# Listening to pupils to improve schools, especially in COVID-19 times

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# Structure

**Context**

Methodology

Findings

Discussion

# Researcher positionality

## Dr Sara Bubb

- Associate Professor, UCL Institute of Education (0.6) since 1994
- Graduate Tutor and Co-head of Research in Department of Learning & Leadership
- Teacher & leader in UK
- Freelance consultant eg Norway for 4 years

## Mari-Ana Jones

- PhD candidate at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim
- Teaches on National Programme for School Leaders and MA in Ed Leadership
- Teacher & leader in UK & Norway until 2019
- MA in Ed Leadership at UCL

# Data gathered - for school improvement in Norway

**A.** Survey <u>Sept 2019</u> - Pupils in Years 3-10

How much do you like these subjects at school? (1=dislike, 4=very much)
How can you learn even more at school?

**B.** Surveys during <u>lockdown</u> April 2020 Pupils Years 1-4, 5-10; Teachers;
Parents/carers

What lessons can schools learn from the experience of home-school?

**C.** Survey for school <u>leaders</u> June 2020

How will you build on the experience of home-school for future school
development?

# Context - Norway

2nd highest spender on school education in OECD; mid-ranking in PISA

**Municipality**

11,000. Approx 100th largest in population out of the 356 municipalities. Fairly wealthy, agricultural, fewer people than national average completing higher education. Pupil motivation low.

8 schools (1600 pupils) size: 80-330

- 5 primary (6-12 years)

- 1 lower secondary (13-16)

- 2 all-through (6-16)

Schools closed for 5+ weeks 13 March, 6-9 year olds returned on 27 April and the rest on 11 May 2020. Open for keyworkers' children & vulnerable.

Playground of a primary school

Trying out the ice rink at playtime

# Norway tops global indexes on children's rights and childhood

Incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) into domestic law (2003)

Act of Education - pupils 'shall have joint responsibility and the right to participate'.

National curriculum of 2020 is clear that pupils should be heard:

- 'Pupil involvement must be a part of the school's practice. The pupils must participate and assume co-responsibility in the learning environment which they create together with the teachers every day.' (UDIR, 2018, 3.1).

- 'The pupils must experience that they are heard in the day-to-day affairs in school, that they have genuine influence and that they can have impact on matters that concern them. ' (UDIR, 2018, 1.6).

Most children in Norway have good physical and mental health (ranked 1st in a Lancet-WHO-UNICEF report pub. 02/2020)
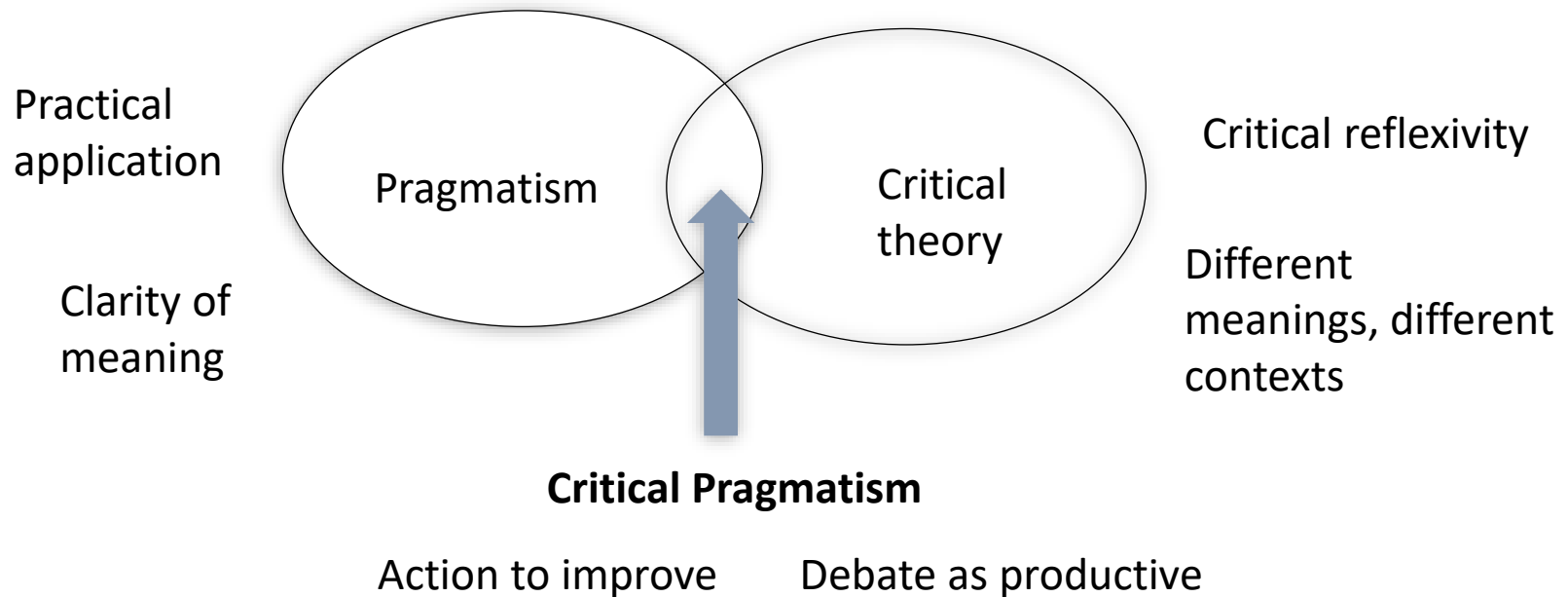
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# Critical Pragmatism

Practical application

Pragmatism

Critical theory

Critical reflexivity

Clarity of meaning

Different meanings, different contexts

**Critical Pragmatism**

Action to improve        Debate as productive

'For the critical pragmatist, good educational research arises out of human needs and serves to improve human flourishing…it takes into account a wide range of values and…it ultimately serves both to improve the situations of people and to provide them with intellectual tools for reflecting on their own immediate aims and interests' *(Feinberg, 2015)*

# Framing - Lens of critical pragmatism

- With the intention to better inform improvements in teaching and learning, the gathering of pupils' insights presented here is more closely connected with what Baroutsis, McGregor and Mills (2016) describe as 'pedagogic voice', rather than the more radical aspects of the student voice discourse (Fielding, 2010).

- 'Why do we ask our students what they think; for whose benefit; and for what purpose?' (Hall, 2020).

- The lens of critical pragmatism allows for pupil voice to be a vital part of professional practice, 'a tool for reflection' (Bourke and Loveridge, 2016). Underpins suggestion of an alternative understanding of listening to and acting upon pupils' views (integrated into everyday practice)

- Children's perspectives often present 'adults with provocative accounts that challenge many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about what children do or think'. (Mayes, Black, & Finneran, 2020)

# Using surveys consciously

**Inclusive** - the surveys have enabled us to collect the views of a significant number of pupils, independently of the involvement of their teachers and regardless of their ages, backgrounds and circumstances

**Leading to action** – pupils' insights form an important part of strategy in the municipality and contribute to bringing about change in schools

**Aware of limitations** – we appreciate that the surveys may not enable the pupils to feel empowered, however, neither are they being 'consumerised'

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# Sept 2019 How much do you like these subjects at school? (1=not at all, 4=very much) Year 3-10 (1007)

|  | Norwegian | English | Science | Humanities | Religion | Music | Art & craft |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School 1 | 2.8 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 2.8 | 2.0 | 3.4 | 3.7 |
| School 2 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 2.6 | 2.1 | 2.9 | 3.5 |
| School 3 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 2.1 | 3.1 | 3.6 |
| School 4 | 2.1 | 2.4 | 2.5 | 2.4 | 2.1 | 3.1 | 2.9 |
| School 5 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.1 | 2.0 | 3.2 | 3.6 |
| School 6 | 2.2 | 2.4 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 3.1 |
| School 7 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 2.8 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 3.0 | 3.4 |
| School 8 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 2.6 | 2.5 | 1.9 | 2.6 | 3.0 |
| Average out of 4 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 2.0 | 2.9 | 3.3 |

# Pupils' views in Sept 2019

- "It is boring to just sit in a classroom for several hours".

- One wished, "That we don't just sit and answer questions in the book".

- "It is difficult for me to learn because they make it so boring!"

- "we pupils need physical activity to learn better".

- "I don't really like just sitting all the time and if I do that then maybe I learn less".

- "the teacher stands for the whole lesson and talks, and we should rather do something active instead of sitting for many hours."

- "We learn best when we are active."

- Advice to teachers : "Give us things to do and don't talk so much, and be outside loads".

# Many of their wishes came true during the lockdown of Spring 2020

How can teachers help you learn more at school?

- *Let me try a little myself before deciding how to do things.*

- *Do something fun so that you will want to learn more from it. how to make Powerpoint or go out and learn it in the fresh air*

- *Help more. Explain properly! And not just say the answer then we learn nothing!*

- *Now I have written my opinions and hope you will address it*


- A fifth of the pupils who commented in September 2019 mentioned the word **'boring'**

- In April the word **'fun'** was used many times. "It is NEVER fun at school but home-school has unbelievably fun activities!". "The time goes much faster".

# Surveys 22-30 April

Anonymous (school, pupil age). Links to SmartSurvey sent by schools

14 questions for teachers, parents/carers and pupils in Years 5-10; 8 for Years 1-4

Covered themes (eg digital learning; creative learning; pupil participation; progress; achievement; feedback; groupwork; parent-teacher relationships; and parents' ability to help) using statements with 4 point Likert scale: "totally agree" to "totally disagree". Each had option to comment.

Eg Technology

- Younger pupils - *I've become better at using an iPad/computer when I'm doing schoolwork*

- *Older pupils - I've become better at using digital tools when I'm doing schoolwork*

- Parents/carers - *My child/children have become better at using digital tools.*

- Teachers - *I have become more adept at using digital tools during home-schooling.*

One open question: What lessons can schools learn from the experience of home-school?'

# How did parents, teachers and pupils (aged 6-16) experience home-school during the lockdown?
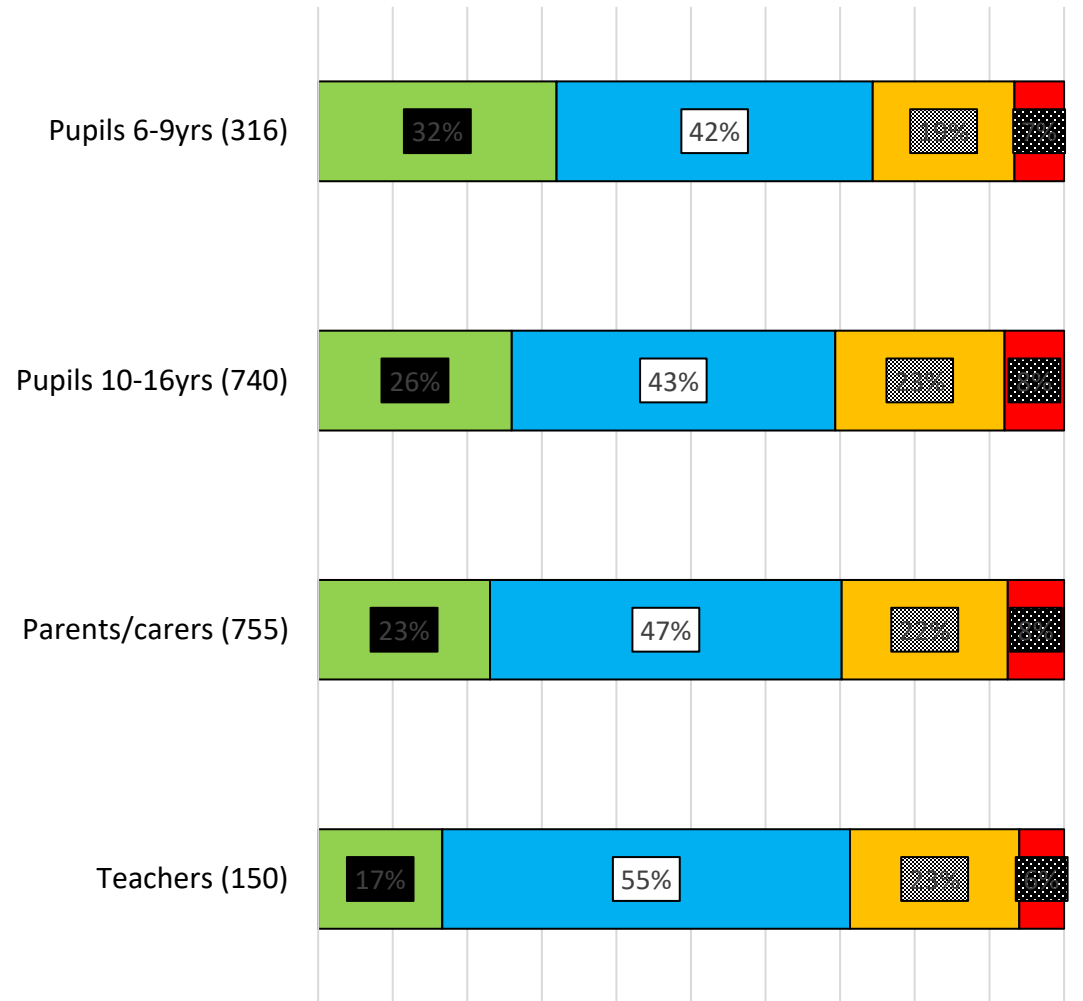
| Surveys | Respondents | Survey open | Response rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers | 151 | 22-30 April | 76% |
| Parents/carers | 779 (1048 pupils) | 22-30 April | 64% |
| Pupils 6-9yrs | 320 | 22-30 April | 49% |
| Pupils 10-16yrs | 745 | 22-30 April | 69% |
| School leaders | 15 | 15-19 June | 75% |
| *Total* | *2010* | | |

# More creative teaching & learning

"I have much more time to plan, create relevant tasks, and to provide feedback." Teacher



Responses to statement about having more creative tasks than in regular school

Legend: strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree

- Pupils 6-9yrs (316): 32% strongly agree, 42% agree
- Pupils 10-16yrs (740): 26% strongly agree, 43% agree
- Parents/carers (755): 23% strongly agree, 47% agree
- Teachers (150): 17% strongly agree, 55% agree

# Activities mentioned by pupils

Making patterns from things outside

Cooking

Collecting sap from birch trees

Making an obstacle course outside

Paint stones and lay them out on a hiking trail

Digital escape rooms

Migratory bird photography

Outside mark out the dimensions of a Bronze Age longhouse (about 7 x 20 metres), mark the fireplace in the middle, and share photographs of the results

# Most pupils said they learned new things

- *I think home-school has been fantastic. I have never been so motivated to do work.*

- *I think that we don't need to go to school anymore, we have shown that we can manage to work at home*

- *I think it is fun when we are challenged to go out walking or try something new*

Year 5-10 (739): I have learned a lot of new things at home school (1 = completely agree, 4 = completely disagree)

□1 □2 □3 □4

- 9%
- 25%
- 25%
- 40%
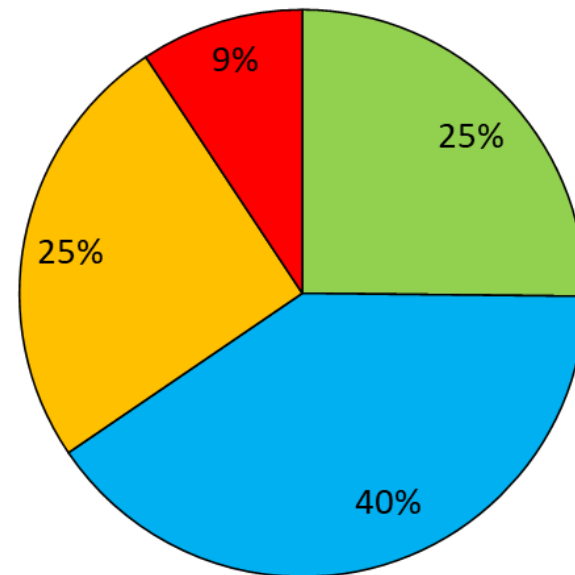
# Feedback was more useful

"Teachers get to see how good all the pupils are, and not just those who always raise their hands in class." Pupil

"I have probably commented on more assignments per pupil than normal. I have probably also divided my attention more fairly between the pupils, as all pupils are now 'shouting' equally loudly." Teacher

Forelde (754): Tilbakemeldinger fra lærere har hjulpet mitt barn/mine barn å bli bedre - Norsk (1= helt enig, 4= helt uenig)
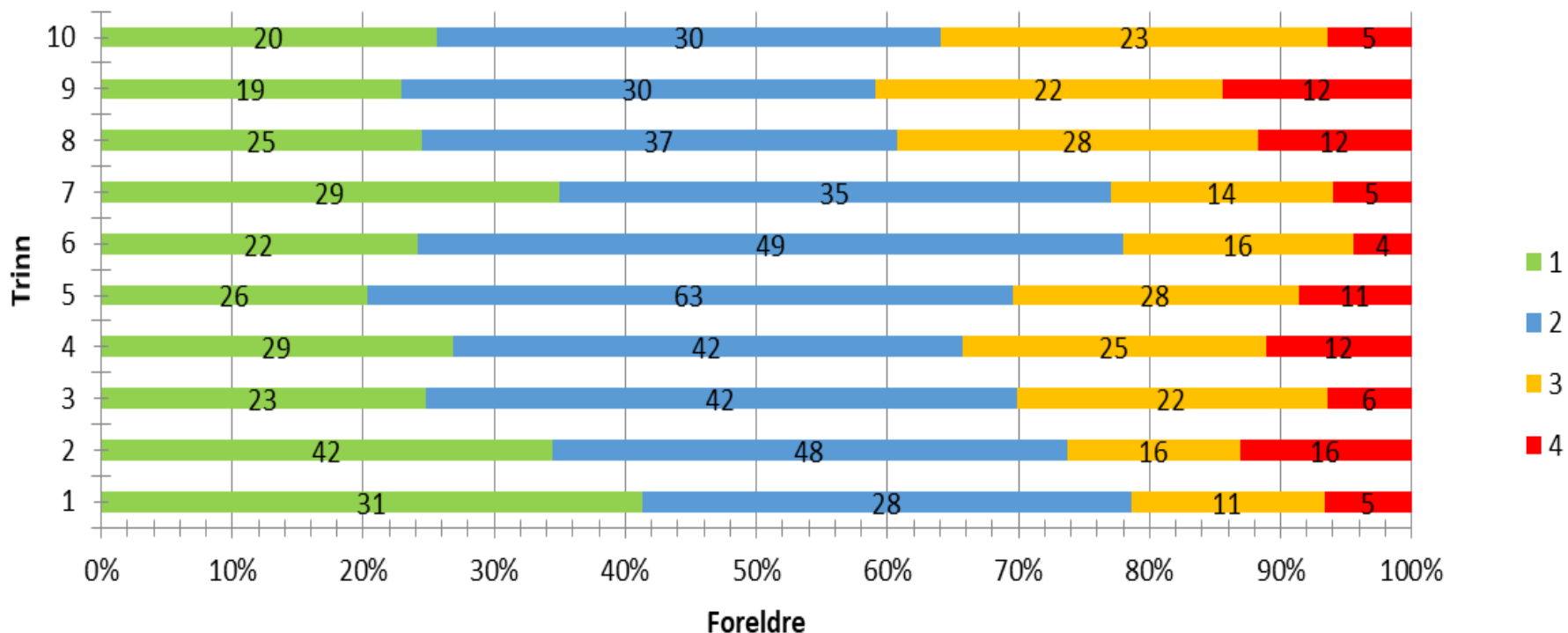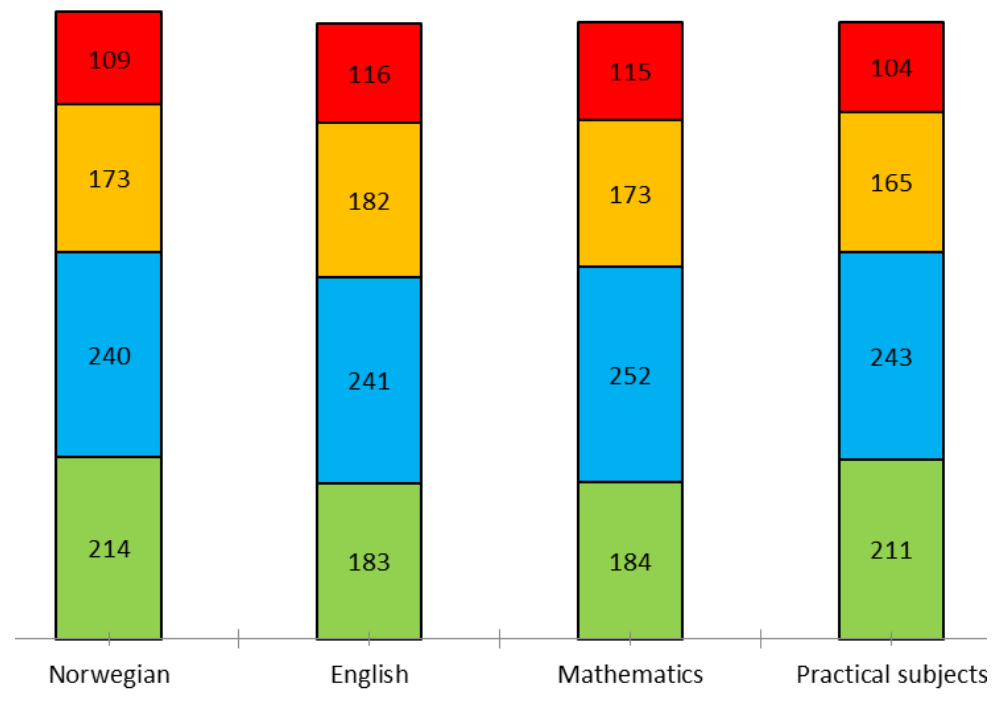
Two-thirds of parents agreed that their children had teacher feedback that helped more than usual in Norwegian.

# Pupils' considered they had done more work in home-school than normal

- "I've done more schoolwork because we have to finish all the tasks while if we're at school we work as far as we get in an hour."

- "I can manage to concentrate much more when I am at home than when I am at school."

Grade 5-10 pupils (737): I've done more schoolwork at home-school than in normal school. (1= totally agree, 4= totally disagree)



| | Norwegian | English | Mathematics | Practical subjects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Red | 109 | 116 | 115 | 104 |
| Orange | 173 | 182 | 173 | 165 |
| Blue | 240 | 241 | 252 | 243 |
| Green | 214 | 183 | 184 | 211 |

# Independence and choice

Pupils became more independent : 74% of teachers, 64% of parents/carers, 71% of Year 1-4 pupils and 78% of Year 5-10 pupils agreed.

63% of pupils in Grades 5 to 10 said that they experienced more influence over their learning in home-school: more choices about what to do and how to organize their learning

- "I could learn more at school if I had more challenges and if I was allowed to work a bit more on my own … I wish I didn't always get a solution to how to do something, but that I found out for myself."

- "I've been able to manage by figuring things out and fixing things."

- "There's no teacher hanging over your shoulder and telling you what you're going to do. When it's home-school, you decide quite a lot yourself.
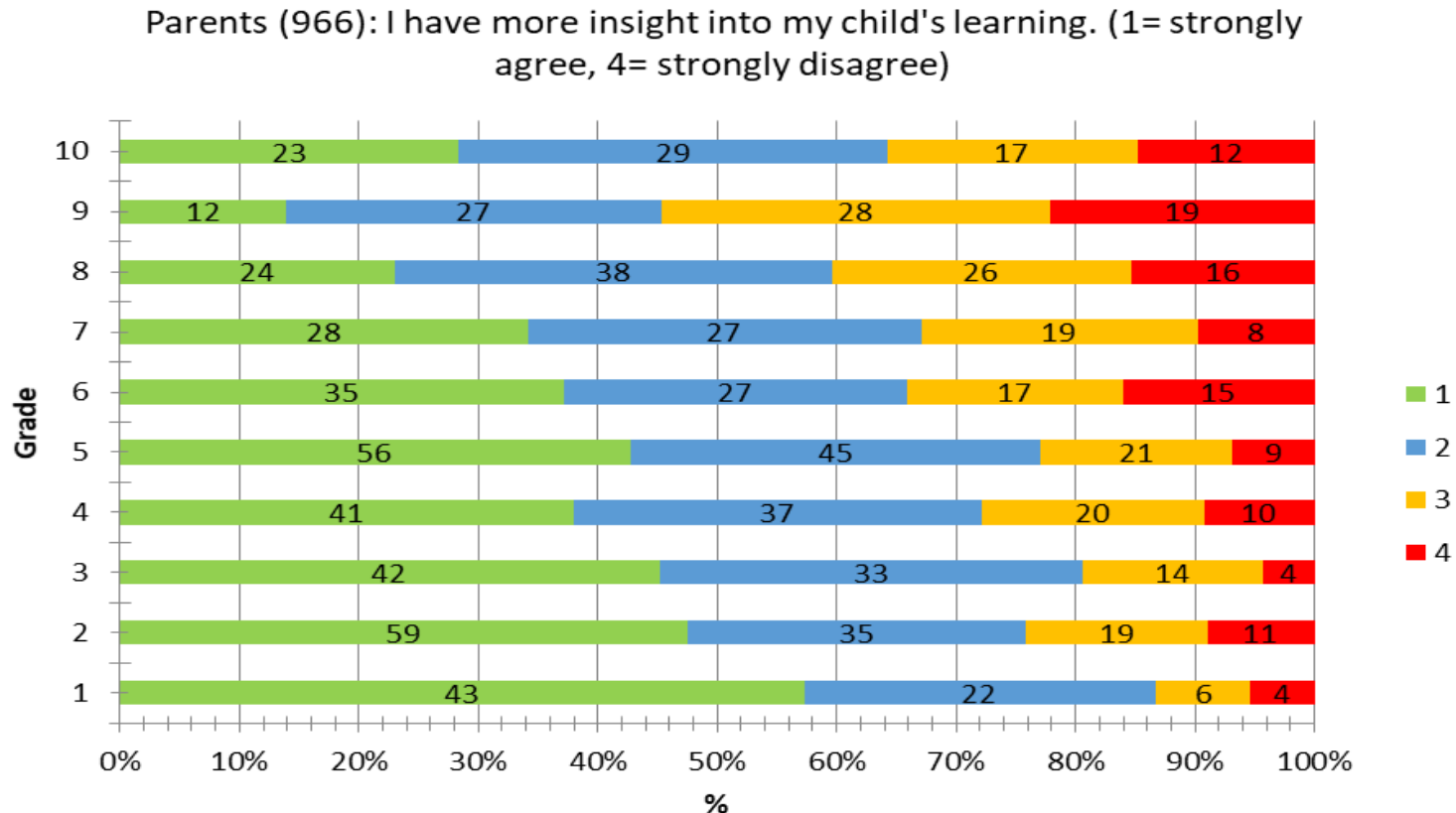
# Vulnerable children

90% of teachers considered that they had catered well for vulnerable pupils.

- "We have done A LOT to adapt for the vulnerable. Some pupils have received video meetings several times a day. Teachers have been available to both pupils and guardians from 08.00-15.30 every day, and at times far beyond working hours. Children who have expressed too little follow-up at home have been contacted specifically every day. Children with multilingual homes have been contacted every day and have had all the information read as audio files."

- They "have never received such close follow-up :-)"

# Parents/carers gained more insight

*Fantastic teachers in this class who are just a phone call away if we as guardians are wondering about something! Can't praise them enough! They are also always available to pupils via chat and video, and respond quickly to all inquiries.*



Parents (966): I have more insight into my child's learning. (1= strongly agree, 4= strongly disagree)

Over half felt that they were in a better position to help their children with schoolwork.

# Survey for leaders 15-19 June

Leaders said they were planning for pupils to experience more creative and practical tasks within and across subjects; exploratory teaching methods and assignments; use of nature and outdoor areas; and more pupil involvement in ways of working. They particularly wanted to build on the experiences with digital tools:

- Digital meetings with staff, parents/carers, agencies

- Use of digital tools in pupil feedback

- Use of digital tools for differentiation in teaching

- Increasing digital competence among teachers and pupils

- Using digital tools for vulnerable pupils and those who cannot attend school.

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# In summary

- The technology was a vital foundation stone, but our research suggests that teachers raised their game.

- Education was personalised in a way that it had not been in the classroom.

- There was more creative learning, better progress, more useful feedback and greater pupil independence. Parents gained more insight into their children's learning and felt more able to support the learning.

- Everyone reported that digital skills had improved.

- School leaders reported that they wanted to implement changes based on the experience of remote learning enforced by the lockdown, so that the crisis has become an opportunity for grassroots innovation.

# Support for remote learning

Since 2017, iPad/laptop for everyone that they used at school and took home

ICT advisor in municipality. Each school had a ICT coordinator.

Pupils already had internet access at home; a few issues with bad connection/bandwidth, sorted out by the parents

A separate team was created in Teams for all teachers where online courses / guidance were conducted, questions could be asked and experiences were shared. Customised training by subject and age.

The municipality's ICT adviser acted as a helpdesk for teachers, arranged access to the digital resources and ensured that the technical function worked as best as possible for both pupils and teachers.

Clear expectations of how much contact teachers should have with pupils: at least 2 x a day to check that they had understood goals and tasks, and to ensure that they were okay.

# Pandemic has given an opportunity to rethink education

- Schools still rely heavily on passive forms of learning focused on direct instruction, rather than interactive methods that promote the critical and individual thinking needed in today's innovation-driven economy

- The World Bank has emphasised the need for "building back better" strategies, which include developing "more equitable and resilient post-COVID education systems that enable children to learn continuously both in schools and at home"

- The COVID-19 crisis has underlined the vital role schools play in caring for children, as well as helping them learn.

# Open for discussion

- Will the schools build on the improvements made during lockdown? What might be the necessary conditions for them to do so?

- How valuable are pupils' insights?

- What are the wider implications for this research and practice?

# Thanks for attending.

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