Pupils' satisfaction with their school

Introduction

The 2004 Children Act emphasises the importance of ensuring that children's happiness, welfare and achievement are central to the services provided for them.

Talking with pupils, seeking their views and sensing how they feel about their school has always been part of inspectors' work and has informed inspection findings. Since September 2003, inspectors have been asked to judge pupils' satisfaction with their school. To help with this, schools can use the pupils' questionnaire developed by Ofsted which was also introduced in 2003.

This paper considers pupils' satisfaction, how they demonstrate it and the factors which contribute to it. It draws on the judgements and evidence from almost 4,000 school inspections carried out between September 2003 and March 2005.

Key findings

- ❐   Mostly, pupils are very satisfied with their school. They are at least very satisfied in nine out of ten primary and eight out of ten secondary schools. This corresponds closely with the views of parents.

- ❐   Pupils' satisfaction is reflected strongly in their attitudes to school, behaviour and in the overall ethos of the school.

- ❐   Pupils' satisfaction varies between types of school. It is slightly greater in denominational and in specialist schools than in others.

- ❐   The highest levels of satisfaction are associated with schools in the most favourable contexts, but in schools in the most disadvantaged contexts, especially secondary schools, satisfaction is also strong.

- ❐   Satisfaction is greatest in schools that are the most effective and where pupils achieve well. In four out of ten secondary schools that are ineffective, inspectors judge that pupils are dissatisfied; pupils in primary schools are more tolerant of ineffectiveness.

- ❐   Satisfaction levels are high in schools that actively seek, value and act on pupils' views, but the quality of teaching, range of enrichment activities and leadership of the headteacher are among many other factors that correlate strongly with pupils' satisfaction.

- ❐   Satisfaction is less strongly linked with factors such as accommodation and resources. In a quarter of secondary schools pupils are very satisfied with their school despite unsatisfactory accommodation and resources.

Evidence and evaluation

Pupils' and parents' satisfaction

Figure 1 shows pupils' satisfaction in primary and secondary schools. In most schools – primary and secondary – pupils are at least very satisfied. They are highly or extremely satisfied in almost half of primary schools.[1] Dissatisfaction is relatively rare, especially in primary schools, but in just under one fifth of secondary schools inspectors sense that satisfaction levels are no more than satisfactory.

Figure 1. Pupils' satisfaction with their school (percentage of schools inspected) [2,3]
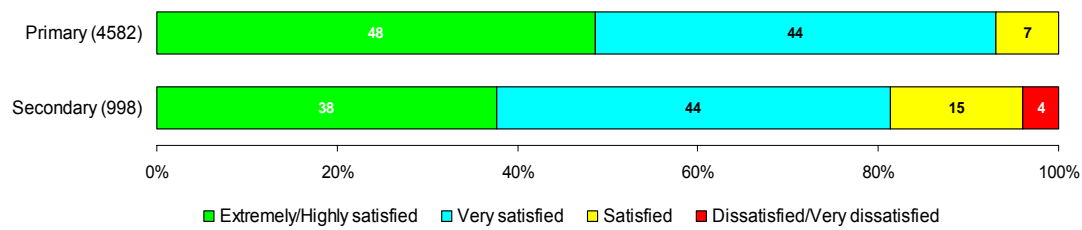
Pupils' and parents' satisfaction are usually closely aligned, particularly where satisfaction levels are high (see Figure 2). Where parents' views of the school are negative, they are often mirrored by pupils, but more strongly in secondary than primary schools. In just over a fifth of primary schools where parents are dissatisfied, pupils are very satisfied.

---

[1] Inspectors make judgements about pupils' satisfaction on a seven point scale: extremely satisfied (grade 1), highly satisfied (2), very satisfied (3), satisfied (4), dissatisfied (4), very dissatisfied (6), extremely dissatisfied (7).

[2] The figures in the charts in this report have been rounded and may not add up to 100.

[3] The figures in brackets in charts are numbers of schools inspected.

Figure 2. Parents' satisfaction with the school in relation to pupils' satisfaction (percentage of schools inspected)
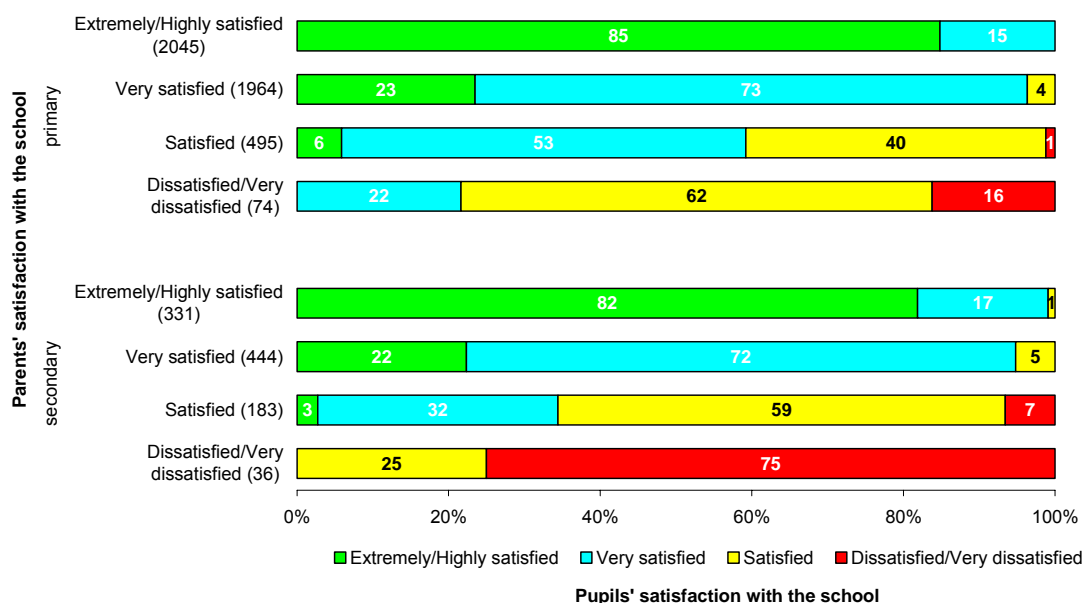
The link between pupils' and parents' views is exemplified in the following case study:

Case study 1. Mixed 11–16 comprehensive school with 1114 pupils. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (24%) is above average.

'Parents feel that many aspects of the school need improvement, including teachers' expectations of their children, behaviour, reports, homework and the school's leadership and management …. Students share the concerns about behaviour and say that this affects their learning.'

In this school pupils were judged to be dissatisfied.

Parents' and pupils' views reflect closely the findings of the inspection team. The report identifies a number of the factors which have contributed to dissatisfaction, including the poor quality of education, such as teaching, poor leadership and management, unsatisfactory personal development and significant underachievement. The school was made subject to special measures.

Pupils' views on their school are generally mirrored in their attitudes and behaviour and the overall ethos of the school. In one inner-city boys' comprehensive school a successful drive to improve attendance led to better examination results and better provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which was then reflected in improvements in students' attitudes, behaviour and relationships. Overall, pupils are now proud of their school and over 80% say that it is well run, a view supported by the inspection team. In another school, pupils say that they feel well supported academically and personally; they feel valued because of the way that they are treated by the

adults in the school; exclusions are falling because of the extensive network of support, and attendance is improving because of excellent procedures to support it.

Where attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory, pupils are also often dissatisfied with their school, particularly in secondary schools (see Figure 3). However, while there is a strong correlation between high attendance and high levels of satisfaction, low attendance is not always reflected in low pupil satisfaction, especially in primary schools.

Figure 3. Pupils' satisfaction in schools where ethos, pupils' attitudes, behaviour or attendance is unsatisfactory or poor (percentage of schools inspected)
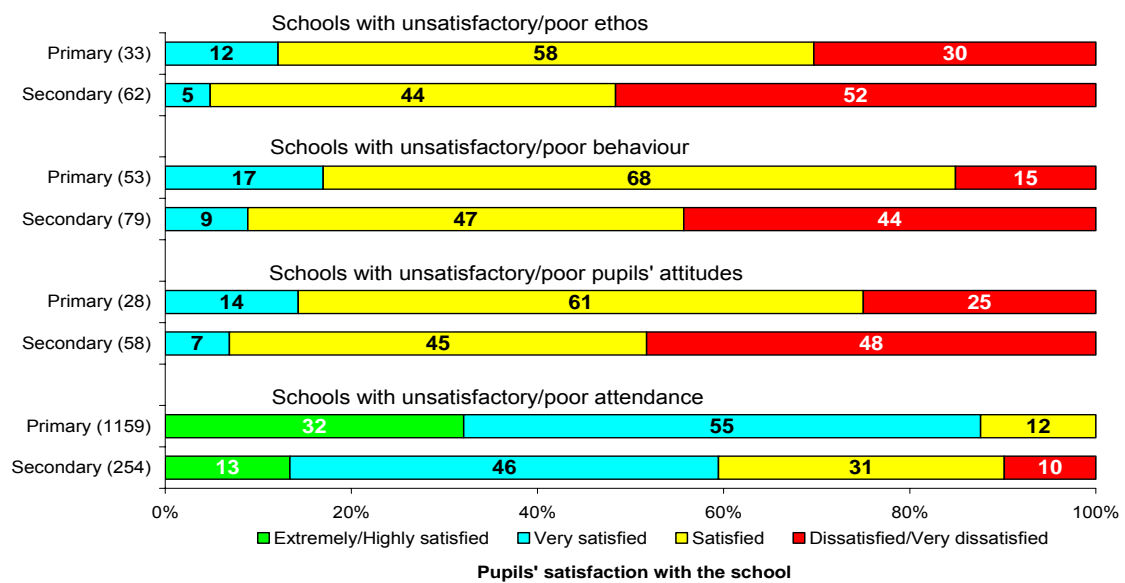
Pupils' satisfaction and characteristics of the school

There are variations in the levels of satisfaction across **types of school**. In the primary phase, for example, the proportion of schools where pupils are very content is highest among infant schools and lowest in junior schools (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Pupils' satisfaction by type of school (percentage of schools inspected)
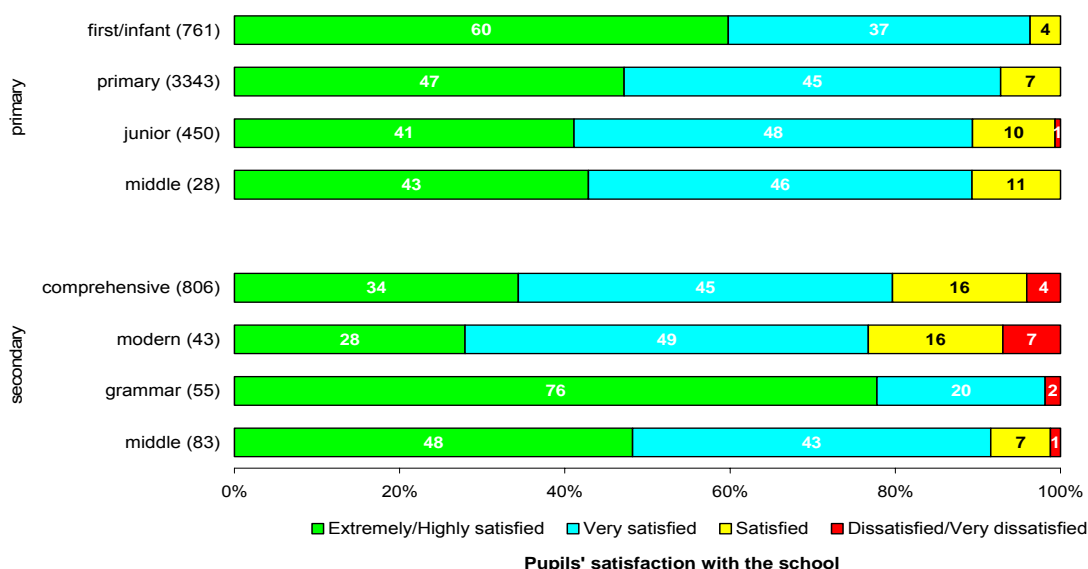
High levels of satisfaction are slightly more prevalent in **denominational** schools and **specialist** schools compared with others. One business and enterprise college in which satisfaction is high, for example, provides pupils with many additional opportunities, including exciting projects in local industry. For another school – a language college – tackling previously low standards in modern foreign languages resulted in a sense of pride among its students in the college.

Satisfaction is highest in schools where the **socio-economic circumstances** are the most favourable (see Figures 5 and 6). The proportion of schools where pupils are very satisfied decreases with increasing free school meal entitlement, although in schools in the most deprived circumstances, especially secondary schools, satisfaction is high.

Figure 5. Pupils' satisfaction in primary schools by free school meal (FSM) band
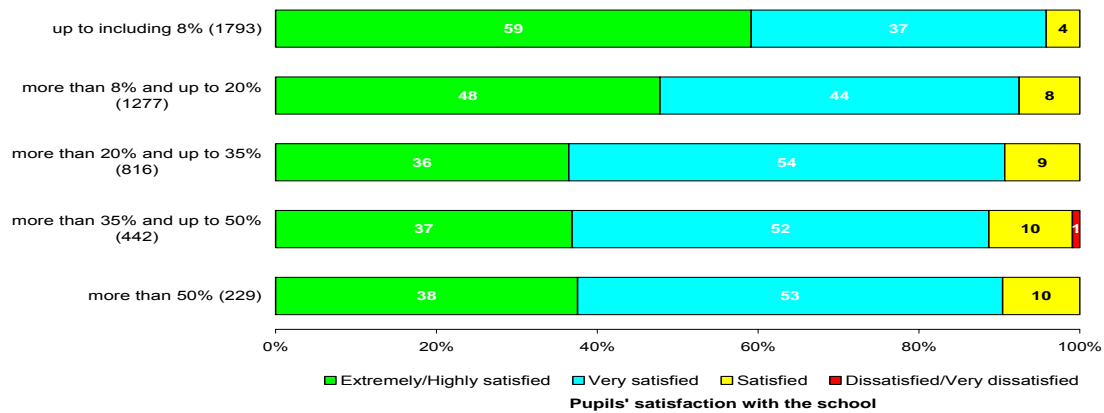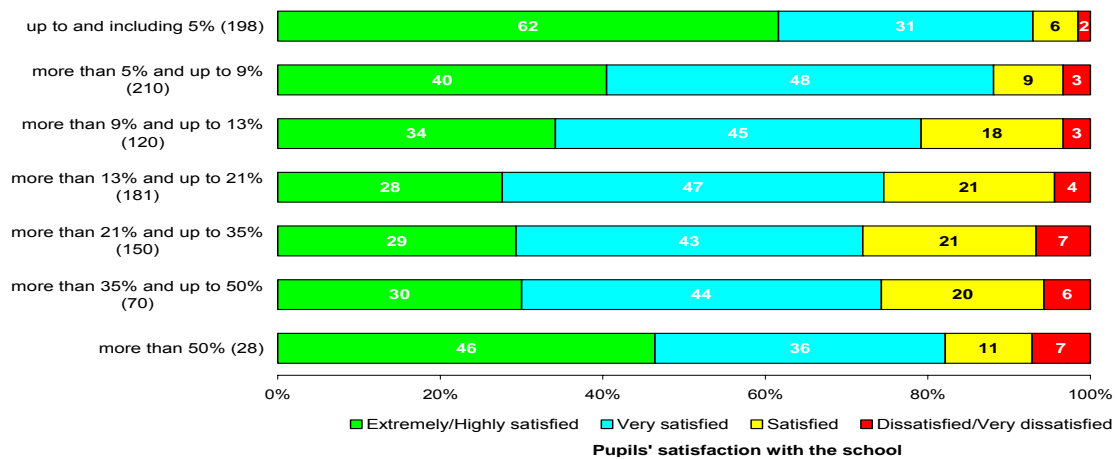(percentage of primary schools inspected)

FSM band	Extremely/Highly satisfied	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied
up to including 8% (1793)	59	37	4	
more than 8% and up to 20% (1277)	48	44	8	
more than 20% and up to 35% (816)	36	54	9	
more than 35% and up to 50% (442)	37	52	10	1
more than 50% (229)	38	53	10	

Pupils' satisfaction with the school

Figure 6. Pupils' satisfaction in secondary schools by free school meal (FSM) band
(percentage of secondary schools inspected)

FSM band	Extremely/Highly satisfied	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied
up to and including 5% (198)	62	31	6	2
more than 5% and up to 9% (210)	40	48	9	3
more than 9% and up to 13% (120)	34	45	18	3
more than 13% and up to 21% (181)	28	47	21	4
more than 21% and up to 35% (150)	29	43	21	7
more than 35% and up to 50% (70)	30	44	20	6
more than 50% (28)	46	36	11	7

Pupils' satisfaction with the school

Factors affecting pupils' satisfaction with their school

Pupils are happy in schools which provide well for them. In over 90% of schools judged to be highly effective by inspectors, pupils are also highly satisfied. However, pupils in ineffective secondary schools are more critical than those in ineffective primary schools (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to the overall effectiveness of the school (percentage of schools inspected)
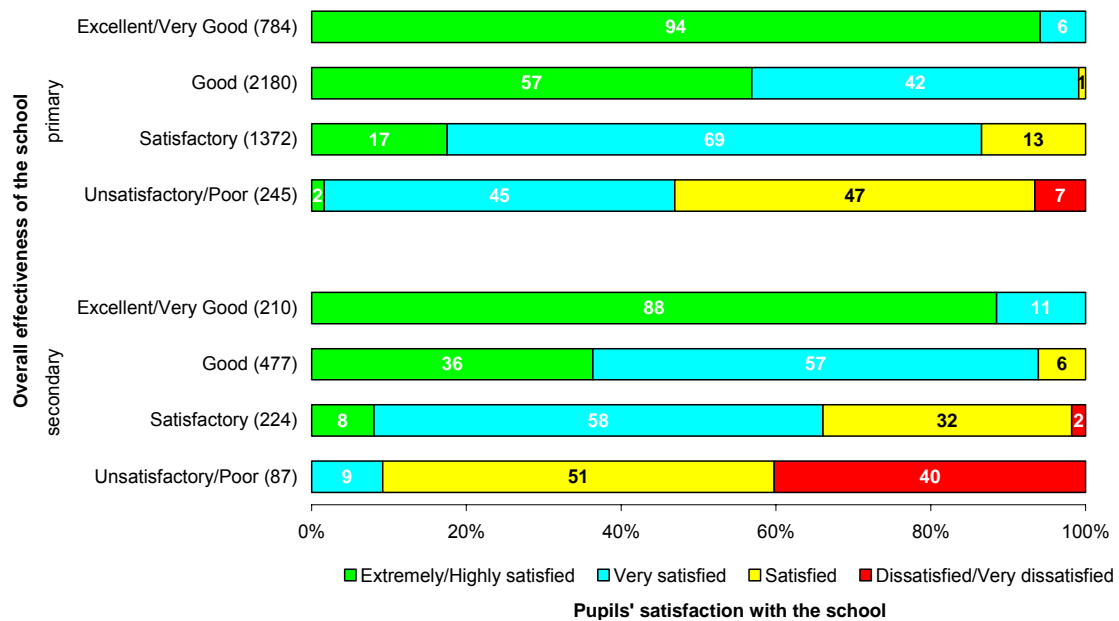
Figures 8 and 9 show the relationship between the overall effectiveness of schools and inspectors' judgements about pupils' satisfaction. Each data point represents an individual school inspected. Where pupils are dissatisfied, it is almost always the case that their schools are a cause for concern – their schools are either made subject to special measures (represented by red '◇') or have serious weaknesses (represented by blue '○'). This is most noticeable in primary schools. However, pupils' predisposition to be loyal to their school is evident; in a significant proportion of schools that are a cause for concern, mainly primary schools, inspectors judge that pupils are satisfied or even very satisfied with their school.

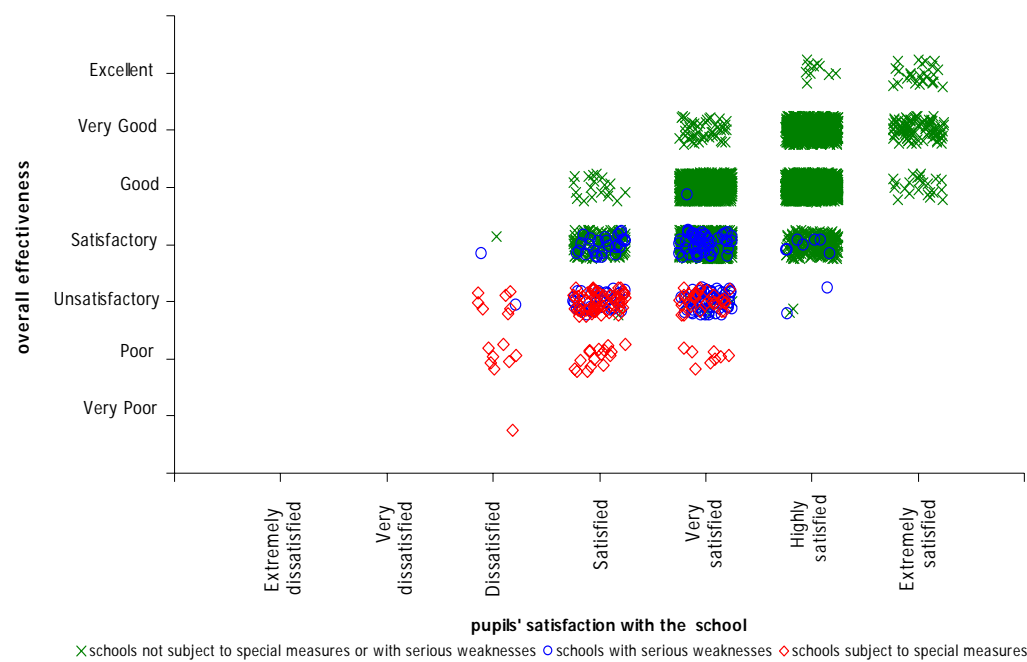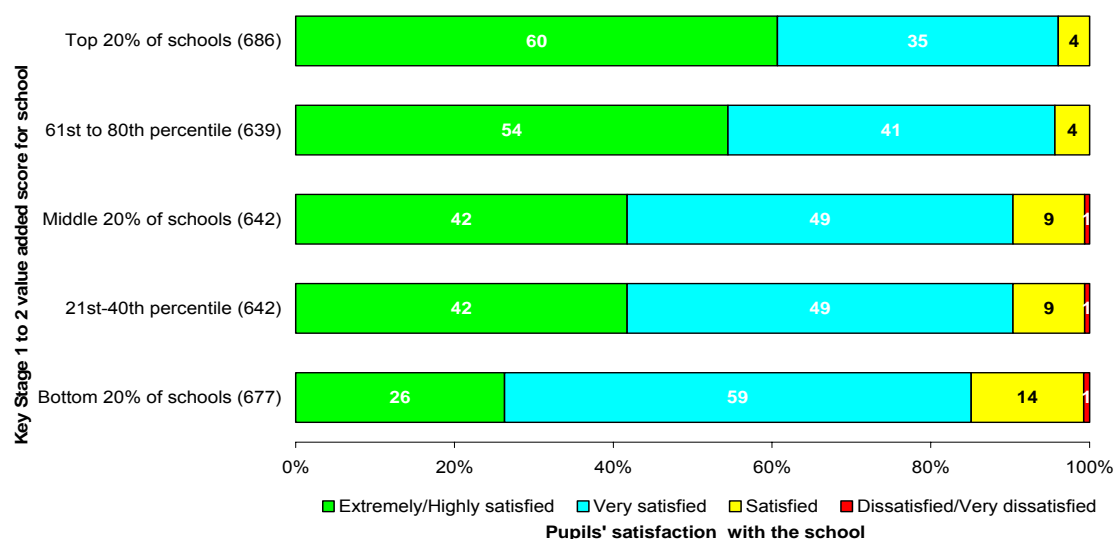## Figure 8. Pupils' satisfaction in primary schools in relation to the overall effectiveness of the school[4]

×schools not subject to special measures or with serious weaknesses ○schools with serious weaknesses ◇schools subject to special measures

Figure 9. Pupils' satisfaction in secondary schools in relation to the overall effectiveness of the school

×schools not subject to special measures or with serious weaknesses ○schools with serious weaknesses ◇schools subject to special measures
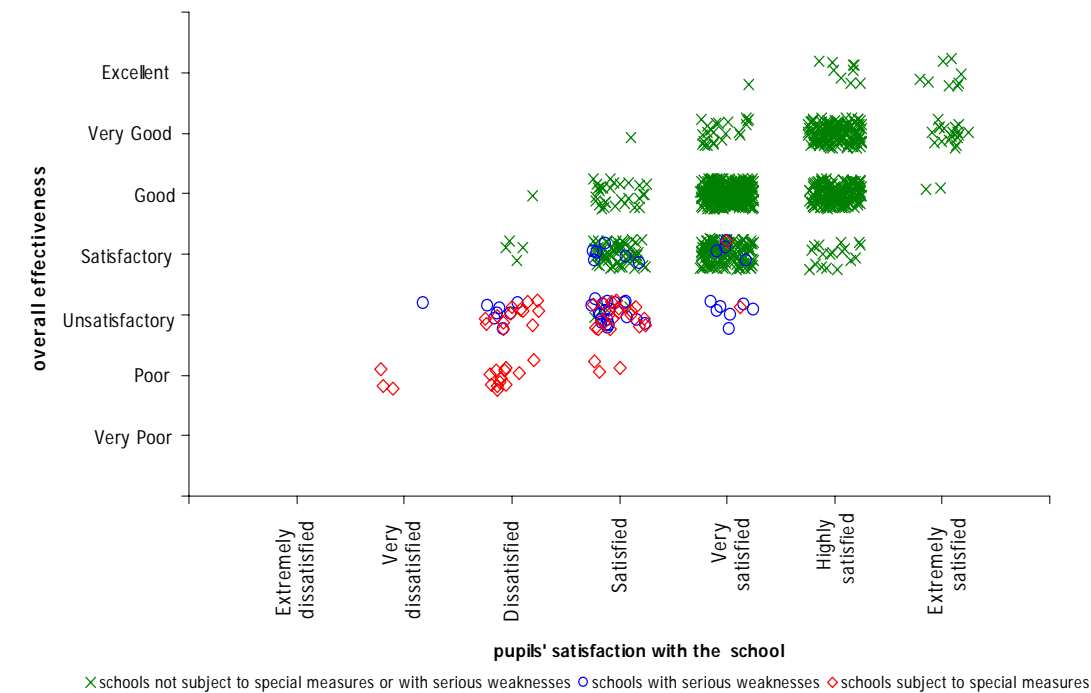
[4] Areas of the chart where the colour is 'solid' (green) are those where the data points are concentrated and merge.

Pupils are happy in schools where they achieve well. This is more marked in secondary schools than in primary schools. In schools where pupils make very good progress, satisfaction levels are very high. By the end of primary education, pupils in the schools making the most progress are over twice as likely to be highly or extremely satisfied with their school as those in the schools where they make least progress (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to Key Stage 1 to 2 value-added scores for primary schools (percentage of primary schools inspected)


In secondary schools which add most value, pupils are five times more likely to be highly or extremely satisfied than in the schools which add least value (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to Key Stage 2 to 4 value-added scores for secondary schools (percentage of secondary schools inspected)
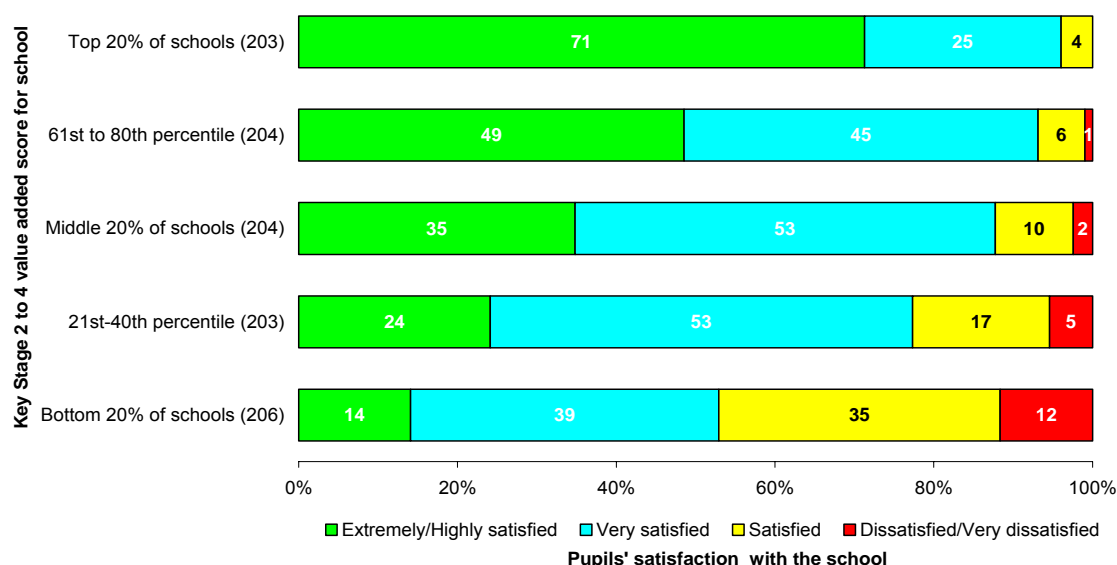
As might be expected, pupils' satisfaction is highest in those schools which actively seek and act on their views. In just over a third of the secondary schools, which do not adequately involve pupils, satisfaction levels are low (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to the extent to which the school involves pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views (percentage of schools inspected)
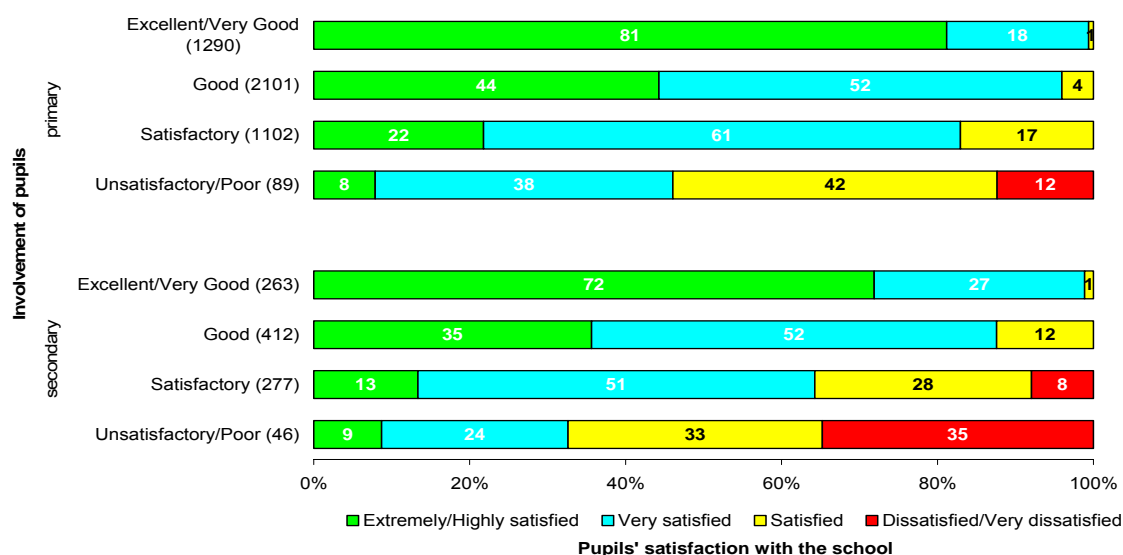
The following case study gives some insight into why, in pupils' eyes, taking their views into account is so significant.

Case study 2. Nursery and primary school (136 pupils) with specialist provision for pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (EBD). A very high proportion of pupils (68%) are entitled to free school meals.
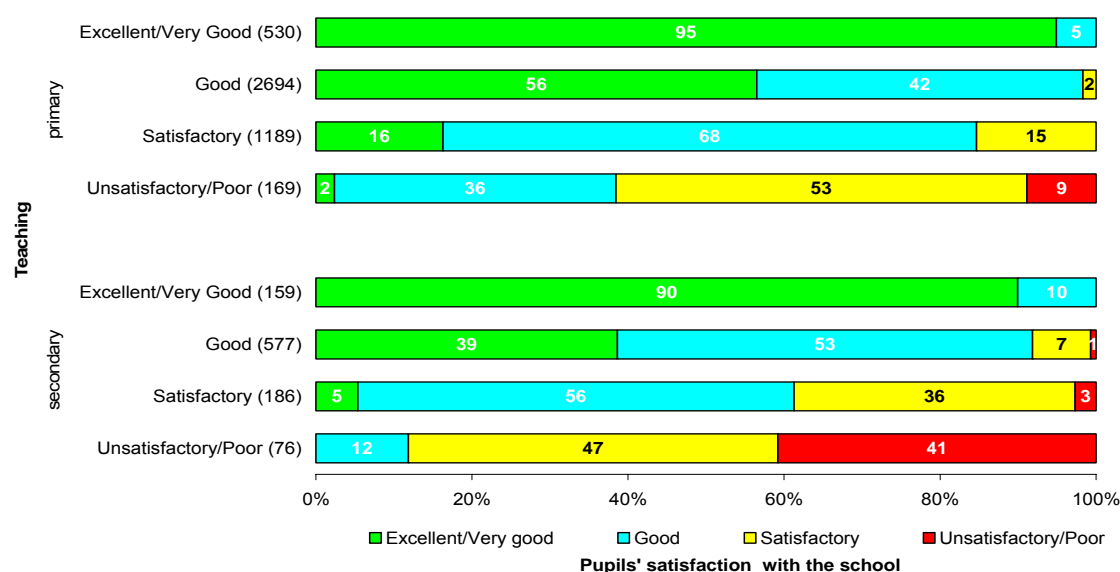
'Pupils clearly love coming to school and are very appreciative of all that the school offers … (they) find learning fun whilst at the same time they feel valued and state that this is a school where they feel listened to and respected …. They are particularly proud of their school council and feel that it makes a difference because suggestions are acted upon.'

'The inspirational leadership and management of the school by the headteacher, the very good and at times outstanding teaching and the very good attitudes of the pupils are key factors in why the pupils achieve so well …. All at the school strive for success in an excellent learning environment where the individuality of each pupil is recognised and celebrated.'

In this school, pupils were judged to be extremely satisfied.

The **quality of teaching** correlates strongly with how pupils feel about their school. In the vast majority of primary and secondary schools, good teaching is reflected in high levels of satisfaction. Pupils in secondary schools are more intolerant of unsatisfactory or poor teaching than children in primary schools (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to the quality of teaching
(percentage of schools inspected)

		Excellent/Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory/Poor

Teaching

primary

- Excellent/Very Good (530): 95 | 5
- Good (2694): 56 | 42 | 2
- Satisfactory (1189): 16 | 68 | 15
- Unsatisfactory/Poor (169): 2 | 36 | 53 | 9

secondary

- Excellent/Very Good (159): 90 | 10
- Good (577): 39 | 53 | 7 | 1
- Satisfactory (186): 5 | 56 | 36 | 3
- Unsatisfactory/Poor (76): 12 | 47 | 41

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Excellent/Very good   ■ Good   ■ Satisfactory   ■ Unsatisfactory/Poor

Pupils' satisfaction with the school

High quality and varied opportunities for **curriculum enrichment** also link strongly with levels of pupil satisfaction. For example, one large primary school provides an excellent range of exciting and innovative learning opportunities to give pupils a rich experience of the world. There is an interesting and extensive range of clubs, visits, visitors and other opportunities, as well as fruitful links with parents, other schools and the community, both near and far. Parents and pupils are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and appreciate the richness of the curriculum. In a secondary modern school, held in high regard by its pupils, there is an unusually rich provision for enhancing children's learning beyond the curriculum, notably in the arts and in sport which supports pupils' personal development and engages them fully in the life of the school.

Pupils' views also correlate with the quality of **leadership** of their school. In both primary and secondary schools, where leadership by the headteacher and by key staff is very good or excellent, pupils' satisfaction is also high. Unsatisfactory or poor leadership is more strongly reflected in pupils' dissatisfaction in secondary than primary schools (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to the leadership by the headteacher (percentage of schools)
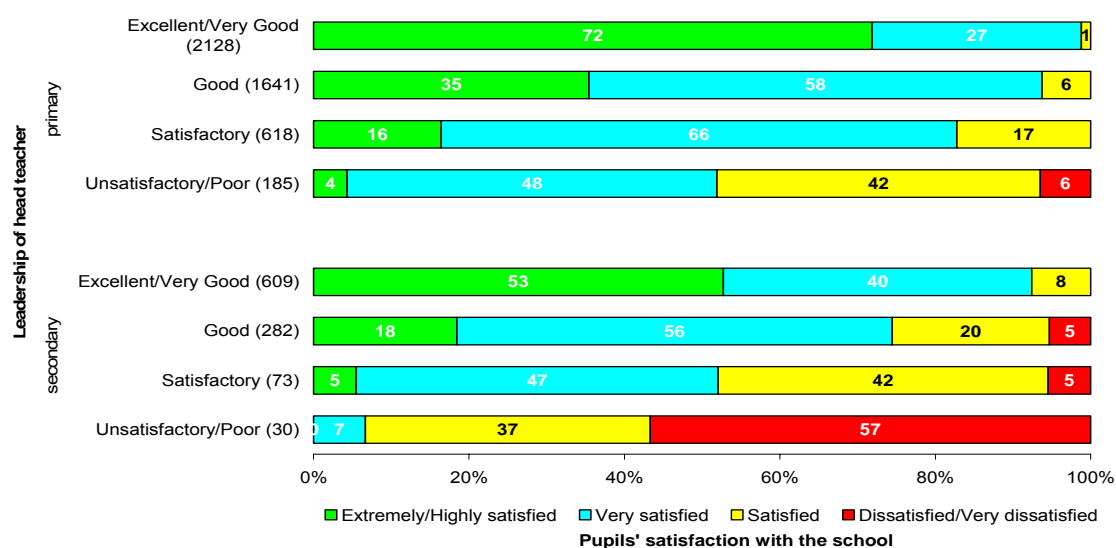
The following case studies illustrate how a combination of factors has influenced pupil satisfaction.

Case study 3. 7–11 junior school with 241 pupils. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (45%) is well above average.

'Parents and pupils have very mixed views of the school, but many have concerns about pupils' behaviour, bullying, unhappy children and the number of supply teachers used by the school …'

'The new headteacher is trying to put the school back on course, following the problems created by too many changes of headteacher in recent years.'

'Teaching is unsatisfactory, lacking sufficient rigour, inspiration, consistency and challenge.'

Pupils were judged to be dissatisfied with their school.

Inspectors agree with the views of pupils and parents and judge that it is a poor school and requires special measures. Achievement is unsatisfactory; teaching is not strong enough. In addition, unsatisfactory behaviour, attendance and punctuality slow down the learning of some pupils; leadership, management and governance are unsatisfactory; the partnership with parents is unsatisfactory. There are, however, some small improvements, notably rising standards in information and communication technology and good links with the community and other schools, which help to enrich pupils' education.

Case study 4. 11–16 mixed comprehensive school and specialist sports college with 842 pupils. A very high proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals (67%).

'Pupils enjoy being in school; they know that their views are important and they show pride and loyalty towards the school.'

'The great majority of pupils behave well and have very good attitudes to learning …. The school has very good procedures for promoting good behaviour, attendance, good relationships and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils.'

'The good provision for pupils' personal development is at the heart of all that it does.'

'The school has a genuine and highly developed sense of conscience towards the community it serves … and generally parents feel that the school has a deep and sensitive understanding of their cultures and their needs …. Parents from minority ethnic groups are supported very well and real efforts are made to ensure that they understand the work of the school.'

'The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is very well supported by other staff in management positions…'

'The particularly rich curriculum supports what is taught in the classroom…'

Inspectors judged that pupils in this school were highly satisfied.

The proportion of pupils for whom English is not the first language is very high and attainment on entry to the school is well below average. The school accordingly places great emphasis on and is very effective at provision for English as an additional language and special educational needs. It has strong links with its community. The great majority of parents are very satisfied with what the school provides. Although standards at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are below average, they are improving and pupils achieve well. Teaching and learning are good and often very good. The main weakness is that accommodation is unsatisfactory; the school is overcrowded with narrow corridors and poor specialist provision in some areas. Despite this, the school maintains its premises well.

Factors which correlate less strongly with levels of pupil satisfaction include the **quality of accommodation** and **resources** (see Figure 15). Where the school has high standards of accommodation and very good resources, these are reflected in high rates of satisfaction across the board, and particularly high satisfaction in secondary schools. As the quality of accommodation and resources decreases so do satisfaction rates. However, where accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory, the link is less clear; for example, in nearly a quarter of secondary schools where accommodation and resources were judged to be unsatisfactory or poor, pupils were still highly satisfied with their school.

Figure 15. Pupils' satisfaction in relation to the accommodation and resources in the school (percentage of schools inspected)
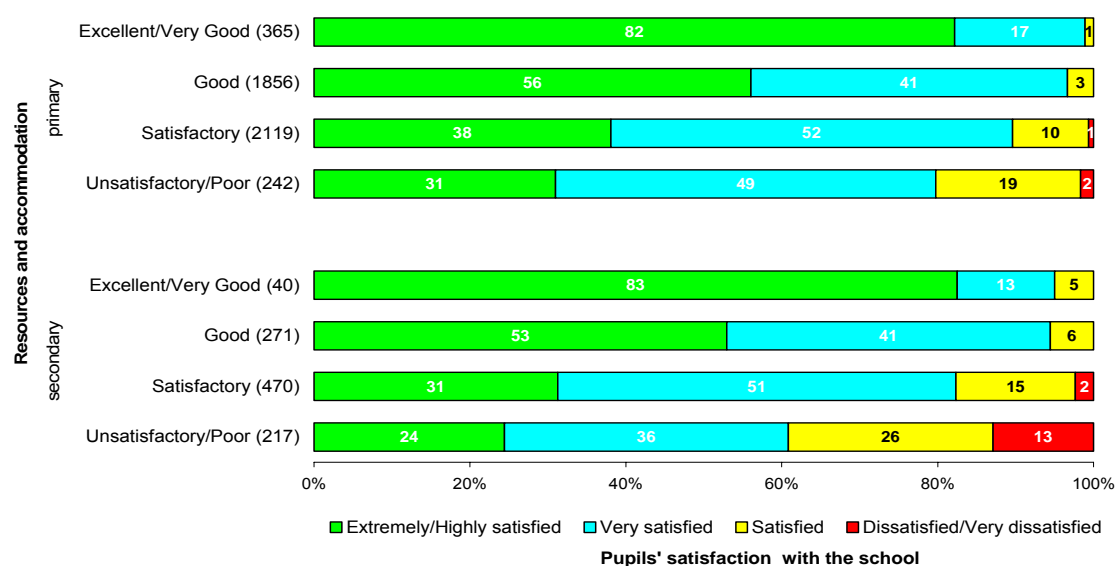
Conclusion

Pupils' satisfaction is a useful barometer for the overall quality of the school, particularly when their views are either very positive or very negative. However, pupils' pre-disposition to be loyal to their school means that in a significant proportion of ineffective schools, particularly primary schools, pupils remain satisfied. Pupils' views are often reflected in their attitudes and behaviour.

Many factors correlate strongly with pupils' satisfaction, ranging from, as expected, the extent to which schools value and act on their views and the extent of provision made through enrichment activities, to the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of leadership. The judgement that inspectors make on pupils' satisfaction levels is likely to be determined by, but is also likely to inform, other inspection judgements.