

Challenges in Home Learning: Emerging findings from the Big Lockdown Learning Parent Survey.



Key findings

- Many families of primary-aged children have found home learning challenging, and this view is more likely to be expressed by low-income families who are eligible for free school meals.
- Whilst differences in average reported learning time were not large, parents of free school meal eligible children were more likely to say no schoolwork was completed on any one day.
- Parents in free school meals households were less likely to feel their own child was motivated to learn or would complete their schoolwork if given free choice.
- Most parents say they feel confident about supporting home learning, though those eligible for free school meals were more likely to feel unconfident and more likely to say they had difficulties understanding work set.
- On any one day, half of families experienced some sort of technological problem and yet very few cited technological challenges as being a significant barrier to home learning.

Introduction to the Big Lockdown Learning Parent Survey

This briefing presents early, emerging findings from an ongoing survey, the Big Lockdown Learning Parent Survey. The ongoing survey is being conducted using an app called Parent Ping, with parents or carers answering daily questions about their child's experience of learning at home. Launched at the end of January, it is collecting daily responses from around 1,240 parents whose children attend 75 primary schools participating in the study.

This initial briefing provides insights into the home learning challenges that families have faced during the latest national lockdown. The briefing also compares the experiences reported by parents whose children are eligible for free school meals (FSM) with those reported by all other parents.

When interpreting this briefing the reader should keep in mind that:

- Findings are based on emerging, exploratory analysis that has not been peer-reviewed, and should be interpreted with care.
- Schools and parents who self-selected to be part of this small exploratory study may not be representative of all schools and parents in England.
- About 15% of the 1,240 parents (approx. 186 parents) in the sample are eligible for FSM. While this is close to the national average of 17%, the sample size for this group is very small. A small sample size means that our estimates are less precise – statistical tests have not been applied at this stage of analysis.
- Parents' experiences of home learning are complex and changing. There are likely to be many reasons why FSM-eligible households report an experience differently to other households, as well as much variation between FSM-eligible households. The upcoming research report on the Big Parent Lockdown Learning Survey will explore these relationships in more detail.

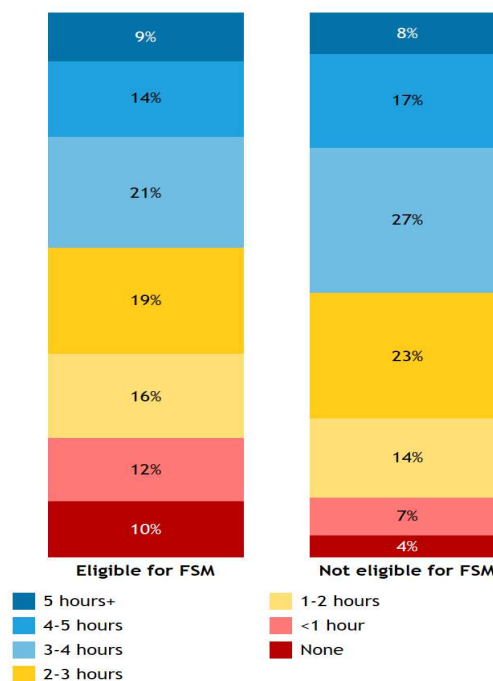
Only small differences in parental reports of learning time

The parents in our survey report differences by free school meals status (FSM) in how much time their child studied on the days we asked, but these differences are not substantial. 44% of parents in FSM eligible households said their primary-aged child studied for 3 or more hours on the day in question, versus 52% in other households. Just one-in-ten FSM families said no learning was done that day, versus just 4% for other families.

There are many reasons why parents' perception of learning time may not be well-correlated with amounts of *effective* learning. Parents may not know whether the child is actively attending to their studies at any time, particularly for older Key Stage 2 children who can work unsupervised. Furthermore, taking part in learning activities may not be an indicator of how much is being learnt.

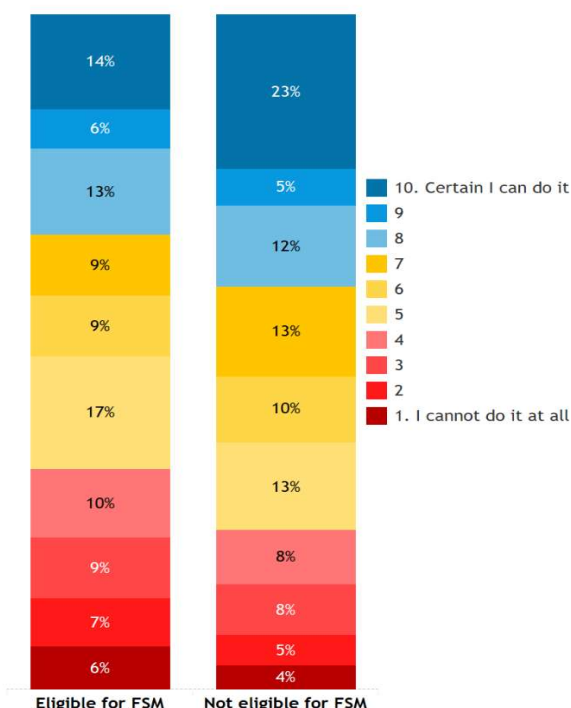
However, there are some signs that FSM eligible children were, in general, more likely to be struggling to keep up with their schoolwork in the period up to the February half term; 18% of FSM-eligible parents said their child was struggling to keep up, versus 9% of other parents.

Figure 1: Number of hours child spent learning the previous day, with responses pooled across three dates in February.



Parents have struggled to cope with home learning

Figure 2: Parent report of feelings about home learning in late February on a scale of 1-10.



Tears – from both parents and children – have been a regular feature of home learning. In 63% of households taking part in the study, either the parent, or the child, or both had cried about schooling in the week in question. In FSM eligible households, this figure was a little higher at 72%.

Tears are a very direct sign that managing home learning is difficult. However, we also regularly asked parents to rate how they felt about home learning at the beginning of the week on a scale of 1-10. In general, the responses of parents became less positive as the month of the survey progressed.

Moreover, parents in FSM households expressed less positive feelings on each occasion. For example, on the 22nd of February, 32% of FSM parents gave low ratings (between one and four on the 10-point scale), versus 25% of other parents. Conversely, only 14% of FSM parents gave the top rating, versus 23% of other parents.

There is a complex inter-relationship between the actions of the child and the feelings of the parent with respect to supporting home learning. More despondent expressions

from parents may simply arise from having to support a child who themselves feels less motivated to learn.

While 1 in 10 of all parents reported that their child had low motivation to learn that week (in the bottom third of the 10-point-scale), 2 in 10 parents in FSM households reported low motivation. Of course, this question does not reveal *why* a child feels unmotivated to learn. It could be that they are finding it hard to understand the lessons or are in an environment where it is hard to learn.

To understand child self-motivation a little better, we asked how much of their schoolwork a child would complete if they were given free choice. Parents in FSM households were more likely to say that they feel their child would do none at all (25% versus 15% for other families).

Future analysis will look more closely at associations between motivation of the child to learn and other factors, but for now it is worth noting that motivation to learn is very closely related to a parent's view of the child's overall happiness. Lockdown has not been universally difficult for all children, but 54% of parents said their child is less happy than normal and 16% say they are worried about their child's wellbeing.

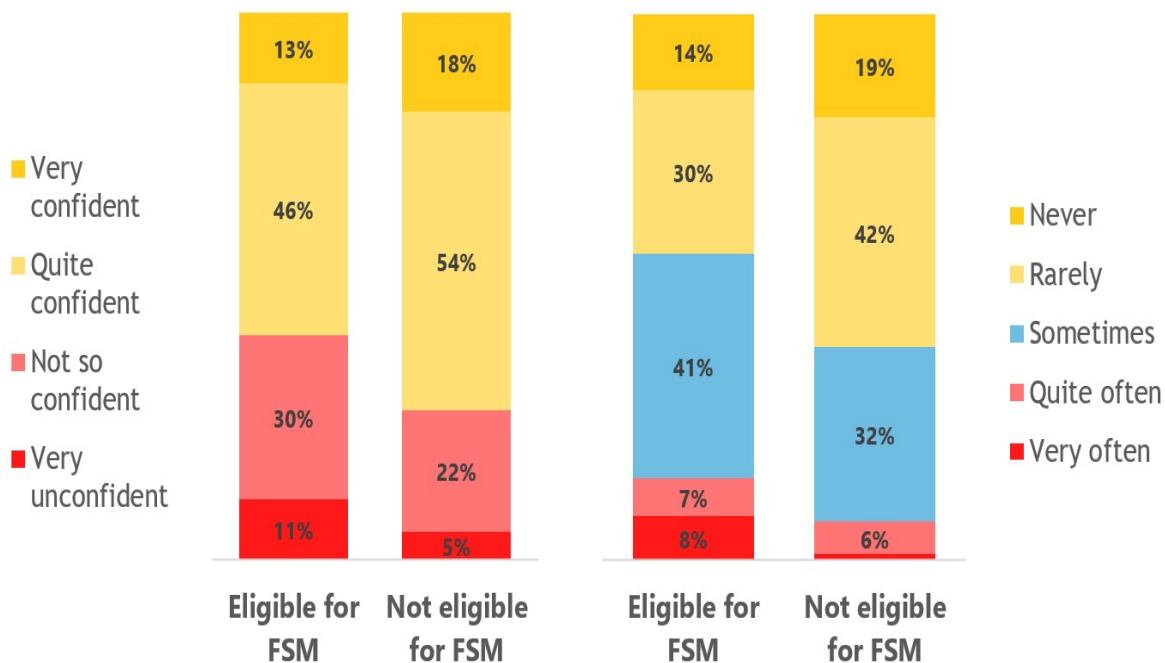
Some differences in confidence and challenges about home learning

Most parents say they feel quite confident about supporting their child in remote learning and understand the home learning tasks set by teachers. This was explored through two separate questions asking: 'how confident do you feel in supporting your children's home learning?' and 'how often are you finding it difficult to understand home-schooling tasks that are set for your children?'

Responses to the questions display a similar pattern where parents from FSM households are more likely to report not feeling confident or not understanding learning tasks than other parents. Conversely, few parents from FSM households report feeling 'very confident' or 'never' having difficulty with tasks, compared to other parents in the study. Overall, confidence appears lower amongst this group.

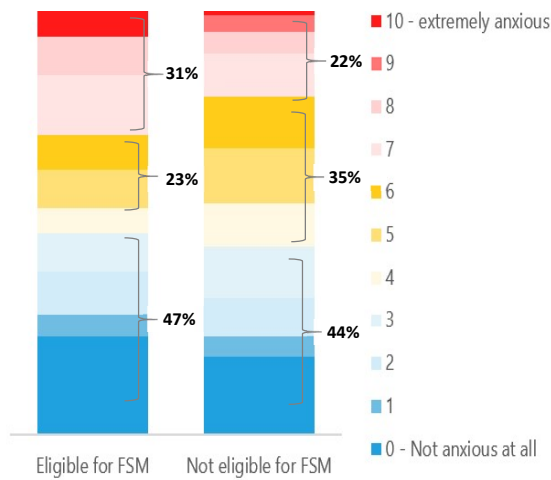
Figure 3: Parents confidence to support home learning.

Figure 4: Frequency parents have difficulty in understanding the home learning tasks.



Differences in sources of anxiety across families

Figure 5: Parent anxiety on a scale of 1-10 (17th February).

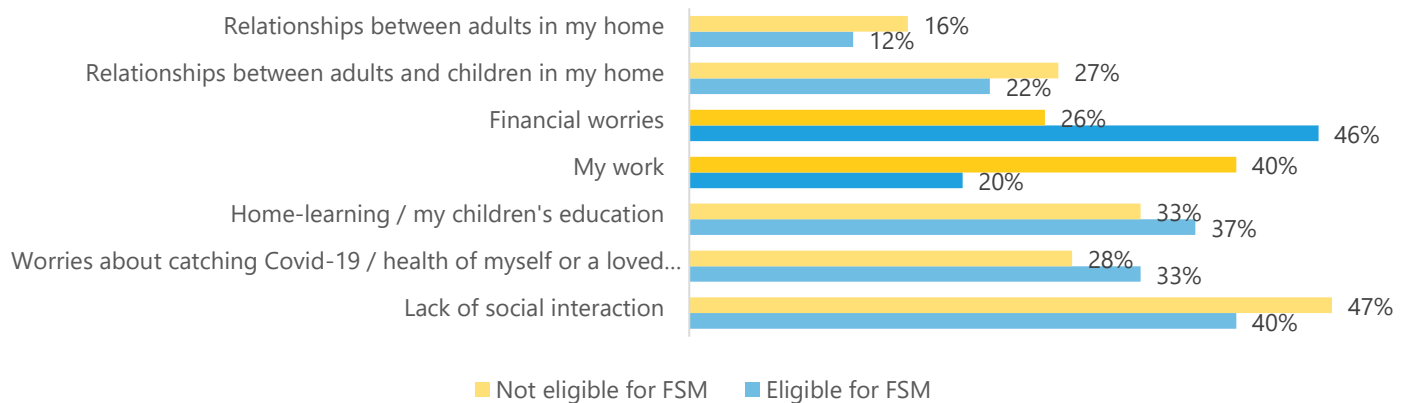


Some FSM eligible families are experiencing higher levels of anxiety in their lives at the moment (selecting between 7 and 10 on a 10-point scale) with 31% saying they were highly anxious versus 22% for other parents. However, it should also be noted that some FSM eligible families are experiencing lower levels of anxiety than their peers – overall fewer parents in the FSM analysis group are selecting the middle points on the scale.

Some causes of anxiety were similar across families. Just under half of all families suggested that lack of social interaction and home learning was creating anxiety.

But for FSM parents, 46% named financial worries as a source of anxiety in the last 24 hours, versus 26% of other families. Only 20% of FSM eligible parents mentioned work, versus 40% for those not eligible. Work worries are less in FSM families, because only a third of FSM respondents are combining home learning with some sort of work (versus three-quarters of parents in non-FSM households).

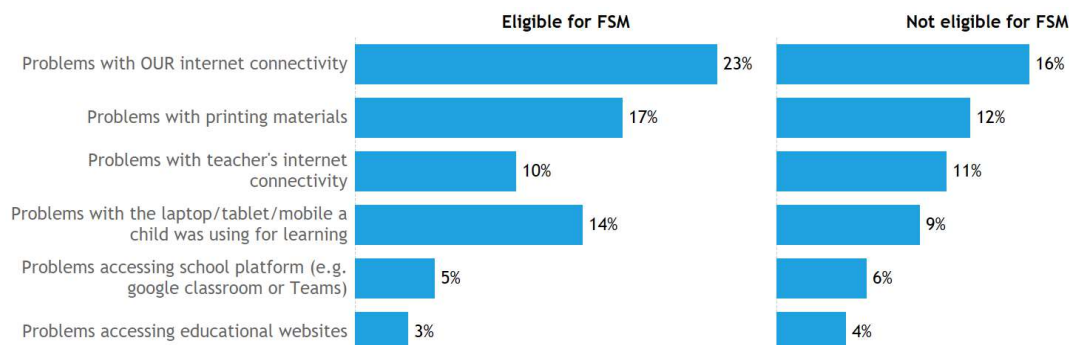
Figure 5: Causes of parent anxiety on a scale of 1-10 (17th February).



Technological problems are frequent, but rarely cited as significant

Whilst just 1-in-10 parents chose to report technology as causing a significant challenge with home learning over the course of a week, the numbers experiencing technological problems is far higher. On any one day, 40% of parents said they'd had some sort of technological problem whilst home learning. [Figure 7:](#)

Technological problems that took place on a single day.

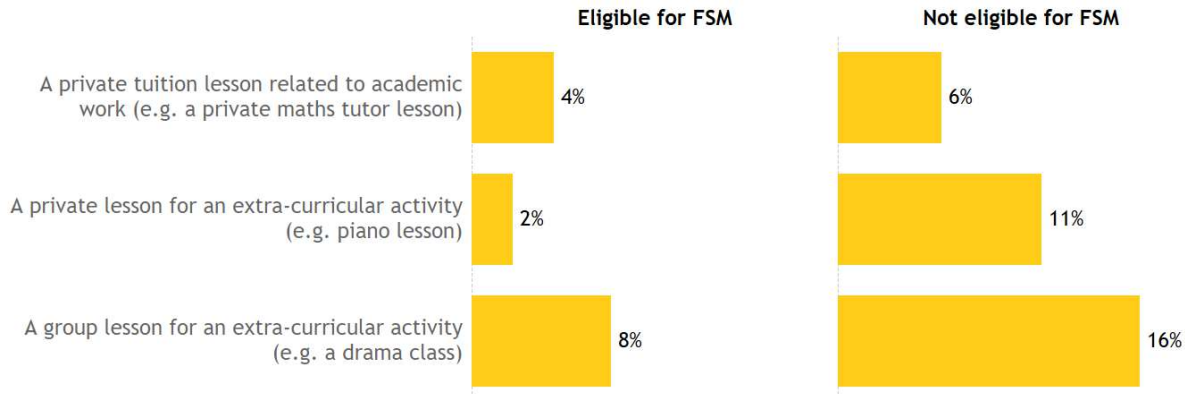


Learning beyond schoolwork

It is important to recognise that home learning set by schools is not the only factor affecting learning. Our survey has asked about additional formal activities children have undertaken whilst schools have been closed to most children, as well as whether children have been reading.

Whilst overall only a small percentage of children are participating in additional activities, fewer children who are eligible for FSM have participated in private or group lessons for extra-curricular activities (e.g., a music lesson or a drama class) than their peers.

Figure 8: Activities completed in the last week.



On the day we asked, many children had read a book in the past 24 hours, either on their own, to an adult or had an adult read to them. Around 1 in 5 children eligible for FSM had not read compared to around 1 in 10 children who are not eligible for FSM. This is not to say that parents were any less supportive - indeed the proportion of children reading to or being read to by an adult was almost identical across the two groups.

Figure 9: Proportions reading a book over a 24-hour period.



Further information on the Big Lockdown Learning Parent Survey

This is an ongoing study of what is happening in the homes of families with primary-aged children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim is to better understand what made home learning successful – and unsuccessful – during the Spring 2021 period of lockdown. Whilst England may not need widespread closures again soon (we hope!), the study hopes to inform policymakers and schools more generally about how to help families support their children's learning.

The study funded by the Education Endowment Foundation has used a daily survey app called Parent Ping to ask questions to over a thousand parents whose children attend 75 primary schools participating in the study. Whilst any parent can use the survey app, the responses reported here all come from the parents who have been directly recruited, via schools, to take part in this study.

Exact response rates vary by day, but each of the charts in this briefing reports data on between 1,034 and 1,240 parent responses. Many questions ask parents about each individual child, and so for these questions the number of responses is as high as 1,733.

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