

INEOS Forgotten Forty Project

Analysis of Lived Experience interviews with children, 2021/22

Introduction

From the INEOS Forgotten 40 Handbook, Appendix 2:

‘We believe headteachers in our primary schools are best placed to understand their pupils and local communities, including the challenges they face. We believe that knowing the ‘lived experience’ of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is key to understanding the barriers that prevent them gaining all they can from what a school has to offer. We want to be sure that schools in the project have a full knowledge of the lives of their most disadvantaged children, not just in school but at home and about in the community. To this end we ask project schools to conduct in-depth interviews with three disadvantaged children to establish their ‘lived experience’. The outcomes of these interviews and the stories the children tell, will form a key element of our evaluation of the project.’

The interviews were conducted with parental permission and asked about:

- self and family
- the school day, including getting ready, preferred subjects/activities and after-school activities.
- evenings, weekends and holidays
- food and eating
- Covid, and finally
- what made them happy and what worried them.

Questions were framed in an open manner. “Tell me about...” “How did you feel when...” “Talk to me about...” etc, with follow-up questions.

The analysis is based on the returns received from the 100 project schools collected towards the end of 2021. In all, 270 returns were included in the analysis.

The report does not pretend to present an academically rigorous analysis. The project team had no control of the children chosen by headteachers, their age, or how disadvantaged their circumstances. Some returns were of great depth and deeply insightful; others were of lower quality and recorded responses without further prompts. We did not always receive three transcripts.

However, for all their shortfalls, the transcripts provide a fascinating insight into how 270 children and their families, from some of the most disadvantaged communities in the United Kingdom, live their lives and what matters to them.

We did not expect the analysis to provide definitive answers; rather it aims to open up questions for project schools as to how they might make more informed decisions about what they do within their curriculum in order to better support children and their families and the challenges they face.



Family Composition and Size

A major interest was whether the children lived with one parent (a 'lone' parent) or two (a 'couple', married or otherwise).

- 110 children lived with a lone parent (41% of the total). Of these, 10 were fathers (9%). 9 of the 100 single mums had live-in boyfriends and one of the dads a live-in girlfriend. These family units were still counted as lone-parent families.
- 160 children (59%) lived with two 'parents', although within this total, 5 children (3%) lived with their grandparents and one child lived with two 'dads' in a single-sex partnership. 29 children (18%) identified one parent, almost exclusively the father, as a step-parent. In almost all cases, the child remained in touch with their birth father (or mother).

The interviews provided information on family size: the numbers of children living within each household. The range was wide, from one to 10 children.

- 912 dependents were identified in the interviews, including the interviewee.
- Of these, 116 children/young people (13%) were said to live elsewhere, part of the family but not of the household. In general, those living elsewhere were older siblings, some with children of their own.
- Of the remainder, 300 children lived with a lone parent and 496 with two 'parents'. This gives ratios of children/household of 2.7 for the lone parents and 3.1 for couples.

How representative of the general population are the above data?

Figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for 2016 indicate there were just over 4m married couples with children in England and approximately 1.5m lone parents. This split (62/38) suggests the INEOS sample at (59/41) is reasonably representative of the country at large. At that time, there were approximately 1,500 lone fathers with children (10%), close to the 9% recorded in our interviews.

The numbers of children per household in the sample appear higher than in the general population. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) puts household size for married couples with children in the UK at 4.0 (that is, a couple and two dependent children). In the INEOS sample, the average household size was 5.1. ONS data suggests the present figure for married couples with children may be below 4.0, as women born in more recent years are having fewer children later in life (for example, women born in 1984 had 1.02 children, on average, by age 30). This indicates that the sample households had more dependent children than the national average.

In 2015, OECD figures for the UK indicated that just 16% of households with children had 3 or more dependent children. In the sample schools, 56% of the interviewees came from households with 3 or more children, excluding the siblings who lived elsewhere. This radical difference may reflect the perception of headteachers that their families with more children were more likely to be affected by poverty, overcrowding and lower disposable income.



Family Routines

The interviews provided insights into family routines, particularly morning and bedtime routines on schooldays and at weekends. School day mornings generally began between 7am and 8am. 129 (48%) of the transcripts recorded a bedtime. There was a much wider variation in bedtimes, from 7pm (10 children) to midnight (2 children). The most oft-recorded bedtime was 9pm (41) and the analysis suggests that 107 (83%) of the children interviewed are in bed by this time on a school day. There was no commonality between the children who regularly went to bed very late: among them there were children of single parents, children from large families, one child who lived with grandparents, and two children of Bangladeshi backgrounds who had spent two to three hours during the evening at mosque school.

Children of Parents Born Abroad

Thirty-eight children interviewed had parents who were immigrants to the UK. The largest group was from the Indian sub-continent, Bangladesh in particular (6), although some countries of origin were not clear. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa were well-represented (Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria), as were Eastern European countries and the Balkans (Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Kurdistan) and the Middle East (Yemen, Syria, and Iran). Many of the countries of origin are or had been experiencing wars and the destruction of their homeland. The incoming families were much more likely to be couples (34 of the 38), with slightly fewer children on average, 2 compared to 2.7 for single parents and 2.8 compared to 3.1 for couples. Transcripts from children of immigrant families were the only transcripts to mention religion or religious practices, such as prayer, attending mosque school or church services.

Extended Family

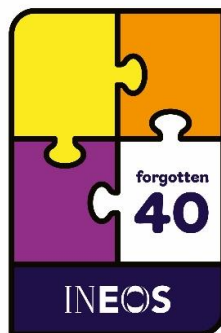
Just over half (52%) of the children interviewed included grandparents within their description of their family. The maternal grandparent (nana) featured most strongly.

Pets, Pastimes, Food and Favourite School Subjects

A half (134) of the families kept pets. Dogs were the most popular pets, with 83 families keeping them, followed by cats (45 families). However, the range of pets was very extensive, comprising, in addition to dogs and cats: hamsters, rabbits, guinea pigs, fish, snakes, budgies, rats, snails, tortoises, lovebirds, a turtle and a spider.

Children were asked how they spent their time outside of school, to investigate the balance between activities indoors and play outdoors. Responses suggested that nearly all of the children enjoyed both, with the exception that outdoor play was severely restricted during Covid. Indoor play was dominated by digital technology, used quite extensively by almost all the children surveyed.

Children were asked about their food preferences and mealtimes. Information collected included information about take-outs, ready-prepared and home-cooked foods, including favourites. Pizza was



children's clear favourite food, with 51 children choosing it¹. Pasta in all its forms came second (43), much cooked at home (spaghetti Bolognese being the most popular pasta dish). McDonalds was the children's favourite take-out (24), followed closely by Chinese (21). Chicken nuggets as a take-out and cooked at home were equally popular (21). 'Roast dinner' (14), KFC (7) and fish and chips (7) completed the favourite eight choices. Take-outs were generally seen as a treat for the end of the week and for children visiting their birth fathers during weekends. Take-outs have become rarer during the pandemic when money is short.

Few families eat together around a table at mealtimes. Most often, children eat 'on the sofa', watching TV. Parents often eat separately. Numbers of children eat their meals in their bedrooms, while playing games on their digital devices. This is more often associated with larger families, where being alone and being quiet is valued.

The interviews collected information on the school subjects the children most enjoyed and subjects they least liked. Mathematics and English comprised 50% of the favourites, with mathematics as the clear favourite, chosen by 29% of interviewees (118). However, for 17 children, mathematics was a least favourite subject. Children were more divided over English, 87 chose it as a favourite, but 24 did not like it, predominately singling out the writing element as the reason for their dislike.

PE (in all its forms) and art were very popular subjects, with few 'dislikes'. In all, PE and art were chosen by 35% of the children as favourites (18% PE, 75 in number, and 17% art, 70 in number). Only 6 children, 2 PE and 4 art, chose these subjects as least favourite.

Other subjects fared less well. Science 9%, history 4% and geography 1%. A third as many children disliked science and history as enjoyed them, and although four children chose geography as a favourite, three disliked the subject.

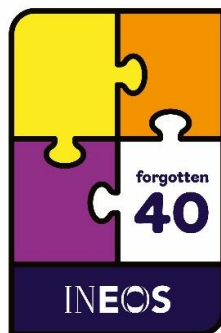
Religious education RE came out as the least-liked subject. Only four children chose it as favourite (as for geography) but 10 children singled it out as a subject they disliked.

The Stories

The interviews provided a rich source of 'soft' data to help us appreciate the 'lived experience' of children. However, the Forgotten 40 project team is equally interested in the stories children tell about their lives, to help in further understanding their 'lived experience' and to support the process of the evaluation of the success or otherwise of the initiatives undertaken by schools.

The stories are inevitably subjective. The teller chooses what to say and the listener what he/she hears and records. Therefore, this part of the analysis requires a qualification that the findings are more of a personal reflection on what children said and what headteachers wrote.

¹ This number includes take-outs such as 'Dominoes' as well as supermarket-bought pizzas.



Each transcript portrayed a unique child, a unique family and a unique headteacher. The children and their families might be bound together by a common experience of living in disadvantaged circumstances but none of their stories is the same. This seems important, as no one strategy or solution to ameliorate the effects of disadvantage will be the same.

That said, certain themes and realities shone through many of the stories. The clearest and most potent of all the messages was the strength of the bond between children and their parent(s). This came through the texts as unconditional love and of dependence. Parents (most commonly the mum) are the focus of each child's happiness, hopes and anxieties.

"I like football and reading and I love my family very much because they take care of me"

Y6 girl, NW

Do you worry about anyone? "Mam" Why? "I love her". Y2 boy NE

"I hug my mam and if she is out I wait for her to come in so I can hug her." "I worry about my mam and dad. I love my mam. My dad has diabetes." Y4 boy NE

The unconditionality was given regardless of the circumstances of the family relationships. It was as true of what appeared as very complex arrangements of parent, step-parent, birth parent, and siblings, half-brothers and sisters as it was of 'traditional' nuclear families. In the majority of accounts, children living with their mums during the week spent time with their estranged dads at weekends, irrespective of whether the father was in a new relationship. Children looked forward to spending time with the missing parent.

"I live with my mum and dad. I have a little sister who is coming to school in September.

I've also got a half-brother, he's 7 and a half and a half-sister, she's 5. I see them once a week and they stay over a lot." Y3 girl, NW

"On Fridays I go to my dad's home. He lives in Bradford. He picks me up and mum picks me up on Sundays. I ring my dad every night. We have 30 minutes on FaceTime" Y4 girl, Lancs (lives with mum and step-dad)

"I live with my sister and two older brothers at my mam's house. I stay with my nana on a weekend and there I have two other sisters and three other brothers. My dad sleeps at his girlfriend's." Y2 girl NE

"I live with my dad. I have a sister. She lives with her dad and sometimes her brother and sister. They are not my brother and sister. Mummy lives on her own." Y3 boy Lincs

The message coming through the interview stories is that life is harder for lone parents compared to couples, and that children worry for them. All the single parents worked. Juggling the demands of work and looking after a family on your own is clearly difficult and exhausting – the children often commented



on how tired their parents were. Getting children up and off to school and themselves off to work and being there for them at the school gate, when working hours and the school day do not match up, is a logistical nightmare. This is when the support of extended family becomes invaluable – nanas, grandads and aunties. After-school clubs are a boon for our working parents so that children are active and cared-for when parents cannot be there. However, lone parents on a low income cannot afford the fees if activities must be paid for.

The stories from children living with two parents tend to be less fraught, most obviously because two adults share the duties that a single parent undertakes² – the childcare, the take and collect from school, the cooking of an evening and recreation at the weekend. Lots of the stories detail the chores children undertake. However, whereas in two-parent families this presents as good parenting, in lone-parent families it seems more like a necessity. Older children must play a part in maintaining the household and help with younger ones. They do not complain, their concerns and love for their mums is the reason they give for wanting to help

“I help Hoover the landing and mop up and clean my bedroom. Sometimes I help pick up the poo from the cats, but I do not like to do this because it smells.”

“I help my parents around the house. I clean my bedroom and put my dirty washing in the wash.” Y3 boy Lancs.

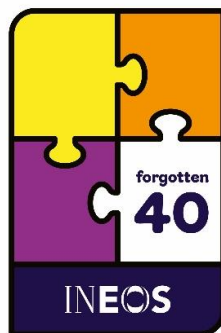
“My mam, sister and dog live in my house. I don’t want to talk about my house because it’s not good for kids. The boiler is broke and there are holes in the ceiling. I’m good at helping with the washing up. I grab a tea towel and dry it quick. My sister does the dusting. My tummy keeps grumbling. I had a banana for breakfast.” Y3 girl NE

The importance of extended family runs through the transcripts as a thread. Grandparents (most often the ‘nan’) live close and are seen often – they play a crucial role supporting parents who juggle work commitments with school runs, often feeding children at teatime and occasionally, in the morning. Aunties and cousins are part of the extended family, most often seen during school holidays and at weekends. Having sleep-overs and playing with cousins is something to be looked forward to, often replacing a holiday away from home. Children sorely missed seeing extended family during lockdown.

“I cook at my nana’s. Nana makes stews and sandwiches and lets me help make cake in the microwave with biscuit pieces in them” Girl NW

“I live with my mum and sisters. I go to nan’s every Sunday. They (grandparents) are not as young as us and not (don’t) have long left. They make me happy and my mum wants someone to talk to.” Y4 girl, NW

² There are exceptions. Some dads lived away from home during the week because of work and a small number of dads worked regular night shifts. In these situations, the mum was effectively a lone parent for much of the week.



Children live with anxiety. They worry about family health, especially a mother's health. For lone parents in particular, children worry their mums work too hard and work when they have an illness or a disability. They worry for them and they worry for themselves; what would happen to them if they were left alone? Some of the children interviewed have experienced the effects of a shortage of money, leading to a shortage of food. Several have experienced the death of a grandparent and sometimes of a young sibling. They get upset when their parents argue, when 'friends' are unpleasant to them. A number of children are afraid of things that happen in their neighbourhood, where crime and violence require a police presence. They do not feel safe outside the home. They are also sensitive to and concerned about broader issues they may have discussed at school, such as concern for the environment, for animals and plastic pollution, and for global warming.

"It's stressful sometimes. My brother snaps but I know mum's password on her phone so I can call one of her friends to help".

"I'm safe here (school). I'm not safe at home. My biggest worry is the neighbours. My grandad lives right next door to us so mum has his support when she is feeling sad and worried." Y5 boy

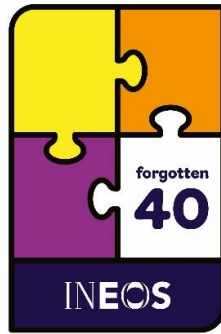
*"In our street there are horrible people, someone got stabbed. It's not safe." Y3 girl Lancs
"I start feeling upset just before I go in the door (of the school) because I don't like leaving mum because she is sad and I worry about her" Y3 girl*

"This is the best place I've lived. I hated the refuge and my last house. It's quiet (here) and I can play video games with my friends." Y6 NE

"I worry about littering and it going in the ocean. Could kill fish and turtles and sea animals. I learned this off YouTube." Y3 girl NW

"I don't like poor people having no food. When I go to Asda I see them singing their songs. Sometimes they are not there. (Does that worry you?) Yes, 'cos if they don't have food, might be hungry and have death." Y2 boy NW

With larger families, of say five or more children, the children can be ambivalent about their siblings. They enjoy the liveliness, the home's 'organised chaos'. At the same time, they value space to themselves and the chance to experience quiet and go to sleep without interruption. Several children said they took their meals in the bedroom to escape the noise of downstairs. Relationships with siblings appear to become strained once brothers and sisters reach adolescence, exacerbated by Covid lockdowns. With young children and babies, the children interviewed often help out, doing chores and playing with the younger ones. They have a well-developed sense of fairness and respect for each other's privacy and seek to be peacemakers in the home.



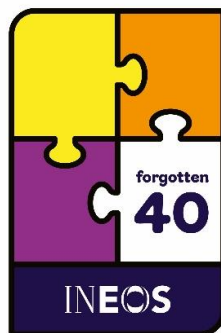
*"It's noisy. I don't like sharing my bedroom. K (brother) puts the light on, My oldest brother, he is sometimes nasty" Y2 boy, NE
(At home)" It's fun but at the same time they (sisters) annoy me a lot. I share with (Y7 sister). It's not good sharing a room. She is always on Xbox banging if she loses" Y4 girl
NW*

Children love school. They love being with friends, they like their teachers and they enjoy learning in lessons and all the many activities making up the school day, including breaks and lunchtimes. Many missed the varied after-school clubs during lockdown. However, for many, the best parts of the school day/week are home-time and Fridays, with the weekend stretching ahead of them!

*"My favourite thing in school is maths as I enjoy the calculations. My favourite days are Tuesday and Friday because they are gym days" P6 girl, Glasgow
"I love coming to school – I love work, it makes my brain go faster." Y3 girl, Lancs
"School makes me happy because I've got friends here and I like the teachers." Y5 girl NW
"I felt sad when I couldn't come to school in lockdown because I like to see my friends and teachers." "It makes my happy when I play with my friends and do Big Maths." Y2 girl S
Wales*

There is a wide-spread concern that too many children spend too much time on digital devices, on video games and on the various social media platforms, including those that are not age-appropriate for children of primary-school age. Notwithstanding the restrictions and limitations of time that a good proportion of parents placed on their children's use of digital devices, the interviews provide supporting evidence that the time children spend on screen and on-line, is disproportionately high. Most evenings, and a large part of weekends, including into the early hours of the morning for some, are spent on Nintendo Switch, X-Boxes, Playstations, ipads, computers and mobile phones, connected to social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and What's App. Alternatively, they play video games such as Fortnite, Roblox, and Minecraft.

*"I relax by watching YouTube on my tablet. Probably for about 6 hours at the weekend but not every day." Y3 boy Lancs
"I go on-line. It keeps me busy. I have two tablets and an Xbox1. I love playing Minecraft. I watch TikTok videos too. It's age 16 to go on. There's dances on there. I like Tik Tok. I have a TV in my bedroom. I watch LD Shadow Lady. I watch her a lot. She's good." Y3 girl Lincs"*



There is little evidence to suggest that children do not like exercise and playing outdoors. PE is very popular in schools, breaks and after-school clubs are often spent playing games. The pandemic has severely restricted school and community clubs with little sign of things returning to normal this year. As the national sport, football is the favourite game played with several children playing for community teams during weekends. There appears to be increasing interest in girls' football, with several girls expressing confidence in their abilities as footballers. As a minority sport, basketball was mentioned several times. The more middle-class sports of tennis, golf, sailing and skiing are never mentioned. Once home, children enjoy playing out when they can, whether on bikes with friends and family in parks or in gardens on trampolines.

"I enjoy playing inside and outside, but outside with my friends is best." P5 boy, Glasgow.
"At home, I really enjoy riding my bike with my dad." P5 Asian boy, Glasgow
"I like to play rugby. I play for X Under 8s. My dad played rugby and so do I. I have scored two tries this season." Y3 boy, Lancs
"I'm really good at football. I practice all the time." Y4 girl Lancs

For the poorest, most-stretched families, weekends and school holidays rarely offered the promise of adventure or excitement. Nothing changes, except, they say, they do not go to school. At the extreme, children simply stay in bed or remain in pyjamas all day. It is in these situations where children often play video games or watch films for hours on end. There is no anticipation of holidays to come. In these circumstances, pets are clearly a source of comfort and companionship.

"I've never been on a holiday. My mum took me to Ireland to see my family when I was a baby. I would like to go there again. I'd like a holiday." Y2 boy NW
"After school, I normally go home, sit in my room and play on my phone. Last night I fell asleep about 5 o'clock and woke about 10 o'clock and then went back to bed at 1am." Y6 girl NW
"I would like to go to the beach when I'm 18 or 19 so I can go on my own and drive my car. I like the beach. We don't go out on days out at all." Y£ boy Lincs
"(At weekends?) I do the same things, but I don't go to school. We stay at home. I feed my hamsters. I play with them." Y3 girl Lincs
I like sleeping in at the weekend. I like laying in bed and playing on the Xbox. I love watching YouTube videos. They are brilliant. Fortnite makes me happy – getting a victory royal in Fortnite makes me very, very happy. I get unhappy when I'm not playing Fortnite. I hate losing. I get very angry." Y5 boy Lincs
"When it's the summer holidays we go in the paddling pool. We put chairs outside." Y3 girl NE



Food, or the absence of it, was a major concern from the outset of the project. Its shortage remains an issue, but only for a very small number of the children interviewed. Questions were asked of each meal: breakfast, (school) lunch and dinner³. School played a significant part in feeding children, in breakfast clubs and in providing a school lunch, much enjoyed by most children. However, it is in the home where there is a wide variation in access to nourishing and varied foods. In some families, parents and children are involved in preparing and cooking food at home and these families are more likely to make mealtimes a shared experience. However, as stress factors mount up: parents working anti-social hours, lone parents stretched for time and money, large numbers of children to feed, for example, this is when mealtimes begin to become fragmented, with parents and children eating separately, in different rooms and at different times and rarely together around a table. Take-out meals, generally from the American chains, present either as regular, easy options for busy parents or as 'special occasion' treats. Children love them. Just rarely, a child interviewed said they didn't eat them and preferred 'home-cooked' food. One thing became clear, children enjoy preparing food at home and at school and are proud of their accomplishments when they do so.

"I didn't have any tea last night. I usually have to ask my dad for dinner when I'm hungry. I haven't had any breakfast today. The last time I ate was burger and pasta in school the day before at lunchtime." Y6 girl NW

"My mum and brother cook tea. My brother makes eggs and my mum is good at making noodles – fresh egg omelettes last week. We all sit and have tea together." Y4 boy Black British M/cr

"I prefer to have my mum's home cooking rather than a take-away." P5 boy, Glasgow

"I've heard about five-a-day, but I don't think I've had it." Y3 boy, Lancs

The children from minority ethnic groups largely new to the UK told stories with a degree of difference from those of the White British families. There were clear similarities, such as a love of school, and the importance of friends and extended family, whether here in the UK or remaining in the country of origin. However, there were some marked differences.

The analysis suggests that families arriving from abroad are much more likely to be two-parent families than single-parent. From the transcripts it appears families retain many of the customs they followed in their countries of origin: traditional foods for one, home cooked and eaten together, and the centrality of religion another. As mentioned in the analysis, prayer, choirs, church attendance and religious studies were only recorded by children from backgrounds other than English, despite a third of the 100 project schools having a religious foundation. On the whole the families new to the UK appear to be improving their circumstances and are more aspirational for themselves: several parents were studying, car ownership was higher, two families were moving from renting to buying houses and holidays were undertaken or planned.

³ Or 'breakfast, dinner and tea' in some regions.



Each of these aspects was rare in the White British families of the children interviewed. The greater degree of parental control was most evident in the more restricted access to digital devices and platforms and the support for school learning.

“We go to church Sunday – but it is on Zoom. I miss church and the community” Y5 boy, Black British M/cr

“Mum and sister (14) cook meals – Ethiopian dinners – sauce, bread, roll it up and eat it”

“(At weekends) we go to Blackpool or drive around to places. Or we go to Liverpool or Sheffield to see friends.” Y3 boy, Mcr

“I like 3-D models and would like to be an architect when I grow up. We go to school in the car with my dad. At 6pm I have my K’uran lessons. I start my Arabic lessons on Saturday.” Asian boy, NE

In Conclusion

We hope the analysis and stories will help school leaders in their consideration of how best to use the INEOS Forgotten 40 gift as the project develops. What broader role can primary schools play, given the resources, to help children and families in disadvantaged communities achieve a more hopeful future and break the iniquitous cycle of deprivation that has plagued the UK for so long?

At the outset of the project, we asked a small number of experienced headteachers what they would do to tackle the underlying causes of underachievement in disadvantaged communities. They were unequivocal in choosing four strategies:

- the enrichment of experiences
- support for families
- tackling hunger and educating about food
- promoting children’s mental health and well-being.

Looking through the many and varied initiatives project schools have chosen for their children and communities, these four categories appear to be standing the test of time.

The analysis and stories make difficult reading in parts. However, the feedback from schools implementing their initiatives is hugely positive. The INEOS gift is going directly to its intended beneficiaries. Headteachers say no one has given them the freedom to do this before.

One unexpected outcome was the emotional response of staff reported by headteachers when, for example, they see children’s joy as they see the sea for the first time, attend their first live theatre, or feel the love and solace of animals.