School funding

Findings from the 2018 Annual Parent Survey

October 2018

Parentkind

Bringing together home & school

Contents

About Us

Parentkind is the new name for PTA UK. We are a charity that champions parents so that they can participate in their child's education and school life to the full. We are also the largest membership body of Parent Teacher Associations and other parent groups in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with over 13,700 members, and present in over 50% of schools. Parentkind offers training and toolkits to head teachers, school staff, governors and parents to build successful home-school relationships.

See more at www.parentkind.org.uk

1. Summary of key findings

- Parents continue to be asked for a range of financial or in kind contributions to help schools with current funding challenges
- A sizeable proportion of parents report being asked to pay to attend school events such as sport days or school concerts (28%) and for after school clubs that used to be free (26%)
- Just over one in five parents (21%) also recall being asked to supply teaching equipment such as stationery, books, glue pens or similar, up from 15% in 2017; 12% have been asked to supply essentials such as toilet paper, up from 7% in 2017
- More parents this year compared to last year also say that schools have been reducing the number of teaching assistants (18% vs 15%), supply teachers (15% vs 11%) as well as the length of the school day (10% vs 8%); 14% say that their child's school has been cutting back on equipment compared to 11% in 2017.
- Looking specifically at donations to the school fund, 43% of parents this year report having been asked to make a contribution, a proportion which continues to be higher than when we first started tracking this measure in 2016 (37%)
- Regionally, although parents in Northern Ireland remain most likely to be asked at 71%, parents in England have seen a significant increase in requests from donations since 2016, with 43% being asked this year compared to 37% in 2016
- The monthly amount that parents report donating has been increasing for the second year running - on average parents donated £ 11.35 a month this year, up from £8.90 in 2017
- While they are giving more, parents also appear to be more aware of how the money that they donate to the school fund is spent, with 51% stating that they know compared to 38% last year
- Nearly half of parents (49%) believe that, overall, pressure on school budgets has negatively impacted on their child's education, with 16% of these saying that the funding crisis has had a significantly negative impact
- Looking at specific measures that schools have been taking, parents are most likely to report being asked to pay for events such as sports days or school concerts (28%) and for school clubs which used to be free (26%). Just over one in five parents (21%) also recall being asked to supply teaching equipment such as stationery, books, glue pens or similar.
- Since 2017, there has also been a small, but statistically significant increase in the proportion of parents reporting that a number of cost cutting solutions have been implemented in their schools. 21% of parents report their school asking them to supply teaching equipment (15% in 2017) as well as essentials such as toilet paper (12% vs 7% in 2017). More parents this year also say that schools have been reducing the number of teaching assistants (18% vs 15%), supply teachers (15% vs 11%) as well as the length of the school week (8% vs 5%).

- Among the measures that overall are considered to be most detrimental for a child's education are schools reducing the length of the school week (84% of those reporting that this measure was implemented in their school think it has had a negative impact), reducing the number of subjects on offer (77%), increasing class sizes (76%), cutting back on equipment (76%), reducing the number of support staff (74%), reducing the number of supply teachers (71%)
- Solutions that involve parents giving additional financial contributions to the school for school clubs (52%), supplying equipment (43%), the school fund (48%) and events (45%), on the other hand, are less likely to be perceived as being detrimental.

2. Overview

Parentkind's Annual Parent Survey (previously PTA UK's Annual Parent Survey), gives a yearly snapshot of parents' behaviour and attitudes towards their children's school and education. This is the fourth wave of the survey which tracks views of parents in England, Northern Ireland and Wales over time on a number of key topics including:

- 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 the school communicates with them on a range of issues affecting their child
- Whether or not they believe their voice is heard by education policymakers at all levels, local and national
- The different ways in which parents involve themselves in school life, from completing surveys to being part of governing bodies, and their awareness or otherwise of parent groups
- The cost of education and school funding and how parents' donations to the school fund change over time.

As well as this, the 2018 wave of the survey explores parents' views on a number of other topical issues such as:

- Parents' attitudes towards and engagement in supporting their child's education outside of school in a range of ways
- Children's experience of issues related to their emotional well-being and mental health as reported by parents and satisfaction with the level of support offered by schools
- What attributes children should leave primary and secondary school with according to parents and what they think defines a successful school.

About this report

This document is one of a series of mini-reports looking in-depth into specific topics of the survey. Here we explore parents' views on the different strategies that schools are implementing in the face of ongoing funding challenges that the education sector has been experiencing in recent years. As already highlighted in past waves of our survey, this is a key issue not only for schools, but also clearly for children and their families whose experience of education is likely to be affected on a number of levels.

Figures published in 2018 by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) highlighted that between 2009/10 and 2017/18, total school spending per pupil in England fell by about 8% in real terms, after a number of factors are taken into consideration[1]; these include a substantial fall in local authorities spending (55%) on services (e.g. home-to-school transport, support for pupils with special educational needs, central administration) and the additional effect of much larger cuts to sixth form spending per pupil (25%) compared to other school phases which hadn't been taken into account in previous calculations[2]. All of this, coupled with a 10% growth in pupil numbers, means that spending per pupil in England over the past eight years has actually fallen by more than previously predicted[3]. Moreover, as the IFS explains, this also means that levels of spending per pupil in England are now very similar to those in Wales, where overall pupil numbers have remained fairly constant over time.

Although in its early days, the introduction of the new National Funding Formula (NFF) which seeks to iron out historical inequalities in school funding across regions through a national calculation of funding allocations, has so far proven divisive for headteachers and school leaders. A recent survey by grassroot campaigning movement *WorthLess?* for instance, has shown that, despite the introduction of the NFF, a substantial proportion of schools continue to face significant budget challenges; within the poll, while 15% of schools think that they are better off in real terms under the NFF, 60% report being worse off[4]. The vast majority (90%) of senior leaders surveyed also lament the lack of financial certainty when it comes to long-term financial planning under NFF[5].

In our survey to parents this year, we have continued to track the extent to which some of these cost-cutting solutions that schools have been forced to take to make ends meet are being implemented by schools. We have also asked parents to tell us whether they think these solutions are having a negative impact on their children's education. Finally, as in the past two waves of the survey, we have looked in depth into whether parents' are being asked to donate to the school fund, how much they have donated, how this has changed over time and whether they are aware of how the money is spent. The next sections of this report illustrate the findings from these questions in more detail.

---

[1] Institute for Fiscal Studies, "School funding per pupil falls faster in England than in Wales", July 2018, https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13143
[2] Institute for Fiscal Studies, "School funding per pupil falls faster in England than in Wales", July 2018, https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13143
[3] As above
[4] S. Weale, The Guardian "New funding system leaves schools worse off, say headteachers", 8th May 2018
[5] As above

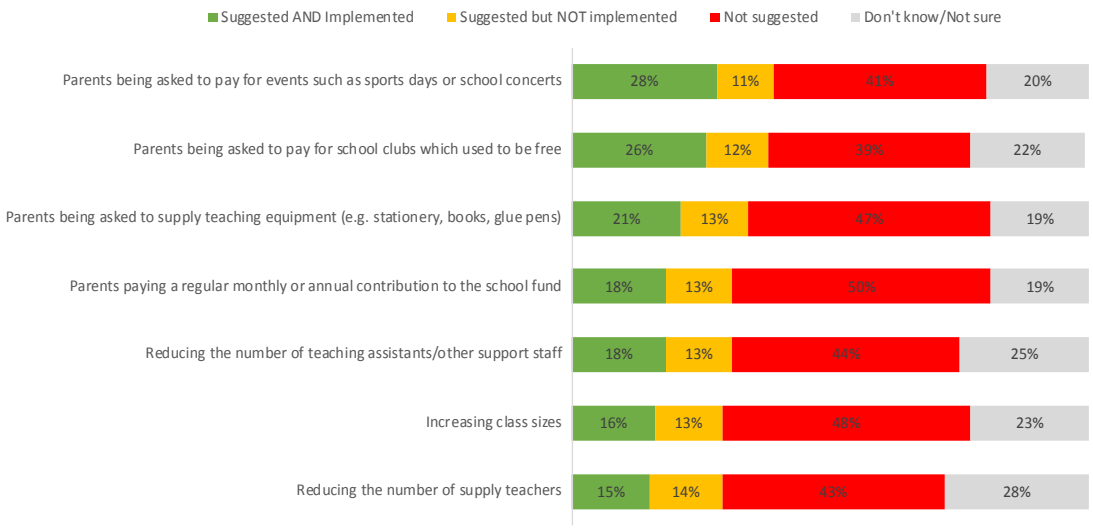
3. Detailed findings

Cost-cutting solutions

In line with findings from other surveys, our latest data suggests that schools continue to face pressure to find alternative ways to address funding shortfalls. It also highlights that some of this pressure, in turn, appears to be falling to parents to shoulder.

Looking at the specific measures that schools have been taking, parents are most likely to report being asked to pay for events such as sports days or school concerts (28%) and for school clubs which used to be free (26%). Just over one in five parents (21%) also recall being asked to supply teaching equipment such as stationery, books, glue pens or similar.

Financial contributions to pay for goods, activities and services which used to be free are amongst the most common measures that parents report

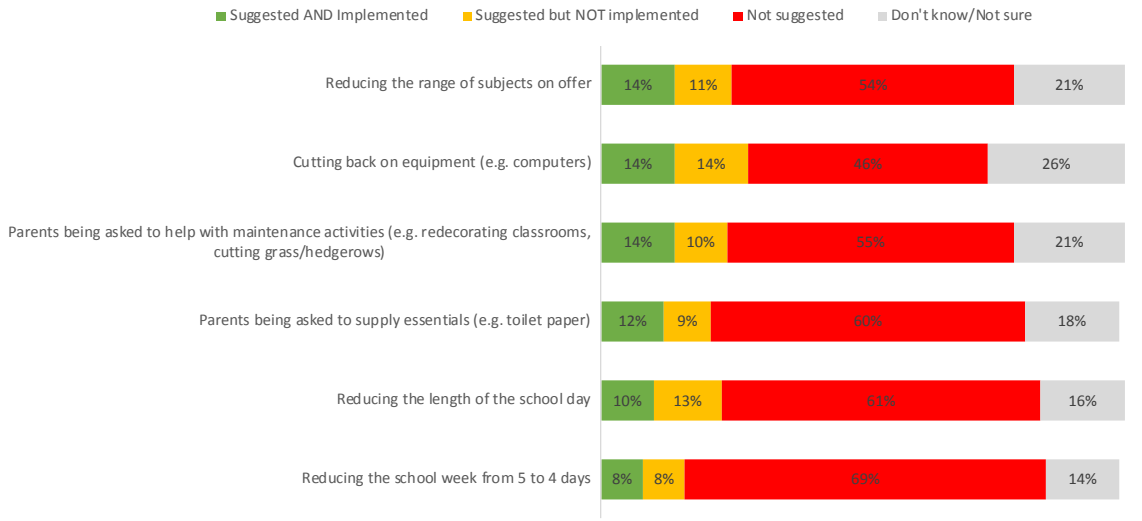


Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Increasingly it has been reported that schools need to take measures to make ends meet. As far as you know, which of the following solutions, if any, have been suggested or implemented in your child's school to address funding shortfalls?" **Ranked by "Suggested AND Implemented"**

Parentkind 1

Although awareness of schools implementing these measures is likely to be higher amongst parents when compared to other measures which are perhaps more distant from their day to day experience of their children's schools (e.g. reducing the number of supply teachers), this highlights how the financial challenges that schools are facing are gradually affecting children and their families in a variety of new ways. It also suggests that donations to the school fund alone may be underestimating the financial impact of the school funding crisis on families (see next section for more details on this topic).

Financial contributions to pay for goods, activities and services which used to be free are amongst the most common measures that parents report

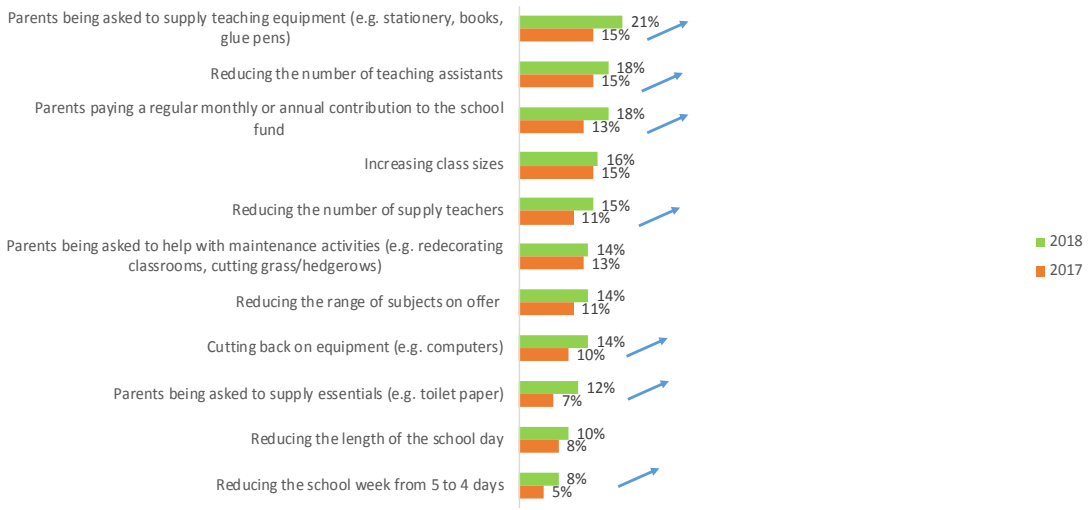


Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Increasingly it has been reported that schools need to take measures to make ends meet. As far as you know, which of the following solutions, if any, have been suggested or implemented in your child's school to address funding shortfalls?" **Ranked by "Suggested AND Implemented"**

Parentkind 2

Since 2017, there has also been a small, but statistically significant increase in the proportion of parents reporting that a number of cost cutting solutions have been implemented in their schools. An increasing number of parents, for instance, report their school asked them to supply teaching equipment (21% vs 15% in 2017) as well as essentials such as toilet paper (12% vs 7% in 2017). More parents this year compared to last year also say that schools have been reducing the number of teaching assistants (18% vs 15%), supply teachers (15% vs 11%) as well as the length of the school week (8% vs 5%). Finally 14% say that their child's school has been cutting back on equipment compared to 11% in 2017.

More parents report schools implementing a number of cost-cutting measures this year

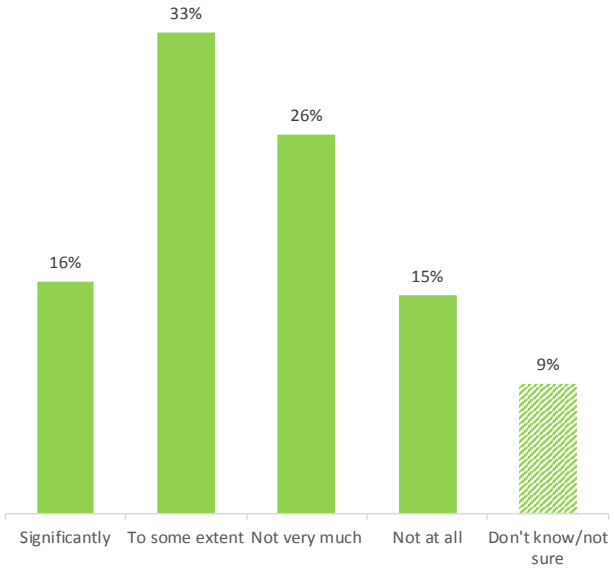


Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Increasingly it has been reported that schools need to take measures to make ends meet. As far as you know, which of the following solutions, if any, have been suggested or implemented in your child's school to address funding shortfalls?" **Suggested AND Implemented,** chart only includes solutions prompted in both 2017/2018

Parentkind 3

Like last year, there are a number of regional differences when it comes to schools implementing cost-cutting measures. London has a significantly higher proportion of parents reporting that their children's schools have implemented cost-cutting measures across the board, e.g. reducing the number of teaching assistants/support staff (32% vs 18% overall) and reducing the length of the school day (21% vs 10%). Parents from the North West are also more likely than parents in some of the other regions to report schools asking them to pay for events (33%), for school clubs (30%) and to help with maintenance activities (18%) as well as schools reducing the number of subjects on offer (17%), the number of supply of teachers (19%), the length of the school day (14%) and school week (13%). Parents from the West Midlands are also more likely than parents in other regions to report parents being asked to pay for after-school clubs which used to be free (33%) and schools reducing the length of the school day (12%). Outside of England, more parents in Wales are likely to report schools increasing class sizes (21%) compared to some of the other regions in England (particularly the East of England, East Midlands and the South West). Finally, parents in Northern Ireland are more likely to report the cost of the funding crisis to be falling on to them than parents in other regions, with a substantial proportion indicating that they have been asked by schools to pay for events (33%) and to provide teaching equipment (36%). Northern Ireland is also by far the region where parents are most likely to be asked to donate to the school fund (see next section for more details on this).

Nearly half of parents believe that the pressure on school budgets has negatively impacted on their children's education



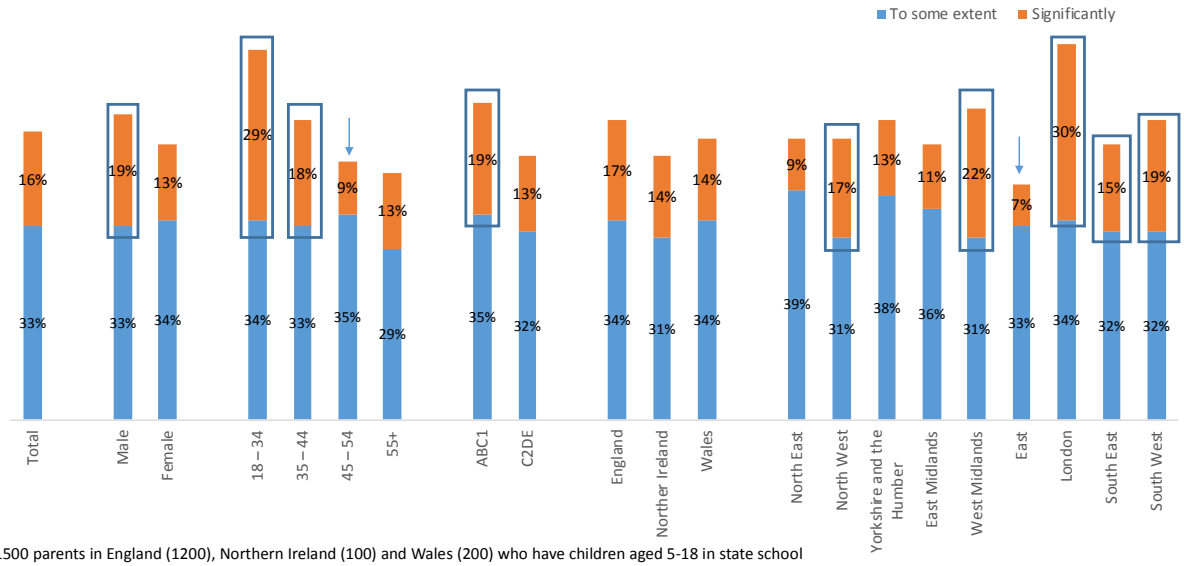
Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Overall, in your opinion, to what extent have pressures on school budgets negatively impacted on your child's education?"

Parentkind 4

When asked to evaluate the extent to which the pressure on school budgets has negatively impacted on their children's education, nearly half of parents (49%) believe that this is the case, with 16% saying that the funding crisis has had a significantly negative impact.

Amongst different demographic groups, fathers, parents under 45 and from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to say that the funding crisis has had a significant negative impact on their children's education than other groups. Regionally, this is also true for parents in London, the West Midlands, the North West, the South East and the South West, compared to parents in other regions, particularly in the East of England.

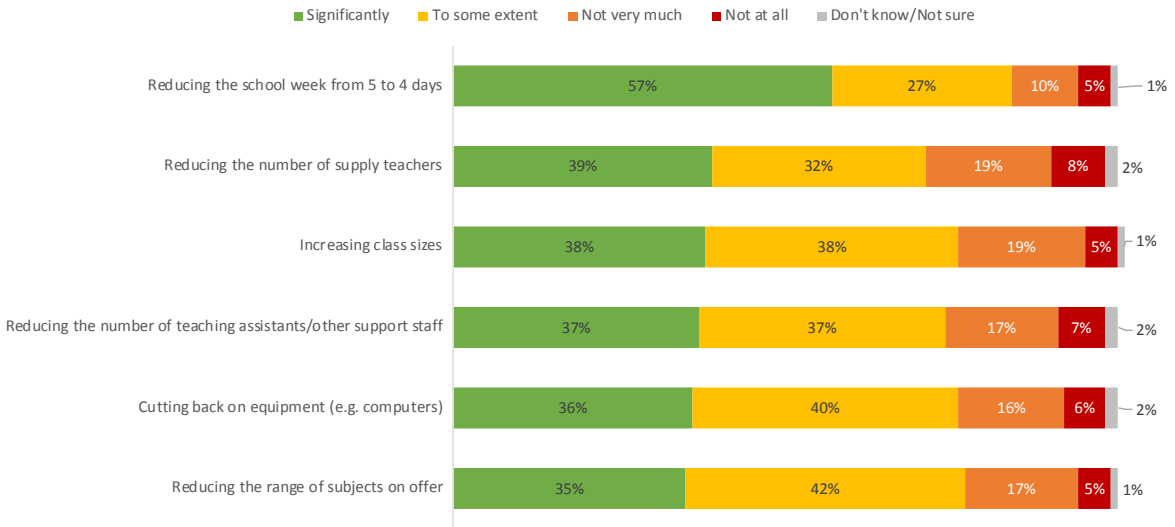
Fathers, younger parents, those from more affluent backgrounds and certain regions in England are more likely to report the negative impact of the funding crisis



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: "Overall, in your opinion, to what extent have pressures on school budgets negatively impacted on your child's education?"

Looking at the impact of specific cost-cutting measures, by far the measure that parents believe has the most negative impact on a child's education is reducing the length of the school week, with 57% of parents who have experienced this saying that it has had a significant negative impact on their children's education, and another 27% saying it has a negatively impacted to some extent.

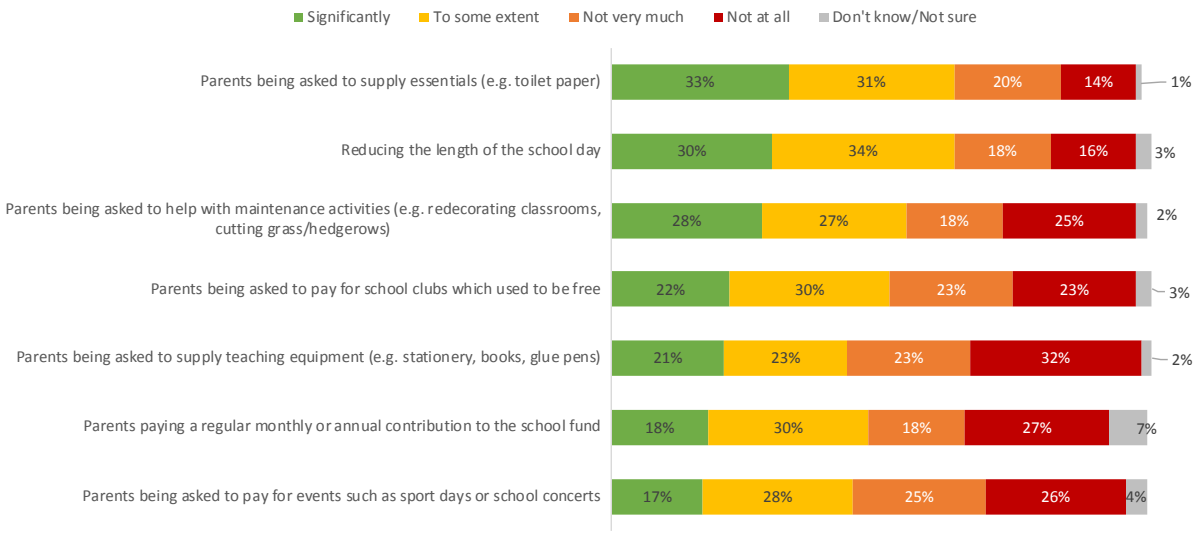
The negative impact of cost cutting solutions



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All those that have reported that a solution has been suggested and implemented at their child's school
Question: "In your opinion, to what extent have these solutions negatively impacted on your child's education?" **Ranked by "Significantly"**

Other measures such as reducing the number of supply teachers (39%), increasing class sizes (38%), reducing the number of support staff (37%), cutting back on equipment (36%) and reducing the range of subjects on offer (35%) follow closely in terms of perceived significant negative impact as reported by parents who have seen these solutions implemented. On the other hand, solutions that involve parents giving additional financial contributions to the school for school clubs (22%), equipment (21%), the school fund (18%) and events (17%), are less likely to be perceived as being detrimental; this may be because they are seen as alternative ways of supporting the school budget rather than solutions which are likely to directly impact on the quality of their children's education (e.g. increasing class sizes, cutting back on equipment etc.)

The negative impact of cost-cutting solutions (continued)



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All those that have reported that a solution has been suggested and implemented at their child's school
Question: "In your opinion, to what extent have these solutions negatively impacted on your child's education?" **Ranked by "Significantly"**

Parentkind 7

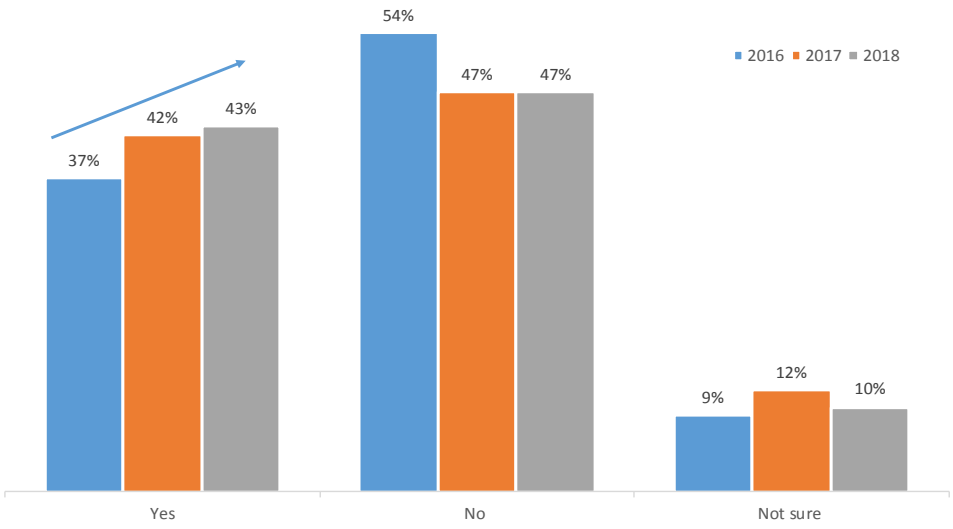
Donations to the school fund

Perhaps one of the most controversial and discussed measures which schools have been taking in order to support their core budgets is asking parents for a donation to the school fund. Looking more specifically at this measure, the proportion of parents who report being asked to donate to the school fund (43%) this year is comparable to what our survey found last year; however, it continues to be higher than when we first started tracking this measure in 2016 (37%).

Demographically, the most significant increases since 2016 in the proportion of those who remember being asked are among fathers (from 35% to 45%), parents under 45 (from 45% to 54% amongst 18-34 year olds and from 35% to 43% amongst 35-44 year olds) and parents from more affluent

backgrounds (from 40% to 49% amongst parents in ABC1 groups). Regionally, although parents in Northern Ireland remain most likely to be asked at 71%, parents in England have also seen a significant increase in requests from donations since 2016, with 43% being asked this year compared to 37% in 2016. This is particularly true for parents in London (from 48% to 62%) and those in the West Midlands (41% to 48%). Primary school is also the phase that has seen the most significant increases in parents reporting being asked for donations, from 31% in 2016 to 38% this year.

The proportion of parents who are being asked for a donation to the school fund continues to be higher than in 2016



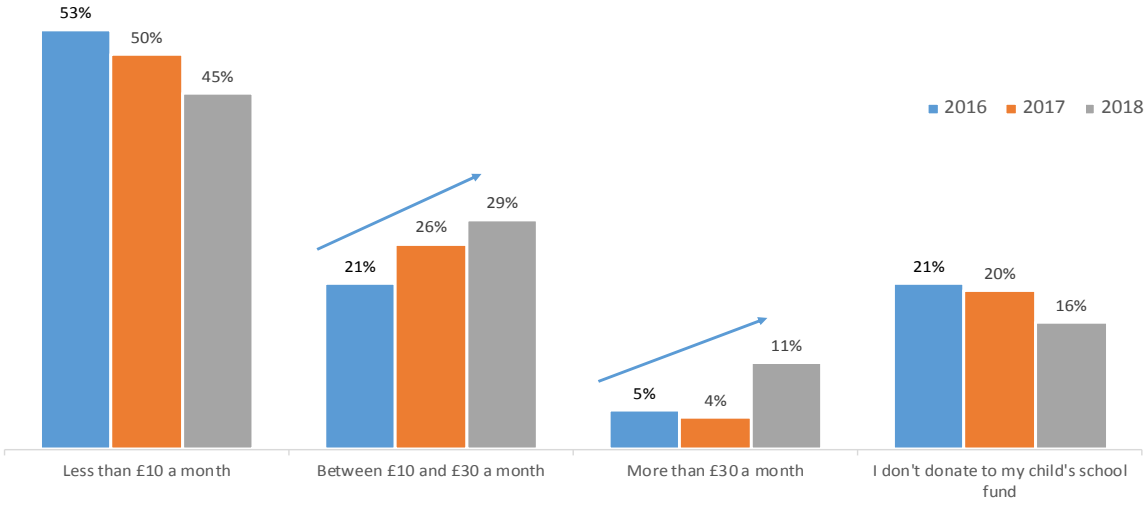
Sample: : 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents
Question: " Some schools ask parents and guardians for a regular voluntary financial contribution to the cost of running the school, which is often known as a 'donation to the school fund' (different to a donation to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fund). Have you ever been asked by your child's school to donate to the school fund?"

Parentkind 8

The proportion of parents who donate to the school fund is overall stable compared to last year (36% report donating this year compared to 34% in 2017) but, like requests for donations, it continues to be higher than in 2016 when only 29% of parents donated.

The monthly amount that parents report donating, on the other hand, has been increasing for the second year running. Although parents most commonly donate less than £10 a month, with 45% of those asked for a donation reporting this, the proportion of those who were asked to donate and gave higher amounts (more than £30 a month) has increased from 4% to 11% since last year.

Parents are donating increasingly higher amounts to the school fund



Sample: : 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: Those that were asked for a donation (639)
Question: Question: "How much, on average, do you donate to your child's school fund?"

Parentkind 9

As a result, on average, parents report donating increasingly higher amounts to the school fund - £11.35 a month on average, up from £8.90 in 2017.

On average, parents have been giving over £11 a month this year

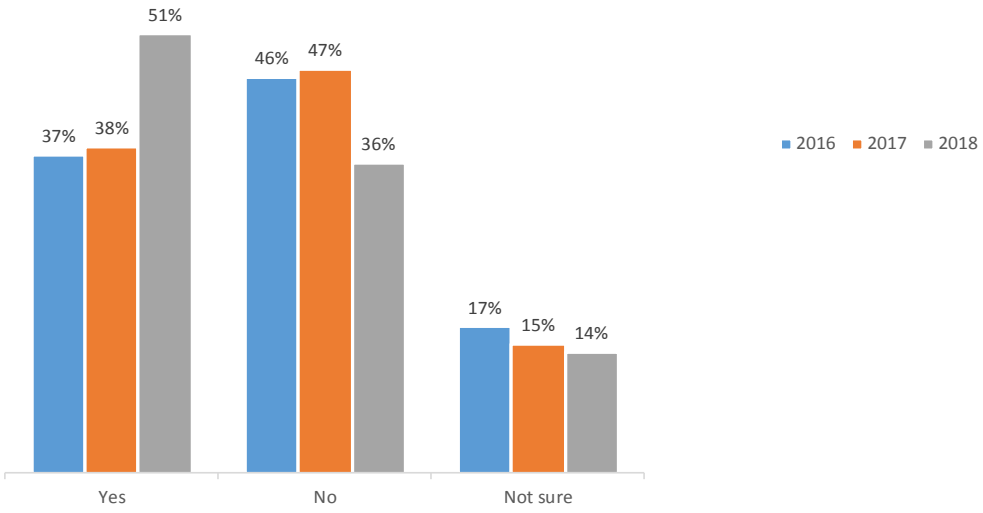
Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: Those that were asked for a donation (639)
Question: Question: "How much, on average, do you donate to your child's school fund?" **MEAN SCORE based on parents who were asked for a donation**

Parentkind 10

As in the past, some groups remain more likely to give higher amounts. This is particularly true for fathers (£13.90 compared to £8.30 reported by mothers) and younger parents (£15.10 reported by parents aged 18-34 and £12.15 reported by those aged 35-44 compared to just over £8 of parents aged 45+). Parents from ABC1 social groups on average give nearly double the amount of those in C2DE groups (£13.65 vs £7.40), while parents living in London give significantly higher amounts (£16.85) than those in other regions. Parents with children in secondary school also give higher amounts on average compared to parents with children in further education (£12.35 vs £10.15).

Interestingly, more parents are likely to know how the money is spent this year compared to 2017, with more than half of those who were asked to donate (51%) reporting knowing this compared to 38% last year. Awareness of how the money from the school fund is spent seem to go hand in hand with donations. Again, fathers, younger parents, those from ABC1 social groups and Londoners are more likely to be aware of how the money is spent.

More than half of parents this year report knowing how the school fund money is spent



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All those that were asked to donate to the school fund (639)
Question: Are you aware of how the money donated to the school fund is spent?

Parentkind

4. Conclusions

- Parents are increasingly under pressure to make financial contributions to support schools with their core budgets and this not only includes making donations to the school fund but also contributing in a number of other ways such as paying for goods, activities and services that were once free.
- Although parents are more likely to say that measures that are likely to directly impact on the quality of children's education (e.g. reducing the length of the school day, increasing class sizes, reducing the range of subject) have a more of a negative impact compared to those that directly impact on families' pockets, this doesn't mean that the financial impact of the crisis on families is any less important.
- Our member associations raise funds and build communities to enhance the education of all the children in their schools. Parentkind believes that, on balance, parents who are willing and able to making a financial contribution to their child's school should do so via a PTA at that school rather than school fund. The very best PTAs have a clear constitution on what they aim to do, are effective partnerships between teachers and parents, can claim Gift Aid as registered charities, and offer parents a chance to influence where any funds raised are invested. They can also generate additional benefits through co-ordinating parent volunteers, bid for grant funding and engage the wider school community in its activities.
- Schools and PTAs should consider the socio-economic disparity within the parent body when they approach parents for donations. The option to donate different amounts per month is indicative that many schools/PTAs have already taken this into consideration.

5. Recommendations

- Parentkind wants to see policymakers actively using evidence gathered from parents to influence all educational matters, and especially the current national debates on the levels of investment in our children's education so that funding challenges can be viewed from the perspective of parents as well as that of our schools.
- Parentkind would like schools to establish strategies to engage with all parents, including those who are 'harder to reach', and make a greater effort to inform and consult parents on funding pressures and their impact. School leaders should seek dialogue with a representative cross-section of parents through a parent voice group such as a PTA or parent council in order to fully understand the parent perspective and the real impact funding decisions have on the families within their school community.
- Schools have the right to fundraise. Parentkind believes that parents who are willing and able to make a financial contribution to their child's school will find to do so via a PTA has benefits over contributing to the school fund. This is because the best PTAs have a clear constitution on

what they aim to do, that they seek to invest to benefit every child in the school and parents can directly influence where any funds raised are invested.

6. Methodology and Sample

Parentkind's Annual Parent Survey is conducted online by Research Now. Respondents were recruited through their UK panel and took part in the survey from 13th August to 7th September 2018. It involved a sample of 1,500 parents from England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) 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.

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 a say on their child'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%).

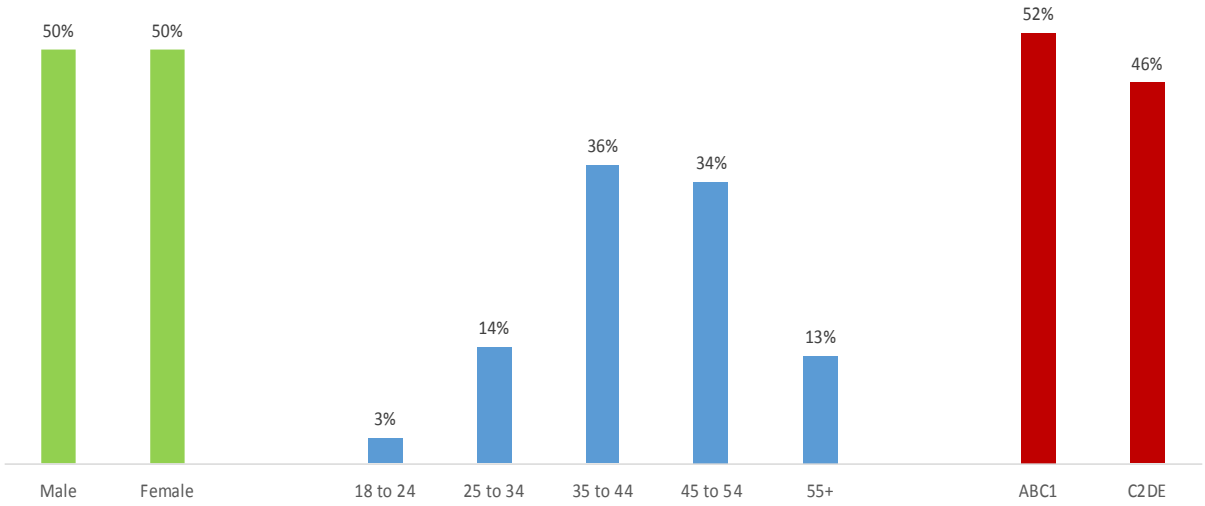
Throughout the report, statistically significant differences across demographic groups have been marked on charts by using blue rectangles and arrows.

Demographics

To ensure the survey truly reflects parents' views, 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).[6]

[6] 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

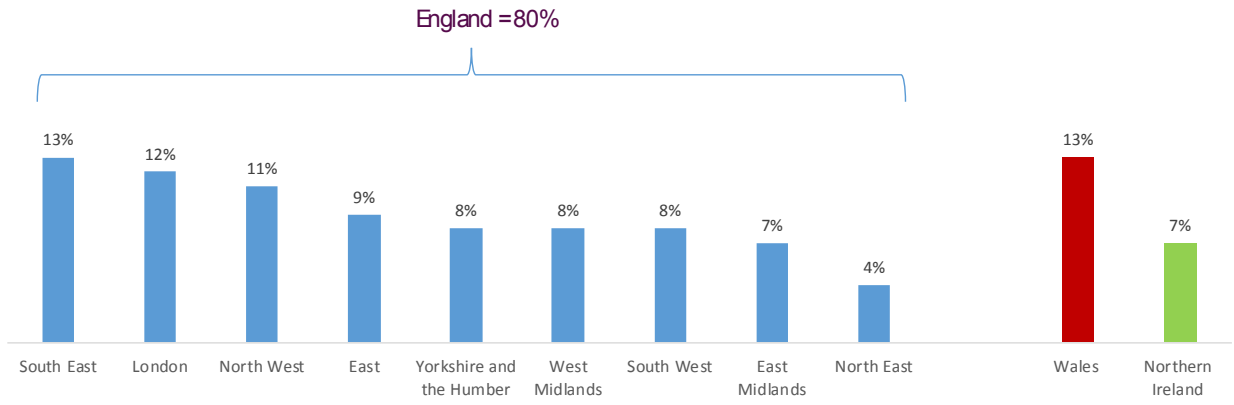
Demographics



Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), 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. 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.

Demographics

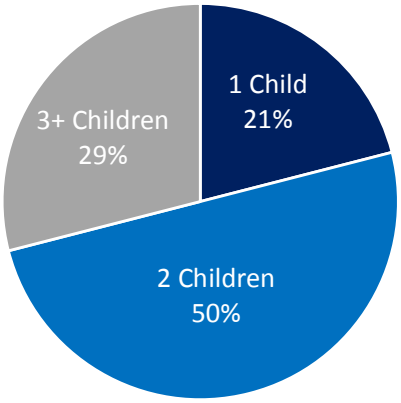


Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

Half of parents in the sample have two children, while just over one in five have one and nearly one in three have more than three. The largest school phase represented is secondary (50%) followed by primary (26%) and Further Education[7] (24%).

Demographics

Number of children in the household



School phase of eldest child

Primary	26%
Secondary/Post-primary	50%
Further/Third Level Education	24%
Don't know	1%

Sample: 1500 parents in England (1,200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

Parentkind

[7] This includes post-16 education in secondary schools and Further Education Colleges