

Local government

Summary

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National school survey results 2006

Schools' views of their council's services and the services provided locally for children and young people (England)

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

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Introduction to the school survey

- 1 The Audit Commission's School Survey captures schools' perceptions of their council's services and the services provided locally for children and young people. The school survey is completed by the headteacher who is encouraged to consult other staff and governors.
- 2 The survey offers schools the opportunity to influence the work of their council as well as the opportunity to feed into the inspection of their council. The detailed results of the survey are used by councils in order to assess and improve their services. The results are also used to inform Joint Area Review and Annual Performance Assessment work.
- 3 The survey has been running as an annual, national, online exercise since summer 2002^I. All but two local councils in England and Wales have participated at least once – both councils maintain only one school each.
- 4 One hundred and thirty-one councils in England opted to take part in this year's survey^{II}, resulting in the survey being available to 19,259 schools; 7,232 chose to respond, an overall response rate of 38 per cent. The survey was open for six weeks during the summer term of the 2005/06 academic year.
- 5 This summary report examines the responses from schools across England to the questions in the survey, which cover six areas: the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes (being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being) and service management.
- 6 Schools were able to answer each question in the survey using one of six possible responses: (1) Very Good (2) Good (3) Satisfactory (4) Poor (5) Very Poor or (X) Unable to comment.

^I Originally created as a paper-based data collection tool for a national study in 1998 (which led to the publication of the report *Held in Trust* in 1999), the survey was then developed to enable schools' views to feed into the local education authority inspection process in England and Wales (1998-2001).

^{II} The 2006 School Survey was also open to schools in six councils in Wales, but as the two countries' surveys are becoming increasingly different, a separate summary has been produced for each.

The views of schools overall

- 7 Of the 76 questions in the survey, 88 per cent received an average rating of satisfactory or above. This indicates that schools are generally content with the support and services provided by their council and other local services.
- 8 The most positively rated areas were child protection and school improvement support.
- 9 The most negatively rated area concerned the ability of local services to meet the mental health needs of children and young people.

Areas on which schools gave their most positive ratings

- 10 The highest-rated items overall (most positively-rated first) were as follows:
 - The effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection provided or commissioned by the council for designated members of staff and governors (Q 2.8.).
 - Your council's support for raising attainment through the primary strategy (Q 3.7.).
 - Your council's effectiveness in challenging your school to perform better (Q 3.6.).
 - Your council's support to develop self-management in your school in order to secure school improvement (Q 3.2.).
 - The effectiveness of the provision for early years education in meeting local needs (Q 3.1.).
 - The quality of your council's financial information, including comparative data for schools (Q 3.31.).
 - The clarity of guidance on when to make a child protection referral to the relevant service (Q 2.9.).
 - The clarity of your council's definition of monitoring, support and intervention (Q 3.4.).
 - Your council's support in developing the effectiveness of your governing body (Q 3.3.).
 - Your council's support for raising attainment at Key Stage 3 (Q 3.8.).
 - The effectiveness of your council's strategy for data collection, and for managing information and data (Q 6.11.).

- 11 The list includes several items that fall under the traditional support for school improvement banner: monitoring, support and intervention; challenging the school to perform better; and support for Key Stages 1 to 3. A point of note is that two child protection items appear among the top-rated areas: effectiveness of support for designated teachers and governors; and clarity of guidance for making child protection referrals.

Areas on which schools gave their most negative ratings

- 12 The lowest-rated items overall (most negatively-rated first) were as follows:
- The effectiveness of local services in meeting the mental health needs of children and young people (Q 1.6.).
 - The accessibility of the social workers responsible for the looked-after children in your school (Q 3.26.).
 - The effectiveness of local services in providing a range of interventions to deflect children and young people from anti-social behaviour (Q 4.4.).
 - The effectiveness of council provision for pupils out of mainstream schools, including pupils who have been excluded (Q 3.16.).
 - The effectiveness of support from local services to help families in danger of harming or neglecting their own children (Q 2.11.).
 - The effectiveness of local services in reducing the fear of crime in children and young people (Q 2.4.).
 - The effectiveness of your council's children's services (education and social care) in working in partnership with other council departments and with external agencies (Q 6.2.).
 - The clarity of your council's rationale for the deployment of special educational needs (SEN) funding (Q 6.10.).
 - The extent to which schools influence policies/plans/procedures for services for children and young people in your area (Q 6.5.).

- 13 The main areas of concern for schools cover the support and services available to the most vulnerable children and young people: those requiring mental health support; looked after children; those at risk of harm from their families or of exhibiting anti-social behaviour themselves; and those outside of mainstream provision. There are also issues surrounding the accessibility of social workers and the way in which councils deploy SEN funding. Partnership working is generally considered to be a weakness as is the influence of schools themselves on policies, plans and procedures for services for children and young people.

Changes over time

- 14 Of the 76 questions comprising the 2006 survey, 65 can be matched to a question in the previous year's survey, which was run in the summer term of the 2004/05 academic year. Thirty-four questions were rated more positively by schools in 2006; 31 were rated more negatively – an almost even split.
- 15 **The top five improvements** (the most positive change listed first) were as follows:
- The effectiveness of local services working together in safeguarding children and protecting them from harm and neglect (Q 2.7.).
 - The effectiveness of intervention and assessment of young children with disabilities and/or special learning needs (Q 3.20.).
 - The effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection provided or commissioned by the council for designated members of staff and governors (Q 2.8.).
 - The clarity of guidance on when to make a child protection referral to the relevant service (Q 2.9.).
 - The effectiveness of local services in meeting the needs of children and young people with disabilities and with long-term health conditions (Q 1.7.).
- 16 Schools are more positive about safeguarding and child protection support (and the two child protection items are also in the top ten rated items overall). The other two items relate to the intervention, assessment and support for children with disabilities or health conditions.

- 17 The top five deteriorations** (the most negative change listed first) were as follows:
- The effectiveness of your council's communication with your school (Q 6.6.).
 - The effectiveness of your council's children's services (education and social care) in working in partnership with other council departments and with external agencies (Q 6.2.).
 - Your council's consultation on the planning and review of the budget for children's services (Q 6.7.).
 - The effectiveness of the leadership of senior officers of your council (Q 6.3.).
 - The quality of your council's SEN strategy (Q 6.9.).
- 18** Two major issues are raised here, both concerning partnership working: the council's relationship with its schools (there are items on communication, consultation, and leadership); and the relationships between services for children and young people and the rest of the council (Q 6.2 is one of the most negatively rated items in the entire survey and also receives one of the largest decreases in ratings).

The views of different types of school

- 19** Nursery schools gave the most positive responses of all phases of school (nursery, primary, secondary and special), rating 76 per cent of questions more positively than the other phases. They were most positive about the effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection provided or commissioned by the council for designated members of staff and governors (Q 2.8.).
- 20** Of the responses from primary and secondary schools, primaries were by far the most positive about their councils and other local services – for 88 per cent of questions they gave more positive ratings than secondary schools. As with nursery schools, primary schools gave their most positive rating to the effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection provided or commissioned by the council for designated members of staff and governors (Q 2.8.).

- 21 Secondary schools gave the most negative ratings of all phases. They gave negative responses to 83 per cent of the questions. The item secondaries gave their most negative rating to was the effectiveness of local services in meeting the mental health needs of children and young people (Q 1.6.).

The views of schools maintained by different types of council

- 22 Schools maintained by inner London boroughs gave the most positive responses of schools in all types of council (county, inner London, outer London, metropolitan district and unitary), giving the most positive rating to 57 per cent of the questions in the survey. The item given the highest rating by schools in inner London was (again) the effectiveness of the training, advice and support on child protection provided or commissioned by the council for designated members of staff and governors (Q 2.8.).
- 23 Schools maintained by counties gave the most negative responses to 64 per cent of the questions in the survey. The item given the most negative rating by county schools was (again, the lowest-rated item by all schools) the effectiveness of local services in meeting the mental health needs of children and young people (Q 1.6.).

 For further information on the School Survey please go to:

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/schoolsurvey

Councils can also access their survey results for 2006 and previous years at this web address.

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