PTA UK | A PTA FOR ALL SCHOOLS
A VOICE FOR ALL PARENTS

Annual Parent Survey 2016

PTA UK | A PTA FOR ALL SCHOOLS
A VOICE FOR ALL PARENTS

Index

Published January 2017

This research was undertaken and the report written in collaboration with Caterina Violi from Preseli Partnerships. Caterina Violi is a freelance researcher based in Tuscany, Italy and works for the non-profit sector. Her journey as a researcher began at Oxfam and carried on at research think tank nfpSynergy where, over the years, she has managed a number of syndicated and bespoke research projects for charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Cancer Research UK, Friends of the Earth, WaterAid, Care International and The Outward Bound Trust. After working in house for London based education charity A New Direction, Caterina relocated to Italy where she continues to work as a freelance researcher.

1. About the study

Parents play a fundamental role when it comes to children's education. There is a wealth of research showing that parental engagement in children's learning and in their school as a whole has a positive impact on academic attainment and educational outcomes more generally[1].

Parents' engagement with children's learning directly contributes to their academic performance and character building; it can take a variety of forms – from helping with homework to developing effective strategies for learning and setting children's aspirations. Parental involvement with school through volunteering, sharing views and being active in parents' groups or governance can also indirectly contribute to this.

Crucially, ensuring that parents' views are heard and taken into account is an increasingly important priority for schools. Ofsted, for instance, not only examines aspects of parent voice as part of their inspections but also involves parents in giving feedback about the quality of their children's school through their Parent View website for example[2]. In addition, consulting parents on certain issues such as changes to admissions policy is a legal requirement for schools and local authorities[3].

Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) are parent-led groups that aim to connect parents with teachers and the school as a whole. Together with other types of parent groups they are a fundamental vehicle to ensure that parents are able to actively engage with their children's school life and express their views. For them and for schools more generally, understanding parents is therefore crucial to be able to engage them effectively. And, of course, as the membership body for PTAs in the UK, PTA UK also has a strategic interest in understanding parents, their attitudes, their hopes and their concerns for their children's education.

PTA UK's Parent Insight Survey aims to do this by looking at parents' attitudes and opinions on a number of topics. It tested parents' views on their relationship with their child's school, their willingness to support it and to have a say in their children's education, as well as their understanding of Government policy.

The survey builds on last year's results by continuing to track parental attitudes. It has also been expanded to test parents' views on a number of new topics, including:

- Parents' engagement with their child's education and involvement in school life and the factors that might prevent this from occurring.

[1] For a summary of existing research see PTA UK's Evidence Review on Involving and Engaging Parents in Education

[2] The common inspection framework: education, skills and early years, Ofsted 2015 and https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/

[3] Schools Admission Code, Department for Education 2014

- Parents' experience of and attitudes towards the cost of schooling, including regular donations to school funds.
- Awareness of PTAs, Parent Councils and other parent groups as well as awareness of PTA UK as an organisation.
- Issues that parents consider important for schools to provide support on outside of the core curriculum subjects
- Parents' understanding of and views on current education policy issues in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The aim for PTA UK going forward is to ensure that, as data builds over time, the survey becomes a barometer for parents' opinions that can inform both the organisation's strategic work championing, engaging and supporting parents, and education policy.

2. Summary of key findings

Overview

The PTA UK Annual Parent Survey presents an annual snapshot of parents' behaviour and attitudes towards their children's school and education.

The survey[4] was commissioned through world leading data collection company Research Now to gain a deeper understanding of parents' views on key educational issues:

1. Parent's participation with children's education at home and at school
2. Parents understanding and engagement with government education policy
3. Parent Voice
4. Cost of education and school funding
5. Awareness and perception of parent groups
6. Education topics outside the curriculum.

Our main findings were:

- Parents want to be consulted by government and schools and there is an appetite to get more actively engaged in school life and education.
- There is a concerning lack of understanding of government education policy among parents.
- There needs to be more investigation into the diversity of parents so that we can better understand their concerns, needs, barriers to engagement and motivations.

What parents are telling us

1. Parent participation in education at school and at home

   Parents are mainly active in supporting their child's learning at home (91%) with 76% regularly attending parent-teacher consultations.

   Despite parents declaring they want to support their child's school (85%), parents tend to engage less and not as regularly with the school community as a whole. Surveys are popular (42% have completed one at some point), followed by volunteering (40%) however only 16% had done so in the past six months. Being active in a parent teacher association (PTA) is the most common form of engagement through a parent group (14%).

   Although this varies across different types of parent, lack of time is the single most important reason for parents not to participate (41%). Almost a third of parents (29%) report not being asked by schools or parent groups to get involved in the first place.

   The research highlights that different segments of the parent population perceive different barriers to engagement. More in-depth analysis to identify solutions for these differing groups

[4] The survey was conducted with 1514 parents of school aged children in England (1214), Wales (200) and Northern Ireland (100) at the end of October/ beginning of November 2016. The respondents reflect the general make-up of the UK parent population in terms of gender, age, and socio-economic factors.

of parents should be sought by government, schools and parent groups to maximise parental participation in school and education.

There is high interest from parents in formal representation in school such as parent councils (49%), and to be more active in PTAs (43%) and volunteering (40%).

Interestingly fathers, older parents (55+) and younger parents (under 34) show a lower level of involvement but a relatively higher interest in getting more involved. Some more research into how to overcome the barriers these groups face is recommended.

Parents from higher social economic groups were more likely to be active and represented in school and as part of parent groups while unemployed parents, in particular, are less likely to get involved because they are concerned about their lack of skills and what they could offer (40% compared to 26% of parents on average) .

2. Parents' understanding and engagement with education policy

Overall the research highlights a concerning lack of understanding of government policy.
53% of parents either don't understand (24%) or are disengaged (29%) with government policy.

Additionally the majority of parents are either unsure (31%) or do not think that the Government listens to them (42%) when it comes to their views on education.

Younger parents (aged under 24 and 25-34) and higher earners, show more confidence in their own ability to understand policy changes. Parents in England are more likely to report understanding changes to government policy (47%) than those in Northern Ireland (41%) and Wales (37%) and they are also more likely to feel that the Government hears their views.

3. Parent voice

The majority of parents (84%) want to be consulted by their child's school on a regular basis, yet apart from surveys, their current engagement in committees or other decision making groups within school is low.

A substantial proportion of parents (46%) either disagree or are not able to give an opinion about the extent to which their child's school takes action based on their feedback, which suggests schools need to improve taking action as a result of parent views or communicating when they have done so.

4. Cost of schooling and school funding

Most parents (72%) agree that the cost of sending children to state school is increasing with nearly half (47%) feeling concerned about this.

Younger parents, parents of children in secondary school and parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be concerned about the cost of sending children to school. In particular, parents are worried about the cost of essentials such as uniforms (40%) and school meals (19%).

37% of parents surveyed recall being asked to donate to their child's school fund. On average parents give around £7.30 a month. Younger parents give, on average, substantially more (£9.40) compared to older parents (£6.20). Parents in Northern Ireland (£9 a month) and London (£8.10 a month) are also giving more on average.

A substantial proportion of parents who were asked to donate to the school fund do not know (46%) or are unsure (17%) about how the money is spent.

The lack of clarity around funding and the perceived rise in the cost of schooling highlights the need for schools and government to be more transparent and take account of parent views through engaging them in discussion and debate on the cost of education and how moneys are spent.

5. Awareness and perceptions of PTAs, Parent Councils and Other Parent Groups

Of all the types of parent groups in school, PTAs have the highest level of awareness among parents. Parents tend to associate PTAs with fundraising (56%), however, over a third (39%) see PTAs as a way for parents to have a voice with 29% seeing the groups as a way to support parents in getting involved with their child's learning.

6. Non Academic Education Topics

On issues outside of the academic curriculum, bullying tops the list of parental concerns, with 77% saying it is a very important issue for schools to offer support on with 67% saying the same about cyber-bullying. Teaching children the right values is very important to 71% of parents, as well as skills for the workplace (62%) and career guidance (57%). In comparison to the other issues, emotional and physical health don't rank as highly, yet overall parents still believe that health needs a space within the school environment with 60% and 58% of parents respectively thinking that they are very important issues for schools to cover.

info@pta.org.uk
http://www.pta.org.uk/Schools--Education/Research-and-Insights

3. Full results and analysis

3.1. Parent engagement with children's education and involvement in school

Existing research on parental engagement suggests that parents can have an enormous influence on children's academic attainment, their character and their mind-set. This is unsurprising, given that parents are children's first teachers before they join formal education and that, beyond school, the majority of children's lives continues to revolve around home and family.

A seminal study conducted by Prof. John Hattie in 2008 on students' achievement in New Zealand found that the effect of parental engagement over a child's school career is equivalent to adding two or three years to that child's education[5].

PTA UK's Evidence Review on Involving and Engaging Parents in Education cites a number of studies which highlight that the positive effects of parental engagement in education are true across a number of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds[6].

The studies suggest that the positive effects of parental influence work through a variety of mechanisms, both at the level of parents supporting children in succeeding academically (parent engagement) and at the level of their involvement with their child's school as a whole (parental involvement).

In terms of parental engagement, some of the forms of engagement that seem to have the strongest impact include support with literacy at primary school level (e.g. reading books with children) and having meaningful conversations about external events (e.g. discussing political/social issues with adolescents); they also encompass subtler yet powerful ways of engaging with children's education such as helping them to understand objectives of academic performance, providing them with learning strategies that can be effectively used as well as demonstrating and setting aspirations for their learning[7].

Parental involvement with the school as a whole through activities such as volunteering, attending events and visiting the school has also been shown to be positively associated with children's educational outcomes; this is most likely because being involved in school life enables parents to show children the value that they place on education.

[5] http://www.pta.org.uk/Schools--Education/Why-parents-matter
[6] "PTA UK Evidence Review: Involving and Engaging Parents in Education", PTA UK, 2016
[7] "The impact of parent engagement on learner success: A digest of research for Teachers and Parents", Centre For Real World Learning, University of Winchester, 2010

Looking at results from our study, it is clear that, overall, parents are keen to engage in their children's education. The vast majority of parents surveyed agree that they want to have a say on how their child is educated (85%).

Across the board they seem to subscribe to a well-rounded notion of education, with 90% of parents agreeing that a good education goes beyond exam results. A substantial proportion also see teaching the right values as being a priority for schools, with 71% stating that this is a very important area of work for schools.

When it comes to participating in their child's education, parents tend to do so through activities that support their own child's academic performance (e.g. helping with homework, attending parent consultation evenings). This is perhaps unsurprising, as these activities tend to be "expected" of parents in their general role of educators and, therefore, are likely to be prioritised above other forms of parental involvement in school life such as volunteering time and skills in school or becoming a school governor.

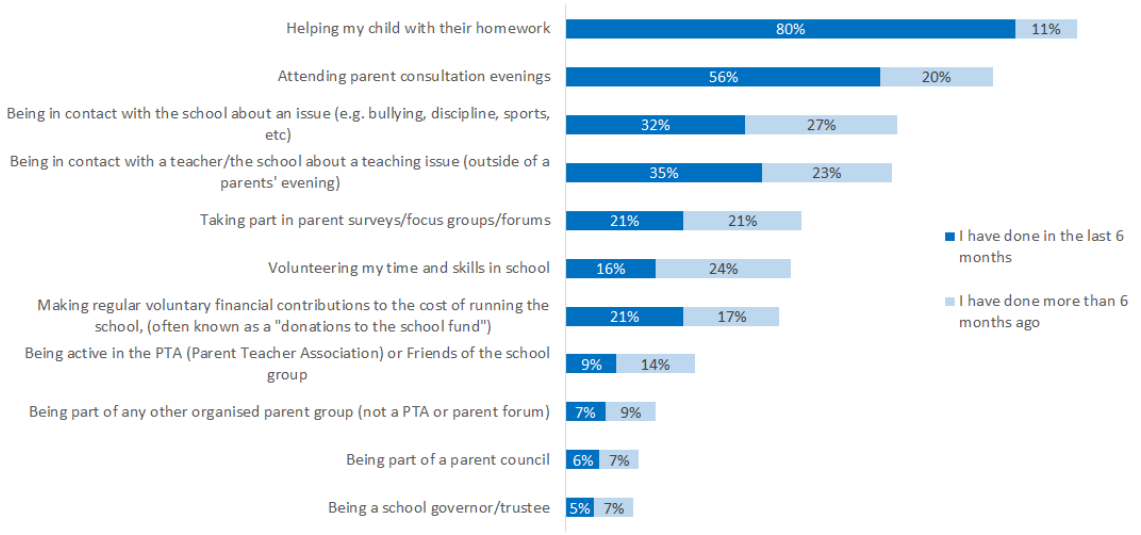
The most common form of parent engagement by far is helping children with their homework, with 80% of parents saying they have done this in the last 6 months[8].

Attending parent consultation evenings (56% of parents have done this in the last 6 months) and being in contact with the school about a teaching or general issue (around one third of parents have done this in the last 6 months) are also fairly common among parents as forms of engagement.

[8] Although one might argue this proportion should be higher, it is likely to reflect the fact that a substantial proportion of the sample is parents of children in secondary and further education which may mean they may not be engaging in this as regularly as they have done in the past, as independence of children grows through adolescence and early adulthood. However, it may also be the case that parents lack the level of knowledge needed to support children with homework at this stage of education. Further research to deepen our understanding of parental behaviour on supporting home learning is needed.

Parents' engagement in school

What parents do



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents, Ranked by have done this in the last 6 months + have done this more than 6 months ago
Question: "Thinking about the different ways in which parents can get involved with and contribute to their child's school or education, which statement best describes your involvement in each of the following? **Ranked by whether they have done this (in the past 6 months or longer ago)**

When it comes to involvement with school as a whole, taking part in surveys, focus groups or forums is the most common form of engagement outside of what is normally expected of parents (overall 42% of parents have done this of which 21% in the last 6 months). This is perhaps to be expected, given that, especially in the case of surveys, this is a relatively mainstream and light touch way of consulting parents. By contrast, being a school governor/trustee is the least likely activity among parents where only 12% of parents have done this either in the last 6 months or longer ago.

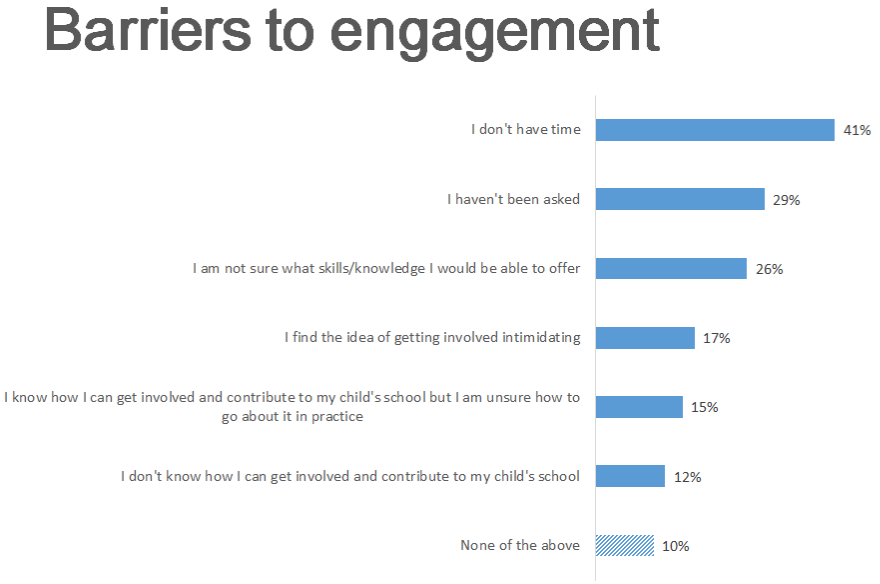
Volunteering in school attracts a high proportion of parents overall, with 40% having done this at some point in their lives but only 16% in the last 6 months. Volunteering is a broad spectrum ranging from one-off 30 minute slots at a summer fair to regular weekly participation in reading schemes and everything in between. The figures suggest that many parents have had experience of volunteering in school but perhaps not on a regular basis.

Participating in parent groups of any kind (PTAs, Parents Councils or other parent groups) is less common among parents than other forms of involvement in school. However, of all types of parent groups, being active in a PTA is the most common, with 23% of parents having done so at some point. This is unsurprising, given that PTAs are the most common type of active parent group in schools. In comparison, the likelihood of parents being active in a parent council or other group is substantially lower, at around half of that of being active through the school's PTA.

3.2 Barriers to Engagement

There are a number of reasons that could explain why parental involvement in school is less common than engagement with children's academic performance.

Lack of time is the single most important barrier to parental engagement in school, with 41% of parents citing it as a reason for not getting involved. It is possible that some of these activities such as volunteering or being active in a parent group are perceived by parents to be too demanding on their time; this suggests there is scope for schools and parent groups to help shift some of these perceptions, for instance by highlighting the fact that many volunteering opportunities for parents in schools can be one-off experiences and need not be a regular commitment.



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: 18-24 (26) , 25-34 (230), 35-44 (538), 45-54 (517), 55+ (204)
Question: "Which of the following statements (if any) best describes the barriers to getting involved with and contributing to your child's school?"

A substantial proportion of parents (29%) also report not being asked to get involved in their own child's school in the first place. This highlights the need for schools and existing parent groups to ensure this basic "hygiene" factor in the relationship with parents is taken care of, not least because this is something that is under their control. Developing methods to communicate with parents effectively on ways to get involved at school is key to a successful partnership. Attention also needs to be paid on how different parent groups communicate to ensure there is equality of opportunity among the parent population to get involved in the first place.

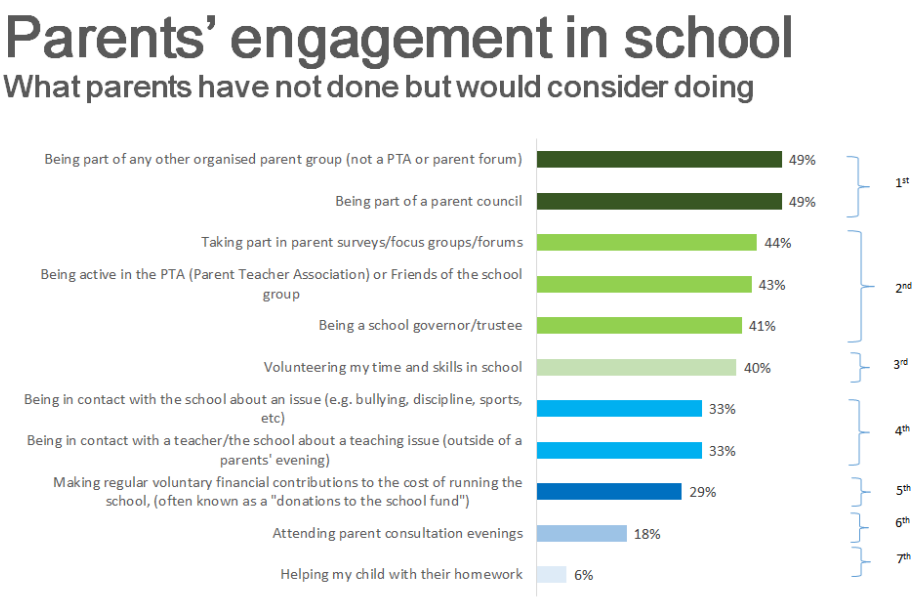
The fact that schools and existing parent groups may be failing to directly ask parents to get involved is also likely to have repercussions on parents being clear about how they can help. Over one in four parents, for instance, report not knowing what skills or knowledge they

could offer to the school. Although this could be related to parents' sense of confidence (17% find the prospect of engaging in school intimidating), at a more basic level, it could also be the result of not being clearly informed about how they can contribute.

3.3 What parents would and would not consider doing

Although levels of parental involvement in school are lower than engagement in children's learning and academic performance, in general, parents tell us that they are open to engaging with the school as a whole, with 85% agreeing that they would like to support their child's school (of which 46% strongly agree). The majority (77%) also agree that positive parent participation in school encourages children to value education.

This is also reflected in parents' consideration to take part in certain activities that they haven't so far.



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents, Ranked by have done this in the last 6 months + have done this more than 6 months ago
Question: "Thinking about the different ways in which parents can get involved with and contribute to their child's school or education, which statement best describes your involvement in each of the following? **Ranked by whether they have done this (in the past 6 months or longer ago)**

Volunteering time and skills in school and taking part in parent surveys/focus groups/forums have substantially higher rates of consideration compared to non-consideration among parents. 44% of parents would consider taking part in surveys/focus groups/forums compared to only 15% who wouldn't. Similarly, 40% of parents would consider volunteering compared to only 19% who wouldn't.

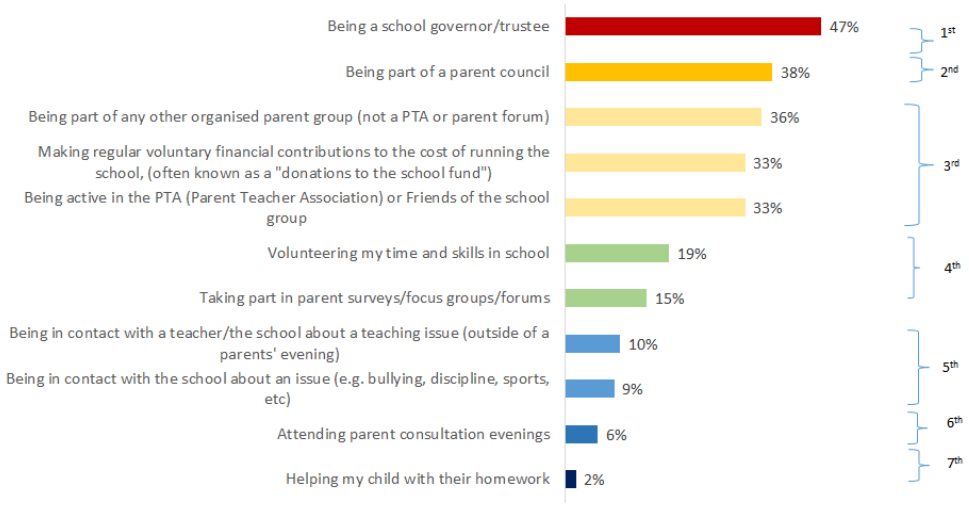
Interestingly, the same proportion of parents would consider volunteering as those who are currently doing it or have done it in the past. This suggests that, if all these parents were to volunteer, schools could potentially double their parent volunteering base.

Parents also strongly consider being part of parent groups and parent councils, with nearly half of parents being open to getting involved through these. Consideration of being part of PTAs is lower (43%), possibly because parents are actually more likely to be involved already.

Overall, the fact that the majority of schools have some form of PTA, parent body or friends group[9] and the fact that many parents say that they would consider getting involved in these ways suggests that there is high potential to improve parental involvement through these platforms.

Parents' engagement in school

What parents would not consider doing



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents, Ranked by have done this in the last 6 months + have done this more than 6 months ago
Question: "Thinking about the different ways in which parents can get involved with and contribute to their child's school or education, which statement best describes your involvement in each of the following? **Ranked by whether they have done this (in the past 6 months or longer ago)**

Perhaps the exception to this is consideration for becoming a school governor/trustee, which appears to be more split. Although 41% of parents would consider doing so, a higher proportion (47%) would not consider it. Here, perceptions of time involved in this activity and sense of confidence in parents' own skills are both likely to play a role.

[9] "Engaging parents and other stakeholders to improve your school", PTA UK and NASBM, 2016

3.4 The demographics of parental engagement and involvement in school

Both parent engagement in children's learning and their involvement in school reveal interesting patterns across demographics.

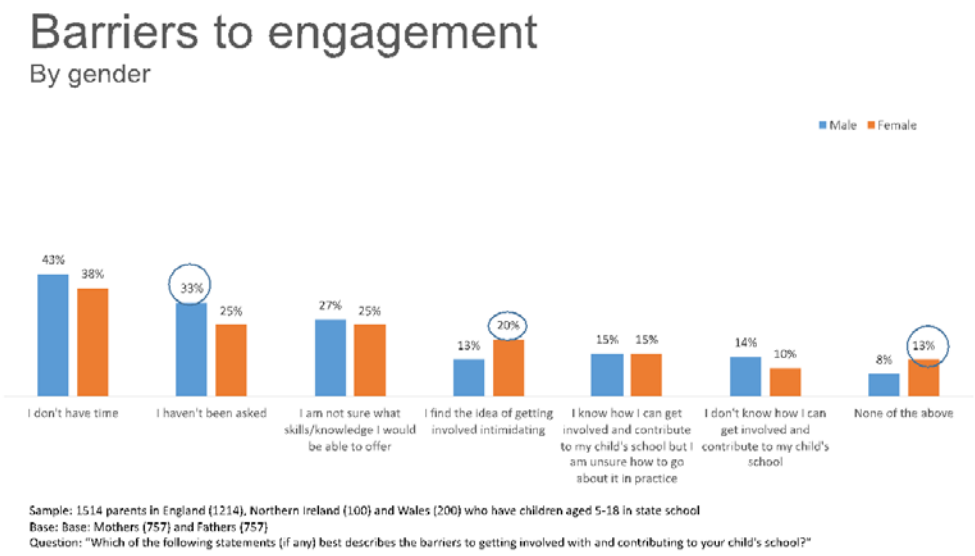
Mothers vs fathers

Although levels of engagement of fathers in children's day to day learning and performance in school are encouragingly high, mothers tend to engage more regularly across a range of tasks such as helping with homework (83% have done this in the past 6 months compared to 77% fathers), being in dialogue with schools by attending parent consultation evenings (62% compared to 50% of fathers) and being in touch with the school about a teaching issue (39% compared to 30% of fathers). This is likely to reflect the fact that, broadly speaking, in our society child caring duties continue to be in mothers' remit more than fathers'.

The more prominent role of mothers in parental engagement with children's day to day education could also explain why this group tends to be more passionate about wanting to have a say on their child's education (43% strongly agree with this compared to 37% of fathers). They are also more likely to say that their school is good at showing them how to support their child's learning (70% of mothers agree overall compared to 66% of fathers), which again, may be reflective of the fact that they are more engaged than fathers when it comes to this.

As with involvement in children's learning, mothers also appear to be more active than fathers when it comes to supporting the school. They are substantially more likely to have volunteered their time and skills (48% have done so at some point compared to 32% of fathers), to have taken part in surveys/focus groups (47% vs 37%) and be active in the PTA (36% vs 20%). They are also more likely to regularly donate to the school fund (42% vs 34%).

While, again, this may reflect the fact that mothers take on a more active role in children's day to day care, our data suggests that fathers are keen to increase their involvement in these activities. In particular, they are interested in becoming involved in activities such as parent councils (49% of fathers would consider doing so), taking part in surveys, focus groups and forums (47%), being active in the PTA (46%) and volunteering in school (45%). Moreover, looking at what stops parents from getting involved in school, fathers are significantly more likely to report not having been asked to get involved (33% compared to 25% of mothers). This, coupled with the fact that parents in general tell us that they are considering getting involved in their children's school, highlights that more can be done by schools and existing parent groups to directly target and engage this group.



Perhaps the only exception when it comes to mothers' and fathers' engagement is being a trustee/school governor, where mothers are actually slightly less likely than fathers to have done so at some point (10% compared to 14%). Again, this may be reflecting traditional gender roles as well as the fact that mothers are more likely to find the idea of getting involved in school intimidating (20% report this being a barrier to engagement compared to 13% of fathers). Trustees and Governors are the highest decision-making level at a school, which makes the gender flip on this level more relevant. Again, this highlights the potential for schools and existing parent groups to tailor their messaging and support to mothers' specific needs and concerns when it comes to involvement in school governance.

Younger vs older parents

In general, and with the exception of being involved in the school's governance system, parents under the age of 44 have higher engagement with their child's education and involvement with the school as a whole.

In terms of parental engagement (e.g. helping with homework, communicating with teachers/school, attending parent consultation evenings), younger parents are more active. This is also reflected in parents' satisfaction with the extent to which the school is good at showing how to support their child's learning (73% of parents 25-34 are satisfied compared to 62% of 45+).

However, if supporting children with learning at home reduces with school phase of the child (from 87% in the last six months in primary school, to 81% in secondary school to 71% in further education) and older children are more likely to be left to their own devices as their independence from parents grows, an important implication is that there may be scope for schools to help parents with this transition as well. Parents may also feel less qualified to support on the subjects the older children study as the depth of the subject matter increases, and may therefore need better information about how they can support their children's learning in other ways.

Of all the age groups surveyed, young parents (particularly those aged 25-34) are also the most involved in their children's school and the ones showing the highest interest in getting involved if they are not already.

They are more likely to have volunteered their time and skills in school (43% have done so at some point, of which 19% have done so in the past 6 months) being a school governor or trustee (18% have done at some point, 8% recently), being active in PTAs (27% have been at some point, 11% recently), parent councils (22% have been at some point, 12% recently) and other parent groups (24% have been at some point, 10% recently). This is also reflected in children's school phase, with parents of primary school children also being more active in supporting the school.

The only exception to this is being a governor/trustee, where parents of secondary school children or those in Further Education are more likely to have done this at some point. On the one hand, it could be the result of having dealt with the school system for longer and, therefore, having had more opportunities to get involved in this way. It may also be related to parents' confidence in themselves and their own skills in taking up the responsibility which may be driven by age and life experience more generally.

The fact that 44% of 18-24 year-old parents and 21% of those aged 25-34 cite feeling intimidated as a barrier to getting involved in their child's school, for instance, may go some way towards explaining the reduced level of involvement at governance level by young parents. If this is the case, it raises the question as to how schools can effectively support younger parents in stepping up and getting more involved in governance from an earlier stage. This may involve buddying younger parents with more experienced parents, for instance, to build the skills and confidence to fulfil such roles.

Older parents and parents of children in secondary school or further education are not only less likely to be currently involved in their children's school but also much less likely to consider doing so. This is particularly true for volunteering (28% of 55+ would not consider doing this), regularly donating to the school fund (41% of 44-55 and 38% of 55+ would not consider doing so), being a governor/trustee (55% of 44-55 and 47% of 55+), being part of a PTA (38% of 45+) or being part of a parent council (44% of 44-55 and 45% of 55+). Older parents also report slightly different barriers to younger parents. Time is more of an issue

for them than younger parents; this may well be reflecting their life stage and professional commitments.

Interestingly, however, older parents (55+) are also more likely to report that not being asked by the school to get involved is a key reason not being active. Like in the case of fathers, this raises the question as to how can schools ensure they actively communicate with this group about opportunities.

Socio-economic background

Socio-economic background seems to play a significant role in the extent to which parents get involved with their children's school as a whole.

Although our data suggests that parents' likelihood to get involved with their children's homework and communicate with school doesn't vary with parents' background, involvement with school does.

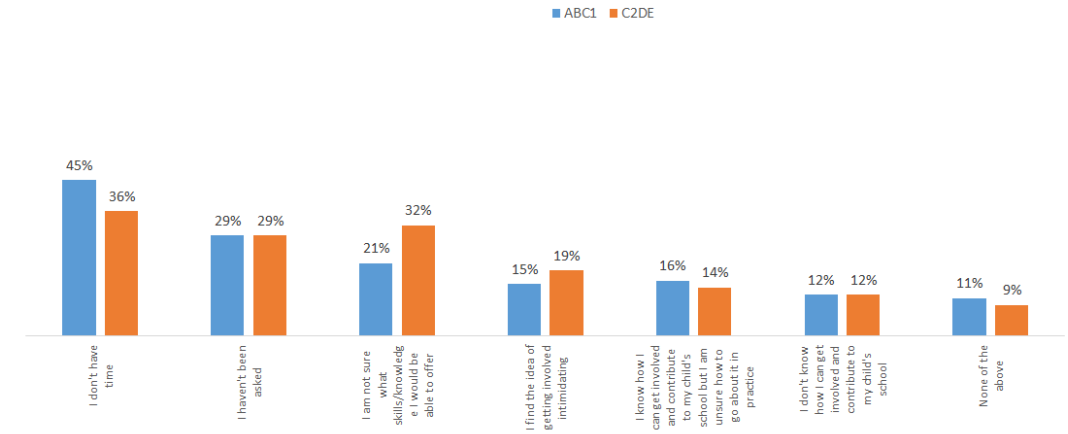
Parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely than parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be currently active in the school in a number of ways, including being consulted through surveys, focus groups or forums (45% of ABC1s compared to 37% of C2DEs), volunteering (44% vs 36%) and donating to the school fund (41% vs 34%). Being part of parent groups or being involved in school governance is also more common for parents from ABC1 groups than those from C2Des both in terms of actual involvement and consideration to get involved.

As well as being generally less involved in school, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also less likely to consider getting involved in a number of ways. The consideration gap is widest between ABC1 and C2DE parents when it comes to being a trustee/governor (55% of C2DE parents would not consider getting involved in this way compared to 40% of ABC1). It is followed by being active in the parent council (44% vs 32%) or any other parent group (42% vs 31%); being active in the PTA (39% vs 28%), volunteering (24% vs 16%) and taking part in surveys (19% vs 11%). The higher the element of direct involvement in decision-making, the less likely parents from lower social-economic groups would consider getting involved in the activity.

Reluctance to get involved with school among C2DE parents may have a number of reasons. When it comes to donating to the school fund, for instance (37% of C2DE parents would not consider this compared to 30% of ABC1 parents), it is likely to be about financial challenges. However, our data also suggests that other factors may be at play. Being unsure about the skills and knowledge that they could offer is one of the two main factors putting parents off becoming more involved in their children's school (32% of C2DE parents mention this compared to 21% of ABC1 parents). They are also more likely to feel intimidated by the

prospect of engaging (19% vs 15%), which, again, could be linked to insecurities about knowledge and skills.

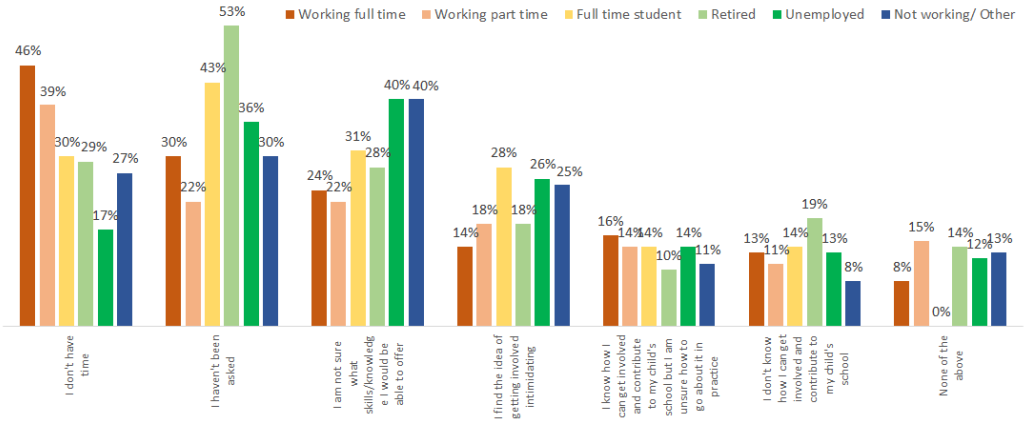
Barriers to engagement
By Social Grade



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: ABC1 (802), C2DE (712)
Question: "Which of the following statements (if any) best describes the barriers to getting involved with and contributing to your child's school?"

These patterns are also reflected in parents' working status with parents who are out of work being worried about not having the knowledge and the skills needed and feeling intimidated.

Barriers to engagement
By Working Status



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: Working full time (903), Working part time (341), Full time student (7), Retired (47), Unemployed (77), Not Working/Other (139)
Question:" Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, which (if any) of the following costs are of particular concern to you?"

These concerns are likely to have a negative impact on parents considering getting involved in all activities that require some self-confidence and, at the very least, the ability to relate to and work with others.

However, this data also reveals a number of opportunities to engage parents from lower socio-economic groups better. There is clearly a case for schools and parent groups to ensure that the correct messaging and support is in place for parents from lower socio-economic groups who, either out of their own perception of these activities or because of objective lack of skills, may find it difficult to make the first step to get involved.

Barriers to involvement for parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds are, on the other hand, very much linked to lack of time (45% compared to 36% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds). That is by far the most important factor for this group and one that is possibly linked to their professional commitments as parents in work (either full-time or part-time). Again, there is an opportunity to increase parental participation for schools and parent groups, by ensuring that there is clear communication with parents about the range of opportunities available as well as the fact that not every opportunity is necessarily as time-consuming or regular a commitment as it may seem.

3.5 Parent Voice

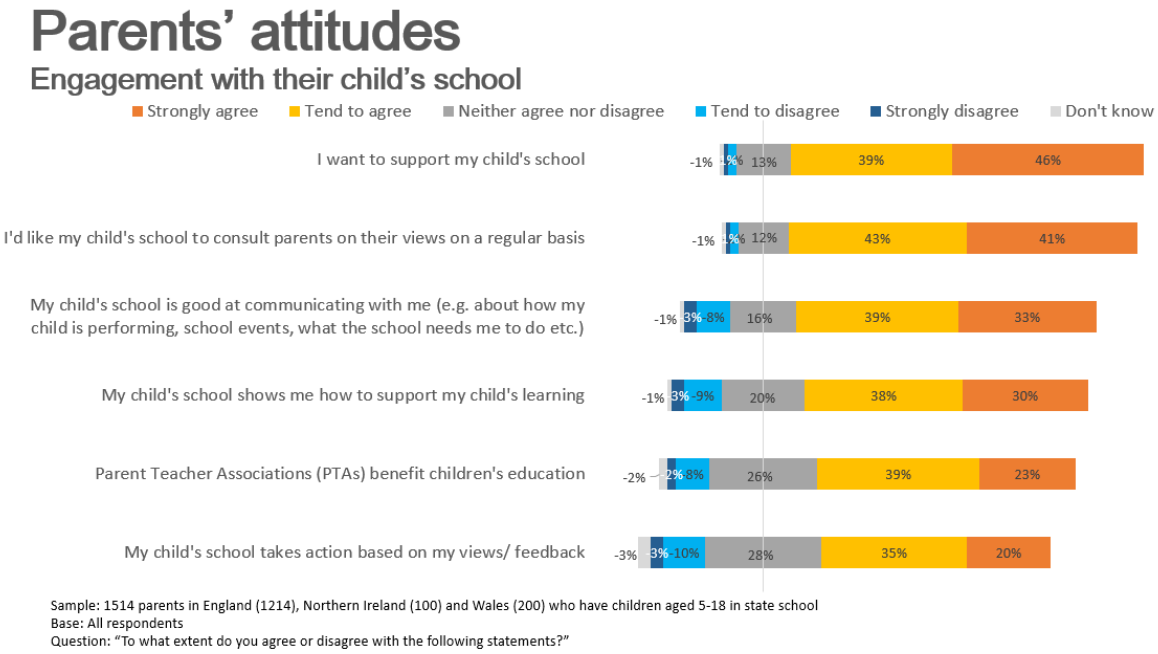
Another key form of parent involvement in school is through opportunities to share their views and feedback on various aspects of their children's school life. Parents can be consulted on a variety of subjects including strategic priorities of the school (e.g. which additional subjects should the school teach, whether or not the school should join Multi Academy Trusts), what the strengths and weaknesses of the school are, whether children feel safe at school, and whether specific school policies should be changed.

This can be done in a number of ways such as through annual surveys, focus groups, and events where parents are invited to offer their views. Parents groups such as councils and PTAs play a key role in promoting opportunities to connect school boards with parents and their views, and also, crucially, to engage otherwise harder to reach parents.

Creating opportunities for parents' voices to be heard is important, first of all because, as a main stakeholder in their child's education, parents have a democratic right to be included and heard on key educational decisions affecting their children. Secondly, results from our study suggest parents want to have a say on how their children are educated. They also tell us that they want to be consulted on their views by their child's school on a regular basis (84% of parents agree with this overall with 41% strongly agreeing).

Consulting parents is also a legal requirement for Local Authorities/schools on certain issues such as admissions arrangements[10]; the recent Government White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (2016), for instance, required boards of all academies to have clear and transparent mechanisms in place to engage with parents.

Finally, as with all other forms of parental involvement in school, an effective parent voice is also likely to have a positive effect on children's own engagement with school as parents show how they value it by getting actively involved in shaping its future.



Despite parents' willingness to be consulted, on the whole, schools' ability to take action on parental feedback seems to be lagging behind parental expectations.

Only 55% of the parents in our survey agree that their child's school takes action based on their feedback and nearly one third neither agree nor disagree. Slight exceptions here are mothers (who are more likely to strongly agree with this than fathers) and younger parents (18-24 and 25-34) which, interestingly, as we have seen in previous sections, are also the groups that are more likely to be involved in sharing their views with schools in a range of ways; this may explain higher levels of satisfaction.

[10] Schools Admission Code, Department for Education 2014

Also, from a regional point of view, schools are more likely to consult regularly with parents in Northern Ireland (70% agree with this overall) and England (77%) than Wales (59%).

Whilst these figures suggest that many schools are fulfilling parents' expectations on this matter, they still raise the question of whether mechanisms to consult parents in schools are widespread enough and, if they are, whether they are effective. Some schools may be acting on feedback from parents but may not be communicating back to parents effectively on this. This is in contrast to communication on other academic and practical issues with which parents seem to be comparatively more satisfied (72% of parents agree with this) and on helping parents support their children's learning (68% of parents agree with this).

PTAs, parent councils and other parent groups are in a particularly strong position to help parents and schools connect on this issue and close the communication loop. PTA UK and NASBM's recent report "Engaging parents and other stakeholders to improve your school" (2016) refers to a number of ways in which this can be achieved.

3.6 Awareness and perceptions of PTAs, Parent Councils and Other Parent Groups

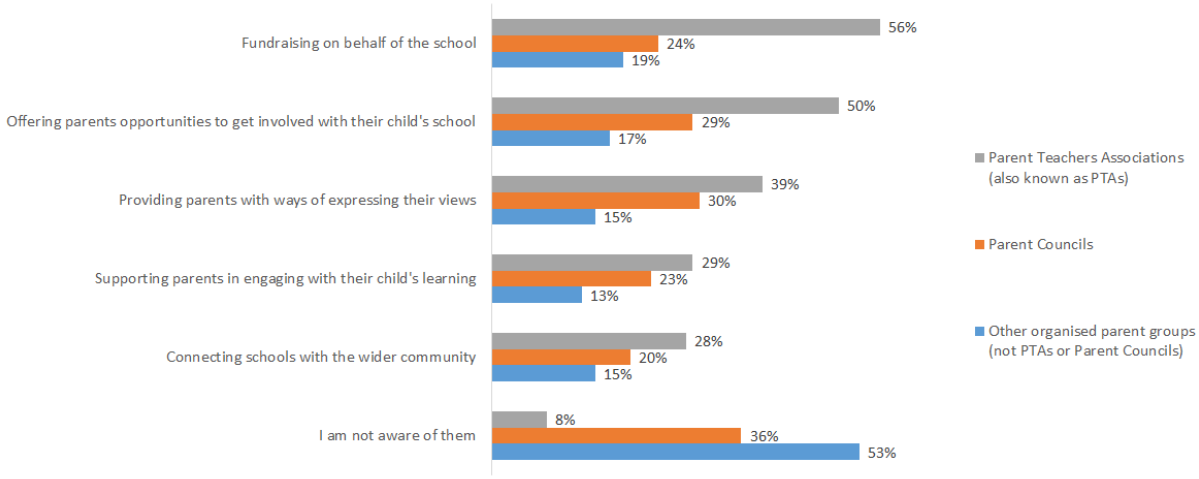
Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs), Parent Councils and any other organized forms of parent groups play a key role in schools, both in terms of representing parent voice and, more generally, helping the school to connect with parents. In previous sections, we have seen how, although parents' participation in these groups is still relatively low compared to other forms, involvement in parent groups has substantial potential to grow. This, in turns, raises the question of how much parents do know about these groups and what parents' perceptions are of their impact.

Of all parent groups prompted in our survey, Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) have the highest level of awareness among parents. Only 8% of parents haven't heard of them compared to 36% of parents who haven't heard of Parent Councils and 53% who are not aware of other types of parent groups in their child's school.

Awareness is slightly higher in Northern Ireland (where only 3% of respondents are not aware of PTAs) compared to the other regions; it is also higher among parents from high socio-economic backgrounds (only 5% of ABC1s are not aware compared to 11% of C2DEs), which is expected, given that this group is also more likely to be active in PTAs and parent groups more generally.

Parents in Wales appear to be less aware of Parent Councils (46% are unaware) than in the rest of the sample (36%).

Perceived Role of PTAs,Parent Councils and other groups



Sample: Parents in England who have children aged 5-18 in state school (1214 in 2016; XXX in 2015)
Base: All respondents

The most common perception among parents is that PTAs deal with fundraising in the school (56% of parents think so), which is unsurprising given that this is what PTAs are traditionally known for. 39% of parents also think that PTAs are a mechanism for parents to express their views, which suggests parents are aware of PTAs being a conduit for their voice to be heard. However, parents are less likely to associate PTAs with supporting parents with their child's learning (29%) than with other roles.

Interestingly, younger parents (18-35) are less likely to associate PTAs with fundraising, which may be due to the fact that this group has a slightly fresher view which is less tied to stereotypes.

Older parents (44-55) are less likely to associate PTAs with supporting parents with their child's learning. Parents of primary school children, on the other hand, are more likely to associate PTAs with opportunities to get involved with the school and supporting parents in engaging with their children's learning.

Parents in Northern Ireland (65%) and in Wales (69%) are more likely to associate PTAs with fundraising. However, PTAs are also more likely to be seen as a mechanism for parents to express their views in Northern Ireland (52%). This ties in with the fact that, in general, parents in Northern Ireland are more likely to say that they are regularly consulted by their school, which may explain why this aspect of PTAs is more top of mind for them.

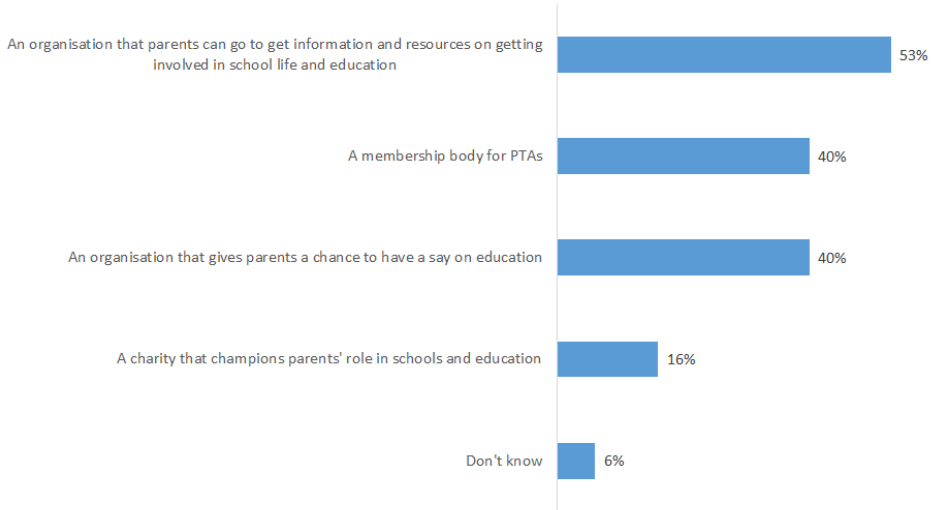
Parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to mention fundraising (61%) and offering parents opportunities for involvement in the school (55%) than parents from lower socio-economic groups.

The majority of parents have a positive view of PTAs. This is perhaps more evident among parents of younger children and may be linked with the fact that PTAs tend to receive more support from parents in primary/secondary school who, generally, have more time to get involved. More than two in three parents agree that PTAs benefit children's education, with 23% of parents strongly agreeing. This is particularly true for parents of children in primary and secondary schools who are more likely to think so than parents of children in further education.

Parents also recognise that PTAs are a way of engaging parents outside the school gate, with 65% of parents agreeing with this overall and 22% strongly agreeing. Here, not only are parents in Northern Ireland more likely to be aware of PTAs but they are also more likely to think that PTAs engage parents outside of the school gate than their Welsh and English counterparts.

Although general awareness of Parent Teachers Associations is high, only 23% of parents have heard of PTA UK. This is to be expected, and equates to the proportion of parents that have been involved with a PTA in their child's school at some point in their lives.

Prompted Awareness of what PTA UK does



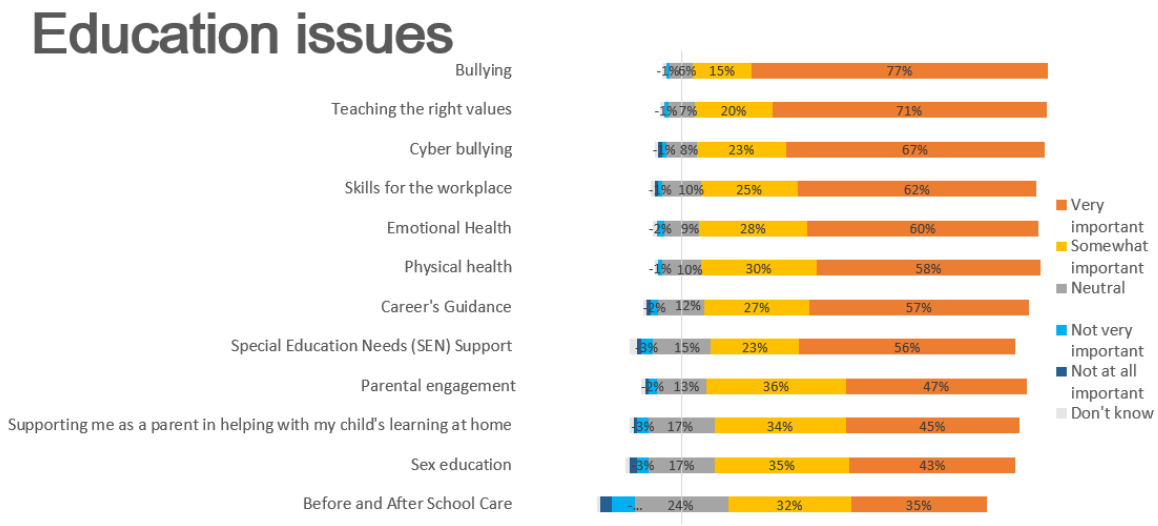
Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

The majority of respondents (53%) think that PTA UK is an organisation that parents can go to in order to get information on how to get involved in school life and education. Two in five parents believe PTA UK is a membership body for PTAs and a similar proportion perceive it as a way for parents to have a say on their children's education. Our research shows that 16% of parents recognise PTA UK as a charity that champion's parents' role in schools and education. In recognition of this PTA UK is developing its programme to engage parents in education policy and champion issues that matter to them.

3.7 Education topics and issues outside the curriculum

When it comes to expressing their views, one of the key elements that parents should be able to have a say on is what issues and areas of knowledge schools should cover outside of core subjects which could support children either directly or indirectly.

When prompted with a range of issues, bullying tops the list for parents, with 77% saying it is a very important issue for schools to offer support and 67% saying so about cyber-bullying. Many parents also see schools teaching children the right values as a priority (71% think that it's very important) as well as skills for the workplace (62%) and careers guidance (57%). In comparison with the other issues, emotional and physical health don't rank as highly, yet overall parents still believe that health needs a space within the school environment with 60% and 58% of parents respectively thinking that they are very important issues for schools to cover.

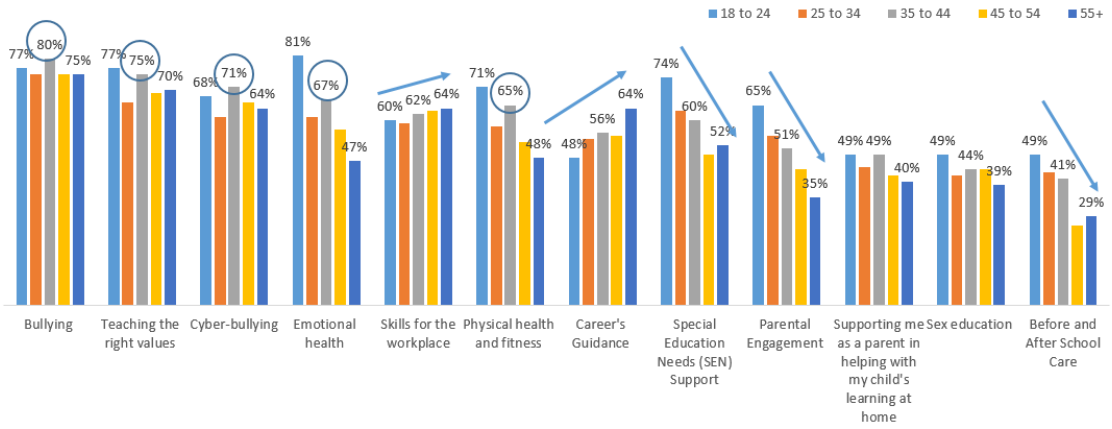


Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "To what extent is it important that your child's school delivers good quality education or support around the following areas?" **Ranked by "Very important" score**

Priorities vary considerably with parents' age and, consequently, with children's school phase and life stage.

Education issues

By age



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: 18-24 (26) , 25-34 (230), 35-44 (538), 45-54 (517), 55+ (204)
Question: "To what extent is it important that your child's school delivers good quality education or support around the following areas?" **"Very important" score**

Parental engagement with school, supporting parents with their child's learning and before and after school care are issues of particular importance to younger parents. It reflects the fact that the majority of these parents have children in primary school. Before and after school care, for instance, is likely to represent an important form of child care for this group, especially working parents. Also, as seen in previous sections, younger parents are more motivated to be engaged with the school community as well as with home learning, which would explain the importance of this issue for them.

Parents aged 35-44, a good proportion of which have children in both primary and secondary school, are more likely to think that issues that can impact on their child's mental and physical health such as bullying, cyberbullying, emotional health and physical health are a priority. Sex education is also much more important for parents of children in secondary school (49% think it is very important for schools to cover this) compared to parents of children in Primary School and Further Education.

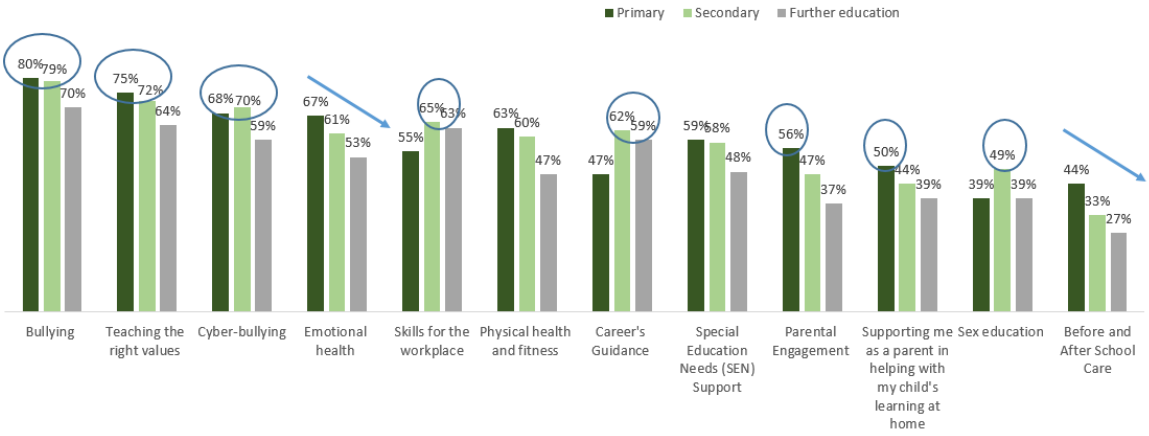
This clearly reflects the fact that their children are in transition between childhood and adolescence and, therefore, these issues are likely to be more pressing. At the same time, this also suggests that parents and schools could work together to ensure that children are equipped to deal with some of these issues from a younger age and not only as they go from primary to secondary school. Developing resource and guidance for parents on how to support their children when they encounter bullying/cyberbullying, mental or physical

health issues or sexual health and healthy relationships, could also present a way for a more holistic education at school and at home.

Older parents (45+) are less likely to think that SEN support, parental engagement, supporting parents with their child's learning at home, and before and after school care are priorities. Their focus is on skills for the workplace and career's guidance which they are more likely to think of as important compared to younger parents; although this clearly reflects their children's life stage it also raises the question as to whether older children's well-being and emotional and physical health are given enough weight by both parents and schools compared to other issues.

Education Issues

By School phase of oldest child



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: Primary (456), Secondary (681), Further Education (347), Strongly/Tend to Agree scores combined
Question: Question: "To what extent is it important that your child's school delivers good quality education or support around the following areas?" **"Very important" score**

Interestingly, socio-economic background also has an impact on how some of these issues are perceived and prioritised by parents. Parents from lower socio-economic grades are more likely to think that a number of issues are very important for schools when compared to parents in higher socio-economic groups. These include bullying, cyber-bullying, skills for the workplace, SEN support and sex education. These differences may well reflect different personal priorities but also different life experiences and incidence of certain circumstances (e.g. SEN needs).

From a regional point of view, parents in Northern Ireland are more likely to rate careers guidance, before and after school care and emotional health as very important. Welsh parents are less likely to think that parental support with children's learning is very important.

3.8 The cost of schooling

In the light of increasingly tighter budgets both for the government and individual families, one of the most current issues in education is the cost of sending children to school. A recent study commissioned by retailer John Lewis[11] into the cost of schooling estimated this to be on average a staggering £4,700 a year (£4,200 for children in primary school and £4,900 for those in secondary school)[12]. This is excluding private school fees, which means that, nowadays, even parents whose children are attending state schools are far from able to enjoy the benefits of a free education.

Not only is the cost of sending children to school high, but data suggests that it has also increased over time. A study conducted by AVIVA in 2013 shows that three years ago sending a child to school costed families just over £1,600 on average[13]. The same study also estimated that the cost of sending children to school increased by 11% between 2008 and 2013.

Looking at parents' attitudes towards the cost of schooling, there is no doubt that, as a result of increasing costs, levels of concern are high. Although 42% agree that the cost of sending children to school these days is acceptable, only 12% strongly agree with the statement and nearly one in four actively disagrees. The vast majority of parents (80%) also report being concerned about the cost of at least one item related to sending their children to school.

Most parents seem to be feeling the effect of ever-increasing school costs with 72% agreeing that the cost of sending children to school is increasing and nearly half of parents (47%) being concerned about it.

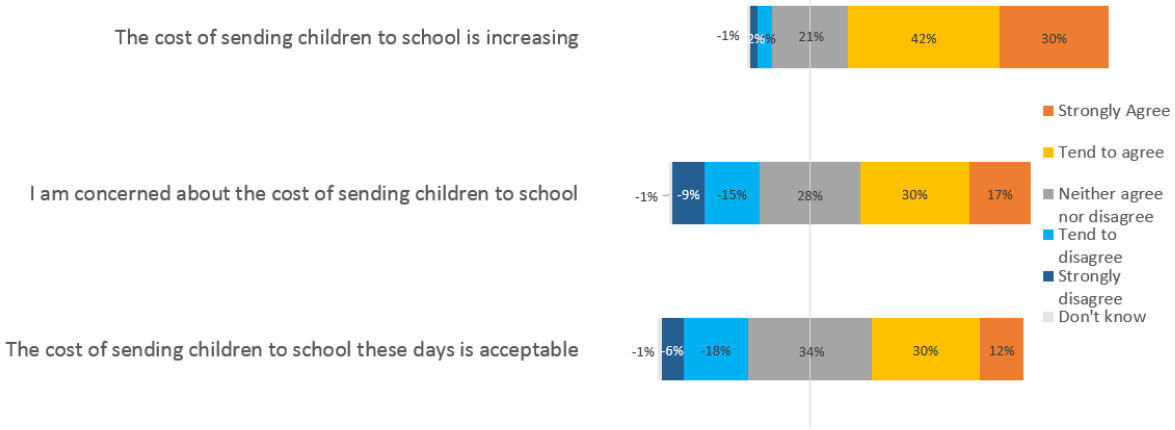
---

[11] https://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/aug/11/parents-6800-childs-first-year-of-secondary-school

[12] This includes excludes private school fees and includes items such as uniforms, stationary, technology as well as hidden costs (e.g. parking). It also includes childcare to cover school inset or training days, social events and even costumes, props and party clothes.

[13] "The Aviva Family Finances Report", AVIVA, July 2013

Attitudes towards the cost of schooling

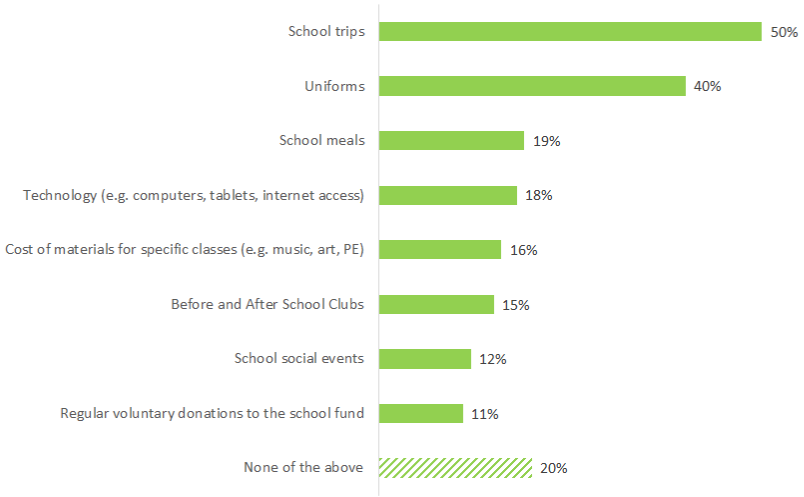


Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? "

When it comes to concern for specific costs, school trips top the list, with half of parents reporting they are concerned about this. This is interesting as it is likely that, over the course of a school year, this is not the largest cost faced by families[14], but certainly one that needs to be sustained upfront rather than staggered throughout the year. This, in turn, means that it is important for schools to consider how families' cash flow (and not only overall income) may affect their ability to pay for school items.

[14] AVIVA estimated the cost of school trips to be £120 a year in 2013, well behind the cost of school dinners/lunches and before and after school care, for instance

Cost of schooling

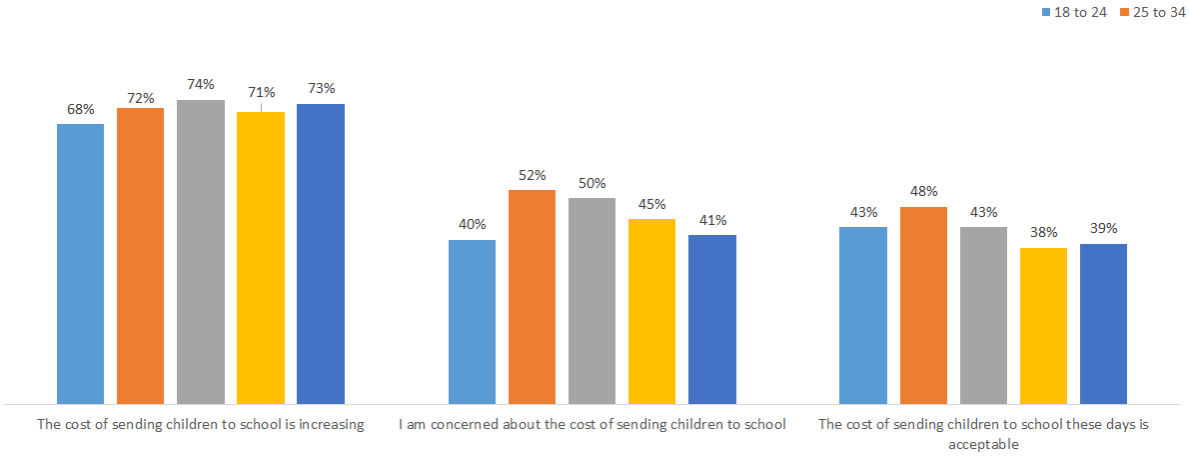


Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents, Ranked by have done this in the last 6 months + have done this more than 6 months ago
Question:" Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, which (if any) of the following costs are of particular concern to you"

Many parents also seem to be worried about the cost of essentials such as uniforms (40%) and school meals (19%), although the latter at relatively lower levels, perhaps due to the universal availability of Free School Meals schemes from Reception to Year 2. Regular donations to the school fund, on the other hand, have the lowest level of concern (11%).

Although younger parents (25-38) are also slightly more likely to say that the cost of sending children to school is acceptable (48% compared to 39% of 55+), they are overall more concerned about the cost of sending children to school than their older counterparts (52% compared to 41% of 55+). Older parents, and those whose children have moved further along in the education system may be in a better position to compare and notice the increase in cost, and therefore less likely to think the cost is acceptable.

Attitudes towards the cost of schooling
By age



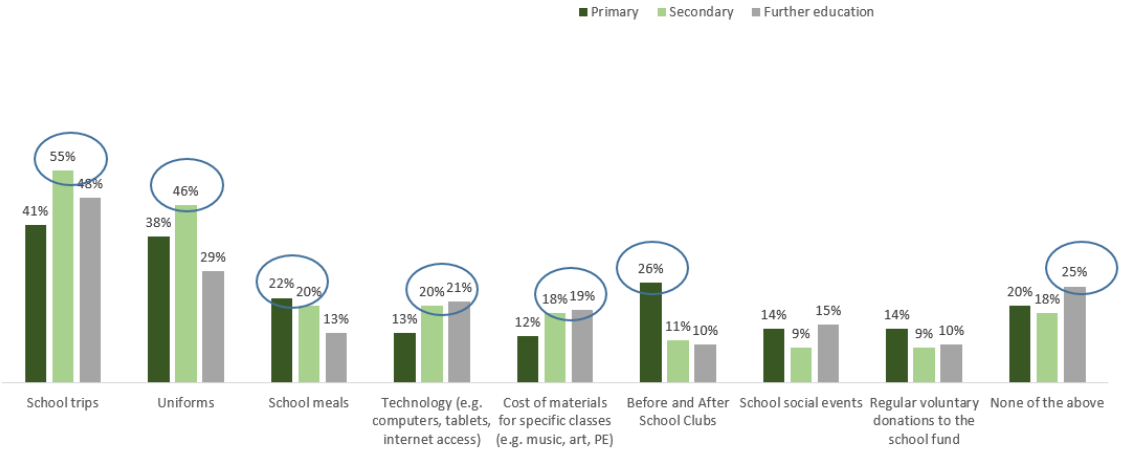
Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: Base: 18-24 (26) , 25-34 (230), 35-44 (538), 45-54 (517), 55+ (204), Strongly/Tend to Agree scores combined
Question: "Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? "Strongly/Tend to Agree scores combined

Among younger parents, those with children in secondary school are more likely to be concerned about the cost of sending children to school; they are also less likely than primary school parents to think that the cost of schooling is acceptable. This ties in with the fact that the cost of sending children to school does increase between primary and secondary school, particularly when it comes to items such as uniforms and additional equipment such as calculators and sports kit. Concern about the cost of uniforms, for instance, is much higher for parents of children in secondary school than those in primary or further education.

Younger parents (25-34 35-44) are also more worried about essentials such as uniforms (49% of 25-34) and school meals (29% of 25-34) than older parents. Primary school parents are also more likely to be worried about before and after school care costs (26%). This could reflect both the fact that these items are likely to constitute a larger portion of their total spend in primary school years than in later years and, therefore, are a much more pressing cost. They could also reflect the financial circumstances of these groups which are at an earlier stage in life than other parents, and possibly less well-established financially.

Cost of schooling

By School phase of oldest child



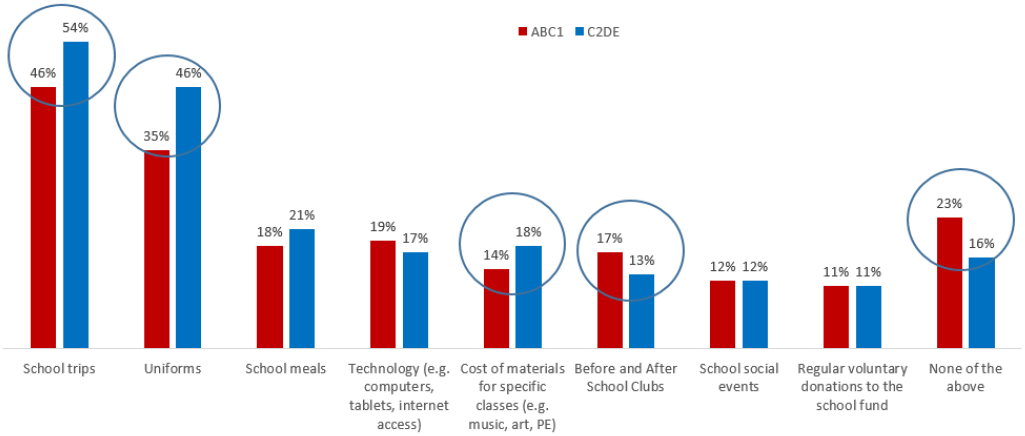
Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: Primary (456), Secondary (681), Further Education (347)
Question:" Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, which (if any) of the following costs are of particular concern to you?"

Older parents and parents of children in Secondary School and Further Education, on the other hand, are more likely to worry about the cost of school trips. Concerns around the cost of technology and material for specific classes are also a distinct trait of this group, with one in five parents of children in Secondary School and Further Education worrying about the cost of technology and a similar proportion about the cost of materials. Again, this is likely to reflect the fact that these items become more relevant as children progress through the school system.

Socio-economic status of parents and the number of children in the household both seem to play a role when it comes to concerns about costs. Overall concern is higher (although, interestingly, not by much) for parents from low socio-economic backgrounds (50% of C2DEs compared to 45% of ABC1s). They are also less likely to think the cost of schooling is acceptable (37% vs 46%). Concern about the cost of schooling also increases substantially with the number of children in the house, with 56% of families with three or more children being concerned about the cost of sending children to school. Not surprising, when as mentioned above, the average cost of schooling per year per child is £4,700.

In terms of specific items, the gap in concern between ABC1 and C2DE parents is largest for essentials such as uniforms (46% of parents from C2DE groups report being concerned about this compared to 35% of parents from ABC1s groups); it is also reflected in concern about the cost of school trips (54% vs 46%), which again may be related to cash flow and the cost of materials for specific classes (18% vs14%). The only exception being that parents from higher social grades are more likely to be worried about before and after school care costs. This could be because they are more likely to make use of them as a child care option for working parents or enrichment activities.

Cost of schooling
By Social Grade

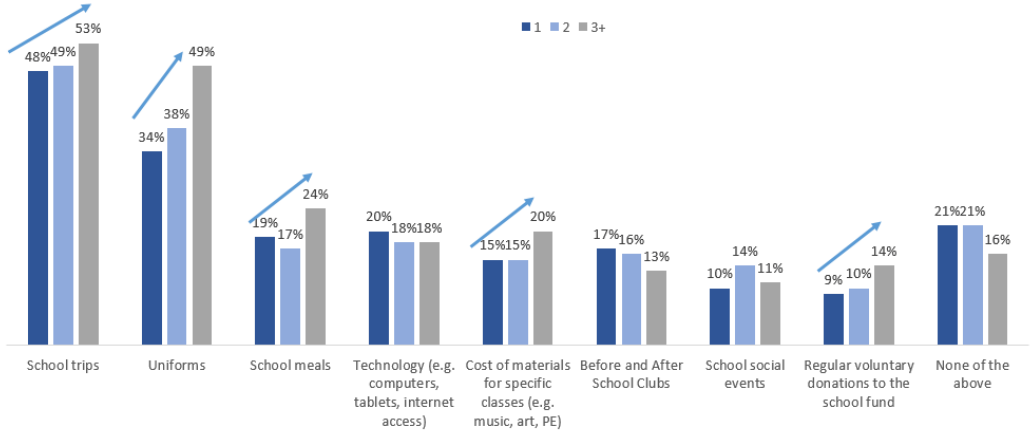


Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: ABC1 (802), C2DE (712)
Question:" Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, which (if any) of the following costs are of particular concern to you?"

Having more children in the household means a higher level of concern across a number of issues, presumably due to higher financial pressures and budget constraints.

These include school trips, uniforms, school meals, cost of materials and regular voluntary contributions to the school fund.

Cost of schooling
By Number of children in the household

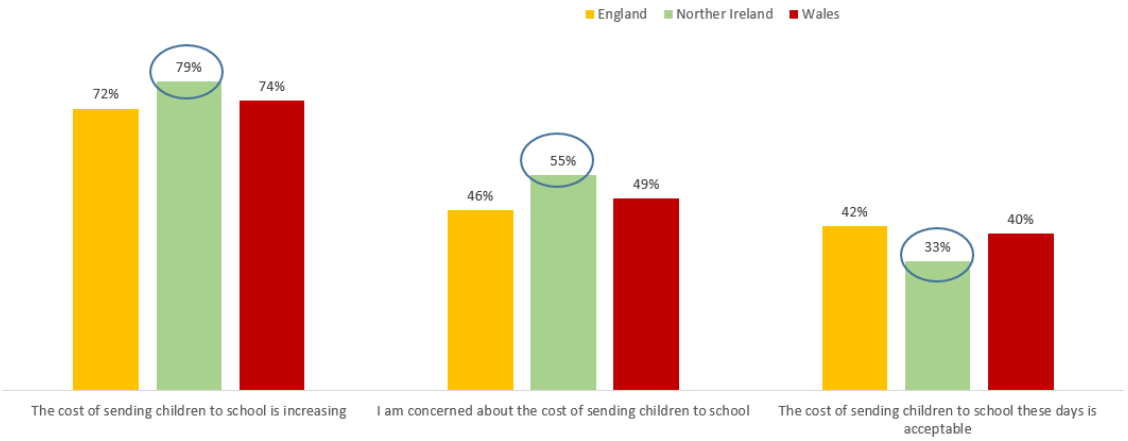


Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: 1 child (372), 2 children (724), 3+ children (418)
Question:" Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, which (if any) of the following costs are of particular concern to you?"

Finally, attitudes towards the cost of schooling also vary between regions. In Northern Ireland, parents are more likely to think that the cost of sending children to school is increasing (79%) and to be concerned about the cost of schooling than their English and Welsh counterparts (55%); they are also less likely to think that the cost is acceptable (33%). Overall, this is, again, a stark reminder of the fact that many parents whose children attend state school around the country may be struggling to make ends meet when it comes to a key service which, by definition, should be free.

Attitudes towards the cost of schooling

By Region



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: England (1214), Northern Ireland (100), Wales (200), Strongly/Tend to Agree scores combined
Question:" Thinking about the financial cost of your child going to school, which (if any) of the following costs are of particular concern to you?" Strongly/Tend to Agree scores combined

3.9 Donations to the school fund

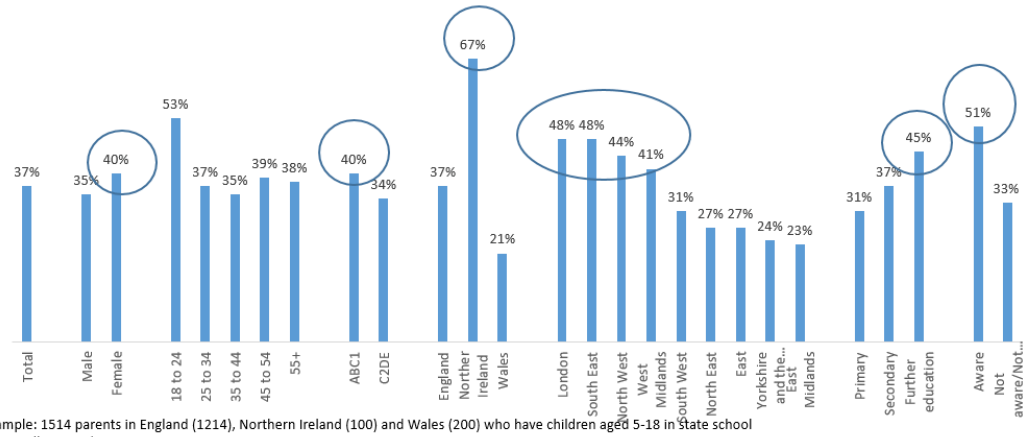
One specific cost that parents may need to face while their children are at school is donating to the school's fund: a practice that is increasingly common amongst schools around the country. This is separate to the fundraising activity of a PTA or other parent group for specific initiatives and it involves the school asking parents for a regular, voluntary donation which will support the general running of the school.

Although most parents do not recall being asked to donate to their child's school fund, a significant proportion (37%) do.

The likelihood of being asked for donations varies geographically. Parents in Northern Ireland are substantially more likely to report having been asked for donations and so are parents living in London, South East, North West and West Midlands.

This is interesting since, as we have seen in previous sections, parents in Northern Ireland are also more likely to be concerned about the cost of schooling than other parents around the UK and it suggests donations to the school fund may be adding pressure to existing concerns. Regionally, parents in Northern Ireland and London are also the groups that give the highest amounts (£9 and £8.10 a month respectively).

Being asked for donations to the school fund



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: " Some schools ask parents and guardians for a regular voluntary financial contribution to the cost of running the school, which is often known as a 'donation to the school fund'. Have you ever been asked by your child's school to donate to the school fund?"

Mothers are more likely to recall being asked for a donation to the school fund than fathers, and so are parents from higher socio-economic groups.

The chances of being asked increase with the number of children in the household and are significantly higher for parents of children at secondary school and further education compared to those at primary school.

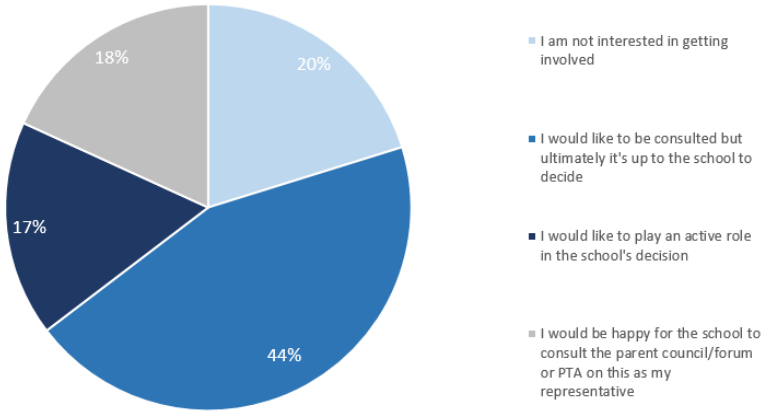
Although 37% of parents report being asked, only 29% of parents in the sample report that they are currently donating money. The average parent gives £7.30 a month. However, amounts vary substantially across demographics.

Younger parents give, on average, substantially more: £9.5 (18-24) and £9.4 (25-34) compared to older parents (55+ give £6.20). Similarly, parents of children in primary and secondary schools also give higher amounts compared to parents of children in further education. This ties in with the fact that younger parents are also more likely to be concerned about the cost of schooling more generally and raises the question whether, despite having less financial possibilities, this group is quietly bearing the weight of increasing school costs.

When asked whether they know how the money donated is spent, a substantial proportion of parents either do not know (46%) or are unsure (17%) about this.

Although, as seen in previous sections, parents express they are keen to be consulted by schools about their views, on this matter they seem to prefer a hands off approach to the decision of how the school's donation fund money is spent. 20% are not interested in getting involved and 44% would want to be consulted but would leave the decision up to the school. Perhaps parents' attitudes would be different if they were aware of the substantial amount they contribute overall as a group to this aspect of schools' finances.

Attitudes towards schools spending donations



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Thinking about parents' donations to the school fund, which of the following statements best describes how schools should go about and decide how the money is spent?"

3.10 Parents' understanding and engagement with education policy

An important aspect of PTA UK's work is to connect schools and parents with the wider Government policy.

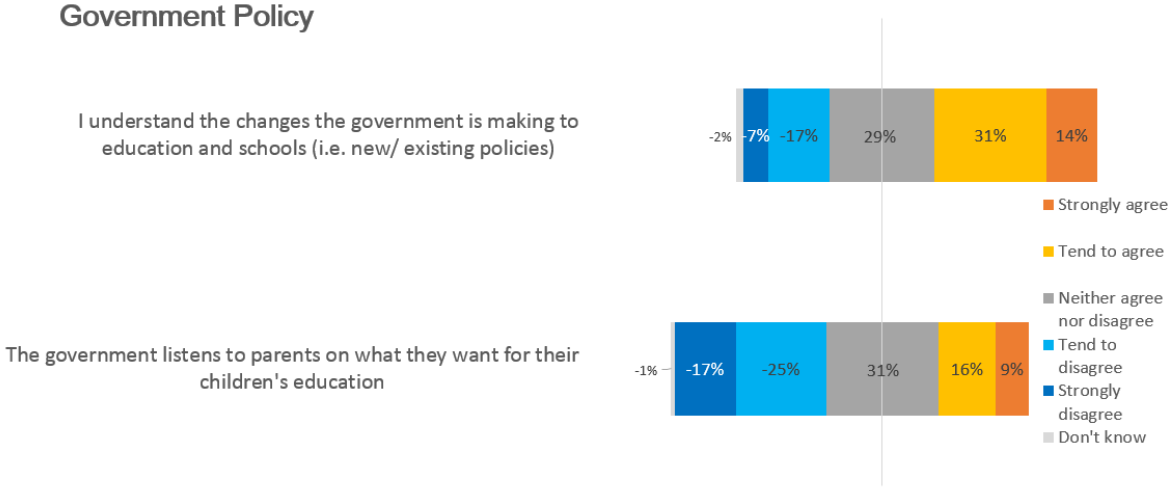
In general, parents in our survey report low levels of engagement with education policy changes and satisfaction with the extent to which the Government listens to their views when it comes to children's education.

More parents either do not understand current changes in government policy (24%) or have no opinion about this (29%) than those who do. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the complexity of the issues and the fact that the current education landscape in the UK is in constant change.

Moreover, the majority of parents either do not think that the Government listens to them (42%) when it comes to their views on education or do not have an opinion about it (31%). This echoes our finding at a micro level in schools, where a sizeable portion of parents are unsure as to whether or not schools are acting on their views.

Parents' attitudes

Government Policy



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?"

Parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds show more confidence in their own ability to understand policy changes with 49% stating that they do compared to 42% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Similarly, parents in England are more likely to say they understand changes to government policy (47%) than those in Northern Ireland (41%) and Wales (37%). They are also more likely to feel heard compared to their counterparts in Northern Ireland and Wales (26% of parents in England feel the Government listens to their views compared to 22% in Northern Ireland and 18% in Wales).

Disillusionment with education policy tends to grow with age. Among parents aged 18-24 and 25-34, 64% and 54% respectively agree that they understand current changes in education policy compared to only 41% of parents aged 55+. Parents in younger age groups also feel more listened to by the Government - 46% and 39% of parents aged 18-24 and 25-34 respectively feel listened to by the Government compared to only 17% of parents aged 55+.This, again, may be reflective of the level of energy and enthusiasm that younger parents show in getting involved in their children's education that we have seen in previous sections of this report.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, our study suggests that there are a number of areas that schools and PTAs should think about when looking to support parents and ensure they are actively engaged in their child's school life:

a) Ensuring parents are asked to participate in their child's school & education

This is a basic hygiene factor that can go a long way to ensure that parents do not miss opportunities to be active in schools. Although not all parents may be as receptive to communication, the fact that many do not recall being asked suggests that there is potential for schools and parent groups to improve on this. Ensuring that a variety of channels are used is key, as well as leveraging PTAs' and parent groups' unique positions to reach out to parents who are less engaged; this is particularly true for fathers (see next point) and for parents over 55 who are more likely to cite not being asked as a barrier to engagement than other groups. Perhaps schools can also learn from their communication to parents about other academic and non- academic issues which, as parents tell us, are effective.

b) Tapping into the potential of fathers' involvement in their child's school

When it comes to getting involved in the school as a whole, fathers are clearly an audience that schools and parent groups should be tapping into more. Despite being less likely to be currently active, their consideration for activities such as volunteering, being active in parent groups and sharing their views through surveys and forums is high and should be taken as a clear signal that this group is keen to participate. Perhaps as a result of the fact that they are currently engaging less than mothers, fathers are also less likely to be asked by schools to get involved, which suggests the need for targeted communication and recruitment of this group.

c) Nurturing young parents' enthusiasm

Overall, our figures suggest that parents under 35 are generally more active in supporting their child's learning, more involved with the school and more likely to be happy about the support and communication received from the school. They are also more confident about understanding changes in government policy and more positive about their views being heard. However, compared to other groups they are also more likely to find the idea of being active in school intimidating; for activities such as becoming a trustee or a governor this feeling may be the main reason why this group doesn't participate as much as older parents.

It is therefore important that schools and parent groups make the most of young parents' energy while helping them ease into more daunting roles. Having a positive experience will ensure that this group remains engaged throughout their children's school life. Solutions such as buddying schemes that pair them up with more experienced parents, for instance, may be worth considering. Also, more generally, making a conscious effort to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere around this group and ensuring basic volunteering good practice is followed could help.

d) Debunking the myth of time commitment

Lack of time is by far the largest barrier reported by parents when it comes to getting involved in school. Although this is likely to be a real issue for some parents (e.g. those in full-time work) many may also have a flawed perception of how time-consuming certain activities are. In this sense, schools and parent groups need to communicate clearly with parents that certain activities may not require as much time as they think, while still making a considerable contribution to the school. Volunteering, for instance, is something that can be done as a one-off activity rather than a regular commitment; so is contributing to a focus group or even helping out at an event. Targeted communication on levels of time commitment for volunteering may have a great impact on changing perceptions. Developing a good volunteering framework, that includes clarity on volunteering opportunities, roles and expectations as well as levels of support available and communication ideas and standards, may also help with debunking this myth.

e) Helping parents who are out of work tap into their own confidence and potential

Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those who are out of work are much more likely to be worried that they do not have the right skills and knowledge to contribute to their children's school. They are also more likely to say that the idea of getting involved intimidates them. This highlights considerable potential for schools and parent groups to increase parental engagement while contributing to the skills, sense of confidence, mental health and perhaps even economic capacity of this group. Like in the case of young parents, peer-to-peer support may be helpful in engaging this group in the first place as well as ensuring a welcoming and friendly atmosphere.

f) Commissioning more research into barriers to participate for older parents, lower social groups and fathers

Our research has identified and made recommendations in relation to three groups whose involvement in schools is lower than average. However, more research is needed to uncover the intricacies of the factors that may be stopping them from participating. While, for instance, older parents may have some obvious reasons (e.g. their children are more independent) it may

also be that, having given so much time and energy in the past, their enthusiasm needs to be rekindled through a fresh approach. In the case of parents from C2DE social groups, how can they be reached effectively? And what are the subtle forces that are at play behind their lack of engagement? What does being intimidated actually involve for them? With regards to fathers, is not being asked the only real problem? Or are there other significant barriers in place?

These are all questions which warrant further research to be commissioned by PTA UK and/or other interested parties.

g) Ensuring parent views are acted on and results communicated back to parents

Parents are keen to be consulted about their views and to have a say on how their children are educated. However, many question the way in which schools act on their feedback. Here the issue could be complex and potentially problematic as, if parents do not feel giving feedback makes a difference, they might become gradually disillusioned with the process. Is it that schools are not acting on parent feedback at all – perhaps because parent consultation is seen as a box ticking exercise or perhaps because they do not have enough resources to do so? Or is it simply that they are not effective at closing the communication loop with parents by informing them about the results of the consultations and the actions taken?

If it's the first, schools have a responsibility to ensure some form of parent consultation is in place. Surveys, forums and focus groups are a light touch way of doing this and one that has high consideration among parents. If it's the latter, perhaps schools need to ensure that their communication channels on this are as effective as when it comes to other academic and non-academic issues. In addition, for those schools it would help to share case studies and good practice models of the number that are providing good levels of feedback to their parents. Establishing parent voice groups may be a great way for schools as well as parents to jointly work towards the wider engagement of the parent community, the majority (85%) of which are often loyal supporters of the school.

h) Helping parents manage the cost of schooling

The cost of schooling is clearly a concern for parents in our study and does reflect increasing costs over time reported in other studies. In the context of ever-increasing pressure on families' real incomes, this is likely to be a real issue for parents, particularly younger ones, those with larger families and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Parents in Northern Ireland also seem to be more affected by this than parents in England and Wales. As well as being a concern on a practical level, it is also worrying given that parents in our study have children who attend state (and, therefore, non-fee paying) schools. Cash flow may be playing a role for some of the costs such as school trips. Here, schools could provide options to stagger the cost of some of these items. In the case of essentials such as uniforms many PTAs and parent groups could already support parents by providing second-hand uniform shops or matching services, which

can be rolled out to all schools. On a larger scale, there is also a role local authorities and governments can take by exploring the 'additional' cost of a free education on families and exploring ways to reduce these, for example by increasing supplier competition on uniforms thus making school uniforms, especially at secondary school level, more affordable.

i) Helping parents understand Government policy

Levels of understanding and engagement with Government policy are clearly low among parents. The fact that parents also do not feel heard could be both a cause and an effect of this. Here, there is therefore a question as to how schools and parent groups could help parents stay in touch with the latest changes in policy and understand how they could be affected. This, in turn, could ensure that parents feel more confident and empowered about having their voice heard. Perhaps this is also something that PTA UK could extend by considering and exploring additional or alternative methods to providing updates and digests of the policy landscape to their member groups as well as continuing to be a conduit for parent voice to be heard through consultations.

5. Appendix 1

5.1. Methodology and sample

The survey was conducted online by fieldwork agency Research Now. Respondents were recruited through Research Now's UK panel (which includes more than 500,000 active panelists) and were given a small monetary incentive to take part in the survey.

Fieldwork was conducted between 24th October and 2nd November 2016. During this period,1,514 parents were surveyed, of which 1,124 live in England, 100 in Northern Ireland and 200 in Wales. Parents had to have at least one child aged 5-18 attending state school in order to qualify for the survey. Overall, the sample is representative of the parent population in England, Northern Ireland and Wales by gender, age and social grade.

As the survey is not polling the entire population of parents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but rather a sample, results are subject to a margin of error which is estimated to be between 0.5 and 2.5 percentage points for the whole sample. The exact margin of error varies with the proportion considered.

This means that, if for instance, according to the survey, 59% of respondents strongly agree that they would like to have a say on their children's education, in reality the proportion is likely to be between 61.5% and 56.5% (i.e. the margin of error would be +/-2.5%).

5.2. Demographics

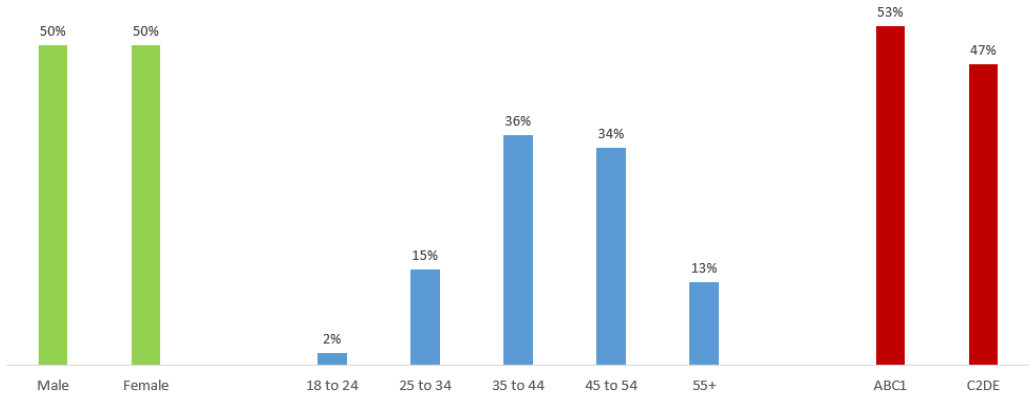
To ensure the survey truly reflects views of parents, its gender, age and social grade make-up mirrors the one of the parent population in England, Northern Ireland and Wales with children in school age.

This means that respondents are equally split between mothers and fathers and that most (70%) are between the ages of 35 and 54. The sample is also made up of slightly more parents belonging to high social grades ABC1 (that is, in managerial, administrative or professional occupations) than there are parents belonging to lower social grades C2DE (manual, casual workers, pensioners, retired and full time students).[15]

[15] The NRS social grades are a system of demographic classification originally developed by the National Readership Survey to classify readers but are now used by many organisations and have become a standard market research classification tool. It is based on the occupation of the head of the household and the categories are as follows:
A – Higher managerial, administrative or professional
B – Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1 – Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial administrative or professional
C2 – Skilled manual workers
D – Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
E – Casual or lowest grade workers, pensioners and others who depend on the welfare state for income

Demographics

Age, gender, social grade



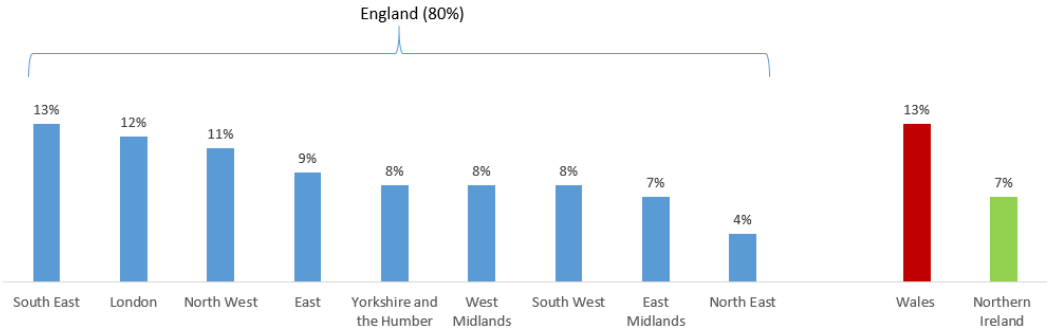
Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

The majority of the sample (80%) is comprised of parents from England and is representative of the parent population by English regions. The Welsh and Northern Irish subsamples have been boosted over and above natural fall-out of respondents to ensure each sample base was large enough to allow cross-regional comparisons.

Nearly half of parents in the sample have two children, while one in four have one and nearly one in three have more than three. The largest school phase represented is secondary (45%) followed by primary (30%) and further education (23%).

Demographics

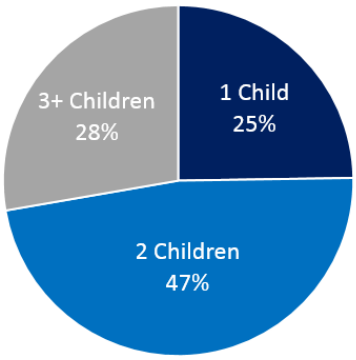
Region



Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

Demographics

Children in the household



School phase of the oldest child

Primary	30%
Secondary	45%
Further Education	23%
Not applicable - my oldest child doesn't attend school	2%

Sample: 1514 parents in England (1214), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents