

PACTS Post-Inspection Survey September 2020

Background

PACTS conducted an electronic survey over four weeks during September and early October 2020 to assess what changes parent/carers had experienced in services and support between November 2019 (the date of the previous survey) and August 2020. Questions remained largely the same as in the previous survey, asking whether services had been better, worse or overall the same as in the previous period, followed by open-text questions on how things had changed or stayed the same. As before, the survey was open to any parent/carer and not simply PACTS members.

There were however three significant differences between last year's questions and this year's: thanks to Covid-19, which hit in late March 2020, we asked parents/carers to tell us about their experiences both before March 2020 and since March 2020. In the latter case, we asked them to take into account the significant disruption the pandemic has caused.

Secondly, we asked respondents to give the first three letters of their postcode to understand more about which parts of Stockport had responded.

Thirdly, we asked for volunteers to become additional case study families. 58 families volunteered and we are now looking at these responses to establish a smaller but representative set of families whom we can follow up.

This survey analysis shows the responses this year. Overall conclusions and comparisons with 2019 come at the end of the paper. Percentages have been rounded.

Headlines

This was our biggest survey to date: 157 responses compared with 2019's 72. These 157 people wrote about 209 children and young people living or receiving services in Stockport, compared with 86 in 2019.

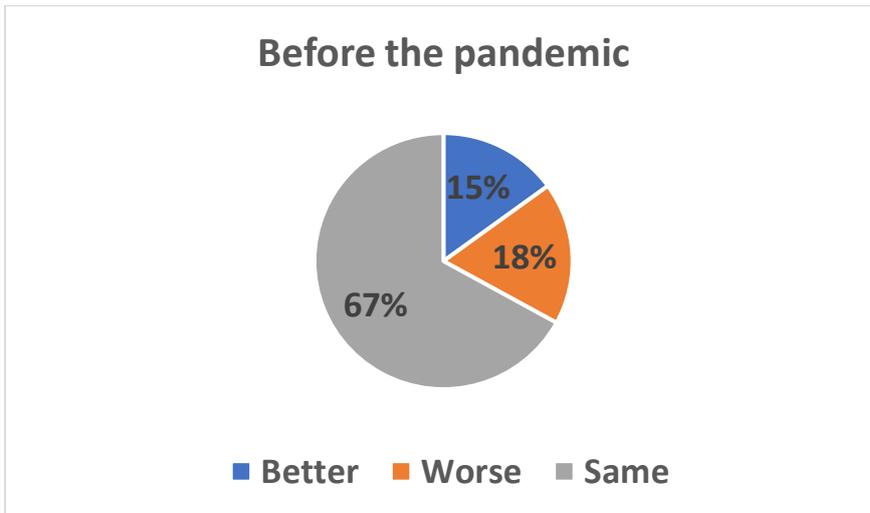


Nearly 90% of replies were about the 5-16 age group. This gave us a good picture of the lived experience of school-age children and young people.

68% of replies from wealthier areas of Stockport
15% from less well-off parts of Stockport

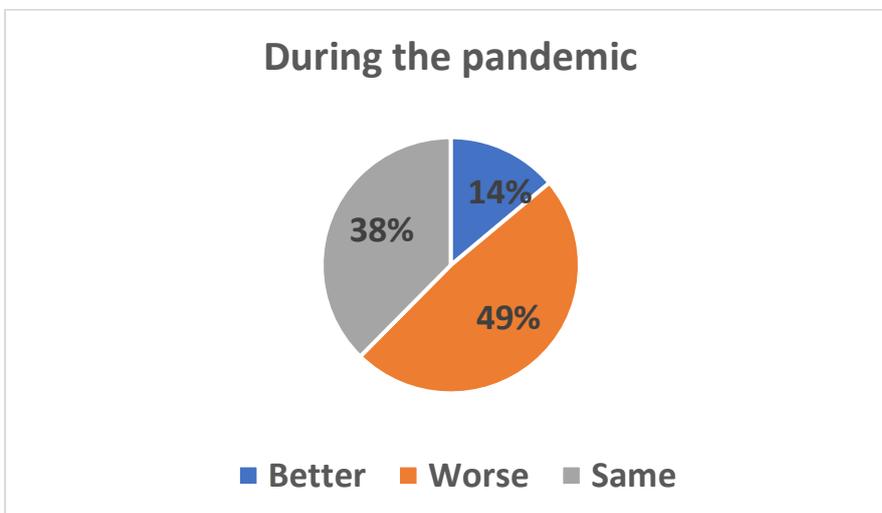
But almost seven out of ten replies came from people in the better-off parts of Stockport. There weren't many replies from people in more deprived areas. That means the survey doesn't give us a really accurate picture across the whole of Stockport.

Headlines - before and during the pandemic



- 15% of people thought services and support were better than last year (slightly up on 2019)
- 18% of people thought they'd got worse (a lot smaller than in 2019)
- 67% of people thought they'd stayed about the same (a lot more than in 2019)

Comments were often less detailed this year than last year. Most were about education, but the rest tended to be about services generally.



- 14% of people thought services and support were better
- 49% of people thought they'd got worse
- 38% of people thought they'd stayed about the same

Many families felt isolated and left to home educate or deal with difficult health issues without the necessary support. On the other hand, others said services responded better and communication was better than before Covid-19 struck.

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Survey results in detail

Q1 Between November 2019 and August 2020, were you a parent/carer of a child or young person with SEND 0-25 living or receiving education, health or social services in Stockport?

157 respondents answered yes and five answered no. This survey gathered over double the responses of the last survey, possibly indicating that SEND issues are even higher on the agenda of parent/carers than previously.

Q2 Thinking ONLY about your children and young people with SEND, which age group(s) do they fall into now?

	2020	%	2019	%
0 - 4	6	3	6	7
5 - 11	89	43	48	56
12 - 16	94	45	17	20
17 - 25	20	10	15	17
	209		86	

As last year, these age ranges were chosen to reflect educational key stages. Respondents indicated the number of children they had with SEND, hence the total here is 209 not 157.

This year's survey not only had a higher response rate, but the largest response (higher than last year) was split quite evenly between the 5-11 and 12-16 age range, with few responses from parent/carers of children in the other age groups. Arguably the survey therefore presents a more balanced picture of services and support during the main years of formal education and before the 16+ progression into education, training or employment. That said, there were slightly more responses from the 17-25 age group than in 2019.

Q3 Please give us the first three letters of your postcode.

This was an optional question and new this year. There were 152 responses:

		%			%
SK1	4	3	SK7	18	12
SK2	17	11	SK8	54	36
SK3	13	9	SK12	2	1

SK4	5	3	M22	2	1
SK5	5	3	WA15	1	<1
SK6	31	20			

It's important to note that nearly 70% of responses came from addresses covering Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple & Marple Bridge (SK6); Bramhall, Hazel Grove and Woodford (SK7); and Cheadle, Cheadle Hulme, Gatley and Heald Green (SK8). By contrast, few responses came from the Heatons (SK4) or Brinnington and Reddish (SK5). The two apparent outliers (M22 – Wythenshawe and Northenden and WA15 – Warrington) can be accounted for by the fact that the survey includes children and young people who receive services in Stockport as well as those resident in the borough.

It's disappointing that the survey didn't gather a more even representation across Stockport. It's also in contrast to the findings of the 2019 SEND JSNA which estimated that rates of SEN need are highest in Brinnington, Central Stockport, Davenport, Cale Green, Edgeley and Cheadle Heath (roughly SK1, 3 and 5).

Q4 Thinking ONLY about these children and young people before the pandemic (November 2019 – early March 2020), did services and support for them overall get better, worse, or stay the same?

	BETTER	WORSE	SAME
0 – 4	1	-	5
5 – 11	11	12	55
12 – 16	14	14	53
17 - 25	1	8	10
Totals	27 (15%)	34 (18%)	123 (67%)
Total responses: 184			

The total response was 184, higher than the 157 respondents. This can be explained because respondents were asked to consider the experiences of their children (209) and some respondents probably wrote about the experiences of all their children with SEND.

The open-text answers 6-8 below show what respondents thought were better, worse or the same.

Q5 Thinking ONLY about these children and young people since the pandemic (March – August 2020), did services and support for them overall get better, worse, or stay the same?

	BETTER	WORSE	SAME
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0 – 4	-	3	2
5 – 11	13	35	28
12 – 16	12	38	34
17 - 25	-	14	5
Totals	25 (14%)	90 (49%)	69 (38%)
Total responses: 184			

The Covid-19 pandemic has been unprecedented, as has the response of services and support. We asked respondents to evaluate their quality taking into account the challenges – a difficult task. It would be unfair therefore to set much store by these figures. We might comment though how remarkable it is to see that slightly fewer than half the respondents thought services were worse and some thought they were better. The open-text answers 9-11 throw more light on these figures.

Open-text responses: Qs 6-11

There's some useful information in Qs 6-11 overall on how respondents thought services and support were better, worse or the same over the period November 2019 – August 2020. However, there was also a small number of confused responses: some seemed to put comments in the wrong section (e.g. commenting under the "Better" questions 6 or 9 that things hadn't changed or had got worse); others put comments that seemed to relate to the pandemic period in the pre-pandemic section. This analysis has tried to reassign such comments, but conclusions below have to be drawn with this in mind.

Q6 If you ticked overall better for question 4 (before the pandemic), please tell us how things got better overall

Just over half the comments related explicitly to education, with roughly another third commenting on services overall. Very few comments related to health or social care. Comments on education related generally to interventions from individual support workers of different kinds or school overall providing valuable and effective support, such as:

- My daughter started showing signs of depression towards the end of last year. Her school brought in outside help from the charity Place to Be which helped immensely.
- Started to see a support worker regularly in school.
- More 1 to 1 work and specific work. Was using a scribe or computer for longer written pieces and tests.

All but two of the comments related to the 5-16 cohort of children and young people.

Q7 If you ticked overall worse for question 4 (before the pandemic), please tell us how things got worse overall

The vast majority of comments again related to the 5-16 age group. This time almost half the comments were very generic in nature, complaining of lack of support from services. Some commented on the lack of communication, others on lack of appointments (though which service was not specified).

The next largest group, about a quarter of the comments, related to education and covered poor transition, inappropriate work being set, insufficient or lack of support in school and failure to follow recommendations (presumably assessment recommendations). A few respondents used terms like “constant battle to get help”. Health accounted for over ten percent of the comments, referring to waiting lists for mental health support and one respondent complaining that professionals were giving conflicting advice. Nearly ten percent of comments concerned central services, mentioning “long delays to EHCPs” or “schools expected to do all the work with less resources from LA/other agencies”.

Eight comments came from respondents of young people aged 17-25 and described a general lack of support. One respondent commented on staff with poor understanding of dealing with young people with SEND, including a caseworker with “little knowledge or understanding of the EHCP process or legal responsibilities towards the YP”.

In summary, although nearly half the comments related to specific services, most of the comments pointed to systemic failures rather than problems with individual staff.

Q8 If you ticked overall the same for question 4 (before the pandemic), please tell us how things stayed the same overall

There were almost 100 comments in this section, the largest response to Qs 6-8. I tried to analyse the total responses to this question to find out whether these seemed to be “the same – just as good” or “the same – just as bad”. About half appeared to fall into each category but with 60% of the comments in the 5-11 age group positive rather than negative, such as:

- school were providing face to face meetings to discuss the SEN plans and review them
- school and parents continued to work together for the benefit of our children
- most of our support is delivered from school which have always provided amazing support.

Comments on health and overall provision were evenly balanced between positive and negative. There were again very few comments about social care, but included a complaint about the limited amount of Aiming High support.

A similar picture emerged in the comments about the 12-16 age group, with more positive than negative comments about education and few comments on either health or social care. About two-thirds of the comments were generic, such as:

- Nothing changed from the service they had been receiving for years
- I get one phone call a year so it’s been the same for me

There were again relatively few responses about the 0-4 and 17-25 age groups and those that were given were often generic.

Q9 If you ticked overall better for question 5 (since the pandemic), please tell us how things got better overall. Remember to take into account the restrictions placed on services

This was the most heartening section of the survey to analyse. Comments were exclusively related to the 5-16 age group, again with a roughly equal number in each. Education featured in nearly half the comments:

- More 1:1 contact via phone. SENCO rang almost weekly had some long chats. She emailed special work, got me in touch with the school counselling service available over lockdown and even dropped off some helpful stationery my son needed. She was a treasure.
- Better communication from school
- Lessons online good email communication and regular phone calls
- She remained in school under the key worker group. Extra support put in place during the holidays through school and fostering agency
- Communication and contact has been excellent both before and after the pandemic. The support during the pandemic was exceptional. Phone calls from the headteacher, the pastoral lead and the form tutor. XXX's relationships with the teachers have really helped him settle in. They have the right balance, so respectful towards the students, friendly yet XXX completely aware of the boundaries. This school is excellent.

The next largest category of comment was about services overall, with the following typical:

- Before the pandemic we had little or no support, now we do
- Regular check-ins with us as parents and not just the school informing us

Again, there were few health or social care comments and a single comment on central services:

- Communication was better in the lockdown as we were nearing the time specified in the EHC Plan process, so the LA and Adapt Team stayed in contact with us. XXX our caseworker at LA was extremely professional and supportive, ensuring the EHC Plan was in place.

Q10 If you ticked overall worse for question 5 (since the pandemic), please tell us how things got worse overall. Remember to take into account the restrictions placed on services

Again most comments related to the 5-16 age group, split roughly equally. Almost half the comments were about services overall, with around a third concerning education and just over a tenth health. Social care and central services received very few comments.

Comments relating to services overall specified the lack of communication and cancelled appointments, but the most common one was "no support at all" or "cannot access services". Some commented tellingly on the impact of the disruption: "There was no extra help. She completely lost focus. Anxiety hit rock bottom". One parent having to work from home and support a child with high support needs was eventually diagnosed by the GP with burnout. A sense of isolation and helplessness

ran through most of the comments. One respondent said “It’s like we stopped existing”.

A similar story emerges from comments on education. Parent/carers understandably struggled with home education and complained of receiving little or no support or undifferentiated or inappropriate material for the child to complete. The suspension of HYMs appointments and the lack of face to face support from Children’s Therapies were also felt keenly.

There were more comments about young people in the 17-25 age group than in other open-text questions. Most concerned the lack of support generally.

Q11 If you ticked overall the same for question 5 (since the pandemic), please tell us how things stayed the same overall. Remember to take into account the restrictions placed on services

Again I tried to analyse the total responses to this question to find out whether these were “the same – just as good” or “the same – just as bad”. There seemed to be a roughly even balance of each, with comments on the 5-16 age group slightly more positive than negative. Few comments related to the 0-4 or 17-25 age groups.

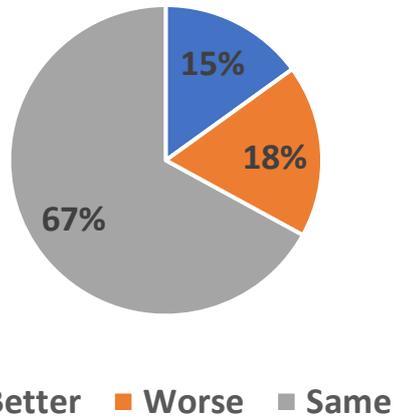
Over half the comments were about services overall and almost a third about education, plus two references to social care, two to health services and one about emotional wellbeing. A few comments showed services performing as excellently during the pandemic as they had before. Some respondents generally appreciated the remote support they received but others felt they were as badly off as they had been before the pandemic hit.

Conclusions and comparison with 2019 post-inspection survey

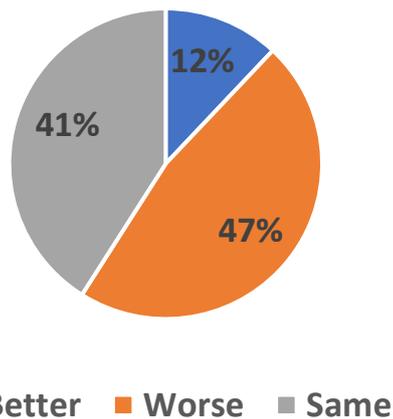
Comparisons with last year’s survey have to be tentative. The pandemic disrupted everything and so it would be unfair to compare opinions on services’ performance in 2019 with the period March to August 2020. On the other hand, comparing 2019 with the period November 2019 to February 2020 means measuring half a year’s experience against a full year’s experience. It would also be surprising if the impact of the pandemic had not to some extent distorted or overshadowed memories of the time before that. Conclusions have to be drawn with all this in mind.

Better, worse or the same before the pandemic?

Before the pandemic by %



2019 by %



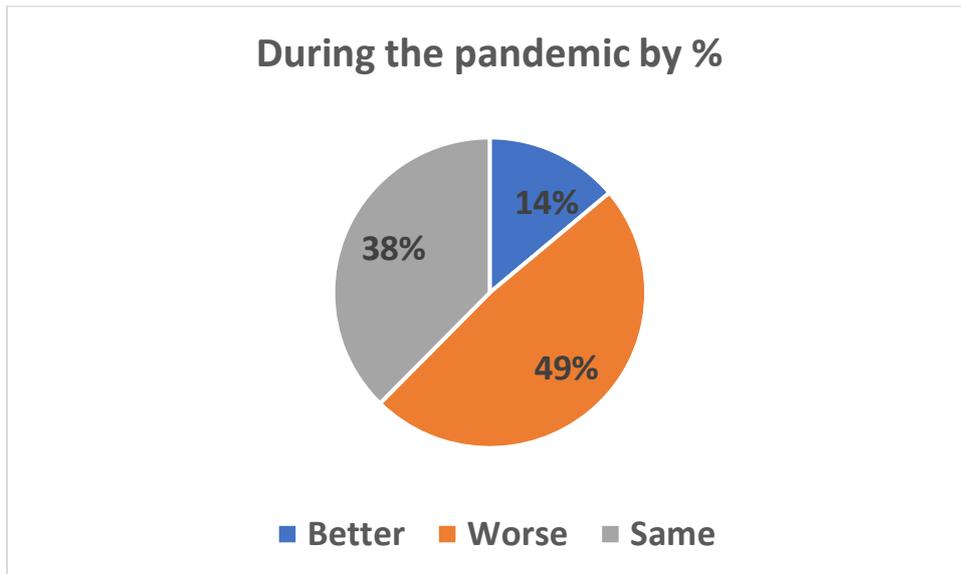
The percentage of respondents who believed services and support were better was slightly higher this year at 15%. A lot more than in 2019 thought they were about the same and far fewer than in 2019 thought them worse. While we might have hoped for a bigger figure than 15% who thought services and support better, it's encouraging that the downward trend of last year seems to have slowed markedly. Although better/worse figures are pretty even for the primary and secondary phases, only one respondent thought the experience of their children aged 17-25 was better and eight thought it worse. This is a very small sample but it repeats what we saw last year.

How was it better, worse or the same before the pandemic?

Education again received most comments. Although there were few comments on social care in 2019, there were even fewer in 2020. This year we also catalogued comments on central services, whereas last year we did not.

Comments this year tended to be slightly more generic and gave less detail. Where they were positive, this could indicate services combining for the benefit of the child or young person. Last year we noticed that improvements were often attributed to receiving an EHCP or getting a diagnosis which brought additional support. This year there were few such comments and fewer complaints about waiting times, but perhaps this was because of the onset of the pandemic and the inevitable disruption to services generally. As last year, there was no mention of any product of the Improvement Programme, although there may have been indirect impact.

What to make of the pandemic period comments?



Disruption to services since March 2020 has been unprecedented. Given this, the number of positive comments showing professionals rising to the challenge is truly remarkable. There was some irony in reading comments that services were more responsive and communication better in the pandemic than under normal conditions. Conversely, other families felt isolated, trying to home school with inappropriate materials or insufficient support. The pandemic may be widening inequalities for children and young people with SEND, not only when compared with their peers without SEND, but when comparing one with another. And this is probably not related to issues of social deprivation, since nearly 70% of respondents live in wards generally considered more affluent.

Paul Harper October 2020