



Summary of results of HPCI Covid Survey – May 2020

In May 2020, Herts Parent Carer Involvement (HPCI) surveyed parent carers of children and young people with SEND in Hertfordshire to gather information about the support and communication they had received from schools and other educational settings during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was open from 5 to 25 May and we received 330 responses from parent carers across the county, whose children attend more than 160 different education settings. **HPCI would like to thank all the families who responded to this survey.**

Key Messages

- There were **difficulties accessing the Free School Meals** voucher system for a significant number of eligible families – the system failed due to delays, schools not issuing them or online shopping not accepting them.
- **Only 56% of respondents had sufficient technology** to allow all their children to be home educated. Issues faced included a lack of equipment for many, difficulties trying to share IT, school work frequently sent in a pdf. format and needing a printer, when many homes are without this equipment or cannot afford the ink.
- There was a great deal of **inconsistency in the levels of support from schools and colleges**. While there were good examples of schools staying in touch, other families struggled with a lack of communication and many children were being set work that was not differentiated for the child's needs.
- Many parent carers reported a **struggle in balancing working from home** and supporting all their children with school work.
- Where the child or young person would normally receive **support from wider services** (e.g. therapies or respite), there was again a great deal of inconsistency in levels of contact and support. Some families reported feeling abandoned and isolated.
- Families also reported a number of **concerns for their child's wellbeing**, with challenging behaviours emerging, losing social skills, mental health issues increasing and difficulties in returning to school where places were offered.

Some of these issues are explored in more detail below.

Free School Meals

20% of the total responses indicated that their child was eligible for free school meals (67 respondents). We asked those eligible, "Have you been able to get the free school meals vouchers worth £15". 68% of respondents said that they had, or that they weren't needed. However, 32% indicated that they had not.

A number of comments were made about this question, with the most common themes being:

- Families unable to spend the vouchers as they were shielding and unable to spend them online.

- Schools instead providing local catering (but in one case insisting this be collected from school which was not possible, and in another providing food that was below the value of £15 and being inflexible to dietary restrictions).
- Difficulties with the website.
- Inconsistency of receipt.

We also asked “Have you been able to spend them?”. Of those that had tried, it was a 50/50 split between yes and no.

Accessing Technology

One of the questions that we asked was “does your family have enough technology, such as laptops, tablets, printer, internet access, data so that all your children can be home educated?”.

267 people answered this question with only 56% able to answer that they had sufficient technology. The table below shows responses by DSPL area - more than a third of parents in each area reported some kind of IT issue, rising to more than two thirds in Stevenage.

Numbers and Percentages who likely do not have sufficient IT	Yes	Some issue ¹	% with issue
Berkhamsted, Tring, Hemel Hempstead and Kings Langley	19	11	37%
Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth, Buntingford, Watton at Stone, Hertford & Ware	15	11	42%
Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston	17	16	48%
Hoddesdon, Broxbourne, Cheshunt, West Cheshunt	9	9	50%
Potters Bar, including South Hatfield Villages, Borehamwood	10	5	33%
St Albans, Harpenden and villages	30	17	36%
Stevenage	12	24	67%
Watford, Three Rivers, Bushey and Radlett	26	16	38%
Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield	12	8	40%

Where we received additional comments, there were a number of recurring themes (listed in order of frequency):

1. No printer or difficulty affording ink
2. Having to buy equipment (this included one family who were eligible for FSM)
3. A lack of the specialist equipment needed
4. Parents needing the IT equipment to work
5. Poor Wi-Fi / insufficient phone data

Other comments related to having to borrow equipment, rely on family members for printing and trying to access work via a smart phone. The financial impact of lockdown learning was mentioned across the themes listed above.

¹ Respondent answered “no”, “they have to share” or commented with an issue.

Support from schools and colleges

The levels of support varied hugely between settings, and often between classes within settings too. While many parents were happy with the support they received, many families also struggled with a lack of contact, work that was not differentiated to take into account the needs of their child, or little feedback on work submitted. We received very detailed comments on this subject – you can see the most frequently raised issues below.



Contact from other services

Parents reported a mixed level of support from other services. The majority of responses relating to therapies such as Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy either reported no contact at all, or only a notification to say services were ceasing. A number mentioned welfare calls from the County Council or contact from a social worker. There were also a number of families who mentioned the support they had received from voluntary and community sector organisations. Overall, the comments for this section generally reflected feelings of disappointment and frustration.

What happened next?

It helped HPCI to identify the key issues that our parent reps needed to feedback to Hertfordshire County Council and other statutory services. It also helped HPCI let our partners know where they needed to focus their work. We worked with them to ensure that their communications were about the right things and in the right way. We have also drawn on this information as the Covid-19 situation has developed to ensure that lessons are being learnt from the initial lockdown period as we go forward. HPCI also informed our national organisation the NNPCF who were able to feed that into their meetings at government level.