

Communication and Support from Schools During COVID-19



This survey was conducted between 24th and 27th April 2020 By Essex Family Forum.

Responses

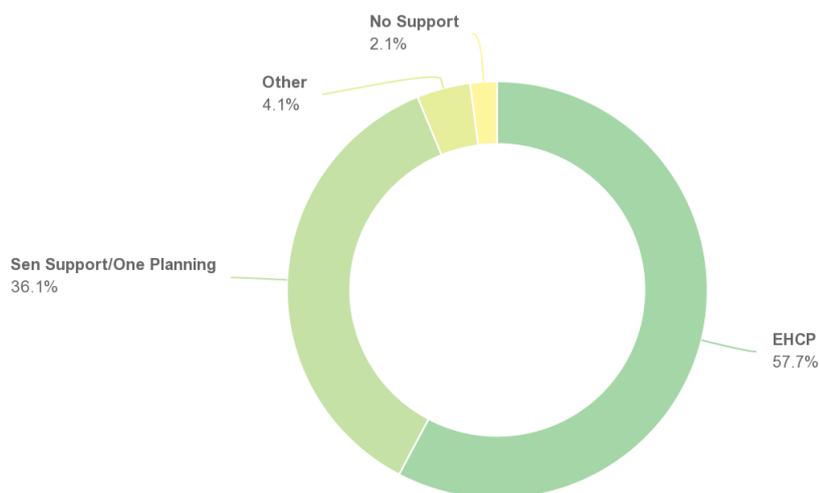
We had 91 responses, of which 2 did not give consent to share the data, so their information has been removed and the report is based on the 89 responses which consented to share their response.

In addition to the results from our survey, also included were comments and feedback that we received from our families, through social media and through e-mail.

Whilst we recognise that the number of responses may be small in comparison to the SEND population in Essex, we feel that that our findings represent the “general feeling” we are seeing on social media and hearing through conversations and feedback from our Family champions.

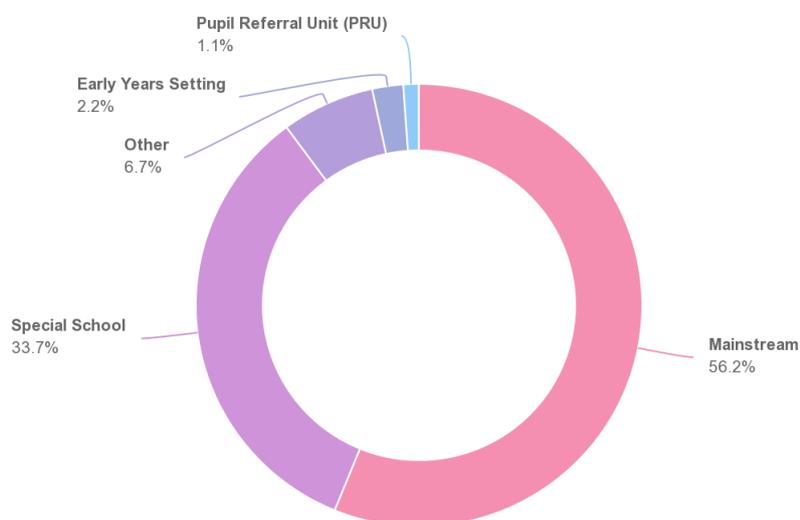
The responses included were from parents with EHCP’s, those on SEN Support/One Planning and some responses from families who are not receiving any form of official support.

What type of support plan does your child have?



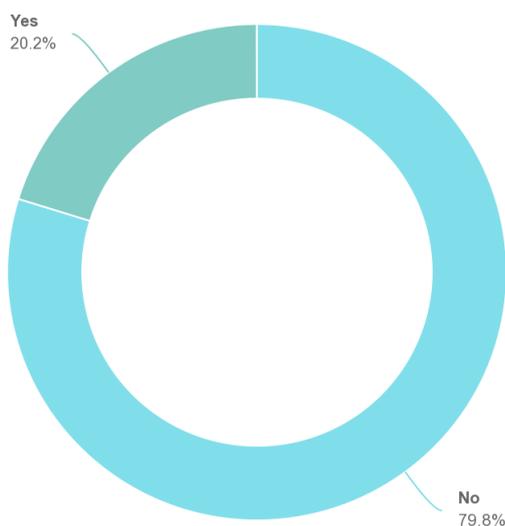
Our responses also reflected the different types of provision attended, with mainstream being the larger group, as we would expect with many families who access special schools also providing substantial information and feedback.

What type of provision does your child attend



Given the guidance for school placements during COVID-19 discusses vulnerable families with an appointed social worker, we asked those who responded, if they had an allocated social worker, so we could review their reported experiences met with current guidance.

Does your family have a social worker?



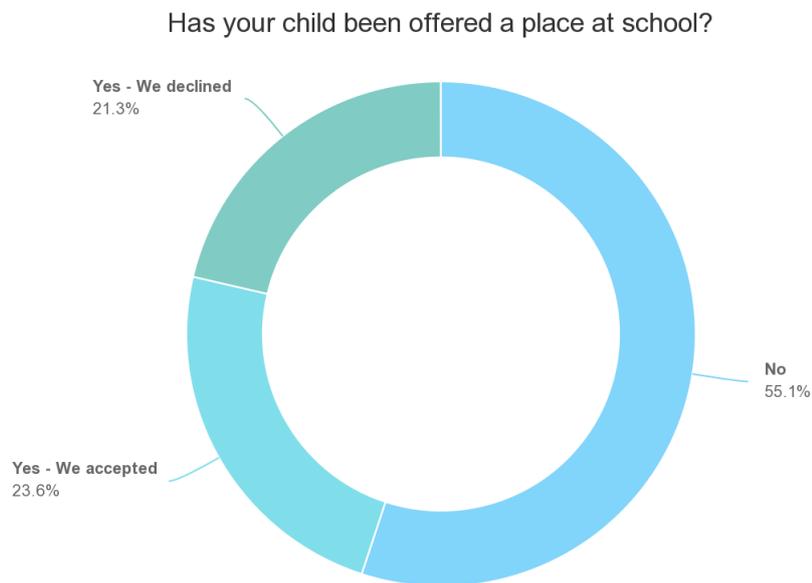
We also asked if a school place had been offered, if it was accepted and if welfare calls have been made to parents. Guidance issued on 19th March, which stated that schools and child care providers should continue to provide care, namely a school place, for those children

that are deemed to be “vulnerable”, which are children with an EHCP, and/or a social worker (whose needs cannot be safely met at home).

Further guidance on 19th April, provided clear guidelines for risk assessments to be carried on “vulnerable” child to determine if a child may benefit more from remaining in school than at home.

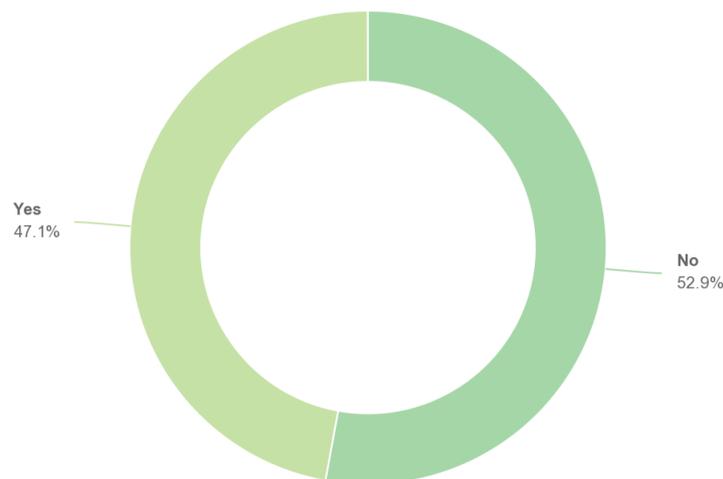
Therefore, it is important to understand that those who should have had, had the appropriate discussions with the school.

This chart shows the responses from parents with EHCP plans only.



This shows responses from families on all types on support

Is your school making regular welfare calls to you, to check on the well-being of your child and the rest of the family?



Report

A full report was sent to Essex County Council which detailed the types of provision children attended and the support and communication that families were in receipt of from schools.

Whilst we are pleased to report that we heard some positive stories of support from schools, we are also disappointed to report that parents' comments also suggested that many schools are failing in their duty to support families appropriately. We wish to assure families that we have highlighted to Essex County Council those schools who are supporting families well and we have highlighted in great detail, by way of sharing families experiences, those schools which are failing in supporting our families.

Essex Family Forum have taken the decision not to make public the full report we issued to Essex County Council, as we want to respect the privacy of those families who shared their stories and personal journeys with us which we included within the report. No personal data was collected by our survey and where any such information was provided via e-mail and Facebook messenger, that information was omitted from our report to Essex County Council.

Alongside our report we made recommendations to Essex County Council, which we believe should be followed to ensure improved support for our families at this time. Our recommendations are follows:

It has been acknowledged that many risk assessments were conducted prior to guidance being issued and that many assessments were conducted in relation to the "risk" to the provision provider and not the child and/or family.

*We acknowledge that many risk assessments were conducted before Easter, prior to the revised guidance being released on 19th April, and as such we would argue that, as recommended within the guidance, Essex County Council and schools revisit those assessments already conducted, in particular from those who were refused a school place or were not offered one, to check whether the decisions made remain appropriate based on current guidance. We also seek to understand how Essex County Council are monitoring the effectiveness of risk assessments that have been and will continue to be carried out. We firmly believe that the risk assessment **must** be carried out with the families **input** and **knowledge**. It is clear from the responses we have had that some parents have either not been consulted, or not been made aware that a risk assessment has been conducted.*

Essex Family Forum acknowledges that many children can be safely supported within their home environment and agree that they should remain within the safety of their home. However, we firmly believe that schools have a duty to provide support, communication and differentiated work. Again, it is clear from the responses that support and communication with schools differs greatly between provisions, with some provisions adapting well and some provisions not meeting the family's needs.

It is acknowledged that week five of the summer holidays can often bring about a “social care peak” for many families, with some families feeling they are unable to cope and seeking additional support. The majority manage the struggle, knowing they only have a week or two left until the start of the new term. We are now within week six of lockdown, with no known end point, it is possible that many families, who were coping as lock-down started, are now struggling and those that need support need to be signposted and directed to professionals for increased support.

We urge Essex County Council to enter dialogue with all schools, highlighting our findings and to request assurances from the schools highlighted by parents that they will make the necessary improvements to increase support and communication to families.

As your parent carer form, we will continue to listen to parents, to signpost parents and to highlight our family’s needs to the local authority, to health professionals and to social care during this time to ensure our families are in receipt of services and provision which meets their needs.

After a discussion with Essex County Council, we have agreed to repeat this survey again in approximately two weeks and we urge anyone with a child who has SEND within Essex to complete it including those that completed this survey and provided feedback . The more families that complete the survey the louder our collective voice is!

We appreciate the time and effort a survey takes for parents and carers to complete; however, we want to ensure that the necessary changes are happening in accordance with our recommendations and new DfE guidance. It is essential that families are receiving the communication and support from services that they need during this pandemic and we can only do this by hearing your voice!

Please feel free to contact us at corona@essefamilyforum.org

Stay Safe

Essex Family Forum