



Educational Supports on the Re-Opening of Schools



A report by AsIAM, Down Syndrome Ireland and Inclusion Ireland on educational supports on the return to school in September 2020.



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Introduction

AsIAM in conjunction with Down Syndrome Ireland and Inclusion Ireland surveyed its members on educational supports on the return to school in September 2020. It is acknowledged that this year has presented a challenge for many school children and families across the state. The impact of Covid-19 on children's educational development is not yet known, however a report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that children with additional needs and those from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds would be more disadvantaged¹. AsIAM is also part of a government funded research project which aims to highlight the unique challenges faced by children and young people on the autism spectrum as a result of the restrictions put in place by Covid-19². School closures and lack of face to face contact acutely impacted members of the Down Syndrome community, the Autism community and Inclusion Ireland's community which is made up of individuals with an intellectual disability. The abrupt closure of schools and other services in March of this year brought many challenges, logistical difficulties and concerns to families. These challenges and concerns directly impacted the demand on each of the organisations associated with this report.

It is acknowledged that Covid-19 presented an unprecedented challenge to Schools and the Department of Education this year. The purpose of this report is to highlight the level of educational supports students and families have received over the course of the last academic year prior to Covid-19 and supports that are currently in place considering Covid-19. The report also highlights the restrictions families have experienced since their children returned to school in September. One area also covered in this report is the controversial topic of reduced timetables which many of our members regularly experience.

¹ Economic and Social Research Institute (2020) *'Assessing the impact of school closures during COVID-19 on second-level teaching and learning in Ireland'*. Available at https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/SUSTAT92_3.pdf (Accessed: 11th November 2020)

² What is T-Res? (2020) Available at <http://tres.ie/index.html#findings> (Accessed: 10th November 2020)

Profile of Contributing Organisations & Methodology

AsIAM

AsIAM is Ireland's National Autism Charity. We work to create a society in which every autistic person is empowered to reach their own personal potential and fully participate in society. We believe that by developing the capacity of the autism community and addressing the societal barriers to inclusion we can make Ireland the world's most autism-friendly country. Our vision is to create a more inclusive Ireland for autistic people – one in which every person can live and succeed "as they are". We provide support to our community through our Community Support and Advocacy Team and run a range of programmes, throughout the life cycle, which aim to equip a wide range of organisations, communities and professionals.



Inclusion Ireland



Established in 1961, Inclusion Ireland is a national, rights-based advocacy organisation that works to promote the rights of people with an intellectual disability. The vision of Inclusion Ireland is that of people with an intellectual disability living and participating in the community with equal rights. Inclusion Ireland's work is underpinned by the values of dignity, inclusion, social justice, democracy and autonomy and we use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to guide our work.

Down Syndrome

Down Syndrome Ireland has worked on behalf of people with Down syndrome and their families since 1971. We work with more than 3,500 people with Down syndrome and their families each year. In addition to a national office, we are made up of 25 local branches which provide a wide range of vital services including education, support and research that enhance the lives of thousands of children and adults with Down syndrome. Our branch network is primarily run on a voluntary basis by our



members and offer a range of activities, outings, services and supports throughout the country. We are dedicated to being the primary source of information and support to people with Down syndrome, their families, and the professional community, working towards an improved quality of life for our members along with a respect and acceptance of people with Down syndrome as valued members of society. We place the person with Down syndrome at the centre of everything we do. We recognise the value and uniqueness of every person with Down syndrome. The unique and diverse needs of people with Down syndrome and their families govern all our activities. We are committed to working towards a society where people with Down syndrome have the same basic human rights to healthcare, education, employment opportunities and decision-making as all other citizens.

Methodology

This survey was conducted over a two-week period from **Monday 5th October to the 19th October 2020**, the number of respondents to this survey was 382 making up community members from Inclusion Ireland, Down Syndrome Ireland and AsIAM. The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey and its quantitative and qualitative tools of analysis. We would like to thank all people who completed the survey.

Survey Analyses

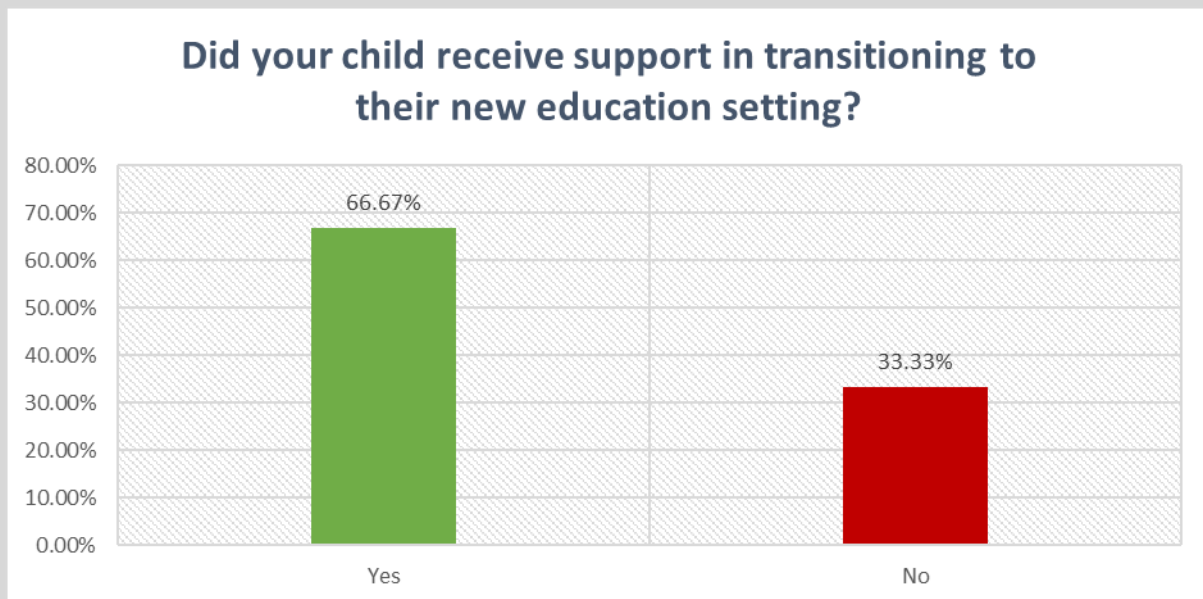
The data in the appendices on page 24 shows a breakdown of the percentage of individuals attending (a) *Primary School or of Primary School age in a Special School* and (b) *Post-Primary School or of post-primary age in a Special School*. A breakdown of this survey shows **68%** of participants were attending a Primary School inclusive of special educational needs settings, whilst **32%** of participants were attending a Secondary School inclusive of special educational needs setting.

Attending School and Transitioning

96% of children attending one of the above educational settings have returned to school post Covid-19, whilst 4% of school children have not yet returned to school on the closing of this survey. This 4% figure, however small, is a significant cohort and it is imperative that the necessary educational supports and resources are put in place to assist this section of our respective communities whilst they are being educated from within the home.

In March of this year, many school children experienced an abrupt end to their time in school. 18% of respondents to this survey during this new academic year had a child who was transitioning from one educational setting to another. Further analyses show that a significant number of these were transitions from primary to secondary school.

The data shows that 67% of children who transitioned from a new education setting had support during this period, whilst 33% of those who transitioned received no support, which is a concern.



It is vital that additional supports are put in place for this cohort of students who transitioned to a new educational environment. In ordinary years, the transition from one school setting to another can bring with it challenges and anxieties for students with additional needs. Covid-19 has certainly heightened these anxieties and pressures, and as a result additional supports are required.

SEN Teaching Supports

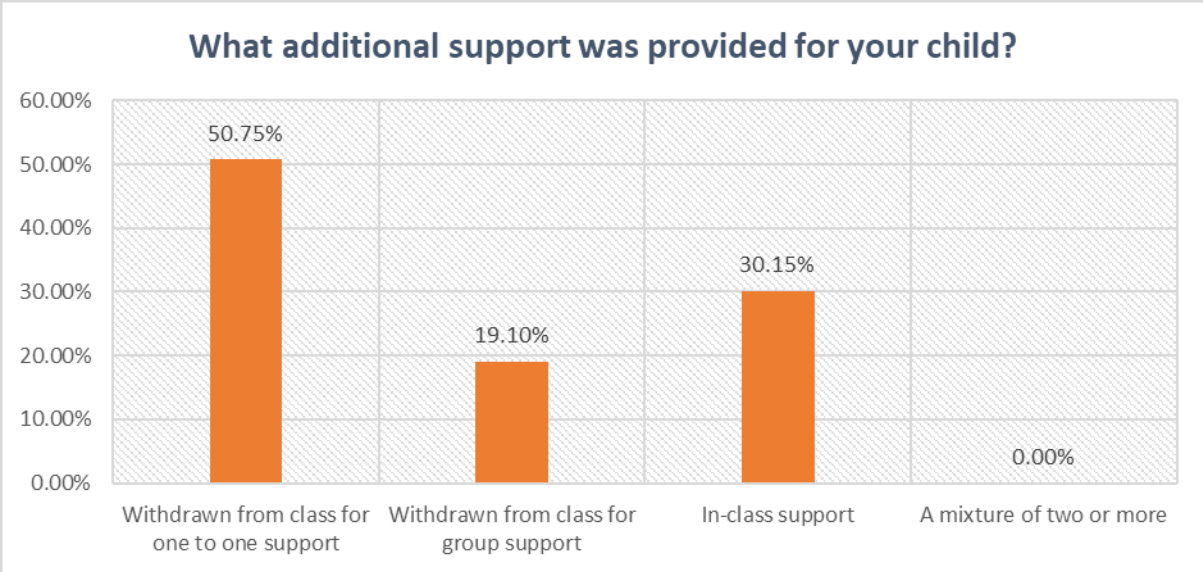
In our survey to parents we asked whether their child was in receipt of any resources or additional SEN support prior to the closure of schools, coupled with questions on whether their children were receiving additional SNA support after the return to school in September of this year. As organisations who represent the most vulnerable cohort of our educational population, we were already of the view that pre-Covid there was a significant shortage of support around the country for children with additional needs. It is a concern that support was not wholly increased post-Covid to reflect the trying realities many families and students with additional needs were experiencing. We also note that despite evidence of increased support needs in schools the frontloaded allocation of SNAs provided to schools in September was based on the resources provided the previous academic year, and so did not reflect new realities.

Additional SEN Support Prior to School Closures

60% of parents stated their child was in receipt of additional SEN supports from their school prior to the closure of schools this year. 22% of parents stated their son or daughter was not receiving any additional SEN teaching support, whilst 18% stated this was 'not applicable' due to their child attending a special school.

When we asked parents to confirm what form this additional support came in for their child:

- 51% of parents stated this support was 'withdrawing student from the class for one-to-one support'
- 19% of parents stated this support was 'withdrawing student from class for group support'
- 30% of parents stated this support was '*In-class support*'

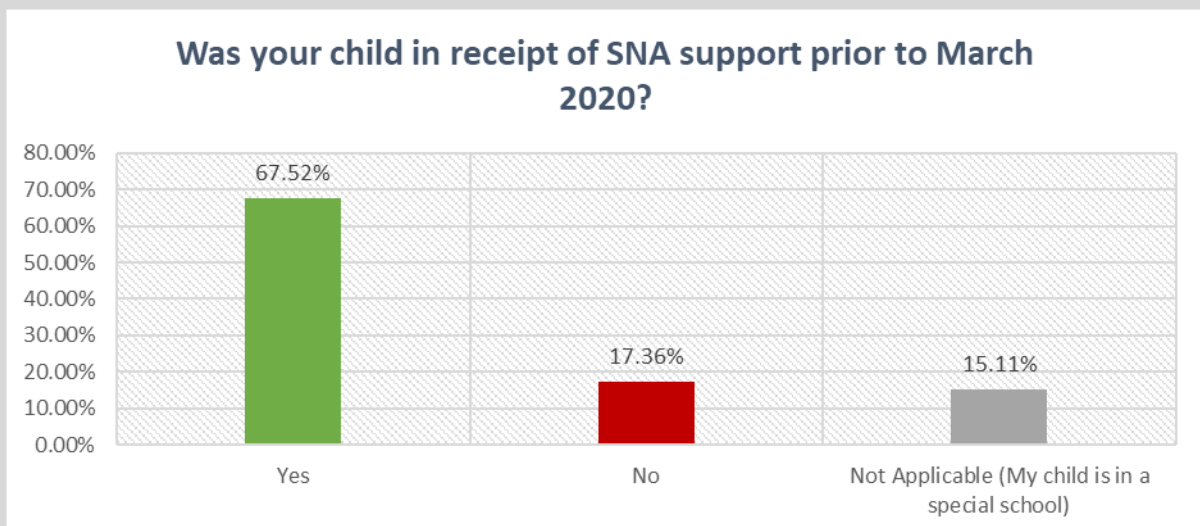


We asked parents to confirm whether their child upon returning to school in September was still receiving additional SEN supports. **17% of parents stated they were no longer receiving these additional supports. While 83% continued to receive additional supports.**

SNA Supports

The role of the SNA is vital in assisting a child with additional needs as they navigate their way through the education system however although this is a needs-based resource, the demand for SNAs currently outweighs the supply. The need for additional SNAs is something each of our organisations is conscious of particularly considering the impact Covid-19 has had on students with additional needs across the country. SNA resource allocation were based on last years and given directly to schools for the first time, there are legitimate concerns with regards trends in students having lost their SNA support in the context of the Ministers plan to formally roll-out the new SNA allocation model.

In this survey 68% of those surveyed stated their child was in receipt of SNA support prior to March 2020, whilst 17% stated their child was not receiving SNA support. 15% of respondents stated 'not applicable' as their child was in a special school.



Of those who confirmed their child was in receipt of SNA supports prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020:

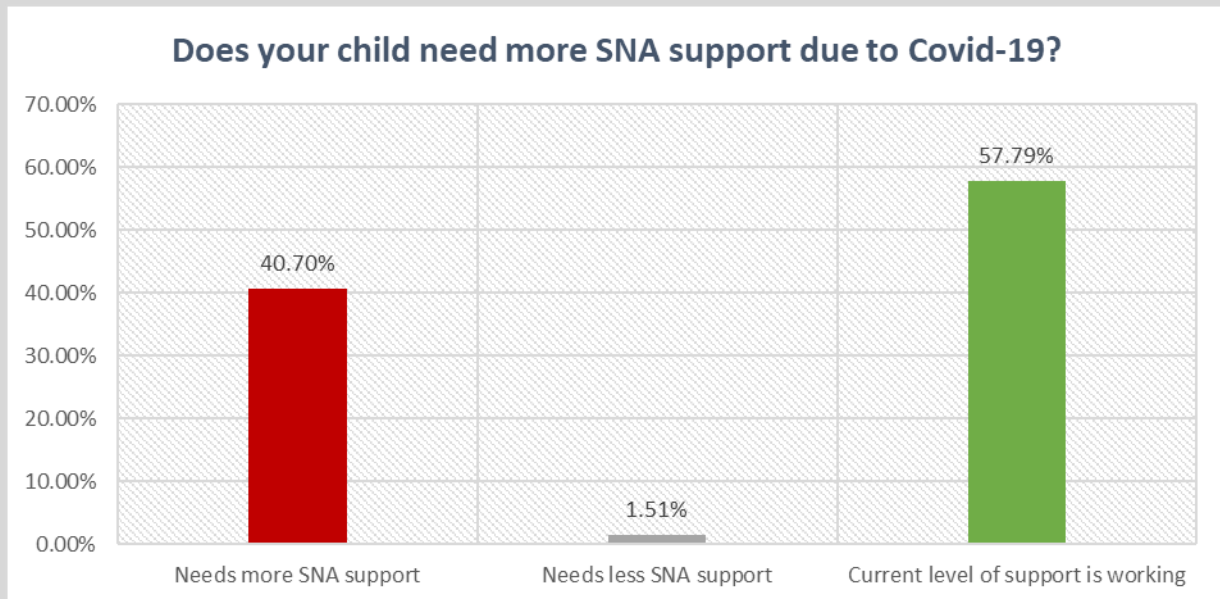
- 39% stated this access was 'one to one' support
- 49% stated this access was 'shared access in class'
- 12% stated this access was 'shared access with students in another class'

We then asked parents since returning to school in September 2020, 'does your child have access to an SNA':

- 69% stated their child's access to an SNA 'remained the same'

- 4% stated their child's hours were *'increased'*
- 22% stated their child's hours were *'decreased'*
- 4% stated their child's access to an SNA was *'removed altogether'*

Considering all of the new changes children with additional needs have had to embrace and experience in light of Covid-19, we asked parents whether access to additional SNA support was needed as a result of the new school environment and public health measures.



- 41% stated their child needs more support
- 58% stated the current level of support is working
- 1% stated their child needs less SNA support

Our qualitative analysis in the appendices shows the experience of parents when it comes to additional supports for their child since returning to school in September is mixed with parents and children with SEN experiencing positive and negative experiences. In some cases, individual resource packs were provided to students, class sizes were reduced, iPad's were provided to students. Whilst others reported no supports being provided whatsoever. There were reports of movement breaks being taken away, less SNA support and very little integration happening.

The above shows a need for an equitable approach by schools in supporting children with SEN and their families.

What, if any, restrictions have you experienced with the return to school?

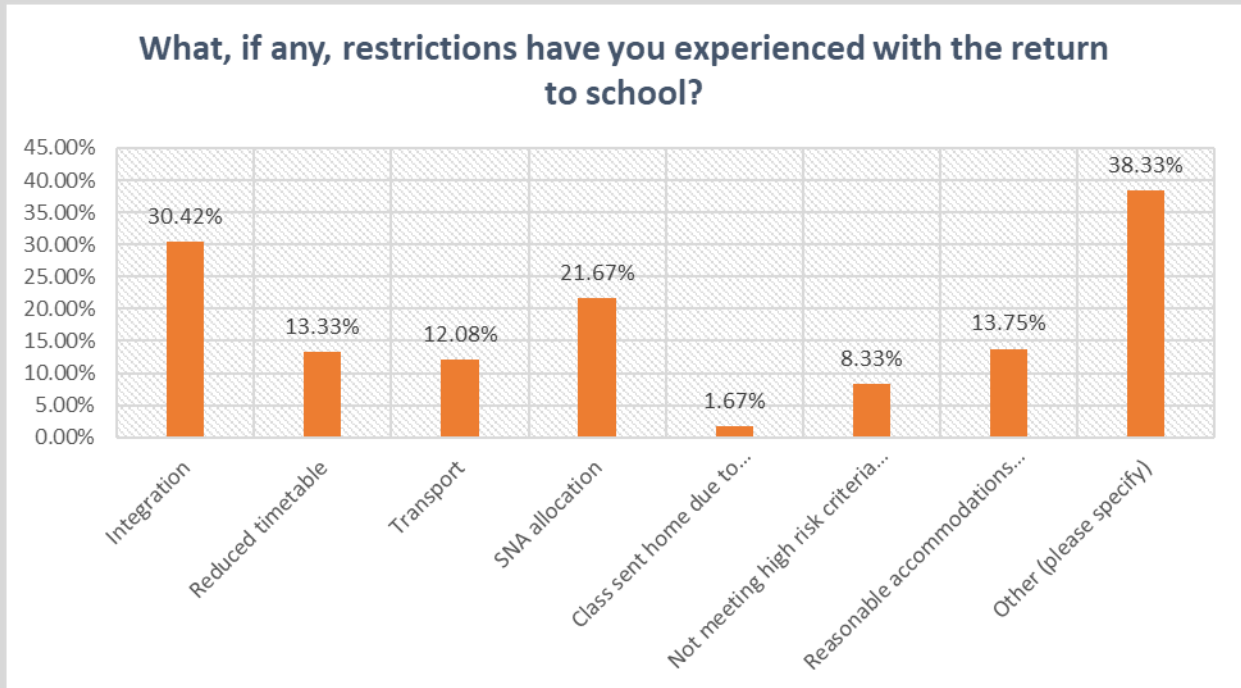
The significant and sudden disruption to SEN pupils' in education this year has augured equally substantial challenges for their return to school settings. As the situation unfolded, and the Government announced their plans to reopen schools with measures to limit COVID-19's spread in place, numerous families had been left without adequate therapeutic supports for their children³; for many of whom, it has been noted earlier in this study, a profound educational regression has likely occurred as a result⁴.

AsIAM, Down Syndrome Ireland, and Inclusion Ireland individually expressed our shared concerns over how the Department sought to support our respective communities' children as they returned to education in this new and volatile context. Of particular attention was how a successful transition could be planned and facilitated for these pupils, whilst ensuring that the new COVID-19 restrictions were respected insofar as possible⁵. Many of these measures, by their practical nature, will have imposed obstacles to accessing key resources and typical avenues of support - namely in terms of maintaining social distancing between pupils and staff, the limited use of school-owned equipment due to disinfection rules, and a restricted provision of adequate spaces and tools for pupils' self-regulation.

³ O'Halloran, Marie. (2020) 'Three months without school or therapists 'catastrophic' for children with special needs', *The Irish Times*. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/three-months-without-school-or-therapists-catastrophic-for-children-with-special-needs-1.4288681> (Accessed: 11th November 2020).

⁴ Note: many therapists were redeployed into covid work https://www.iaslt.ie/documents/public-information/IASLT/IASLT_Pre-Budget%202021.pdf

⁵ Inclusion Ireland. (2020) *Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid – 19 Response*. Pg.3. Available at: <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/news-item/1875/covid-committee-submission.pdf> (Accessed: 12th November 2020).



Our research here sought to understand which areas of difficulty children were experiencing the most with upon their return to school under the new restrictions. Respondents were presented with a range of single-issue answers and asked to make a choice as to which one was the biggest challenge arising from the anti-COVID measures. Respondents who felt none of the options available matched their experiences best were asked to fill out 'Other,' and then provide a brief description of what those entailed.

Chief among the problems identified were integration (**30.4%**), issues with Special Needs Assistant allocations (**21.7%**), pupils not being allowed to bring reasonable accommodations, such as stimming tools or ear defenders, into school with them (**13.8%**), and reduced timetables' use (**13.3%**).

That integration features as the biggest singular challenge for respondents' children is concerning for several reasons, perhaps most saliently that it indicates a potential disconnect between homes and schools in facilitating a child's transition. A separate AsIAM survey on COVID-19's effects on autistic young people's education found that up to 56.9% of respondents had received no contact from their child's school since guidance was issued from the national lockdown's outset in March⁶.

⁶ AsIAM. (2020) COVID-19 and Education.

Concerns had already been raised, prior to the pandemic, around the proposed new Model of SNA Allocation and it is concerning the challenges some families have reported in accessing SNAs this academic year. It highlights the need for strong consultation, clear safeguards and guidance prior to moving forward with the new model, as is proposed, in September 2021. We note the additional 1,000 SNAs provided in Budget 2020 but this will not have an impact during this particularly challenging academic year.

The reduction in the use by pupils' of reasonable accommodations from home is a matter of concern. Whilst there is no *explicit* prohibition in the NCSE's document for parents and schools⁷, full compliance with the COVID-19 measures would infer bringing in as few and strictly necessary items from home into class as possible. This definition of what constitutes as 'necessary', however, can and has been a contentious point between families and schools, even during pre-COVID settings. In the present context, where many pupils with disabilities' typical coping mechanisms are either prohibited or strictly rationed, a general discouragement of bringing in individual sensory tools will exacerbate growing stress levels. Such tools are even more necessary in class environments which are not only laid out differently, but are also subjected to regular and thorough disinfections, making them potential triggers for sensory overloads. This report nevertheless acknowledges the practical difficulties of administering such an allowance, particularly in those schools with substantial pupil populations and where risks of spreading infections are high.

We would recommend that a dialogue be established with the Department to re-examine this issue; with a view to investigate if it may be possible to allow for pupils with special educational needs to bring in sensory tools, with clear understandings between their respective SETs to appropriately store and disinfect them after use.

The rates of respondents encountering reduced timetables as a difficulty arising from their child's return to school under the restrictions gave us cause for concern. This is an issue AsIAM⁸

⁷ National Council for Special Education. (2020) *Preparing Young Children for Primary School A Resource for Parents, Early Learning and Care Settings and Schools*. Available at: <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NCSE-Preparing-Young-Children-for-Primary-School-1.pdf> (Accessed 13th November 2020).

⁸ AsIAM. (2019) *Invisible Children: Survey on School Absence and Withdrawal in Ireland's Autism Community*. Available at: <https://asiam.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Invisible-Children-Survey-on-School-Absence-Withdrawal-in-Irelands-Autism-Community-April-2019.pdf> (Accessed: 13th November 2020).

and Inclusion Ireland⁹ researched extensively and produced separate papers on, both finding widespread abuse of reduced timetables as illegal disciplinary measures or means of exclusion for pupils with disabilities in all schools. Since their respective publications, the two reports gained rapid traction within the wider disability community, as well as the Oireachtas itself, having been directly cited during the Joint Committee on Education and Skills' own report¹⁰ into the issue. It has been over sixteen months since the report was launched, yet few (if any) of its recommendations have been followed up on by the Department or the NCSE since.

Among the key actions the three reports suggested was establishing a clear monitoring mechanism; the upskilling of SEN professionals in supporting their pupils with disabilities; and ensuring that those pupils receive equitable access to in-school supports best suited for their individual needs. This report appreciates that a reduced timetable may be beneficial for some pupils with disabilities, who are struggling with the transition process or cannot, for various reasons, sit a full school day. Indeed, this was borne out by the three aforementioned reports. Rather, what is so disquieting about the fact that reduced timetables are arising as a complication from the restrictions is that there appears to be neither effective safeguards in place against their abuse, nor any clear, in-school pathways to supports for pupils.

Down Syndrome Ireland have written to the new Education Committee members, as well as the Minister of Education and the Minister of State for Special Education, expressing their concerns here and desire to continue the momentum towards meaningful reform. ASIAm have also echoed these calls during our own dialogue with the Minister for Special Education. It is our collective belief that the Department should act swiftly on the report's recommendations, to safeguard vulnerable children against systemic exclusion and an overt denial of their constitutional right to an education¹¹.

⁹ Inclusion Ireland. (2019) Education, Behaviour and Exclusion: The experience and impact of short school days on children with disabilities and their families in the Republic of Ireland. Available at: <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/1655/small-inclusion-ireland-short-school-days-report.pdf> (Accessed: 13th November 2020).

¹⁰ Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills. (2019) *Interim Report on the Committee's Examination on the Current Use of Reduced Timetables*. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/reports/2019/2019-07-04_interim-report-on-the-committee-s-examination-on-the-current-use-of-reduced-timetables_en.pdf (Accessed: 13th November 2020).

¹¹ Ireland. (1945) *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (The Constitution of Ireland, enacted in 1937). Article 42.2 (On Education).

School Closures

If schools are to close

Children from our respective communities have had a significant interruption to their education in 2020. The research indicates that in many of these cases educational regression may occur. For this reason, it is important for schools to remain open for children with special education needs (SEN) in the event of a second closure of schools. It must also be noted the more inclusive approach to the 2020 “summer programme” however challenges around communicating and organising the initiative still meant that overall uptake was below what would have been hoped or anticipated.

When asked about the possibility (albeit unlikely) of school closures, parents were quite strong in their assertion that children with special education needs (SEN) should continue to have access to in-school supports. 79% of respondents to our survey stated that children would need in-school support to continue their learning.

Many of the parents who answered ‘no’ to schools remaining open for children with SEN cited their child being in a ‘high risk’ health category while others stated it could be on a menu of education options for the child.

In the main, parents are not teachers. The National Council for Special Education has on a number of occasions pointed out that SEN teachers require additional skills and training over and above regular teachers.¹² Most parents do not have the required skills to teach their child with SEN at home making access to the school environment of critical importance.

An Inclusion Ireland survey noted that home education during the March-July school closures did not work for most children with SEN for a variety of reasons.¹³ Barriers to remote education included the child’s ability to learn at home, parents working from home and more than one child learning from home. A sizable cohort of pupils had no access to any form of technology for learning (11%) with only 56% having access to highspeed broadband.¹⁴

¹² For example: Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Schools – NCSE Policy Advice 2015

¹³ The Implications of Covid-19 on the education of pupils with intellectual disabilities and autism-supporting children to learn, Inclusion Ireland, 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid

Parents know what worked and did not work during the previous school closure. While the clear preference is for schools to remain open, parents have also indicated in this survey what supports will work for their child. Home tuition is a support that parents feel will be required by many young people to access their education in the event of school closures. For others, access to the teacher via virtual classroom means or 1:1 with the SEN teacher is a support that would work well.

Our qualitative responses showed a variety of comments from parents regarding the potential closure of schools. Full reporting of these can be found in the appendices of this report, however, below is an insight into some of the comments from parents:

Parent 1:

“Daily check in with SNA (virtually) to keep some routine or structure. Sending out information does not work. Some interaction via live video call is needed”

Parent 2:

“My son would need more one to one structure! I am not sure he would cope very well at all with another lockdown.”

Parent 3:

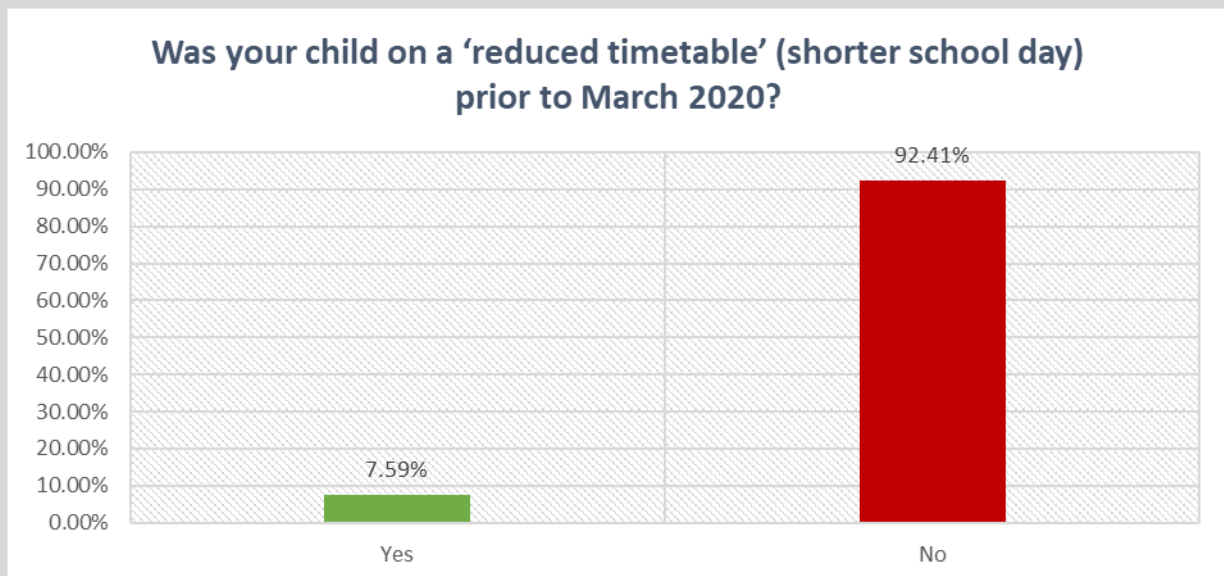
“Online classes. Not all day but at least an hour or two, so my son feels part of a class. To be honest, I think that applies to all children. SET support either one on one or with a small group, online. Some resources for parents re how to provide appropriate support, such as movement breaks, helping him sit up in the chair. Some kind of online learning that he could attempt to do independently as it just was not possible to work from home and teach from home. Schools should remain open in my view. It wasn't good for his mental health.”

Reduced Timetable

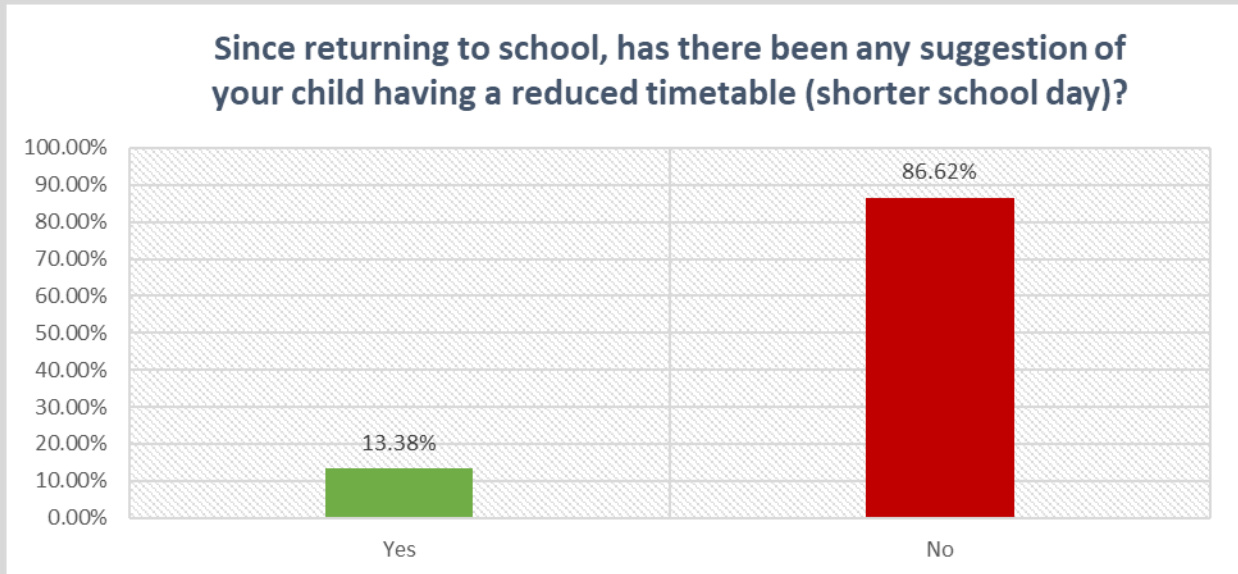
The use of reduced timetables as a means of supporting a child with additional needs should never be used in lieu of a lack of resources. Excluding a child from any part of the school day is a suspension and should be treated as such. It is acknowledged that there are circumstances whereby a reduced timetable can be permitted in consensus with the parents of a child and if it is deemed in the best interest of the child, but these are exceptional circumstances. Each of the respective organisations associated with this report know too well the impact reduced timetables has on its members and their families.

The findings of this report show that 8% of respondents' children were on a reduced timetable prior to the school closures in March of this year. The report also highlighted that upon the return to school in September 2020, 13% of respondents stated their child's school suggested to put their child on a reduced timetable.

Pre-Covid



Post-Covid



Our qualitative analysis on reduced timetables pre-Covid and post-Covid show a mixed response from parents with some indicating that the reduced timetable is necessary for this moment in time. Other parents have stated the reduced timetable currently in place for their child is something they do not consent to. Detailed commentary on reduced timetables can be found in the appendices of this report. Some of the commentary from parents can be seen below:

Parent 1:

“Since our son started in an ASD unit he has been on reduced days as they feel he is not ready for a full day or that he gets upset at a certain time. This was initially supposed to be for 2 weeks it has now been 8 weeks and they have now told me they might consider a full day after midterm. This is happening without my consent and without the department of education being notified”

Parent 2:

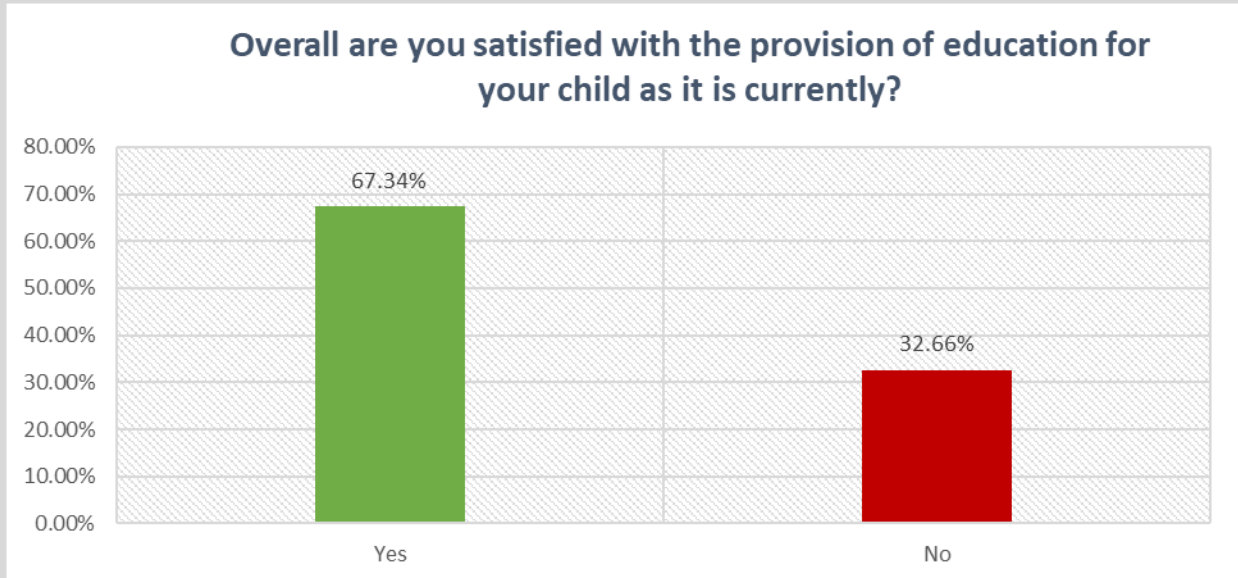
“Currently the school is struggling with the dilution of its allocation, it is now a health and safety and wellness issue. SNA are moving between bubbles, none of staff are getting their proper breaks to cope with this dilution. It is beyond crazy. Only for the Principal has insight I think the situation would be much worse.”

Parent 3:

“My child is physically and mentally exhausted after a couple of hours in school. Reduced timetable is absolutely the best decision at the moment.”

Overall Satisfaction

67% of parents stated they were satisfied overall with the level of education provision provided to their child, whilst 33% of parents were not satisfied.



Recommendations

Integration / Socialisation with Peers

The lack of opportunities for integration with their peers has become a fact of life for many children with SEN since returning to school in September 2020. It should be possible for schools to initiate a system where all children, both mainstream and children with SEN, will have opportunities to learn together.

Sensory Needs

Reduction, or in some cases, the complete removal of opportunities for movement breaks and sensory room activities, is detrimental to the progress and development of many children with SEN. All sensory-based activities must be reinstated in schools, with additional staff provided to facilitate this where required.

SEN Teaching Support

In the absence of adequate cover for absent teachers, many SEN teachers have been deployed into the mainstream classroom. Adequate substitute cover must be provided for all schools across all sectors.

SNA Support

The reduction in the allocation of SNA support in many schools is regrettable. Having missed a sizeable portion of their education to date in 2020, SNA support should be increased as opposed to reduced, for children with SEN. Similarly, replacement cover must be provided for schools where SNAs in high risk categories are unable to attend school. Sharing of SNAs across pods is inappropriate where schools are maintaining pods and additional personnel must be appointed in affected schools. Challenges around access to SNA support this year must inform the Department's approach to moving forward with the new SNA Allocation Model in September 2021.

Communication from Schools

The incidences of reduced communication / no communication between schools and parents is concerning. While one-to-one meetings may be ill advised at this time, other channels of

communication such as written, email, communication journal, telephone contact etc. should be utilized in all schools.

Online Teaching

There must be a realization within the Department of Education & Skills that online tuition, such as on Microsoft Teams or Zoom, does not work for all students with SEN. In the event of any future school closures, support in the form of Home Tuition must be provided by the Department. In addition, a proper syllabus, in line with curriculum requirements, should be developed for home tuition

Wearing of Masks

Some children with SEN rely on reading lips and facial expressions in their communication with others. This must be addressed in any future planning, with alternatives such as the use of transparent masks.

IEP/Student Support Plan/File

Even in the current climate of change and uncertainty, there is no reason why schools would not have developed an IEP/Student Support Plan/File for their pupils with SEN. Parental involvement remains a necessary component of the process and must be facilitated by the schools.

External Supports

The immediate return to post of those therapists, psychologists and other personnel who have been redeployed to testing and contact tracing must be ensured in all regions. In the medium term, Children's Disability Network Teams must be established and fully resourced in every region nationally.

Reduced Timetables

This practice must stop as it is not justified for any reason. Specific guidelines developed on the use of reduced timetables must be issued to and become operational in schools at both primary and post –primary level as a matter of urgency. In the context of the challenges being experienced by autistic children at this time it is also important that long-awaited guidelines

on the use of restraint in school are finalised and that data relating to the suspension or expulsion of students with disabilities is collected and analysed this year.

Transitions

The importance of adequate preparation for transition, both pre-school to primary; and primary to post-primary, cannot be over emphasized. Many schools were unprepared for the unprecedented situation faced in 2020, and many children missed out on this vital steppingstone as a result. All schools should have a transition programme in place which would be available to all relevant parties in the event of any further closure of schools.

Standardised Approaches

There is a marked lack of consistency across all sectors in the management on Covid 19 in schools. A standardised approach must be developed to lessen the difficulties for parents dealing with mixed messages from individual schools. Issues such as temperature testing in schools and school transport, and children returning to school after leaving to attend a medical appointment, need to be clarified by a directive at national level, as opposed to differing rules applied in individual schools in the same local areas.

Children with complex medical needs

The DES needs to make a suite of education supports including the home tuition scheme open to the small cohort of children with disabilities and comorbid health conditions. For these children attendance at school is virtually impossible at present. Supports can be provided on a case by case basis in consultation with the parent.

If schools face a second closure

If there is a second closure of schools, the DES should in the first instance seek to find opportunities to provide an in-school education for students with the greatest level of need, such as those attending special classes and schools, whilst adhering to public health guidelines and taking the necessary precautions. For children learning from home a technology audit should be undertaken by the DES.

Appendices

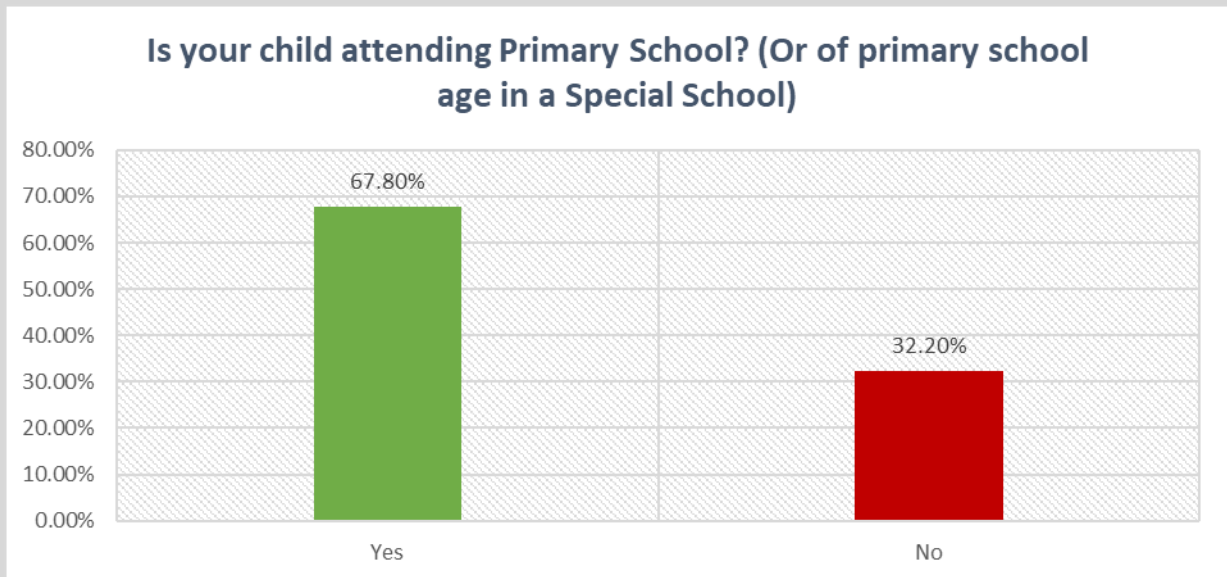


Figure 1: Is your child attending Primary School/Secondary School? (Or of Primary/Secondary School age in a Special School)

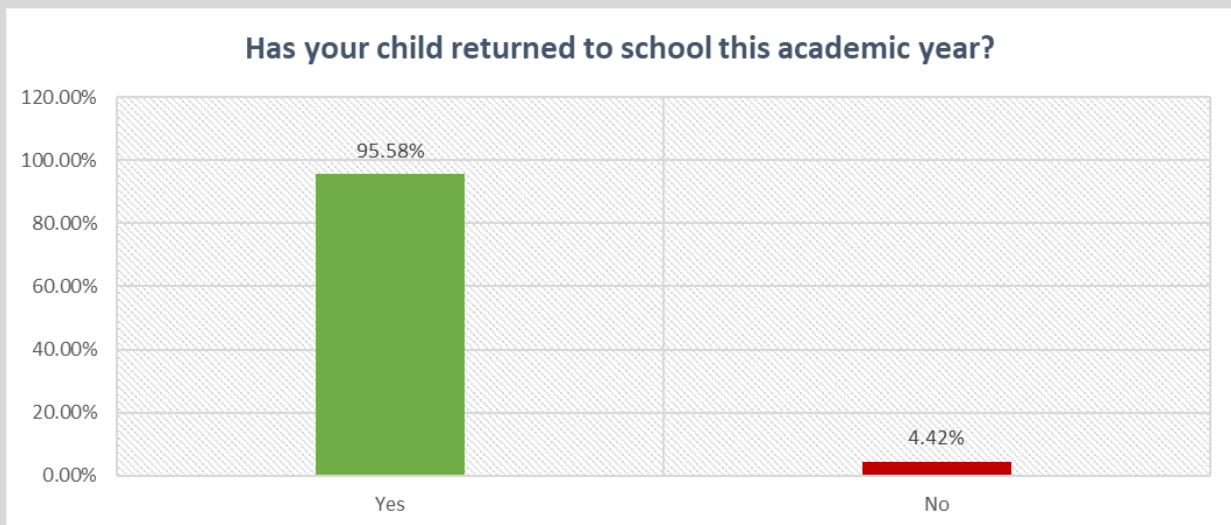


Figure 2 Has your child returned to school this academic year?

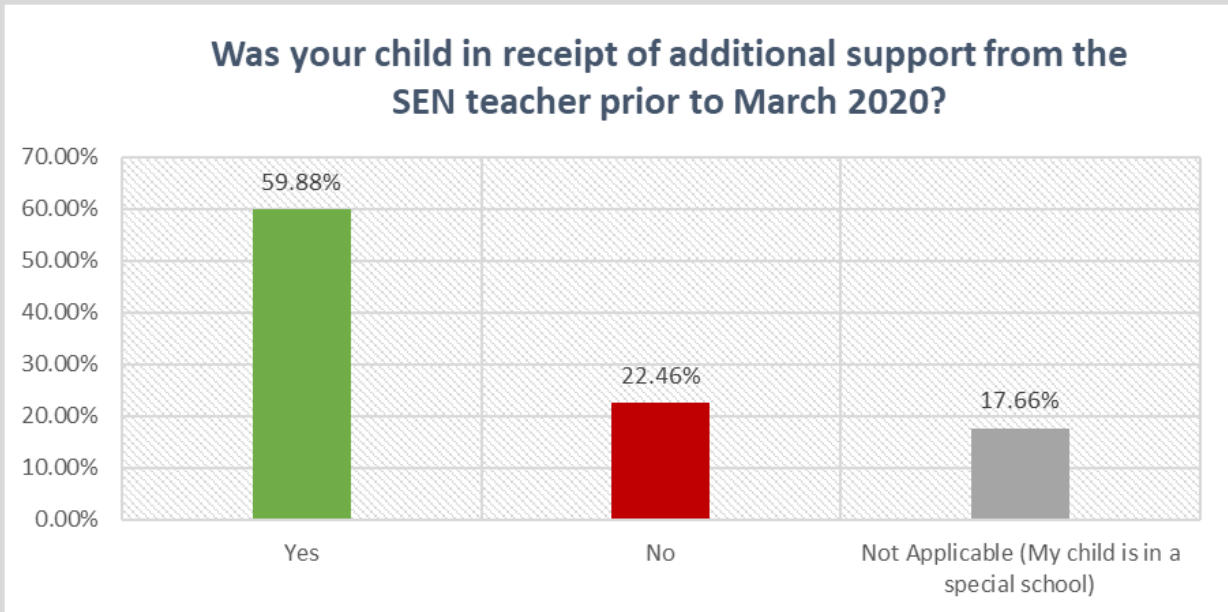


Figure 3 Was your child in receipt of additional support from the SEN teacher prior to March 2020?

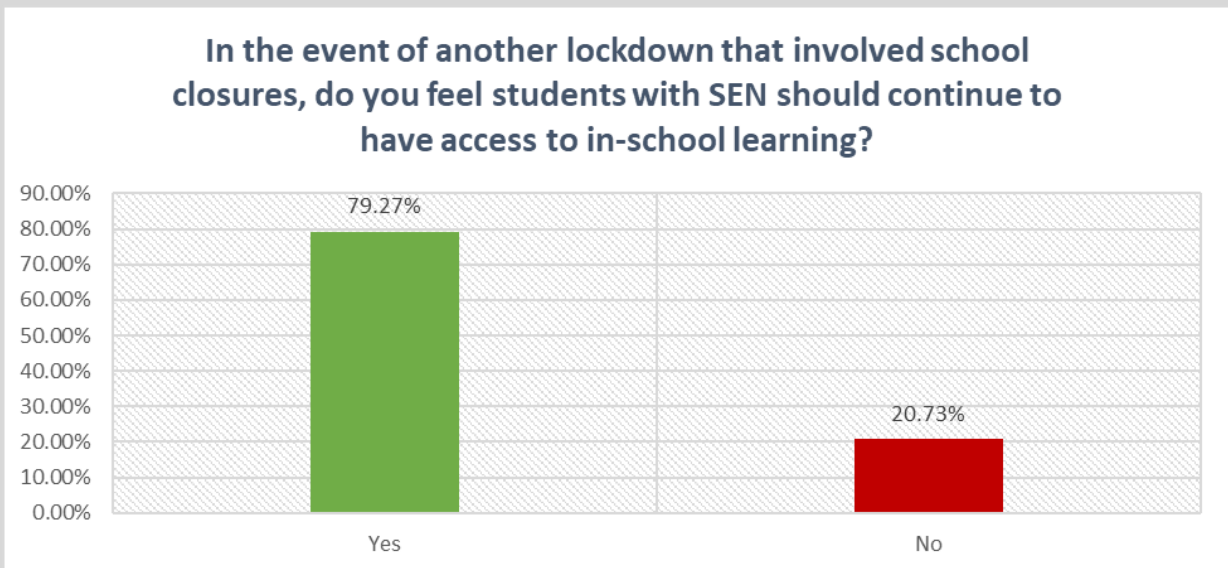


Figure 4 In the event of another lockdown that involved school closures, do you feel students with SEN should continue to have access to in-school learning?

The Qualitative analysis gathered during this data collection shows that a variety of transitional supports were put in place, but they varied between school and location. Supports such as virtual meetings.

Support to Transition	
Source: Q8 – Have they had support to transition?	
Category	Quotation
Level of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little because of Covid just got to view the school prior
SNA Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer provision and SNA • SNA & Social story • SNA in the classroom and the school is hugely supportive • SNA & Support teacher
Online Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive Buckeridge's Zoom school prep classes on a weekly basis in August.
Service Provider Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Michael's House had information sent, a dossier with child's info for team at school and have been preparing for past year • Support from Speech and Language Therapist in the form of Photo book • Service Provider also supported school with advice • Assistance from Early Intervention
School Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports and getting used to the environment sessions were available • Behaviour support psychologist & teacher all working together with me weekly to get child from a 1-hour day to full day. We are at 4 hours now

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My son was given a support teacher who he shares with another child. • Support from Resource Teacher. • Social story and contact from new school in June • School visit day before start, school student morning in January • They got to visit their new classroom and meet their new teacher and SNA prior to starting. • Primary teachers brought child to visit the secondary school before lockdown and teachers communicated together during lockdown. • New school sent social stories home also • Short visit in July and social story • Meeting new teachers, visiting school, book with visual pics about new school • Contact from secondary school few days before they went back
<p>School Age Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had online meeting with school age team and new and old teachers

Changes in Additional Support since Return to School

Source:

Q13 - Outline any changes in additional support for your child

A) Positive

Category	Quotation
No Change - General Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None - school is brilliant • Seems very good. Very happy with supports and school and communication • School have been outstanding - so much support - only issue is she struggles with the face coverings • No changes to additional support. • All still in place.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual resources supplied for each pupil
Class Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller class (6) with teacher & 2 SNAs
SEN Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My son is in an ASD class attached to a mainstream school. Since returning to school, he has been on a reduced timetable but with my consent, as we are gradually increasing the time, he spends each week. He has access to an additional resource teacher now along with his SEN teacher and 2 SNA's. The staff have been supportive, but I feel like my child is one of the lucky ones, as I

	<p>have heard so many horror stories from other parents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child was on withdrawal 4 days a week. She is now taken out 5 days a week • Now receives 1 to 1. • New IEP drawn up.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given access to tablets for use during school and home.
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its more class based which is working out well • Moving between mainstream and the special class has stopped. He had to decide if it was best to be full time mainstream with supports or full-time special class. We decided mainstream with supports. His mainstream class has a teacher, an SNA and a teacher's assistant for remedial work • Walk around school before re-opening accommodated
B) Negative	
Category	Quotation
Support Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support whatsoever • No additional support for my daughter and is in higher level for all subjects • Not received any one to one support • It was not well thought out to begin with - parent not supposed to be

	<p>mentoring an SEN teacher in front of SENCO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support has been offered
Movement Breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to movement breaks • No whole class movement breaks, must go outside classroom on own
SNA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have had dilution of SNA resources as school was not given additional hours for a child with obvious additional needs starting in junior infants. Decision was appealed. Some sharing of SNA currently which is wholly unsuitable when trying to maintain pods (our child in an older class). Have already seen direct linear effect of junior infant family getting sick then SNA getting sick then my child and our family getting sick. All requiring absenteeism due to Covid symptoms. Schools are not being given resources to manage SNA support generally, let alone in a pandemic. • SNA now shared • Less access to SNA support • SNA who cannot return to school due to being in a high-risk category has not been replaced • Principal contacted me to say the school has not been allocated enough hours for SNAs and needed

	<p>parents to sign for when principal was going to appeal for more. So far, my son has his shared SNA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNA being rotated with other students • Class of 27 with just one SNA. Preschool had 11 with one SNA, • My child has had their SNA allocation reduced by 50% following a new entrant commencing in the school and no increase in SNA allocation. The principal and BOM have advocated strongly to SENO. SENO in verbal conversation ' no school in her area has more than 2 SNAs'. Number Crunching at its worst and bias. This is a 2-teacher school with a teaching principal and 3 children requiring SNA support across 2 classrooms. Principal is very inclusive as has insight as his daughter is my child. We have had another with additional needs die 6 years ago. The system is failing us again. Loosing hope. • Lost full access to SNA, possible 1-hour access which is an hour before school finishes. • School oblivious to damage caused by specific SNAs
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<p>Social Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No groups allowed for social skills class. • He cannot have social groups in his SEN classes or use soft play where he used to go for reward • Is required to work alone more • Child has started mainstream secondary. It is more difficult for my child to find opportunities to make friends due to Covid changes, very few kids in canteen, only 2 per table, no morning break etc. • Connection with peers was not being developed - even if policy looks good on paper
<p>SEN Teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only once per week now, was previously 3 sessions per week. Less areas covered so puts us under more pressure at home. • Less of a time allocation • No access to learning support/resource teaching • This is inconsistent as SEN teacher pulled for COVID issues. My son has low self-esteem and high learning needs and so class teacher cannot get his challenges. Also, class too distracting. Therefore, son goes under radar in class and is about 2 years behind. We had bad experience in 1st class and although

	<p>2nd class was better, we are so far behind on fundamentals, it is hard to see how he can realise his potential this year!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learning support group has doubled in size. Two groups from last year put together • Seems to have reduced from daily to 2-3 times a Week • Has yet to have SET teaching, class withdrawal not currently possible • Resource not in place any longer as transitioned from Primary to secondary • Increase in students in SEN resource class from 7 to 15. Class now not meeting child's needs. Heightened anxiety since return to school. Mainstream teachers not making allowances for need. All trying to catch up. School Sen Dept have been made aware.
<p>Communication With / From School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the past if my daughter were having a bad morning, I would send a note in to the teacher so she would be prepared and be able to avoid my daughter having a meltdown. Now unfortunately no notes are permitted and I have to ring the school usually by the time

	<p>the message gets relayed to the teacher my daughter has already become overwhelmed and suffered a meltdown which then takes the entire day to get her back on track. We also used to have regular contact with teacher and SEN team, but I have yet to have any meetings or calls with either of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No engagement with teacher or SEN so no idea what is happening in school, • Communication diary not being used • No face to face discussions on IEP • Honestly, I am not even sure, communication is limited this year as I must drop him off at a different “zone” and there is no face to face communication with SEN teachers • I have yet to have a meeting with Class teacher and SEN teacher. No IEP yet either. • I am not sure of what supports my son is getting -requesting a meeting -communication is very lacking from school
<p>School Transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every support has been reduced and once again we had to fight for transport due to "overcrowding" a 16-seater with 5 students including 2

	<p>from the same household is hardly overcrowded</p>
Substitute Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal is sole SEN teacher. If she cannot get a sub in for a missing teacher, she will have to teach the missing teacher's class and will not be able to provide SEN support. She has advised that it is almost impossible to find substitute teachers now (co. Meath)
Transition Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My child is in transition year. No contact whatsoever from school Minimal contact with SNA. Apparently, no SEN allocation due to the fact he is in transition year. This was never relayed to me that this was the way it would be. Appalling communication or lack of from school
School Age Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Still awaiting acceptance into school age team where more additional support will be given but no further on in the process now and he will age out of the service in 1 year
Services – SLT/OT/PT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No services - speech, OT No input from service provider in form of therapy. My child needs both SLT and physio.

