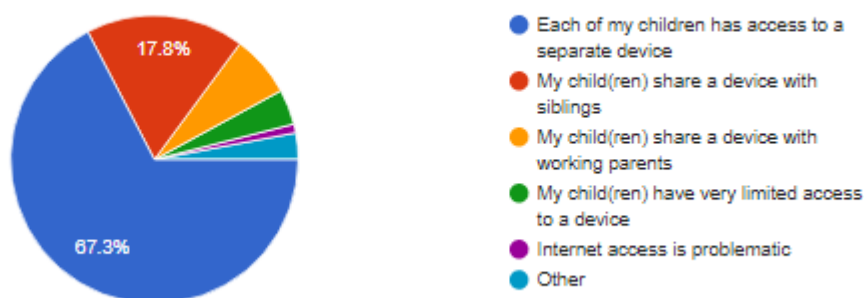


Summary of Distance Learning and Homework Survey completed by parents and guardians of children attending RETNS

This survey was completed in the first weeks of October 2020. We are grateful to all parents and guardians who took the time to participate. 101 families out of a total of 150 families in the school participated, a response rate of 67.3%.

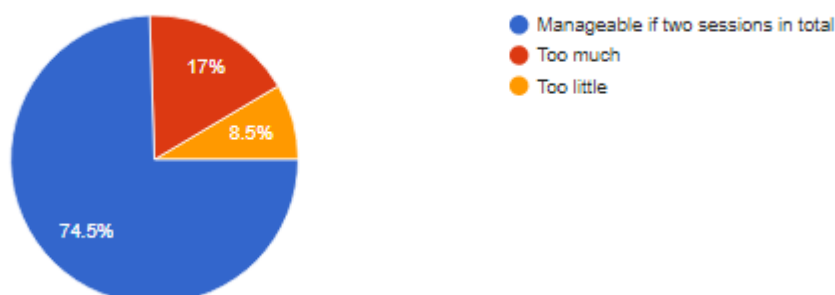
Question 1. If we were obliged to return to distance learning, we would foresee more live contact between children and their class teacher. We would expect that all children would engage in these live sessions so it would be helpful to know about your child(ren)'s access to technology for distance learning. 101 responses

101 responses



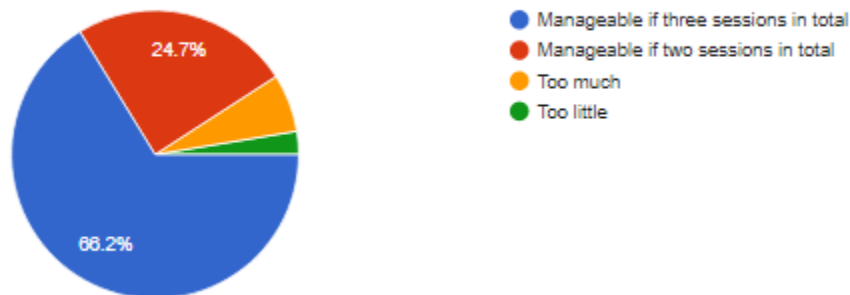
Question 2. (For Junior Infants – 1st class) If returning to distance learning, the most likely scenario is that only one class, or part of that class, would be at home. In the case of the closure of one class, we would anticipate that your child would have a live group zoom lesson to start the day, followed by one whole-class zoom session in the early afternoon. The sessions would last between 20 and 30 minutes. We anticipate that the morning lessons would be in groups of around 9 – 10 children and would cover literacy and maths. The plenary session would bring the whole class together for a check-in and story time. We would use the SeeSaw platform for assigning work for time spent offline. Would you consider this level of engagement as:

47 responses



Question 2. (For 2nd – 6th classes) If returning to distance learning, the most likely scenario is that only one class, or part of that class, would be at home. In the case of the closure of one class, and based on pupil feedback, we would anticipate that your child’s day would begin with a live zoom session, followed by up to two sessions later in the day, one mid-morning and one early afternoon. The sessions would last between 30 and 45 minutes. We would use the SeeSaw platform for assigning work for time spent offline. Would you consider this level of engagement as:

77 responses



While the graphs provide a quantitative summary, we found the comments particularly useful. I have included a selection of comments which reflect the range of responses received to questions 3 & 4.

Question 3. Looking back to the period of school closure from March 2020, what elements of the school provision did you find **particularly positive?** – 89 responses

- *Open door policy and support from teacher and resource. Having all books at home*
- *That there was daily communication and tasks.*
- *Children being able to directly send schoolwork through a platform to their teacher*
- *Seesaw / teacher videos / small groups*
- *Direct contact with teacher*
- *Some of the website links gave us access to resources we would never have otherwise found!*
- *Having the Reading Eggs and Matific apps that could allow them some independent work*
- *Daily email from teacher*
- *Choice of assignments*
- *That the teachers assigned practical and achievable tasks for the children.*
 - *Instructional videos on key concepts - these were really useful for explaining quick concepts in Maths in particular*
- *Bua na Cainte was also popular so great to have access to that*
- *Breadth of activities provided and lack of pressure to complete.*
- *The fact that whenever we sent work in we received such a positive and encouraging response*
- *Structured work*
- *Project based work*
- *The SEN were really helpful*
- *Timely feedback from teachers*
- *Consistency of type and method of communication*
- *Once they started to receive some videos from their teacher it really helped them connect back into learning.*
- *The specific tasks of drawing/make something/photos of nature were helpful in motivating the children to get out of the house and use their imagination.*

- *Website activities such as Darren's workouts were great to remind the boys of the whole school as a community.*
- *Both the girls really liked when the workbooks from school were sent home.*

Question 4. It is clear to us that increased live engagement would be a feature of distance learning in the future. Looking back to the period of school closure from March 2020, what other changes would you like to see?

87 responses

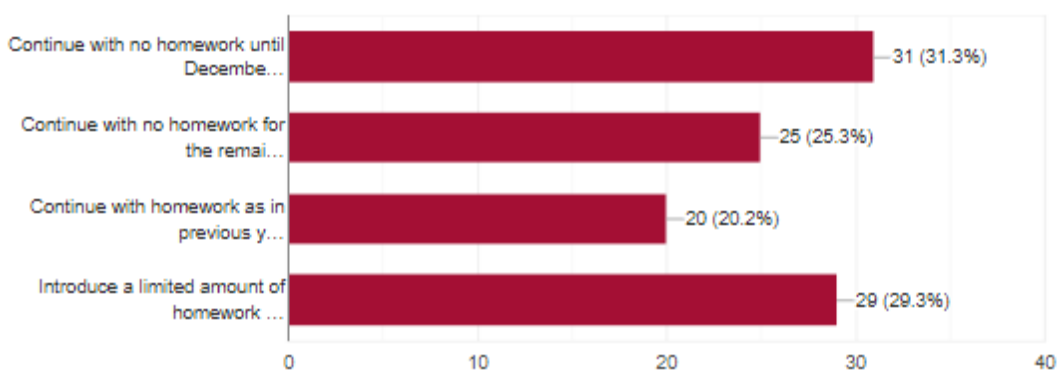
- *More class interaction*
- *Live engagement*
- *Engagement with exercise through the school.*
- *Activity based learning encouraging the children outdoors.*
- *An opportunity to underpin children led learning.*
- *More projects and interactions in small groups*
- *Smaller groups in the zoom calls*
- *For teachers to cc parents on feedback or contact parents of work late/incomplete*
- *Online lessons - not necessarily live but can be pre-recorded video lessons. It is difficult for parents to teach new concepts / lessons as we are not trained to teach, kids lose attention span, do not take a parent as seriously as a teacher, limited time as we are working from home.*
- *If the teachers were directive during online classes, the children would be more likely to engage and follow through on work required afterwards.*
- *When there was group sessions participation was minimal because of the large group size and boredom set in quickly. Participation groups should be smaller.*
- *Some kind of reading challenge*
- *Need to explore whatever methods are possible to help children work as independently as possible*
- *Less requirement to use electronic devices in order to complete work set, outside of live engagement teaching sessions.*
- *I would like to see the children encouraged to pursue something of their own particular interest over time.*
- *Even for the class teacher to tee-up the day and outline the learning outcomes for the day would be very helpful for both students and parents.*
- *That the live sessions would relate to assigned work.*
- *Facility for children to upload work to Seesaw for teacher to comment on/provide some small feedback, would be really motivating for children to engage and complete work if they know their teacher is expecting to see it. Also it would be great to have learning plans and activities uploaded to Seesaw so it's all in the one place rather than having to scroll through emails and open and download attachments separately.*
- *More accountability for learning, e.g. Work set but with an expectation that it would be submitted and corrected/feedback given.*
- *I did see that the children and my child got a bit bored in circle time on the zoom, waiting to share their news. Could some creative interactivity be introduced here? Could they have signs with Yes/no, thumbs up/down. Etc. to respond to the teacher's questions.*
- *Tutorials for maths concepts, Irish*
- *When junior and senior infants moved to a weekly schedule of work with a suggestion of how to break down the week that really helped us.*

- *I think plenty of encouragement to be outside whenever possible in our own family groups could be helpful too. I know the weather will be worse than before but the physical activity and engagement outside will be more vital than before. Maybe something along the lines of the forest learning could be included for each class, whether foraging for things, making mini shelters or encouraging things like skipping competitions which don't need much space or expensive equipment.*
- *We attended a different school but as a general comment, clear objectives/activities/routines to be met daily/weekly by the children would be helpful*
- *Scheduled live group sessions, even for short periods of time, with an opportunity for pupils to demonstrate something they have achieved/learned.*
- *I also think it is worth using RTE school hub activities if necessary - most people have access to a TV, and there was an element of interaction that helped my kids. They are short bursts of general learning that we found useful.*
- *More self-led project work. Teaching through play.*
- *Workbooks sent home with lots of fine motor activities, maths activities and word work so that screen time is reduced and that the adult can use the book as a guide would be helpful.*
- *More use of feedback would be good. During the previous closure, while the work was forthcoming, it felt that the feedback loop was not closed most of the time. Correct answers were provided by the teacher for self-correcting and this was appreciated - but overall, the lack of feedback led to a real decrease in motivation. (E.g. "who cares, the teacher isn't checking anyway.)*

Homework

In light of the very changed circumstances of this school year, we will not assign homework for September and October. We are reviewing our homework plan for the remainder of the school year. Having consulted staff and pupils, we now ask for your views as parents and guardians. Your views will inform our decision for the remainder of the school year. Would you like to:

99 responses



As is clear from the above graph, there is quite a spread of views amongst our parent / guardian body on the issue of whether or not to reintroduce homework. However, of the families who chose to comment, 12% mentioned both advantages and disadvantages of homework, 27% would welcome the reintroduction of homework but over 60% would prefer

no homework for the remainder of the year. It was heartening that a number of parents also said they were happy to trust the teachers' judgements!

Again I have included a range of comments:

- *I do think that the basics are really important and important to consolidate at home (e.g. tables and spellings, reading...) but no homework so far has made the house calmer and increased family time.*
- *I am sure different for others but we really struggle with projects as parental involvement is usually required on some level, and with normal extracurricular activities it is really hard to find the time after work and between activities to sit down and help encourage the child to do the project!*
- *Regarding the homework I am not against no or reduced homework however I do feel senior classes maybe 4-6th should have some homework to keep them in the habit of doing it as secondary school gets closer.*
- *Every child and family are different, but in our family, homework over the years has brought more negative points than positive ones.*
- *No homework has been a hugely positive experience for X, he is more excited to go to school the next day after having a good break from school work. I do not think this has impacted his learning in any way, it has actually improved it. He has a renewed interest in school work this year that he hasn't had any year before this. Fantastic for his overall mental health and no negatives from our experience*
- *For younger classes like Junior Infants, I feel very little homework is needed, however, kids that age almost look forward to getting big kid homework and it is a great way for us as parents to stay involved.*
- *Overall we have noticed that the children are much happier and calmer without homework.*
- *I found that homework last year not in lockdown but in ordinary times- took longer than stated in the school policy.*
- *I feel that homework is good preparation for homework and study in senior school and is good training on how to work independently. As homework isn't going to be cancelled in all schools I think the kids will be at a disadvantage heading into senior school if our school abolishes it.*
- *My child is bored not having any homework.*
- *I think homework can be a good thing in small doses as it gives the children an opportunity to show the parents what they've been up to at school, where there might not be on a daily basis otherwise. But also there is stress involved with some homework, and I think no homework for now and a review at the end of the year might be the best way to go.*
- *Research homework for older children as this enables me as a parent to ensure that my child is reading and I can see how my child is able to present and discuss their project. I can also determine their attitude to work in general.*
- *Maths tables could be done using an app.*
- *Spellings could be assigned and assessed using Spellings for me online.*
- *Assigned reading would be preferable from a reading app such as Epic or reading Eggs.*
- *I think a limited amount of homework is vital in order to help with routine and to give parents an idea of how their children are progressing or areas of difficulty.*
- *Having no homework has made the return to school less stressful and given the children time to enjoy spending time with their friends after school and partake in activities without the added pressure of having to get homework done in the evening. Less stress for parents too, juggling time and commitments.*
- *I have really liked the approach to homework in RETNS to date, exclusively reading homework in Infants 🍀. I am in favour of this continuing in first class perhaps with some spelling homework related to the Spellings for Me programme.*
- *I would be happy to help my child with interesting little project/creative work a couple of times throughout the year, something that could be slightly self-directed by the child with guidance from the teacher.*

- *I understand that there are new precautions and safety measures to take into account with sending books home at the minute, however, I really would have expected a reader or two per week to have come home by now, even with your decision to have no homework for September and October. We have plenty of resources and access to ebooks at home that we continue to use however, nothing beats your teacher sending work home for motivation to get it done! Also I imagine other families may not have access to other sources of reading material and I would love to see this part of Homework reinstated very soon.*
- *Maybe given how much time at home for all now more life skill homework like cooking dinner, doing the laundry, working in the garden, general helping and being responsible for certain chores each week that might change and keep them from devices!*
- *My daughter is so much happier since there has been no homework. She finds the school day long enough and the homework created tears and stress. It is a much nicer calm atmosphere now that she can come home and relax.*
- *I really dislike homework that involves transcribing and written comprehension, e.g. writing lists of Irish verbs.*
- *It would be great to have more reading books loaned out especially as the access to Public libraries is limited.*
- *I have found that there being no homework has really improved our life as a family, as I do not have to keep on nagging Y. to keep focused and do it (it somehow used to take much much longer than it was meant to). As a result our relationship is easier and happier. There is time after school for free play, for reading according to her interests, for other types of learning, and (when they are on) for afterschool activities without bedtime being pushed back really late because homework had to be done as well. There is time for her to play with her sister, for me to find out about her day, and for more time outside being active. It is much less stressful for me as a parent too. I strongly believe that we should allow children a balance between their learning at school and different types of learning that occur naturally through allowing them to follow their own interests after school. I think as well that Y. has a better attitude to her time in school when she doesn't have to do homework.*
- *Without ORT books to read aloud, which took a lot of time, there is more time for us to read books that interest her and challenge her more.*
- *With good communication through Seesaw I feel I would still be able to know what kind of things Z. was learning at school and ask her about them.*
- *The kids have really enjoyed the break from homework and adapting to life back at school. As Parents, it's great to have no homework on what are busy enough weeks. However, I did learn a lot about my child's weaknesses and strengths when doing homework. It's only through homework that I figured out that they struggled in certain areas. This is easier to see one to one.*
- *I also worry about how the transition gap from primary to secondary school would be greater if they had no preparation. It is a discipline that they will need to adapt to in later years with studying and homework is the stepping stones.*
- *Homework creates too much stress for all involved at the moment. Best to make learning a joy.*
- *I would like to see the continuation of no homework for the rest of the school year due to the positive impact it has had on our child and our home life. Our child has benefited hugely from being able to "leave school at school" and having the opportunity to come home to relax fully and to engage in her own personal interests. She is spending more time outside, more time socialising, is happier and more content in herself, communicates in the home during the week in a much more positive manner, spends more time playing/drawing/reading/chatting. She has been far happier and "lighter" after school Monday-Thursdays than I've seen her for years.*
- *Our experience of no homework during September has had a very beneficial and calming effect on our child and in our house.*
- *I have really noticed the benefits of no homework. The kids are coming out of school happier and A. has been writing and drawing more at home!*
- *The kids have been in school all day working with a structured day so they should have the freedom to do their own thing.*

- *For me is good to do some homework with my child. It is an opportunity to know how she is doing and to follow her progress or difficulties, if this is not happening I don't know exactly how to help her and encourage in her learning. Also without homework it makes more difficult independent learning skills that are needed for distance learning.*
- *Would be good to keep up the essentials at a minimum (spellings, tables, some Irish).*
- *No Homework has been great for the kids this term. There is less stress in the house, and we are not rushing them to finish in the short time we have after school. Both the kids are doing more creative play themselves after school, projects they never seemed to have time for previously. We also seem to have more time to talk to them about their day and what's going on in the classroom.*
- *If Homework were to come back, one subject a day for a focused 20 minutes might be a good way to go.*
- *Both of my kids miss the homework, it usually doesn't take too long and often consolidates what they were doing in class, also the parents can see what they're doing because when you ask them they don't ever communicate it!*
- *I never imagined how much impact not having 'structured' homework would have on our afternoons! We now try to build some math tables and Gaeilge into the day, and reading in the evening, to reinforce some basics. But the freedom from having to continue with schoolwork in the afternoon has been a revelation. I should point out that homework hasn't been tortuous and usually the kids just got on with it, but it put a dampener on the afternoons and caused pressure when there were other activities to do. It felt like a lot of stress for questionable benefit.*
- *I do like the idea of research /project work, especially for the senior classes - it encourages independence and helps them learn to focus and structure their ideas. I wouldn't mind supporting the kids doing that kind of work.*
- *I'm not worried they won't learn as much as children who continue to do homework, but I suppose that is a gamble. It is a gamble I am willing to take (never thought I would say that!)*
- *I feel reading out loud in English is very important for the junior classes. Oral maths (tables) could be introduced for 2nd class and up. Maybe consider seasonal homework (written activities for darker nights). In general I think that homework needs to stay very very simple and not require too much communication between parent child and teacher.*
- *I think Seesaw has become a communication tool which fulfils some of the function of homework as communication between school and home. It would be nice to see the text books and copies that the children use. Possibly a photograph of these?*
- *..... a more differentiated approach would be needed and it would need planning if it was to be effective, and if this is done, it could add value for the kids (most importantly) and the parents.*
- *Homework wise, we think as little as possible but prefer none except reading. Seesaw keeps us informed of what is being learned in class and that is great.*
- *I would strongly be in favour of continuing to have no homework going forward as we have more time in the evenings for playing, reading and going outside. Having the extra time has meant B. has been reading more himself and engaging in other projects such as gardening, writing his own stories and playing board games. He is definitely happier without homework. We are happier too as after a day at work, trying to fit homework in around dinner etc. can be stressful.*
- *I would prefer more project/ experimental assignments (e.g. measuring in the kitchen to learn about weights etc.). I would like reading to be the main focus, less written work, more oral work please.*
- *I strongly believe that homework should be dropped in its entirety for the year. This could be followed by a review to consider whether a no/reduced homework policy within the school could be adopted going forward.*
- *My preference would be for occasional project work, reading (Irish & English) and Maths tables. Life at home has been very pleasantly improved by having no homework, I was surprised what a difference it made. They are more enthusiastic about what they are doing in school too.*
- *I would be interested in teachers' views as to whether they have seen a positive or negative impact on children's progress.*
- *Would like to see core subject work still coming home.*

This survey has provided a very helpful overview of the opinions of parents and guardians on both Distance Learning and Homework. The detailed comments, a selection of which were reproduced here, were particularly useful. The views provided, in addition to the views children have already shared with their teachers, will help inform our planning for the remainder of the school year.

Maeve Mc Carthy
02.11.20