
EXTENDED SCHOOLS SURVEY OF SCHOOLS, PUPILS AND PARENTS A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS AND USAGE OF EXTENDED SERVICES IN SCHOOLS

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Background

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by DCSF to undertake a survey of schools, parents and pupils in relation to current provision, usage and perceptions of extended schools services. Extended schools offer pupil and parents access to a wide range of services, such as activities and childcare and parenting support classes. The surveys aimed to assess current levels of provision of extended services, rates of usage and users' perceptions of the current offerings. The findings will feed into DCSF guidance and support for schools to assist in the roll-out and wider implementation of extended services.

Key Findings

- ◆ Overall, schools are more likely to agree (42%) than disagree (28%) that they currently receive sufficient support to develop and provide extended services. The majority of schools report that they engage in consultation about the development of extended services with parents (86% schools) and pupils (73% schools). The majority of parents (60%) and pupils (69%) feel that their school has listened to their views in developing services.
- ◆ Nearly all (94%) schools offer activities and/or childcare either at or through the school. In line with this, 88% of parents are aware that activities are provided by their child's school. Around three in five (58%) parents say their child has attended activities or used childcare provided at or through their child's school in the past term. Activities provided straight after school are most commonly used, followed by before-school activities, and evening activities.
- ◆ Results from the survey of parents indicate that pupils from more deprived backgrounds are less likely than average to be using activities and childcare services. The majority of parents and pupils rate the childcare and activities provided by their school positively: 67% of pupils say the activities available to them are good, and 60% of parents report that the services on offer meet their needs.
- ◆ For both parents and pupils, having fun and socialising form the main appeal of activities, rather than improved academic outcomes.
- ◆ Key reasons for not using childcare and activities, according to parents and pupils, are that the activities on offer do not appeal, and pupils' lack of time or tiredness. However, cost (16%) and a lack of transport (10%) are also cited as barriers by parents.
- ◆ Of the other extended services, 76% schools provide Swift and Easy Access, 70% offer parenting support and over half provide community access to school facilities (54%). Among parents, 40% report using Swift and Easy Access services, 36% have attended parenting support sessions and 21% have used community access services.

Methodology

School survey: Questionnaires were mailed to primary, secondary and special schools across England. Where schools did not respond to the postal survey, Ipsos MORI attempted to contact and interview schools by telephone. In total, 1,901 responses were obtained from June-July 2008, giving an overall response rate of 53%. Data are weighted to reflect the profile of all primary, secondary and special schools in England. The survey is representative of all schools in England, rather than those identified as Extended Schools. The survey asked about the provision of all extended services, including those offered on- and off-site.

Parent and pupil surveys: A random sample of parents and pupils across England was selected from the National Pupil Database. Parents and young people were sent a letter before being approached by an Ipsos MORI interviewer to conduct the interview face-to-face in their home. In total, 1,021 interviews were conducted with parents of primary, secondary and special school pupils (a response rate of 75%), and 1,019 interviews with secondary school pupils (a response rate of 71%). Fieldwork took place June-August 2008.

Policy background

Current government policy aims for all schools to be extended schools by 2010 (with half of all primary schools and a third of all secondary schools doing so by 2008)¹. Extended schools offer access to a wide range of services from 8am - 6pm, 48 weeks a year, including school holidays. The core offer comprises:

- A varied menu of activities (including study support, play/recreation, sport, music, arts and crafts and other special interest clubs, volunteering and business and enterprise activities) in a safe place to be for primary and secondary schools;
- Childcare 8am-6pm, 48 weeks a year for primary schools;
- Parenting support including family learning;
- Swift and Easy Access to targeted and specialist services such as speech and language therapy; and
- Community access to facilities including adult learning, ICT and sports facilities.

¹ *Extended Schools: Access to Opportunities and Services for All* (DfES, 2005).

To be an 'extended school', schools need only offer those services for which there is a demand locally. These services may be delivered directly through schools, or delivered in partnership with other local schools, agencies or children's services; as such, services may be provided on the school site or elsewhere. At the point of surveying, schools will have been providing extended services for varying periods of time. Take-up of these services by parents and children is voluntary.

Main findings

Management and provision of extended services

Over half of schools (55%) provide extended services as part of a 'cluster' of schools working together, while around two in five (43%) do not. Cluster working appears to offer a number of advantages: cluster schools are more likely than non-cluster schools to cite receiving support from a number of sources asked about – including local authorities, other schools and the health sector, for instance – and are more likely to agree they have received sufficient support (48% agree compared with 36% of non-cluster schools).

Most schools take at least some responsibility for the day-to-day provision of extended services, although the majority work in partnership with other local agencies and services, particularly in the delivery of parenting support classes (only 33% schools offer these independently).

Childcare and activities and community access services are typically funded by users of the services, while schools themselves are more likely to fund parenting support and Swift and Easy Access services. The majority of schools that charge users for childcare and activities provide help for families who struggle to pay the full fee.

Support in developing and providing extended services

Schools are more likely to agree (42%) than disagree (28%) that they currently receive sufficient support to develop and provide extended services. The most commonly cited sources of support include local authorities (mentioned by 82% schools), other schools (54%), the health sector (32%) and School Improvement Partners (26%).

Special schools are less likely than mainstream schools to agree they receive sufficient support

currently, and 12% of special schools say they have not received any support at all.

Consultation and information about extended services

The majority of schools report that they engage in consultation about the development of extended services with parents (86% schools) and pupils (73% schools).

Parents and pupils generally feel consulted and listened to by schools in the development of extended services: seven in ten pupils report being consulted and listened to about the activities on offer, and over half of parents (54%) cite ways in which the school has sought their views. However, the findings indicate a clear appetite among users for more information about what is on offer, and a significant minority of parents (40%) do not feel they have been consulted about services currently offered by the school recently.

Parents indicate they prefer to receive communications about extended services in writing from schools and nearly all schools report they currently use written channels to promote extended services, such as letters home (used by 95% schools) and school newsletters (93%). However, smaller proportions of parents recall receiving this information (77% recall seeing extended services information in letters and 60% in the newsletter), suggesting that some information disseminated by schools is not received, or recalled, by parents. This is likely to be a wider issue, affecting not only communications about extended services.

Provision and usage of childcare and activities

Nearly all (94%) schools offer activities and/or childcare either at or through the school. In line with this, 88% of parents are aware that activities are provided by their child's school.

Around three in five parents (58%) say their child has attended an activity or used childcare services provided by their school in the last term. Provision and usage of childcare is highest straight after school (91% of schools provide these services straight after school, and 53% of parents say their child has attended after-school activities in the past term). While before-school activities are attended by smaller numbers (16% of parents say their child has used them in the past term), users tend to attend

before-school activities more frequently than after-school services.

Activities after 6pm in the evening are offered by half of secondary schools (51%) but by smaller numbers of primary and special schools (21% and 38%, respectively). Accordingly, attendance at these activities is higher among older than younger pupils.

Although only six percent of parents say their child has attended an activity during a school holiday in the past year, demand for holiday provision appears to be widespread; for instance, 58% of parents say they would like to use more activities during the summer holidays. Over half (52%) of schools say they provide these activities, suggesting that there is either a lack of awareness and/or barriers to accessing these activities.

Supervised activities such as sports, drama and performing arts clubs are the most widely used type of activities (48% parents say their child has attended these in the past term). However, the survey of pupils indicates different preferences for activities by age and gender. Girls are more likely than boys to have attended dance, drama, performing arts, music and arts and crafts clubs, while boys are more likely than girls to have attended sports clubs. Meanwhile, secondary schools pupils are more likely than primary school pupils to have attended homework and study groups (25% compared with four percent). Understanding and catering for these preferences seems likely to be important in developing sustainable and appealing services.

Ratings of childcare and activities

A majority of parents and pupils rate the childcare and activities provided by their school positively: 67% of pupils rate the activities available outside lesson times as good, and 60% of parents say the services meet their needs. However, a significant minority (26%) of parents say current offerings do not meet their needs.

Parents and pupils from two-parent families – especially where both parents work – and younger pupils and their parents are most likely to say that services meet their needs. In contrast, the parents of pupils in special schools are least likely to feel that activities meet their needs, as are the parents of pupils in years 7-9 in secondary schools.

Reasons for use and barriers to using childcare and activities

For both parents and pupils, having fun and socialising form the main appeal of activities rather than improved academic outcomes (mentioned by 62% and 61% parents, respectively). However, helping the child to do better in school is more frequently mentioned (52%) by secondary school parents, while a third of pupils (34%) say they like the chance to learn new things.

Parents of primary school children are more likely to cite allowing the parent to work as a benefit of childcare and activities (22% compared with eight percent of secondary parents). The parents of pupils attending special schools are more likely to mention that the childcare and activities allow them to spend time on other things (39%) and offer respite and a break from caring (33%).

Key reasons for not using childcare and activities are that the activities on offer do not appeal, and pupils' lack of time or tiredness. However, cost (16%) and a lack of transport (10%) are also cited as barriers by parents. Meeting costs is most likely to be a barrier according to lone parents and the parents of special school pupils. Lack of transport is cited by 15% of parents of secondary school pupils and by 39% of parents of special school pupils, possibly because pupils are likely to travel further to these types of schools.

Other extended services

Of the other extended services, 76% schools provide Swift and Easy Access, 70% offer parenting support and 54% provide community access to school facilities. Parental support is more likely to be offered in schools with relatively high levels of deprivation (as measured via the proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals). Community access is most commonly offered in secondary schools and schools working in a cluster to deliver extended services.

Among parents, 40% report using Swift and Easy Access services; however, nine in ten parents say they would approach the school if their child had a problem, suggesting that parents are open to using this service where they have a need.

Thirty six per cent of parents have used parenting support services, usually through information sessions for parents: parents of special school children are particularly likely to have attended these sessions. Parenting support services appear to be popular, and a third of parents would like to see more information sessions available.

Twenty one percent of parents have used community access services, which typically involves schools allowing public access to halls, classrooms and sports facilities.

Conclusions and implications

- **Developing and providing extended services in a cluster appears to be effective.**

Schools providing services in clusters are more likely than average to say they have received support from a range of sources. Parents and pupils attending schools that provide extended services in clusters are more likely than others to feel consulted and informed about these services. Rates of provision of all five core extended services are also higher among schools working in clusters. The findings suggest that clear communication of the benefits of working in a cluster, explanation of how clusters are established and operate (including the role of Extended Schools Co-ordinators within clusters for example) could be worthwhile, and highlight the value of current DCSF initiatives to support schools in setting up and developing these types of networks.

- **There is room for more support and guidance to schools to help in developing and providing extended services – particularly schools that do not deliver services in a cluster.**

Non-cluster schools are least likely to say they receive support for planning, developing and providing services, and are also least likely to agree they receive sufficient support.

- **Findings from across the surveys highlight that further support and assistance in establishment and provision of extended schools services in special schools would be worthwhile.**

Staff in special schools are less likely than those in mainstream schools to feel they

usage and user ratings of services are all lower in special schools. At the same time, extended services appear to fulfil different, and important, functions for parents of special school children: for example, a third of these parents mention that childcare and activities provide respite from caring for their child and a chance to engage in other activities themselves. However, the parents of SEN pupils are the least likely to say that childcare and activities currently meet their needs. In addition to more general support for special schools to help with provision of services, transport and cost are particular barriers for parents of special school pupils, and more help and support on these issues could help to improve access to services where they are available.

- **Schools should continue to inform parents about extended services via preferred channels: written information, including email, and parents evenings.**

Findings show that written information and parents evenings are most effective in raising awareness of extended services among parents, and that written communications are preferred by parents. Email communications are cited third most often by parents as their preferred channel of information from schools about extended services, although they rarely recall having received information in this way. Some of the most widely used forms of consultation about extended services are parents evenings, questionnaires and informal discussions. Written communications updating parents and pupils on the changes that are being made in response to their feedback could help to reinforce the message that schools are acting upon consultation findings.

- **Awareness of extended services among parents is broadly in line with provision; however, a significant minority of parents do not recall being consulted or listened to when schools developed extended services, and a similar proportion feel they do not know much about these services. The greatest communications challenge appears to be in secondary schools, where parents are less likely than average to feel informed or consulted about extended services.**

While nearly nine in ten schools say they have consulted parents about extended services, two in five parents do not recall being consulted and the same proportion do not feel the school listens to their views when developing extended services. A significant minority of parents also say they do not know much about extended services at the moment. However, general levels of awareness of the provision of each of the five core services are in line with the rates of provision reported by schools (for example, 70% of schools provide parenting support services and 70% of parents are aware that their child's school provides these). The findings indicate a correlation between service usage and feeling consulted about services, highlighting the importance of ensuring parents feel they are listened to.

- **Childcare and activities are used widely at present; however, pupils from more deprived backgrounds are less likely than average to use activities. Findings suggest that more help and support for these groups, or more communication about the fact that financial help is available, could be worthwhile.**

Pupils from more deprived backgrounds (i.e. those eligible for Free School Meals and/or with only one or no parents in work) are less likely than average to use activities. In line with this, cost is the third most commonly cited barrier to using activities (mentioned by 16% of parents), and is most likely to be mentioned by lone parents. Although schools are clearly making efforts to improve affordability – for example, by waiving fees or part of the fees, or by signposting parents to financial support services – the findings suggest that more help and support for these parents, or more communication about the fact that financial help is available, could be worthwhile.

- **There appears to be a gap between usage and provision of, and demand for, childcare and activities in the school holidays, suggesting that a significant proportion of parents and pupils are unable to access holiday activities and/or are unaware of them.**

Over half of schools provide activities and childcare during the school holidays, but only six percent of parents say their child has attended these activities, despite the fact that there is a clear demand for parents

to have access to holiday-time services: for example, just under three in five would like to use more activities in the summer holidays. The findings suggest that there is either a lack of awareness of holiday activities and/or barriers to accessing activities currently provided by schools in the holidays.

- **Findings indicate that more work on making activities more appealing to pupils – particularly groups of pupils who currently have lower levels of access to services – could be of value.**

One of the main barriers to using activities more often – as cited by parents and pupils – is that the activities on offer are not of interest to the pupils. This is particularly the case for secondary school pupils and, in line with this, use of activities is lower among those in Years 7-10. Usage is also more limited among children from relatively deprived backgrounds. Having fun and socialising are the key appeal of activities for pupils and their parents, rather than educational value. More work to align activities to what parents and pupils want to use, and to ensure they are appealing, could help to increase usage.

- **Transport is more likely to be cited as a barrier to using childcare and activities among secondary school and special school parents than primary school parents, suggesting that more work to fund and provide this may help improve access.**
- **Information sessions for parents are very popular and widely used at present. A third of parents say they would like more of these, indicating that further work to develop and provide more parenting support sessions would be useful.**

These findings, conclusions and recommendations are based on initial quantitative surveys of schools, parents and pupils to measure what and how services are currently being provided, who uses them and opinions of current offerings. Usage and perceptions are likely to evolve as the extended schools programme is rolled out over the next couple of years. The forthcoming full evaluation will produce a comprehensive assessment of the long-term impact of extended schools, building on information of service provision, usage, and programme implementation.

Additional Information

The full Research Reports (DCSF-RR068) can be accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Leila Wright, 4th Floor - ARD, DCSF, SB2, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT
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