Coronavirus has led to major change in attitudes about parental responsibility for children's education

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School closures have led to a change in attitudes among parents about who should be responsible for their child's education, a major new survey shows.

Families are more likely to think they should be involved in their child's education since the coronavirus pandemic began, the research, from the Centre for Social Mobility at the University of Exeter, shows.

The survey, jointly designed with the Centre for Education and Youth, was run online to allow parents and teachers around the country to share their experiences and concerns about school closures. Around 2,200 people took part in the survey during April.

A total of 35% of parents said before the school closures they had thought children's education was the responsibility of schools, compared to 7% after closures. Around 60% had viewed education as a shared responsibility between teachers and parents, this fell to 38%. A total of 5% said before closures they had thought said education was the responsibility of parents, after closure this rose to 55%.

The survey also shows a fifth of parents who took part in the research would consider educating their children at home after the coronavirus lockdown if they were paid to do so. 21% of those who responded said they would want to teach their children part time if they were paid to do it when schools reopen.

Almost three quarters of teachers who responded to the survey, 72%, said school closures would have a negative impact on pupil wellbeing and safety, while around one in 10 felt it would make no difference.

Many parents who took part in the survey said they are enjoying the chance to spend more time with their children, but they are also feeling tired, stressed and anxious about their ability to juggle work, home schooling, and their own needs.

Students said they were finding learning at home boring, stressful, and repetitive, but many also said they were finding more time to relax, and some said their health had improved without the pressure of exams.

Half of parents said they felt their main purpose in home schooling was to provide continuity with their child's previous school-based learning, while a quarter said they were aiming to provide a broader range of experiences than their child would normally get in the classroom and 25% said they were trying to keep their children busy until schools reopen.

Parents of children with special educational needs
and disabilities are facing particular challenges. One parent said: "My child is autistic and has found the schools closing very difficult. He misses his school, his friends, his teacher and his routine. He is very sad about missing out on year 6 experiences. He is very worried that he might not be able to go back to school before the end of the year. He is working hard at his home schooling because the work is set by his teacher, but he misses the input of the class and he needs a lot of help and encouragement in some curriculum areas."

More broadly, parents are feeling the strain but also reported finding some positives. One parent said: "I am working from home and it is very hard to supervise school work for two children whilst working. I am feeling stressed that I am not doing a good enough job and that their education will suffer. I am so tired at the end of each day that I have cried a few times. On the plus side it has been lovely spending so much time with the kids and they seem happy."

Many teachers highlighted the challenges inherent in off-site learning. However, around half of teachers who took part in the research said they felt that their experience of off-site teaching will have a positive impact on their teaching once children return to classrooms.

A total of 38% of teachers who took part said they didn't think the lockdown would have an impact on their teaching, and 6% said it would have a negative impact.

Professor Anna Mountford-Zimdars, Academic Director of the University of Exeter's Centre for Social Mobility, said: "Our survey paints a picture of the current wellbeing of parents, guardians, children and teachers just a few weeks into this major change in children's lives. We can see their views have changed rapidly, and this is likely to have an impact on education in the future.

"Our aim is to rapidly analyse our findings so we can report them to Government and others who support children and families."


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