mummypages.ie

Back to School
INSIGHTS 2015

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Back to School

MUMMYPAGES 'BACK-TO-SCHOOL' INSIGHTS 2015

MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest community of mums, launches the most comprehensive research into all aspects of 'Back-to-School' that this country has ever seen. The research addresses key areas such as cost of education and after-school activities. It also focuses on the real issues such as the use of technology and mental health education in schools.

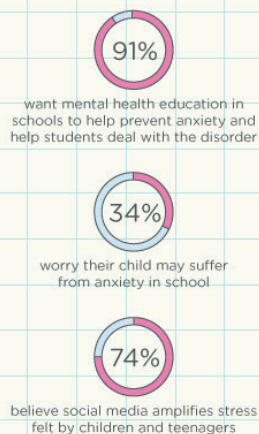MummyPages research covers nine key areas, which are as follows:

1. Cost of Education in Ireland
2. School Curriculum
3. Mental Health Education
4. Technology in Irish Schools
5. Parental Involvement In School
6. Parent / Teacher Relations
7. School Gate - Mum's Sorrow or Sanity
8. After-School Activities
9. After-School Care

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'BACK-TO-SCHOOL'
insights
2015

Cost of Education

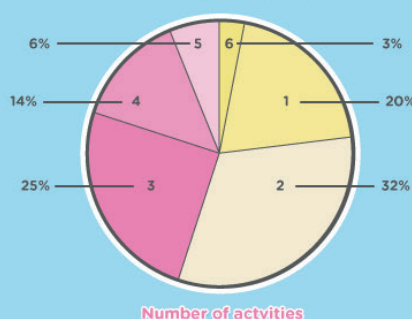€ — 80% of mums find school expensive with 61% experiencing financial difficulty

75% of mums find school uniforms to be the most expensive aspect of the school bill

Only 13% of mums are able to buy generic school uniforms

A child in primary school will cost the average family €2,211 per year

A teenager in secondary school will cost the average family €3,375 per year

Mental Health Education

91%
want mental health education in schools to help prevent anxiety and help students deal with the disorder

34%
worry their child may suffer from anxiety in school

74%
believe social media amplifies stress felt by children and teenagers

After-School Activities
55% of children are participating in after-school activities. Children are participating in:

Pie chart — Number of activities:
- 1 — 20%
- 2 — 32%
- 3 — 25%
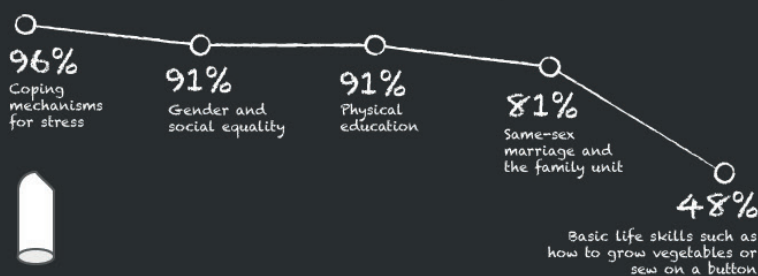- 4 — 14%
- 5 — 6%
- 6 — 3%

Number of actvities

Mums spend an average of €220 on sports gear and equipment for PE and activities

Mums spend an average of €144 per term on after-school activities in primary school

School Curriculum
Mums call for an overhaul of the school curriculum to include teachings on:

96% Coping mechanisms for stress

91% Gender and social equality

91% Physical education

81% Same-sex marriage and the family unit

48% Basic life skills such as how to grow vegetables or sew on a button
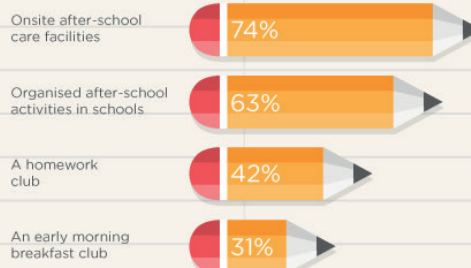
Technology

15% of schools have introduced e-readers or tablets in place of traditional school books

91% call for the Government to create a national strategy on digital technology use in the classroom

The digital revolution in Irish classrooms costs parents an average of €289 in primary school and €779 in secondary school

School Gate – Mum's Sorrow or Sanity

63% of mums breathe a sigh of relief and secretly look forward to 'Back-to-School' time

91% look forward to getting back into a routine

43% find It exhausting entertaining children during the summer

34% can't wait to have some free time for themselves

After-School Care
Mums would like to see the following facilities available in schools:

- Onsite after-school care facilities — **74%**
- Organised after-school activities in schools — **63%**
- A homework club — **42%**
- An early morning breakfast club — **31%**

MummyPages.ie is Ireland's biggest parenting community, it engages with over 600,000 mums on everything from pre-pregnancy to parenting and family life. MummyPages 'Back-to-School' Insights were collated from the responses of 1,766 mums who participated in this survey.

1. COST OF EDUCATION IN IRELAND

Stressful times for parents In Ireland

- 80% of mums find primary and secondary school expensive compared to 63% of mums last year
- 61% of mums have experienced financial difficulty in putting their children through school compared to 51% last year
- 89% of mums feel increased pressure at the start of the school year due to the cost of putting children through school
- 91% of mums would favour a phased payment system throughout the year to incorporate the voluntary contribution, schools books and book rental scheme fees

School Bill

For parents, the most expensive aspects of the 'Back-to-School' Bill are:

- School Uniform (including P.E. uniform) (75%)
- School books (69%)
- School shoes & coat (46%)
- Technology (45%)
- Voluntary contribution (37%)
- School bag & stationary (30%)
- School travel pass (7%)

Primary school costs: According to research on school costs, a year in primary school will cost the average family in Ireland an astonishing **€2,211** per child. This includes all school related costs from books, uniforms, voluntary contributions, registration fees and shoes. It also incorporates the cost of technology such as an e-reader and e-books, term fees for after-school activities, school lunches, school trips, PE gears and equipment, school transport and so on. The figure does not include the cost of after-school care, which can add a further **€4,000** to working parents' Back-to-School bill. This adds up to a whopping **€6,211** per child per year in primary school.

Secondary school costs: Costs increase dramatically in secondary school, where the average cost of putting a teenager through school is **€3,375** per year. This includes all school related costs from organised study to school trips and even extra tuition and where technology is being used in the classroom parents can expect to face an extra bill of **€779** for a tablet and the relevant e-books, giving the family a Back-to-School bill of **€4,154.**

AVERAGE COST OF PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL IN IRELAND

School	Primary	Secondary
School uniforms	€102.50	€189.50
School shoes	€33.15	€61.20
School bag	€23.00	€42.00
School books	€112.40	€191.60
Book scheme registration	€76.40	€136.40
Voluntary contribution	€72.00	€114
Stationary	€50.15	€77.70
Sports gear & equipment	€220	€216.70
Sub-total:	€689.60	€1,029.10
Technology (if applicable)	€289 (E-reader + e-books)	€779.40 (IPad + e-books)
School transport	€125	€264
Lunch	€221.90	€293.50
Grinds / Extra-tuition (per term x 3)	€92 x 3 = €276 (if applicable)	€258 x 3 =€774 (if applicable)
School trips / school tours	€54.50	€276
Presents for teachers	€39.15	€40.30
Charity collections	€41	€62.50
After-school activities (per term)	€144 – PER TERM X3 = €432	€138 – PER TERM X3 = €414
Organised study / HW Club	€43	€222
Sub-total:	€2,211.15	€3,518.80
After-school care (10 months)	€400pm X 10 =€4,000 (if applicable)	N/A
Total costs:	**€6,211.15**	**€4,154.80**

School uniforms

School Uniform breakdown:

- 49% wear a crested school uniform
- 35% wear a mix of generic and crested uniform garments
- 13% wear a generic school uniform
- 3% wear no uniform in school

Mums buy their child's school uniform:

- Through the school (11%)
- In specified school uniform store (68%)
- In a department store (51%)
- In a second hand store (4%)

Mums rate the quality of generic uniforms as:

- Very good (26%)
- Good (40%)
- Average (30%)
- Bad (3%)
- Very bad (1%)

Can-the-Crest

- 8,204 mums voted in MummyPages 'Can-the-Crest' campaign
- 84% of mums are familiar with MummyPages 'Can-the-Crest' campaign
- 67% of mums did / would vote in favour of their child's school changing its school uniform policy
- 24% of mums say their child's school recently made changes to its school uniform policy to help make uniform costs more manageable

School book rental scheme

- 70% of schools have a book rental scheme in place with a further 5% of schools hoping to introduce a scheme in future
- 62% of mums have to pay a registration fee to join the book rental scheme while 38% don't

School book rental schemes includes:

- 69% of schemes cover school books only
- 16% of schemes cover school books and workbooks
- 10% of schemes cover school books, workbooks and some stationary
- 5% of schemes cover everything

Voluntary contribution

- 30% of mums says their school offers a sibling discount, however, 33% of mums say their school doesn't offer this discount

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"Ireland's free education is a joke according to our MummyPages mums who face school-related costs of up to €2,211 per child in primary school and up to €4,154 for a child in secondary school. Our research reveals that 61% of mums have experienced financial difficulty in putting their children through school in the last year, an increase of 10% from last year."

"The main reasons for these increases can be attributed to the snob-factor of the rising costs of crested uniforms and the increased reliance on digital technology in the classroom with parents compelled to purchase devices and software with bills adding up to hundreds of euro. The cost of after-school activities, sports gear for PE and equipment quickly adds up and this is on top of existing costs such as voluntary contributions, school books, transport, school shoes and more."

"Worryingly, 89% of mums are suffering from high levels of stress because of the costs at back-to-school time with 80% of mums saying its very expensive compared to 63% of mums last year. To ease the burden on parents MummyPages advises school boards of management to consider a phased payment system throughout the year to incorporate the voluntary contribution, schools books and book rental scheme fees."

"Unsurprisingly, the most expensive aspect of the school bill is the school uniform. Despite our best efforts to campaign for reform with 8,204 digital signatures on our petition to the government in May of this year, schools continue to be allowed to demand parents fork out large amounts of money for crested school uniforms when similar generic garments are available for a fraction of the price."

2. SCHOOL CURRICULUM

- 91% of mums are happy with their child's academic progress in primary school
- 81% of mums think that the newly passed marriage referendum should be discussed in the school curriculum in SPHE (social, personal and health education)
- 91% of mums think the SPHE curriculum should incorporate teaching children and teenagers about gender and social equality
- 30% of mums feel schools aren't equipping children with the basic skills they need for life
- 36% of mums think the school days should be extended to 9am to 5pm to allow children to do their homework, partake in afterschool activities and spend time learning other skills
- 91% of mums think schools need to devote more time to physical education
- 83% of mums think SPHE (social, personal and health education) needs to be allotted more time in the classroom
- 48% of mums think school should be responsible for teaching children basic life skills
- 79% of mums think schools need to address the overt early sexualisation of children

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"The world we live in is changing at a rapid pace, technology now forms a key part of our children's education and our inclusive society where same-sex marriage is now legal is changing the way we teach our children about the family unit. Feedback from our survey highlights that parents are calling for an overhaul of the school curriculum to mirror these changes and to teach children about gender and social equality, basic life skills, how to stay safe when using the internet and much more."

"To allow for the expansion in the school curriculum 36% of mums recommended extending the school day to 9am to 5pm to allow children to do their homework, partake in afterschool activities and spend time learning other skills. To combat Ireland's growing obesity levels parents are calling for schools to allow more time for physical education."

3. MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Insights from MummyPages 'Back-to-School – Mental Health Education'

- 91% of mums call for mental health education in primary & secondary schools
- 92% of mums want professional mental health services available in schools
- 96% of mums think schools should teach pupils / students coping mechanisms for stress
- 74% of mums feel social media amplifies the stress felt by children and teenagers
- 95% of mums think the SPHE curriculum should teach children mindfulness techniques
- 67% of mums note their child's school is taking measures to tackle cyber-bullying

The Top Five parental concerns in Ireland are as follows:

- 81% of parents fear their child will be bullied in school
- 54% of parents worry their child is unhappy at school
- 42% of parents agonise that something may be wrong and their child won't talk to them about how they are feeling
- 41% of parents fret about their child making friends with other children
- 34% of parents worry that their child may suffer from anxiety

Parents combat bullying by:

- Talking to children about bullying from both sides (81%)
- Teaching children how to stand up for themselves (51%)
- Voicing concerns to the teacher (47%)
- Supporting the school's zero tolerance approach to bullying (41%)
- Involving children in school talks on bullying (31%)

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"In recent years, Ireland has seen an increase in the number of young people being diagnosed with depressions and anxiety disorders. To tackle this issue MummyPages mums are calling for mental health education to be taught in schools and access to medical professionals to be readily available to all students."

"Earlier this year, the Department of Education released new guidelines on promoting positive mental health in primary schools which highlights the need for collaboration between parents, schools and health agencies. The announcement by the Department will go a long way in tackling the issue however parents feel schools should teach children coping mechanism for stress and mindfulness techniques especially in the run up to exams."

"Interestingly, 74% of mums feel social media amplifies the stress felt by children and teenagers. MummyPages would recommend mums monitor the amount of time children and teenagers spend on the social media and digital devices, as it can affect sleeping patterns which amplifies stress further. Social media can also alienate users and young people can begin to harbour feelings of inadequacy as they benchmark their lives against their friends' 'lives'."

4. TECHNOLOGY IN IRISH SCHOOLS

- 15% of schools have introduced e-readers or iPads in place of traditional school books

- 96% of mums think schools need to embrace digital technology in order to teach children how to use it safely and productively thus helping tackle the current issue of cyberbullying

- 55% of mums are happy with the introduction / future introduction of digital technology in their child's classroom, 12% of mums are unhappy about the introduction of technology and 33% of mums would prefer if technology is introduced when children are older or in second level

- Mums rate their child's school use of technology as:
  - Excellent – 20%
  - Good – 46%
  - Average – 27%
  - Poor – 8%

- Who supplies the children with the digital devices (PC, Laptop, tablet & e-reader) and technology (e-books & e-readers) that they use / will use in school?
  - Mum & Dad – 44%
  - School – 35%
  - Other – 21%

- 91% of mums think the Government should create a national strategy on digital technology which covers all aspects from funding to how technology should be used in the classroom

- 15% of mums state that their child uses a digital device to do their homework, of those mums, 97% would feel comfortable helping their child with their homework using this device

- Schools in Ireland are using the following digital platforms / social media channels:
  - 79% - Website
  - 26% - Facebook
  - 15% - School blog
  - 10% - Twitter

- Schools communicate with parents by:
  - (73%) send a letter home in the child's school bag
  - (49%) rings mum on her mobile
  - (10%) rings mum on the landline
  - (21%) posts a letter home
  - (16%) sends an email
  - (76%) sends an SMS
  - (7%) contacts parents through social media

- 83% of mums say their child's school has interactive white boards in its classrooms

- 20% of mums don't understand how children learn from an interactive white board

- 36% of mums feel out of touch when it comes to what and how children are learning

- 88% of mums would like to spend a day in their child's classroom or attend a talk in the school to understand or experience how children today are learning and how technology is being used to enhance the overall classroom experience

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"The feedback from our mum community on the introduction of technology into the classroom is quite mixed, 55% of mums are happy with the introduction of tablets and e-readers, however there is a large proportion who are concerned for their child's wellbeing. They are concerned about the side effects of introducing their children to technology at a young age with many mums calling for technology to be introduced at secondary level. Their chief concerns are that it will hinder their child's ability to learn from traditional methods ultimately affecting their ability to read, write and communicate with others. However these concerns can be easily addressed by parents and teachers by setting down some ground rules on digital technology usage both at home and at school"

"Overall, the introduction of technology can have a positive influence on learning. It brings a number of benefits to the classroom - technology gives children access to a wealth of information which allows them to feed their own thirst for knowledge and allows them to make informed decisions. The use of tablets engages children in interactive learning as children can complement their learning with additional sources by watching a video or listening to audio."

"More importantly, our research highlights that parents are currently struggling to cover the existing cost of back-to-school, when technology is introduced in the majority of cases it is the parents who are forking out hundreds of euro for the new piece of technology which is putting a huge strain on the family's finances. Some of our mums report that their child's school is requesting them to purchase an iPad even though there are more competitive options on the market."

"MummyPages is calling for the Department of Education Government to launch a national strategy on digital technology covering all aspects from funding to how technology should be used in the classroom."

5. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL

- 93% of schools have set up a parents' council committee
- 22% of mums are involved in the parents' council committee in their child's school
- Main reasons for mums not participating include:
  - 18% - I have never been asked to participate
  - 13% - I feel like I don't belong there
  - 8% - I don't know how to get involved
  - 24% - It sounds like it's too much of a commitment for me right now
  - 46% - I don't have time to get involved
  - 10% - I don't know

- Involvement in children's schooling and education:
  - 17% of mums would like to be more involved with their child's education at home
  - 28% of mums would like to be more involved with their child's education at home and at school
  - 11% of mums would like to be more involved with their child's education at school
  - 44% of mums feel they are already very involved in their child's education and schooling

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"A parent association or council allows parents to work together with the school principal, staff and board of management for the best possible education for their children both at home and in school. A parent council can advise the school authorities on policy issues that may require a review of school policy. It gives parents a chance to voice their concerns and pave the way for change on a number of topics such as technology use, school uniform policy, a zero tolerance approach to bullying, safety, homework, enrolment and so on."

"We would advise more mums to get involved with the parents' council in their child's school. Feedback from our mum community has highlighted that many mums don't know how to get involved, have never been asked to participate, with many mums feeling like they don't belong on the council – with this in mind it is important for every parents' council in Ireland to reach out to all parents and invite them to join."

"It is not always possible for working mums and mums with young children to find the time to participate in these types of committees as it can be stressful taking care of young children, a household and a career without feeling the added pressure of committing to a parents' council. With this in mind MummyPages has some advice for mums to help them stay involved in their child's education at home, which are as follows; communicate your belief in your child's potential, talk to them about all aspects of school even the fun stuff, instil strong work habits and positive attitudes and most importantly read together."

6. PARENT / TEACHER RELATIONS

- The number of formal parent-teacher meetings in a year

  - 1 – 82%
  - 2 – 12%
  - 3 – 3%
  - 4+ - 2%

- 75% of mums feel that both mum and child would benefit from more teacher input regarding their child's behaviour and learning throughout the year

- 85% of mums would be happy to receive regular feedback through a secure online website or app

- Mums would like to receive the following information or tasks via an app or a website on a weekly / daily basis:

  - 57% - To learn about their child's daily curriculum and development activities
  - 57% - To learn more about their child's behaviour at school
  - 39% - To receive instructions regarding their child's homework
  - 19% - To see how much exercise their child gets at lunchtime in school
  - 80% - To know whether their child is having difficulty with certain tasks at school and how mum can support or help them at home
  - 44% - The updates would allow mum to connect with her child as she could talk about school activities at home
  - 18% - To grant permission to the school to bring children away on a school trip
  - 34% - To inform teachers of any absences due to appointments or illness

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

" "There is no denying the powerful impact teamwork between parents and teachers can have, it can help identify any emerging learning difficulties or development issues children may have at an early stage allowing for early intervention that could save both the child and its parents undue stress in the future."

"Formal parent teacher meetings are an important part of school life, it allows mums to build a picture of their child's life at school academically, socially and physically. However, MummyPages research identified that less than one in five mums have a formal meeting with their child's teacher more than once a year. The use of technology here could be a very effective way of bridging this communication gap and not intrude too much more on the busy day of the teacher."

7. SCHOOL GATE - MUM'S SORROW OR SANITY

- 63% of mums breathe a sigh of relief and secretly look forward to 'Back-to-School' time
- Mums look forward to the following aspects the most:
  - 91% - Getting back into a routine
  - 34% - Having some free time for themselves
  - 17% - School is less expensive than the cost of summer activities
  - 43% - It is exhausting trying to entertain children during the summer holidays
  - 25% - Back-to-school limits the amount of screen time
  - 25% - It gives mum time to organise and clean her house
  - 30% - It makes it easier for mum to manage her work life, childcare and the household when children are at school

- 76% of mums are acquainted with some of the other mums, 5% know all of them while 19% find it difficult to make a connection with the other mums
- 48% of mums think the school could do more to foster a sense of community within the school
- 20% of mums feel judged by other mums for being a 'SAHM' or 'Working Mum' at drop-off / pick-up

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"It comes as no surprise that 63% at mums breathe a sigh of relief and secretly look forward to 'Back-to-School' time. As much as mums enjoy spending time with their children during the summer months when it comes to the end of August lots of mums are only too happy to drop their children at the school gate."

"After an exhausting summer, both mum and her purse need a break. Back-to-School time allows mums to get the whole family back into a routine. It gives mum time to start organising her house after a chaotic summer. Apart from that it allows mum to focus time on herself whether it's meeting up with friends or going to the gym – Back-to School effectively means more time for mums and for working mums it makes meeting the daily demands of a career and motherhood more manageable."

8. AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

- 55% of mums state that children are participating in after-school activities
- Breakdown in the number of activities that children are involved in:
  - 1 – 20%
  - 2 – 32%
  - 3 – 25%
  - 4 – 14%
  - 5 – 6%
  - 6 – 3%

Regarding participation in after-school activities:

- 6% of mums believe children are pressured into engaging in too many extra-curricular / after-school activities
- 12% of mums believe children aren't encouraged to take part in enough extra-curricular / after-school activities
- 56% of mums say it is important to get the balance right – children need downtime too
- 18% of mums think it's important for children to get a taste of as many activities as possible so they can decide which activities they like best
- 6% of mums don't have children old enough to be enrolled in any activities
- 3% don't believe in any of the above statements

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"There is no denying the importance of involving children in new activities. After-school activities and hobbies have numerous benefits, it can aid a child's development and works on honing children's social skills, life skills, helps builds confidence and teaches children about the importance of team work."

"It also has a number of health benefits. In today's modern world children are spending increased amounts of time in front of screens, after-school activities helps move children away from the TV, computer or game screen and encourages them to get active and spend more time outdoors which helps maintain a healthy weight, relieves stress and aid better sleep patterns in children. It is important to instil the importance of physical activity at a young age to help combat Ireland's rising obesity rates among young people in Ireland."

"School years are the perfect time for children to try out different activities, if they try a wide variety during their school years they will find one they will excel at. MummyPages advises parents not to overload children as too many activities can have a detrimental effect on their school work, sleep and ability to engage in their own creative play, and the constant rushing to and fro can be stressful for both the child and parents. Children should be allowed at least two afternoons and evenings during the school week to just relax."

9. AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

- 76% of mums struggle to manage the daily demands of their child's education, after-school care and career
- 84% of mums think schools should be more accommodating towards the needs of working parents
- 46% of mums employ after-school care services for their child during the school year
- 32% of mums employ full-time childcare which covers before and after-school care
- 68% of mums employ part-time childcare
- Childcare providers include:
  - Childminder (35%)
  - Grandparent (34%)
  - After-school club (23%)
  - Crèche (17%)
  - Extended family member (12%)
  - Family friend (12%)
  - Au-pair (5%)

- Mums would like to see the introduction of the following facilities in their child's school:
  - Onsite after-school care facilities (74%)
  - A variety of organised after-school activities that children can attend (63%)
  - A homework club (42%)
  - An early morning breakfast club for children who are dropped off early by parents (31%)

According to Laura Haugh, Mum-in-Residence for MummyPages.ie, Ireland's largest online parenting community:

"Feedback from our working mums highlights the daily juggling act they face each day trying to manage the daily demands of their child's education, after-school care and career. The majority of mums wish schools could be more accommodating towards their needs however with limited resources this isn't always possible. A happy medium would be for schools to introduce a homework club or have organised after-school activities in the afternoons to alleviate the pressure on working mums. The research also highlights the role extended family members play in bridging the childcare gap and the need for the government to invest more into childcare for children of school-age as well as younger children."

NOTES TO EDITOR

MummyPages 'Back-to-School' survey is nationally representative. The fieldwork was conducted over a two week period from 22nd June to 6th July 2015. Insights were collated from the responses of over 1,766 mums with children currently enrolled in primary and / or second level education.

Laura Haugh is an experienced contributor on all parenting matters featuring regularly in broadcast media and print media.

If you would like to write a feature article about our press release or if you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

Laura Haugh – 087 196 1939   Email – laura@sheologydigital.com

Emma Keating – 085 181 7290   Email – emma.keating@sheologydigital.com

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About MummyPages.ie

Launched as a blog by Sandra and Cormac McKenna in 2009, MummyPages.ie is Ireland's biggest community of mums. With over 700,000+ unique users per month from all over the island of Ireland, MummyPages.ie engages with mums on everything from pre-pregnancy, to parenting and family life. MummyPages.ie also has a thriving online Facebook community of more than 327,000 mums, making it the biggest mum page in Ireland. A British version of the website was launched in 2011, and now reaches over 1,500,000 unique users per month. MummyPages is a part of Sheology Digital, a digital publishing house leading the market in reaching women online in Ireland.