



Dear Secretary of State...

A six point plan for parents

Parentkind

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- 1 Don't be afraid to say children should enjoy school.
- 2 Commit to listening to parents when decisions are made.
- 3 The cost of school must be part of a national approach to poverty.
- 4 Support new Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in our poorest areas.
- 5 Ofsted needs to report back on parent engagement.
- 6 Announce a National Parent Participation Strategy.

Introduction by Jason Elsom and Alex Peace-Gadsby

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your new role. We are writing to you with a plan to make parents a bigger part of the way we do education in your objectives for our school system.

The evidence is clear: better parental engagement leads to better educational outcomes for children¹. When the Department for Education conducted a major evidence review on the role of parents, they found that parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning².

Parents spend more time with their children than teachers and have a large impact on a child's educational outcomes, yet they tell us they often lack the knowledge or time to support them. If the Government seeks to build an education system that prepares our children for life, work and the future, this needs to change.

Between the ages of 4 to 16 a child will spend more than 80% of their time outside of school,³ but we don't spend 80% of our time talking about what happens at home and beyond the school gates.

Our six point plan sets out practical steps the new Government could take to tackle the issue of parents too often being overlooked. Just 14% of parents tell us the Government listens to their views when big decisions are made.⁴

When it comes to schools providing the help they need to support their child's learning at home, one in five parents say their child's school isn't giving them the help they need, a figure that rises to one in four for parents with children at a school in a multi-academy trust.⁴

These figures come from the National Parent Survey, Britain's biggest parent poll. Parents told us that they are worried about their children's mental health, that learning at school is not enjoyable for a lot of older pupils, and that the cost of school is making the cost-of-living crisis worse.

We're calling on the new Government to deliver some practical changes that will help our children to succeed:

1. We shouldn't be afraid of saying children should enjoy school. It should be an ambition, because too many children simply don't enjoy school. The DfE should conduct an urgent review of the curriculum and the way we assess learning to make enjoying school a priority.

Any new curriculum and approach to the way we do school needs to prepare children for life beyond school. A child starting school this year will enter the workplace in the late 2030s when the world of work will be a very different place. Robotics and AI will change the way we work and threaten many low-wage and low-skilled jobs. Labour's ambition to build an education system that prepares our children for life, work and the future is more important than ever to ensure that today's children become lifelong learners and are not switched off from learning.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a804b4a40f0b62302692a78/Schools_and_parents.pdf

² DfE, Review of best practice in parental engagement (2011)

³ Parentkind calculation

⁴ The National Parent Survey, 2023

The only way that we will create a new generation of lifelong learners at scale is to provide an educational experience today that is engaging, interesting and enjoyable.

2. Parents tell us they don't feel listened to by your Department when major changes are proposed. The DfE should commit to independently assessing the views of parents as part of the launch of the expert-led review of curriculum and assessment and any other major changes to education policy.

3. The cost of sending a child to school needs to be part of any new approach to tackling poverty. The Government's commitment to bring down the cost of school by limiting the number of branded items of uniform and PE kit that schools can require is a reasonable starting point, but the cost of education is about much more than just school uniforms. In Parentkind's National Parent Survey, 44% of parents said they had particular concerns around the cost of school trips, 30% around the cost of school meals / drinks and 19% around the cost of technology such as computers, tablets and internet access.⁴

To effectively understand and address the costs of sending a child to school, the Government should establish an independent advisory body on the cost of school. This advisory body should publish an annual assessment of school costs and make recommendations to the Prime Minister on how to reduce these costs for families.

4. Schools in our poorest areas are much less likely to have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) than schools in wealthier areas.⁵ Despite this, the National Parent Survey shows that parents on the lowest incomes are more willing to contribute to school funds than better off parents.⁴ These schools are missing out on extra income from a well-run PTA.

Our research suggests that parents raise over £150 million a year for schools,⁵ but more could be raised and spent on things that really matter.

State schools in the most affluent areas are more than ten times as likely to have a PTA as state schools in the poorest areas.⁵ This means schools in our poorest areas are missing out on funds that could support enrichment activity, access to sport, art and drama. The DfE should develop an ambitious plan to help schools in our poorest areas set up PTA groups.

⁵ Parentkind calculations based on estimates of member data

⁶ Parentkind Ofsted poll of 1,000 parents of children aged 4-18 in England, February 2024

5. Most parents told us they think that Ofsted reports should include feedback about how well a school communicates and engages with parents.⁶ Ofsted is under the spotlight and it needs to change. The DfE should require Ofsted to include an assessment of parental engagement in any new approach to reporting back when a school is inspected.

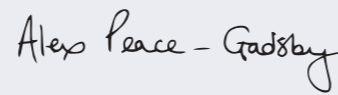
6. Parents are the missing piece of the education jigsaw. Our National Parent Survey shows there are more than 11 million parents across the UK who would like to contribute more to their child's school, but two million don't know how to and almost three million have never been asked.⁴ If those three million parents (who have never been asked to help) did one hour a week over the school year, the value of that contribution at just the national minimum wage would be over £1.2 billion to our schools.

A new National Parent Participation Strategy should include a kitemark for parental engagement, with the ambition that every school will achieve this new kitemark status within five years.

This isn't the end of our ambition, but it starts a conversation about the role of parents in education. It sets out what we can do to listen to their views and make parents a big part of any future education reforms during this Parliament.



Jason Elsom
Chief Executive



Alex Peace-Gadsby DL OBE
Chair of Trustees



What parents tell us and why Government needs to listen

Our six point plan is based on what parents across the UK told us is important to them. To make sure the policy recommendations in this manifesto represent the voice of parents, we have used data from The National Parent Survey and a special parent poll conducted by WeThink in February 2024.

The National Parent Survey is the largest parent survey of its kind. In 2023, Parentkind commissioned YouGov

to speak to 5,126 parents of children aged 4 to 18 across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We also commissioned a special poll of parents' views on education earlier this year, where we commissioned WeThink to speak to a nationally representative sample of 1,000 parents in England with at least one child aged 4 to 18.

We need to change the way we do school

A new government should be the starting point for a conversation about the way we do school.

Our special parent poll tells us that almost half (46%) of children are bored of school, according to their parents. Eight in ten (80%) parents would support a politician who said that how much children enjoy school is just as important as a school's record of exam success.

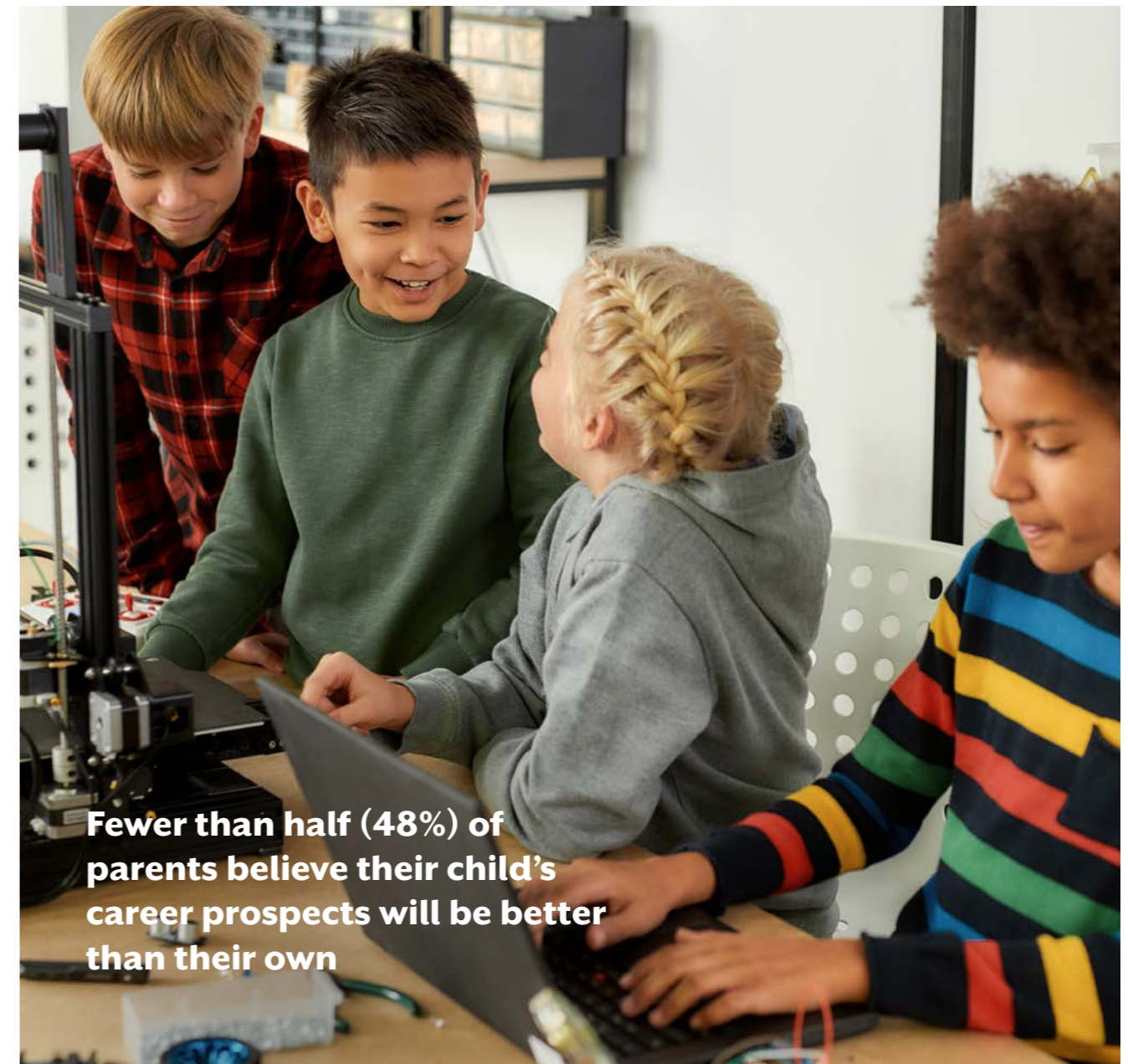
Too many children simply don't enjoy being at school, something that gets worse as they get older. The National Parent Survey found that 81% of primary school children enjoy school, but this falls to 58% when children reach secondary school.



Preparing for life beyond school

Our economy is changing and parents just don't feel like our education system is keeping up with the pace. Parents also tell us they think the outlook is bleak for their children.

Fewer than half (48%) of parents believe their child's career prospects will be better than their own, and just four in ten (41%) parents believe their child will have a better standard of living than they do.



How will schools prepare children for the 2030s and beyond...

A third (33%) of parents with a child at secondary school are concerned that school isn't preparing their child for the future jobs market.

The curriculum is still too focused on academic subjects, with a majority of parents (55%) telling us they want their child's school to do more to nurture non-academic pupils to develop practical and technical skills.

Raising a generation of digital natives is a major priority for parents. Seven in ten (71%) parents think that digital skills should be given equal importance in the core curriculum alongside reading, writing and maths.



A third (33%) of parents with a child at secondary school are concerned that school isn't preparing their child for the future jobs market.



Almost one in five (19%) parents with a child at secondary school or in college said their child had experienced depression

Parents are concerned about their child's mental health

It is not news that we have a serious child and adolescent mental health problem and parents are worried about the mental health of their children. Almost one in five (19%) parents with a child at secondary school or in college said their child had experienced depression, a figure that reaches almost a quarter (23%) for children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM).

The amount of time children spent on electronic devices is the biggest mental health concern for parents (44%), followed by exam stress (42%), the pressure to live up to expectations on social media (37%) and bullying (33%). In our education-focused parent poll, 71% of parents told us they feel they are overlooked when plans are made to tackle child and adolescent mental health problems.

The cost of school

The cost of school is a major worry to parents. In a cost-of-living crisis, school costs are often a non-negotiable part of a household budget, putting added pressure on families. More than a quarter of all families (27%) say they are struggling with school costs, with school uniform and paying for school trips the top parent worries. Almost a fifth of parents are worried about the cost of electronic devices required by schools.

In our special parent poll, 39% of parents said they have gone without eating and heating to pay for school costs, such as uniforms and school trips, with one in ten (10%) of parents telling us that this is something they do regularly. More than a third (36%) of parents have paid for school costs through taking on debt such as using a credit card or payday loan.

More than a quarter of all families (27%) say they are struggling with school costs



More than three quarters of parents (76%) agree that the Government should consult parents before making significant changes to the curriculum or education system

Parents feel left out and overlooked

Parents are the missing piece of the education jigsaw, but they are underused and overlooked. More than 11 million parents⁷ across the UK tell us they would like to contribute more to their child's school, but two million don't know how to and almost three million have never been asked.

In our special parent poll, more than three quarters of parents (76%) agree that the Government should consult parents before making significant changes to the curriculum or education system. The National Parent Survey found that just 14% of parents told us that the Government listens to parents on what they want for their child's education.

There are some quick wins for your new department, with almost a quarter (22%) of parents telling us that they simply haven't been asked to get involved with their child's school, while a fifth (21%) of parents tell us that their child's school does not provide the help they need to support their child's learning at home, a big missed opportunity to boost attainment and help build on learning in the classroom.

⁷ Parentkind calculation from The National Parent Survey

A six point plan for parents

1

Don't be afraid to say children should enjoy school...

Too many parents tell us their children simply don't enjoy school and many say their children are not being taught the skills they need for a changing world. Poor mental health is another barrier to learning, which is exacerbated by children not enjoying their experience in school. 80% of parents would support a politician who said that how much children enjoy school is just as important as a school's record of exam success.

The DfE should commit to an immediate review of the school curriculum and the way we assess learning to make school enjoyable. This review should announce a series of new measures to report on enjoyment of school and not just learning for a test.

...and prepare children for life beyond school with a big 'Commission on the Future Jobs Market.'

How will their education prepare today's reception aged children for entering employment beyond 2035? Robotics and AI will change the way we work and the jobs we have. It is more important than ever that today's children become lifelong learners, not switched off from learning. We urgently need to reassess the way we prepare children for a new world of work.

The DfE should launch a big 'Commission on the Future Jobs Market' to better understand the world of work that today's reception children will enter in the 2040s. This Commission should inform the way we deliver a new curriculum and prepare children for the world they will enter.

Commit to listening to parents when decisions are made.

Parents tell us the Government simply doesn't listen to them. This has to change and parents need to be listened to when it comes to major changes to our education system. The Department for Education should commit to consulting parents as standard ahead of major policy announcements.

The Department for Education should commission a large scale annual assessment of parent opinion conducted by an independent body to accurately understand the views of parents and their satisfaction with their child's education. Schools should be required to support this annual survey to help individual schools understand the views of their parents and provide a large scale national snapshot of parent opinion.

The cost of school must be part of a national approach to poverty.

Too many parents are struggling with the cost of schooling. This is often a non-negotiable cost that makes life even harder for parents during a cost-of living crisis. The Government has announced its intention to develop an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty. This must commit to including the cost of school as part of any new strategy.

Parentkind is calling on the Government to establish an independent advisory body on the cost of school. This advisory body should publish an annual assessment of the cost of school and make recommendations to the Secretary of State on how to reduce school costs. While half of all parents say they are concerned about the cost of school uniform, this isn't the only concern for parents. The cost of trips is only just behind uniform as a major worry for parents. There are many other additional school costs that are keeping parents up at night. Tackling the cost of school is about more than just uniform and any new advisory body needs to look at all the extra costs that can quickly add up for parents.

Support new Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in our poorest areas.

Schools that don't have a PTA are missing out. We know that schools in our poorest areas are much less likely to have a PTA or parent-led fundraising group. We also know that one in four of the lowest earning parents donate regularly to their child's school fund. This means that schools in our poorest areas are missing out by not having a PTA. Our evidence shows that schools in the poorest areas are more than ten times less likely to have a PTA than schools in the most affluent areas.

There is no official record of PTA groups, which means we don't know which schools have a PTA and which schools don't.

The School Census should be amended to include a question on PTAs to establish how many schools have a PTA group. The DfE should commit to quickly identifying schools in areas of high disadvantage without a PTA group. These schools should be supported to set up a PTA through a new government programme. This is a low cost, high impact idea that could make a big difference to schools in our poorest areas.

Ofsted needs to report back on parent engagement.

Any shake up of how Ofsted reports back to parents needs to include a measure of how well a school engages parents. Parental engagement shouldn't be overlooked in any new approach to inspection reports. When we surveyed parents they overwhelmingly agreed that Ofsted reports should include feedback about how well a school communicates and engages with parents. This is a simple change that should be made quickly to improve engagement with parents.

The DfE should require Ofsted to include an assessment of parental engagement in any new approach to reporting back when a school is inspected.

Announce a National Parent Participation Strategy.

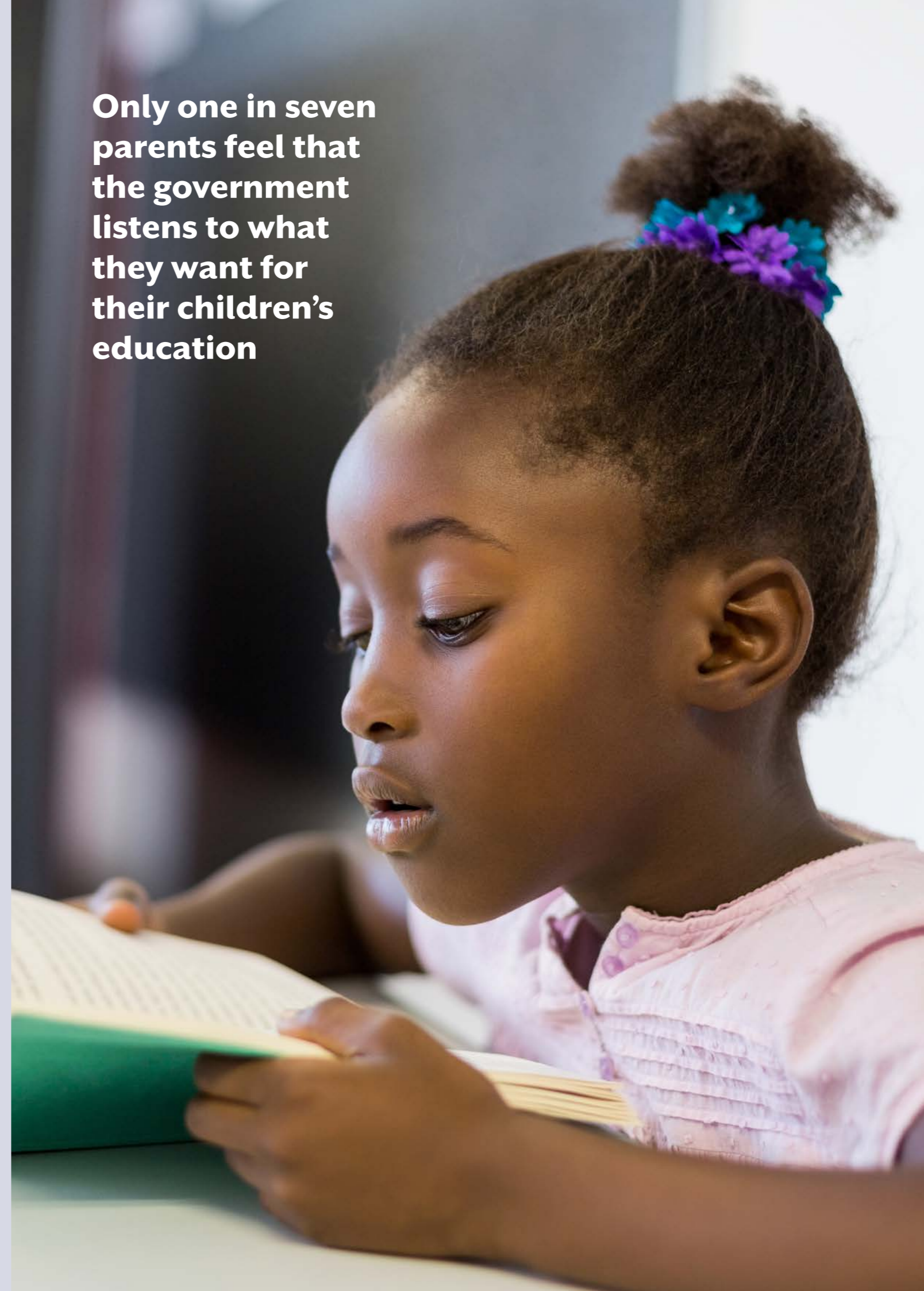
More than 11 million parents across the UK tell us they would like to contribute more to their child's school, including two million who don't know how to get involved and three million who have never been asked.

A new National Parent Participation Strategy, proposed by the Centre for Social Justice and backed by Parentkind, should create a new duty for schools and multi-academy trusts to focus on parent participation with a nationally recognised 'kitemark' for engaging with parents.

The DfE should set an ambition that every school will achieve the standards set out in a new 'kitemark' for engaging with parents. Almost eight in ten parents (78%) agree that having a national standard for parental engagement and communication would improve how schools communicate with parents.

The Parentkind 'Blueprint for Schools' provides a template for any new approach and ministers should build on this.

Only one in seven parents feel that the government listens to what they want for their children's education



About Parentkind

Parentkind is one of the largest federated charities in the UK, representing parents and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). Parentkind represents parents and PTAs at over half of all UK schools.



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