

Supplementary Report 05: Parents/carers report on their own and their children's concerns about children attending school

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The Co-SPACE Study

Background

COVID-19 has caused major disruptions to families' lives, through social distancing, school closures and lock-down. This is also a rapidly changing situation where different pressures will arise for children, young people and their families over time. While research has provided valuable information about how parents can support their children's mental health in general, we know little about what is most effective in the current, changing context.

The Co-SPACE project is tracking the mental health of school-aged children and young people aged 4-16 years throughout the COVID-19 crisis. An online survey is sent out and completed on a monthly basis by parents/carers and young people (if aged 11-16 years) throughout the pandemic. The study has full ethical and data protection approval (ethical approval ref: R69060) and is fully GDPR compliant.

The findings will help identify what protects children and young people from deteriorating mental health over time, and at particular stress points. Findings will be shared directly with health and education services to inform the development and provision of effective support for children and families.

Recruitment & Sample

The study sample has been recruited through a variety of means, including social media, distribution through partner organisations, networks and charities, the media and targeted online advertising. The self-selecting nature of recruitment means that this will not be a nationally representative sample. See Appendix A for the demographic information.

For the long-term, we are aiming to have good representation across a wide range of socio-demographic and health factors (e.g., income, ethnicity, pre-existing mental/physical health difficulties) to investigate the experiences for different groups that may be particularly vulnerable during and after the pandemic.

We are keen to recruit as many families as possible to the study. Parents/carers can sign up and take part at any point: <https://cospaceoxford.com/survey>

Further information

For further information or to request specific analyses, please contact the research team at co-space@psy.ox.ac.uk

Focus of this report

To date, over 10,000 parents/carers and 1,000 adolescents have taken part in the Co-SPACE survey and we continue to collect data on a monthly basis.

This report provides cross-sectional data from approximately 1602 parents/carers who have answered questions about concerns around children and young people attending school during the Covid-19 pandemic between 06/07/2020 and 27/07/2020, either as part of the initial survey or the monthly follow-up surveys.

In this report, we examined responses for the following specific groups:

1. The whole sample
2. Children by BAME/ non-BAME ethnicity
3. Primary and secondary school aged children
4. Children by gender
5. Children with special educational needs and/or neurodevelopmental disorder (SEND/ND)
6. Children with pre-existing mental health difficulties
7. High and low household incomes
8. Parent working status (e.g. not working, employed part-time, employed full-time, or self-employed).

Focusing on the following issues:

- a. Parent/carer report on their own and their children's feelings around attending school.
- b. Parent/carer report on their and their children's specific concerns relating to attending school.

Key findings

- Over two thirds of participating parents feel comfortable about their children going back to school.
- The most common concerns among parents/carers are the practicalities of their child being in/not in school, that their child will struggle with the workload, and the lack of educational support.
- Parents of children with SEN/ND are particularly uncomfortable about their children attending school, as are parents who do not work, and those with lower incomes (<£16,000).
- Particular concerns for parents of children with SEN/ND are that their child will not get the emotional, behavioural and educational support that they need, or that they will struggle with the workload.
- Parents who are working full-time or part-time are most concerned about the practicalities of their child being in/not in school.
- Parents on lower incomes appear to be particularly concerned that their child will lack the emotional/behavioural support, the educational support and that their children will struggle with the workload.
- Only a minority of children and young people are perceived by their parents/carers to not feel comfortable attending school.
- Parents/carers perceive their children to be most concerned about things being different or uncertain, the enjoyable aspects of school not happening, and not being back in school at the same time as close friends. Other worries relate to changes in friendships and transitioning to a new school/class/group.
- Both primary and secondary school aged children appear to be concerned about things being different or uncertain. Secondary school aged children appear to be more concerned about academic pressures.
- Parents/carers of children with SEN/ND or a pre-existing mental health difficulty, in particular, report that their children are not comfortable about attending school.
- Parents of children with SEN/ND report that their children are particularly concerned about things being uncertain or different, the transition to a new school/class/group and problems with paying attention in class.

Findings

1. The Whole Sample

a. Feelings about child attending school

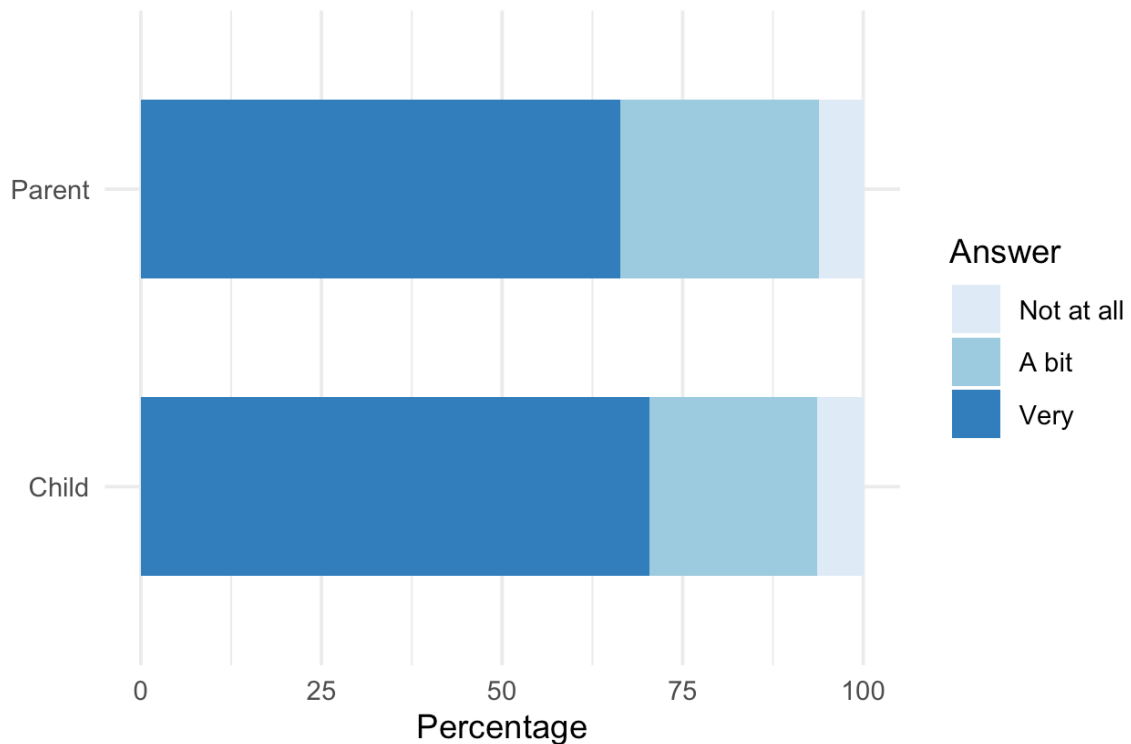


Figure 1. Percentage of parent/carers reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about the child attending school

Parents/carers reported on how comfortable they, or their children, felt about their child attending school. Possible responses were “not at all”, “a bit”, “a lot” and “extremely”. Data represents the percentage of parents reporting feeling “not at all”, “a bit” and “a lot/extremely” comfortable.

In general, parents/carers reported that their children feel comfortable about attending school, with 70.4% of parents reporting that their child would feel “very” comfortable and 23.2% reporting they would feel “a bit” comfortable. Only 6.4% of parents/carers reported that their child would not feel comfortable at all.

Similarly, two thirds of parents/carers reported that they feel very comfortable about their child attending school (66.4%), with less than a third reporting that they feel “a bit” comfortable (27.5%) and just 6.2% reporting that they feel “not at all” comfortable.

b. Specific concerns around attending school

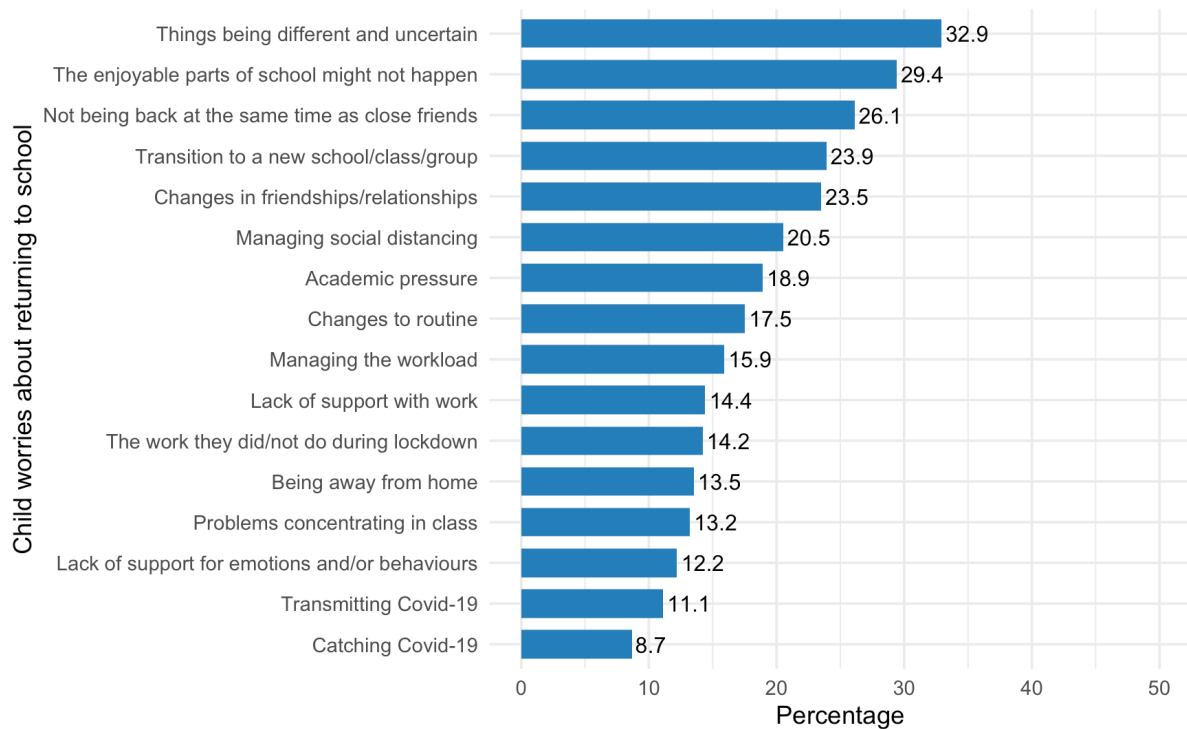


Figure 2. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school

Data in the graph represents the percentage of parents reporting substantial worries (i.e., responses of “a lot” or “extremely” to the question) about specific concerns.

Parents/carers reported that children’s main concerns were around things being different or uncertain (32.9), the enjoyable parts of school not happening (29.4), not being in school at the same time as close friends (26.1%), the transition to a new school/class/group (23.9%), and changes to friendships during lockdown (23.5%).

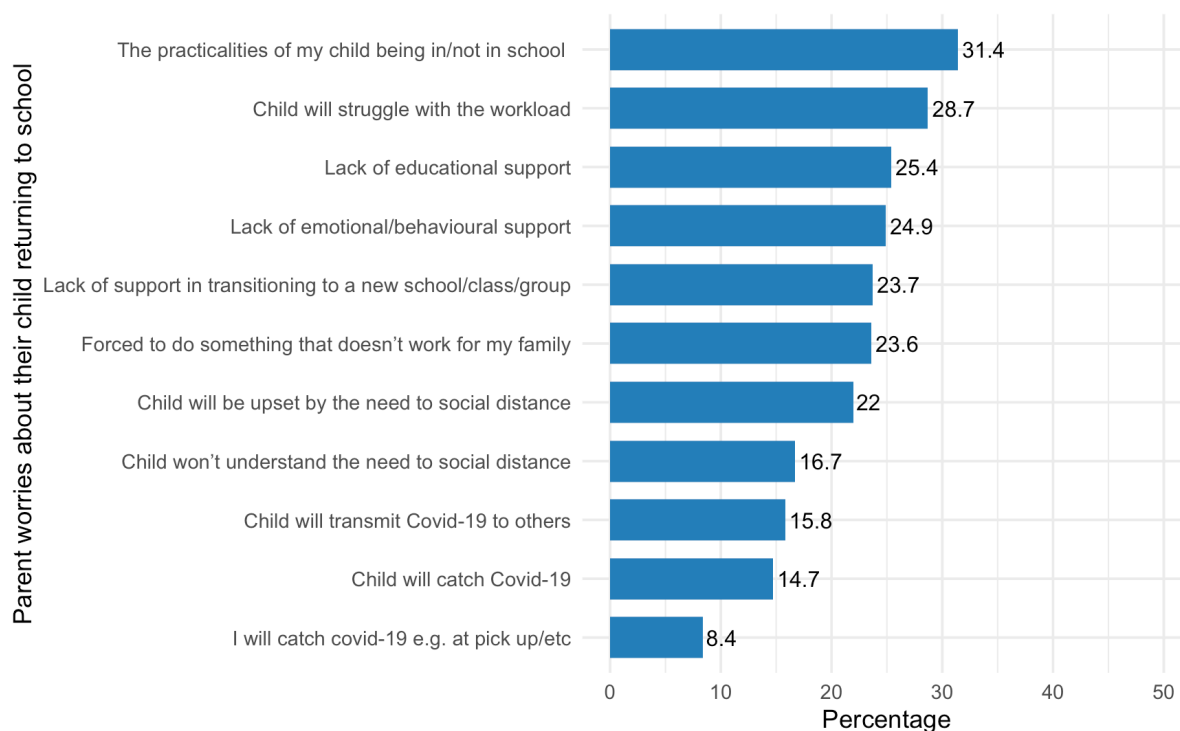


Figure 3. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school

2. Family ethnicity

a. Feelings about child attending school

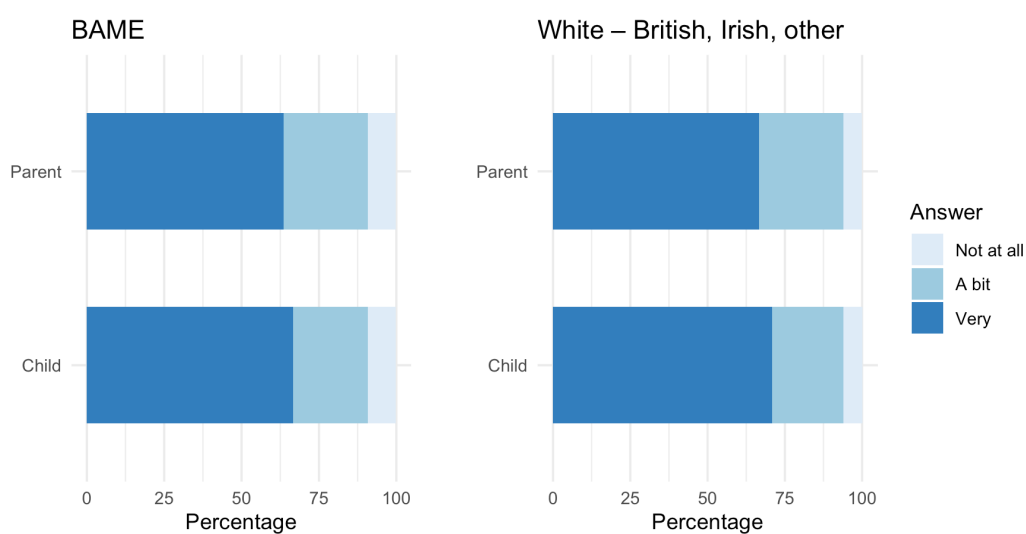


Figure 4. Percentage of parent/carers reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about the child attending school, by ethnicity.

The current sample included 1525 parents/carers who are White and 66 parents/carers from Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

Regardless of ethnic groups, the majority of parents/carers felt comfortable about their child attending school. A similar pattern is observed in the proportions of parents/carers for how comfortable they reported their child to be about attending school. **The small number of families in the BAME group means these findings need to be interpreted with caution.**

b. Specific concerns around attending school

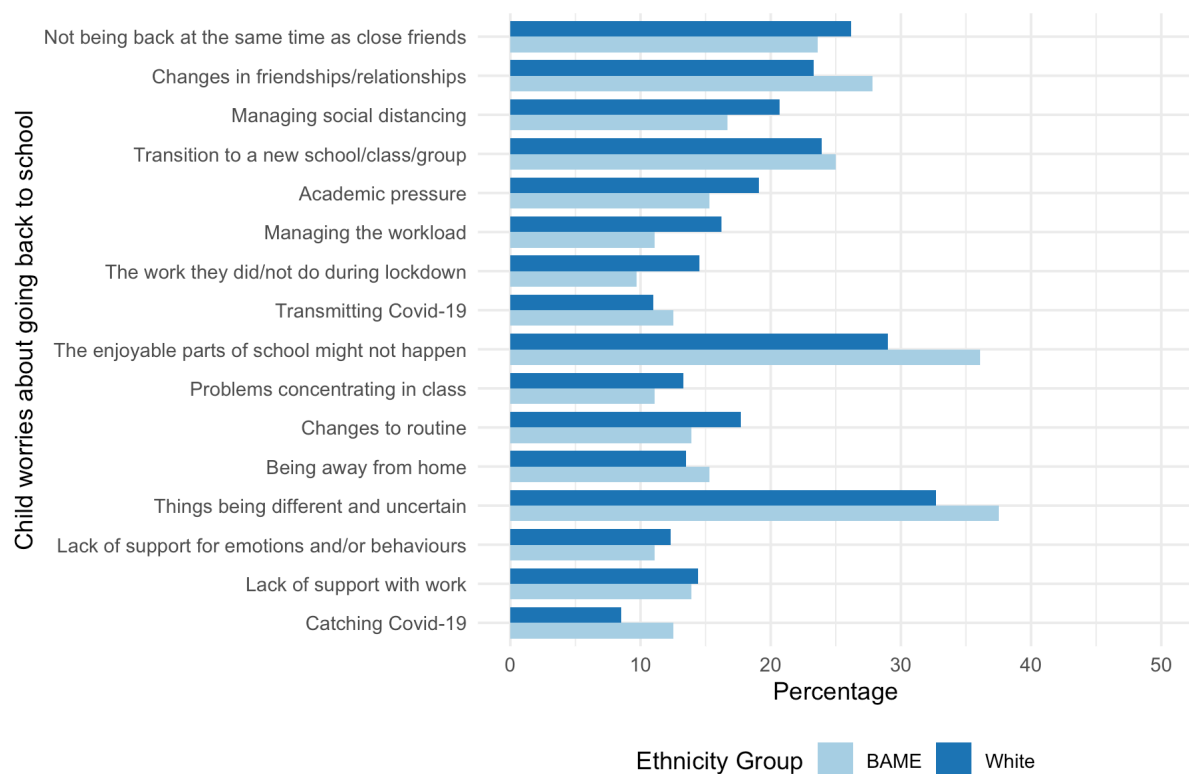


Figure 5. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by ethnicity

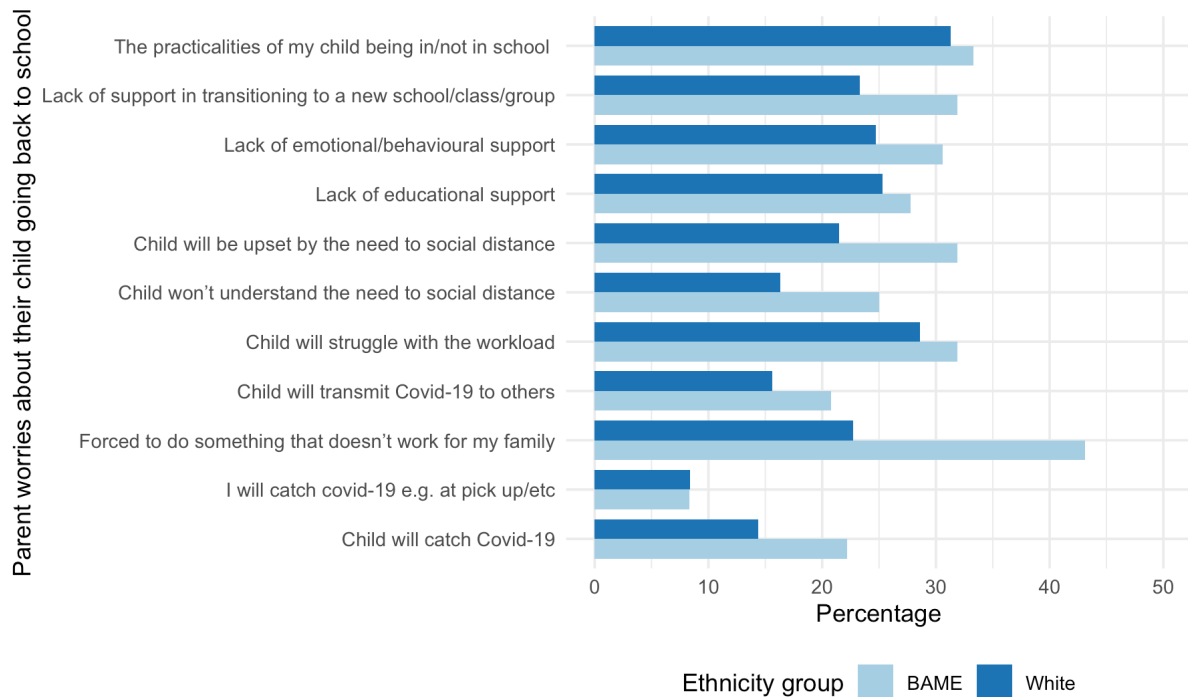


Figure 6. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by ethnicity

2. Child Age Group

a. Feelings about child attending school

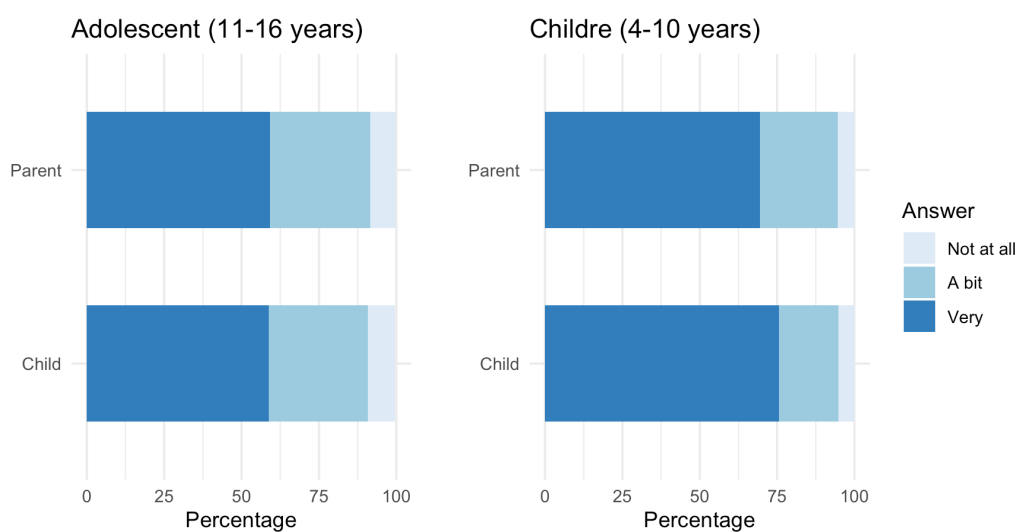


Figure 7. Percentage of parent/carers reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about the child attending school, by child age group.

The current sample included 1100 parents/carers of children aged 4-10 years and 502 parents/carers of young people aged 11-16 years.

Majority of the parents/carers of children reported that their primary school aged child would feel very comfortable attending school (75.6%). Close to two thirds of parents/carers of young people of secondary school age reported that their child would feel very comfortable attending school (58.8%).

Only a minority of parents/carers of both primary (5.3%) and secondary school aged children (8.9%) reported that they do not feel at all comfortable about their child attending school and an even smaller number of the parents/carers of secondary school aged children reported that their child does not feel at all comfortable attending school (8.2%). Similarly, only 5.2% of parents/carers of primary school aged children said that their child does not feel at all comfortable about attending school.

b. Specific concerns around attending school

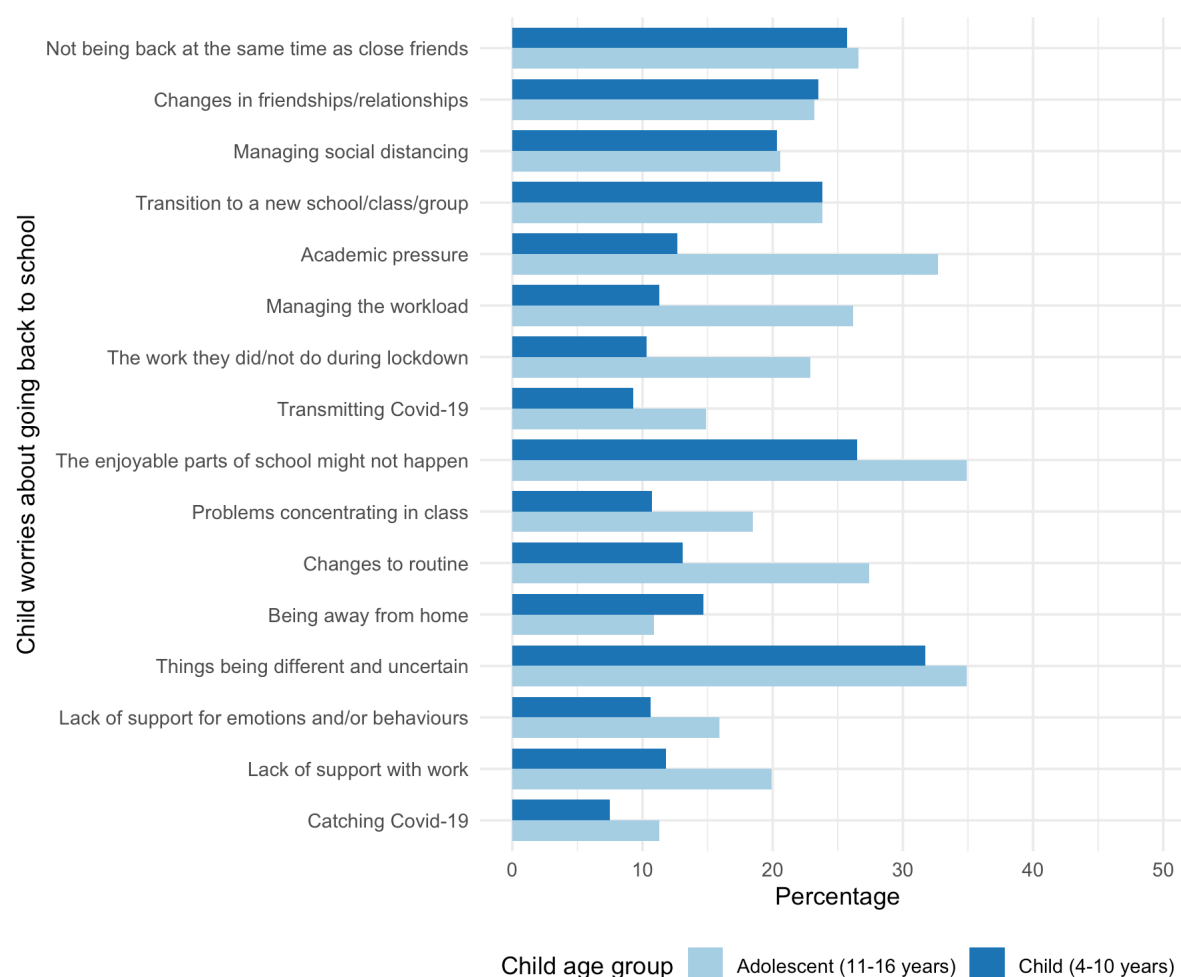


Figure 8. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by child age group

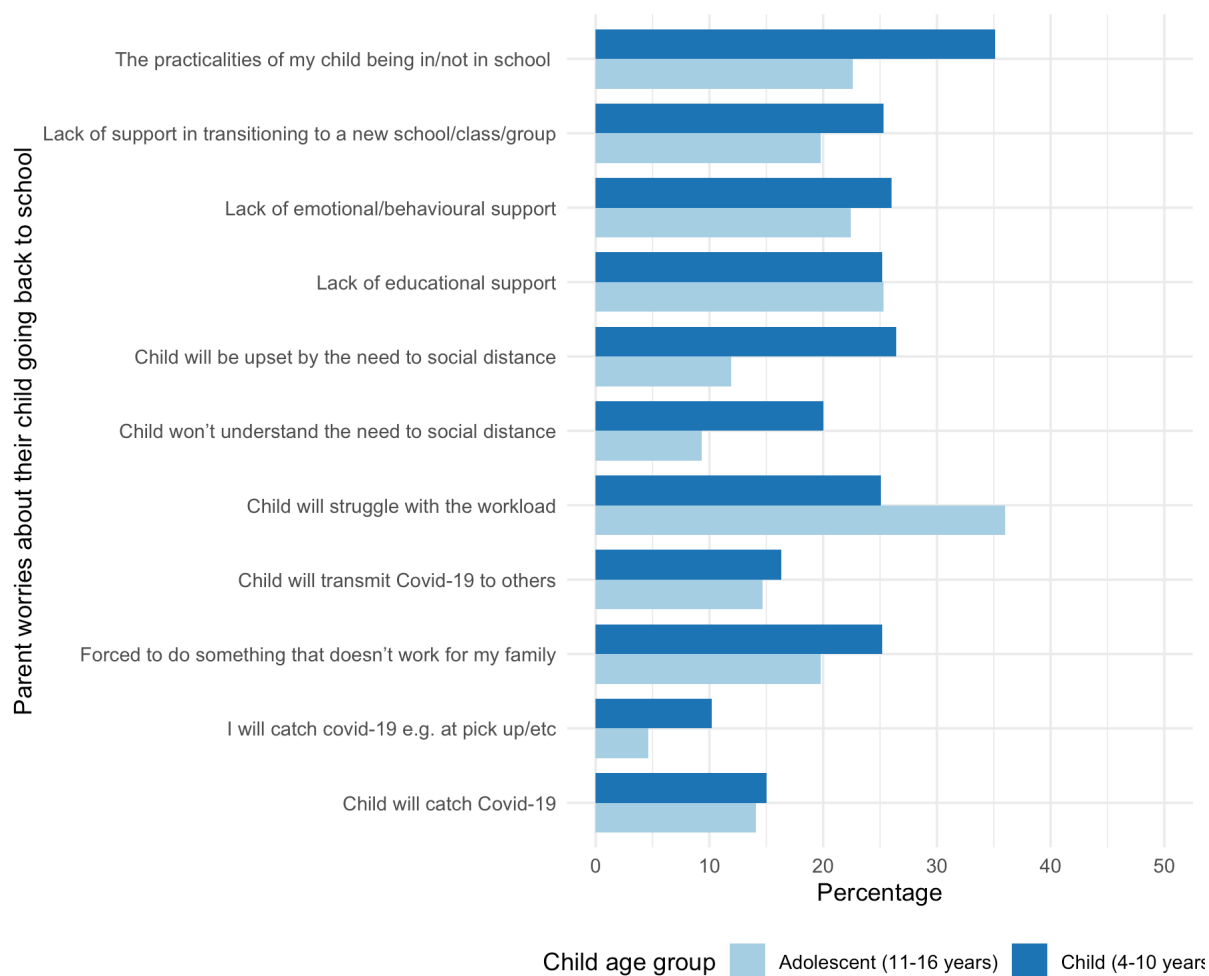


Figure 9. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by child age group

3. Child Gender

a. Feelings about child attending school

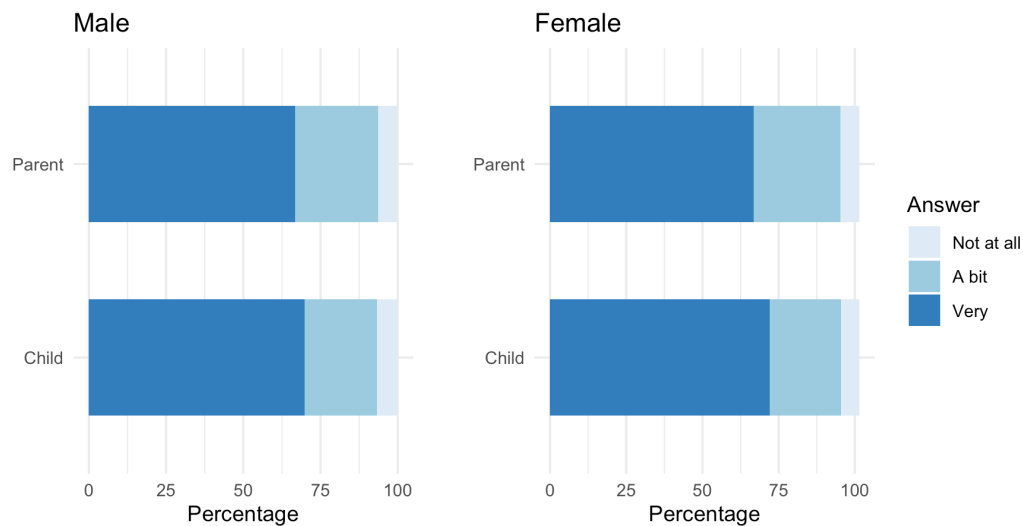


Figure 10. Percentage of parent/carers of male and female children reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about the child attending school.

The current sample included 851 parents/carers of boys, 740 parents/carers of girls and 11 parents/carers of children who do not identify as male/female.

There was a broadly similar pattern in the proportions of parents/carers of boys and girls for how comfortable they feel about their child attending school. Similarly, there was a broadly similar pattern in the proportions of parents/carers of boys and girls for how comfortable they reported their child to be about attending school.

b. Specific concerns around attending school

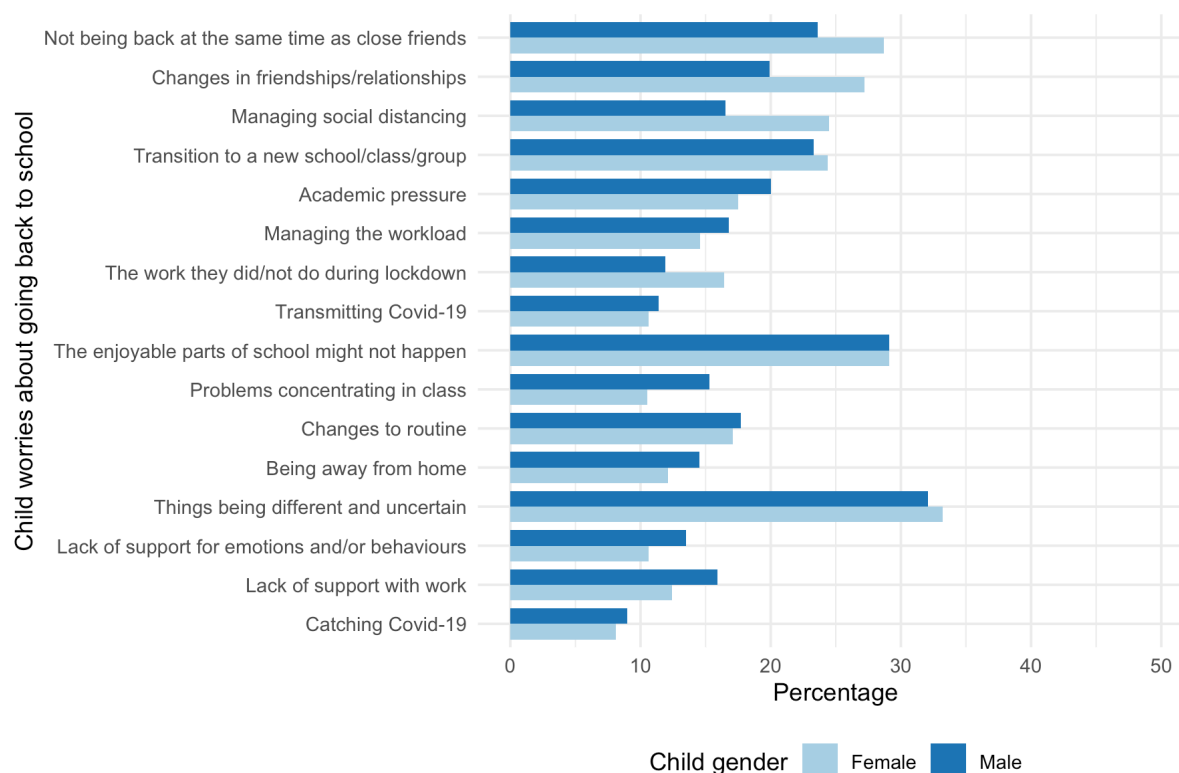


Figure 11. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by child gender

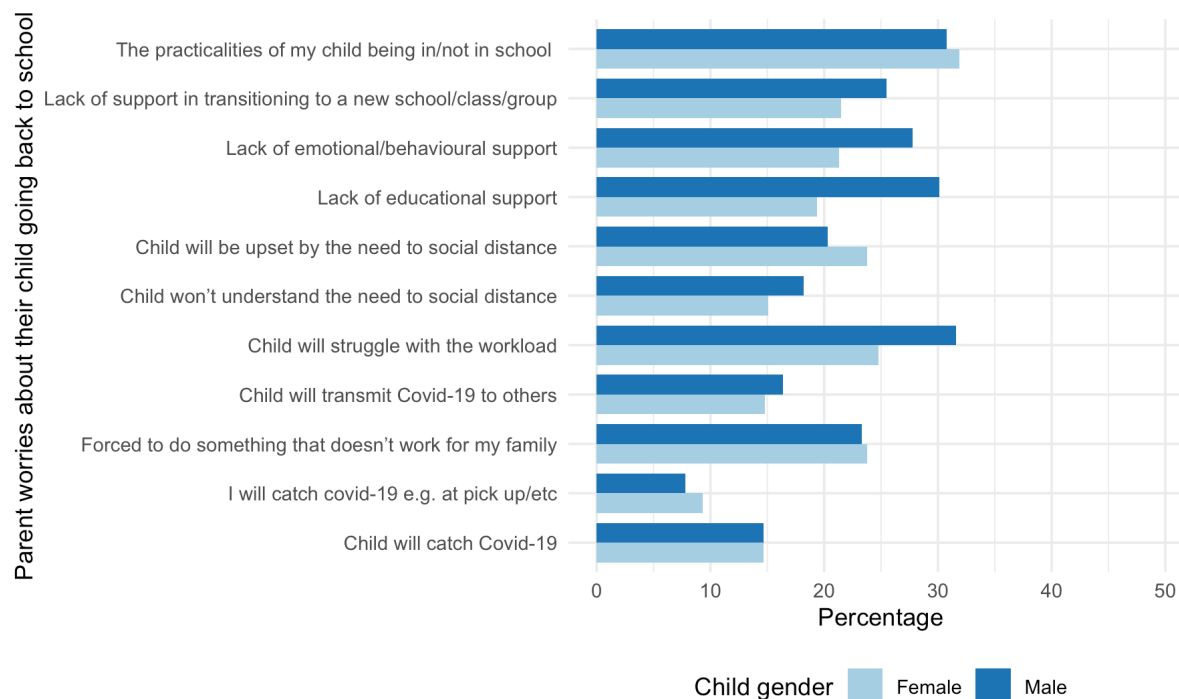


Figure 12. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by child gender

4. Children with Special Educational Needs and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

a. Feelings about child attending school

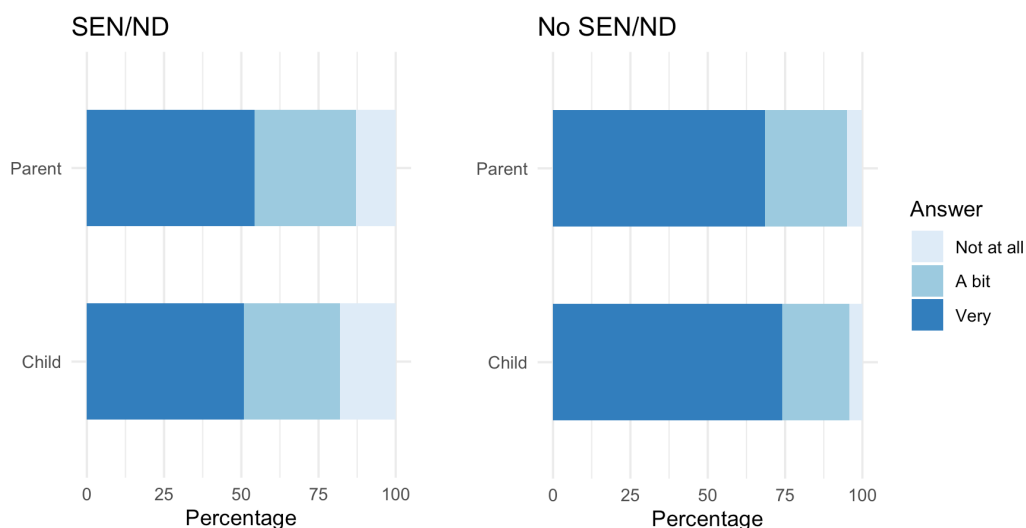


Figure 13. Percentage of parent/carers of children with and without SEN/ND reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about the child attending school

Within the sample, 256 (16.0%) of the parents/carers reported on a child with special educational needs or a neurodevelopmental disorder (i.e., autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; SEN/ND).

There was a broadly similar pattern in the proportions of parents/carers of children with or without a SEN/ND for how comfortable they feel about their child attending school.

However, a larger proportion of parents/carers of children with SEN/ND (18.0%) than those of children with no SEN/ND (4.2%) reported that their child would not feel at all comfortable about attending school; and a lower proportion reported that their child would be very comfortable (50.8% of those with SEN/ND; 74.1% of those with no SEN/ND).

b. Specific concerns around attending school

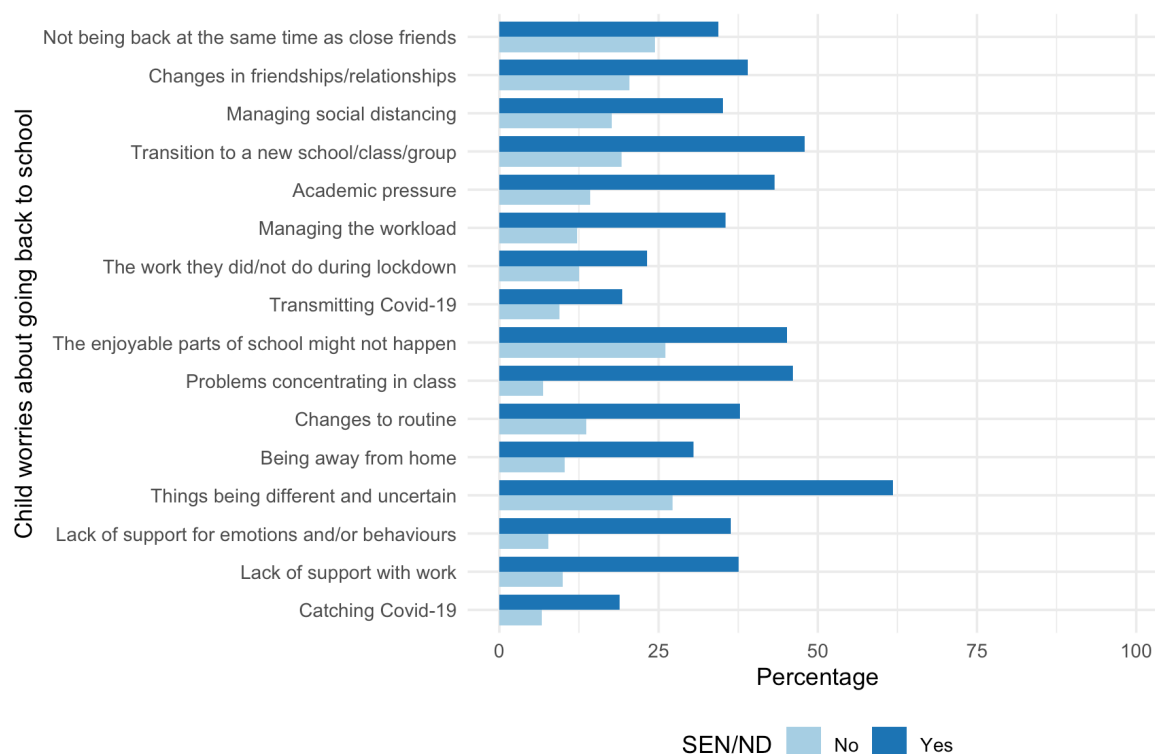


Figure 14. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by children with or without SEN/ND

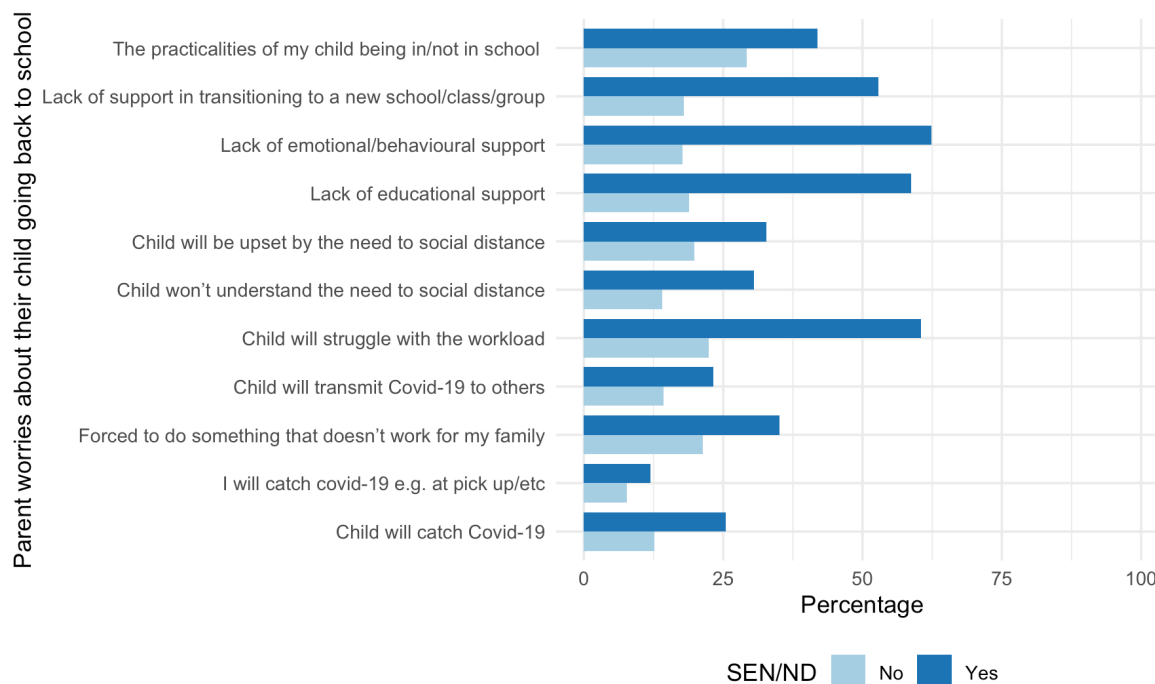


Figure 15. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by children with or without SEN/ND

5. Children with Pre-existing Mental Health Difficulties

a. Feelings about child attending school

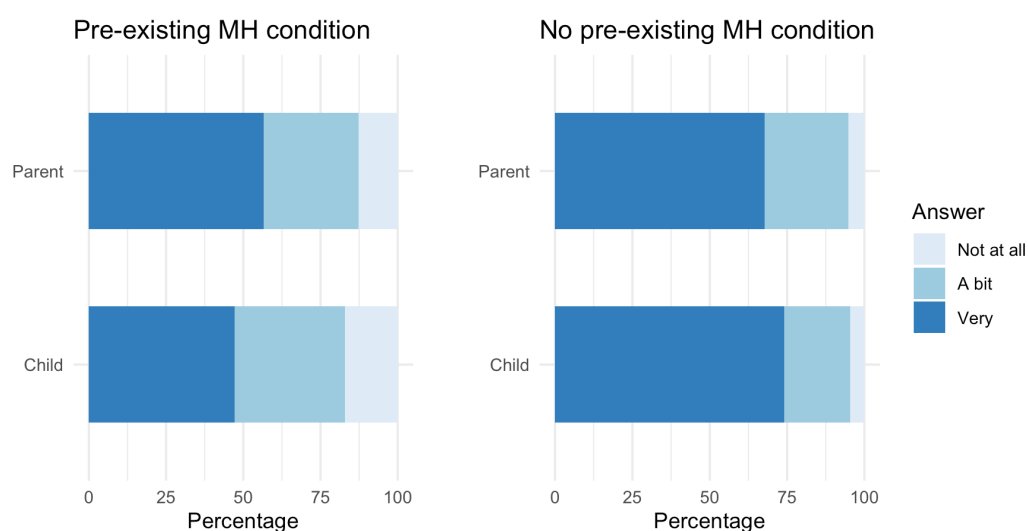


Figure 16. Percentage of parent/carers of children with and without existing MH difficulties reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about the child attending school.

Parents reported on whether their child had a diagnosed mental health (MH) difficulty before the pandemic, including clinically diagnosed depression, anxiety or other mental health problem, as well as neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD and ASD.

Over half of parents, whether their child had a diagnosed mental health (MH) difficulty or not, reported feeling very comfortable about their child attending school.

However, more than 50% of parents/carers of children with a pre-existing MH difficulty reported that their child felt either “a bit” or “not at all” comfortable about attending school. Parents/carers of 17.0% with and 4.7% without pre-existing MH difficulty reported that their child feels “not at all” comfortable.

b. Specific concerns around attending school

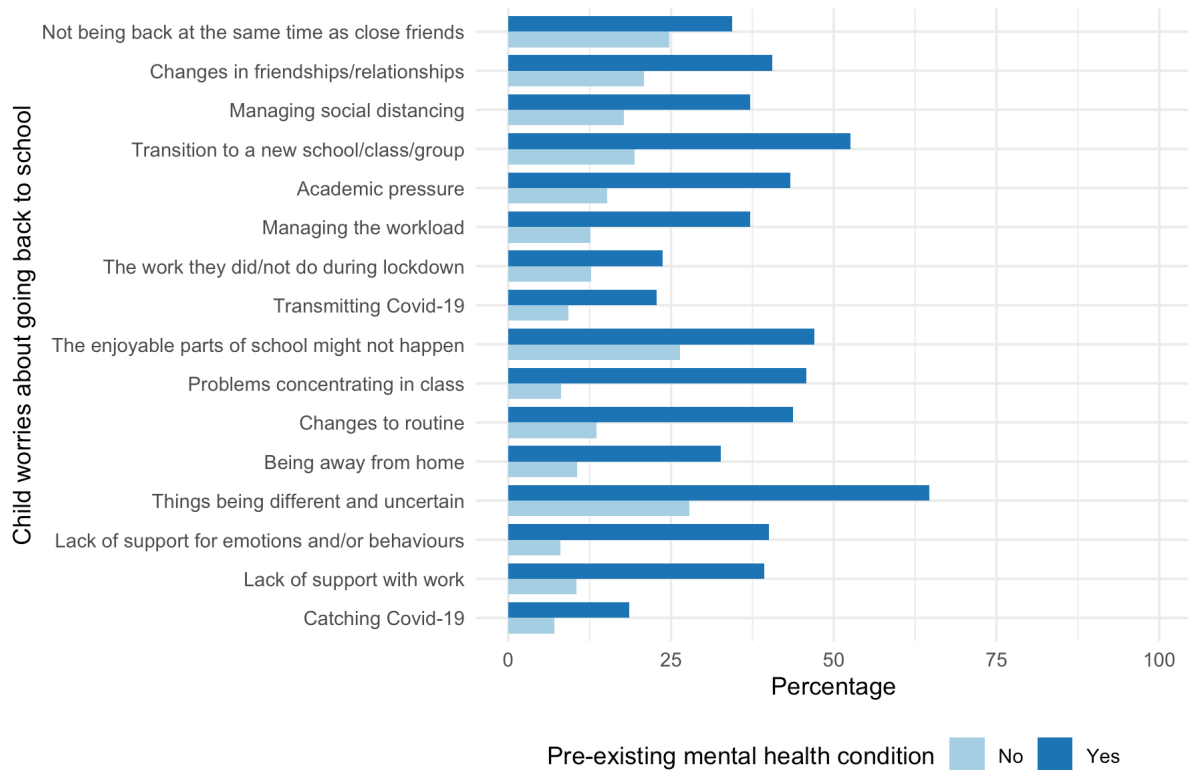


Figure 17. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by child pre-existing mental health difficulties

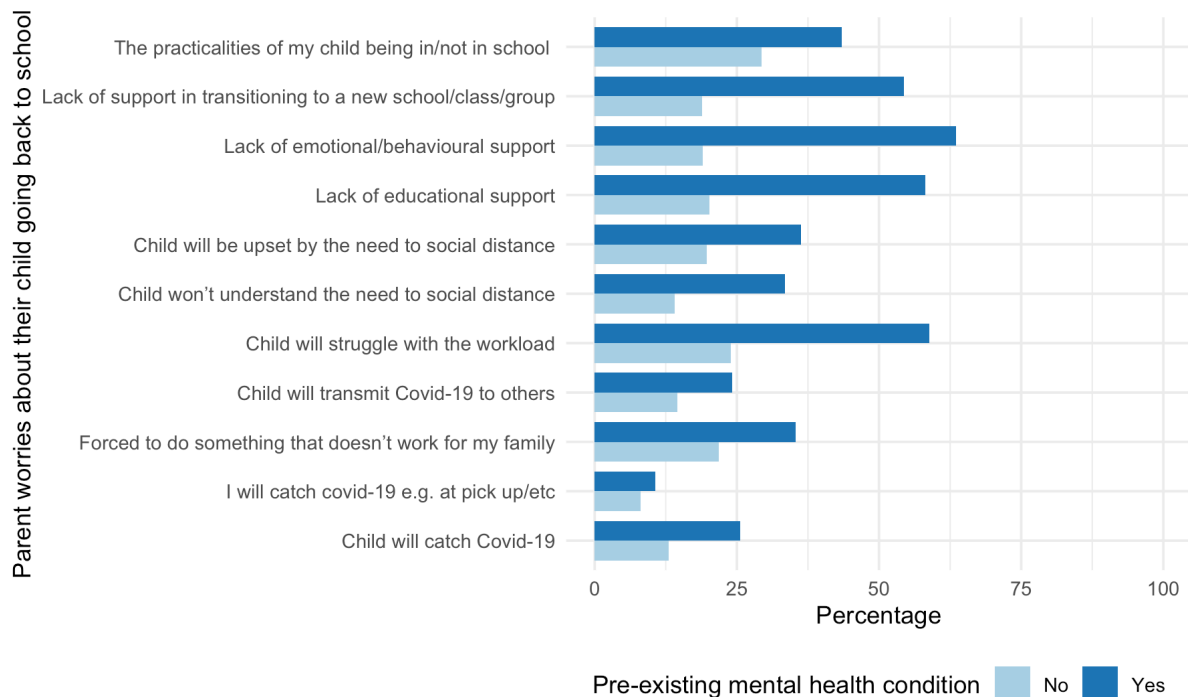


Figure 18. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by child pre-existing mental health difficulties

6. Household Income

a. Feelings about child attending school

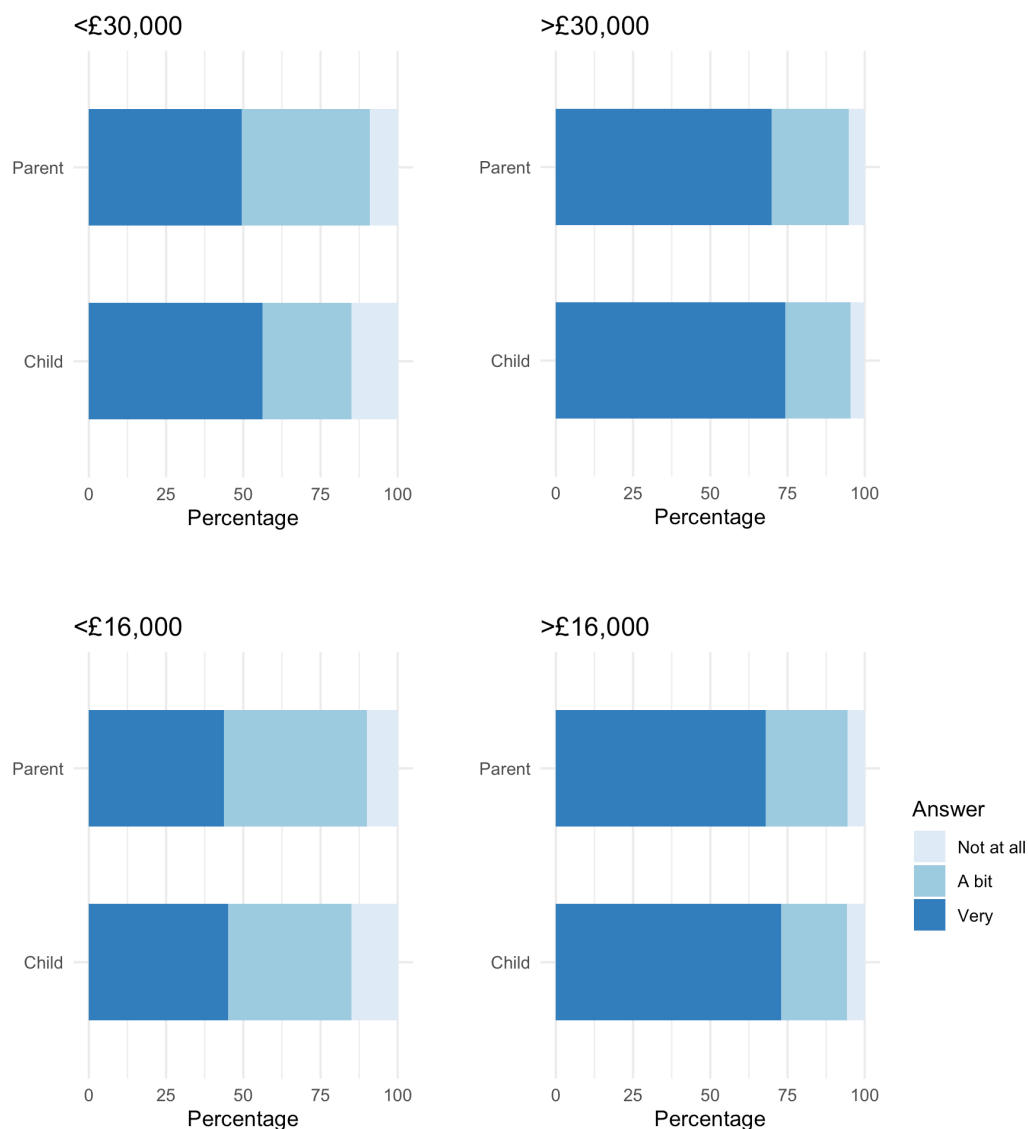


Figure 19. Percentage of parent/carers of children with high and low household incomes reporting how comfortable they and their children feel about them attending school.

Of the 1491 parents/carers who reported on their usual total household income, 233 parents reported theirs as below the national average of £30,000 per annum (14.5%) and 1258 reported theirs as above the national average (78.5%) and 80 reported their annual household income as below £16,000.

The majority of parents/carers in higher income household (either >£16,000 or >£30,000) reported their child feeling very comfortable with attending school.

15% of parents/carers from lower-income households (<£16,000) reported their child not feeling comfortable about attending school. Less than half of parents/carers from a lower-

income household reported feeling very comfortable about their child attending school (43.8% for <£16,000 and 49.4% for <£30,000). While over two thirds of parents/carers from a higher-income household (>£30,000) reported feeling very comfortable about their child attending school (69.8%). **The small number of families on lower incomes means these findings need to be interpreted with caution.**

b. Specific concerns around attending school

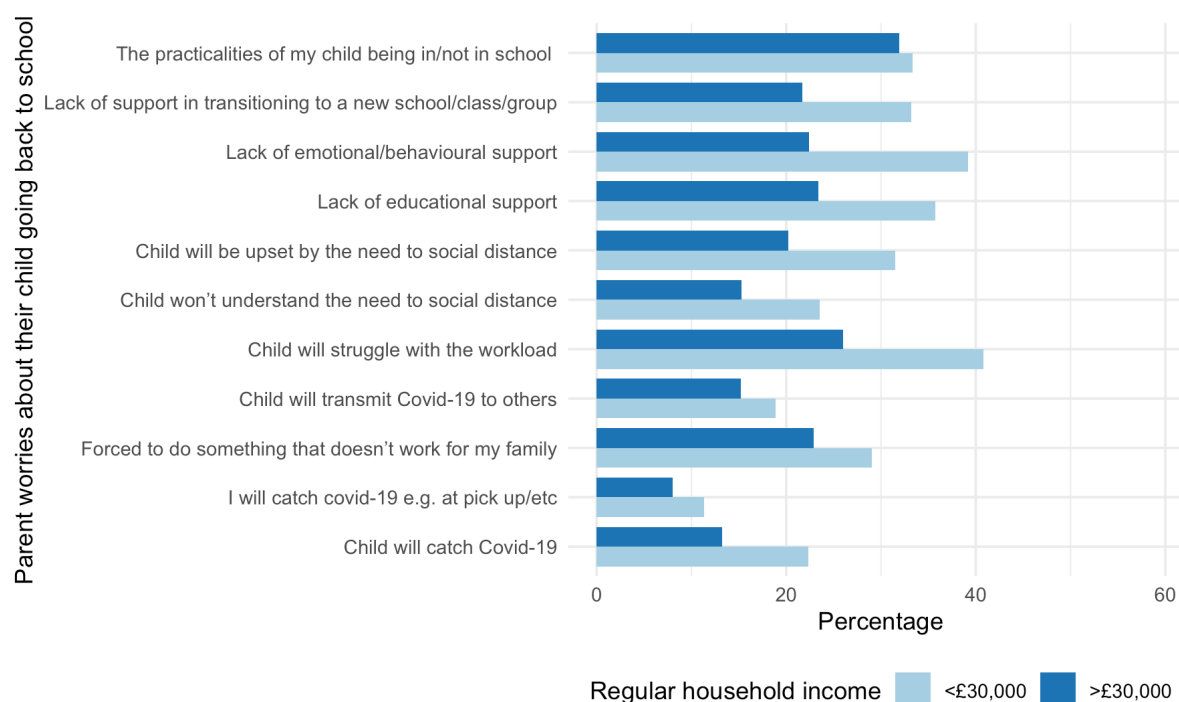


Figure 20. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by household income (>£30,000 and <£30,000)

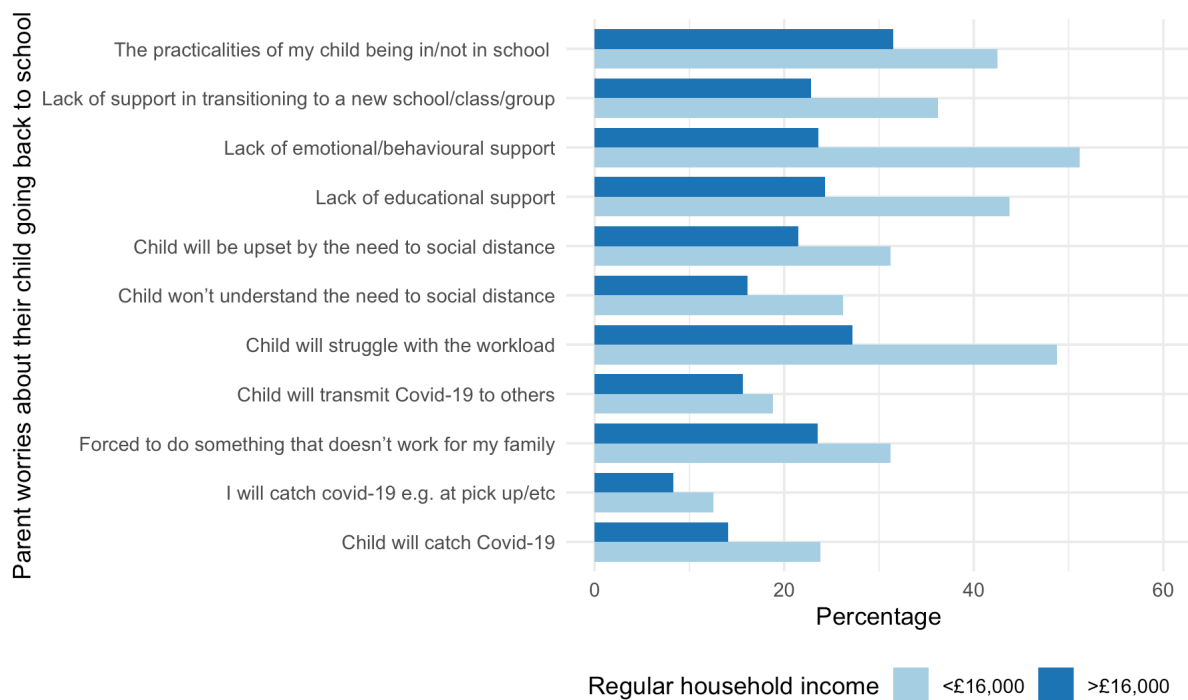
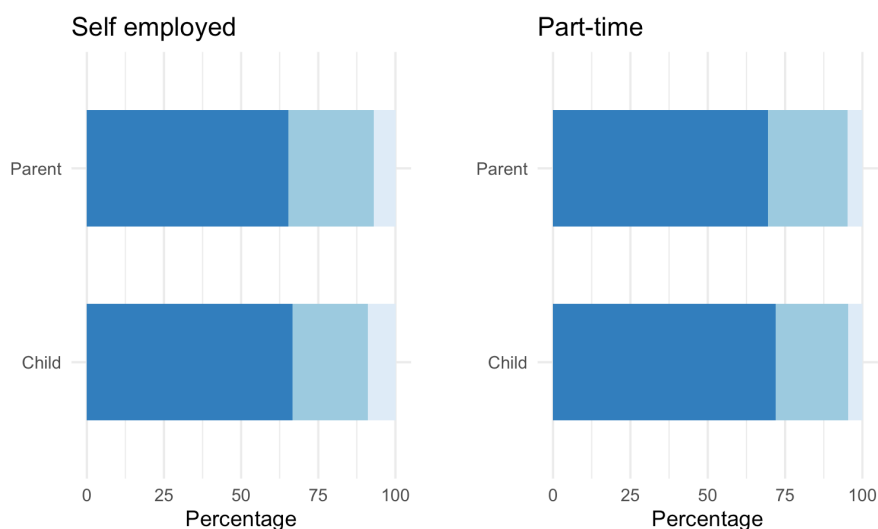


Figure 21. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by household income (>£16,000 and <£16,000)

7. Parent Working Status

a. Feelings about child attending school



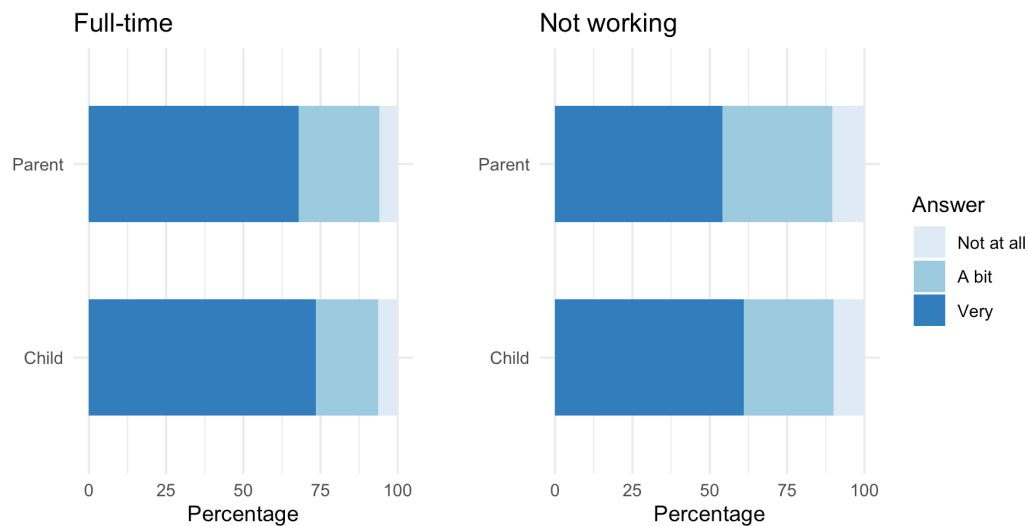


Figure 22. Percentage of parent/carers with different working status's reporting how comfortable they feel about them attending school

Parents/carers reported on whether they were self-employed, employed part-time, employed full-time, or not working (including those who are in education themselves, homemakers, unable to work, unemployed, or retired).

Parents/carers who are working full-time and part-time appear to be most comfortable about their children attending school. Over two thirds reported feeling “very comfortable” (68.0% and 69.4%, respectively). 54.1% of those who are not employed and 65.4% of those who are self-employed reported feeling very comfortable about their children attending school.

Parents/carers who are not working appear to feel the least comfortable about their child returning to school; 10.4% reported that they do not feel comfortable at all.

b. Specific concerns around attending school

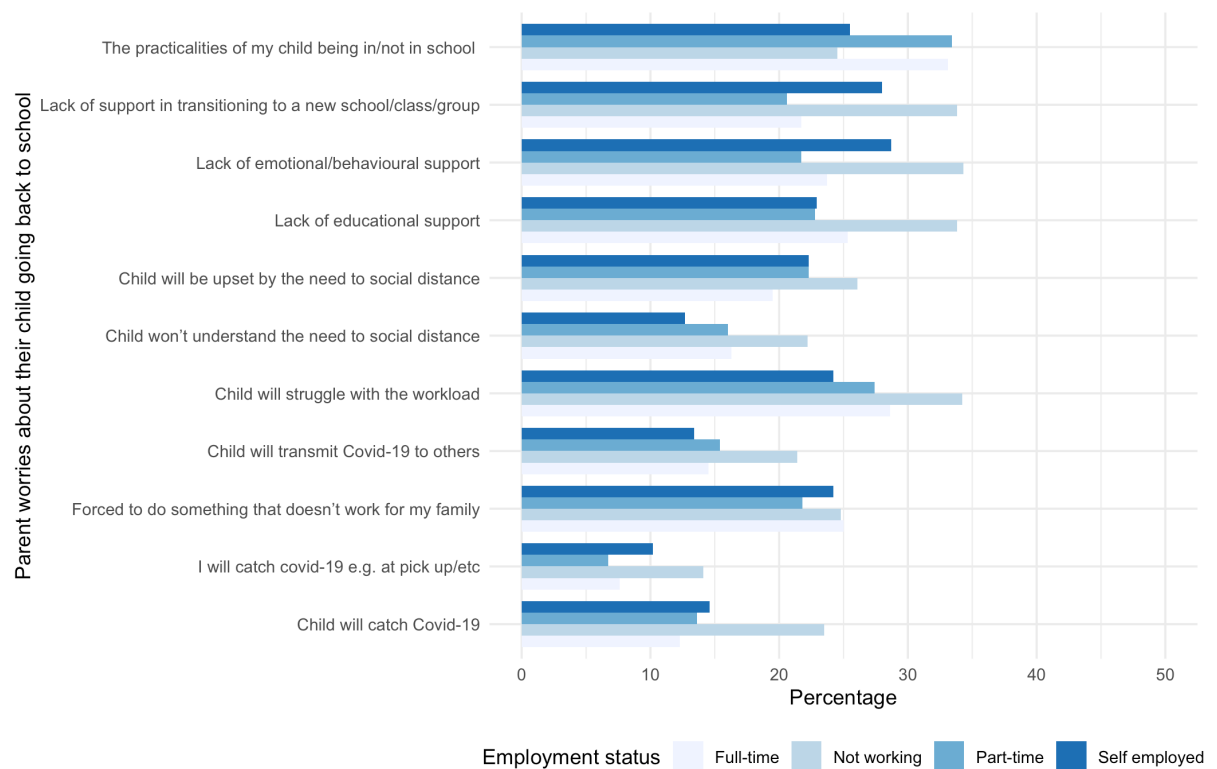


Figure 23. Percentage of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school, by parent working status

	Ethnicity		Child gender		Child age group		Child mental health condition and special educational needs				Household income				Employment status			
	White	BAME	Female	Male	Child (4-10 years)	Adolescent (11-16 years)	SEN/ND	No SEN/ND	Pre-existing MH (Child)	No pre-existing MH (Child)	>£30,000	<£30,000	>£16,000	<£16,000	Not working	Employed part-time	Employed full-time	Self-employed
Catching Covid-19 themselves	8.5	12.5	8.1	9	7.5	11.3	18.9	6.7	18.6	7.1	7.4	14.3	8.1	15	14	8.2	6.5	10.8
Problems concentrating/ paying attention in class	14.4	11.1	10.5	15.3	10.7	18.5	46.1	6.9	45.8	8.1	11.7	23.1	13	25	20	9.6	14.5	12.7
Transmitting Covid-19 to others (e.g., family, friends, school staff)	12.3	12.5	10.6	11.4	9.3	14.9	19.3	9.9	22.8	9.2	9.8	15.5	10	18.8	15	10.1	10	12.1
Not being able to get the support they need for emotions and/or behaviours	32.7	11.1	10.6	13.5	10.6	15.9	36.3	7.7	40	8	11.2	17.6	12	23.8	19	9.5	12.2	14.6
Being away from home	13.5	15.3	12.1	14.5	14.7	10.9	30.5	10.3	32.6	10.6	10.7	23.9	12	25	25	12.9	9.2	14.6
Not being able to get the support they need with work	17.7	13.9	12.4	15.9	11.8	19.9	37.6	9.9	39.3	10.5	12.4	21.6	13	28.7	22	11.9	14	14
Managing the workload	13.3	11.1	14.6	16.8	11.3	26.2	35.5	27.2	37.2	12.6	14.4	21.9	15	30	18	14.8	17.5	12.7
The work they did/not do during lockdown	29	9.7	16.4	11.9	10.3	22.9	23.2	7.7	23.7	12.7	11.9	22.3	13	27.5	15	14.2	14.3	12.1
Changes to routine (e.g. getting up earlier than in lockdown)	11	13.9	17.1	17.7	13.1	27.4	37.8	13.6	43.7	13.5	15.6	28.2	17	30	22	15.3	18.7	16.6
Being put under pressure academically	14.5	15.3	17.5	20	12.7	32.7	43.2	10.3	43.3	15.2	16.6	27.7	17	35	24	16.9	19.8	16.6
The transition to a new school/class/group	16.2	25	24.4	23.3	23.8	23.8	47.9	13.6	52.6	19.4	21.6	35.7	23	35	29	21.7	22.8	28.7
Managing social distancing with other people (e.g., hugging/touching friends)	19.1	16.7	24.5	16.5	20.3	20.6	35.1	6.9	37.2	17.8	18.4	28.6	20	30	25	21.4	16.5	23.6
Changes in friendships/relationships following lockdown	23.9	27.8	27.2	19.9	23.5	23.2	39	26.1	40.5	20.8	20.1	38.2	22	41.2	30	21.2	22.5	26.1
Not being back in school at the same time as close friends	20.7	23.6	28.7	23.6	25.7	26.6	34.4	24.6	34.4	24.7	24.4	31.1	25	35	26	26.6	25.2	26.8
The enjoyable parts of school might not happen	23.3	36.1	29.1	29.1	26.5	34.9	45.2	26.1	47	26.4	27.6	36.1	29	35	30	27.9	29	34.4
Things being different and uncertain	26.2	37.5	33.2	32.1	31.7	34.9	61.8	27.2	64.7	27.8	30.1	43.3	31	47.5	40	30	30.9	40.1

Figure 24. Percentage chart of parents/carers reporting that their child has substantial worries around different aspects of attending school

	Ethnicity		Child gender		Child age group		Child mental health condition and special educational needs				Household income				Employment status			
	White	BAME	Female	Male	Child (4-10 years)	Adolescent (11-16 years)	SEN/ND	No SEN/ND	Pre-existing MH (Child)	No pre-existing MH (Child)	>£30,000	<£30,000	>£16,000	<£16,000	Not working	Employed part-time	Employed full-time	Self-employed
I will catch covid-19 e.g. at pick up/drop off/interacting with school staff	8.4	8.3	9.3	7.8	10.2	4.6	12	7.7	10.7	8.1	8	11.3	8.3	12.5	14.1	6.7	7.6	10.2
My child will catch Covid-19 (at school/ on way to school)	14.4	22.2	14.7	14.7	15	14.1	25.5	12.7	26	13	13	22.3	14	23.8	24	13.6	12.3	14.6
My child will transmit Covid-19 to others	15.6	20.8	14.8	16.4	16.3	14.7	23.2	14.3	24.2	14.5	15	18.9	16	18.8	21.4	15.4	14.5	13.4
My child won't understand the need to social distance from other children/young people	16.3	25	15.1	18.2	20	9.3	30.5	14.1	33.5	14.1	15	23.5	16	26.2	22.2	16	16.3	12.7
My child won't be able to get the educational support they need	25.3	27.8	19.4	30.1	25.2	25.3	58.7	18.9	58.1	20.2	23	35.7	24	43.8	33.8	22.8	25.3	22.9
My child won't be able to get the support they need for their emotional/behavioural needs	24.7	30.6	21.3	27.8	26	22.4	62.4	17.7	63.6	19	22	39.2	24	51.2	34.3	21.7	23.7	28.7
My child won't be able to get the support they need in making the transition to a new school/class/group	23.3	31.9	21.5	25.5	25.3	19.8	52.9	18	54.4	18.9	22	33.2	23	36.2	33.8	20.6	21.7	28
My child will be upset by the need to social distance within school	21.5	31.9	23.8	20.3	26.4	11.9	32.8	19.8	36.3	19.7	20	31.5	22	31.2	26.1	22.3	19.5	22.3
I will be forced to do something that doesn't work for my family	22.7	43.1	23.8	23.3	25.2	19.8	35.1	21.4	35.3	21.8	23	29	24	31.2	24.8	21.8	25	24.2
My child will struggle with the workload following recent disruptions to their learning	28.6	31.9	24.8	31.6	25.1	36	60.5	22.4	58.9	23.9	26	40.8	27	48.8	34.2	27.4	28.6	24.2
Managing the practicalities of my child being in/not in school (e.g. transport, other children, work)	31.3	33.3	31.9	30.8	35.1	22.6	41.9	29.2	43.5	29.4	32	33.3	32	42.5	24.5	33.4	33.1	25.5

Figure 25. Percentage chart of parents/carers reporting that they have substantial worries around different aspects of attending school

Appendix A

Participants' demographics

		Number of observations	%
Parent/carers gender	Female	1469	91.7
	Male	111	6.9
	Other	7	0.4
Work	Working full-time	544	34.0
	Working part-time	671	14.4
	Self-employed	231	41.9
	Not working	156	9.7
Annual household income	< £30,000	233	14.5
	> £30,000	1258	78.5
	< £16,000	80	5.0
	> £16,000	1411	88.1
	Prefer not to say	111	6.9
Child age	Child (aged 4-11 years)	1100	31.3
	Adolescent (aged 12-16 years)	502	68.7
Child gender	Female	740	46.2
	Male	851	53.1
	Other	11	0.7
Child SEND/ND	SEND/ND	256	16
	No SEND/ND	1346	84
Existing MH concerns	Pre-existing MH difficulty	212	13.2
	No pre-existing MH difficulty	1390	86.8

Parent/Carer Ethnicity	Asian/Asian British – Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, other	17	1.1
	Black/Black British – Caribbean, African, other	8	0.5
	Middle Eastern/Middle Eastern British – Arab, Turkish, other	1	0.1
	Mixed race – other	28	1.7
	Mixed race – White and Black/Black British	5	0.3
	Other ethnic group	7	0.4
	White – British, Irish, other	1525	95.2
	Prefer not to say	11	0.7

Appendix B

Survey questions

How comfortable do you feel about your child attending school?
My child will catch Covid-19 (at school/ on way to school)
My child will transmit Covid-19 to others
My child will struggle with the workload following recent disruptions to their learning
My child won't understand the need to social distance from other children/young people
My child will be upset by the need to social distance within school
My child won't be able to get the educational support they need
My child won't be able to get the support they need for their emotional/behavioural needs
My child won't be able to get the support they need in making the transition to a new school/class/group
Managing the practicalities of my child being in/not in school (e.g. transport, other children, work)
I will catch covid-19 e.g. at pick up/drop off/ interacting with school staff
I will be forced to do something that doesn't work for my family
How comfortable does YOUR CHILD feel about attending school?
Catching Covid-19 themselves
Transmitting Covid-19 to others (e.g., family, friends, school staff)
The work they did/not do during lockdown
Managing the workload
Being put under pressure academically
The transition to a new school/class/group
Managing social distancing with other people (e.g., hugging/touching friends)
Changes in friendships/relationships following lockdown
Not being back in school at the same time as close friends
Not being able to get the support they need with work
Not being able to get the support they need for emotions and/or behaviours
Things being different and uncertain
Being away from home
Changes to routine (e.g. getting up earlier than in lockdown)
Problems concentrating/ paying attention in class
The enjoyable parts of school might not happen