

# Parent Survey – Thematic Analysis

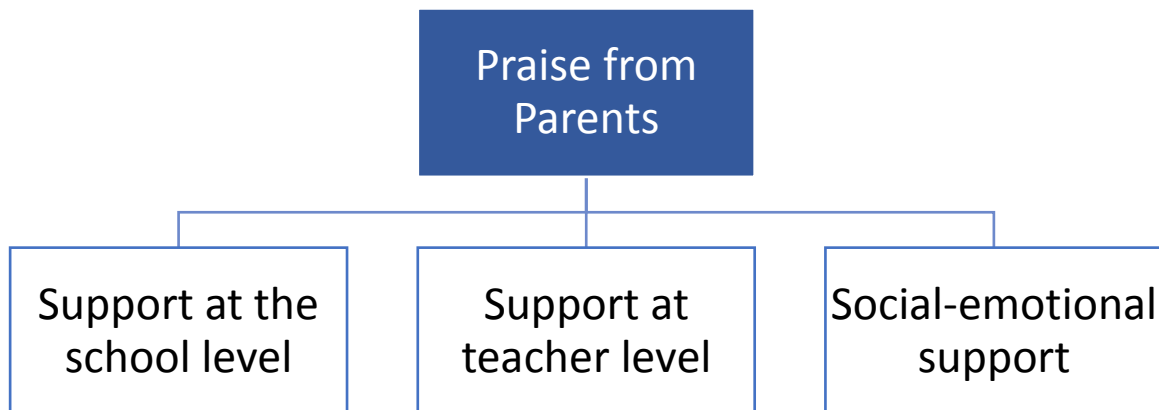
## An Initial Thematic Analysis of Parent Surveys

In response to the question “Overall, on a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied have you been with how the school/EYC has supported your child's learning and engagement at home?” 6,054 of 6,653 (90.98%) responding parents stated that they were very satisfied, satisfied or neutral. The average weighted score on a scale of 1 to 5 was 3.99.

2,069 parents/carers gave more detailed responses to this question, and these responses were read and analysed according to the six stages of thematic analysis, as per Braun & Clarke (2006). The three major themes identified by this process were:

1. Praise from Parents
2. Parental Requests
3. Questions on the Return to School

### Praise from Parents



Within the theme ‘praise from parents’, several subthemes began to emerge: support at the teacher level, support at the school level, and social-emotional support.

Many of the 2,000 parents surveyed acknowledged that, within a difficult and unprecedented time, their child(ren)’s teachers, school, or early years’ centre had gone above and beyond to provide educational continuity for their children. Hundreds of parents specifically expressed their gratitude for their child’s specific teachers and school.

#### Support at School Level

In this difficult time, many schools were praised by parents for continuing to provide the support and services that families, whether vulnerable or not, rely on.

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*"X school have been very supportive and great at keeping in touch with my child. Seesaw apps, messages, and lovely videos and assemblies which have made my child happy and made him feel like he still belongs. Teachers have also been volunteering delivering food boxes and homework to the school kids and always have a smile and a wave to the kids waiting eagerly to see them each week."*<sup>1</sup>

Providing food to children and young people who relied upon free school lunches was an area of concern prior to lockdown, and families anecdotally indicate that this support has continued to be delivered in a positive manner.

Furthermore, many schools have made use of virtual learning environments (VLEs), online platforms and social networking sites to continue to promote a sense of connection for pupils and families where possible.

*"X school have been amazing in both preparing our children for lockdown and maintaining contact and support throughout. I feel they have gone above and beyond for my children. Online learning through Facebook group. Weekly telephone and FaceTime calls. IT support at home and even doorstep drop offs for special occasions. As parents we have felt supported with constant updates and able to message for assistance with home schooling. We are so grateful for their dedication."*

Many parents and carers made brief, general comments on the support that they'd received from their child's school. The quality and quantity of work received were often praised, whether the work was being delivered online or in paper form.

### Support at Teacher Level

Parents appreciated receiving support from teachers in the form of phone calls, video calls, socially distant visits etc.

*"X Academy have been wonderful. My children's guidance teacher Mrs X has been in regular contact to see how my two children are getting on (S1&S2). The school also offered parent the chance to pop in and collect paper copies of some of the children's work which was fantastic as we only have one laptop at home We were notified when the change of timetable was happening too. Personally given the fact this global pandemic hit without warning I personally think X Academy Staff (and my NHS of course) have done an outstanding job! Thank you, stay safe and look forward to seeing our children return to school and regain a normal routine."*

Parents were thankful that teachers supported not only their children's wellbeing, but also their own.

*"X primary and early years have been fantastic in supporting my son and my son that will be starting EYC after the holidays. They have had continuous support in school work and*

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<sup>1</sup> Some verbatim responses were edited slightly for clarity and/or to preserve anonymity.

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*transitioning. Supporting me in home schooling and for theirs and mine health and well-being has been their main priority."*

### Social-Emotional Support

As previously mentioned, teachers have continued to provide social and emotional support to children, young people, and their families despite the COVID-19 related school and early-years centre closures. The focus on supporting health and wellbeing for all was regularly mentioned in this survey. Whether this support was provided through targeted activities (e.g. Wellbeing Wednesday, making health and wellbeing posters etc.), a nurturing approach, check-ins via phone call, efforts to make pupils feel less lonely, or an understanding attitude, many families felt they benefited.

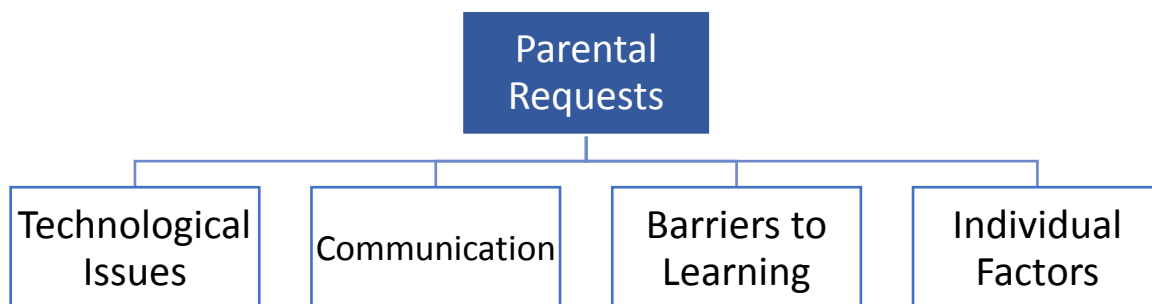
*"Staff at X primary have been excellent at helping us with the homeschooling and my kid has been enjoying the content and activities. Teachers and Mrs. X have also been excellent at supporting us mentally as my kid is a single child and has been feeling very lonely. They always send messages that cheer him up and give him motivation to keep going and try harder... I have no words to express our gratitude to all the staff during this weird time..."*

In particular, many parents seemed to appreciate that while their children were largely given enough work to keep them busy, they were able to choose how much to complete based on what was best for their family (e.g. *"sent with a caring 'just do what you can do!' message"*). Primary and secondary schools did not, parents felt, pressure children to complete more work than they felt able to do.

*"X primary have been very supportive during this time, they send updates regularly and always give fun tasks for kids to be involved in. There has never been a shortage of home learning tasks and also no pressure to complete all. Overall I'm very happy with the support and work of the staff :)"*

While the support of health, wellbeing, and safety was appreciated by many parents at this time, it is worth noting that there were some parents who requested less health and wellbeing content and more literacy and numeracy work

### Requests from Parents



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Within 'requests from parents', several subthemes were discovered – technological issues, communication, barriers to learning and individual factors.

### Technological Issues

Schools in South Ayrshire and across the world had to suddenly move their learning online when COVID-19 forced lockdown and school closures. This transfer to online teaching has understandably had some growing pains, though many parents agree that the early difficulties have improved (e.g. *"Teachers have done an amazing job doing a 180 from classroom training to fully on line. Teething problems for everyone, parents and staff to begin with, but all working well now"*).

For many families a lack of access to technology (old devices, one device among multiple children, no tablets/laptops etc.) has proved difficult, and the use of hard copies of work was frequently suggested as a solution. Where families reached out to their school/teacher for support in this area, most reported that they had received it.

*"Overall I think the teachers have done a great job. I do think too much of the work has relied on a computer though. Which not everyone has access to, and if they do, with multiple children it can be difficult. I think more resources could have been given. Worksheets, reading books etc."*

Lastly, the use of multiple platforms was often confusing for parents and pupils alike – the use of a single platform to teach/access work and a single log-in was frequently requested. What that platform should be was not agreed upon – parents commented in favour of and against many of the apps/VLEs being used (Microsoft Teams, Show My Homework, Seesaw, Twitter etc.).

*"The only comment I have is that I wish all the teachers used the same communication method - I have 4 children whose teachers all use slightly different places to post the activities and it took me a good few weeks to work it all out."*

### Communication

Parents have had varying experiences of communication at this time. While, as previously discussed, many parents have enjoyed regular contact or engagement from their child's school, there were also many parents who found that communication from their school was lacking in quality and quantity.

*"Not much contact and would have liked some sort of tutorial on how to use glow, SMH etc. In saying that though, I am realistic about how difficult it is for schools and am very grateful for what they've done so far"*

*"No personal communication at all from the school, no phone calls or emails. Stuff available on glow but teams is variable and my child doesn't really enjoy/engage with the learning apps, ie Sumdog"*

Many parents also felt that their child would have benefitted from more feedback, particularly one-to-one, from teachers. The nature of several of the online platforms used

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meant that all children's work was visible to the whole class, which could *"encourage social media-like engagement"*. It was felt by some parents that increased feedback would have helped to keep their child motivated, and ensure that their educational progress was not overly hampered (a common concern).

In order to increase communication both with class teachers and peers, many parents requested some form of video classroom/face-to-face learning and teaching – this was by far the most popular suggestion of this particular survey. Parents phrased this in various different ways, but overwhelmingly sought out regular video teaching (via Zoom, google classroom, skype etc.).

### Barriers to Learning

Parents of children with additional support needs expressed some concerns about supporting their child adequately at home. While some parents felt they were receiving extra support from their child's educational provision, there were some who felt that either their child's needs or their own were not being met during school closures.

*"With both of us working full time at home, my son is pretty much left to amuse himself during the day. At school he would be getting a lot of support for his Dyslexia that can't be given at home. As a parent with Dyslexia, I find it very confusing We are mainly focusing on keeping him happy and safe at the moment, rather than getting him upset about his school work."*

Several parents expressed concern that their child was going to fall (further) behind during this period, and several felt guilty that their child might be let down by their personal circumstances and lack of support for home learning (due to being a keyworker, no access to technology, competing childcare needs etc.).

*"there is only so much I can teach him, he is already behind and my fear for him is that he will fall further behind because I can't give him the proper support and learning he needs that he receives in school."*

### Individual Factors

Parents expressed concern over their own ability to teach, engage, or motivate their own children. It was regularly acknowledged that parents are not teachers (e.g. *"Recognizing we are not teachers and our and children's mental health is important at this time"*), and while no one would expect this, parents sometimes felt that the conflict that occurred when trying to encourage their children to learn at home was too much.

*"Teachers are doing great at giving the kids work. But it got a bit too much as I had 3 teachers giving us work and my [son] just refused to do any of it which is hard as this is a hard time for them as well and I cannot take my [son's hand] and force him to write x"*

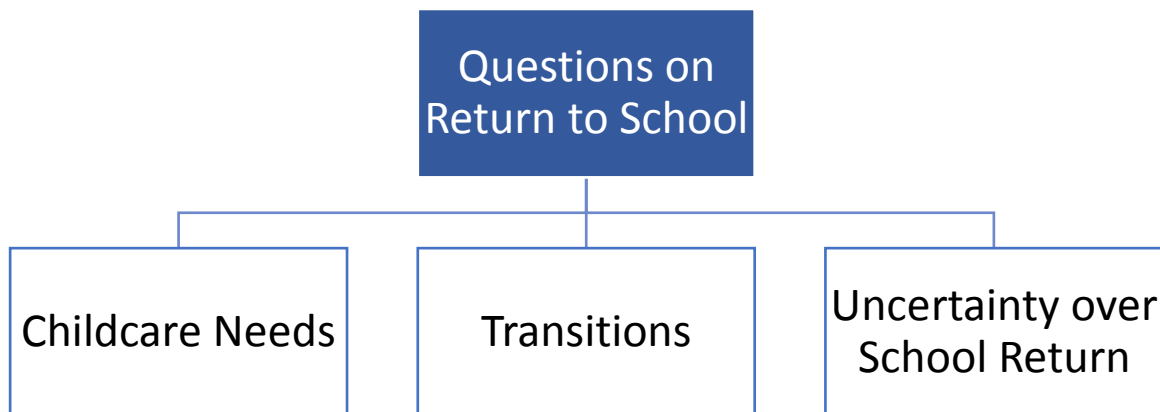
Additionally, many parents who were working from home found that the competing demands of working and teaching were not manageable, or worried that they would become unsustainable.

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*"The school and nursery have been great at communicating with us during this difficult time. It's not easy home schooling and is probably going to get harder once parents have to go back to work."*

Parents with multiple children across different schools and centres felt that their experience of remote learning during lockdown could be very inconsistent. There were several instances of parents who felt that one of their children's schools was better supporting children and young people than others (e.g. *"Wildly varied involvement from different teachers/subjects"*).

## Questions on the Return to School



As one might expect at this difficult time, there were many questions raised around the return to school – the main subthemes within this area were childcare needs (owing to being a keyworker/full-time work), concerns over the return to school and transitions.

### Childcare Needs

For those who have worked through this pandemic and those who anticipate working again once schools return in August, there were many varying concerns around childcare. These concerns related both to accessing keyworker hubs and general childcare for days of home learning.

*"Please bear in mind many parents are working parents and will also have to return to work at some point. This can be difficult to manage days at home when working. What is in place for those at work - will someone pay our childcare? Or is there childcare supporters that can offer to do the home learning?"*

In particular, the ability of children to access home learning in keyworker hubs or alternative childcare on "non-school days" was a regular concern.

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*“Am adding here: what will be the option for parents/carers who are unable to homeschool their children on the days not in school? I am happy for part time school attendance but it seems the council have assumed there will be someone available on the other days to homeschool, which is not the case for many families. I would like to see an option for 3 days per week in school and no home schooling. It is also critical that there are no ‘optional’ lessons as this will drive a wedge between the children of those able to spend more time homeschooling and those of us who cannot. We must be careful not to create a system that exacerbates an attainment gap between our children due to a family’s individual circumstances which many parents have no control over.”*

*“The school have been good at putting school work on teams however my children are at a hub 5 full days a week and it is impossible for them to do school work during the week as they are exhausted when they return home.”*

### Transitions

Parents whose children are due to transition into Primary 1 or 1<sup>st</sup> year of secondary school regularly discussed their worries about this missed period of transition. While this could not have been avoided, there were those who felt their child had been supported and those who felt they had unanswered questions.

*“My son is P7 going to X in august and X primary teachers been great and accessible and the transition prep being given for [academy] is useful to and helping my son look forward to what August brings. Only downside is not being able to finish primary but that’s understandable why he can’t”.*

Parents were often understanding and tolerant of the uncertainty, with the hope that more information will come as the situation becomes clearer.

*“X primary and Academy have been great teaching staff on hand to help. I have a daughter going from [primary] to [academy] and would like more information on transport and the adjustment for them but I do understand this is being worked on”*

### Uncertainty over School Return

Uncertainty over the specific logistics of a return to school in August as well as an inability to anticipate how well controlled the spread of COVID-19 will be was a regular concern. Many parents discussed being uncomfortable with sending their children back to school in the autumn due to infection control or shielding issues. Many parents also had suggestions to make around the specific schedule of part-time return and blended learning. While there is little that can be done to mitigate the anxiety of this uncertainty, most parents would benefit from additional information.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to note that the aforementioned comments represent a cross-section of opinions from across the authority. While approximately 2,000 comments have been interpreted by one individual, it’s important to note that this analysis has been carried out methodically and in line with an established approach to provide meaning. Going forward, it

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will be useful to collect and analyse the views of children and young people on remote/blended learning to support its successful continuation during the current restrictions on in-school learning.



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## Reference

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.