

# Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Study

SQW Consulting



# **Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Study**

**Report to the Department for Children, Schools and Families**

**ISBN Number: 978 1 84775 732 6**

**March 2010**

**The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.**

---

# Contents

---

Executive Summary .....	i
1: Introduction .....	1
2: Methodology and research process .....	4
3: Background .....	11
4: Lessons from the case studies .....	21
5: Findings from the national parental surveys .....	38
6: Findings from surveys of parents in five case study areas .....	59
7: Summary and conclusions .....	93
Annex A: Profile of case study areas.....	A-100
Annex B: Thematic case study questions.....	B-103

# Executive Summary

---

## Background

1. The Government aims to drive-up school standards, by empowering parents, creating diversity and choice and changing the role of local authorities from providers to commissioners and champions of parents and pupils.
2. The Children Act 2004 gave local authorities the lead role with local partners in setting up Children's Trusts, focusing on improving the well-being of children and young people and integrating services around their needs.
3. The Schools White Paper, Higher Standards, Better Schools for All, 2005, followed by the Education and Inspections Act 2006, set out an enhanced role for local authorities as strategic commissioners of schools in their areas. They were to:
  - become the champions of pupils and parents
  - promote choice, diversity and fair access to school places and school transport
  - map needs by looking at demographics, diversity and demand for children's services etc.
  - ensure a sufficient supply of places: let popular schools expand or federate and run competitions to open new schools
  - specify what new and replacement schools should provide and how they should work in partnership with other schools and services
  - help schools improve their standards, through the support and challenge of School Improvement Partners, and intervene in schools that are falling below expectations, and where necessary close schools that are poor or fail to improve.

## The study

4. In 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) appointed SQW Consulting with GfK NOP to undertake a study of the Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders.
5. The study was commissioned in order to measure the impact and effectiveness of the commissioning role in different circumstances (acknowledging the long time period over which the full effects of improvements may be realised); and to identify and analyse particular successful (and less successful) approaches to implementation of the commissioning role.
6. The Pathfinder projects explored different aspects of the commissioning process:

- **Understand** (Establish Demand) – covering data and engagement
- **Plan** – including provision of diversity of places and raising standards
- **Do** (Implementation) – support for schools, fair access and school services
- **Review** (Support and Challenge) – set targets, monitor and assess risk, and address and tackle underperformance.

7. Table 1 summarises the eight case study areas studied in detail in 2009 and the research topics explored in each area. There are seven Pathfinders and one additional area, Cambridgeshire, which was added as a site that had potential to provide useful lessons for other areas.

Table 1: Case studies and research themes

Case study areas with project titles	Research theme/s
<b>Bolton</b> <i>Engaging with potential new school providers</i>	Market development
<b>Devon</b> <i>Securing an arm's length education service for Devon schools</i>	Market development Relations between schools and Children's Trusts
<b>Essex</b> <i>Commissioning to improve school performance</i>	Building Schools for the Future
<b>Gloucestershire</b> <i>(1) Engaging with parents and measuring parental satisfaction</i> <i>(2) Supporting parent promoters for a new school</i>	Market Development Parental, student/pupil and community engagement
<b>Kent</b> <i>(1) Using a market segmentation tool to support fair access</i> <i>(2) Using a market segmentation tool to help schools understand the communities they serve</i>	Relations between schools and Children's Trusts The role of the commissioner in holding schools to account: challenge and intervention
<b>Poole</b> <i>Commissioning SEN services, linked to creation of a Trust Special School</i>	Building Schools for the Future
<b>Sheffield</b> <i>(1) Using Neighbourhood Commissions to consult the community on school diversity plans</i> <i>(2) Planning for changes in 14–19 responsibilities</i>	Market development Parental, student/pupil and community engagement The role of the commissioner in holding schools to account: challenge and intervention
<b>Cambridgeshire</b> <i>Not one of the original 16 Pathfinders</i>	Market development Relations between schools and Children's Trusts

Source: SQW Consulting

## Findings from case studies on approaches to commissioning

8. Table 2 sets out critical success factors and barriers to success identified in case study areas.

**Table 2: Summary of critical success factors and barriers to success in case study areas**

<b>Critical success factors</b>	<b>Problems and barriers to be aware of</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use and apply the DCSF guidance provided</li> <li>• See school commissioning as part of a wider commissioning process</li> <li>• A formal commitment to outcomes-based commissioning as a way of working</li> <li>• Agree geographically appropriate governance and management arrangements</li> <li>• Designate a (senior) lead officer to drive the process</li> <li>• Provision of a specific fund to finance the costs of changes, e.g. re-designs of job roles, mergers and re-configuration of professional teams</li> <li>• Appoint dedicated transition co-ordinators to work with schools, so changes are introduced in a smooth and managed fashion</li> <li>• Establish a strategic development team – to align BSF, PCP and wider strategies to join up capital and revenue programmes</li> <li>• Involve people with previous experience of commissioning, e.g. via Sure Start</li> <li>• Use external support to ensure there was local capacity in vital areas of expertise</li> <li>• Provide a development/support programme for staff</li> <li>• Get to grips with the legal issues associated with running schools competitions, including roles and potential conflicts of interest</li> <li>• Operate a dedicated forum for monitoring and then supporting and challenging the performance of schools causing concern</li> <li>• Provide a regular forum via which interested parties can come together to discuss issues and priorities, e.g. an annual conference</li> <li>• Maintain a forum via which the local authority can consult schools directly</li> <li>• Support geographic groupings of (secondary and primary) schools to share information, learning, good practice and act as a sounding board</li> <li>• Involve (representatives of) parents, headteachers and pupils in all stages of the commissioning process</li> <li>• Use the discipline brought about by bidding for beacon status</li> <li>• Understand and (where necessary) develop the supplier base</li> <li>• Use schools to 'champion' engagement</li> <li>• Manage expectations with regard to the BSF programme – in terms of what and when it can deliver</li> <li>• Operate effective risk management processes to keep costs under control</li> <li>• Use commissioning to 'squeeze out' of the system poor decision-making practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different guidance and approaches to commissioning from DCSF and Department of Health concerns and confuses partners at the local level</li> <li>• Different interpretations of what 'commissioning' means, e.g. some partners see it as a synonym for procurement, where as others see it as a broader process involving setting priorities, making the in-house/outourcing decision as a means of bringing change etc.</li> <li>• Different procurement rules and processes across agencies can hinder joint-commissioning, e.g. different practices regarding the duration and renewal of contracts between NHS and local government partners</li> <li>• Lack of political support for all or parts of the agenda can limit progress, e.g. political opposition to any non-local authority schools limits market development</li> <li>• Lack of resources to ensure commissioning process and the transition to commissioning is properly resourced</li> <li>• Where partners operate in a number of local authorities e.g. via sub-regional arrangements, and local authorities have different approaches to commissioning, relationships can be complicated and confusing</li> <li>• The development of new schools is often linked to new housing developments, i.e. where there is no or only a limited community to consult, making it difficult to engage and understand parents' needs</li> <li>• When school rolls are falling, schools can compete with each other – making it hard to promote collaboration</li> <li>• The separate operating arrangements of Academies can lead to a limited flow of information, making the commissioning process more difficult, due to greater uncertainty on supply and demand issues</li> <li>• Large local authorities face many different types of issues in different areas, which may require discrete arrangements and strategies to be pursued in different parts of the same local authority district – complicating arrangements and communications to stakeholders</li> <li>• Local authorities have multiple obligations and objectives, e.g. in terms of community relations and wider service delivery, which means opposition to school closures due to poor performance and/or falling rolls can make delivery of purely educational objectives difficult</li> </ul>

*Source: SQW Consulting from Pathfinder case study fieldwork 2009*

9. The case studies highlighted particular issues:

- school commissioning has to be part of wider governance, management and commissioning processes
  - school commissioning should be treated as part of a local authority's core activities
  - leadership needs to be exercised by a range of partners, in particular in establishing and articulating a clear set of outcomes to be sought, so that local resources are used effectively
  - school commissioning needs to be embedded in the wider commissioning processes operating in a local authority area, which are often driven by the 'personalisation' agenda and/or the devolution of decision-making to local areas
  
- parents should be involved in all stages of the commissioning process
  - local authorities need to consider where, when and how parents can be engaged in commissioning – as a means of gathering information and of building ownership and choice into local arrangements
  
- data need to be collected and analysed in a timely fashion, in order to inform decision-making
  - local authorities need to understand demographic changes and develop scenarios of how populations may change over time, as part of their commissioning process
  - partnership and cross-departmental working within local authorities is required in order to understand how family and household patterns are changing and where and when new demands may arise
  - performance data – at school and at a wider, area-based level – is important for commissioners in engagement, planning, implementation and challenging and supporting schools – traffic light systems (highlighting performance on the basis of red, amber or green) help to monitor progress and to inform decisions on the provision of support and interventions
  - local authorities need to consider how performance data sets relate to informing parents about their options.

## Findings from parental surveys

10. In addition to fieldwork in case study areas, the study also carried out parental surveys, in order to track the impact of changes over time. The surveys were conducted in two waves (2008 and 2009). In each wave, there was a national sample of 2,000 parents in England and local authority samples of 500 parents in each of five case study areas.<sup>1</sup> The surveys were structured on the basis of the need to understand:
- **the factors affecting parents' choice of school** – e.g. academic results; location; the needs of the child; the school's reputation; and whether siblings attended the school, it was seen as a 'good overall school', it was judged to offer a 'good overall education'
  - **the process of selecting and getting into a school** – including information on the schools available, the application process, admissions criteria and deadlines
  - **parents' views on choice and the diversity of provision and partnership working** – such as the availability of 'good' state schools, the role of tactics in making choices, parental attitudes towards diversity of schools and the need for diversity locally, as well as awareness of Academies and Trust schools and views on the different types of partners involved in schools.
11. The survey found only limited changes in the views of parents in the case study areas:
- all Pathfinders saw an increase in awareness of Academies and Trust schools – except Kent, which already had a high level of awareness
  - Gloucestershire showed a significant increase in the proportion of parents saying they had sufficient information to make an informed decision
  - Bolton experienced a reduction in the proportion of parents saying they did not receive enough information on the application deadline
  - Bolton, Essex and Kent all saw increased awareness of Academies in the area – awareness of Trusts saw less progress, with a drop in awareness of Trusts in Essex
  - Bolton and Sheffield saw falls in the proportion of parents who were favourable towards Academies, Bolton also saw an increase in those with an unfavourable attitude, as did Gloucestershire
  - Essex saw a decline in the proportion of parents unfavourable to Academies and Sheffield saw a reduction in the proportion of parents unfavourable to Trusts schools.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bolton, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent and Sheffield.



12. More generally, the surveys found, for those using state education, proximity to the school was by far the most important factor in determining the choice of school. The extent to which this can affect the drive to improve standards was illustrated by case study experience of parental opposition to the closure of a failing school that was closer to home than better performing alternatives.
13. Academic performance was another important factor in choosing a school – it was more likely to be cited by upper middle class and middle class parents than by other social classes, as was overall reputation. On the other hand, class size was cited by a relatively small proportion of parents.
14. The parental surveys showed that while there was broad support for a diversity of school types, there was space for the case for particular types of school to be made as attitudes vary from place to place.
15. The surveys also found variations in the popularity of different types of organisations getting involved in schools – faith groups, independent schools and business were on the whole less popular than parents groups, colleges and universities.
16. Thus, the findings from the parental surveys pose challenges for the choice agenda:
  - 'location is king' but is not a factor than can be easily altered
  - there is parental support for variety of choices, but it is conditional on the types of options available and the types of partners involved
  - sometimes local authorities may need to challenge the views and raise aspirations of parents, as part of efforts to improve overall school performance.

# 1: Introduction

---

- 1.1 The provision of good schools is an essential local service that assists every child to realise his or her potential. Furthermore, education policy and practice can be controversial. From parent-promoted schools; to school closures in rural areas (with wider social consequences on local communities); to pressure on school places and teaching resources due to unanticipated increases in pupil numbers; to allocation of scarce places in 'good' schools by lottery (as a means of ensuring fairness); to the introduction Academies to replace underperforming schools; to the Building Schools for the Future programme – education is a hot political topic.
- 1.2 This report does not address the 'politics' of commissioning. It looks at the processes involved in commissioning schools (both school places and schools to improve). It reviews data on what drives parental choice and parents' views on the choices available to them. It also looks at what local authorities have done in order to understand the factors affecting demand and supply of quality education in their areas.

## Legislative and policy background

- 1.3 The Children Act 2004 gave local authorities the lead role with local partners in setting up Children's Trusts, focusing on improving the well-being of children and young people and integrating services around their needs.
- 1.4 The Schools White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, 2005, followed by the Education and Inspections Act 2006, set out an enhanced role for local authorities as strategic commissioners of schools in their areas. Local authorities are expected to be powerful champions of parents and pupils and the provision of new schools open to greater competition. The 2006 Act placed local authorities under a duty to promote choice, diversity and fair access and gave them new powers to help in their commissioning role.
- 1.5 Following on from this, DCSF funded 16 Pathfinder projects to explore various aspects of local authority commissioning of schools. These were relatively small projects (of between £50,000 and £150,000) aimed at developing learning and understanding on different aspects of commissioning activity. The programme began in July 2007 and ended in April 2008.

## Aims of the research

- 1.6 In 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) appointed SQW Consulting with GfK NOP to undertake a study of the Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders.

- 1.7 The study was commissioned in order to measure the impact and effectiveness of the commissioning role in different circumstances (acknowledging the long time period over which the full effects of improvements may be realised); and to identify and analyse particular successful (and less successful) approaches to implementation of the commissioning role.
- 1.8 The Pathfinder projects explored different aspects of the ‘commissioning process’:
- Understand (Establish Demand) – data and engagement
  - Plan – covering provision of diversity of places and raising standards
  - Do (Implementation) – support for schools, fair access and school services
  - Review (Support and Challenge) – set targets, monitor and assess risk and address and tackle underperformance.
- 1.9 The research was to look particularly at the relationships between local authorities, schools and parents. It was also to provide lessons on commissioning from selected case study areas (10 in 2008 and eight in 2009). The lessons were developed using consultees’ views on the overall commissioning process, critical success factors and barriers to success. It was also to provide findings from two waves of parental surveys in five case study areas, along with a national control sample from England to enable comparison between case study-specific changes and wider national patterns in England. The surveys were carried out in order to understand parents’ views of the factors affecting choice and their satisfaction with the choices on offer, and to see whether these views changed in case study areas, relative to changes in England.
- 1.10 The brief did not require a value for money judgement; therefore, the case studies do not look in detail at matters of economy, efficiency and effectiveness – the Pathfinder Programme was a relatively small element of local authorities spending on the commissioning process and authorities were not expected to undertake detailed financial reporting on their activities.

## Structure of this report

- 1.11 The report has the following chapters:
- **Chapter 2: Methodology and research process** – summarises the research questions, the issues to be addressed and the work that was carried out.
  - **Chapter 3: Background and context** – describes the policy landscape against which the Pathfinders operated, the different types of schools operating in England and the basic understanding of the commissioning process that operated over the lifetime of the study.
  - **Chapter 4: Lessons from the case study areas** – sets out practice from eight case study areas and lessons learned with regard to critical success factors and barriers to commissioning.

- **Chapter 5: Findings from national parental surveys** – summarises the findings from two waves of the parental survey (one in early 2008, the other in late 2009), to introduce the issues associated with parents' views on the process of selecting schools and to provide a point of comparison for the parental surveys in case study areas.
- **Chapter 6: Findings from surveys of parents in five case study areas** – provides an analysis of findings and variations between the two waves of the parental survey in five case study areas, noting significant changes relative to patterns in England.
- **Chapter 7: Conclusions** – reviews the main findings in relation to the lessons learned about the commissioning process, evidence of changes and factors affecting parents' views of the process of selecting schools.

## 2: Methodology and research process

---

- 2.1 This section provides a short chronology of research activity and an outline of the methodology.

### Research methodology

- 2.2 The research was developed on the basis of understanding the preferences and motivations of parents and children (as ‘users’ of education) and local authorities (as commissioners of schools).<sup>2</sup> This understanding was developed taking account of local context; and the four elements of the commissioning process: Understand (Establish Demand), Plan, Do (Implementation) and Review (Support and Challenge).

### *Scoping work*

- 2.3 In order to understand the context and priorities in the case study areas, the study team reviewed relevant documents, including Annual Performance Assessments, Ofsted inspection reports, Joint Area Reviews and Children and Young People’s Plans. The documents were reviewed in relation to the ‘Every Child Matters’ themes (Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-being). The team also reviewed wider literature on school types, parental choice, and guidance on commissioning that went beyond the education agenda.
- 2.4 Baselines of the areas were also produced. These drew on secondary data (such as the Office of the Schools Commissioner, DCSF and the authorities themselves) and the findings from the parental surveys. They were periodically updated to see if contextual conditions had changed. Annex A provides a brief profile of the areas.
- 2.5 The study team reviewed these sources of literature and data over the course of the project, in order to ensure the study was informed by changes in the literature, policy and guidance and any changes the case study areas. This report does not recount the outcomes of each update – it would be wearing on the reader and in most cases change was limited.

### *Case study approach*

- 2.6 Ten case study areas were visited between November 2007 and January 2008 (Table 2-1). Consultations were carried out with a range of local stakeholders, including local authority officers, school governors and local councillors etc. The study team also observed local consultation events where this was possible. Summaries of case study areas were produced in terms of their socio-economic

---

<sup>2</sup> Other research commissioned by DCSF dealt with the views of ‘new entrants’ or potential providers of school places.

profile and educational attainment levels; the local education system, e.g. grammar or comprehensive etc; local priorities for education; evidence on demand and supply of school places and parental satisfaction; approaches to commissioning; and activity associated with Pathfinder status. The reports were produced on the basis that they were confidential working papers and not for publication; but would inform this report – where pathfinders are named and examples cited, each case study has had the opportunity to review and amend the relevant text.

2.7 One of the research issues raised as part of the fieldwork was that the Pathfinder projects did not operate in isolation; in most cases they formed part of a wider programme of activities. Therefore, any understanding of their impact was likely to be based on how they added to or improved upon the commissioning processes that were already operating in case study areas, rather than on any directly traceable impact on satisfaction, standards and attainment levels based on the Pathfinder project alone.

2.8 A second round of fieldwork took place in 2009 in eight case study areas. In contrast to the first round of fieldwork, the case studies were conducted on the basis of specific themes or issues, rather than attempting to cover all issues in all areas. Cambridgeshire County Council was included even though it had not been a Pathfinder because DCSF had a specific interest in its market development and school competition activity. The themes for review were discussed and agreed with the DCSF. They were:

- Market development
- Parents, student/pupil and community engagement
- Building Schools for the Future
- Relationships between schools and Children's Trusts
- Role of commissioning in holding schools to account: challenge and intervention.

2.9 Consultation questions, based on each theme were developed (Annex B). The purposes of the thematic questions were:

- to understand the local authority's approach to activity on the particular theme
- to discover how the local authority's approach had changed, e.g. what was different to its activity 2-3 years ago?
- to highlight 'what worked' and the factors affecting success
- to identify lessons learned within the themes
- to collate material to provide illustrations of what has been done.

### ***Parental satisfaction survey***

2.10 A parental satisfaction survey was conducted in two waves. It consisted of a national sample of 2,000 parents in England and local authority-level samples of 500 parents in each of five case study areas. The surveys were structured on the basis of the need to understand:

- **The factors affecting parents' choice of school** – e.g. academic results, location, needs of the child, reputation/recommendation, siblings at the school, good overall school, good overall education – and to what extent these factors varied between users of private and state sectors.
- **The process of selecting and getting into a school** – including information on the schools available, the application process, admissions criteria and deadlines.
- **Parents' views on choice and the diversity of provision and partnership working** – such as the availability of 'good' state schools, the role of pragmatism or tactics in making choices, parental attitudes towards diversity of schools and need for diversity locally, as well as awareness of Academies and Trust Schools and views on the different types of partners involved in schools.

2.11 For the national sample, the first wave took place between 7 and 25 January 2008. One thousand nine hundred and ninety nine parents and guardians of children aged 4 to 16 years of age living and attending schools in England were interviewed by telephone. A random digit dial (RDD) sample of telephone numbers was screened in order to identify households containing eligible parents and guardians. Where a parent/guardian had more than one child in the 4 to 16 years age-range who was attending school, one of the eligible children was selected by the interviewer and questions were asked about the parent's experiences in relation to that particular child. Quotas were set by Government Office Region (GOR), age band of child, social class<sup>3</sup> and number of adults in the household, in order to ensure the representativeness of the parents interviewed. The survey data have been weighted by GOR, age band of child and social class. The second wave of the survey was carried out using the same approach and methodology and it took place between 14 October and 17 November 2009. The second wave covered 2,000 parents.

2.12 When comparing the findings from the two waves of the control sample of parents in England, changes of +/- 2.0 percentage points or greater are significant at the 95% confidence level for findings around the 10% or 90% level (e.g. from 10% to 12% or from 90% to 92%). For findings around the 50% level, changes of +/- 3.1 percentage points or more are significant.

---

<sup>3</sup> Social classification uses the following categories: A – upper middle class – higher managerial, administrative or professional; B – middle class – intermediate managerial, administrative or professional; C1 – lower middle class – supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional; C2 – skilled working class – skilled manual workers; D – working class – semi and unskilled manual workers; E – those at the lowest level of subsistence – state pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers.

- 2.13 Surveys of parents in five pathfinder areas were also conducted following the same methodology and approach. The survey of Bolton covered 501 parents in 2008 and 500 parents in 2009, whilst the survey of Essex covered 499 and 504 respectively. The surveys of Gloucestershire, Kent and Sheffield each interviewed 500 parents in both waves.
- 2.14 Five case studies were surveyed, rather than all 10 of the Round One case studies, because in some instances the nature of the project indicated no impact in parental satisfaction could occur, e.g. Lincolnshire had a research project on implications of school commissioning in an area operating selective education. When comparing findings from the local authority-level surveys (of 500 parents) changes of +/- 4.1 percentage points or more are significant for findings around the 10% or 90% levels (at the 95% confidence level). While for changes to be significant around the 50% level they have to be +/- 6.2 percentage points or more (with 95% confidence).<sup>4</sup>

### Chronology of research activity

- 2.15 The work began in late 2007 with the development of research tools; selection of case studies (in consultation with DCSF); and scoping work that looked at the policy background and material from selected case study areas. Table 2-1 illustrates the original 16 Pathfinders, the 10 case study areas that were selected for review in 2008 and the eight areas selected for review in 2009.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.16 The first round of fieldwork in the 10 case study areas took place between November 2007 and April 2008. Short working summaries of findings were produced in February 2008.<sup>6</sup> The first parental satisfaction survey took place over the same period.
- 2.17 Following a call around of case study areas in autumn 2008, DCSF and the study team discussed next steps – taking account of different rates of progress in case study areas, willingness/capacity to continue participation and research issues that appeared to be of importance. Following these discussions, it was agreed that the second round of fieldwork should focus on particular themes associated with the commissioning of schools (rather than the area-based case study approach adopted in 2007-08). The themes were selected on the basis of ones that appeared to be important to local authorities and/or had the potential to provide new evidence on 'what works'. Table 2-2 sets out the themes pursued in each case study area, in addition to general views on school commissioning. The second round of fieldwork

---

<sup>4</sup> More up-to-date data on socio-economic make-up in the case study areas became available between the 2008 and 2009 surveys, GfK NOP applied this information to both sets of data to ensure consistency between the two surveys.

<sup>5</sup> Changes to case study areas reflect pragmatic choices based on a number of constraints which included the fact that areas were not obliged to take part on the second phase of the evaluation, i.e. once DCSF funding ceased areas did not have to participate in the study. Furthermore, some areas experienced staff changes which limited their capacity to participate further in the study; and some projects were deemed unlikely to yield further learning opportunities, e.g. where projects were research related. Cambridgeshire was added as a likely source of good practice based on DCSF's experience of school place commissioning more widely.

<sup>6</sup> A short profile of the 10 case study areas developed at the start of the study is provided in Annex A.



took place between March and July 2009. The second parental satisfaction survey ran in November-December 2009, with results reported mid-January 2010.

Table 2-1: Original Pathfinders and selected case studies

The 16 Pathfinder authorities and project titles	The 10 Case studies for 2008	The eight case studies for 2009
<b>Bolton</b> <i>Engaging with potential new school providers</i>	<b>Bolton</b>	<b>Bolton</b>
<b>Brent</b> <i>Community consultation to shape future schools strategy</i>	<b>Brent</b>	
<b>Devon</b> <i>Securing an arm's length education service for Devon schools</i>	<b>Devon</b>	<b>Devon</b>
<b>Ealing</b> <i>Assessing commissioning knowledge and skills in schools and the local authority</i>		
<b>Essex</b> <i>Commissioning to improve school performance</i>	<b>Essex</b>	<b>Essex</b>
<b>Gloucestershire</b> <i>(1) Engaging with parents and measuring parental satisfaction</i> <i>(2) Supporting parent promoters for a new school</i>	<b>Gloucestershire</b>	<b>Gloucestershire</b>
<b>Kent</b> <i>(1) Using a market segmentation tool to support fair access</i> <i>(2) Using a market segmentation tool to help schools understand the communities they serve</i>	<b>Kent</b>	<b>Kent</b>
<b>Kingston</b> <i>Preparing for Building Schools for the Future and Primary Capital Programme</i>	<b>Kingston</b>	
<b>Kirklees</b> <i>Supporting a Muslim school to join the maintained sector</i>		
<b>Leicestershire</b> <i>Improving the effectiveness of School Improvement Partners</i>		
<b>Lewisham</b> <i>Exploring the scope for federations</i>		
<b>Lincolnshire</b> <i>Exploring commissioning in the context of selective education</i>	<b>Lincolnshire</b>	

The 16 Pathfinder authorities and project titles	The 10 Case studies for 2008	The eight case studies for 2009
<b>North Tyneside</b> <i>Planning a Trust model to bring in new partners and raise local skills levels</i>	<b>North Tyneside</b>	
<b>Poole</b> <i>Commissioning SEN services, linked to creation of a Trust Special School</i>		<b>Poole</b>
<b>Sheffield</b> <i>(1) Using Neighbourhood Commissions to consult the community on school diversity plans (2) Planning for changes in 14–19 responsibilities</i>	<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>Sheffield</b>
<b>Shropshire</b> <i>Undertaking a review of primary school places</i>		
		<b>Cambridgeshire</b>
<i>Source: SQW Consulting</i>		

Table 2-2: Case study areas in 2009 and the research themes covered

Case study area	Research theme/s
<b>Bolton</b> <i>Engaging with potential new school providers</i>	Market development
<b>Devon</b> <i>Securing an arm's length education service for Devon schools</i>	Market development Relations between schools and Children's Trusts
<b>Essex</b> <i>Commissioning to improve school performance</i>	Building Schools for the Future
<b>Gloucestershire</b> <i>(1) Engaging with parents and measuring parental satisfaction (2) Supporting parent promoters for a new school</i>	Market Development Parental, student/pupil and community engagement
<b>Kent</b> <i>(1) Using a market segmentation tool to support fair access (2) Using a market segmentation tool to help schools understand the communities they serve</i>	Relations between schools and Children's Trusts The role of the commissioner in holding schools to account: challenge and intervention
<b>Poole</b> <i>Commissioning SEN services, linked to creation of a Trust Special School</i>	Building Schools for the Future
<b>Sheffield</b> <i>(1) Using Neighbourhood Commissions to consult the community on school diversity plans (2) Planning for changes in 14–19 responsibilities</i>	Market development Parental, student/pupil and community engagement The role of the commissioner in holding schools to account: challenge and intervention
<b>Cambridgeshire</b>	Market development Relations between schools and Children's Trusts

*Source: SQW Consulting*

2.18 This chapter has provided a summary of the research activity and methodology. The next section provides the Background to the work.

## 3: Background

---

- 3.1 This section provides a summary of institutional arrangements and national policy in England, and a discussion of ‘commissioning’ as understood in the case study areas, in order to assist understanding and interpretation of the report.

### Institutional context

#### ***Types of school***

- 3.2 There are a number of different types of school operating in England (Table 3-1). The variety points to a certain amount of choice in terms of ownership, funding, management and control and specialist functions.

#### ***Partnerships and stakeholders***

- 3.3 A number of institutions and partnership arrangements currently operate in the provision of primary and secondary education. They operate at national; regional; sub-regional; local; and, what might be best termed, neighbourhood levels. The degree of change and the level of interactions between the different institutions produce a level of complexity that affects the different aspects of commissioning and is picked up in the case studies.
- 3.4 Table 3-2 highlights some of the main institutions identified in the research process – it is not a comprehensive list, e.g. it excludes reference to trade unions and professional bodies/associations, Teacher Development Agency, School Teachers Review Body etc; as these were not raised in consultations with case studies. As such it should be viewed as a tool to assist the reader when reviewing case study findings, rather than as a guide to all stakeholders operating in the field of education.

Table 3-1: The characteristics of the different school types in England

	<b>Characteristics/ Type of school</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Education Funding</b>	<b>Mgmt &amp; control</b>	<b>National curriculum</b>	<b>Inspection</b>	<b>Specialist function</b>
<b>Schools funded and managed by LA</b>	<b>Community schools and Community special schools</b>	LA	LA	Governing body but overall responsibility with LA	Yes	Ofsted	Community engagement and also education for students with SEN
	<b>Voluntary-controlled schools</b>	Voluntary or religious groups	LA	Governing body but overall responsibility with LA	Yes	Ofsted and in faith schools also religious body	Can be a faith school
	<b>Maintained boarding schools</b>	LA	LA	LA	Yes	Ofsted	Provide accommodation
	<b>Pupil Referral Units</b>	LA	LA	LA	Yes	Ofsted	Continuous education under unusual circumstances
	<b>Secure Units</b>	LA	LA	LA	Varies across units	Ofsted	Education services for Youth Service
<b>Independently managed but state funded schools</b>	<b>Foundation and Trust</b>	Voluntary organisations, Charitable Trusts, religious groups or private governing body	LA	Governing body. If a Trust (Foundation with a Foundation) then the Trust may appoint the majority of governors)	Yes	Ofsted	Can be a faith school Foundation special schools provide SEN education
	<b>Voluntary-aided schools</b>	Voluntary organisations such as religious groups	LA with contribution from VO towards capital costs	Governing body with the VO being able to appoint the majority	Yes	Ofsted and in faith schools also religious body	Can be a faith school
	<b>Academies</b>	Public-private partnership	DCSF or LA for initial capital funding and DCSF for running costs	Governing body (Academy Trustees) with the sponsor being able to appoint the majority	Yes in Maths, English and ICT	Ofsted	Can have various, e.g. religion
	<b>City Technology College</b>	LA and private	LA with contribution from sponsor towards capital costs	Governing body with the sponsor being able to appoint the majority	Yes, vocational qualifications	Ofsted	Science and technology subjects
<b>Ind't</b>	Private	Private from school fees	Private	Not compulsory	Ofsted or Independent	Can have various	

Characteristics/ Type of school	Ownership	Education Funding	Mgmt & control	National curriculum	Inspection	Specialist function
Schools		and investment		but some do.	Schools Inspectorate	special functions such as religion, philosophy, subject specialisms, SEN, grammar etc.

Source: SQW Consulting

Table 3-2: Institutions and partnership arrangements – current and proposed

National level institutions/arrangement	Regional/Sub-regional institutions/arrangements	Local/neighbourhood institutions/arrangements
Department for Children Schools and Families	Government Offices	Local Authorities/Local Education Authorities (LAs)
Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)	LSC regional offices	Children's Trusts – established by the Children's Act 2004 to bring together all services for children and young people in an area
Learning and Skills Council (LSC) – to be replaced in 2010	Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) – between neighbouring authorities and central government	Local Children's Service Partnerships – operating in some areas to bring services together
Partnership for Schools (Pfs)	City-Regions	Children's Trust Boards – established by ASCLA – to be responsible for preparing a Children and Young People's Plan
Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)	Sub-regional groupings for the Young Peoples' Learning Agency – covering the 16-19 group	Schools Forums – established 2002, with an enhanced role from 2006 – made up of headteachers and governors, independent of LAs, approve changes to LA formula for allocation of the budget etc.
National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services		Schools – see Table 2-2 for range of types of schools
National Leader of Education – head teacher recognised as a national expert		Boards of governors
Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) – established by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (ASCLA)		Schools Councils – made up of pupils
Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) – established by ASCLA – to regulate awarding bodies and qualifications and assessment arrangements		Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships/Attendance Partnerships
Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency – established by ASCLA		Safer Schools Partnerships – joint working between schools and the police
		Accredited Schools Groups
		Local Learning Partnerships/Clusters of schools – groups of secondary and primary schools working to drive improvement
		Building Schools for the Future Board
		Local Leader of Education – head teacher recognised as a local expert
		School Improvement Partner – individual employed by local authority, to assist improvement; will be subject to approval by the school

Source: SQW Consulting

## Legislative and policy context

### **Legislation**

- 3.5 The Government aims to drive-up school standards, by empowering parents, creating diversity and choice and changing the role of local authorities from providers to commissioners and champions of parents and pupils.
- 3.6 The *Education Act 2005* requires local authorities to run competitions for new secondary schools. The *Education and Inspection Act 2006* extends the requirement to primary and special schools – including those established as a result of reorganisations and amalgamations. It also places a duty on authorities to promote higher standards and the fulfilment of all children's educational potential; and requires them to promote diversity and choice, when they commission school places in an area. The competition process is defined by legislation and is set out in associated regulations and guidance.
- 3.7 The *Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009* made local authorities responsible and accountable for securing the provision of education and training for 16-19 year olds, and for 19-25 year-olds subject to a learning difficulty assessment.<sup>7</sup> The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) will be established to ensure coherence of planning and control of the budget (of around £7bn). There is an expectation that in carrying out their responsibilities local authorities 'will work together in sub-regional groupings to plan and agree how to commission provision across an area' based on young people's travel-to-learn patterns. The plans will be produced by working with Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and GORs and will be 'signed off' by the YPLA.

### **Policy**

- 3.8 The 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters* defined commissioning as:
- ...developing an overall picture of children's needs within an area, and developing provision through public, private, voluntary and community providers to respond to those needs...*
- 3.9 The 2005 White Paper, *Higher Standards Better Schools For All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, set the policy context for schools commissioning. It set out changes to:
- ...improve the system by putting parents and the needs of their children at the heart of our school system, freeing up schools to innovate and succeed, bringing in new dynamism and new providers, ensuring that coasting let alone failure is not an option for any school...*

---

<sup>7</sup> Making local authorities responsible for provision from 0-19 years of age.

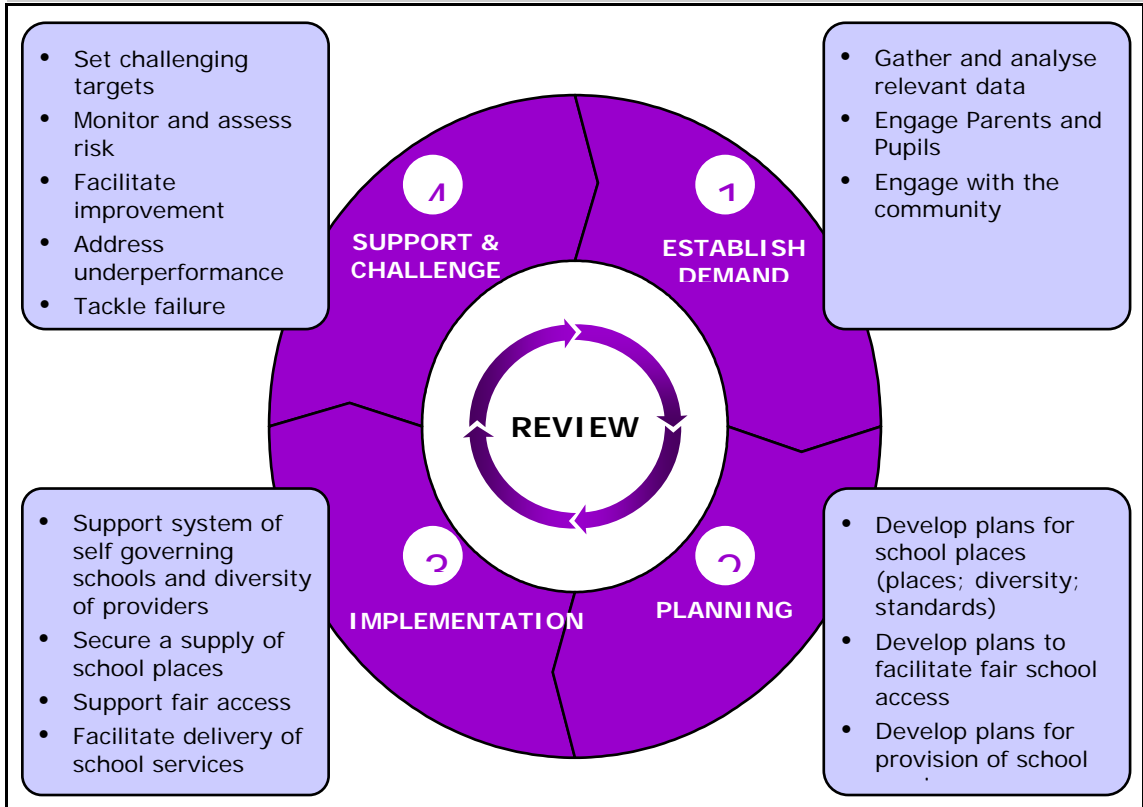
- 3.10 It also proposed changes to the local authority role, in particular, a shift from provider to commissioner. It noted the commissioner role already ran through the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme, the '10 Year Child Care Strategy', the 'Youth Matters' Green Paper and 14-19 education reforms. Its intention was to extend the approach to schools.
- 3.11 These changes meant local authorities would, as a part of their wider responsibilities for children and young people:
- become the champions of pupils and parents
  - promote choice, diversity and fair access to school places and school transport
  - map needs by looking at demographics, diversity and demand for children's services etc.
  - ensure a sufficient supply of places: let popular schools expand or federate and run competitions to open new schools
  - specify what new and replacement schools should provide and how they should work in partnership with other schools and services
  - help schools improve their standards, through the support and challenge of School Improvement Partners, and intervene in schools that are falling below expectations, and where necessary close schools that are poor or fail to improve.
- 3.12 In order to make choice real, the 2005 White Paper highlighted the importance of the quality of information available to parents; access to free school transport; and schools' ability to offer places to children over a wider area within a fair admissions system.
- 3.13 Building on the lessons and experience gained from earlier work on commissioning, DCSF also set out a four stage commissioning process to guide local authorities (Figure 3-1).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> DCSF has also established commissioning support [www.commissioningsupport.org.uk](http://www.commissioningsupport.org.uk)



Figure 3-1: Commissioning Cycle



Source: DCSF

- 3.14 The 2009 White Paper, *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system*, set out the policy framework within which provision is to be provided. It set out new guarantees for pupils and parents. It says:

*...Local authorities are responsible for ensuring there is a pattern of high-quality provision to meet local demands... [local authorities will be required]...to gather parents' views on the schools choices available in their area, and to publish a local plan for improvement if a high proportion of parents are dissatisfied...this will mean a significant strengthening of parental voice in the education system as a driver for improvement...*

- 3.15 With regard to commissioning schools to improve – as opposed to commissioning school places – the White Paper says:

*...local authorities need to commission clear and costed local menus of support for school improvement, across all five Every Child Matters outcomes, from which their schools and SIPs [School Improvement Partners] can draw... Such commissioning and brokering of support should increasingly replace the employment of local consultants, so that schools can access the most appropriate support, regardless of the provider...*

3.16 The 2009 White Paper proposes specific reforms to school accountability arrangements – relevant to local authorities’ support and challenge role. It sets out a model of the accountability mechanisms with a series of components:

- continual self-improvement based on self-evaluation
- new School Report Card based on external assessments
- Ofsted inspection
- SIPs appointed by local authorities to monitor performance and provide support and challenge, as well as broker external support where required. Their role is to be clarified and strengthened with them acting as ‘the primary intermediary between schools and their local authority’.

### What is meant by commissioning?

3.17 In the course of the study it became apparent that people had different conceptions of what commissioning meant both in theory and in practice. Pathfinders’ work on the commissioning of school places was part of a wider set of commissioning and governance arrangements covering a range of children’s services, and as such different interpretations of commissioning were in operation in case study areas.

3.18 In 2009, consultees were asked for their views of commissioning, how things had changed over time and what the prospects were for the future. A number of themes were apparent from consultees’ responses. Case studies showed:

- Authorities were treating school commissioning as part of wider changes to commissioning
  - in some cases this was driven by the ‘personalisation agenda’ with concepts such as ‘Team Around the Child’, cited by Poole
  - in others, such as Sheffield, school place commissioning was rolled out in the context of neighbourhood commissioning.

*It’s not desirable to look at schools commissioning in isolation; it is part of the wider commissioning approach being adopted as part of the Children’s and Young People’s Agenda. Consultee in Kent*

- Commissioning was part of core activities.

*Commissioning is about outcomes. Consultee in Devon*

*The local authority has come to realise it doesn’t have to deliver everything itself. Consultee from Bolton*

- Authorities noted the **importance of data** – both in terms of using **contextual data**, such as levels of deprivation, that might affect educational outcomes, and **performance data** at the level of the school; often based around a red,

amber, green traffic lights system, e.g. in Essex – the data was used to **inform consultations and establish priorities** for action.

- **Parental involvement at all stages**, including Sheffield's establishment of a 'pool' of parents to be consulted.

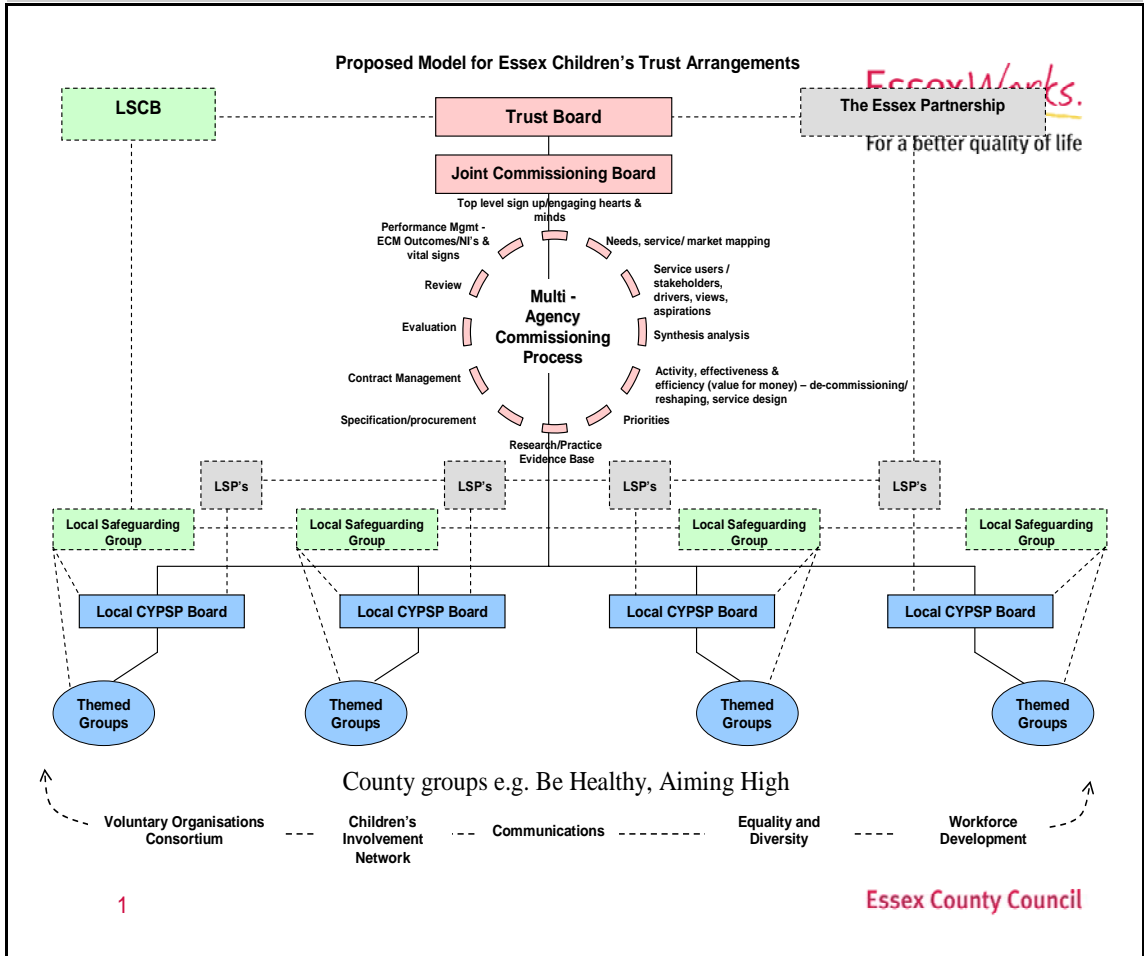
3.19 It should be noted that while local authorities were clear about the **separation of the commissioning and provider roles**, schools, particularly primary schools, have not always found it easy to come to grips with the changes in role.

### What's the relationship between governance and commissioning?

3.20 Case studies had a range of governance and management arrangements. Consultations showed:

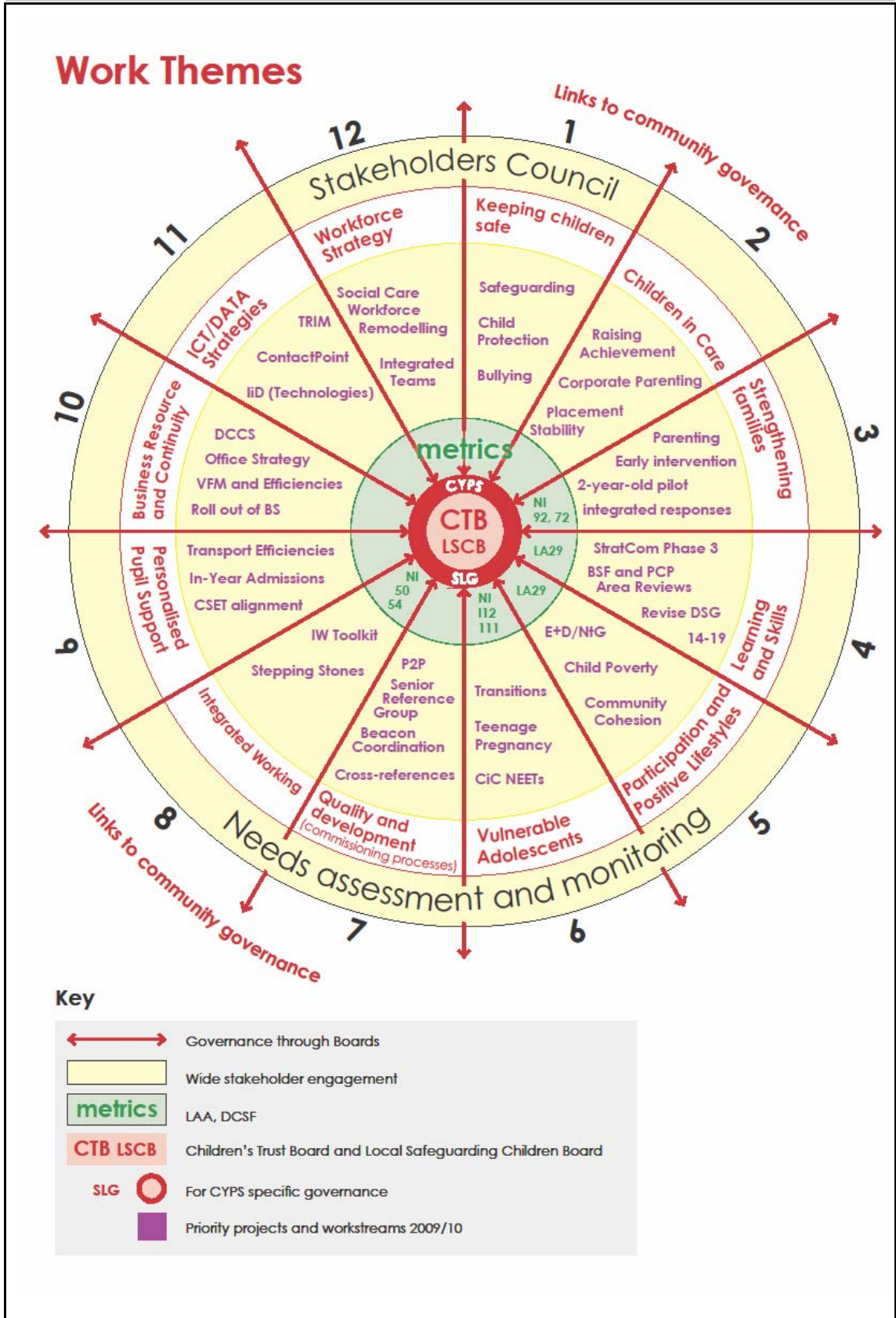
- **Organisational and partnership arrangements changed** in response to the choice agenda, in some cases significant and complex arrangements were (or are being) introduced, in order to meet the challenges of the agenda (Figure 3-2 sets out proposed changes in Essex; while Figure 3-3 sets out governance arrangements in Devon).
- Specific management arrangements to tackle issues of performance, e.g. Cambridgeshire's 'Schools Causing Concern Forum'.

Figure 3-2: Proposed commissioning model



Source: Essex County Council Commissioning Review Briefing Paper for Partners, April 2009

Figure 3-3: Governance through Commissioning Boards in Devon



Source: Devon County Council's Business Plan for Children and Young People's Services 2009-10

## 4: Lessons from the case studies

---

- 4.1 The second round of fieldwork in 2009 looked at specific themes related to commissioning: market development, engagement, the Building Schools for the Future programme, Children's Trusts and the Challenge and Intervention role. This chapter reviews the findings in each of these themes.

### Market development

- 4.2 Five areas provided material on market development: Bolton, Cambridgeshire, Devon, Gloucestershire and Sheffield. A number of themes appeared in each of the case study areas, including:
- contextual issues, such as the demographic context, e.g. an overall fall in school rolls, but rising intakes in some areas with housing growth located too far away from existing schools with spare capacity
  - councils' views on Academies and Trusts, e.g. whether political leaders did or did not support Academies and Trust in principle; and whether the council wished to lead on the delivery of a new school, which affected potential bidders' willingness to bid – in most instances local authorities said they would only act as 'providers of last resort', i.e. where no credible bid was received
  - the difficulties of ensuring bidders have local knowledge and provide a local 'fit' – especially in areas of housing growth where communities were not fully formed
  - 'interesting bids' that lacked local knowledge or experience of running a school
  - established schools have sometimes been reluctant to participate in competitions, perhaps due to risk aversion; but successful schools can be attracted into the process by the 'federation model'
  - it can be hard to build bidders' capacity and maintain impartiality – local authorities tried to support bids by providing transparent information, e.g. Gloucestershire provided indicative budgets and had a dedicated space on competitions on the council's website.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=16010>

**Bolton – Academies in the context of no demand for additional schools**

No new schools are planned in Bolton. However, the local authority is supporting a programme of 'academisation'; with three schools planned to become academies. The council now acts as a co-sponsor of Academies, although it did not co-sponsor the first academy. The council does not report any difficulties in identifying sponsors for the Academies. Without Academies, the local authority would have used the Building Schools for the Future programme as a means of regenerating schools and raising standards.

**Cambridgeshire – commissioning in the context of demand for additional primary and secondary schools**

Projected house building means Cambridgeshire may require an additional 20 primary schools and four or five new secondary schools by 2020. The downturn in the housing market has introduced a level of uncertainty around the likely timing of competitions to deliver the new schools. Thus, as well as understanding the likely sources of new schools, the local authority has to monitor the development market too.

External consultants were used to assist the authority identify potential bidders and support the competition process; however, it may well be that building in-house capacity would lead to more tailored solutions that meet local needs.

The local authority has promoted competitions and has made local schools and local Roman Catholic and Church of England dioceses aware of the proposals. Bids are sought from a range of sources: one bid was received from a provider based in Sweden and another from an education organisation with much experience in education, but none in building and running schools.

As the demand for new schools is so closely linked to housing developments, it is hard for commissioner and bidder alike to engage communities that are not fully formed. However, local schools have become involved in the commissioning process, e.g. via federations. This has provided local knowledge, a track record of delivery and some connection to potential parents and users. The interest from a number of local schools acting in rival bids has posed some challenges for the local authority. The council tries to be impartial and even handed and provides constructive feedback to bidders, as it does not want to discourage bidders from bidding again in the future.

**Devon – difficulties attracting bidders to build and run new schools in rural areas**

Just under a quarter of schools in the county are self-governing; there are some secondary schools that have Trust status but no Academies. Failing schools have not been an issue and, therefore, they have not been a driver of change in Devon. There has been a growing population and proposals for new towns (and therefore new schools) have pushed the commissioning agenda.

The first school competition to be held in Devon was for a new primary school, in Sherford. The process generated two bids. The award was made to the developer; however, since the appointment, the economic downturn has put plans on hold.

A second competition has been held in Okehampton. Again only two bids were lodged, public presentations were not well received and bids scored less than 50 per cent against the scoring criteria. The Council had not made it clear to stakeholders in advance of the competition that it had the right to submit its own bid in the event of other bids being unsatisfactory. Given the lack of clarity and the fact that community stakeholders had not been given the full picture at the start of the process, the local authority did not feel it had the moral authority to step in when the bids were deemed unsatisfactory. This led to a situation where the local authority (under advice from DCSF) went back to the two bidders to see if they would work together on a joint bid. There followed a protracted negotiation process, as one bidder pulled out for a time and had to be persuaded back to the table.

A third competition, for a second school in Sherford, was due to be launched in June 2009. This is currently on hold due to the economic downturn, as developers have delayed their plans for building new homes in the town.

**Gloucestershire – developments in a market characterised by high performing Foundation and Trust Schools**

The council encourages competition. It has completed two new school competitions to date, and launch a third competition in 2009.

The local authority advertises new competitions widely, e.g. in the local and national press, and works with an outside consultant to provide help to bidders and to filter out unsuitable proposals.

The competitions have generated three bids per competition with community/parent bids coming in two competitions and local schools also interested in bidding; outside bidders have also been attracted but they have not always had sufficient development work. For example, one bidder who entered the process a little late (and did not use the support of the external consultant) later withdrew from the process as the bid's weaknesses became apparent.

In addition to encouraging new providers into the area via competitions, the council supports new models that will lead to school improvement. It is following Devon's example and developing a toolkit for federations.

The council, using DCSF resources, worked with parent promoters linked to a new housing development that had a new school as part of its section 106 agreement with the developer.

The competitions are helping to develop the market – and the competitions are in effect driven by population growth and the need to address poor performance in some schools that start to experience falling rolls. Prior to the commissioning process the local authority would have been more likely to close a failing school without a competition.

### **Sheffield – market development to create diversity as a means of tackling underperformance**

Sheffield has a range of school types, including an academy, a foundation school, a Trust school with five more seeking Trust status. The council is supporting schools taking the Trust route, and its preference is for the local authority to be the Trust partner. Most of the moves for Trust status are based around a 'family' of schools – a secondary school and several 'feeder' primary schools.

The authority is actively encouraging parent-promoters, and one new parent-led foundation will open in 2011; as a result of merging two older schools: Myers Grove and Wisewood secondary schools. The Secretary of State agreed an exemption from the competition process for the parent-led foundation to go ahead.

The local authority has engaged academic and public sector partners in developing links with schools. Both Sheffield's universities have committed to partnerships with schools and discussions have also taken place with the hospitals and other public bodies. The first Trust school in Sheffield, Meadowhead, had two business partners recommended by the governing body.

Population growth is only affecting demand at primary school ages and there had been no competitions at the time of writing but changes in secondary schools are taking place as a result of the need to address poor performance and to increase parental choice.

Prior to the 2006 Act, the council's approach would have been for the schools management team to plan provision centrally with only limited consultation.

## **Engagement**

4.3 A number of case studies provided evidence on engagement and all stressed the importance of getting parents and young people's views throughout the commissioning process; although some did note how difficult it could be to engage parents. Important lessons from the case studies are:

- the importance of the collection and presentation of accurate data on context and outcomes, in order to ensure informed decision making
- the need for effective outreach work – building on existing organisations, e.g. community groups; and links to parents, e.g. parental support advisers who have direct contact with parents, in order to get a better understanding of needs
- take account of new developments and any 'new' places where information can be gathered and where meetings can be held, e.g. new shopping or social facilities that come on stream as a result of development, in order to maximise parental engagement
- the impact of national policy changes on 14-19 year-olds and the need to communicate and explain choices, especially in relation to colleges of further education as well as schools, in order to drive improvement
- the need to build on engagement in the early stages of the commissioning cycle, in order to cover all stages of the process, as parents and pupils can 'add value' at all stages of the cycle
- there were difficulties in finding the resources to pay for robust surveys of parental satisfaction, but e-surveys of pupils could at least gauge pupils' satisfaction levels in a cost effective way.



### **Gloucestershire – engagement in the context of building new schools**

As part of the original Pathfinder, Gloucestershire carried out two pilot exercises: market research into parent and pupil satisfaction and community engagement involving parent promoters.

Budget constraints meant these approaches have not been mainstreamed, but the local authority aims to carry out an authority-wide satisfaction survey at some point when resources are available. An online survey of pupils is, however, carried out. It covers over 50 per cent of schools and is held for Years 2, 4, 6 and 10.

There are difficulties engaging 'hard to reach' groups and the expertise and knowledge of the council's participation team will be used to engage hard-to-reach groups, including the very young. For the most part, existing structures and processes are used, rather than the development of new mechanisms.

On a very practical level, consultation around a new school linked to a new housing development, illustrated the importance of testing out and responding to parents' and residents' needs on how to receive information and on the location of meetings. Consultation collection points on new developments increase the spread of information and introduce new residents to the engagement process.

To date, parental engagement has tended to focus on the early stages of the commissioning cycle – survey of needs prior to competitions and engagement in the bidding process. In the long term, the council aims to empower parents in their role as consumers, so that they can challenge schools. Although it should be noted that schools carry out consultations autonomously – extended schools appear to be particularly good at this. The local authority is considering a parental forum to build more permanent links.

The main lessons learned from the process to date have been the bid scoring process – which was seen as both robust and participative. The interview panel stage was seen as particularly important, as it provided face-to-face contact between bidders and parents.

The use of a poster competition for pupils was also seen as effective engagement as it informed the architects' designs – more workshops are being held to inform school design, as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme.

### **Sheffield – engagement in the context of no new school competitions**

The City Council seeks to achieve sustained engagement of schools, parents and communities based on an area's needs, current outcomes, current provision, demographic issues and options for increasing the diversity of provision.

The council has a dedicated parental participation officer and is hoping to add two further posts to undertake outreach work. The work will be to engage 'hard to reach groups' – areas with housing development are often close to deprived areas, so both issues have to be addressed in the same area.

The outreach work will build on existing links with parents via parental support advisers and existing community groups. In particular, work will link to community assemblies (ward based residents forums), a city-wide parent network (with around 70 members at the time of writing and a target of 200) and established venues such as children's centres and schools.

Significant factors that have affected or will affect consultation have been population growth and its implications for schools; changes in the 14-19 year-olds provision, in particular communicating choices and options; and school competitions when they arise.

Schools consult and engage parents directly and extended schools are undertaking a lot of activity. The parental participation officer seeks to join up the different consultations to form an overall picture and develop consistency of approach across the city.

In terms of lessons learned, the council notes the importance of ensuring parents, and in this case a neighbourhood commission, are well briefed, e.g. with contextual and performance data. Also where issues of underperformance are concerned, it can be difficult to get those involved to face up to the scale of the problems, e.g. in one case, focus groups with parents and governors suggested a learning partnership, i.e. a minimalist response, when the council was considering closure of a school. So, honest appraisals are required if effective decisions are to be taken, while maintaining community support.

## Building Schools for the Future

4.4 The Building Schools for the Future programme aims to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school in England and promote a 'step-change' in the quality of education provision. Two case studies provided some evidence on commissioning and the Building Schools for the Future programme: Essex and Poole. A number of issues of note were raised, including:

- the need to manage expectations about what programmes can deliver and when activity will occur
- consult early and widely
- the programme needs to relate to other commissioning activity, e.g. in neighbourhoods
- where schools have developed separate ICT systems, the local authority has to develop an ICT strategy to bring consistency across an area
- the commissioning cycle has informed local authorities' approach to the programme – with local experience of understanding local need informing the building programme and the commissioning of other associated services
- placing schools as the leaders of their own development has ensured they are more engaged with the wider community and can improve parent-school relationships.

### **Essex – managing the roll-out of Building Schools for the Future along with expectations**

Essex treats schools commissioning as part of its overall commissioning approach to children's services. Before applying to the BSF programme, Essex County Council (ECC) split the county into 'quadrants', which contained around 20 secondary schools each, plus an additional cluster of special needs schools.

Each cluster is joining the programme at a different time. The south cluster (which is the most deprived) was granted entry during waves 4-6 of the programme, the west cluster was granted entry during waves 7-9, the special schools were split between waves 4-6 and 7-9 and the remainder of the county will be in waves 13-15.

Looking specifically at the south cluster, which was granted entry in January 2007, decisions were made to close one school and construct a new one on the same site and to refurbish or rebuild three schools.

At the time of the fieldwork (June 2009) the council was in competitive dialogue with potential bidders (Skanska RM was announced as the preferred bidder in February 2010<sup>10</sup>). ECC ensured bids were 'educationally driven' and aligned/supported the strategy for change that has been produced by ECC and the schools.

ECC has developed a strategic development team that ensures that BSF, Primary Capital Programme and other capital programmes are aligned with wider DCSF strategies and guidance. The strategic team feed new guidance to the delivery team; which ensures the guidance is implemented.

Engagement of and consultation with local schools began prior to the development of the BSF application, and has been maintained throughout the process. On receipt of the news that the south cluster was to enter in wave 4, the BSF team undertook feasibility work with relevant schools, which in conjunction with discussions with education colleagues and wider stakeholders, resulted in the prioritisation of schools.

Ongoing consultation included:

- working closely with headteachers and governors
- ICT development – as 50 per cent of the relevant schools were grant maintained, which resulted in a proliferation of different ICT packages
- working with the Sorrell Foundation<sup>11</sup> in order to get pupils involved as part of the bidding process.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.essexbsf.org/news.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.thesorrellfoundation.com/home.php>

The following key lessons were identified by consultees:

- early involvement of all stakeholders is essential
- ensure all relevant parties are aware that the BSF programme does not entail rebuilding all secondary schools, and that refurbishment is based on needs.

## **Poole**

### *Context and vision*

Poole and Bournemouth local authorities put in a joint application to the BSF programme, releasing £120m of Wave 6 funding (which commenced in spring 2008) for nine local schools (four in Poole, of which two are special schools).

Construction is expected to start in 2011, with completion anticipated for 2013. The local BSF programme is managed by a set of organisations, which include the two local authorities and Partnership for Schools (PFS).<sup>12</sup>

The overarching vision of the local programme is to transform the lives of children and young people in Bournemouth and Poole, by ensuring their education meets their individual needs. This is to be facilitated through the provision of teaching and learning environments that:

- place school sites at the heart of local communities; using co-location of facilities to create community hubs and a sense of local identity and pride
- provide integrated services that improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and relevance to the area and local authority
- transform learning and living for local people through the use of ICT.

At the time of the consultations (June 2009), DCSF had accepted the local authorities' strategy for change, and the authorities were beginning to develop plans for individual schools.

Poole is also part of the Primary Capital Programme (PCP), that supports capital investments and activities to transform teaching and learning in primary schools. PCP in Poole is managed by the local authority.

Both the PCP and BSF programmes follow the local commissioning cycle, which seeks to take an integrated approach to the commissioning of all services, including social care, health, education, and youth services etc.

### *The commissioning cycle and understanding need*

The introduction of the DCSF commissioning model has drawn more people from different disciplines together to discuss the range of services that could be commissioned. There is also a general recognition of the commissioning model between the majority of parties and the steps required to facilitate the approach.

Poole has incorporated the 'establishing demand' aspect of the commissioning cycle into its approach to the PCP and BSF programmes, through the development of the Child Vulnerability Index, which collates local data based on 'individual vulnerabilities' of the child population, based on 20 variables, including health and crime. This is used to produce an index at postcode level. The process is facilitating a more tailored approach to commissioning, e.g. through the identification of 'hot spots' that require specific services.

Consultees noted that their approach to the PCP had been constrained by the statutory duty to focus on school places for primary children, which had in effect distorted the commissioning model.

Consultees also stated that when a school became part of either the PCP or BSF programme, it became the lead for its own development, including working out what services were required by families in the area. This process has facilitated the engagement of parents and families in the identification of the community's needs.

A particular challenge in assessing demand and how that affected BSF related to the 14-19 years-old age group. Poole had to estimate the number of places, taking into account changes over the course of the programme, e.g. the increase in the statutory school age and the delivery of three-year diplomas. To address these issues Bournemouth and Poole set up a joint stakeholder group to consider issues relevant to the 14-19 years age group. This stakeholder group is considering issues such as the travel to learn area.

### *Children's Trust and BSF*

The Children's Trust Board forms part of the overarching governance structure of the local BSF programme, where for example, any planning document (e.g. the strategy for change) must be approved by the Children's Trust prior to consideration by the BSF Board. Consultees went on to state that all relevant stakeholders of the Children's Trust had been engaged and consulted as part of the process.

The PCP has not explicitly used the Children's Trust, as there are only a small number of schools taking part in the programme and the local authority is in sole charge of the PCP.

### *BSF and the wider community*

The BSF programme was viewed to be fast paced, which had driven the authority to define a clear direction for each of the relevant schools. Consultees went on to state that each school now required a locality planning group, to ensure that the development of the schools was seen as part of a wider provision of services. They also recognised that the redevelopment of the schools could contribute to the wider neighbourhood renewal agenda.

<sup>12</sup> Partnerships for Schools (PFS) is responsible for delivering the government's secondary school renewal programme, Building Schools for the Future (BSF).

Consultees thought that the BSF programme will benefit the wider community, as schools developed as 'extended schools' will offer a range of facilities for the community; such as childcare, leisure, performing arts, adult learning classes and access to ICT and computers.

## Relationships with Children's Trusts

4.5 Fieldwork occurred before Royal Assent was given to the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. Following on from this Act, schools are represented on Children's Trust Boards. Three areas provided evidence on relations between schools and Children's Trusts: Cambridgeshire, Devon and Kent, in addition to the points raised in the Poole case study above, which notes the Children's Trust's role in the Building Schools for the Future programme. Some general observations can be made from the case studies:

- local authority and primary care trusts are undergoing organisational changes which are informed by the development of Children's Trusts and in turn affect arrangements for Children's Trusts
- locality-based teams join-up services at the local level, under the auspices of a Children's Trust
- Children's Trusts need to tie-in school commissioning into wider commissioning activity for children and young people
- Children's Trusts need to know what resources are available for which services in particular areas and they need to align budgets to ensure efficiency; pooled budgets may follow.

### Cambridgeshire

At the time of consultations (May 2009), Cambridgeshire was finalising its Children's Trust Partnership. Both the council's Children and Young People's Department and the PCT were undergoing organisational change; therefore, the new Children's Trust Partnership arrangements were to be finalised by the end of the 2009/10 financial year, once the council and PCT had gone through its internal re-organisation/change.

A children and young people's strategic partnership had been in place at the county level for some time. There were also three area partnerships linked to district councils. The transition to new trust arrangements includes a move to 14 locality teams, which will comprise a mix of existing local partnerships, Connexions and statutory service providers.

The formal Children's Trust Partnership will be a county-level partnership made up of members, officers and other stakeholders. The Children's Trust Partnership will have the overall responsibility for delivering outcomes for children and young people and will influence the work of the locality teams.

In terms of reporting and hierarchy, the locality teams will be answerable to the council's Children's and Young People's Services Department, which in turn is answerable to the Director of Children's Services, who reports to the Children's Trust Partnership Board.

A joint commissioning team comprising the PCT and the council was being put in place, at the time of fieldwork. There were differences between the local authority and PCT in how roles operated – the former has commissioned and delivered services, whereas the PCT has focused on the commissioning of services.

## Devon

The Devon Children's Trust comprises: Devon County Council; eight local councils (East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon, North Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge and West Devon); parents, parent governors and parent carers; the voluntary and independent sector; Cornwall and Devon Connexions ; schools, colleges and other learning settings; Devon and Cornwall Constabulary; faith communities; Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council; Devon and Cornwall Police Authority; Devon and Cornwall Probation Area; Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service; Devon Primary Care Trust; Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust; Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust; South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust; and South West Strategic Health Authority.

There are also local Children's Trusts based on district council areas. Each group designs and implements the Children's Trust work plan for their area and monitors its delivery. The local Children's Trusts, which align with the Strategic Partnership's local groups, will increasingly be the vehicle for responding to local needs, with devolved commissioning powers.

Partners have agreed in outline the roles of the Children's Trust Board, a Partnership Council and 12 Commissioning Boards. The working relationship with the Devon Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB), as a central component of the Trust has also been strengthened.

The Commissioning Boards comprise: children in care; learning and skills; participation and positive lifestyle; vulnerable adolescents; Quality and Development (Commissioning) Board; integrated inclusion strategies; personalised pupil support; business resource and continuity; ICT/data strategies; workforce strategy; strengthening families, and keeping children safe.

During 2009-10 Devon County Council planned to:

- roll out the 12 Commissioning Boards, transferring performance management responsibilities when each was functioning smoothly
- develop a structured system of cross-referencing to support 'read-across' performance management (overseen by the Quality and Development Board)
- use spar.net<sup>13</sup> (the management information system that all Trust partners have signed up to), in order to establish evidence trails of cause and effect against defined targets
- finalise the commissioning responsibilities of the Children's Trust Board and its Partnership Council
- work with partners to establish appropriate parameters and local governance arrangements, in order to increasingly devolve commissioning responsibilities to communities through local Children's Trusts and clusters of schools).

The Children & Young People's Strategy business plan summarises the advantages of this approach as: promoting a focus on outcomes; preventing people from settling into structural silos; funnelling high-level reporting to the Commissioning Board, where senior officers can keep an overview of inter-related outcomes.

## Kent

The Kent Children's Plan sets the priorities for the county, and the Children's Trust has agreed a general commissioning model (based on that suggested by DCSF) to deliver the Plan. The model includes: needs assessment; planning and response; implementation; and review. Given Kent's size and the diversity of circumstances in the county, there are 23 'localities' with Children's Trust Partnerships.

The process is holistic, i.e. schools commissioning is not treated in isolation from the commissioning of other services.

The local authority has 'taken on board' the DCSF guidance on engaging schools as part of Children's Trust arrangements; but schools were already involved in the local Children's Trust Partnerships (and were involved in the locality partnerships that pre-dated these).

School commissioning is not undertaken separately from the Children's Trust arrangements (although the local authority has ultimate decision-making authority over some things), and the purpose of the local partnership arrangements is to secure an integrated approach to provision, especially of health and education.

In relation to Children's Trust arrangements and joint commissioning a real challenge is how best to reconcile the priorities of individual organisations with those of the partnership as a whole. This can make it difficult for partners to engage at a local level.

There is currently a lot of debate about aligning strategies and priorities as part of the Children's Trust arrangements, but there has been much less debate and activity around pooling budgets. This is probably the next step; but for now it is important to understand who is funding what, where and at what scale and how the spending helps to deliver particular outcomes.

---

<sup>13</sup> Spar.net is an outcomes based performance monitoring system. The important thing is that all Children's Trust partners have signed up to the same system. Spar.net allows national and local KPIs to be monitored, using a traffic light (red, amber, green) approach. It promotes the systematic embedding of performance management.

## Challenge and intervention

4.6 Three areas provided information on challenge, intervention and support for improvement: Essex, Kent and Sheffield. General points arising from the consultations include:

- analysing performance data in order to understand the full story of school performance is essential in developing the options for improvement
- sharing contextual and performance data with schools and parents is important to gain stakeholders' buy-in
- in some instances, work may be required to raise parental aspirations, as some value proximity to the school over educational attainment.

### **Essex – school improvement and managing local community views**

Consultees described their current work in Chelmsford as an example of effective school improvement, where direct face-to-face engagement between schools and parents had facilitated change and positive outcomes. Information had been shared between schools and parents on the supply of places, demand and performance. The data was used as a basis for discussion between the local schools, young people, parents and local community, who developed a package of measures to support a poorly performing school out of its position. This included the facilitation of a vocational centre, and the future potential to house a children's centre on the site to ensure that the children and young people in the area were appropriately catered for.

Colchester was cited as another example. The potential closure of two local schools that had been put into 'special measures' provoked local opposition; as some parents valued the proximity of the underperforming schools over the achievements of schools that were further away from where they lived. Thus, as well as working to improve schools, local agencies had to work with families to raise their aspirations, and provide support to cope with changes.

### **Kent – data-led performance management**

#### *Data analysis as a driver*

The ability to analyse data is seen as important in dealing with performance issues and given the size of the county it is cost-effective to employ dedicated analysts.

The team supplements nationally available statistics with county-level and local-level data. It is possible to cut the data by residence or characteristics of particular children, e.g. looked after children or by school. The main geographies used for analysis are: Kent-wide, area-wide (Kent is split into 6 service areas), district (coterminous with the district council boundaries), local children's trust partnership level (there are 23 of these), and individual school level.

#### *An example of what data analysis can be used for*

The decision was made to compare the relative performance of the three-tier system of schooling on the Isle of Sheppey to the two-tier system in the rest of Kent. The local authority found children going through a three-tier system on the Isle did not perform as well as children from similar backgrounds going to school elsewhere in Kent, or children who lived on the Isle but attended school elsewhere. Thus, the data implied a need to change the three-tier system of education on the Isle.

#### *National challenge schools*

At the time fieldwork was carried out (May 2009) Kent had 30 national challenge schools, i.e. secondary schools where 30% of children did not achieve 5 GCSEs (A-C) including maths. Grammar schools make up 25% of the county's schools. This inevitably has an impact on the intake of other secondary schools.

Kent has carried out its own analysis to assess what schools should be seeking to achieve. This analysis suggests that, given the characteristics of pupils and past performance, in some cases DCSF aspirations are not achievable in the short term; and targeted support or structural solutions are required. It also shows that in other cases, schools should be pushed to achieve the minimum floor target very quickly because it is attainable.

The schools that need a lot of support to achieve the minimum floor target have DCSF funded national challenge advisors working alongside them and monitoring progress. Furthermore, structural solutions, e.g. federation with another school or changing to academy status may be required.

## **Sheffield – intervention, structural change, additional support and making the most of local expertise**

### *Provision of information*

The local authority gathers national and local performance information (school-level data) and publishes it on its Children's Profile website,<sup>14</sup> which is accessed by officers and schools and members of the 0-19 Partnership. It also publishes monthly and quarterly performance reports for targeted monitoring meetings.

The Planning, Policy & Performance Service feeds data into the directorate and the corporate planning and reporting cycle. Furthermore, the Learning and Achievement Service collects information about school performance and review, and colleagues collaborate to provide performance data to ensure directors and members have up-to-date information. Schools and the Learning and Achievement Service in the local authority are both involved in the collection of data. The Learning and Achievement Service, School Improvement Partners and increasingly the Governors of Schools are involved in the interpretation of this data, as the relationship between the local authority and schools becomes more about commissioning and challenge.

An Every Child Matters survey of children and young people has been carried out. It identified children's concerns about bullying and the cost of activities acting as a barrier to participation; as a result bullying and positive activities are now part of Sheffield's Local Area Agreement.

Schools and the Learning and Achievement Service in Sheffield are both involved in the collection of data. The Learning and Achievement Service, School Improvement Partners and increasingly the Governors of Schools are involved in the interpretation of data, as the relationship between the local authority and schools becomes more about commissioning and challenge.

The Children's Trust has its own public website with information available through the Children & Young People's Plan and related documentation, and regularly discusses performance across the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Parental involvement and consultation has been targeted as an area for further development.

Within the primary sector, teams of support staff visit schools to capture pupil performance/assessment data, and there are plans to implement this in the secondary sector for the next academic year.

### *Addressing underperformance*

The local authority has used a range of leadership and governance models to address underperformance. This has included developing 12 learning partnerships between schools ('soft governance federation') in some cases with an executive headteacher, and three 'hard governance federations' with an executive headteacher are in train.

At the time of the fieldwork (June 2009), the local authority had served a warning notice on one primary school and Interim Executive Boards (IEBs) were in place for two schools in special measures. An application had also been made to the DCSF for a third IEB. The warning notice was served because the local authority thought the school's leadership, including governors, failed to deal with issues quickly enough and could not provide convincing evidence that action being taken would bring about the required improvement. The application for the third IEB is for another secondary school in special measures. Funding and staffing delegated powers have currently been removed from this school.

To date, the IEBs are seen to have increased the speed at which issues are addressed. Direct access through the Board to appropriate support has ensured that action is rapid. One school has been judged by HMI as having made satisfactory progress, since it was placed in special measure. The second school had yet to receive its second monitoring visit but was judged as making satisfactory progress at the first visit.

In 2008/09 the local authority deployed seven primary lead headteachers to vulnerable schools (either as acting headteacher, where the headteacher was removed or was on sickness absence), or to work alongside the substantive headteacher to bring about rapid improvement. This initiative has reportedly been very successful and all schools identified have had a successful inspection. The number of primary heads appointed in this way was expected to increase. Furthermore, at the time fieldwork was undertaken, the local authority was in the process of recruiting two secondary lead headteachers.

The local authority, in partnership with National College for School Leadership, has an accredited team of 15 Local Leaders selected from the city's most successful headteachers to work alongside headteachers and senior leadership teams to address school improvement issues.

### *Personalisation as a means of driving improvement*

Sheffield's favoured approach is to work with schools to improve performance of individual children and groups of children and, thereby, improve overall performance.

Personalisation conferences have been supported by pupil-level data, and these conferences impact on the performance of individual children. Personalisation conferences encourage schools to focus on personal learning and development pathways, linked to individual tracking through teacher-assessment of the progress being made. These are facilitated by the Learning and Achievement Service and supported by centrally provided datasets, which help to target pupils and vulnerable groups. Schools are also encouraged to tie this into the use of intervention strategies in their school.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/plans-partnership-consultation/performance>

## Critical success factors and problems in achieving success

4.7 The case study areas identified a number of critical success factors and problems. These are set out in Table 4-1. The main points can be grouped into a number of themes:<sup>15</sup>

- **Contextual factors** – such as, falling school rolls that set the backdrop to all commissioning decisions
- **Leadership** – in the local authority (senior councillors and officers); schools (headteachers, teachers and governors); and chairs and senior staff in partner bodies (e.g. Primary Care Trust, third sector organisations)
- **Clarity of objectives** – for example, agreement on the outcomes to be sought
- **Structures and roles** – local authorities and partners need to make changes, e.g. merge teams and change job roles, move from in-house provision to outsourcing, change planning and quality assurance/inspection arrangements etc.
- **Process issues** – including:
  - regular, effective engagement of stakeholders (parents, children, governors, headteachers and teachers, third sector organisations and other public sector bodies) at all levels/stages of the commissioning process
  - collection, analysis and provision of data to challenge schools and ensure informed decision-making
  - the availability of external expertise and advice to bring in new ideas and additional capacity
- **Resources** – there is a need for additional resources in the transition to new arrangements, e.g. to fund engagement activity.

---

<sup>15</sup> The list is not in order of importance nor is it based on any sequencing – as these factors are always present and interact with each other over time.



Table 4-1: Critical Success factors and problems in achieving success

Critical Success factors	Problems to achieving success
<p><b>Bolton</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCSF guidance helped</li> <li>• Bringing in external support to help drive improvement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Bolton</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource constraints on carrying out the commissioning process for new schools</li> <li>• The mismatch between the local authority's approach and that of the wider conurbation (which is part of the Greater Manchester Challenge) adds a complicating factor for local partners</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cambridgeshire</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The operation of a 'Schools Causing Concern Forum' to share performance data between partners and agree actions to address problems</li> <li>• The Schools Forum provides a means for the local authority to consult schools effectively – the Forum has themed sub-committees where specific issues such as finance, can be picked up in detail</li> <li>• Secondary heads meet as a group and primary heads meet in geographic groupings, enabling effective communications with the council – as well as between schools</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cambridgeshire</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much of the pressure for new schools – and subsequent competitions – is due to population growth and housing developments; it is difficult for bidders to show understanding of community need and engagement, when the community has not been fully formed</li> </ul>
<p><b>Devon</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement of headteachers, parents and young people at every level/stage of the process</li> <li>• The bid for and the process of being a 'beacon council' for the strategic commissioning of children's services brought its own momentum</li> <li>• Involvement and commitment of councillors – which was in part achieved as a result of beacon status</li> <li>• The commitment to outcomes based commissioning – as opposed to procurement based on service or input specification</li> <li>• Establishment of a reserve of funds to finance modernisation, e.g. funds to cover the costs of consultation and engagement</li> <li>• Establishment of a senior officer role to promote 'achievement through collaboration', including an annual conference to support collaboration</li> </ul>	<p><b>Devon</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural factors can hold up changes, e.g. changing long standing professional practices</li> <li>• The complex 'architecture' of the spectrum of children's services (in education, health and social care) makes it difficult to ensure services are joined-up, especially in a large county with a dispersed population</li> <li>• Different partners' understanding of what commissioning is, i.e. health partners often see commissioning as a synonym for procurement, whereas education practitioners see it as a tool for transforming services</li> <li>• Falling school rolls make schools defensive and competitive, which can hinder efforts to promote collaboration</li> </ul>
<p><b>Essex</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of a strong business case for change, built on solid consultation</li> <li>• A shared belief that commissioning is likely to lead to improved outcomes eased the changes</li> <li>• Appointment of dedicated transition coordinators to work with schools to join-up services in their area</li> <li>• Provide drop-in sessions for parents</li> <li>• Involve young people – through School Councils</li> <li>• Ensure the necessary supplier base is there</li> <li>• A strategic development team, aligning Building Schools for the Future, Primary Capital Programme and wider strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Essex</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The different commissioning approaches being promoted by DCSF and Department of Health causes some concern/confusion among partners</li> <li>• Partners' different timescales for contracting made coordination of commissioning difficult, e.g. NHS contracts renewed every 3 years, the County Council's contracts renewed every 5 years – with an option to extend for a further 2 years</li> <li>• The size and complexity of the area covered by a county like Essex poses challenges of consistency – being addressed by the development of delivery quadrants</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gloucestershire</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A key driver of change was the development of the Pathfinder project, as it provided a dedicated resource to move-on the commissioning agenda</li> </ul>	<p><b>Gloucestershire</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The age profile of the leadership in schools, and lack of candidates to succeed them</li> <li>• Overall school rolls are falling, but there are pockets</li> </ul>

<b>Critical Success factors</b>	<b>Problems to achieving success</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Schools Commissioning Programme Board established to drive forward the commissioning agenda – it is led by the Directors of Learning &amp; Development and Commissioning &amp; Partnerships</li> <li>• A commissioning team led by someone with previous experience of commissioning from the Sure Start programme</li> <li>• External support in embedding the commissioning processes and procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• of population growth, linked to new housing developments – this adds to the complexity of need and engaging parents and young people</li> <li>• Problems in identifying appropriate contact points to engage residents in new housing</li> <li>• Wider community tensions associated with new housing development and the use of ‘planning gain’</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of devolved Children’s Trust Partnership arrangements to local areas – given the overall size of the county – as a means of getting integrated local services</li> <li>• Look at schools commissioning as part of a wider commissioning approach to deliver desired outcomes</li> <li>• Schools commissioning carried out via Children’s Trust arrangements – not via the local authority acting alone</li> <li>• Understanding the full context in an area provides a better understanding of need and the sorts of interventions required to increase school performance – a central data team exists to analyse the relevant data</li> <li>• Provision of data sets to local Children’s Trust Partnerships to track performance and highlight performance management issues</li> </ul>	<p><b>Kent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The term ‘commissioning’ has been associated with tendering out services – stakeholders, such as third sector representatives and councillors have taken some time to come to interpret it as a four-stage, holistic process</li> <li>• The transition process – with its reliance on partnership working – is generating more work than before</li> <li>• Local opposition to school closures – linked to both under performance and falling school rolls – makes delivery of national policy difficult to achieve in practice, as the local authority has wider community relations to consider</li> </ul>
<p><b>Poole:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An effective Voluntary Sector Commissioning Forum</li> <li>• Using specialist schools as a champion for engagement</li> <li>• Using commissioning to promote wider engagement</li> <li>• Effective leadership from headteachers</li> <li>• Sharing of good practice on commissioning services to schools</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poole:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rivalry between schools means they do not wish to share development plans with each other</li> <li>• The move to greater independence for schools can make joint-commissioning more difficult</li> <li>• Schools and their boards are at different stages of development – which means development work is required if everyone is to operate at the same level</li> <li>• Schools’ roles on Children’s Trusts have not been well communicated, causing some confusion</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sheffield</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A commissioning development programme for lead commissioners, which aims to develop skills in commissioning, promote coherence and consistency of approach and assist senior managers re-position their role (Figure 4-1 illustrates the sorts of issues where managers required support and the format of how that support was provided)</li> <li>• Organisational re-structures to clarify roles and responsibilities with regard to commissioning</li> <li>• Additional resources from the Pathfinder programme and the Area Based Grant helped to cover the additional costs associated with change</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sheffield</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of political support for non-local authority schools limits the possibility for market development</li> <li>• Political support for traditional approaches to admissions based on catchment areas</li> <li>• Tensions between the local authority (as advocate of young people’s and families and commissioner of wraparound services) and greater independence of schools – operating as Academies or Trusts</li> <li>• The separate operation of Academies can reduce the flow of information sharing</li> </ul>

Source: SQW Consulting analysis of case study evidence

Figure 4-1: Extract from Sheffield's Development Programme: Bringing About Change

Time	Detail
09.15	Gather and have coffee
09.30	Review activity since last time & introduction to day three This workshop explores the wider implications of introducing commissioning, especially across all services. We will be joined during the morning by a senior OD officer from SCC and a colleague from the PCT, to hear the presentations and contribute their views and experience.
09.50	What is the culture change? Gloucestershire's journey towards integrated front line services and a management structure that supports locality based working and continuous improvement. Presentation & discussion in groups of similarities and differences with Sheffield.
11.15	Break
11.30	Listening to children, young people and families The front line view of the culture change that is needed. How young people's and children's views are recorded and responded to. Discussion - where are the priority areas (geography or service) in Sheffield for this type of approach?
13.00	Lunch
13.45	The Provider perspective What providers need, expect and can offer - now and in a commissioning system. Discussion
15.30	Break
15.45	Mapping the market What is the market like for your services/groups of children and young people (a) currently and (b) ideally? What steps can you take to bridge that gap? Plenary discussion
16.30	Review of day and preparation for organisational raids
17.00	Close

Source: Sheffield City Council Development Programme: Bringing About Change, 15 July 2009

## Benefits from the commissioning process

- 4.8 The case studies were asked to identify anticipated or unanticipated benefits from the commissioning process; for the most part consultees believed it was too early to tell if there had been an improvement in educational standards or Every Child matters outcomes. A time-period of another 2-3 years was most commonly cited as the period required before impact could be judged. Table 4-2 sets out the benefits that case studies were able to identify.

Table 4-2: Anticipated and unanticipated benefits of school place commissioning

Bolton

- The benefits of bringing in external support to drive improvement are: raised profile of the issues in schools; a third party can engage people in a different way to a local authority, thereby opening up opportunities; and a third party brings in fresh ideas and approaches, e.g. prompting the Educational Improvement team to strengthen its relationship with the Secondary Headteachers Association

Devon

- Wider Every Child Matters outcomes have improved, e.g. increased stability of placements for children in care (with evidence of improvements in educational attainment by those involved); reductions in high offending rates (Barnstaple saw a 64 per cent reduction in first-time offenders and there was a 10 per cent reduction in first time offenders across Devon, relative to the 2005/06 baseline)

Poole

- The process has led to improved relations between parents and schools – relative to local authority-parent relations in the past, which had been more adversarial
- Service users often developed solutions to issues which were more cost effective than traditional approaches – so including service users in the planning process had financial benefits
- Schools have a better understanding of the wider context in which they operate – making them more aware of factors affecting achievement/attainments and more open to working with others, in order to tackle these issues
- The wide range of partners that contributed to the process – including private sector involvement, e.g. Chase Manhattan Bank's involvement in a new foundation trust, including the direct support of human and physical resources

---

*Source: SQW Consulting analysis of case study evidence*

- 4.9 Thus, case studies anticipate improvements in educational attainment will take 2-3 years to arrive; but, depending on the circumstances, outcomes such as attendance at school and reductions in youth crime can be delivered in much shorter timescales. They also provide some indication of likely future impact, e.g. improved attendance should lead to higher attainment.

## Costs of the commissioning process

- 4.10 The case studies did not find it easy to provide specific figures on the overall cost of commissioning. However, they could make general observations about the issues involved in resourcing the commissioning process and the expected direction of costs, i.e. whether they would go up or down, overtime.
- 4.11 **Bolton** noted that given 'squeezed budgets', it was asking itself the question: 'is it better to retain a small core staff to commission more services from outside the authority, or keep more services in-house?'. While **Devon** noted 'there is no doubt' that if you are serious about moving towards a commissioning approach additional costs will be incurred. It therefore created a reserve of funds that enabled activity to proceed. While **Essex**, noted that it had used the commissioning process to refocus or realign existing budgets, in order to achieve efficiencies; and remodelled partners' approaches, so that poor decisions could be squeezed out of the system, thereby reducing waste.

- 4.12 **Gloucestershire** had not conducted a comprehensive assessment of its costs; but noted its restructure had resulted in significant one-off costs with additional posts across a range of grades being created; however, other posts were lost and staff moved to other departments to offset this. Consultees reported costs of a £4-12,000 for a school competition, depending on the level of advertising and the number of bidders. **Kent**'s view was that the extensive partnership working meant benefits did not currently appear to exceed costs; but that this would change once the new arrangements had been properly embedded. **Poole** noted that the authority had experienced some 'capacity issues' – and potential additional costs of operating dual systems over the transition to the new arrangements. However, the case study also noted that provided risk management was employed effectively, the costs could be kept under control.

**Poole: Using Risk management to keep control of costs**

To control costs as commissioning was introduced Poole used risk management. The authority asked itself:

- What does the needs analysis indicate the borough should be doing?
- Are service users satisfied?
- Does the borough have the resources to undertake the activity?

With an eye to improving existing provision, rather than introducing additional provision.

- 4.13 **Sheffield** is managing change within existing budgets; but is accessing additional resources, e.g. from the DCSF Pathfinder programme and the Area Based Grant, which helped to fund a new parental participation officer post. However, in the long term, the process is not expected to lead to increased costs, when compared to the costs of previous arrangements.
- 4.14 Thus, most case studies believe the transition phase has led to the need for additional resources; and sometimes these were found from outside the core education/children's services budgets. Furthermore, most case studies expect savings to be achieved in the longer term, e.g. through better coordination of the use of partner resources, and more effective decision-making processes that should reduce the number of poor (and costly) decisions. Where costs were identified as an issue, they were managed as part of a risk management process.

### Lessons learned from the commissioning process

- 4.15 In addition to identifying critical success factors and barriers to success, case studies were asked to identify lessons they wished to highlight to others. Table 4-3 provides a summary of responses.

Table 4-3: Lessons learned by case studies

- Provide data on localities via a website, so people can understand how local needs were mapped and responded to
- Early involvement of all stakeholders at all stages of the process
- Establish and maintain a 'thread' of engagement from the Children's Trust Board to the local level
- Hold an annual festival for young people to ensure engagement and enable partners to keep up with young people's views
- Two-way communication between parents and schools is key to developing an effective commissioning process
- Manage expectations, e.g. around what the Building Schools for the Future programme will and won't do
- External support brings new ideas, which can improve the way you deliver existing services, as well as coming up with ideas for new activities
- Ensure there is sufficient staff capacity to manage the processes involved, e.g. school competitions
- Access 'external' or additional funding to enable the transition, e.g. to create new parental participation post
- Get to grips with the legal details associated with running competitions, e.g. role of existing governing bodies
- Commissioning requires a cultural shift for a local authority and its partners, particularly about how people plan and organise activities; therefore cultural change has to be planned, as part of the delivery of wider changes in structures and processes
- Establish a policy to practice partnership – involving academic and third sector partners
- Take up networking opportunities as they provide a means to find out what others have done and then apply the lessons locally – the Pathfinder programme facilitated this process
- Rivalry between mainstream schools can mean plans aren't shared, which makes overall planning difficult – this is especially a problem against a backdrop of falling school rolls

*Source: SQW Consulting analysis of case study evidence*

- 4.16 Thus, the case studies highlight a number of points those undertaking commissioning need to keep in mind. The provision of accessible local data that includes contextual information helps all stakeholders understand needs and problems, the responses required and, over time the impact actions have had.
- 4.17 The early involvement of parents and young people at all points of the process, including annual events with a range of purposes, is essential if the process is to achieve its overall objectives and can lead to better parent-school relationships. While, access to external expertise (either via networking or procurement of specialist services) is a useful source of new or alternative ideas, and can reduce the risks of activities as it offers access to the findings of tried and tested approaches from practical experience. Successful change is achieved by those who ensure the necessary staff resources are in place to manage the process and that those involved understand the legal issues associated with the process, while managing stakeholders' expectations (about what is available and when). Furthermore, the importance of managing 'cultural change' should not be discounted, as part of the wider process of introducing commissioning.
- 4.18 Local structures and processes need to provide robust and reliable channels of communication for headteachers and teachers, so that performance can be improved. However, these arrangements need to be designed to reflect local geography and population density. And, the presence of falling school rolls may make schools reluctant to share plans and/or cooperate with each other; which local authorities need to recognise and then devise incentives to participation.

## 5: Findings from the national parental surveys

---

- 5.1 This chapter provides a summary of the national parental satisfaction survey that was conducted in England by GfK NOP in two waves. The national survey was conducted in order to provide a comparison between patterns in England and any changes in the case study areas. The findings are reported here in order to provide background and a point of comparison for the case study surveys, which are reported in the next chapter.
- 5.2 The survey tested a number of things including the factors affecting school choice, views on the process of getting a child into a school, attitudes towards increasing the diversity of school-types and responses to involving a range of partners in running schools.
- 5.3 This chapter highlights changes in the opinions and comments of parents since the first wave was completed in 2008 – it should be noted that changes of less than 2% for findings around the 90% or 10% level are within normal surveying error and findings of less than 3% at the 50% level are within normal surveying error.
- 5.4 The chapter has the following sections:
- factors affecting parents' choice of school
  - the process of selecting and getting into a school
  - diversity of provision and partnership working.

### Factors affecting parents' choice of school

- 5.5 It is important to gain an understanding of the things that parents say inform their decisions, in order to understand what factors affect the demand for places in one school relative to another, and the relative demand for state school places to those in the private sector.<sup>16</sup> By building an understanding of the factors that affect parental choice, local authorities can understand the likely needs and concerns of parents and identify which ones they can or should try either to influence or respond to in the short, medium and long term. The parental satisfaction survey provides indication of the factors that are important to parents, and data on parents' views of the services local authorities provide.

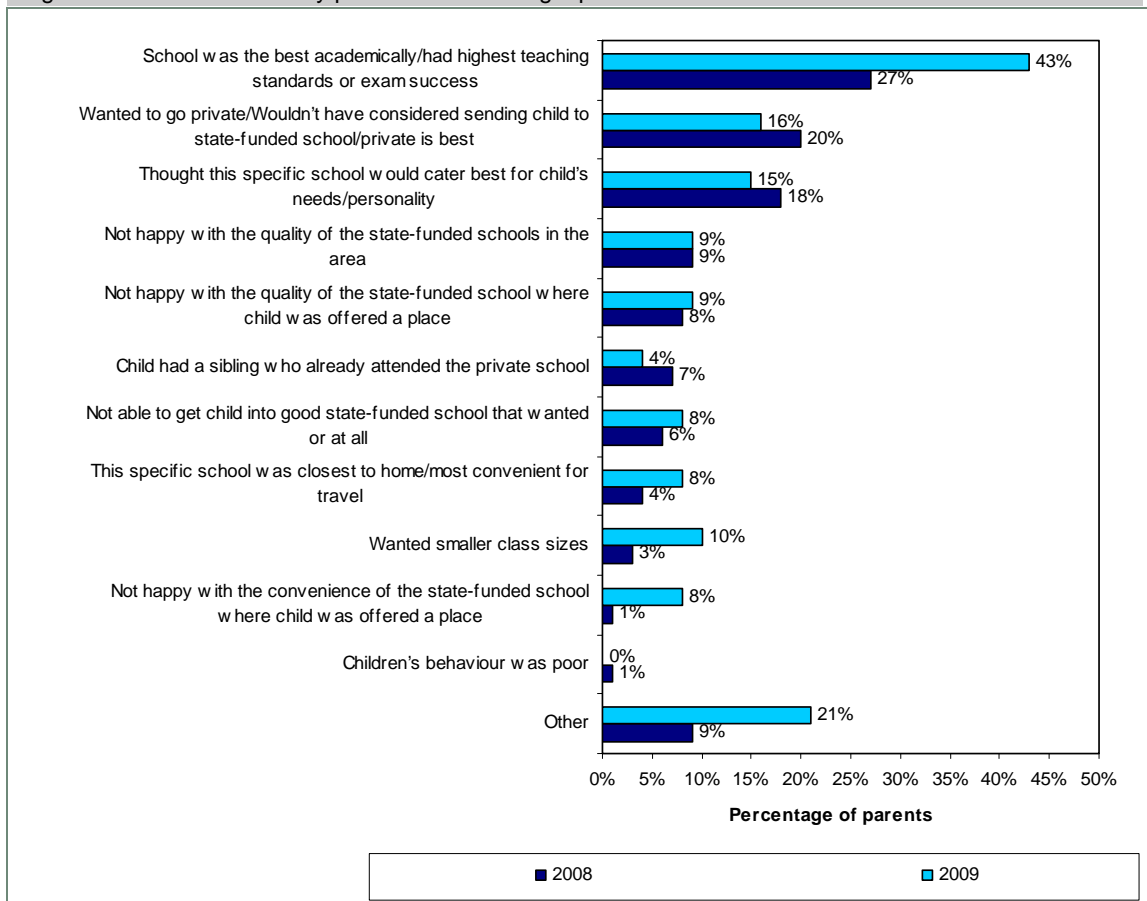
---

<sup>16</sup> The survey split respondents into those who used private education and those who used state provision. The factors affecting the decisions of these two groups are set out separately.

### Factors affecting the choice of private sector education

- 5.6 Approximately 6% of all parents surveyed in 2009 had placed their children into private rather publicly funded schools. The number of parents deciding this was relatively constant over the two waves of surveys (8% in 2008).
- 5.7 As shown by Figure 5-1, the three main reasons, cited by parents, for choosing a private school over a state-funded one were:
- Academic/examination performance or overall success school
  - General preference for private schools
  - Better ability to cater for their child’s needs or personality.
- 5.8 The most significant change in reasons for choosing private education was the increased importance of the school’s academic standards in parents’ decisions.

Figure 5-1: Reasons cited by parents for choosing a private school instead of a state-funded school



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.9 The survey questions allowed a breakdown of responses by socio-economic and ethnic characteristics. The responses provided by parents in different social classes were broadly similar whilst they varied across different ethnic groups. Parents in social classes DE considered less the academic credentials of the school than other parents: only 17% of parents in classes DE stated academic performance was a reason for opting out of the state schools compared to 43% of parents in AB; 48% in



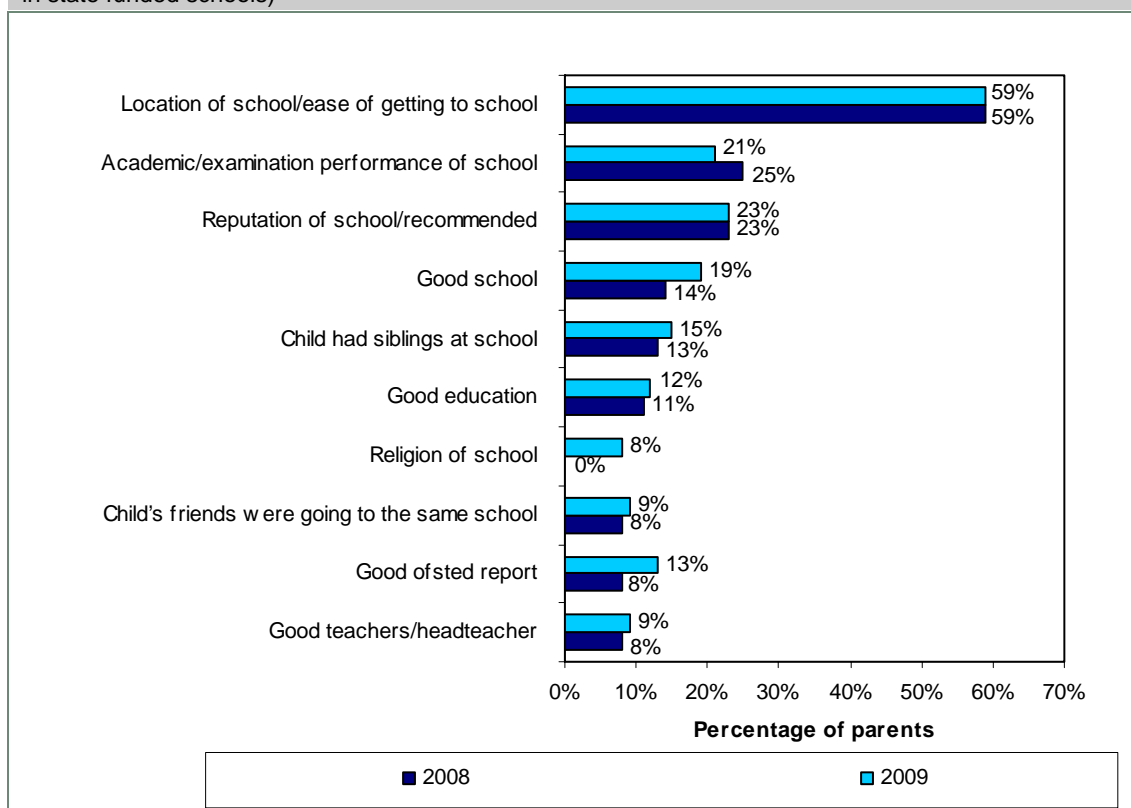
C1 and 39% in C2. They emphasised more the ability of the school to cater for their child (49% compared to 8% of parents in AB, 15% in C1 and 29% in C2).

- 5.10 For the purposes of analysis the following ethnic categories were used to categorise respondents: White; Black/Black British; Asian/Asian British; and Chinese, Mixed Background and Other Background (as one category due to a relatively small overall number of respondents). The school’s academic performance was a reason for going to a non-state school for 44% of white parents in comparison to 43% of Asian, 36% of mixed/other and 26% of black parents. Black parents were more likely to put their children into private sector schools due to general preference than other parents (76% of black parents as opposed to 13% of white and 27% of Asian parents).

**Factors affecting the choice of schools in the state sector**

- 5.11 Parents choosing to place their children in the state sector schools were asked to identify two or three key factors they considered when deciding which school to apply for. Figure 5-2 shows the 10 most frequently cited reasons.

Figure 5-2: Key reasons considered by parents when considering which school to apply to for (children in state funded schools)



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.12 The single most important reason was the location or convenience of getting to the school; this reason was cited by over half of the parents. Other key factors included academic performance; reputation and perception of a ‘good school’ as well as having siblings going to the same school. The relative importance of reputation and Ofsted reports and the view that it was a ‘good school’ increased.

- 5.13 The survey found that location was cited as a significant factor by between 57% (ABs) and 63% (C2s). The proportion of parents mentioning academic performance varied from 16% (DE) to 24% (AB) and 'reputation of school' from 17% (DE) to 25% (C2). The parents in social classes AB valued academic performance (25%) and overall reputation of the school (24%) more than other social classes.
- 5.14 Getting a 'good education' was mentioned by a smaller proportion of parents from social classes AB (11%) compared to parents from social classes C1 (12%) or DE (15%); whilst good Ofsted reports were a lower priority for parents in social classes C2 and DE (8%) compared to parents in social classes AB (16%) or C1 (14%).

Table 5-1: Reasons affecting school choice in the state sector (by ethnic group of parents)<sup>17</sup>

	W 08	W 09	B 08	B 09	A 08	A 09	O/M 08	O/M 09	Nat. 08	Nat. 09
Location of school/	60%	59%	56%	67%	48%	62%	55%	59%	59%	59%
Academic Performance	25%	21%	37%	27%	26%	18%	26%	23%	25%	21%
Overall reputation	24%	24%	13%	12%	19%	19%	23%	14%	23%	23%
Good school	13%	18%	18%	16%	21%	20%	15%	23%	14%	19%
Whether child had siblings at school	14%	16%	5%	9%	9%	11%	6%	10%	13%	15%
Good education	11%	11%	11%	15%	18%	23%	6%	10%	11%	12%
Good Ofsted report	9%	13%	2%	9%	7%	7%	4%	12%	9%	13%
Religion/ faith of school	8%	8%	19%	10%	6%	6%	13%	6%	9%	15%
Good teachers/ headteacher	8%	8%	10%	18%	11%	10%	4%	15%	8%	9%
Whether child's friends were going to same school	8%	10%	2%	2%	6%	8%	6%	3%	8%	9%
Facilities within school/ sporting/ music:	6%	8%	6%	5%	7%	4%	2%	8%	6%	7%
Small class sizes	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	70%	6%	0%	4%	3%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

<sup>17</sup> W=White, B=Black/Black British; A=Asian or Asian British; and O/M=Chinese, Mixed Background and Other Background, Nat=National average

- 5.15 The survey indicated some variation in the responses by ethnic group (Table 5-1). Academic performance was cited more often by black parents (27%) than parents from Asian (18%) backgrounds. The importance of reputation showed even greater variation (12% to 24%) with white parents more likely to mention this as a factor than black parents. Furthermore, white parents were more likely to cite siblings attending the school as a factor (16%) relative to black parents (9%).
- 5.16 There have been some changes to the factors mentioned by parents when comparing the findings of the first and second wave of the survey. More white parents considered the impression of 'good school'. Fewer black parents considered academic performance and the religion of the school but more took into account whether other siblings were going to the same school or whether it had good teachers. Among Asian parents, there was a notable increase in the proportion considering the location of the schools or the impression of 'good education'; whilst the share of parents considering academic performance reduced. More parents from other/mixed ethnic groups thought about factors such as impression of a good school, Ofsted reports, teachers, facilities.
- 5.17 Thus, the parental satisfaction survey indicated that the major factor affecting parents' choice of school was location/ease of access. This poses particular challenges for the provision of school transport, and the location of new schools, if the choice agenda is to prove effective. The relative importance of reputation also points to the need for local authorities to update people's perceptions of schools that have had poor reputations but have improved in recent years.

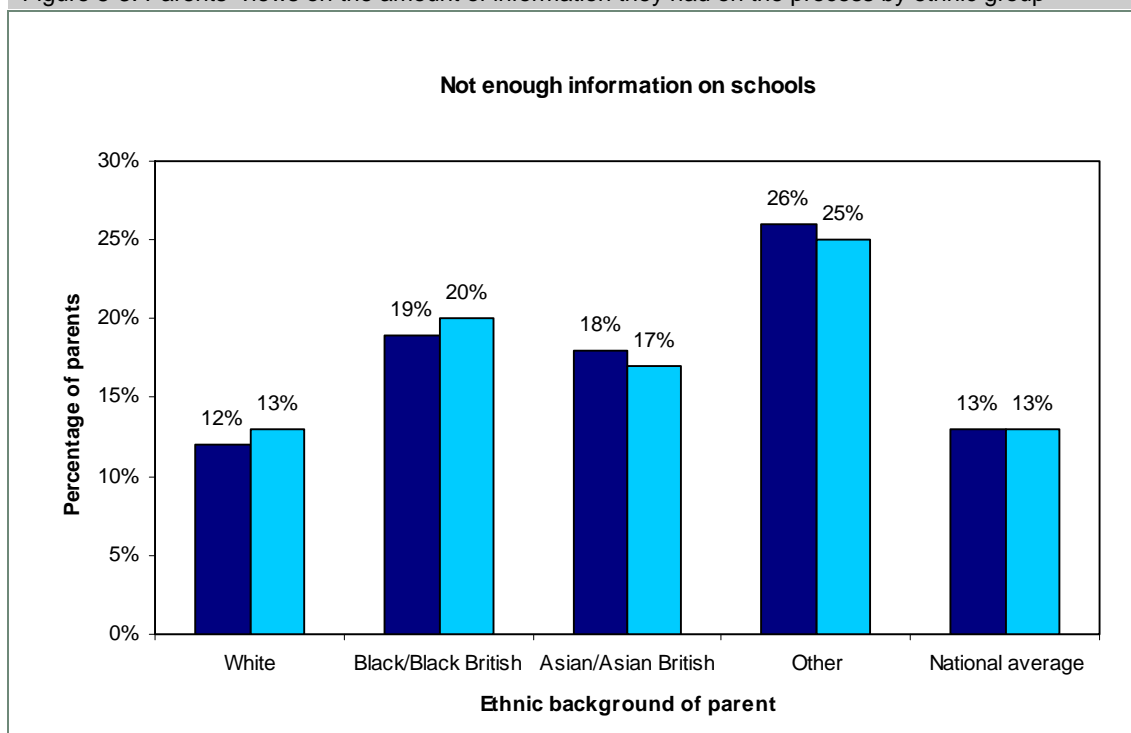
### The process of selecting and getting into a school

- 5.18 In order for parental choice of school to be meaningful and effective in practice, parents need to make informed decisions and they also need the selection process to operate smoothly with transparent and consistently applied admissions criteria. The parental survey looked at views on these aspects of the process.

#### ***Information on schools***

- 5.19 Parents were asked whether they received enough information from their local authority at the application stage. Nearly eight in 10 parents (79%) stated they received enough information, whilst 13% believed they did not receive enough and 5% stated they received no information. This is in line with the findings of the first wave in 2008. The responses of parents in different social classes were similar but responses varied between the ethnic groups (Figure 5-3).

Figure 5-3: Parents' views on the amount of information they had on the process by ethnic group



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.20 More parents from black (25%) and other ethnic groups (20%) received too little information on schools from their local authority compared to white parents (13%). There was very little change in the proportion of parents not receiving sufficient information on schools since the first wave of the survey.

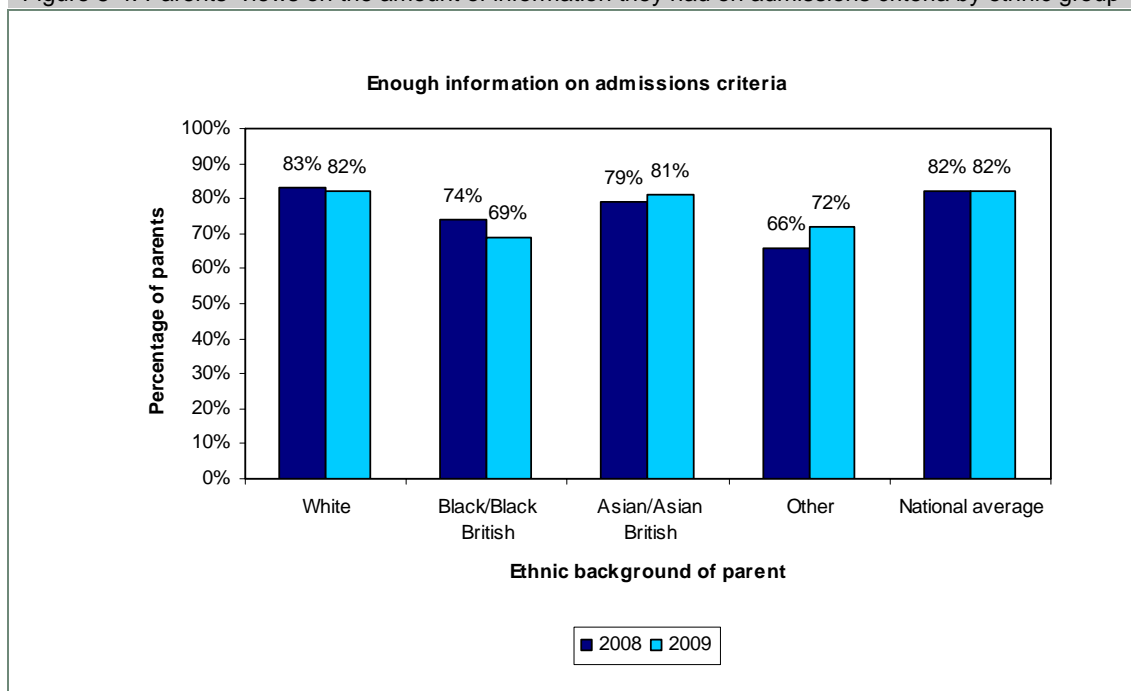
#### **Information on the application process**

- 5.21 The parental responses suggest more information was available on the application process than on the schools: 86% of the parents reported they had received sufficient information on the application process; 8% cent believed they had not received enough information and 2% stated they had not received any information. Compared to the first wave of the survey, the proportion of parents receiving enough information has grown: in 2008 the respective proportion was 84% (10% said they had not received enough information and 4% said they had received no information).
- 5.22 The responses were very similar across the social classes but there were differences in the responses by ethnic groups. The proportion of parents from black (20%) and other/mixed ethnic groups (25%) who stated that they had not received enough information noticeable greater than the proportion of white parents (12%). The proportion of parents who had not received any information was similar across different ethnic groups.

### **Information on admissions criteria**

- 5.23 Eighty-one per cent of parents thought they received enough information on the admissions criteria. Just over one in 10 (11%) believed they had not received enough and 3% stated they had not received information. The responses to the second wave of the survey were similar to those in 2008. Again differences occurred by ethnic group (Figure 5-4).

Figure 5-4: Parents' views on the amount of information they had on admissions criteria by ethnic group



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.24 In the 2009 survey, white parents were more likely to report they had received enough information on admission criteria than black parents (82% to 69%). The 2009 survey showed an increase in parents of other/mixed ethnicity reporting they had received enough information, whilst the share of white and Asian parents reporting the same remained fairly close to that found in 2008. The proportion of black parents receiving enough information reduced by five percentage points.

### **Information on the applications deadline**

- 5.25 The 2009 survey reported a slight increase of four percentage points to 90% of parents reporting that they had received enough information on the deadlines of the applications (only 2% stated that they had not received any information about it, compared to 4% in 2008). As in the survey carried out in 2008, 6% stated they had received some but not enough information.
- 5.26 The proportion of parents in social classes DE with not enough information (7%) was three percentage points higher than the proportion of parents in classes AB reporting they did not have enough information on the applications deadline (4%). The proportion of black parents (14%) who did not receive enough information was higher than the proportion of white parents (5%). The reported gap between black and white

parents without sufficient information has increased since 2008, when the respective proportions were 9% and 6%.

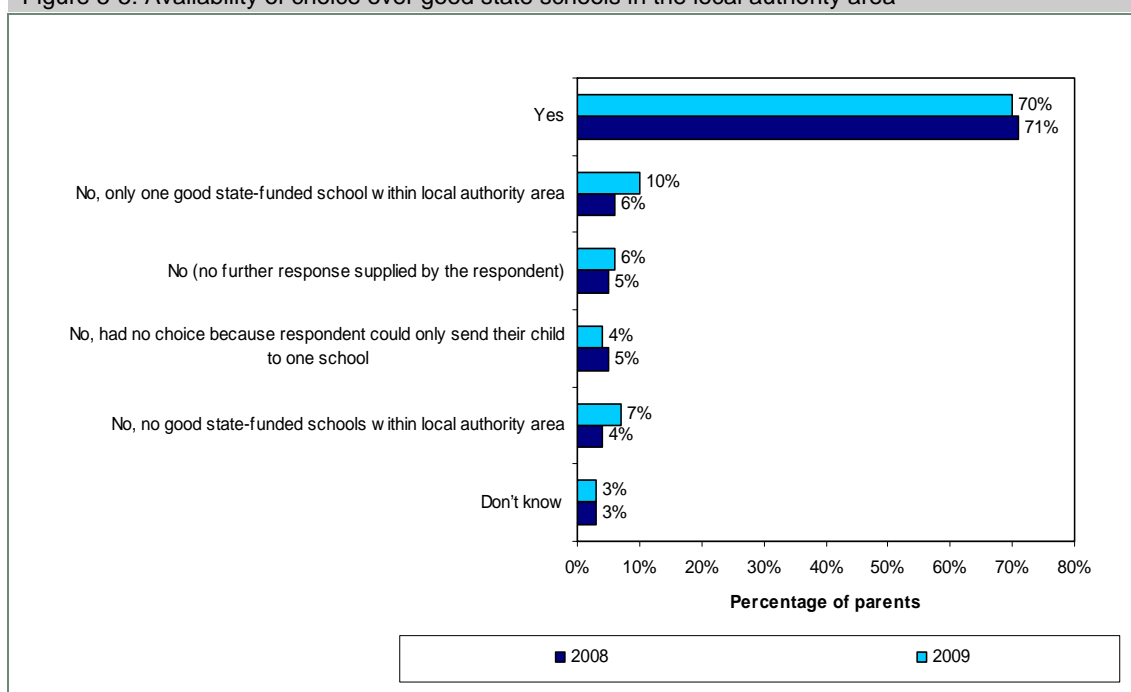
## Choice and diversity of provision and partnership working

- 5.27 National and local policies on the commissioning of school places need to be developed and implemented in the context of existing provision and the public's awareness of and its attitude towards the 'choice agenda'. The parental satisfaction survey asked about the supply of 'good' schools in an area and tested attitudes to having a diversity of schools in an area and views on the involvement of different types of organisation in the running of schools, and awareness of different types of school (in particular Academies and Trust schools). It also looked at parents' views on whether there was a need for more particular types of school in their area.

### **Availability of 'good' state schools**

- 5.28 Majority of parents (70%) believed they had good choice of state-funded schools whilst 27% believed they did not have choice (Figure 5-5).

Figure 5-5: Availability of choice over good state schools in the local authority area



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.29 One in 10 stated they had limited choice as there was only one good state school in the local authority area, whilst 4% thought they had no choice as they could only send their child to one school. The responses were fairly similar to those of the first wave of the parent survey, with a minor increase in the proportions of parents stating they had one or no good state funded schools in their local authority.
- 5.30 The positive responses by parents varied from 64% in AB and 70% in C1 compared to 73% of parents in classes C2 and DE, indicating higher levels of satisfaction in parents from the latter social classes. The responses were similar in 2008.

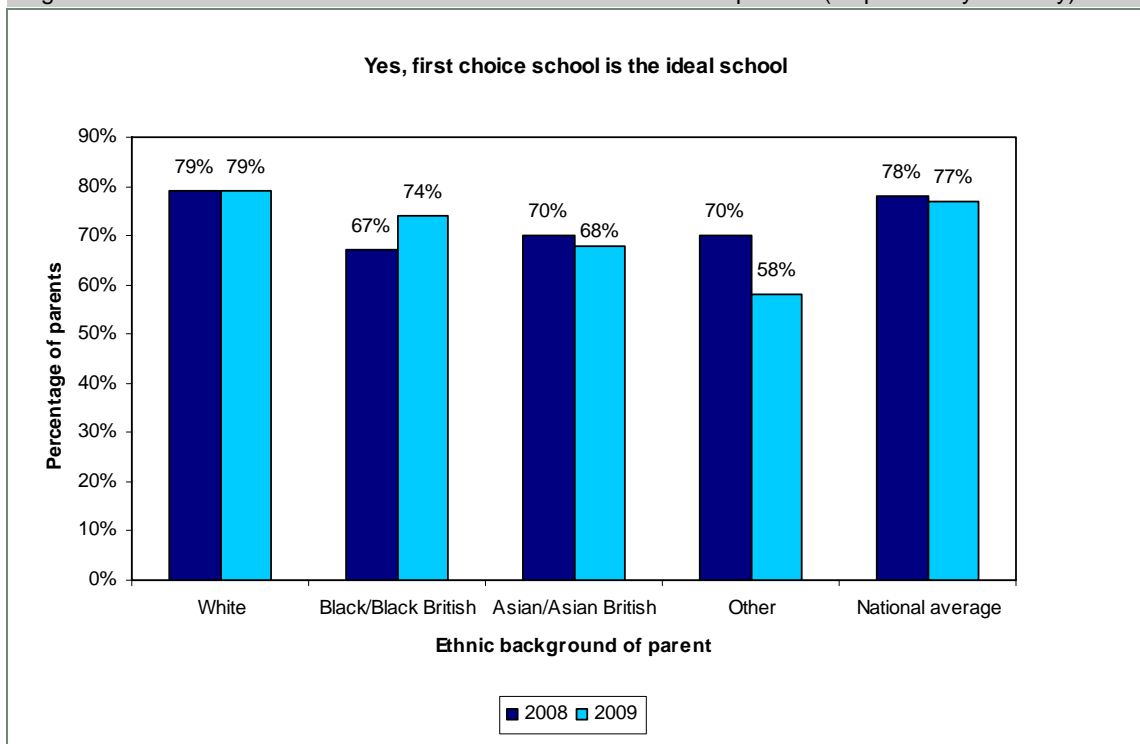
5.31 There was also variance by ethnicity, with black parents (62%) and parents from other/mixed ethnic groups (51%) showing least satisfaction with the choice available to them, compared to white (71%) and Asian (74%) parents. Compared to the 2008 survey wave, there had only been minor (and not significant) changes to the satisfaction of parents by ethnicity. Whilst the share of satisfied Asian parents had reduced by one percentage point the share of satisfied black parents had increased by two percentage points and the share of parents from other/mixed ethnic groups had increased by nine percentage points. White parents were as satisfied as in 2008.

**Pragmatism in choices**

5.32 The survey asked parents whose children were in state-funded schools whether their first choice school was the ideal choice or a pragmatic choice based on constraints (such as, the ideal school was too far away or over subscribed and offered little chance of getting in). For 77% of the parents, their first choice was the ideal school, similar to the 78% in 2008. The proportion of parents who considered their child’s school to be only best under the circumstances was 22% in 2009 (it was 19% in 2008).

5.33 Whilst there was little variation between parents from different social class the responses varied notably between the ethnic groups (Figure 5-6). White (79%) and black parents (74%) were notably more likely to consider the first choice as the ideal school, compared to Asian (68%) or parents from other/mixed ethnic groups (58%). The proportion of parents from the other ethnic groups who provided a positive response dropped twelve percentage points since 2008; whilst the equivalent proportion of black parents increased slightly (by seven percentage points).

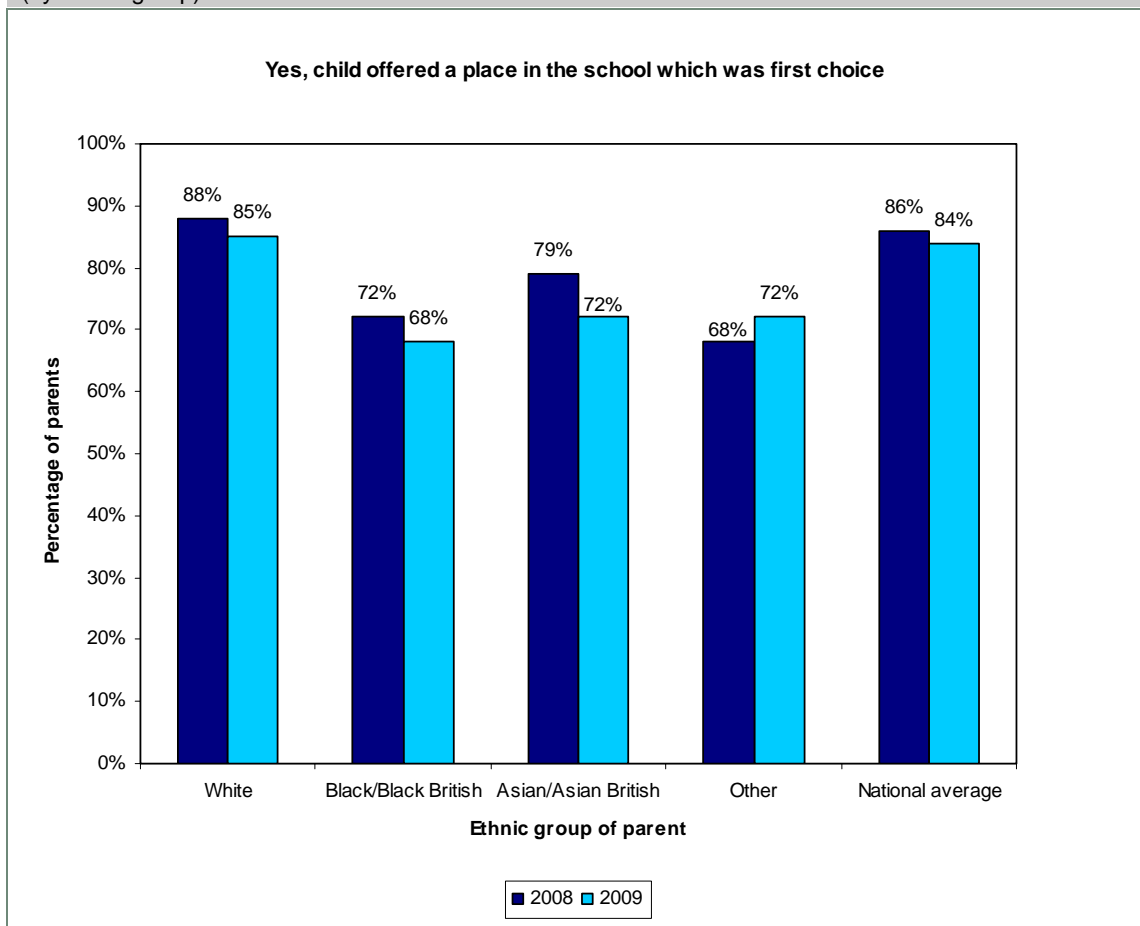
Figure 5-6: Whether first choice school was the ideal school for the parents (responses by ethnicity)



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.34 The survey also asked parents whether their child was offered their first choice and 84% said they were (10% said they weren't, and 6% were waiting to hear at the time of the interview). In comparison to the 2008 responses, slightly fewer parents (86%) had their child offered a place in their first choice school.
- 5.35 Parents in social class C2 were most likely to get their child into their preferred school (86%) whilst parents in social class C1 the least likely (81%). Eighty-three per cent of parents in social classes AB and DE received a place for their child in their first choice school.
- 5.36 In terms of ethnicity, white parents were most likely to get their children into the school of their first choice (85%), whilst black parents were the least likely (68%) (Figure 5-7). Seventy-two per cent of Asian parents and parents from other/mixed ethnic backgrounds stated their children had been offered a place in their first choice school. For parents from other/mixed ethnic groups this is four percentage points more than in 2008, whilst for parents from all other ethnic groups the proportions fell.

Figure 5-7: Proportion of parents whose children have been offered a place in their first choice school (by ethnic group)



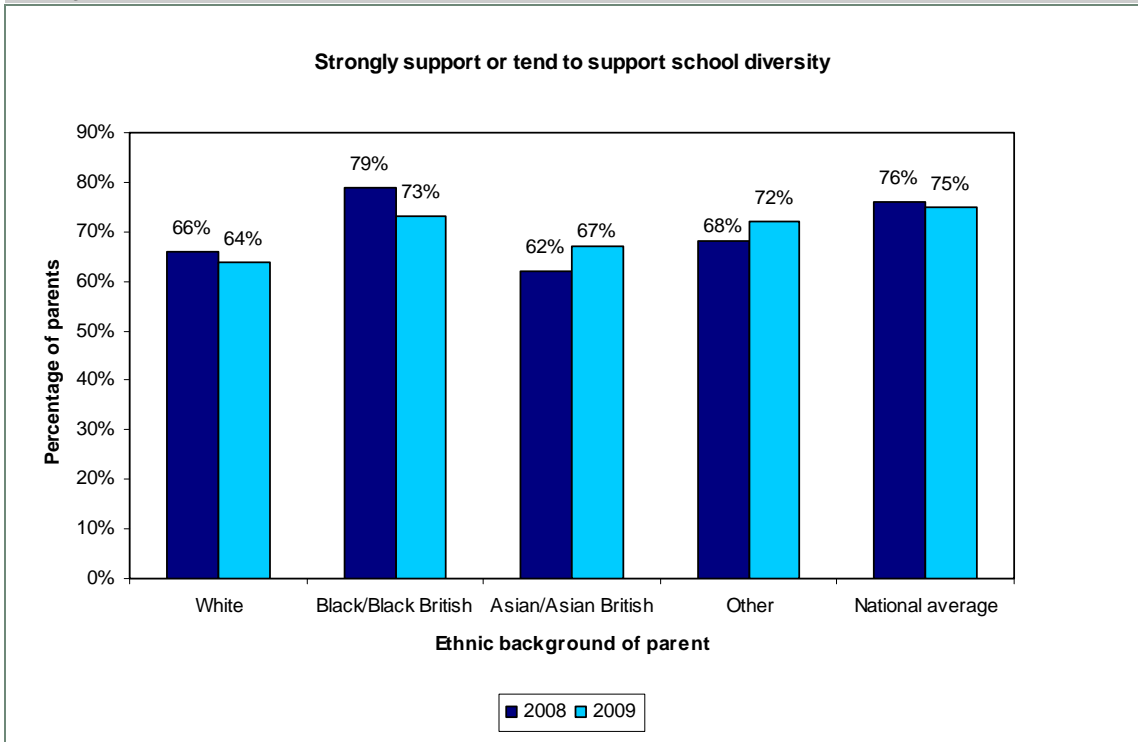
Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting



### **Parental attitudes towards diversity of schools**

- 5.37 The survey showed relatively strong support for having a range of schools in an area: 65% said they strongly supported or tended to support the idea (only 7% strongly opposed or tended to oppose the idea). This was in line with the findings of the first wave of the survey.
- 5.38 Parents in social class C2 were least supportive (60% of them strongly agreed or tended to agree, compared to 66% of parents in social classes AB and DE or 68% in C1). The support of parents in social classes C2 and DE has dropped compared to 2008 (64% in 2008, 60% in 2009 for C2s and 71% in 2008 compared to 60% in 2009 for DEs).
- 5.39 Parents from black and other/mixed ethnic background were most supportive of having a range of schools available (Figure 5-8).

Figure 5-8: Proportion of parents who strongly support or tend to support school diversity (by ethnic background)

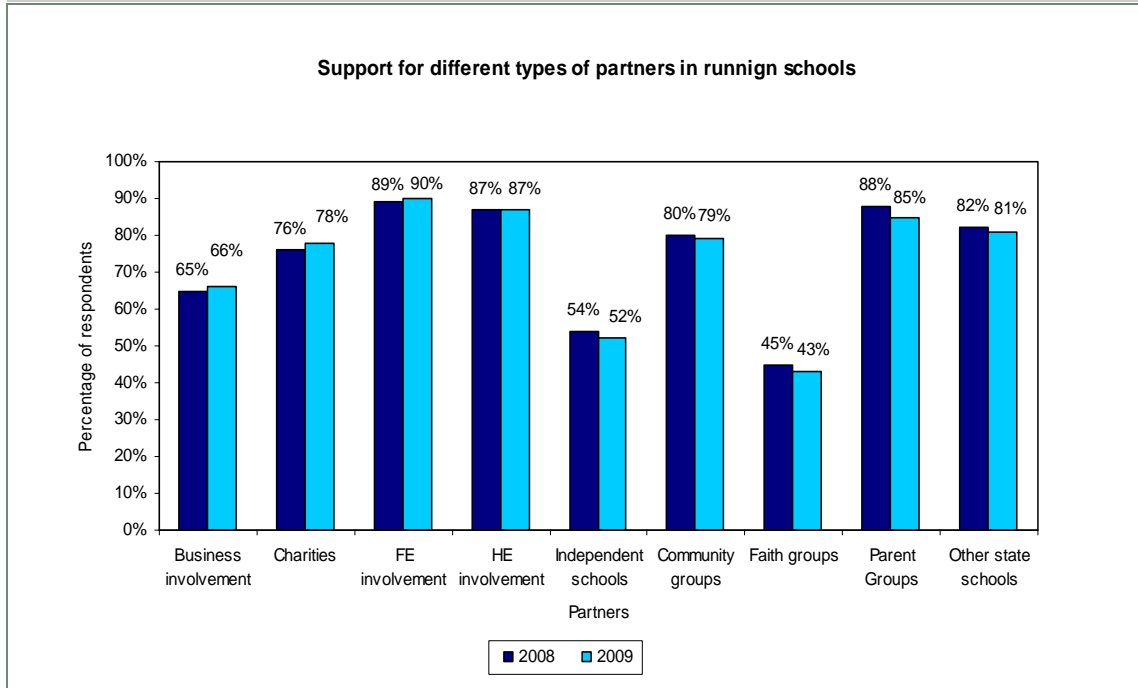


Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

### **Attitudes to different types of partners being involved in running schools**

- 5.40 When asked about the types of organisations people thought should get involved in the management of schools, parents showed different levels of support for different types of organisations (Figure 5-9).

Figure 5-9: Parental support for different types of partners being involved in running schools



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.41 The most preferred partners were Further and Higher Education institutions (FE and HEIs) although parent groups, state school and charity involvement were also considered to be a positive thing by over three-quarters of parents. Engaging schools from the independent sector received positive responses in 56% of cases, whilst the involvement of faith groups is the least preferred option with only 43% of parents saying it is a 'good thing'. The responses of the second wave vary little from the findings of the first survey.
- 5.42 This suggests that while the principle of engaging other bodies in schools is supported, the actual detail of which institutions people want involved poses some questions for national and local policy makers. The survey indicates that national policy efforts to engage faith groups and the independent sector are targeting the sectors that are likely to be hardest to generate public support. While, work with FE colleges and HEIs would be the most popular move, along with engaging parents.
- 5.43 There were a few differences in the way the different social classes and ethnic group valued the different potential partners (Table 5-2). The parents in social classes DE were less supportive of businesses, other state schools or independent schools being involved in running the schools than other social classes. A larger proportion of parents in social classes AB thought involving charities, faith groups and other states schools was a good thing; whilst parents in C1 class indicated the most support, compared to parents from other social classes, for the involvement of independent schools. Parents in social class in C2 showed strongest support for FE involvement.

Table 5-2: Parental support for different partners by social class and ethnic group

	AB	C1	C2	DE	White	Black	Asian	Other/ Mixed
Business	69%	68%	68%	58%	67%	60%	57%	52%
Charities	83%	80%	75%	75%	78%	84%	78%	78%
FE	88%	88%	92%	90%	90%	90%	93%	89%
HE	87%	87%	88%	87%	87%	93%	88%	87%
Independent schools	55%	56%	50%	47%	50%	61%	61%	64%
Community groups	81%	80%	80%	77%	80%	79%	77%	67%
Faith Groups	47%	45%	40%	41%	41%	61%	55%	52%
Parent Groups	86%	86%	84%	86%	85%	89%	84%	87%
Other state schools	86%	82%	82%	75%	82%	77%	76%	75%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.44 Parents from white ethnic backgrounds were more supportive of business involvement and other state schools and least supportive of faith school involvement in running the schools, whilst parents from black backgrounds expressed strongest support, compared to other ethnic groups, for charities, HEIs, faith and parent groups. FE involvement was particularly favoured by Asian parents. Parents from other/mixed backgrounds were the most supportive of involving independent schools in running the schools but least supportive of business or community group involvement.

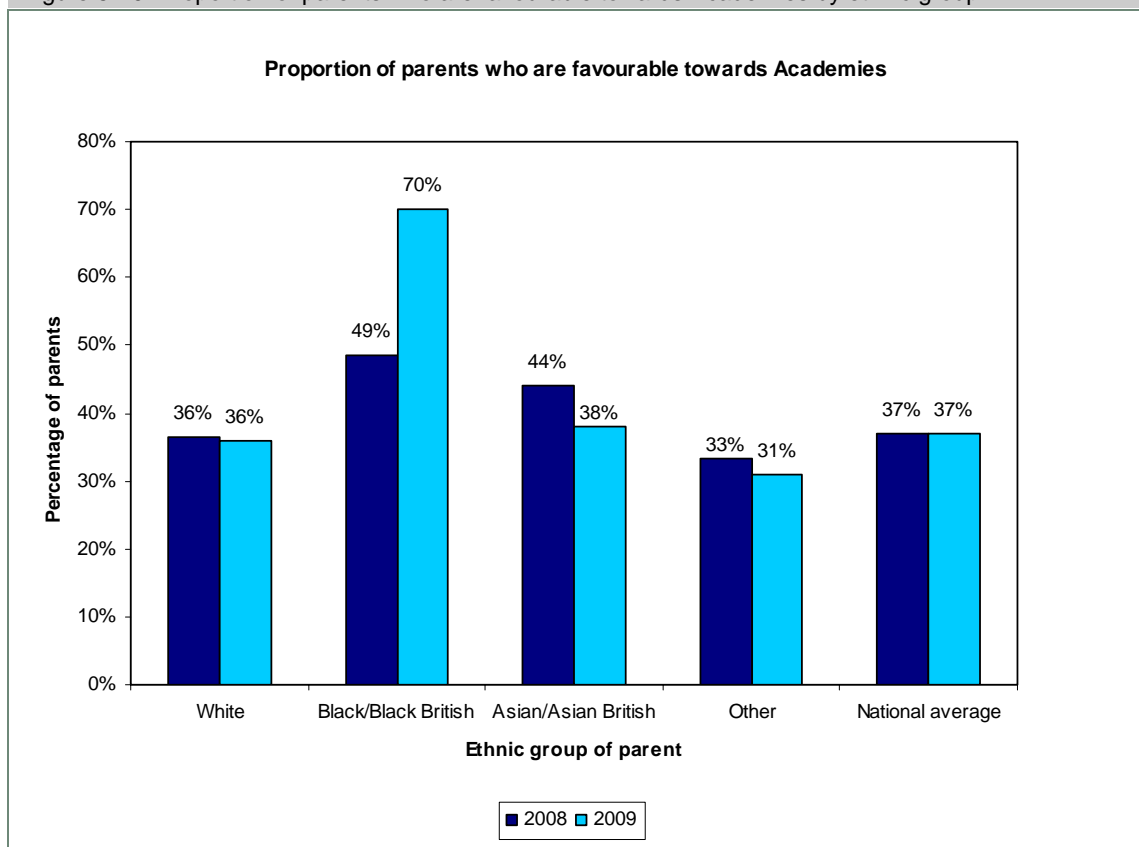
### **Parents' awareness of and support for Academies and Trust schools**

#### *Academies*

- 5.45 Around 60% of the surveyed parents were generally aware of Academies and Trust schools. A similar proportion (58%) said there were Academies in their local area. More parents from social classes AB were aware of Academies in their area (78%) compared to from social classes C1 (66%), C2 (54%) and DE (45%). Similarly, parents from white ethnic groups were far more likely (63%) to be aware of Academies than parents from Asian (41%), black (45%) or mixed/other ethnic groups (42%).
- 5.46 Parental awareness of Academies had increased by five percentage points since 2008. The increase in awareness was greatest in social classes C1 (seven percentage points) and DE (six percentage points). Among the ethnic groups, the awareness of Asian parents had increased significantly since the first survey: awareness had improved from 25% in 2008 to 41% in 2009.

- 5.47 When asked about their attitudes towards Academies, 37% of parents were favourable towards them, whilst 16% were unfavourable. Just under two-fifths (39%) had no opinion and stated they were neither favourable nor unfavourable. Parental attitudes had not changed since 2008. This implies a lack of information on which people feel able to make a decision about Academies. It maybe that this information gap needs to be addressed, if the number of Academies are to be expanded with strong parental support.
- 5.48 Parents in social classes C2 (40%) and DE (43%) were most likely to be favourable compared to parents in classes AB and C1 (34%). Figure 5-10 shows the proportion of parents who are favourable towards Academies by ethnic group. Parents from black ethnic backgrounds were most likely to be favourable towards Academies and they had also become more favourable towards them since 2008.

Figure 5-10: Proportion of parents who are favourable towards Academies by ethnic group



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.49 The main reasons for being favourable towards Academies are summarised in Table 5-3. Nearly one-third of the parents who were favourable towards Academies had a general preference but nearly one-quarter believed Academies were a 'good thing', as they raised standards in failing schools. Just under one-sixth of them stated that good facilities or quality of teaching were reasons for being favourable towards them. The main reasons for being favourable remained the same as in 2008 and the proportions of parents citing them changed little.

**Table 5-3: Reasons cited by parents for being in favour of Academies**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Generally in favour/good thing	29%	32%
Raise standards in failing schools	23%	22%
Good facilities	14%	14%
Quality of teaching is good	14%	12%
External Partners in running schools is a good thing	8%	9%
Benefit disadvantaged communities	9%	7%

*Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting*

5.50 Parental responses differed by social classes and ethnic groups. Parents in social classes AB emphasised good facilities (20%) more than parents in C1 (14%), C2 (12%) and DE (11%); whilst citing less general positive attitude (22%) as a reason for being in favour of Academies (the share of parents in other social classes varied from 33% to 37%). Parents in classes C2 (3%) and DE (4%) were less likely to be in favour academies because they benefitted disadvantaged communities. Parents from other/mixed ethnic backgrounds were less likely to mention raising standards (12%) compared to white (23%) and Asian parents (24%), whilst black parents (18%) mentioned benefits to disadvantaged communities more than parents from other ethnic groups.

5.51 The three main reasons for being unfavourable towards Academies included beliefs that schools should be run by local authorities and not other partners; and a general impression that they are ‘not a good thing’ and ‘cherry pick’ students (Table 5-4).

**Table 5-4: Reasons cited by parents for being not in favour of Academies**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Schools should be run by local authorities/not other partners	14%	27%
Generally not in favour/not a good thing	25%	24%
Cherry picking students	18%	9%
Don't like business involvement	6%	8%
Too large	2%	8%
They are failing/poor reputation	5%	7%
Academies receive more funding than other schools	13%	6%

*Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting*

5.52 Compared to the findings of the 2008 survey, the reasons for a negative attitude towards Academies have changed. Nearly twice as many parents said that schools should be run by local authorities and not external partners; and many more parents now stated that Academies were too large. However, only half as many parents stated reasons like ‘cherry picking’ students or academies receiving more funding as the reasons for their negative attitude.

Table 5-5: Reasons for being unfavourable of Academies (share of parents by social class and ethnic group)

	AB	C1	C2	DE	White	Black	Asian	Other/ Mixed
Schools should be run by local authorities/not other partners	30%	32%	17%	23%	26%	100%	27%	33%
Generally not in favour/not a good thing	20%	21%	29%	32%	25%	-	27%	-
Cherry picking students	10%	8%	7%	12%	9%	-	14%	16%
Don't like business involvement	12%	13%	2%	-	8%	-	14%	18%
Too large	7%	3%	12%	12%	8%	-	-	-
They are failing/poor reputation	4%	10%	10%	4%	8%	-	-	-
Academies receive more funding than other schools	11%	3%	5%	-	6%	-	-	18%

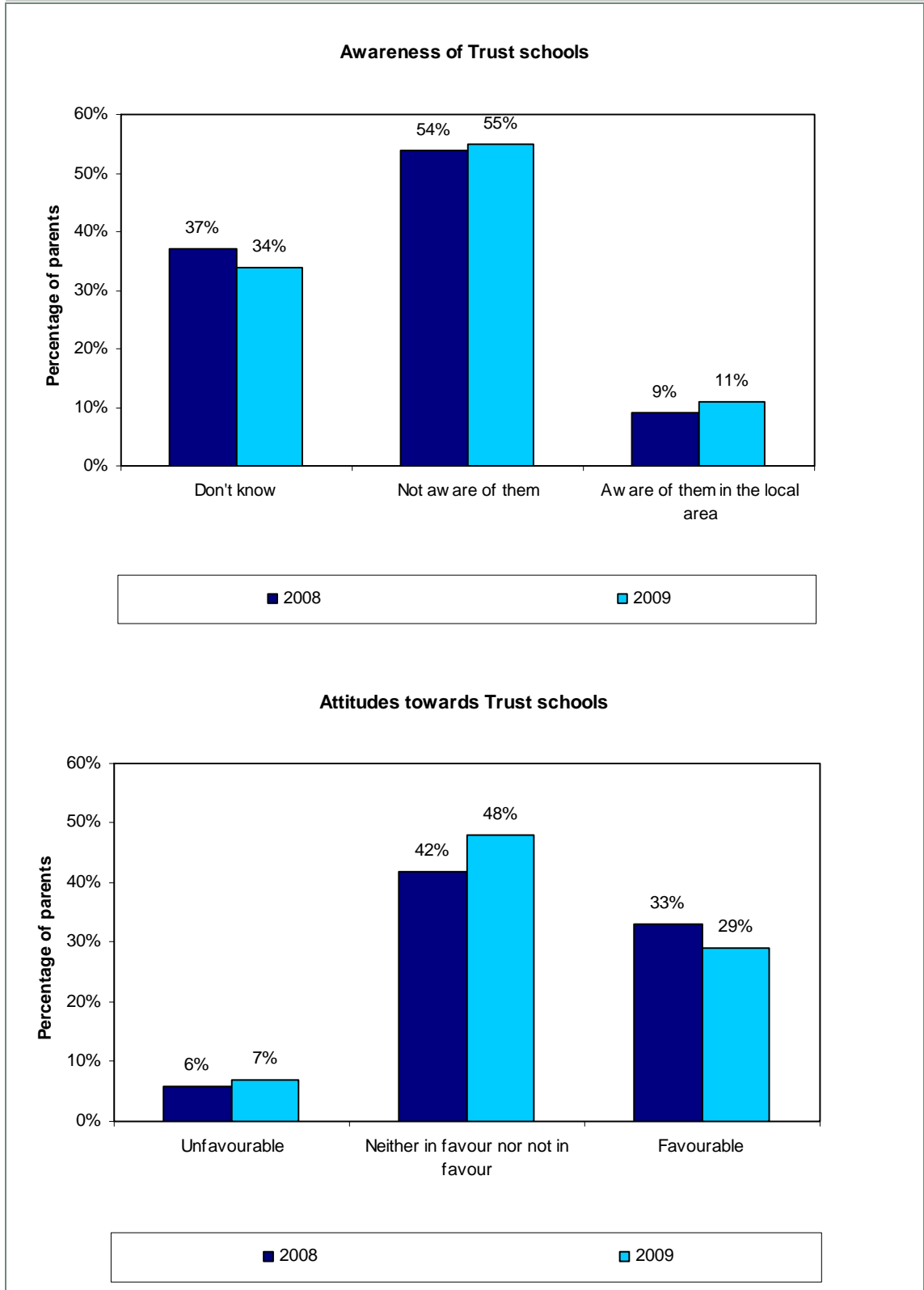
Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.53 As shown in Table 5-5, parents in classes AB and C1 were more likely to cite reasons like not wanting other external partners or businesses to be running schools than parents in classes C2 and DE (who were more likely to cite large size or general negative attitude). All black parents stated that they were not in favour of Academies because they believed schools should be run by local authorities and not external partners. 'Cherry picking' and not approving of business involvement were mentioned by a smaller proportion of white parents than parents from Asian or other/mixed ethnic backgrounds.

#### *Trust schools*

- 5.54 The survey asked the parents whether there were any Trust Schools in their area. Compared to Academies, fewer parents stated that they had one in their area (11%). Fifty-five percent said there were none and 34% were unsure. Moreover, only 29% stated they were in favour of them, whilst 48% stated they were neither in favour nor not in favour. Seven per cent said they were unfavourable towards them (Figure 5-11).

Figure 5-11: Parents' awareness of and attitudes towards Trust schools



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

5.55 Awareness of Trust schools has remained limited. However, there have been some small changes to parental attitudes towards them. The proportion of parents who were favourable has reduced slightly (four percentage points), whilst the proportion of parents who reported being ambivalent has increased (six percentage points).

- 5.56 A larger proportion of parents in social class AB (11%) were unfavourable compared to parents in social class C2 (5%) or DE (3%). In terms of ethnicity, black parents were most likely to be favourable (43%) and parents from mixed/other ethnic background (27%) the least likely. These findings are in line with the 2008 survey.
- 5.57 Those who stated they were favourable towards Trust schools were asked for their reasons (Table 5-6).

Table 5-6: Reasons cited by parents for being in favour of Trust schools

	2008	2009
Generally in favour/good thing	33%	31%
Raise standards in failing schools	25%	22%
External Partners in running schools is a good thing	13%	13%
Benefit disadvantaged communities	8%	6%
Good quality of teaching	8%	6%
Good facilities	6%	5%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.58 The main reason for being favourable was a general opinion that they were a good thing but the ability to raise standards in failing schools and having external partners were also popular reasons for having a positive attitude towards Trust schools. The proportions of parents citing the different reasons have varied little from the findings of the first survey and the changes reflect the general decrease in the proportion of parents who are in favour of them.
- 5.59 Whilst the reasons for being favourable did not vary based on social class, there were differences between ethnic groups. Parents from mixed/other ethnic groups (16%) were less likely to be just generally in favour compared to Asian (46%) and black parents (39%). Raising standards were mentioned by many more Asian parents (36%) compared to black parents (9%), who in turn cited more the benefits to disadvantaged communities as an important reason (36% compared to 6% of white and 18% of Asian parents).
- 5.60 The main reasons for being unfavourable towards Trust schools is the belief that schools should be run by local authorities; generally being opposed to the idea; or the impression that they 'cherry pick' students (Table 5-7). Compared to 2008, more parents believed schools should not be run by other bodies than local authorities, and more had a negative attitude towards Trust schools because they 'cherry pick' students.



**Table 5-7: Reasons cited by parents for being not in favour of Trust Schools**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Schools should be run by local authorities/not other partners	27%	40%
Generally not in favour/not a good thing	30%	19%
Cherry picking students	5%	10%
Don't like business involvement	4%	6%
Trust schools receive more funding than other schools	8%	5%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 5.61 Whilst over one-half of parents in social class AB (52%) were not in favour of Trust schools because they believed the schools should be run by local authorities, only 25% of parents in social class C2, 37% of parents in C1 and 39% in DE stated this.

**Local need for greater diversity of schools**

- 5.62 The survey concluded by asking people about the local need for different types of schools and questions to elicit whether they had particular personal motivations for their answer. Ninety-four per cent of respondents said they had no personal reason to ask for a new school. Those with a personal reason cited the following issues: poor standards (3%), lack of a school nearby (1%), lack of places at a nearby school (1%) and child being bullied (1%).
- 5.63 The parents were also asked if they thought they had enough schools of different types available in their local area. Table 5-8 shows the findings.

**Table 5-8: Breakdown of answers to the question "In your local are there enough...?"**

<b>Type of school</b>	<b>Enough</b>		<b>Not enough</b>		<b>Don't know</b>	
	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>
Specialist schools	43%	45%	40%	36%	17%	19%
Faith schools	66%	65%	22%	22%	12%	12%
Single sex schools	39%	39%	44%	42%	17%	19%
Grammar schools	40%	38%	46%	46%	14%	15%
Academies	27%	36%	46%	37%	27%	26%
Trust/ Foundation schools	19%	21%	44%	36%	36%	43%
Special schools for those with special education needs	43%	44%	40%	37%	18%	18%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 5.64 There is relatively strong demand for schools of different types. Over one-third of parents said there were not enough of most types of school in their local area with the exception of faith schools, where only just over a fifth of the parents said there weren't enough in their area. Grammar and single sex schools were most in demand. The demand for different types of schools has changed only a little in the last year – the largest changes were a drop in demand for Academies and Trust Schools.
- 5.65 The demand for more schools poses challenges for national and local policy makers. Parents seeking more choice and diversity inevitably seek additional provision. However, where there are already surplus school places in an area, local authorities are encouraged to minimise the surplus in the system. This is a tension that has to be managed at national and local levels.
- 5.66 There are some differences in demand for different types of schools across different social classes and ethnic groups. There is greater demand for specialist schools from parents in social classes DE (43% said there were not enough of them in their area) compared to parents in classes AB (27%) and among black parents (48%) rather than white parents (35%).
- 5.67 Black parents (32%) were more likely to say that there were not enough faith schools than white parents (21%). Asian parents (54%) were much more likely to state that there were not enough of single sex schools than parents from other/mixed ethnic backgrounds (30%). More parents in social classes ABC1 (50%) and parents who are of mixed/other ethnic background (56%) stated that there are not enough Grammar schools in their area, compared to parents in classes DE (41%) and parents who are white (46%).
- 5.68 The parents from the different social classes were fairly equally satisfied with the amount of Academies in their area: the proportion of parents who believed there were not enough Academies varied from 34% of parents in AB to 39% of parents in C1. Asian (45%) and black (44%) parents were much more likely to say that there were not enough Academies compared to white parents (37%) or parents from other/mixed backgrounds (34%).
- 5.69 Forty-one per cent of parents in social class C1 stated there were too few Trust schools compared to less than one-third of parents in AB (32%). A larger proportion of white parents (36%) also stated that there were not enough Trust schools, in particular compared to parents from other/mixed ethnic backgrounds (25%).
- 5.70 The strongest demand for special schools came from parents in social classes DE: the proportion of parents stating there were not enough Specialist schools varied from 32% of parents in AB to 47% in DE. Similarly, parents from other/mixed ethnic background were requiring most new special schools (52% of ethnically other/mixed parents, relative to 37% of white and Asian and 44% black parents).

## Summary

- 5.71 The national survey of parents in England provides overall insight into the factors affecting parental choice. It is clear that proximity, exam results and reputation are key factors affecting choice. Proximity is not something local authorities can influence easily. Reputational factors – especially as reputation tends to lag behind actual experience is an area where local authorities might be able to influence levels of satisfaction by providing up-to-date information on improvements.
- 5.72 The national sample of parents in England also showed parents generally say they are making informed decisions, but in some cases they believe their choice of school is limited, so they do not necessarily select the ideal school for their child. Thus, in developing their understanding of demand and satisfaction, local authorities need to understand the nuances involved in making choices and the fact that ‘first choice’ schools are not necessarily the preferred choice, they can be the realistic choice in the circumstances.
- 5.73 Parents also showed support in principle for a diversity of school-types and a demand for more school-types in their area – a need for more grammar schools and single sex schools was most likely to be cited. While there was support for the involvement of partners in schools. The level of support for different types of partner varied considerably: FE and HE institutions were viewed very positively; while faith groups and independent schools received less support. This suggests that when promoting the involvement of partners in schools it should be easier to win parents’ support if the partners are universities and colleges, rather than other types of body or group.

## 6: Findings from surveys of parents in five case study areas

---

- 6.1 This chapter summarises the findings of the parental surveys carried out in the five pathfinder areas: Bolton, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent and Sheffield.<sup>18</sup> Thus, of the eight case studies reviewed for good practice Devon, Poole and Cambridge were excluded from successive parental surveys. Devon and Poole were not included as their work was judged to require a longer lead in time for any impact to be reasonably expected; while Cambridge of course was not a Pathfinder area and therefore was not identified as a site for a parental survey in 2008. The chapter highlights changes in the parental opinions and compares responses to the national survey of parents in England.<sup>19</sup> The chapter has the following sections:
- factors affecting parents' choice of school
  - the process of selecting and getting into a school
  - diversity of provision and partnership working.

### Factors affecting parents' choice of school

- 6.2 The parental satisfaction survey asked parents to identify factors which are important to them, and probed for their views on the services local authorities provide.

#### ***Factors affecting the choice of private sector education***

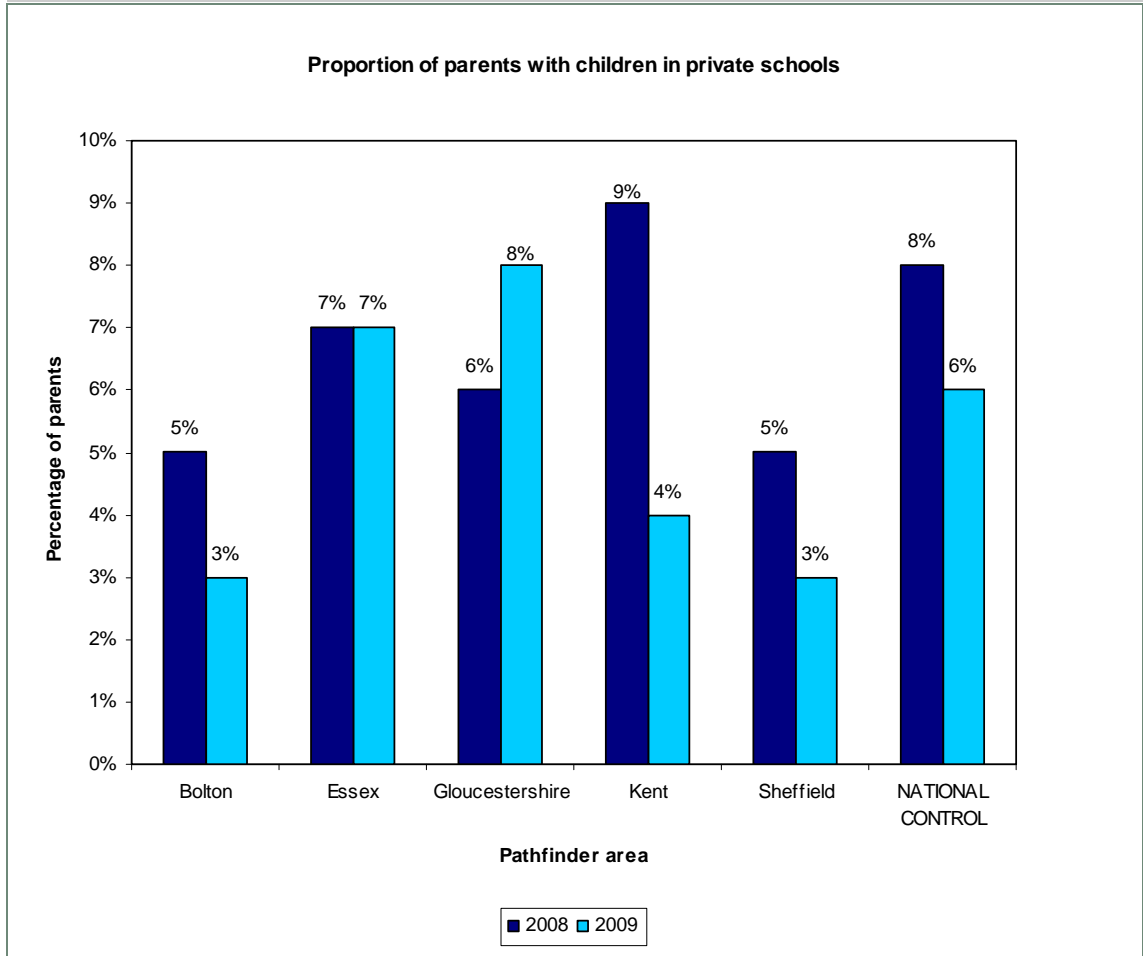
- 6.3 The national survey of parents in England showed 6%-8% of parents chose the private options. The percentage in Pathfinder areas varied both above and below this level in the 2008 and 2009 surveys (Figure 6-1). Of the pathfinders, Kent appears to have had the largest shift (from 9% to 4%), but this may be the result of the recession cutting back household incomes and therefore cutting back use of private education.

---

<sup>18</sup> The first survey took place in January 2008 (six months into the Pathfinder programme) and the second survey in October-November 2009 (18 months after the Pathfinder programme had ended), in order to give the maximum amount of time for the impact of activity in Pathfinder areas to be picked up. The survey of Bolton covered 501 parents in 2008 and 500 parents in 2009 whilst the survey of Essex covered 499 and 504 respectively. The surveys of Gloucestershire, Kent and Sheffield each interviewed 500 parents in both waves.

<sup>19</sup> When comparing findings from the local authority surveys (of 500 parents) changes of +/- 4.1 percentage points or more are significant for findings around the 10% or 90% (at the 95% confidence level), and for changes to be significant with 95% confidence for findings around 50% of respondents, they have to be +/- 6.2 percentage points or more in order to be significant.

Figure 6-1: Parents with children in private schools



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 6.4 The 2009 survey indicated that parents in Bolton who had put their children into private schools did so for a number of reasons, most significant was the fact that they did not get a place in a good state-funded school or the school they wanted (29%). Other reasons included unhappiness with the quality of the state schools in the area (23%) or a belief their chosen school was academically the best (22%). The importance of higher academic standards has reduced significantly since 2008 (by thirty-seven percentage points), whilst the inability to get a place in the chosen school has become more of a driver (increase of eighteen percentage points). General preference towards private schools (17%), the second most common reason cited in 2008, was cited less (8%) in 2009.
- 6.5 In 2009 Essex parents decided to choose a private school because of the academic standards (42%) or because they were not happy with the quality of the state schools in the area (19%) or in the school where a place was offered (18%). The importance of academic standards rose since 2008 (by 24 percentage points from 18%); whilst the quality of state schools where their child was offered a place or in the area more generally, were not mentioned in 2008.

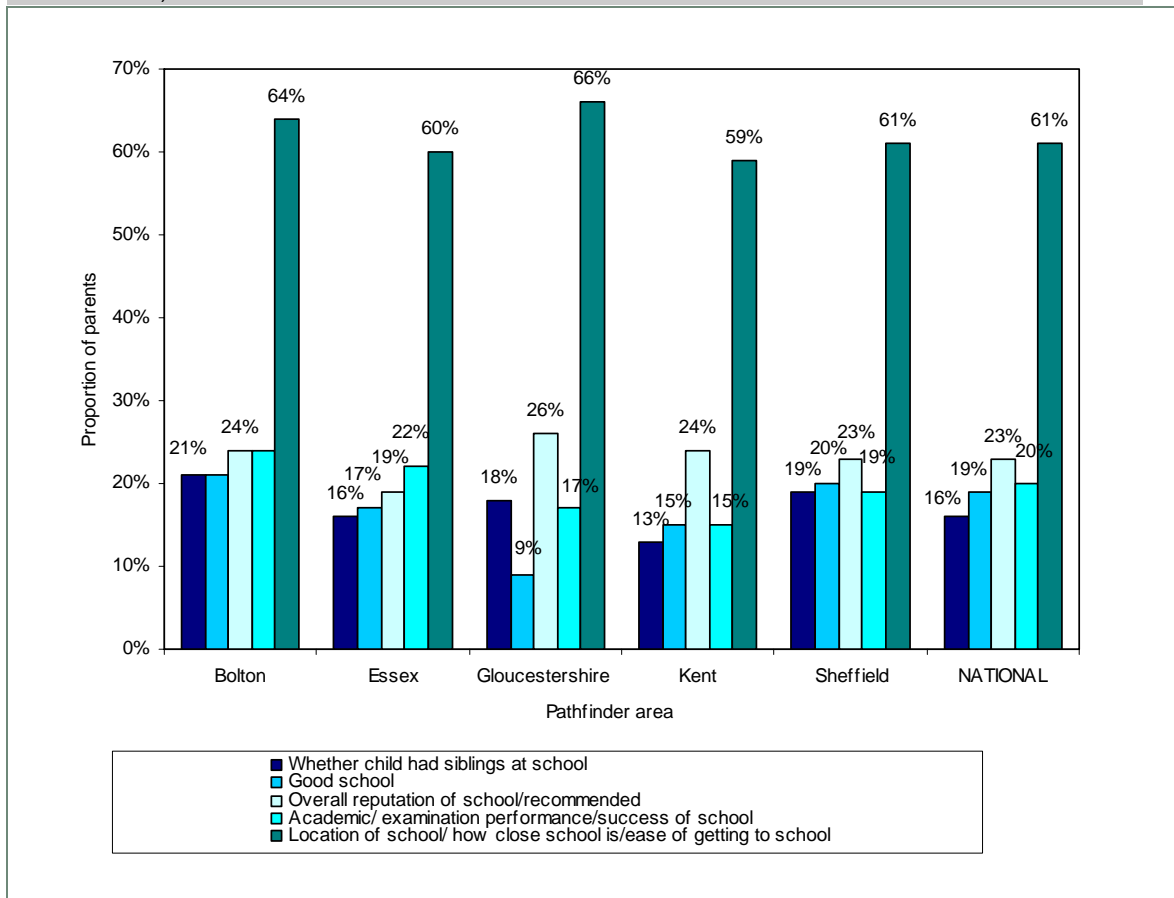
- 6.6 According to the 2009 survey, the three main reasons for parents placing their child into a private school in Gloucestershire were the academic performance of the school (42%), dissatisfaction with the quality of state schools in the area (19%) and better catering for the child's needs (14%). Although the Gloucestershire parents' views reflect closely the views of parents nationally, their opinions have changed somewhat since the first wave of the survey. Then the main reason cited was general preference for private sector education (21%) which was not mentioned in 2009. Moreover, the importance of academic performance increased by twenty-three percentage points, whereas less parents have stated better catering for their children's needs as the main reason.
- 6.7 The 2009 survey showed parents in Kent were more persuaded by the academic standards of the private schools compared to parents across the country. Nearly one-half of parents (49%) said this was the reason for choosing private sector education (compared to 43% nationally). Other reasons included general preference for private schools (30%) and better catering for child's needs (25%). Whilst the three most popular reasons have remained the same since 2008, the importance of the school's academic performance has increased (by 21 percentage points).
- 6.8 Compared to parents surveyed nationally in 2009, fewer parents in Sheffield considered academic performance (26% compared to 43%) but more considered the school's ability to cater for their child's needs (20% compared to 18%) and the quality of the state school their child was offered a place in (22% compared to 8%).

#### ***Factors affecting the choice of school in the state sector***

- 6.9 Parents were asked to comment on the key factors they considered when applying for schools. Figure 6-2 shows the five most cited reasons across the five pathfinder areas by parents whose children were going to a state school.
- 6.10 In Bolton, the parents outlined the key factors to be the location, academic performance of the school and the overall reputation. Although the main factors provided matched the ones mentioned by parents nationally, the proportions of parents mentioning each of the factors were larger. No significant changes were found between 2008 and 2009, i.e. they were less than 6.2 percentage points.
- 6.11 In Essex, the main reasons outlined were the same as nationally but slightly fewer parents considered the overall reputation and the impression of being a 'good school' whilst more parents considered the academic performance of the school. In the recent year, the proportion of parents considering overall reputation has gone down (eight percentage points).

- 6.12 In Gloucestershire, many more parents consider location, the overall reputation and whether they have siblings in the school when applying for places for their children than nationally. However, it was less common for parents to consider factors such as academic performance and the impression of a 'good school'. The proportion of parents considering location as a factor in their decision making increased whereas the share of parents who consider reputation and academic performance have reduced but both changes are likely to be within the standards survey error margin.
- 6.13 Although the factors considered by parents living in Kent matched the nationally most commonly mentioned factors, the proportions of parents mentioning them are generally slightly smaller. Over the last year, the proportion of parents considering location increased (from 54% in 2008 to 59%) as did the share of parents considering academic performance (five percentage points). While the change is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, it contrasts to the picture in England where the proportion contracted.
- 6.14 Parents in Sheffield responded in a very similar manner to parents around the country: only the proportion considering whether they have siblings in the same school is higher (three percentage points). Compared to the responses from Sheffield in 2008, fewer parents considered location (six percentage point decline).

Figure 6-2: Factors considered when applying for a school place for their child (parents with children in state schools)



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey 2009

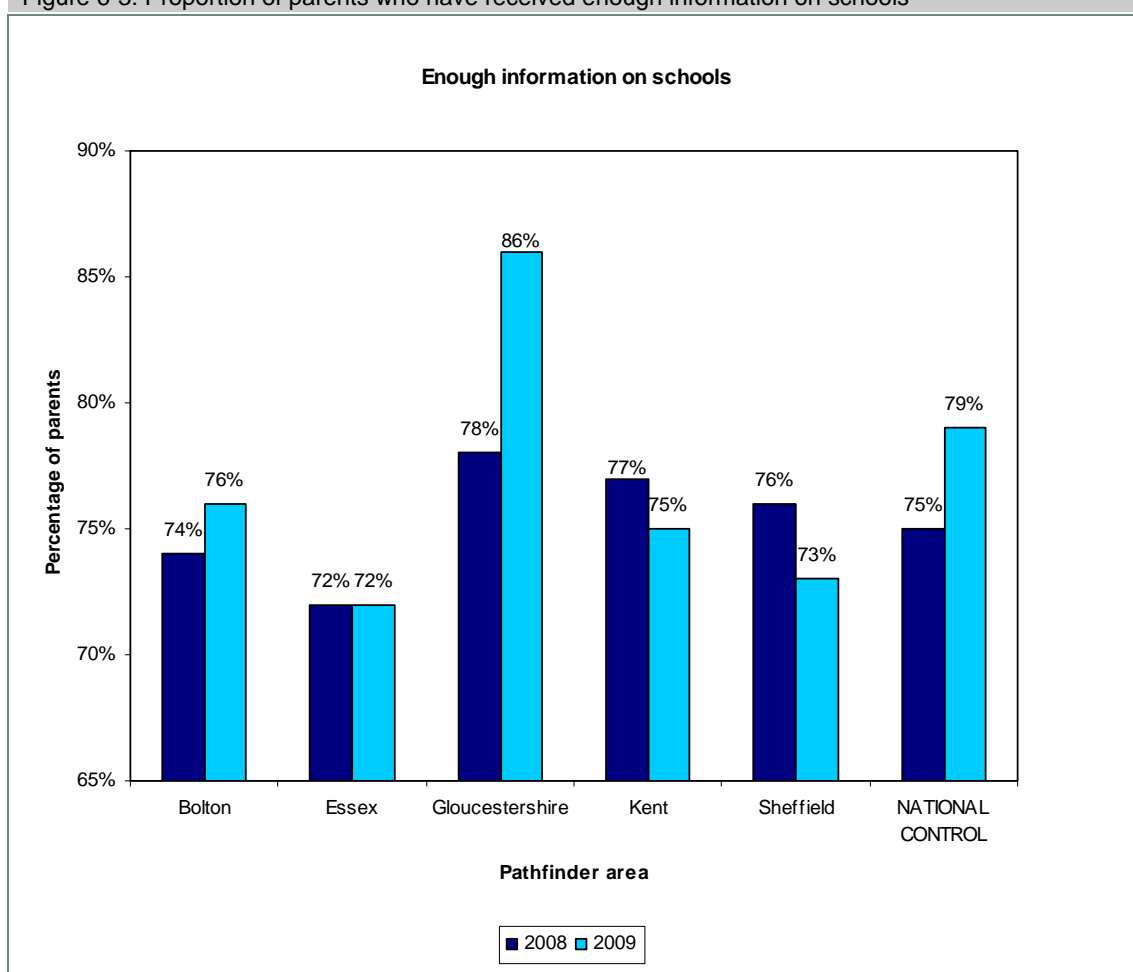
## The process of selecting and getting into a school

- 6.15 The parental survey asked the parents about the extent to which they received information on schools, application process, admissions criteria and application deadlines.

### **Information on schools**

- 6.16 As shown in Figure 6-3, the extent to which parents considered to have received enough information varied from one pathfinder area to another with Gloucestershire as an outlier in terms of an increased proportion of parents saying they had enough information on schools.

Figure 6-3: Proportion of parents who have received enough information on schools



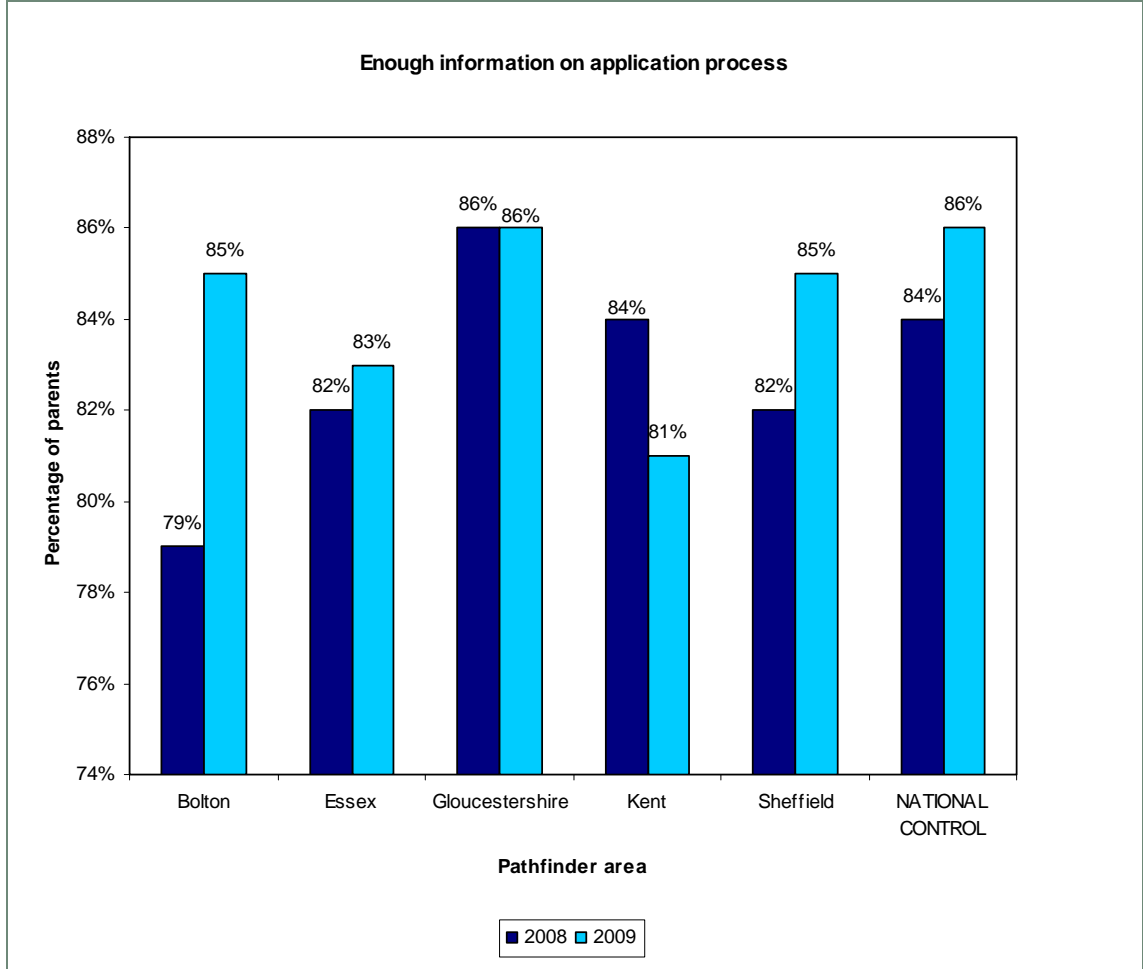
Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinder's Parental Satisfaction Survey



### Information on the application process

6.17 Bolton showed the largest improvement in parents saying they had enough information on the application process (Figure 6-4).

Figure 6-4: Proportion of parents who have received enough information on the application process

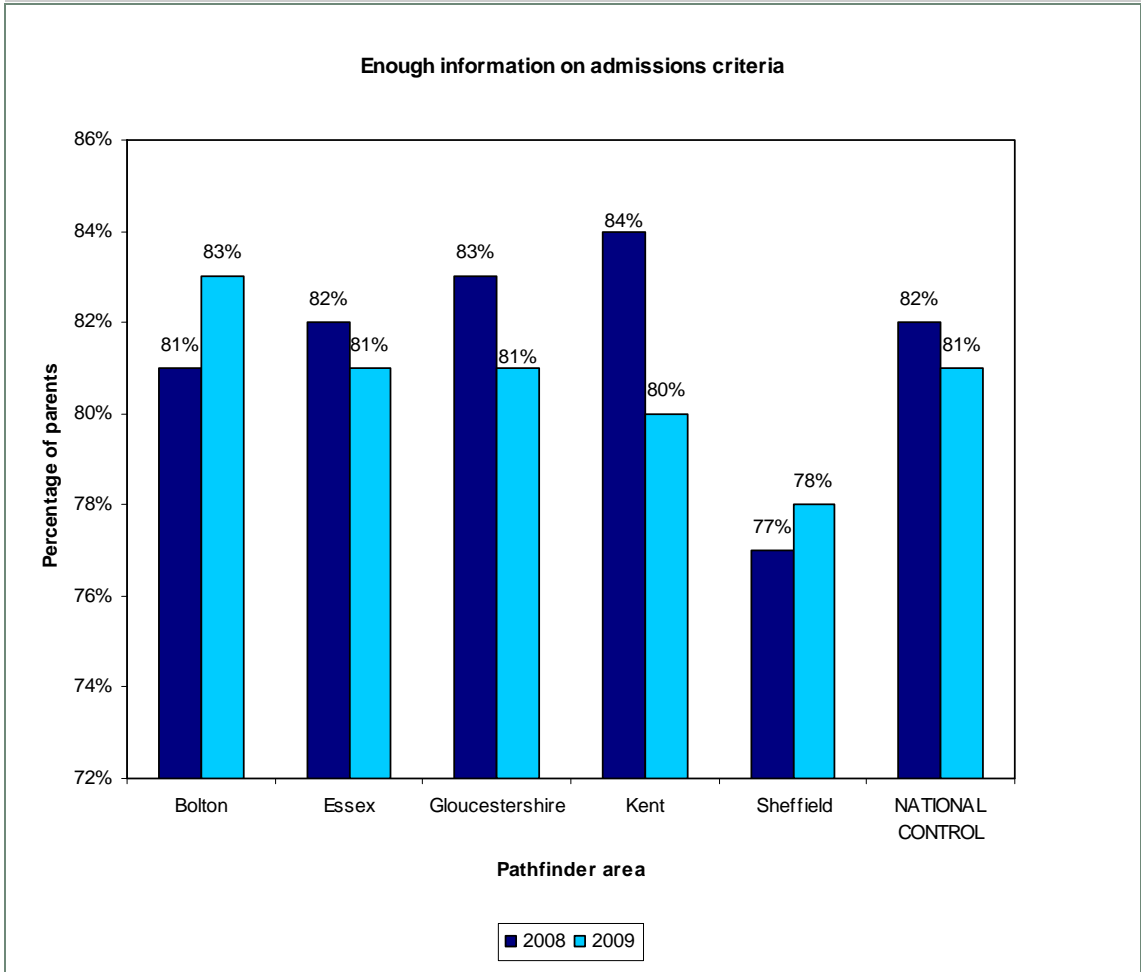


Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

### Information on admissions criteria

6.18 Nationally, 81%-82% of parents stated they had received enough information on admissions criteria and 11% said they did not receive sufficient information. Figure 6-5 shows the proportions of parents who stated they received enough information across the five pathfinder areas. The picture is fairly stable around this national average in all areas except Sheffield which sits below the national average in both 2008 and 2009. There was no significant change in any areas.

Figure 6-5: Proportion of parents who have received enough information on the admissions criteria

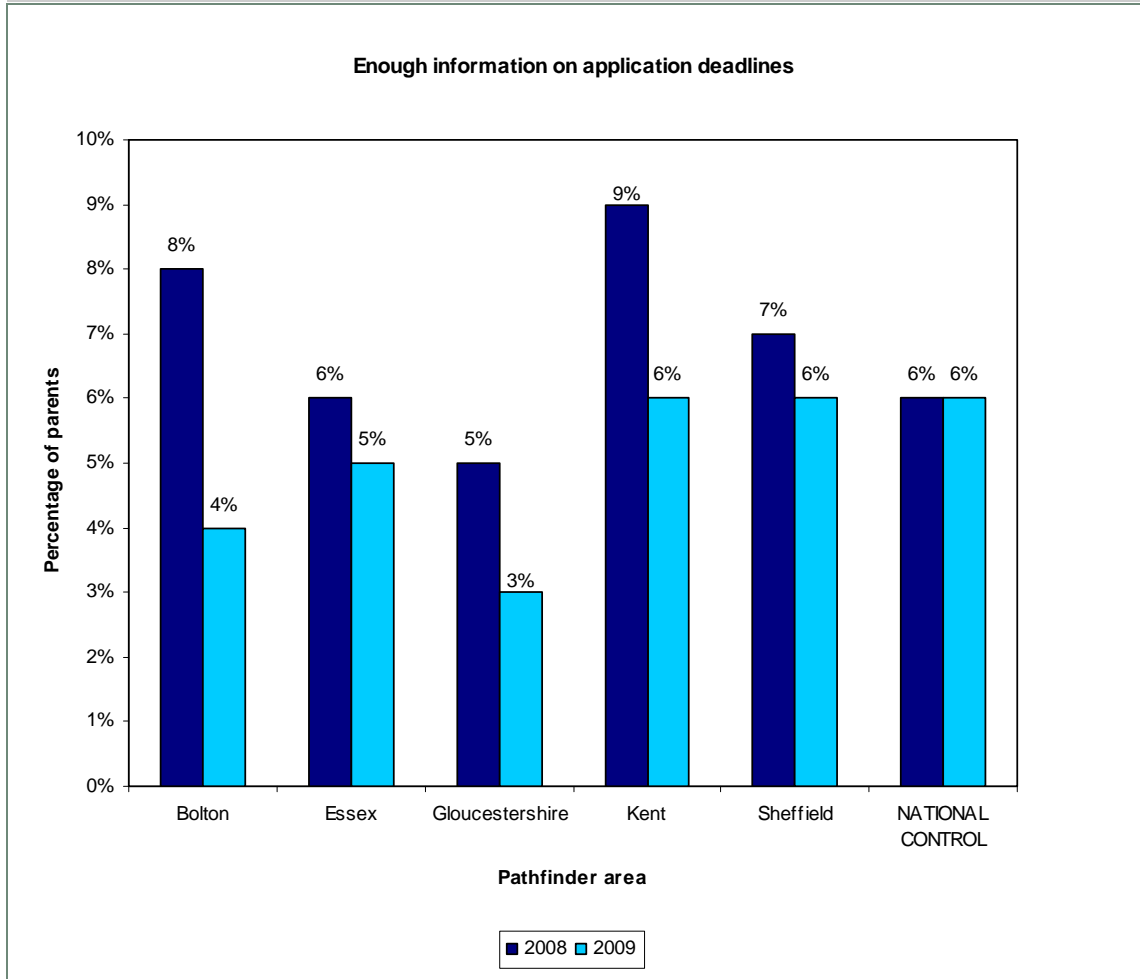


Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

### Information on the applications deadline

6.19 Nationally, 89% of the surveyed parents stated they had received enough information and 6% stated they had not, whilst 2% said they had not received any information on application deadlines. Bolton, Kent and Sheffield were slightly above the national average of parents saying they had not received enough information in 2008. Essex and Gloucestershire were at or below the national average in both waves of the survey (Figure 6-6). None of the changes were statistically significant.

Figure 6-6: Proportion of parents who have not received enough information on application deadlines



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

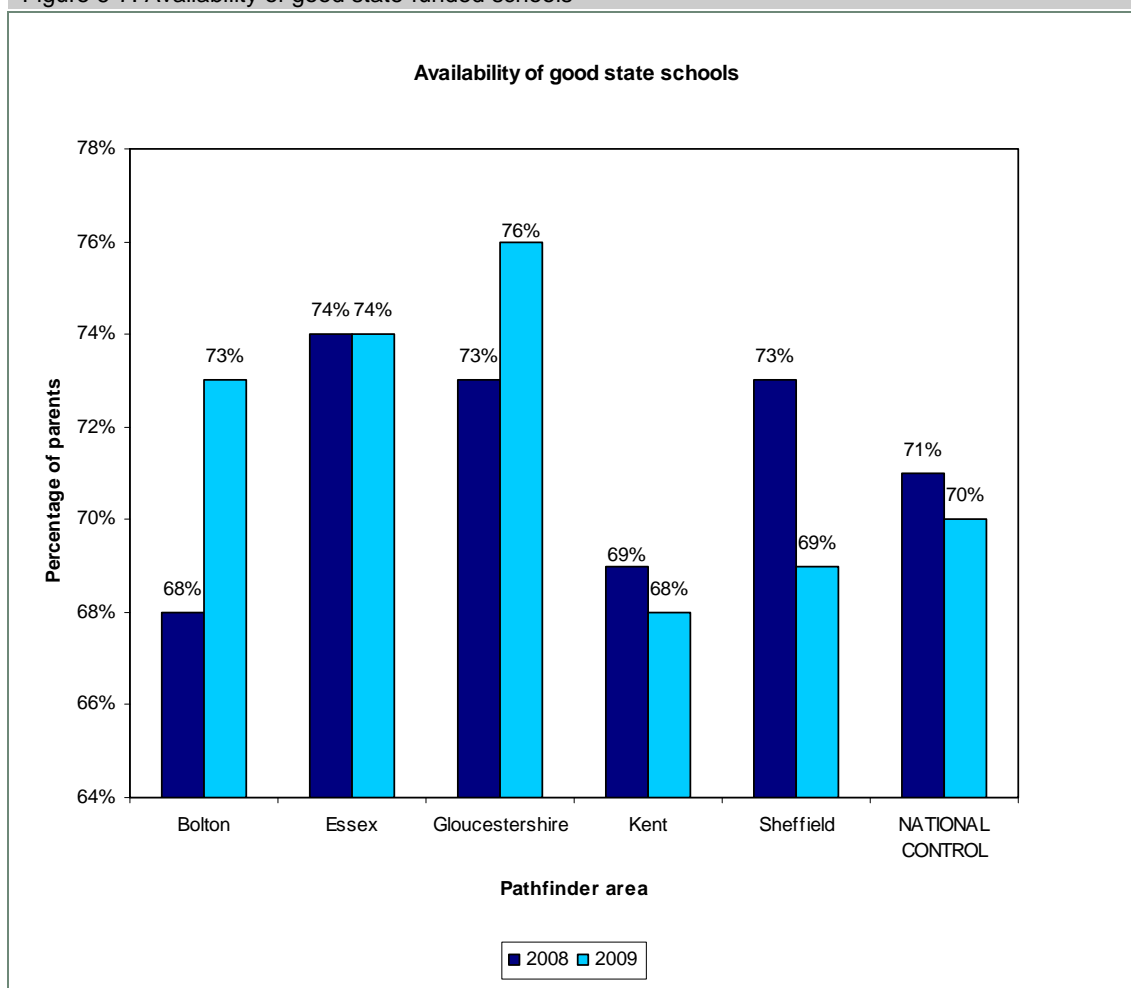
## Choice and diversity of provision and partnership working

- 6.20 The parental survey probed parents about the extent to which they valued school diversity and believed there was choice available in their local area.

### **Availability of 'good' state schools**

- 6.21 In 2009, seven in 10 parents surveyed across the country believed they had good choice of state-funded schools available to them whilst 27% stated this was not the case.

Figure 6-7: Availability of good state-funded schools



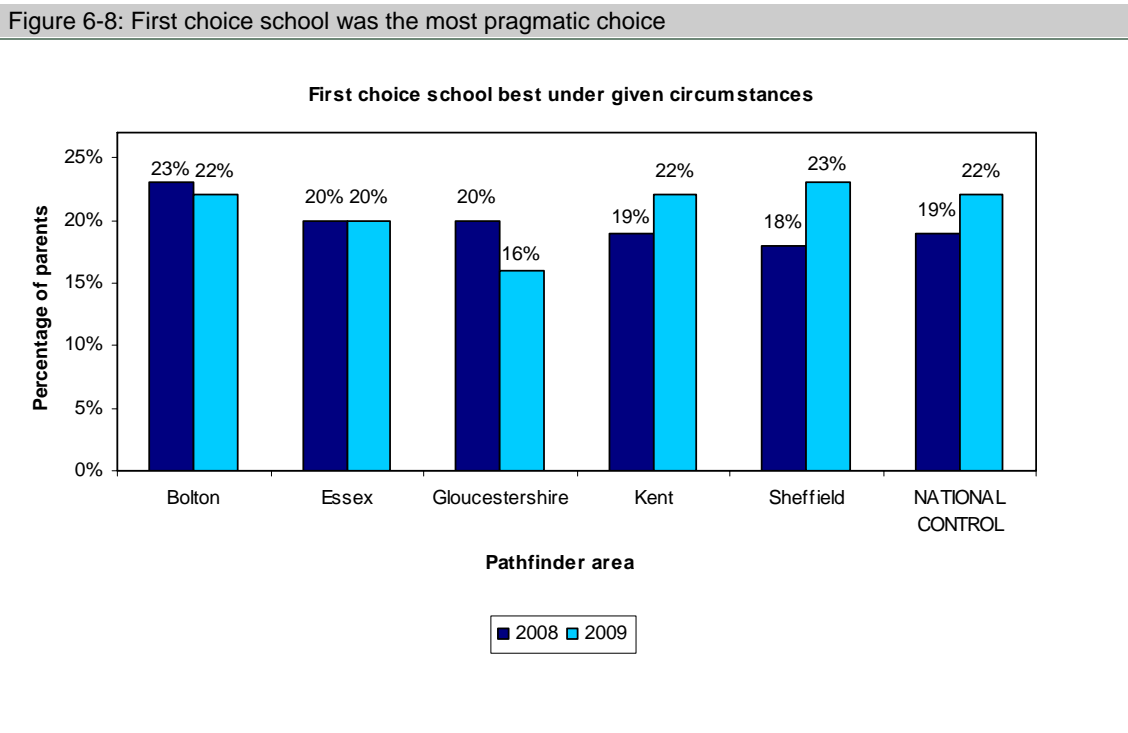
Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 6.22 In Bolton, after an increase of five percentage points since 2008, nearly three quarters of parents said they had good choice available to them, shifting them from below to above the national average (although this is within the scope of survey error). In Essex, where the parental satisfaction with the good state schools in 2008 was above the national average by a three percentage points, the share of parents remained constant. In Gloucestershire the proportion of parents being positive about the level of state school choice available to them increased by three percentage points, compared to a national decrease of one percentage points.

6.23 In Kent there was little change between the first and second wave of the surveys and the proportion of satisfied parents was just below the national average. In Sheffield the share of parents stating they had enough choice decreased by four percentage points signalling a more restricted choice of good state schools than nationally (but the change was not statistically significant).

**Pragmatism in choices**

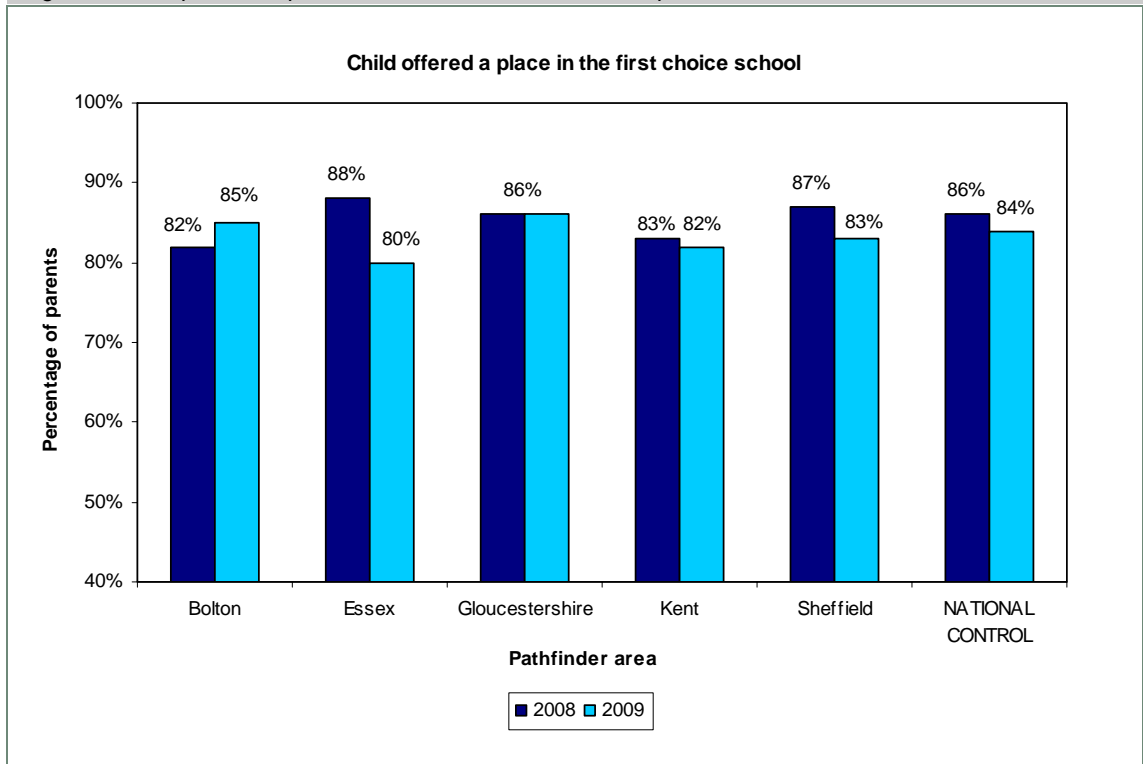
6.24 The 2009 national survey of parents showed that for most parents (77%) whose children were in state-funded schools, the school of their first choice was the ideal school for their child. For 22% the first choice school was a pragmatic choice (e.g. based on location or availability of places). Figure 6-8 shows across the five areas the share of parents who stated that their first choice of school was not ideal but the most pragmatic choice under the given circumstances – it shows a fairly stable pattern across areas and the country.



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

6.25 Parents were also asked whether their child was offered a place in their first choice school (Figure 6-9) – again the pattern is fairly consistent.

Figure 6-9: Proportion of parents whose child was offered a place in the school of their first choice

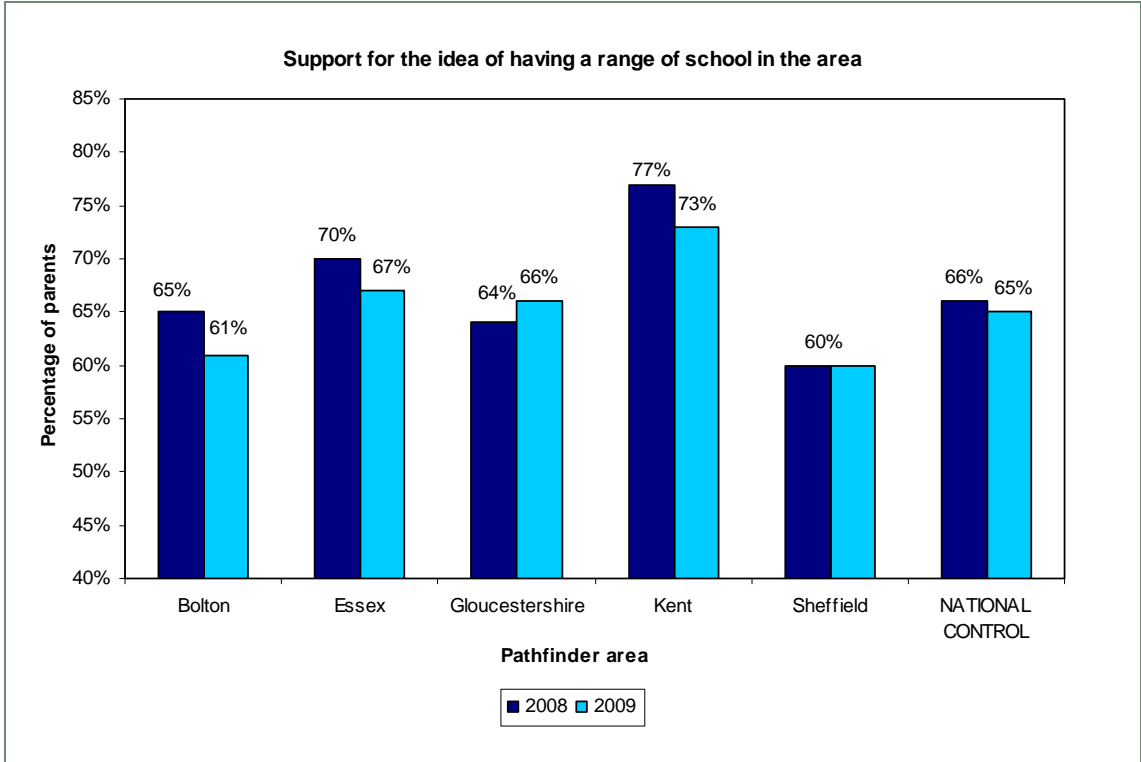


Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinder's Parental Satisfaction Survey

### Parental attitudes towards diversity of schools

6.26 The survey asked parents about the extent to which they supported the idea of having different types of schools available to them in their local area. The surveys of parents in England and in Pathfinders showed support for having a range of schools in an area. While there was some movement, none of the changes were statistically significant.

Figure 6-10: Parents supporting school diversity



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

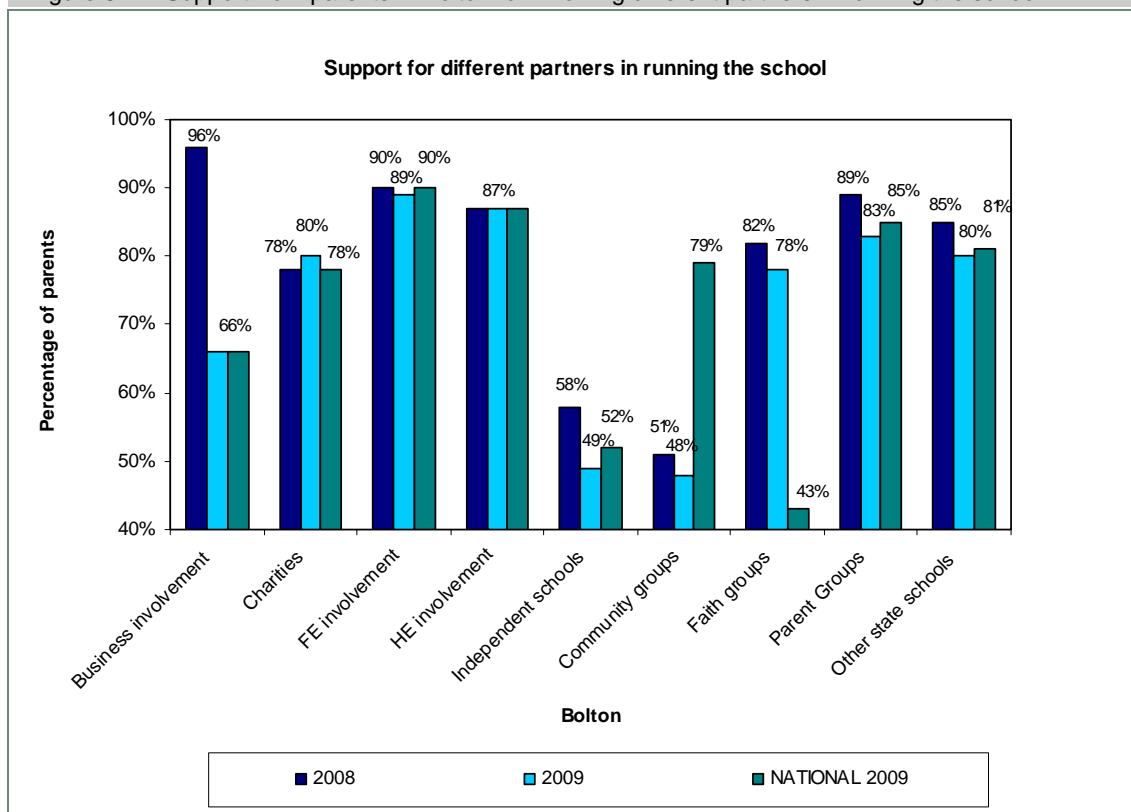
### **Attitudes to different types of partners being involved in running schools**

6.27 The national survey of parents in England found that the three most preferred partners to be involved in running schools were further education colleges (90%), higher education institutions (87%) and parent groups (85%).

#### *Bolton*

6.28 In Bolton, parents expressed strongest support for involving further and higher education institutions as well as parent groups, in line with the national sample for England (Figure 6-11).

Figure 6-11: Support from parents in Bolton for involving different partners in running the school



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

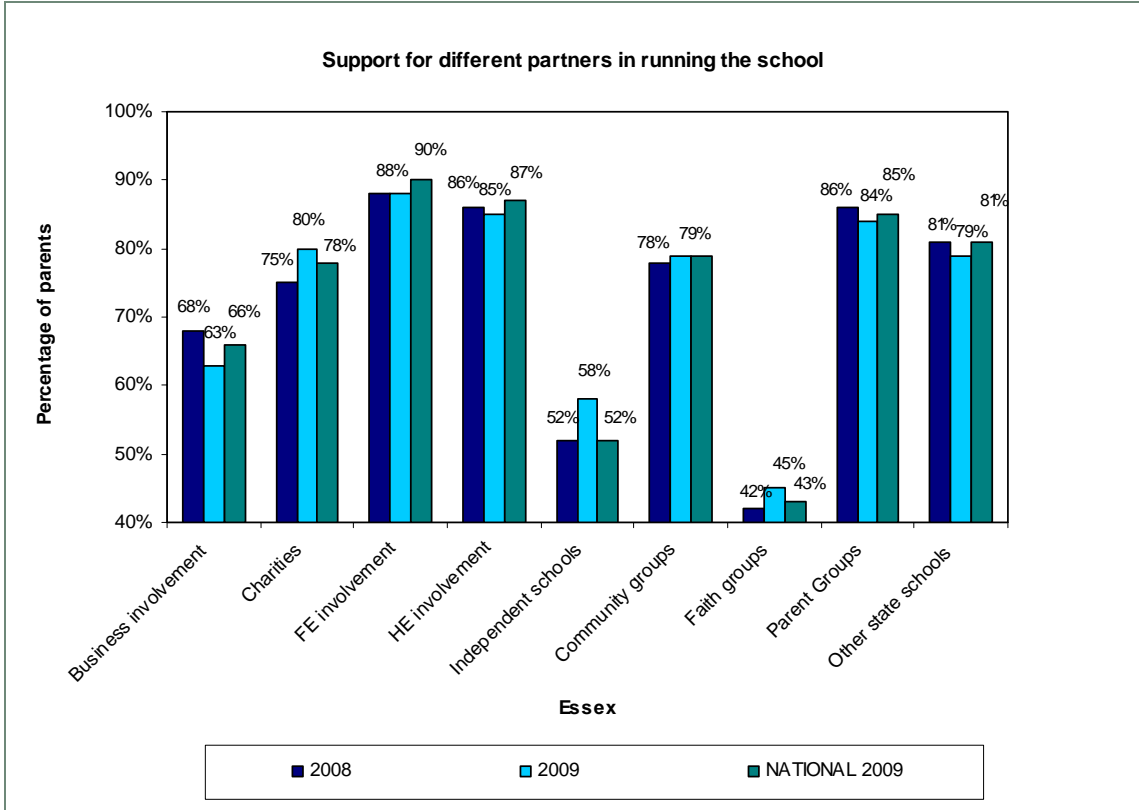
6.29 Whilst the national survey of parents in England showed an increase in support for involving businesses, in Bolton the support reduced significantly since 2008. Similarly, the decline in support for parent groups being involved in running the schools (six percentage points) was larger than nationally (three percentage points). The reduction in the support for independent school involvement was also notable (nine percentage points).



Essex

6.30 In line with national findings for England, parents in Essex were most favourable towards involving further and higher education and parent groups (Figure 6-12).

Figure 6-12: Support from parents in Essex for involving different partners in running the school



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

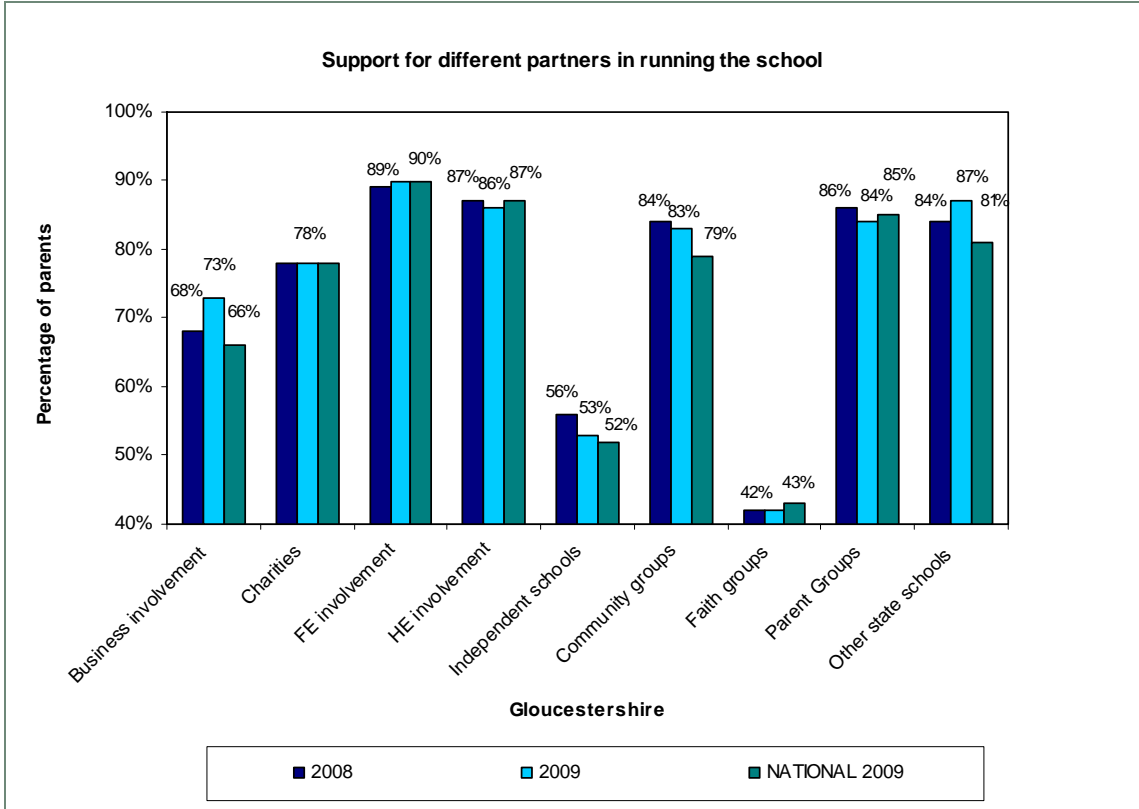
6.31 Whilst the support for business involvement in running schools increased nationally, there was a five percentage decrease in the proportion of parents in Essex supporting businesses involvement (this was not statistically significant). There was more parental support for charities, independent schools and faith groups in Essex than nationally, and the increase in support for charities was larger than across the country (but again at 95% confidence level this was not statistically significant).

6.32 Whilst nationally the support for independent schools decreased by two percentage points since 2008, parents in Essex were more supportive of these partners being involved in running the school (a six percentage point rise).

Gloucestershire

6.33 In Gloucestershire the parents showed more support for business, community group, independent and other state school involvement whilst being less supportive of faith group involvement in running schools than parents nationally (Figure 6-13). There were few significant changes between 2008 and 2009, although support for business involvement rose by five percentage points (which is within the margin of survey error).

Figure 6-13: Support from parents in Gloucestershire for involving different partners in running the school

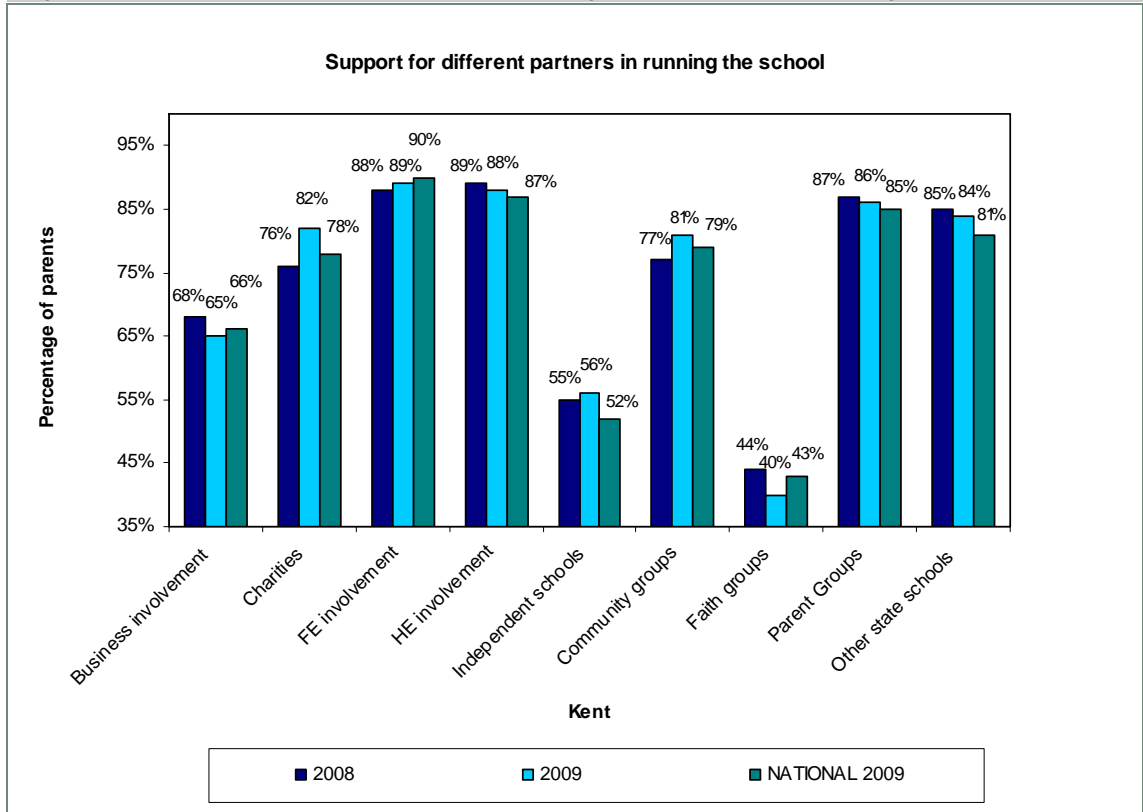


Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

Kent

6.34 Like nationally, FE, HEIs and community groups were the most supported partners for running schools in Kent. However, the proportions of parents stating they support higher education and parent group partners were larger than the English average (Figure 6-14). There was no significant change in responses between 2008 and 2009.

Figure 6-14: Support from parents in Kent for involving different partners in running the school

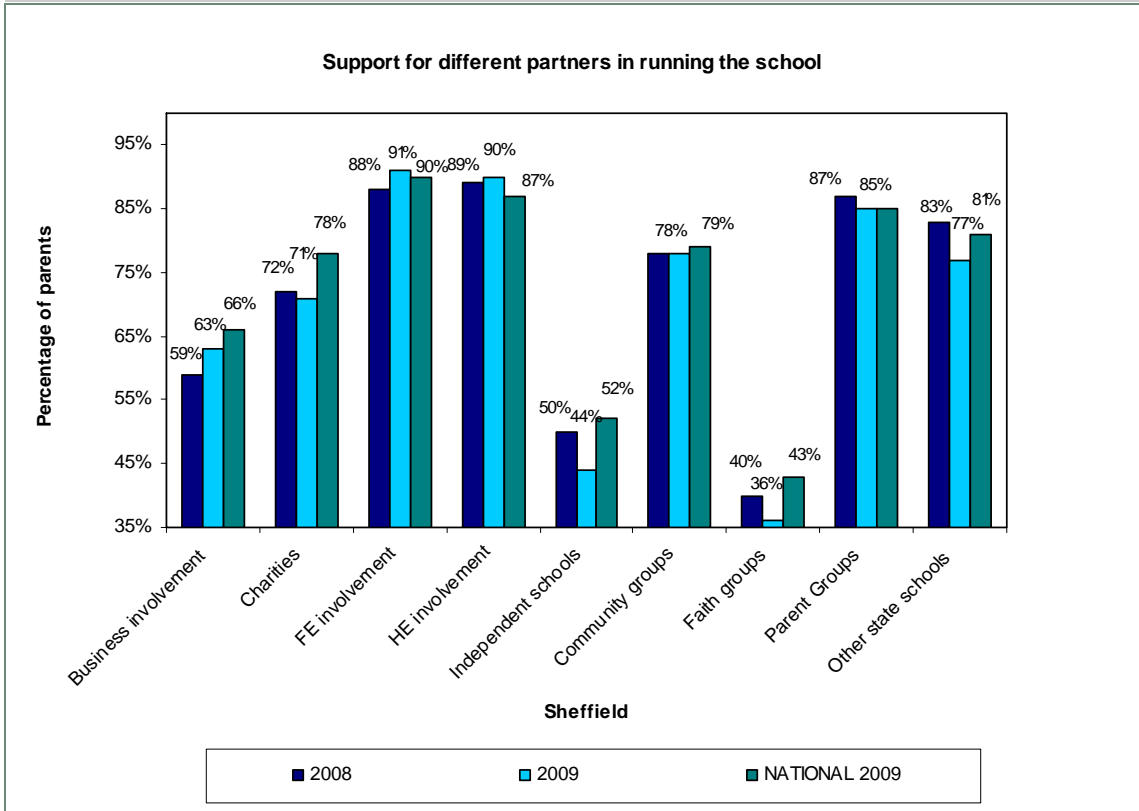


Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

Sheffield

6.35 The surveyed parents living in Sheffield expressed stronger support for FE and HE involvement than parents nationally (Figure 6-15). Support for independent schools' involvement in state schools reduced by more than it did on average across the country (down from 50% to 44%, but not statistically significant).

Figure 6-15: Support from parents in Sheffield for involving different partners in running the school



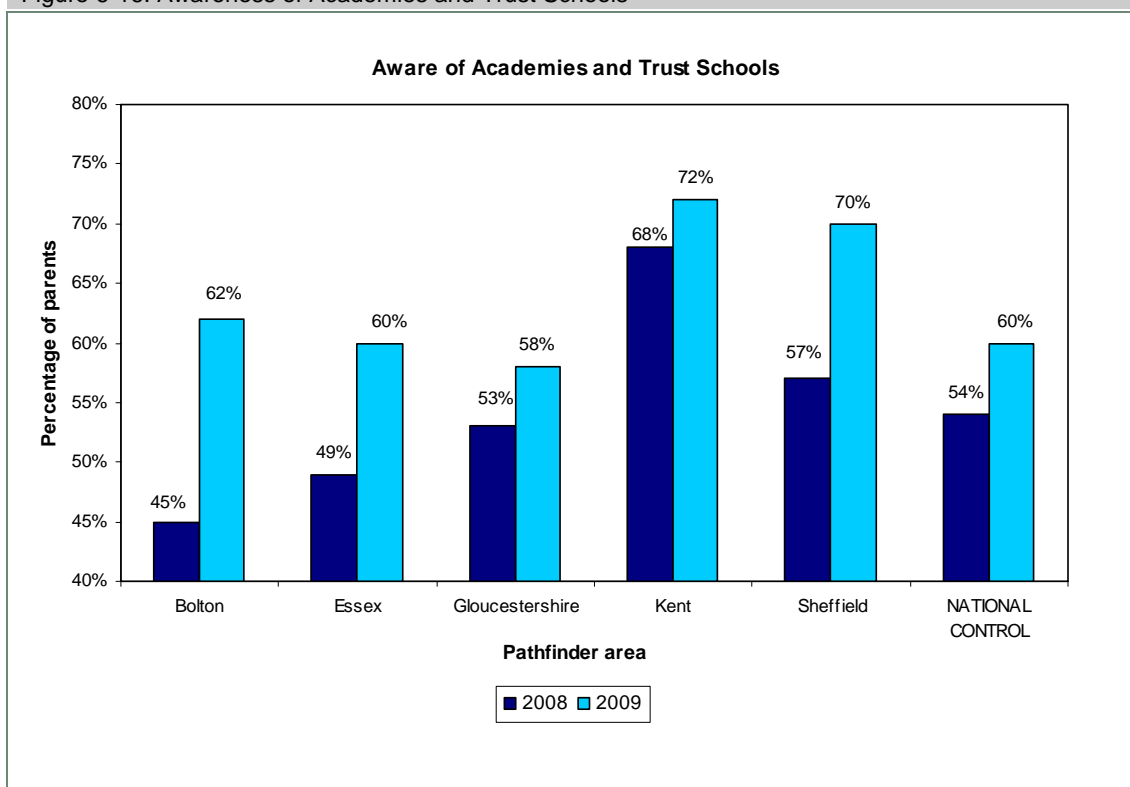
Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

## Parents' awareness of and support for Academies and Trust schools

### Academies

- 6.36 Nationally, 60% of parents were aware of Academies and Trust Schools in general, and a similar proportion (58%) knew they existed in their area. In most of the pathfinder areas, both the general awareness and awareness of the Academies in their area was above national average (Figure 6-16).
- 6.37 In Kent and in Sheffield the general awareness of Academies and Trust schools was much better than nationally; only in Gloucestershire was awareness below the national average. Compared to a four percentage point increase nationally between the first and the second wave of the parental survey, the general awareness improved much more in Bolton (seventeen percentage points), Essex (eleven percentage points), and Sheffield (thirteen percentage points).

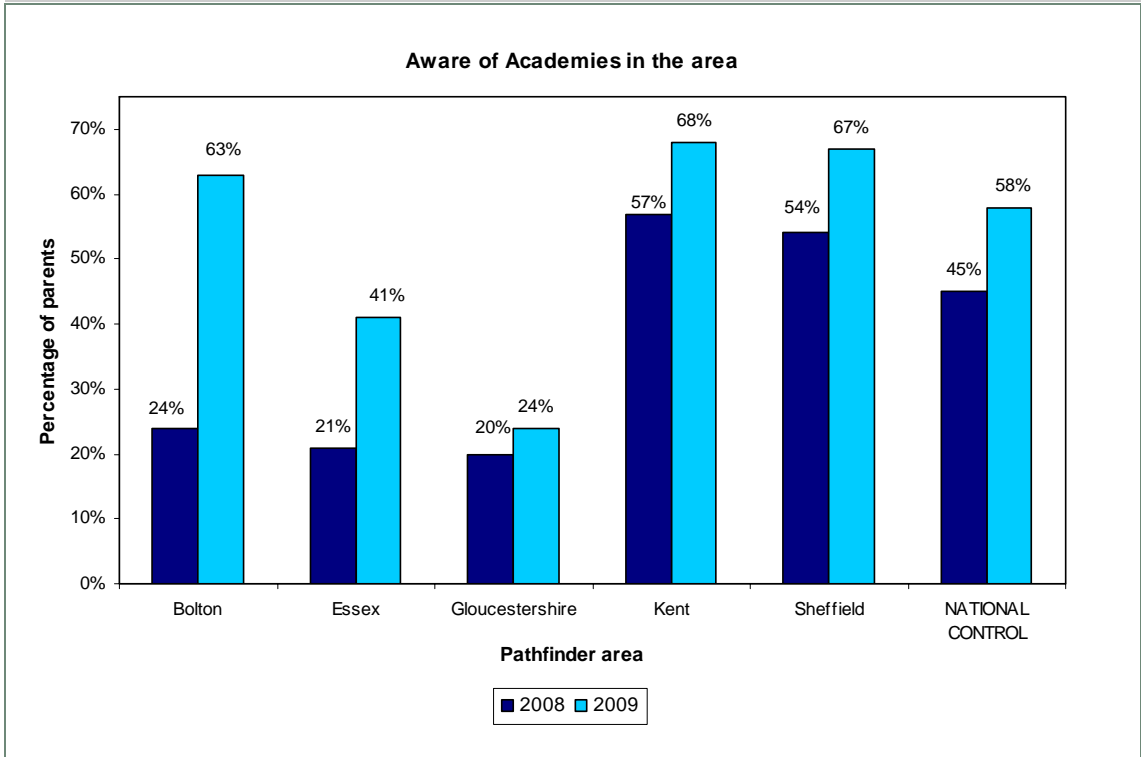
Figure 6-16: Awareness of Academies and Trust Schools



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 6.38 The parental awareness of Academies in their area also increased (Figure 6-17). In the context of a thirteen percentage point increase nationally; the awareness increased most in Bolton (39 percentage points) and Essex (20 percentage points). Parental awareness of Academies in the area was higher in Sheffield than nationally and had risen by more than national average.

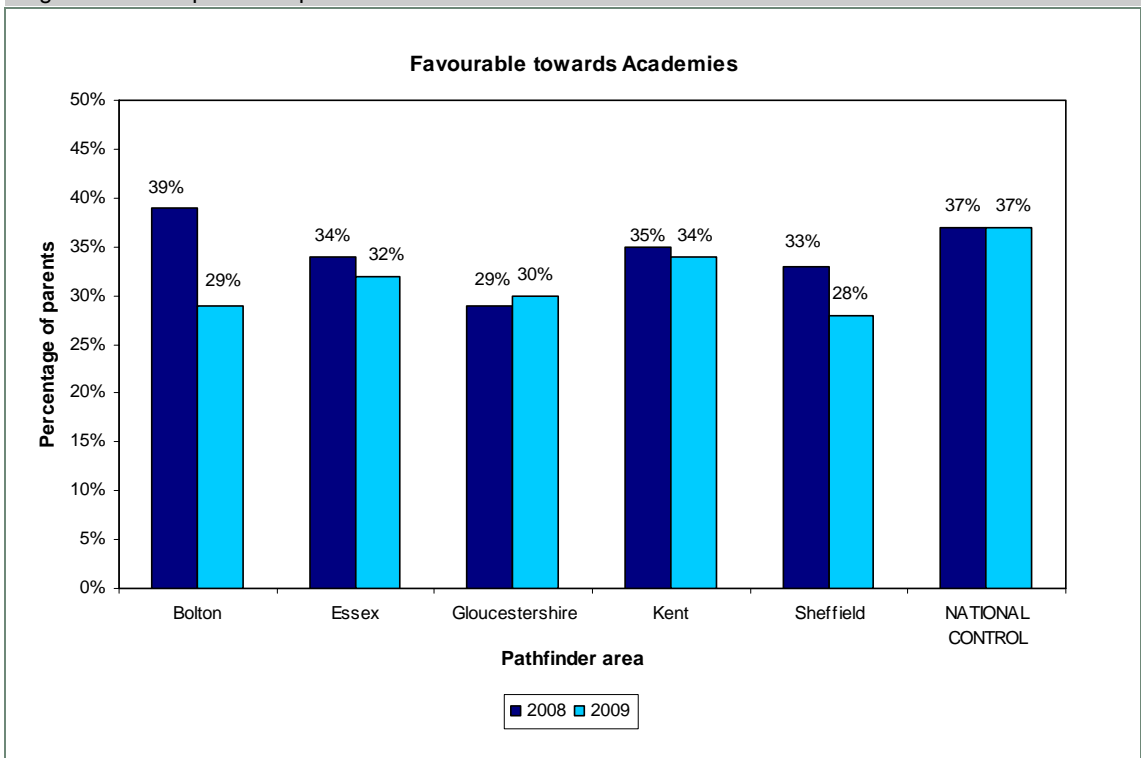
Figure 6-17: Parental awareness of Academies in the area



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

6.39 Whilst the awareness of Academies is increasing, only around a third of parents expressed direct support for them (Figure 6-18). Around four in 10 parents nationally were undecided and around one in six parents were unfavourable towards them.

Figure 6-18: Proportion of parents who are favourable towards Academies



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 6.40 In the Pathfinder areas, the proportion of favourable parents was smaller than nationally. In Bolton, the proportion was eight percentage points below the national level in the most recent wave and (in contrast with a nationally constant level of support) there was a reduction of 10 percentage points in the proportion of parents stating they were favourable towards Academies.
- 6.41 The main reasons for being favourable towards Academies were general support (32%), their ability to raise standards in failing schools (22%) and the good facilities they have (14%) (Table 6-1). However, in Gloucestershire and Kent more parents were supportive of Academies because they believed the involvement of external partners in running schools was a good thing, whilst a larger share of parents in Essex and Gloucestershire were in favour of Academies because they attracted more funding than other schools.

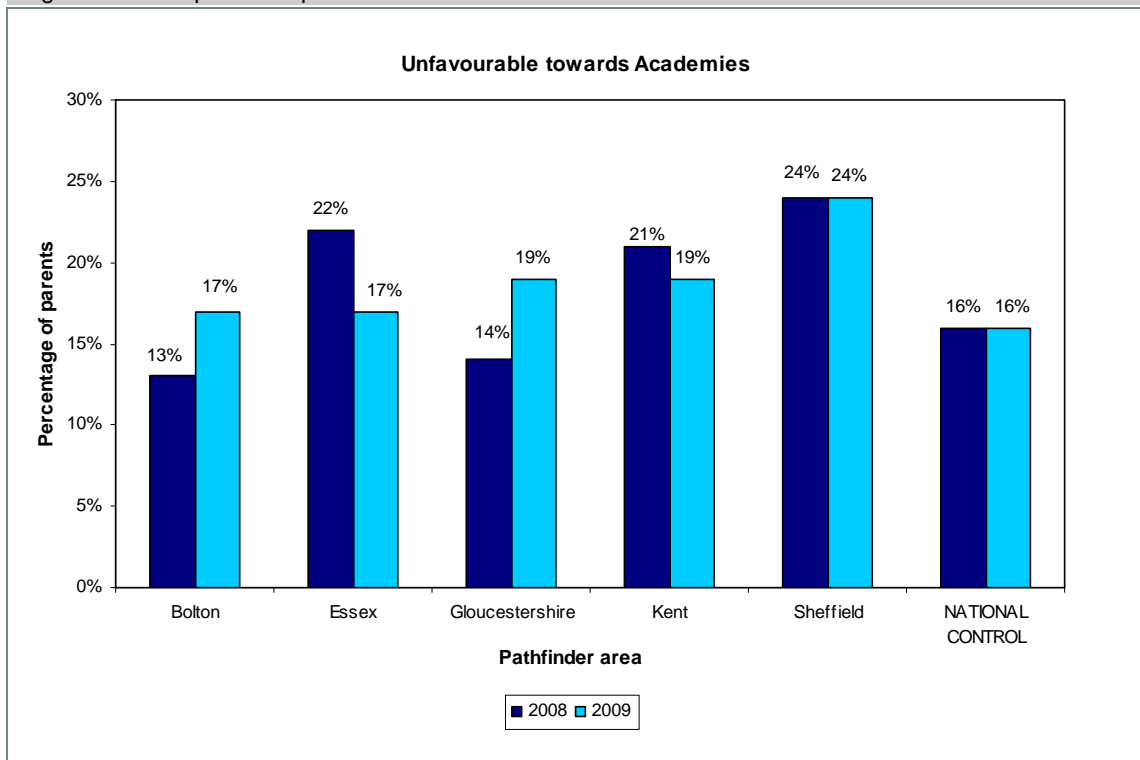
Table 6-1: Reasons cited by parents for being in favour of Academies (2009)

	<b>Bolton</b>	<b>Essex</b>	<b>Gloucest.</b>	<b>Kent</b>	<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>National i.e. England</b>
Generally in favour/good thing	35%	42%	23%	31%	34%	32%
Raise standards in failing schools	24%	18%	13%	22%	21%	22%
Good facilities	16%	9%	11%	17%	10%	14%
Quality of teaching is good	10%	8%	9%	11%	11%	12%
External Partners in running schools is a good thing	8%	6%	17%	17%	13%	9%
Benefit disadvantaged communities	7%	5%	9%	7%	9%	7%
Innovative	7%	5%	5%	0%	6%	2%
Good for specialist subjects/needs/talent	6%	5%	3%	2%	0%	3%
Receive more funding	5%	11%	11%	7%	3%	5%
Better for children	5%	5%	0%	0%	6%	2%
More subject/rounded education on offer	4%	3%	3%	6%	3%	1%
Make pupils behave well	4%	3%	3%	8%	0%	0%
More subjects/well rounded education	4%	3%	3%	6%	3%	1%
Good for community	3%	3%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Enables more choice	3%	3%	6%	0%	1%	2%
More opportunity/all deserve a chance	2%	3%	9%	1%	2%	5%
Free from local authority control	0%	1%	4%	1%	1%	0%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 6.42 The reasons for being supportive did not change much between surveys. In Essex, the higher funding of Academies was not mentioned at all by parents in 2008, whilst in the recent wave 11% stated this to be the reason for their support. In Gloucestershire, the proportion of parents who supported Academies out of a general preference nearly halved from 41% in 2008 to 23% in 2009, compared to a three percentage point increase nationally.
- 6.43 In Kent the share of parents stating the involvement of external partners was the main reason for their support increased by seven percentage points, as opposed to one percentage point nationally. In Sheffield there was a six percentage point reduction in the proportion of parents being supportive of Academies because of their good facilities and teaching. In the context of minor national changes (no change and two percentage point decrease respectively).
- 6.44 Nationally the proportion of parents who were not supportive of Academies remained at 16%, and none of the areas saw a statistically significant shift in views (Figure 6-19).

Figure 6-19: Proportion of parents who are unfavourable towards Academies



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 6.45 The two main reasons for unfavourable attitudes towards Academies are the same as stated nationally: a perception that schools should be run by local authorities and a general impression that they are 'not a good thing' (Table 6-2).



- 6.46 In Bolton, 'cherry picking' was not as commonly cited a reason for not supporting Academies as in other areas, but poor reputation of Academies and a general impression of Academies not being a good thing were mentioned by more parents than nationally. In Essex, fewer parents were unfavourable towards academies due to believing that schools should be run by local authorities or general impression that they were not a good thing. The parents in Gloucestershire were more likely to cite disapproval for business involvement and less likely to mention Academies being too large than parents nationally.
- 6.47 In Kent a much larger proportion of parents mentioned poor reputation of Academies being the reason for their negative attitude, whilst a smaller proportion mentioned preference for local authority running schools. In Sheffield the parental reasons for not being in favour of Academies matched the findings of the national survey of parents in England with one exception: the proportion of parents mentioning 'failing reputation' as the main reason was nearly four times as large as nationally.
- 6.48 There were some changes to the reasons cited by parents between 2008 and 2009. In Bolton, the share of parents citing general impression that Academies are not a good thing has reduced from 35% in 2008 to 21% in 2009 and in the context of a national drop of only one percentage point, this difference is notable. The share of parents mentioning 'cherry picking' students also reduced by more than fifteen percentage points compared to a nine percentage point drop nationally.
- 6.49 In Essex, fewer parents in the 2009 survey mentioned that they were just generally not in favour of Academies (fourteen percentage points reduction compared to one percentage point nationally). Similarly in Gloucestershire, this share reduced by nine percentage points.
- 6.50 Between the two surveys carried out in Kent, the parental reasons for negative attitudes stayed largely the same. The only exception was the share of parents who stated that a general impression of Academies not being a good thing was the reason for their negative attitude towards this school type: the proportion of parents citing this reason reduced by 20 percentage points (compared to one percentage point nationally). This change was also observed in Sheffield where the share of parents also reduced sixteen percentage points.

Table 6-2: Reasons cited by parents for not being in favour of Academies (2009)

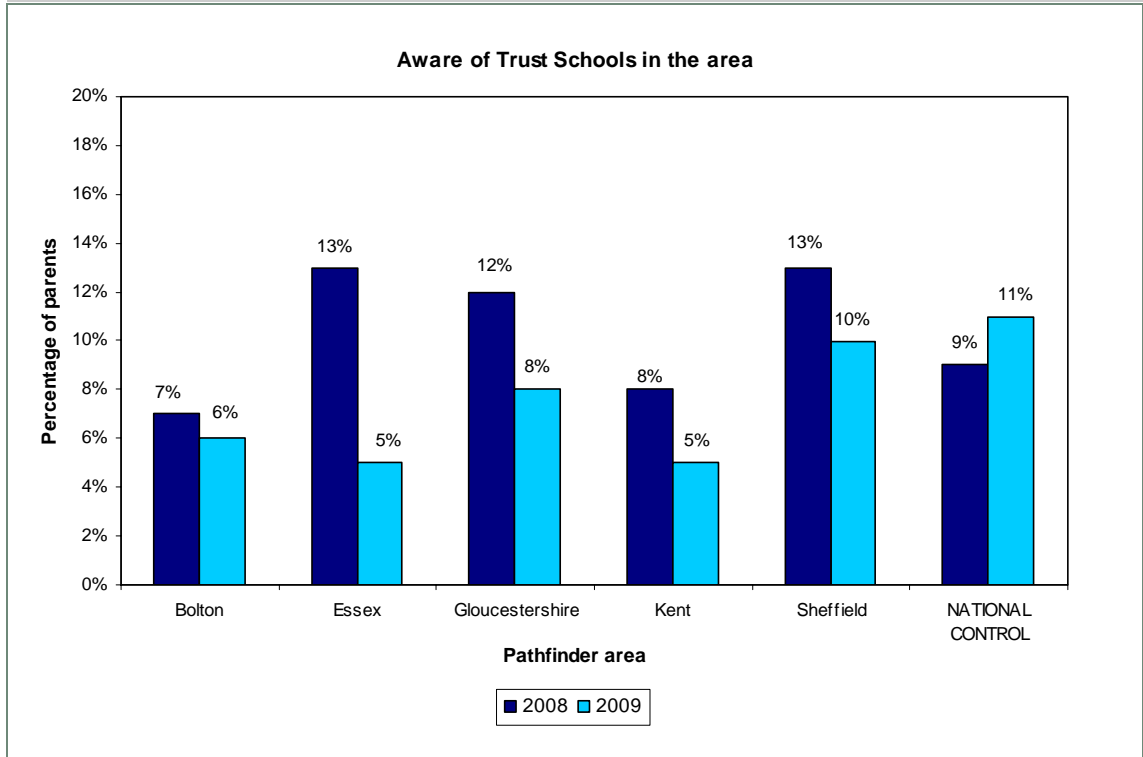
	Bolton	Essex	Gloucest.	Kent	Sheffield	National i.e. England
Schools should be run by local authorities/not other partners	21%	21%	31%	20%	27%	27%
Generally not in favour/not a good thing	35%	13%	20%	21%	23%	24%
Cherry picking students	2%	6%	12%	6%	4%	9%
Don't like business involvement	9%	2%	13%	6%	5%	8%
Too large	3%	4%	3%	9%	5%	8%
They are failing/poor reputation	12%	6%	3%	18%	27%	7%
All schools should be improved	6%	6%	2%	1%	1%	3%
They receive more funding than other schools	5%	8%	5%	9%	3%	6%
They don't benefit disadvantaged communities	4%	8%	5%	6%	5%	3%
It just changes the name	4%	0%	0%	6%	2%	5%
Own experience	2%	2%	3%	0%	0%	1%
Unsure of motives	2%	0%	2%	3%	4%	3%
Make pupils behave well	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Disagree with profit making	2%	0%	1%	0%	4%	1%
Don't like the idea of religion/faith school/influence	2%	0%	3%	1%	4%	2%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

### *Trust Schools*

- 6.51 Parental awareness of Trust schools being in the local area varied from one Pathfinder area to another but generally there was a reduction in awareness, in comparison to an increase in the sample of parents in England (Figure 6-20). The largest reductions in awareness were in Essex and Gloucestershire, whilst the smallest reduction was in Bolton – none of the changes was statistically significant.

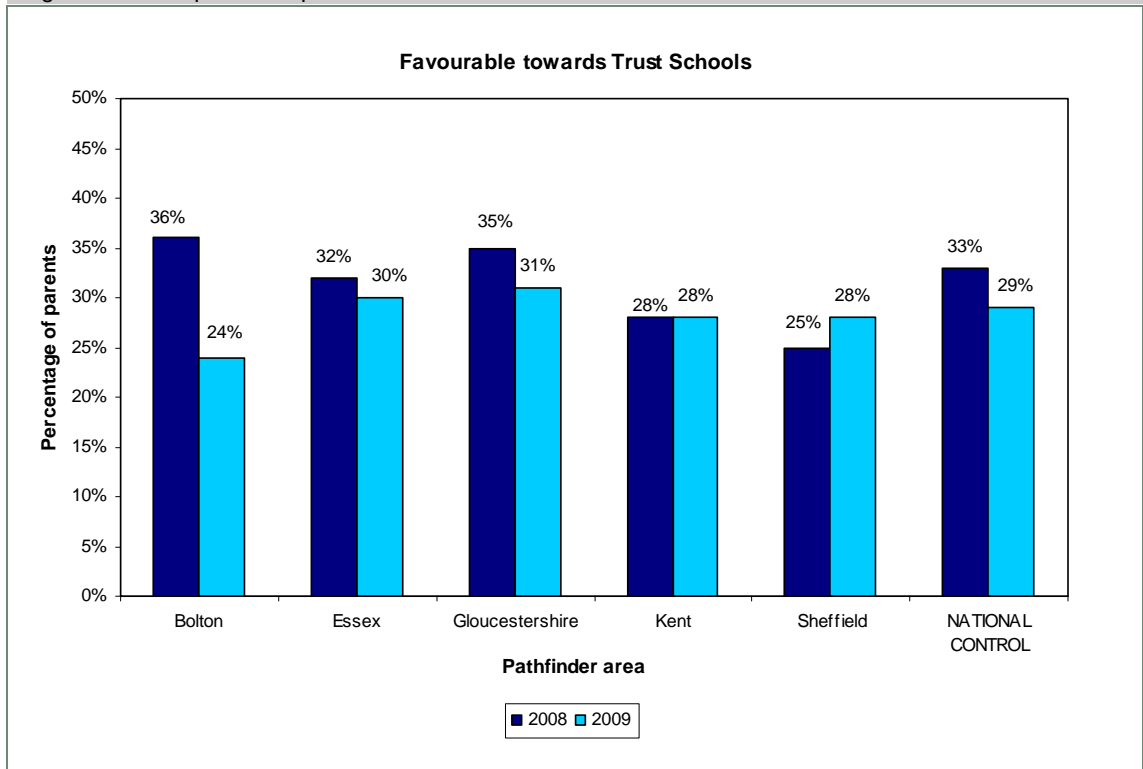
Figure 6-20: Proportion of parents aware of Trust Schools in the area



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

6.52 The share of parents who were positive towards Trust schools was fairly stable between 2008 and 2009 (Figure 6-21). Only in Bolton was the change notable (a reduction of 12 percentage points).

Figure 6-21: Proportion of parents who are favourable towards Trust Schools



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 6.53 The main reasons for being favourable towards Trust schools were: 'generally in favour' of them, their ability to raise standards and external partner involvement a good thing (Table 6-3).
- 6.54 In Essex the proportion of parents who stated they were favourable towards Trust schools because they benefit disadvantaged communities was smaller than nationally. In Gloucestershire the share of parents stating that their positive attitude was due to a general impression that they are a good thing was smaller than on average across the country. In Kent and Sheffield fewer parents were favourable towards Trust Schools due to their ability to raise standards in failing schools.
- 6.55 In Bolton, the share of parents who were supportive of Trust schools due to their ability to raise standards reduced from 39% in 2008 to 28% in 2009. In contrast to a reduction of three percentage points nationally. In Essex, the proportions of parents who stated they were favourable towards Trust schools because of generally positive attitude towards them or because of good quality teaching reduced (by seven and five percentage points, respectively). Nationally the respective proportions declined by two percentage points.
- 6.56 Compared to 2008, in Gloucestershire notably fewer parents supported Trust schools out of general preference (a significant reduction of twenty-one percentage points); their ability to raise standards (a reduction of seven percentage points) and support for external partner involvement (a reduction of eight percentage points). More parents in Kent were favourable towards Trust schools because of general support for Trust schools (an increase of eight percentage points) or because the involvement of external partners in running schools (an increase of eleven percentage points). However, fewer parents there stated that they were supportive because they raise standards (a reduction of six percentage points) or benefit disadvantaged communities (a reduction of 10 percentage points).
- 6.57 Parents in Sheffield provided fairly similar responses in both survey waves, although the share of parents who mentioned the reason for their positive attitude towards Trust schools to be due to their ability to raise standards reduced by 14 percentage point; whilst the share of parents mentioning the involvement of external partners being a good thing increased by six percentage points.

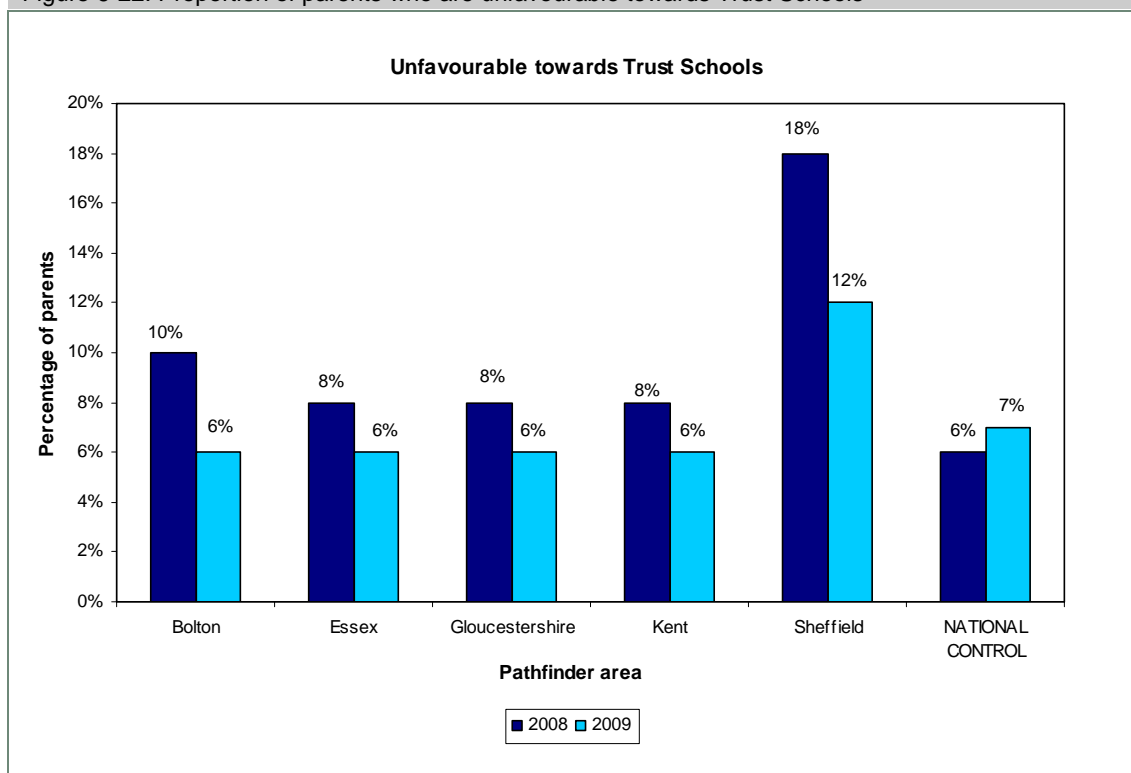
Table 6-3: Reasons cited by parents for being favourable towards Trust Schools (2009)

	Bolton	Essex	Gloucest.	Kent	Sheffield	National i.e. England
Generally in favour/good thing	34%	35%	23%	31%	35%	31%
Raise standards in failing schools	28%	21%	25%	19%	20%	25%
External Partners in running schools is a good thing	11%	13%	10%	25%	16%	13%
Benefit disadvantaged communities	12%	3%	6%	0%	6%	8%
Quality of teaching is good	5%	4%	5%	2%	6%	6%
Good facilities	4%	4%	7%	2%	7%	5%
More opportunity/all deserve a chance	0%	2%	4%	4%	2%	5%
Enables more choice	3%	0%	2%	2%	0%	3%
Innovative	3%	3%	0%	0%	4%	2%
Better for children	0%	3%	4%	1%	7%	1%
More subject/rounded education on offer	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	1%
Good for community	0%	2%	3%	2%	1%	1%
Own experience	2%	0%	4%	0%	2%	1%
Good for specialist subjects/needs/talent	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Receive more funding	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Make pupils behave well	3%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%
More subjects/well rounded education	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Free from local authority control	2%	2%	1%	3%	3%	0%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

6.58 The share of parents who were unfavourable towards Trust schools reduced across the Pathfinder areas in contrast with a nationally increasing trend (Figure 6-22). The changes were small with the exception of Sheffield, where the proportion of parents unfavourable towards Trust schools declined by six percentage points.

Figure 6-22: Proportion of parents who are unfavourable towards Trust Schools



Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 6.59 The main reasons supplied by parents in the pathfinder areas for being unfavourable towards Trust schools were the same as nationally: preference for local authorities running schools, general negative attitude towards them and impression of 'cherry picking' students.

Table 6-4: Reasons cited by parents for not being in favour of Trust Schools (2009)

	Bolton	Essex	Gloucest.	Kent	Sheffield	National i.e. England
Schools should be run by local authorities/not other partners	29%	30%	39%	45%	40%	40%
Generally not in favour/not a good thing	26%	25%	19%	23%	25%	19%
Cherry picking students	0%	5%	19%	23%	7%	10%
Don't like business involvement	4%	11%	0%	9%	7%	6%
Only good schools will get Trust status	0%	0%	5%	9%	8%	5%
All schools should be improved	11%	6%	0%	0%	7%	4%
They receive more funding than other schools	0%	5%	5%	13%	3%	5%
Don't like the idea of religion/faith school/influence	0%	0%	5%	0%	2%	0%

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey and SQW Consulting

- 6.60 In Bolton and Essex notably fewer parents mentioned that they were unfavourable towards Trust Schools because they preferred schools to be run by local authorities than nationally. In Bolton, Essex and Sheffield more parents expressed just a general preference for Trust schools, and in Gloucestershire and Kent 'cherry picking' as a reason was mentioned by more parents than nationally.
- 6.61 When comparing the responses provided by parents in each pathfinder area for the two waves, in Bolton fewer parents stated that they were unfavourable towards Trust schools because of preference for schools being run by a local authority (a reduction of 13 percentage points compared to 2008). Considering that nationally there was an increase of 13 percentage points, the change observed in Bolton is notable. In Essex, the only significant change since 2008 was the reduction in the share of parents who said they were unfavourable towards Trust Schools because they thought schools should be run by local authorities, not external partners: The proportion reduced from 41% in 2008 to 30% in 2009.
- 6.62 In Gloucestershire the share of parents who were unfavourable towards Trust schools because of preferring local authority run schools reduced by 29 percentage points. In Kent, the proportion of parents citing the same reason increased by 22 percentage points. There was also a large reduction (20 percentage points) in the proportion of parents who were unfavourable due to general negative attitude towards Trust schools. The reduction nationally was 11 percentage points.

***Local need for greater diversity of schools***

- 6.63 The survey probed parents' views on the local need for different types of schools. Table 6-5 shows proportions of parents in each of the Pathfinder areas stating there was not enough of a particular type of school.
- 6.64 In Bolton, parents expressed strongest demand for more single sex and grammar schools. Although the demand for these schools fell, the proportion of parents stating there were not enough of such schools was still above the English average (42% and 46% respectively). The demand for Grammar schools, Academies and Special schools reduced more than nationally.
- 6.65 In Essex, there was most demand for grammar schools and Academies. However, compared to the findings of the national survey of parents in England, the demand was slightly weaker. The most recent wave of the survey in Essex found there to be more demand for special schools (the opposite direction to the picture for England). In Gloucestershire, fewer parents stated there were not enough single sex schools (a reduction of 15 percentage points).

6.66 In Kent, fewer parents generally expressed a need to have more schools of different types than nationally. The demand was strongest for special and specialist schools. However, the need for specialist schools reduced by more than the national sample (an eight percentage point reduction compared to four nationally). In Sheffield, the strongest demand was for grammar (50%) and special schools (49%); and, compared to the responses provided by parents across the country, the demand was stronger than nationally (37% and 46% respectively). The demand for special schools also rose since the last wave of the survey and by more than nationally. The demand for Academies and Trust/Foundation Schools was reduced in Sheffield.

Table 6-5: Parents stating there are not enough of schools of different types  
(Proportions of parents in 2008 and 2009 surveys)<sup>20</sup>

Type of school	B 08	B 09	E 08	E 09	G 08	G 09	K 08	K 09	S 08	S 09	Nat. 2009-08
Specialist school	41%	33%	38%	35%	38%	32%	37%	29%	46%	42%	-4
Faith school	21%	18%	24%	22%	19%	18%	20%	20%	27%	23%	0
Single sex school	58%	48%	40%	36%	39%	24%	22%	24%	51%	40%	-2
Grammar school	61%	56%	38%	40%	31%	31%	18%	20%	54%	50%	0
Academy	50%	35%	49%	39%	46%	37%	34%	27%	41%	26%	-9
Trust/Foundation school	40%	36%	36%	34%	38%	28%	30%	22%	42%	31%	-8
Special school for those with special education needs	40%	33%	37%	42%	42%	37%	36%	35%	44%	49%	-3

Source: GfK NOP Local Authority Commissioning Pathfinders Parental Satisfaction Survey

<sup>20</sup> B= Bolton; E=Essex, G=Gloucestershire; K=Kent; S=Sheffield; Nat. 09-08= Change in proportions of parents stating there were not enough of such schools between the two waves of the surveys (expressed in percentage points).



## Summary of findings by case study

6.67 Table 6-6 provides a summary of findings from the parental survey by case study. It shows:

- all Pathfinders saw an increase in awareness of Academies and Trust schools – except Kent, which already had a high level of awareness
- Gloucestershire showed a significant increase in the proportion of parents saying they had sufficient information to make an informed decision
- Bolton experienced a reduction in the proportion of parents saying they did not receive enough information on the application deadline
- Bolton, Essex and Kent all saw increased awareness of Academies in the area – awareness of Trusts saw less progress, with a drop in awareness of Trusts in Essex
- Bolton and Sheffield saw falls in the proportion of parents who were favourable towards Academies, Bolton also saw an increase in those with an unfavourable attitude, as did Gloucestershire
- Essex saw a decline in the proportion of parents unfavourable to Academies and Sheffield saw a reduction in the proportion of parents unfavourable to Trusts schools.

Table 6-6: Summary of parental surveys in five Pathfinder areas

Indicator	Bolton	Essex	Gloucestershire	Kent	Sheffield
<b>Proportion of Parents with children in private schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistically insignificant reduction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small increase compared to national decrease (statistically insignificant)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant drop since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistically insignificant reduction</li> </ul>
<b>Reasons for choosing state school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as nationally, i.e. location, academic performance and overall reputation</li> <li>Fewer parents mentioned overall reputations than in 2008</li> <li>More parents mentioned academic performance; being a 'good school' and having siblings in the same school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as nationally i.e. location, academic performance and overall reputation</li> <li>Fewer parents considering overall reputation than in 2008</li> <li>Consideration for having siblings in the school grew since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as nationally i.e. location, academic performance and overall reputation</li> <li>The proportion of parents considering location increased since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as nationally i.e. location, academic performance and overall reputation but proportions of parents citing them tend to be smaller</li> <li>Proportion of parents considering location and academic performance increased since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as nationally i.e. location, academic performance and overall reputation</li> <li>Fewer parents considered location and more took into account of whether they have siblings than in 2008</li> </ul>
<b>Information on schools – Proportion of parents with enough information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relatively stable at, three-quarters received enough information which is slightly below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stable since 2008 and remained under national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Significant increase</b> to highest share of parents receiving enough information among the pathfinders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share of parents receiving enough information saw a statistically insignificant decrease since 2008</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share of parents receiving enough information saw a statistically insignificant decrease since 2008</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>
<b>Information on application process – Proportion of parents with enough information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Increase since 2008</b> (compared to small a small increase nationally)</li> <li>Now in line with national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small statistically insignificant increase</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change</li> <li>In line with national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistically insignificant reduction since 2008</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistically insignificant increase since 2008</li> <li>Close to national average</li> </ul>
<b>Information on admissions criteria – Proportion of parents with enough information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable change since 2008</li> <li>Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable change</li> <li>In line with national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable change</li> <li>In line with national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drop since 2008</li> <li>Slightly below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable change</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>

Indicator	Bolton	Essex	Gloucestershire	Kent	Sheffield
<b>Information on application deadline</b> – Proportion of parents not receiving enough information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Proportion halved (compared to no change nationally)</b></li> <li>• Slightly below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change</li> <li>• Close to national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small decrease</li> <li>• Same as national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change</li> <li>• Same as national average</li> </ul>
<b>Availability of good state schools</b> – Proportion of parents who think they had good choice of state schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Slightly above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Notably above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Just under national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Decrease since 2008</b></li> <li>• Just under national average</li> </ul>
<b>Pragmatism in choices</b> – Proportion of parents whose first choice is the most pragmatic choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Close to national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Just under national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small decrease since 2008</li> <li>• Notably under national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small increase since 2008</li> <li>• Inline with national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small increase since 2008</li> <li>• Just above national average</li> </ul>
<b>Child offered a place in their first choice school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change</li> <li>• Just above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Decrease since 2008</b></li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Just above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Slightly below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small statistically insignificant decrease since 2008</li> <li>• Just below national average</li> </ul>
<b>Parental attitudes towards diversity of schools</b> – Proportion of parents supporting school diversity in their area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Slightly above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Slightly above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small decrease since 2008</li> <li>• Notably above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Notably below national average</li> </ul>
<b>Parental support for the involvement of different partners in running schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less support for involvement of businesses, faith groups, parent groups and other state schools than in 2008</li> <li>• But nearly twice as much support for faith groups than nationally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less support for businesses involvement than 2008</li> <li>• More support for charities and independent schools</li> <li>• The support for Independent schools is more than nationally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in parental support for business involvement since 2008</li> <li>• More support for business involvement and other state schools than nationally</li> <li>• Less for community groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in support for charities since 2008</li> <li>• Less support for Independent schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in support for independent schools as partners in running schools since 2008</li> <li>• Less support for business, charity, independence school, faith groups and other state school involvement than nationally</li> </ul>

Indicator	Bolton	Essex	Gloucestershire	Kent	Sheffield
<b>Awareness of Academies and Trust Schools –</b> Proportion of parents aware of Academies and Trust School in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notable increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notable increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• In line with national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notable increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Close to national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant increase since 2008, but from a relatively high base</li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Notable increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>
<b>Awareness of Academies in the area –</b> Proportion of parents who know there are academies in their areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>More than doubled since 2008</b></li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nearly doubled since 2008</b></li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant change</li> <li>• Proportion of parents nearly half of the national proportion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Some increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increased since 2008</b></li> <li>• Above national increase</li> </ul>
<b>Parental attitudes towards Academies –</b> Proportion of parents favourable towards them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease since 2008</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease since 2008</li> <li>• Below national average</li> </ul>
<b>Reasons for being favourable towards Academies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable changes since 2008</li> <li>• Reasons similar to those provided nationally: general support; ability to raise standards and good facilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since 2008, notably more parents mentioned greater funding of academies as a reason for their support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proportion of parents who support them out of general preference nearly halved since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More parents than nationally supportive of Academies because involvement of external partners is good (above average increase since 2008)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase since 2008 in the proportion of parents supporting Academies due to good facilities and teaching</li> </ul>
<b>Parental attitudes towards Academies –</b> Proportion of parents unfavourable towards them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Close to national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Decrease since 2008</b></li> <li>• Close to national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Increase since 2008</b></li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No notable change since 2008</li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> <li>• Above national average</li> </ul>
<b>Reasons for being unfavourable towards Academies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the share of parents stating Academies not a good thing since 2008</li> <li>• Reduction in the share of parents mentioning cherry picking since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the share of parents stating Academies not a good thing since 2008 and fewer parents stating this in the second wave than nationally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction since 2008 in the proportion of parents stating Academies generally not a good thing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No change since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasons largely the same as nationally</li> <li>• Since 2008 a reduction in the proportion of parents stating Academies generally not a good</li> </ul>

Indicator	Bolton	Essex	Gloucestershire	Kent	Sheffield
<b>Awareness of Trust schools in the area</b> – Proportion of parents who know there are Trust Schools in their areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable change since 2008</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Drop since 2008</b></li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small drop since 2008</li> <li>Little below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small insignificant drop since 2008</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small, insignificant drop since 2008</li> <li>Close to national average</li> </ul>
<b>Parental attitudes towards Trust schools</b> – Proportion of parents favourable towards them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in favourable attitudes since 2008</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant change</li> <li>Just above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant change</li> <li>Below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change since 2008</li> <li>Close to national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable change</li> <li>Close to national average</li> </ul>
<b>Reasons for being favourable towards Trust schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notable reduction in share of parents citing raising standards as a reason since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer parents mentioned general positive attitude as a reason than in 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since 2008, notable drop in share of parents citing general positive impression, ability to raise standards and external partner involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More parents now favourable because of general positive impression or because of involvement of external partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction since 2008 in the share of parents mentioning ability to raise standards</li> <li>Share of parents mentioning external partner involvement increased since 2008</li> </ul>
<b>Parental attitudes towards Trust schools</b> – Proportion of parents unfavourable towards them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant change since 2008</li> <li>Just below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant change since 2008</li> <li>Just below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant change since 2008</li> <li>Just below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant change since 2008</li> <li>Just below national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Notable reduction since 2008</b></li> <li>Significantly above national average</li> </ul>
<b>Reasons for being unfavourable towards Trust schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer parents mentioned preference for local authority run schools as a reason for negative attitude than nationally – Proportion reduced since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since 2008, significant reduction in the proportion of parents saying schools should be run by local authorities rather than external partners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share of parents mentioning preference for local authority run schools as a reason for negative attitude towards Trust Schools reduced since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share of parents mentioning preference for local authority run schools as a reason for negative attitude towards Trust Schools increased since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notable changes compared to reasons provided in 2008</li> </ul>
<b>Local need for greater school diversity</b> – Proportion of parents stating not enough of schools of different types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strongest demand for single sex and grammar schools</li> <li>Demand for such schools fallen since 2008 but still above national average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strongest demand for grammar schools and Academies. Still less demand than nationally.</li> <li>Demand increased since 2008 for Special Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer parents demanding single sex schools than in 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strongest demand for Special and Specialist Schools but demand for such schools reduced more than nationally since 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strongest demand for grammar schools and special schools (stronger than nationally)</li> <li>Demand for special schools increased by more than nationally since 2008</li> </ul>

## 7: Summary and conclusions

---

### Background

- 7.1 The study set out to look at local authority school commissioning. It sought to learn lessons from case studies selected from 16 Pathfinder areas and to see if their work had a measurable impact. In order to do this, the study reviewed the national policy context, local contexts in case study areas; conducted two rounds of fieldwork; and carried out two waves of parental surveys.

### Lessons on commissioning from case study areas

- 7.2 In 2008, fieldwork was carried out in case study areas to observe what was happening in relation to the Pathfinder activity. Subsequent fieldwork took place in 2009, in order to see what Pathfinders went on to do. This produced examples of good practice and the identification of ‘success factors’, as well as potential barriers and problems for school commissioning.

#### **General learning points**

*School commissioning has to be part of wider governance, management and commissioning processes*

- 7.3 General learning points highlighted by case study areas were that school commissioning – whether of school places or of improvement – needs to be understood and operated as part of wider changes to the roles of local authorities and their partners. In other words, ***school commissioning needs to be embedded in the wider commissioning process, which is often driven by the ‘personalisation’ agenda and/or the devolution of decision-making to areas, e.g. via neighbourhood-level commissioning.***
- 7.4 This observation was linked to the view that ***school commissioning should be treated as part of a local authority’s core activities***, in the sense that local authorities and their partners ‘commission outcomes’ but do not directly deliver all the services that help to achieve those outcomes. In order for this to work well, leadership ***needs to be exercised by a range of partners, in particular in establishing and articulating a clear set of outcomes to be sought, so that local resources are used effectively.***

- 7.5 The joining-up of the commissioning agenda across a range of services resulted in changes in governance and management arrangements. This was often under the auspices of Children's Trusts, linked in to Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements. Different areas had different arrangements, depending on their history and local authority structures (e.g. single or two-tier authorities). Some organisations were more able to adjust to the split of commissioner and provider roles than others (primary schools tended to be reported as in need of more support to adjust to the changes than other partners).
- 7.6 Some areas had specific sub-groups or teams address discrete elements of the commissioning process, e.g. a large county like Kent had a dedicated data team, as part of the work to establish demand and manage performance; and Cambridgeshire established a forum to address schools 'causing concern', as part of the support and challenge role. Targeted resources – justified by the scale of the task – contributed to effective progress being made.

*Engage parents at all stages of the commissioning process*

- 7.7 Case studies highlighted the importance of engaging and involving parents at all stages of the process, i.e. not just in work to understand demand and develop plans, but also in implementation and challenge roles. This was because parents acted as a source of information to inform decisions. The development of semi-permanent 'pools' of consultees to enable regular and sustained consultation was one straightforward way of doing this. **Local authorities and their partners need to consider where, when and how parents and pupils can be engaged in all parts of the commissioning process – as a means of gathering useful information and of building ownership and choice into local arrangements.**

*Collect and analyse data in a timely fashion, in order to inform decision-making*

- 7.8 Most case studies highlighted the importance of data in informing decisions. Contextual data – such as demographic changes and planned housing development – were viewed as important for long-term planning and in understanding the relationship between school rolls, performance and wider social and economic factors. **Local authorities need to develop their understanding of demographic changes**, and develop scenarios of how populations may change over time, as part of the commissioning process. **This will involve authority-wide working with other services and departments to understand how families and household patterns are changing and where and when new demands may arise.** It also requires partnership working, e.g. with health partners who will have data on arrivals into an area.

- 7.9 Performance data – at school and at a wider, area-based level – was also viewed as important for commissioners in engagement, planning, implementation and challenging and supporting schools. Traffic light systems (highlighting performance on the basis of red, amber or green) helped to monitor progress and to inform decisions on the provision of support and interventions. However, case studies did not necessarily view the provision of this information to parents as positive – in other words, some consultees saw a tension between the provision of data to inform strategic commissioning decisions and the provision of data to inform parents’ choice of school. ***Where performance data is collected as part of reviewing, supporting and challenging schools, local authorities need to consider how the performance data set relates to ensuring parents are well informed about their options when they make choices for their children.***

*General lessons on ‘Dos and Don’ts’*

- 7.10 Table 7-1 provides a summary of the main factors affecting the likelihood of successful commissioning as highlighted by case study areas. Table 7-2 takes these findings to produce a checklist for local partners, to see how many of the critical success factors they have in place.



Table 7-1: Summary critical success factors and barriers to success from case studies

Critical success factors	Problems and barriers to be aware of
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use and apply the DCSF guidance provided</li> <li>• See school commissioning as part of a wider commissioning process</li> <li>• A formal commitment to outcomes-based commissioning as a way of working</li> <li>• Agree geographically appropriate governance and management arrangements</li> <li>• Designate a (senior) lead officer to drive the process</li> <li>• Provision of a specific fund to finance the costs of changes, e.g. re-designs of job roles, mergers and re-configuration of professional teams</li> <li>• Appoint dedicated transition co-ordinators to work with schools, so changes are introduced in a smooth and managed fashion</li> <li>• Establish a strategic development team – to align BSF, PCP and wider strategies to join up capital and revenue programmes</li> <li>• Involve people with previous experience of commissioning, e.g. via Sure Start</li> <li>• Use external support to ensure there was local capacity in vital areas of expertise</li> <li>• Provide a development/support programme for staff</li> <li>• Get to grips with the legal issues associated with running schools competitions, including roles and potential conflicts of interest</li> <li>• Operate a dedicated forum for monitoring and then supporting and challenging the performance of schools causing concern</li> <li>• Provide a regular forum via which interested parties can come together to discuss issues and priorities, e.g. an annual conference</li> <li>• Maintain a forum via which the local authority can consult schools directly</li> <li>• Support geographic groupings of (secondary and primary) schools to share information, learning, good practice and act as a sounding board</li> <li>• Involve (representatives of) parents, headteachers and pupils in all stages of the commissioning process</li> <li>• Use the discipline brought about by bidding for beacon status</li> <li>• Understand and (where necessary) develop the supplier base</li> <li>• Use schools to 'champion' engagement</li> <li>• Manage expectations with regard to the BSF programme – in terms of what and when it can deliver</li> <li>• Operate effective risk management processes to keep costs under control</li> <li>• Use commissioning to 'squeeze out' of the system poor decision-making practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different guidance and approaches to commissioning from DCSF and Department of Health concerns and confuses partners at the local level</li> <li>• Different interpretations of what 'commissioning' means, e.g. some partners see it as a synonym for procurement, where as others see it as a broader process involving setting priorities, making the in-house/outourcing decision as a means of bringing change etc.</li> <li>• Different procurement rules and processes across agencies can hinder joint-commissioning, e.g. different practices regarding the duration and renewal of contracts between NHS and local government partners</li> <li>• Lack of political support for all or parts of the agenda can limit progress, e.g. political opposition to any non-local authority schools limits market development</li> <li>• Lack of resources to ensure commissioning process and the transition to commissioning is properly resourced</li> <li>• Where partners operate in a number of local authorities e.g. via sub-regional arrangements, and local authorities have different approaches to commissioning, relationships can be complicated and confusing</li> <li>• The development of new schools is often linked to new housing developments, i.e. where there is no or only a limited community to consult, making it difficult to engage and understand parents' needs</li> <li>• When school rolls are falling, schools can compete with each other – making it hard to promote collaboration</li> <li>• The separate operating arrangements of Academies can lead to a limited flow of information, making the commissioning process more difficult, due to greater uncertainty on supply and demand issues</li> <li>• Large local authorities face many different types of issues in different areas, which may require discrete arrangements and strategies to be pursued in different parts of the same local authority district – complicating arrangements and communications to stakeholders</li> <li>• Local authorities have multiple obligations and objectives, e.g. in terms of community relations and wider service delivery, which means opposition to school closures due to poor performance and/or falling rolls can make delivery of purely educational objectives difficult</li> </ul>

Source: SQW Consulting from Pathfinder case study fieldwork 2009

**Table 7-2: Potential self-assessment questions based on case studies' critical success factors**

- Have we used and applied DCSF guidance effectively?
- Have we agreed geographically appropriate governance and management arrangements?
- Is there local political support for all or only parts of the agenda?
- Have we got a consistent understanding of commissioning across partners in the area?
- Is school commissioning effectively embedded as part of a wider commissioning process?
- Are different procurement rules and process across agencies hindering joint-commissioning?
- Have we made a formal commitment to outcomes-based commissioning as a way of working?
- Have we designated a senior lead officer to drive the process?
- Have we made provision for a specific fund to finance the costs of changes, e.g. re-designs of job roles, mergers and re-configuration of professional teams?
- Have we appointed dedicated transition co-ordinators to work with schools, so changes are introduced in a smooth and managed fashion?
- Have we established a strategic development team – to align BSF, PCP and wider strategies to join up capital and revenue programmes?
- Have we involved people with previous experience of commissioning, e.g. via Sure Start?
- Have we used or have we taken steps to use external support to ensure there is local capacity in vital areas of expertise?
- Have we provided a development/support programme for staff?
- Have we got to grips with the legal issues associated with running schools competitions, including roles and potential conflicts of interest?
- Do we operate a dedicated forum for monitoring and then supporting and challenging the performance of schools causing concern?
- Do we provide a regular forum via which interested parties can come together to discuss issues and priorities, e.g. an annual conference?
- Do we maintain a forum via which the local authority can consult schools directly?
- Do we support geographic groupings of (secondary and primary) schools to share information, learning, good practice and act as a sounding board?
- How effectively are we managing rivalry between schools and how well are schools sharing information?
- Are (representatives of) parents, headteachers and pupils involved in all stages of the commissioning process?
- Have we understood and (where necessary) developed the supplier base?
- Do schools 'champion' parental engagement?
- Have we/how do we propose to manage expectations with regard to the BSF programme – in terms of what and when it can deliver?
- Do we operate effective risk management processes to keep costs under control?
- Do we really use commissioning to 'squeeze out' of the system poor decision-making practices?
- How well are we balancing the multiple obligations and objectives we face, e.g. in terms of community relations and wider service delivery issues?

---

*Source: SQW Consulting*

## Lessons from the parental surveys

- 7.11 Parental surveys were carried out in five case study areas – Bolton, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent and Sheffield – along with a national comparator sample from England. The local authority areas were selected because the nature of the activity they were undertaking was thought to have the potential to have a measurable impact during the lifetime of the evaluation. The Pathfinders started in July 2007 and ended in April 2008. The surveys were conducted in January 2008 and October-November 2009 (18 months after the Pathfinder projects were completed).
- 7.12 The questions were structured around influences on parental choice, in terms of:
- school-related factors e.g. academic results, location, needs of the child, reputation/recommendation, siblings attended the school, good overall school, good overall education
  - process issues, including information on the schools available, the application process, admissions criteria and deadlines
  - views on diversity and the need for different types of school, such as the availability of ‘good’ state schools, the role of pragmatism or tactics in making choices, parental attitudes towards diversity of schools and need for diversity locally, as well as awareness of Academies and Trust Schools and views on the different types of partners involved in schools.

### **Case study areas**

- 7.13 The parental surveys showed only limited statistically significant change in parental perceptions and views in the case study areas – this was always a potential finding, given the long-term and structural nature of some of the factors that affect the choice of school and access to it.
- 7.14 **Awareness of Academies and Trust went up** – or, as in the case of Kent, were already relatively high. Some Pathfinders saw a significant improvement in parents’ responses to questions about the information available to them when they were making decisions: **there was a significant increase in the proportion of parents saying they had sufficient information to make an informed decision in Gloucestershire**; and **Bolton experienced a reduction in the proportion of parents saying they did not receive enough information on the application deadline**. These improvements in parental views link to the Pathfinders’ work and their subsequent follow on work, but they have to be acknowledged as limited.

### **General findings**

- 7.15 For those using state education, location (i.e. proximity to the school) was by far the most important factor in determining the choice of school. This is, of course, the least flexible factor in terms of a local authority’s ability to respond to parents’ needs. The extent to which the importance of location can affect the drive to improve standards

was illustrated by case study experience of parental opposition to the closure of a failing school that was closer to home than better performing alternatives. Where low aspirations are a factor, local authorities and partners may need to challenge parents' assumptions and preferences, as part of a long-term process to drive up standards. In other words, engagement is more than understanding current needs in order to respond to them, it could also involve understanding current views in order to open a dialogue with the aim of changing views and raising aspirations.

- 7.16 Academic performance was an important factor in choosing a school – it was more likely to be cited by parents in social classes A and B than other social classes, as was overall reputation. The role of reputation – particularly in schools where performance is being turnaround – may need to be consciously managed by local authorities and partners, so that word-of-mouth reputation does not lag behind current improved performance.
- 7.17 More generally, the parental surveys showed that **while there was broad support for a diversity of school types**, there was 'space' for 'the case' for particular types of school to be made as attitudes varied from place to place.
- 7.18 Furthermore, there were variations in the popularity of different types of organisation getting involved in managing schools – faith groups, independent schools and business were on the whole less popular than parents groups, colleges and universities. Although there was some variation in case study areas over the relative merits of involving business and faith groups.
- 7.19 Thus, the findings from the parental surveys pose challenges for the choice agenda. Both in terms of local authorities being able to respond to parents' priorities – as 'location is king' but not easily altered – and in their ability to promote greater proactive choice by parents as a means of driving up standards – because although wider diversity is supported, the support is conditional on the types of options available.
- 7.20 The surveys also showed that, as well as changes over time, the responses of different social and ethnic groups vary. Thus, when seeking to establish the factors affecting demand, **local authorities, schools and their partners need to understand the likely priorities and preferences of different groups and manage the engagement process accordingly**. In some instances **this may mean challenging local aspirations and views rather than mapping, understanding and responding to them**.

## Annex A: Profile of case study areas

Pathfinder	Type of authority	Project title	Stage of commissioning cycle <sup>21</sup>	Population	Above or below UK average for NVQ Level 2 and above	Average weekly pay	% BME <sup>22</sup>	% of population under 16 years <sup>23</sup>	% surplus places (Primary) - OSC	% surplus (Secondary) - OSC
Bolton	Metropolitan	Embedding partnerships and community cohesion	planning	262,400	Above (64.1%)	£400.7	11	21.7	7.4%	2.7%
Brent	London Borough	Parental engagement in school commissioning	establishing demand planning	271,400	Below (50.2%)	£474.6	54.7	19.8	10.4%	7.2%
Devon	County Council	Engaging schools as stakeholders in commissioning	establishing demand planning	433,800	Above (68.4%)	£ 398.8	1.1	18.1	9%	3.9%
Essex	County Council	Commissioning to improve school performance	planning implementation support & challenge	1,361,200	Below (59.5%)	£503.2	2.9	20.0	12.4%	6.4%
Gloucestershire	County Council	Parental engagement, competition processes and parent promoters	establishing demand planning	578,600	Above (67.6%)	£467.6	2.8	19.7	11.9%	5.6%

<sup>21</sup> As defined by local authorities in their project proposals

<sup>22</sup> Figures represent the % of non-white residents within the local authority or local education authority. Office of National Statistics (2001). Census 2001: Census Area Statistics 2001: Ethnic Group. Accessed online:

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadAreaSearch.do?a=3&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1207659173699&enc=1&areaSearchText=&areaSearchType=180&extendedList=true&searchAreas=Search>

<sup>23</sup> Figures represent the % of residents within the local authority or local education authority that are 15 years old or under. Office of National Statistics (2001). Census 2001: Census Area Statistics 2001: Age. Accessed online:

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadAreaSearch.do?a=3&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1207659173699&enc=1&areaSearchText=&areaSearchType=180&extendedList=true&searchAreas=Search>

Pathfinder	Type of authority	Project title	Stage of commissioning cycle <sup>21</sup>	Population	Above or below UK average for NVQ Level 2 and above	Average weekly pay	% BME <sup>22</sup>	% of population under 16 years <sup>23</sup>	% surplus places (Primary) - OSC	% surplus (Secondary) - OSC
			cross-cutting							
Kent	County Council	Using MOSAIC to better deploy Choice Advisors and to commission school places and services	establishing demand planning support & challenge cross-cutting	1,382,900	Above (64.0%)	£492.9	3.1	20.4	12.7%	6.9%
Kingston	London Borough	Developing an integrated Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Primary Capital Programme (PCP) strategy	establishing demand planning cross-cutting	155,900	Above (72.5%)	£611.3	15.5	18.9	6.2%	5.4%
Lincolnshire	County Council	Exploring commissioning of school places within a selective system	establishing demand implementation cross-cutting	686,200	Below (60.2%)	£405.9	1.3	19.2	14.7%	5.2%
North Tyneside	Metropolitan	Building solutions for the future: creating and commissioning area based trusts	implementation cross cutting	195,000	Above (64.3%)	£387.8	2.5	19.2	18.5%	7.5%
Sheffield	Metropolitan	Aligning the commissioning of school places with the commissioning of 14-19	cross-cutting	525,800	Below (60.9%)	£424.1	8.8	19.1	11.8%	2.7%

Pathfinder	Type of authority	Project title	Stage of commissioning cycle <sup>21</sup>	Population	Above or below UK average for NVQ Level 2 and above	Average weekly pay	% BME <sup>22</sup>	% of population under 16 years <sup>23</sup>	% surplus places (Primary) - OSC	% surplus (Secondary) - OSC
		places								
GB	na			58,845,700	63.8%	£459.0	7.8	19.0 <sup>24</sup>	No OSC figure available	7.1%

<sup>24</sup> 1996 mid year population estimates (ONS)

## **Annex B: Thematic case study questions**

---

### ***Generic questions – to be covered in all case study visits***

1. What does the LA understand the role of commissioning to be in an education context? Has this changed over time? And if so how?
2. Describe the LA's overall approach to commissioning in the context of education services? Distinguish between the following types of services:
3. School places
4. School improvement
5. Wider children's services commissioned by or for schools
6. How have your commissioning approaches in education changed since the introduction of DCSF policy and guidance (and commissioning cycle model)? For example, what are you doing differently now, compared with 2-3 years ago and why?
7. What has been the driver(s) for changes in commissioning approaches and practice? (e.g. DCSF guidance, member support, other policy initiatives?)
8. To what extent is there a common understanding of what is meant by 'commissioning' in an education context:
  - across the local authority
  - amongst Members
  - amongst other stakeholders or partners (e.g. PCT, voluntary sectors)
9. To what extent do the groups highlighted above support the commissioning agenda? Has this changed over time? If so, what are the reasons for this?
10. Are you facing any barriers embedding commissioning approaches in education? What are they? How are you tackling them?
11. What are the factors that are facilitating commissioning approaches in education?
12. What have been the benefits arising from your overall approach to commissioning? Any unexpected benefits arising?
13. What are the costs arising from your overall approach to commissioning?
14. Is there any early evidence of commissioning approached impacting upon school standards, wider ECM outcomes or parental satisfaction?
15. Are there any lessons learned in relation to commissioning practice in education that you would like to highlight?



16. Does the local authority feel any pressure from competing policy objectives, e.g. reducing the number of surplus school places, but at the same time in a rural context maintain locally-based services? Please describe these and how they have been overcome (if at all)?
17. What are LA's current priorities in relation to commissioning? How and why have these been identified?
18. How is commissioning in education likely to evolve in your local authority over the next 2-3 years? What are the medium to long term priorities?

### ***Market development***

19. Please describe the supply-side in relation to schools provision in your LA (e.g. types of provision available and who is delivering this)?
20. What are you doing to stimulate the market of potential providers?
21. What is driving the market (e.g. competitions or lack of them and new partners for e.g. Trust schools) in a local context? Probe:
  - need to address issues of failing schools
  - a desire to promote parental choice
  - the demand for new provision to meeting population growth
  - other.
22. What would have been the LA's approach to tackling the issues above (see bullets) prior to the introduction of the DCSF's commissioning approach?
23. To what extent is there local support for open competition in the schools market? (e.g. amongst Officers, Councillors, schools and parents) Is there more support for this type of approach in particular circumstances – please describe?
24. Please describe any school competition activity the LA is currently involved in?
25. How have you identified new school promoters and partners, and how successful has this been?
26. How have you sought to engage businesses, parents, schools and other sponsors in the process? Has this worked?
27. Were you able to identify sufficient interest from sponsors/promoters? Why?
28. What - if any - role have parent promoters played locally? How has the local authority supported this group?
29. How can the local authority support the development and capacity of potential sponsors whilst remaining impartial in the competition process?

30. Is the local authority the provider of last resort in a school competition? Do they seek to be a partner in any new school? Would the LA consider submitting its own bid to run a new school? Please explain the rationale for the authority's position
31. If you have run a school competition please describe the process you went through? What are the lessons learned for others?
32. How has the wider community been engaged in the school competition process, e.g. consultation mechanisms? How successful has this been?
33. What are the costs involved in running a school competition? Do the benefits outweigh the costs?
34. What plans are in place for developing the 14-19 supply-side market in the local authority? How will you approach this?

### ***Parents, student/pupil and community engagement***

35. What roles does the LA think parents, wider community and schools should have in commissioning?
36. How does the LA engage with parents, pupils and the wider community on issues related to schools/education? How have engagement/consultation techniques changed since the introduction of the DCSF commissioning approaches?
37. How do you engage with hard to consult groups within the community?
38. Have any new structures developed as a result of your work in this area, e.g. Parent Forums? Please describe.
39. What issues have you consulted parents, students and the wider community on? (e.g. school competitions, school performance, mergers, decommissioning of places) Has this changed over time? How successful is this?
40. Do you engage and consult with parents, students and wider community in relation to all aspects of the commissioning cycle (establish demand, planning, implementation, and support & challenge) or this type of activity more dominant in one or more parts of the cycle? Why?
41. How are schools themselves encouraged to consult and engage with parents, students and the wider community? On what issues, and how successful is this?
42. Is there any early evidence that parent, student, community engagement activity is resulting in any positive outcomes, e.g. greater parental satisfaction, choice or improved relationships between schools and wider community? Please describe?
43. Is the LA conducting any work to develop the capacity of parents/wider community to engage in school competitions (if applicable)? Please describe – how successful has this been

44. Please summarise the lessons learned from your approaches to parental, student and community engagement.

***Building Schools for the Future***

45. How has your approach to commissioning been linked with BSF and/or PCP, e.g. planning and implementation aspects of the commissioning cycle?
46. Has the introduction of the DCSF commissioning model altered your approach to the BSF or PCP programme? How and why?
47. How have you incorporated the 'establishing demand' aspects of the commissioning cycle in your approach to BSF or PCP, e.g. engaging with parents, students and community, gathering and analysing data?
48. Are there specific ways in which the BSF or PCP programmes have facilitated your approach to schools commissioning? Please describe?
49. How have you consulted/engaged with Children's Trusts, wider community and schools in relation to BSF or PCP? Lessons learned?
50. Has the timing of the phasing of different BSF or PCP waves impacted on your ability to effectively integrate your development of the programmes with the commissioning cycle model? How and why?
51. What are the lessons learned for commissioning from the approach you have taken to BSF or PCP?

***Relationship between schools and Children's Trusts***

52. Please describe your current Children's Trust arrangements (e.g. LA-wide, locality-based, key stakeholders and partners involved)
53. Is the Children's Trust currently a commissioner of services? What types of services? Is this likely to change/evolve in the future?
54. Prior to planned changes in guidance/legislation, what was the role of schools in your Children's Trust arrangements?
55. How successful were you in engaging schools in Children's Trust arrangements? How did schools view their role?
56. In light of planned changes in guidance/legislation, how are you now engaging schools in Children's Trust arrangements? How successful has this been to date?
57. How do schools now view their role in relation to Children's Trust arrangements? Does this view differ from the LA's view? If so, how and why?
58. How is the Children's Trust partnership seeking to develop the skills and capacity of schools to engage in their new role? What are the challenges being faced (if any)? What type of support do schools need?

59. To what extent do schools understand the current commissioning agenda? Do they see the link between this and their role in Children's Trusts? With 21st century schools?
60. What are the likely benefits of a more formalised role for schools in Children's Trust arrangements? How might this benefit approaches to commissioning?
61. Have schools been involved in any specific commissioning activity linked to Children's Trust arrangements, e.g. commissioning of SEN or extended schools provision? How has this worked in practice? What were the challenges and lessons learned?
62. Are there any other lessons learned or challenges that you would like to share in relation to the role of schools in Children's Trust arrangements?

***Role of commissioner in holding schools to account: challenge and intervention***

63. Please describe the systems you have in place to capture information on school performance? e.g. Ofsted Reports, nationally published statistics, locally developed indicators?
64. Who is involved in the collection and interpretation of this data? How is it used?
65. Is it all performance data published? If not, why? How do you ensure transparency?
66. How is performance management information shared and used by different stakeholders, e.g. schools, parents, Children's Trusts?
67. How have methods for capturing and sharing information on performance changed since the introduction of the DCSF commissioning approach? Are you now using data in different ways? How and why? What have been the benefits?
68. How is performance management data used in the support and challenge role? What are the implications of this?
69. Has the local authority ever used its ability to serve 'notice to improve' on a school? If not, why not, and are you considering using such powers in the future? If yes, why and what lessons have been learned?
70. How else are you addressing underperformance issues, e.g. creating federations, de-commissioning of places or trust arrangements? Please probe for examples that can be highlighted in the case study.
71. Does the LA have a favoured approach to addressing under-performance? Please describe? Why is this approach(es) favoured and what has been the result?
72. Are your overall approaches to addressing under-performance changing? Why?
73. Any other lessons learned in relation to the role of commissioner in holding schools to account?

**Ref: DCSF-RR231**

**ISBN: 978-1-84775-733-3**

**© SQW Consulting**

**[www.dcsf.gov.uk/research](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research)**

**Published by the Department for  
Children, Schools and Families**

**Registered Charity no. 313392**



**department for  
children, schools and families**