



# **Schools’ accountability**

**Findings from the  
2019 Annual Parent Survey**

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## 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](http://www.parentkind.org.uk)

## 2. Summary of key findings

### Awareness and understanding of school governance models

- The majority of parents have heard of academies (91%) but only 51% would be able to explain what they are
- Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are less well known with 49% of parents overall having heard of them and only 19% being able to explain what they are; even amongst parents whose children attend a school governed by a MAT, only 40% feel that they would be able to explain what a MAT is
- Only 32% of parents know that MATs can decide teachers' salaries independently of the Department for Education and 36% incorrectly believe that schools in MATs are bound to follow the National Curriculum

### Trust in education leaders

- Trust in leaders to deliver the best education is highest at school level, with 80% of parents overall trusting leaders in school and 39% saying they trust them a lot
- Trust in school leaders is higher amongst primary school parents than parents of older children (43% trust them a lot vs 36% of parents in secondary school and 35% of parents in further education).
- A substantially lower proportion of parents trust Multi-Academy Trust and local government leaders (57%) and leaders at central government level (38%)

### Parent Voice

- Overall, 76% of parents want to be able to have a say at school level, a proportion that has remained relatively stable since last year
- However, only half of parents (50%) agree that their child's school listens to their views; similarly, only 27% of parents agree that their Local/Education Authority or MAT listen to their views and 23% think so of the Government
- One notable exception are parents whose children are in local authority-maintained schools who are more likely to report feeling heard by their school compared to children in stand-alone/MAT governed academies

## Raising issues and contributing ideas about education

- 55% parents report not raising issues/giving feedback at any level (school, Multi-Academy Trust, local or central government) compared to 42% last wave
- Regionally, parents from Wales were significantly more likely this wave to have expressed ideas/contributed feedback overall (only 45% reported not doing so compared to 56% of parents in England and 61% in Northern Ireland)
- In England, parents with children in academies were less likely to have engaged overall compared to those in local authority-maintained schools (58% did not contribute ideas/feedback vs 51% of parents in stand-alone local authority schools and 44% of those whose school belongs to a federation)
- When asked more specifically what issues parents discussed, bullying is amongst the top 3 issues spontaneously raised by parents across all settings, being the main theme of 15% of all responses given by parents who did raise issues.

## 3. Overview

Parentkind's Annual Parent Survey gives a yearly snapshot of parents' behaviour and attitudes towards their children's school and education. This is the fifth 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
- Parents' views on the cost of education and school funding and whether parents have been asked to donate to the school fund

As well as this, the 2019 wave of the survey explores parents' views on a number of other topical issues such as:

- Parents' awareness and knowledge of different school governance models

- Parents' trust in education leaders at different levels (school, local and central government)
- Parents' views on the curriculum and the extent to which it is meeting their child's needs

This document is one of a series of mini in-depth reports focusing on a specific topic of the survey. Here we explore parents' views on the accountability of schools and the education system as a whole. As in past waves of the survey, we look at whether parents are keen to have their voice heard at different levels (school, Multi-Academy Trust, local government and central government), the extent to which they feel heard; and we investigate the different channels through which parents have contributed feedback or ideas about their children's education. In light of the recent growth of stand-alone academies and Multi-Academy Trusts, in this wave we have also explored parents' awareness and understanding of different school governance models and their trust in education leaders at different institutional levels, from school to central government.

## Introduction

In its 2019 Governance Handbook, the Department for Education (DfE) stresses the importance of engaging parents in schools' decision-making processes. As stated in the handbook "it is vital that [school] boards are connected with, and answerable to, the communities they serve, particularly parents/carers"<sup>1</sup>. In particular, decisions need to be informed both by evidence of what works/is likely to be effective and the needs of key stakeholders, of which parents and carers are one of the most important, if not the most important, ones. According to the DfE, this involves, amongst other things, regular, clear communication with parents on the part of the school as well as helping parents understand the structure of the school and how it operates. It also involves a range of mechanisms for parents to put forward their views at key points in their children's education<sup>2</sup>.

As noted in past Annual Parent Survey reports, in England the significant growth in academies and free schools over the past decade 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 Ofsted and Regional School Commissioners (RSC) who, in turn, are tasked with approving new schools and intervening when they underperform. Moreover, whilst leadership has traditionally been embedded in individual schools, for many schools this is no longer the case, particularly where structures such as Multi-Academy Trusts are in place.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education (2019) "Governance Handbook for academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools"

<sup>2</sup> As above

There are currently 8,901 Academies and Free Schools in England, making up 41% of all state-funded schools (35% of primary schools and 75% of secondary schools)<sup>3</sup>; they are attended by more than 4.1 million pupils<sup>4</sup>. As well as being financially independent from local authorities, academies and free schools enjoy a number of important freedoms such as being able to set their own school day/term times and teacher salaries, and not being bound to follow the National Curriculum.

Just over 17% of academies (1,596) belong to a Single Academy Trust, a charitable company limited by guarantee which is governed by a single set of articles and has a direct funding agreement with the Secretary of State<sup>5</sup>.

However, the vast majority of Academies (nearly 83%) are part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The MAT is a single legal entity accountable for a number of academies which is funded by the government on the basis of the number of academies it operates<sup>6</sup>. Although there might be local governing bodies (LGBs) overseeing one or more schools, the trust remains directly accountable for the performance of its schools to the DfE. Levels of delegation to LGBs vary from trust to trust and trustees have complete discretion over these; some LGBs are wholly advisory, escalating issues and risks to the trust but without real decision-making powers; in other cases individual schools have more power over key decisions such as for example learning/teaching approaches, and curriculum models<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the extent to which, in practice, MATs directly connect with parents and their priorities as stakeholders is likely to vary substantially from trust to trust. The National Governance Association, for instance, has recently highlighted that a lack of parent representation on the boards of schools run by MATs has created a “democratic deficit” in school governance<sup>8</sup>.

In this and past waves of our survey with parents, we found that the vast majority of parents (87% this wave) are keen to play an active role in their children’s education. We also found that, while many are willing to express their views and are confident to do so at school level, this is not necessarily true at local /central government or MAT level where most of the key decisions for schools and school policy are currently made. Moreover, while parents trust leaders at school level, they are less inclined to do so at MAT and local/government level; this, again, is a sign that the current structure of the education system is not doing enough to help reduce distance between parents and key-decision makers. This is particularly important when schools are taken over by, or change hands to another, MAT and this impacts on the ethos and values of the school.

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Education (2019) “Open academies, free schools, studio schools, UTCs and academy projects in development” (October 2019 release)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education (2019) “Open academies, free schools, studio schools, UTCs and academy projects in development” (July 2019 release)

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education (2019) “Open academies, free schools, studio schools, UTCs and academy projects in development” (October 2019 release)

<sup>6</sup> As above

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (2016) “Multi-Academy Trust: good practice guidance and expectations for growth”

<sup>8</sup> The Guardian “Academies without parents on boards risk community rejection” (28<sup>th</sup> June 2019) accessed online <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jun/28/academies-without-parents-on-boards-risk-community-rejection>>

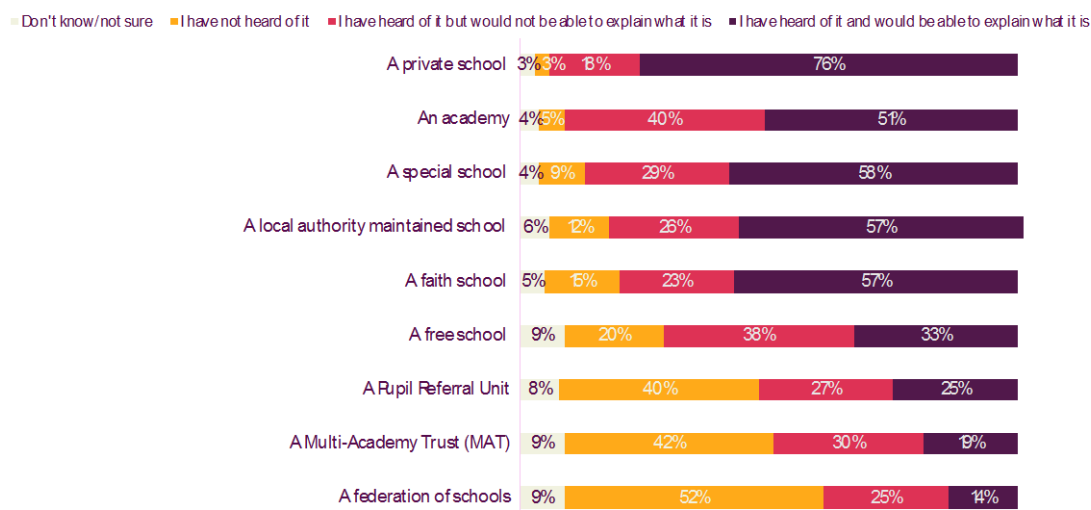
Finally, the rise in new types of schools and federative systems means that awareness and understanding of school governance models is increasingly important for parents to be able to confidently interact with schools and to hold them accountable for their decisions. Once again, our data from this wave of our parent survey suggests that while, on the surface, parents are aware of a range of school models, their understanding of how they operate and their key features is limited. We can speculate that this, in turn, is likely to have an impact on their willingness and confidence to express their opinions at different levels, particularly beyond school – an important factor in parents being able to support their children’s education.

## 4. Detailed findings

### 4.1 Awareness and understanding of school governance models

Although parents have clearly heard of a wide range of school models, at best only half of those we surveyed felt they were able to explain what each model that we prompted actually is. Perhaps the exception to this are private schools, which overall nearly all parents (94%) have heard of and the majority (76%) claim to be able to explain what they are.

### Parents’ understanding of school models varies



Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school

Base: All those living in England (100)

Question: In England there are different types of schools that children can attend and different ways in which they are grouped. Which of the following have you heard of? Ranked by having heard of it

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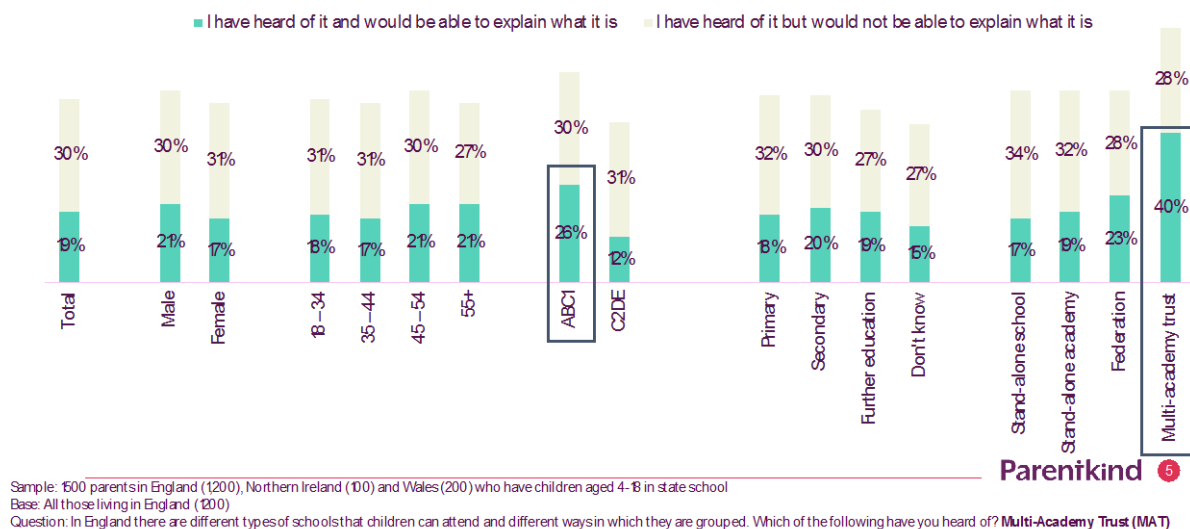
Academies are the best-known school model (91% of parents overall have heard of them). This reflects their remarkable growth in the past decade. However, only 51% of parents feel they can explain what an academy actually is. Although parents whose children attend academies (stand-alone

or part of a MAT) are substantially more likely to say that they could explain this (71% vs 48% of parents in standalone academies and 49% of those in federations), around a quarter still feel they would be unable to do so. This is important as it suggests that, although academies are well-known, there is a lack of understanding amongst parents about what differentiates them from other types of schools and, potentially, of the implications that this may have for key stakeholders, including parents themselves.

Although overall awareness of local authority-maintained schools is lower compared to academies, a higher proportion of parents say that they could explain what they are (57%) compared to those who say so of academies (51%). This could be because this governance model has been in place for longer and, therefore, those who have heard of it are likely to have a better understanding of what it is compared to newer school models such as academies or free schools.

Awareness of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) is amongst the lowest with 49% of parents overall having heard of them, together with school federations (39%); only 19% of parents feel that they are able to explain what a MAT is and 14% say so of a federation of schools.

## Only 40% of parents whose children are in a school which belongs to a MAT can explain what it is



Although in-depth understanding of a MATs is higher amongst those parents whose children are in schools which belong to one (40%), the majority would not be able to explain what it is. This suggests that a lot still needs to be done to ensure that parents have enough of an understanding of this model to be able to relate to it in an effective way.



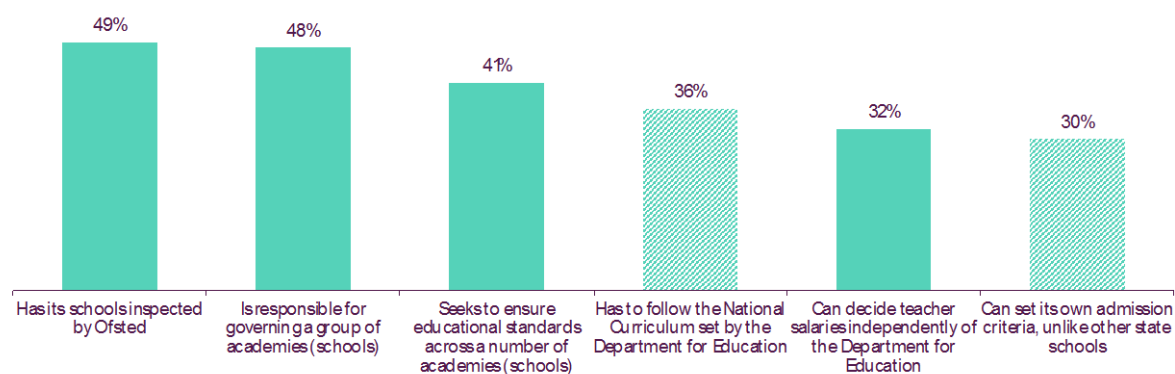
## 4.2 Understanding of Multi-Academy Trusts

As part of exploring parents' understanding of MATs, we asked all those parents who claimed to be aware of MATs (whether they felt they could explain what they are or not) to identify some of their key features amongst a list of prompted ones.

In general, it seemed that parents were able to easily identify some of the general features of MATs. Around half, for instance, know that MATs are responsible for governing a group of academies (48%) and that they are inspected by Ofsted (49%); two in five (41%) also correctly stated that MATs seek to improve educational standards for the academies they govern.

However, understanding of some of the more specific features of MATs is generally lower amongst parents. For instance, only 32% know that MATs can decide teachers' salaries independently of the Department for Education.

### More than one third of parents who are aware of MATs think that its schools have to follow the National Curriculum



Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school

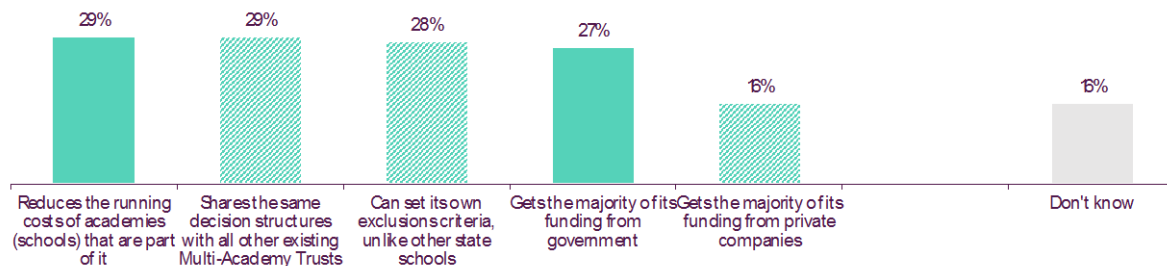
Base: All those living in England who have heard of a Multi-Academy Trust (594)

Question: "As far as you know, which of the following statements describes what a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is and/or does? Please select as many as you think apply. A Multi-Academy Trust..."

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Moreover, some parents incorrectly indicated that schools in MATs are bound to follow the National Curriculum (36%). Just under a third of parents wrongly believe MATs can set their own admissions (30%) and exclusions criteria (28%); a similar proportion (29%) also believe all MATs share the same decision structures and 16% think that they are mainly funded by private companies.

## Confusion amongst parents around MATs sharing the same decision structures and being able to set their own admissions/exclusions criteria



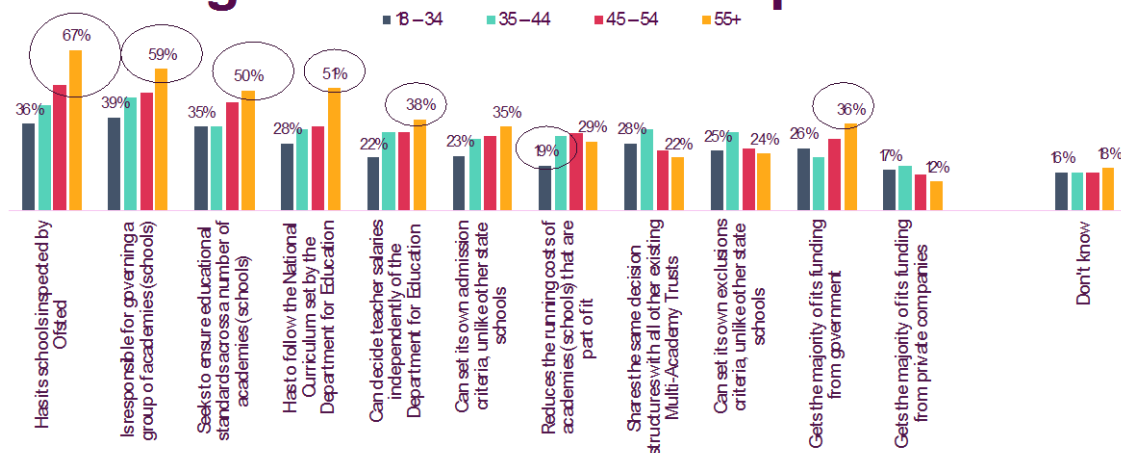
Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school  
 Base: All those living in England who have heard of a Multi-Academy Trust (594)

Question: "As far as you know, which of the following statements describes what a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is and/or does? Please select as many as you think apply. A Multi-Academy Trust..."

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With respect to some of the areas we prompted, older parents appear to be more knowledgeable about MATs than younger parents. This could be because they have had more contact with the education system over time compared to their younger counterparts. It may also be because they are more likely to have children in secondary schools which, in turn, are more likely to be academies. Those aged 55+ are substantially more likely than younger parents (18-34) to be aware of some of the key characteristics of MATs; 59% know that MATs are responsible for governing a set of academies (vs 39% of 18-34 year olds) and 67% are aware that schools in MATs are inspected by Ofsted (vs 36% of 18-34); 50% know that MATs seek to ensure certain academic standards (vs 35% of 18-34). Older parents are also more likely to know that MATs can set their own teachers' salaries (38% vs 22% of 18-34). However, this group also lacks a certain level of detailed knowledge around other areas – for instance, it is more likely to wrongly state that academies in MATs need to follow the National Curriculum compared to younger parents (51% vs 28%).

## Older parents appear to be more knowledgeable about certain aspects of MATs



Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-16 in state school

Base: All those living in England who have heard of a Multi-Academy Trust: 18-34 (96), 35-44 (206), 45-54 (210), 55+ (83)

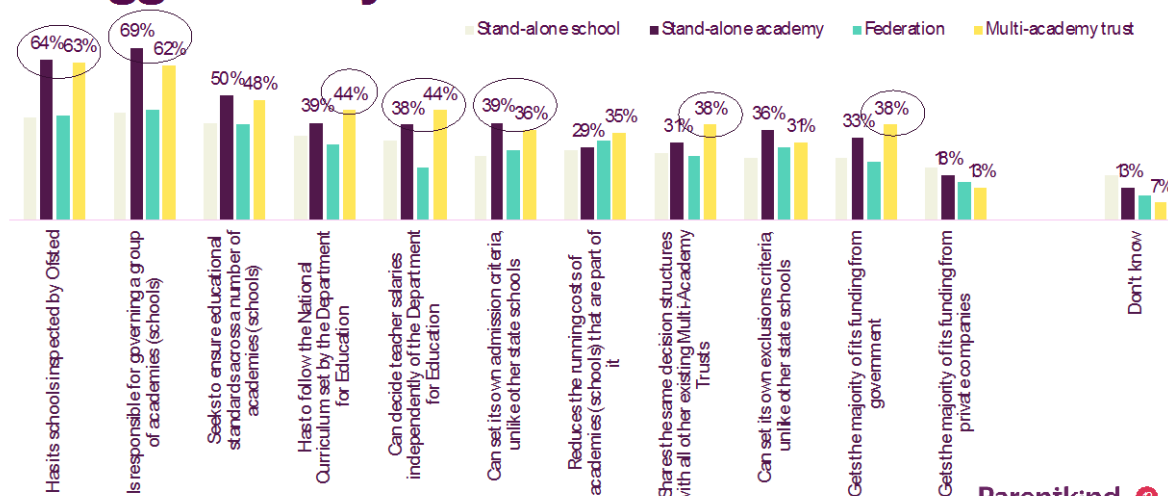
Question: "As far as you know, which of the following statements describes what a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is and/or does? Please select as many as you think apply. A Multi-Academy Trust..."

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Interestingly, parents who claim to be able to explain what a MAT is are more likely to tick any of the areas we prompted, including those that do not actually apply to MATs. This, once again, reinforces the idea that, even when parents feel confident about how much they know about this school model, in practice their understanding is incomplete in relation to certain areas.

Amongst those who have children whose school is part of a MAT, understanding does seem to be slightly more nuanced. For instance, 44% correctly believe that MATs can set their own teachers' salaries independently of DfE and 38% say that MATs get the majority of their funding from the Government.

## Even parents whose schools are in MATs struggle to fully understand them



Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-6 in state school

Base: All those living in England who have heard of a Multi-Academy Trust : Those with children in Stand-alone schools (22), Stand-alone academies (62), Federations (83), MATs (136)

Question: "As far as you know, which of the following statements describes what a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is and/or does? Please select as many as you think apply. A Multi-Academy Trust..."

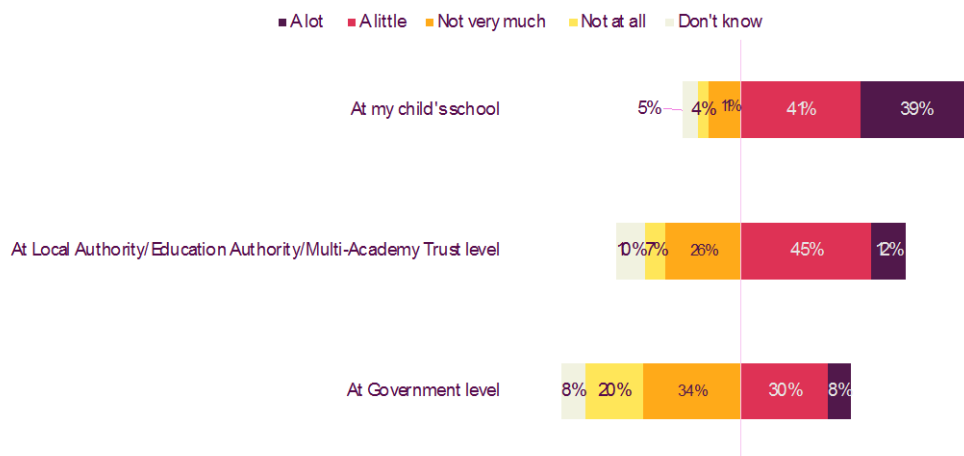
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However, even parents in this group struggle to fully understand them; for example, they are more likely than parents with children in any other school type to believe that schools in MATs need to follow the National Curriculum (44%). They are also more likely than parents in local authority maintained schools (stand-alone or federations) to believe that MATs can set their admissions criteria (36%) and more likely than parents in other type of schools to believe that all existing MATs share decision-making structures (38%). Once again, this shows that a detailed understanding beyond broad awareness is difficult to achieve, even for those parents that supposedly have more direct contact with this school model.

### 4.3 Trust in leaders

When we asked parents whether they trust leaders at different levels of the education system to deliver the best education for their children, trust in school leaders is highest - 80% overall trust them, with 39% saying they trust them a lot.

# Parents trust leaders in schools more than those at higher levels



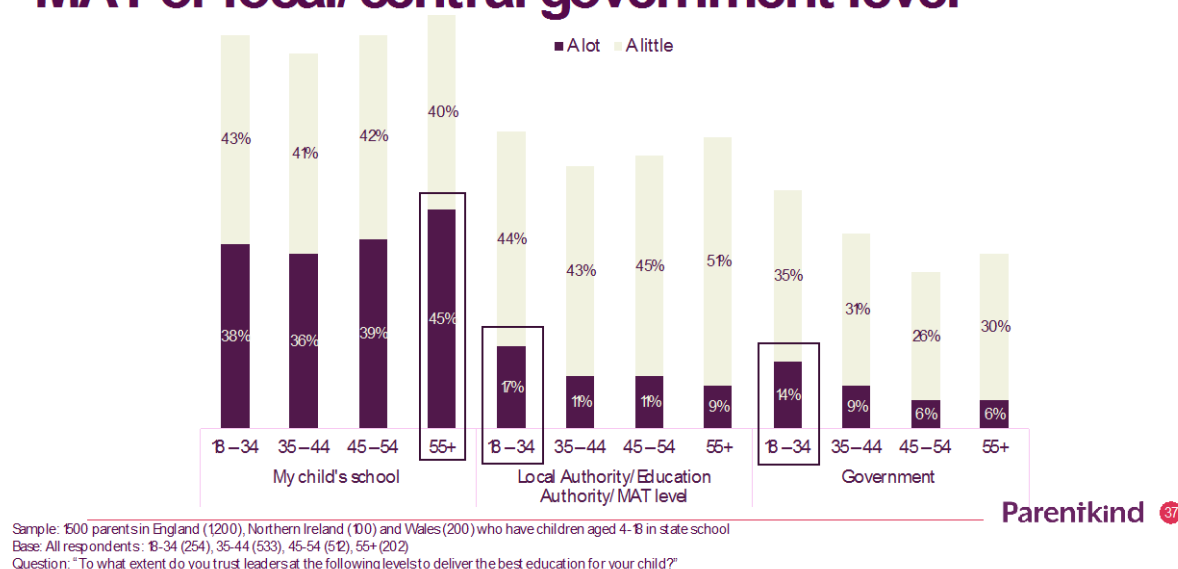
Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school  
 Base: All respondents  
 Question: "To what extent do you trust leaders at the following levels to deliver the best education for your child?"

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Multi-Academy Trust and local government leaders are trusted by 57% of parents, with 12% trusting them a lot, a substantially lower figure compared to that of school leaders. A low proportion of parents also trust leaders at central government level (38%) with only 8% saying that they trust them a lot. On the one hand, it is realistic to think that this discrepancy in trust between leaders at school and government level is simply due to the fact that parents trust what is closer to them and, therefore, better known; on the other hand, it also highlights the distance between parents and decision-making structures beyond school set in a background of an increasingly decentralized school system.

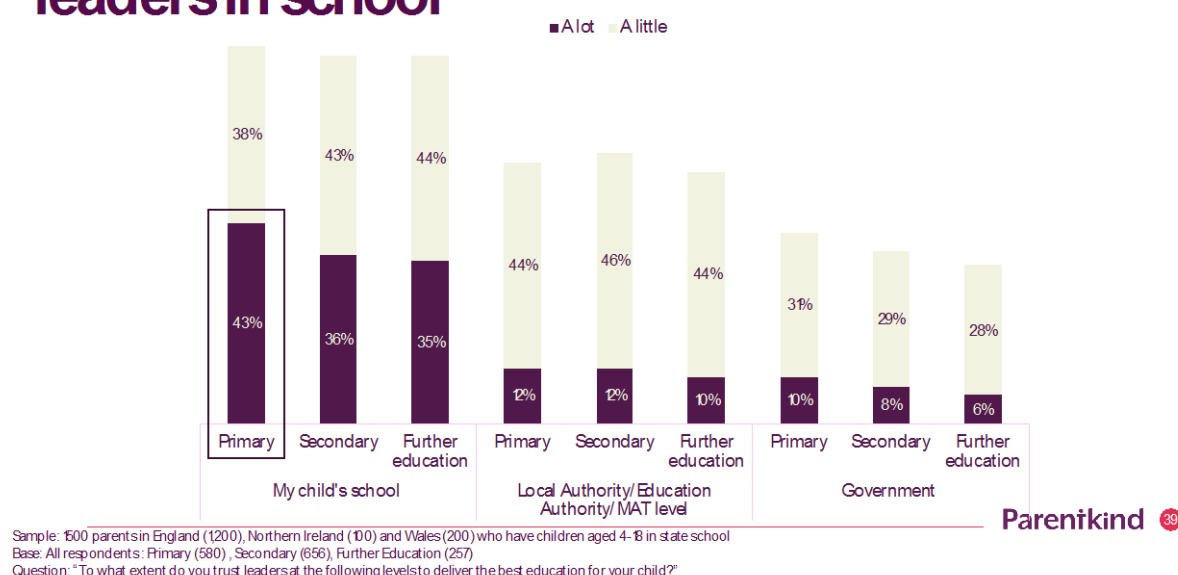
Looking at demographic differences in views, older parents (55+) are more likely to say that they trust school leaders a lot (45%) compared to younger parents, particularly 18-34 year olds (38%). This is also true of parents whose children are in primary school (43% trust leaders in schools a lot vs 36% of parents in secondary school and 35% of parents in further education).

## Younger parents are more trusting of leaders at MAT or local/ central government level



Younger parents, on the other hand, are more likely to trust leaders at MAT/local government level than older parents (17% of 18-34 vs 9% of 55+ trust them a lot) and leaders at central government level (14% of 18-34 vs 6% of 55+ trust them a lot).

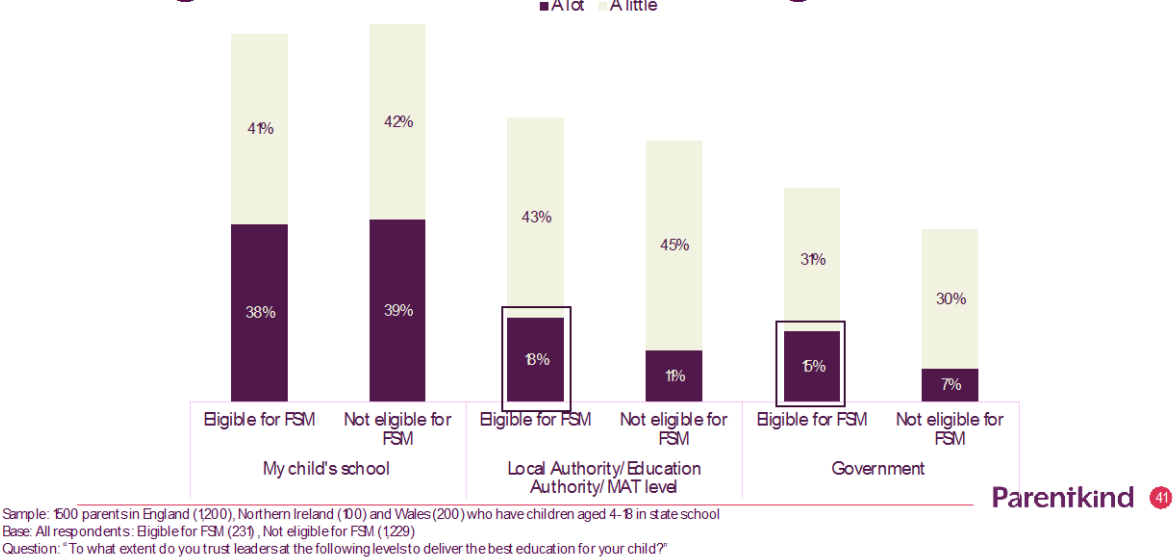
## Primary school parents are more likely to trust leaders in school



Interestingly, this age pattern is not reflected across school phases, where 43% of primary school parents trust leaders in schools a lot vs 36% in secondary school and 35% in further education.

Parents from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to trust leaders at local/central government level than those from more affluent backgrounds. In particular, parents whose children are eligible for FSM are more likely to place high levels of trust in leaders in MATs/local government than those whose children are not eligible (18% trust them a lot vs 11%) and in central government (15% vs 7%).

## Parents of children on Free School Meals are more trusting of MATs and local/central government leaders

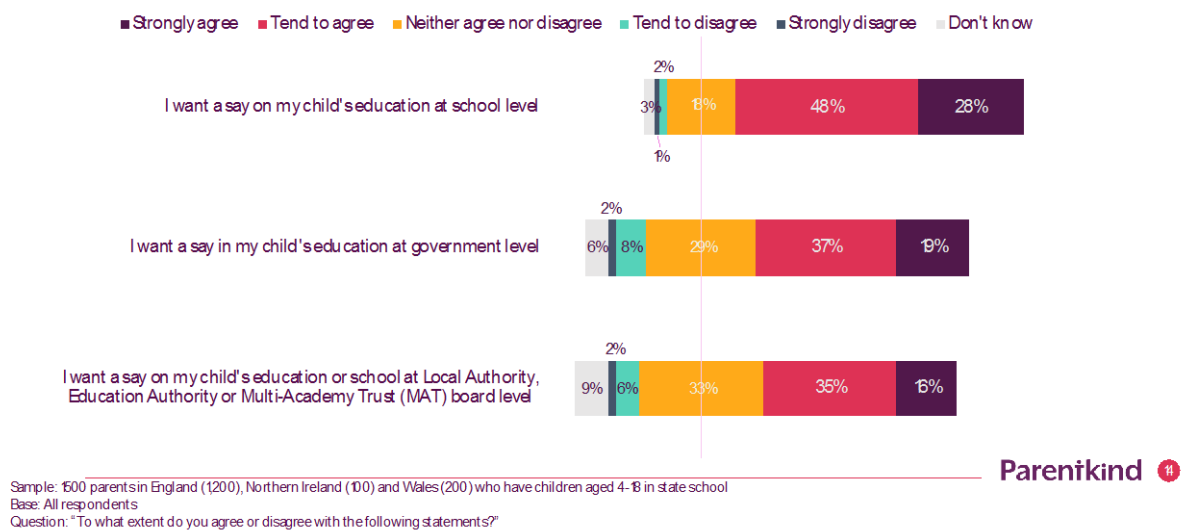


### 4.4 Parent Voice

School continues to be the institutional level at which parents are most likely to want to have a say when it comes to matters that affect their child's education. Overall, 76% of parents agree that they want to be able to have a say at school level (a proportion that has remained relatively stable since last year), with 28% of parents strongly agreeing.

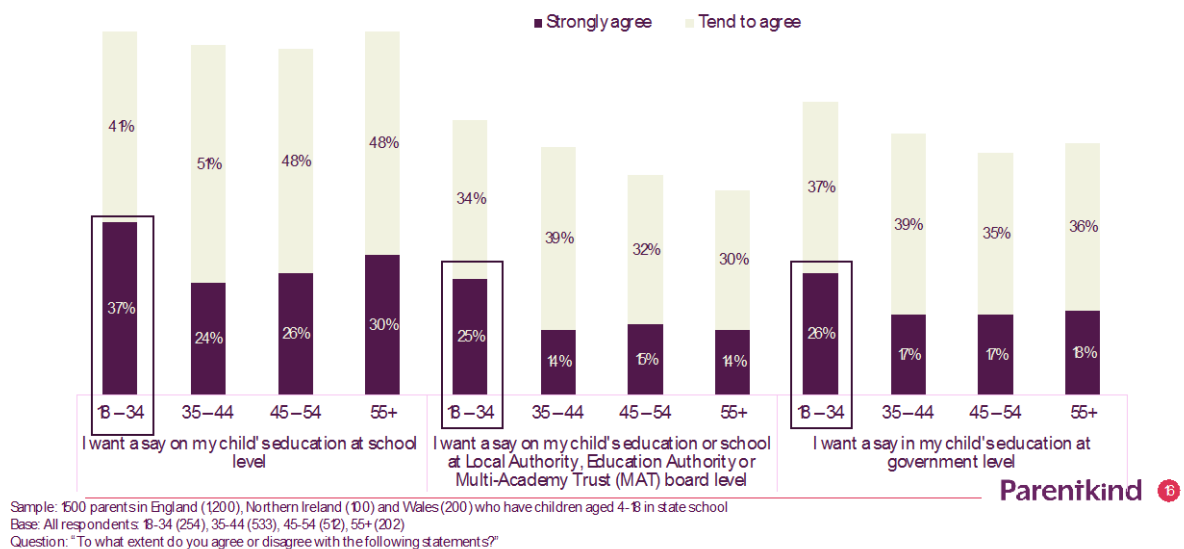
As already noted last wave, parents are much more uncertain about wanting to have a say at government level (29% neither agree nor disagree) and local authority/education authority/MAT level (33% neither agree nor disagree) compared to having a say at school level (only 18% are neutral).

# Parents are most likely to want to have their voice heard at school level



Younger parents tend to be keener to have their voice heard by all institutions prompted and are also more likely to feel heard. This, once again, is in line with the fact that engagement with school and educational matters appears to be higher within this group compared to older groups.

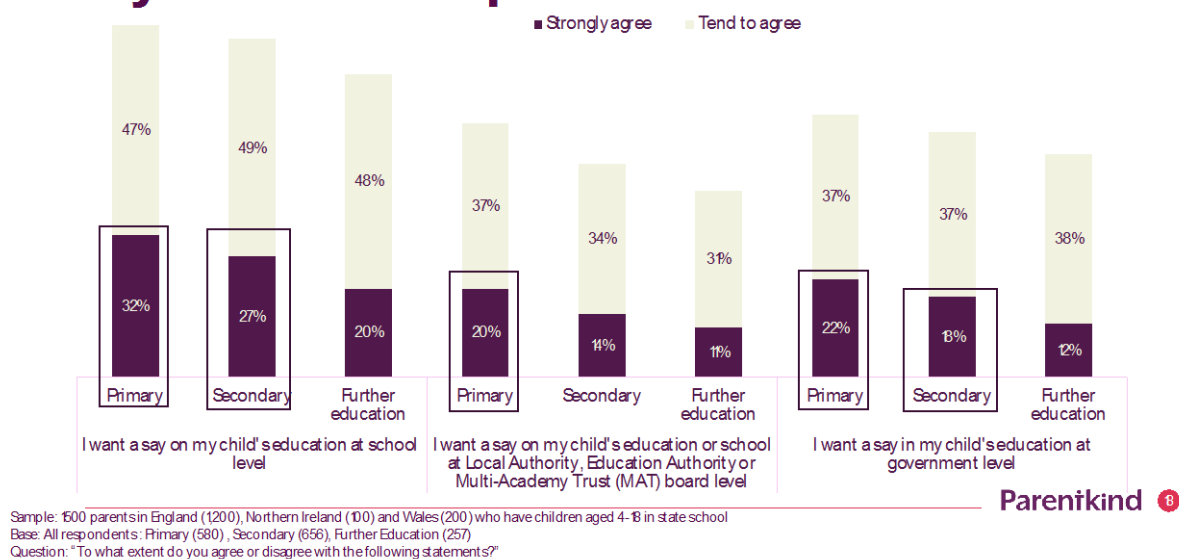
# Younger parents are keener to be heard at school level





It is also reflected in children's school phase; for instance, 32% and 27% of parents in primary and secondary school strongly agree want to have a say about education at school level compared to 20% of parents in further education. Similarly, 22% of primary school parents and 18% of those in secondary school strongly agree that they want to express their opinion at government level compared to only 12% of parents in further education. Primary school parents are also keener to do so at local government/MAT level (20% strongly agree vs 14% of parents in secondary schools and 11% of parents in further education).

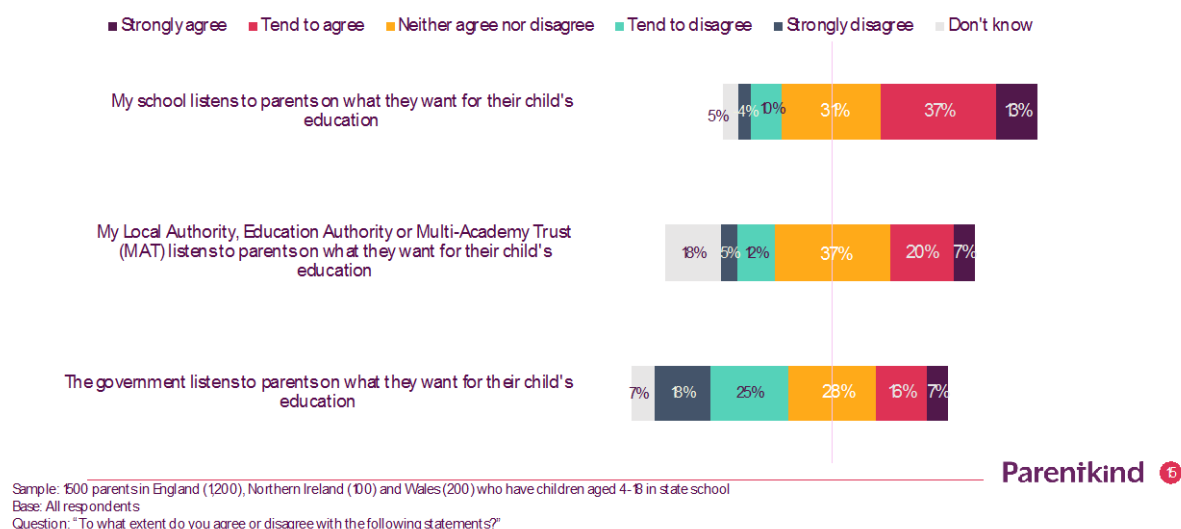
## Primary and secondary school parents are more likely to want to express their views at all levels



Regionally, this wave Welsh parents are more likely to strongly agree that they want their voice heard at local government level (26% strongly agree vs 15% in England and 14% in Northern Ireland).

At all levels, there is still a considerable gap between the extent to which parents want to express their opinion and the extent to which they claim they are actually heard by institutions. Half of parents (50%) agree that their child's school listens to their views (with 13% strongly agreeing). However, as already noted, a much higher proportion of parents (76%) reported that they would like to have a say at school level.

# At best only half of parents feel heard at any one level

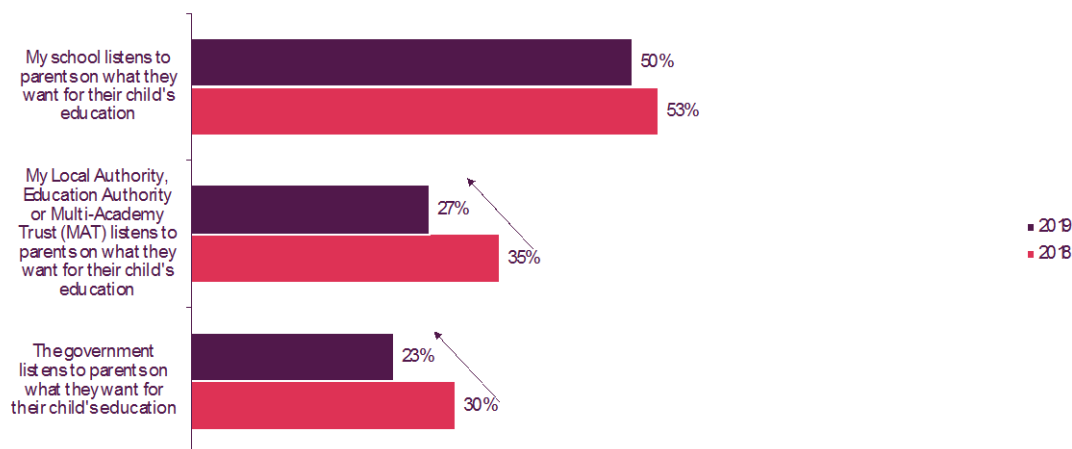


Similarly, when we look at institutions beyond school, only 27% of parents agree that their Local/Education Authority or MAT listen to their views (7% strongly agree) and 23% think so of the Government (7% strongly agree).

Perhaps one notable exception are parents whose children are in local authority maintained schools who are more likely to feel heard at school level than those of children attending academies (18% and 14% of parents whose children are in stand-alone and federations of local authority maintained schools respectively strongly agree that their school listens to parents compared to 8% and 10% of those with children in stand-alone academies and MATs respectively).

Not only does there continue to be a gap between parents' expectations and the extent to which they actually feel heard, but parents appear to be less keen this wave to have their voice heard beyond school level and less likely to report that they feel heard compared to last year.

## Less parents feel heard by MATs and local/central government this wave



Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school  
 Base: All respondents  
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree** **Tend to Agree**

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Both the proportion of parents who want to have a say beyond school and of those who feel heard at local government /MAT level (27%) or government level (23%) is lower compared to 2018 (35% and 30% respectively). Although only looking at future data will tell us whether this is a long-term decline, this may be a sign that parents are becoming increasingly disillusioned with institutions at these levels.

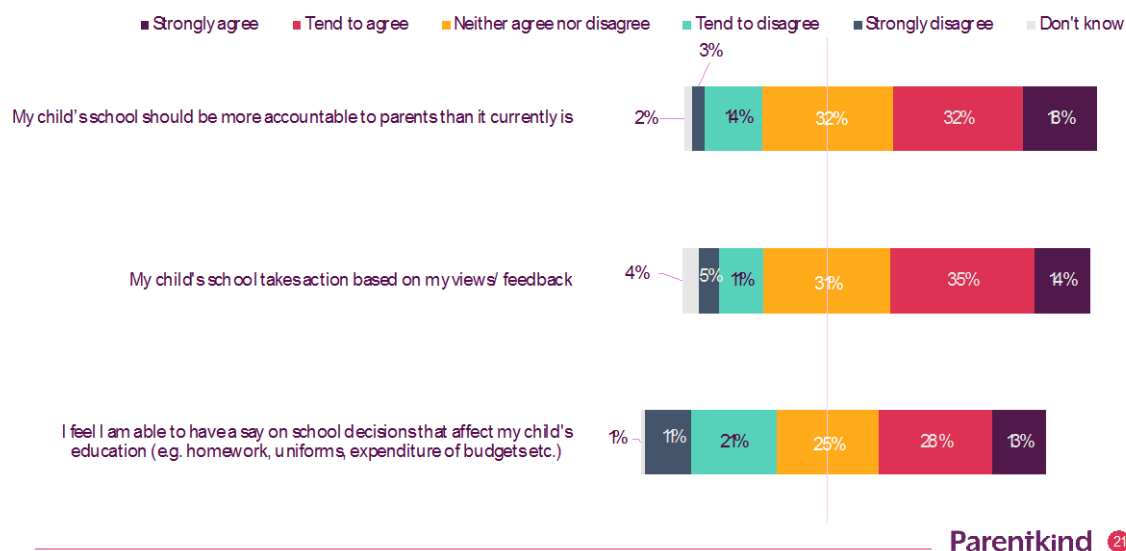
### 4.5 Raising issues and contributing ideas about education

Giving parents the opportunity to raise issues, contribute ideas about their child's education and ensuring that they are adequately listened to are key elements of schools' accountability to parents.

Our data suggests that parents' feelings on how well schools are succeeding in this are mixed. On the one hand, a substantial proportion of parents in our sample (41%) feel they are able to have a say on school decisions that affect their children's education. However, the majority are uncertain/don't know (26%) or actively disagree (32%). Similarly, while nearly half (49%) believe that their school takes action on their views and feedback, a similar proportion don't actively subscribe to this view (35% are uncertain/don't know and 16% actively disagree).

Moreover, when we explicitly ask parents whether they think schools should be more accountable to them, views are polarized, with half of parents (50%) agreeing and half being either uncertain or disagreeing. This, in turn, suggests that while a significant proportion of parents are satisfied with the extent to which schools hold themselves accountable, there is scope for improvement.

# Views on schools' accountability are mixed

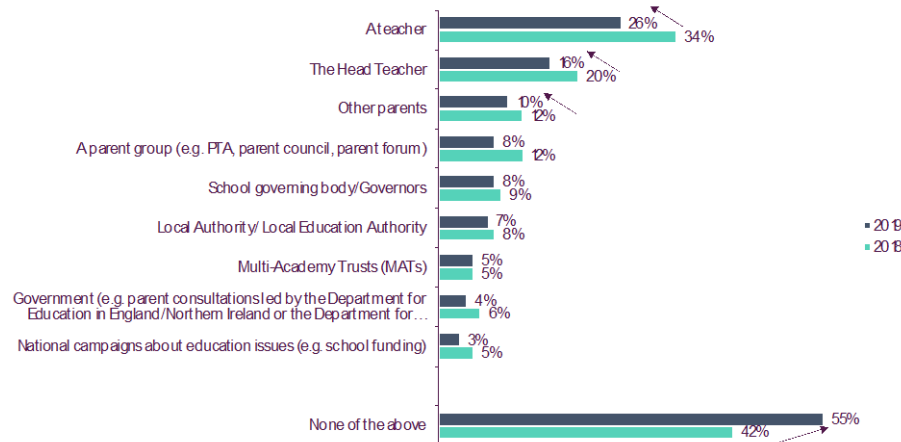


Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school  
 Base: All respondents  
 Question: "Thinking about the school that your oldest child currently attends, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to their schooling?"

When we look at whether parents have engaged in education by raising issues/giving feedback at any level (school, Multi-Academy Trust, local or central government), a similar story emerges. Overall more than half of parents (55%) have not done so in the last 12 months compared to 42% last wave. Although the relative importance of answers remains broadly the same, fewer parents this year report contributing ideas/feedback to teachers (26% vs 34% last wave), the head teacher (16% vs 20%) and Parent Groups (8% vs 12%). As in last wave, raising issues at local government level (7%), MAT level (5%), through central government consultations (4%) and national campaigns (3%) remain the prerogative of a niche group of parents. This suggests that some of the mechanisms that hold schools accountable for what they do may not be fully taken advantage of by parents.

Similarly to last year, there are a number of demographic groups which overall are less likely to have contributed their views and ideas about education matters. These include mothers (58% say they have not contributed ideas/feedback at all vs 52% of fathers), those from less affluent backgrounds (58% of C2DEs vs 51% of ABCIs) and parents with children in further education (61% vs 50% of parents in primary school).

## Over half of parents have not discussed issues related to their child's school/education



Parentikind 26

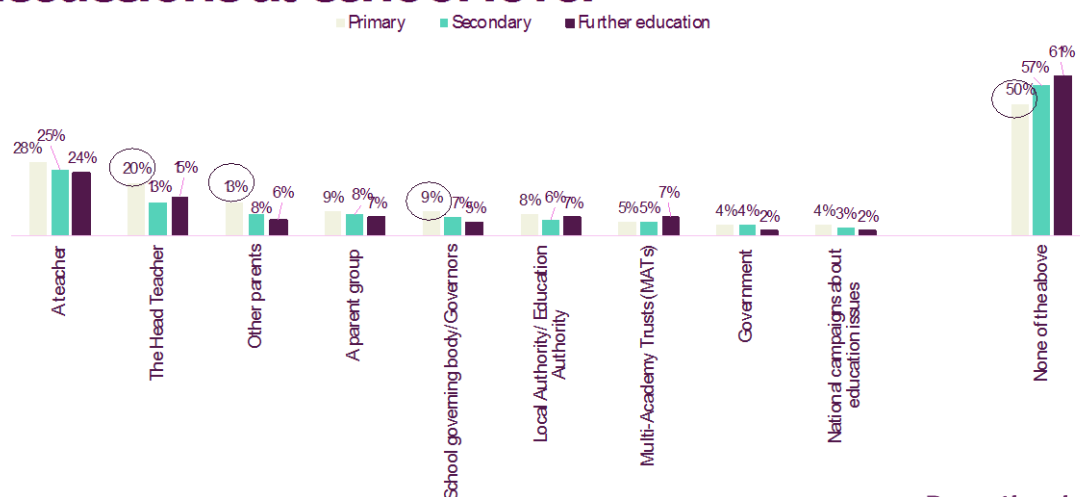
Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school

Base: All respondents

Question: "Over the past year, have you raised issues and/or contributed ideas/feed back about your child's school and education with any of the following? Please select all that apply"

On the other hand, parents in primary school were more likely to report engaging in discussions at school level by talking to other parents (13% vs 8% of parents in secondary school and 6% of those in further education), consulting with head teachers (20% vs 13% and 15%) and school governors (9% vs 5% of parents in further education).

## Primary school parents are more likely to engage in discussions at school level



Parentikind 27

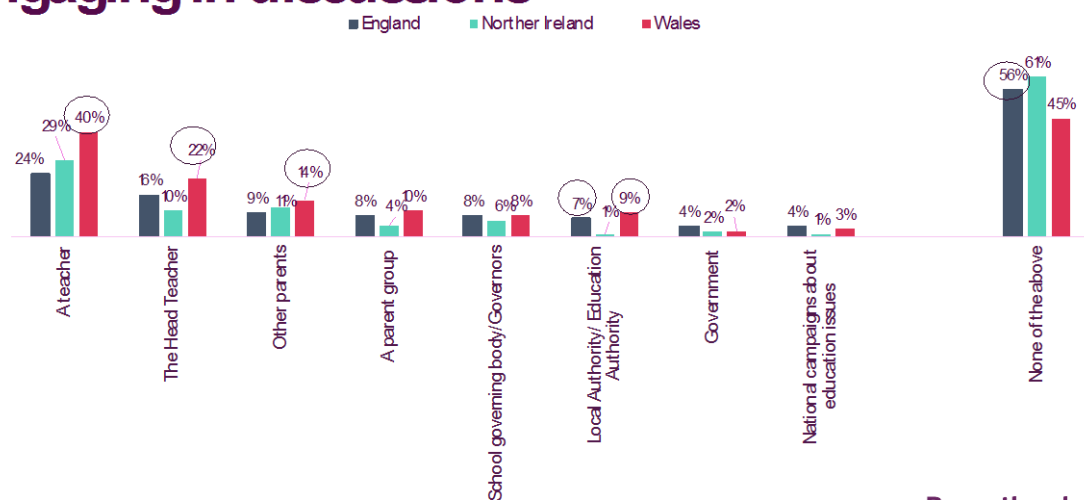
Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school

Base: All respondents: Primary (580), Secondary (656), Further Education (257)

Question: "Over the past year, have you raised issues and/or contributed ideas/feed back about your child's school and education with any of the following? Please select all that apply"

Regionally, parents from Wales were significantly more likely this wave to have expressed their views overall (only 45% reported not doing so compared to 56% of parents in England and 61% in Northern Ireland). They were particularly likely to do so by engaging at school level with teachers (40% vs 24% in England and 29% in Northern Ireland), Head Teachers (22% vs 16% and 10%) and other parents (14% vs 9% and 11%). Alongside parents from England, they were also more likely to engage with local government institutions (7% in England and 9% in Wales vs 1% in Northern Ireland).

## Parents in Wales are overall more likely to report engaging in discussions



Sample: 600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school

Base: All respondents: England (1200), Northern Ireland (100), Wales (200)

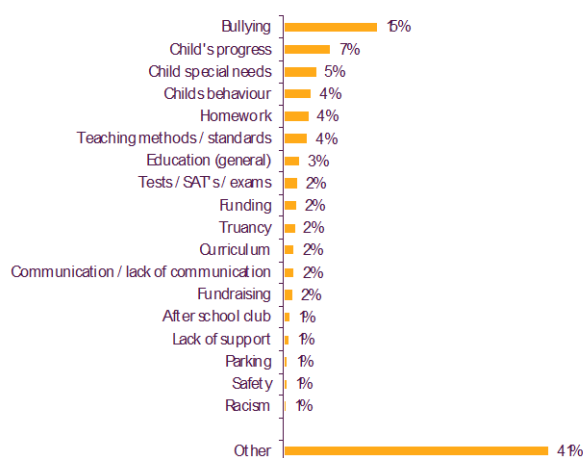
Question: "Over the past year, have you raised issues and/or contributed ideas/feedback about your child's school and education with any of the following? Please select all that apply"

Parentkind 28

In England, parents whose children attend academies were less likely to have engaged overall compared to those in local authority-maintained schools (58% vs 51% of parents in stand-alone local authority schools and 44% of those whose school belongs to a federation).

# Issues raised by parents

## Percentage of total answers related to each theme



Theme	Number of respondents*
General discussion	5
Out of school activities	5
PTA	3
School transport	3

\*Due to small numbers, figures represent the number of respondents mentioning each issue

Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school

Base: All those who raised issues through national campaigns about education issues (50)

Question: "For each of the bodies/persons that you selected in the previous question, can you briefly tell us what the issue(s) or the feedback was? If you raised more than one issue/given more than one piece of feedback, please list them all."

Parenikind 50

When asked more specifically what issues parents discussed, bullying is amongst the top 3 issues spontaneously raised by parents across all settings, being the main theme of 15% of all responses.

It features prominently in conversations with head teachers (top position, with 44 parents mentioning it), teachers (64 parents), other parents (21 parents), school governors/governing bodies (12 parents) and parent groups (8 parents). Given the open-ended nature of the question, this suggests the issue is top of mind and extremely salient for parents and their children.

Other important themes include children's academic progress (7% of answers) and homework (4%), as well as special needs (5%) and behaviour (4%). Teaching methods and standards are also a relatively common topic, with 4% of all parents raising issues mentioning it spontaneously across all platforms of feedback. Although parents do talk about school wide issues such as funding/fundraising (2%) and the curriculum (2%), issues that are to do with children's direct experience of school are naturally more prominent. Although the numbers are small, funding emerges as one of the main issues of feedback with DfE and national campaigns.

## 5. Conclusions

Parental engagement is a key ingredient for good school governance and for ensuring that parents' views and priorities are adequately taken into account, particularly at a time where the school landscape is growing in complexity. In England, the rise in new school models has meant that 40% of schools are now academies or free schools and nearly a third of all state schools are academies which are part of a MAT.

This implies that, for many schools, the centre of decision making has been gradually shifting away from local communities and parents. Past waves of our survey highlighted that, in England, parents in local authority-maintained schools are overall more satisfied about various aspects of school accountability than parents in academies. This wave, our data suggests that parents in local authority-maintained schools are also more likely to feel heard by their school compared to parents in academies. In this sense, now more than ever, given the growing importance of new school models, it is important to ensure that parents are reached out to, listened and their views are taken into consideration in decisions that directly impact on the quality and experience of education of their children.

Data from our survey suggests that the majority of parents trust school leaders to a much greater extent than leaders in MATs, local or central government. This means that there remains considerable distance between parents and key education decision makers. The fact that younger parents appear to be more trusting of leaders at MAT and local/central government level and are keener to get their voice heard than their older counterparts represents a great opportunity for schools to cultivate and grow a base of parents who are interested in being engaged at all levels.

Importantly, parents need to have a good awareness and understanding of the decision structures in their school and education system as a whole to be able to interact with them effectively and make their voice heard. This is a basic but fundamental element of enabling parental voice that schools need to take into account when devising an engagement strategy.

Our data shows that parents in England currently have reasonable awareness but limited understanding of governance models, particularly when it comes to academies and MATs. It also shows that more than half of parents have not raised issues/contributed feedback at any level of the educational system. This, in turn, suggests that there might be a link between awareness of governance models and parents' confidence and ability to express their views, particularly beyond school where the decision-making processes are complex and the channels for contributing ideas are less familiar to parents. In this sense, it is important that parents are provided with enough information to ensure that they can effectively interact with schools and the education system as a whole on matters that impact on their children's experience of education.



## 6. Recommendations

It is important and beneficial to have a system where every education level can be held to account for the service they provide and are open to input from all stakeholders, including parents. This leads to better policies and practices that are fit for purpose. This approach creates a culture of genuine partnership between home and school as well as a pathway for continuous school improvement.

To achieve this, we asking for:

- **A consultative parent body within the accountability structure of every school**, with direct lines of communication to decision-makers within the school/academy and wider LA/MAT or governing board. Parentkind will support schools and parents in setting up and sustaining groups through our training and resources.
- **Schools and Government to adopt [Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools](#)**, which provides a framework for parental participation in education and will formalise parents as key partners in education.
- **Greater transparency to parents at every level.** Government and schools must be clearer to parents about how the accountability structure works in practice and how parents can feed back. This includes less jargon in consultations, and, as the Welsh government currently does, creating surveys on the same issue for different stakeholders, including parents.
- **The role of parent governors to be retained in every school, as the NGA recommends.** NGA highlighted that a lack of parent representation on school boards run by MATs has created a “democratic deficit” in school governance.
- **Ofsted to expand opportunities for parents to engage with the schools inspectorate following the introduction of their new inspection framework.** How well schools engage parents should be taken into account in Ofsted’s assessment criteria and included in published reports.

In addition, Parentkind calls on Welsh legislature to capitalise on the fact that parents in Wales are engaging with their child’s school more than their counterparts in England and Northern Ireland and push for a parent body in every school to improve children’s attainment.

## 7. Methodology and Sample

Parentkind’s Annual Parent Survey is conducted online by Dynata (formerly Research Now). Respondents were recruited through their UK panel and took part in the survey from 2<sup>nd</sup> June to the 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019. 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 4-18 attending state school.

The sample is representative of the parent population by gender, age and social grade and is achieved through interlocking quotas. Sub-samples in Wales and Northern Ireland were boosted to achieve a large enough base of respondents to compare findings across regions.

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 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 rectangles and arrows<sup>9</sup>.

## 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).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Please note that, in general, calculating margins of error and statistically significant differences would require a (probability) random sample rather than a quota sample; although our survey is based on a quota sample, in this report we use these calculations to give a sense of where the differences are largest and most likely to be significant.

<sup>10</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

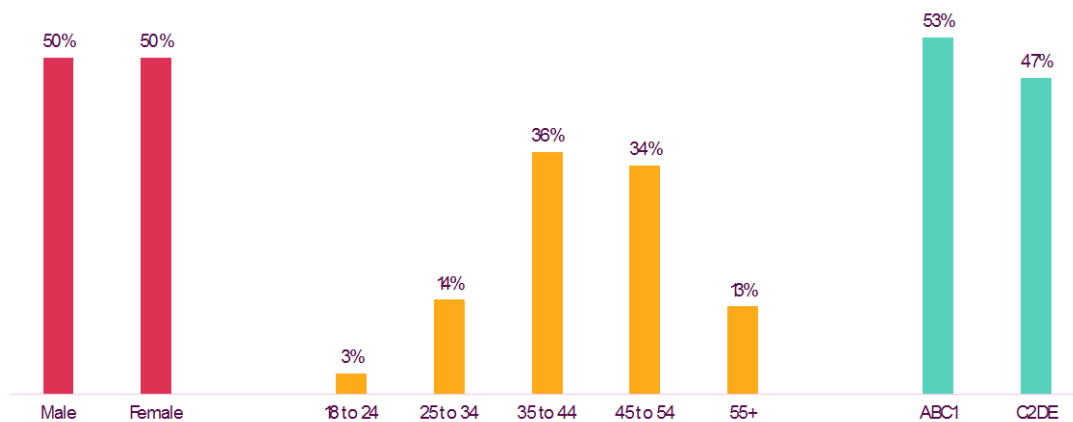
C2 – Skilled manual workers

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

### Age, gender, social grade



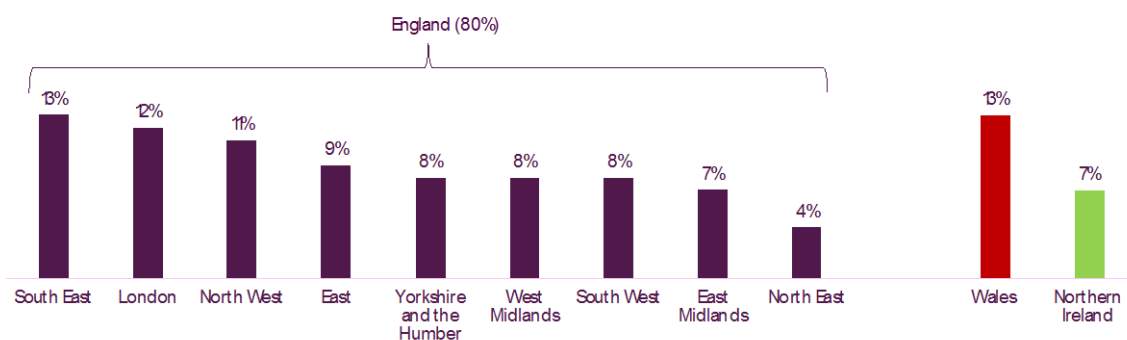
Parentkind 4

Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-11 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

### Region



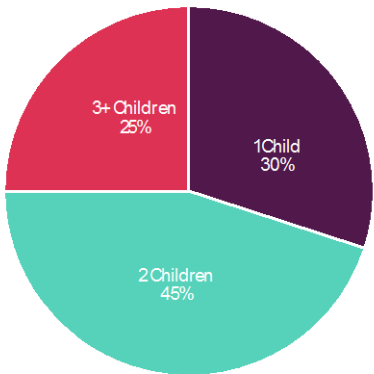
Parentkind 5

Sample: 1500 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-11 in state school  
Base: All respondents

45% of parents in the sample have two children, while just under one in three (30%) have one; one in four parents surveyed (25%) have more than three. The largest school phase represented is secondary (44%), followed by primary (39%) and further/third level education (17%)<sup>11</sup>. This year the sample is slightly more skewed towards parents whose oldest child is in primary school compared to last wave's (26%).

# Demographics

## Children in the household



## School phase of the oldest child

Primary	39%
Secondary/Post-primary	44%
Further/ Third Level Education	17%
Don't know	0%

Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-8 in state school  
Base: All respondents

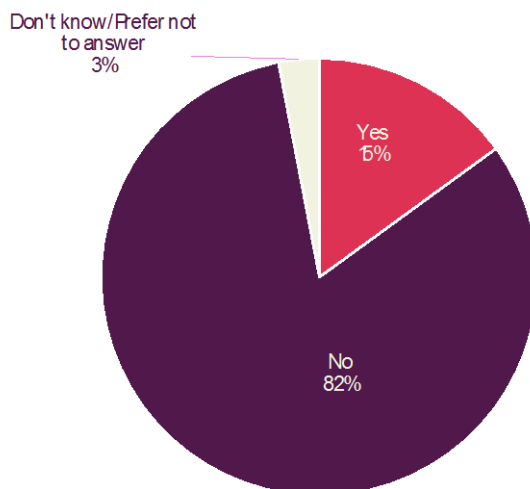
Parenikind 8

As an additional measure of disadvantage, this wave we asked parents to tell us whether they were receiving benefits which implied that their child was eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). The question was worded specifically to bypass the fact that children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are universally entitled to FSM.

<sup>11</sup> This includes post-16 education in secondary schools and Further Education Colleges

## Demographics

### Free School Meals entitlement



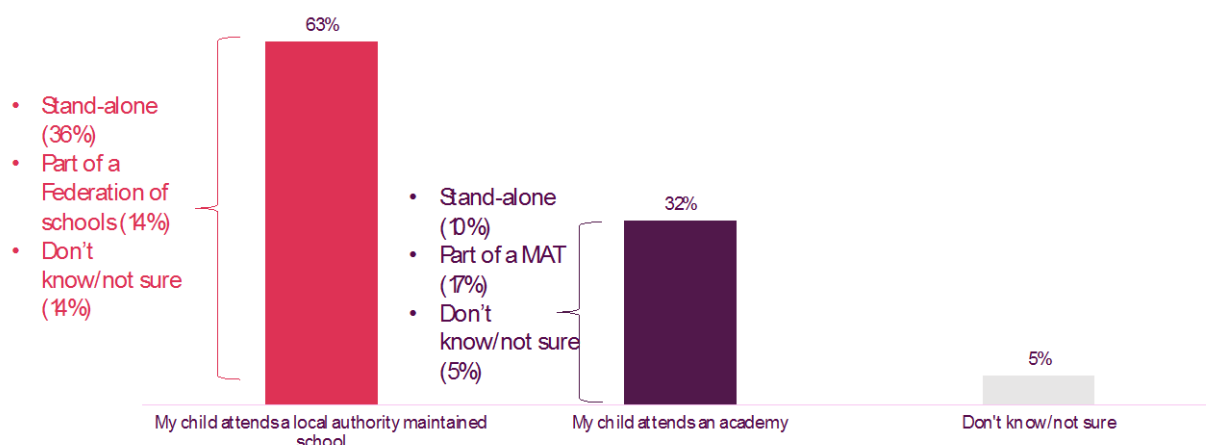
Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school  
 Base: All respondents  
 Question: "Are you claiming any benefits which mean that your child is eligible for free school meals?"

Parenikind 7

In our sample, 15% of parents reported their children were eligible for FSM. This broadly tallies with Government figures which suggest that 13.7% of children in primary school and 12.4% in secondary school are eligible.

## Demographics

### School governance model



Sample: 1600 parents in England (1200), Northern Ireland (100) and Wales (200) who have children aged 4-18 in state school  
 Base: All parents living in England (1200)  
 Question: "Thinking about where your OLDEST child aged between 4 and 18 goes to school which of the following statements best apply?" "Is your child's local authority maintained school/academy..."

Parenikind 9

Finally, we asked parents whether they knew which type of school their child was attending. The majority of parents in our sample reported their children were in local authority-maintained schools (63%) whilst around one in three (32%) reported they attend an academy. Of those whose children

are in a local-authority maintained school, 36% attend a stand-alone school and 14% a school that belongs to a federation. Of those with children in an academy, 10% are in a stand-alone school and 17% in a school which is part of a Multi-Academy Trust.