

Teachers' responses to the school re-opening strategy

14 May 2020



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Headlines

Schoolzone surveyed its research panel in the three days following the government's announcement of their school re-opening strategy on 11 May. 4,500 valid responses were received (breakdown appended),

- Two thirds of teachers across all key stages think that school closures have had a **significant impact** on pupils' education.
- The impact of school closures has been felt **most strongly at KS4**; slightly less so post 16.
- If schools partially re-open in June the impact will be mitigated to quite a large extent in primary schools and at KS3, but it seems **too late for exam classes**, where there will still be a high degree of concern.
- Teachers do not expect a high turnout in the school years that are scheduled to re-open in June, with **only a third of teachers expecting more than half of pupils to return**. Secondary phase return rates are expected to be a little lower than primary.
- **Three quarters** of teachers do not expect social distancing in schools to be effective.
- The only element of the suggested strategy that teachers expect to be at all **effective is via access to a Covid testing regime** – even then, under two thirds expect this to be at all effective.
- **Teachers will not want to return** to schools without effective social distancing, frequent hand washing and cleaning, reduced occupancy levels and a system of test, track and isolate in place.
- **Virtually no teachers** feel confident that adequate safety measures will be in place.
- Teachers say that the government strategy for re-opening in June is **dangerous, irresponsible, unrealistic and ill-considered**.
- The **government is very strongly not trusted** to tell teachers at all levels when it's safe to go back to school. The **scientific community** is trusted by two thirds to say when.
- If unions suggest **boycotting** the return to work, **three quarters** would follow the advice.

Impact of school closures

At the time of completing this poll, schools had been closed for seven weeks, two of which would have been Easter holidays, so effectively around 25 days of school had been lost. Exam cancellation and the knock-on effect of applications to sixth form and universities may also have affected teachers' views on the impact of school closures.

The impact on the education of young people at KS4 and at post 16 has been very significant, teachers say. 88% of KS4 teachers and 73% at post 16 think there has been some impact and **at KS4 almost half say the impact has been very significant.**

In September, Y11 and Y13 students will have nine weeks' worth of work to catch-up on, unless they – and their teachers – have been making a big effort during the closures. It might be hoped that this effort will continue during the summer holidays, but teachers will be faced with an incredibly wide range of progress among students when they return.

It's likely that some form of diagnostic assessment will be needed, either during the month that Y10 and Y12 classes are back, or in September, to help teachers to plan for the autumn

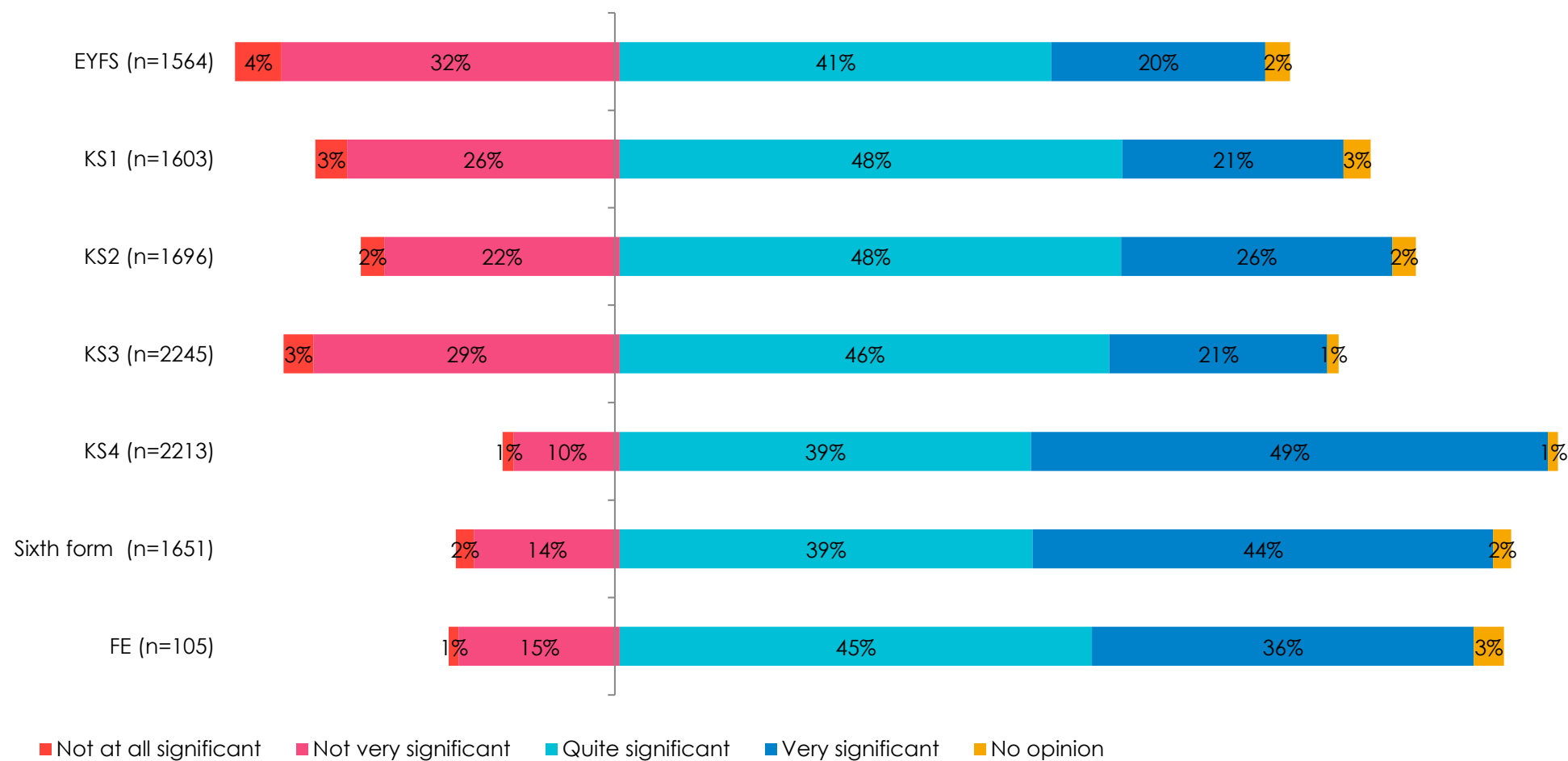
term and beyond. Students can probably expect unusually high levels of chalk-and-talk with more frequent academic testing for the second halves of their exam courses.

At earlier key stages the impact seems to have been felt rather less, with around half of teachers at EYFS, KS1 and KS2 as at the examined key stages describing the impact as very significant.

However, the impact across KS1 to KS3 is also keenly felt, with over **two thirds of teachers expressing concern** to some extent. Although the stakes are not so high at this end of school, teachers here too will face a tough challenge to regain lost ground and may find an even wider range of progress made by children during the closures than at secondary level, especially in English and maths, where home schooling is unlikely to have followed schools' well-developed strategies as well as would have been achieved in schools.

Catch-up resources in English and maths may well be in demand in September, but potentially reaching to a higher level than has previously been required.

How significant do you think the impact of education establishment closures have been on students' education so far?



Various studies have suggested that pupils aren't doing as much work as their schools expect them to during the closures. TeacherTapp [suggest](#) that only half of primary and a third of Y8 pupils are doing enough private study.

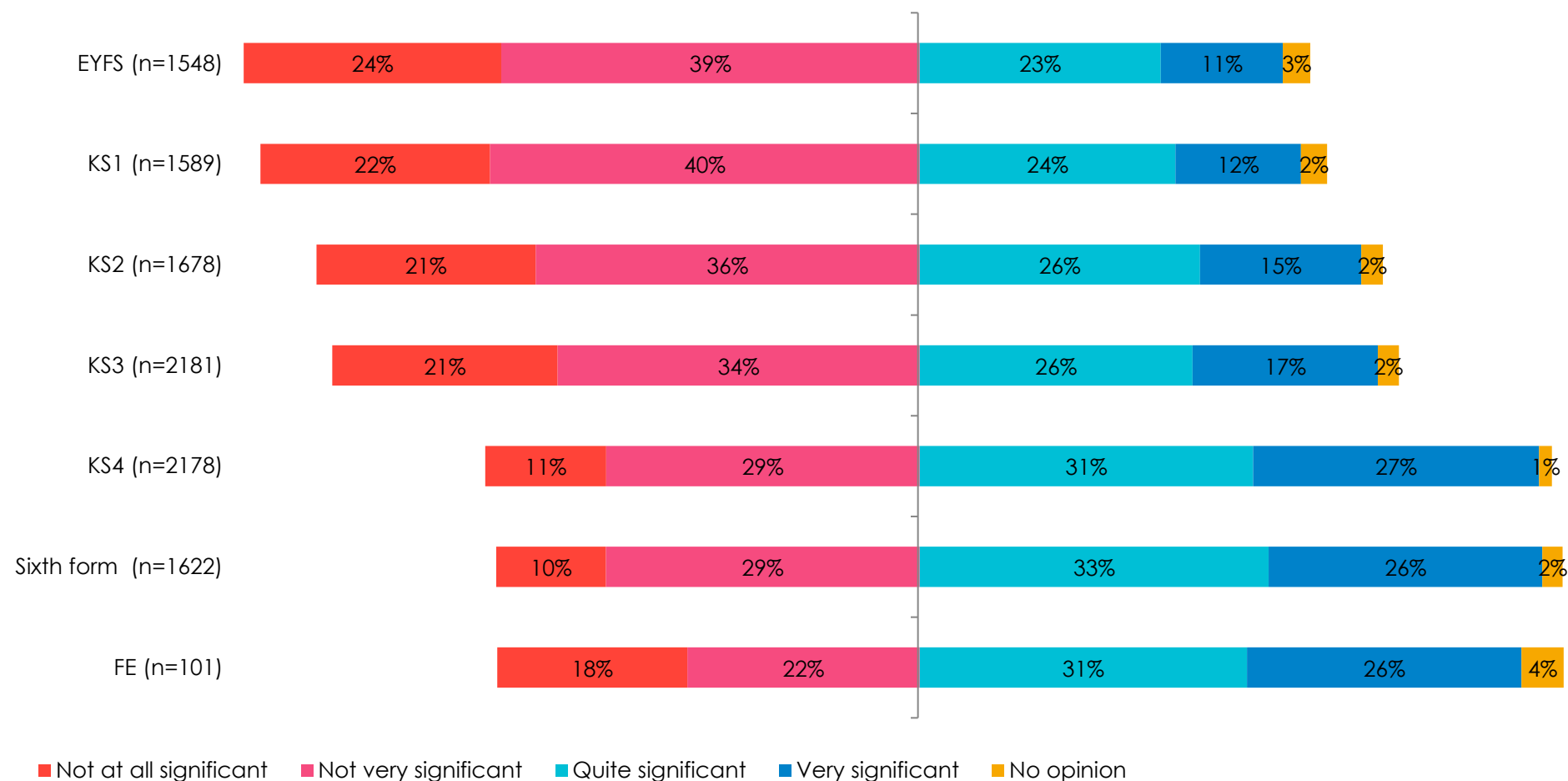
Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, [EPI research](#) found that disadvantaged children are already on average one and a half years of learning behind other pupils by the time they take their GCSEs. They have called on the government to set out a school "Catch Up Plan" to provide targeted pupil support, including additional funding, a volunteer force and suspending Ofsted inspections.

The prospect of partial **school re-opening** from 1 June seems to suggest that the impact will be **mitigated to some extent**, but over a third of EYFS and KS1 teachers think that the impact this term will still be quite significant or very significant, despite the re-opening. The proportion expressing this opinion at KS2 and KS3 is slightly higher.

Well over half of teachers at **KS4 and post 16** say **there will still be significant impact** this term on those classes which are due to return in June. In other words, less than half of secondary

teachers think that it would make much difference re-opening schools to exam classes this term.

Under the new proposals (re-opening for key transition years and exam classes in June), how significant do you think the impact will be on students' education this term?



Anticipating re-opening

The [attendance](#) rate of those pupils for whom schools have remained partially open has been low. In April, only 10% of children in need attended, while only 4% of critical workers' children turned up. Schools have been operating on a pupil:teacher ratio of **1:1.7**.

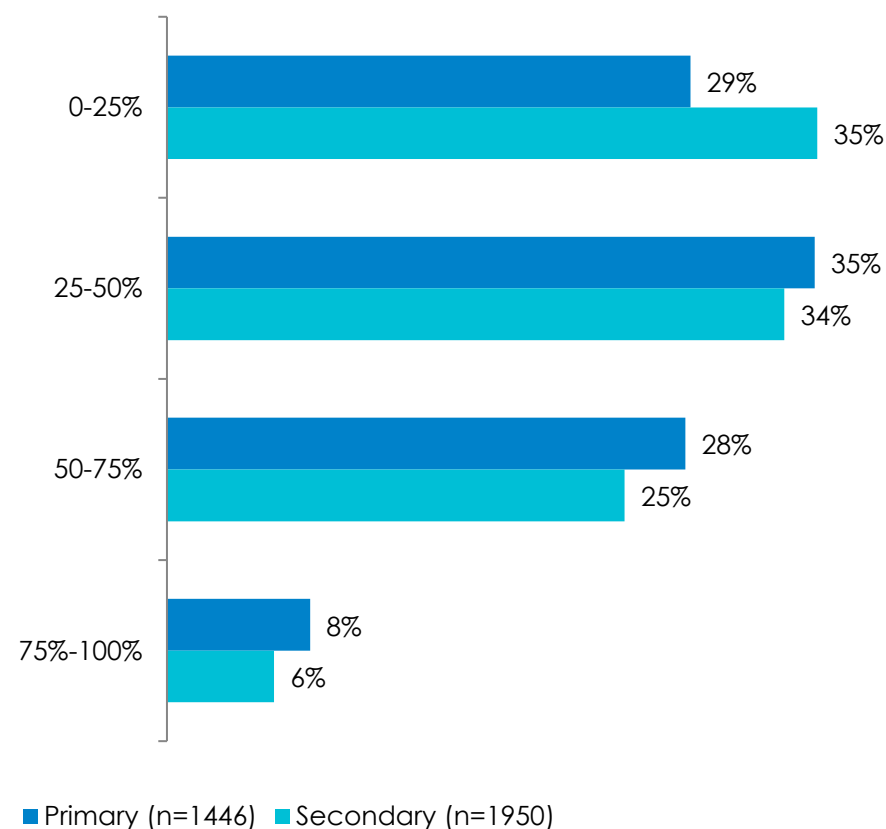
So it's not surprising that teachers have low expectations for pupils to come back in large numbers if schools re-open for specified years groups in June.

Primary teachers expect a slightly higher return rate, possibly partly because of increased parental need for child-care at that end of the school age.

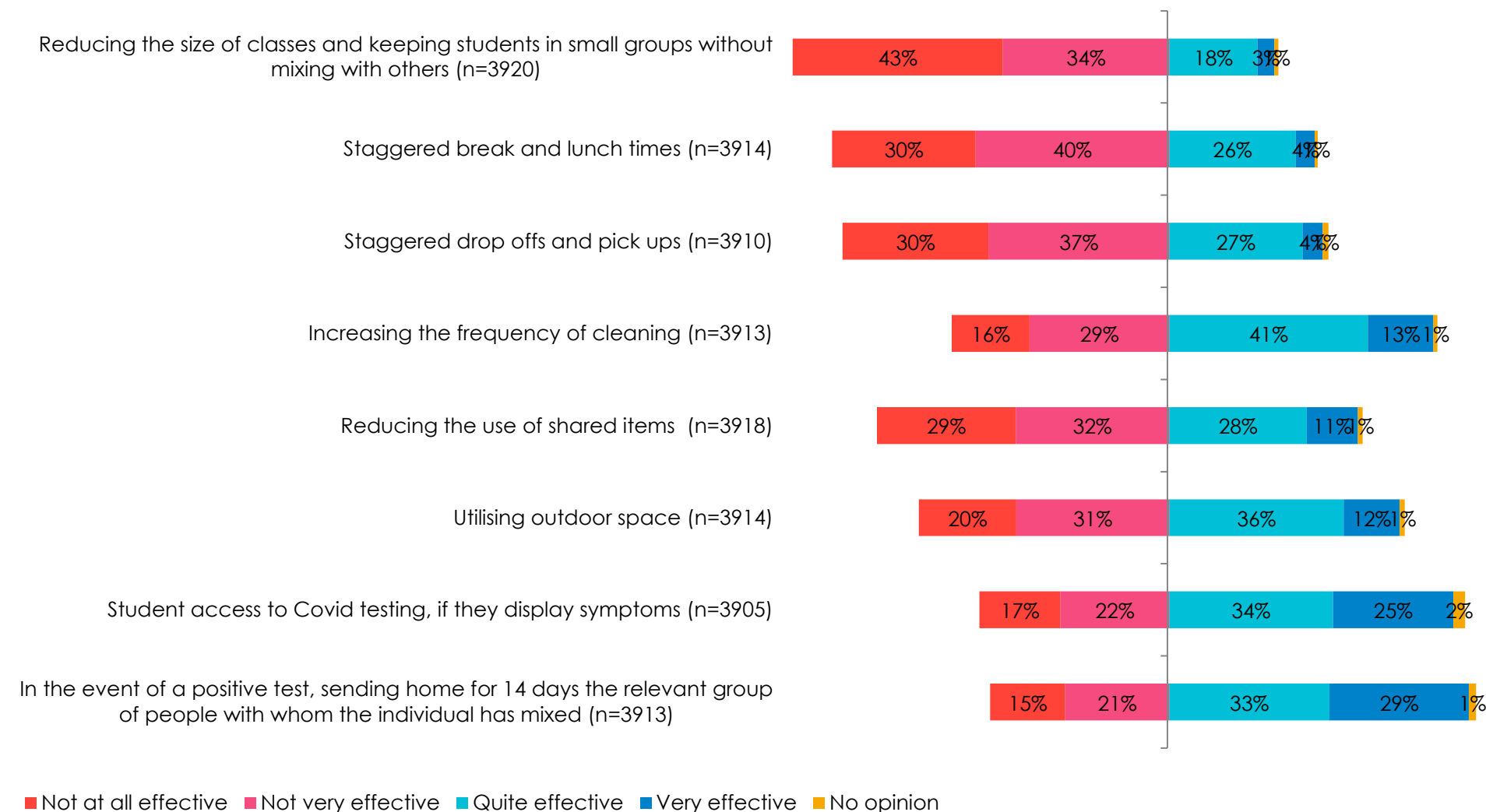
However, across the whole of EYFS to post 16, the return rate is expected to be low, with **two thirds of teachers expecting that up to a half of pupils will stay away**. A very small proportion of teachers expect more than three quarters of eligible pupils to return.

There is a high degree of concern over the likely effectiveness of the government guidelines for school re-opening.

What proportion of children in the year groups that will be open do you think will be in your school if they do re-open in June?



How effective do you think the government guidelines published 11 May will be:

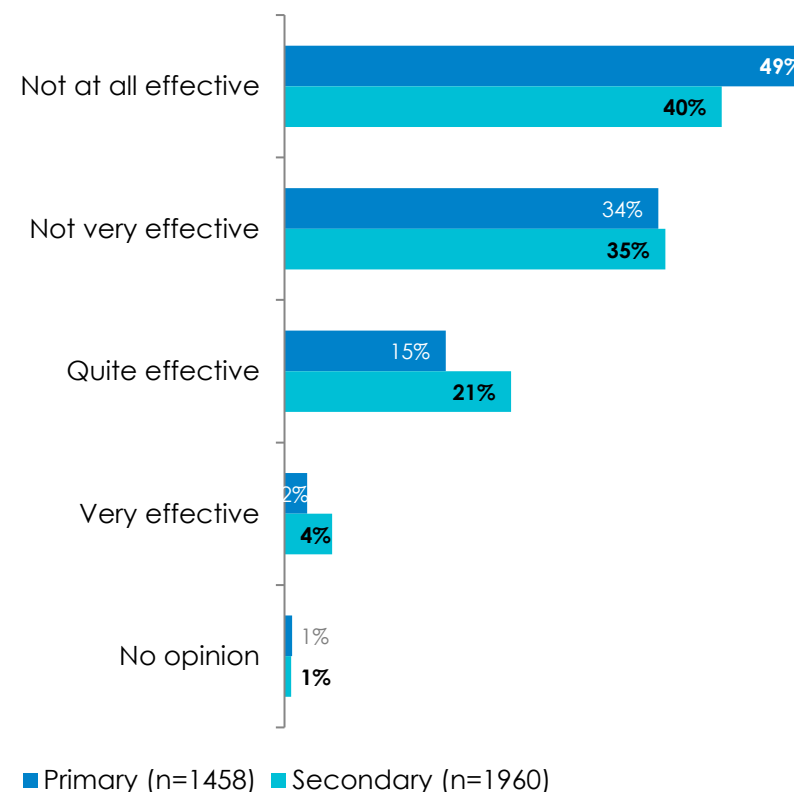


Clearly, the central principle of the guidelines: **to maintain social distancing** by keeping children within small groups, is **mistrusted**, with over three quarters of teachers fearing that it will not be effective. **Primary teachers** are even more concerned about the effectiveness of this measure.

It's not yet clear to teachers how these measures would be implemented in their own schools as there have been other suggestions that pupils should be taught by just one teacher the whole time they are in school, yet teachers would be seeing different children in primary schools each day, while at secondary, there seems little point in pupils being taught by non-specialists. Teachers have also expressed concern that the 2m separation rule has been left out of the guidance.

Staggered breaks, lunchtimes, drop offs and pick ups are also seen as likely to be **ineffective**. Break and lunchtimes need adult supervision, especially with the need to monitor physical distancing, so staggering the timings could just compound the difficulties.

Reducing the size of classes and keeping students in small groups without mixing with others



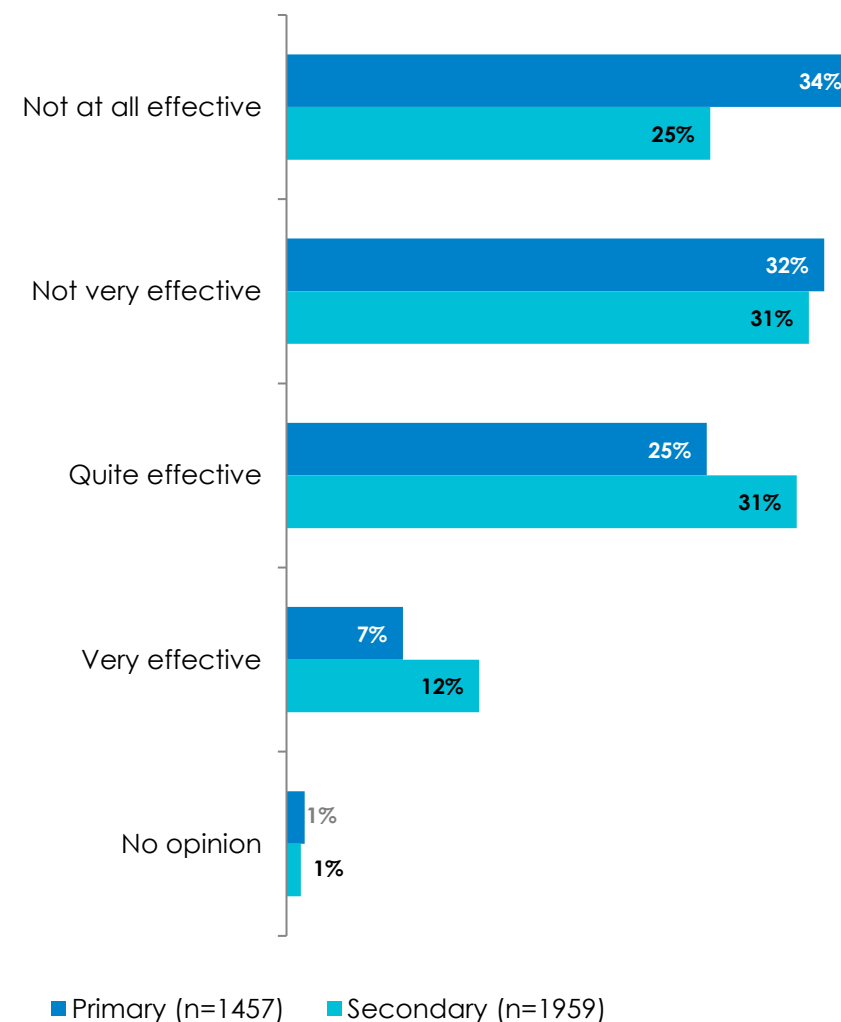
Reducing the use of shared items does not seem likely to be particularly effective, either. Again, primary teachers are less confident than secondary teachers in this regard – younger children tending to share a greater number of physical resources.

Teachers are more **divided** about the impact of **using outdoor space**, with almost half of teachers thinking this will have some effect – though only 12% think it will be very effective. This measure also brings complications which reduce the perceived impact, including supervision, reliability of the weather, impact on teaching and learning and others.

More frequent cleaning is seen as having some positive effect by just over half of teachers, though it's not clear who would be doing the cleaning.

Only testing of those displaying symptoms and sending home anyone who has mixed with them is seen as being effective by more than half of teachers. Even so, over one in three teachers do not trust these measures to be effective.

Reducing the use of shared items



Teachers are being asked to return to work while Covid-19 is still active in the community and people are still being asked to stay at home if they can. They expect **safety measures** to be in place to protect them and there is **very close agreement** about what some of those measures need to be, in order for them to return to work.

At least 85% of teachers across all phases expect the following measures to be in place:

- Effective social distancing measures for students and staff
- Frequent cleaning of surfaces, including resources
- Frequent washing of hands by students
- Reduced occupancy levels of buildings
- A system of test, track and isolate for all students and teachers before they return

At least half of teachers expect the following:

- Provision of mask and gloves (at least) for staff
- Provision of mask and gloves (at least) for students
- Students getting there without using public transport

Secondary teachers seem to have slightly higher expectations across all of these proposed strategies.

Unfortunately, teachers do not have high expectations that these measures will be in place this term. Only cleaning of surfaces and washing of hands are expected to have been provided.

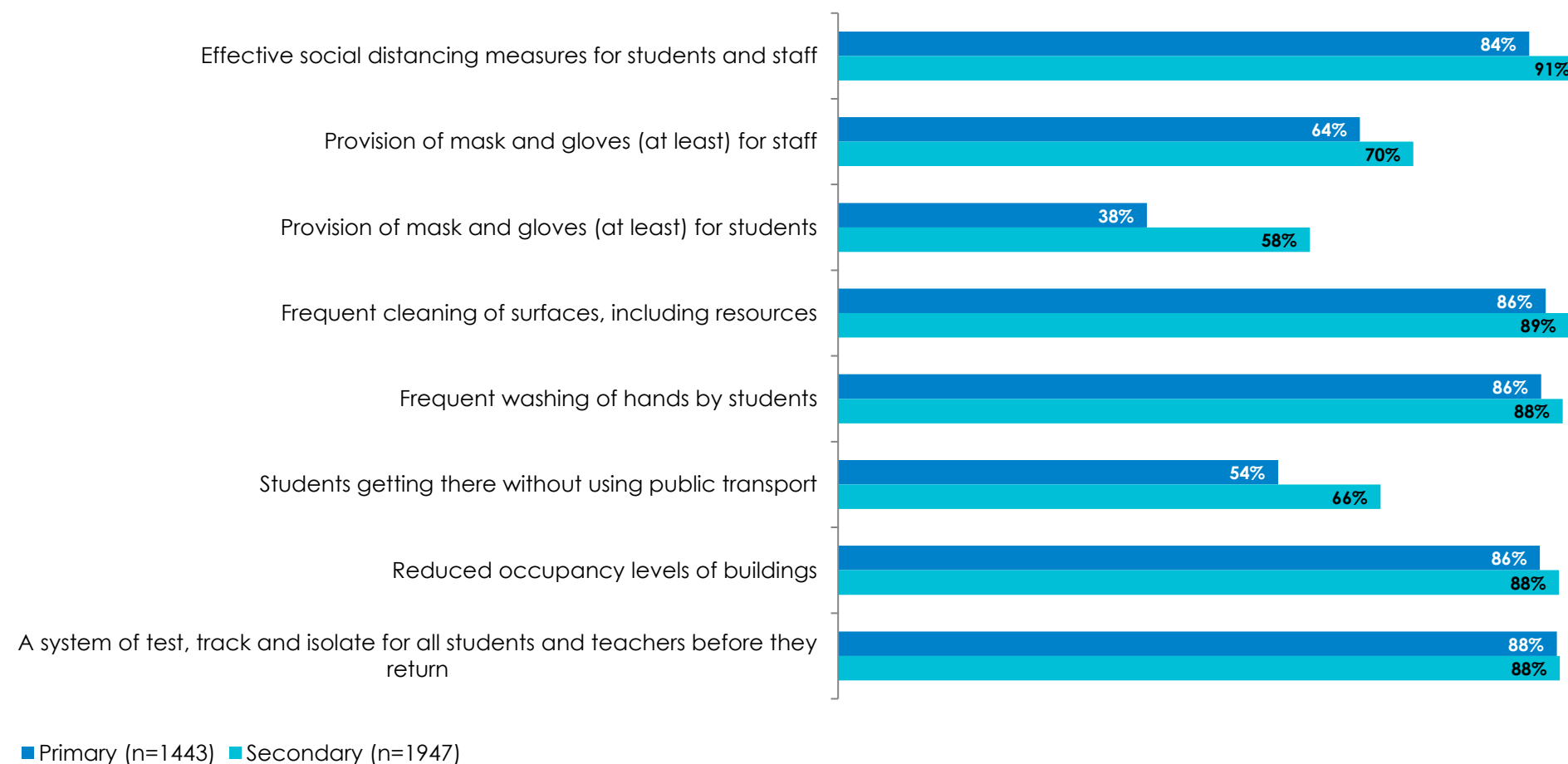
Of the other essential measures:

- Only **14% of primary** and **27% of secondary** teachers expect effective **social distancing** to be in place
- Only **22% of primary** and **42% of secondary** teachers expect **reduced occupancy** of buildings

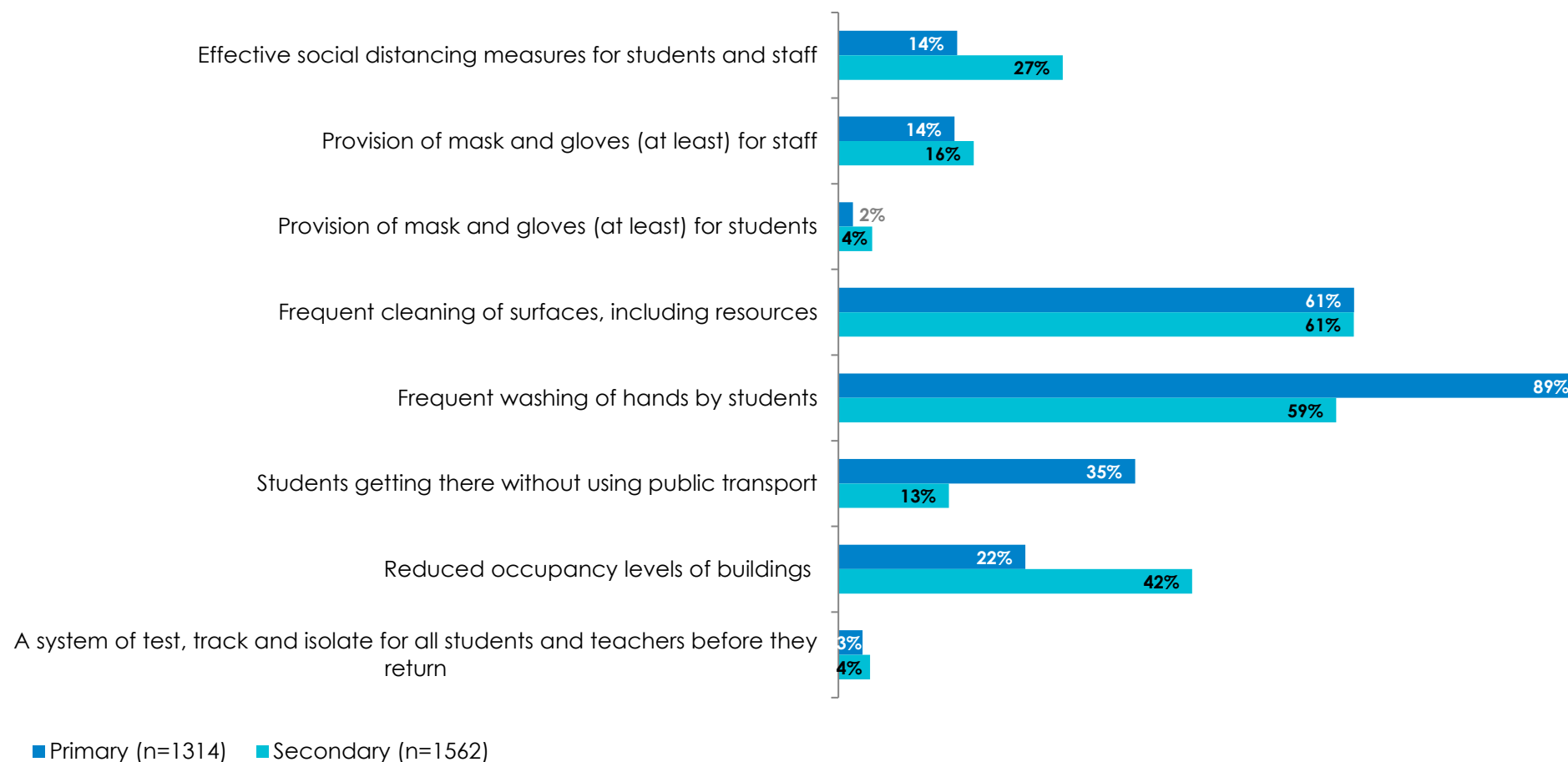
But the measure which is considered **most effective**, a system of track, trace and isolate, is considered likely to be available by **less than 4%** of teachers. This is possibly simply a reflection of the lack of availability of these tests to the wider public, but will be a cause of concern to a large number of teachers.

The provision of **masks and gloves** for use by students and teachers is also considered very unlikely, with **under 4%** expecting them to be available for students. This might be because of a lack of availability or because schools don't really expect them to be effective.

Which of the following strategies would have to be implemented, before you felt safe in returning to work?



Which of these do you think are likely to be available in your place of work this term?



How do teachers feel about returning?

When asked what **one word** respondents would use to describe the government's plans to partially re-open schools from 1 June, over 4,000 suggested responses essentially comprised around [630 different words](#). These are the most commonly used:

Dangerous	294
Ridiculous	197
Irresponsible	156
Unrealistic	132
Madness	113
Risky	103
Ludicrous	86
Unsafe	82
Rushed	74
Crazy	71
Chaotic	69
Optimistic	64
Stupid	60
Ambitious	55

Necessary	46
Scary	44
Good	43
Confused	41
Vague	41
Foolish	39
Misguided	39
Hasty	36
Sensible	36
Impractical	35
Impossible	26
Foolhardy	25
Wrong	23
Challenging	21
Ill-considered	21
Bonkers	20
Careless	20
Concerning	20

How do teachers feel about returning?

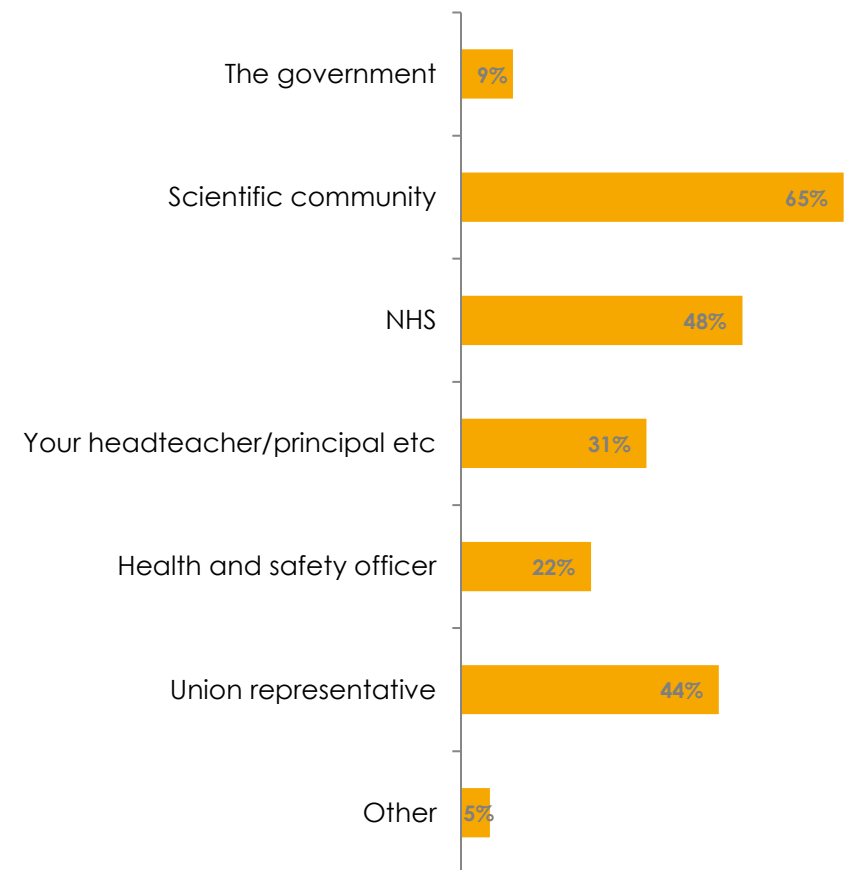
It's extremely unusual to encounter such a strength of opinion about a government policy for schools and there is clearly a strong feeling at the time of the strategy announcement that it's **not yet safe**. Some teachers (albeit a small number) fear for their lives and those of their students, or think they are being used as guinea pigs, while others use words to describe a negative impact on mental health.

Teachers clearly do not trust the government to tell them when it's safe to go back to school. Even at a local level, they don't entirely trust school leaders or health and safety officers to tell them when.

The message about when it's safe to go back needs to come from the **scientific community** – presumably when it's safe in the country as a whole, rather than just in schools.

The **NHS** is also quite highly trusted, as are **union reps**.

Whom do you trust to tell you it's safe to go back to work at your establishment? (n=4525)

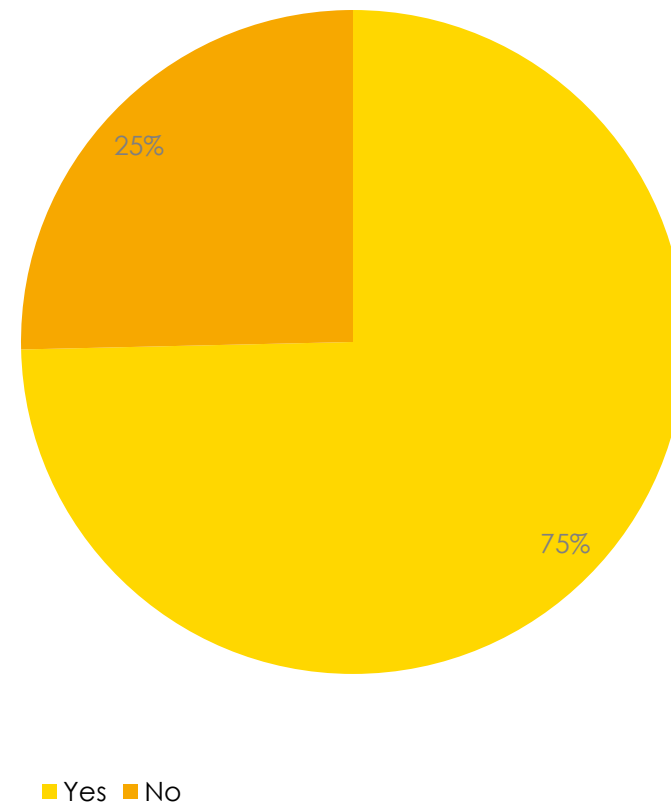


How do teachers feel about returning?

Unions have, collectively (including National Education Union, the National Association of Headteachers, NASUWT, GMB, Unison and Unite), expressed their concerns about the strategy and it seems that teachers (75%) would listen to them if they suggested that **re-opening** was **boycotted**.

It's clear that currently (12 May 2020) **teachers do not feel safe going back to school on 1 June.**

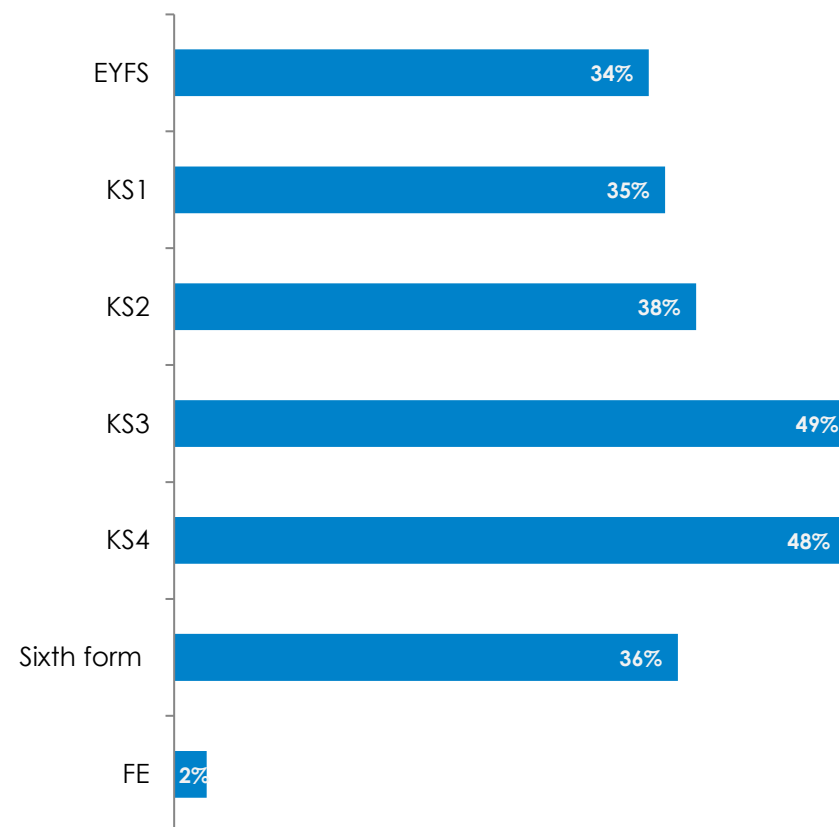
If your union suggested nationally that you boycott re-opening because of health and safety concerns, would you take part in the boycott? (n=4523)



Profile of respondent age groups taught

Our survey launched to the Schoolzone panel at 9AM on 12 May, the day after the Prime Minister announced the strategy for partial re-opening of schools scheduled for 1 June. It received over 4,600 responses within 3 days, reflecting the strength of feeling about the issue.

Does your establishment cover: (n=4602)



The logo for Schoolzone is centered within a yellow rectangular frame. The word "schoolzone" is written in a sans-serif font, with "school" in black and "zone" in yellow.

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