



SCHOOL EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 WERE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS READY?

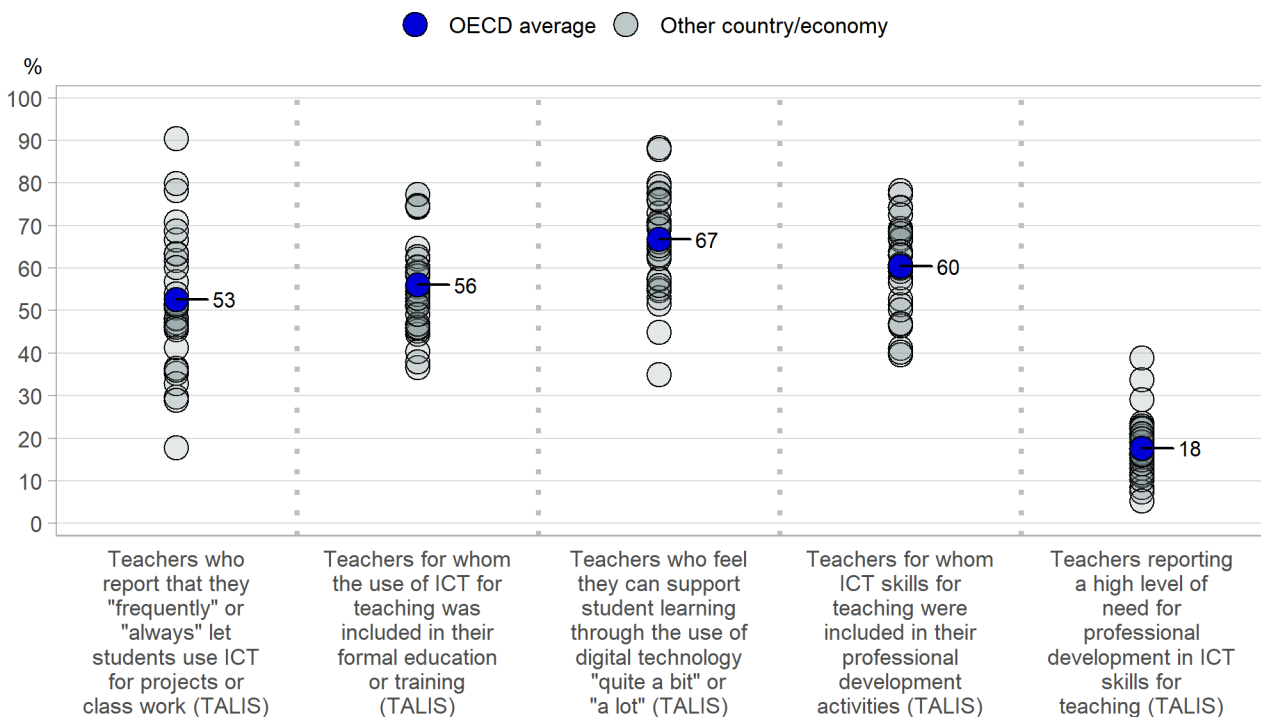
Ireland

As the COVID-19 pandemic worsened in countries across the globe, most governments took the precaution of closing their schools in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus. In Ireland, excluding the non-compulsory part of the curriculum, each week of school closures represents about 28 hours of face-to-face compulsory instruction time at school (lower secondary school – general orientation), that is to say 3% of annual compulsory instruction time. Schools were forced to replace this time in class with online learning and home schooling, in most cases facilitated by teachers and parents.

After weeks of school closures, some countries are now starting the complicated process of gradually reopening their schools. To support these efforts, this COVID-19 country note aims to bring together evidence from various OECD school education surveys conducted prior to the crisis and use it to examine how prepared teachers, students and schools were in Ireland to face the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view to informing and guiding future policy responses to the crisis.

Teachers', students' and school's familiarity with the use of ICT for teaching and learning prior to the crisis

Figure 1. Teachers' preparedness for ICT-based teaching prior to the crisis



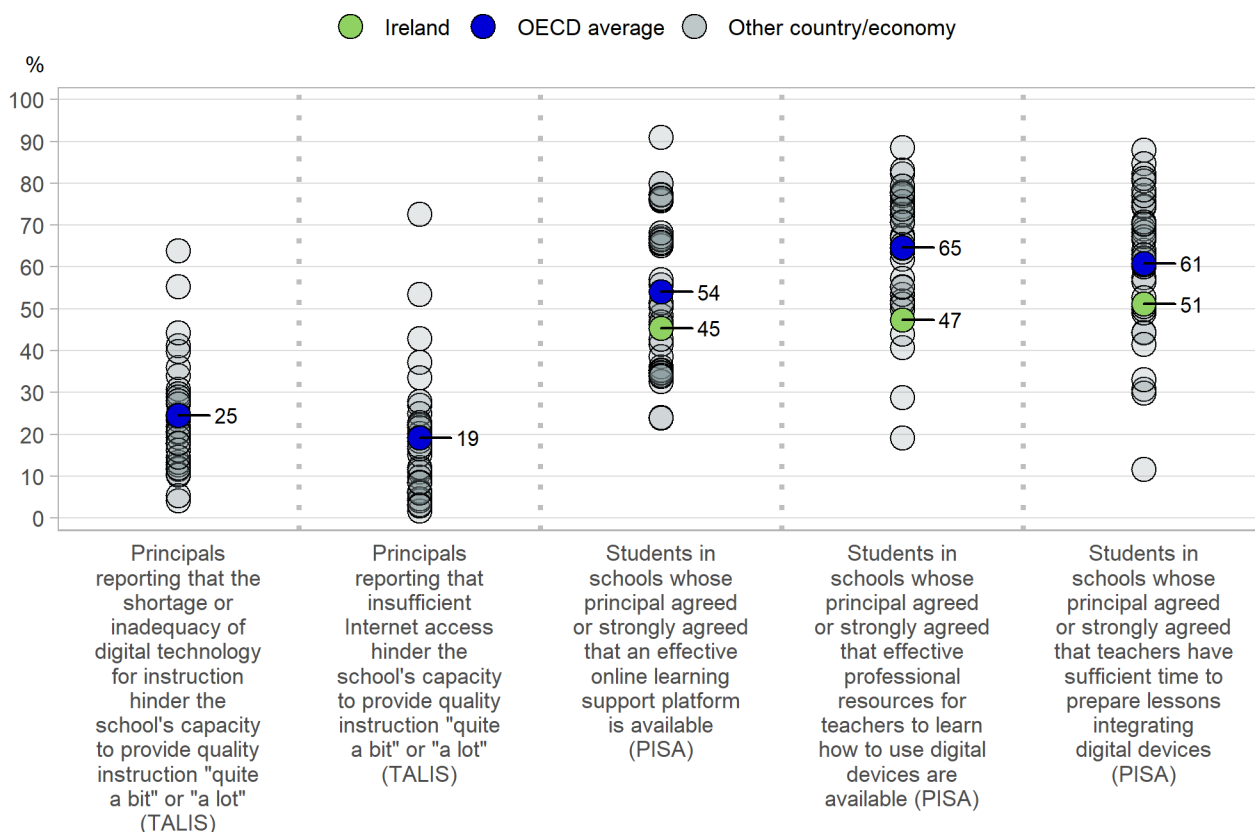
Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The OECD average refers to the average of OECD countries participating in TALIS 2018. No data is available in TALIS 2018 for Ireland.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database.



The availability of information and communication technologies (ICT) makes it possible to continue instruction and learning when physical interactions are no longer possible. However, both teachers and students need to be very familiar with these technologies and their use in order for them to be effective.

Figure 2. School and student preparedness for ICT-based learning prior to the crisis



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The OECD average refers to the average of OECD countries participating in TALIS 2018 and/or PISA 2018. No data is available in TALIS 2018 for Ireland.
 Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database and PISA 2018 Database.

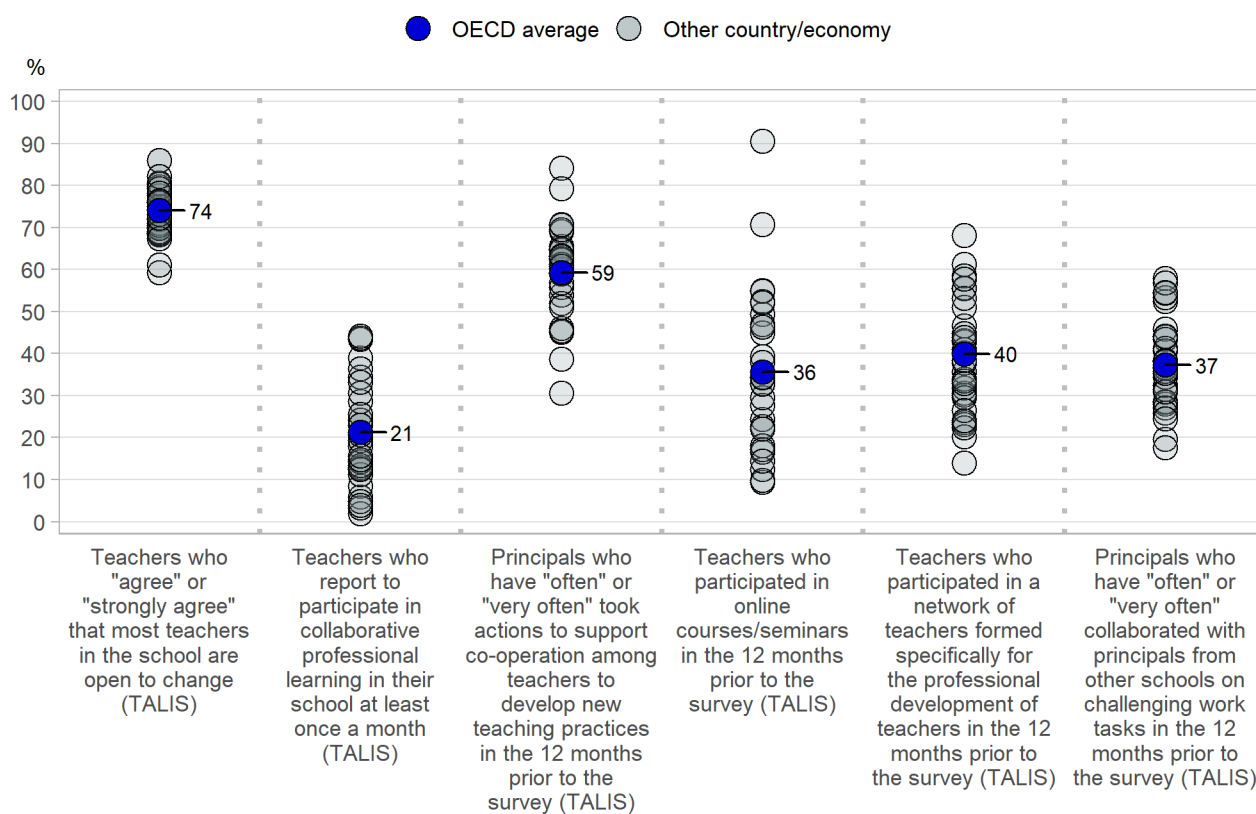
Data from the 2018 cycle of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provide further insights into schools' capacity to enhance teaching and learning using digital devices. Some of these aspects refer to the availability or quality of ICT infrastructure, while others refer to teachers' and the schools' capacity to integrate digital devices into instruction. In Ireland, 45% of students were enrolled in a school whose principal "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that an effective online learning support platform is available, which is lower than the average across OECD countries (54%). At the same time, 47% of students in Ireland attended a school whose principal "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that effective professional resources designed to help teachers learn how to use digital devices were available, which is lower than the average across OECD countries (65%). PISA 2018 also asked principals about the time teachers are given to prepare lessons. In this regard, in Ireland, 51% of students attended a school whose principal "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that teachers have sufficient time to prepare lessons that integrate digital devices into learning, which is lower than the average across OECD countries (61%).



Teachers' and schools' readiness and capacity to overhaul their ways of working prior to the crisis

The capacity of schools to innovate, adapt and support staff varies from country to country and school to school. Yet it is these school capacities that can prove to be valuable assets for responding to crises and uncertain times, as well as building resilience when facing challenges in delivering instruction.

Figure 3: Schools' leadership, collaboration and resources prior to the crisis



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The OECD average refers to the average of OECD countries participating in TALIS 2018. No data is available in TALIS 2018 for Ireland

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database.



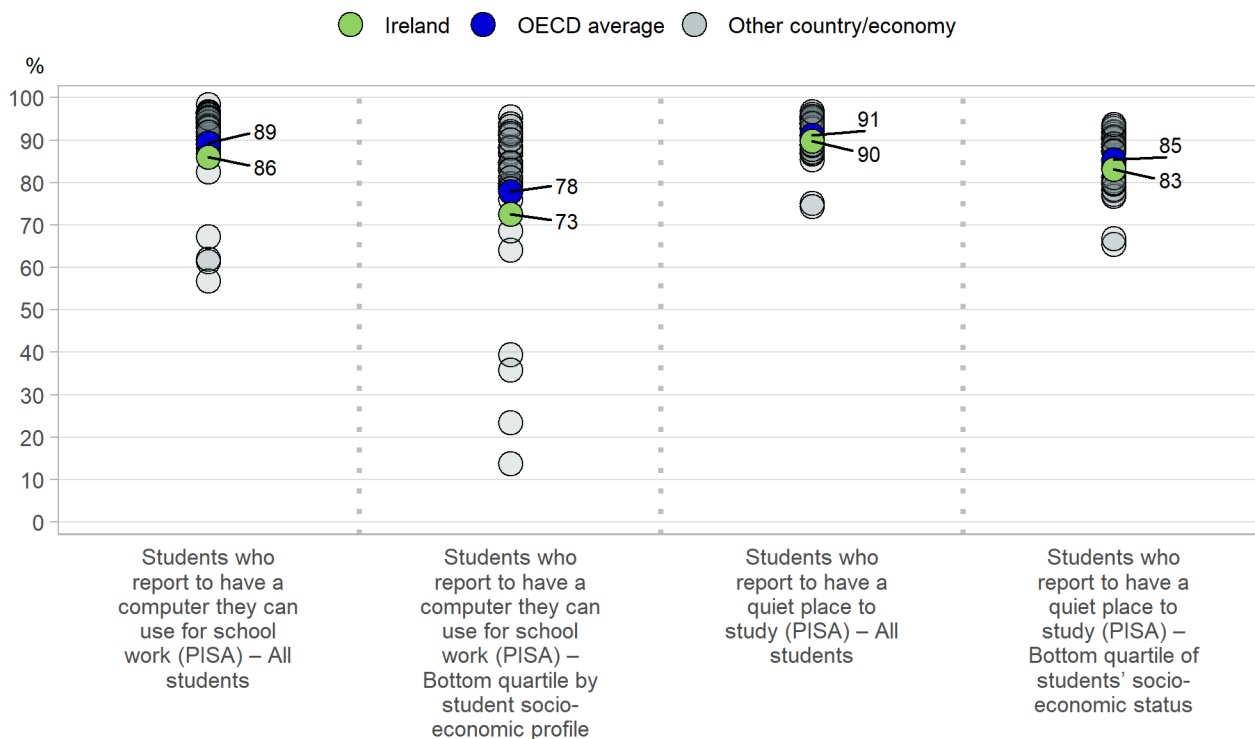
What do we know about students' conditions and environments for home schooling prior to the crisis?

Although the absence of in-person lessons can be somewhat compensated by the use of online platforms and other technology-rich activities, access to the necessary digital devices is not equally distributed across the population. In particular, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who lack the means to access to these devices may be severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis, increasing learning inequalities as a result.

A pre-requisite for any type of online learning activity is that students have access to a computer. According to PISA 2018 data collected prior to the crisis, this is a precondition that was not met by all students before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In Ireland, 86% of students reported having a computer they could use for school work, which is lower than the OECD average (89%). For those from the bottom quartile of the socio-economic distribution, 73% of students reported having a computer they could use for school work, which is lower than the OECD average (78%). Moreover, access to the home computer may in fact have deteriorated with the crisis in cases where its use had to be shared with other members of the household.

The conditions for creating an adequate climate for home schooling not only rely on access to technology, but also on whether an appropriate physical space for learning exists at home. In Ireland, 90% of students reported having a quiet place to study at home, which is lower than the OECD average (91%). This percentage was 83% for students coming from the bottom quartile of the socio-economic distribution, which is statistically not significantly different from the OECD average (85%). Much like access to computers, access to a quiet place to study may also have deteriorated during the crisis due to similar needs by parents for teleworking, and siblings for home schooling.

Figure 4: Students' home settings for online learning prior to the crisis



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The OECD average refers to the average of OECD countries participating in PISA 2018.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database.



Students' attitudes towards self-directed learning and the scope for parental support prior to the crisis

The COVID-19 crisis is changing the life of millions of families around the world. Students and their families are learning to operate under a climate of uncertainty and risk-prevention, which can negatively affect students' academic motivation. Moreover, in a remote teaching and learning context, parents become a key resource for education provision as both motivators of student engagement and facilitators of student learning.

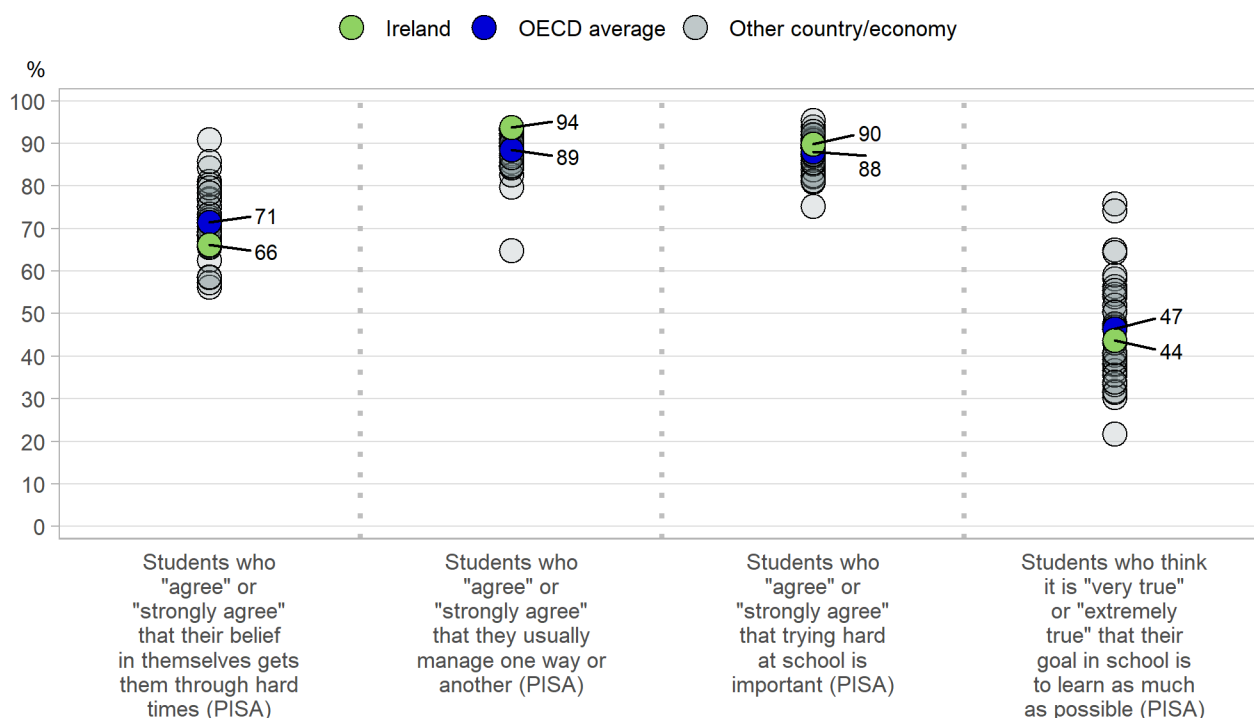
Levels of resilience and self-efficacy describe students' confidence in their ability to pursue their goals in the face of challenging situations. Based on PISA 2018 data collected before the crisis, 66% of students in Ireland "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their belief in themselves gets them through hard times, which is lower than the OECD average (71%). At the same time, 94% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they usually manage one way or another, which is higher than the OECD average (89%).

When looking at students from the bottom quartile of the socio-economic distribution, 66% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their belief in themselves gets them through hard times, which is lower than the OECD average (71%), and 93% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they usually manage one way or another, which is higher than the OECD average (86%).

Students' learning goals at school are an important factor to estimate the level of motivation and engagement with their education during these troubled times. In Ireland, 90% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that trying hard at school is important (OECD average: 88%). Also, 44% of students thought it is "very true" or "extremely true" that their goal in school is to learn as much as possible (OECD average: 47%).

Looking at students in the bottom quartile of socio-economic distribution in Ireland, 86% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that trying hard at school is important, which is statistically not significantly different from the OECD average (87%), while 38% of students think it is "very true" or "extremely true" that their goal in school is to learn as much as possible, which is lower than the OECD average (42%).

Figure 5: Students' attitudes towards self-directed learning prior to the crisis



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The OECD average refers to the average of OECD countries participating in PISA 2018.

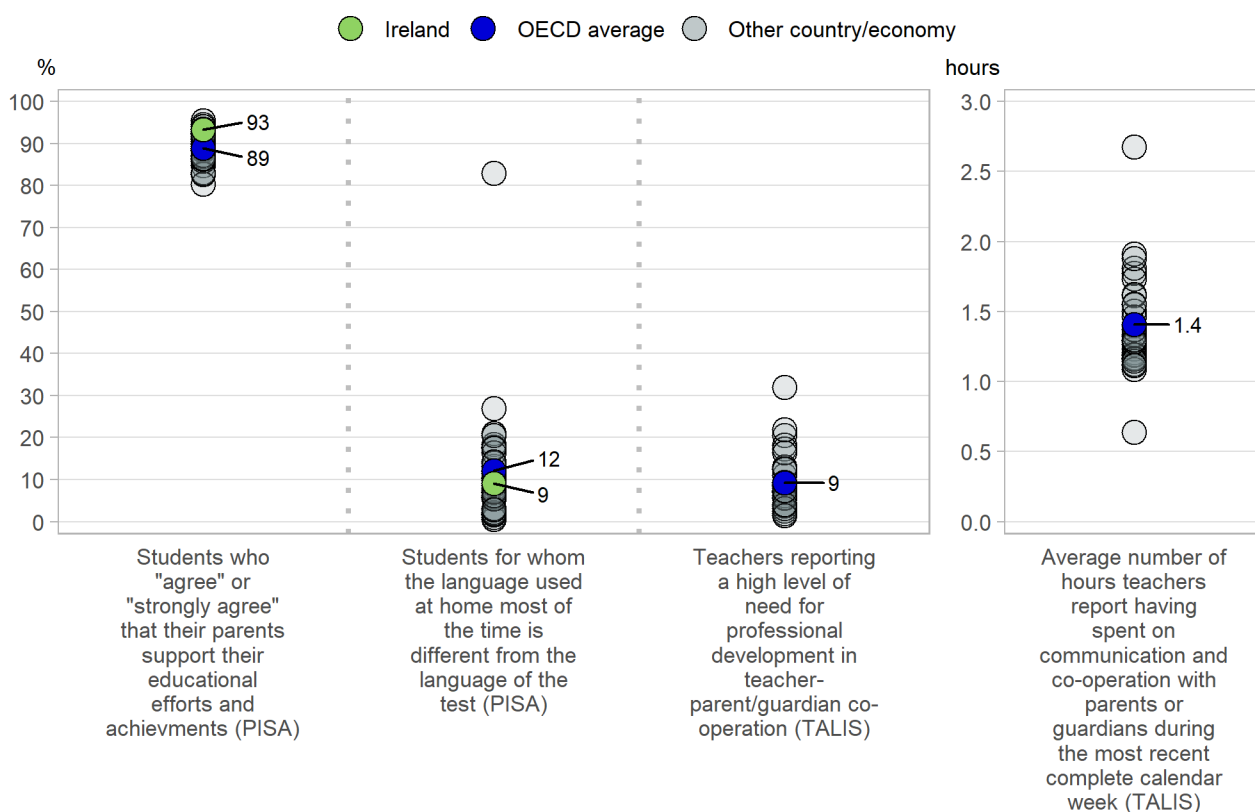
Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database.



Students need the support of their parents to engage with their learning and reduce anxiety in these stressful times. In Ireland, 93% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that their parents support their educational efforts and achievements, which is higher than the OECD average (89%). At the same time, 91% of students coming from the bottom quartile of the socio-economic distribution reported so, which is higher than the OECD average (85%).

Nevertheless, in some specific socio-demographic groups, the academic support of parents to students might be hindered by language barriers. In Ireland, 9% of the students reported that the language used at home most of the time is different from the language of the PISA test (OECD average: 12%). This is the case for 12% of students coming from the bottom quartile of the socio-economic distribution (OECD average: 19%).

Figure 6: Parental support and assistance prior to the crisis



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Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database and PISA 2018 Database.



Background and technical note

The information provided in this country note relies on existing cross-national datasets on school education from the Directorate of Education and Skills. All the data reported correspond to time periods prior to the crisis. The sources used are the following:

- Education at a Glance is the authoritative source for information on the state of education across OECD countries and a number of partner countries. It provides comparable data and indicators on the output of educational institutions; access, participation and progression in education; the financial resources invested in education; and teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools. Data on instruction time refer to a typical full week of instruction without national bank holidays or other planned school closures. The values refer to classroom instruction time, excluding breaks between lessons. It assumes an equal distribution of instruction time between grades in the specified level of education.
- The Programme for the International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial survey of 15-year-old students around the world that assesses the extent to which they have acquired key knowledge and skills essential for full participation in social and economic life. Students also answered a background questionnaire that seeks information about the students themselves, their attitudes, dispositions and beliefs, their homes, and their school and learning experiences. In PISA 2018, all 37 OECD countries plus 42 partner countries and economies took part in the study. The PISA OECD average represents the arithmetic mean across all OECD countries.
- The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is an international survey of teachers and school leaders on different aspects affecting student learning. The international target population for TALIS 2018 is lower secondary teachers and their school leaders in mainstream public and private schools. For the 2018 survey, 31 OECD and 17 partner countries and economies participated in the study. The TALIS average represents the arithmetic mean across all OECD countries with the exception of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland and Switzerland. No dataset is available in TALIS 2018 for Ireland.
- All statements about differences between the national mean and the OECD mean are based on statistically significant testing at 95% level.

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For more information visit: <https://oe.cd/EduCovid19CountryNotes>



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