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National Foundation for Educational Research

SERVICE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: Annual survey of parental views

Final Report

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APV

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Service Children's Education (SCE) has responsibility for, and represents the interests of, children in service schools in ten countries around the world. These schools follow the National Curriculum (England), administer national assessments and public examinations, and are inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). As at January 2006, there were 44 service schools: 36 primary, six secondary and two middle schools (attended by approximately 10,100 children in total). There are also 41 Foundation Stage (FS1) settings (previously known as Pre-schools), which are managed by primary schools and are attended by approximately 1,800 children. Service schools are located within the following ten countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Cyprus, Denmark, Gibraltar, Falkland Islands, Belize and Brunei.

Although SCE has much in common with an English local authority, there are also some key differences. For example, two important characteristics to note are: (1) the wide geographical distribution of SCE schools, and (2) the fact that about three-quarters of children attending such schools are of primary age (mainly because of the younger profile of service families).

In order to investigate whether the schooling needs of service families are being met and whether parents are satisfied with the education their children are receiving, SCE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake a questionnaire survey of parental satisfaction with both primary and secondary service schools. Three previous surveys of parents' views have been carried out by NFER for SCE - in 1999, 2004 and 2005.

This report presents the detailed findings from the 2006 questionnaire survey of parents and, where relevant, explores how parents' views have changed since last year's survey.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of the survey was to explore the views of parents with children in service schools, in order to examine the level of their satisfaction with the education their children are receiving. This research aimed to help inform schools and SCE of any areas for which there was a high level of satisfaction,

as well as areas where improvements could be made. It also aimed to identify any major changes in parents' views since the previous survey in 2005.

1.3 Research methods

As was the case in the previous surveys, all parents in all 44 service schools and 41 Foundation Stage Settings were surveyed, in order to ensure that the findings were fully representative of parents' views across all service schools.

The survey questionnaires used were the same as those used in the 2004 and 2005 surveys (which had been developed in consultation with SCE), so that comparability between the surveys could be achieved. There were two versions of the questionnaire, one for primary schools and Foundation Stage settings and one for secondary schools. Middle schools were sent primary questionnaires for parents of pupils up to and including Year 6, and secondary questionnaires for parents of pupils in Year 7 and above.

The questionnaires used for parents in primary schools and those in secondary schools had a large degree of overlap and indeed most of the questions asked were common to both phases. The only differences were that the primary school questionnaire contained a question related to transfer from primary to secondary school, and questions relating specifically to Foundation Stage settings, while the secondary school questionnaire contained two questions relating to preparation for further education and employment.

The two questionnaires sought to ascertain parents' views on various aspects of their children's education, and included questions which related to:

- the relationship between parents and their child's school
- the standards of education in their child's school
- the support given to pupils by their school
- the overall level of satisfaction with the education their child receives.

In addition, one of the questions was open-ended, which gave parents an opportunity to comment on any issues relating to their child's education, in their own words. The NFER research team conducted a specific analysis of these open-ended responses, and the findings are presented in Sections 2.6 and 3.6.

Questionnaires were sent in bulk to the schools in May 2006, and schools were asked to arrange for the distribution of the questionnaires to the parents of their pupils. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire (one per family) and return it to their child's school sealed in the envelopes provided (to ensure

confidentiality). The schools then returned the completed questionnaires in bulk to the NFER. A reminder letter was sent to all schools four weeks after the questionnaires were originally despatched.

By the end of the summer term, 41 of the 44 service schools, including 39 of the FS1 settings, had returned parental questionnaires. The three schools that did not return their questionnaires by this date were primary schools, two of which had an FS1 setting attached to them. A total of 9,502 primary school parent questionnaires were sent out and 2,099 were returned, giving a response rate of 22 per cent. A total of 2,968 secondary school parent questionnaires were sent out and 536 were returned, giving a response rate of 18 per cent.

The emphasis in the survey was on obtaining current parental views on, and overall levels of satisfaction with, their children's current schooling. However, some comparisons have been made with the results of the previous survey of parents, to explore any changes over time, and the report draws attention to any major differences that have been identified between the 2005 and 2006 findings. The total numbers of respondents to the 2005 survey were 2,512 parents in the primary school survey, and 486 parents in the secondary school survey. It is worth noting that it is not known how many of the parents who responded to the 2006 survey also returned a questionnaire in the 2005 survey.

As part of the evaluation, the NFER compiled feedback for individual schools based upon the questionnaire responses of the parents of children in the school. The provision of aggregated feedback means that staff in individual schools can examine how their parents' views differ from those of parents with children in SCE schools overall.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 of this report presents the responses to the individual questions in the primary school questionnaire (including responses from parents of children in Foundation Stage settings). Chapter 3 discusses the findings from the secondary school questionnaire. Chapter 4 concludes by presenting an overview of the findings from the two surveys, and identifies the key issues that have emerged from the research.

2. Parents' views: primary schools and foundation stage settings

This chapter presents the findings from the questionnaire survey of parents of children in primary schools and FS1 settings. In the main, the responses of parents with children in FS1 settings and those with children in primary schools are grouped and reported together, as the experiences of the pupils in these two settings are broadly similar. However, for some key questions, the responses of parents with children in FS1 settings are reported separately and compared with those of primary school parents. Of the 2,099 parents who completed a primary school questionnaire (from 33 of the 36 primary schools and the two middle schools), just under a quarter (24 per cent, or 498 individuals) indicated that their only or eldest child attended an FS1 setting.

2.1 The partnership between parents and schools/FS1 settings

As Table 2.1 shows, the majority of parents who responded to the survey were positive about their relationship with their child's primary school/FS1 setting. A total of 93 per cent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel welcome in their child's school, with 48 per cent indicating that they strongly agreed with this statement. Most parents also agreed or strongly agreed that school staff are easy to approach (92 per cent), and that teachers are usually available when they want to see them (88 per cent). A similar proportion of parents (91 per cent) indicated that they are encouraged to play an active role in their child's learning and in the life of the school.

Table 2.1 Views of the partnership between parents and the school/FS1 setting

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	No response %
I feel welcome in the school/FS1 setting	48	45	2	1	1	4
The school staff are easy to approach with questions or problems	47	45	3	1	1	4
You can usually get to see teachers/FS1 practitioners when you want to	41	47	3	1	4	4
Parents are encouraged to play an active part in children's learning and the life of the school	47	44	3	1	2	4

N = 2099

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 2024 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

The parents who indicated that their only or eldest child attended an FS1 setting appeared to be more positive about the relationship with their child's school than primary school parents overall. They were more likely to strongly agree that the school was welcoming, the staff approachable and easy to see, and that the school encourages them to play an active role in the school. For example, 61 per cent of FS1 parents strongly agreed that they felt welcome in their child's school, compared with 47 per cent of primary parents overall. For both settings, only very small percentages (no more than three per cent) disagreed with the positive statements, suggesting that the majority parental view is that these schools have a welcoming and friendly ethos.

While the majority of primary/FS1 parents indicated that they were encouraged to play an active part in their child's schooling, they were less likely to report that they had attended school meetings or events. As Table 2.2 shows, although most parents had been involved in events directly related to their child's activities (for example, parents' meetings, school performances), they were less likely to have attended other events or meetings at the school. Just under a third of parents, for example, had attended a Parents' Association event during the last year, while 18 per cent had attended a Parents' Association meeting. Only nine per cent of parents reported that they had participated in an annual meeting of the School Advisory Committee. These findings are broadly similar to the responses given by primary/FS1 parents in the 2005 survey.

Table 2.2 Parents' involvement in the school/FS1 setting

Parents participated in:	Yes %	No %	Not applicable %	No response %
Parents' meetings to discuss child's work	89	7	3	1
School/FS1 performance	81	13	5	2
Parents' Association Meeting	18	70	7	6
Parents' Association Event	32	56	8	4
Annual Meeting of School Advisory Committee	9	79	7	6
Helping with school/FS1 activities	52	42	3	3
N = 2099				

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 2087 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

As was the case in the 2005 survey of parental views, parents with children in FS1 settings were less likely than primary school parents overall to report that they had participated in meetings or events at the child's school, and were more likely to indicate that these events were not applicable to them. For example, 78 per cent of FS1 parents had attended parents' meetings to discuss their child's work, compared with 89 per cent of primary parents overall.

Just under one third (31 per cent) of primary school parents who responded to the survey stated that they had raised issues of concern with their child's school. Of these 656 parents, most (76 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that their concern had been dealt with well by the school. However, 12 per cent of the 656 disagreed that their concern had been dealt with well, and a further six per cent strongly disagreed.

As shown in Table 2.3, the majority of parents appeared to be satisfied with the information they received from the school regarding their child's progress. A total of 82 per cent of parents, for instance, indicated that they were satisfied with the information they had received about their child's work, and a similar proportion (83 per cent) felt that they received sufficient information about the overall progress their child is making. Slightly lower proportions of parents reported that they received enough information about their child's progress in specific subjects (77 per cent for English, 73 per cent for mathematics and 70 per cent for science). This meant that a notable minority of parents felt that they had not received sufficient information from the school on their child's progress in these core subjects, although it is worth noting that the proportions

of parents who were dissatisfied were lower than in the 2005 survey, so there has been an improvement in communications.

Table 2.3 Extent to which parents receive sufficient information from the school/ FS1 setting

Sufficient information on:	Yes %	No %	No response %
the work which your child is doing	82	16	1
the progress your child is making overall	83	16	2
the progress your child is making in maths	73	24	3
the progress your child is making in English	77	21	3
the progress your child is making in science	70	27	3
the progress your child is making in other areas of the national curriculum/ Foundation Stage 6 Areas of Learning	69	26	5
any difficulties your child may be having	77	20	3

N = 2099

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 2076 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

Although the responses of parents with children in FS1 settings were broadly similar to those of primary school parents overall, they were more likely to report that they had received sufficient information on their child's work (87 per cent, compared with 82 per cent of primary parents overall).

Despite primary school parents' positive responses about the information they receive from their child's school/FS1 setting, 45 per cent indicated that they would like more information. This proportion had decreased from 50 per cent of primary parents in the 2005 survey. Table 2.4 reveals that parents were more likely to require further information on their child's activities, for example, on any difficulties they might be having (70 per cent), their overall progress (64 per cent) and their general behaviour (64 per cent), rather than information about school behaviour policies (34 per cent) or activities (22 per cent).

Table 2.4 Extent to which parents would like more information from the school/ FS1 setting

More information on:	%
any difficulties your child may be having	70
the progress your child is making overall	64
the general behaviour of your child	64
the progress your child is making in individual subjects	65
the work which your child is doing	61
information about teaching methods	52
information about support staff and how they are used	43
information on school/FS1 behaviour policies	33
information about school/FS1 activities or events	22
No response	<1

N = 943*More than one answer could be given, so percentages may not sum to 100**A filter question: all those who indicated that they would like more information from the school**Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006*

2.2 Quality of care provided by schools/FS1 settings

The majority of parents were positive about the quality of care provided by their child's primary school/FS1 setting. For example, as Table 2.5 illustrates, most parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school helps new pupils to settle in well (93 per cent), and that good behaviour was recognised and praised (91 per cent). In addition, 95 per cent of parents indicated that the school building is clean and attractive, and 90 per cent reported that pupils are encouraged to avoid behaviour which could damage their health or well-being.

Although there was little disagreement with any of the statements presented in Table 2.5, it is interesting to note that fairly large proportions of parents were unsure about some aspects of their child's school. For example, a fifth of parents did not know whether pupils' opinions were listened to, and the same proportion of parents were unsure whether their child's school provides support for pupils who experience difficulties with their work. School staff may, therefore, wish to consider if they could improve how they inform parents about the care and support they provide to pupils.

Parents with children in FS1 settings appeared to be slightly more positive about the quality of care provided than primary parents overall. For example, they were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the FS1 setting is safe and secure (93 per cent, compared with 89 per cent of primary parents overall), and that good behaviour is recognised and praised (95 per cent, compared with 91 per cent of primary parents overall).

Although the overall findings were broadly similar to the 2005 survey, parents in the 2006 survey were slightly more likely to strongly agree with some of the statements presented in Table 2.5. For example, they were more likely to strongly agree that:

- their child's school/FS1 setting helps new pupils to settle in well (45 per cent, compared with 41 per cent in the 2005 survey)
- the school/FS1 setting encourages pupils to avoid behaviour which could be damaging to their health or well-being (41 per cent, compared with 37 per cent in the 2005 survey)
- pupils' opinions are listened to (23 per cent, compared with 20 per cent in 2005)
- the school/FS1 setting is clean and attractive (44 per cent, compared with 41 per cent in 2005).

These findings indicate a steady improvement in these environmental and care aspects of primary schools/FSI settings.

Table 2.5 Views on the care given to pupils by the school/FS1 setting

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	No response %
New pupils are helped to settle in well	45	48	2	<1	4	1
Pupils who have difficulties with their work usually get help	28	46	3	1	20	2
If my child has a problem he/she knows how to get help and from whom	29	54	5	1	10	2
Pupils' opinions are listened to	23	50	5	1	20	2
Good behaviour is recognised and praised	46	45	3	<1	5	2
The school/FS1 buildings are safe and secure	39	50	4	1	4	2
The school/FS1 setting is clean and attractive	44	51	3	<1	1	2
The school/FS1 setting encourages the pupils to avoid behaviour which could damage their health/ well-being	41	49	1	<1	7	2

N = 2099

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 2076 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

2.3 Standards in the school/FS1 setting

The primary/FS1 parents who responded to the survey were generally positive about the educational and behavioural standards in their child's school/FS1 setting and the values which it held. As shown in Table 2.6, most parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school has sensible rules (93 per cent), that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on their child (88 per cent), and that the school/FS1 setting achieves high standards of behaviour (81 per cent) and education (75 per cent).

A slightly lower proportion of parents (63 per cent) felt that the school/FS1 setting deals appropriately with bullying. A total of 29 per cent of parents indicated that they were unsure about how the school deals with bullying, and although this proportion was slightly lower than in the 2005 survey (31 per cent), schools may wish to further consider ways in which they could improve their strategies for disseminating information on their bullying policies to parents.

Table 2.6 Views on the standards in the school/FS1 setting

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	No response %
The school/FS1 achieves high educational standards	26	49	6	1	17	1
The school/FS1 achieves high standards of behaviour	28	53	5	1	12	1
The school's/FS1's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child	35	53	4	1	6	1
The school/FS1 setting has sensible rules	35	58	1	<1	4	1
The school deals appropriately with bullying	24	39	6	1	29	2

N = 2099

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 2085 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

Parents whose eldest or only child attended a primary school (rather than an FS1 setting) (1,601 parents) were asked about the level of their satisfaction with various aspects of the school. As Table 2.7 reveals, primary school parents generally reported a high level of satisfaction with most aspects of the school. In particular, the majority of parents indicated that they were fairly or very satisfied with the equipment and resources in their child's school (88 per cent), with how their child is taught (85 per cent) and with the way their child

is treated by teachers (85 per cent). These findings broadly reflect those from the 2005 survey.

As was the case in the 2005 survey, the aspects of the school which parents appeared to be least positive about related to homework and opportunities for sport. Although around three-quarters of parents indicated that they were fairly or very satisfied with the type and amount of homework given, and the opportunities within the school for sport, notable minorities were not very satisfied. A total of 18 per cent were not happy with the amount of homework set, while 17 per cent were not very satisfied with the nature of the homework. In addition, 12 per cent were not very satisfied with the opportunities for sport available to their child.

Table 2.7 Parents' satisfaction with their child's primary school

Satisfaction with:	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
how your child is being taught	52	33	5	1	9
the progress your child is making in maths	44	33	8	6	9
the progress your child is making in science	41	33	4	13	9
the progress your child is making in English	46	34	6	6	9
the progress your child is making in other subjects	40	35	3	12	9
the kind of homework your child is given	32	40	17	2	9
the amount of homework your child is given	31	40	18	2	9
the way your child is treated by teachers	55	30	4	3	9
the way your child is treated by other pupils	36	45	6	4	9
the school's religious and moral teaching	35	38	4	13	10
the school's equipment and resources	61	27	1	2	9
opportunities for sports	39	36	12	4	9
opportunities for music/ drama	36	39	9	6	10

N = 1601

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

*A filter question: all those parents who did **not** indicate in question 2 that their only or eldest child attended an FS1 setting*

A total of 1466 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

Parents with children in FS1 settings (498 parents) were also asked about their satisfaction with specific aspects of this setting. Table 2.8 presents their

responses, and shows that the majority of these parents were fairly or very satisfied with:

- how their child had settled in the FS1 setting (91 per cent)
- the way their child is treated by FS1 staff (88 per cent)
- how the FS1 setting encourages and supports pupils to develop self-help skills (85 per cent)
- the opportunities that the FS1 setting offers for pupils to be creative (85 per cent)
- the outdoor learning environment in the FS1 setting (85 per cent).

As was the case in the 2005 survey, only small proportions of parents expressed any dissatisfaction with aspects of the FS1 setting. The area that parents appeared to be least positive about related to the information and support provided by the school to enable parents to support their child's learning at home. Although three-quarters of parents were fairly or very satisfied with this support, 11 per cent of parents were not very satisfied. This proportion was, however, lower than in the 2005 survey, when 14 per cent of parents expressed dissatisfaction.

Table 2.8 Parents' satisfaction with their child's FS1 setting

Satisfaction with:	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
how your child has settled	75	16	1	<1	9
how your child is encouraged and supported to develop self-help skills	65	20	1	5	9
the way your child is treated by the FS1 staff	73	15	<1	3	9
the way your child is treated by other pupils	46	35	3	6	9
the progress your child is making in communication, language and literacy	57	26	2	6	9
the progress your child is making in mathematical development	44	29	4	14	10
the opportunities for your child to be creative	65	20	3	3	9
the topics used to help your child to learn more about others and the world	59	23	1	7	9
the FS1 setting's equipment and resources for the 6 Areas of Learning	57	25	1	8	9
the outdoor learning environment	57	28	3	3	9
the equipment for large physical play	57	24	4	6	9
the information/ support to enable you to support your child's learning at home	46	29	11	5	9

N = 498*A series of single response items**Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100**A filter question: all those parents who indicated in question 2 that their eldest or only child attended a Foundation Stage 1 setting**A total of 456 respondents answered at least one item in this question**Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006*

In comparison with parents' responses to the 2005 survey, parents of children in FS1 settings this year appeared to be more satisfied with various aspects of the setting. In particular, they were more likely to indicate that they were very satisfied with:

- how their child is supported to develop self-help skills (65 per cent, compared with 61 per cent in the 2005 survey)
- the way their child is treated by other pupils (46 per cent, compared with 41 per cent in 2005)
- the equipment and resources in the FS1 setting for the six areas of learning (57 per cent, compared with 53 per cent in 2005).

2.4 Transfer to schools within Service Children's Education

As illustrated in Table 2.9, many parents were positive about the process of pupils transferring to service schools, and transferring from FS1 to FS2 settings. Just under two-thirds of parents (63 per cent), for instance, agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided with sufficient information about the new school or setting. Fifty nine per cent of parents felt that children were well prepared for the move to the new school or setting, and the same proportion felt that the new school had effective induction procedures. As would be expected, however, notable proportions of parents indicated that they were unsure about the process of transferring to service schools, or that the question was not applicable to them.

Table 2.9 Views about transferring to SCE schools and from FS1 to FS2

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	Not applicable %	No response %
Parents are provided with sufficient information about the new school	22	41	6	1	6	16	8
Children are well prepared for the move to new school	21	38	6	1	9	17	8
Children who are worried about the move are helped	17	35	5	1	15	19	8
The new school ensures good continuity of learning for children	20	33	5	2	15	17	8
The new school has effective induction processes which help to settle in children quickly	22	37	3	1	13	17	8

N = 2099

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 1944 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Primary Survey of Parental Views 2006

2.5 Overall parental satisfaction

Encouragingly, the majority of primary/FS1 parents who responded to the survey indicated that they were happy with the education their child was

receiving. Half the parents stated that they were very satisfied with their child's education, while 41 per cent were satisfied. These findings are similar to those from the 2005 survey, when 48 per cent of parents were very satisfied and 43 per cent were satisfied. As was the case in last year's survey, only six per cent of parents stated that they were not very satisfied, while one per cent reported that they were not at all satisfied.

Parents with children in FS1 settings appeared to be even more satisfied with their child's education than primary parents, with 58 per cent of parents indicating that they were very satisfied. This represents a slight increase from 54 per cent of parents in the 2005 survey. A total of 35 per cent of FS1 parents were satisfied with their child's education. Only four per cent of parents reported that they were not very satisfied, and none said that they were not at all satisfied.

Primary parents also appeared to be positive about the combined support provided by their child's school/FS1 setting and by SCE. A total of 43 per cent of parents indicated that they were very satisfied with this support, while 45 per cent were satisfied. These proportions reflect those from the 2005 survey, when 41 per cent of parents were very satisfied and 47 per cent were satisfied with the support provided. Only seven per cent were not very satisfied and a further one per cent were not at all satisfied. Two per cent of parents indicated that this question was not applicable to them, which suggests that neither they, nor their child, had encountered any need for support from their school, or from SCE.

Again, parents of children in an FS1 setting seemed to be slightly more positive about the support received from their child's school, or from SCE, than primary parents overall, as 50 per cent of parents stated that they were very satisfied with the support provided. Indeed, this represented an increase from 45 per cent of FS1 parents in the 2005 survey. Only six per cent of FS1 parents this year indicated that they were not very satisfied with the support provided, and only one parent said that they were not at all satisfied.

2.6 Additional comments on the school

Primary school/FS1 parents were invited to write any comments they wished to add about their child's school, and the education their child was receiving, in an open-ended question. One third of parents gave a response to this question, and they made a range of positive and negative comments that were similar to those given by parents in the 2005 survey.

The most common response given by parents (13 per cent of all parents) was that they were happy with their child's school/FS1 setting and the education they were receiving. Many were also happy with the staff and the teaching

methods in the school (eight per cent). Six per cent of parents reported that their child had settled well into their SCE primary school or FS1 setting and enjoyed school.

Four per cent of parents commented on the ethos of their child's school/FS1 setting, and felt that it had a warm and positive atmosphere, and two per cent of parents indicated that the school had encouraged their child's personal development, and improved their confidence and social skills. Four per cent of parents felt that their child was making good progress at school, and two per cent were happy with the support their child had received.

Other positive comments made by smaller proportions of primary/FS1 parents included that their child's school had good facilities and resources (two per cent), that there was a good level of communication between parents and teachers (two per cent), and that they were happy with the curriculum their child was following (one per cent).

As would be expected with an open-ended question of this type, a notable proportion of parents expressed concerns or criticisms about their child's primary school/FS1 setting. Most commonly, parents indicated that they had insufficient communication with, and feedback from, their child's school (eight per cent of all parents). Parents' main concerns about this issue were that they did not receive enough feedback about their child's work and progress, there were insufficient opportunities to meet with their child's teacher, and that their comments or concerns were not listened to by their child's school.

Six per cent of parents stated that they had concerns about the staff in their child's school and their teaching methods, and these included concerns about teachers' attitudes, variability of teaching standards between staff and high staff turnover. Five per cent of parents made negative comments about the curriculum their child was following. In most cases, these perceptions related to concerns about certain subjects, the lack of opportunities for PE lessons and extra curricular activities, the lack of provision for more able pupils, and duplication of work covered in their child's previous school.

Other negative comments, expressed by smaller numbers of primary/FS1 parents, included complaints about the lack of support provided to pupils (four per cent) and parents (three per cent), concerns about the lack of progress their child was making at school (three per cent), and concerns about the nature and amount of homework given to pupils (three per cent).

3. Parents' views: secondary schools

This chapter presents the findings from the survey of parents with children in secondary schools. A total of 536 parents responded to this survey, from all six secondary schools and the two middle schools. This chapter examines parents' views on their relationship with their child's school, the quality of care provided by schools, the standards in their child's school, and the extent of preparation and support provided for further education and employment. The chapter also explores parents' overall satisfaction with the education their child is receiving, and the support they have received from the school and SCE.

3.1 The partnership between parents and schools

As Table 3.1 illustrates, most secondary school parents were positive about the partnership with their child's school. In particular, the majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt welcome in the school (89 per cent), and that school staff are easy to approach (85 per cent).

Table 3.1 Views of the partnership between parents and the school

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	No response %
I feel welcome in the school	22	67	6	1	4	<1
The school staff are easy to approach with questions or problems	20	65	8	2	5	1
You can usually get to see teachers when you want to	14	57	12	2	14	1
Parents are encouraged to play an active part in the life of the school	16	50	19	3	12	1

N = 536

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 535 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006

Comparison with the responses from secondary school parents in the 2005 survey revealed that parents this year appeared to be more positive about their partnership with their child's school. For example, they were more likely to agree or strongly agree that:

- school staff are easy to approach (85 per cent, compared with 79 per cent in 2005)
- they are able to see teachers when they want (71 per cent, compared with 66 per cent in 2005)
- parents are encouraged to play an active role in their child's schooling (66 per cent, compared with 62 per cent in 2005).

As was the case in the 2005 survey, secondary school parents appeared to be less positive about their partnership with their child's school than responding parents with children in primary schools/FS1 settings (reported in Section 2.1). Although the overall findings were similar, secondary school parents were less likely to strongly agree with each of the statements about their child's school. In particular, they were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they are able to see teachers when they want to (71 per cent, compared with 88 per cent of primary parents), and that parents are encouraged to play an active role in the life of their child's school (66 per cent, compared with 91 per cent of primary parents). To some extent, these findings may be due to the fact that secondary schools tend to be much larger than primary schools, and that parental involvement generally tends to decrease as children become older.

As was the case with primary school parents, although the majority of secondary school parents (86 per cent) reported that they attended meetings to discuss their child's work (see Table 3.2), they were less likely to have attended other school events or meetings, such as a Parents' Association meeting (six per cent), or event (four per cent). These findings are broadly similar to those from the 2005 survey of secondary school parents.

Comparison with the responses of primary school parents revealed that secondary school parents were less likely to report involvement in their child's school. In particular, they were much less likely to have:

- helped with school activities (12 per cent, compared with 50 per cent of primary parents)
- attended a school performance (43 per cent, compared with 84 per cent of primary parents)
- attended a Parents' Association event (four per cent, compared with 29 per cent of primary parents).

Table 3.2 Parents' involvement in the school

Parents participated in:	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
	%	%	%	%
Parents' meetings to discuss child's work	86	12	2	<1
School performance	45	46	8	2
Parents' Association Meeting	6	83	9	3
Parents' Association Event	4	82	11	3
Annual Meeting of School Advisory Committee	5	84	7	4
Helping with school activities	12	77	9	3

N = 536*A series of single response items**Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100**A total of 534 respondents answered at least one item in this question**Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006*

Secondary school parents were asked whether they had raised issues of concern with their child's school, and half reported that they had done so. Although this proportion is higher than the proportion of primary school parents who reported that they had made a complaint to their child's school (31 per cent), it is slightly lower than the proportion of secondary school parents who reported in the 2005 survey that they had complained (54 per cent).

Of the 268 parents who indicated that they had raised issues of concern with their child's school, one fifth strongly agreed that their concern had been dealt with well (a slight increase from 16 per cent in 2005), while a further 47 per cent agreed. However, just over a fifth (21 per cent) of parents disagreed that their complaint had been dealt with well, and a further eight per cent strongly disagreed. Again these findings are less positive than those from the survey of primary school parents – 67 per cent of secondary school parents stated that their concern had been dealt with well, compared with 76 per cent of primary school parents.

Most secondary school parents appeared to be satisfied with the amount of information they received from their child's school, and there had been little change from the 2005 survey. As shown in Table 3.3, more than three quarters of parents (77 per cent) felt that they had been given enough information about the overall progress their child was making at school. Slightly lower proportions of parents indicated that they had received sufficient information about their child's progress in specific subjects (75 per cent for mathematics, 74 per cent for English and 74 per cent for science).

These findings are broadly similar to the responses of primary school parents. However, secondary school parents were slightly less likely to report that they received sufficient information about the work that their child is doing (68 per cent, compared with 82 per cent), and on any difficulties they may be having at school (66 per cent, compared with 77 per cent).

Table 3.3 Extent to which parents receive sufficient information from the school

Sufficient information on:	Yes %	No %	No response %
the work which your child is doing	68	30	2
the progress your child is making overall	77	22	1
the progress your child is making in maths	75	24	2
the progress your child is making in English	74	24	2
the progress your child is making in science	74	24	2
the progress your child is making in other areas of the curriculum	71	28	1
any difficulties your child may be having	66	32	2

N = 536

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 532 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006

When asked if they would like further information from their child's school, more than half the parents (55 per cent) indicated that they would. As Table 3.4 illustrates, the information that parents most commonly reported they would like related to difficulties that their child may be having (71 per cent), the work their child is doing (61 per cent) and the overall progress of their child at school (57 per cent).

Table 3.4 Extent to which parents would like more information from the school

More information on:	%
any difficulties your child may be having	71
the work which your child is doing	61
the progress your child is making overall	57
information about teaching methods	51
the general behaviour of your child	54
the progress your child is making in individual subjects	56
information about support staff and how they are used	42
information about school activities or events	37
information on school behaviour policies	37
No response	0

N = 297

More than one answer could be given, so percentages may not sum to 100

A filter question: all those who indicated that they would like more information from the school

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006

It appears that there may have been some improvements in schools' procedures for sharing information with parents over the last year, as secondary school parents this year were less likely to report that they required information on many of the aspects of their child's school outlined above, compared with parents in the 2005 survey. In particular, they were less likely to indicate that they required information on:

- the work their child is doing (61 per cent, compared with 68 per cent in 2005)
- information about support staff and how they are used (42 per cent, compared with 47 per cent in 2005)
- information about school activities or events (37 per cent, compared with 46 per cent in 2005)
- information on school behaviour policies (37 per cent, compared with 43 per cent in the 2005 survey).

3.2 Quality of care provided by schools

The majority of parents were positive about the quality of care provided by their child's secondary school. In particular, as Table 3.5 shows, most parents agreed or strongly agreed that new pupils are helped to settle into the school (92 per cent), that the school encourages pupils to avoid behaviour which could damage their health or well-being (86 per cent), that the school is clean and attractive (82 per cent) and safe and secure (81 per cent), and that good behaviour is recognised and praised (80 per cent).

As was the case in the 2005 survey, secondary school parents were less likely to agree or strongly agree that pupils who experience difficulties with their work are able to get support from their school (60 per cent), and that pupils' opinions are listened to (52 per cent), and in fact a quarter or more of parents were unsure about these aspects of their child's school.

Table 3.5 Views on the care given to pupils by the school

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
New pupils are helped to settle in	25	67	4	1	4	<1
Pupils who have difficulties with their work usually get help	14	46	9	1	29	2
If my child has a problem he/she knows how to get help and from whom	15	62	10	1	11	1
Pupils' opinions are listened to	9	43	16	5	25	2
Good behaviour is recognised and praised	21	59	6	2	11	1
The school buildings are safe and secure	20	61	4	2	12	1
The school is clean and attractive	18	64	10	2	5	1
The school encourages the pupils to avoid behaviour which could damage their health or well-being	24	62	3	1	9	1

N = 536

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 535 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006

These findings broadly reflect those from the 2005 survey of secondary school parents. However, parents this year appeared to be more positive about certain aspects of the care provided by their child's school, particularly in relation to the school environment. They were, for example, more likely to agree or strongly agree that:

- the school helps new pupils to settle in well (92 per cent, compared with 86 per cent in the 2005 survey)
- the school buildings are safe and secure (81 per cent, compared with 75 per cent in 2005)
- the school is clean and attractive (82 per cent, compared with 75 per cent in 2005).

Although these findings are similar to those from the survey of parents with children in primary schools/ FS1 settings, secondary school parents appeared

to be less positive about all aspects of the care provided by schools. In particular, they were less likely than primary school parents to agree or strongly agree that:

- pupils who have difficulty with their work receive help from their school (60 per cent, compared with 74 per cent of primary school parents)
- pupils opinions are listened to (52 per cent, compared with 73 per cent of primary school parents)
- good behaviour is recognised and praised (80 per cent, compared with 91 per cent of primary school parents)
- the school buildings are safe and secure (81 per cent, compared with 89 per cent of primary school parents)
- the school is clean and attractive (82 per cent, compared with 95 per cent of primary school parents).

3.3 Standards in the schools

On the whole, parents with children in secondary schools were positive about the standards in their child's school. For example, as shown in Table 3.6, more than three-quarters of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school has sensible rules (81 per cent), and achieves high educational standards (77 per cent). As was the case in the survey of primary school parents, notable minorities of parents were unsure about the standards in their child's school, particularly in relation to the school's bullying policies (29 per cent), although this proportion had decreased from 34 per cent in the 2005 survey.

Comparison with the responses of primary school parents revealed that, while parents with children in primary schools/FS1 settings were equally likely to report that their child's school achieves high standards of education, they were less likely to agree or strongly agree that:

- the school achieves high standards of behaviour (70 per cent, compared with 81 per cent of primary school parents)
- the school's values have a positive effect on their child (72 per cent, compared with 88 per cent of primary school parents)
- the school has sensible rules (81 per cent, compared with 93 per cent of primary school parents).

Table 3.6 Views on the standards in the school

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	No response %
The school achieves high educational standards	18	59	5	1	16	1
The school achieves high standards of behaviour	14	56	10	3	17	1
The school's values have a positive effect on my child	15	57	11	3	12	2
The school has sensible rules	15	66	8	3	7	1
The school deals appropriately with bullying	16	44	8	3	29	1

N = 536*A series of single response items**Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100**A total of 535 respondents answered at least one item in this question**Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006*

When asked about the extent of their satisfaction with various aspects of their child's secondary school, the majority of parents were positive about the various aspects explored. As Table 3.7 illustrates, most parents indicated that they were fairly or very satisfied with the equipment and resources in their child's school (94 per cent), with how their child is taught (91 per cent) and the opportunities for sports (91 per cent).

Parents appeared to be least satisfied with the homework their child was given, particularly the amount of homework they were given, as 24 per cent of parents indicated that they were dissatisfied with this aspect. Furthermore, 19 per cent of parents reported that they were not very satisfied with the kind of homework given to their child. These proportions were slightly higher than in the 2005 survey, when 19 per cent of parents were not satisfied with the amount of homework provided, and 17 per cent were not satisfied with the nature of the homework.

Table 3.7 Parents' satisfaction with the school

Satisfaction with:	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
how your child is taught	45	46	7	1	1
the progress your child is making in maths	47	37	8	6	2
the progress your child is making in science	43	44	5	6	2
the progress your child is making in English	41	41	10	6	2
the progress your child is making in other subjects	33	52	6	8	2
the kind of homework your child is given	24	53	19	5	1
the amount of homework your child is given	24	48	24	5	<1
the way your child is treated by teachers	35	42	16	6	1
the way your child is treated by other pupils	28	53	12	7	1
the school's religious and moral teaching	23	49	8	18	1
the school's equipment and resources	57	37	1	5	1
opportunities for sports	54	37	6	3	<1
opportunities for music, drama	49	39	5	7	1

N = 536*A series of single response items**Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100**A total of 535 respondents answered at least one item in this question**Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006*

3.4 Preparation for further education and working life

Just under a third (32 per cent) of parents indicated that they had been given sufficient information from their child's secondary school about the choices that would be open to their child at the end of Year 11. This is higher than the proportion who reported this in the 2005 survey (26 per cent), which suggests that schools may have improved their communication with parents in this area. Nearly a quarter of parents who responded to the 2006 survey indicated that they had not received enough information on their child's post-16 options, while 39 per cent were unsure.

Secondary school parents had mixed views on how well their child's school prepares them for further education and employment, and there was little change from the 2005 survey. For example, as revealed in Table 3.8, three-quarters of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child is encouraged by their school to take responsibility for their own learning. However, lower proportions of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school is preparing them for further education (52 per cent), and working life (52 per cent), and that the careers guidance provided had been helpful (44 per cent). In these cases, around a third of parents indicated that they were unsure about whether their child was being adequately prepared for the future.

Table 3.8 Views on preparation for further education and working life

Views on preparation	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not Sure %	No response %
The careers and educational guidance provided is very helpful	12	32	11	2	35	7
My child is encouraged to take some responsibility for his/her own learning	16	59	4	1	15	6
The school is preparing him/her for adult/working life	11	41	11	2	29	6
The school is preparing him/her well for further education/training	12	40	10	3	29	7
N = 536						

A series of single response items

Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100

A total of 509 respondents answered at least one item in this question

Source: NFER evaluation of Service Children's Education: Secondary Survey of Parental Views 2006

3.5 Overall parental satisfaction

Most of the secondary school parents who responded to the survey indicated that they were either very satisfied (37 per cent) or satisfied (52 per cent) with the education their child is receiving. Only nine per cent stated that they were not very satisfied, and a further two per cent were not at all satisfied. While these findings are broadly similar to those from the survey of primary/FS1 parents, a lower proportion of secondary school parents reported that they were very satisfied with their child's education (37 per cent, compared with 50 per cent of primary school parents).

The majority of secondary school parents were also positive about the support they and their child had received from the school or from SCE. A total of 28 per cent of responding parents stated that they were very satisfied with the

support they had received, while 53 per cent indicated that they were satisfied. Ten per cent reported that they were not very satisfied, and a further two per cent were not at all satisfied. Four per cent of parents indicated that this question was not applicable to them, suggesting that they had not required or received any support from their child's school or from SCE. These responses are largely similar to those given by secondary school parents in the 2005 survey. Although they broadly reflect the responses of parents with children in primary schools/FS1 settings, a lower proportion of secondary school parents indicated that they were very satisfied with the support they received (28 per cent, compared with 43 per cent of primary school parents).

3.6 Additional comments on the school

More than two fifths (44 per cent) of responding secondary school parents gave a response to an open-ended question about their child's school, and the education they were receiving. These included a range of positive and negative comments, and were broadly similar to those given by primary school/FS1 setting parents. Secondary school parents, however, made more negative comments than parents with children in primary schools/FS1 settings.

The most frequent comment given by parents who responded to this question related to concerns about the staff and teaching methods in their child's school (12 per cent of all parents), and these concerns most commonly related to variability of teaching standards between staff, poor teacher attitudes and teaching standards.

Ten per cent of secondary school parents complained that they did not have enough communication with, or feedback from, their child's school, and their comments included concerns about the lack of feedback they were given on their child's work and progress, and on school events, and complaints that their concerns were not listened to by their child's school.

Parents also expressed concerns about the curriculum their child was following in their secondary school (nine per cent) and, in particular, they complained about certain subjects, the lack of opportunities for more able students, and they were concerned that their child was not being challenged enough by their curriculum. Seven per cent of parents commented on the lack of support their child had received from their school.

Concerns about pupil discipline and school policies on pupil behaviour were expressed by six per cent of parents. Other comments made by smaller numbers of parents included concerns about the homework given to their child (five per cent), the lack of opportunity for parents to be involved in the school (three per cent), and the lack of progress their child was making (three per cent of parents).

Many parents made positive comments about their child's secondary school, most commonly that they were happy with the school and the education their child was receiving (ten per cent of parents). Six per cent of parents commented that they were happy with the staff in the school, and their teaching methods.

Five per cent of parents indicated that their child had settled well into the school, and enjoyed school, and the same proportion reported that their child was making good progress. Smaller proportions of parents commented that they were happy with the support provided by their child's school, that the school was contributing to the personal development of their child, and that the school provided good extra-curricular activities.

4. Conclusions

The findings from the surveys reflect the views of a sample of parents across nearly all the FS1 settings, primary and secondary schools supported by SCE. It is worth noting that we do not have information on how representative the responding parents are of all parents, and thus we cannot be certain whether the findings presented in this report fully reflect the views of non-responding parents. However, the fact that there has been little change from previous surveys suggests that the findings are largely representative of parents overall.

In general, parents' views were mainly positive and the majority of parents were satisfied with the education their child was receiving. The responses of primary school/FS1 parents and those of secondary school parents were broadly similar. However, there were some interesting differences in the responses of these two groups of parents, and, in the main, primary school parents tended to be more positive about their child's school than secondary school parents. This difference between primary and secondary school parents is not unique to SCE schools, as similar findings were reported in the recent Ofsted report on parental satisfaction¹. This report suggested that the higher levels of satisfaction observed among primary school parents, compared with secondary school parents, could reflect a greater sense of loyalty to primary schools among parents, *'which means that parents of children in primary schools can be satisfied even when school effectiveness and pupil achievement are less than good.'*

The majority of both primary and secondary school parents were positive about their relationship with their child's school and, encouragingly, the responding secondary school parents were more positive about this relationship than those who responded to the 2005 survey. Most parents reported that they felt welcome in their child's school, and they perceived the staff to be friendly and approachable. Although most parents reported that they were encouraged to play an active role in their child's school, parental involvement in school meetings or events appeared to be somewhat limited. While this may be due to the distance that many parents live from their child's school, the comments from some parents suggested that they did not receive sufficient information from the school on meetings and events (such as the School Advisory Committee, or Parents' Association meetings). Schools may, therefore, wish to review their strategies for informing parents about such meetings, to ensure that they are fully aware of them and have sufficient opportunities to be involved.

¹ OFSTED (2006). *Parents' Satisfaction with Schools* (HMI 2634). London: Ofsted.

Most parents were also happy with the care and support provided by their child's school, and both primary and secondary school parents were more positive about several aspects of the care provided than parents in the 2005 survey. In particular, they were more positive about the support provided to pupils who are experiencing difficulties, and the school environment.

While most parents reported that they had received sufficient information from their child's school on various aspects of their child's work and progress, around half the parents indicated that they would like further information from the school. In particular, they requested additional information on the work their child is doing, their progress and any difficulties they might be having. A minority of parents also complained that there were insufficient opportunities to meet with their child's teacher, and that their concerns were not listened to by their child's school. Of those parents who reported that they had raised issues of concern with their child's school, most stated that their concern had been dealt with well. However, notable minorities of parents, particularly those with children in secondary schools, did not feel that their concern had been adequately addressed.

There did seem to have been some improvements in communication between parents and their child's school over the last year, as parents who responded to this survey were less likely to report that they wanted further information from the school than those who responded to the 2005 survey. They were also more likely to indicate that they had received sufficient information from their child's school about their future choices. However, given the importance of effective parent-school communication, particularly for service families, who may live some distance from their child's school, this may be an ongoing area for development for schools.

As was found in the previous surveys of parents with children in SCE schools, homework was a concern for a notable minority of parents, and their concerns related to both the amount of homework set (most commonly, that the amount was insufficient, or varied among teachers), and the type of homework set. Indeed, secondary school parents appeared to be more dissatisfied with their child's homework than responding parents in the 2005 survey. Schools may, therefore, wish to reflect on their homework policies and on their mechanisms for informing parents about the homework set.

Overall, although there were some areas for potential improvement, both primary and secondary school parents were largely positive about their child's school and education, and the support provided by the school and SCE. In addition, although some of the 2006 findings were very similar to those for 2005, there were also a number of indications of steady improvement in relation to certain areas. These included, for example, the ethos and environment of the school, and the quality of school-parent communications.