



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

EIS Member Survey 2021: COVID-19 findings

Member Survey Results

December 2021

The Educational Institute of Scotland

Background

The EIS is the largest teacher trade union in Scotland, representing over 80% of all teachers across nursery, primary and secondary education. With such a broad and expansive membership the EIS is committed to seeking and representing the views of its members through direct engagements as well as through the use of member surveys.

For just short of 2 years, teachers in Scotland have been battling COVID-19 infections within schools, continually adjusting policies and practices to implement safety mitigations, as well as continuing to provide blended learning to support the large number of pupils who have been absent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our members within the secondary school sector have also performed herculean efforts to prepare students for national qualifications with ever-changing requirements.

The past 21 months have undoubtedly put a strain on our teachers and our education system as a whole. However, even before March 2020 teachers in Scotland had raised the alarm on high levels of stress, unsustainable levels of workload and poor wellbeing within the profession.¹

This survey looks at the key issues facing teachers in Scotland today: workload, COVID-19 and their health and wellbeing at work.

Methodology

The EIS school sector survey was opened on Thursday 11th November and closed on the morning of 29th November. The survey has a total of 32 questions, but owing to survey design, most members were not required to answer all questions.

In total 16,056 responses were gathered, with a return rate of 32%. This turnout shows just under a third of all members eligible have completed the survey. The average response time to complete the survey was 8 minutes; however some members noted that it took them longer than this due to the extended answers that they gave.

Eligible members were emailed a link to the survey, which was also promoted on the EIS website and the EIS social media pages. Prior to the survey going live to members, it was issued to a small test sample of members for peer review.

The survey was broken down into 4 sections: About You, COVID-19, Workload, and Health and Wellbeing. There was also an opportunity at the end for members to note any further comments. This report highlights the findings from the COVID-19 questions. Information on the other sections will be published shortly.

None of the questions were mandatory. This allowed respondents to skip questions as they progressed throughout the survey. This was done to ensure that there was no false recording within the survey, to improve confidence in the results. Some questions also had 'logic' applied, meaning that respondents would be redirected to different follow-on questions depending on the answers they gave. Details of how many respondents answered each question are included throughout this report.

¹ EIS, Value Education, Value Teachers Survey Results (2019) <https://www.eis.org.uk/Time-To-Tackle-Workload/SurveyResults>

All figures within this report have been rounded to the nearest one decimal place, meaning that some questions may not have a total exacting 100%, with other questions within the survey allowing for multiple responses.

There was considerable opportunity for members to record more detailed answers to the questions posed, either by using comment boxes, or by ticking an “other” option where appropriate. Throughout this report member comments have been included under the corresponding questions. As some questions within the survey elicited thousands of additional comments or responses, the quotes selected are only a snapshot of this wider data but have been chosen to reflect the majority of views captured.

Margin of Error

This survey was conducted on the Survey Monkey platform. Survey Monkey describes the margin of error as:

“Margin of error (also called confidence interval) indicates the level of certainty with which you can expect your survey results to reflect the views from the overall population. Surveying is always a balancing act where you use a smaller group (your survey respondents) to represent a much larger one (the target market or total population).

“Margin of error is often used as a way of measuring how effective a survey is. The smaller the margin of error, the more confidence you may have in your results. The bigger the margin of error, the farther they can stray from the views of the total population. One way in which to reduce the margin of error is to increase the sample size.”²

Using the full eligible membership as our baseline figure, the margin of error with our sample of 16,056 is less than one percent³.

² Survey Monkey, Margin of Error Calculator https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/margin-of-error-calculator/?ut_source=mp&ut_source2=sample-size-calculator&ut_source3=inline&ut_ctatext=margin%2520of%2520error%2520calculator

³ Ibid.

Section 1 – About You Findings

About You

The first section of the survey asked respondents to fill in key details about themselves. The answers given in these opening sections give an indication of who our members are and what they teach. Whilst these answers provide insight into EIS teacher members when looked at on their own, they can also be analysed alongside other questions within this survey to provide information on how different sections of EIS membership responded to certain issues.

Within the survey, members were asked whether they taught in primary, secondary, nursery, or special schools (with the ability to select more than one option as appropriate), with secondary school teachers then also being asked what subject(s) they taught. Members were asked, also, to state what their substantive post is from a range of options, and which local authority they worked in.

The questions on member characteristics were compulsory, to ensure that only eligible members filled in the survey, as well as ensuring that there was a large sample to allow for disaggregation. Where the sample size was lower than 1,000 these have not been disaggregated to ensure confidence in the results.

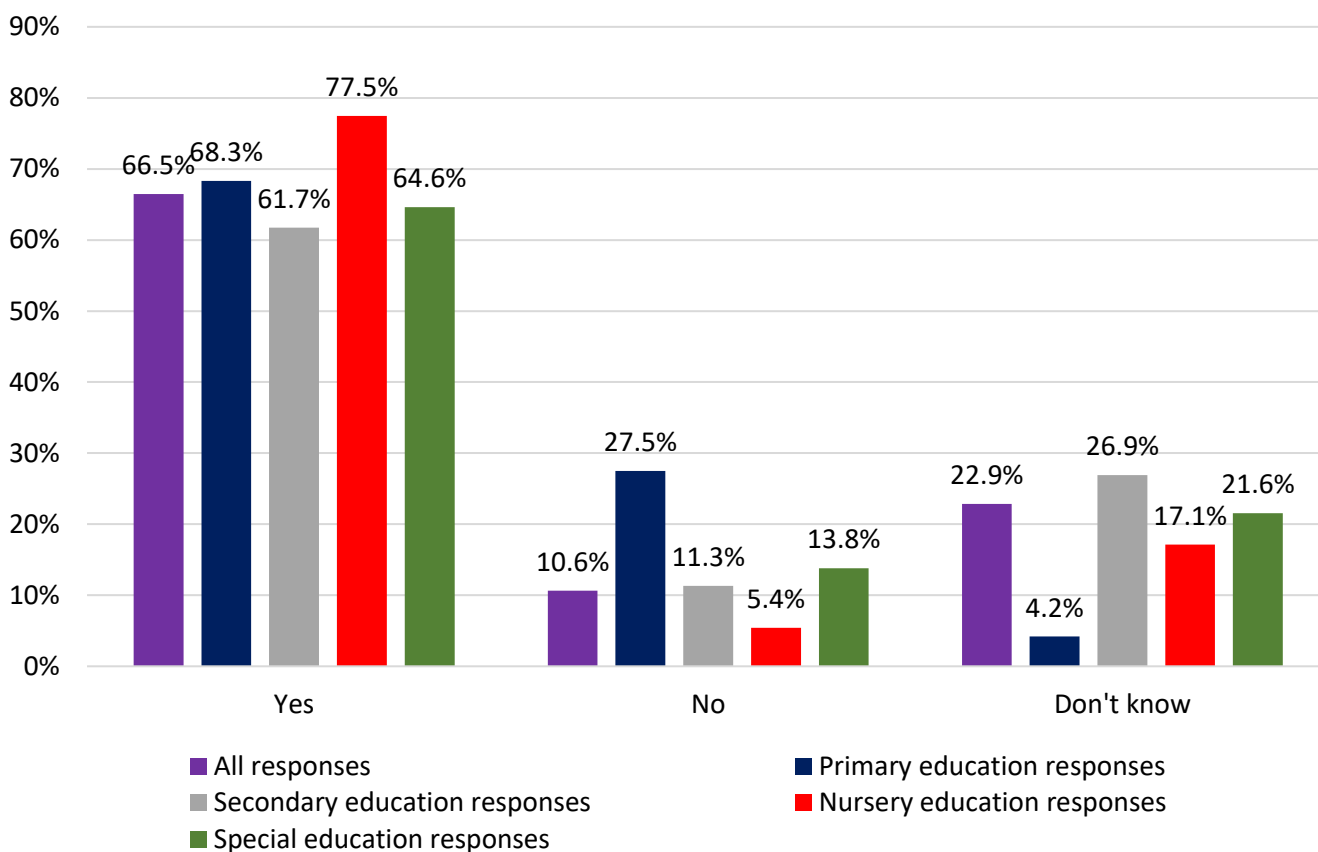
Where useful, results have been refined to illustrate nuances in response based on indicators such as sector worked in, post held or any other relevant characteristic.

Section 2 – COVID-19

Since the first cases of COVID-19 hit Scotland early in 2020 much more is known about the virus and how it spreads. There is also an extensive vaccination programme in place which has provided vaccines to all school staff who are able to receive it. Despite this, ongoing measures are still needed to ensure that the levels of infection do not become unmanageable.

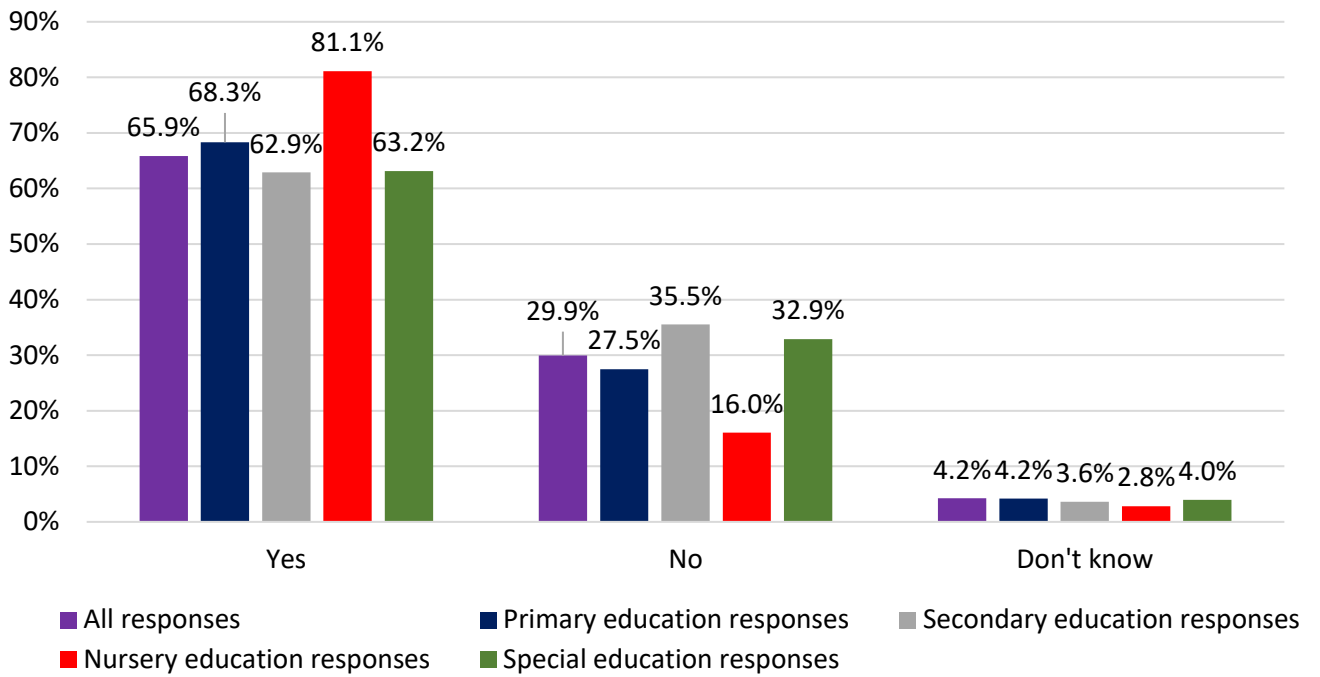
To better understand the extent to which these measures are being deployed successfully across our schools the EIS survey looked at key measures such as ventilation, and the use of face coverings in schools, to determine how safe teachers feel in school. The following tables look at the implementation of CO2 monitors, risk assessments and the quality of ventilation within schools.

Figure 1: Have risk assessments been regularly revisited within your establishment to ensure that measures in place take full account of current contexts?



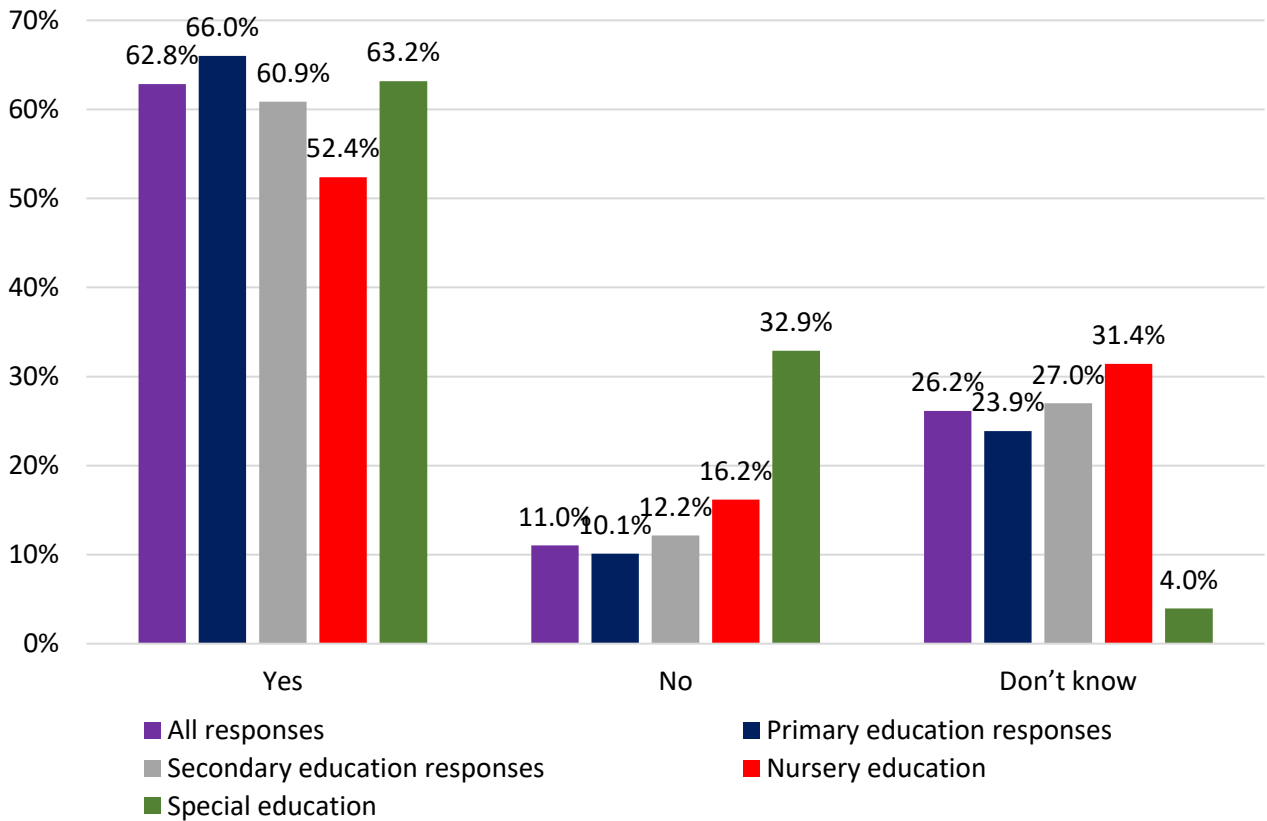
Total responses: 15,397

Figure 2: Do you feel that your working spaces are well ventilated?



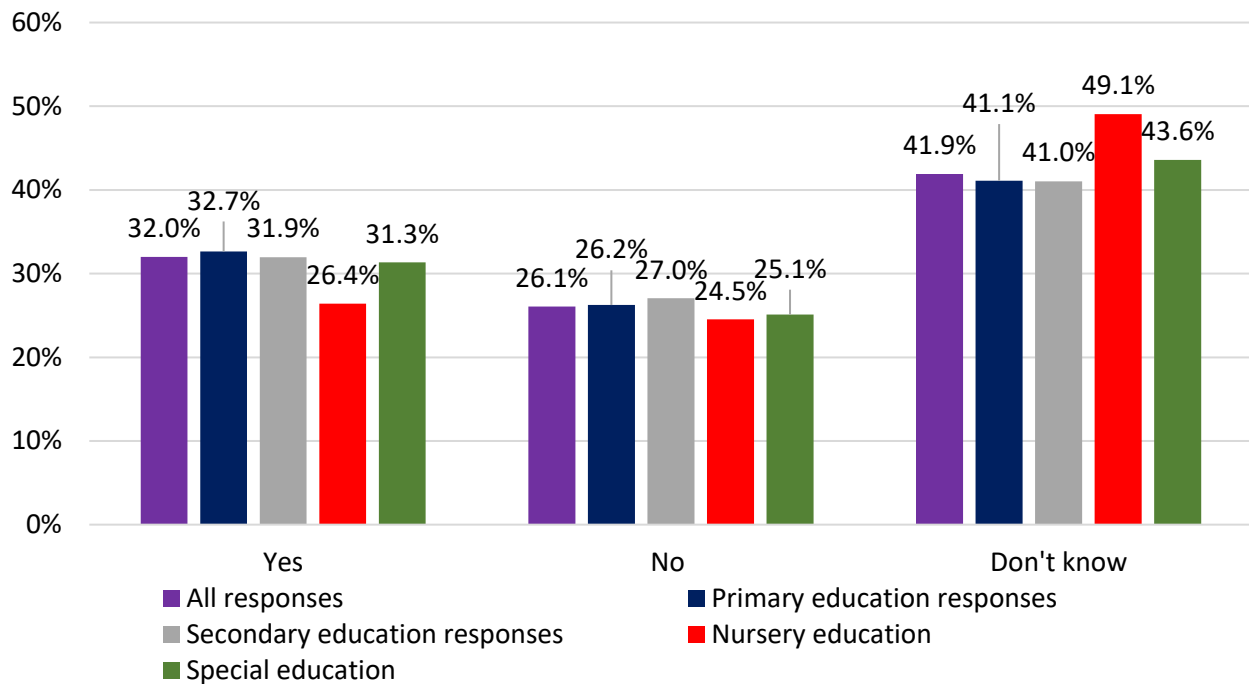
Total responses: 15,021

Figure 3: To your knowledge, has your school / employer checked the ventilation of your working spaces?



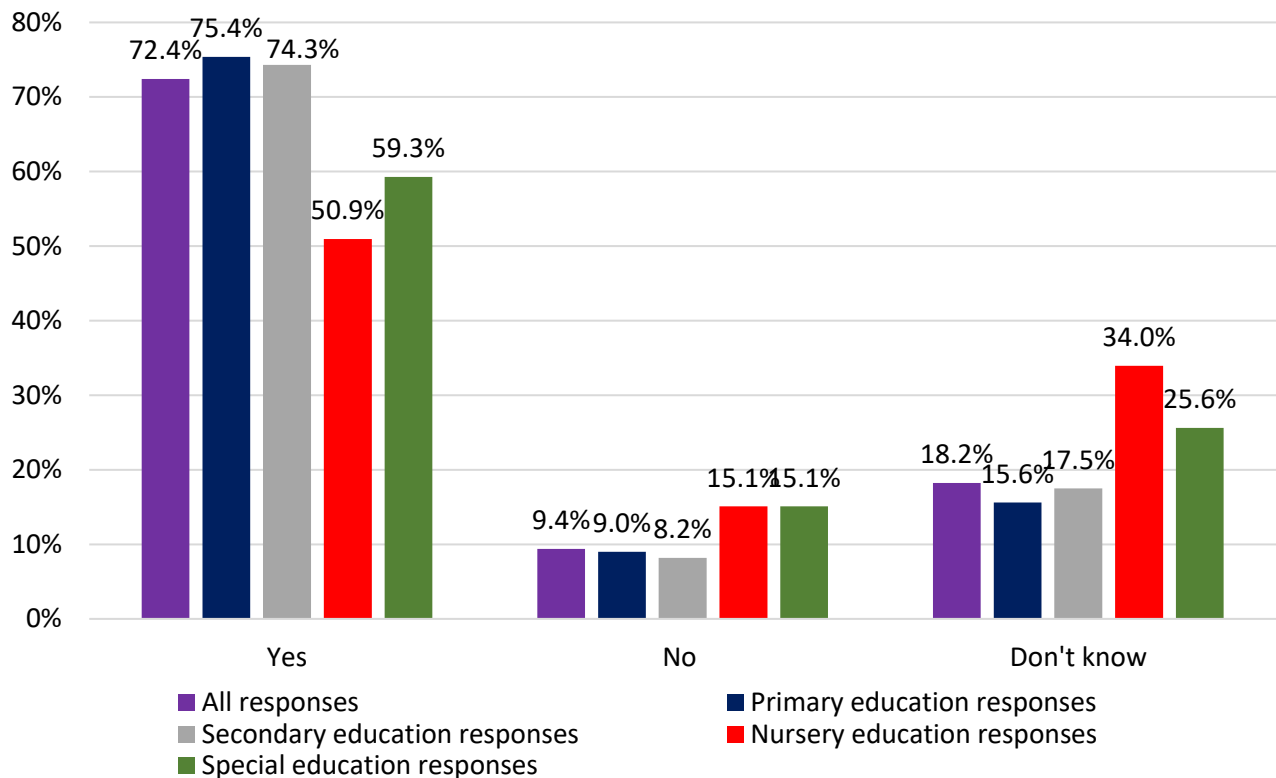
Total responses: 15,012

Figure 4: Has your school / employer set out a procedure to raise ventilation concerns?



Total responses: 15,013

Figure 5: Has your school / employer either used CO2 monitors to investigate ventilation quality or set out how your workspace's ventilation may be measured?



Total responses: 15,020

Figures 1 to 5 above show that whilst the safety mitigations around CO2 monitors and ventilation are in place, there remains inconsistency in member experiences. Two thirds of all members (67%) stated that risk assessments have been regularly revisited within their establishments, although this was slightly lower for those working in the secondary education sector (62%).

Those working in the nursery education sector were more likely to say that they felt their working spaces were well ventilated (81%) compared to those in the secondary education sector (63%). Those in the primary education sector were also more likely to report that their school or employer had checked the ventilation of their working spaces (66%) than their secondary (61%), nursery (52%) or special education (63%) counterparts.

Only 32% of respondents said their school or employer had set out a procedure to raise ventilation concerns. When disaggregated by sector there was little difference between respondents in primary, secondary and special education, with those in nursery education most likely to respond “don’t know” to this question. That in every sector, more than 40% of teachers, rising to almost 50% in Nursery, did not know of any procedure to raise ventilation concerns is worrying from a health and safety perspective.

There was unity across the primary (75%) and secondary (74%) education sectors when asked if their school or employer had either used CO2 monitors to investigate ventilation quality or set out how their workspace’s ventilation may be measured. This was much lower in the nursery (51%) and special (59%) education sectors.

Member comments on ventilation and risk assessments

There were 3,831 further comments left at the end of these questions. Within these comments, members raised time and again the issues of balancing the necessary ventilation requirements with a comfortable working environment, especially as the weather continues to turn colder. Some also raised concerns about the ability to fully ventilate their classrooms as their windows did not open fully, or that they must rely on keeping doors open throughout the school to allow air to circulate.

Some respondents stated that the communication within their school or from their employer was poor, and therefore they were not able to answer some of the questions above.

There were also a notable number of positive comments left from our members who wanted to highlight the great work that had been carried out by senior management team members in reporting CO2 levels and managing staff concerns. Below are a small number of the comments received.

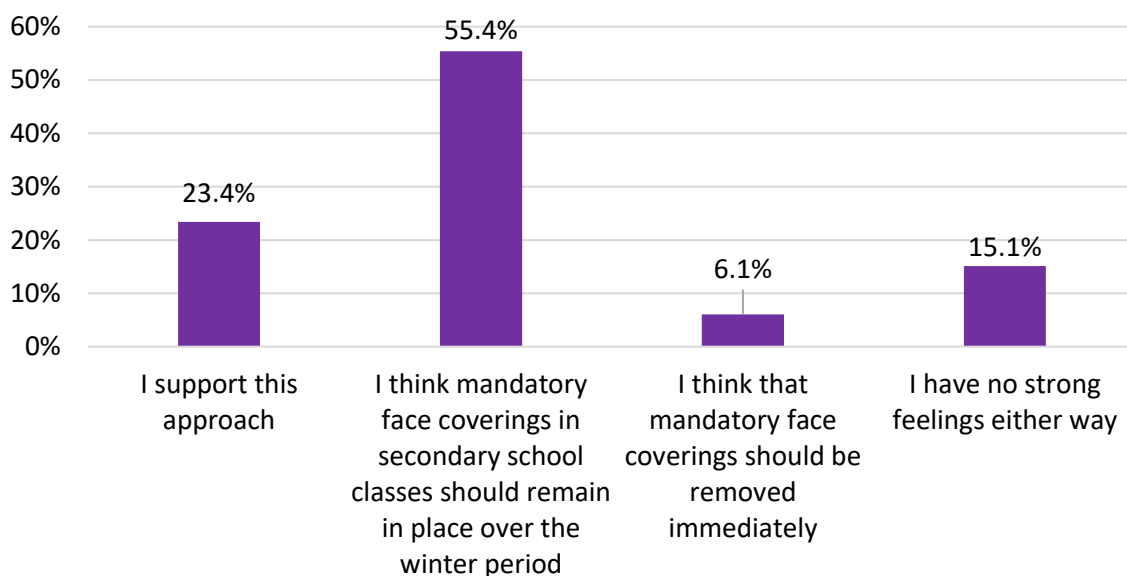
- “All the above measures have been raised but we are responsible for ventilating our own classrooms. Unfortunately, due to severe weather conditions this is not always possible, but I do generally keep an exit door or window open.”
- “Monitors shared between classes but no procedure to go with them. For example, when all windows are open but monitor is flashing.”
- “Although staff are trying to keep the school well ventilated, this is difficult when some classrooms only have very small and few windows that can open, and if they do have better options for ventilation it is now becoming very cold.”
- “Feel very left out of decision making and processes.”
- “We were issued with CO2 monitors after October break. We were asked to take a reading but not given any indication what the readings were for.”
- “The ventilation was assessed and found to be extremely poor. This was done in Sep/Oct and nothing has been done off the back of this.”

- “The rooms I am usually given are spacious with wide open windows/doors, and clearly very well ventilated.”
- “As a peripatetic teacher I find that some schools are good about ventilation and have CO2 monitors but others do not.”
- “We have monitors in each classroom and they beep if the levels are too high reminding us to open a window a bit more.”
- “I feel our risk assessments & procedures devised were thorough & maintained well. On the whole I felt safe at work and appreciate the level of effort by school management to ensure this.”
- “Schools are far too cold to work in. How is sitting eating your lunch in a freezing cold hall in your jacket good for staff morale and mental health. The children are also freezing which is affecting the learning taking place.”

Face coverings

The final question within this section looked at the use of face coverings in schools. Over half of respondents said they thought that mandatory face coverings in secondary schools should remain in place over the winter period. 23% said that they supported the Scottish Government approach to remove the mandatory wearing of face coverings as soon as it is able, with only 6% stating that they should be removed immediately. Figure 6 below details the full results to this question.

Figure 6: The Scottish Government has indicated that it intends to remove the requirement for mandatory face coverings in secondary school classes as soon as it is able. Which of the following statements best matches your view on this?



Total responses: 14,758

Member comments on face coverings

In response to the question on the use of face coverings a further 1,409 comments were left in response to this. Many members highlighted their concerns over the ever-changing environment when managing the pandemic, not least the newest variant- omicron.

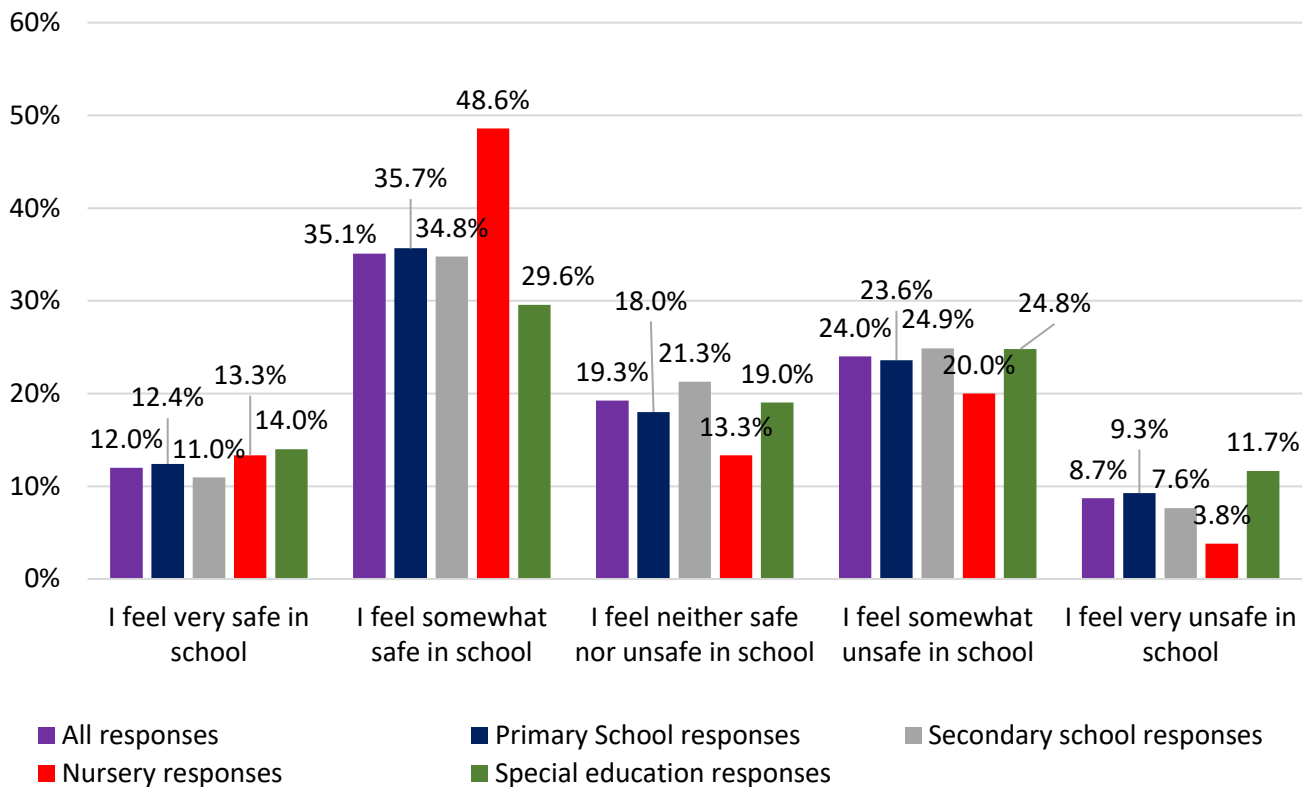
Some members within the primary sector highlighted that they believed there should be greater use with older pupils in primary school. There were also considerable concerns raised from members who had underlying health conditions who believe that masks should continue to be worn as there is evidence suggesting that they do curb infection spread.

- “Given the emerging variants, this is more essential than ever, as it has proven effectiveness, however, 50% of pupils don't wear them properly and have to be requested to keep them over their noses.”
- “Pupils are already removing them and this is not being addressed.”
- “I am hearing impaired and would prefer no masks but accept that they are necessary during the pandemic.”
- “It is becoming increasingly difficult to manage this during social times. Young people are consistently wearing a face covering in class.”
- “I caught Covid probably at school this session & feel vulnerable in a small classroom with max size 30 classes up to 7 times a day.”
- “As in Primary Sector a third of my class of 33 have had covid so definitely face coverings essential to protect self.”
- “I think it should be extended to upper stages in Primary school.”
- “I think face coverings limit infection spread, it's the least we can do and I think it works. I know from family in Spain that they have very few Covid cases but all children wear masks as do teachers and all generally comply with this, it seems to work.”
- “Evidence clearly shows that masks work. It would be premature of us to stop using them over the winter months. As someone with a weakened immune system I would feel extremely vulnerable if face coverings were abolished. Working in a school with a health condition or with people at home with health conditions is very concerning and causes a lot of worry for those going into school. This is not only my personal experience but that of other teachers I have spoken to who have vulnerable family members at home. We are all worried and removing the masks will only increase stress levels for teachers.”

Feeling safe in school

The final question within the COVID-19 section asked members how “COVID safe” they felt with the current mitigations in place. Figure 7 below shows the responses from members across different sectors.

Figure 7: With the current mitigations in place when you are in school how “Covid safe” do you feel?⁴



Total responses: 14,770

Those working within nursery education were the most likely to report feeling “COVID safe”, with 62% reporting that they felt “very” or “somewhat” safe in school. Conversely, those working in special education were the least likely to say they felt safe at school with only 44% saying they felt “very” or “somewhat” safe. 46% of those in secondary, and 48% of those in primary schools reported feeling “very” or “somewhat” safe in school.

Less than half (47%) of all respondents said they felt safe in school, reflecting the ongoing concerns around COVID-19 and its spread within schools. That around half of respondents are anxious about their safety is a matter of concern from a mental health and wellbeing health and safety perspective. Members also reported having to balance improved ventilation with working in a comfortable environment, and as the temperatures are expected to drop further through the winter months this is likely to be an ongoing issue.

⁴ Within the answer choices the options of “I don’t know” and “not applicable” were also available. Due to the very low numbers recoding this these values have been omitted from this graph. The percentages represented here at the totals with all answers included and have not been adjusted to remove the omitted data.

The results from these questions shows that the concerns around COVID-19 remain very real to those working in schools. All possible mitigations must be considered to improve our school environments.

Further Information

For more information on any of the themes within this report please contact:

Lesley Warren, Campaigns, Policy and Research Co-ordinator

Email: lwarren@eis.org.uk

Member advice and support can be found here:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Member-Support/Advice>

For more information on the health and wellbeing support available:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Member-Support/HWRResource>

Professional Learning Opportunities:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Meetings-And-Events/Courses>

For more information on the Educational Institute of Scotland:

Website: www.eis.org.uk

Twitter: @EISUnion

Facebook: Educational Institute of Scotland

Email: enquiries@eis.org.uk

Phone: +44 (0)131 225 6244

Postal address:

The Educational Institute of Scotland

46 Moray Place

Edinburgh

EH3 6BH