

AUSSIE PARENTS CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND WELLBEING DUE TO REMOTE LEARNING

More than half of Aussie parents are concerned their children have experienced declining academic performance and mental wellbeing challenges due to lockdowns; with parents altering school preferences as worries about long-term impacts arise

SYDNEY, MARCH 2022 – Aussie children are experiencing the long-term consequences of COVID-19 lockdowns with almost half of parents (34%) concerned their child has fallen behind at school.

According to new research by Real Insurance, the majority (62%) of Aussie parents report that they believe remote learning has been ineffective for their children, while around half (46%) fearing that it will have significant implications for their child's academic progress and job prospects in the long run.

Commissioned by Real Insurance in partnership with consumer research group CoreData, *The Real Education Report 2022* surveyed more than 5,000 Australian parents to uncover the experience of students and parents over the past two years of disruption, and what this means for school selection.

Unsatisfied with the effectiveness of remote education, many Aussie parents have sought out special academic consideration (33%) or the support of a private tutor (9%) for their child, to address concerns of them developing knowledge gaps (60%), lacking skills development (52%) or the motivation to learn (46%).

Family psychologist, Deidre Brandner, commented: “Parents became increasingly concerned about their children's learning and progress during remote learning. “Essential literacy and numeracy skills have not been covered for many of those in the early years which were the cohort that would have found remote learning almost impossible.”

Beyond stifling their academic progress, Aussie children have also borne the emotional brunt of the pandemic, with an astounding 3 in 5 parents reporting that they believe the disruptions have negatively impacted their child's mental wellbeing.

Between missing their social interactions at school (90%), losing their confidence (55%), feeling more anxious or stressed (54%), or becoming withdrawn (38%), it's not surprising that parents are keen to see their children back in the classroom (76%). But at the same time, being back in a contained physical space with other children does raise concerns about keeping their children safe and healthy, with safe operating conditions during pandemics (54%) now the number one consideration for school selection among parents.

“There has been a significant increase in anxiety, stress and low mood because of lockdowns. For many children the return to on site school saw an alleviation of these mental health issues. However, for many children and families, they continue to experience mental health challenges”, said Brandner.

“The return to the classroom has had many positives but the hangover of lockdown learning remains and is evident in gaps in academic progress, missed opportunity to navigate social development stages and the ongoing adaption to new friendships, routines and rules.”

“As a result, many parents have sought advice on what might be their child's best learning environment and whether their current school is the right match”, said Brandner.

The study shows that parents have shifted their decision drivers when selecting an appropriate school for their children (62%) because of these experiences. Where academic reputation and NAPLAN results have always been a determining factor (36%), parents now put more weight on things such as access to digital resources and effective home-schooling support when needed (46%).

In this same vein, many Aussie parents would also like to see the curriculum broadened to include online safety for children (68%), the mental health impacts of social media (67%), personal finance training (66%), resilience training (64%), sex and consent education (66%) and digital skills (59%).

Ms. Brander explained: “For the first time ever, parents were able to observe what was happening in “classrooms” during remote learning, combined with increased anxiety about their child’s physical and emotional wellbeing, parents now expect much from schools in terms of life education. The pandemic has taught us all that it isn’t just about being able to read and write, we have to be able to support and nurture the whole child.”

Whereas private education has always been preferred by most parents (39%), the experiences during the pandemic have seen this preference further increase. 1 in 7 (15%) parents have changed their preferences to private schools as they are believed to provide more value during lockdown. A considerable number of these parents already have their children attend private school or were considering a school change to a private school (36%). Additionally, the debate on co-ed vs single sex schools is also still a decisive factor when selecting schools (40%).

With the cost of living rising during the pandemic, many families (74%) are feeling they are having to sacrifice a lot to pay for their children’s current private education to give their child the brightest future possible. The majority (42%) dedicating at least ten per cent of their annual earnings towards tuition fees as well as making sacrifices to household budgets (38%), cutting back on holidays (34%) and entertainment (34%).

Close to half (44%) of parents whose child attends public school admit they would like to send their child to a private school but cannot afford it while those who’s child attends private school have considered pulling their child out of private school if fees continue to rise (56%).

Further key findings from the research

Academic progress interrupted by COVID disruptions:

- Over 3 in 5 parents feel their child(ren) have been seriously impacted by continued disruptions due to COVID-19 (64%)
- The concerns parents had about the long-term impacts of COVID-19 were gaps in their overall education (60%), lack of key skill development (52%), engagement with studies and motivation to learn (46%), stunted/slower educational progress (46%) and poorer employment prospects (31%).
- 1 in 3 (33%) have sought special considerations in their education due to difficult circumstances during COVID-19 including missing class (17%), passing exams (11%), entry to a school (8%), avoiding repeating a year (8%) and entry to university (7%).

Mental health impacted by COVID:

- The greatest concerns parents had about their child(ren) returning to school were; health and safety concerns for them and the household (52%), anxiety they have about keeping safe (32%) and anxiety they have about socialising and returning to school environment (27%).

Choosing schools: Shift in key decision drivers:

- Top 5 considerations that have now become more important: Safe operating conditions for managing on site schooling during pandemics (54%), access to digital resources and effective support for home schooling when needed (46%), academic reputation/NAPLAN results (36%), artistic/creative/environmental/other reputation (25%) and private vs public school (24%)
- The greatest reason to attend private school was the standard of facilities on offer (45%) followed by education/teaching standards (37%) and level of discipline (36%).

The rising cost of private school:

- 3 in 5 private school parents report paying 10% or more of their total household income for children's annual private school fees cost (58%) – with 26% of those paying over 20%
- Top 5 financial sacrifices made to pay for private school are; general household budget tightening (38%), cut back on holidays (34%), cut back on entertainment spending and eating out (34%), cut back on hobbies and other discretionary spending (29%) and ensuring double income in family (27%)

Further insights from the research can be found on the Real Insurance website here:

<https://www.realinsurance.com.au/news-views/real-education-report>

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About the *Real Education* report

The Real Education Report 2022 forms part of the Real Insurance Research Series and explores feelings around parents and children returning to face-to-face learning. The research also looks at school preferences, private vs. public and other considerations that go into choosing a school.

The report is compiled based on research commissioned by Real Insurance and conducted by CoreData between 28 January and 8 February 2022.

The study compares education data from the New Family Norm 2020 as well as the Real Family Concerns 2021 surveys, and compares families with younger and older children, higher vs. lower income families, as well as location (state, city vs rural).

The research was conducted via a quantitative online survey, gathering 5,007 responses from Australians over 18 years old with at least one child aged 19 years old and below attending school.

About Real Insurance

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