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Monograph:

Marshall, Helen, Rudd, Peter orcid.org/0000-0002-8824-3247 and O'Donnell, Lisa (2008) Service Children's Education:Survey of Parental Views 2008. Research Report. National Foundation for Educational Research , Slough.

Service Children's Education: Survey of Parental Views

Final Report

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October 2008

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Service Children's Education (SCE) is an Agency of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and provides education for children of MOD personnel stationed outside the United Kingdom. SCE provide education from Foundation Stage to Sixth Form, following the National Curriculum (England). The schools employ teachers trained in the UK and SCE schools are subject to inspections by Ofsted, in line with state schools in the UK.

SCE have 35 primary, two middle and six secondary schools and a further 38 Foundation Stage (FS1) settings in nine countries across the world (Belgium, Belize, Brunei, Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Germany, Gibraltar, Italy and Netherlands). Approximately 10,000 pupils attend the primary, middle and secondary schools while the FS1 settings cater for almost 2,000 children. The FS1 settings are each linked to, and managed by a primary school.

The aim of SCE is to provide a good education for children and to provide these children with the chance to benefit from living abroad. SCE works to support pupils to reach their full potential in all areas of school life and to support teachers by providing training and career development opportunities. In addition to the independent inspections carried out by Ofsted, SCE have internal monitoring processes to track educational performance and standards in their schools and to ensure teaching and learning of high quality. They are also committed to achieving the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes: to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being.

SCE view the opinions of the parents and carers of their pupils very highly and consequently they have, since 2004, commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to conduct a survey of parents' views across FS1 settings, primary schools and secondary schools.

This report contains the findings of the 2008 survey.

1.2   Aims and objectives

The aim of this survey was to gather the views of parents of SCE pupils in relation to their child's education and in particular how satisfied they were with the education their child received. It also looked to identify any areas for improvement that SCE and schools could work on. The survey was designed to build on the 2007 questionnaire so that comparisons could be made where appropriate.

1.3   Research methods

The survey was carried out between June and August 2008. Copies of the questionnaires were sent to all 43 schools and 38 FS1 settings. Questionnaires were sent directly to the schools for distribution to parents of their pupils. Enclosed with each copy of the questionnaire were a newsletter explaining the purpose of the survey and a return envelope (postage paid) for parents to send the completed questionnaire directly back to NFER. Each school was sent enough copies of the questionnaire for every pupil, plus a number of spare questionnaires for new pupils. Parents were asked to complete one questionnaire per family, in relation to their experience with the child that had attended the school the longest. The team at NFER used email and telephone reminders to check that the questionnaires had been received by schools, and to encourage schools to remind parents to complete and return the survey. Most schools said that they would remind parents via a school newsletter.

Completed questionnaires were received from 40 of the 43 schools and 33 of the 38 FS1 settings. The total numbers of questionnaires despatched and received are shown in Table 1.1, along with the response rates. The response rates for the primary schools and FS1 settings are lower than in 2007; this could be because this year the project started later in the academic year than previous years, which meant that the period during which parents could return their questionnaires was shorter than in previous years.

Table 1.1   Number of questionnaires despatched and returned

	Number of questionnaires despatched*	Number of questionnaires returned	% of despatched questionnaires returned
FS1 settings	1916	425	22
Primary schools	6933	1144	17
Secondary schools	2822	375	13

The number of questionnaires sent was based on the number of pupils in the school, plus five spare questionnaires per school for each FS1 setting and ten spare questionnaires per school for secondary schools and primary schools.

In line with the survey in 2007, three versions of the questionnaire were developed and distributed – one each for the FS1 settings, primary schools and secondary schools. Middle schools were sent enough copies of the primary questionnaire for pupils up to and including Year 6, while pupils in Year 7 and above were provided with copies of the secondary school version of the questionnaire. In one school, owing to the high proportion of non-English speaking parents, the questionnaire was translated into their primary language, to ensure that all parents had an equal opportunity to provide their feedback.

As previously mentioned, the survey for 2008 was designed to build on the version circulated in 2007. Most of the questions were retained and, where minor changes were made, these were to make it easier for respondents to navigate around the survey. The sections on how the school or FS1 setting contributed towards pupils achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes were kept in the questionnaires after their introduction in the 2007 study.

The three questionnaires mostly contained the same questions although there were some questions tailored to specific aspects unique to each phase of education. For example, the secondary school questionnaire asked for parental views on the boarding houses provided. Two open-ended questions inviting parents to say what they thought the school did well, and what could be improved, were retained at the end of the survey. The NFER team conducted analyses of these open questions and the findings are presented in Sections 2.4, 3.4 and 4.4. This year the questionnaires included new questions about support for special or additional needs.

The findings presented in this report reflect the views of a sample of parents from almost all of the FS1 settings, primary schools and secondary schools supported by SCE. However, it is important to note that we do not have information on how representative the parents who responded are of all parents of SCE children, and

therefore we cannot be certain that the findings presented in this report reflect the views of non-responding parents.

In addition to producing this report, NFER also produced feedback for each school and FS1 setting so that they could see how the views of responding parents of children at their school compare with the views of all responding parents.

1.4   Structure of the report

The report presents the findings from each school phase separately: FS1 settings in Chapter 2; Primary schools in Chapter 3 and Secondary schools in Chapter 4. The key issues that emerged are highlighted in Chapter 5.

2. Parents' views: Foundation Stage 1 settings

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the survey of parents of children at SCE Foundation Stage 1 (FS1) settings. Questionnaires were returned by 425 parents from 33 FS1 settings.

Parents were asked to provide some background information about their child at the FS1 setting. The average (median) age of children was four. Most children had joined the FS1 setting within the last academic year.

2.2 Partnership between parents and the FS1 setting

Parents were asked about their experience when their child started at the FS1 setting. There were 313 parents whose child started at the FS1 setting within the most recent academic year (since September 2007). On the whole, as illustrated in Table 2.1, these parents were positive about the information they received from the FS1 setting (95 per cent) and were happy that the FS1 setting had helped their child to settle in quickly (96 per cent). Very few parents disagreed with these statements.

Table 2.1   Parents' experiences of their child starting at the FS1 setting (if started within last academic year)

Parents' experiences	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
I received sufficient information about the FS1 setting when my child started	49	46	3	1	0	<1
The FS1 setting helped my child to settle in quickly	62	34	3	0	1	1
N = 313						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A filter question: all those parents who indicated that their child had started at the FS1 setting within the 2007-08 academic year
A total of 312 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Generally parents were happy with how the FS1 setting worked in partnership with them (Table 2.2). Parents appeared to feel that the FS1 setting was open and accessible: almost all who responded said that it was easy to talk to a teacher about their child's education if they needed to (94 per cent) and that they felt welcome when they visited the setting (97 per cent). Although most parents were happy with the communication from the FS1 setting, around one in ten parents felt that the FS1 setting did not keep them informed about their child's progress (12 per cent) or their child's behaviour (ten per cent); this is in line with the findings from 2007.

Table 2.2   Views of the partnership between parents and their child's FS1 setting

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
If I need to talk to a teacher about my child's education, it is easy to do so	58	36	3	1	1	<1
The FS1 setting takes account of parents' suggestions and concerns about the FS1 setting	36	46	5	1	10	1
I am made to feel welcome when I visit the FS1 setting	64	33	1	<1	1	<1
The FS1 setting keeps me informed of my child's progress	44	42	10	2	2	<1
The FS1 setting keeps me informed of my child's behaviour	44	43	8	2	2	<1
I am satisfied with the FS1 setting's building and facilities	51	40	5	1	2	<1
I am satisfied with the FS1 setting's equipment and resources	56	41	1	1	1	<1
N = 425						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 424 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Parents with children who would be moving to Foundation Stage 2 in the next academic year were generally happy with how the FS1 setting had prepared their child for this change (Table 2.3). Around four in five parents felt that they had received sufficient information about the new school (79 per cent) and that their child had been well prepared and supported for the move (86 per cent); almost half (49 per cent) of parents strongly agreed with this statement.

Table 2.3   Parents' views on how their child has been prepared for the move to Foundation Stage 2

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
I have been provided with sufficient information about the new school	43	36	8	3	4	6
My child has been well prepared and supported for the move to the new school	49	37	3	<1	6	5
N = 279						

A series of single response items
A filter question: all those parents who indicated that their child would be moving to FS2/reception in September 2008
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 268 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

One in twenty respondents (five per cent; 23 parents) said that their child had special or additional needs, and, of those, almost all (19 parents) said that their child received support from a specialist who was not a member of FS1 setting staff. Most of these parents (21 parents) were satisfied that the FS1 setting was meeting the special or additional needs that their child has.

Around one in eight parents said they had raised a concern with the FS1 setting in the last year (55 parents; 13 per cent) and almost two thirds (33 parents; 60 per cent) of those parents were happy with the way the FS1 setting dealt with the concern. Common reasons why parents were pleased with how the school dealt with their concern included:

- the FS1 setting took appropriate action and dealt with the concern (18 parents)
- the FS1 setting listened to the concern and discussed the problem with parents (ten parents)
- the FS1 setting acted promptly (six parents).

Although there were fewer parents who were not happy with the way the FS1 setting dealt with the concern, a number of common reasons for their discontent emerged:

- the FS1 setting did not handle the issue in a sensitive or appropriate manner (six parents)
- the FS1 setting staff did not listen or would not accept that there was an issue (six parents)
- the problem was not addressed by the FS1 setting (five parents).

Most parents were happy with the progress their child was making at the FS1 setting (Table 2.4). The majority of parents were satisfied with the progress their child was making in communication, language and literacy (95 per cent) and in numeracy (91 per cent). In addition, similar proportions of parents were satisfied with the opportunities their child had to be creative at the FS1 setting (95 per cent), that their child was supported to learn more about the environment around them (96 per cent) and with the outdoor environment at the FS1 setting (95 per cent). Taken together, all of these findings indicate that parents have a very high level of satisfaction with their child's FS1 setting. In line with the results of the 2007 survey, slightly fewer parents were satisfied with how the FS1 setting supported them to enable their child to learn at home (81 per cent), which suggests that this is an area of support that FS1 settings could improve in the future.

Table 2.4   Parents' satisfaction with their child's FS1 setting

Satisfaction with...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
the progress your child is making in communication, language and literacy	66	29	3	<1	1	<1
the progress your child is making in numeracy development	54	37	5	0	3	1
the opportunities for your child to be creative	72	23	3	0	2	0
how the FS1 setting helps your child to learn more about others and the world around them	64	32	1	0	2	<1
the FS1 setting's outdoor learning environment	69	26	3	1	2	<1
how the FS1 setting supports you to enable your child to learn at home	41	40	12	2	4	<1

N = 425

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 425 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

2.3 FS1 settings' achievements towards the Every Child Matters outcomes

Parents were asked how they felt the FS1 setting was working to support their child to achieve the Every Child Matters outcomes: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve and make a positive contribution.

Almost all parents were satisfied with the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'be healthy', as illustrated in Table 2.5. For example, two-thirds of parents were very satisfied and a further three in ten were fairly satisfied that the FS1 setting encouraged their child to have a healthy and active lifestyle.

Table 2.5   Parents' satisfaction with the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'be healthy'

Satisfaction...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
that the FS1 setting encourages your child to have a healthy and active lifestyle	66	30	1	<1	2	0
that the FS1 setting encourages your child to eat healthily	61	33	3	1	2	0
with the FS1 setting's provision for sport and recreation activities	61	32	3	1	3	0
N = 425						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 425 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Parents were also quite happy with the FS1 settings' provision to 'stay safe' as shown in Table 2.6. Most parents felt that the FS1 setting provided a safe and secure environment (97 per cent) and also that it provided a caring and supportive environment (97 per cent). Parents were less sure about FS1 settings' ability to deal appropriately with bullying (68 per cent) and that the FS1 settings had clear procedures for parents and children to make complaints (73 per cent). Both of these statements had a relatively high proportion of parents who said that they were 'not sure' (27 per cent and 20 per cent respectively). This could be because these parents have not had any experience of the way the FS1 setting dealt with bullying or handled complaints. It could also mean that the policies on bullying and complaints could be

more accessible to parents and this is something that FS1 settings may wish to consider reviewing.

Table 2.6   Parents' views on the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'stay safe'

The FS1 setting...	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
provides a safe and secure environment for my child	64	33	1	<1	1	0
provides a caring and supportive environment for my child	66	31	2	<1	1	0
deals appropriately with bullying	38	30	2	1	27	1
has clear procedures for children and parents to make complaints	40	33	5	1	20	<1
N = 425						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 425 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Most parents were satisfied with the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'enjoy and achieve' (Table 2.7). In particular, there was a very high proportion of parents who felt that the FS1 setting promoted good behaviour (96 per cent), that the FS1 setting was helping to develop their child's personal, social and moral development (96 per cent) and that the FS1 setting supported their child (96 per cent); indeed, three-quarters of parents were very satisfied with the way the FS1 setting supported and treated their child. Parents were also satisfied with their child's progress at the FS1 setting (95 per cent) with two-thirds of parents reporting that they were very satisfied with their child's progress.

Table 2.7   Parents' satisfaction with the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'enjoy and achieve'

Parents' satisfaction...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
with their child's progress at the FS1 setting	67	28	2	<1	2	0
that their child's achievements are recognised and praised	68	25	3	1	3	0
with how the FS1 staff support and treat their child	75	21	2	<1	2	0
that the FS1 setting promotes good behaviour	68	28	2	1	1	0
that the FS1 setting is helping to develop their child's confidence and self-esteem	68	26	2	<1	2	<1
that the FS1 setting is helping to develop their child's personal, social and moral development	67	29	1	<1	2	<1
N = 425						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 425 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Parents were also quite positive about the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'make a positive contribution' (Table 2.8). Around nine in ten parents felt that the FS1 settings provided good opportunities for their child to contribute their ideas and opinions (89 per cent) and that the FS1 setting provided opportunities for their child to help and support other pupils (90 per cent). Almost all parents said that the FS1 settings helped their child to develop positive relationships with adults and other children (97 per cent).

Table 2.8   Parents' views on the FS1 settings' provision for pupils to 'make a positive contribution'

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
The FS1 setting provides good opportunities for my child to contribute his/her opinions and ideas	49	40	1	<1	8	<1
The FS1 setting helps my child to develop positive relationships with adults and other children	61	36	2	<1	2	0
The FS1 setting provides opportunities for my child to help and support other pupils	53	37	1	<1	8	<1
N = 425						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 425 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

2.4   Overall parental satisfaction

Almost all parents that responded were satisfied to some extent with the education that their child received from the FS1 setting (96 per cent) with two-thirds of parents reporting that they were very satisfied. Only four per cent of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the education that their child received. These results are very similar to the results of the 2007 survey when 98 per cent of parents were satisfied with the education provided and three per cent were not satisfied.

When given the opportunity to express any concerns about the FS1 setting, only four in ten chose to do so (Table 2.9). The most common concern, expressed by over one in five parents, was regarding the level of communication and feedback from the FS1 setting (21 per cent). Other concerns raised were about their child's progress (11 per cent) and about pupil discipline (nine per cent). The most common concerns have changed since 2007: while concerns about communication and about their child's progress were the most common concerns in both 2007 and 2008, this year the third

most common concern was about discipline and pupils' behaviour in contrast to concerns about teaching methods or standards last year[1].

Table 2.9   Parents' concerns about their child's FS1 setting

Parents' concerns	%
The level of communication with, or feedback from, their child's FS1 setting	21
Concerns about their child's progress	11
Concerns about pupil discipline or FS1 policies on pupil behaviour	9
Teaching methods or standards in the FS1 setting	8
Concerns about the level of support provided for their child	5
Other	12
No response	60
N = 425	

A multiple response item: more than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 171 respondents answered this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Around three-quarters of parents took the opportunity to highlight what they thought the FS1 setting did well, as illustrated in Table 2.10. One in four parents said that the FS1 setting provided good support for pupils and a similar proportion reported that the FS1 setting had a good ethos and atmosphere (23 per cent). A number of parents praised the curriculum (15 per cent) and the teaching methods employed by the FS1 setting (15 per cent).

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1.   The question wording was amended in 2008 to open up the question to all parents. As a result, for this question, it is not appropriate to compare differences in percentage responses in the 2008 survey with the results of 2007.

Table 2.10   Parents' views on what their child's FS1 setting does well

What the FS1 setting does well	%
It provides good support for pupils	25
It has a good ethos/atmosphere/environment	23
The focus on personal development	20
It provides a good curriculum	15
It has good teaching methods/approaches	15
It has good staff	14
The FS1 setting does well in most areas	13
It has good communication with parents	10
It has good facilities/resources	9
It is a happy FS1 setting	9
It has good discipline and praise strategies	6
It encourages parental involvement	4
It provides good extra-curricular activities/school trips	4
I am happy with my child's progress	3
It has good healthy eating/exercise policies	2
Other	2
Nothing/not sure	1
No Response	26
N = 425	

An open-ended, multiple response question
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 315 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

Just over half of the parents who responded to the survey identified improvements that the FS1 setting could make, as shown in Table 2.11. Two areas were most commonly raised as in need of improvement: communication with parents (14 per cent) and facilities and resources (14 per cent). Parents also felt that the FS1 setting could give more support to pupils (seven per cent). It is important to note that one in nine parents took the opportunity to say that they felt that no improvements were needed (11 per cent).

Table 2.11   Parents' views on improvements that their child's FS1 setting could make

Improvements	%
Better communication with parents	14
Improve facilities/resources	14
Provide more support for pupils	7
Improve teaching approaches/the attitudes of teachers	6
Improvements to the curriculum	4
Provide more structured learning	4
Improve school meals/healthy eating policies	3
Ensure adequate staffing	3
Improve discipline and reward policies	2
Improve FS1 setting policies	2
Provide more opportunities for parental involvement	2
Use more learning through play	2
The FS1 setting is already taking steps to improve	1
Other	5
Not sure	1
No improvements necessary	11
No Response	45
N = 425	

An open-ended, multiple response question
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 235 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: FS1 survey 2008

3. Parents' views: Primary schools

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the survey of parents of children attending SCE primary schools around the world. Responses were received from 1,144 parents across 33 of the 35 primary schools and one of the two middle schools run by SCE.

Some background information was collected on the children attending the primary schools. The average (median) age of children was seven. Parents of children in all year groups were represented, as shown in Table 3.1. The children had attended between none and nine schools before attending their current primary school, the average (median) number of schools attended previously was one. Most children had joined their primary school within the last three academic years.

Table 3.1   Year group of children of responding parents

Year group	%
FS2/Reception	18
Year 1	14
Year 2	17
Year 3	14
Year 4	13
Year 5	11
Year 6	11
No response	1
N = 1144	

A single response item
A total of 1135 respondents answered this question
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to100
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

3.2 Partnership between parents and the primary school

Parents with children that started at the primary school within the last academic year were quite positive about the experience (Table 3.2). They felt that they had received sufficient information about the school (93 per cent) and that the school had helped their child to settle in quickly (95 per cent). However they were slightly less positive that the school had ensured good continuity of learning for their child (81 per cent).

Table 3.2   **Parents' experiences of their child starting at the primary school (if started within last academic year)**

Parents' experiences	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
I received sufficient information about the school when my child started	40	53	5	1	1	<1
The school helped my child to settle in quickly	51	44	2	<1	1	<1
The school ensured good continuity of learning for my child	38	43	8	2	10	1
N = 441						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A filter question: all those parents who indicated that their child had started at the primary school within the 2007-08 academic year
A total of 441 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

Parents were generally happy with their relationship with their child's primary school as illustrated in Table 3.3. They felt that it was easy to speak with a teacher about their child's education (92 per cent) and that they were made to feel welcome when they visited the school (94 per cent). Parents were slightly less positive about some aspects of communication from the school, for example, just over three-quarters of parents agreed that the school took account of parent's suggestions and concerns (76 per cent). However almost nine in ten parents who responded to the survey felt that the school kept them informed of their child's progress (85 per cent) and informed of their child's behaviour (86 per cent). It is worth noting that more than one in ten parents did not feel informed about their child's progress (12 per cent) nor about their child's behaviour (11 per cent) and this is an area that primary schools may wish to consider reviewing.

Table 3.3   Views of the partnership between parents and their child's primary school

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
If I need to talk to a teacher about my child's education, it is easy to do so	49	43	5	1	1	<1
The school takes account of parents' suggestions and concerns about the school	28	48	10	3	11	1
I am made to feel welcome when I visit the school	47	47	3	1	2	<1
The school keeps me informed of my child's progress	33	52	10	2	3	<1
The school keeps me informed of my child's behaviour	33	53	9	2	3	<1
I am satisfied with the school's building and facilities	42	50	6	1	1	<1
I am satisfied with the school's equipment and resources	45	48	4	1	2	<1
N= 1144						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 1,142 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

Parents with children due to move to secondary school in September 2008 (the next academic year) were happy with how their child had been supported for the move by the primary school (Table 3.4). Almost nine in ten parents felt that they had received sufficient information about the move (85 per cent) and that their child had been well prepared and supported for the move (86 per cent).

Table 3.4 **Parents' views on how their child has been prepared for the move from Year 6 to secondary school**

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
I have been provided with sufficient information about the new school	37	48	5	3	4	2
My child has been well prepared and supported for the move to the new school	43	43	7	0	4	2
N = 121						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A filter question: all those respondents who indicated that their child would be moving to secondary school in September 2008
A total of 119 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

Almost one in ten parents said that their child had special or additional needs (nine per cent). Of these children, three-fifths received support from a specialist who was not a member of the primary school staff (60 per cent). More than eight in ten parents of children with special or additional needs felt that their child's needs were met by the school (82 per cent), only 12 per cent felt that their child's special or additional needs were not met by the school.

One quarter of parents responding to the survey had raised a concern with the school in the last year. Of these parents, more than half were happy with how their concern had been dealt with by the primary school (54 per cent, 156 parents). The most common reasons given for this satisfaction were:

- the school dealt with the concern (60 per cent, 94 parents)
- the school listened and discussed the concern (28 per cent, 44 parents)
- the school dealt with the issue quickly (28 per cent, 44 parents).

Around four in ten parents (39 per cent, 113 parents) who had raised a concern were not satisfied with how it had been dealt with by the school; common reasons for their dissatisfaction included:

- the issue was not dealt with in a sensitive or appropriate manner (32 per cent, 36 parents)

- the problem was not dealt with (30 per cent, 34 parents)

- they would have liked more feedback from the school (17 per cent, 19 parents)

- they were made to feel uncomfortable about complaining (13 per cent, 12 parents).

3.3 Primary schools' achievements towards the Every Child Matters outcomes

The majority of parents of primary school children were happy with the schools' provision for meeting the Every Child Matters Outcomes.

Most parents were satisfied with the primary schools' provision for pupils to 'be healthy' (Table 3.5). Almost all parents felt that their primary school encouraged their child to have a healthy and active lifestyle (96 per cent) and that the school encouraged their child to eat healthily (95 per cent). Around nine in ten parents were pleased with the school's provision for sport and recreation activities (89 per cent).

Table 3.5   Parents' satisfaction with schools' provision for pupils to 'be healthy'

Satisfaction...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
that the school encourages your child to have a healthy and active lifestyle	60	36	2	1	1	<1
that the school encourages your child to eat healthily	58	37	3	1	1	<1
with the school's provision for sport and recreation activities	49	40	8	2	1	<1

N = 1144

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 1,141 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

Parents' views on the schools' provision for pupils to 'stay safe' were slightly more mixed, as illustrated in Table 3.6. Most parents felt that the school provided a safe and secure environment (95 per cent) and a caring and supportive environment (94 per

cent) for their child. Seven in ten parents felt that the school dealt appropriately with bullying (70 per cent) and just over three-quarters said that the school had clear procedures for children and parents to make complaints (76 per cent). However almost one in five parents were unsure about the schools' ability to deal appropriately with bullying (19 per cent) and one in eight (13 per cent) were unsure about the schools' procedures for making complaints. Furthermore one in ten parents disagreed with each of these statements; primary schools may wish to consider the need to review their bullying and complaints policies in light of this.

Table 3.6   Parents' views on schools' provision for pupils to 'stay safe'

The school...	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
provides a safe and secure environment for my child	55	40	2	1	1	<1
provides a caring and supportive environment for my child	51	43	2	1	3	<1
deals appropriately with bullying	33	37	7	3	19	1
has clear procedures for children and parents to make complaints	34	42	8	2	13	1

N = 1144

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 1,141 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

As shown in Table 3.7, parents were satisfied with primary schools' provision for pupils to 'enjoy and achieve'; more than half of the parents who responded were very satisfied with each of the statements in this area. More than nine in ten parents were satisfied with their child's progress (93 per cent) and that their child's achievements were recognised and praised (91 per cent). Parents also felt that the school promoted good behaviour (93 per cent) and that it helped to develop their child's confidence and self esteem (91 per cent).

Table 3.7   Parents' satisfaction with schools' provision for pupils to 'enjoy and achieve'

Parents' satisfaction...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
with their child's progress at school	55	38	4	1	1	<1
that their child's achievements are recognised and praised	58	33	6	2	2	<1
with how the school staff support and treat their child	57	36	5	1	2	<1
that the school promotes good behaviour	57	36	4	1	2	<1
that the school is helping to develop their child's confidence and self-esteem	53	38	5	1	3	<1
that the school is helping to develop their child's personal, social and moral development	52	41	4	1	2	<1
N = 1144						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 1,142 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

Most parents were satisfied with primary schools' provision for pupils to 'make a positive contribution', as illustrated in Table 3.8. Around nine in ten parents felt that the school helped their child to develop positive relationships with adults and other children (92 per cent) and that the school provided opportunities for their child to help and support other pupils (89 per cent).

Table 3.8   Parents' views on schools' provision for pupils to 'make a positive contribution'

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
The school provides good opportunities for my child to contribute his/her opinions and ideas	36	52	3	<1	8	<1
The school helps my child to develop positive relationships with adults and other children	40	52	3	<1	5	<1
The school provides opportunities for my child to help and support other pupils	38	51	1	<1	9	<1
The school encourages pupils to become involved in decision-making (e.g. through School Council)	36	48	2	<1	12	1
N = 1144						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 1,142 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

3.4   Overall parental satisfaction

The majority of parents (94 per cent) were satisfied with their child's education overall. In particular, over half of parents (55 per cent) were very satisfied and a further four in ten (39 per cent) were satisfied with their child's education. A minority were dissatisfied with four per cent not very satisfied and one per cent (13 individuals) not at all satisfied. These results were very similar to the findings last year when 95 per cent of parents were satisfied with their child's education.

As shown in Table 3.9, almost half of responding parents expressed a concern about their child's school (45 per cent). The most common concerns were regarding the level of communication with their child's school (18 per cent) and regarding homework set by the school (16 per cent). Other issues included concerns about their child's progress (13 per cent), about pupil behaviour and discipline (11 per cent), about teaching methods or standards (ten per cent) and about the level of support

provided for their child (nine per cent). The three most common issues were the same as were found in the survey in 2007[2].

Table 3.9   Parents' concerns about their child's school

Parents' concerns	%
The level of communication with, or feedback from, their child's school	18
Concerns about the nature or amount of homework their child is given	16
Concerns about their child's progress	13
Concerns about pupil discipline or school policies on pupil behaviour	11
Teaching methods or standards in the school	10
Concerns about the level of support provided for your child	9
Other	14
No response	55
N = 1144	

A multiple response item: more than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 515 respondents answered this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

More than six in ten parents took the opportunity to say what they felt the primary school did well, as shown in Table 3.10. Almost one in five parents felt that the school provided good support for pupils (19 per cent). Other positive aspects highlighted by parents included a good ethos or atmosphere (14 per cent), a good curriculum (ten per cent) and good extra-curricular activities and trips (ten per cent). In addition, ten per cent of parents said that the school does well in most areas. The most common responses to this question were similar to the areas praised by parents in the 2007 survey.

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2.   The question wording was amended in 2008 to open up the question to all parents. As a result, for this question, it is not appropriate to compare differences in percentage responses in the 2008 survey with the results of 2007.

Table 3.10   Parents' views on what their child's primary school does well

What the primary school does well	%
It provides good support for pupils	19
It has a good ethos/atmosphere/environment	14
It has a good curriculum	10
The school does well in most areas	10
It has good extra-curricular activities/school trips	10
It has good communication with parents	9
It has good staff	7
There is a focus on personal development	7
It is a happy school	7
It employs good teaching methods/approaches	6
It has good discipline and praise strategies	6
There is a good healthy eating focus	5
It encourages parental involvement	5
It has good facilities/resources	3
I am happy with my child's progress	3
It has good school policies	1
Other	6
Nothing/Not sure	2
No response	39
N = 1144	

An open-ended, multiple response question
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 697 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

Parents were also given the opportunity to say where they felt the school could improve and, as shown in Table 3.11, nearly half of responding parents took this opportunity (48 per cent). The most common area for improvement raised by parents was around school communication with parents – this was also the most common issue raised by parents in last year's survey. In fact there has been an increase in the proportion of parents citing communication as an area for improvement compared with last year. In 2007 ten per cent of parents highlighted communication as an area for improvement in contrast to 15 per cent this year, so this could be an area that primary schools may wish to explore further with parents. Other areas for improvement highlighted by parents this year included improvements to the curriculum (nine per cent), improvements to school policies (six per cent) and improvements to facilities or resources (six per cent). It is also worth noting that four per cent of parents felt that no improvements were necessary.

Table 3.11   Parents' views on improvements that their child's primary school could make

Improvements	%
Better communication with parents	15
Make improvements to curriculum	9
Improve school policies	6
Improve teaching approaches/attitudes of teachers	6
Improve facilities/resources	6
Provide more support for pupils	6
Offer more extra-curricular activities/trips	4
Improve discipline and reward policies	4
Improve homework policies	4
Improve school meals/healthy eating policies	3
Better recruitment of teachers	2
Provide more opportunities for parental involvement	2
Provide more support for parents	1
Other	4
Not sure	<1
The school is already taking steps to improve	<1
No improvements necessary	4
No response	52
N = 1144	

An open-ended, multiple response question
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 547 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Primary School survey 2008

4. Parents' views: Secondary schools

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the secondary school survey of parents. Responses were received from 375 parents, across all six secondary schools and from one of the two middle schools.

As with the surveys of parents of children in FS1 settings and primary schools, background information on the children of the parents was collected. The secondary school children were aged between 11 and 17 and the average (median) age of children was 13. As Table 4.1 shows, most parents that completed the secondary school survey had children in Years 7 to 10 so it is important to consider that the views of parents with children in Year 11 and above might not be fully represented in these findings. Most children had started at their current secondary school within the last three academic years.

Table 4.1   Year group of children of responding parents

Year group	%
Year 7	23
Year 8	23
Year 9	21
Year 10	16
Year 11	10
Year 12	3
Year 13	2
Year 14	0
No response	1
N = 375	

A single response item
A total of 373 respondents answered this question
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to100
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

Parents were also asked how many schools their child had attended before this school. The number of schools attended prior to this school varied considerably: children had attended between one and ten primary schools, between zero and four middle schools and between zero and three secondary schools. The total number of schools attended

before their current school ranged from zero to ten schools and the average (median) number of schools attended was three.

4.2   Partnership between parents and the secondary school

Parents with children who had started at the secondary school within the last academic year were generally happy with how the school had supported this process (Table 4.2). Around nine in ten parents felt that they had been provided with sufficient information about the school (94 per cent) and that the school helped their child settle in quickly (90 per cent). Fewer parents felt that the school ensured good continuity of learning for their child (73 per cent) with almost one in five (19 per cent) disagreeing with this statement.

Table 4.2   Parents' experiences of their child starting at the secondary school (if started within last academic year)

Parents' experiences	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
I received sufficient information about the school when my child started	37	57	5	0	1	0
The school helped my child to settle in quickly	31	59	4	2	3	1
The school ensured good continuity of learning for my child	25	48	12	7	8	1
N = 145						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A filter question: all those parents who indicated that their child had started at the secondary school within the 2007-08 academic year
A total of 145 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

As shown in Table 4.3, most parents were happy with their relationship with the secondary school. In particular, nine in ten parents were happy with the school's building and facilities (91 per cent) and the school's equipments and resources (91 per cent), and around the same number said that they felt welcome when they visited the school (90 per cent). Slightly fewer parents felt that they were kept informed of their child's progress (85 per cent) and of their child's behaviour (84 per cent), and 77 per cent of parents felt that it was easy to talk to a teacher if they needed to. Although

approximately three in five parents agreed that the school took account of parents' suggestions and concerns (59 per cent), almost one in four parents were unsure about this (23 per cent). This could be because they have not raised any issues with the school; however schools may wish to review how they use feedback from parents and how they publicise any actions taken as a result of this feedback.

Table 4.3   Views of the partnership between parents and their child's secondary school

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
If I need to talk to a teacher about my child's education, it is easy to do so	20	57	15	3	4	<1
The school takes account of parents' suggestions and concerns about the school	11	48	13	4	23	<1
I am made to feel welcome when I visit the school	25	65	6	1	3	<1
The school keeps me informed of my child's progress	28	57	10	4	1	<1
The school keeps me informed of my child's behaviour	27	57	10	3	3	0
I am satisfied with the school's building and facilities	29	62	6	1	3	<1
I am satisfied with the school's equipment and resources	32	59	5	1	4	0

N = 375

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 375 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

Almost one in ten parents had a child with special or additional needs (nine per cent, 34 individuals) and almost half of these children received support from a specialist (47 per cent, 16 individuals). More than three-quarters of the parents with children with special or additional needs felt that the school met those needs (77 per cent, 26 individuals), however seven parents felt that the school did not meet those needs (21 per cent).

More than one-third of parents who completed the questionnaire had raised a concern with the secondary school during the last year (37 per cent). Of these parents, two fifths (55 individuals) were satisfied with the way the school had dealt with the concern and these parents expressed the following reasons for this:

- the school dealt with concern (21 parents)
- the school dealt with the issue quickly (20 parents)
- the way the school communicated with them: the school kept them informed (six parents) and the school listened to and discussed the concern (six parents).

Over half of the parents who had raised a concern with the school were not happy with the way the school had dealt with the issue (54 per cent) and the reasons for this dissatisfaction included:

- the problem was not dealt with (19 parents)
- the issue was not dealt with in a sensitive or appropriate manner (17 parents)
- parents would have liked more feedback from the school (12 parents)
- the school was slow to respond to the issue (11 parents).

4.3 Secondary schools' achievements towards the Every Child Matters outcomes

Parents were largely satisfied with how the secondary schools were working towards the Every Child Matters outcomes. They were most happy with the provision for pupils to 'be healthy', to 'enjoy and achieve' and to 'make a positive contribution' however they were slightly less positive about the provision to 'stay safe' and 'achieve economic well-being'.

When asked about secondary schools' provision for pupils to 'be healthy', parents were generally happy, as illustrated in Table 4.4. Around nine in ten felt that the school encouraged their child to have a healthy and active lifestyle (89 per cent) and were satisfied with the school's provision for sport and recreation activities (90 per cent). Slightly fewer responding parents (around three-quarters) were satisfied that the school encouraged their child to eat healthily (74 per cent) and that the school provided appropriate drug awareness education (72 per cent) and sex and relationships education (75 per cent).

Table 4.4   Parents' satisfaction with schools' provision for pupils to 'be healthy'

Satisfaction...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
that the school encourages their child to have a healthy and active lifestyle	33	56	5	1	4	1
that the school encourages their child to eat healthily	22	52	11	3	11	1
with the school's provision for sport and recreation activities	42	48	7	1	2	0
that the school provides appropriate drug awareness education for their child	27	45	5	<1	23	0
that the school provides appropriate sex and relationships education for your child	28	47	6	<1	18	0
N = 375						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 375 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

In line with the findings of the FS1 setting and primary school surveys, parents' views in relation to the schools' provision for pupils to 'stay safe' were mixed, as shown in Table 4.5. Around nine in ten parents agreed that the secondary school provided a safe and secure environment (91 per cent) and that it provided a caring and supportive environment (86 per cent) for their child. However, only around two-thirds of parents felt that the school dealt appropriately with bullying (64 per cent) and that the school had clear procedures for children and parents to make complaints (68 per cent). Around one in five parents were unsure about each of these measures and so schools may wish to consider whether there is a need to improve parents' knowledge of the school's policies in these areas.

Table 4.5   Parents' views on schools' provision for pupils to 'stay safe'

The school...	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
provides a safe and secure environment for my child	34	57	4	1	3	<1
provides a caring and supportive environment for my child	27	59	5	3	6	0
deals appropriately with bullying	22	42	11	4	21	0
has clear procedures for children and parents to make complaints	20	48	12	3	17	0
N = 375						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 375 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

Generally parents were pleased with the secondary school's provision for pupils to 'enjoy and achieve' (Table 4.6). In particular, parents were satisfied that the school promoted good behaviour (88 per cent) and that their child's achievements were recognised and praised (85 per cent). Almost nine in ten parents were satisfied to some extent with their child's progress at school (88 per cent) - almost half were very satisfied with their child's progress (44 per cent).

Table 4.6   Parents' satisfaction with schools' provision for pupils to 'enjoy and achieve'

Parents' satisfaction...	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Not very satisfied %	Not at all satisfied %	Not sure %	No response %
with their child's progress at school	44	44	7	4	1	0
that their child's achievements are recognised and praised	47	38	9	3	2	<1
with how the school staff support and treat their child	34	50	9	3	3	0
that the school promotes good behaviour	35	53	5	3	4	0
that the school is helping to develop their child's confidence and self-esteem	37	45	9	4	5	0
that the school is helping to develop their child's personal, social and moral development	34	47	8	3	8	<1
N = 375						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 375 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

Most parents were happy with the secondary schools' provision for pupils to 'make a positive contribution', as shown in Table 4.7. Parents tended to agree that the school provided good opportunities for their child to contribute their ideas and opinions (80 per cent) and that the school helped their child to develop positive relationships with adults and other children (83 per cent). In contrast, only two-thirds felt that the school provided opportunities to participate in voluntary activities to support the community and so this is an area that schools may wish to review.

Table 4.7   Parents' views on schools' provision for pupils to 'make a positive contribution'

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
The school provides good opportunities for my child to contribute his/her opinions and ideas	27	53	8	1	11	0
The school helps my child to develop positive relationships with adults and other children	27	56	7	2	8	0
The school provides opportunities for my child to help and support other pupils	26	50	8	1	15	<1
The school encourages pupils to become involved in decision-making (e.g. through School Council)	28	49	4	1	18	0
The school provides opportunities for pupils to take part in voluntary activities to support the community (e.g. voluntary work, fundraising)	26	40	9	2	23	<1
N = 375						

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 375 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

Parental views on schools' provision for pupils to 'achieve economic well-being' were less positive than the other areas of the Every Child Matters outcomes, as can been seen in Table 4.8. Approximately six in ten parents felt that the school provided good opportunities for vocational learning (58 per cent) and that the school provided good opportunities for work-related learning and work experience (61 per cent). For most of these statements relating to careers education and guidance at least a quarter of parents who responded were unsure of the schools' provision in these areas. As a result, schools may wish to review their careers education and guidance policies, and the communication of these policies, to parents. The exception to this was related to

independent learning: 84 per cent of parents felt that their child was encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and only around one in ten were unsure about this (11 per cent).

The 178 responding parents with children in Years 9 to 11 had mixed views about whether they had received enough information about the choices available to their child once they finish Year 11. A similar proportion of parents agreed (42 per cent, 75 parents) that they had enough information about post Year 11 choices as those who felt that they had not received enough information (43 per cent, 77 parents).

Table 4.8   Parents' views on schools' provision for pupils to 'achieve economic well-being'

Parents' views	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure %	No response %
The school provides good opportunities for vocational studies	15	43	10	3	30	<1
The school provides good opportunities for work-related learning and work experience	19	42	11	3	26	<1
The school provides my child with access to a range of learning opportunities post-16 to meet his/her needs	11	31	9	4	42	3
The careers education and guidance provided to my child is helpful	13	38	11	2	34	2
The school supports my child to develop team-working and enterprise skills	18	49	3	1	27	2
The school is preparing my child well for adult and working life	14	46	9	2	28	1
The school is preparing my child well for further education or training	15	43	8	2	31	2
My child is encouraged to take some responsibility for his/her own learning	22	62	3	1	11	1

N = 375

A series of single response items
Due to rounding, percentages may not always sum to 100
A total of 375 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

Although three of the six secondary schools provide boarding accommodation, only 22 parents replied that their child boards at the school. This low response could be because the questionnaires were sent directly to the school and so parents with children who board at the school might not receive letters home as regularly as parents of children who do not board. On the whole, as shown in Table 4.9, these parents were positive about their child's boarding house. For example, most parents were satisfied with the living accommodation (18 parents) and most felt that they were kept informed of any issues concerning their child (19 parents).

Table 4.9   Parents' views on the boarding house their child attends

Parents' satisfaction that the boarding house...	Very satisfied (no.)	Fairly satisfied (no.)	Not very satisfied (no.)	Not at all satisfied (no.)	Not sure (no.)	No response (no.)
provides a satisfactory standard of living accommodation for their child	9	9	4	0	0	0
provides an appropriate standard of supervision for their child	9	11	1	1	0	0
keeps them informed of any issues concerning their child	14	5	3	0	0	0
supports their child to have an active and healthy lifestyle	11	10	0	0	1	0
provides appropriate medical support for their child	13	6	2	1	0	0
provides a safe environment for their child	11	10	1	0	0	0
provides appropriate after-school recreational facilities and activities for their child	15	4	2	0	1	0
has a good standard of pupil behaviour	11	9	1	1	0	0

N = 22

A series of single response items
A filter question: all those respondents that indicated that their child boards at the school
A total of 22 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Due to the small response to this question, values are reported rather than percentages
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

4.4   Overall parental satisfaction

When asked about their overall satisfaction with their child's education, the majority of parents of children at SCE secondary schools were satisfied (87 per cent). More than one-third were very satisfied (35 per cent) and around half of the parents were satisfied (52 per cent). One in ten were not very satisfied and a minority were not at all satisfied (three per cent, 13 individuals). This is an improvement on the results of the 2007 survey when 83 per cent of parents said they were satisfied, although it may be worth highlighting that the proportion of parents who were not at all satisfied has increased from one per cent (four individuals) to three per cent (13 individuals) this year.

Almost three-fifths of parents who responded to the survey expressed a concern about their child's school (58 per cent). As illustrated in Table 4.10, the most common concerns raised were regarding teaching methods or standards (23 per cent), communication and feedback from the school (22 per cent), pupil discipline and behaviour (18 per cent) and homework (18 per cent). The most common concerns of parents were largely similar to the concerns of parents of secondary school pupils in the 2007 survey[3] although this year the issue of homework was noted by a larger proportion of parents than last year.

Table 4.10   Parents' concerns about their child's school

Parents' concerns	%
Teaching methods or standards in the school	23
The level of communication with, or feedback from, their child's school	22
Concerns about pupil discipline or school policies on pupil behaviour	18
Concerns about the nature or amount of homework their child is given	18
Concerns about their child's progress	15
Concerns about the level of support provided for your child	13
Concerns about the curriculum their child is following	8
Other	13
No response	42
N = 375	

A multiple response item: more than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 216 parents answered this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

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[3]   The question wording was amended in 2008 to open up the question to all parents. As a result, for this question, it is not appropriate to compare differences in percentage responses in the 2008 survey with the results of 2007.

Almost six in ten parents (58 per cent) expressed a view on what their child's secondary school did well, as shown in Table 4.11. The most common aspects praised were that the school provided good support for pupils (18 per cent), that it offered a good curriculum (17 per cent) and that it provided good extra-curricular activities or trips (ten per cent). It is important to note that four per cent of parents responded that they were not sure or that the school does 'nothing' well.

Parents' views on the positive areas of the schools were similar to those expressed in the 2007 survey, although last year 'good teaching methods' was among the three most commonly noted areas whereas this year there was more praise for the extra-curricular activities provided by the schools.

4.11 Parents' views on what their child's secondary school does well

What the secondary school does well	%
It provides good support for pupils	18
It offers a good curriculum	17
It has good extra-curricular activities/trips	10
It has good discipline and praise strategies	8
There is a good ethos/atmosphere/environment	8
It has good communication with parents	8
It employs good teaching methods/approaches	5
The school does well in most/all areas	5
There is a focus on personal development	5
It has good facilities/resources	4
It is a happy school	3
It has good staff	2
I am happy with my child's progress	2
It has good school policies	2
Other	5
Nothing/not sure	4
No response	42
N = 375	

An open-ended, multiple response question
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 218 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

A similar proportion of parents (57 per cent) highlighted areas for improvement in their child's secondary school as had mentioned good aspects of the school. As shown in Table 4.12, parents most commonly felt that the secondary schools needed better communication with parents (14 per cent) and to provide more support for students (12 per cent). In addition, they felt that schools could improve their teaching

approaches and teacher attitudes (11 per cent) and the curriculum (ten per cent). In contrast, in 2007 the most common area for improvement was related to school policies, followed by better communication and more support for pupils.

4.12 Parents' views on improvements that their child's secondary school could make

Improvements	%
Better communication with parents	14
Provide more support for students	12
Improve teaching approaches/teachers attitudes	11
Improvements to curriculum	10
Improve discipline and reward policies	9
Improve school policies	7
Improve facilities/resources	6
Offer more extra-curricular activities/trips	4
Better recruitment of teachers	3
Improve homework policies	3
Provide more opportunities for parental involvement	2
The school is already taking steps to improve	<1
Everything	<1
Other	4
No improvements necessary	4
No response	43
N = 375	

An open-ended, multiple response question
More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100
A total of 212 respondents answered at least one item in this question
Source: NFER survey of parents with children in SCE schools: Secondary School survey 2008

5. Conclusions

Generally, parents of children at all stages of education were positive about the education that their child received from SCE schools. Overall, the majority of parents were satisfied with their child's education and, in particular, the proportion of secondary school parents who were satisfied had increased from last year.

There was a similar pattern of feeling related to the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for all education stages. Parents were satisfied with the schools' provision for pupils to 'be healthy', 'to enjoy and achieve' and 'to make a contribution'. Particular highlights included that they felt that the school or FS1 setting supported personal and social development and promoted the development of their child's confidence. Parents were also pleased with their child's progress. However, at all education stages parents were less certain about how well the schools contributed to pupils' ability 'to stay safe'. Although parents were happy that their child was provided with a safe and secure environment, the areas of uncertainty were related to bullying and how the school manages complaints. The parents of secondary school children were the only group asked about how the school helps their children 'to achieve economic well-being' and they were less positive about the schools' contribution in this area than in the other ECM outcomes.

Communication was an area for improvement that emerged for all three stages of education, as was the case in 2007. This issue did not just emerge through the question explicitly asking what the school or FS1 setting could improve, but it was also one of the most common concerns parents held about the school and one of the reasons why some parents were not happy with how their concerns had been dealt with. Furthermore, a number of parents were unsure of how the school deals with bullying and how to make complaints, and around a fifth of secondary school parents were unsure about the provision for drugs and sex and relationships education. This suggests that there is scope for schools to further develop their communication strategies.

It should be noted that some parents did praise communication by the school or FS1 setting, and any review of communication undertaken by schools could be usefully informed by the following aspects that parents liked and appreciated:

- schools that listen to concerns and discuss issues with parents
- teachers who are accessible so that it is easy for parents to speak to them
- use of a diary or contact book to make parents aware of emerging issues
- schools that encourage parents to be involved in the school
- regular newsletters
- schools that have a welcoming atmosphere and an open relationship with parents.

Although Service children tend to change schools more frequently than non-service children, parents were generally satisfied with how the SCE schools deal with transition. Parents were happy with how the schools and FS1 settings helped their child to settle in, and also with how they prepare children for the move to the next stage of education.

The support that the SCE schools and FS1 settings provided for pupils was not only related to transition between schools. Support for pupils was the most common aspect of schools praised by parents for all three education stages. In particular, parents valued that children were treated like individuals, that SCE schools and FS1 settings tailored support according to ability, and helped the children to reach their full potential. Parents also felt that the SCE schools were sensitive to the unique situation of Service children and that, for example, SCE schools are good at supporting pupils when a parent is deployed.

The pattern of responses tended to be quite similar for each of the levels of education although there were some interesting variations. Generally responses to the Foundation Stage 1 and primary school questionnaires were slightly more positive than responses to the secondary school survey, however this is in line with the findings of last year's SCE parental views survey. In addition there were some differences in the issues raised and good aspects praised by parents of children at different stages of education. For example, secondary school parents were less likely to highlight that the school had a good ethos or atmosphere than parents of children attending FS1 settings or primary schools. This could be related to the differences in the size and focus of the different levels of education. Another difference between responses was that parents of children at FS1 settings were more likely to feel that facilities and resources needed improving than parents of children at primary or secondary schools.

On the whole, parents were happy with the service provided by SCE schools and FS1 settings although, as described above, some minor differences were apparent between

the views of parents with children at different stages of education. While parents were satisfied with the overall education provided for their child and with the support given to their child, some areas for improvement did emerge, in particular around communication.