



No child with cancer left out

The impact of cancer on children's primary school education

CLIC Sargent, the UK's leading cancer charity for children and young people, has published new research which shows that a cancer diagnosis can have a significant impact on a child's primary school education, sometimes leaving them feeling isolated and alone.

No child with cancer left out sets out the findings from our consultation with 221 parents, 60 children, 68 CLIC Sargent health and social care professionals and 18 hospital schools. We asked them to consider the impact of cancer on children's primary school education in terms of:

- Learning in hospital or at home
- Returning to school during or after treatment
- Social needs and support.

Key findings

Learning in hospital or at home

- Over two in three (70%) parents reported that their child had received some form of education away from their primary school during their treatment, mostly through hospital schools
- All of the hospital schools we spoke to told us that the level of communication varies considerably from one primary school to another
- More than one in three (36%) parents said their child's primary school was in regular contact with their child's hospital school during their time in hospital – but the majority of families did not feel they were kept well-informed about their child's education when their child was taught in hospital
- Some children with cancer found it difficult to access home tuition, and some never managed to access it at all. Almost all the hospital schools we spoke to reported problems with home tuition
- Just over half (56%) of parents said they were satisfied that their child was given suitable school work when they were being taught at home

Returning to school

- Almost two in three (63%) parents told us they felt well-informed about their child's education at their primary school following their cancer diagnosis
- Almost two in three (64%) parents said they were consulted about how their child's diagnosis should be communicated to other teachers and school children – although one in three were not consulted on the matter
- Just over half (56%) of parents of children who have returned to school felt that their child had received sufficient support to enable them to resume as normal an education as possible

Social impact and support

- More than one in three (35%) parents said their child had experienced bullying or teasing from their peers because of their cancer diagnosis and treatment
- Almost half (47%) of parents said that their child had grown apart from friends because of their cancer diagnosis and treatment
- Almost half (47%) of parents said their child's school did not help to maintain contact with peers and friends during their absence from school.





The impact of cancer on children's primary school education

Our research has demonstrated that cancer can significantly disrupt a child's education – nine in 10 (90%) children told us that their cancer diagnosis and treatment made a difference to their school life.

Our findings show that improving communication between education professionals, a pupil with cancer and their family can considerably lessen the impact of cancer on a child's primary school education. Good communication, for example, can enable a child with cancer to keep in touch with classmates when they are absent from school, allow for a smoother transition when they return to school and help parents feel empowered and informed.

Raising awareness, and building knowledge and understanding of the impact of cancer on a child, can help teachers and other pupils to better understand and support a classmate with cancer during and after cancer treatment.

It is essential that information about hospital education and home tutoring services are made freely available to parents and professionals in order that they can more easily access these services.



"The overwhelming success was the home tutor that our local council provided. They were just wonderful. We received incredible support and every family should have that as standard."

Parent of a child with cancer

CLIC Sargent wants to see a primary education system that enables children diagnosed with cancer to receive the support they need quickly, and for as long as they need it, so that cancer does not unnecessarily impact on their education or their social and personal development. In order for this to become a reality, systems for funding hospital schools and home tuition must be fair and transparent to enable children with cancer to receive sufficient education that is flexible enough to meet their needs.



Ways forward

Policy and influencing

- Proposed changes to SEN and disability provision across the UK, in particular the Children and Families Bill in England, must take into account the needs of children with cancer. CLIC Sargent will seek to raise awareness of their needs and influence policy makers to ensure that children with cancer receive the support they need in education to achieve their full potential
- Government funding reforms must ensure that hospital school and home tuition funding arrangements allow children with cancer to access appropriate, quality provision. We will continue to work together with hospital schools to ensure that government funding reforms are informed by the needs of children with cancer

Information

- Good information for children, parents and professionals on how they can support continued education during cancer treatment and beyond is vital. Parents must be empowered with information about how the education system works, their child's rights and how to access the support that they need. CLIC Sargent will signpost families and professionals to existing information and work in partnership with others to develop resources where there are gaps
- Our research illustrates a number of good practice examples of how to support children learning in hospital, at home and when they return to primary school. We will share these ways of working with policy makers and education professionals to help them gain new insights and inspiration

Communication and engagement

- Primary schools, hospital schools and families play a vital role in helping children with cancer stay in touch with classmates when they are absent from school. CLIC Sargent will seek to raise awareness of good practice, such as encouraging phone calls and letters and by maximising the use of technology
- Our research shows that by primary schools adopting an individualised and flexible approach to supporting the child, the experience of children returning to school during and after cancer treatment can be greatly improved. CLIC Sargent will share examples of good practice and provide information to schools encouraging them to deliver the reasonable adjustments that a child with cancer might need on their return to school
- Our research highlights the importance and benefits of improving communication between education and other professionals involved in a child's cancer journey, and CLIC Sargent will share the findings and best practice to support a more integrated response. In particular, we will promote the use of Teachers' Days as a particularly effective tool in improving primary school teachers' understanding of childhood cancer.

To download a copy of *No child with cancer left out* go to our website www.clicsargent.org.uk/nochildwithcancerleftout or email info@clicsargent.org.uk