

CHEF. SURVEY

2023-25



INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Cambridgeshire Home Educating Families (CHEF) survey was conducted between 1st February and 1st March 2025. It was NOT carried out on behalf of the Local Authority (LA) and is a follow up to the one conducted by an experienced local home educator in 2023. The aim is to build up anonymous comparison data over time, solely for the purposes of serving our community's interests. The survey was shared in the CHEF email group and in a wide variety of WhatsApp and Facebook groups used by local home educators. It asked about families' home education experiences, and their views on the LA and the local home education community.

The survey was open to:

- current home educators who live in Cambridgeshire;
- people who lived in Cambridgeshire while home educating at any point from 1st January 2023, but who don't home educate now;
- current or past home educators as above who do not live in Cambridgeshire, but who consider themselves part of the Cambridgeshire home-educating community (e.g. travelling in)

Notes:

- In this survey, all references to the LA refer to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LA.
- Charts and graphs are not as tidy as we know they could be due to time constraints and were auto-generated from the Google form. They display main trends only; blue arrows indicate there were further responses e.g. from free text boxes, which are too long to fully display in this report. If you would like clarification on anything, please email hellofromchef@gmail.com and we'll do our best to respond.

Privacy

No one except the volunteer survey coordinator (a local home educating parent) has access to the raw data, which is being collected solely for the purposes of holding our own anonymised data to serve our community's interests over time. It has been collated in this document to share with local home educators, so that it may assist us as we all work together to continue to see our community thrive.

HIGHLIGHTS

We don't have data on the continuously fluctuating numbers in the much-used and valued WhatsApp and Facebook groups, but we do know that there were 498 members of the CHEF email group when the survey was circulated. We had a total of 96 respondents to the survey. With the likely overlap between email and social media group membership, it has been estimated that we had an approximate response rate of around 19%, which is a reasonable data sample.

These initial highlights were shared by email:

- Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the local home ed community, the variety of things on offer and the friendliness of families.
- However, it's important to note that some still felt isolated, that it's hard to find a way in, and overwhelmed by the many communication platforms used to organise things.
- Only one respondent felt that there was a CHEF/not-CHEF divide. It's important to remember and share the message that ANY local home educator IS very much part of CHEF, even if they prefer not to use the email group/calendar, because we are ALL Cambridgeshire Home Educating Families.
- Newcomers really value support from other families in 'finding their feet' and in finding/accessing the modes of communication that work best for them.

498

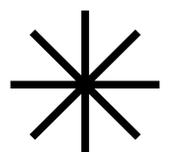
CHEF email group members when survey was circulated

19%

estimated response rate

517

Increase of 19 CHEF email group members since survey closed on 1 March 2025



- There were lots of great ideas arising, such as organising a more generic end-of-year celebration that feels more inclusive than the many Christmas-themed ones that happen; more 'whole community' events like the 'not back to school' picnic; more things that welcome and celebrate the diversity among us; and encouragement to step up and organise things where you can, to create even more opportunities to help as many as possible feel included.

“It is great to have opportunities to feedback to other local families and the Local Authority”

Home Educating Parent

There is a friendly, thriving, busy home education scene, but it can still feel overwhelming for newcomers and SEND families.

Precis of responses regarding strengths and weaknesses

97%

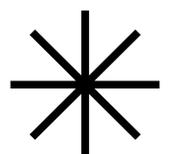
Live and home-educate in Cambs

74%

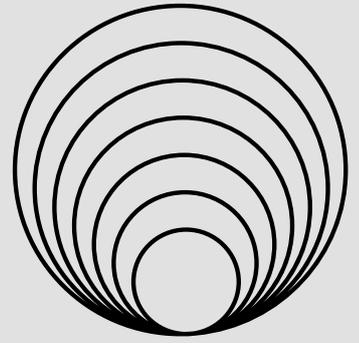
use a child-led/autonomous approach

22%

choose home education to address mental health concerns



THE DATA



What follows are graphs and observations generated from the raw data; where available, comparable data from the 2023 survey is also shown.

There are three sections:

Section 1 - page 6

About home-educating families

Section 2 - page 18

Experiences of the Local Authority

Section 3 - page 33

About the home education community

SECTION 1

ABOUT LOCAL HOME EDUCATING FAMILIES

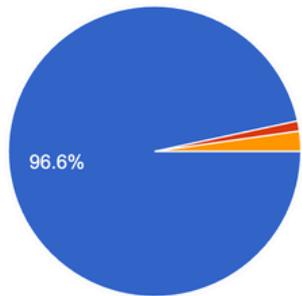
WHERE WE ALL ARE

There was a negligible decrease in those responding who have lived and home educated in Cambs since 2023.

2025

Do you live in Cambridgeshire (Cambs)?

89 responses

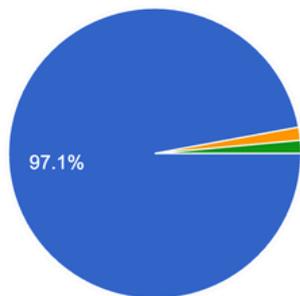


- Currently live and home educate in Cambs
- Home educating in/since January 2023 but do not live in Cambs
- Home educated in/since January 2023 in Cambs but don't now

2023

Do you:

69 responses



- Currently live and home educate in Cambridgeshire
- Have lived and home educated in Cambridgeshire at any point in or after January 2023, but don't home educate...
- Do not live in Cambridgeshire but are currently or have home educate after 1st Jan 2022, and consider yourself a me...
- Have lived and home educated in Cambridgeshire at any point in or after...

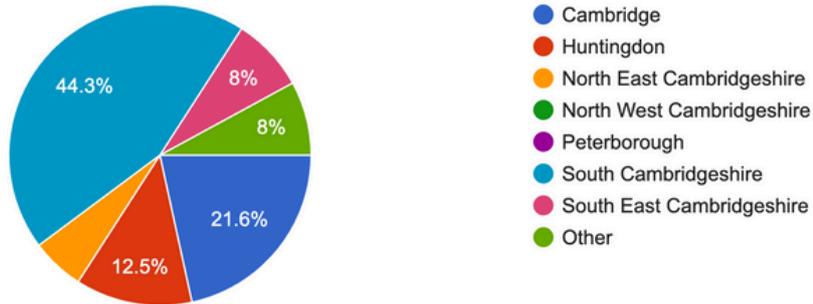
CONSTITUENCIES

Significant numbers are still based in South Cambs, as in 2023, reflecting this large constituency area.

2025

Which constituency do you live in?

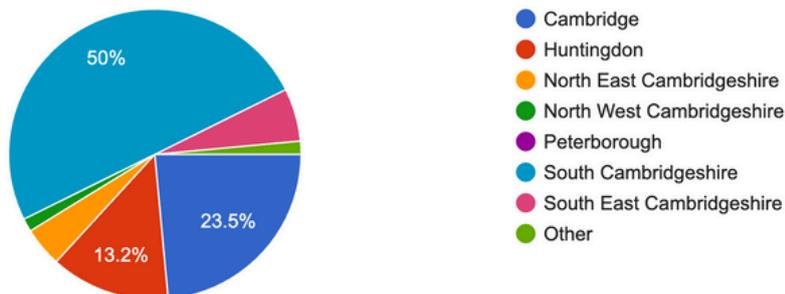
88 responses



2023

Which constituency do you live in?

68 responses



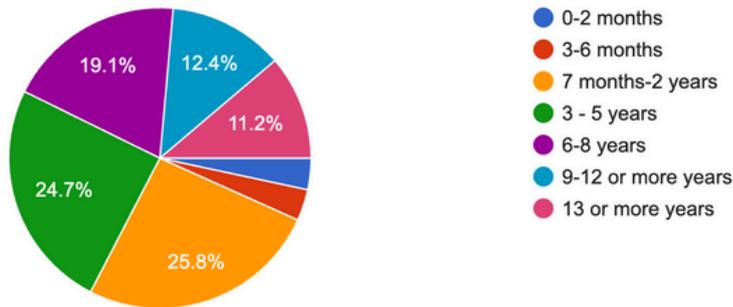
HOME ED EXPERIENCE

Those with at least six months experience of home education represented the vast majority of respondents in 2025. Categories have been simplified since 2023 to make data easier to read.

2025

Roughly, how long have/did you home educate for?

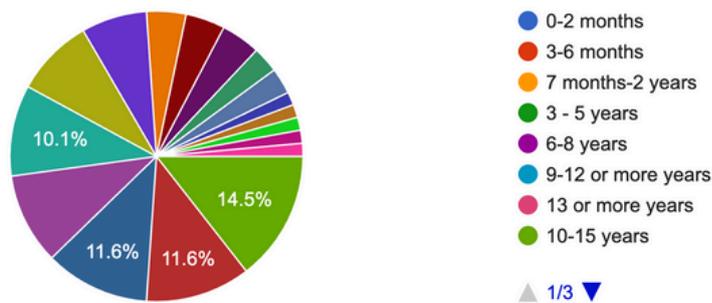
89 responses



2023

Roughly, how long have/did you home educate for?

69 responses



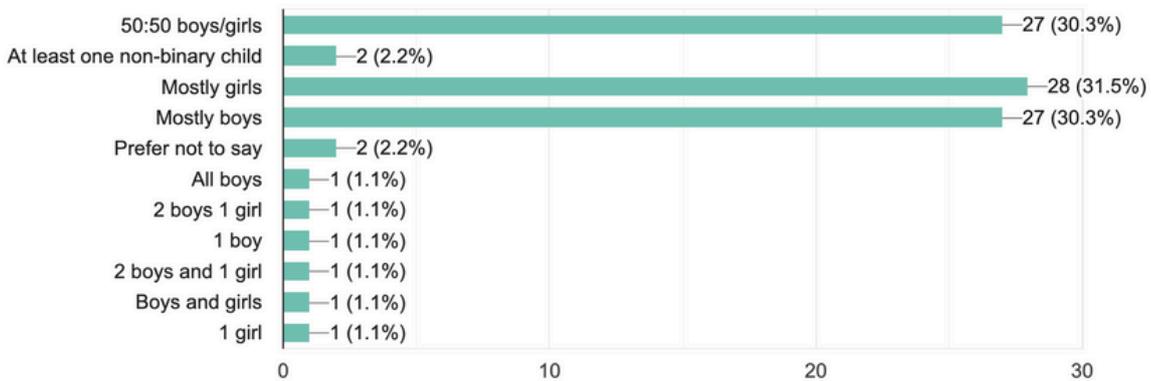
GENDER

Additional categories were added to give more nuanced data on gender in the 2025 survey, with a fairly even split between boys and girls and around 4.5% non-binary or preferring not to say.

2025

Gender of home-educated children

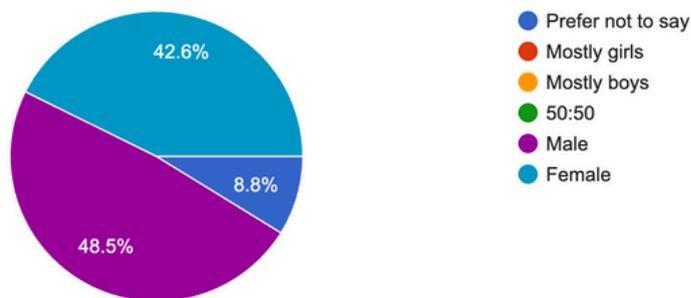
89 responses



2023

Gender of your home-educated children

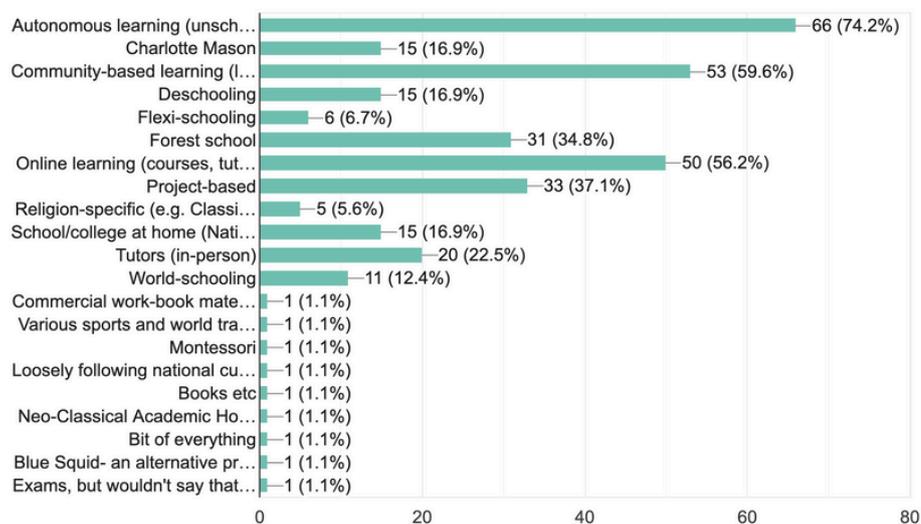
68 responses



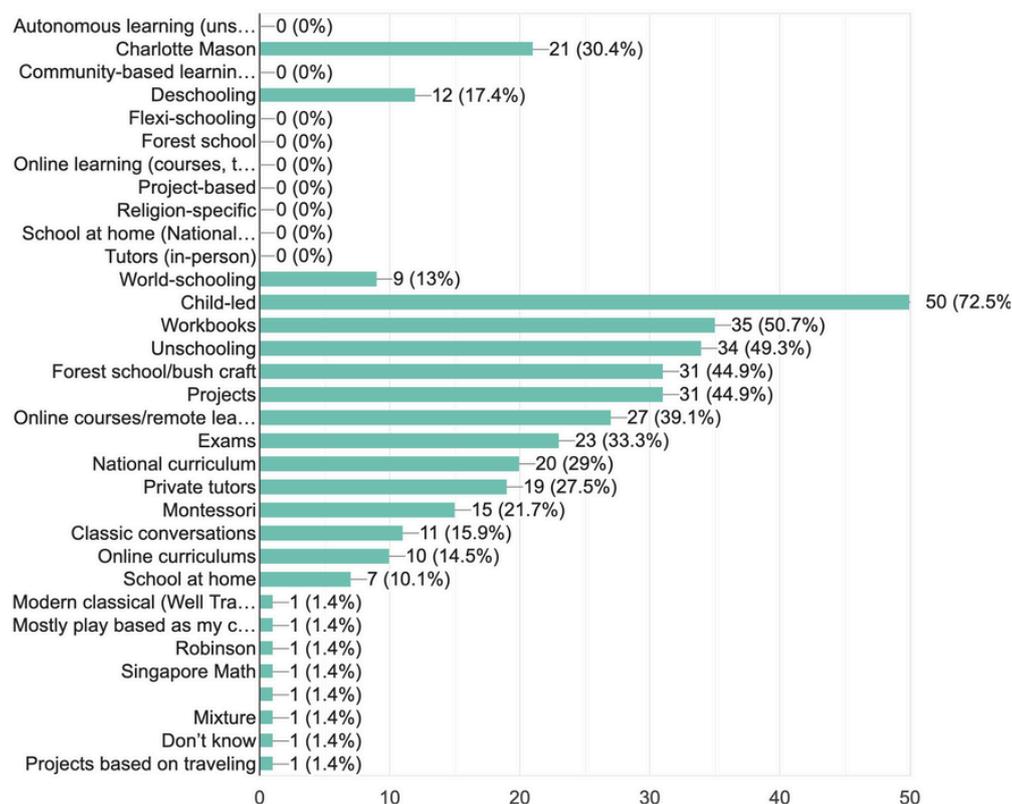
EDUCATION STYLE

Respondents were able to choose all options that applied to them in recognition of the fact that many families use more than one approach. 74% said they take an autonomous learning approach encompassing the terms unschooling, self-directed and child-led. Note that the 2023 data on this incorporates options added in 2025, so some categories may appear as 0% only because those options didn't exist in 2023.

2025



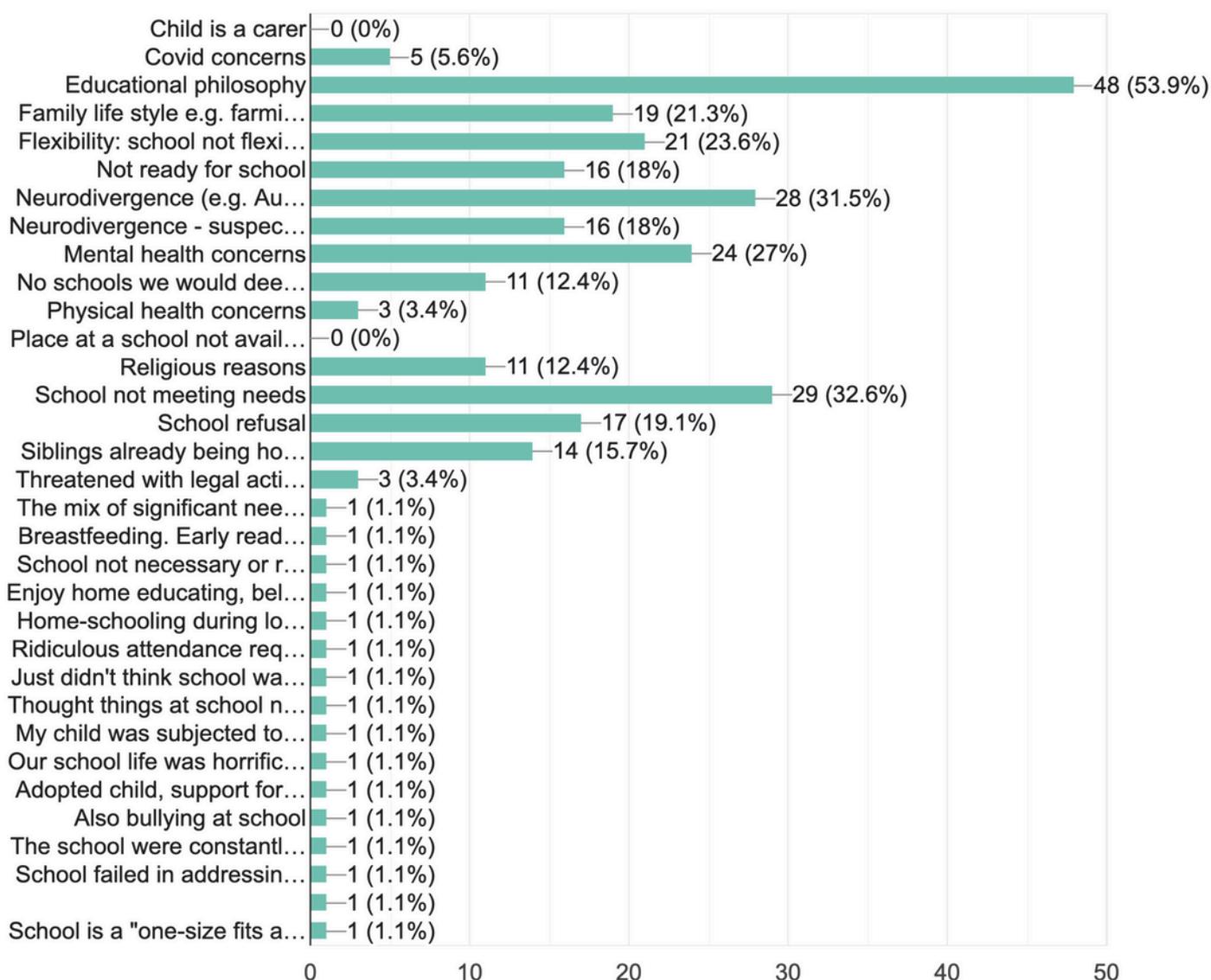
2023



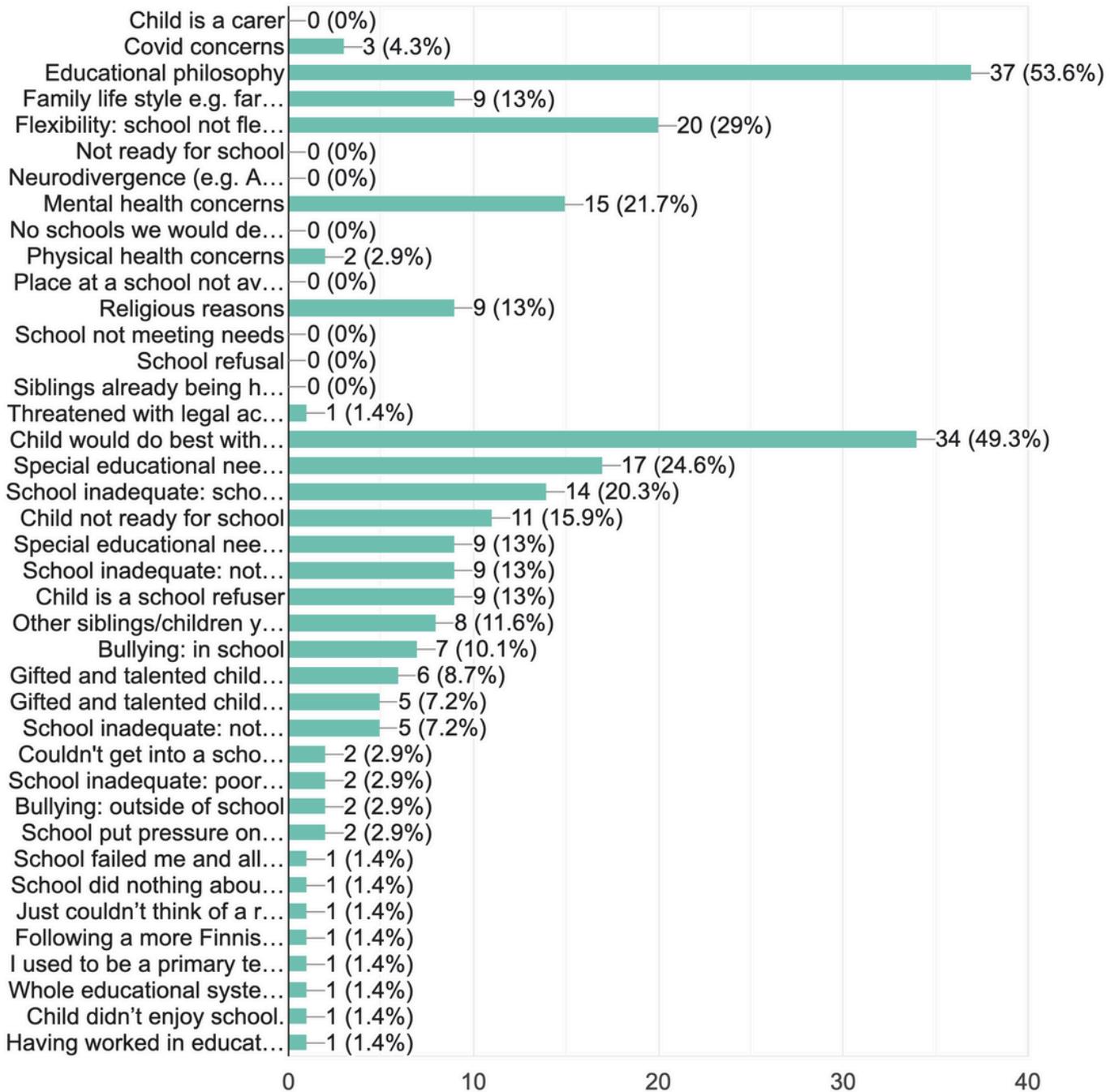
REASONS

Respondents were able to choose all options that applied to them in recognition of the fact that many families had more than one reason. The highest number of responses in both 2023 and 2025 were 'educational philosophy', at around 54% in both surveys. The 2025 data showed nearly 50% also cited neurodivergence as a main reason. Note that the 2023 data on this incorporates options added in 2025, so some categories may appear as 0% only because those options didn't exist in 2023.

2025



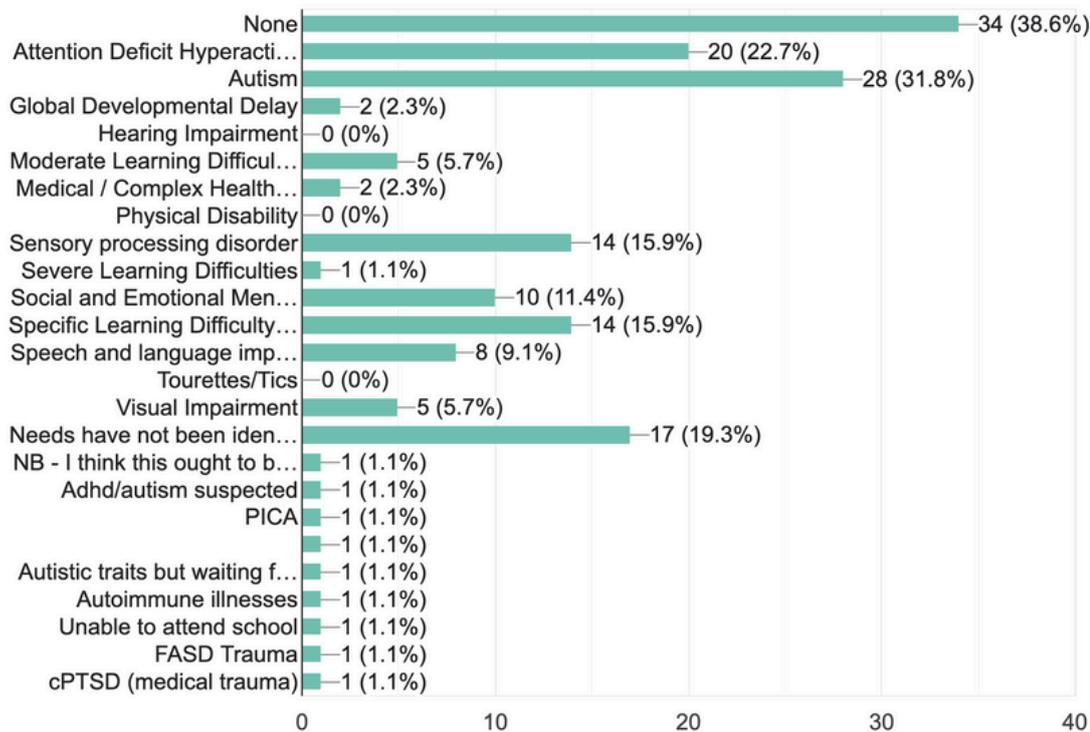
2023



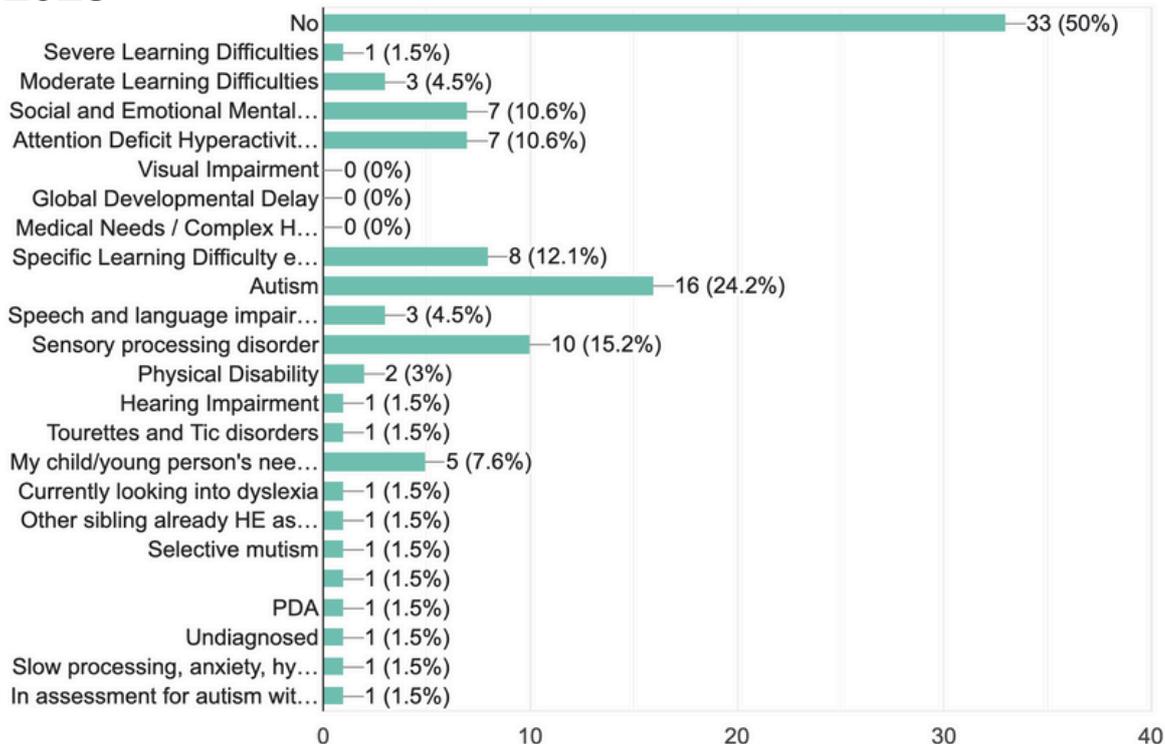
SPECIAL NEEDS

Respondents were able to choose all options that applied to them. In 2025, around 39% said that their children did not have any special educational needs or disabilities, compared to 50% in 2023. This means that 61% of home educating families have a child or children with some form of SEND. Autism was selected by around 32% in 2025, compared to 24% in 2023. Note that the 2023 data on this incorporates options added in 2025 so some categories may appear as 0% only because those options didn't exist in 2023.

2025



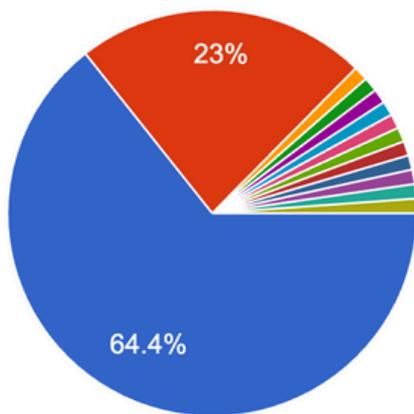
2023



ADAPTING APPROACH

Asked, “Do you/did you adopt different styles of home education for different children and/or for the same children at different times?”, 2025 saw a very significant increase in those answering ‘yes’, possibly reflecting the increased awareness of the potential for home education to take a tailored and flexible approach.

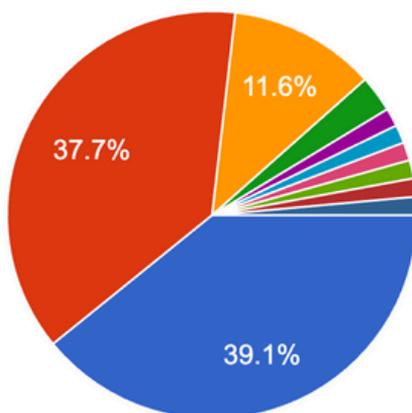
2025



- Yes
- No
- Only have one child
- Only have one child.
- Not-applicable (only one child)
- I have one child at HE
- Na
- N/A, younger sibling is not CSA

▲ 1/2 ▼

2023



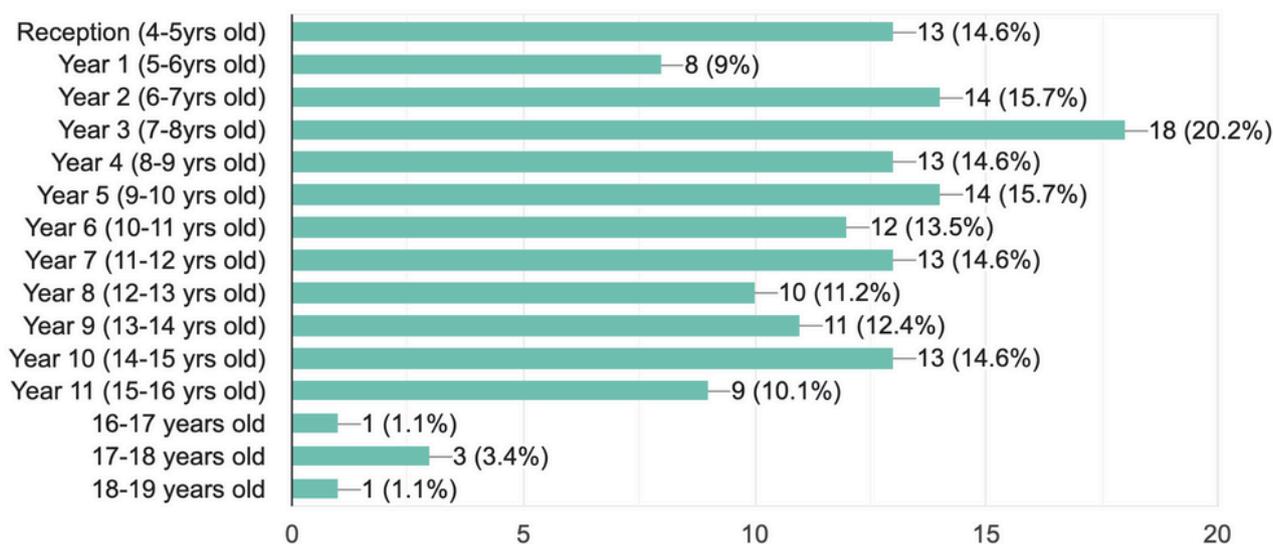
- Yes
- No
- N/A - only have/had one child being h...
- Maybe
- N/A - only one child
- N/A
- One is NT, two are autistic, so yes, but...
- Small adaptations

▲ 1/2 ▼

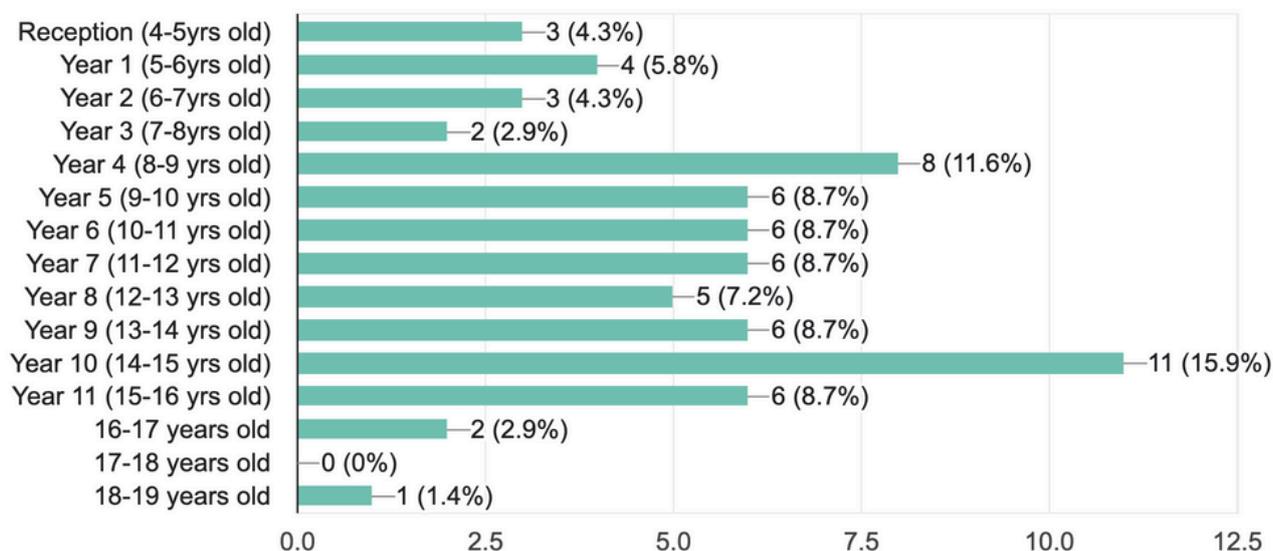
AGE OF CHILDREN

There was a significant increase in those home educating Reception-aged children (up 10% since 2023). Year 10 remained around 15% and years 3 and 4 combined also show significant increases. 80% responded that they were still actively home educating in the 2025 survey with the remainder being those whose children are now beyond compulsory education age or who stopped home educating, e.g. to take up a school or college place.

2025



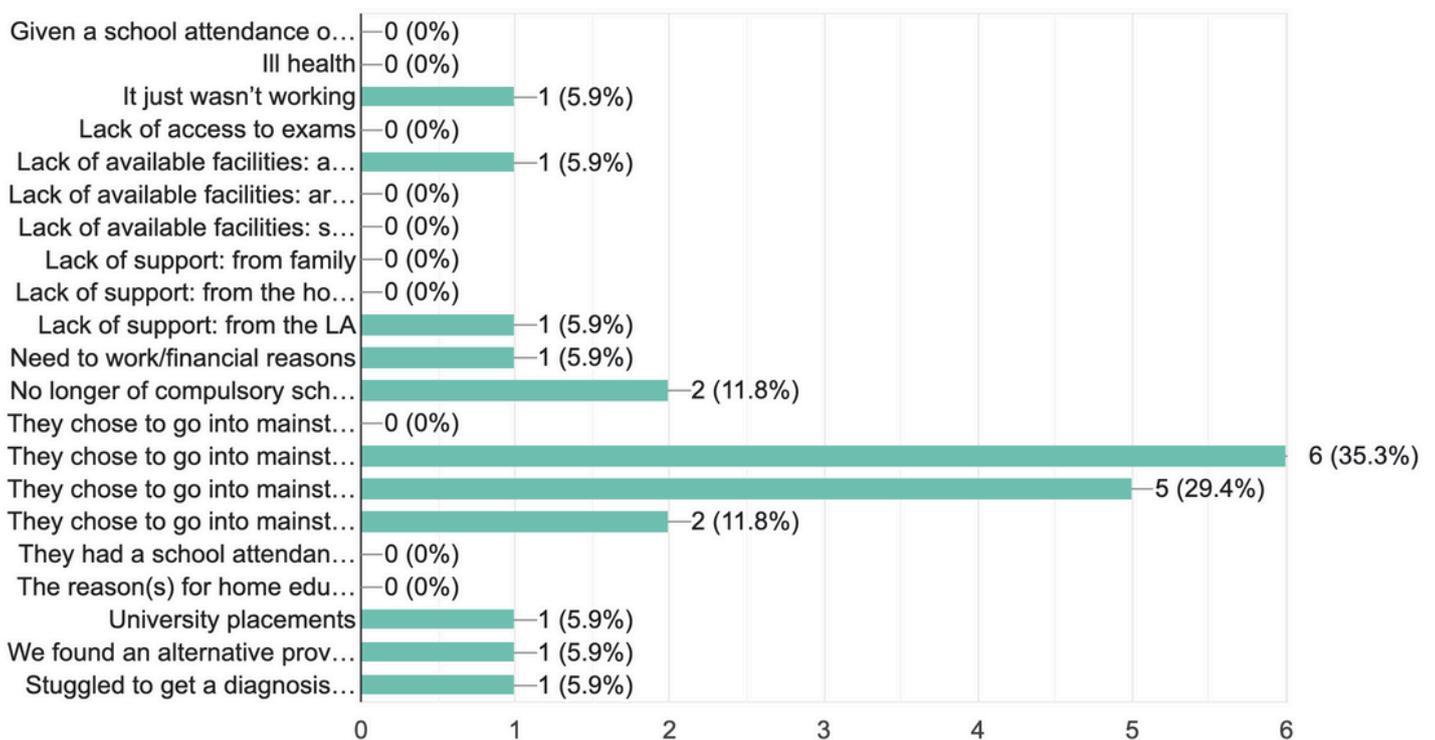
2023



STOPPING HOME ED

In 2025, 17 parents indicated that they had stopped home educating, with around 76% of those giving the reason that their child chose to go to mainstream secondary school, Sixth Form, or Further Education college, and around 12% were no longer of compulsory school age.

2025



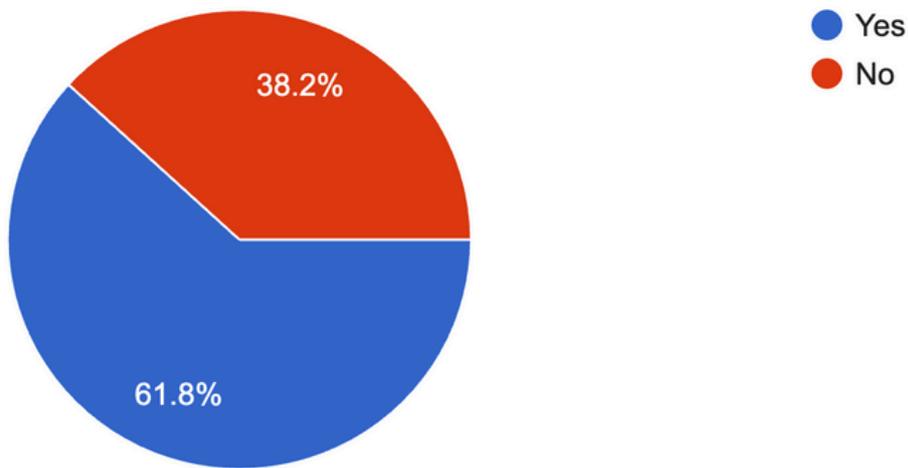
SECTION 2

EXPERIENCES OF
THE LOCAL
AUTHORITY

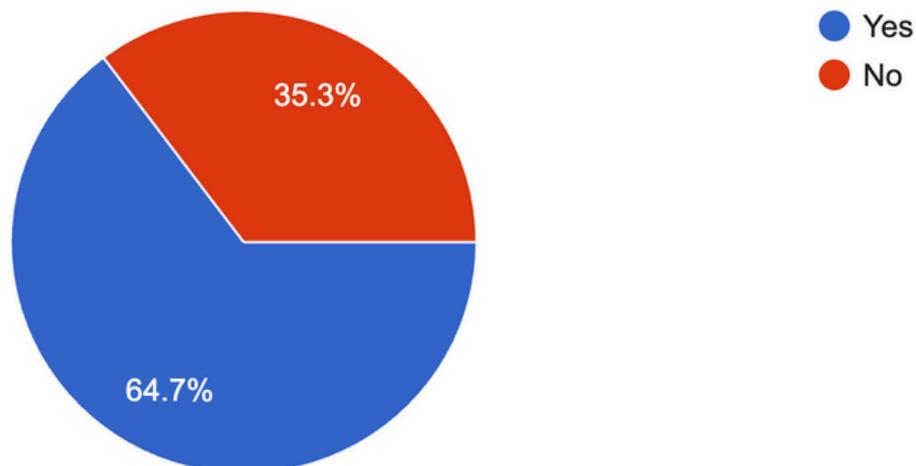
KNOWN TO THE LA

2025 saw a slight decrease in those responding that one or more of their home educated children have been known to the Local Authority and also an increase in those responding that they have not.

2025



2023



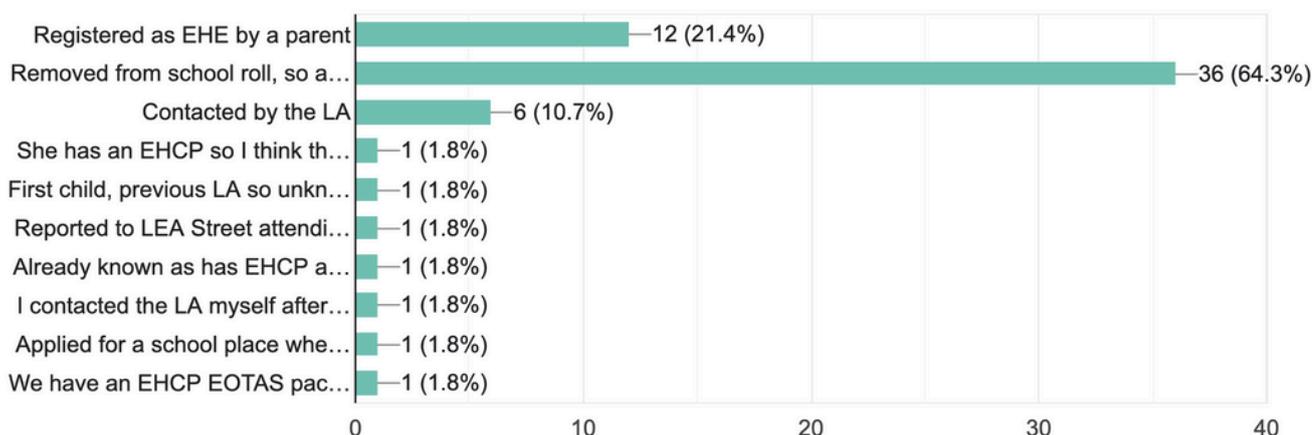
HOW KNOWN TO LA

2025 saw a slight decrease in those responding that their children were known to the Local Authority because they voluntarily registered and numbers who were known because they came out of school increased from 28 in 2023 to 36 in 2025. Around 10% reported being 'found' or contacted by the LA in both years.

2025

If yes, how did they come to be known?

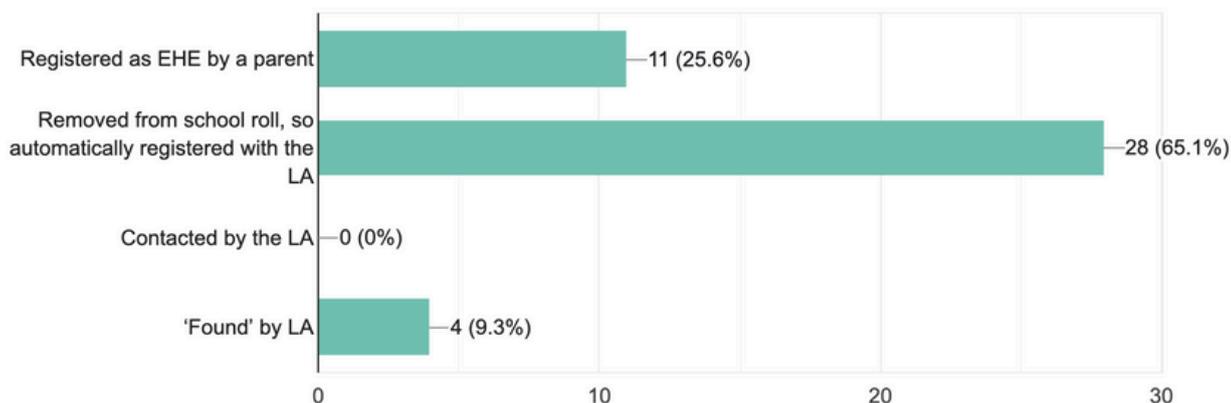
56 responses



2023

If yes, how did they come to be known?

43 responses



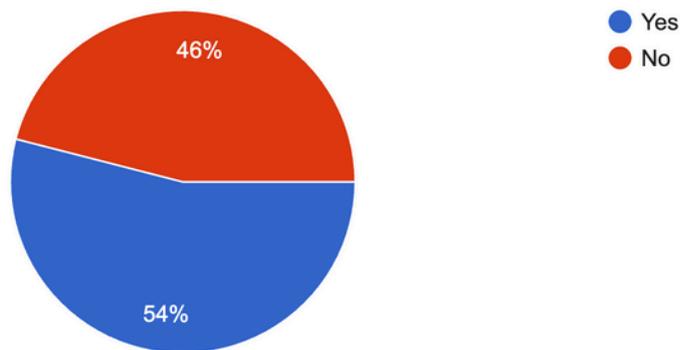
REPORTS TO THE LA

In 2025, 54% of respondents said they had sent a report to the LA compared to 34% in 2023 - a significant increase.

2025

Have you ever sent in a home education report (either written or by completing their form) to the LA?

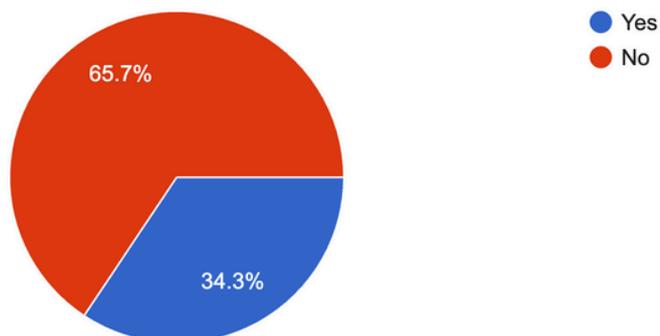
87 responses



2023

Have you ever sent in a home education report (either written or by completing their form) to the LA?

67 responses



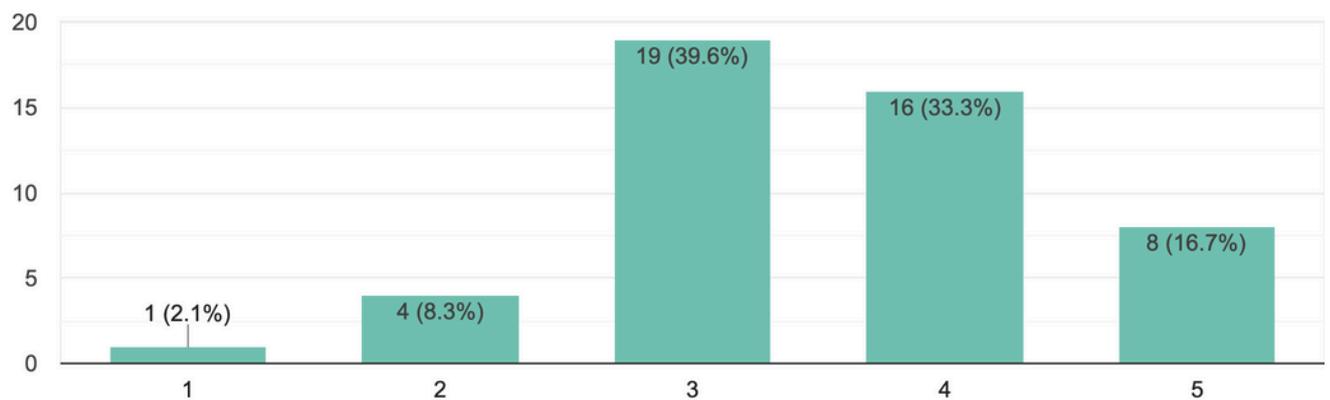
REPORT EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked to rate their experience of writing a report online or in their own report format. They were asked to rate the experience from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'really bad' and 5 being 'really good'. Around 17% in 2025 said it was really good compared to 13% in 2023. 1 respondent in 2025 did however say that it was really bad.

2025

How did you find the experience of writing up a report?

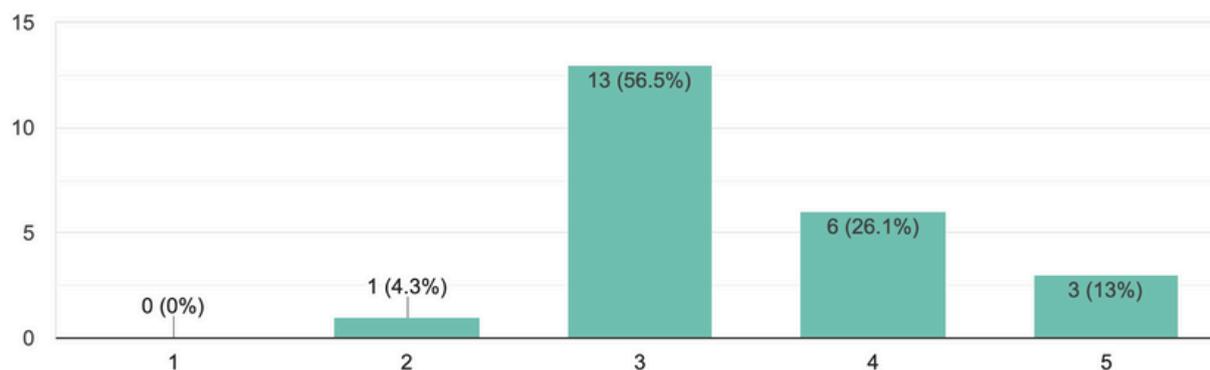
48 responses



2023

How did you find the experience of writing up a report?

23 responses



REPORT ACCEPTANCE

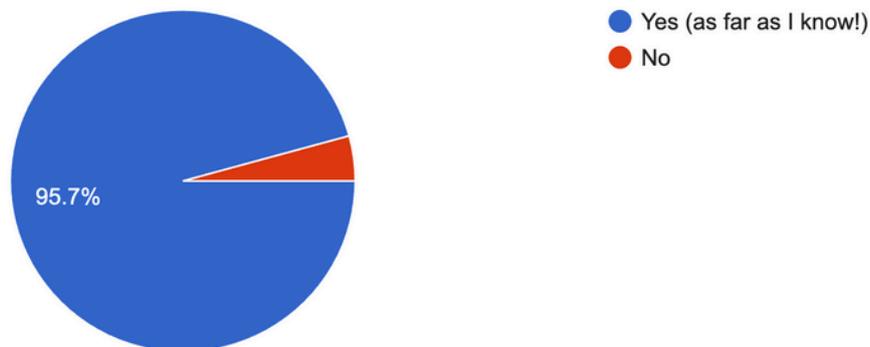
Survey respondents were reminded that the Local Authority do not routinely send out acknowledgement of reports.

As was raised and discussed at the last Positive Dialogue meeting on 13 November 2024, the Local Authority do not have the resources for the additional administration of acknowledging all reports received, so they only make contact if they need further details.

In both 2023 and 2025, around 96% said their reports had been accepted.

2025

47 responses

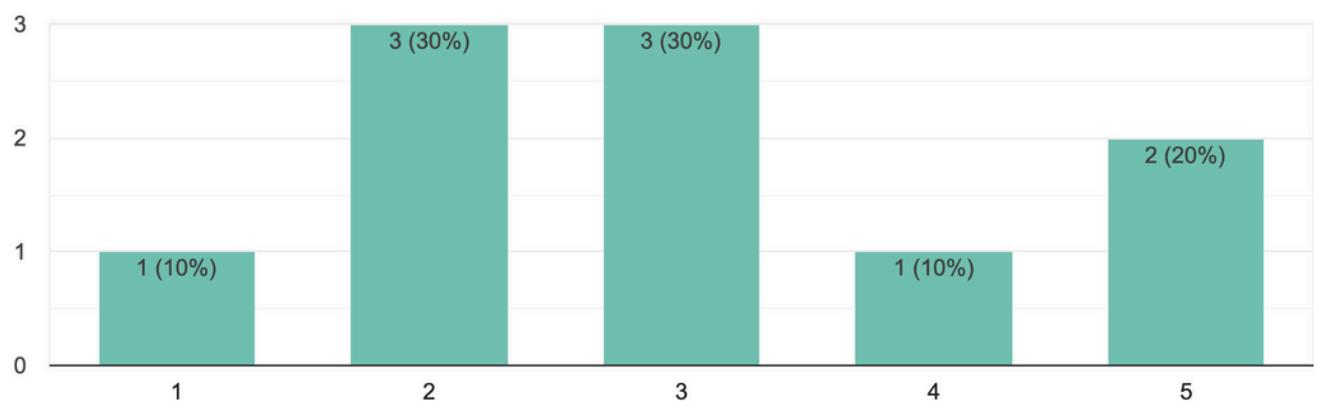


REPORT FOLLOW UP

Respondents were asked to rate their experience about whether they had received any follow up from the Local Authority about their reports. They were asked to rate the experience from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'really bad' and 5 being 'really good'. In 2023, the experiences were all 'neutral', but in 2025, 4 responses were negative and the remaining 60% were neutral or positive. In both years several respondents noted that acknowledgement would be appreciated.

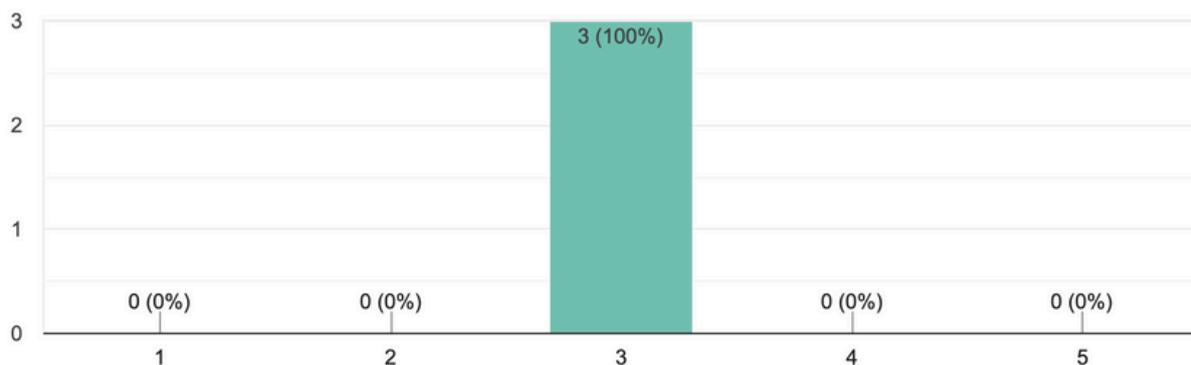
2025

10 responses



2023

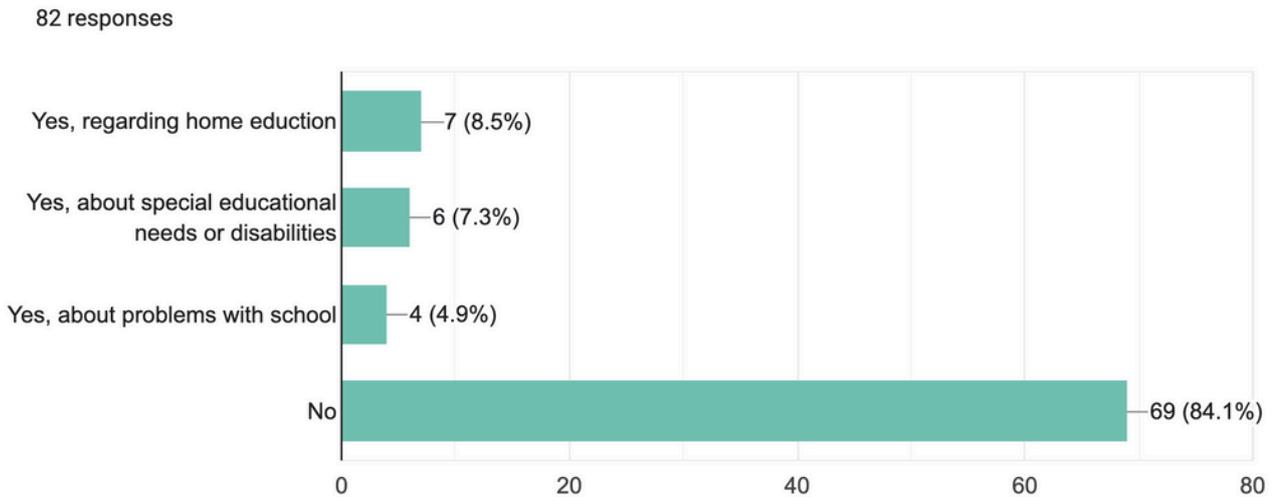
3 responses



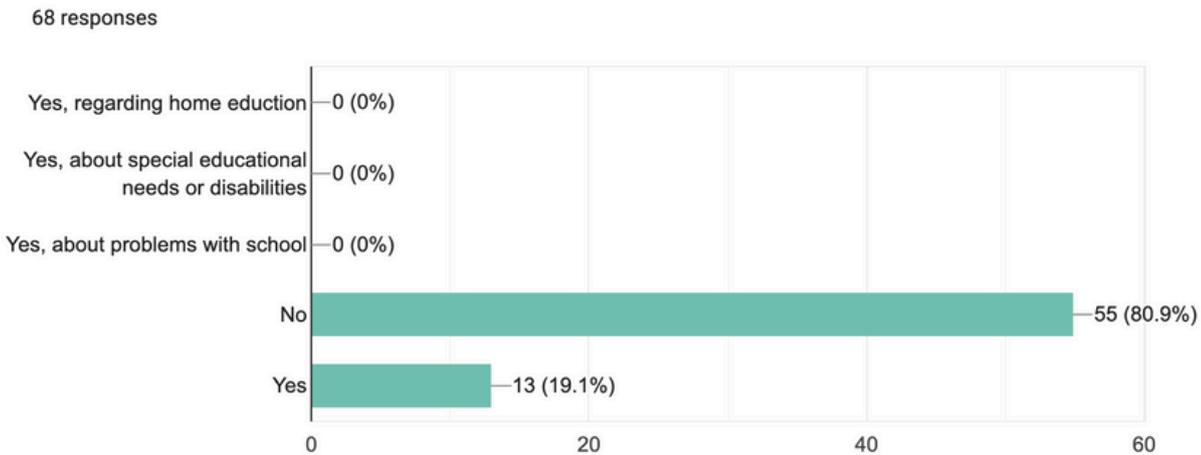
SUPPORT FROM LA

Respondents were asked if they had ever sought support from the Local Authority education department, with a slightly more nuanced selection of possible answers available in 2025. There appeared to be an increase in requests for support since 2023.

2025



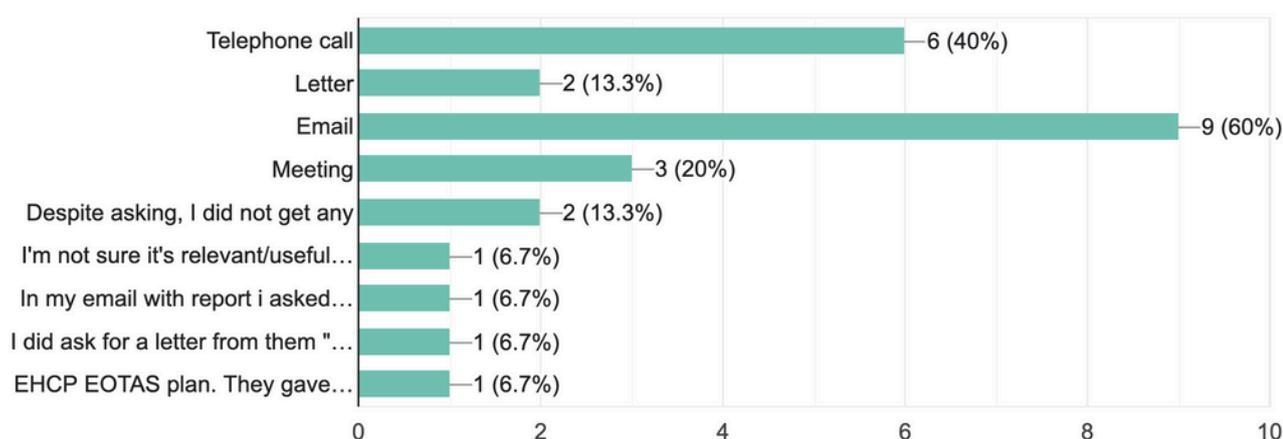
2023



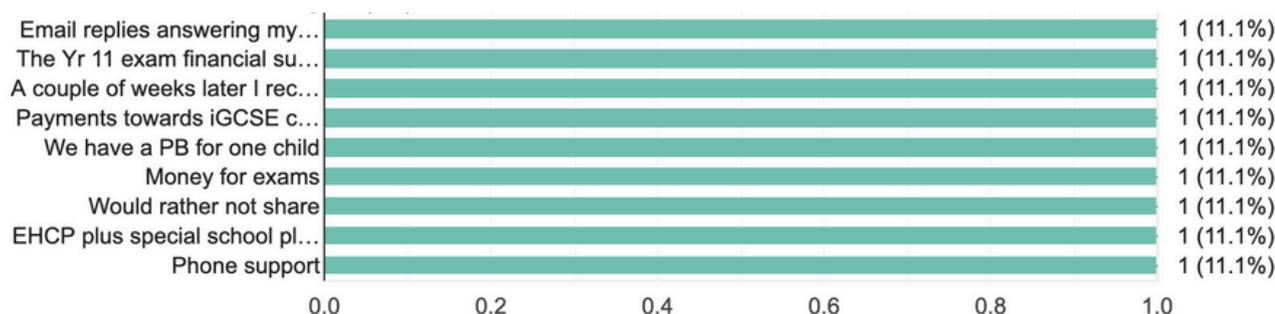
FORM OF LA SUPPORT

Respondents were asked, if they had received support from the LA, what form this took; in 2023, respondents gave individual responses which included reports of financial support, e.g. for exams. In 2025, most support was in the form of an email, although one respondent did report receiving EHCP/EOTAS plan, which provides significant funding that can be used towards home educating their child. 2025 responses also included expressing frustration about promised letters not being sent.

2025



2023



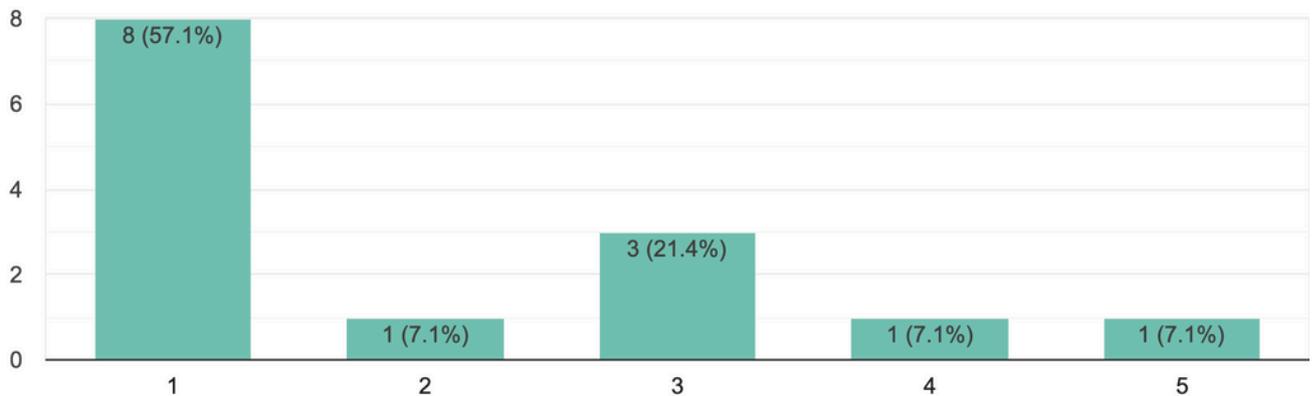
SATISFACTION WITH REQUESTED SUPPORT

Respondents were asked to rate the experience of requesting support from the Local Authority from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'totally unsatisfied' and 5 being 'totally satisfied'. 58% expressed dissatisfaction in 2025 compared to 36% in 2023 (note the low number of respondents to this question).

Suggestions for improvements included more funding for exams, timely responses within legal timeframes, not ignoring calls and emails, building positive relationships with parents through named contacts and providing support for accessing exam centres.

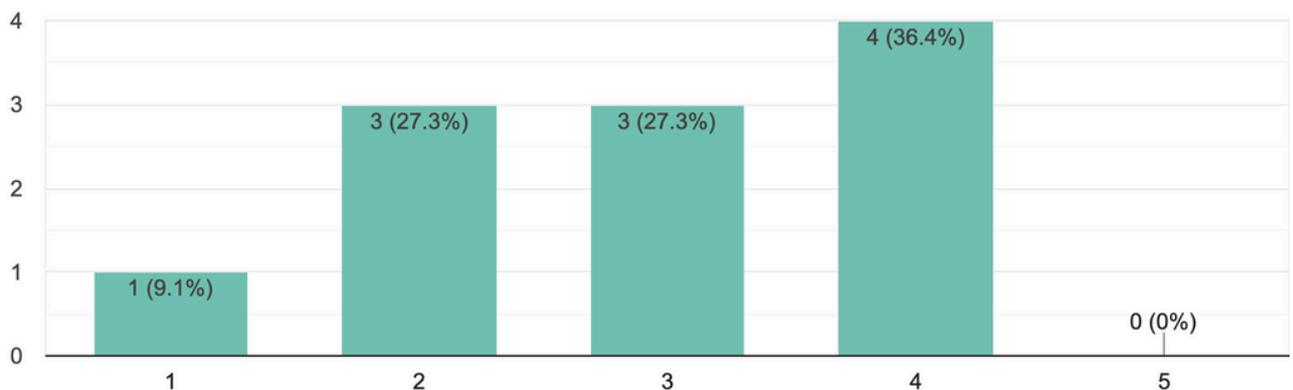
2025

14 responses



2023

11 responses

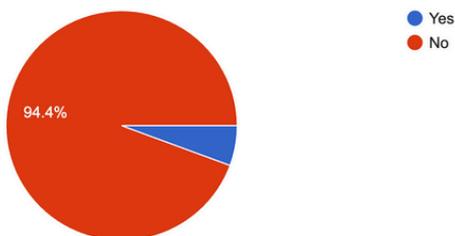


UNSOLICITED SUPPORT

Respondents were asked if they had ever received any unsolicited support from the Local Authority. There was an increase of around 5% of those saying they had not since 2023, and an increase in the uptake of that unsolicited support in 2025. Ideas for improvements included more funding, more empathy and better signposting. Praise was given for post-16 support and vaccination reminders.

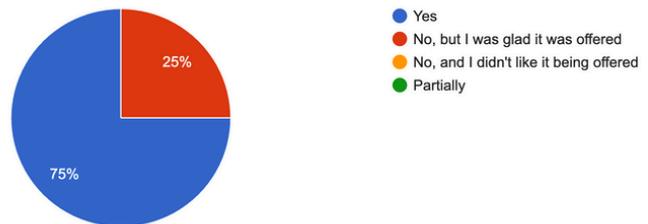
2025

71 responses



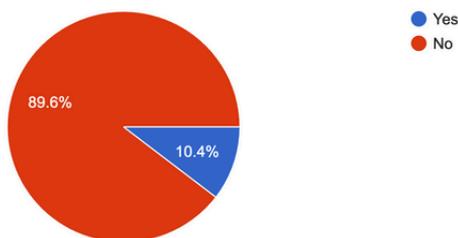
If yes, did you take them up on it?

4 responses



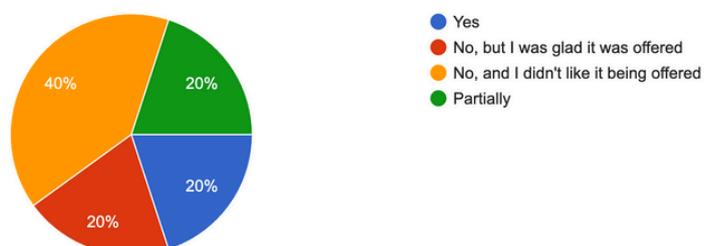
2023

48 responses



If yes, did you take them up on it?

5 responses



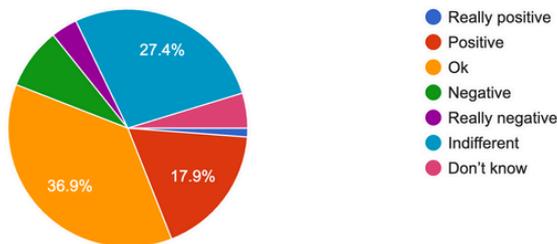
LA PERCEPTION

The graphs below compare perceptions of the LA from 2023 to 2025. There seems to be a slight increase in positive perceptions. In 2023 the main focus was on respondents noticing negative changes in reporting requirements. In 2025 responses were more neutral or positive with many saying they feel the LA is fairly 'light-touch'. A few expressed concerns about changes in staffing at the LA and lack of training in understanding home education, with one respondent saying they experienced the new LA contact for home education as "rude and dismissive", and others expressing understanding that the LA staff now have no discrete budget to support home educators.

2025

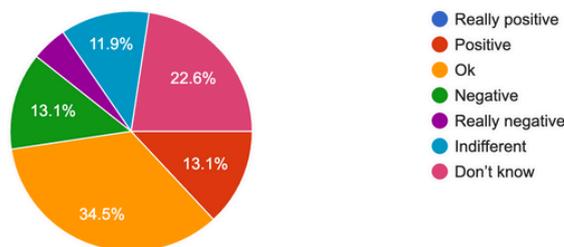
How do you feel about the LA currently?

84 responses



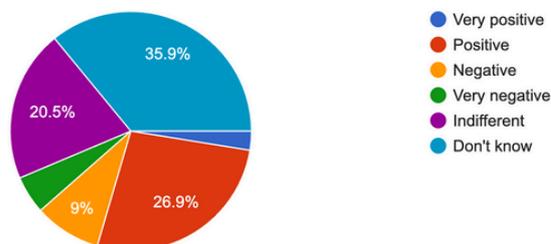
How do you think the LA feel about home educators currently?

84 responses



How would you rate the LA's way of dealing with home educators over the last 1 - 2 years?

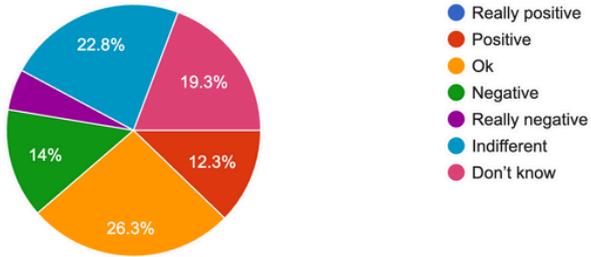
78 responses



2023

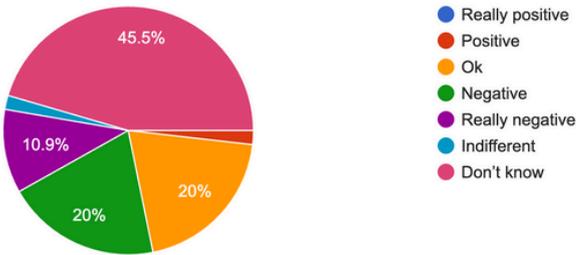
How do you feel about the LA currently?

57 responses



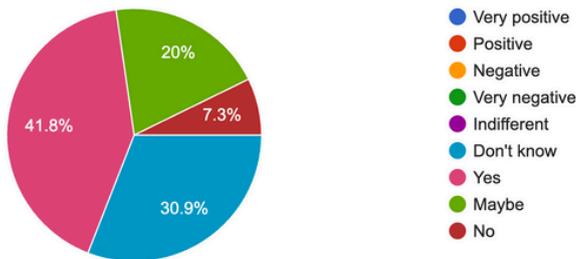
How do you think the LA feel about home educators currently?

55 responses



How would you rate the LA's way of dealing with home educators over the last 1 - 2 years?

55 responses



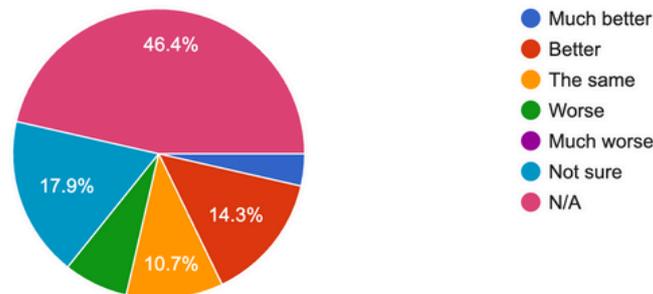
COMPARING LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Respondents were asked about their experiences with other Local Authorities (LAs). In 2025, 7.4% had had experience with other LAs compared to 19% in 2023. The LAs mentioned included Bedfordshire, Barnet, Conwy, Essex, Hartlepool, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, London, North Tyneside and Oxfordshire. Data below rates Cambs LA approach compared to others. Some felt previous LAs they had experienced were even more 'hands off', but a greater number felt Cambs was better. One respondent even reported that they felt they had been targeted by their LA. Asked if they would recommend new home educators to voluntarily register with our LA in 2023, 40% said no, compared to 43% in 2025.

2025

How would you rate your experience with Cambridgeshire LA relative to other LAs you have come into contact with (with regard to home education)?

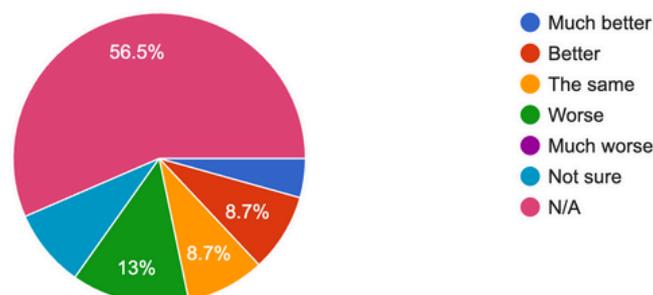
28 responses



2023

How would you rate your experience with Cambridgeshire LA relative to other LAs you have come into contact with (with regard to home education)?

23 responses



FEEDBACK FOR THE LA

Respondents were asked if they had any other thoughts, comments or suggestions for the Local Authority (LA).

2025

In 2025, free text field responses showed themes emerging as follows:

- Recognise that numbers of home educating families are increasing because schools are increasingly failing children.
- Do not intimidate parents or add to already stressful situations.
- Be aware that many children have been home educated successfully and obtained qualifications.
- Know that many home educators feel home education is a safer environment than school.
- We are aware how under-funded the LA is and grateful that they do their best to engage.
- Negotiate free or discounted access to online learning platforms.

2023

In 2023 free text field responses showed themes emerging as follows:

- Thanks to the LA for taking time out of hours to meet with us.
- Offers of help to LA to apply for funding to improve their resources for home educators.
- Pleas for the LA to be as positive about home education as many of us are.
- Requests that the LA focus on supporting those who need and want it only.
- The LA needs to upskill on supporting home educators
- Help home educators access teacher materials e.g. on Exampro.

Provide support where it's invited and learn about home education.

Precis of responses

SECTION 3

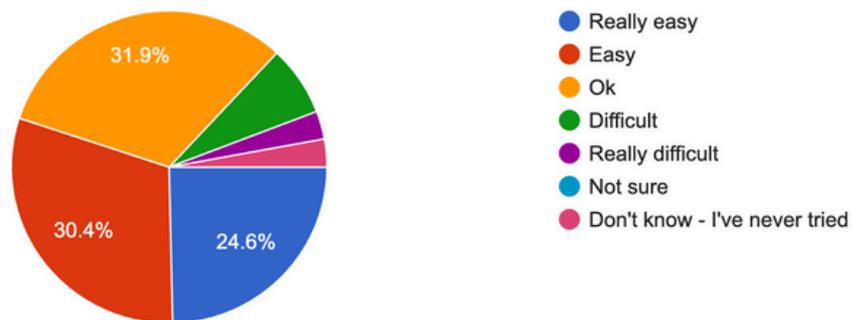
ABOUT THE
LOCAL HOME
EDUCATION
COMMUNITY

COMMUNICATIONS

Asked how they found out about the survey, 56% said it was through the CHEF email group in 2025, compared to 67% in 2023, demonstrating the shift towards a greater number of platforms now being used for communications. Around 34% found out about it on a WhatsApp group in 2025, compared to 11% in 2023. Around 8% found it on a Facebook group in 2025, compared to 14% in 2023. These trends were also reflected in how people reported communicating with other home educators locally, with all respondents making use of both open public channels and private closed ones. In 2023, 66% felt the communications channels were good or really good, compared to 72% in 2025. In both 2023 and 2025, 10% said they found it difficult or really difficult to connect with other home educators online and 14% found it difficult or really difficult in person in 2025, compared to 10% in 2023. Charts below show ease of meeting up and making friends.

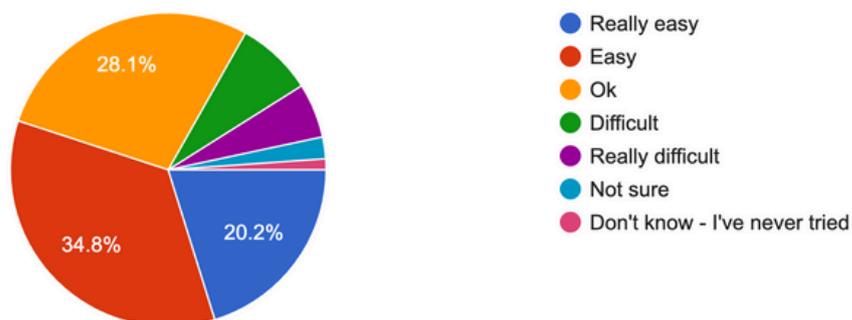
2025

How easy do/did you find it to meet up with other Cambridgeshire home educators?
69 responses



2023

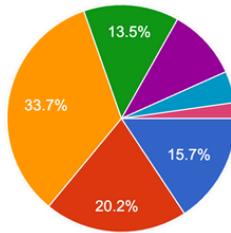
How easy do/did you find it to meet up with other Cambridgeshire home educators?
89 responses



2025

How easy did you/your child(ren) find it to make Cambridgeshire home-educating friends?

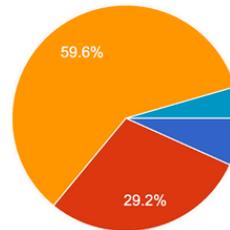
89 responses



- Really easy
- Easy
- Ok
- Difficult
- Really difficult
- Not sure
- Don't know - I've/We've never tried

With regard to meeting up with other Cambridgeshire home educators, would you like to do it...

89 responses

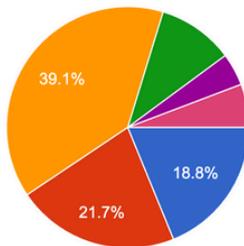


- Much more than you do now
- More than you do now
- Same as you do now
- Less than you do now
- Much less than you do now
- Don't know

2023

How easy did you/your child(ren) find it to make Cambridgeshire home-educating friends?

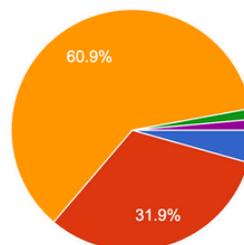
69 responses



- Really easy
- Easy
- Ok
- Difficult
- Really difficult
- Not sure
- Don't know - I've/We've never tried

With regard to meeting up with other Cambridgeshire home educators, would you like to do it...

69 responses



- Much more than you do now
- More than you do now
- Same as you do now
- Less than you do now
- Much less than you do now
- Don't know

ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked what sorts of groups they would like to see, which might be useful for anyone considering setting something up:

- Art sessions for younger ones
- SEND specific/friendly playgroup
- Making music groups and choir
- More teen sports, digital art, musical theatre and meet ups for teens
- Something like nature/wildlife surveys for my older child.
- Science and technology classes and events
- Coding/animation
- Things that might tempt children with anxiety and demand avoidance
- Regular one-off workshops
- Informal, inexpensive meets, especially outdoors - it was noted that some existing meets felt hard to break into for newcomers
- Chess, board games and card games (LED-free venue preferred)
- Stargazing
- Cheaper forest schools
- Share work experience opportunities for older children
- Museum trips
- Trips and groups that are public transport friendly
- Lego group
- Skateboarding jams
- Library club

Note many of the things currently on offer are on the CHEF calendar which is shared and maintained by everyone:

<https://www.cambridgehomeeducators.org.uk/calendar-guidelines.html>

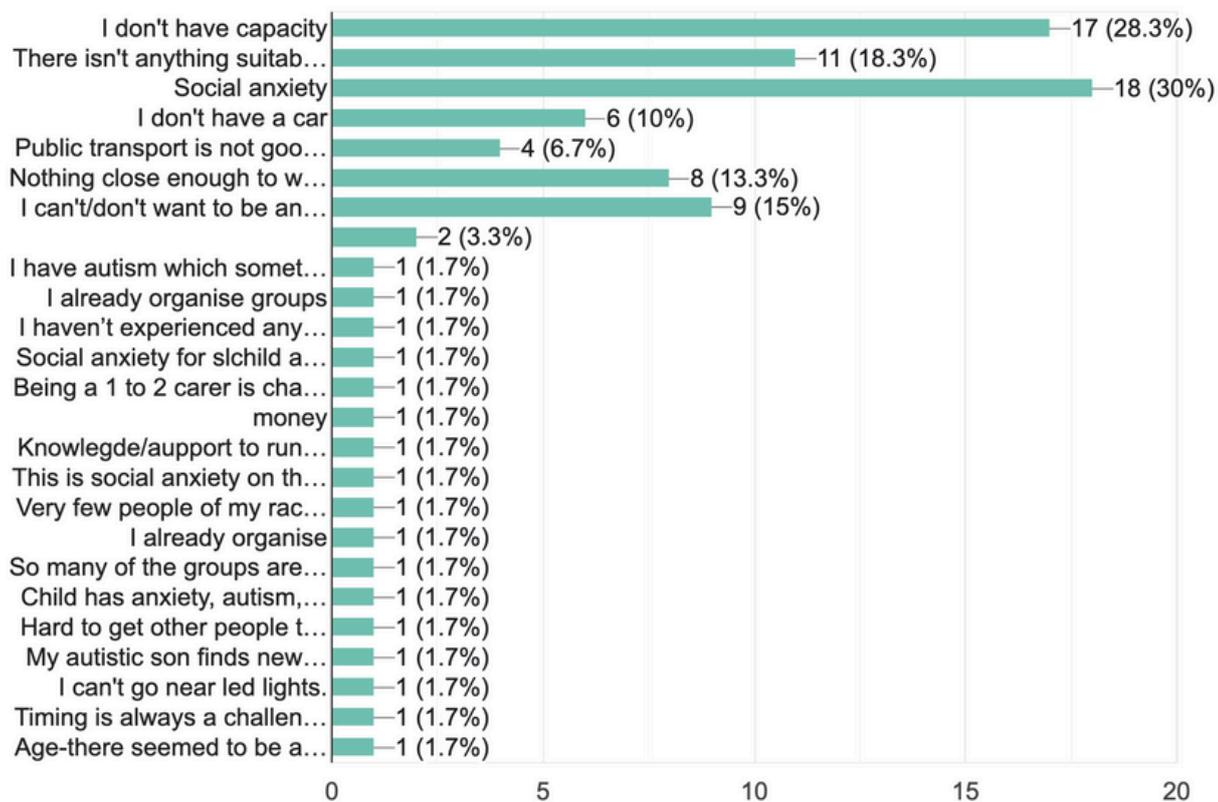
Since 2023, some of the things that were suggested in the 2023 survey have indeed started up e.g. dance, a new social group for teens, a new multi-sports provider (GK Fit), art groups (teacher-led at Art-K and parent-led at Orchard Park), Roller Skating (Curve Motion), soft play meets and self-directed learning groups. In addition to Orchard Park, we are now also back at the Meadows community centre. 52% said they would consider running an activity in 2025 compared to 50% in 2023.

BARRIERS

Respondents were asked about barriers they experienced to getting involved with the home education community. Responses echoed those found in 2023, with personal capacity and lack of car being significant contributors for many.

Do you experience any barriers to getting involved in the home education community?

60 responses

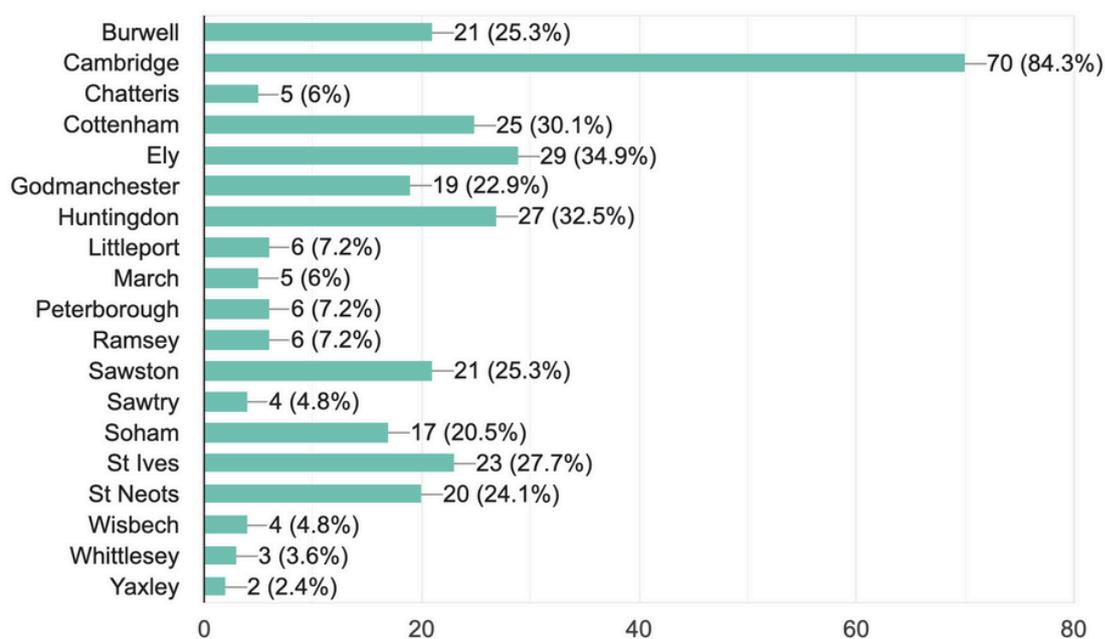


TRAVELLING

Respondents were asked about areas they are willing to travel to for activities. There was a 7% increase since 2023 of those willing to travel into Cambridge.

Roughly, which area do you and/or would you be happy to travel to for home-education groups and meet ups? (Tick all that apply.)

83 responses



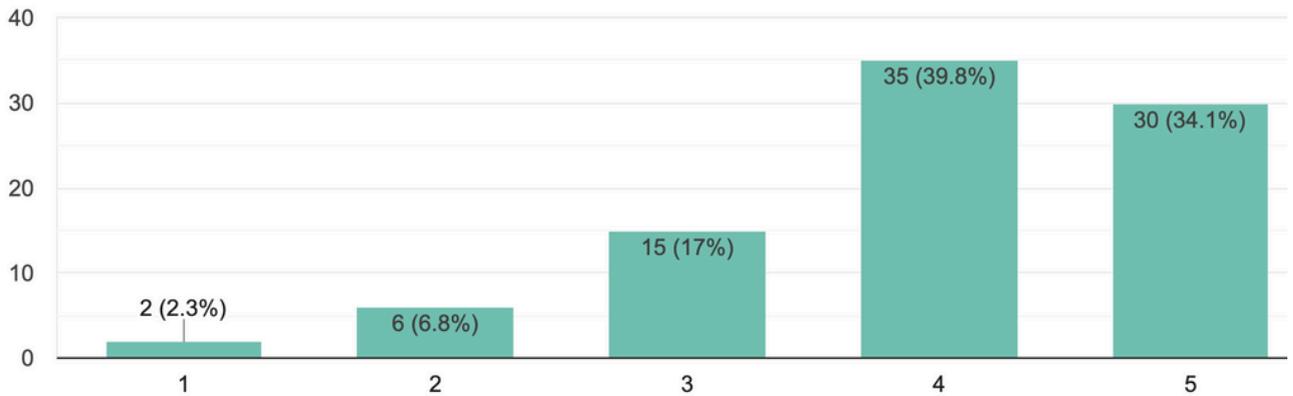
SATISFACTION

Respondents were asked about overall levels of satisfaction with the Cambs home education community by rating it from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'I feel actively excluded' and 5 being 'really friendly'. Around 74% scored it as 4 or 5 in 2025 compared to 88% in 2023. A greater number seemed ambivalent or felt excluded in 2025.

2025

How would you describe the Cambridgeshire home-educating community?

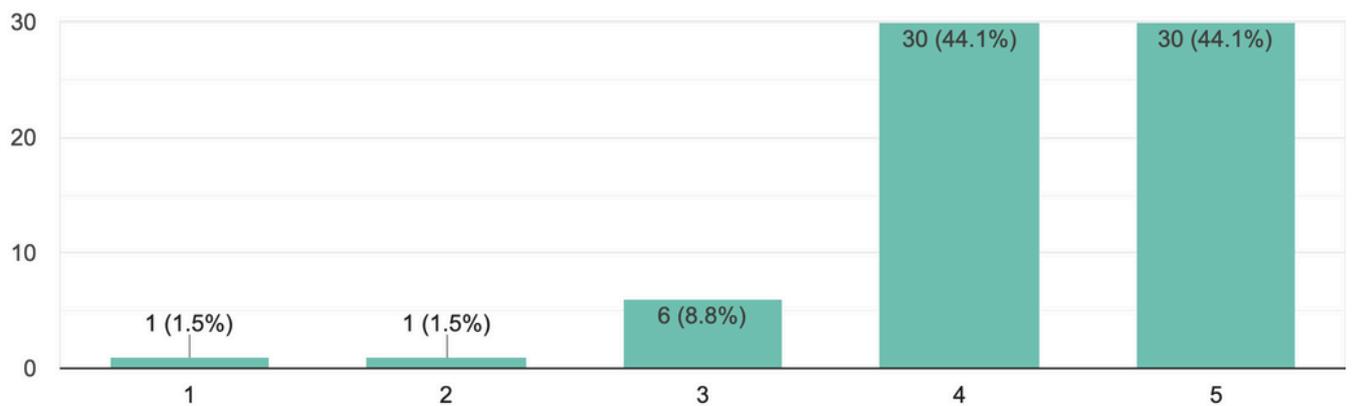
88 responses



2023

How would you describe the Cambridgeshire home-educating community?

68 responses



STRENGTHS

Respondents were asked about what they felt the local home educating community was good at.

2025

In 2025 free text field responses showed themes emerging as follows:

- Networking and support
- Information sharing and organisation
- LA liaison
- Range of activities
- Welcoming, accepting and friendly
- Calendar
- Email and WhatsApp groups

2023

In 2023 free text field responses showed themes emerging **in addition** to the same ones identified in 2025 above, as follows:

- Size and diversity of community
- Inclusive of all home education approaches

Although it can be hard getting started, everyone is welcomed, things seem well-organised and there is a huge amount going on.

Precis of responses

IMPROVEMENTS

Respondents were asked about what they felt the local home educating community could get better at.

2025

In 2025, free text field responses showed themes emerging as follows:

- Too many channels/less cross-posting
- Good that all channels are embraced
- Accessibility for newcomers coming to groups for the first time - avoid cliques
- More whole group activities e.g. end of year celebration
- Fewer clashes and more use of shared calendar
- More for children 11+
- More commitment, organisation and contribution from more people

2023

In 2023, free text field responses clearly demonstrated the hit the community had taken because of Covid, with the loss of the Meadows and in-person meet-up opportunities lamented. People felt the community was becoming more fragmented and wanted more low key, low structure meet ups, they wanted a comprehensive list/calendar of what was on (this now exists). There were feelings of concern about things becoming decentralised and therefore harder to access. There were still concerns about cliques and many wanted a central communication hub - Discord was suggested. Home educator cards were also suggested (this has been raised and actioned at a subsequent Positive Dialogue meeting).

“Smile, be welcoming,
acknowledge others.”

Home educating parent



Thank you to everyone who took part in the survey and to those who have read the results.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Particular thanks to the former home educating parents who started the survey in 2023 and to all the organisers of activities and admins of social media groups that help make our community function.

LET'S USE THE
DATA TO KEEP
IMPROVING OUR
LOCAL HOME
EDUCATING
COMMUNITY