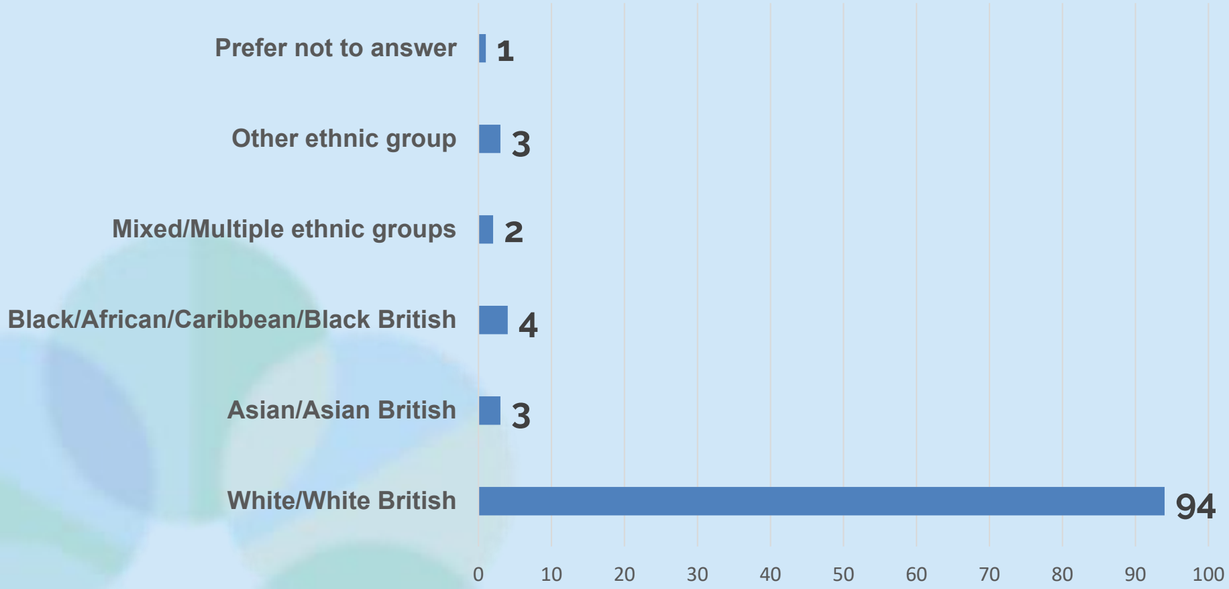
Members responded from 28 local authorities



Parents and Carers who took part



Ethnicity



What is your marital status?

- Married **68**
- Divorced **8**
- Separated **5**
- Single **17**
- Prefer not to answer **9**

Please describe your household

- Single Parent Household **23**
- Household has 2 or more adults in it **77**
- Prefer not to answer **3**

Is English your First Language?

- Yes **91**
- No **16**

Other First Languages

Yoruba
Swedish
German
Greek
Portuguese
Shaetlan
French
Igbo

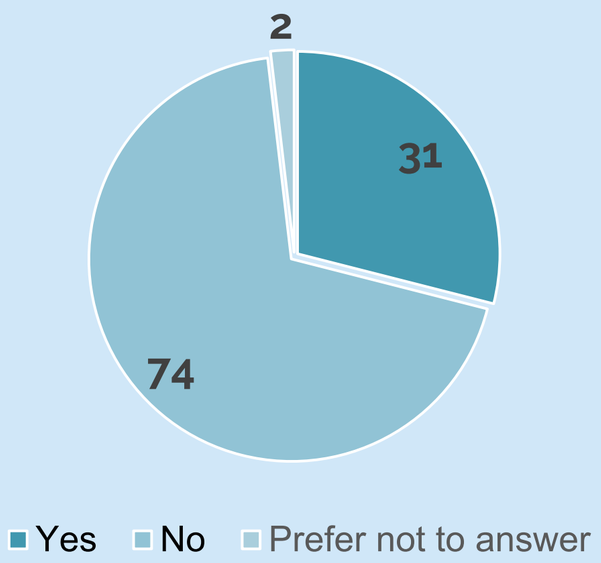
Age Bracket

- 25-34 **6**
- 35-44 **44**
- 45-54 **48**
- 55-64 **9**

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Parents and Carers who took part

Parents Who Consider Themselves to Have a Disability or Long Term Health Condition



Parents Who Are Care Experienced



Employment

Full time employment **32**

Part time employment **34**

Unemployed (not looking for work) **4**

Inability to work **6**

Other **11**

Part time student & Part time working **1**

Full time freelancing **2**

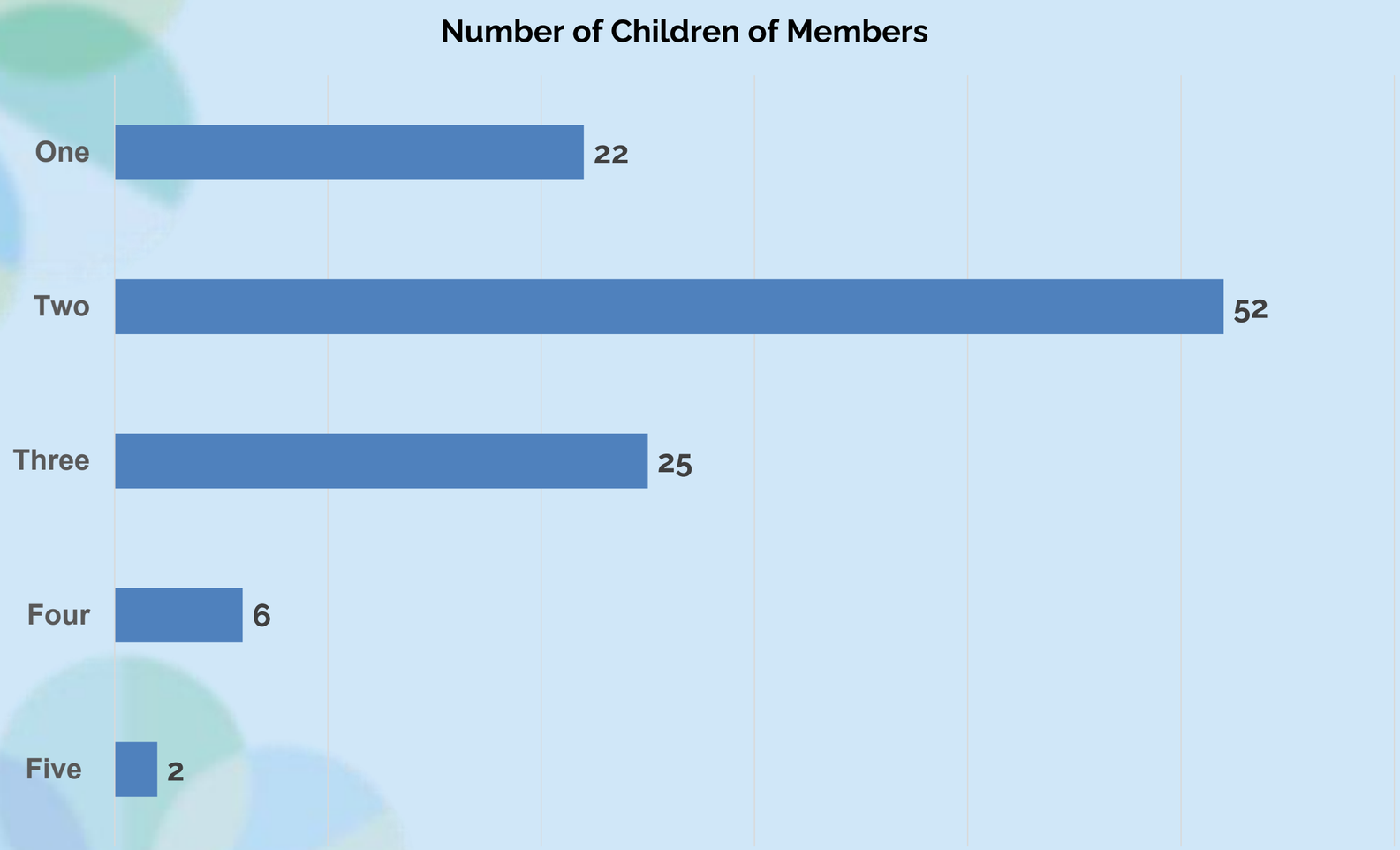
Self Employed **13**

Prefer not to answer **4**

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Children & Young People

Assembly Members have at least 1 school aged child



Child Gender

- Female **69**
- Male **72**
- Transgender **4**
- Non-binary **2**
- Prefer not to answer **1**

Parent Roles

- Biological Parent **100**
- Kinship Carer **3**
- Adoptive **1**
- Foster Carer **1**
- Other **2**

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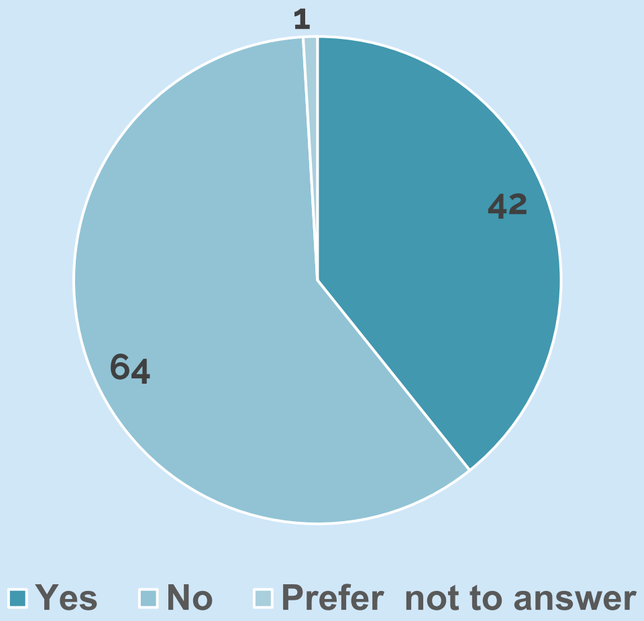
Children – English as additional language

Yes – all my children have English as an additional language **6**
No – all my children have English as their first language **100**
Some of my children have English as their first language, and some as an additional language **1**

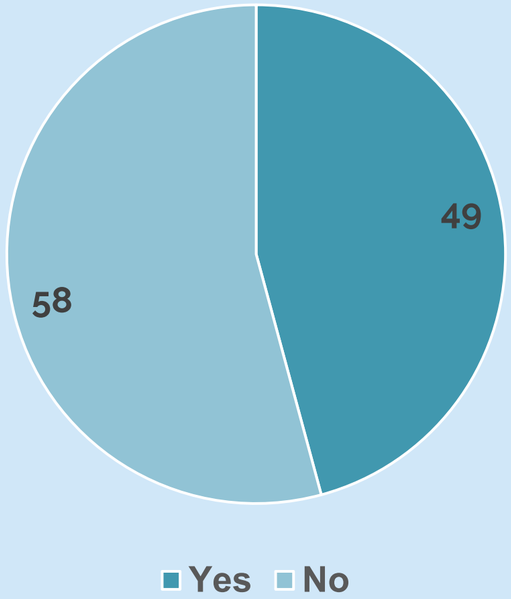
Other Languages

Portuguese
Shaetlan
Spanish
Polish
German

Children with a Disability or Health Condition



Children Receiving Additional Learning Support

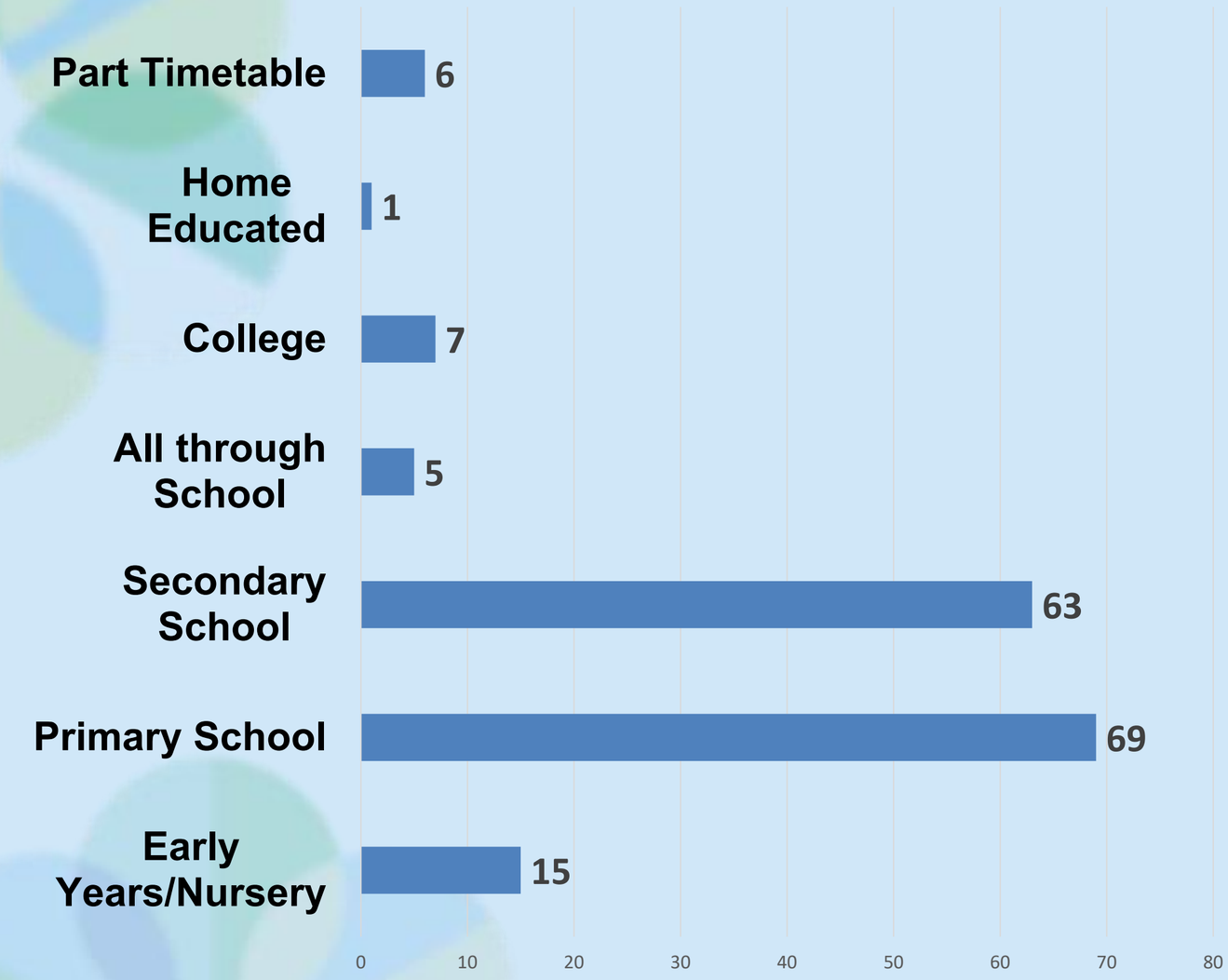


Child Currently or Has Had Previous Experience in Care

Yes **9**
No **98**

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Education Setting



Education Location

- Rural **25**
- Urban **62**
- Mix of urban and rural catchment **24**

Education Type

State school **107**
Direct grant **1**
Special school **9**
Gaelic medium education **1**
Denominational/Religious School* **9**

***we only started asking this question in the 2025 recruitment**

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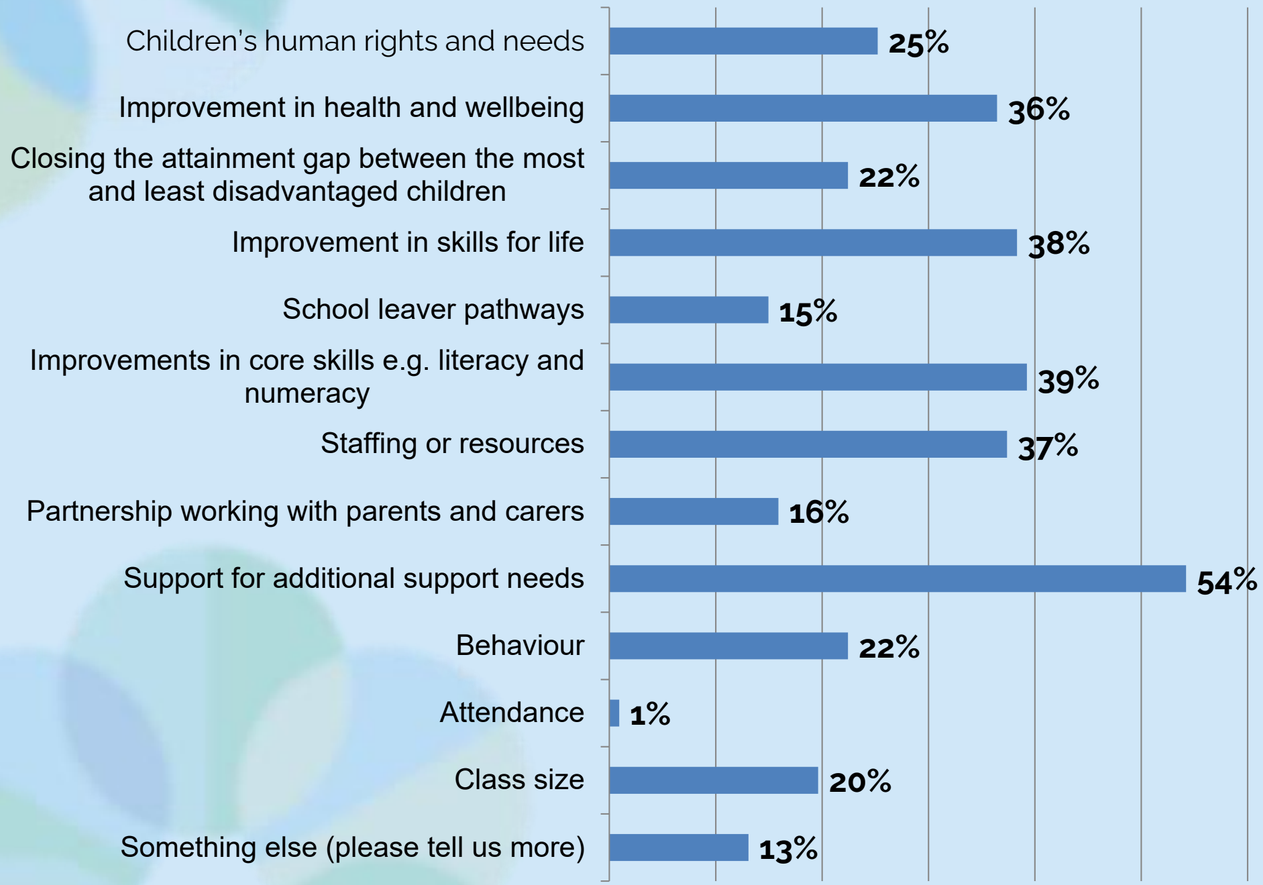
National Improvement Framework (NIF)

These questions are about what you think schools should focus on, what can affect children and young people's experiences at school, and what could help every child and young person thrive and succeed.

What matters most for children and young people.

Q1. What do you think are the most important things schools should focus on to help all children and young people thrive and succeed? (107 answered, 0 skipped)

Members were asked to select up to 3 choices.



- Children's human rights and needs **25% (27)**
- Improvement in health and wellbeing **36% (39)**
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children **22% (24)**
- Improvement in skills for life **38% (41)**
- School leaver pathways **15% (16)**
- Improvements in core skills e.g. literacy and numeracy **39% (42)**
- Staffing or resources **37% (40)**
- Partnership working with parents and carers **16% (17)**
- Support for additional support needs **54% (58)**
- Behaviour **22% (24)**
- Attendance **1% (1)**
- Class size **20% (21)**
- Something else (please tell us more) **13% (14)**

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Q1. What do you think are the most important things schools should focus on to help all children and young people thrive and succeed? Something else – **13% (14)**

14 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Additional Support Needs **3**
- Inclusive curriculum **4**
- Teacher training **2**
- School environment **3**
- Wellbeing and belonging **3**
- Literacy and numeracy **1**
- Life skills **1**
- Parent and carer involvement **2**
- Children's rights **3**
- Access to mental health support **3**
- Attendance and unmet needs **1**
- Wider school priorities **2**

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'Focus on a curriculum, as well as the delivery of teaching degrees, that are neurodiverse and ASN inclusive from the out set.'

'Think it's rather unfair to have to only highlight 3 when all of the above is what has been promised and legislated for.'

'Training to eliminate stigma and allow all children their intelligence and opportunities to use it. Create safe autistic schooling away from mainstream where our brightest children can thrive in their high intelligence and be supported with safe supporting school that provides help for social and sensory needs and slower development in other aspects. 'spikey' profiles are not a disability but schools are disabling.'

'School is beyond attainment for many - social skills, confidence and belonging is more important.'

'Training to eliminate stigma and allow all children their intelligence and opportunities to use it. Create safe autistic schooling away from mainstream where our brightest children can thrive in their high intelligence and be supported with safe supporting school that provides help for social and sensory needs and slower development in other aspects. 'spikey' profiles are not a disability but schools are disabling.'

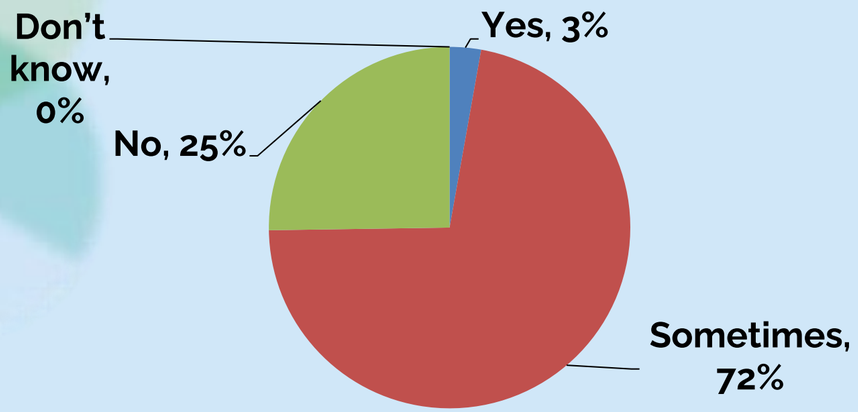
'Reducing CAMHS assessment times.'

'Learning to cooperate and collaborate outside friend groups.'

'Good, safe care in school for those with complex needs'

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Q2. Do you think schools currently focus on the things that matter most to young people and their families? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Yes **3% (3)**
- Sometimes **72% (77)**
- No **25% (27)**
- Don't know **0% (0)**

If no, what should schools focus on? 29 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Too much focus on attainment **2**
- More focus on core learning **5**
- Less focus on wellbeing **1**
- Mental health and wellbeing **9**
- Additional support needs **6**
- Individualised learning **3**
- Inclusive school environments **5**
- Life skills **2**
- School safety and bullying **4**
- Early intervention **3**
- Reduced reliance on technology **1**
- Children's experiences and views **3**
- Parent and carer involvement **5**
- Staffing and resources **2**
- Curriculum flexibility **1**
- Different experiences across schools **1**
- Attendance and barriers to learning **4**

Sample of Parent's Comments

'Financial education, being smart with your finances , having healthy lifestyle.'

'For young people and their families, the most important thing is a safe environment where the child is seen, understood, and given the tools to thrive. Instead, the current focus is on a rigid, one-size-fits-all academic structure. Families are stressed because their children are unhappy, burning out, or waiting indefinitely for diagnosis and support. Schools need to shift their focus from administrative targets to what actually matters to families: early intervention, mental health, and individual care.'

'GIRFEC.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Schools should focus on making the learning environment suitable for all learners.'

'Focus on teaching subject matter more and wider wellbeing issues less. There are other agencies specialising is these other areas.'

'Some schools are currently very focused on the so-called "gold standard" of 5 Highers. This is not suitable, or necessary, for all young people.'

'No. not in my son's experiences, still does not.'

'Calm environments conducive to learning, for those able to function respectfully in that environment.'

'Schools should focus on removing barriers to learning rather than expecting every child to fit the same model. For neurodivergent young people that means timely support based on need rather than diagnosis, emotional wellbeing and belonging, sensory and communication needs, executive-function support, flexible teaching and assessment, and genuine child and family involvement. Attainment matters, but children cannot demonstrate what they are capable of if they are overwhelmed, absent, dysregulated or unable to access learning in the first place. Inclusion should mean being able to participate, learn and belong, not simply being physically present in a mainstream classroom.'

'Making schools fun, having all staff invested in the pupils they are teaching having a good balance between nurture and boundaries.'

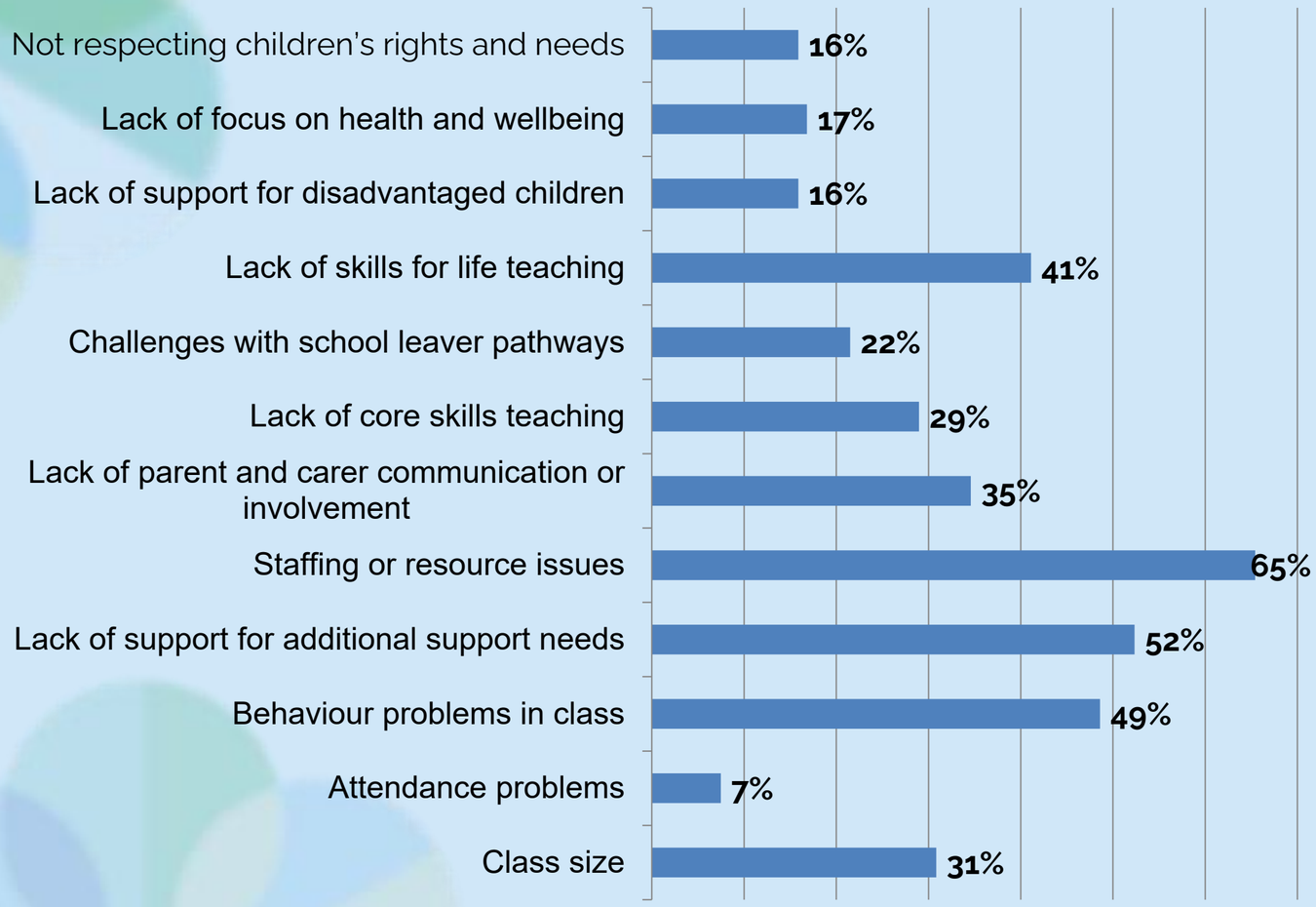
'The abuse and threatening behaviour towards families is causing negative school experiences and reducing attendance and attended t as unwelcoming and disgusting staff abuse their posts to cover up neglect, incidents and harm to our children.'

'Currently there's a high focus on attainment. However, that comes at significant cost to our children's mental health and well-being.'

'Raising attainment for ALL children. My child has disabilities such as ADHD and Dyslexia but schools tells me that they don't get enough funding to support him because we are in an affluent area. Disabilities don't understand postcodes. I don't want to hear about the poverty related attainment gap. Just raise standards for ALL children please.'

'Dismantling the toxic bullying culture including trans and homo phobia and inability especially among girls to speak let alone work with anyone outside friend groups'

Q4. What do you feel are the biggest challenges currently affecting learning, wellbeing, attendance, achievement and inclusion in your child's school? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Not respecting children's rights and needs **16% (17)**
- Lack of focus on health and wellbeing **17% (18)**
- Lack of support for disadvantaged children **16% (17)**
- Lack of skills for life teaching **41% (44)**
- Challenges with school leaver pathways **22% (23)**
- Lack of core skills teaching **29% (31)**
- Lack of parent and carer communication or involvement **35% (37)**
- Staffing or resource issues **65% (70)**
- Lack of support for additional support needs **51% (56)**
- Behaviour problems in class **49% (52)**
- Attendance problems **7% (8)**
- Class size **31% (33)**
- Something else (please tell us more) **29 answered**

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Q4. What do you feel are the biggest challenges currently affecting learning, wellbeing, attendance, achievement and inclusion in your child's school? Something else

29 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Staffing and resources **1**
- Additional Support Needs **3**
- Teacher training **2**

- Lack of joined up services **3**
- Mental health and attendance **4**
- Funding and resource allocation **4**

- Classroom behaviour **3**
- Bullying and discrimination **3**
- School environment **5**

- Lack of wider opportunities **6**
- Mainstream inclusion **3**
- Impact on children and families **7**

- Over reliance on EdTech **2**
- Mobile phone distractions **1**
- Literacy and numeracy **4**

- Curriculum and teaching **7**
- More able pupils overlooked **4**
- Parent and carer communication **2**

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'The school environment can be overwhelming for some young people.'

'Schools do communicate but I don't think and it isn't the school's fault that it is mostly tick-box rather than actively promoted. As a former parent council chair I felt we could have been included in parents' evenings etc we weren't.'

'Time and effort spent on those not attending, misbehaving and underachieving. So young people who are doing well but are quiet are being missed. Nobody has time to check on them, get to know them, help them achieve their potential.'

'Parental strategies, supports for ASN outside, ASN training and resources in mainstream since that's where most learners are now presumed to attend as no specialist placements, having no ASL team has definitely impacted schools, we now have a teacher doing the job of ASL team.'

'Lack of teacher training in understanding additional support needs in particular for neurodivergent kids. Tiny changes in teaching habits can result in a completely different classroom environment which in turn has a huge impact on behaviour. Seemingly small occurrences do result in young people having to leave the classroom for the day AND can result in them leaving school short- or long- term.'

'Pressure to meet some attainment targets do not always work best for pupils eg my child has been placed in Applications of Maths class less than a month into S3. Early setting in QS classes limits opportunity.'

'Reduced resourcing while expected to manage higher levels of need. This has recently resulted in a very dangerous situation in my child's special school where a very vulnerable child was hurt.'

Q5. From your experience, what could help ensure that all young people have the same opportunities to succeed, regardless of where they live or their background? (93 answered, 14 skipped)

93 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Equity **27**
- Individualised provision **16**
- Postcode differences **16**
- Communication with parents **8**
- Attainment **17**
- Bullying **9**
- Inconsistency in provision **6**
- Good practice in schools **10**
- School leadership **4**
- Children's rights and participation **30**
- Wider opportunities and activities **24**
- Digital access **6**
- More focus on learning **34**
- Resources **28**
- Reduced timetables **1**
- Inclusion **16**
- Staff training **15**
- Mobile phone restrictions **4**
- Reduced reliance on EdTech **4**
- Behaviour and discipline **21**
- Right support at the right time **14**
- Additional Support Needs **26**
- Family support **12**
- Life skills **8**
- Teacher training **15**
- School environment **20**
- Alternative learning pathways **7**
- Outdoor and practical learning **8**
- Smaller class sizes **20**
- Joined up services **7**
- Subject choices and qualifications **14**
- Fair pathways and opportunities **27**
- Staffing **25**
- Accountability **10**
- Different experience across schools **6**
- Early intervention **9**
- Families having to fight for support **5**
- Impact on children and families **22**

Sample of Parent's comments

'All schools to get same finances, support and training packages (proportionate to students, not postcode)'

'Retaining experienced teachers, behaviour being managed better - consequences for this. Additional support needs being supported better and reduced class sizes - one teacher cannot attend to 30 + children who have widely differing needs.'

'Each child getting the support they need. This will be different for everyone.'

'Partnership working with parents and carers so they understand the needs of the child. Then adequate staffing and resources to deliver what the child needs. Additional support needs have to be supported before children reach crisis point.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Education should be tailored to a child's strengths and interests. There should be life skills such as budgeting, running a household and healthy relationships.'

'Schools which are truly inclusive. The environment has to be calming, nurturing, sensory friendly. We need to broaden our view of success. There's such a focus on literacy and numeracy. Stop testing P1s. Much more play and a kindergarten stage in Scotland. Focus on building relationships, connection, fun, the child's interests. Lots more music, art, creativity.'

'Targeted investment in school in the most disadvantaged areas. Support workers in schools to deal with the social issues so teachers are free to teach.'

'I have two children in two different primary schools; one is a purpose built resource base school with a deaf base and ASN base. It is brilliant at supporting proper inclusion for my late diagnosed deaf child. He has BSL access full time, core teaching in a small deaf class and spends time every day in mainstream class (with other deaf children) with communication support workers providing BSL and support. Mainstream teachers have deaf awareness training and some have some BSL. This model works really well. He is successfully integrating into mainstream, and because the support is great there is no additional strain on the mainstream class. Everyone benefits- the mainstream class are learning BSL as another language. My other son is in a fully mainstream school which is unsuccessful at having children with additional needs in the classroom- because these children are not supported the whole class suffers.'

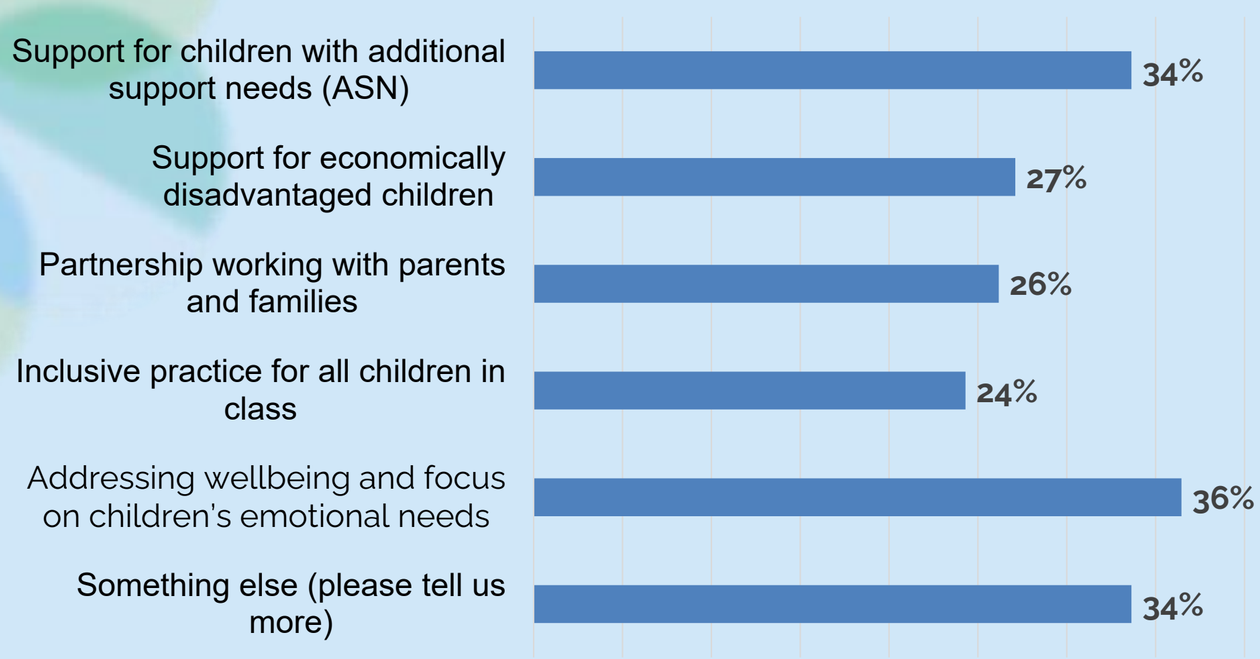
'Ban phones in class, asap. I disagree with reliance on mobile phones in school for "research" and teaching. Enforce school uniform. Take the focus off material things like clothes and phones. Teaching study skills, set tasks to complete, now that homework is not given out often out children are not in the habit of working independently at home. Thus, reliance on parents to help promote this which will be variable. Come exam time there will be issues.'

'Smaller class sizes, more support staff, stop encouraging bad behaviour by handing an iPad and time out of class, yes kids might need time out of class but handing them an iPad encourages the behaviour. Cl&d *(Community Learning and Development)* back in schools because they get to know the families and can offer support where parents might not want to ask the school.'

'Providing focused small-group or one-to-one learning support in foundational literacy and numeracy specifically tailored for pupils who could benefit from it. Distributing digital devices and providing internet access or digital skills training to ensure all learners can participate fully in digital learning, regardless of household background. Incorporating hands-on skills development and real-world learning pathways into the school curriculum to prepare young people for positive post-school destinations.'

'That all young people should be treated equally and with respect. It would also be beneficial for teachers to understand that not all young people are academically sound and are more practically minded.'

Q6. What is working well in your child's school to support learning and promote inclusion? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Support for children with additional support needs (ASN) **34% (36)**
- Support for economically disadvantaged children **27% (29)**
- Partnership working with parents and families **26% (28)**
- Inclusive practice for all children in class **24% (26)**
- Addressing wellbeing and focus on children's emotional needs **36% (39)**
- Something else (please tell us more) **34% (36)**

Something else (please tell us more) 36 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Nothing working well **7**
- Additional Support Needs **6**
- Inclusive practice **8**

- Wellbeing support **3**
- Positive school environment **8**
- Pupil participation **1**

- Positive staff relationships **8**
- School leadership **2**
- Good practice in schools **8**

- Staffing and resources **3**
- Inconsistency in provision **1**
- School culture and ethos **2**

- Individualised support **5**
- Support without diagnosis **12**
- Learning hubs and specialist provision **6**

- Families having to fight for support **1**

- Outdoor learning **9**
- Wider achievement and activities **9**
- Partnership with parents and carers **6**

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Sample of Parent's Comments

'Individual teachers do their best to promote inclusion, but they lack the resources and backing from the wider system. Inclusion cannot work well when children are left on years-long waiting lists for essential neurodivergent diagnoses and mental health support.'

'I honestly don't know. I know the HT is working hard with individual kids who are known to have particular issues eg relating to home environments, some additional support needs, but it's as if he has short term projects and then moves on to the next and he/ the school definitely don't have a picture overall. Eg young people can be off school for weeks / months and parents who try to get in touch with school about this find it hard even to get a response, let alone access support or learning,'

'Our school has streamlined their maths learning so that pupils across the school are working in groups of similar ability as opposed to their age-dictated class. This seems to have been well received by pupils & teachers alike and grades are improving school-wide.'

'My S4 has moved schools, and the support has been much better. She attends a learning hub twice per week and the relationships she has built with staff there have been brilliant.'

'I don't feel any of these aspects are prioritised . There have been cuts to ASN provision, worsening behaviour. There are no breakfast clubs to help parents work, and due to the pressures of behaviour, many are impacted negatively and their wellbeing is diminished. This becomes exclusion to others at the cost of inclusion of all in a main classroom environment.'

'I can't tick any of these as nothing works really well. There are elements of them all being attempted but from personal experience it is only through having to 'fight' for them that things get put in place. Families that don't know how to challenge things or understand the system will not be offered anything - you have to understand the system to be able get the right help. Also - inclusive mainstream is not what it claims to be - you are not included if you are in a separate room down a corridor. You are not included if you cannot force yourself to be more neurotypical. You are not included if you lack resilience.'

'Some individual staff are working hard in all these areas, but it needs leadership to change established culture and ethos, which is currently quite traditionalist.'

'Providing free to access toast at breaktime so no young person is trying to learn whilst hungry. It's done with no stigma and is open to all.'

'What makes the biggest difference is when staff know the individual child rather than relying on a diagnostic label: they anticipate sensory and communication needs, provide predictable routines, allow appropriate regulation breaks, offer flexible ways to engage and demonstrate learning, and maintain good communication with families. Having a trusted adult and staff who adapt early rather than waiting for a crisis can transform a child's ability to participate.'

Q7. What changes do you think would have the greatest positive impact on attainment, attendance, behaviour, learning and inclusion? (91 answered, 16 skipped)

91 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Staffing **32**
- Smaller class sizes **23**
- Additional Support Needs **13**
- Inclusion **13**
- Early intervention **6**
- Teacher training **9**
- School leadership **7**
- Behaviour and discipline **19**
- Literacy and numeracy **7**
- Practical and outdoor learning **2**
- Alternative learning pathways **6**
- Reduced reliance on EdTech **3**

- Mental health and wellbeing **14**
- School environment **23**
- Flexible or reduced timetables **3**
- Parent and carer involvement **24**
- Joined up services **8**
- More focus on learning **28**
- Family support **5**
- Funding and resources **18**
- Accountability **9**
- Attendance and unmet needs **10**
- Children's views and experiences **6**

Sample of Parent's comments

'It's quite complex I believe as it's all starts with parents. If they struggle mentally financially they are unable to support their children. Should schools take the burden can they? It's comes with additional resources and cost.'

'Greatly increasing the number of specialized support staff, counsellors, and reducing class sizes would have the biggest impact. Right now, inclusion fails because teachers do not have the time or resources to see every child as an individual. With more hands-on support and faster access to diagnoses, we can tackle the root causes of poor attendance and challenging behaviour before they escalate, ensuring every young person has the chance to succeed.'

'Adequate support for additional support needs, listening to parents and carers as equal partners in our child's education.'

'Listening to the child / young person and working in partnership with them.'

'Admitting that mainstreaming isn't a success. Measured by the high numbers of mainly neurodivergent kids who are unable to attend mainstream due to needs not being met. We need smaller better designed schools that are designed to mitigate the risks of being overwhelmed with all your senses being attacked every second of every day. We know this it's research based knowledge yet we continue to make children unwell. That continues to be a scandal and disgrace. History will not look kindly at those who continue with this despite the evidence.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Staffing - staff are exhausted on their feet and too much is asked of them. Need programs of learning such as literacy programs are schools are making it up as they go individually.'

'Cl&d *(community, learning and development)* in school, parent groups especially where parents have more than one child, it allows them to have one on one time to see what kind of things the kids are learning about and I also think this gives staff time with smaller class sizes if half of the class is away doing an activity with parents/carers/cl&d staff.'

'More learning support for children with dyslexia and other additional support needs in Gaelic medium education/fluent secondary school classes.'

'Consistency and boundaries. We have focused a lot on children as individuals and wellness and encouraging children to come to school. But all children need some boundaries and the vast majority need consequences. The young people see that there is no consistency and it encourages bad behaviour in some and affects motivation and enthusiasm in others.'

'Supporting teachers and other school staff with continuous professional learning, ensuring high-quality, adapted learning, teaching, and assessment. Providing flexible, relevant opportunities to celebrate individual progression and build skills for future life and work, ensuring every learner feels valued and included.'

'Very consistent and fair behaviour rules that create an environment in which all students feel safe to learn without interruptions.'

'I think the streamlining of core maths; literacy & reading skills would have a hugely positive impact on these. When a child feels like they are being challenged and rewarded for improvement it gives them natural confidence. Especially if their gain is measured against others at a similar level. It encourages them. When a child is encouraged & feels like they are improving they are less likely (I feel) to misbehave and cause distraction to others.'

'Interest based learning, an increase to alternative provisions including forest schooling. Early Intervention.'

'The greatest impact would come from making additional support a properly resourced part of ordinary education rather than something schools try to bolt on after a child starts struggling. Every school needs sufficient teachers and support staff, mandatory practical professional learning in neurodiversity and inclusive pedagogy, and rapid access to specialist advice from services such as educational psychology, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy where needed. Support should begin when a need becomes apparent, not after diagnosis or crisis. Schools should be able to adapt timetables, teaching, sensory environments, class/group arrangements, technology and curriculum pathways around individual needs. Attendance and distressed behaviour should trigger investigation of barriers and unmet needs rather than an exclusively punitive response.
The test of success should be whether the child is safe, engaged, learning, included and making progress—not simply whether they are physically in a mainstream classroom.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'We need more teachers and support staff, less EdTech and more of a focus on health and wellbeing. Our school keeps the kids inside if it is even remotely raining and gives them iPads to do every lesson on (there is 'no money for physical books', according to the deputy headteacher). Studies have raised concerns about declining handwriting and spelling skills, reduced concentration and memory retention, poorer reading comprehension when reading on screens, and the impact of excessive screen time on sleep, physical activity and mental wellbeing. Technology has its place in education, but it should never come at the expense of good teaching, physical activity, social interaction and the basic skills children need to thrive.'

'Teachers having training in ASD/ADHD and all associated conditions relating to those. Teachers need to listen to parents about their children and stop thinking they are 'fine' a group of parents would be a good idea to teach teachers about these conditions as I truly believe teachers do not understand these conditions and whilst helping are actually causing anxiety and distress.'

'Listening to child's needs sharing with all and new staff and making sure needs are met each term.'

'More support staff, flexible timetables, different learning environments more outdoor education.'

'Pupils feeling like they belong in school that they aren't a burden or different. involving families.'

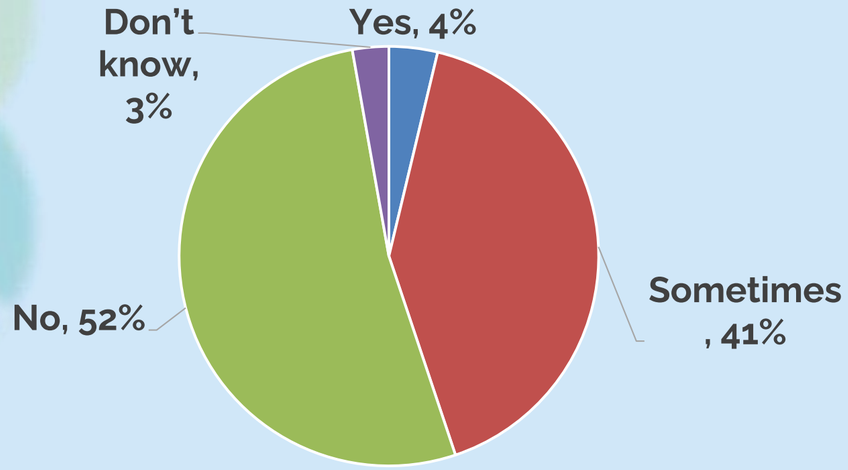
'Access to support at the right time, from the right people. Not relying on exams as the measure of success - for many young people, exams are not the way to show their skills or knowledge. We need to do other things that make young people feel successful. Making schools inclusive and open places that values all forms of learning and knowledge, wider than just exams and written work.'

'Additional resources, to address e.g. large class sizes and learning support. Also, more suitable learning environments e.g. classrooms with better acoustics, properly equipped sensory room, outdoor space which is not concrete. I have no complaints about the staff at my child's school: they go above and beyond within the limits imposed by resources. My child, who has significant ASN, is still struggling more and more as he moves through mainstream primary because nothing in the curriculum or environment is suited to his needs. It is not the fault of the staff, it is a systemic failing.'

'School needs to be a safe experience for children. There needs to be a wider variety of educational placements recognising that the school environment as we know it, is not right for some learners.'

'Clear guidelines and follow through when students/parents don't abide by them. There seem to be no consequences currently for anyone.'

Q8. Do all young people have access to the support they need to succeed? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Yes **4% (4)**
- Sometimes **41% (44)**
- No **52% (56)**
- Don't know **3% (3)**

If no, what additional support could make the biggest difference? 56 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Unmet Additional Support Needs **17**
- Lack of staffing and resources **16**
- Delays accessing support **34**
- Positive experiences of support **10**
- Early intervention **5**
- Support only after crisis **34**
- Support dependent on diagnosis **34**
- Inconsistency in provision **1**
- Postcode differences **5**
- Lack of specialist services **17**
- Mental health support **11**
- Individualised provision **4**
- Families having to fight for support **6**
- Impact on children and families **12**

Sample of Parent's Comments

'I don't think they do, engaging with organisations where employees can support kids in high school, guiding them, directing, telling them about opportunities where they can succeed whether via apprenticeship, internships etc. Often those kids miss school don't attend it rebel as they don't get support from their parents who often struggle themselves.'

'Specialist provisions for children with ASN.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'The biggest difference would be made by drastically shortening the waiting times for neurodivergent diagnoses and providing immediate, accessible mental health counselling within schools. Additionally, we desperately need a major increase in qualified Support for Learning Assistants in classrooms. Right now children are completely missing out on the support required to access the curriculum and thrive.'

'The right support given to the child at the right time. And not just removed when the child appears to be coping. If there are improvements in the child this should be recognised as a result of the support and not in spite of the support.'

'Different environments. Smaller schools.'

'Staff who are trained to allow kids to sit nat 5 & highers even when they're in a school for kids with additional needs, just because they're in these schools doesn't mean they don't get to thrive because the school can't accommodate them.'

'Use of appropriate written tactile hard copy materials in different colours and avoiding making children read books off screens instead of paper.'

'Additional support is also needed for learners who have to use on-line learning as there is no subject teacher. It is good this can happen but young people can be thrown into a way of learning at the deep end that they are not ready for. A greater link between parents, school and the on-learner is required.'

'Not discounting pupils who seem to be doing well. In primary my son was passed over for opportunities in class and told he had to draw back on his learning to make it easier and better for slower learners.'

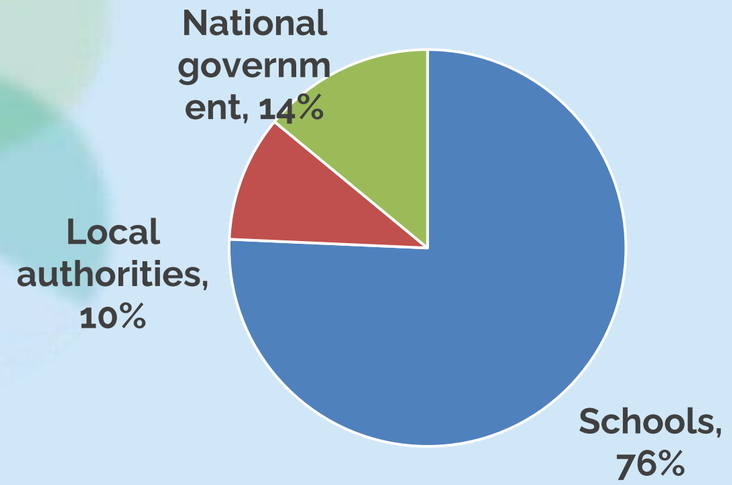
'The LDAN Bill *(Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill)*, if SGov are going to hand over more power to schools / localities then there needs to be legislation around standards to met and consistency across the country in all areas of education and in particular around resource and training relating to additional support needs which will benefit all young people and all those working in education.'

'I think this answer depends on a child's needs, but to me I'd like to see the focus on education come back to educating children and young people through explicit teaching and a knowledge-based curriculum. Actually, even a clear curriculum would be a good start and ensuring children and young people are taught key skills such as reading, writing and numeracy to mastery before moving on to be able to think critically. So in my view, teach children how to read would improve behaviour (they won't have to hide that they can't read to levels to access the work expected for their age and stage of schooling), attendance (they won't want to avoid school because they can't access it and they will see the purpose of school if they are receiving knowledge rather than trying to discover it for themselves without the skills to do so), and it will improve attainment. Sometimes the simplest answers are the best.'

School Empowerment

School empowerment is about where decisions are made and whether schools should have more flexibility to make decisions based on the needs of their children and young people. We also want to understand how parents and carers should be involved in these decisions

Q9. Who is best placed to make decisions about supporting young people in schools? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Schools **76% (81)**
- Local authorities **10% (11)**
- National government **14% (15)**

Could you please tell us more about your answer? 92 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Decisions made at school level **39**
- Decisions made by teachers **39**
- Headteacher decision making **39**
- Shared decision making **39**
- Parent and carer involvement **32**
- Children's views **3**
- Individual needs **20**
- School leadership **17**
- Resources and funding **16**
- Accountability **38**
- Clear responsibilities **38**
- Trust in decision makers **39**
- Inconsistency across schools **15**

Sample of Parent's Comments

'The schools know their pupils best and should be consulted on any support supplied.'

'Schools are aware of what is important to the children and families in their schools - if they ask and work with families.'

'A head teacher knows their school best. But almost all decisions they make come down to levels of funding and that is both the responsibility of national government and local authorities. I live in a small local authority where head teachers all know each other and share best practice but this is championed and coordinated by the education department so they both play a part.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Schools are on the frontline and know the unique needs of their pupils better than any distant bureaucracy. Decisions about support must be decentralized to allow headteachers and staff the flexibility to act quickly based on the specific children in their care. Crucially, these decisions should be made in equal partnership with parents and carers, who know their children best. When local authorities or national governments make rigid, top-down decisions, it creates unnecessary red tape and prevents the immediate, individualized intervention that struggling or neurodivergent children desperately need.'

'I've found schools are not interested in supporting young people adequately until complaints raised with local authorities. Ideally, I'd like to think schools who know the child best, but there needs to be a route to appeal this when schools aren't putting adequate support in place. A right that can't be enforced isn't much of a right in the first place.'

'Local authorities are sometimes more concerned about budgets. National government look at the bigger picture but can sometimes be more removed. School are working directly with their pupils and are close to their community, however, you need proactive, compassionate and well-resourced staff to make this work.'

'People with lived experience of doing life with children should have the most input. My experience is that many in local authority and government have no idea what's going on in schools'/ issues children and families face. They deal with theoretical issues but schools deal with real terms, practical issues.'

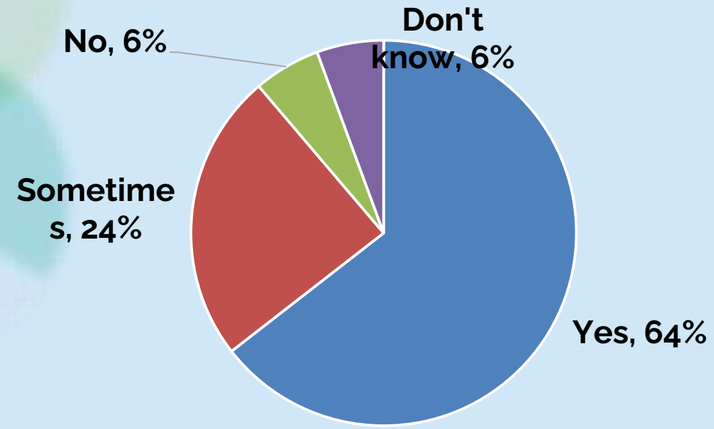
'Local authorities are too large to have an understanding of individual pupils' needs, school buildings/equipment can vary a lot within a LA. Schools are best placed to understand their own pupils' needs.'

'I don't mind decisions being taken higher up or for a wider area. But I believe decisions should always be made by people who work or have worked in schools. They should have good communication channels with head teachers of all schools. The decision makers should continue to spend time in schools. And see how things work on a day to day basis, not on a special occasion visit.'

'I am very fearful of what school would look like if things were left to individual heads to run without the framework nationally in place. Key funding from this year's McManus review. A lot of assumption is being made that recommendations are followed when this is far from the truth. Differences between LAs make it impossible for families to understand their rights. This localised empowerment world just make the postcode lottery even worse. We need a much better and clearer acknowledgment of what isn't working and resources to fix that before you start handing over these responsibilities to head teachers who already have way too much to do.'

'From experience: the people near the top of the food chain have absolutely no idea what it's like on the ground. You cannot change a system from the top, it has to come from bottom level - who actually experience it daily. However, I also believe schools should not be given free reign. There needs to be accountability.'

Q10. Do you think your child's school should be able to make more decisions based on the needs of its young people? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Yes **64% (69)**
- Sometimes **24% (26)**
- No **6% (6)**
- Don't know **6% (6)**

Could you please tell us more about your answer? 72 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Greater school autonomy **30**
- Individualised provision **13**
- Decisions closer to children **30**
- Flexibility in learning and support **30**
- Parent and carer involvement **11**
- School leadership **4**
- Accountability **32**
- Inconsistency in provision **3**
- Staffing and resources **14**
- Concerns about greater autonomy **30**

Sample of Parent's Comments

'For schools to effectively support every child as an individual, they must have the power to tailor their approach. Currently, rigid rules from higher authorities trap children in waiting lists and standardized systems. Giving schools more decision-making freedom allows them to bypass this bureaucracy, listen to parents, and adapt immediately to the specific well-being, neurodivergent, or learning challenges present in their specific classrooms.'

'I've found schools are not interested in supporting young people adequately until complaints raised with local authorities. Ideally I'd like to think schools who know the child best, but there needs to be a route to appeal this when schools aren't putting adequate support in place.'

'Local authorities can tend to introduce one size fits all solutions - whereas each school needs to respond based on its unique community and background.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Yes in partnership with parents. If you have a kid with a disability in Scotland you're treated as the enemy. Patronised by folk who know zero about disability.'

'It depends entirely on what the decision is and how well informed or knowledgeable the staff are. Literacy or numeracy programs should be decided at state level, not individual schools but schools should have some element of flexibility on supporting the children in front of them.'

'It does feel that schools are sometimes bound by the decisions made by the Local Authority or National government which aren't always the best decisions for that particular school at that time.'

'I do agree with this for the most part because the staff get to know the kids and I think they would try to implement things that would benefit the kids, however, my son's high school refuse to let kids sit Nat 5 and Highers if they don't think they will pass, this might be across the board with schools but it's ridiculous, for what reason, a good rating for having good pass rates.'

'Definitely not, they already have this right and have not done a good job for any of mine. My sons have all suffered due to their handling both in education and health and wellbeing. They ignored all of their needs.'

'I don't think young people really are included in decisions as they should be. Their experiences are something to learn from. I think they should be encouraged to participate more in decisions and to have some ownership in them.'

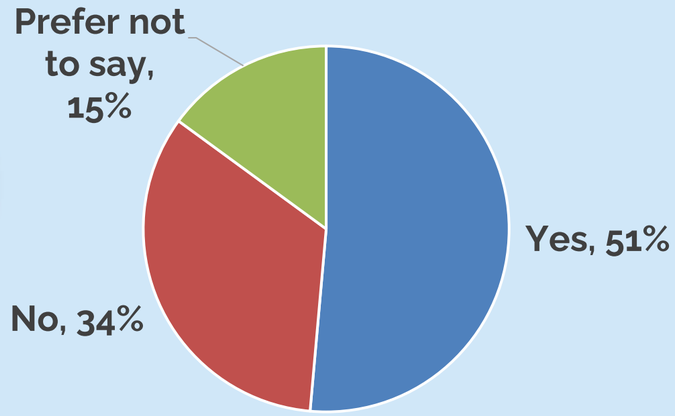
'They do this for the most part, however the LA often makes decisions for them but then don't give them the resources to carry these things out.'

'I think decisions such as human rights, support for economically disadvantaged people should be made by the local authorities. This will ensure that all schools in each local authorities are doing the same thing.'

'We had some helpful things implemented at out child's previous school, however following an inspection these were deemed problematic and along with the local authority there was a risk that these things would be reduced or removed e.g. scrapping the nurture room and a desire to have all children access mainstream classes.'

'Yes. Schools should have greater ability to act quickly on the needs they see... for example by changing staffing arrangements, buying appropriate resources or assistive technology, adapting the sensory environment, creating targeted support, adjusting timetables or offering different curriculum pathways. However, more autonomy must not mean weaker rights or a postcode lottery. Schools should have discretion over how they meet needs, not discretion to decide whether a child's recognised support needs will be met. Empowerment therefore needs transparent funding, minimum national standards, good data, specialist support and clear accountability.'

Q11. Have there been situations where your child's school was unable to respond quickly enough to a need or issue affecting young people's learning or wellbeing? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Yes **51% (55)**
- No **34% (36)**
- Prefer not to say **15% (16)**

Please tell us more about this? 62 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Delays accessing support **31**
- Additional Support Needs **16**
- Staffing and resources **11**
- Lack of accountability **3**
- Positive experiences of timely support **9**
- Parent's concerns not listened to **10**
- Lack of communication **18**
- Local authority delays **1**
- Lack of school autonomy **6**
- Behaviour or bullying **12**
- Mental health and wellbeing **22**
- Attendance difficulties **12**
- Impact on children and families **24**
- Families having to fight for support **4**

Sample of Parent's Comments

'Staff has no training for anything outside their doors. No training or willingness to learn about son's diagnosed disabilities, unwillingness to accommodate or find solutions with NHS or social care.'

'While I receive quick responses at the moment, it is solely because my specific contact person works unpaid overtime during evenings and weekends. The only reason the school manages to respond to our needs is because individual staff members are constantly overworking themselves. This is completely unsustainable. I am deeply concerned about staff burnout, and a public education system should never rely on the unpaid, exhausting sacrifices of dedicated employees just to function and support children's wellbeing.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Yes, and had to take out formal complaint with local authorities. Too many families are not being listened to and have to fight too hard to get their child's needs understood and support in place.'

'My own son was bullied and v little response was made by the school.'

'I am lucky enough that my daughter's school is excellent.'

'My kids have both had lengthy spells where they have been unable to attend school due to this. Problem is if you even submit a formal complaint to council, they are the ones marking their own homework so unless you are willing to go to tribunal, it feels pointless arguing. My child's transition is high school was so poor that she now can only attend part time. All down to lack of support.'

'Often, ignore your emails to the point you have to chase them for a reply. Will eventually arrange a meeting only to not get the answers or help needed. Which is where I've had to reach out on occasions when consistently getting nowhere or feel this is not right.'

'Regulation support, support with lunch money. Support in classes, support out with classes when not coping. In the past he has been sent home unofficially.'

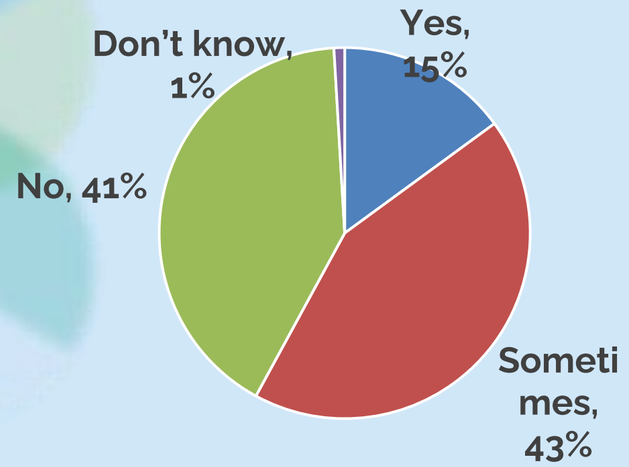
'Child being hurt on a regular basis and school not really having anything they could do about this. Bitten, hit and pinched on a regular basis. I guess that the child has ASN but my child deserves to be safe in his class.'

'Yes. They aren't trained in the specific depth of autism-informed information. The school was aware that support/change was needed, but no access to depth of knowledge meant it could not happen quickly enough. The result was increased distress / missed learning / reduced attendance / dysregulation / family strain. My concern is that systems often respond only after a child's needs have escalated. Schools need enough delegated resource and authority to put sensible interim adjustments in place immediately while specialist assessment or longer-term support is being arranged. Earlier action could prevent relatively manageable needs developing into crisis.'

'In the primary school our daughter attended the staff and classes were so pushed to their limits that they could not meet the needs of the high achievers due to having to afford so much time to dealing with the kids with additional support needs.'

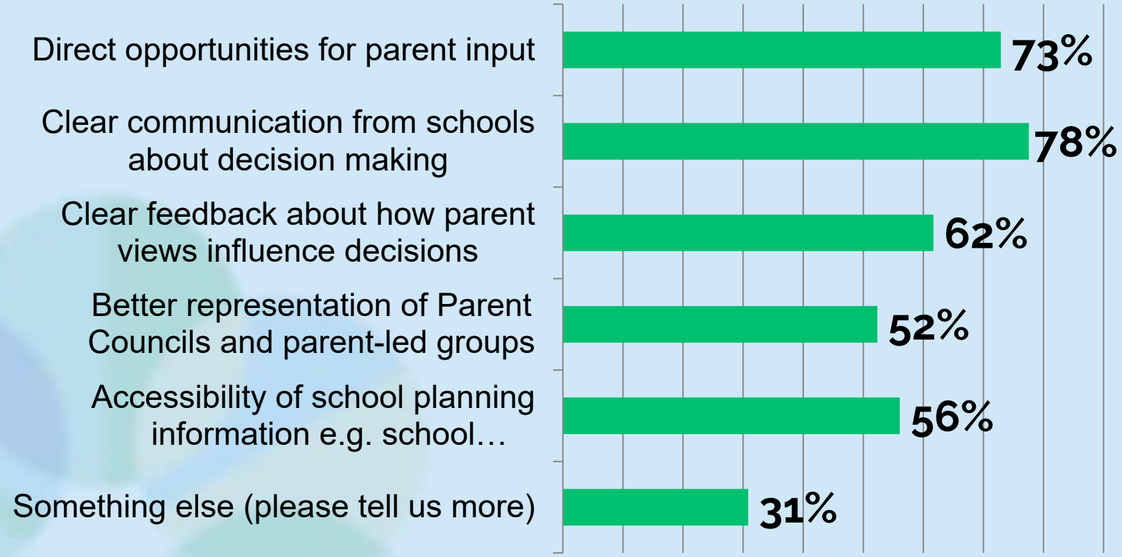
'I gave them chance after chance, begged them for help, begged to speak to interrupted learners and got told we could flexi school for one day or home ed. No reasonable option was available it is hidden behind many hoops. I had to remove my daughter for her wellbeing's sake.'

Q12. Do you feel that you have a genuine voice in their education? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Yes **15% (16)**
- Sometimes **43% (46)**
- No **41% (44)**
- Don't know **1% (1)**

Q13. How can parents and carers be more involved in decisions that affect their school and improve outcomes for young people? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Direct opportunities for parent input **73% (78)**
- Clear communication from schools about decision making **78% (83)**
- Clear feedback about how parent views influence decisions **62% (66)**
- Better representation of Parent Councils and parent-led groups **52% (56)**
- Accessibility of school planning information e.g. school improvement plans, inspection documents **56% (60)**
- Something else (please tell us more) **31% (33)**

Q13. How can parents and carers be more involved in decisions that affect their school and improve outcomes for young people? Something else 31% (33)

33 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Better communication **7**
- Early involvement in decisions **7**
- Genuine partnership working **26**
- Building trust and relationships **4**
- Barriers to parental involvement **26**
- Listening to parents and carers **26**
- Parent Council involvement **12**
- Accessible engagement opportunities **3**
- Wider representation of parents **26**
- Informal opportunities to contribute **2**
- Shared decision making **7**
- Transparency **7**
- School leadership **3**
- Accountability **7**

Sample of Parent's comments

'Being properly listened too. Not just attending meetings but being listened to at meetings.'

'Make school events accessible for all. There should always be dial in options or alternatives. I haven't been able to attend a single event at my kids high school as they are all in person in the evening when my disabilities prevent me from attending. I haven't requested accessible formats but am always told no.'

'I'm not convinced parents need to be more involved. I'm involved enough I just wish the school could take a tougher line with some situations to change the environment and create a better learning outcome for all.'

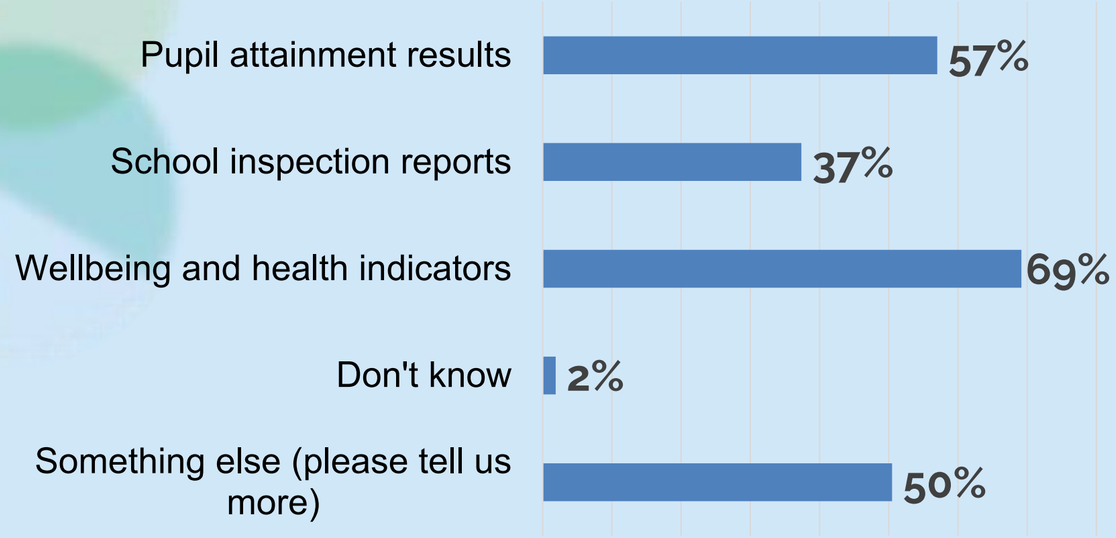
'After trying everything. The only thing I could suggest is with regards to supporting ASN. Have 2 separate parent councils. I was involved in parent councils from my eldest being in P1 straight through to my youngest being S3, up until 2 years ago. I found it's all about school performance rather than the needs side for ASN students. Found it hard for my voice to be heard being the minority parent trying for ASN. I also found some parent's views offensive towards children with ASN due to their ignorance. So for an ASN perspective, could also help the parents help their kids knowing all the available support available. It's also extremely difficult sitting listening to the conversation of how and what the wider school pupils are enjoying, experiencing and achieving. I cried after most of these meetings so stressed as it is unfair. So this may help future parents sharing strategies, help they hadn't thought of, being together to change ASN support could be to their advantage.'

'Tougher penalties for LA who fall short!! They are NEVER held accountable. I was stonewalled and gaslit to the point of a breakdown. I am not alone in this. This is a common experience.'

Improvement

These questions look at how we know whether children and young people are getting the support and opportunities they need, what is already working well, and what we can learn from families' experiences.

Q14. What information or evidence could be used to understand whether young people are getting the support and opportunities they need? (107 answered, 0 skipped)



- Pupil attainment results **57% (61)**
- School inspection reports **38% (40)**
- Wellbeing and health indicators **69% (74)**
- Don't know **2% (2)**
- Something else (please tell us more) **50% (54)**

Something else (please tell us more) 54 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Attainment and academic progress **13**
- Literacy and numeracy **2**
- Individual progress **1**
- Mental health and wellbeing **6**
- Attendance **4**
- Reasons and non-attendance **4**
- Accountability and transparency **1**
- Additional Support Needs **7**
- Children's experiences and views **19**
- Parent and carer feedback **35**
- Inclusion and belonging **1**
- Behaviour and bullying **3**
- School leaver destinations **1**
- Independent assessment and evidence **13**

Sample of Parent's comments

'Measure how many graduates are in employment, apprenticeship, internships.'

'We should measure the actual waiting times for neurodivergent diagnoses and mental health support. If children are waiting months or years, the system is failing, regardless of what exam results say. We also need direct feedback and surveys from families and carers about their experience with support. The true evidence of a successful system is whether a child feels safe and seen, and whether families have to fight for basic resources.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'I think the most important indicator would be to ask the parents. They know their child best. Education isn't just about attainment; it's about the whole child. And graphs and numbers don't show that.'

'Kids filling out their experiences in a safe way. Service user quality indicators.'

'I'm unsure, maybe changing the girfec because that piece of paper is a waste of time, especially when staff are under no obligation to actually read it. Report cards giving a bit more information about the child, instead of tick boxes or copy and paste with the name of the child changed. My older son had a report card from S1 telling me how he was on track and had excellent behaviour and good time keeping, he has barely set foot in the school never mind going to classes, he missed out on two years of education but got a great report.'

'Parent's voice. How a child is responding! Individual Pupil attainment results where the child is not hidden in the wider school's attainment results making all appear well.'

'Attendance, if a child isn't attending or attendance is low and the parent wants them in school and is very engaged then their is an issue with the support they are receiving.'

'Asking young people and families if they are getting what they need. Starting with those who are not attending or frequently missing school. The problem is, you have to know who these people are before you can find out what their barriers to education are. My S6 now has Six Nat 5s and 5 Highers all at A, but was completely self taught in several subjects as teachers would not engage with her out of class and she was unable attend in person due to her needs not being met, so attainment not a worthy indicator. Also assumptions are made about kids with ASN that they will not attain to the same level as their peers when in fact they can with the right support and environment, even with learning disabilities.'

'More explanation about national testing and the scoring, as well as the results.'

'Achievements in subjects other than exam results, the pressure on schools for grades is ridiculous. It's failing young people who aren't academic, creativity is just as important if not more so. Yet it's consistently cut from the curriculum.'

'We need far better data on attainment and tests. The vague staging data that we currently get is hugely inadequate. Scotland is plummeting in the PISA rankings and it's not good enough to suggest that we 'remain internationally competitive' because so many other countries are doing the same. We need to go back to basics, get a good education for all kids - and to do that properly and assess it, we need to start gathering much better data on attainment.'

'The pupils own voice! Nothing can tell us what a child needs more than the child themselves!'

Q15. Are there examples of things that work well in your child's school that other schools could learn from? (73 answered, 34 skipped)

73 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Good practice in schools **23**
- Nothing positive to report **2**
- Positive school leadership **23**
- Outdoor learning **12**
- Practical learning **1**
- Wider achievement and activities **12**
- Supportive staff relationships **10**
- Individualised learning **6**
- Additional Support Needs **8**
- Behaviour and discipline **5**
- Effective communication **13**
- Different experiences across schools **1**
- Inclusive practice **9**
- Learning hubs and specialist support **8**
- Wellbeing support **6**
- Staffing and resources **10**
- Positive school environment **23**
- Partnerships with parents and carers **21**
- Pupil participation **3**

Sample of Parent's comments

''My children school is very good in supporting my children and making them thrive. There is no room for bullying, discrimination and disrespect. It's catholic school which lives by Christian values. Staff is incredibly supportive and responsive as well if any issues arise.'

'Yes. Since we are a small community, there is a strong sense of care, but other schools can learn from our leadership and physical environment. Our headteacher is experienced, calm, accessible, and always visible around the school, which builds immense trust. Furthermore, the school has recently created a dedicated ASN classroom equipped with individualized desks with privacy screens and bean bags. This tailored, sensory-friendly space allows neurodivergent pupils to decompress and learn at their own pace. Visibility in leadership and flexible, quiet physical spaces are things every school should implement.'

'Weekly assembly where praise is given and new targets set has made pupils more aware of expectations and motivated more of them.'

'My daughter's school is really excellent in understanding each child's individuality. The staff take the time to get to know the children and parents.'

'Excellent cultural life, such as a school drama performance in summer and for Christmas. Better information on Sexual Health curriculum. Merit and de-merit system.'

'Mentoring, Career Ready, Good understanding of The Promise for care experienced young people.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Bring back cl&d, I will die on this hill. Parents being welcome in school, at my kids old primary before amalgamating parents were welcome to go to coffee mornings, we could help out with school shows, reading or math groups, cl&d activities with our own kids, this helped to build a community in the school and also helped staff be able to get around all kids instead of having to pick and choose who needed more help. Since amalgamating and COVID it's far and few between where parents have been made welcome in schools. I have high expectations for the new head teacher at my son's old primary school because I intended my daughter going there but because it's not our catchment I'm no longer able to put in a placing request in my LA so she will instead be home educated.'

'At this time for my son, no. While in S3 I could have said yes had started improving. However school removed all his support in under a year. We are still on a recovery journey. He still does not understand why school did this to him.'

'Primary school- engaging pupils. There are so many ways of pupils getting involved in things. The staff really get to know the children. I think they've managed very well to keep a small school feel through their expansion. Secondary- I like the way they break slightly from the local authority attitude. They do what suits their pupils. They offer courses and encourage subjects based on the young people rather than league tables.'

'Children actively explore wellbeing Indicators and suggest ways to monitor their own wellbeing. All children can request trusted-adult conversations at any time. Teachers do regular check-ins with the children and guide them through Zones of Regulation. Every classroom has a Safe Space. Celebration conversations based on school values. Assembly certificates. Headteacher/teachers are always happy to meet parents and discuss the children's needs/learning with them.'

'The school has begun to provide a satellite provision out of school which is a great touch point for those unable to engage with school. The HT is very proud of it and rightly so, but there is not much evidence of reflection and review and it feels like the box has been ticked and he's moved on. In reality it is very difficult for young people using the provision to get the learning they need especially when they get to the senior phase.'

'My primary school asked parents and carers for their improvement priorities for the improvement plan. These were then discussed at parent council as well and then then incorporated into the three year cycle. This was shared with parents and carers in a parent -friendly version.'

'Our school offers bee keeping to ASN mainstream young people - more of this kind of qualification would be fabulous. There subjects give a sense of pride and value to the ASN people who are most at risk of low self esteem.'

'Homework is non-compulsory but reading and maths are encouraged across all primaries. Reading for fun is encouraged through children choosing their own library book for the week alongside their classroom book.'

'Historically, there was excellent communication between school and parents. Parents were actively consulted on many aspects. This helped us to feel involved, part of a community and that we were part of the team. That is sadly no longer the case.'

Q16. In your experience, how can the views and experiences of parents and carers be used more effectively to improve education? (84 answered, 23 skipped)

84 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Genuine partnership working **79**
- Parents and carers as equal partners **79**
- Early involvement in policy **5**
- Direct engagement with decision-makers **17**
- School leadership **1**
- Transparency and accountability **21**
- Listening to lived experience **6**
- Acting on feedback **1**
- Parents' concerns not listened to **10**
- Wider representation of parents **79**
- Accessible engagement **2**
- Parent Councils **6**
- Building trust **26**
- Families having to fight for support **4**
- Positive partnership experiences **13**

Sample of Parent's comments

'Parents and carers should be treated as genuine experts on their own children. Currently, when a parent raises a concern about mental health or neurodivergence, they are often told to wait for formal bureaucratic assessments. To improve education, schools should use parent feedback as an immediate trigger for early intervention. If a parent says a child is struggling, that should be enough evidence to start providing tailored support and sensory adjustments in the classroom right away, rather than letting the child fall behind while waiting on a list.'

'Keep revisiting topics/questions rather than assuming that what the parent cohort thought a few years ago still applies.'

'Parents could be listened to at the first point of contact. Many parents of neurodiverse children are often not listened, labelled and gaslighted, rather than acknowledging that they are the experts in their children's needs.'

'I would prefer the views of school staff be considered.'

'Feed back to government that education needs to focus on core teaching, maths and literacy. Social justice issues should not be focussed on. Health and Wellbeing is important, but is this a school issue, and what has this to do with education. Start reading full books again. Limit screen time.'

'Encourage better participation in parent council etc. Invite parents to be involved in curriculum decisions. My child's sec school is unfortunately not located in our immediate community (20 min drive away), so we feel quite isolated as a result as communication can be poor.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Make it easier for parents to communicate with the school. Communications all tend to be one way with no obvious way to reply.'

'You are gaining access to real experiences, real impact, real journeys, hopefully some positive ones, sorry I couldn't help! If a child cannot cope then it's not working for them. If the school are not affording them their education and getting results, then that also is not working for them. If the child is struggling with extreme social anxiety and low mood, disengaged with all then he has been failed, needs not met, bullied or both.'

'I think discussion is useful for everyone. By discussing subjects at parent council meetings, I have seen ideas generated that have resulted in changes to policies, procedures and approaches. It's always good to get different opinions ideas.'

'Can be same group of parents listened too and asking for positive feedback minimising negative feedback and be tokenistic as worried about school reputation.'

'Schools must listen to parental requests and if they can't action then their authority should listen. Parents should have a pathway of easier support if they think the school is going against their needs or policy. I didn't want my son on a part time timetable and asked that staff are better trained and trauma informed. They did not listen and he was kept on a part time timetable without my consent. This affected his emotion well being and safety as I work full time. He would go into school as he wanted to be there and would be asked to leave. He is CE and ASN.'

'The most effective approach is to move from informing parents to consulting them, to genuinely involving them in decisions and improvement. This requires schools to listen to a diverse range of families. Value parents' experience alongside professional expertise and educational evidence. Act on feedback where appropriate. Communicate the impact of that feedback. Evaluate whether the changes have improved children's learning, wellbeing and inclusion. Parents and carers should not be expected to replace teachers or educational professionals. Instead, their knowledge should complement professional expertise, helping schools develop more responsive, inclusive and effective educational experiences for all children.'

'Treat parent and carer experience as a form of improvement evidence, not simply as feedback or something collected when a problem becomes a complaint. Families often see patterns across school, home, health and support services that no single professional sees. Schools and government should gather lived-experience evidence routinely, in accessible ways, and combine it with attainment, attendance, wellbeing and inclusion data. Parents should be involved in co-designing policies and services before decisions are made, with particular effort to include families of neurodivergent children, children with complex needs and children who are struggling to attend. Most importantly, consultation needs a visible feedback loop: tell families what was heard, what will change, who is responsible, the timescale and how impact will be measured. Repeatedly asking families for their story without visible change undermines trust.'

'The Assembly is a useful approach. What is needed next is for those with the power to listen and act on what we say, not just read our comments and then do whatever they had already decided.'

Additional Questions

Q17. If you could make one change to improve education outcomes for young people in Scotland, what would it be? (101 answered, 6 skipped)

101 respondents left comments on the following themes

- More staffing and resources **19**
- Smaller class sizes **14**
- Additional Support Needs **19**

- School leadership **3**
- Mental health and wellbeing **17**
- Individualised learning **15**

- More inclusive education **9**
- Reform mainstream provision **9**
- Alternative learning pathways **9**

- More parental involvement **22**
- Greater accountability **9**
- School environment **14**

- Early intervention **4**
- Teacher training **8**
- More focus on literacy and numeracy **5**

- Fair opportunities for all **17**
- More focus on teaching and learning **14**

- More practical and life skills **4**
- Ban or restrict mobile phones **4**
- Better behaviour management **7**

Sample of Parent's comments

'Their success in life, are they thriving in profession they are best at, are they happy healthy and successful.'

'To truly improve outcomes, Scotland needs to bridge the gap between academic pressure and pupil well-being. A major barrier today is that we treat education as a one-size-fits-all system. Many young people are struggling with their mental health or waiting years for essential neurodivergent diagnoses. My single change would be to mandate tailored, timely support and ensure teachers have the resources to see and support every child as an individual, rather than forcing them into boxes. A child who is struggling mentally cannot learn effectively.'

'To properly support and resource additional support needs. There are too many unmet needs due to lack of staffing, resources, training and understanding. My son has a one-to-one support assistant, and they require no training on any of my son's disabilities. There is no mandatory training on neurodivergent children and without understanding, how can education outcomes improve?'

'It would be individualised. An educational plan should be written from nursery and be electronically stored so every involved professional can have access to it to help develop it as the child gets older. We need smaller schools for neurodivergent kids. They can't cope in huge cathedral designs. Kids are being traumatised and that's just immoral and wrong in a country that says it's a commitment to UNCRC. I hope that in future those who caused so much harm are prosecuted for their failures.'

'Ask the Education Secretary to see the PISA results in a realistic light and step away from party politics making the leading party look good. It is about the education of the young generation, not the next election result.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'A total reform of education including specialist education and class sizes.'

'Focus on national literacy and numeracy programmes of work, rather than individual schools paying for this subscription or that lesson planner - most don't even align with CfE.'

'Improve standards of behaviour for everyone's benefit.'

'I would give them more educational challenges and regularise homework. Students need a bit of push to excel in their life skills.'

'Regardless of timetabling or transport issues, make the same opportunities available for all of our young people. Change the culture of 5 Highers being the gold standard. Change the culture of university being the most suitable pathway for all - most definitely not the case!'

'Remove devices with screens from all but computing lessons.'

'A need for awareness, a genuine real understanding of social anxiety, the daily challenges that can present with this. If unsupported, pushed too far than able to do so can manifest in a child to avoidance, and low mood as well as other medical issues. This would be my one change! the only avoidance I want to see is another child going through this at the hands of education.'

'My son has been at secondary since August, and teacher attendance seems to be an issue. I'm sure that every week since starting he has come home and said a teacher was off and they had a substitute covering that either done something different entirely to the planned class or they had a free period to sit in the communal area. I'm of with occasional times like this but it is a regular occurrence. It doesn't exactly show pupils that attendance is a priority in the school.'

'Make education right for all children and stop trying to shove them all into one box. Make schools different to each other so that kids who want to go in one direction can attend a school geared towards that and others can go to other schools geared towards what other kids want to learn. Stop the one size fits all education from years past. We are entering a new world, and these kids will be the ones that change it. Educate them so they can do it in the best way for them.'

'Kindergarten stage in introduced, giving every child more of a chance to start learning formally when they are 7, rather than forcing kids to school at 4. Many kids already have a disadvantage if parents are disengaged/unsupportive and they just aren't ready for learning in the way it is now.'

'Ease off a bit. Children's and their teachers predominantly work ridiculously hard in a system that hasn't adapted or changed in a while. They are trying to prepare for a world that has never been seen before and learning as they go how to adapt to it. It would probably be an unpopular opinion but having a bit more support, fun and time off would, in my mind, do wonders.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'If I could make one change, it would be to move towards a genuinely child-centred education system, where decisions are based on the needs, abilities, interests and aspirations of individual young people rather than the constraints of the system. We need to recognise that children do not all learn in the same way or have the same strengths. Success should not be defined too narrowly by academic attainment. Young people should have access to the right support, opportunities and pathways to allow them to develop their strengths and achieve their potential, whether that is through academic, vocational, creative, sporting or other routes. This also requires earlier identification of barriers to learning and better partnership between schools, families and other services, so that children receive the right support before difficulties become entrenched.'

'More support staff to make all the other things happen.'

'Enhanced outdoor learning provision - classrooms do not need walls for the children to learn effectively but regular and consistent exposure would benefit young people both from an academic side and also health and wellbeing.'

'Far more centralised, far more accountability from councils and schools.'

'Ensure a wider variety of education models are available. Traditional schooling does not meet the needs of every child. There needs to be more opportunities for learning which do not involve classroom settings.'

'ASN support or failing that proper home education support and funding. Don't drive kids out of school with inadequate support then put the costs on families.'

'Clear flow charts disseminated to all ..children, catered and parents, staff and local government if safe behaviour policies as the standard....all incidents recorded. Staff who fail to record sacked! Because a child health, future and learning is destroyed by their incompetence any staff who lie to cover up immediately sacked. Bring back qualities of honesty, trust and compassion and open apology for when things go wrong in schools to families and especially the pupils! No child should be hit kicked and clothes stripped off and hurt at school?!... Especially not by staff? The illegal restraints? Have to stop!'

'An overhaul of what class teachers need to cover to free up time so children have more mental health and wellbeing time, more down time, more quiet times, less of a packed timetable so all staff could support children more fully.'

'As a parent of two neurodivergent children, I have experienced how difficult it can be for children whose needs don't necessarily fit within the traditional education system. I would like to see a more flexible and individualised approach, where children's emotional wellbeing, sensory needs and different ways of learning are genuinely understood and supported. I believe genuine inclusion means listening to children and their parents, recognising difficulties before they become overwhelming, and adapting the environment rather than expecting children to constantly adapt to it. Every child deserves not just access to education, but an environment where they can feel safe, understood and able to thrive.'

Q18. What would an education system that promotes excellence and equity look like for every young person in Scotland? (92 answered, 15 skipped)

92 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Equity **24**
- Fair opportunities for all **24**
- Individualised provision **23**
- Wellbeing and belonging **18**
- Staffing and resources **8**
- Children's rights and views **24**
- Additional Support Needs **16**
- Inclusive education **13**
- Individual progress **23**
- Parent and carer involvement **18**
- Positive school experiences **11**
- Accountability **10**
- Attainment **23**
- Literacy and numeracy **4**
- Life skills **4**
- Alternative learning pathways **5**
- Curriculum flexibility **14**
- Safe and supportive schools **37**

Sample of Parent's comments

'An education system promoting excellence and equity would be a compassionate, flexible system where well-being and academic achievement go hand in hand. Equity would mean that every single child is truly seen, and their unique learning or mental health challenges are met with immediate, early intervention rather than years on a waiting list. Excellence would naturally follow, because when pupils feel safe, understood, and supported as individuals—with access to calm, tailored environments—they are empowered to reach their full potential, regardless of their background.'

'A child-centred approach. The child's needs should be first and foremost and working in partnership with parents to get the right support in place for the child.'

'Every child should be literate, have access to at least two healthy meals a day and physical activity three times a week.'

'Adaptable, inclusive, equal and respectful.'

'Neuroinclusive, smaller classes, more 1:1, outdoors, valuing play, lots of music, art, drama and creativity. Less focus on literacy and numeracy and closing the attainment gap because clearly what's happening isn't working. Less national testing. More flexible options - forest school etc.'

'Support would be available for children with additional needs, and taking care of these children would not affect the other students in the class. Often the teachers spend the majority of time dealing with the children that need more support and the children who are seen as capable are given less attention.'

'Lots of small bespoke designs of schools to meet the various needs of so many diverse children. This country takes more heed of religious beliefs than the facts of disability. We do not need separate school because of gods.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Remove the neuronormative elements of the cFE benchmarks and pls pls train staff on how to support all kids. Not a half an hour lecture on autism or young carers once at uni. On going training. And give them more time to focus on this and less wasting time on paperwork etc.'

'High expectations of the children. Making sure they all find a place of belonging. Make sure children get to explore pathways and options, and seeing role models as examples of what they can be if they work hard!'

'Ensuring that every young person feels valued and leaves school with some level of qualification that has met their needs.'

'Inclusion, not "presumption of mainstream", actual inclusion where children are included in an environment suited to their needs, not suited to the wants of local authorities under the guise of inclusion.'

'For all with and without ASN to achieve qualifications that they aspire to achieve, not restricted of what the school allows.'

'One that adheres to the wonderful legislation already adopted such as the UNCRC and the Islands Act. One that listens to parents/carers such as those on SW Mull that feel invisible in the system and who are concerned at their children's long-term educational outcomes and the impact of enforced separation so they can complete their high school education in Oban when there is an opportunity to do this on Mull. Ensure that data is not only being recorded but is also available and being reviewed and concerns are being actioned. Promote collaborative working and see review and change as important to meet changing needs rather than criticism. Promote a better way of working for all so all have ownership in the educations system/buy-in.'

'It would provide high-quality teaching, a supportive and inclusive learning environment, and early access to the right support for those who need it (including support from NHS and CAMHS). Success would not be measured only by academic attainment, but also by young people's wellbeing, confidence, skills and readiness for adult life. Teachers would have the time, resources and training to meet diverse learning needs, while parents and carers would be valued as partners in decision-making. Young people's voices would always be heard, with their individual strengths, interests and aspirations helping to shape their learning. Ultimately, excellence and equity mean having high expectations for every young person while recognising that not everyone needs the same support to succeed. No child should be disadvantaged because of poverty, disability, additional support needs or their family circumstances. Every young person should feel included, valued and equipped to achieve their potential.'

'One with a clear leadership - not some decisions made by the HT, some by the local authority, some by the government. We have a postcode lottery for education in Scotland.'

'A system that listens to families and young people. A system that offers every person an opportunity. A system that supports its teachers and schools to offer the very best that they can.'

Q19. What should be the top priorities for the next five years to help young people achieve their full potential? (96 answered, 11 skipped)

96 respondents left comments on the following themes

- Staffing and resources **32**
- Additional Support Needs **32**
- More inclusive education **20**

- Ban or restrict mobile phones **1**
- Review reliance on Edtech **1**
- Mental health and wellbeing **26**

- Early intervention **10**
- Smaller class sizes **28**
- Teacher training **23**

- School environment **28**
- Fair opportunities for all **18**
- Parent and carer involvement **32**

- School leadership **2**
- Behaviour and discipline **10**
- Literacy and numeracy **16**

- Children's voices **6**
- Accountability **10**
- Evidence-based teaching **36**

- More focus on core learning **14**
- Life skills and practical learning **12**
- Alternative learning pathways **9**

- Wider achievement and qualifications **17**
- School leaver pathways **16**

Sample of Parent's comments

'Guiding them from education to adulthood. Often young adults leave school without proper guidance training preparation for an adult life. They lacking financial education, they lacking confidence they don't know their options.'

'Over the next five years, the top priorities must be: 1. Eradicating waiting lists for neurodivergent diagnoses and mental health support, ensuring that early intervention happens the moment a child struggles rather than years later. 2. Properly funding frontline staff and classroom resources, reducing class sizes so teachers have the capacity to see every child as an individual without relying on unpaid staff overtime. 3. Adapting the physical school environment to be genuinely inclusive, learning from schools that successfully implement quiet, sensory-friendly spaces and tailored learning areas for pupils with additional support needs.'

'Better partner working with pupils and wider agencies. Increased staffing (staff feel under valued and burnt out). Further work including the UNCRCs children's rights.'

'Investment in support to increase attendance. Continuous assessment being a real option for pupils who don't/ can't do exams.'

'Belonging- not just "access" or "inclusion". Role models. Opportunities outside school. Life skills and wellbeing.'

'Encourage children to take school as an advantage for learning. Put more pressure on teachers for teaching rather than giving them paper work. Help all students in their learning journey to settle them better in high schools.'

'Get phones out of classrooms.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'Allow academic children to shine too (a lot of focus on non academic pathways). Allow headmasters powers to deal with serious behaviour issues with exclusion type punishments.
Behaviour and support for learning are two issues that affect EVERY child as they take extra teaching time. Support for learning is a positive system we need; dealing with behaviour issues is a negative experience for absolutely everyone including the wider class - allow more punishments, involve the parents in a more meaningful way, nip bad behaviour in the bud.'

'More lifeskills education (such as money management, entrepreneurship, community participation, politics etc) and health and wellbeing support (for example giving pupils the tools they need to be healthy such as diet advice, mental wellbeing advice/support.'

'Priority is it can't take 5 years, that's like saying current S1 experiencing challenges, could potentially struggle throughout high school until you implement what they need for the better. You need to act for the kids struggling now.'

'Review of the local authority role in education; review of the parent & carer role in education; promote more discussion for instance on-line and in-person chats with local stakeholders etc who want to support our schools; review how parents/carers are communicated to and included in education; have some sort of group that meets to discuss these specific concerns.'

'Early intervention and individualised support: Identify learning difficulties, additional support needs and emotional wellbeing concerns early, ensuring young people receive the right help before they fall behind. Reduce inequalities: Address the impact of poverty and disadvantage so every young person has access to the resources, opportunities and experiences they need to succeed. Support teachers and school staff: Invest in staffing, training and manageable workloads so professionals have the time and resources to meet the diverse needs of their pupils. Prioritise mental health and wellbeing not only for students but also for teachers and other school staff: Ensure people feel safe, included, valued and supported, with timely access to appropriate mental health services. Strengthen partnerships with families: Listen to parents and carers, value their knowledge of their children and involve them meaningfully in decisions about learning and support. Develop skills for life and work: Provide relevant learning experiences that develop critical thinking, digital skills, creativity, independence and employability, alongside academic achievement. Ultimately, I would prioritise creating an inclusive education system that recognises every young person's individual strengths and needs, rather than expecting everyone to succeed in the same way. This requires early support, adequate resources and genuine collaboration between schools, families and communities.'

'Training for teachers and support in classrooms. Bring in external tutors eg dance like hip hop, drama, graffiti artists, bricklayers, nursery teachers and engaging in visits. My daughter is currently visiting a care home and has been matched with a lady called Nora. She's also visited the local nursery to help out, these are invaluable and should be offered in all schools to teach empathy amongst other life skills.'

Sample of Parent's Comments continued

'1.Increase number of staff to support the poor behaviour from increasingly disruptive children. 2.Increase the number of staff to provide a more individualised approach to teaching. This can even be PSAs who do their reading with them or whatever they are needing support with to really thrive. This shouldn't be left simply to those who are struggling, but for those who can really strive and exceed way beyond. 3. More structured tests to see where the kids levels are at more consistently through the year so support can be targeted where it is needed. 4. Introduce real consequences to bad behaviour. 5. Reduce class sizes.'

'1. To have the right to decide if it's academic or practical they want to learn at school. 2. More face to face education and less reliant on technology. 3. Enhance social and life skills.'

'Improve communication between schools and parents, with regular, informal check-ins rather than waiting for problems to arise. Encourage genuine curiosity from school staff about children's experiences, needs and home lives. Build trusting relationships with families, making it easier for parents to raise even small concerns without feeling they are making a fuss. Prioritise early intervention, identifying difficulties before they escalate or reach crisis point. Provide more individualised and flexible support, recognising that every child learns and develops differently. Invest in smaller class sizes and better staff training, particularly around neurodiversity in girls, emotional wellbeing and additional support needs. Listen more actively to children and parents, recognising their experiences as valuable sources of information. Value emotional wellbeing alongside academic achievement, ensuring children feel safe, understood and included. Offer diverse educational pathways, recognising different strengths, interests and definitions of success.'

'Opening more opportunities for youth work and youth workers to meet young people in places and spaces where they feel comfortable.'

'Address the needs of young people that are struggling to ensure they want to attend school. Provide a curriculum that excites young people and ignites their curiosity, driving the learning process.'

'1. Access to whole family support. 2. Access to dignified food provision / free school meals for all. 3. A varied timetable so that there are options to support achievement in a range of ways, and subjects. 4. Support for technical / practical subjects to be valued as highly as academic. 5. support for young people with additional support needs - when, where and how they need it - not a postcode lottery or waiting until they are in crisis.'

'Better data, more centralisation, more back to basics - and get screens out of classrooms, where all the evidence now says that they do more harm than good. Admit that there have been mistakes and move on to a system that prioritises the right things.'

'I don't care now, we have a year to go then we will be out of the toxic high school system. My children are intelligent, hard working, ambitious, but school was a disaster. Because they have invisible disabilities and neurodiversity. We are well off middle class academic types but they also wouldn't have coped with private schools. So I have no idea what I could have done differently. I tried my best, all my emails and responding to consultations, and meetings, and writing to MSPs, councillors, parent council, etc. In the end as long as teachers are not trained in diversity and equality and there are no consequences for their poor practice, nothing will change. And as long as popular kids face no consequences for their subtle bullying nothing will change.'

Focus Group Discussions – summary

Focus Group 1 – 21st October 2026

The discussion highlighted that national ambitions and school-level powers need to be judged by their effect on children's day-to-day learning, inclusion and support. Parents wanted clarity about who can decide what, transparent accountability, and evidence that their experiences influence the next stages of policy development.

- **Inclusion and support**

Members emphasised meaningful participation, practical ASN training and recognising attendance difficulties as possible unmet needs

- **Safety, behaviour and learning**

Bullying, unsafe spaces and classroom behaviour were discussed as barriers to wellbeing, attendance and learning.

- **What counts as success**

Families wanted individual progress, belonging and wellbeing recognised alongside attainment and standard reporting.

- **School decisions and accountability**

Parent saw the value in decisions made close to the child but called for clear national safeguards and independent challenge.

- **Resources and partnership**

Views differed on the roles of funding and school culture. Parents want early, respectful involvement and clarity about school powers.

'There's definitely a lack of understanding for additional needs, I feel.'

'I think it needs to be mandatory.'

'I'm in the class. I'm sitting with the class. The teacher's talking to the class, but I'm actually included in the class.'

'Nobody questions why a child doesn't want to go to school.'

'How can you learn if that's happening? Your basic needs aren't really being adhered to.'

'The protection seems to be more for the bullies than the bullied children.'

'What's successful for some individuals is making it through a whole day of school.'

'Where is the actual real measuring of attainment based on the actual young people that are involved instead of this generic capture.'

'I don't care who makes the decisions. I want the person who has the right attitude and the right leadership qualities.'

'Their local school has got to be the best fit for every child'

'The school and the parents, they know the pupil better and they should be allowed to make those decisions.'

'None of the things my son needs cost anything.'

'There needs to be mechanism that so much funding must go towards ASN.'

Focus Group 2 – 22nd October 2026

Parents and carers want an education system that gets the basics right, responds to individual needs and makes decisions based on what works for children and young people. While recognising the pressures facing schools, they called for greater transparency, accountability and meaningful parental involvement, particularly around the use of technology, resources and decisions affecting their children's learning and wellbeing.

- **Core learning and progress**

Parents want clearer evidence of literacy and numeracy progress, including learning gaps not reflected in attainment targets.

- **Digital learning and smartphones**

Participants questioned screen use, educational apps and transparency, distinguishing classroom technology from smartphone rules.

- **Inclusion and timely support**

Families described difficulties accessing adjustments before distress escalated, while recognising pressures on all learners and teachers

- **Autonomy, accountability and spending**

Parents asked who can make decisions, how can they be challenged, and what evidence supports resource and technology spending.

- **Genuine parent voice**

Families want accessible information, opportunities to shape decisions early and visible feedback on what changed.

‘You can't improve what you don't measure.’

‘I have massive concerns about the use of screens and iPads and technology in school.’

‘I don't know how much screen time he has in school per day.’

‘I think there's two separate issues between the phone and the way the technology is used.’

‘..then teach them how to search things online and teach them about, you know, checking the sources”

‘I begged the head teacher put in more adequate support.’

‘The teachers are struggling to support all needs in the classroom.’

‘Everybody's struggling. The children are struggling, all children, not just neurodivergent children.’

‘How on earth can you have school empowerment when you can't have a teacher who is even allowed to feel slight friction with the council.’

‘You can't have effectiveness if you haven't got transparency.’

‘Your decision making should be accountable to the people who you are working for.’

‘They can't afford to buy textbooks for the class because we all have to use an app.’

‘Stop spending money on screens and saying there’s no money for teachers.’

TEXT BOX

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