



# Annual Parent Survey 2017

## Part 3 – Parent Representation and School Accountability

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This research was conducted as part of the PTA UK Annual Parent Survey. PTA UK are now known as Parentkind following a name change in February 2018.

The survey was conducted online by Research Now. Respondents were recruited through their UK panel and took part in the survey from 20th August – 11th September 2017. It involved a sample of 1,507 parents from England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have at least one child aged 5-18 attending state school. The sample is representative of the parent population by gender, age and social grade. Sub-samples in Wales and Northern Ireland were boosted to achieve a large enough base of respondents to compare findings across the three regions of England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The research was undertaken and the report written in collaboration with Caterina Violi from Preseli Partnerships. She is a freelance researcher based in Tuscany, Italy, who 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.

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## 1. About the research

### Overview

The Parentkind (formerly PTA UK) Parent Survey gives an annual snapshot of parents' behaviour and attitudes towards their child's school and education. This is the third wave of the survey which tracks views of parents in England, Northern Ireland and Wales who have at least one child in a state school.

As with our [2016 parent survey](#), the 2017 survey was commissioned through world leading data collection company Research Now to gain a deeper understanding of parents' views on key educational issues, as well as whether or not some views are changing over time. Key topics tracked in all waves of the survey include:

- Parents' attitudes to their child's school and schooling including their views on supporting their child's learning, how the school takes their views into account and how effectively school communicates with them
- Whether or not they believe their voice is heard by education policymakers at all levels
- The different ways in which parents involve themselves in school life, and their awareness or otherwise of parent groups
- The cost of education and school funding, including parents' perceptions of whether or not costs are increasing and which costs are of most concern
- Donations to the school fund.

### About this report

This is one of a series of mini-reports looking in depth into specific topics of the survey. Here we explore parents' perceptions of how they are represented in education, and how schools and other governance structures are accountable to them.

Other reports based on our 2017 findings look at:

- The cost of schooling
- Enabling positive home-school partnerships
- Parents' participation in their child's school
- Parents' views on how schools promote social mobility and work readiness

## 2. Summary of key findings

- 81% of parents would like schools to consult them on a regular basis, a stable figure compared to last year's (84%)
- However, a much smaller proportion of parents (51%) report that schools are taking action based on their views or feedback
  - This is particularly true for parents whose children are already in secondary school (50%) or further education (49%) compared to those whose children are in primary school (57%) and for parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds (47% compared to 55% of parents from higher socio-economic groups)
- By far the most effective way of having their voice heard at school level according to parents is through an 'open door' policy (55%)
- 34% of parents think that a joint parent/school advisory group (representing parents and the school at different levels) would be an effective means of representation
  - This is particularly true for parents from higher socio-economic groups (38% vs 29% of their counterparts in lower socio-economic groups)
- 63% of parents agree that schools should be more accountable to parents than they currently are
- Only 19% of parents think that an informal parent group would be an effective way of having their views heard
  - Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are substantially more likely to indicate this as an effective means of representation (22% of C2DE parents compared to 16% of ABC1 parents)
- Nearly two-thirds of parents (62%) would like a say in their child's education at Local Authority, Education Authority or Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) board level and a similar proportion (59%) would like a say at government level
  - Parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to want to have a say at both local government/MAT level (64% compared to 58% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds) and central government level (62% compared to 55% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds)
- 75% of parents say that they understand how schools are accountable to them
- However, only just over one in two say that they understand how the education system is accountable to parents at local government/MAT level (52%), or at the level of the Department for Education (52%), with only one in six reporting that they understand this very well
- This is also reflected in parents' confidence in raising issues at a level beyond the school itself
  - Only 39% of parents are confident raising issues at local governing body/Multi-Academy Trust level in academies and Local/Education authorities in maintained schools
  - Only 36% of parents are confident raising issues with the Department for Education, with 29% being either not very confident or not at all confident.

## 3. Full findings and analysis

### 3.1 Introduction

Accountability of the education system, that is, its ability to explain and justify decisions made at different levels to a variety of stakeholders, is a key point in the education debate. In England, the rise of academies (there are currently over 6,700 in England - nearly 34% of all state-funded schools<sup>1</sup>), state schools which are directly funded by and therefore accountable to the Department for Education rather than Local Authorities, and the move towards a more centralised education system, means that accountability now spans a number of levels, from schools themselves to local and central government.

Parents (and ultimately children) are the key stakeholders which the entire education system needs to be held accountable to, ostensibly because the purpose of our education system is to ensure children receive an excellent education which provides them with opportunities for a fulfilled adult life. An important aspect of accountability is parents' ability to have their voice heard at different levels, contributing to decision-making processes, monitoring how decisions are being implemented and challenging them if necessary.

At school level, there are a number of channels available through which parents are able to do this, including talking directly to teachers and head teachers outside of parent evenings, participating in research undertaken by the school (surveys, focus groups, forums), being part of parent groups such as parent councils and Parent Teacher Associations, approaching (or even becoming) parent representatives or school governors. These are perhaps the most direct and accessible ways for parents to make their voice heard, although the extent to which these channels are used can vary significantly between schools.

At government level, parent engagement is also possible, for example, in responding to national consultations on relevant education issues by the Department for Education, although this is arguably more difficult than at school level. Although a number of channels and platforms including social media, surveys, Ofsted's Parent View<sup>2</sup>, newsletters and public consultations on education policies exist, usage is low due to lack of parental awareness of these platforms and other issues such as language barriers.

In practice, it has been noted that the 'academisation' of the school system in England has gradually shifted the schools' decision-making process away from parents and their local communities. Traditionally, maintained schools have been accountable to local authorities steered by elected politicians, and therefore directly accountable to the local community. Today, on the other hand, academies are directly accountable to Regional School Commissioners (RSC) and Ofsted whose responsibilities include, for the latter, conducting school inspections, and for RSCs, approving new academies and intervening when they underperform.

A substantial number of academies are also part of Multi-Academy-Trusts (MATs), legal structures that support groups of academies in collaborating and expanding, and directly funded by the Department for Education. MATs are part of the Academies programme

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<sup>1</sup> "Open academies and academy projects awaiting approval", Department for Education, September 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>

<sup>2</sup> An ongoing online survey that parents can fill in expressing their views about their child's school, which is independent from the DfE.



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launched in 2010 and are seen as a means to create economies of scale across such schools (e.g. academies in the same MAT are often able to pool the cost of core services and staff) and of sharing best practice (it is not uncommon, for instance, for underperforming schools to join a MAT). In 2016, it was estimated that of all the 21,525 state-funded schools in England, 4,140 were academies in MATs; this represented 65% of all academies (75% of primary and 51% of secondary)<sup>3</sup>.

MATs have a trustee board responsible for the same three governance functions performed by the local governing boards in maintained schools, namely, setting direction, holding head teachers to account and ensuring financial probity. In this sense, they represent a shift in accountability away from local governing boards in schools to a central trustees board. A recent report by the Education Committee highlighted that, overall *“more work needs to be done to ensure that MATs are accountable to the communities in which their schools are located and that there must be more engagement with parents and clarity around the role of local governing boards”*<sup>4</sup> to which Parentkind contributed<sup>5</sup>.

In light of these changes in mechanisms through which the education system is accountable, in our survey, we have asked parents about their views on the extent to which they would like their voice to be heard at different levels (school, Local/Education Authority, Multi-Academy Trust and Department for Education), how confident they are in expressing their views and which specific mechanisms of representation they see as being most effective in achieving this.

The next sections of this report give an in-depth analysis of the findings which very much reflect the fact that accountability of the education system, beyond school itself, is a complex issue for parents to understand.

While many parents are willing to, and confident in, expressing their views at school level, there still remains considerable uncertainty as to how this can be done beyond school at local and central government levels. This is an important finding as it highlights the need to ensure that parent view is heard and taken into account at both local/MAT and central government levels where most of the key decisions for schools and school policy are currently made.

## 3.2 Parent voice in schools

As already shown by the research carried out in 2016, parents continue to want their voice to be heard in education, particularly at school level.

This year, 81% of parents told us that they would like schools to consult them on a regular basis, a stable figure compared to last year's (84%). This is once again particularly true for mothers (84% compared to 78% of fathers) and parents whose older children are in primary school (84% vs 76% of parents whose children are in further education).

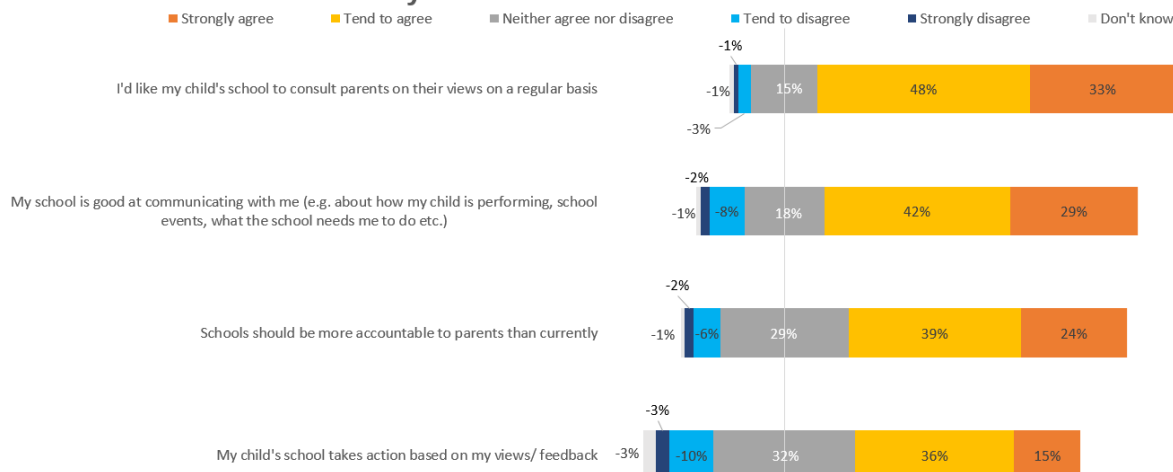
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<sup>3</sup> Multi-Academy Trusts”, House of Commons Education Committee, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Multi-Academy Trusts”, House of Commons Education Committee, 2017

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/News/Parents-Views-on-Multi-Academy-Trusts>

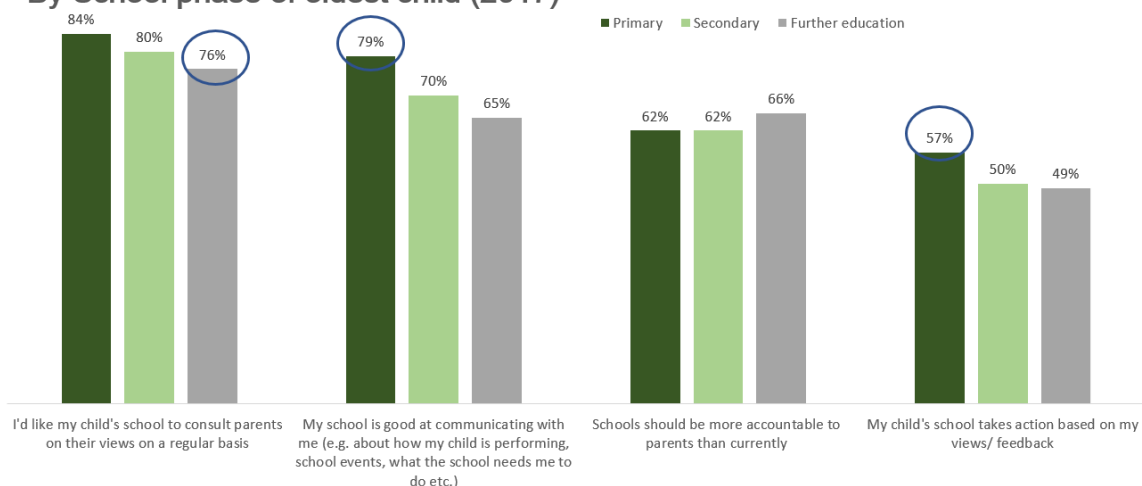
## Parent attitudes towards education Schools' accountability and communication



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) 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?" Ranked by "Strongly Agree + Tend to agree"

However, a much smaller proportion of parents (51%) report that schools are taking action based on their views or feedback. As highlighted in the 2016 report, this could be either because schools are genuinely not acting on the feedback or, perhaps more likely, they are not communicating with parents effectively about how their views are used to shape decisions.

## Parent attitudes By School phase of oldest child (2017)



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
 Base: Primary (487), Secondary (677), Further Education (318)  
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree scores

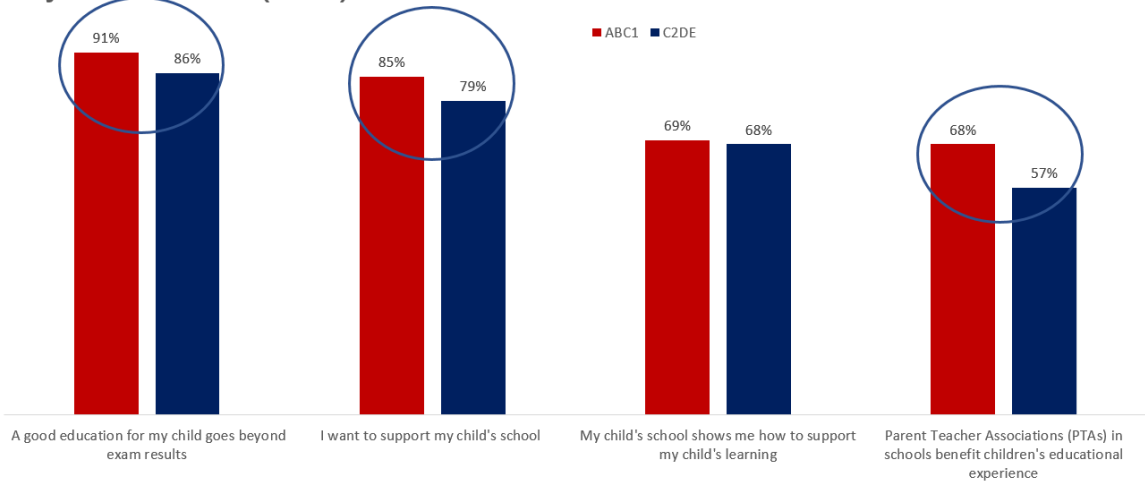
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Despite being just as likely to want to be consulted by schools as younger parents, older parents (43% of parents aged 55+) are less likely to agree that school takes action based on their views. This is also true for parents whose children are already in secondary school (50%) or further education (49%) compared to those whose children are in primary school (57%). This could be a reflection of the fact that primary schools tend to be more proactive in engaging parents, which may mean they are also better at keeping them informed about how their views impact on wider decisions.

## Parent attitudes

By Social Grade (2017)



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
Base: ABC1 (799), C2DE (708)  
Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree scores

Interestingly, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to report that schools take action based on their views (47% compared to 55% of parents from higher socio-economic groups); this suggests that the need to engage this group of parents, which is potentially harder to reach, is more pressing than ever for schools, and requires consideration to ensure all parent voices are heard and the process and method of capturing feedback is fully inclusive.

### 3.3 Parent representation in school

There is a substantial body of research suggesting that parents' involvement in children's education has a positive effect on academic attainment which lasts into adolescence and adulthood<sup>6</sup>. Although this has been proved to be true when it comes to parents' direct involvement with their children's learning and their attitudes towards learning, it is also likely that parents' engagement with school life as a whole plays a role in supporting children's

<sup>6</sup> "The impact of parental involvement in children's education" Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008



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development. The social mobility commission recently highlighted that *“The more involved the parents were in their children’s school life (including volunteering in school, participating in Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) conferences, and teaching at home), the more positive the impact became on children’s performance academically. [...] only a minority of parents in the United Kingdom are uninterested in their children’s education. Instead the majority may experience difficulty in expressing their interest, something which is identified and acknowledged by professionals.”*<sup>7</sup>

Generally, schools that do involve parents find that it helps develop a positive relationship between home and school and that this ultimately benefits the children<sup>8</sup>. A study conducted by the Human Scale Education, for instance, highlights the positive impact of setting up different forms of parent councils in selected schools in England<sup>9</sup>. The study shows that encouraging a culture of genuine parent participation and collaboration within school does generate a positive response, with parents actively taking part in meetings, reaching out to new parents and showing willingness to participate in new ways.

There are a number of ways in which parents are able to get involved in the school community and influence its decision-making processes. These channels of representation go beyond parents’ traditional role as governors in schools and include class representatives, formal parent groups (parent councils and, increasingly, Parent Teachers Associations) and informal parent groups. Schools can also gather parent views on issues and policies through surveys, focus groups and forums.

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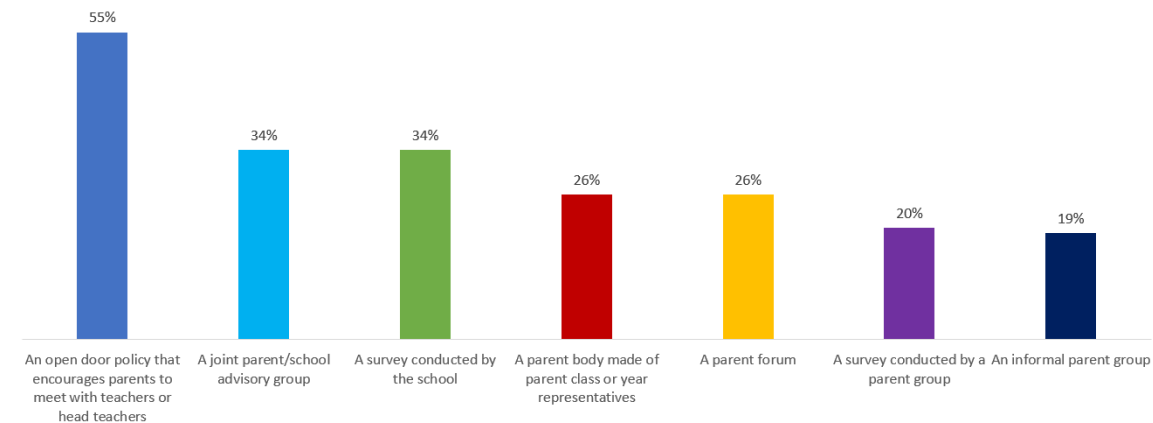
<sup>7</sup> Helping Parents to Parent, Social Mobility Commission, Feb 2017

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/helping-parents-to-parent>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pta.org.uk/Info-sheets/Developing-parent-voice-at-your-school>

<sup>9</sup> “Setting up parent councils”, The Human Scale Education, 2006

## Representation at school level



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
Base: All respondents

Question: "Thinking about how your views as a parent/guardian can be represented at school level, which of the following do you consider most effective?"

Our 2017 survey asked parents which representation mechanisms within schools they found most effective. By far the most common answer amongst parents was an 'open door' policy (55%) within the school which makes it easy for parents to meet teachers at the end of the school day and head teachers, generally by appointment. This is something many schools have and which parents clearly value, perhaps because it facilitates communication with staff.

Just over a third of parents (34%) also think that a survey conducted by the school is the most effective mechanism of representation while only one in five parents (20%) think this of a survey conducted by a parent group. This is significant, as it suggests that parents may be more trusting of, and therefore more inclined to participate in, surveys coming directly from schools compared to those conducted by other groups within school. They may also feel that surveys conducted directly by the school will give their voice more impact as they feed back more directly into the decision-making process.

The idea of a joint parent/school advisory group (representing parents and the school at different levels) is also popular amongst parents, with 34% indicating that this would be an effective means of representation. The idea of a joint school/parent group seems more appealing to parents than other types of parent groups (formal or informal), perhaps because of its collaborative nature between parents and the school itself.

Informal parent groups (19%), on the other hand, score lower in terms of effectiveness than any other mechanism, perhaps highlighting the fact that although an informal group may encourage parent participation, it is not necessarily considered as effective as other more formal types of representation within the school.

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There are some notable differences across various groups of parents when it comes to their perceived effectiveness of representation mechanisms.

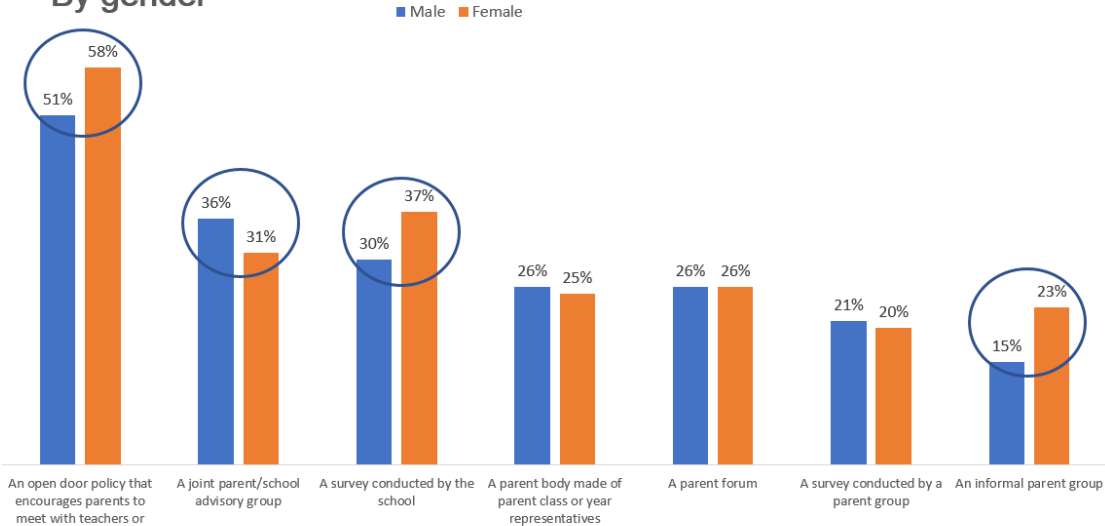
Mothers, for instance, are more likely than fathers to consider an open door policy (58% vs 51% of fathers) and surveys conducted by the school (37% compared to only 30% of fathers) effective mechanisms of representation. This may be because, generally, mothers tend to have a more ‘hands-on’ approach with children’s education and learning on a day to day basis<sup>10</sup> and for this reason may be more likely to engage in a dialogue with teachers and head teachers about their child’s development. Parents in general are often juggling work and other commitments together with the day to day caring of their children so it is perhaps unsurprising that they favour the quicker and less time-consuming method of surveys which they consider to be more effective as a way of communicating their views.

Compared to fathers, mothers are also more likely to think that informal parent groups are an effective way of having their voice heard (23% vs 15% of fathers).

Fathers, on the other hand, are slightly more likely to think that a joint parent/school advisory group would be an effective way of having their voice heard (36% vs 31% of mothers).

## Representation at school level

By gender



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
 Base: Mothers (753) and Fathers (753)  
 Question: "Thinking about how your views as a parent/guardian can be represented at school level, which of the following do you consider most effective?"

<sup>10</sup> "The impact of parental involvement in children’s education" Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008

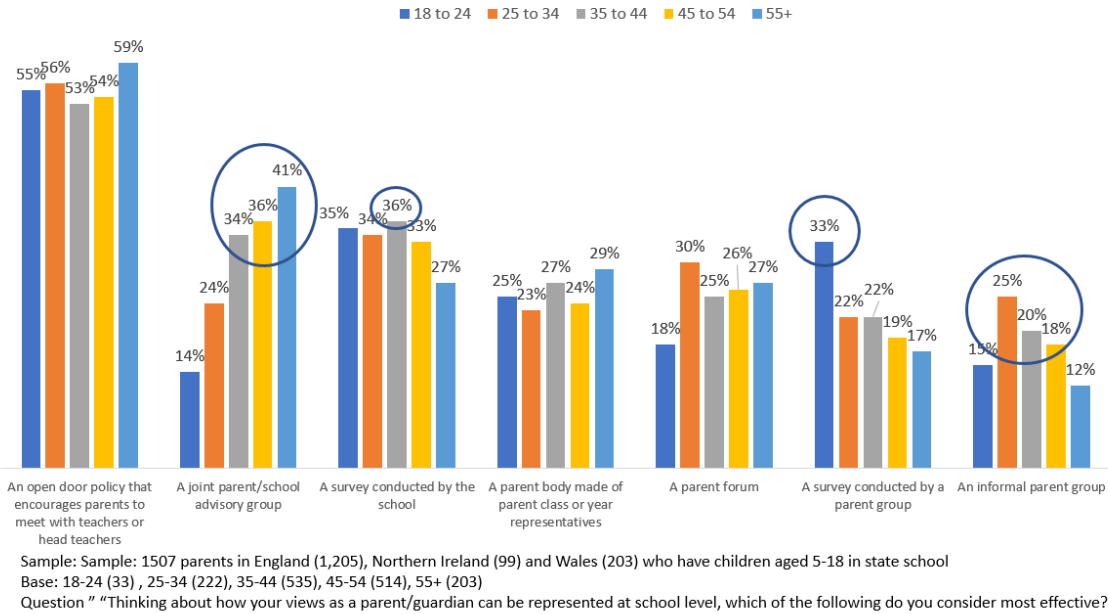
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Younger parents have a similar pattern of preference to mothers, with surveys and informal parent groups scoring higher within this group compared to older parents. This may be linked to the fact that younger parents are also more likely to have younger children, which means having the opportunity of engaging directly with teachers and staff is more relevant to them, given their child’s stage of education.

It may also be that they lack the confidence that older parents develop when relating to schools, therefore informal parent groups could be more appealing to them than other formal mechanisms of representation such as, for instance, a joint parent/school advisory group, which is more popular amongst older parents (41% of parents aged 55+ compared to 24% of parents aged 24-35).

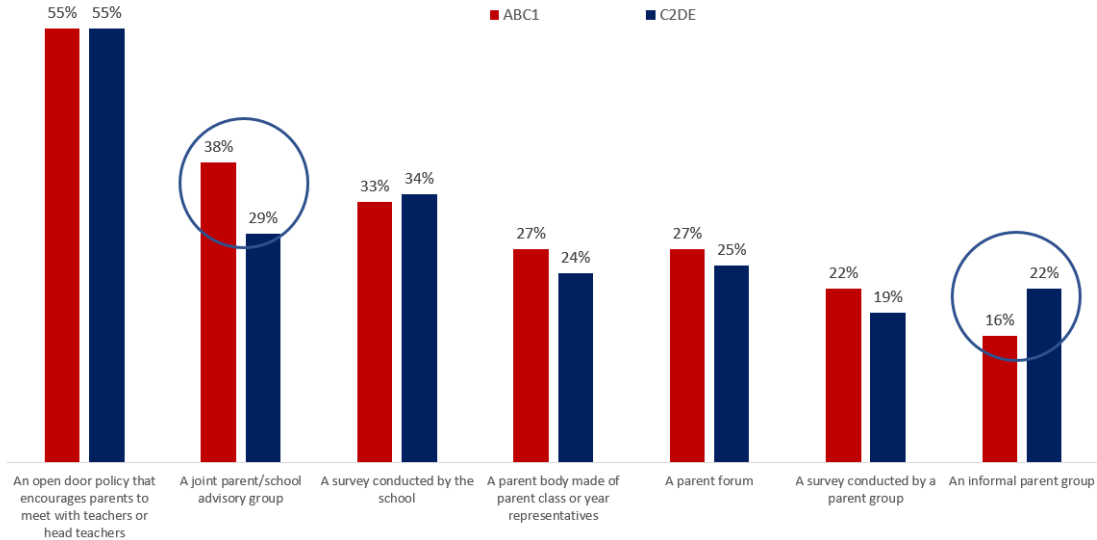
## Representation at school level By age



Parents from different socio-economic backgrounds also have different views about the most effective ways of having their voice heard. Interestingly, parents in professional occupations are considerably more likely to think that a joint parent/school advisory group would be an effective channel of representation for parents (38% of ABCI parents compared to 29% of C2DE parents). On the other hand, there is a much stronger preference for informal parent groups amongst parents in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations compared to their counterparts in professional roles (22% of C2DE parents compared to 16% of ABCI parents).

## Representation at school level

By social grade



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
 Base: ABC1 (799), C2DE (708)  
 Question "Thinking about how your views as a parent/guardian can be represented at school level, which of the following do you consider most effective?"

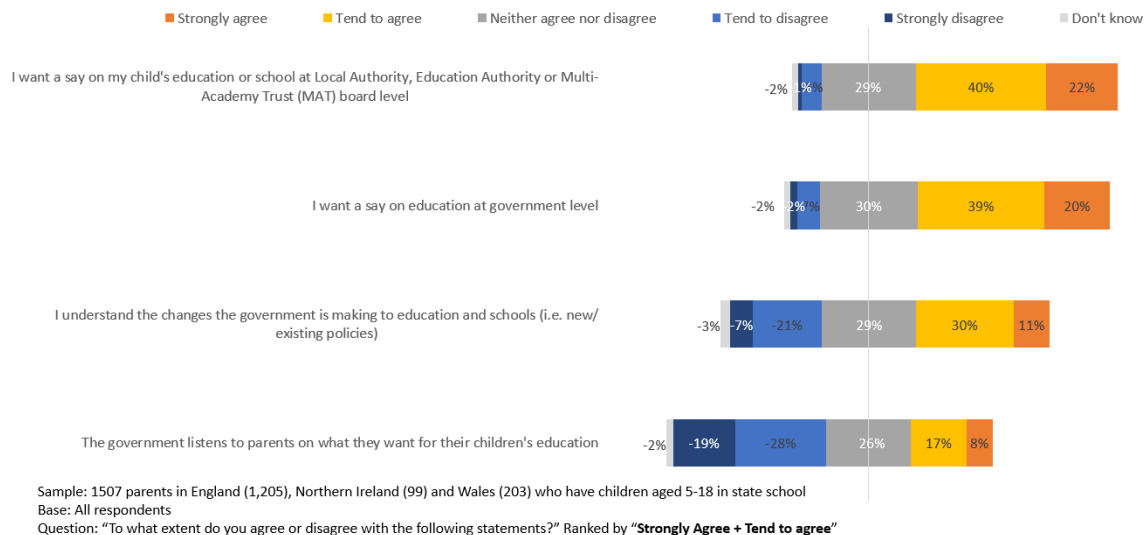
This is important, as it highlights that an informal route may be key to ensuring that parents who are typically harder to reach are comfortable and able to engage with their children’s school life. Schools should consider a combination of different methodologies to engage parents, reflecting the makeup of their school community in order to ensure that a broad section of views is represented.

### 3.4 Parent voice at local and central government level

Although having their say at school level is key for the vast majority of parents, a smaller but sizeable proportion also want to have their voice heard at Local and Central Government level.

## Parent attitudes towards education

### Having a say at central and local government level



Just under two-thirds of parents (62%) would like a say on their child’s education at Local Authority, Education Authority or Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) board level and a similar proportion (59%) at government level. Compared to having their voice heard in schools, there is much more uncertainty around this, with just under one third of parents neither agreeing nor disagreeing that they want a say in education at local government, MAT or central government level.

This is understandable, given that parents are less likely to be familiar with the mechanisms for representation at this level compared to school and, therefore, to be confident about making their voice heard. As noted in earlier sections of the report, the recent growth in Multi-Academy Trusts in England has made parent representation mechanisms less systematic and potentially less clear.

A recent report by the House of Commons’ Education Committee found that the means by which local communities can hold a MAT to account are less clear than in maintained school structures. Often, it is difficult for parents to see how they can get their voice heard in a MAT. With decisions being made further and further away from them, they are likely to “*Feel powerless to engage with chains whose central administrations can be geographically very separate from their local school*”<sup>11</sup>. In September 2016, the Government abandoned its earlier proposal to no longer require parents to be represented on MATs and local governing boards as parent governors. As such, parents remain often too removed from the MAT structure and do not get high enough in the hierarchy to share their views and make an impact.

<sup>11</sup> “Multi-Academy Trusts”, House of Commons Education Committee, 2017



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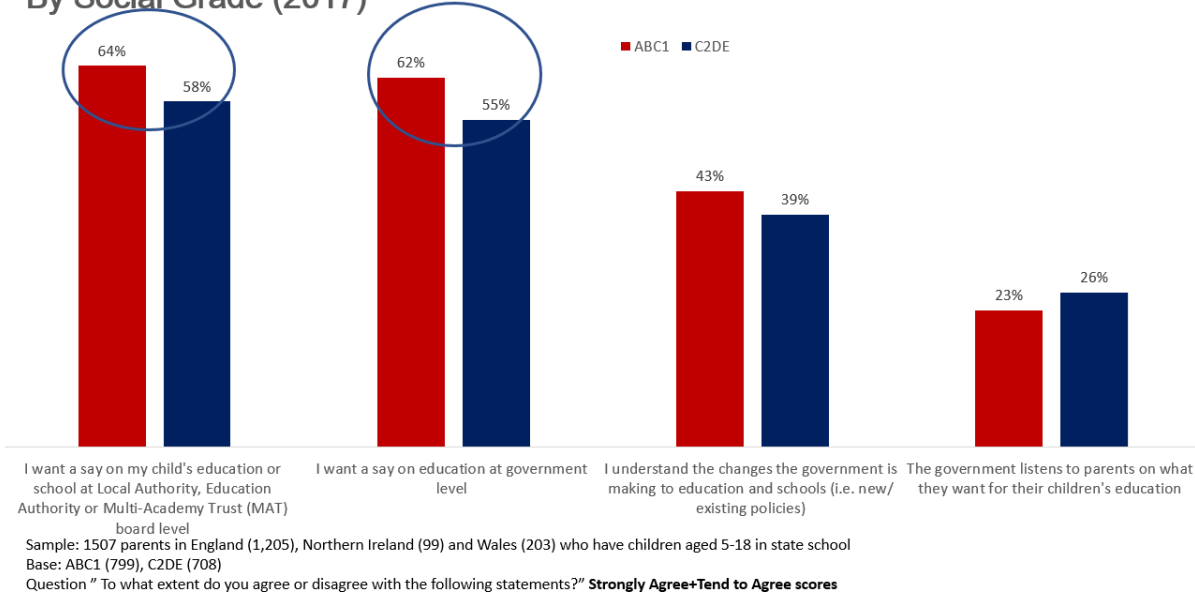
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At central government level, there are various ways in which parents are potentially able to get their voice heard (e.g. social media, surveys, public consultations) but these mechanisms are often limited due to accessibility issues, lack of awareness, or limited scope to feedback, and leave parents with the feeling that they are unable to directly and easily influence their child's education.

Figures on whether parents think that the government is listening to their views on education support this interpretation, with only 25% of parents agreeing that this is the case and 47% actively disagreeing.

## Parent attitudes

By Social Grade (2017)



Amongst different groups of parents, it is those from higher socio-economic groups that are more likely to want to have a say at both local government/MAT level (64% compared to 58% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds) and central government level (62% compared to 55% of parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds).

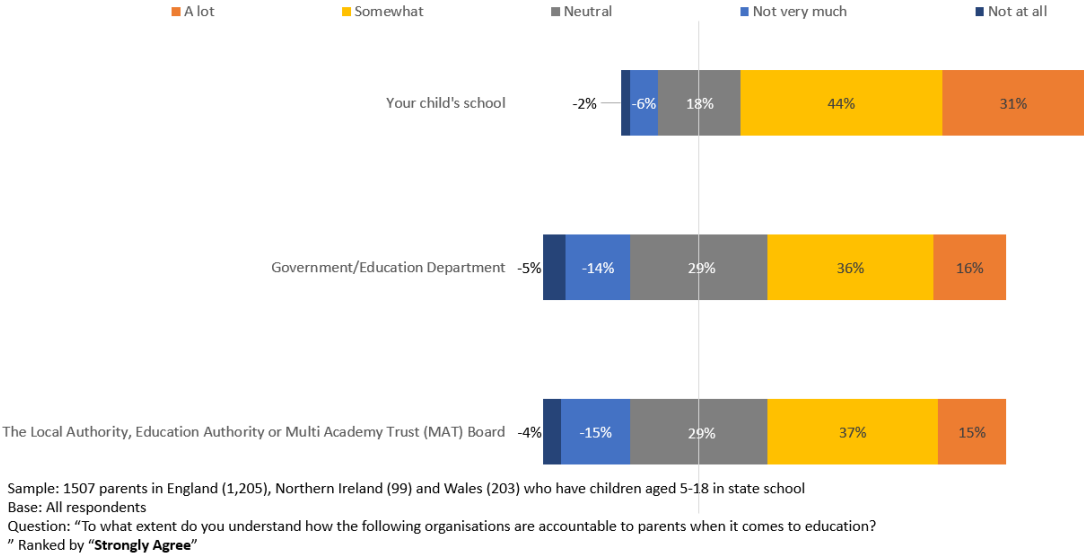
Interestingly, this doesn't seem to be linked to confidence in making their voice heard, as figures for confidence to raise issues at local and central government levels are similar for both groups (see section 3.5 for more on this). Rather, it seems that parents from higher socio-economic groups place more value on expressing their views beyond the school level than parents from lower socio-economic groups.

### 3.5 Parent views on the accountability of the education system

Figures on the extent to which parents want a say at different levels for education are also echoed by how much they understand how the education system is accountable to them at different levels. Our data suggests that accountability is better understood by parents at school level than at government level.

Three in four parents (75%) say that they understand how schools are accountable to them and a considerable proportion (63%) also believe that schools should be more accountable to parents than they currently are.

## Parents' understanding of accountability

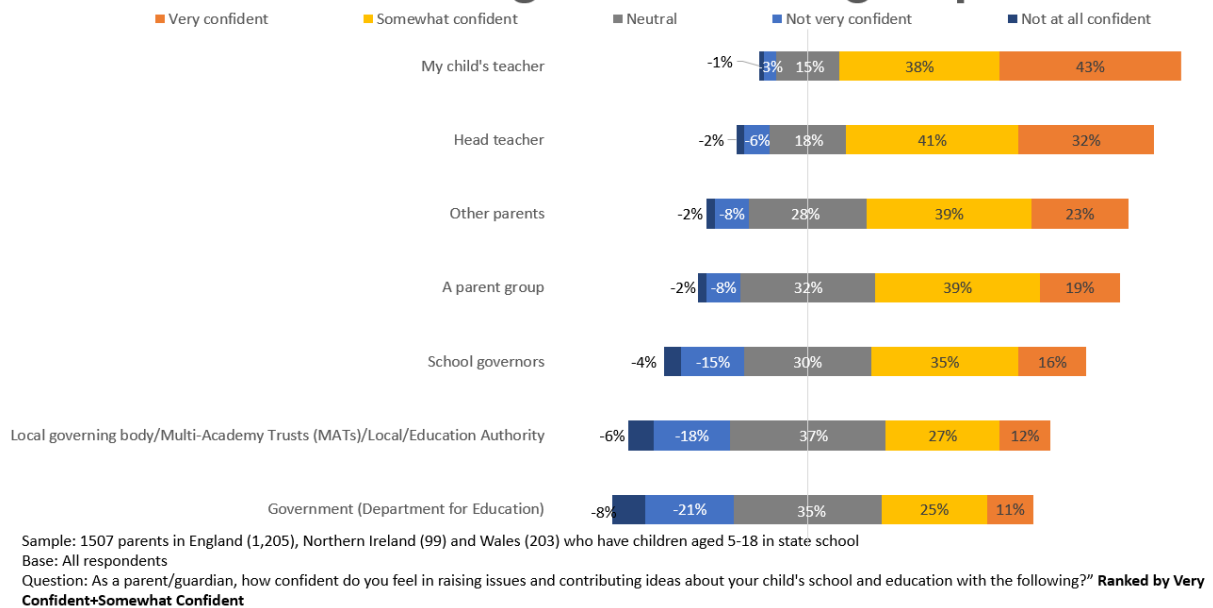


However, only just over one in two, say that they understand how the education system is accountable to parents at local government/MAT level (52%) or at the level of the Department for Education (52%), with only one in six reporting that they understand this very well.

Therefore, although a sizeable proportion of parents want to have a say about education at local and central government levels, many struggle to understand how accountability works at that level. This, again, suggests that parents may be feeling disconnected from the education system in a broader sense than just their child's school, and highlights the need to ensure that they feel empowered to influence decisions at these levels.

Lack of knowledge of accountability mechanisms at local and central government levels is also reflected in parents' confidence in raising issues with different groups.

## Confidence in raising issues with groups



Unsurprisingly, when asked how confident they are in raising issues and contributing ideas at different levels, parents tend to be most confident to do so with their child's teacher (81%, with 43% being very confident) and head teacher (73%, with 32% being very confident). The fact that many schools currently have an open door policy in an effort to improve parental engagement is likely to be contributing to this.

Parents are also confident about raising issues and ideas with other parents. Here, parents from London seem to be much more confident in doing this than those in other regions (29% report being very confident compared to 23% of parents as a whole). 62% of parents are confident about doing this informally and 58% are confident about doing so in a more formal way through a parent group.

Only half of parents would be confident about talking to school governors, which is unsurprising, given that governors may be one step removed from parents' day to day contact with the school compared to teachers and other parents. This means that it is very important that governors consider how they can improve parental engagement by making themselves more visible to parents as many strategic decisions are made at board level. The most recent version of the Governance Handbook in England, for instance, stresses how governors should try and engage meaningfully with parents and carers<sup>12</sup>. In collaboration with the NGA (National Governance Association) Parentkind has published joint guidance highlighting ways to improve communication between governors and parents<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/582868/Governance\\_Handbook\\_-\\_January\\_2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/582868/Governance_Handbook_-_January_2017.pdf)

<sup>13</sup><https://www.parentkind.org.uk/uploads/files/1/Knowing%20your%20school%20-%20Engaging%20parents%20-%20Final%20-%20June%202016v2.pdf>

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Finally, parents are least confident about raising issues at local governing body/Multi-Academy Trust level in academies and Local/Education authorities in maintained schools; only 39% of parents are confident doing this, with only 12% being very confident. Similarly, only 36% of parents are confident raising issues with the Department for Education, with 29% being either not very confident or not at all confident. Again, what is closer to home is perhaps easier for parents to understand and engage with.

There are some interesting demographic patterns when it comes to parents' confidence in expressing ideas at different levels. Fathers appear to be more confident than mothers in expressing their ideas at an institutional level, with local governing bodies and MATs, Local or Education Authority and with the Department for Education.

Parents of children at primary school are more likely to be confident in raising issues with teachers and other parents than parents of older children; this could be because they are more likely to be focused on the day to day development of their child and are used to talking about it more openly in all areas of life, given their child's age and phase of life. It could also be that they are more likely to see their child's teacher in school and develop a relationship with them compared to secondary school parents who instead tend to be reliant on technology and parent evenings to communicate with teachers.

The same is true for parents with more than one child, which could be due to the simple fact that they are well-versed in relating to schools, having experienced this multiple times with their children. They are also likely to be more confident in engaging at Local/Central Government level.

## 4. Conclusions

Our 2017 data shows that parents remain keen to have a say in their child's education at school level. However, it seems as though many schools are still struggling to communicate to parents how these views actually impact on their decision-making processes. This is something that needs addressing if parents are to feel valued and kept engaged in school life as a whole. This is particularly true for secondary and further education, where parents tend to be more distant from the day to day aspects of school life and, therefore, generally less engaged with the school as a whole.

Most parents are confident raising issues with their child's teacher and the school head teacher and an open door policy is by far considered the most effective mechanism that parents have to ensure their voices are heard at school level. This highlights how much parents value the opportunity to make contact with staff and solve issues on a one-to-one basis.

When it comes to being represented across groups of parents, preferences differ significantly. Those from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to express that a joint parent/school advisory group operating at different levels would be an effective mechanism of representation; on the other hand, those from less affluent backgrounds see informal parent groups as an effective mechanism. This, once again, highlights the importance for schools to offer a variety of

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channels for representation, from more formal to more informal ones that are able to cater to different needs and effectively involve parents from a variety of backgrounds.

Although parents report having a relatively good understanding of how schools are accountable to them, their understanding of accountability at local authority/MAT and central government levels is not as strong and neither is their confidence to deal with institutions at these levels. While this is unsurprising, given the gradual shift to a more centralised and centrally accountable education system, it does raise the question as to how parents can be given clear and effective channels to influence decisions at these levels.

## 5. Appendix

### 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 panellists) and were given a small monetary incentive to take part in the survey.

Fieldwork was conducted between 20<sup>th</sup> August and 11<sup>th</sup> September 2017. During this period, 1,507 parents were surveyed, of which 1,205 live in England, 99 in Northern Ireland and 203 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%).

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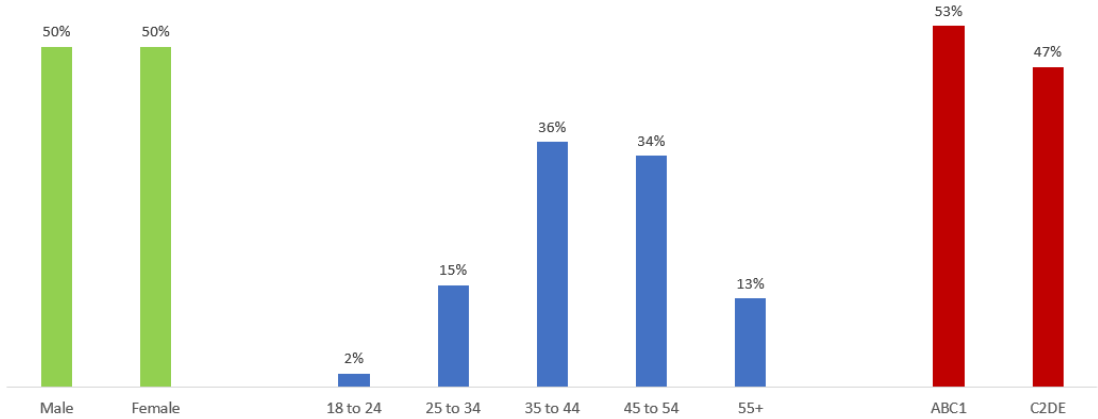
## 5.2. Demographics

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 of 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).<sup>14</sup>

## Demographics

Age, gender, social grade



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
Base: All respondents

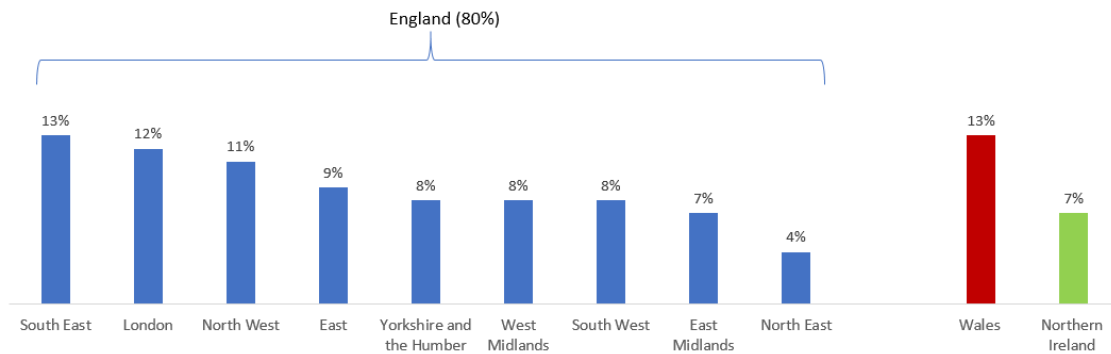
The majority of the sample (80%) is comprised of parents from England and is representative of the parent population by English regions. Subsamples for Wales and Northern Ireland have been boosted over and above natural fall-out of respondents to ensure each sample base was large enough to allow cross-regional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

<sup>14</sup> 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 Region

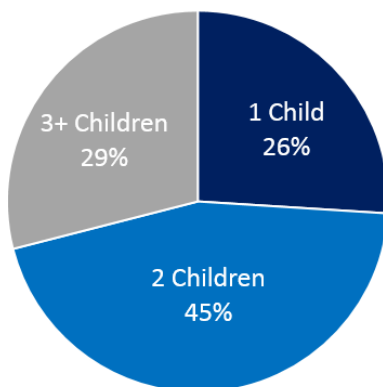


Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
Base: All respondents

Nearly half of parents in the sample have two children, while just over 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 (32%) and further education (21%).

## Demographics

### Children in the household



### School phase of the oldest child

Primary	32%
Secondary	45%
Further Education	21%
Not applicable - my oldest child doesn't attend school	1%

Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school  
Base: All respondents