

GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND: Early experiences of Primary School



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Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report, and for all interpretation of the data, lies solely with the authors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of largely descriptive analysis of the considerable data which GUS has collected on children's early experiences of primary school from both the birth and child cohorts between 2007 (sweep 3) and 2011 (sweep 6). This analysis seeks to provide a better understanding of the factors which lead to a positive early experience of school for children, the early engagement of parents with the school and the child's teacher, and the many practical issues associated with starting school such as school choice, transport, and wrap-around care.

The aim of the report is to provide an overview of these issues and experiences exploring how they vary according to characteristics of the child, family, area (e.g. area deprivation), and the school (e.g. size). Both interview data and administrative data drawn from school records has been analysed.

The main findings are presented below by chapter.

Entry to school

In Scotland, the school year starts mid-August and any single school year group consists of children born between the beginning of March in one year and the end of February the following year. This means children usually start school between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5 years old. Indeed, data in this chapter show this to be the case for most GUS children.

However, parents of children born between September and February can request to defer their child's entry to the following August. As the following data demonstrate, age at entry is the key driver of parental decisions to defer, but other factors are also influential.

- At school entry, 42% of children were under 5, 49% were aged between 5.0 and 5.5 years, and 9% were older than 5.5 years.
- 87% of children started school in the August when they were first eligible and 13% had their entry deferred.
- Almost half of the children born in January or February were deferred compared with almost no children whose birthdays were between March and August. 15% of boys had their entry deferred compared with 9% of girls.
- There were no significant differences in deferral by key parental socio-economic characteristics.
- Parental concerns about the child's development were, however, associated with deferred entry. Amongst parents who reported some concerns about their child's development at age 5, 21% of parents deferred entry compared with 10% of those who reported no concerns.
- The most common reasons parents actually gave for deferring entry were that the parent(s) felt the child was 'not ready' (44%) or that he or she was too young (32%). 8% said they deferred for health or developmental reasons and 5% said they had followed advice from the child's nursery or health visitor.

- For deferrals related to the birth cohort, 53% were automatic (involving children born in January or February) and 47% were discretionary (involving children born between September and December).
- When compared with automatic deferrals, discretionary deferrals were significantly more likely to be for health or developmental reasons. Deferrals for children in lower income groups were more likely than for those in higher income groups to be related to health or developmental issues or based on advice received from the child's nursery.

School choice, school characteristics and moving schools

This chapter considers survey data around the factors that parents considered important when deciding which primary school the cohort child should attend, the proportion and characteristics of parents who made placing requests for a non-designated school and sources of information and advice on enrolment. In addition, administrative data was used to examine key characteristics of the schools attended by children in Scotland in their first primary year.

School choice

- Proximity is the most common reason given as the main factor influencing choice of school: 34% of parents cited this reason.
- The importance attached to the school's exam results/academic reputation has a strongly positive relationship to parental social advantage across several indicators (area deprivation, socio-economic classification, equivalised income and highest level of parental qualification).

Placing requests

- 32% of parents made a placing request whilst the remainder (67%) accepted their allocated place at their local school. Only 1% of parents making a placing request were unsuccessful.
- Placing requests were more common amongst families in more disadvantaged circumstances.

Information and advice about enrolment

- 61% of parents sought advice on enrolment ahead of their child starting school; pre-school and primary school staff were the most commonly cited sources of advice. Satisfaction with the advice was very high, with 95% of parents saying they were quite or very satisfied.

School characteristics

- 19% of children were attending a faith school and 4% of children attended a school where some form of Gaelic Medium Education was being provided.
- Most children in Primary 1 (66%) attend schools with 200 or more pupils on the roll. Just 8% attend a school with less than 100 pupils.

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- Children living in areas in the least deprived quintile and those living in areas classified as 'large urban' were more likely to attend larger schools than those living in all other area types.
- The average P1 intake was 39 pupils and the average P1 class included 19 pupils.
- Children living in less deprived areas are more likely than those living in areas with higher deprivation, to attend schools with larger Primary 1 intakes and larger Primary 1 class sizes.

The transition to school

This chapter explores a range of issues related to the child's transition from pre-school to primary school. Four key concepts are examined: parental perceptions of the child's 'readiness' for school; the child's adjustment to school in the first few months; how well they have coped with the change in learning style and environment; and activities initiated by the school and/or undertaken by the parent and/or the child in preparation for going to school.

Perceptions of the child's readiness for school

- The vast majority of children were perceived by their parents to be ready for school. Children in more socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances tended to have lower perceived readiness than those in more advantaged circumstances, though differences were small.
- After controlling for socio-economic characteristics, the key factors associated with perceived school readiness were the child's pre-school experience (time spent at pre-school), and their cognitive and social, emotional and behavioural development around the time they started school.

Activities in preparation for school

- Virtually all parents (99%) reported having done at least one activity associated with the child's transition to school. 92% had talked to their child about school, 90% had visited the school before the child started, 87% had sought or received advice and 86% had practiced reading, writing and/or numbers.
- Most parents (61%) had done eight or more different activities, 31% had done between four and seven, and just 8% reported three or less.
- Parents in higher income households and those with higher levels of education reported a greater average number of activities.

Adjustment to school

- 92% of parents believed that their child had adjusted easily to school. Though 22% felt that their child was happier with the way he or she learned things in pre-school.
- Children with lower perceived adjustment were more likely to also have poorer social, emotional and behavioural development and cognitive ability.

Managing the learning transition

- The vast majority of parents (87%) thought the pace of learning at school was just right for their child, though 10% said it was too slow and 3% that it was too fast.

- Most children (90%) were reported as either finding some parts of school work hard (41%) or never finding school work hard (49%).
- Reports on the extent to which the child had coped with the learning transition varied, in particular, according to differences in their social and cognitive development.

Parental involvement in school activities

Research has shown that where parents are more involved with their children's education and learning, their children have more positive school experiences and do better than those children who are less involved. Parental involvement incorporates a broad range of activities including helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, and taking part in school governance. GUS data show that most parents are actively involved in school activities, but also that parents in more disadvantaged circumstances report lower levels of involvement.

Involvement in school activities

- 5% of parents had not participated in any activities or events at the child's school since the child started Primary 1.
- The most common activity for parents to be involved in was visiting their child's classroom, with 86% of parents reporting they had done this.
- 49% of parents participated in two or three activities or events at the child's school, while 29% attended three or four activities or events.
- Couple families and older mothers were more likely to have higher involvement than lone parents and younger mothers. Parents living in less deprived areas, those in higher occupational classes, in higher income groups, and with higher educational qualifications tended to report higher levels of involvement.
- Households where the respondent (usually the mother) worked part-time reported slightly higher involvement than those where the respondent worked full-time or was not working.

Homework

- 71% of Primary 1 pupils receive homework every or most days and virtually all parents (93%) said that their child always completed it.
- Almost all (95%) parents helped their child with their homework and 85% of parents said that it was easy to get their child to do their homework. The most common reason parents gave for finding it difficult to get the child to complete his or her homework, was that the child was not interested.
- Nine out of ten parents were confident helping their child with all subjects though confidence levels varied according to a number of demographic factors.

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Information from and contact with teachers and the school

Schools have a key role to play in supporting parental involvement by communicating effectively with parents and seeking, encouraging and ensuring their involvement in their child's school experience and the broader life of the school. This chapter considers some of the data GUS has collected around school-parent communication including data on how and what information parents receive from their child's school and their contact with teachers at the school.

Information from the school

- The vast majority of parents had received information from the school about their child's progress or learning. Around three-quarters of parents had received a school report.
- Parents in more advantaged circumstances were more likely than those in more disadvantaged circumstances to report having received information about their child's progress.

Parents' evenings

- 94% of parents reported that they had attended a parents' evening since their child had started P1. Those from more disadvantaged circumstances were slightly less likely to have attended than those from more advantaged circumstances.
- Most parents found parents' evening very useful (60%) or quite useful (36%) with no significant variations by parental characteristics.

Other contact with teachers

- Almost half (48%) of parents indicated that they had talked to their child's teacher outside of a parents' evening. The contact was more likely to have been initiated by the child's parents than by the school, though in around one-third of cases (32%) neither party had initiated the meeting suggesting that it occurred on a more informal basis.
- Degree-educated parents were more likely to have had such contact than parents with lower or no qualifications. It was also more common for parents whose child attended a smaller school and for parents with some concerns about their child's development or adjustment to school.
- Amongst those who had not had such contact, the majority said they would find it either very (76%) or quite easy (22%) to approach their child's teacher.

Advice on helping the child at home

- 65% of parents reported that they had received information/advice on how to help their child with learning at home (excluding doing homework). 73% of parents in the highest income group reported receiving this advice compared with 58% in the lowest income group.

Attendance and absence

This chapter uses both survey and administrative data to examine levels of absence amongst children in Primaries 1 and 2, the main reasons for it and whether it varies according to certain child and family characteristics. School attendance levels are of importance as they are strongly linked to attainment levels and likelihood of further education, even when measured at primary school.

- 71% of pupils had full attendance over the previous month but only 21% had full attendance over the previous 6 months.
- 20% of pupils reported between ½-2 days absence in the previous month.
- Deprivation status, ethnicity and adjustment to school all affected attendance levels.
- Child illness was the main reason for absence over both the previous month and previous 6 months, the next most common reason was a medical appointment.
- Child health, as reported by the parent, affected how many days a child was absent due to sickness.
- Deprivation status also affected unauthorised absence (in particular, truancy) and lateness.

Additional Support Needs

Whether a child has Additional Support Needs (ASN) or not can strongly influence their experiences of school, and as such it is important to identify and provide for those who may need additional support. This chapter considers the prevalence of additional support needs, the types of ASN reported, support received and analysis of how other aspects of learning are affected by ASN.

- 8% of children at Primary 1 are reported as having ASN by their main carer.
- This figure is higher for boys (10%) than it is for girls (4%) and is also higher amongst children living in the most deprived two quintiles of the Scottish Index for Multiple Deprivation.
- Nearly half of those with ASN (46%) were reported to have speech and language problems, just under a quarter (23%) reported social and/or behavioural problems and just under one-fifth (17%) reported learning disabilities.
- Nearly one in three (31%) who reported having ASN have more than one type of need.
- The most common form of support received was from the teacher who helped more than half of all those with ASN.

Practical arrangements

For most families, having a child start school requires the consideration of a series of practical and logistical arrangements – getting the child to and from school, ensuring they have lunch, and making provision for before and after school care if necessary. In this chapter, we consider some of the data collected on GUS on each of these aspects of the child's early experience at school.

Lunch at school

- Most children (53%) in Primary 1 and 2 take a packed lunch to school with slightly fewer (43%) choosing a school meal.
- Children from more disadvantaged circumstances were more likely to have school meals and less likely to have packed lunches than those in more advantaged circumstances.

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Travel to and from school

- Around half of all children walk to and from school, 38% make the journey to school by car and around one-third (33%) return home by car.
- Amongst those families who own cars, children living in the least deprived areas are just as likely to be taken to school by car as those living in the most deprived areas.
- Children in rural areas were less likely to walk to school and more likely to take a school bus than children in other areas.

Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs

- 8% of children attended a breakfast club and 16% attended an after-school club.
- Most children who attended an after-school club (57%) did so on only one or 2 days each week. In contrast, almost three-quarters (71%) of children who used breakfast clubs attended on 3 of the 5 days including 38% who attended every day.
- The most common reason given for use of either club was 'for childcare'.
- Children in lone parent families were more likely than those from couple families to attend breakfast clubs.
- Children in households where parents had higher levels of education and higher incomes were more likely to attend after-school clubs than those in households where parents had lower qualifications or incomes.

Satisfaction with school

Understanding the factors that drive parental satisfaction with schools enables causes of dissatisfaction to be addressed and/or high levels of satisfaction to be maintained. This chapter examines reported levels of satisfaction, with the child's school and variations in satisfaction levels by themes explored in earlier chapters, including contact with the school and level of involvement.

- Overall, parental satisfaction with the child's school is very high: 97% of parents responded that they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the school (71% 'very' and 27% 'fairly').
- 'School-related factors' are generally associated with satisfaction in the expected way: for example greater parental involvement in school activities, receipt of information from the school about the child's learning, and approachability of teachers were all associated with higher reported satisfaction.
- Relationships between parental and area characteristics and levels of satisfaction were more mixed, though some did emerge. For example, parents of 'non-white' background were less likely than 'white' parents to say that they were very satisfied with the school (62% and 71% respectively).
- When the analyses controlled for other factors, most associations between parental and area characteristics and school satisfaction were not significant.

- School-related factors appeared to be more important with several being independently associated with parents' satisfaction, again mostly in the expected direction. For example, parents who had not received information from the school on how to help the child's learning were less likely than those that had to say they were 'very satisfied'; and those who felt it was or would be less easy to approach teachers were less likely than those who thought it was 'very easy' to say they were 'very satisfied'.

Parental aspirations and attitudes to schooling

This chapter explores the data collected in GUS on the educational and life aspirations that parents held for the cohort child and how these vary according to key parent, child and family characteristics. Some consideration is also given to parents' attitudes to certain aspects of schooling. These sorts of aspirations amongst parents and their attitudes to schooling and education can influence a child's educational achievement.

Education and life aspirations

- 88% of parents would like their child to attend college/university.
- Parents who were themselves degree-educated, were more likely to want their child to go to university (91%) than were those with no qualifications (84%).
- Parents of girls were slightly more likely to want their child to attend college/university than parents of boys (91% compared to 86%).
- Compared with those whose children had no additional support needs (4%), parents of children with additional needs (7%) were more likely not to mind how far their child goes in education.
- The most prevalent life aspiration amongst parents, was that they would like their child to be in full-time employment by their mid-twenties (82% of parents would like this).
- Parents of boys were more likely to want their child to have a full-time job compared to parent of girls (85% versus 80%).
- There was also support amongst parents for their child to have gone travelling (64%) and to have left home (41%).

Attitudes to schooling

- Fifty-five per cent of respondents thought that learning about other subjects and life skills is just as important as learning basic skills such as reading, writing and maths, whilst 28% thought that learning basic skills is more important than anything else.
- 77% of parents agreed and 9% disagreed with the statement: "I would not mind if my child went to school where half the children were of another religion". Disagreement was higher, in particular, amongst parents who were Roman Catholics (16%).

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Conclusions

Scotland has witnessed significant review, discussion, debate and development of its school education system over the last 10 years. This period of change was initiated by The National Debate on Education in 2002 and has continued through to the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence into schools in August 2010, with developments continuing still.

On the whole, the findings in this report show that, for most children and their parents, early school experiences – across a range of domains – are positive. However, for some children, particularly those in more disadvantaged social circumstances, the experience is less positive. This has important implications for their continuing educational career and for school and education policy.

Parents have had a statutory right to exercise choice in their child's schooling since the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Proximity was key to choice of school, indicating a general satisfaction or acceptance of the local school. However, with parents living in more deprived areas more likely to make placing requests, there is a suggestion of lower satisfaction with local schools amongst these groups and thus an opportunity for improvement.

A range of previous analysis in GUS has demonstrated strong links between a child's developmental status around the time they enter pre-school and at the point they start primary school. With perceptions of pre-school readiness shown to be associated with perceptions of school readiness, there is further evidence of the importance of early experiences in influencing outcomes and of the ability to identify support needs ahead of primary school entry.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the involvement of parents in their children's education and in the work of schools themselves. For parents with children in P1, involvement in school activities and events is generally high. However, once other factors were controlled for, measures of socio-economic disadvantage remained significant predictors of lower parental involvement. Thus, it would appear that there is still a need to encourage and facilitate participation of those from more deprived backgrounds.

Satisfaction with the child's school was also generally high. However, poorer perceptions of information from and communication with the school were key factors associated with lower satisfaction. Improvements to channels of communication and openness between schools and parents – already a key aim of Curriculum for Excellence – may therefore raise satisfaction levels.

It is encouraging that around half of all children in P1 and P2 walk to and from school. However, almost all of the remainder make the journey by car meaning there is still a significant opportunity to improve 'active travel' on the journey to school.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A successful school experience is crucial for the achievement of positive child outcomes. The Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study provides a unique opportunity to present a detailed exploration of the experiences of children and their families around the time they move to primary school and during their first school year.

This report presents the results of largely descriptive analysis of the considerable data which GUS has collected around this topic from both the birth and child cohorts between 2007 (sweep 3) and 2011 (sweep 6). This analysis seeks to provide a better understanding of the factors which lead to a positive early experience of school for children, the early engagement of parents with the school and the child's teacher, and the many practical issues associated with starting school such as school choice, transport, and wrap-around care.

The aim of the report is to provide an overview of these issues and experiences exploring how they vary according to characteristics of the child (e.g. age at entry, gender), family (e.g. household income, level of education, employment), area (e.g. area deprivation, urban/rural characteristics) and school (e.g. size, sector). Both interview data and administrative data drawn from school records has been analysed.

1.2 Policy context

Primary schools are very important places in a child's life. They often give the first experience of formal learning which can influence the route they take through the education system and their success within it. But primary schools offer more than just learning. They are important providers of care and support to children, and their experience at school can strongly affect a child's wellbeing. Additionally, as they are one of the few places that almost the entire population attends, they are well placed to identify children in need of extra support and to deliver that support.

Scotland has witnessed significant review, discussion, debate and development of its system for school education over the last 10 years. The National Debate on Education in 2002 opened up this discussion and asked probing questions about what Scottish schools should be like in the future, what pupils should learn and how the system could be made more effective. Key findings from the debate included an increase in pupil choice, simplification of assessment, proposals to reduce class sizes and to tackle discipline/bullying, improving buildings, giving headteachers more control of budgets, having teachers work across primary and secondary, involving parents more and strengthening the role of inspection.

From the debate, focus moved to the re-design of the curriculum via the Curriculum Review Group which, in 2004, published plans for the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence – a widespread transformation of teaching practice and school education in Scotland with the aim

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of enabling “all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society”. (Scottish Executive, 2004).

Since then a range of policy documents and legislation has been introduced to influence the way school education is delivered in Scotland. Those relevant are discussed in the individual chapters which follow in this report. However, all are now underpinned by a series of broad-ranging policy frameworks introduced more recently, all focussed on children and young people and having a specifically ‘child centred, outcome-focussed approach’ including the Early Years Framework, Getting it Right for Every Child and the Curriculum for Excellence.

The Early Years Framework (EYF) covers the period from pre-birth to 8 years old, although the principles are applicable beyond this. Broadly speaking, the EYF aims to ensure that all children have the same outcomes and opportunities. Those at risk and those who have not achieved those outcomes should be identified and supported effectively with solutions developed within families and communities using public services where required. Although the emphasis is on children and families who may need greater levels of support, the policy is applicable to everyone.

The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach is designed to influence all aspects of policy and service delivery associated with children and young people. It places the child at the centre of decisions and aims to integrate the services they may need to ensure they reach their full potential. There are three key areas affected by this. First, practice – GIRFEC aims to give professionals the tools they need to do their jobs better and with greater support. Secondly, legislation – which will be introduced to ensure different agencies cooperate and share information. Thirdly, removal of barriers to joined up working. Many of the barriers currently preventing joined up working between agencies will be removed to ensure the child gets timely and appropriate help. The GIRFEC approach recommends that there is one ‘named contact’ who can coordinate help and advice for children and their families should they require it. In many situations, this will be their teacher, further enforcing the idea that primary schools are there to support children outside of the classroom as well.

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), already noted above, has continued to develop and influence since the initial plans were published in 2004. Rollout of CfE into schools commenced in August 2010 meaning that children in the GUS birth cohort will be one of the first year groups to experience the Curriculum from entry to primary school and throughout their school careers.

1.3 The Growing Up in Scotland study

The analysis in this report draws on the experiences of children in both the child cohort and the birth cohort. However, given the larger numbers involved, where possible, and unless otherwise stated, the results refer to data from the birth cohort only. Where there is matching data from the child cohort, comparisons have been made to check for significant differences. Any such differences are highlighted in the text.

The eligibility range for dates of birth in each cohort and the fieldwork pattern is such that children in each cohort span two school year groups and are interviewed at different points in the school year. This means that children entered primary school across four school intakes in different years – two per cohort. In the child cohort, around two-thirds of children started school in August 2007 and one-third in August 2008. For some children in this cohort, Primary 1 data was captured at sweep 3, and for others it was captured at sweep 4. In the birth cohort, two-thirds of children started school in August 2009 and the remainder in August 2010 with the early school data captured across sweeps 5 and 6.

To obtain a measure of experience at school entry or in the first year at school has required data to be merged from two sweeps of data collection each corresponding with the child's first year at primary school. Those children whose data are taken from sweep 3 for the child cohort or sweep 5 for the birth cohort were, on average, younger at school entry than were those whose Primary 1 data were captured at sweep 4 or sweep 6 respectively. As the spread of age at entry when the two groups in each cohort are combined is similar to that of any single school year group this is not considered to be problematic. For example, at Primary 1 intake, children in a typical school year group in Scotland will range in age from 4.5 to 6 years old. As can be seen from the discussion in section 2.4 below, this range is reflected in the GUS data.

For some topics data are only available either for a particular cohort and/or a particular sweep. For example, the findings related to school lunches and travel to and from school in chapter 9 are taken exclusively from sweep 4 of the child cohort. As such they refer to children across P1 and P2. Where use has been made of specific data like this it is highlighted in the text.

Not all families who participate in GUS do so at every sweep. There are a number of reasons why respondents drop out from longitudinal surveys and such attrition is not random. All of the statistics have been weighted by a specially constructed longitudinal weight to adjust for non-response and sample selection. Both weighted and unweighted sample sizes are given in each table. Standard errors have been adjusted to take account of the cluster sampling¹.

1.4 Education administrative data

This report incorporates analysis of education administrative data drawn from the ScotXed databases held by the Scottish Government Education Directorate. Permission to link survey information with this administrative data was obtained from parents at sweep 6. Of the 3657 parents interviewed at sweep 6, 97% ($n=3534$) gave permission to obtain data on their child from ScotXed. Of these, a successful match between GUS details and education records was made for 3465 children (95% of those who consented). Further details on the matching process is provided in the technical appendix.

¹ The GUS sample is generated in two stages. The first stage randomly selects geographic areas or clusters, the second stage selects individuals within those clusters. The standard errors are adjusted to take account of the geographic clustering of the sample at the first stage.

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ScotXed collate a range of information associated with Scottish state schools and the pupils who attend them. A large part of this information is drawn from the annual school and pupil census. The school census provides a range of information on the school roll, including the total number of pupils and classes overall and at each stage. It also provides information, for example, on the number of pupils with additional support needs and who are receiving Gaelic education as well as details of the school denomination and teacher numbers. The pupil census provides similar data, but at the level of the individual pupil, identifying – amongst other things – the school they attend, additional support needs, looked after status and level of Gaelic education. In addition to the census information, the other key dataset is on pupil attendance and absence. This data, which is drawn in September of each year, provides information on the number of sessions (or ‘openings’ – equivalent to a morning or afternoon at school) the child has been absent or late in the previous academic year, and the reasons for each absence.

Analysis of administrative data is mostly included in Chapters 3, 7 and 8. Its use has been clearly indicated in the text.

1.5 Presentation of results

Unless otherwise stated, all differences presented in this report are significant at the 95% level of confidence. Statistical significance may be presented either as ‘Not Significant’ (NS) or at three levels of ‘confidence’ – 95% ($<.05$), 99% ($<.01$) or 99.9% ($<.001$). All figures quoted in this report have an associated margin of error, due to the fact that they are estimates based on only a sample of children, rather than all children. This margin can be estimated for each figure. For a figure which has a significance value (or p -value) of $<.05$ or 95%, this indicates that there is a 95% chance that the true value across all children in the subgroup (as opposed to just those in the sample) falls within the margin. Thus a lower significance value (of <0.1 or <0.01) indicates a lower margin of error and a greater chance that the figure or relationship presented in the report occurs within the population.

1.6 Structure of the report

The report is structured across 11 chapters. Chapters 2 to 4 address issues associated with school entry and transition including consideration of deferral rates, school choice, the characteristics of the schools children in Scotland attend in the early primary years and issues associated with the child’s transition to school including perceptions of readiness and adjustment. Chapters 5 and 6 move on to discuss contact between schools and parents and parental involvement in school activities. Chapter 7 presents a detailed consideration of data on attendance and absence whilst Chapter 8 examines the prevalence and nature of additional support needs. Some of the practical arrangements associated with children attending school – such as travel to and from school and before and after-school care – are explored in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 considers parents’ overall satisfaction with their child’s school before Chapter 11 presents data on parents’ broader aspirations for their child.

2.1 Introduction

In Scotland, the school year begins in mid-August. Any single school year group consists of children born between the beginning of March in one year and the end of February the following year. Children born between March and August start school in the August of, or following, their fifth birthday. Those born between September and February start school in the August prior to their fifth birthday. As such, children in Scotland usually start school between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5 years old.

However, parents of children born between September and December can request to defer their child's entry to the following August. These deferrals are not automatic and are subject to approval by the local education authority. Parents of children born in January and February may also choose to defer their child's entry; these requests are automatically approved. Children with birthdays in January and February and whose entry to school is deferred are eligible for a further year of funded pre-school education whereas those with September to December birthdays who are deferred are not. Children whose entry is deferred will tend to be aged between 5.5 and 6 years old at the time they start school.

2.2 Key findings

- At school entry, 42% of children were under 5, 49% were aged between 5.0 and 5.5 years, and 9% were older than 5.5 years.
- 87% of children started school in the August when they were first eligible and 13% had their entry deferred.
- Almost half of the children born in January or February were deferred compared with almost no children whose birthdays were between March and August. Fifteen per cent of boys had their entry deferred compared with 9% of girls.
- There were no significant differences in deferral by key parental socio-economic characteristics.
- Parental concerns about the child's development were, however, associated with deferred entry. 21% of parents with some concerns about their child's development at age 5 deferred entry compared with 10% of those parents who had no concerns.
- The most common reasons for deferring entry were that the parent(s) felt the child was 'not ready' (44%) or that he or she was too young (32%). 8% said they deferred for health or developmental reasons and 5% said they had followed advice from the child's nursery or health visitor.
- For deferrals related to the birth cohort, 53% were automatic (involving children born in January or February) and 47% were discretionary (involving children born between September and December).

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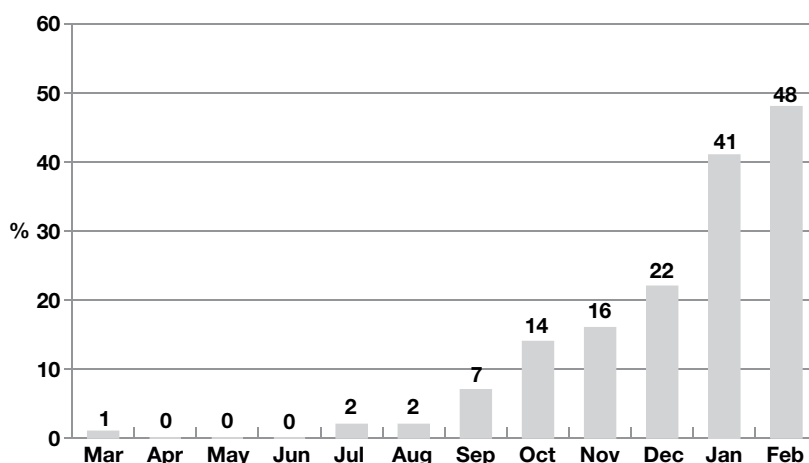
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- When compared with automatic deferrals, discretionary deferrals were significantly more likely to be for health or developmental reasons. Deferrals for children in lower income groups were more likely than for those in higher income groups to be related to health or developmental issues or based on advice received from the child's nursery.

2.3 Entry and deferral

Approximately two-thirds of children in the birth cohort were eligible to start school in August 2009 with the remainder eligible the following August. Looking at all children together, 87% started in the August when they were first eligible with 13% deferring entry. The rate of deferral is marginally higher in the birth cohort than in the child cohort (who started school in 2008 and 2009), where 9% of parents deferred the cohort child's entry.

Figure 2-A Percentage of children with deferred primary school entry by month of birth



Weighted base = 439, Unweighted base = 439

As may be expected, key to the decision to defer appeared to be the child's age with those children who were youngest at their eligible starting date most likely to be deferred. Figure 2-A illustrates the proportion of children whose entry was deferred by their month of birth. The data show that almost half of those born in January or February were deferred compared with almost no children with birthdays between March and August.

The child's gender also appeared to influence the parent's decision to defer. Fifteen per cent of boys had their entry deferred compared with 9% of girls. There were no significant differences by parental level of education, household income or area deprivation. Parental concerns about the child's development were, however, associated with deferred entry. Amongst those who had some concerns about their child's development at age 5, 21% deferred entry compared with 10% who had no concerns. Indeed, gender differences in parental concerns about development may explain, at least in part, the differences in rates of deferral between boys and girls as parents of boys are significantly more likely to report developmental concerns than are parents of girls. For example, at age 5, 27% of parents of male children reported some concerns about their child's development compared with 14% amongst parents of female children. Such findings resonate with earlier analysis of data from

the older GUS child cohort which showed that around the time of school entry, parents of boys were more likely to report difficulties with their child's social, emotional and behavioural development² than were parents of girls (Bradshaw and Tipping, 2010).

Indeed, around 8% of parents in the child cohort who deferred their child's school entry said they did so for health or developmental reasons. However, as shown in Table 2.1, the most common reason given was simply that the parent(s) felt the child was 'not ready'. The next most common reason was that the child was not old enough, reflecting the differences by birth month shown above. In addition, around 5% said they had deferred following advice or consultation with the child's nursery or health visitor.

Table 2.1 Reasons given for deferring child's school entry – Child cohort

Reason	% of children deferred
Not ready	44
Not old enough	32
Health or developmental issues	8
Chose not to send	6
Advised to defer	5
Something else	5
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	190
<i>Unweighted</i>	228

As noted above, Scottish education policy insists that referral requests are treated in two separate ways by local education authorities: requests for children born in January or February are automatically granted whereas those for children born in September to December are discretionary. Overall, for deferrals related to the birth cohort, 53% were automatic and 47% were discretionary. The proportions for the child cohort were different with 69% of deferrals as automatic and 31% discretionary. There is no obvious reason for this difference between the two samples and it may therefore represent a downward trend in applications for deferral or the success of those applications.

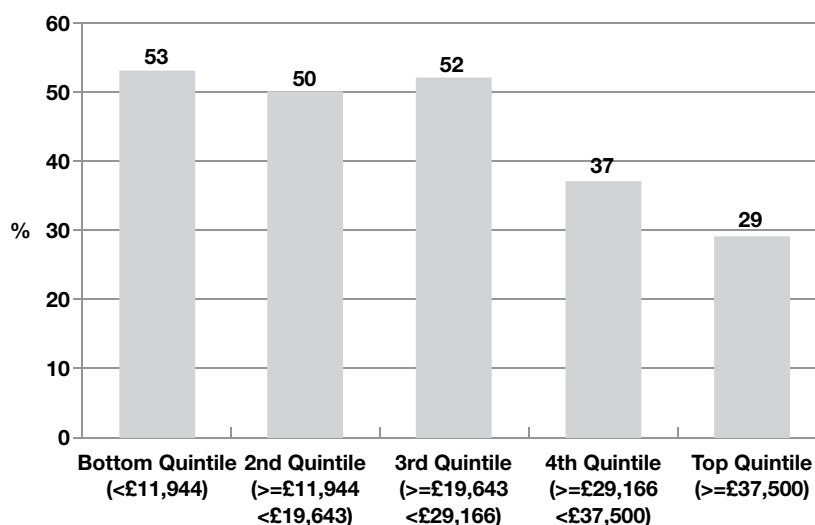
Analysis was undertaken within the sub-sample of children in the birth cohort whose entry was deferred to explore whether or not discretionary deferrals were more common amongst particular subgroups. The analysis indicated that, despite there being no differences in overall likelihood of deferred entry by family socio-economic characteristics, where a child's entry to school had been deferred, that entry was significantly more likely to have been discretionary than automatic amongst children in more disadvantaged circumstances.

² As measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997)

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Figure 2-B Percentage of children with deferred primary school entry whose deferral was discretionary by equivalised household income



Weighted base = 422, Unweighted base = 428

For example, Figure 2-B shows that, compared with families with higher levels of household income, deferrals relating to children from lower income families were significantly more likely to be discretionary (referring to a child with birth month of September to December) than automatic (referring to a child with a birth month of January or February). Amongst lower income families, the split by deferral type is around half automatic and half discretionary, whereas for higher income families around one-third of deferrals are discretionary with two-thirds automatic. As may be expected, there is no variation in birth month by level of household income.

Reasons for deferral varied according to whether or not the request was automatic or discretionary, and according to household income as shown in Table 2.2. Although the dominant reasons related to age and perceptions of 'readiness' remain, when compared with automatic deferrals, discretionary deferrals were significantly more likely to be for health or developmental reasons. In addition, deferrals for children in lower income groups were more likely than for those in higher income groups to be related to health or developmental issues or based on advice received from the child's nursery.

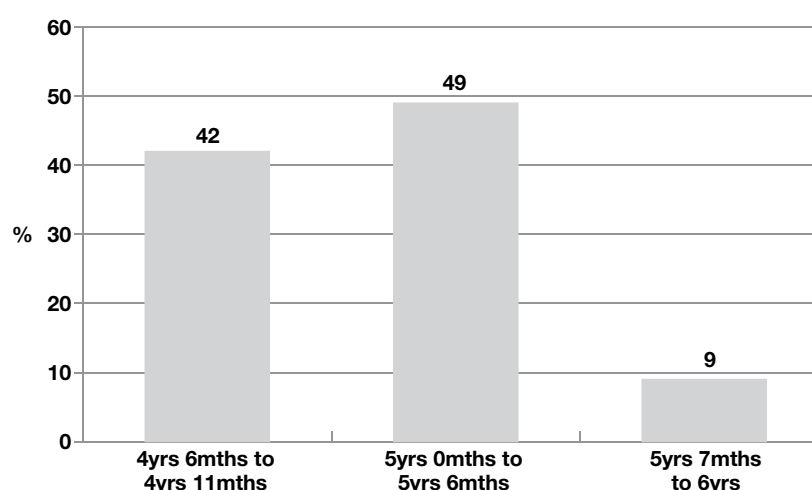
Table 2.2 Reasons given for deferring child's school entry by deferral type and household income – Child cohort

Reason	Deferral type		Equivalised income group	
	Automatic (%)	Discretionary (%)	In bottom 3 quintiles (%)	In top 2 quintiles (%)
Not ready	50	29	39	48
Not old enough	35	25	31	37
Chose not to send	5	7	4	10
Advised to defer	5	5	8	1
Health or developmental issues	4	19	12	3
Something else	1	14	7	1
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	135	55	107	66
<i>Unweighted</i>	147	56	106	78

2.4 Age at school entry

As noted above, the entrance policy in Scotland allows that children are eligible to start to school when they are aged between 4.5 and 5.5 years old. However, this policy also allows the flexibility for children at the younger end of the spectrum to have their entry deferred for a year meaning that a small proportion of children will be slightly older than 5.5 at the time of entry.

Figure 2-C illustrates the typical age range of a Primary 1 class at the point of entry based on the GUS birth cohort data. The data confirm that the vast majority (91%) of children are aged between 4.5 and 5.5 years old with those aged between 5.0 and 5.5 years forming the single largest group. Around two-fifths (42%) are under 5 and just 9% are older than 5.5 at the time of entry.

Figure 2-C Percentage of children in each age range at school entry

SCHOOL CHOICE, SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS AND MOVING SCHOOLS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines several issues around school choice including:

- the factors that parents considered important when deciding which primary school the cohort child should attend,
- what proportion of parents made placing requests for a non-designated school and the extent to which such requests were successful,
- sources of information and advice on enrolment and satisfaction with these,
- school characteristics, and
- changing schools.

It is important to understand the factors that parents consider when deciding which primary school their children should attend. Over the years, a number of studies have identified key reasons for parents choosing schools. It appears that academic performance, while important, is generally not the chief amongst these – for those whose children went to state schools, Hansen and Vignoles (2010), using Millennium Cohort Study data, found that proximity and attendance of siblings/friends preceded performance as major factors for school choice. This was true to a similar extent across all countries of the UK. Reviewing earlier studies of experiences at Scottish secondary school level, Willms (1997) notes that proximity again, and factors such as good discipline and a good social atmosphere were considered more important than academic performance.

The opportunity to actually exercise choice in schooling was established as a statutory right in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. In contrast to the rest of the UK, children in Scotland are automatically allocated a place and enrolled in a designated local school, but parents may make a written request to place their child in another school – known as a placing request. Hansen and Vignoles (2010) found that, in 2005-06, 38% of Scottish parents made such a request. This is much lower than those making an application for a particular school in other countries of the UK and the authors suggest that this is related to the fact that “in rural areas the local school may be the only practical option” (p.191). Naturally, the literature overall also notes that choice may only be practical in towns and cities, and thus more parents in urban areas make placing requests than those in more rural areas.

Especially in the context of school choice, parents require good information about schools to help make informed choices. To this end, there are various sources of official guidance available such as the Parentzone area of Education Scotland website, and official advice includes suggestions such as visiting the school(s) and speaking to the headteacher³. However, previous reviews such as Willms (1997) noted that while parents said that official information was useful in making choices they actually relied heavily on knowledge gathered via social networks, especially other parents.

3 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/11/10093528/2>

Another fundamental choice that parents may exercise, financial constraints allowing, is between state and private schooling. The numbers choosing private education at primary school level are lower than at secondary UK-wide, but differ by country. For the children in the Millennium Cohort Study, in Scotland the figure is around 2%, compared to 5% in England (Hansen and Vignoles, 2010). This may reflect the lower proportion of private schools in existence in Scotland (though clearly there is a relationship between this and demand) but also the differences in the variety of state schools in the respective countries. The Scottish state education system has less diversity in school type (no Academies or Free Schools) and delivery of the curriculum and in (perceived) performance between schools. These things will undoubtedly relate to the extent that school choice is exercised.

As well as issues of school choice, this chapter also provides a summary of the characteristics of the schools attended by children during the first school year. Finally, we shall briefly examine the extent to which children have changed schools during the Primary 1 year, and the reasons for this.

3.2 Key findings

- Proximity is the most common reason given as the main factor influencing choice of school: 34% of parents cited this reason.
- The importance attached to the school's exam results/academic reputation has a strongly positive relationship to parental social advantage across several indicators (area deprivation, socio-economic classification, equivalised income and highest level of parental qualification).
- 32% of parents made a placing request whilst the remainder (67%) accepted their allocated place at their local school. Only 1% of parents making a placing request were unsuccessful.
- Placing requests were more common amongst families in more disadvantaged circumstances.
- 61% of parents sought advice on enrolment ahead of their child starting school; pre-school and primary school staff were the most commonly cited sources. Satisfaction with the advice was very high, with 95% of parents saying they were quite or very satisfied.
- 19% of children were attending a faith school and 4% of children attended a school where some form of Gaelic Medium Education was being provided.
- Most children in Primary 1 (66%) attend schools with 200 or more pupils on the roll. Just 8% attend a school with less than 100 pupils.
- Children living in areas in the least deprived quintile and those living in areas classified as 'large urban' were more likely to attend larger schools than those living in all other area types.
- The average P1 intake was 39 pupils and an average P1 class included 19 pupils.
- Children living in less deprived areas are more likely than those living in areas with higher deprivation, to attend schools with larger Primary 1 intakes and larger Primary 1 class sizes.

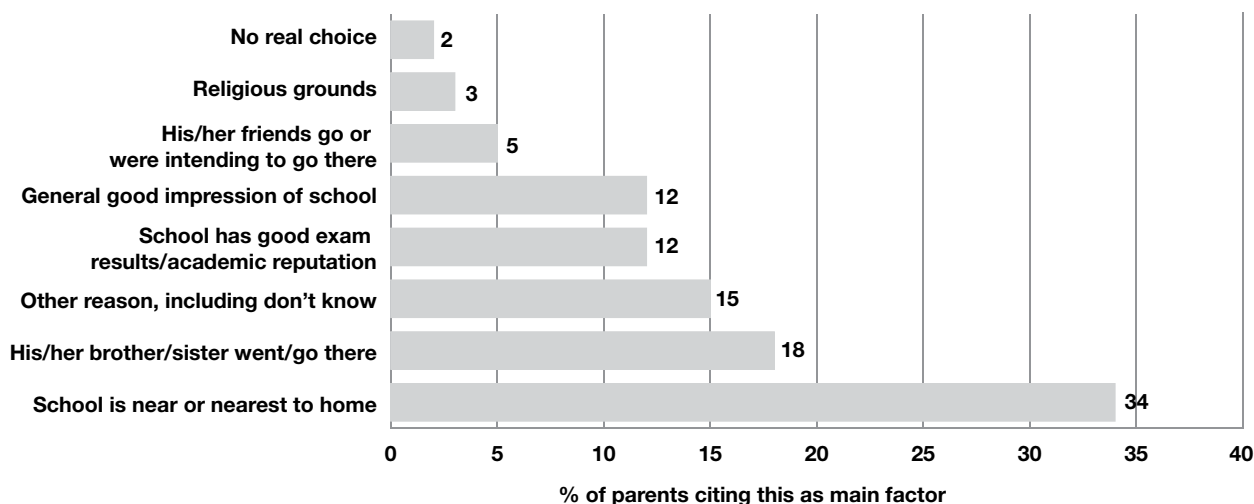
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3.3 Factors influencing school choice

Proximity (34%) is clearly the biggest factor by some margin (Figure 3-A) – even if other similar categories are combined such as the ‘exam results/academic reputation’ and ‘general good impression of school’ categories (24%) or the ‘siblings went/go there’ and ‘friends go/intending to go there’ (22%).

Figure 3-A Most important factor when thinking about schools the child might attend

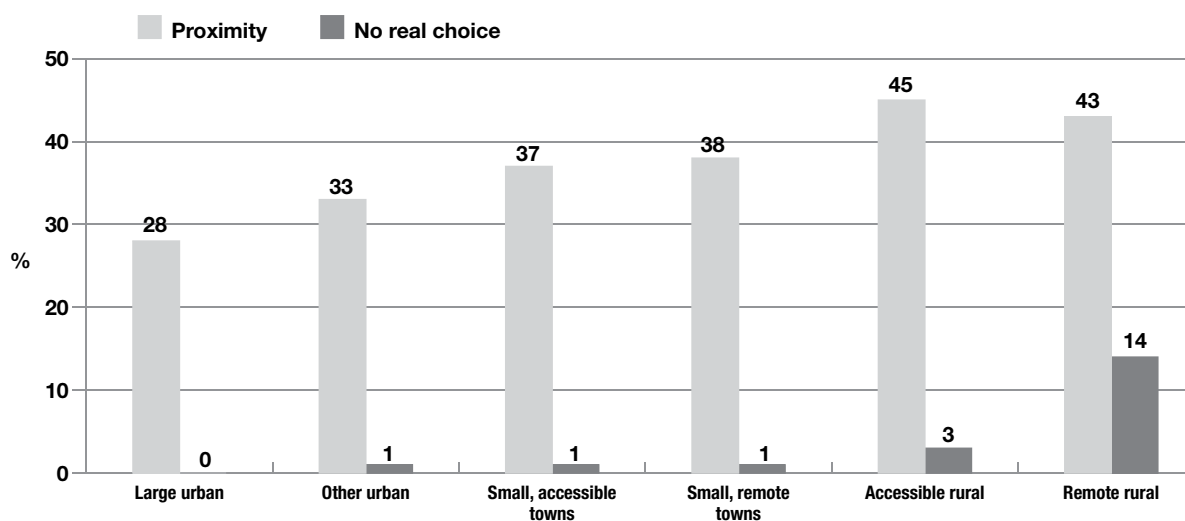


Bases: weighted: 3627; unweighted: 3644

There are large and striking differences in the importance attached to the school's exam results/academic reputation across a set of associated parental characteristics: area deprivation, socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), equivalised household income and highest level of parental qualification. Across all of these characteristics, those in the ‘higher’ categories (least deprived area, managerial and professional occupations, highest income and highest level of qualification) cite the school's exam results/academic reputation as the most important factor much more frequently than those in the ‘lower’ categories. The contrasts are stark: twice the proportion of parents in the least deprived areas (18%) as in the most deprived (9%); just over twice in the highest income quintile (19%) as in the lowest (8%); over three times those in managerial and professional occupations (16%) compared with those who have never worked (5%) and four times the proportion of those parents with a degree or higher-level qualification (16%) compared with those with no qualifications (4%).

Looking at differences by urban/rural classification, it is not surprising that ‘no real choice’ is much more commonly cited by those living in remote rural areas (14%) than all other types of area (between 1% and 3% for the middle four urban/rural categories) – and is not a factor at all for those in large urban areas. The importance of proximity also maps closely with increasing rurality as shown in Figure 3-B, though a slightly lower proportion of those living in remote rural areas (43%) cited this factor than those in accessible rural areas (45%).

Figure 3-B Percentage of parents citing proximity and ‘no real choice’ as main factors for school choice by urban/rural classification



Bases: weighted: 3627; unweighted: 3631

Some other differences included:

- Proximity of the school was less important for older mothers than for younger mothers – 30% of mother's aged 40 or older (at the time of the interview) selected this factor compared with 38% of those aged between 20 and 29.
- As may be expected, in larger families, attendance of siblings at the school was more important than for smaller families.
- Parents with a white ethnic background tended to give less importance to the school's academic reputation compared with those of other ethnic backgrounds, but this difference was not statistically significant.

3.4 Placing requests

In Scotland, children are automatically allocated a place and enrolled in a designated local school, but parents may make a written request to place their child in another school – known as a placing request.

Around one-third (32%) of parents reported that they had requested a school place whilst the remainder (67%) said they had been allocated a place at their local school. Only 1% of parents making a placing request were unsuccessful – their child is not currently at the school they made the request for. This low number means it is not possible to analyse further the characteristics of parents not getting their school of choice.

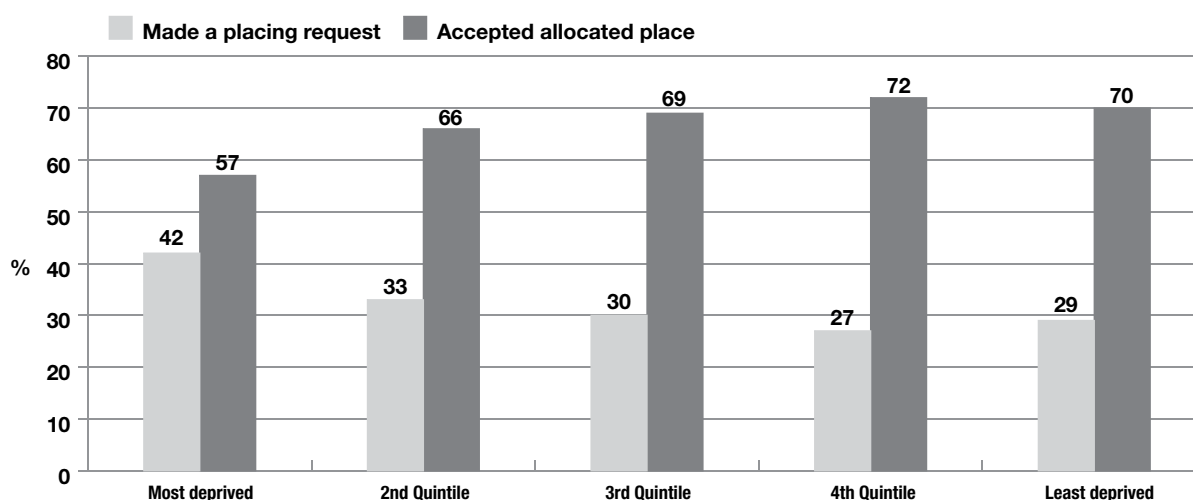
Placing requests were more common amongst families in more disadvantaged circumstances suggesting that these families were less content with the quality of their catchment school. For example, 42% of parents living in an area in the most deprived quintile made a placing

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request compared with 29% of parents living in an area in the least deprived quintile (Figure 3-C). Similar patterns were observed by household income. Those from an 'other ethnic background' were also more likely to make a request than those from a white background (45% compared to 32%). Parents living in rural and remote areas were less likely to make a placing request than those in urban areas, presumably because there is less choice (18% living in remote rural compared to 37% in large urban areas, with a positive relationship between likelihood of making a request and increasingly urban classification) – a factor reflected in the earlier data.

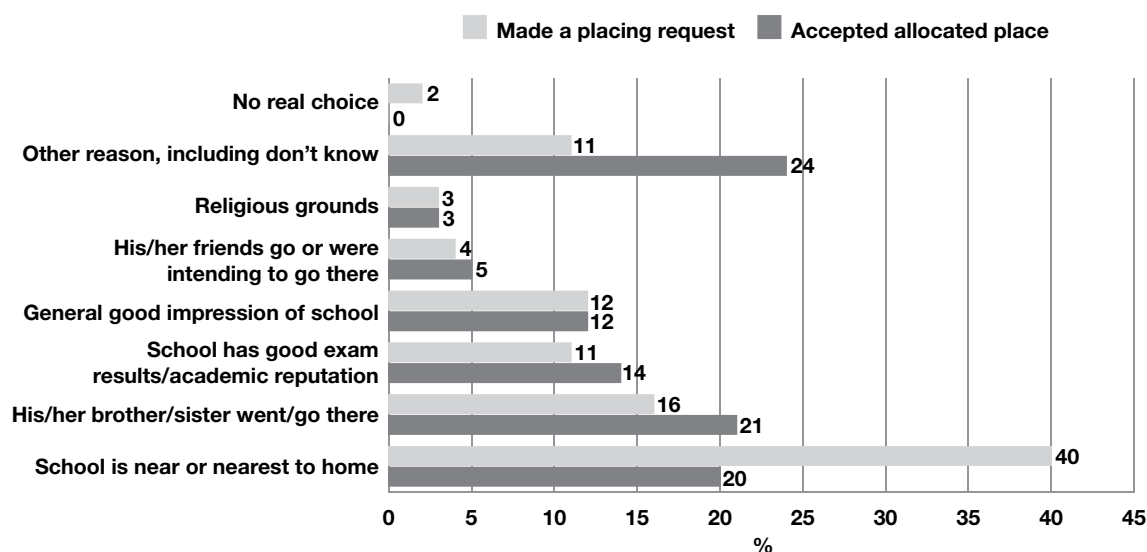
Figure 3-C Percentage of parents who made a placing request or accepted an allocated place, by area deprivation index



Bases: weighted: 3613; unweighted: 3612

There are some differences in the main reason for choosing a school between parents making or not making a placing request (Figure 3-D). Proximity is still the dominant factor overall, but unsurprisingly it is far more important for those allocated a place than those making a placing request (40% as to 20%). Also, as might be expected, the school's exam results/academic reputation is more important for those requesting a place – but the difference is not large (14% to 11%). 'Other' reasons are much more important to those making a request (24% to 11%) and the presence of siblings is cited as the main factor for 21% of those requesting a place compared with 16% of those allocated a place. Religious grounds appear to be important to the same degree irrespective of placing request or allocation.

Figure 3-D Percentage of parents citing different main factors when thinking about schools the child might attend, by whether made a placing request



3.5 Sources of information and advice on enrolment⁴

Sixty-one per cent of parents reported looking for advice ahead of the child starting school. All sources were used by at least some respondents, but the most frequently cited were pre-school (39%) and primary school staff (21%), and several informal sources including friends (29%), other parents (11%) or siblings (9%).

Overall, there appear to be very high levels of satisfaction with the level of advice, information and support available. Over 95% of parents were very or quite satisfied, and only 2% were quite or very dissatisfied.

There are few clear patterns in the characteristics of those parents who did or did not seek advice. The proportion seeking any advice decreases with increasing number of children and respondent age, as might be expected because they are more likely to already have children in school. There is some variation by parental education, but no clear pattern. There are no other significant differences.

There is previous evidence (Mabelis and Marryat, 2011) that at earlier child ages disadvantaged parents are less likely to seek information and advice from formal sources. This analysis examines the use of any formal source, and then the number of formal sources used. Formal sources are here defined to include primary school staff, pre-school staff, the Local Authority and the Parentzone website.

⁴ This data is only available from parents of those children in the birth cohort who had started school by the time of their sweep 5 interview.

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There are few statistically significant variations in use of any formal sources amongst parents with different characteristics. Parents with degree level qualifications are most likely to have used any formal source (57%) though it is those with middle qualifications (upper-level Standard Grades or intermediate vocational qualifications) that are least likely (42%). Those with no qualifications (45%), lower level Standard Grades or other qualifications (48%) and Higher Grades or upper level vocational qualifications (47%) use any formal source to a similar extent. Use of any formal source decreases with the number of children in the household – as with use of any source.

Use of any formal source also varies by urban/rural classification: those in large urban and remote rural areas are least likely to have used any formal source (45%), while those in small remote towns are most likely (64%).

The number of formal sources used by those who used any varied in two significant ways. First, by tenure. Parents with 'Other' tenure status were least likely to have used two or more sources (16%), followed by 'social rented' (26%), owner occupied (34%) and those in private rented accommodation – who were most likely to have used two or more sources (67%). Urban/rural classification was also related to the number of sources used. Those in remote and accessible rural areas were most likely to have used two or more (53% and 43% respectively); those in large urban, other urban and small remote towns were about equally likely (31-32%) and those in small accessible towns were least likely (26%) to have used two or more sources.

3.6 School characteristics

Primary school education is delivered via a variety of different school and classroom environments across Scotland. Schools vary in the number and age mix of pupils, denomination, the geography of their surrounding area and a myriad of other characteristics. All of these varying characteristics contribute to a child's school experience and may impact on that experience in different ways for different pupils. This section uses the administrative data held by ScotXed on the schools attended by children in Growing Up in Scotland to explore some of the key variations in school environment experienced by Scottish children when they enter primary school.

The administrative data analysed below is only routinely available for state-run schools. Data from the parent questionnaire indicates that just 1% of children were attending an independent school in Primary 1⁵. As such the administrative data describe the schools attended by the vast majority of children in GUS and in Scotland. No survey data are used in this section of the report.

⁵ As may be expected, with such a small number attending independent schools it is not possible to robustly consider how the characteristics of these children vary from those attending state schools.

3.6.1 Denomination and Gaelic language

Scottish state schools are, by and large, either non-denominational or Roman Catholic. A small number of other faith schools also operate catering for children of other Christian, Jewish or Muslim faiths. The data indicate that 19% of children were attending a faith school in their Primary 1 year. The vast majority of these children (90%) attend a Roman Catholic school (17% of all children in P1).

As noted in the introduction, following the Standards for Scottish Schools Act (2000), local authorities began to develop and enhance their education provision. On applying for a school place, parents in some local authorities can choose – via a placing request – to send their child to a school which offers Gaelic Medium Education (GME). Figures indicate that in 2010-11 there were 2312 children in 60 primary schools across 14 local authorities receiving some form of GME (HMIE, 2011).

In Primary 1, GUS data suggest that 4% of children were attending a school where some form of GME was being provided. At school level, the delivery of GME is defined, via the administrative data, in one of six ways:

- Exclusively taught through Gaelic
- All curriculum through Gaelic or bilingual
- Some curriculum through English, some through Gaelic
- Gaelic the only subject taught through Gaelic
- Gaelic taught as learner
- No Gaelic taught

Amongst those children who were attending a school which offered GME, 44% were in the ‘Gaelic taught as learner’ category, with a further 29% at schools teaching exclusively through Gaelic. The remainder were evenly split between the other categories (around 9% in each).

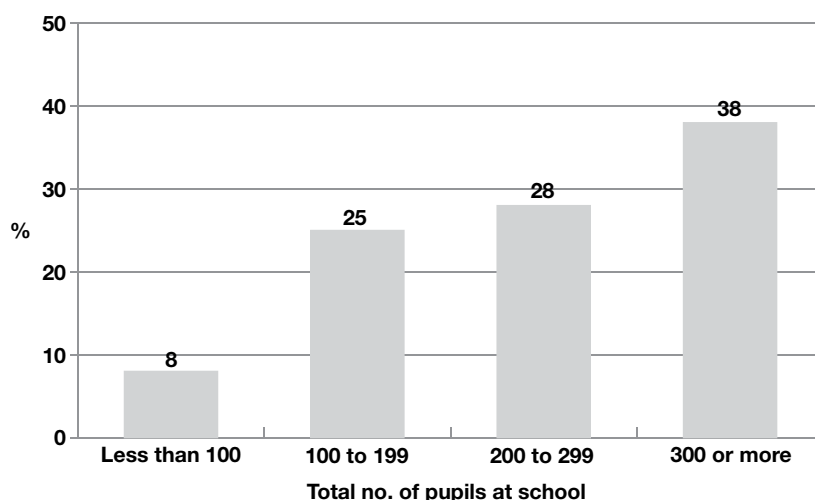
3.6.2 School, intake and class size

For the purposes of this analysis, school ‘size’ is defined in terms of number of pupils. Children in Scotland enter primary schools which range from having as few as 10 to over 300 pupils. The mean number of pupils across all primary schools was 261. As shown in Figure 3-E, most children in Primary 1 (66%) attend schools with 200 or more pupils and just 8% attend a school with less than 100 pupils.

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Figure 3-E Percentage of pupils attending primary school by total number of pupils

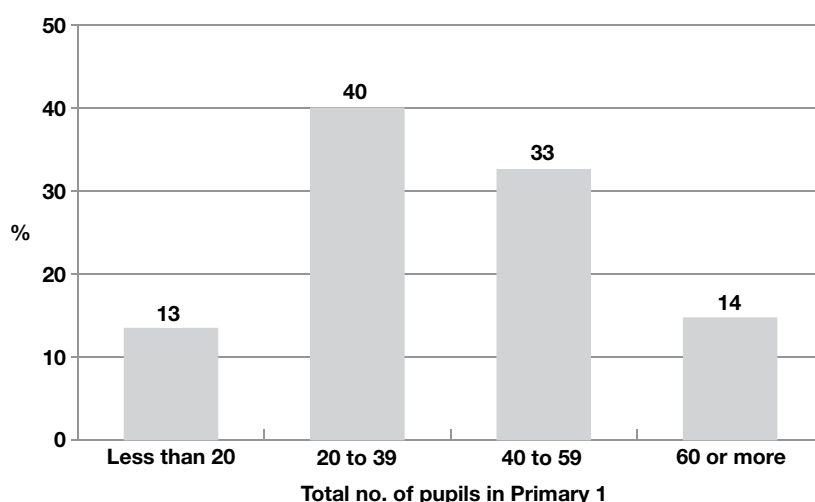


School size varied by the area deprivation and urban-rural classification of the child's home address⁶. Children living in areas in the least deprived quintile and those living in areas classified as 'large urban' were more likely to attend larger schools than those living in all other area types. For example, 63% of children living in the least deprived quintile attended a school with 300 or more pupils compared with between 31% and 35% of those living in more deprived areas. Half (50%) of children living in large urban areas attended schools with 300 or more pupils. Only a slightly smaller proportion did so in small, accessible towns (46%) and small, remote towns (47%). However, considerably fewer attended such large schools in accessible (14%) and remote rural areas (8%).

As may be expected, the size of the school was associated with both the size of the P1 intake and the average P1 class size. Children who started their school career at larger schools tended to do so alongside a greater number of pupils across the year group and in their class. The average P1 intake at the time GUS children started school was 39 pupils. This ranged from just 1 to over 100 pupils. As illustrated in Figure 3-F, 40% of children were in a year group of between 20 and 39 pupils and 33% started as one of 40 to 59 pupils. Lower proportions joined the smallest year groups of less than 20 pupils and the largest year groups of 60 pupils or more (13% and 14% respectively).

On average, a P1 class included 19 pupils. This figure did vary to some extent. Around one-quarter (24%) of pupils started in a class of up to 15 pupils in total, with about a further quarter (27%) in a class of between 16 and 19 pupils. Twenty-nine per cent were in a class of between 20 and 23 pupils, and 21% shared a class with a total of 24 or more pupils.

⁶ As opposed to the school's classification on these measures which may be different to that of the child's home address.

Figure 3-F Percentage of pupils attending primary school by total number of pupils in corresponding P1 intake

The patterns of school size seen by area deprivation and urban-rural classification illustrated above are repeated in relation to numbers of P1 pupils and class sizes (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). Children living in less deprived areas are more likely than those living in areas with higher deprivation to attend schools with larger Primary 1 intakes and larger Primary 1 class sizes. School characteristics, in terms of pupil numbers, are broadly similar for pupils living in areas in the 2nd through 5th deprivation quintiles – it is only the figures for those living in the least deprived quintile which are notably different.

Table 3.1 Mean total number of pupils, pupils in P1, and P1 class sizes by area deprivation quintile

	Area deprivation (2009)				
	Least deprived	2	3	4	Most deprived
Mean total number of pupils	338.1	241.1	236.9	247.0	247.9
<i>SE</i>	11.34	8.69	8.40	6.57	7.88
Mean number of pupils in Primary 1	50.0	35.8	35.1	37.6	37.9
<i>SE</i>	1.63	1.36	1.31	.99	1.18
Mean Primary 1 class size	20.9	18.7	17.5	18.8	19.0
<i>SE</i>	0.33	0.44	0.41	0.31	0.30
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	599	656	601	619	687
<i>Unweighted</i>	715	740	648	565	493

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As shown in Table 3.2, children living in large urban areas experience the largest P1 intakes and average class sizes. However, the key distinction is between the four ‘urban’ and the two ‘rural’ categories. For children living in either remote or accessible rural areas, both P1 intake and class sizes are significantly smaller than for their urban peers.

Table 3.2 Mean total number of pupils, pupils in P1, and P1 class sizes by area urban-rural classification

	Urban-rural classification					
	Large urban	Other urban	Small, accessible towns	Small remote towns	Accessible rural	Remote rural
Mean total number of pupils	299.8	266.5	288.5	281.0	173.0	124.1
<i>SE</i>	8.66	6.85	13.25	23.28	8.55	9.37
Mean number of pupils in Primary 1	45.2	40.1	42.7	40.4	25.9	17.8
<i>SE</i>	1.31	1.05	1.76	4.25	1.31	1.60
Mean Primary 1 class size	21.0	18.9	19.2	19.7	15.9	12.6
<i>SE</i>	0.28	0.24	0.45	1.03	0.44	1.18
<i>Bases</i>						
<i>Weighted</i>	1119	1062	327	86	385	184
<i>Unweighted</i>	1025	1025	342	96	449	224

With considerably smaller school, intake and class sizes, it is unsurprising that children attending schools in rural areas had a greater chance of experiencing Primary 1 as part of a composite class with older children. Overall, 41% of children started in a school where at least one P1 class was a composite (though they may not have been in that class)⁷. In remote rural areas this figure rose to 65%, whereas in large urban areas it was 30%. Figures in the most and least deprived areas were similar at 36% and 38% respectively. However, the proportion was higher for children living in areas in the 2nd and 3rd deprivation quintiles at 45% and 48% respectively.

3.7 Changing schools

Just 1% of children had changed schools since starting P1. Of those who had, most had only attended one other school although a small number had attended two. The dominant reason by far for changing school was a house move – cited by 55% of those parents where the child had changed school. Twelve per cent said they had moved to a school nearer their home and 9% because of problems with the previous school.

⁷ This figure is not the same as the proportion of P1 pupils who were actually *in* a composite class. This data is not available at an individual level in the GUS data. However, the full school level administrative dataset indicates that in the 2010-11 academic year, 12% of P1 pupils were in a composite class. It may be expected that this figure varies in a similar fashion according to area deprivation and urban-rural classification to the figure reported above.

4.1 Introduction

Starting school is a major step in a child's life. Indeed, for many it will represent the most significant change to their daily lives since birth. Some children make the transition to school smoothly and cope easily with the change. Others find it more stressful which can impact negatively not only on wider aspects of their *early* school experience but may also have longer-term impact on their educational outcomes (Dunlop and Fabian, 2003).

This chapter explores a range of issues related to the child's transition from pre-school to primary school. These issues are explored in relation to four main concepts: parental perceptions of the child's 'readiness' for school; the child's adjustment to school in the first few months; how well they have coped with the change in learning style and environment; and activities initiated by the school and/or undertaken by the parent and/or the child in preparation for going to school.

4.2 Key findings

- The vast majority of children were perceived by their parents to be ready for school. Children in more socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances tended to have lower perceived readiness than those in more advantaged circumstances, though differences were small.
- After controlling for socio-economic characteristics, the key factors associated with perceived school readiness were the child's pre-school experience (time spent at pre-school), and their cognitive and social, emotional and behavioural development around the time they enter school.
- Virtually all parents (99%) reported having done at least one activity associated with the child's transition to school. 92% had talked to their child about school, 90% had visited the school before the child started, 87% had sought or received advice and 86% had practised reading, writing and numbers.
- Most parents (61%) had done eight or more different activities, 31% had done between four and seven, and just 8% reported doing three or less.
- Parents in higher income households and those with higher levels of education reported a greater average number of activities.
- 92% of parents believed that their child had adjusted easily to school. Though 22% felt that their child was happier with the way he or she learned things in pre-school.
- Children with lower perceived adjustment were more likely to also have poorer social, emotional and behavioural development and cognitive ability.
- The vast majority of parents (87%) thought the pace of learning at school was just right for their child, though 10% said it was too slow and 3% that it was too fast.

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- Most children (90%) were reported as either finding some parts of school work hard (41%) or never finding school work hard (49%).
- Reports on the extent to which the child had coped with the learning transition varied, in particular, according to differences in their social and cognitive development.

4.3 Perceptions of the child's readiness for school

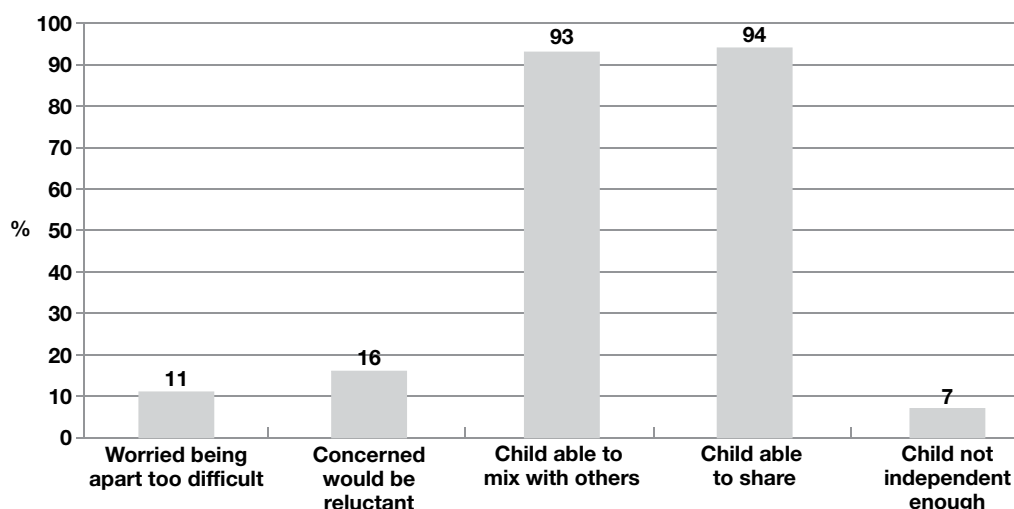
The notion of 'school readiness' is contentious in academic, policy and practice debates. Even amongst those who agree that such a characteristic exists amongst children, there is much discussion over whether and how it can be measured (Saluja *et al*, 2000). In fact, theorising on the issue of school readiness has moved beyond the child to consider issues of the 'readiness' of schools and communities (Halle *et al*, 2000). Perhaps the dominant position in the literature on school readiness stems from the work of the National Education Goals Panel in the 1990s (Kagan *et al*, 1995) which argued that a child's readiness should be considered across five domains: social and emotional development, physical wellbeing and motor development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge.

The data considered in this section is based on a more general parental perception of how ready the child was for school. To measure this general perception, parents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with five statements.

- I was worried that [child name] would find being apart from me too difficult
- I was concerned that [child name] would be reluctant to go to primary school
- I felt that [child name] was able to mix with other children well enough to get along at primary school
- I believe that [child name] understood enough about taking turns and sharing to manage at primary school
- I was worried that [child name] was not independent enough to cope with primary school

These statements were aimed at capturing the parent's feelings about their child's readiness on a range of dimensions – the child's level of independence and how he or she would react to being apart from the parent, whether he or she would be generally reluctant to go to school and his or her social development and relationships with peers. The data were collected during the time the child was in P1 at school.

In general, ratings on all items indicate that the vast majority of children were perceived by their parents to be ready for school. As shown in Figure 3-A, only 7% of parents felt that their child was not independent enough for school, with similarly low levels worried their child would find being apart too difficult or that their child would be reluctant to go. In contrast, around 93% believed their child was able to share and mix with other children sufficiently to attend school.

Figure 4-A Percentage of parents agreeing with each readiness statement

Bases: Weighted = 3347, Unweighted = 3726

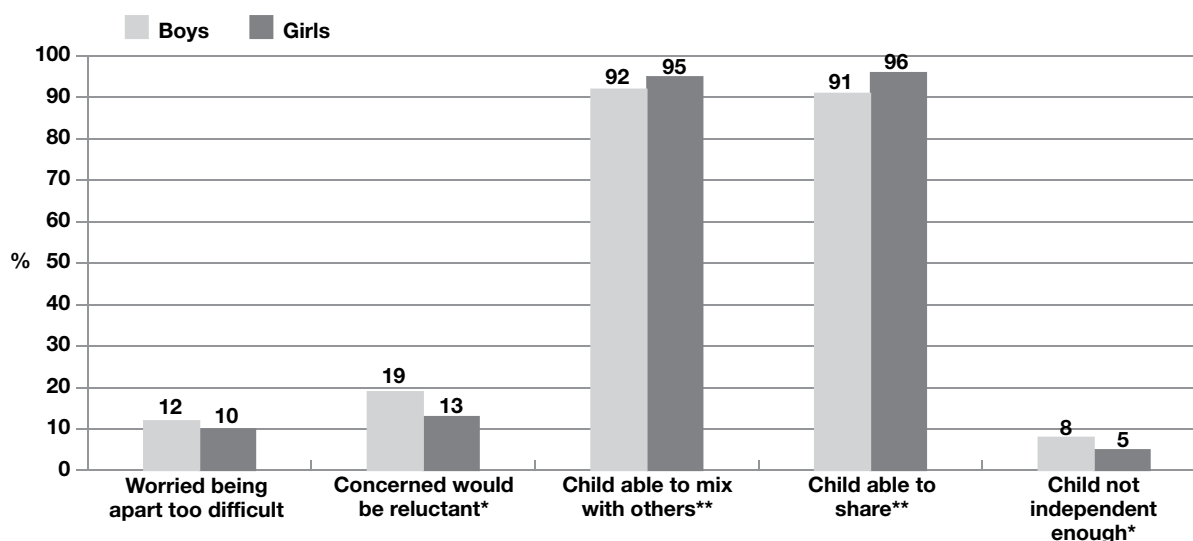
The individual items were re-coded and responses summed in order to create an index of perceived readiness. The index had a minimum possible score of 5 and maximum possible score of 25. The mean score on the index was 21, indicating the generally high level of perceived readiness amongst all parents, as suggested by the findings shown in Figure 4-A.

Mean scores on the index were compared across various sub-groups of interest to examine which children were more or less likely to be reported by their parents to be 'ready' for school. Girls had a slightly higher mean readiness score than boys (21.2 compared with 20.5). This complements a range of other data on GUS, as noted earlier, which indicates that girls are generally reported by their parents to have fewer difficulties related to other areas of development. Figure 4-B illustrates the differences in agreement on the individual readiness items by the child's gender. The graph indicates that, as may be expected, girls were reported to be more 'ready' across all of the items, though differences were mostly small. The largest difference was in relation to the extent to which parents believed their child would be reluctant to go to school – 19% of boys' parents agreed with this statement compared with 13% of girls' parents.

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Figure 4-B Percentage of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing with each readiness statement by child's gender



Bases: Weighted = 3347, Unweighted = 3726

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$

Perceived school readiness also varied according to the child's age at school entry. Those children who were aged between 5 and 5.5 years at entry had the highest average readiness score (21.2) whereas those who were under 5 years or older than 5.5 years had similarly lower scores (20.6). Whilst a lower perceived readiness amongst parents of children aged under 5 may be expected given the younger age of the children concerned, lower perceived readiness amongst parents of older children is surprising. Those children in the oldest age group are those for whom entry has been deferred. Although differences are small, the lower readiness scores amongst this group suggest that, despite deferring entry for a year, parents of these children still hold some concerns about their child's readiness for school when compared to children in the 5 to 5.5 years age group. Whether the cohort child had a sibling of primary school age (and thus likely to already be attending school) had no bearing on their perceived readiness.

Children in higher income households, those whose parents had higher levels of education and those living in areas of lower deprivation each had higher perceived readiness scores than children in lower income households, those whose parents had lower levels of education and those living in area of high deprivation (Table 4.1). Although differences were statistically significant, they were generally small (for example, the mean score amongst children in the lowest income group was 20.3 compared with 21.6 in the highest income group).

Table 4.1 Mean readiness score by household income, parental level of education and area deprivation

	Readiness score		Bases	
	Mean	SE	Weighted	Unweighted
Equivalised household income***				
Highest income quintile	21.6	0.11	534	646
Lowest income quintile	20.3	0.20	797	596
Parental level of education***				
Degree or equivalent	21.2	0.08	1206	1412
No qualifications	19.5	0.35	183	117
Area deprivation***				
Least deprived quintile	21.4	0.11	647	735
Most deprived quintile	20.3	0.17	775	527

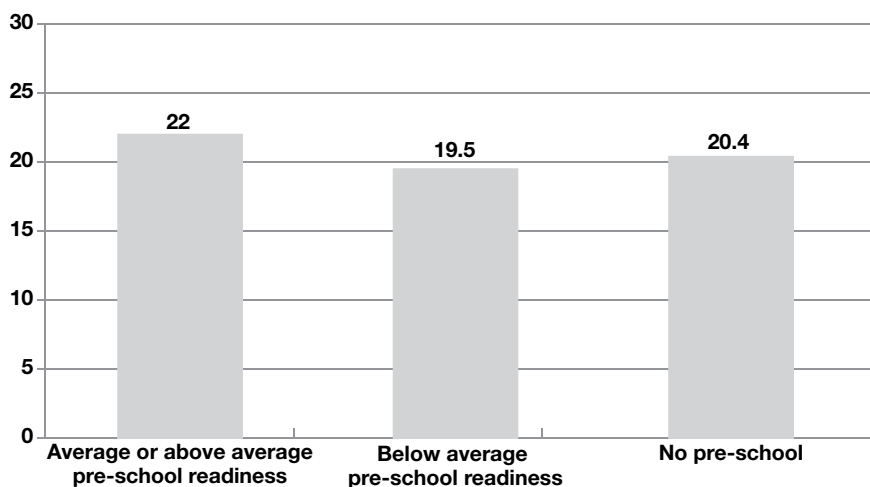
Certain aspects of the child's experience at pre-school were associated with their perceived readiness. For example, children who attended pre-school at a private or partnership nursery had the highest mean readiness score (21.3) whereas those who did not attend pre-school or who attended pre-school at a local authority nursery had the lowest scores (20.4 and 20.3 respectively). These differences may reflect the particular socio-economic characteristics of children more and less likely to be using different types of pre-school provision. Previous analysis of GUS data (Bradshaw, 2010) showed that whilst children in all groups were most likely to have attended a nursery class attached to a state or independent school, reflecting the dominant type of provision offered in Scotland, those in the higher education groups were more likely than those in the lower groups to have attended a private nursery school and those with no qualifications a Local Authority nursery school. Differences in mean readiness score were also evident according to the number of hours of pre-school the child attended per week with those who attended for 15 or more hours per week returning the highest scores. However, this is again likely to reflect the particular social characteristics of those children more likely to use pre-school or nursery provision for longer – that is children of professional, employed parents who require additional childcare on top of the statutory pre-school provision. There were no differences in readiness according to the 'duration' of pre-school education received – i.e. the time in months between starting pre-school and starting school.

Similar questions were asked of parents around the time their child started pre-school (for the birth cohort these were asked at sweep 4, when the child was aged just under 4 years old) to assess perceptions of readiness for that transition. Comparison of pre-school readiness scores with school readiness scores indicates that those children who were perceived by their parents to be less ready for pre-school also tended to have lower school readiness scores (Figure 4-C).

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Figure 4-C Mean perceived school readiness score by pre-school readiness score



Perceived readiness was also associated with children's social, emotional and behavioural development and with their cognitive ability (measured at ages 6 and 5 respectively). Those children with below average readiness scores had higher mean scores on the SDQ total difficulties scale – indicating a higher level of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties – and lower mean problem-solving and vocabulary ability scores.

There is some overlap between those families belonging to the various social background categories considered and the characteristics of children in those families. For example, families where parents are more highly educated are more likely to have higher incomes and children in each of those groups are more likely to have higher cognitive ability and lower social development difficulties (Bradshaw, 2011; Bradshaw and Tipping, 2010). The analysis described so far does not identify whether each characteristic impacts on perceived school readiness independently of the other characteristics. For example, it is unclear whether the higher perceived readiness amongst children whose parents are degree-educated simply reflects the higher average cognitive ability and lower social development difficulties reported amongst those children – factors also shown to be associated with a higher perceived school readiness.

Multivariate analysis was used to determine which characteristics are related to having an average or higher than average school readiness score when holding the other, potentially confounding, characteristics constant⁸. The results are summarised in Table 4.2⁹.

⁸ The statistical analysis and approach used in this report represents one of many available techniques capable of exploring this data. Other analytical approaches may produce different results from those reported here. A description of the analysis is included in the technical appendix.

⁹ The regression output is included in the technical appendix

Table 4.2 Statistical significance of independent associations between selected child and family characteristics and an average or higher than average perceived school readiness score

Child or family characteristic	Sig.*	Direction of relationship**
Child's gender (Male)		
Female	NS	
Age at school entry (5 yrs 0 mths to 5 yrs 6 mths)		
Under 5 yrs	< .001	-
Older than 5 yrs 6 mths	< .01	-
Household equivalised income (Lowest income group)		
2nd quintile	NS	
3rd quintile	NS	
4th quintile	NS	
Highest income group	NS	
Parent's highest level of education (No qualifications)		
Lower Standard Grades or VQs or Other	NS	
Upper level SGs or Intermediate VQs	NS	
Higher grades and upper level VQs	NS	
Degree level academic and vocational qualifications	NS	
Type of pre-school attended (Nursery class attached to primary school)		
Local Authority nursery school	NS	
Private/partnership nursery	NS	
Other	NS	
Hours of pre-school per week (12 to 12.5)		
Less than 12	< .05	-
12.5 to 15	< .05	-
More than 15	NS	
Perceived readiness for pre-school score (Average or above)		
Below average	< .001	-
Classification of SDQ total difficulties score age 6 (Normal)		
Moderate	NS	
Severe	< .001	-
Vocabulary ability at age 5 (Below average)		
Average or above	< .05	+
Problem solving ability at age 5 (Below average)		
Average or above	< .05	+

* Statistical significance is presented either as 'Not Significant' (NS) or at three levels of 'confidence' – 95% (< .05), 99% (< .01) or 99.9% (< .001).

** A plus sign (+) indicates the characteristic is associated with greater odds of having an average or above average score and a minus sign (-) indicates the characteristic is associated with lower odds of having an average or above average score. The reference sub-group is indicated in brackets. Where the variable is not significant, the direction of the relationship has not been included.

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The table illustrates a number of notable findings. First, neither household income nor parent's level of education have an independent relationship with perceptions of school readiness. Instead, after controlling for these dominant socio-economic characteristics, the key factors associated with perceived school readiness are the child's pre-school experience, and their cognitive and social, emotional and behavioural development around the time they enter school. Irrespective of social background, children who demonstrated average or above average cognitive ability and those with no social or behavioural difficulties were more likely to have an average or above average school readiness score. Cognitive and social development are two aspects often used to define school readiness as noted above. This finding indicates therefore, that whilst the school readiness items used in GUS did not directly measure the child's ability or development in these domains, parental perceived readiness is closely linked to the child's cognitive and social development. Such connections may also explain why those children who were younger than 5 and older than 5 years 6 months (and thus had been deferred) at the point of entry were less likely to receive an average or above average readiness score.

Whilst there is no significant independent relationship between school readiness and type of pre-school provision attended, the findings do suggest that compared with those children who attended between 12 and 12.5 hours, those who attended for shorter or slightly longer durations were less likely to have an average or above average readiness score. Whilst it is perhaps easy to assume that children who attended fewer hours of pre-school may be less prepared for school, the same logic does not hold for the other group who attended more hours. As such, these factors may be defining two groups of children with particular characteristics not controlled for in the model and which may be driving this association, rather than demonstrating a direct relationship between pre-school duration and school readiness.

The findings also indicate that those children who had scored below average on the readiness for pre-school scale were less likely to have scored average or above on the readiness for school scale. As the items used measure similar behaviours – related to independence and social skills – this suggests that, for many of these children, the experience of pre-school education had not assisted in allaying the concerns about the child held by parents around the time they entered pre-school.

4.4 Activities in preparation for school

Schools employ a range of transitions systems designed to ease the process for children. These may include a combination of school visits – for different durations, sometimes accompanied by parents, other times not – meetings with parents, starting with the rest of the school or before or after other pupils have begun on the first day, and starting initially with half days. Aside from those school-led activities in which they are involved, parents may also seek information, or undertake activities with the child with a similar aim. These could involve finding out more information from the child's school or nursery about the transition process and the child's early period at school, teaching the child to recognise numbers or letters or talking to the child about moving to primary school.

Parents were asked whether they had done any activities, from a list provided, to get the child ready for starting school. Thirteen activities were listed – these activities are detailed in Table 4.3. To summarise the results, responses on individual items were combined into four broader groups along with an ‘other’ option: visiting the school; sought or received advice about preparing the child for school; practised reading, writing or numbers; and talked to the child about school.

Table 4.3 Full list and summary grouping of potential activities undertaken to prepare the child for school

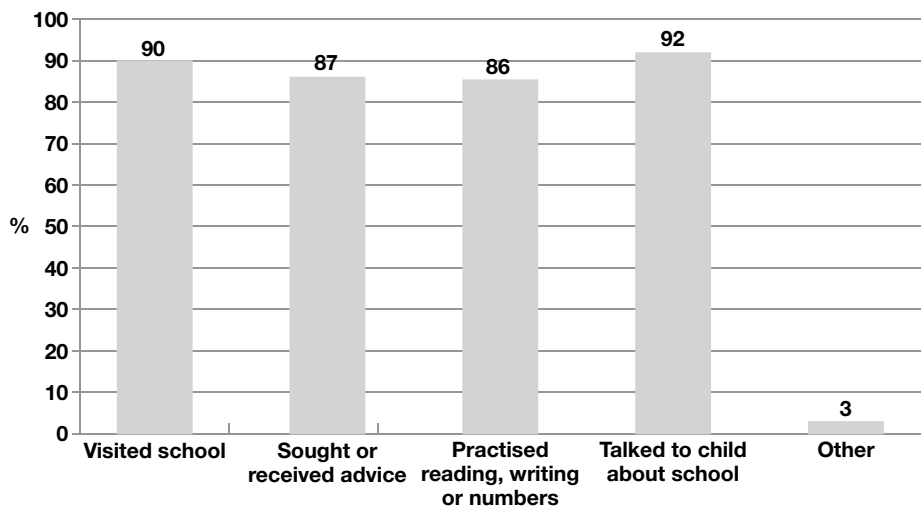
Detailed activity	Summary group
Visited the school without the child	Visiting the school
Visited the school with the child	
Found out more about what the child would learn in Primary 1	Sought or received advice about preparing the child for school
Asked nursery or school for advice about preparing child for school	
Received information from the nursery about preparing child	
Received information from the school about preparing child	Practised reading, writing or numbers
Started teaching the child the alphabet	
Practised writing letters with the child (such as his or her name)	
Practised reading with the child	
Started teaching child to count	Talked to the child about school
Chatted to child about what school is like	
Talked enthusiastically about starting school	
Warned child that they would have to behave at school	Other
Something else (please say what)	

Virtually all parents (99%) reported having done at least one activity. The proportion of parents reporting activities in each group is summarised in Figure 4-D. As the graph shows, the most common activity was talking to the child about school, reported by 92% of parents. Around 9 in 10 parents had visited the school before the child started. Seeking or receiving advice and practising reading, writing and numbers were less common but still reported by the vast majority of parents.

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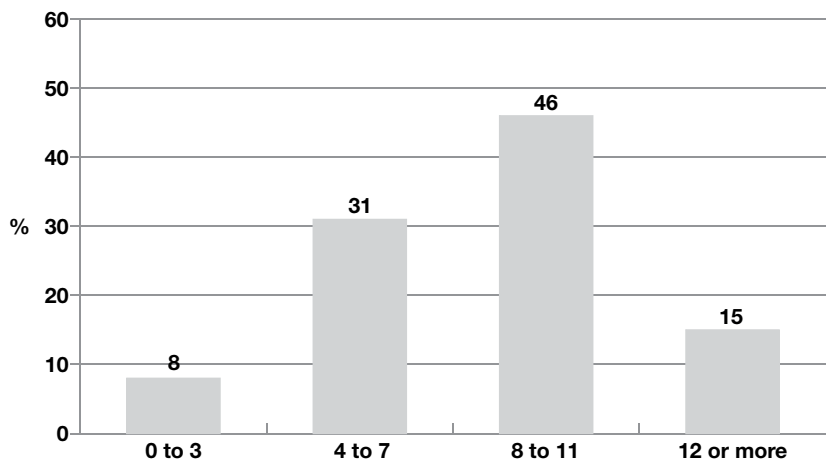
Figure 4-D Percentage of parents reporting school preparation activity



Bases: Weighted = 3349, Unweighted = 3352

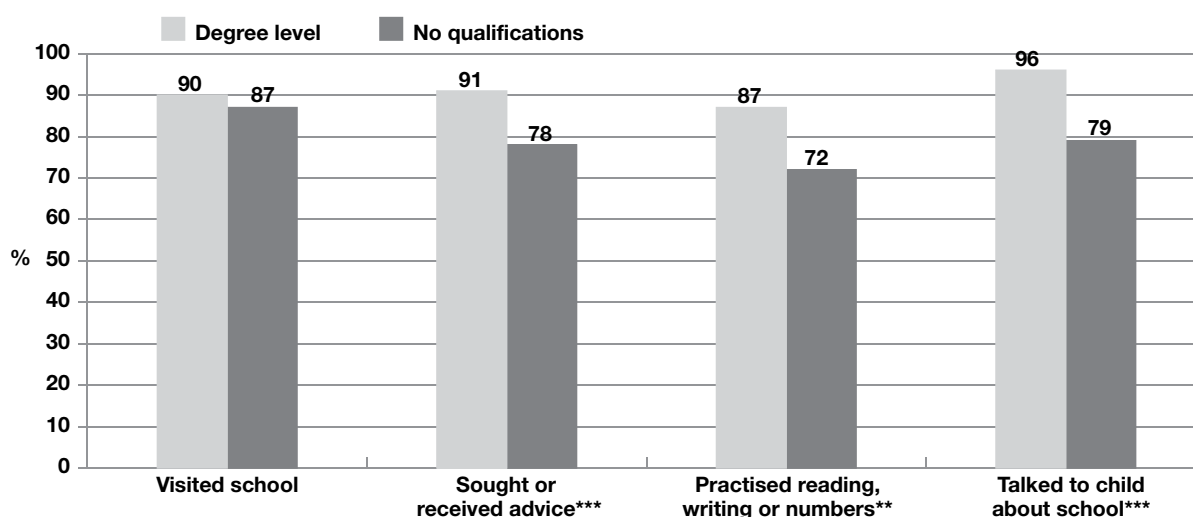
Parents could report more than one activity. Indeed, the majority (61%) reported having done eight or more different activities, with 31% saying they had done between four and seven, and just 8% doing three or less (Figure 4-E). The average number of activities reported, out of a possible 14, was 8.2.

Figure 4-E Percentage of parents who reported different numbers of preparation activities



Parents in higher income households and those with higher levels of education reported a greater average number of activities. For example, parents with a degree-level education reported an average of 8.6 activities compared with 7.7 amongst those with upper level Standard Grades and 6.6 amongst those with no qualifications. Whilst all parents are almost equally as likely to visit the school, key differences are evident in the extent to which parents in more advantaged circumstances are more likely to seek or receive advice, to talk to the child about school and to have practised reading, writing or numbers than are parents in more disadvantaged circumstances. The data in Figure 4-F indicate that 96% of parents with a degree-level education had talked to their child about school compared with 79% of parents with no qualifications.

Figure 4-F Percentage of parents reporting activity by parent's highest level of education



Bases: Weighted = 3349, Unweighted = 3352

* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < .001$

4.5 Adjustment to school

To assess the child's adjustment to school, parents were asked how often the child had:

- complained about school,
- said good things about school,
- looked forward to going to school,
- been upset or reluctant to go.

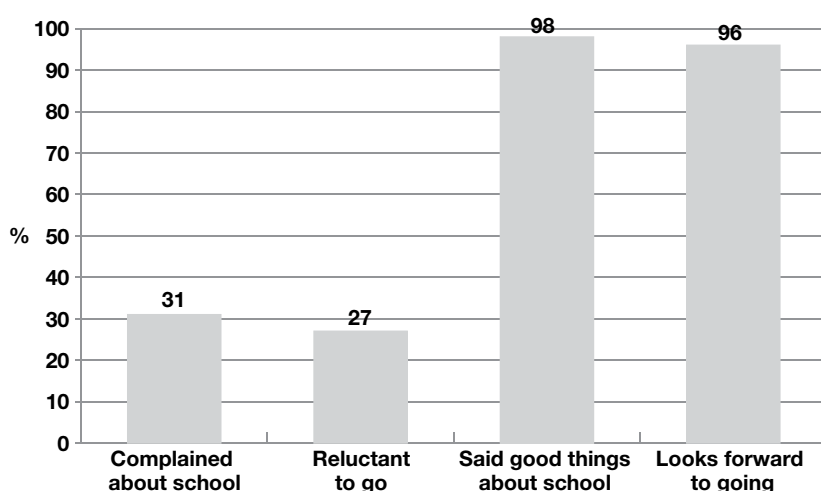
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The response could be selected from three options: more than once a week, once a week or less, and not at all. The proportion of parents who answered more than once a week or once a week or less at each item is displayed in Figure 4-G.

As the graph illustrates, most parents perceived their child to have adjusted well to school; almost all children looked forward to going and said good things about school. However, one in three children had also complained about school or had been reluctant to go.

Figure 4-G Percentage of parents saying their child did this at least once after starting school



Bases: *Weighted* = 3332, *Unweighted* = 3336

The individual items were summed to create an index of adjustment ranging from a possible minimum of 4 to a maximum of 12. A high score indicated good perceived adjustment. As suggested by the graph, scores on the index were generally high – indeed, the mean was 11 and 87% scored 10 or more. Nevertheless, some variations by child and family characteristics were evident.

Girls (11.1) had very slightly (but statistically significantly) higher average scores than boys (10.8). Children in more advantaged circumstances had slightly higher scores than those in less advantaged circumstances. For example, those living in households in the highest income group had a mean adjustment score of 11.1 compared with 10.8 amongst those living in the lowest income household.

Adjustment was associated with social, emotional and behavioural development and with cognitive development. As may be expected, children who had lower adjustment scores tended to have higher mean scores on the total difficulties scale and lower mean vocabulary and problem-solving scores. For example, as shown in Table 4.4, children who scored below average on the adjustment scale had a mean difficulties score of 9.3 compared with 6.7 for children who scored on or above average for adjustment.

Table 4.4 Mean total difficulties, vocabulary ability and problem-solving ability scores by adjustment score

	Adjustment score		Bases	
	Average or above	Below average	Weighted	Unweighted
Mean total difficulties score	6.7	9.3	3345	3348
SE	.104	.235		
Mean vocabulary ability score	110.0	107.7	3280	3294
SE	.371	.732		
Mean problem-solving ability score	83.4	81.5	3274	3291
SE	.343	.626		

Note: A higher adjustment score indicates a better perceived adjustment to school

Few of the characteristics describing the child's pre-school experience were associated with their adjustment to school. There were no statistically significant differences in adjustment scores according to type of pre-school attended nor weekly duration of pre-school. However, some small differences were evident according to variations in the 'period' of pre-school education the child had received – that is, the approximate time in months between commencing pre-school education and starting school. Those children who had attended over the very longest period – of 25 months or more – had lower mean adjustment scores (10.8) than children who had attended for shorter periods of time (for example, 11.1 for those who had received up to 12 months of pre-school education).

The child's adjustment to pre-school was also related to their adjustment to primary school. Those children who had greater difficulty adjusting to the pre-school environment were more likely to have difficulty adjusting to school. Children who had a below average score on the pre-school adjustment scale scored an average of 10.7 on the adjustment to school scale compared to an average of 11.2 among children who scored above average on the pre-school scale.

Adjustment was also associated with perceived readiness. Children who had below average adjustment scores had lower mean scores on the index of readiness than those with an adjustment score at or above average (19.6 compared with 21.3 respectively). However, there was no relationship between adjustment and the volume of preparation activities undertaken with the child.

We also examined whether features of the school and Primary 1 environment into which the child was moving were associated with adjustment. Factors examined were variations, for example, in typical Primary 1 class size, the size of the Primary 1 intake or whether the class was composite or solely Primary 1¹⁰. The results are shown in Table 4.5.

¹⁰ Note that data on number of classes and pupils, and whether any P1 classes were composite, have been calculated at an aggregate level for the child's school, not at the individual level referring to the actual class the child is in. See section 3.6.2 for more details.

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There were very small differences in levels of adjustment according to the total number of Primary 1 classes in the intake (reflecting, to some extent, the size of the school) and in the average size of Primary 1 classes at the school. Slightly lower adjustment was reported amongst children who started schools with larger Primary 1 intakes (of three or more classes) and where the average P1 class size was larger (containing 24 or more pupils), though similar figures were also recorded for those in classes of between 16-19 pupils. Whether or not the class was likely to be composite with children at another primary stage did not have a significant association with adjustment.

Table 4.5 Mean adjustment score by selected characteristics of Primary 1 intake at child's school

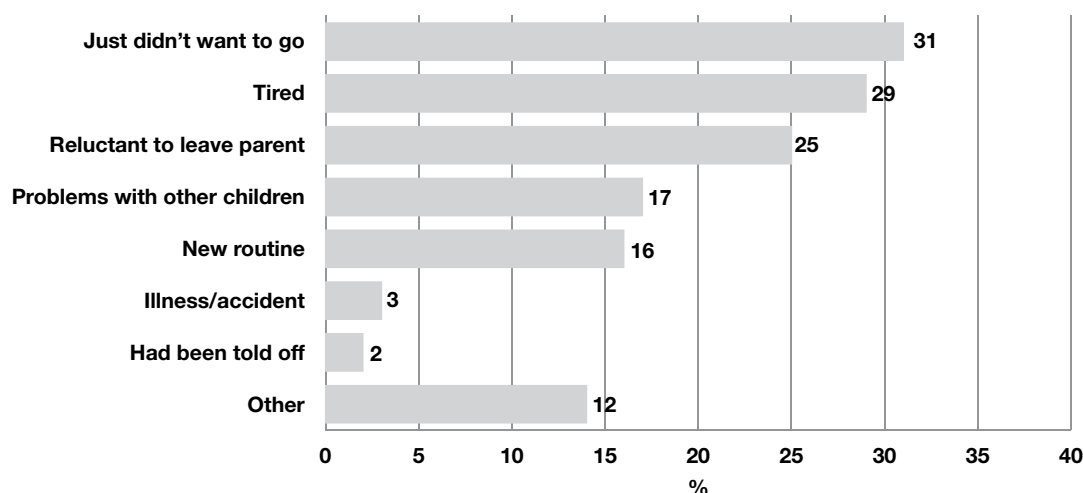
	Mean adjustment score	SE	Bases	
			Weighted	Unweighted
Total number of classes with P1 pupils*				
One	10.9	.060	792	815
Two	11.0	.042	1561	1525
Three or more	10.8	.065	795	809
Mean size of P1 class(es) in school*				
Up to 15 pupils	11.0	.057	742	753
16 to 19 pupils	10.9	.066	865	836
20 to 23 pupils	11.1	.051	897	905
24 or more pupils	10.8	.073	644	655
Whether any P1 classes were composite (NS)				
No	11.0		1850	1817
Yes	10.9		1299	1332

Note: * = $p < .05$

4.5.1 Reasons for being upset about or reluctant to go to school

As indicated in Figure 4-G, 27% of parents said their child had, at some point since starting school, been upset about going to school or reluctant to go. These parents were asked why the child was upset or reluctant. The most common reasons given are summarised in Figure 4-H.

As the graph shows, the main reason cited was simply that the child didn't want to go. This was followed by tiredness and being reluctant to leave the parent. Around 17% of those who were reluctant said this was due to problems with other children at the school.

Figure 4-H Reason child was upset about going to school or reluctant to go

4.6 Managing the learning transition

Parents were asked a number of questions designed to capture how they felt the cohort child was managing the change in learning approaches and environment which occurs in moving from pre-school to primary school. Questions related to:

- the pace of learning,
- whether school work was found hard,
- whether school work was found boring,
- their perception of how the child was adapting to school.

4.6.1 Pace of learning

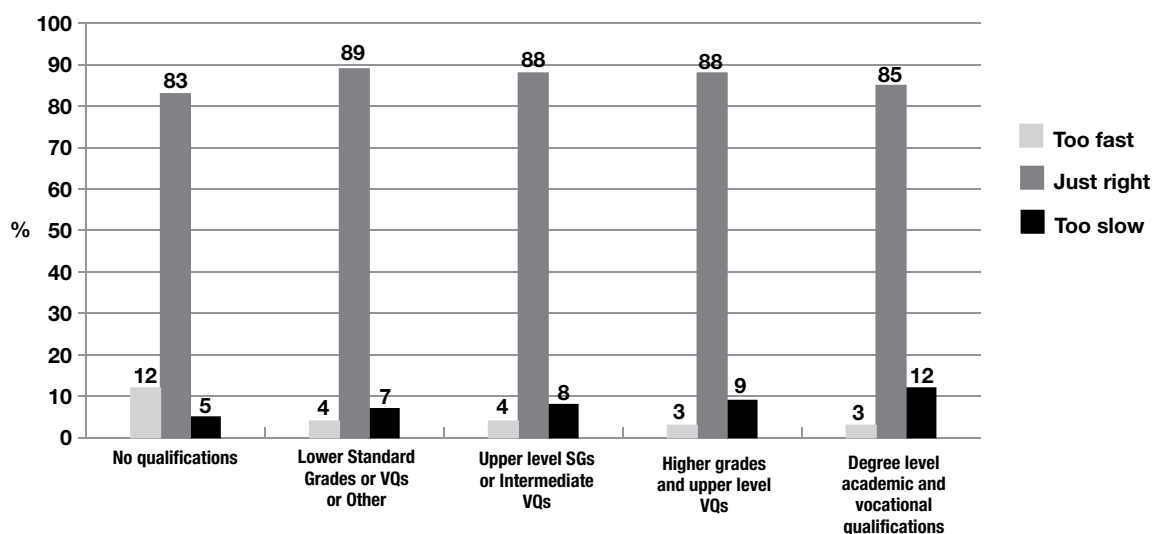
Parents were asked whether they felt the pace of learning at school was too fast, too slow or just right for the child. The vast majority (87%) believed it to be just right, with 10% saying it was too slow and 3% that it was too fast.

There were no statistically significant differences by child gender or household income on the perceived pace of learning. However, some small differences were observed by parental level of education. In particular, degree-educated parents were more likely to report the pace as being too slow and less likely to report it as being too fast compared with parents with lower or no qualifications (Figure 4-I).

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Figure 4-1 Perceptions of the pace of learning by highest parental level of education



Bases: Weighted = 3284, Unweighted = 3289

Views on the pace of learning also varied according to the child's social and cognitive development (Table 4.6). Children of those parents who reported the pace to be too fast had significantly higher total difficulties scores than children of those reporting the pace to be too slow (12.1 compared with 6.9). In addition, children whose parents said the pace was too slow had higher mean cognitive ability scores than those whose parents said the pace was too fast.

Table 4.6 Mean total difficulties, vocabulary ability and problem-solving ability scores by views on the pace of learning

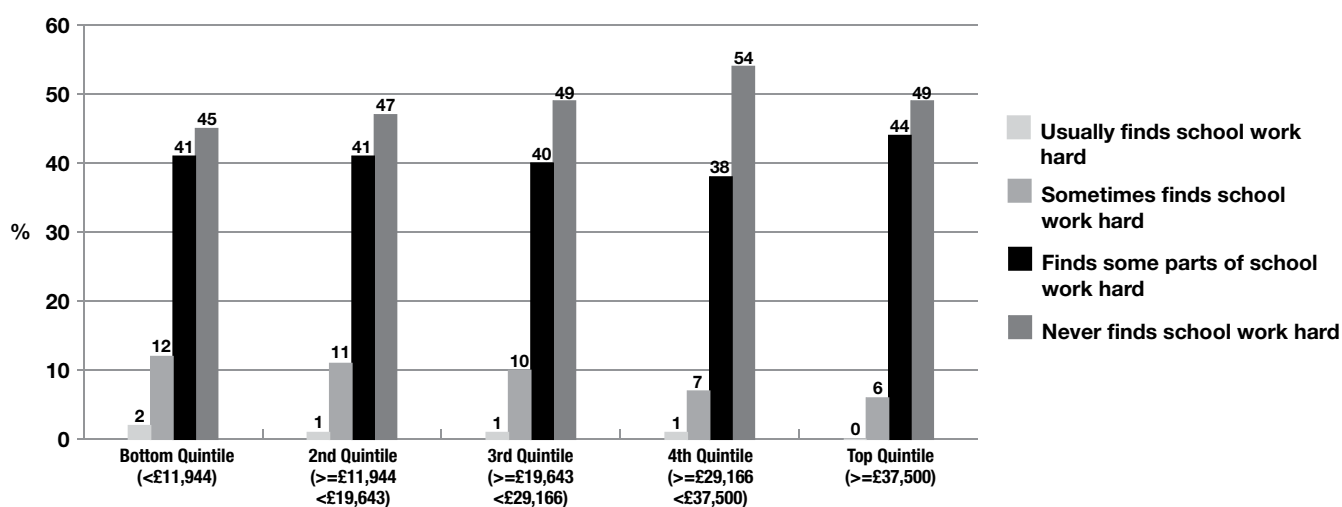
	Pace of learning			Bases	
	Too fast	Just right	Too slow	Weighted	Unweighted
Mean total difficulties score	12.1	7.3	6.9	3344	3348
SE	.694	.111	.277		
Mean vocabulary ability score	99.6	109.3	113.1	3279	3294
SE	1.841	.371	.988		
Mean problem-solving ability score	75.7	82.8	86.4	3274	3291
SE	1.033	.388	.713		

4.6.2 Finding school work hard

A further question asked parents the extent to which the child found school work hard. Parents could indicate whether the child never, sometimes or usually finds school work hard or if they found 'some parts' of school work hard. Most children (90%) were reported as either finding some parts of school work hard (41%) or never finding school work hard (49%). Most of the remainder sometimes found school work hard with only 1% being reported as usually finding school work hard.

Gender differences did exist on this item with girls being more likely to be reported as never finding school work hard than were boys (52% compared with 46%). Some small differences were also evident by level of household income and parental education. However, the differences were mainly on the second response – ‘sometimes finds school work hard’ – with more advantaged parents less likely to choose this option. For example, as shown in Figure 4-J, 12% of parents in the lowest income group reported their child to sometimes find school work hard compared with 6% in the highest income group.

Figure 4-J Whether finds school work hard by equivalised household income quintile



Bases: Weighted = 3284, Unweighted = 3289

Similar to the question on the pace of learning, there were also variations according to measures of children's social and cognitive development. For example, children reported as usually or sometimes finding school work hard had higher average SDQ scores (12.0 compared with 6.5) and lower average problem-solving (77.7 compared with 84.4) and vocabulary (98.8 compared with 111.3) scores than children who never found school work hard.

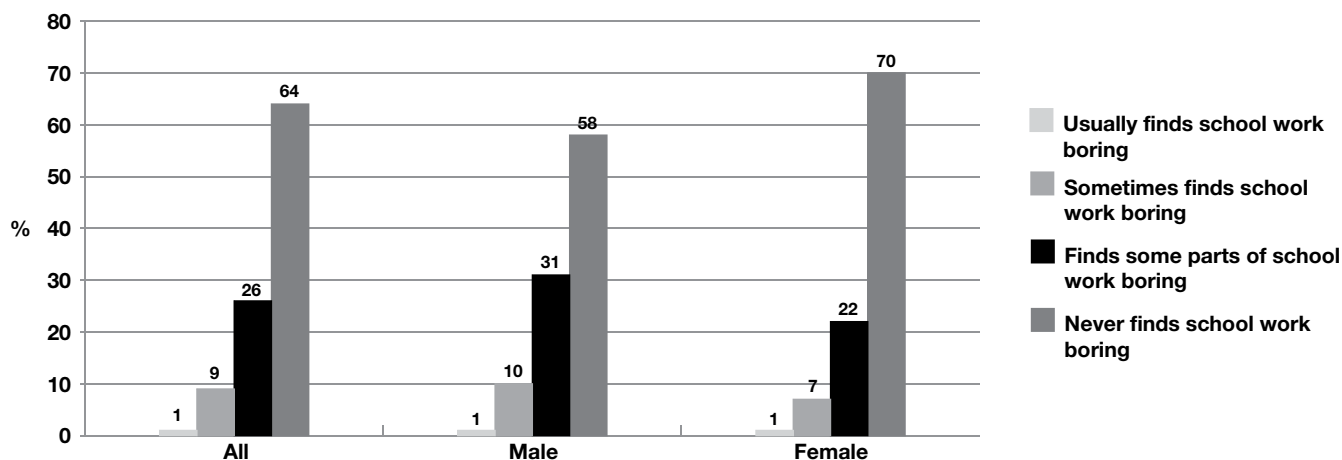
4.6.3 Finding school work boring

In addition to asking whether the child found the work hard, parents were also asked whether the child found the work boring (see Figure 4-K). Children were more likely to find school work hard than they were to find it boring. Around half (51%) said their child found at least some school work hard compared with 36% who said their child found some of it boring. Patterns by sub-group were similar to those observed in relation to finding school work hard. Boys were more likely to be reported as finding school work boring than girls (42% compared with 30%, Figure 4-K). There were also some small differences by level of household income with children in the highest income group more likely to find school work boring than children in the lowest income group (29% in the highest income group found some parts of school work boring compared with 21% in the lowest income group).

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Figure 4-K Whether finds school work boring by child's gender



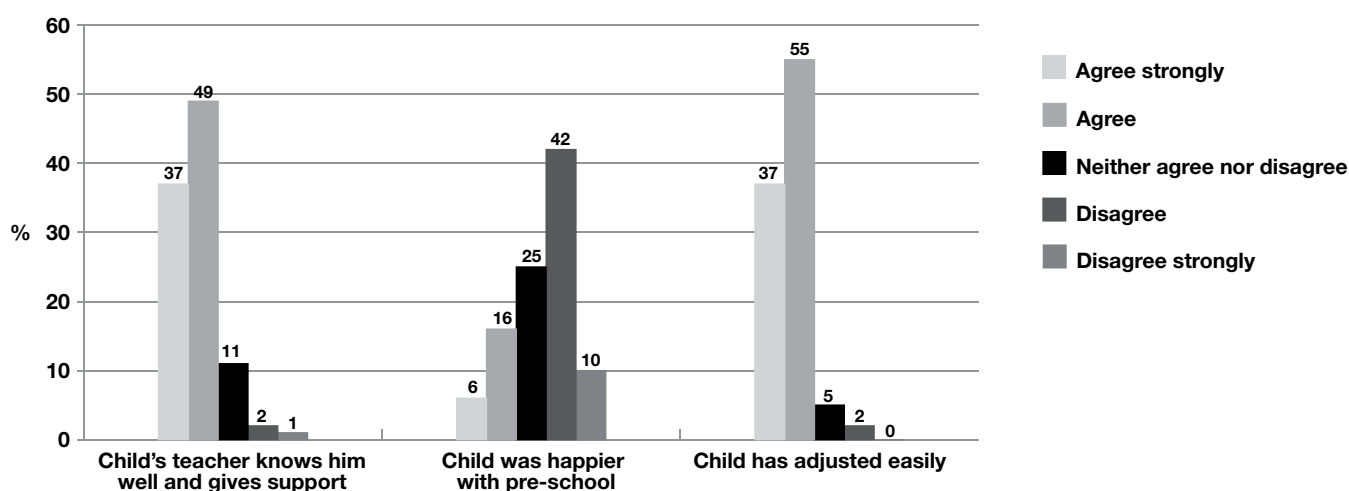
Bases: Weighted = 3284, Unweighted = 3289

4.6.4 General adjustment to learning

To gauge how well the child was adapting to the different learning environment experienced at school, parents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- [Child name's] teacher knows him well and gives him just the support he needs
- [Child name] was happier with the way he learned things in pre-school/nursery
- [Child name] has adjusted easily to the way they do things in school

The proportion of parents who agreed and disagreed with each statement is illustrated in Figure 4-L. As the graph shows, the patterns of agreement and disagreement vary slightly in relation to each statement. Agreement is strongest for adjusting easily – 92% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child had adjusted well to school. Similarly, 86% of parents felt that their child's teacher knew him or her well and gave appropriate support. Responses to whether the child was happier with the way he/she learning things in pre-school/nursery were a little more ambivalent. Whilst a little over half (52%) disagreed that their child was happier, one quarter were undecided (selecting 'neither agree nor disagree') and the remaining quarter agreed. Thus whilst most parents believed their child had adjusted well to the new learning environment and was being appropriately supported, a significant minority (22%) nevertheless felt that the child was happier with the way they learned things in pre-school.

Figure 4-L Proportion of parents who agreed or disagreed with adjustment statements

Responses differed according to a range of child, family and school characteristics. The child's social development, as measured by the SDQ, in particular showed significant differences on each of the three items as shown in Table 4.7. Mean difficulties scores were highest amongst children whose parents disagreed that the child's teacher was giving him/her support, agreed that the child was happier with the pre-school learning environment and disagreed that the child had adjusted well to how things are done in school. This suggests that the child's higher level of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties may have affected their transition into the school environment. Children in the same groups – where the parent disagreed that the child was being supported, agreed that the child was happier with the pre-school learning environment and disagreed that the child had adjusted well to how things are done in school – also tended to have lower mean vocabulary and problem-solving ability.

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Table 4.7 Mean total difficulties score by response to learning adjustment items

	Mean total difficulties score	SE	Bases	
			Weighted	Unweighted
[Childname's] teacher knows him well and gives him just the support he needs				
Agree/agree strongly	7.2	.098	2775	2791
Neither	8.8	.357	364	356
Disagree/disagree strongly	9.9	.771	84	82
[Childname] was happier with the way he learned things in pre-school/nursery				
Agree/agree strongly	8.6	.249	708	680
Neither	7.9	.225	813	791
Disagree/disagree strongly	6.7	.121	1723	1781
[Childname] has adjusted easily to the way they do things in school				
Agree/agree strongly	7.1	.099	3045	3067
Neither	11.0	.503	164	147
Disagree/disagree strongly	12.1	.674	90	93

All differences significant at $p < 0.001$

There were small but significant differences by gender on the second and third statements. Parents of boys were more likely to agree that their child was happier in pre-school (23% compared with 20%) and disagree that he had adjusted well to school (3% compared with 1%). In relation to income, 60% of parents in the highest income group disagreed that their child was happier at pre-school compared with 45% in the lowest income group.

Characteristics of the P1 school intake appeared only to affect response to the first item on perceived support from the teacher with smaller year groups and class sizes producing very slightly more favourable opinions amongst parents. Agreement that the teacher knew the child well and gave appropriate support was higher amongst parents whose child attended a school with just one P1 class than amongst those where there were two or more classes (89% compared with 85%), and those where the average size of a P1 class was smaller (up to 15 children – 89%) compared with all larger class sizes (85%).

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

5.1 Introduction

Parental involvement incorporates a broad range of activities including helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, and taking part in school governance. Here we specifically look at parental involvement in a range of activities or events *at the child's school* including attending a PTA meeting, or speaking to the headteacher as well as less formal parental involvement which occurs in the home.

It is well known that parental involvement in children's education from an early age is associated with educational achievement (for reviews see Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Henderson and Mapp 2002, DCSF 2008). In addition, it has been found that the more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects. This holds true for all types of parent involvement in children's learning and for all types and ages of students (Cotton and Wiklund 2001). Cotton and Wiklund (2001) stated that considerably greater achievement benefits have been noted by researchers when parent involvement is active – when parents work with their children in the home, but also when they attend and actively support school activities and when they help out in classrooms or on field trips, and so on.

Previous research has established a firm link between parental involvement and educational achievement and has demonstrated large differences between parents in their level of involvement in school activities (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that white, middle-class families in America are more likely to be involved at school than other types of families. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) also reported that levels of involvement are positively related to social class and to maternal levels of education. Single parent status and problems with maternal psycho-social health (especially depression) have a negative impact on involvement. In Britain, DCSF (2008) reported that parents from Black British ethnic backgrounds are more involved in their child's school activities. They also reported that some groups of parents are less likely than average to feel very involved in children's education, for example parents from white or Asian backgrounds, lone parents, and parents who left education at a younger age.

Various barriers to parental involvement have been discussed in the literature, with the most commonly cited barrier being work commitments or other home-school scheduling conflicts (DCSF 2008, Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems 2003). Other barriers reported by parents include childcare issues/the demands of other children (DCSF 2008), being put off from school involvement by feeling put down by schools and teachers (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003), or not wanting to become involved because they question their ability to make a difference (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems 2003). Conflicting beliefs about the ways in which parents should be involved in their children's schooling has also been cited as a potential barrier to increased involvement (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems 2003).

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the involvement of parents in their children's education and in the work of schools themselves. The National Debate on

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Education in 2002 identified a need for increased parental involvement in their children's education. In response the Scottish Executive produced "Educating for Excellence" (2003) which identified the importance of improving partnerships between key stakeholders, in particular parents and schools. In 2006 the Scottish Parliament passed the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act which aims to help parents to be:

- involved with their child's education and learning
- welcomed as an active participant in the life of the school
- encouraged to express their views on school education and work in partnership with the school

The Act was introduced to help parents, carers and schools work together as partners in children's learning. It places duties on schools, local authorities and Scottish Government to make it easier for parents to become involved.

In 2009, Consumer Focus Scotland commissioned a survey of 1000 parents to look at the impact of the Act (Consumer Focus Scotland, 2009). They concluded that: "The increase in the number of parents who are members of Parent Councils, and other school-based parent bodies, is an endorsement of the change to reduce restrictions on membership and increase the flexibility of representative structures". They do however, caution that since the changes were only implemented a year or two before the survey was conducted, they are still in the early stages of development. However, some indication is provided that the new structures are attracting a wider group of parents than their predecessors (School Boards). This chapter allows us to look at parental involvement in these formal activities as well as less formal activities and events four years after the introduction of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act.

5.2 Key findings

- 5% of parents had not participated in any activities or events at the child's school since the child started Primary 1.
- The most common activity for parents to be involved in was visiting their child's classroom, with 86% of parents reporting they had done this.
- 49% of parents participated in two or three activities or events at the child's school, while 29% attended three or four activities or events.
- Couple families and older mothers were more likely to have higher involvement than lone parents and younger mothers. Parents living in less deprived areas, those in higher occupational classes, in higher income groups, and with higher educational qualifications tended to report higher levels of involvement.
- Households where the respondent (usually the mother) worked part-time reported slightly higher involvement than those where the respondent worked full-time or was not working.
- 71% of Primary 1 pupils receive homework every or most days and virtually all parents (93%) said that their child always completed it.

- Almost all (95%) parents helped their child with their homework and 85% of parents said that it was easy to get their child to do their homework. The most common reason parents gave for finding it difficult to get the child to complete his or her homework, was that the child was not interested.
- Nine out of ten parents were confident helping their child with all subjects though confidence levels varied according to a number of demographic factors.

5.3 Prevalence of parental involvement in school activities

In this section we explore the prevalence of the different activities of parental involvement that were asked about in sweep 6 amongst families where the cohort child was in Primary 1 at that time. We also examine a composite index of these different activities.

The main carer was asked whether they or their partner had participated in nine activities since their child had started Primary 1. They were also asked to specify any other activities they had participated in other than the nine listed¹¹. Table 5.1 shows the prevalence of each of these nine activities along with the prevalence of any other activities, and the proportion of parents who had participated in no activities since their child started Primary 1.

The most common activity that parent's had participated in was visiting their child's classroom (86% of parents said that they had done this), followed by attending a school event in which their child had participated (81%). Twenty-four per cent of parents had attended a Parent Council, PTA, or other such meeting while 19% of parents had volunteered in the classroom, school office, or library. Five per cent had not participated in any activities or events at the child's school since their child started Primary 1.

Table 5.1 Prevalence of activities or events attended

Activity	Percentage of parents
Visited your child's classroom	87
Attended a school event in which your child participated	81
Spoken to the headteacher	38
Attended a school event in which your child did not participate	30
Volunteered and attended a trip or a school event	28
Attended a Parent Council, PTA, or other such meeting	24
Volunteered in the classroom, school office or library	19
Have volunteered for school activities but haven't been asked	14
Attended information meeting	0
Something else	2
None of these	5
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	2486
<i>Unweighted</i>	2497

Note: Respondents could give multiple answers. Numbers will not total 100%.

¹¹ Activities and events did not necessarily have to involve the cohort child.

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Almost all parents (88%) reported attending more than one, and half (49%) had attended two or three events. The number of events attended was banded into four groups: 0-1, 2-3, 4-5 and 6 or more. Table 5.2 shows the distribution over these four groups.

Table 5.2 Number of activities or events attended, grouped

Number of activities or events	Percentage of parents
0-1	12
2-3	49
4-5	29
6 or more	10
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	2486
<i>Unweighted</i>	2497

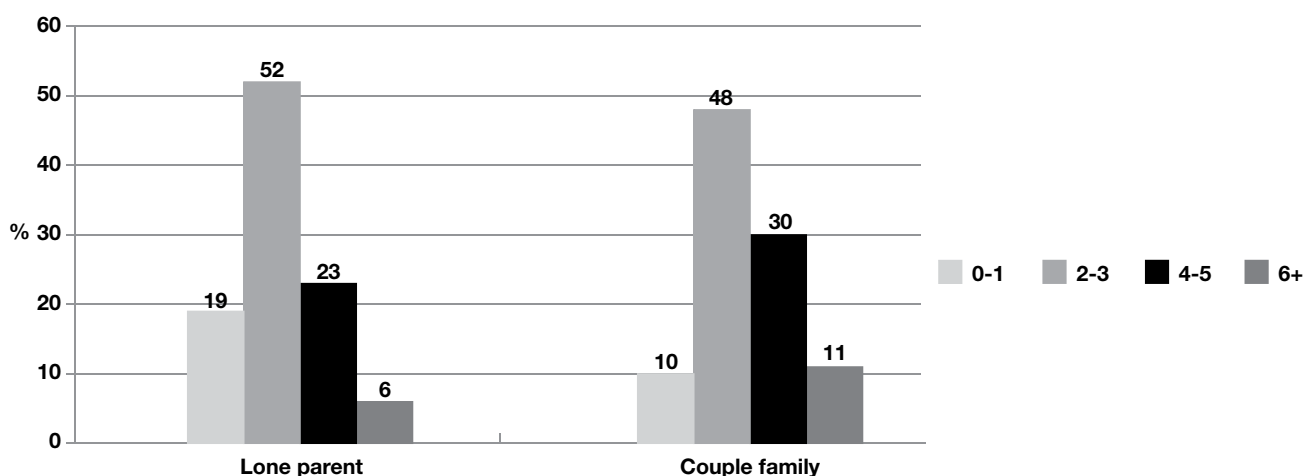
5.4 Differences in involvement by socio-demographics

The proportion of parents in each of the four groups of school involvement was compared across key sub-groups of interest. The number of children in the household did not appear to influence the parent's involvement in the study child's school events, with parents with only one child just as likely as parents with more children to attend four or more events.

Family type, however, was associated with higher parental involvement. Lone parents were less likely to attend four or more activities or events than couple families. This finding is displayed in Figure 5-A.

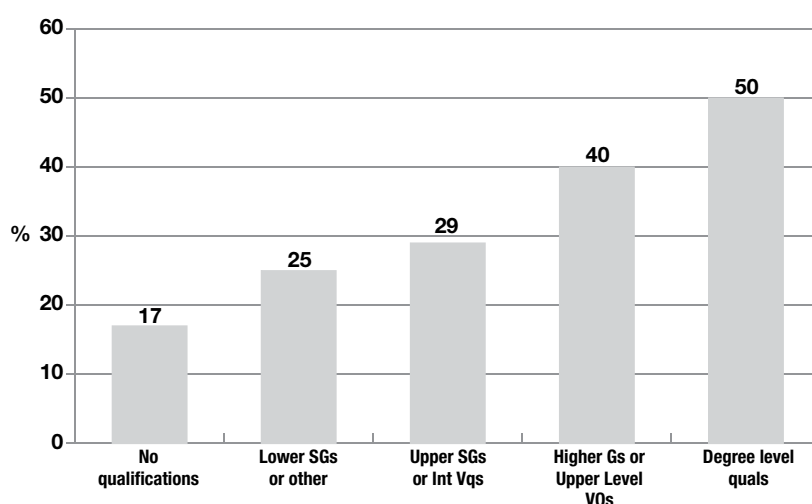
Younger mothers were also less likely to attend four or more events at the child's school. Thirty per cent of mothers aged 20 to 29 reported attending four or more events, compared with 39% of mothers aged 30 to 39 and 46% of mothers aged 40 or older.

Figure 5-A Parental Involvement (number of events or activities attended) by family type



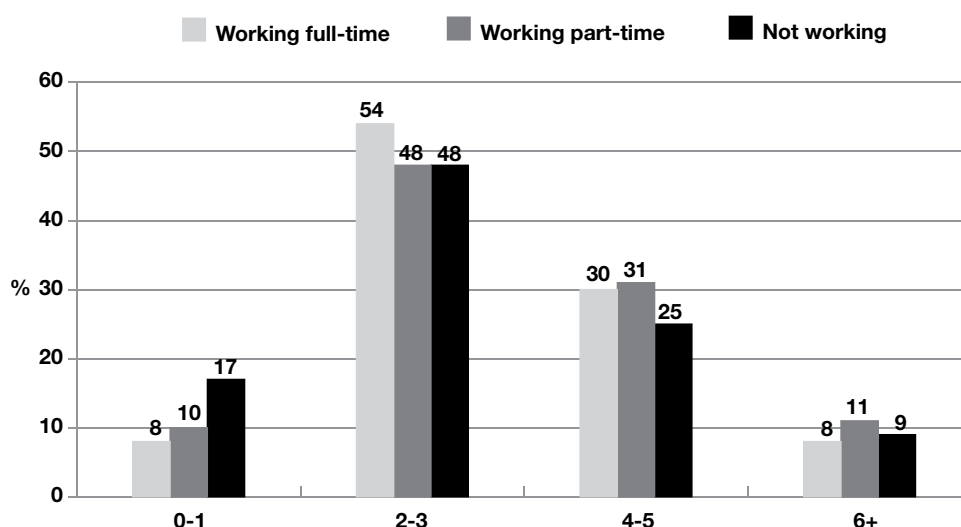
Various measures of social disadvantage were associated with parental involvement. Those in less deprived areas were more likely to attend more events as were those parents in higher socio-economic occupation groups, those in higher income brackets, and parents in owner-occupied accommodation compared with social or private rented accommodation. Similarly, parents with higher educational qualifications were more likely to attend more events, as shown in Figure 5-B.

Figure 5-B Parental involvement (four or more events or activities attended) by educational qualifications



Respondents (in most cases the mother) in part-time employment (less than 35 hours per week) were the most likely to attend four or more events or activities at the child's school, with 42% reporting having done so compared with 38% of full-time workers and 35% of respondents who were not working at all. The distribution of the number of events attended by work status is shown in Figure 5-C.

Figure 5-C Parental involvement (number of events or activities attended) by work status



Finally, families in rural areas were more likely to have higher parental involvement in school activities than families in urban areas.

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5.5 Multivariate analysis

In the previous section, relationships between various socio-demographics and parental involvement were examined in isolation. In this section we extend the analysis to look at these relationships while controlling for other factors. Multivariate logistic regression allows us to assess which factors are independently associated with lower parental involvement.

A description of the analysis and the full results are included in the technical appendix. Socio-economic occupation group, educational qualification and tenure were the only significant variables once other variables were controlled for. Work status and family type became non-significant in the presence of these variables, suggesting that it is social disadvantage that drives parental involvement rather than the time available to parents to become involved in school activities. Those parents in more socially disadvantaged groups (in lower socio-economic occupation groups, with lower educational qualifications and not in owner-occupied accommodation) were more likely to only be involved in one activity or none at all.

5.6 Homework

Of all the activities that the term parental involvement covers, those that are done ‘at home’ have been shown to be the most influential on child attainment (Desforbes and Abouchar, 2003). As such, the Curriculum for Excellence has placed extra emphasis on parents as ‘key partners’ in their child’s education, developing resources and advice to help with this. This section covers questions asked to both cohorts on the topic of homework. These questions collected information about the frequency homework is received and completed and on the extent to which someone at home helped the child with his or her homework.

Slightly different questions were asked of the child and birth cohorts. Where there is matching data and there were no differences between the cohorts, only data from the birth cohort are presented. Any differences observed are highlighted. The data are drawn from sweep 4 for the child cohort and sweep 6 for the birth cohort where, for both cohorts, the majority of children were in Primary 1 at the time of the interview, though some were in Primary 2.

5.6.1 Frequency homework received

The majority (71%) of children in the child cohort received homework every day or most days (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Frequency of homework

Frequency of homework	Percentage of child cohort
Everyday/most days	71
Two or three times a week	18
About once a week	9
Less often, never, or hasn’t received any so far	1
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	2187
<i>Unweighted</i>	2189

Virtually all (93%) of those who received homework said that they always completed it and 6% said that they usually completed it. Just 1% of parents said that homework was only sometimes completed and less than 1% said it never was. Children from families living in more deprived areas were less likely to always complete their homework than were children living in less deprived areas (90% compared with 96%, Table 5.4). There were no statistically significant differences by the child's gender.

Table 5.4 Deprivation quintile and completion of homework, child cohort

How often children usually complete their homework	SIMD quintile					
	Least deprived %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Most deprived <1%	All %
Always	96	93	93	91	90	93
Usually	4	7	6	6	8	6
Sometimes	0	1	1	3	2	1
Never	-	-	-	<1	-	0
<i>Bases</i>						
<i>Weighted</i>	443	447	428	374	478	2171
<i>Unweighted</i>	498	499	456	338	382	2174

Note: Columns do not always add up to 100% due to rounding.

5.6.2 Help with homework

Parents aren't the only source of help that children may draw on when completing homework. Childcare arrangements mean that many children may spend the after-school period, when homework is arguably most likely to be completed, with grandparents or in after-school clubs. Parents of the child cohort were asked who helps their child with their homework¹².

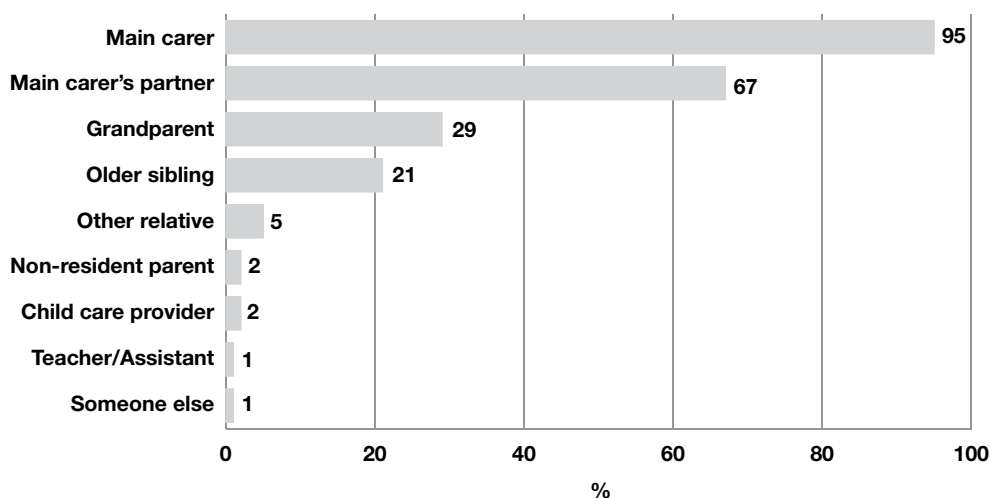
Figure 5-D shows the range of people reported to help the child with his or her homework. The data show how, at this early stage of primary school, almost all (95%) parents are involved in helping their children with their work outside of the classroom. It also highlights the important roles of other relations, particularly grandparents and older siblings, in children's learning.

¹² This question was only asked at sweep 4, so data for some children, might refer to the early period of Primary 2.

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Figure 5-D Percentage that reported different people who help the child with their homework



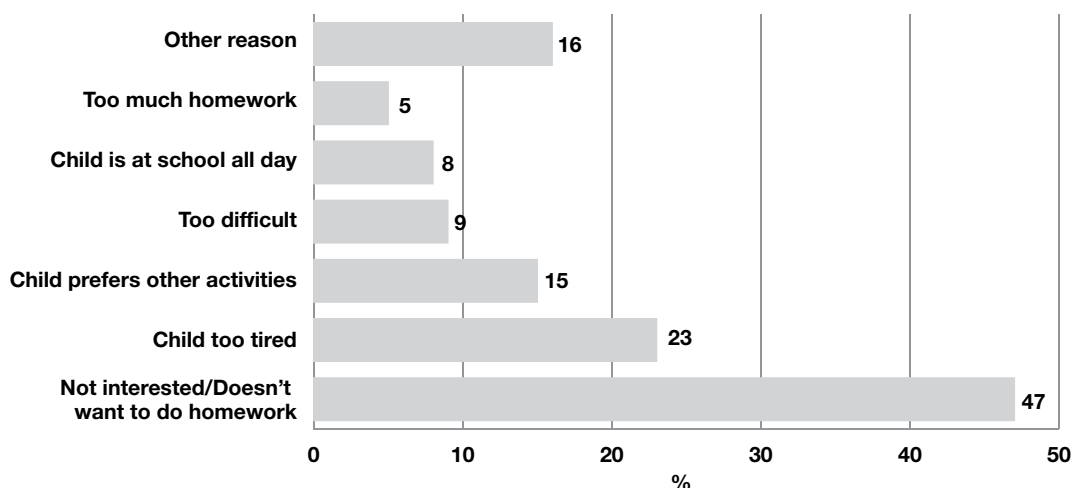
Bases: weighted 2171, unweighted 2174.

5.6.3 Ease of getting children to do their homework

Parents of both cohorts were asked how easy they find it to get their child to do their homework. The vast majority (85%) of respondents in the birth cohort said it was very or fairly easy, 7% said that it was neither easy nor difficult and 8% said it was fairly or very difficult.

Those parents who reported some difficulty in getting the child to complete his or her homework (8%) were asked to indicate why this was so. The main reason (reported by 47% of those who had difficulties) was because the child was not interested in their homework, tiredness (23%) and the child's preference for other activities (15%) also featured as common reasons (Figure 5-E).

Figure 5-E Reasons for finding it difficult to get child to do his/her homework, birth cohort



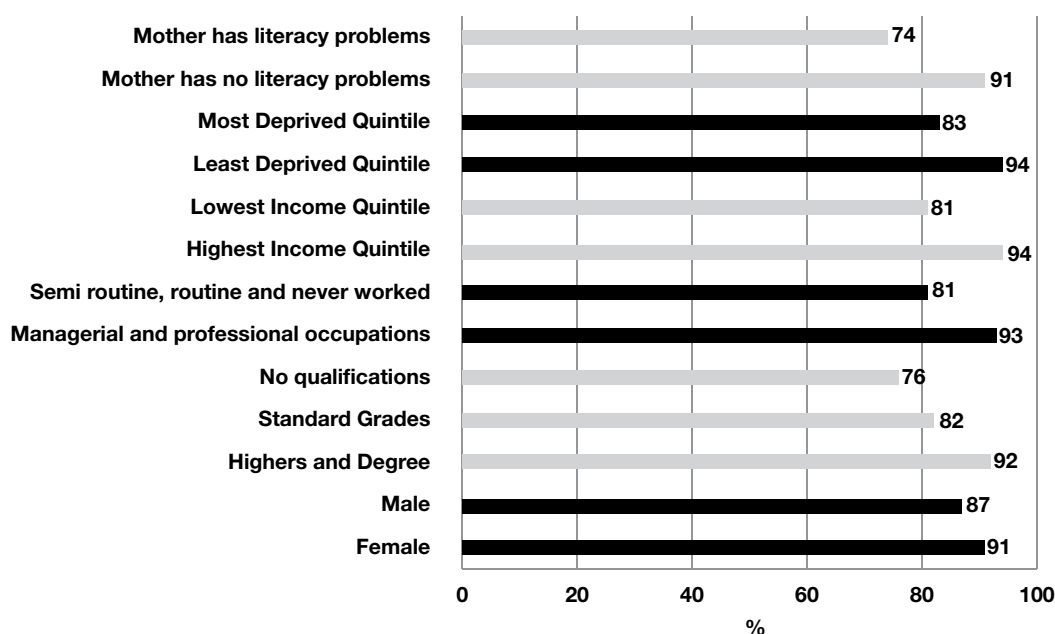
Base: Parents in the birth cohort who found it difficult to get child to do homework: weighted = 295, unweighted = 277.

Parental confidence when helping with homework has been shown to affect levels of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, 2001). Confidence levels have been shown to be subject specific (Moon and Ivins, 2004) and decrease as the child progresses through education, often attributed to the increased complexity of the work (Williams, 2002).

Parents from the birth cohort were asked how confident they were helping their child with his or her homework. They were asked to indicate whether they were confident in all subjects or tasks, most subjects or tasks or not confident at all. The vast majority (89%) said they were confident helping their child with all tasks, 10% were confident with some and just 1% were not confident at all. This is similar to the figure reported by DfES who found that 96% of Year 1 parents felt confident helping with their child's homework always or most of the time (Williams, 2002). Whilst confidence was generally high across all parents, some small variations did exist including, in particular, in relation to levels of parental education qualifications.

Figure 5-F shows a number of demographic characteristics that significantly affected confidence levels in all tasks. Parents were more likely to be confident in all tasks if their child was female. Parental education, current occupation, income quintile and deprivation status all affected confidence levels.

Figure 5-F Percentage of confidence in all tasks by various demographic factors



Bases: Weighted bases 3602, Unweighted bases 3606.

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The impact of various socio-demographic factors on confidence levels, particularly education levels, is supported by research elsewhere (Davies-Kean 2005). Although unsurprising, it is interesting to note that these trends are apparent even at this early stage of schooling.

Interestingly, gender of the child influences how confident parents are helping with homework. One interpretation of this relationship may be that as girls tend to report better overall ability, they require less assistance from parents, and parents believe the child is doing it correctly.

Additionally, it appears that parental confidence levels are associated with how easy they find it to get the child to do his or her homework. Although it is possible that difficulties may stem, at least in part, from the parent's own confidence in tackling the tasks assigned to the child, it may also be that difficulties in getting the child to do their homework moderate confidence levels. However, what is clear is that parental confidence, whether measured by qualifications achieved, literacy difficulties or current occupational status, influences the homework experience.

Table 5.5 Parental confidence and ease of getting child to do their homework

How confident helping with homework	Ease of getting child to do their homework			
	Very or fairly easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Very or fairly difficult	Total
Confident in all subjects or tasks	91	79	80	89
Confident in some subjects or tasks but not in others	9	20	16	10
Not confident at all	1	1	4	1
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	3050	256	295	3602
<i>Unweighted</i>	3084	245	277	3606

Note: columns may not always add up to 100% due to rounding.

INFORMATION FROM AND CONTACT WITH TEACHERS AND THE SCHOOL

6.1 Introduction

As noted in the introduction to Chapter 5, research has shown that where parents are more involved with their children's education and learning, their children have more positive school experiences and do better than those children whose parents are less involved. Variations in parental involvement in school activities has already been addressed. However, the school itself has a key role to play in communicating with parents and seeking, encouraging and ensuring their involvement in their child's school experience and the broader life of the school.

Curriculum for Excellence encourages schools to form 'positive partnerships' with parents, to adopt clear, open channels of communication regarding their child's progress as well as getting parents involved in personal learning planning with the aim of building strong relationships and encouraging involvement in the child's learning and progress. Part of building this relationship relies on how effectively schools communicate with parents. Education Scotland, the national public body charged with supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching, states that: "the better the information schools provide to parents, the more they can support their children's learning and the school" (Education Scotland, 2012).

Indeed, qualitative research on improving parental involvement undertaken in Scotland (Russell and Granville, 2005) found that parents depended on effective channels of communication to know where and how they could be involved. The same research also indicated that numerous different methods of communication were practiced by schools and that they varied in effectiveness. In general, communication was deemed to be more effective at the primary, rather than secondary, stages.

This chapter considers some of the data GUS has collected around school-parent communication including data on how and what information parents receive from their child's school and their contact with teachers at the school. All data in this chapter are taken from the sweep 6 interview with the birth cohort at which point around two-thirds of the children were in P1 and one-third were in P2.

6.2 Key findings

- The vast majority of parents had received information from the school about their child's progress or learning. Around three-quarters of parents had received a school report.
- Parents in more advantaged circumstances were more likely than those in more disadvantaged circumstances to report having received information about their child's progress.
- 94% of parents reported that they had attended a parents' evening since their child had started P1. Those from more disadvantaged circumstances were slightly less likely to have attended than those from more advantaged circumstances.

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- Most parents found parents' evening very useful (60%) or quite useful (36%) with no significant variations by parental characteristics.
- Almost half (48%) of parents indicated that they had talked to their child's teacher outside of a parents' evening. The contact was more likely to have been initiated by the child's parents than by the school though in around one-third of cases (32%) neither party had initiated the meeting suggesting that it occurred on a more informal basis.
- Degree-educated parents were more likely to have had such contact than parents with lower or no qualifications. It was also more common for parents whose child attended a smaller school and for parents with some concerns about their child's development or adjustment to school.
- Amongst those who had not had such contact, the majority said they would find it either very (76%) or quite easy (22%) to approach their child's teacher.
- 65% of parents reported that they had received information/advice on how to help their child with learning at home (excluding doing homework). 73% of parents in the highest income group reported receiving this advice compared with 58% in the lowest income group.

6.3 Type of contact with school

Parents were asked about the different types of contact they had had with their child's school. The results are shown in Table 6.1. The most common form of contact with the school was information about the child's progress (84%), followed closely by information about their child's learning (83%). Around three-quarters of parents had received a school report. It is worth noting that this data is affected by the point in the school year at which the interview took place. Data collection for GUS is undertaken over a 14-month period and parents are therefore interviewed at different points in the school year. For some parents, at the time of the interview the child had not yet completed a full year of school. As such, these figures do not necessarily reflect the proportion of parents who 'ever' receive such contact over the course of a full school year. However, even if the analysis is restricted to those families interviewed in the last (summer) term (between April and June) the figures remain very similar suggesting that some parents have not received this type of information from the school, or did not recall receiving it.

Table 6.1 Type of contact parents have had with the school

	Percentage of parents
Information about child's progress	84
Information about child's learning	83
School report	73
Attendance report (incl as part of school report)	45
None of these	4
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	2486
<i>Unweighted</i>	2497

There were some differences in the extent to which different parents reported receiving different types of information. For example, parents in more advantaged circumstances were more likely than those in more disadvantaged circumstances to report having received information about their child's progress. Ninety-two per cent of parents in the highest income group said they had received such information compared with 77% of parents in the lowest income group. Similar patterns can also be seen according to area deprivation; those living in deprived areas were less likely to receive progress information. This suggests that either the schools which children in more disadvantaged circumstances attend are less likely to provide this information, or that these parents are less likely to take note of such information when it is distributed, or indeed that it is less likely to reach them by whichever means it is sent.

6.4 Parents' evenings

Parents were asked a series of questions about parents' evenings. Virtually all respondents (94%) reported that they had attended a parents' evening since their child had started P1. Whilst attendance was high for all parents, those from more disadvantaged circumstances were slightly less likely to have attended than those from more advantaged circumstance. For example, 91% of parents in the lowest income groups had attended a parents' evening compared with 97% in the highest income group.

Those that attended were asked the main reasons why they had done so (Table 6.2). The most prevalent reason for attending parents' evening was for parents to find out about their child's general progress (81%). However, around one-fifth (21%) of parents were also interested in ensuring that the child had settled in well and made friends. Finding out what was going on at school (10%) and visiting to familiarise themselves with the school or teacher were less important. There were no notable differences in the reasons given by parents with different background characteristics.

Table 6.2 Main reasons for attending parents' evening

	Percentage of parents
Progress in general	81
Settling in and making friends	21
Find out what child is going at school	10
To visit/get to know our child's teacher/school	8
Child's behaviour	4
To find out how to support my child at home	4
Expected to go	4
To see that child is happy	4
So that I/we are involved in child's education	3
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	2337
<i>Unweighted</i>	2359

Note: Parents could choose more than one reason for attending the parents' evening so totals will not equal 100%.

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Respondents were asked how useful they found it attending the parent's evening. The majority found it either very useful (60%) or quite useful (36%) with no significant variations by parental characteristics.

The reasons parents gave for finding the parents' evening useful are shown in Table 6.3. The most common answer given – by around one-third of parents (33%) – was that they had found the evening useful as a means of obtaining information about their child's progress at school. A further fifth (27%) said that it gave them reassurance about their child's life at school.

Some reasons why parents did not find the evening useful included there not being enough time (4%) and/or that they were not given the information they wanted (3%).

Table 6.3 Main reasons for finding parents' evening useful

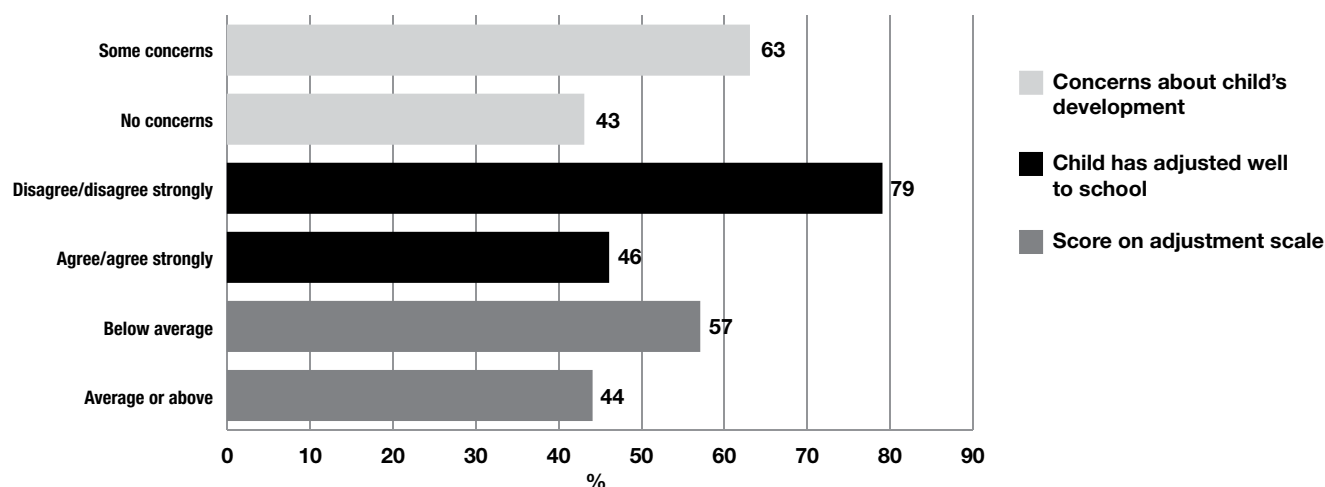
	Percentage of parents
Information on child's progress in general	33
Gave me reassurance	27
Teacher was able to explain things (provide right information)	18
Opportunity to see the child's classroom, work and find out what child is doing at school	17
Opportunity to meet teacher (and check teacher out)	12
Given advice on how to help child	9
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	2337
<i>Unweighted</i>	2359

6.5 Additional contact with teachers

In addition to questions on regular parents' evenings, parents were also asked about any other times when they had spoken to any teachers about their child since he or she had started P1.

Almost half (48%) of respondents indicated that they had talked to their child's teacher. Degree-educated parents were more likely to have had such a meeting than parents with lower or no qualifications. Fifty-three per cent of degree-educated parents reported having spoken to the child's teacher other than at a parents' evening compared with 46% of those with no qualifications. Parents whose children attended smaller schools were also more likely to have spoken to their child's teacher – 58% whose child was in a school with under 100 pupils on the role had done so compared with 43% whose child was in a school of 300 or more. This suggests it may be easier to approach and develop informal relationships with teachers in smaller schools.

Figure 6-A Percentage of parents who had additional contact with teacher by concerns about child's adjustment to school and child's development



Bases: Adjustment scale: below average – weighted = 2416, unweighted = 2440; average or above – weighted = 915, unweighted = 895; Child has adjusted well to school: agree/agree strongly – weighted = 3064, unweighted = 3085; disagree/disagree strongly – weighted = 93, unweighted = 95;

Concerns about development: no concerns – weighted = 2653, unweighted = 2697; some concerns – weighted = 693, unweighted = 652.

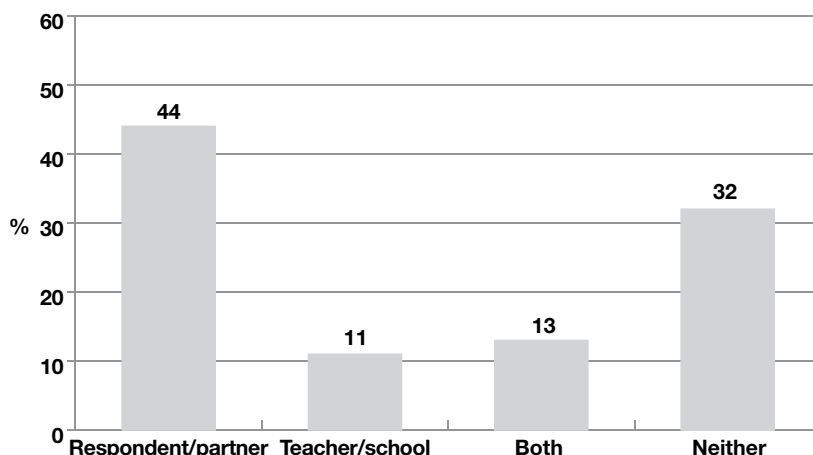
Parents with some concerns about their child's adjustment to school or their development more generally were more likely to have spoken to a teacher than those who had no such concerns. As shown in Figure 6-A, 57% of parents whose child had score below average on the adjustment scale (discussed in section 4.5) had spoken to the teacher separately from a parents' evening compared with 44% of those whose child score average or above. Similarly, 63% of parents who noted some general concern about their child's speech, behaviour or other development had spoken to a teacher compared with 43% of parents who had no development concerns. It is likely, therefore, that these concerns will often form the basis for the meeting.

Those who had had additional contact with the child's teacher were then asked who initiated the contact. The results are shown in Figure 6-B. The contact was more likely to have been initiated by the child's parents than by the school. Forty-four per cent of parents who had an additional meeting said they had asked for it whereas just 11% having such a meeting at the request of the school. In around one-third of cases (32%) the respondent reported that neither party had initiated the meeting suggesting that it occurred on a more informal basis perhaps at an unrelated school event or in the playground at the end of the school day. The likelihood of this more informal discussion is, as may be expected, greater in smaller schools and, thus, also for parents living in remote and rural areas. Forty-four per cent of parents living in rural areas said that neither party had initiated contact compared with 31% in living large urban areas and 27% in other urban areas. Similarly, half (49%) of parents whose child attended a school with fewer than 100 pupils said neither party had initiated contact compared with around one-third (28%-32%) of parents whose child was attending a larger school.

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Figure 6-B Who initiated additional contact with teacher?



Base: those who had spoken to child's teacher other than at parents' evening, weighted = 1739, unweighted = 1736

Compared with parents who had no concerns about their child's adjustment to school, those who did have concerns were more likely to have initiated contact themselves. Amongst those with more general concerns about development, there was a greater likelihood that the contact had been initiated by the school, or by both parties compared with parents who had no concerns. For example, amongst those who had spoken to a teacher outside of a parents' evening, 20% of those who had some concerns about their child's development said both parties had initiated the meeting compared with 10% of parents who had no concerns.

Those parents who had met the child's teacher were asked how easy they had found it to approach the teacher. The vast majority found it either very (83%) or quite easy (14%). With such a high level of agreement, there is little notable variation according to parental characteristics. However, parents in rural areas and those whose child was attending a smaller school did report greater ease in approaching the child's teacher than those in urban areas and those whose child was attending a larger school. For example, amongst those who had had such contact, 87% of parents living in rural areas said it had been very easy to approach the child's teacher compared with 69% living in large urban areas.

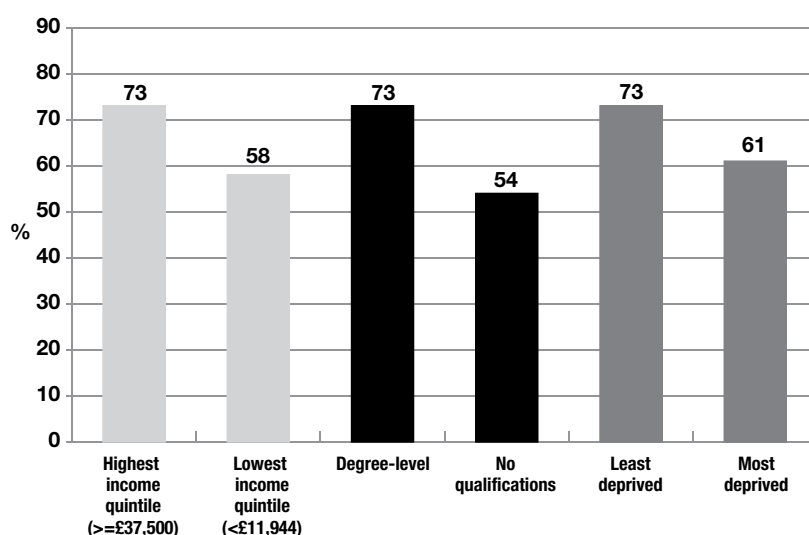
Those respondents who had not spoken to the teacher, were asked how easy they *would* find it to approach the teacher. Similar patterns were seen in the response to this item with the majority saying they would find it either very (76%) or quite easy (22%) to approach their child's teacher.

6.6 Advice on helping child learn at home

Respondents were asked if, since their child had started school, they had received any information/advice on how to help their child with learning at home (excluding doing homework). Almost two-thirds (65%) of parents reported that they had received such help/advice and virtually all who had (97%) stated that they had found the advice to be either very or quite useful.

The data show differences in the extent to which parents with different characteristics reported receiving such advice from the child's school. As shown in Figure 6-C, on the whole, parents in more advantaged circumstances were more likely to report having received such advice than were those in less advantaged circumstances. For example, 73% of parents in the highest income group reported receiving this advice compared with 58% in the lowest income group. It is unclear whether this indicates that more disadvantaged parents are less likely to receive the information – either because it is not issued by the school, or when it is, it does not ultimately reach them – or they are less aware of the purpose of the information when it is received.

Figure 6-C Percentage of parents who had received any information/advice on how to help their child with learning at home by household income, parental education and area deprivation



Bases: Income: highest income – weighted = 583, unweighted = 686; lowest income – weighted = 869, unweighted = 683; Parental education: Degree-level – weighted = 1023, unweighted = 1187; no qualifications – weighted = 309, unweighted = 220; Area deprivation: least deprived – weighted = 702, unweighted = 819; most deprived – weighted = 796, unweighted = 610.

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE

7.1 Introduction

This section examines levels of absence amongst children in Primaries 1 and 2, the main reasons for it, and whether it varies according to certain child and family characteristics. School attendance levels are of importance as they are strongly linked to attainment levels and likelihood of further education, even when measured at primary school (Malcolm, 1996; Reid 2006; Scottish Government 2007).

Regular recording of school attendance also serves as a safety mechanism by following up the non-attendeers. Recent Scottish Government policy has stressed the role of the school in both encouraging engagement in school activities and ensuring each child has the support they need to succeed irrespective of family circumstances. At the heart of the Curriculum for Excellence is the aim that all pupils will be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors – all of which are dependent on regular attendance at school. Similarly, Getting it Right for Every Child's new approach to giving Scotland's young people the best possible start in life requires great involvement and responsibility from the school. Such involvement can only be achieved if the child attends regularly.

7.1.1 Data

The data presented are from sweep 4 for the child cohort and from sweep 6 for the birth cohort. At the time the data were collected, the majority of children in both cohorts were in Primary 1 but a small proportion had started school the year before. Data on attendance from school administrative records are also available for children in the birth cohort. This data provided more detail on the number of school sessions (equivalent to half days) the child was late, absent due to sickness or had an unauthorised absence during Primary 1.

The questions on school absence asked in the survey differed slightly between cohorts. Respondents in the birth cohort were asked to list *any* reasons why the child had been absent from school in the previous 6 months with an option for no absence. Respondents in the child cohort, on the other hand, were asked on how many half days their child had been absent in the previous month and, where they had been absent, the *main* reason for this absence.

7.2 Key findings

- 71% of pupils had full attendance over the previous month but only 21% had full attendance over the previous 6 months.
- 20% of pupils reported between 0.5–2 days absence in the previous month.
- Deprivation status, ethnicity and adjustment to school all affected attendance levels.

- Child illness was the main reason for absence over both the previous month and previous 6 months, the next common reason was a medical appointment.
- Child health, as reported by the parent, affected how many days a child was absent due to sickness.
- Deprivation status affected unauthorised absence (in particular, truancy) and lateness.

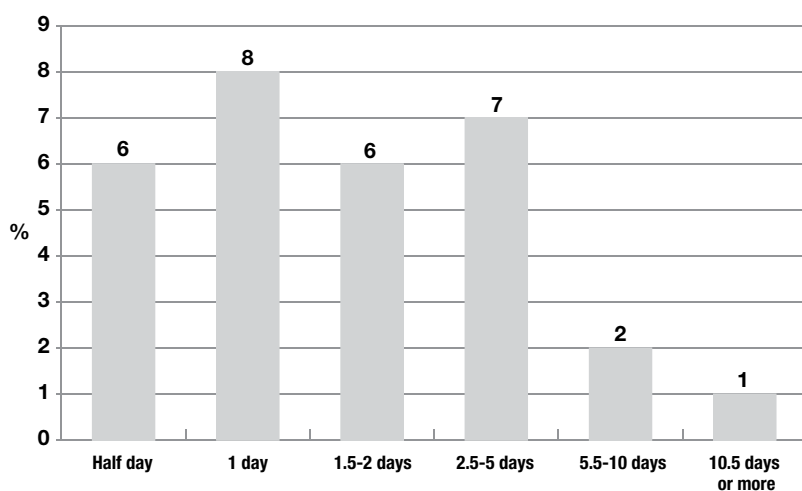
7.3 Attendance levels

7.3.1 Overall attendance

Results from the survey data show that the majority of children in the birth cohort had some absence from school in the 6 months prior to the interview, with only 21% reporting full attendance. Conversely, 71% of the child cohort reported full attendance, although this was for the shorter time frame of the previous month.

20% of the child cohort reported between 0.5–2 days absence in the previous month but less than 3% reported more than 5 days away.

Figure 7-A Proportion reporting different lengths of child absence in previous month (child cohort)



Bases: Weighted bases 2184, unweighted bases 2186

The national level of total primary school attendance has been relatively stable over the last 5 years at around 95%, that is 95% of all possible half days at school were attended (Scottish Government, 2011b). Combined with the data presented above, this may imply that absence, at least at primary school age, is due to the majority of pupils recording short-term absence rather than a minority repeatedly not attending school.

There was no effect of gender for either cohort on self-reported attendance levels. This is in line with previous research that has shown no differences between sexes for overall attendance levels, despite some larger differences in authorised and unauthorised absence.

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7.3.2 The effect of deprivation

It is widely reported that levels of absenteeism are higher in deprived areas and that although the effect is larger for secondary school, it is still evident at a younger age. For example, the latest 2010-11 Scottish primary school attendance figures (Scottish Government, 2011b) show a difference of 4 percentage points between children living in areas in the highest and lowest 20% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (97% and 93% of all possible half-days attended respectively). Both the child and birth cohort data give some evidence to support this (see Table 7.1). The same official attendance figures also highlight lower attendance levels amongst children living in urban communities compared with those in rural areas, possibly linked to the higher levels of deprivation in some large cities (Scottish Government, 2011b). The GUS data from either cohort does not show any such variation in attendance levels across the different classifications of urban-rurality.

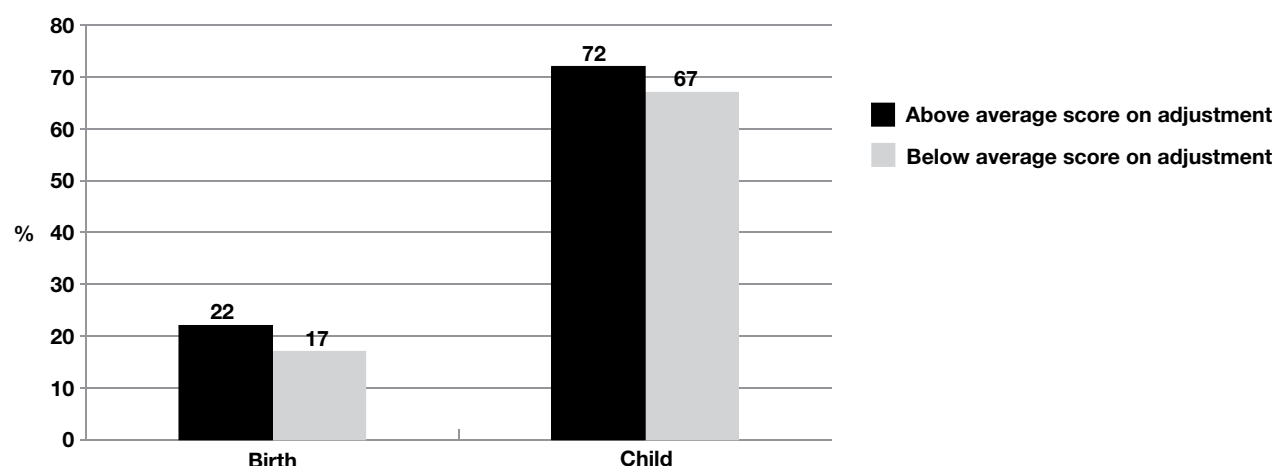
Table 7.1 Attendance at school by SIMD quintile¹³

	SIMD Quintile					
	Least deprived	2	3	4	Most deprived	Total
Birth						
Full attendance in last 6 months	23	21	23	17	19	21
Bases						
Weighted	702	746	687	698	797	3630
Unweighted	819	832	736	635	610	3633
Child						
Full attendance in last month	75	73	72	69	64	71
Bases						
Weighted	444	451	432	373	483	2184
Unweighted	500	504	459	337	385	2186

7.3.3 The effect of adjustment

Attendance levels in the first few years at primary school may be influenced by the child's adjustment to school. As Figure 7-B indicates, those that scored below average on the measure of adjustment to school were less likely to report full attendance than those who scored above average. This was statistically significant in both the child and birth cohorts.

¹³ 2006 SIMD quintiles for child cohort and 2009 for birth cohort

Figure 7-B Proportion reporting full attendance and adjustment to school

Bases: Birth cohort: Weighted 3349, Unweighted 3352; Child cohort: Weighted 2084, Unweighted 2086.

7.3.4 Reasons for absence

Those respondents that did not report full attendance were asked the reasons for their child's absence. Both cohorts said that child illness was the main reason for time off school, followed by doctor, dentist or hospital appointment. This was irrespective of slight differences in the questions between sweeps. Parents in the child cohort were asked the main reason for absence while those in the birth cohort were asked to report all that applied. The data are summarised in Table 7.2. These findings are similar to those from the Millennium Cohort Study which also found child illness to be the main reason for primary school absence, although this did not distinguish between medical appointments and illness (Hansen, 2010).

Table 7.2 Reasons for absence

	Birth cohort – any reason for absence (multiple answers allowed) %	Child cohort – main reason for absence (one answer allowed) %
Child illness	81	69
Doctor, dentist or hospital appointment	39	13
Family holiday	16	9
Child refused	1	1
Other reason	12	8
<i>Bases</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	2884	642
<i>Unweighted</i>	2853	619

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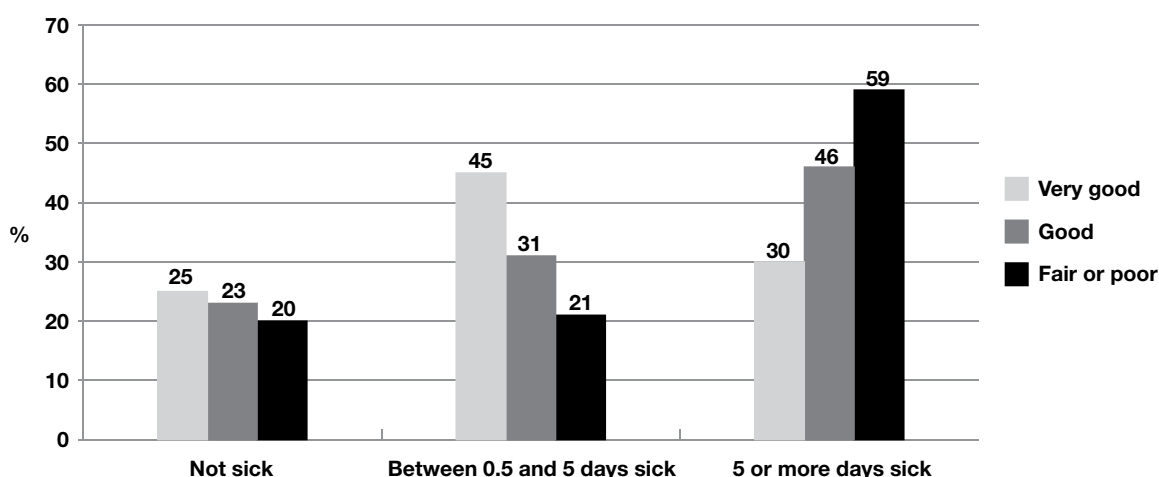
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7.3.5 Sickness

Information on absence from school administrative records is available for the birth cohort. This data allowed more detailed consideration of absence including absence due to sickness over the entire P1 school year.

The administrative data indicate that 76% of GUS sample children reported absence due to sickness in their P1 year. Interestingly, child's health (as reported by the mother) was not significantly associated with whether the child had any time off due to sickness. However, those reporting 'fair or poor' health were significantly more likely to report more days of absence due to sickness.

Figure 7-C Proportion recording absence due to sickness and child health

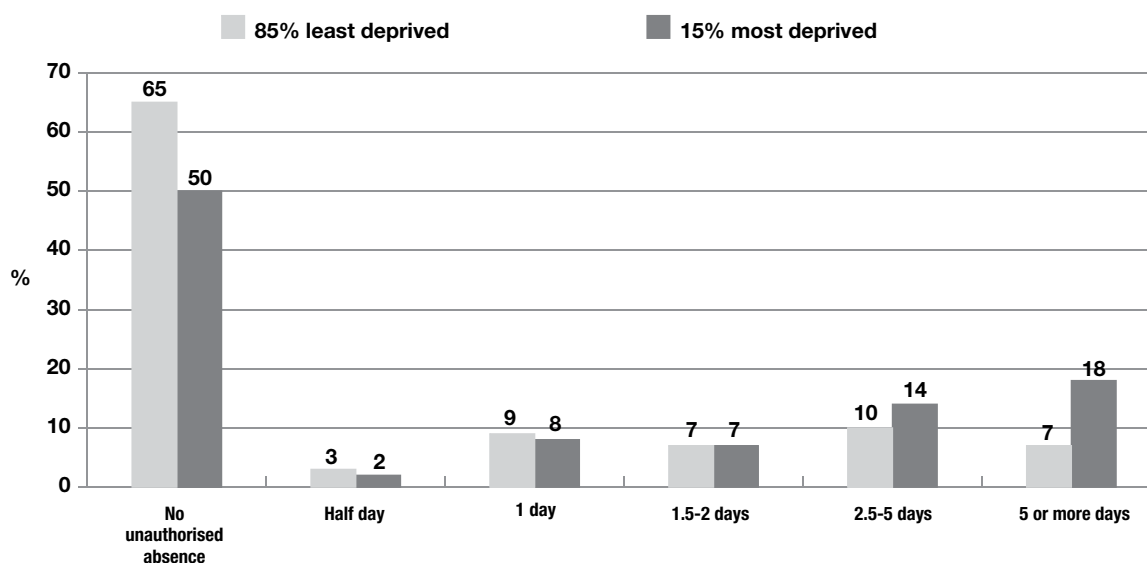


Bases: Weighted 3111, Unweighted 3101

7.3.6 Unauthorised absence

The administrative data on absence also provide figures for the number of unauthorised absences. This showed that, on average, 38% of children in the birth cohort recorded some unauthorised absence during their P1 school year.

Figure 7-D shows how the amount of unauthorised absence over the year varied by area deprivation. Those children living in areas in the bottom 15% according to deprivation status are more likely to report at least some unauthorised absence. They are also more likely to report more than 2.5 days unauthorised absence.

Figure 7-D Proportion recording unauthorised absence from school during P1 by deprivation status

Bases: Weighted 3111, Unweighted 3101

The reasons provided in the administrative data for unauthorised absence are given in Table 7.3. The most common reasons were ‘family holiday’ and ‘truancy’, which together accounted for 92% of all unauthorised absences. Deprivation status did influence whether certain reasons were reported. Those in the bottom 15% were more likely to report truancy during P1 compared with the rest of the population (36% versus 12%). Although not significant, there was a trend towards those in the bottom 15% being less likely to report ‘family holiday’ as a reason for unauthorised absence (18% versus 23% for the rest of the population).

Table 7.3 Number of and reasons for unauthorised absences

Reason for unauthorised absence	Per cent of all unauthorised absence	Median half days absent	Maximum half days absent	Bases (all with any unauthorised absence)	
				Weighted	Unweighted
Family holiday	51	5	46	675	744
Truancy	41	4	58	482	409
Exceptional domestic circumstance	2	2	14	51	45
Other	7	3	39	132	125

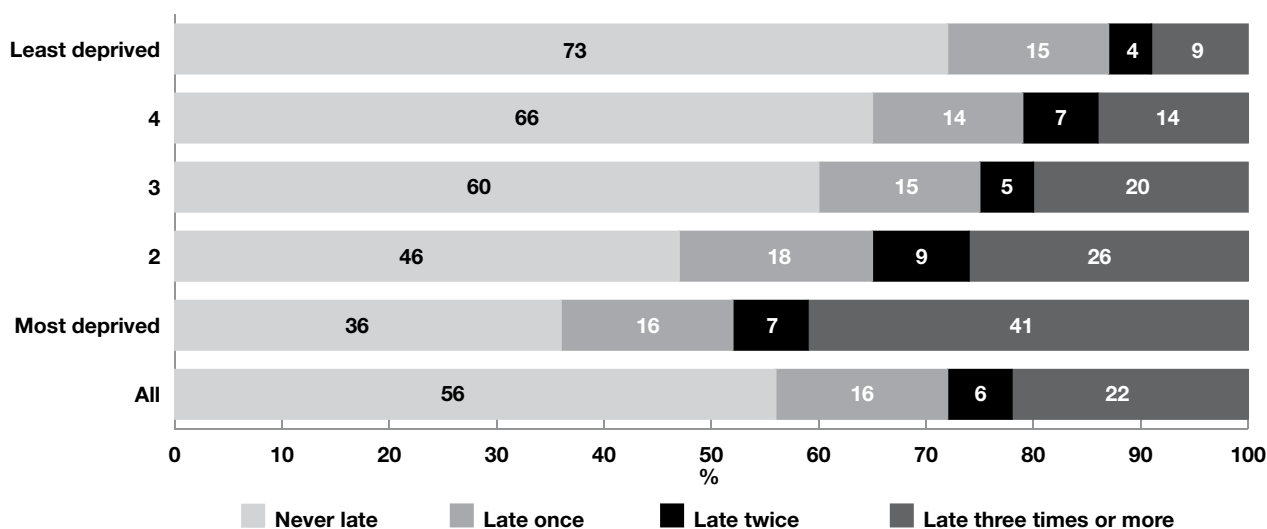
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7.3.7 Lateness

The school administrative data also provided details of lateness to school during the child's Primary 1 year. Forty-four per cent of the birth cohort were recorded as being late at least once during their P1 year. Deprivation status is equally influential on whether a child is late to school or not, as it is on overall attendance levels. As Figure 7-E shows, the more deprived the quintile, the more likely the child is to have been late during their P1 year, and this is more likely to have happened on multiple occasions.

Figure 7-E Lateness at school and deprivation quintile



Bases: Weighted 3111, Unweighted 3101

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

8.1 Introduction

This section considers the prevalence of additional support needs (ASN), the types of ASN reported, support received and analysis of how other aspects of learning are affected by ASN. Whether a child has ASN or not can strongly influence their experiences of school, and as such it is important to identify and provide for those who may need additional support.

The last decade has seen the development and enactment of a range of important legislation related to this issue. In 2003, the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act came into force, introducing the 'presumption of mainstreaming'. This put a responsibility on local education authorities to place children, including those with disabilities and challenging behaviour, in mainstream schools.

In 2004, the concept of Additional Support Needs was established under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act. This widened the previous definition of Special Educational Needs to any situation where a child or young person would be unable to benefit from school education without the provision of additional support (Scottish Executive, 2005b).

This Act was updated in 2009 providing further rights for parents of children with ASN, placing more responsibilities on local councils and introducing requirements for looked after children. At the time of writing, there is a review underway (the Doran Review) to investigate whether the current system is achieving the best possible outcomes for those with ASN and to see if further improvements are necessary. Interim findings were published in October 2011 (Scottish Government, 2011).

Two Scottish Government approaches for supporting children and young people – the Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child – recognise the need to care and provide for each child in an individualised way. A strong theme in the Curriculum for Excellence is that education should be adapted to each child's needs, which may include additional support. Getting it Right for Every Child focusses on the child's wider environment, but highlights the key role that school can play in ensuring each child's situation is assessed and provided for.

Additional Support Needs can be identified in a number of ways, usually through the parent or teacher raising concerns. Often, an assessment is done informally at school level but this may involve the local education authority and other specialists. Dependent on the level of needs, pupils may receive a Personal Learning Plan (PLP), Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) or a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP).

A PLP is used for all children who have ASN. This allows teachers to work with the parents and children to set goals and regularly review progress and effectiveness of the support provided. Children who require a significant adaptation of the curriculum or need to

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coordinate input from other professionals may need an IEP. Again, it is a document to help plan and monitor support provided. CSPs are the only legally binding document and are used for those with complex and/or multiple ASN. They are produced to ensure different services work together to ensure the child gets the best support they need.

These recent developments within Scotland have had implications for the comparison of Scottish data over time and with other jurisdictions in the UK and beyond. With a wider definition introduced in recent times and updated recording practices, longitudinal data within Scotland should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, the term 'Additional Support Needs' is specific to Scotland, with other countries using the 'Special Educational Needs', each with their own precise definition. This makes direct international comparison difficult, even within the UK.

National data in Scotland are collected through publicly funded schools and defines the following reasons for ASN:

- Learning disability
- Dyslexia
- Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. numeric)
- Other moderate learning difficulty
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Deafblind
- Physical or motor impairment
- Language or speech disorder
- Autistic spectrum disorder
- Social, emotional and behavioural difficulty
- Physical health problem
- Mental health problem
- Interrupted learning
- English as an additional language
- Looked after
- More able pupil
- Other

The questions used in GUS have been designed using the same categories except for learning disability, which has a wider definition than that of the national data as it combines the other specific and moderate learning difficulties categories.

8.1.1 Data

The analysis in this section combines data from the birth cohort from sweeps 5 and 6 to in order to reflect the child's first year in primary school. Questions on ASN were also asked of the child cohort, however, these were used only at sweep 4 by which time some children had started Primary 2. The data were tested for the effect of interview date on the basis that those children who had been at school longer prior to their interview would have had a greater chance of being identified for ASN. There were no statistically significant differences in prevalence of ASN by date of interview for the birth cohort.

8.2 Key findings

- 8% of children at Primary 1 are reported as having ASN by their main carer.
- This figure is higher for boys (10%) than it is for girls (4%) and is also higher amongst children living in the most deprived two quintiles of the Scottish Index for Multiple Deprivation.
- Nearly half of those with ASN (46%) were reported to have speech and language problems, just under a quarter (23%) reported social and/or behavioural problems and just under one-fifth (17%) reported learning disabilities.
- Nearly one in three (31%) who reported having ASN have more than one type of need.
- The most common form of support received was from the teacher who helped more than half of all those with ASN.

8.3 Prevalence of Additional Support Needs

Eight per cent of children were reported by their parent to have ASN in Primary 1. This is slightly lower than the latest (2010) Scottish national statistics figure of 9% for ASN prevalence amongst primary school children (Scottish Government, 2010). However, as ASN prevalence increases until a peak of around 9 years old, this might be expected when measuring the youngest age group (Department for Education, 2011). Additionally, recent national reporting of ASN prevalence has changed to a more comprehensive measure, which explains the large increase compared to the 2009 figure of 5.4%.

The differences by gender are also evident in the Scottish national summary statistics for schools (Scottish Government, 2010). In GUS, ASN prevalence was significantly higher for boys (10%) than it was for girls (4%), which is in line with national data from Scotland and further afield. It is not entirely clear why this is the case, perhaps due to physiological differences, behavioural differences or bias in the referral systems. It may also be influenced by other health outcomes (Coutinho, 2001). Boys also reported higher mean scores on the strength and difficulties questionnaire and a higher likelihood of having a long-standing illness than girls at sweep 6. These health trends have been observed in GUS data seen since the early stages of the study (Bradshaw, 2008).

There was a notably higher prevalence of ASN amongst children living in the two most deprived quintiles, with average rates of 10% and 11% respectively. This was apparent for

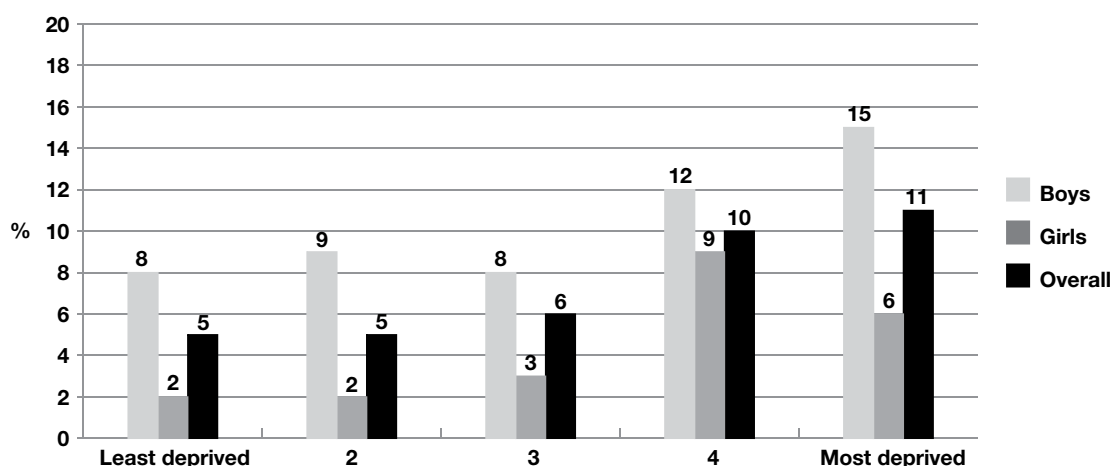
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both boys and girls, with boys in the most deprived quintile reporting rates of nearly twice the average at 15%. Again, this trend is apparent within both national statistics and other comparable surveys. For example, the Millennium Cohort Study found higher rates of special needs amongst those in poverty, and the latest official statistics from England and Wales found higher rates amongst those eligible for free school meals (Department for Education, 2011, Hansen, 2010).

The effect of ethnicity was also investigated as it is a commonly reported demographic factor for this topic. National Scottish data have found differences in ASN prevalence according to ethnic group although the main differences appear to be between Travellers (high levels of ASN) and Asian Chinese (low levels of ASN) (Scottish Government, 2010). English data also show that black pupils have an increased likelihood of reporting SEN (Department for Education, 2011a). Due to the nature of the GUS sample, analysis is only possible for the groups 'white' and 'non-white', between which no significant difference in ASN prevalence was found.

Figure 8-A Prevalence (%) of ASN by quintile of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and gender



Bases: Weighted 3344, Unweighted 3346.

8.4 Type of Additional Support Needs

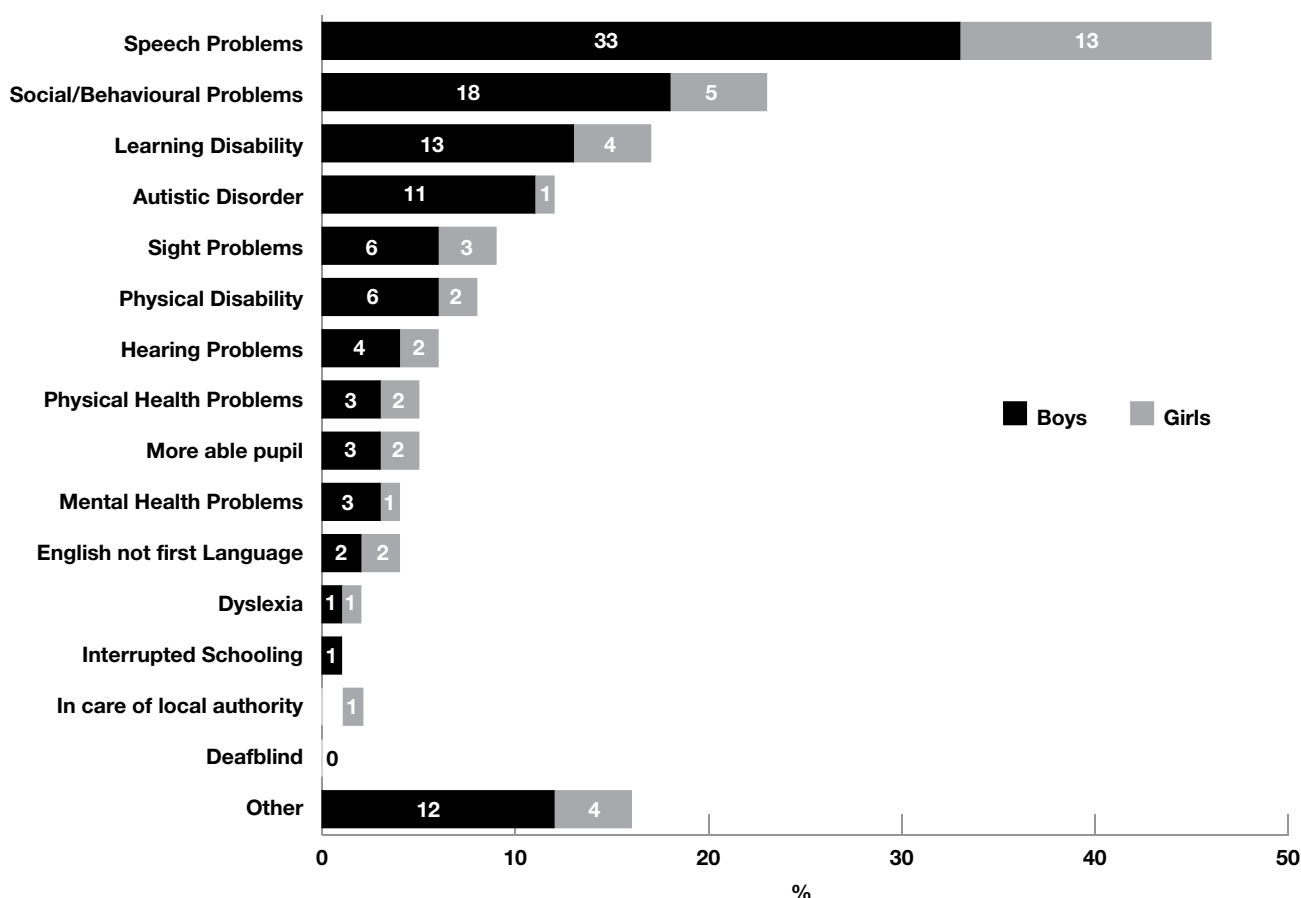
Problems with speech and language were those most commonly reported. Just under half of all children with ASN were reported to have speech and language difficulties (46%; 4% of the cohort). A little under one-quarter were reported to have social and/or behavioural problems (23%; 2% of the cohort) and just under one-fifth learning disabilities (17%; 1% of the cohort).

The prevalence of all types of need were more common amongst boys than girls with the exception of dyslexia and being looked after, where the bases were very small. Most notably, boys accounted for 94% of all autistic disorders and 86% of all mental health problems reported.

These patterns match the latest data from England showing speech and language difficulties

to be the most prevalent type of special need in primary school children (Department for Education, 2011). Interestingly, this did not match the conclusions from the Scottish national statistics (Scottish Government, 2010). They showed that learning disability (including moderate difficulties) was the most prevalent at 39%, followed by social or behaviour problems (20%) and then language or speech problems (13%). It should be noted that these national figures refer to all primary school children, and speech problems may be more prevalent at the younger end of the primary age range.

Figure 8-B Proportion of those with ASN reporting type by gender



Bases: Weighted bases 251, Unweighted bases 250

8.4.1 Multiple Additional Support Needs

If a child has ASN arising from one or more complex reasons or multiple reasons, the local education authority is required to prepare a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP). Despite this, the characteristics of those who have multiple ASN are not widely reported. Around one in three of those reporting ASN had more than one type of ASN although this equated to just 3% of all children in Primary 1.

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Table 8.1 Multiple ASN

Number of additional support needs	As percentage of those with ASN	As percentage of whole sample
1	69	5
2	14	1
3	11	1
4	3	<1
5	1	<1
6	1	<1
<i>Bases</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	251	3375
<i>Unweighted</i>	250	3954

Speech and language problems was the type of ASN most frequently reported by those with multiple ASN (72% of those with two or more ASN). This was followed by learning disability (46%), social and behavioural problems (36%), autistic disorder (30%), physical disability (25%) and sight problems (23%).

8.5 Support for ASN

Support provided for those identified with ASN can be wide ranging, from extra help from a teacher to visits from a health professional to attending a special school. Parents of children with ASN were asked what type of support their child received¹⁴. Support from a teacher was the most commonly reported type with 60% of those with ASN mentioning this. The second most common answer was 'other' (21%) indicating the wide variety needs and support provision.

Table 8.2 Those using specific types of support as a percentage of those who have ASN

	Percentage of those requiring type of support who have ASN	
	Birth	Child
Support from teacher	60	56
Special classes	18	18
Special school	12	11
Equipment provided	10	11
Environment adapted	8	9
Support from family	4	6
Other	21	36
<i>Bases</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	251	142
<i>Unweighted</i>	250	143

¹⁴ Those that started school in sweep 5 were only asked this question if they had ASN while those starting in sweep 6 were asked the support question before that on ASN. This led to some parents reporting additional support but no ASN. These cases are not included in this Table 8.2.

Interestingly, 13% of those with ASN either did not require or were not receiving any form of support listed above. These included children with a range of ASN types but were predominantly speech and language problems, social and behavioural problems and ‘other’ ASN types. The majority (60%) used only one form of support (predominantly support from the teacher or ‘other’). 27% reported using two or more types of support, ranging up to six different types.

8.6 ASN and homework

The presence of ASN influenced a number of outcomes relating to homework. Children with ASN were less likely to receive homework than those without (6% versus less than 1%). Parents of children with ASN were more likely to say it was difficult to get their child to do their homework and less likely to say it was easy.

Table 8.3 Ease of getting child to do their homework

	Additional Support Needs		
	Yes	No	Total
Very or fairly easy	67	85	84
Neither easy nor difficult	9	7	7
Very or fairly difficult	17	7	8
Child does not get homework	6	0	1
<i>Bases</i>			
<i>Weighted</i>	189	2084	3347
<i>Unweighted</i>	172	2111	3351

Parents of children with ASN were also more likely to say they were confident helping their child with some tasks rather than all tasks. However, it did not affect whether parents said they were not confident at all.

Table 8.4 Confidence in helping with child’s homework

	Additional Support Needs		
	Yes	No	Total
Confident in all subjects or tasks	80	90	89
Confident in some subjects or tasks but not in others	18	10	10
Not confident at all	2	1	1
<i>Bases</i>			
<i>Weighted</i>	235	3081	3322
<i>Unweighted</i>	209	3111	3326

Note: columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

8.7 ASN and attendance and absence

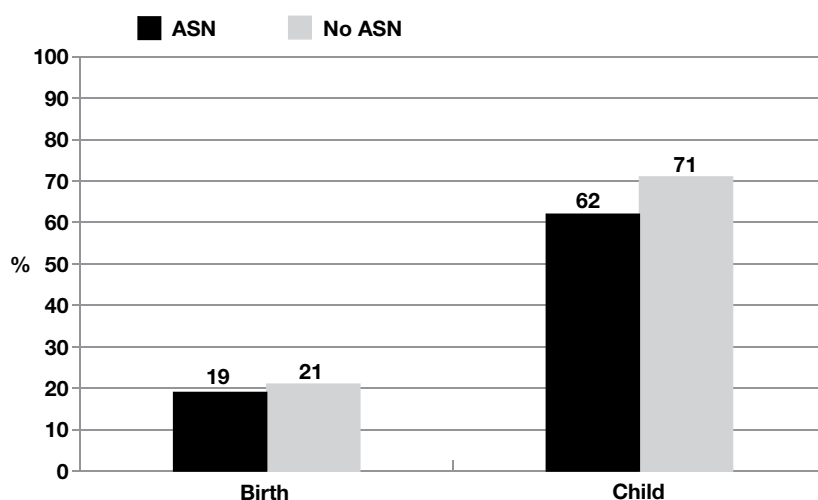
Pupils with ASN were less likely to achieve full attendance when asked about the previous month (child cohort) but there were no differences when asked over the previous six months (birth cohort).

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As with other variables analysed in the attendance and absence section, the common trends found in other literature are only picked up in the GUS data when measured over the shorter recall period. Scottish national statistics have shown that those with ASN have higher levels of absence from school, although the difference is more obvious in secondary schools (Scottish Government, 2011b).

Figure 8-C Full attendance levels and ASN



Bases: Birth cohort: Weighted 3349, Unweighted 3352; Child cohort: Weighted 2184, Unweighted 218.

Children with ASN from the child cohort were more likely to be absent due to medical appointments and less likely to be ill than those without ASN. Data from the birth cohort supported this finding for the medical appointments but there were no significant differences for child illness¹⁵. The national statistics for England also found that children with ASN were less likely to be ill but they did not mention any differences in medical appointments (Department for Education, 2011).

Table 8.5 ASN and main reason for absence¹⁶

	Additional Support Needs		
	Yes	No	Total
Child was ill	51	72	69
Child had doctor, dental or hospital appointment	25	11	13
A family holiday or trip	9	9	9
Child refused to go to school	3	1	1
Other	11	8	8
<i>Bases</i>			
<i>Weighted</i>	70	572	642
<i>Unweighted</i>	62	557	619

Note: columns may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

¹⁵ Note methodological differences – Birth cohort 6-month time frame versus child cohort 1 month. Birth cohort asked for all reasons that applied, Child cohort asked for main reason.

¹⁶ Data from child cohort using sweep 4 data only and only those reporting absence in a 1 month time frame.

8.8 Attitudes towards inclusive schooling

At sweep 4, a number of questions were included which explored parents' attitudes towards inclusive education where children with additional support needs attend mainstream schools. The items were asked of parents in both cohorts. The figures here are from the birth cohort.

The first two questions asked parents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements:

- It is important that parents of children with additional support needs are able to send their child to a mainstream school if they wish
- Allowing pupils with additional support needs to attend mainstream school improves the education experience of those pupils

81% of parents strongly agreed or agreed with the first statement and 68% strongly agreed or agreed with the second. There were no significant differences by child, parent or family characteristics.

The final question asked parents to select which, from a choice of three, statement came closest to their feelings about inclusive education for children with ASN. The statements provided were:

- Allowing pupils with additional support needs to attend mainstream school has a *negative* impact on other pupils at the school
- Allowing pupils with additional support needs to attend mainstream school has a *positive* impact on other pupils at the school
- Allowing pupils with additional support needs to attend mainstream school has *no* impact on other pupils at the school

71% of parents selected the middle statement, believing that there is a positive impact on other pupils if pupils with additional support needs are in mainstream schools. A further 21% believed there was no impact on other pupils. Just 8% felt there was a negative impact. No significant differences were observed across any key sub-groups.

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

9.1 Introduction

For most families, having a child start school requires the consideration of a series of practical and logistical arrangements – getting the child to and from school, ensuring they have lunch, and making provision for before and after school care if necessary. In this next section, we consider some of the data collected on GUS on each of these aspects of the child's early experience at school. This data is drawn exclusively from sweep 4 of the child cohort and as such refers to the school years of 2008-09 and 2009-10 during which around two-thirds of the cohort were in Primary 1 and the remainder were in Primary 2.

9.2 Key findings

- Most children (53%) in Primary 1 and 2 take a packed lunch to school with slightly fewer (43%) choosing a school meal.
- Children from more disadvantaged circumstances were more likely to have school meals and less likely to have packed lunches than those in more advantaged circumstances.
- Around half of all children walk to and from school, 38% make the journey to school by car and around one-third (33%) return home by car.
- Amongst those families who own cars, children living in the least deprived areas are just as likely to be taken to school by car as those living in the most deprived areas.
- Children in remote rural areas were less likely to walk and more likely to use a school bus for their journey to school.
- 8% of children attended a breakfast club and 16% attended an after-school club.
- Most children who attended an after-school club (57%) did so on only one or two days each week. In contrast, almost three-quarters (71%) of children who used breakfast clubs attended on three of the five days including 38% who attended every day.
- The most common reason given for use of either club was 'for childcare'.
- Children in lone parent families were more likely than those from couple families to attend breakfast clubs.
- Children in households where parents had higher levels of education and higher incomes were more likely to attend after-school clubs than those in households where parents had lower qualifications or incomes.

9.3 Type of school lunch

9.3.1 Background

What children eat during their school lunch break has been the subject of much research, debate and controversy in recent years, most notably perhaps in celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's high profile campaign to improve the nutritional content of meals provided by schools¹⁷. Since 2003, the Scottish Government has introduced a range of policy and legislation, such as The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008 aimed at improving the nutritional standard of food provided by schools in Scotland. Local authorities have also introduced programmes with similar aims. For example, Glasgow City Council have recently piloted the Big Eat In initiative, a programme designed to encourage predominantly secondary school pupils to stay within the school grounds at lunchtime, eat a healthy lunch and participate in a lunchtime activity (Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2011).

School-provided meals are not the only focus of this debate however. On average, around half of school pupils in the UK take a packed lunch to school (Gregory *et al*, 2000). Recent research with 8 to 9-year-old children attending primary schools across the UK (Evans *et al*, 2010) found that only 1% of packed lunches met the nutritional standards set for school meals.

The interest in what children eat at school is not without purpose. Data from GUS suggest that at age 6, not long after they have started school, 22% of Scottish children are overweight or obese (Parkes *et al*, 2012). NHS statistics from the National Child Measurement Programme in England suggest that overweight and obesity increases amongst children during their time at primary school (Department of Health, 2011). Data from the 2010-11 school year indicate that 23% of children in reception class (the equivalent of Primary 1) were overweight or obese on entry to primary school rising to 33% of children in the year prior to starting secondary school. In addition, research has suggested that what children eat at lunchtime may also impact on their behaviour and educational outcomes (Golley *et al*, 2010).

Whilst data from GUS do not allow consideration of the nutritional content of what children eat during school lunch breaks, the questions asked do allow consideration of differences in uptake of school meals versus packed lunches amongst children with different characteristics.

9.3.2 Findings

The proportion of children who took different types of school lunch are shown in Figure 9-A. As the graph shows, most children (53%) in Primary 1 and 2 take a packed lunch with slightly fewer (43%) choosing a school meal. Very few children went home for lunch.

¹⁷ <http://www.jamieoliver.com/school-dinners/>

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Figure 9-A Type of school lunch taken

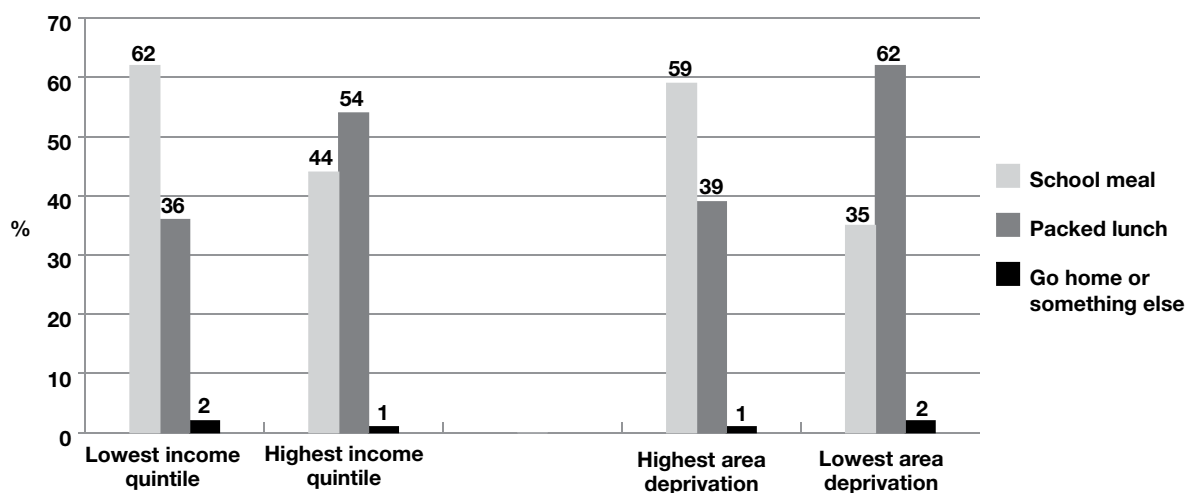


Bases: weighted = 2186, unweighted = 2188

Family socio-economic and area characteristics were closely associated with type of school lunch. Children from more disadvantaged circumstances were more likely to have school meals and less likely to have packed lunches than those in more advantaged circumstances. For example, as shown in Figure 9-B, 62% of children in the lowest income group took school meals for lunch compared with 44% of children in the highest income group. In contrast, 54% of children in the highest income group took packed lunches compared with 36% of those in the lowest income group.

These differences largely reflect the policy on eligibility for free school lunches. Parents can claim free school lunches for their children if they are receiving certain welfare benefits or tax credits though more recent legislation enabled local authorities to provide free lunches to all P1-P3 pupils from August 2010¹⁸. Whilst not all children who are eligible for free lunches necessarily take them (Scottish Government, 2009), enough do so to influence the pattern observed.

Figure 9-B Type of school lunch taken by household income and area deprivation



Bases: lowest income quintile – weighted = 500, unweighted = 422; highest income quintile – weighted = 346, unweighted = 396; highest area deprivation – weighted = 484, unweighted = 386; lowest area deprivation – weighted = 444, unweighted = 500

¹⁸ Note that the GUS data used here pre-dates this policy change.

9.4 Travel to school

9.4.1 Background

Scotland has a relatively poor record for health and physical activity, including amongst children and young people. In its *Route Map Towards Healthy Weight* (Scottish Government, 2010), the Scottish Government identifies an increase in ‘active travel’ when making local journeys as one of the key pathways through which an increase in physical activity and a decrease in overweight and obesity can be achieved. Indeed, active travel also plays a significant role in the Scottish Government’s physical activity strategy (Physical Activity Task Force, 2003).

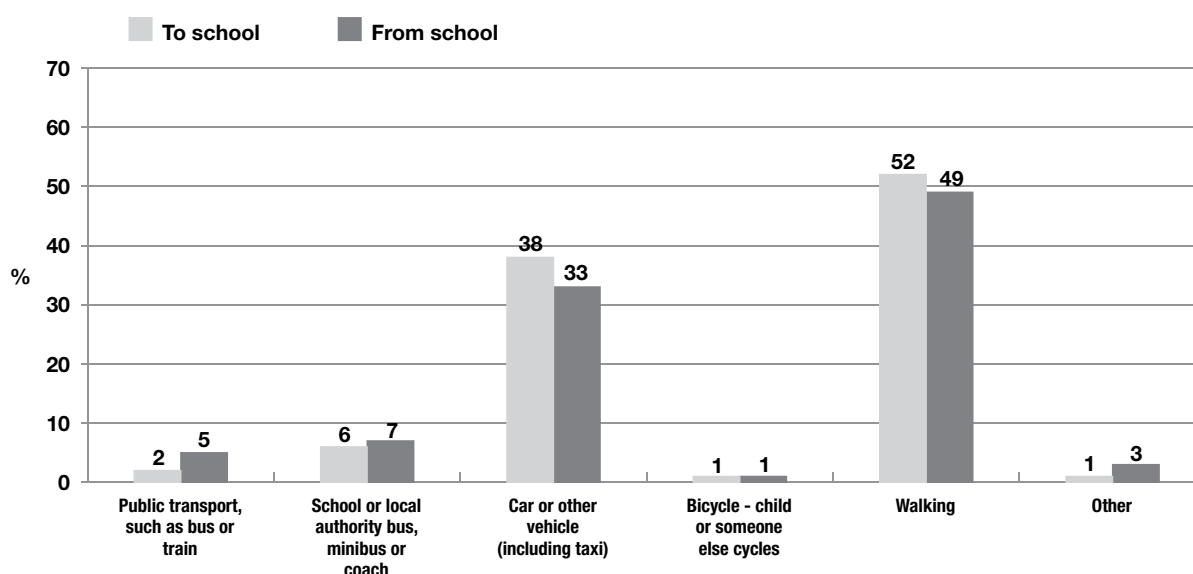
One journey highlighted as offering potential for change, and which has been the focus of funding and development in recent years, is the journey to school. GUS data permit an exploration of the home-to-school journeys of children in P1 and P2 and how the mode of transport varies according to key family and area characteristics.

9.4.2 Findings

The proportion of children using different modes of transport for their journey to and from school is shown in Figure 9-C. Around half of all children walk to and from school. Travel by car is the next most common method with around two-fifths (38%) making the journey to school by car and around one-third (33%) using the car for the journey home.

For some children the method used for both journeys is different, though for most it is the same. Children who travel to school by public transport are most likely to use a different method for the journey home – 15% return home by car and 11% by walking. Eighty-three per cent of children who travel to school by car also return home by car. The remainder largely walk home. Almost all children (95%) who walk to school also walk home.

Figure 9-C Modes of transport used for journey to and from school



Bases: weighted = 2187, unweighted = 2189

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Mode of transport used for the journey to school varies according to area characteristics including deprivation and urban-rural classification. Differences by area deprivation quintile are shown in Table 9.1 and those for urban-rural classification in Table 9.2. As the data for all children mask differences in car ownership by area deprivation and urban-rural classification, results have been displayed separately for those families who own a car.

Table 9.1 Modes of transport used for journey to school by area deprivation and car ownership

	All children					Families with access to a car				
	Least deprived %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Most deprived %	Least deprived %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Most deprived %
Public transport, such as bus or train	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	3	1	1
School or local authority bus, minibus or coach	4	9	10	3	4	4	9	11	3	2
Car or other vehicle (including taxi)	40	46	43	36	28	40	48	47	47	43
Bicycle – child or someone else cycles	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Walking	52	42	42	58	64	51	40	38	47	52
Other	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	1
<i>Bases</i>										
<i>Weighted</i>	444	451	432	375	484	432	430	384	267	293
<i>Unweighted</i>	500	504	459	339	386	489	486	420	252	250

Looking first at the data for all children, making the journey by car is significantly more common amongst children living in an area in the least deprived quintile than it is for children in the most deprived quintile. However, the relationship is not completely linear as those children living in areas in the second and third quintiles are slightly more likely to make the journey by car than are those in the first quintile. The pattern is opposite for walking, with children living in areas in the two most deprived quintiles more likely to walk than children living in areas in the other three quintiles. Children living in areas in the 2nd and 3rd quintiles are least likely to walk.

Turning to the data on modes used amongst only those families with access to a car, it is clear that variations in car ownership by area deprivation are key to influencing school journey decisions¹⁹. After controlling for car ownership, the variations by area deprivation are considerably less. Indeed, amongst families with access to a car, there is no significant difference in the proportion of children who go to school by car or who walk between those living in the least deprived areas and those in the most deprived areas.

Variations by the urban-rural classification of the area in which the child lives are shown in Table 9.2. Due to small numbers in some of the remote and rural categories the two remote and two accessible categories have been combined.

¹⁹ Families in less deprived and rural areas are more likely to own a car than those in more deprived and/or urban areas.

Table 9.2 Modes of transport used for journey to school by area urban-rural characteristics and car ownership

	All children				Families with access to a car			
	Large urban %	Other urban %	Accessible small town or rural %	Remote small town or rural %	Large urban %	Other urban %	Accessible small town or rural %	Remote small town or rural %
Public transport, such as bus or train	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	3
School or local authority bus, minibus or coach	4	5	8	17	4	5	8	18
Car or other vehicle (including taxi)	39	39	37	40	47	46	41	43
Bicycle – child or someone else cycles	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Walking	53	53	52	40	46	47	46	35
Other	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
<i>Bases</i>								
<i>Weighted</i>	768	734	514	170	606	595	454	152
<i>Unweighted</i>	700	718	566	204	582	612	517	186

As may be expected, key differences in the data are between children who live in remote areas and those who do not. Amongst all children, those who live in remote areas are significantly less likely to walk and significant more likely to use a school bus to make the journey to school than are children living in all other area types. This simply reflects the likely longer distances between children's homes and their schools in these areas. Car use patterns remain broadly similar amongst those families with access to a car with similarly high proportions in this group in remote areas using a school bus as compared with families in other areas. Given that almost all families in remote areas own a car (89%), the similar patterns between the 'all children' and 'car owner' groups are to be expected.

9.5 Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs

9.5.1 Background

Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs fulfil a range of functions for the children who attend them and parents who use them. In relation to the latter, whilst the provision of a free or subsidised breakfast in a school or community-based setting is core to the service, breakfast clubs are also designed to "incorporate a range of additional social, health, education and childcare elements into healthy breakfast provision" (Scottish Community Diet Project, 2004). The provision of breakfast clubs in Scotland grew steadily from the mid-1990s (Cassels and Stewart *et al*, 2002) and they have featured as key elements in successive policies aimed at improving children's healthy eating habits such as Hungry for Success (Scottish Executive, 2002) and Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008.

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After-school clubs are generally geared towards the provision of care for children following the end of the school day until they are able to be collected by parents who may be in employment, education or training. Such services often also provide childcare for school-aged children during school holidays and may be operated by voluntary organisations using parent management or advisory groups, community businesses, local authorities or health authorities. After-school clubs provide children with a range of activities and play equipment often different to, but complementing, the school curriculum as well as the opportunity to socialise and play with other children.

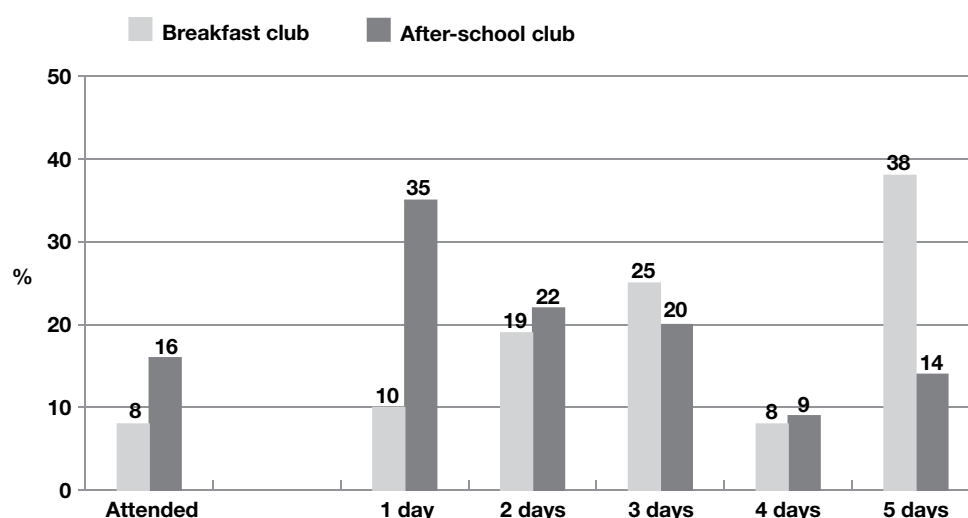
GUS collects information on parents' use of regular childcare for the cohort child and on reaching school age, information is collected on use of breakfast and after-school clubs for this purpose. However, the data considered in this section is drawn from a set of questions specifically about use and awareness of breakfast and after-school clubs asked of parents of children in the child cohort at sweep 4, around the time when the child was aged 6 and in Primary 1 or 2.

9.5.2 Findings

The proportion of children who attend breakfast clubs and who attend after-school clubs, as well as the number of days attended, is displayed in Figure 9-D. Children were considerably more likely to attend an after-school club than a breakfast club though most did not attend either. Just 8% attended a breakfast club, 16% attended an after-school club.

Amongst those children who attended an after-school club, most (57%) did so on only one or two days – indeed the most common attendance pattern was on one day only (35%). Children who went to breakfast club tended to do this over multiple days each week. Almost three-quarters (71%) attended on three of the five days including 38% who attended every day.

A little over three-quarters (77%) of breakfast clubs were situated on school premises, considerably more so than after-school clubs where around half (55%) were on school premises. There was some overlap between children who attended either club – for example, one-quarter of children who attended an after-school club also attended a breakfast club.

Figure 9-D Attendance at breakfast and after-school clubs and number of days attended

Bases: Attended – all children, weighted = 2187, unweighted = 2189; Number of days – breakfast club, weighted = 195, unweighted = 186; Number of days – after-school club, weighted = 359, unweighted = 377

Parents who used either club were asked to indicate, from a list provided, their main reasons for doing so (see Table 9.3). Reasons differed slightly between breakfast and after-school clubs.

Table 9.3 Reasons for using breakfast and after-school clubs

Reason for using breakfast club	Percentage of parents using breakfast club
For childcare	68
So he/she can socialise with friends	33
To have breakfast	22
It gives him/her an opportunity for informal learning	3
Other reason	7
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	195
<i>Unweighted</i>	186
Reason for using after-school club	Percentage of parents using after-school club
For childcare	75
So he/she can socialise with friends	33
It gives him/her an opportunity to get involved in sports/activities	20
It gives him/her space to do and support with his/her homework	10
It gives him/her an opportunity for additional learning	6
Other reason	8
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	359
<i>Unweighted</i>	377

Note: parents could select multiple responses, summed percentages will not equal 100%.

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As shown in Table 9.3, the most common reason given for use of either club was ‘for childcare’. This was slightly more common as a reason for using after-school clubs than breakfast clubs. Similar proportions of breakfast club and after-school club users – around a third for each club – cited the opportunity for the child to socialise as a reason. A little over one-fifth (22%) of those using breakfast clubs said they used it for the child to have breakfast. A similar proportion said the chance for the child to participate in sports or activities was a key reason for using an after-school club.

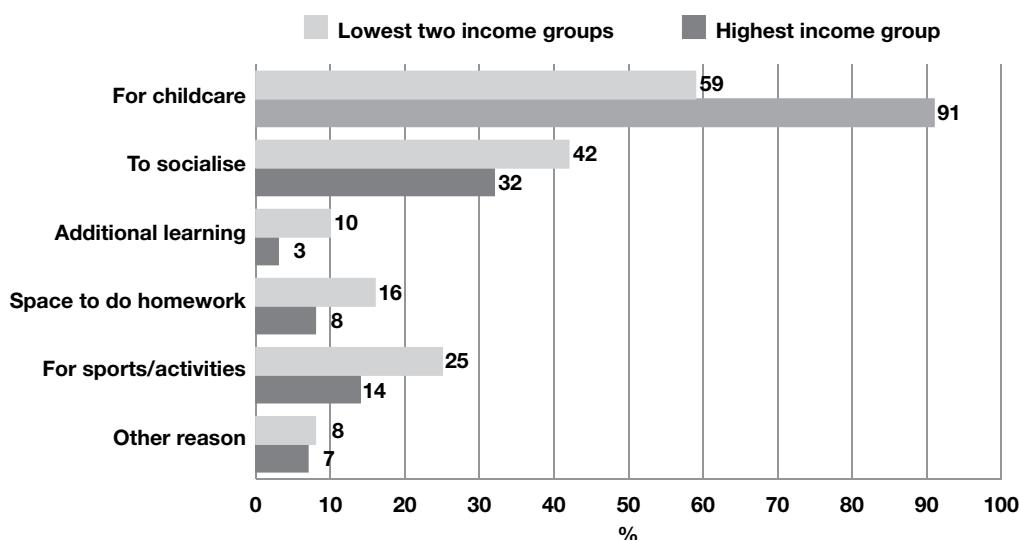
Use of breakfast and after-school clubs varied according to key socio-economic characteristics of the family. The use of breakfast clubs did not differ significantly according to parental education level or household income, but there were some small differences by parental employment and other factors. Children in households where no parent was working were more likely to attend a breakfast club than were children in households where parents were employed (12% compared with 10% in households with a parent in part-time employment and 8% in households where a parent was in full-time employment). Children in lone parent families were more likely than those from couple families to attend breakfast clubs (12% compared with 8%) as were those in large urban areas when compared with children in other urban-rural area types.

Different characteristics were associated with use of after-school clubs and breakfast clubs. Children in households where parents had higher levels of education and higher incomes were more likely to attend after-school clubs than those in household where parents had lower qualifications or incomes. Thirty per cent of children from families in the highest income group attended an after-school club compared with 13% of those from families in the lowest income group. Despite ‘childcare’ being a more prominent reason for use of after-school clubs, there were no statistically significant variations in use between households where parents were employed full-time and those who were employed part-time or were not working. Differences did exist according to area deprivation with use higher amongst families living in areas with lower deprivation.

The small numbers involved make it difficult to consider differences in reasons given for use of breakfast clubs between parents with different socio-economic characteristics. However, it is possible to give some tentative consideration of this in relation to after-school clubs.

Figure 9-E displays the reasons given for using after-school clubs by level of household income. To increase the base size, responses from the bottom two income groups have been combined.

The graph shows that the dominant reason for using an after-school club given by parents in the highest income group was for childcare – 9 in 10 parents cited this reason. This is considerably higher than the 6 in 10 (59%) parents in the lower income group. Lower income parents were significantly more likely to say they used the after-school club for the child to socialise, experience additional learning opportunities and do homework, and for sports or activities. A similar pattern was evident according to area deprivation with childcare being the dominant reason amongst parents living in less deprived areas.

Figure 9-E Reasons for use of after-school clubs by level of household income

Bases: lowest two income groups – weighted = 109, unweighted = 95; highest income group – weighted = 103, unweighted = 121

Those parents who were not using an after-school club were asked whether they thought there was one available locally that they could use. Combining their responses with those who were actually using an after-school club indicates that three-quarters of parents were either using or knew of an after-school club in their area. Those not using a club (84% of all parents) were also asked why. For the most part, parents said they were simply not interested (88%) although a small proportion (4%) indicated there were no places available at their local club. Amongst parents who were not using an after-school club and were not aware of any such clubs operating locally (22% of all parents), around two-fifths (42%, or 9% of all parents) said that if an after-school club did operate locally they would use it, suggesting a small unmet need for this service.

10.1 Introduction

This chapter examines reported levels of satisfaction with the child's school and variations in satisfaction levels by themes explored in earlier chapters, including school choice/ allocation, information received from the school, confidence in helping the child with school work, contact with the school and level of involvement. Variations according to area and parental characteristics will also be explored. The chapter first looks at bivariate relationships between satisfaction levels and school factors and parental and area characteristics. Logistic regression analysis is then used to assess the relationship between satisfaction and various background characteristics (school-related, parental and area), while controlling for other factors. This allows us to assess which factors are independently associated with a 'very satisfied' rating.

Understanding the factors that drive parental satisfaction with schools enables causes of dissatisfaction to be addressed and/or high levels of satisfaction to be maintained. Previous research in Scotland (findings from the Scottish Household Survey 2009/2010 [Scottish Government, 2011]) indicated parents had very high levels of overall satisfaction with the education provided by their child's school – 91% of all parents with school-aged children strongly agreed/tended to agree that they were satisfied with the education provided by their child's school. This did not differ by area deprivation, and only small differences by urban/ rural location were found – those in remote rural areas reported slightly lower levels of overall satisfaction (88%).

10.2 Key findings

- Overall parental satisfaction with the child's school is very high: 97% of parents responded that they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the school (71% 'very' and 26% 'fairly').
- In the bivariate analysis, school-related factors are generally associated with satisfaction in the expected way: for example greater parental involvement in school activities, receipt of information from the school about the child's learning, and approachability of teachers were all associated with higher reported satisfaction.
- In the bivariate analysis, patterns of association between parental and area characteristics and levels of satisfaction were more mixed, though some did emerge: for example, parents of 'non-white' background were less likely to say that they were very satisfied with the school compared to 'white' parents (62% and 71% respectively).
- When analysed controlling for other factors in the multivariate logistic regression, most associations of parental and area characteristics with satisfaction disappeared, though couple families had greater odds of being 'very satisfied' compared to lone parents and lower levels of socio-economic classification had a varied effect on the odds of being 'very satisfied' compared to those in managerial and professional occupations.

- The multivariate analysis showed many school-related factors were independently associated with parents' satisfaction, again mostly in the expected direction. Examples are that those not having received information from the school on how to help the child's learning had lower odds of reporting they were 'very satisfied' compared to those that had; and those who felt it was or would be less easy to approach teachers had lower odds of saying they were 'very satisfied' compared to those who thought it 'very easy'.

10.3 Exploring satisfaction by school-related factors

Parents were asked how satisfied they were with the education received by the study child at his/her current school. The majority of parents (71%) were very satisfied with the current school while 2% were fairly or very dissatisfied.

Table 10.1 Levels of satisfaction

Satisfaction	Percentage of parents
Very satisfied	71
Fairly satisfied	26
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	2
Fairly or very dissatisfied	2
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3623
<i>Unweighted</i>	3627

In this section we examine the bivariate relationships between the satisfaction indicator and various school-related factors. The 'neither satisfied or dissatisfied' category and the 'fairly or very dissatisfied' category are combined for this analysis due to low numbers of responses in these categories.

Table 10.2 shows that in the GUS cohort (the findings were only statistically significant at the 90% level) there were differences in satisfaction by whether a place was requested at a particular school or allocated by the local authority. A slightly higher proportion of parents who requested a place were very satisfied with the school (72% compared to 70% of parents whose children were allocated a place). Conversely, those parents whose children were allocated a place by the local authority were more likely to be in the least satisfied categories.

Table 10.2 Satisfaction by whether requested or allocated a place

Childcare type	Percentage of parents	
	Requested	Allocated
Very satisfied	72	70
Fairly satisfied	26	27
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied	2	4
<i>Bases</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	1165	2416
<i>Unweighted</i>	1123	2454

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Parents who were confident in helping their child in all homework subjects or tasks were more likely to be very satisfied with their child's school (73%) than those parents who were not confident, either in some or all subjects (57%).

The higher the involvement in school activities (as measured by the number of activities or events the parents were involved in) the more likely the parent was to be very satisfied with the child's school. 63% of parents who had only been involved in one activity or event at the school, or none at all, reported being very satisfied with the school, compared to 77% of parents who had been involved in six or more activities or events.

A higher proportion of parents who had contact with the school through the child's school report, receiving information on the child's progress, or receiving information about what subjects their child was learning were very satisfied with the school compared to those parents who had not had contact with the school in these ways. There was no difference in the proportion answering very satisfied between parents who had received an attendance report and those parents who had not.

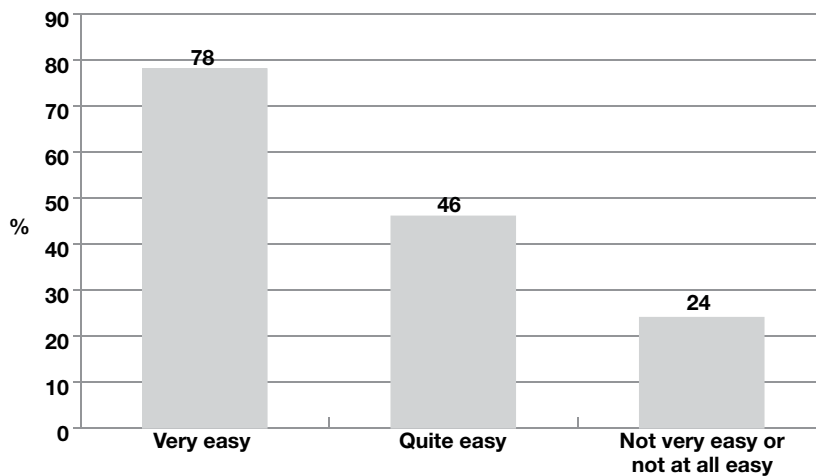
Table 10.3 Satisfaction by types of contact with the school

Information from school	Percentage answering very satisfied	
	Not mentioned	Mentioned
School report	67.8	72.8
Attendance report	71.6	71.2
Child's progress	65.0	72.7
Subjects learned	60.0	74.1
None of these	71.8	61.8
<i>Bases</i>		
School report		
<i>Weighted</i>	702	1780
<i>Unweighted</i>	680	1814
Attendance report		
<i>Weighted</i>	1370	1112
<i>Unweighted</i>	1356	1138
Child's progress		
<i>Weighted</i>	424	2057
<i>Unweighted</i>	384	2110
Subjects learned		
<i>Weighted</i>	475	2007
<i>Unweighted</i>	429	2065
None of these		
<i>Weighted</i>	2378	104
<i>Unweighted</i>	2407	87

Similarly, more parents who had received information and advice from a teacher or the school about how to help their child with his/her learning at home (not just in relation to the homework they receive) were very satisfied with the school than those parents who had not (74% and 64% respectively, data not shown). However, those parents who had spoken to any teachers about how their child was doing at school outside of parents' evenings or similar events were less likely to be very satisfied with the school than those parents who had not (68% compared to 74%, data not shown).

There was a marked difference in the proportion of parents reporting they were very satisfied with the school by how easy they felt it was or would be to approach a teacher, and also by how useful they found parents' evenings. 78% of those parents who found it very easy to approach a teacher (or thought it would be very easy) were very satisfied with the school, compared to 46% of those who found it quite easy and 25% of those who found it not very easy or not at all easy. 83% of those parents who found parents' evenings very useful reported being very satisfied with the school, compared to 33% of parents who found parents' evenings not very useful or not at all useful.

Figure 10-A Percentage of parents reporting they were very satisfied with the school by how easy they felt it was or would be to approach a teacher

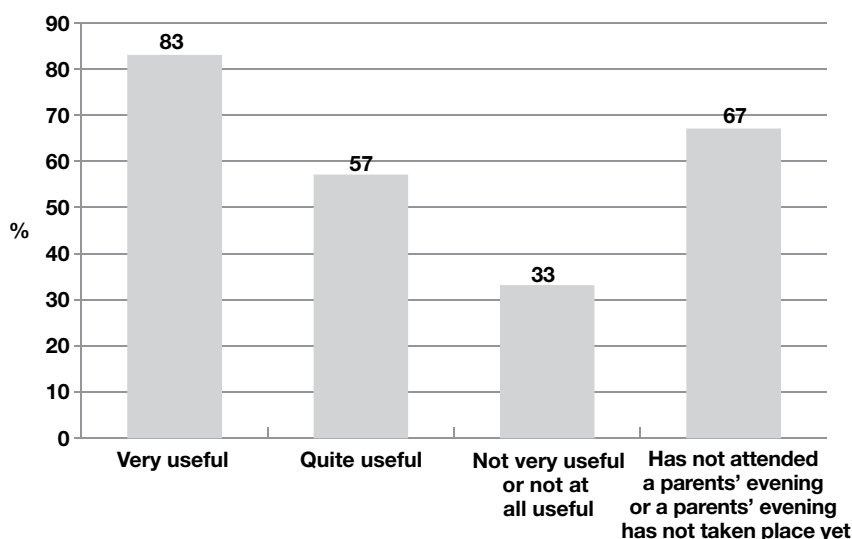


Bases: weighted: 3623; unweighted: 3627

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Figure 10-B Percentage of parents reporting they were very satisfied with the school by how useful they found parents' evenings



Bases: weighted: 3623; unweighted: 3627

10.4 Exploring satisfaction by parental and area characteristics

The relationship between satisfaction with the child's school and various parental and area characteristics are explored in this section.

The number of children in the household and family type were both related to parents reporting being very satisfied with their child's school. Families with four or more children and lone parent families were both less likely to report being very satisfied with the school.

Overall satisfaction was similar for ethnicity but those of 'non-white' background were less likely to express being very satisfied with the school (see Table 10.4).

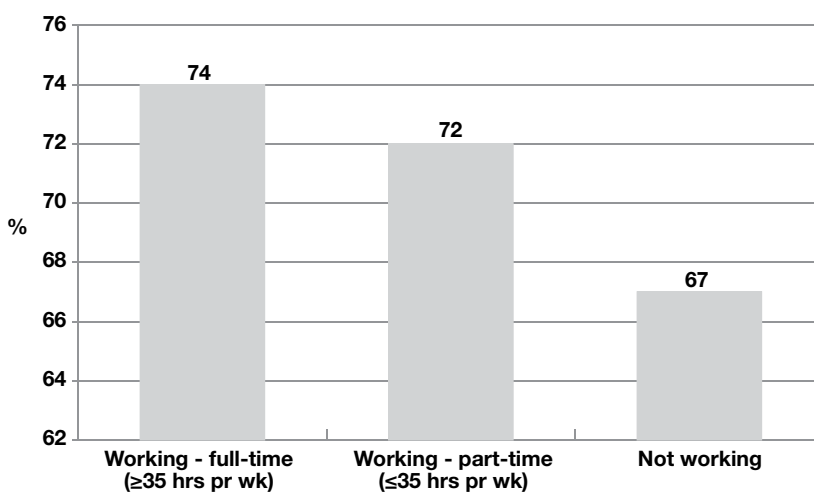
Table 10.4 Satisfaction by respondent ethnicity

Ethnicity of respondent	Percentage of parents	
	White	'Non-white'
Very satisfied	71	62
Fairly satisfied	26	35
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied	3	3
<i>Bases</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	3488	128
<i>Unweighted</i>	3523	98

There was no significant relationship between socio-economic status (quintiles of SIMD, NS-SEC groups and income quintiles) and the percentage of parents reporting being very satisfied with their child's school. However, those parents not in work were less likely than full-time or part-time working parents to report being very satisfied (see Figure 10-C).

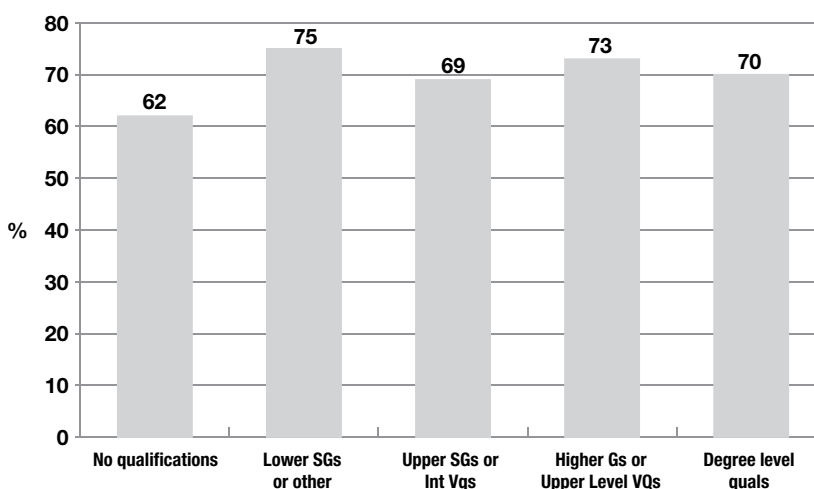
Qualification levels and tenure were also related to being very satisfied with the child's school. Parents who were in social rented accommodation were less likely than parents in owner occupied accommodation or privately rented accommodation to report being very satisfied with their child's school. The relationship with parental qualifications was not as clear-cut. The lowest percentage of parents reporting being very satisfied was amongst parents with no qualifications. However, the highest percentage was amongst parents with lower Standard Grades or other qualifications (see Figure 10-D).

Figure 10-C Percentage of parents reporting they were very satisfied with the school by employment status



Bases: weighted: 3623; unweighted: 3627

Figure 10-D Percentage of parents reporting they were very satisfied with the school by highest qualification



Bases: weighted: 3623; unweighted: 3627

Neither the respondent's age nor urban/rural location were related to reporting being very satisfied with the child's school.

10.5 Multivariate analysis

In the previous sections, relationships between various socio-demographics and satisfaction, and between various school-related factors and satisfaction were examined in isolation. In this section we extend the analysis to look at these relationships while controlling for other factors. Multivariate logistic regression allows us to assess which factors are independently associated with lower satisfaction – specifically we compare those who say they are ‘very satisfied’ with the other categories of satisfaction. As a rough check on whether the single satisfaction question is a reasonable measure it was compared to several factors that might also reflect satisfaction with the school. This comparison suggested that the single question is a reasonable measure: for example, higher overall satisfaction was associated with factors such as parents finding the pace of learning for the child ‘about right’ and agreeing with the statement that the teacher supports the child.

A summary of the factors which remained significant in the logistic regression analysis is provided in Table 10.5²⁰. Confidence in helping the child with their homework, receipt of information about how to help them learn, the usefulness of parents’ evenings and approachability of teachers were significant predictors of being very satisfied with the school once other variables were controlled for. In contrast, parents that had not spoken to teachers about how their child was doing at school outside of parents’ evenings or similar events were more likely to be very satisfied with the school than parents who had. Socio-economic status (NS-SEC) became a significant predictor of satisfaction once other variables were controlled for, and family type remained a significant predictor, with couple families having greater odds of being very satisfied with the school. Other factors became non-significant in the presence of these variables. The analysis suggests that, unsurprisingly but reassuringly, the actions of the school and interaction with parents are important in driving satisfaction.

²⁰ Further details and the full regression results are available in the technical appendix.

Table 10.5 Factors independently associated with parents reporting they are 'very satisfied' with the child's school

School-related factors, parental and area characteristics	Significant*	Direction of relationship**
Confident in helping with homework (Confident in all subjects or tasks)		
Confident in some but not in others, or not confident at all	<.001	-
Family type (Lone parent)		
Couple family	<.05	+
Socio-economic classification (Managerial and professional occupations)		
Intermediate occupations	NS	
Small employers and own account workers	NS	
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	NS	
Semi-routine and routine occupations	<.01	+
Never worked	NS	
Has received information from school on how to help child's learning (Yes)		
No	<.001	-
How easy was it or would it be to approach teacher (Very easy)		
Quite easy	<.001	-
Not very or not at all easy	<.001	-
How useful found parents' evening (Very useful)		
Quite useful	<.001	-
Not very useful or not at all useful	<.001	-
Has not attended a parents' evening or a parents' evening has not taken place yet	<.05	-
Has spoken to any teachers about how their child is doing at school outside of parents' evenings or similar events (Yes)		
No	<.001	+

* Statistical significance is presented either as 'Not Significant' (NS) or at three levels of 'confidence' – 95% (<.05), 99% (<.01) or 99.9% (<.001).

**A plus sign (+) indicates the characteristic is associated with greater odds of being very satisfied with the school and a minus sign (-) indicates the characteristic is associated with lower odds of being very satisfied with the school. The reference sub-group is indicated in brackets. Where the variable is not significant, the direction of the relationship has not been included.

PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS AND ATTITUDES TO SCHOOLING

11.1 Introduction

Previous research has shown that the attitudes of parents (and children themselves) may predict later educational achievement. However, this association is complex. Parents with higher levels of education tend to have higher expectations for their child's achievements, but these parents will also tend to have children who already attain more highly. Parents' perceptions of their child's ability may also affect their aspirations for the child, and parents with higher aspirations are more likely to be involved in their child's education (Goodman and Gregg, 2010).

Other research has shown that parental aspirations and expectations play a role in child achievement, even when taking into account other factors. For example, analysis from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) indicates that parental aspirations are one of the factors contributing to differences in educational attainment amongst primary school children. However, these aspirations often differed according to parents' socio-economic characteristics. For example, 81% of the richest mothers indicated that they would like their child to go to university compared with 37% of the poorest mothers (Goodman and Gregg, 2010).

Parents' aspirations for their children can also change over time. Research for the Department for Children, School and Families has shown that parents have very high aspirations when their children are young but that these aspirations fall as the child gets older (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008).

11.2 Key findings

- 88% of parents would like their child to attend college/university.
- Parents who were themselves degree-educated, were more likely to want their child to go to university (91%) than were those with no qualifications (84%).
- Parents of girls were slightly more likely to want their child to attend college/university than parents of boys (91% compared to 86%).
- Compared with those whose children had no additional support needs, parents of children with additional needs were more likely not to mind how far their child goes in education (4% compared with 7%).
- The most prevalent aspiration amongst parents, was that they would like their child to be in full-time employment by their mid-twenties (82% of parents would like this).
- Parents of boys were more likely to want their child to have a full-time job compared to parent of girls (85% versus 80%).
- There was also support amongst parents for their child to have gone travelling (64%) and to have left home (41%).

11.3 Educational aspirations

At age 6, parents were asked how far in school they would like their child to go in education. As can be seen in Table 11.1, almost nine out of ten respondents (88%) indicated that they would like their child to attend college or university. This is perhaps a reflection of the UK policy drive to encourage greater take-up of further education and widen access. However, it could also reflect the trend described in the literature where parental aspirations tend to be very high when children are young and lower as the child gets older. This trend could be for a variety of reasons, such as greater evidence of the child's abilities or due to financial constraints.

Table 11.1 How far parents would like their child to go in education

Level of education	percentage of birth cohort
Attend college or university	88
Achieve Higher Grades	6
Don't mind	4
Achieve Standard Grades	2
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3650
<i>Unweighted</i>	3650

Differences in educational aspirations were examined by a number of different socio-demographic characteristics of the household (household income and NS-SEC), respondent (education, employment status), partner (education and employment status) and the cohort child (gender, and additional support needs).

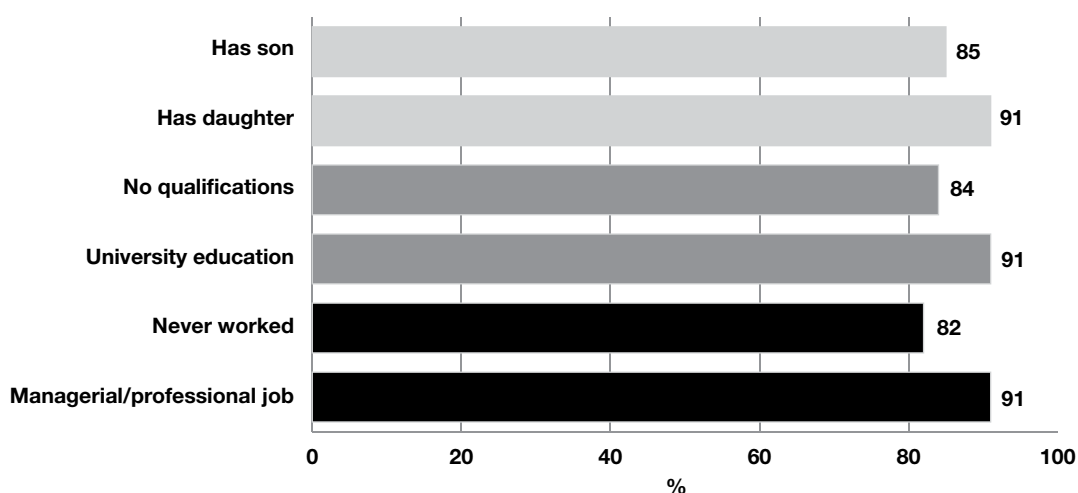
The biggest (and statistically significant) differences in educational aspirations were related to household NS-SEC, respondent's level of education and the cohort child's gender. These are shown in Figure 11-A. As the graph shows, over nine out of ten parents (91%) in households with a parent in a professional/managerial position wanted their child to go to college or university compared with around eight out of ten (82%) parents in households where no-one had ever worked. Similarly high levels of desire for a college or university education were observed amongst parents who themselves were degree-educated – 91% who had a degree or above said they would like to see their child attend university/college compared with 84% of those respondents with no qualifications.

Aspirations were slightly higher for girls than they were for boys. Ninety-one per cent of parents of girls wanted their child to attend college or university compared with 85% of parents of boys. These differences in aspirations between the sexes may be due to differences in perceptions of ability between parents of girls and parents of boys, perceptions which reflect observed differences in ability between boys and girls in the early years. Previous research from GUS and from the Millennium Cohort Study shows that at ages 3, 5 and 7, on average girls have higher cognitive ability than boys (Bromley, 2009; Hansen, 2008; Hansen *et al*, 2010). In addition, boys are more likely than girls to have difficulties with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties at entry to primary school (Bradshaw and Tipping, 2010).

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Figure 11-A Percentage of parents who want their child to attend university by selected parental characteristics



Overall, 4% of parents did not mind how far their child would go in education; this was higher amongst parents of children with additional support needs of whom 7% indicated that they did not mind how far their children went in education. No other statistically significant differences were observed.

11.4 Life aspirations

Respondents were asked a further question which looked at aspirations more broadly, incorporating thoughts about employment and family life that parents may have for their children. Respondents were asked what they would like their child to be doing, or to have done, by the time he or she had reached his or her mid-twenties. The choice of options and the proportion of parents who selected each are presented in Table 11.2.

The majority of parents (82%) said they would like their child to be in full-time employment by their mid-twenties but there was also considerable support for the child to have been travelling (64%). Forty-one per cent of parents would like their child to have left home by their mid-twenties but only 4% would like them to have started a family.

Table 11.2 Parental aspiration for child to have done by mid-twenties

Activity/achievement	Percentage of birth cohort
In full-time job	82
Been travelling	64
Left home	41
Volunteered	10
Had a family	4
In family business	2
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3642
<i>Unweighted</i>	3640

The life aspirations that parents had for their child were examined by a number of different parental and child characteristics.

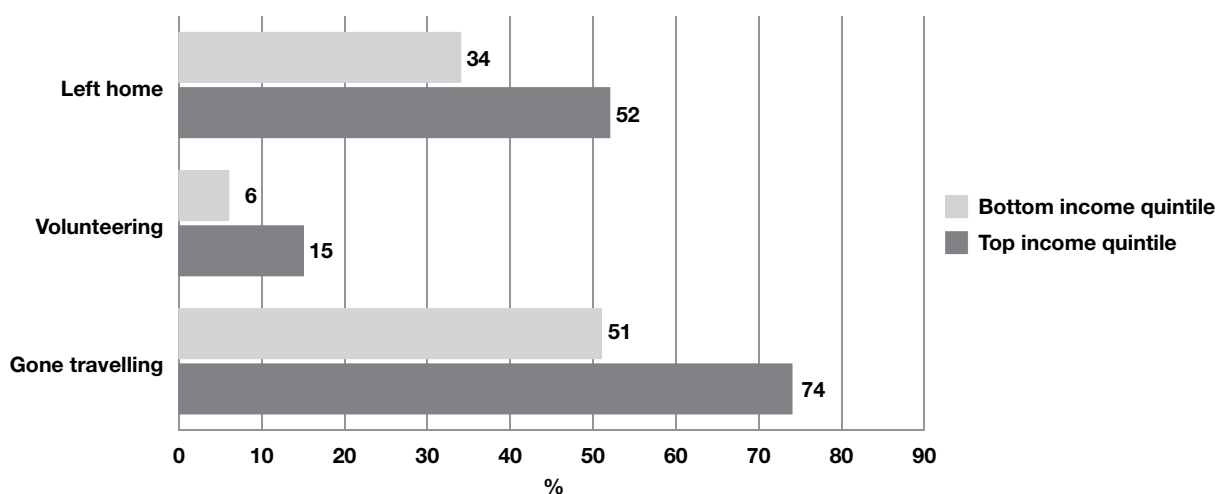
In terms of employment-related aspirations, no real differences were seen by household NS-SEC, parent's education level nor the respondent's employment status. However, there were slight variations in the extent to which parents chose the option 'being in a full-time job' by whether the child was a boy or girl – 85% of parents of boys would like their child to have a full-time job compared with 80% of parents of girls.

The wish for their child to leave home increased with household income; 34% of parents from the bottom income quintile wanted this to have happened by the time their child was in his or her mid-twenties compared with 52% of those in the top income quintile (Figure 11-B). Similar trends can also be seen by the respondent's level of education. Around one-quarter (24%) of respondents with no educational qualifications wanted their child to have left home, less than half the proportion of those with a qualification at degree level who said the same (55%).

Travelling was also a more prominent choice amongst more advantaged parents. For example, 51% of parents in the lowest income quintile supported the idea of their child having travelled by their mid-twenties compared with 74% of respondents in the highest income quintile.

Although just 10% of respondents said they wanted their child to have done some volunteering work, there are some notable differences in this choice. Generally speaking, parents in more advantaged circumstances were more supportive of volunteering than were those in less advantaged circumstances. For example, 2% of respondents with no educational qualifications said would like their child to have spent some time volunteering compared with 17% of respondents with a degree or above.

Figure 11-B Selected life aspirations at mid-twenties by level of household income



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11.5 Attitudes to schooling

Data in this section were drawn from sweep 4 and sweep 6 of the birth cohort. In each of these sweeps of data collection, parents were asked a series of attitudinal questions exploring their views on different aspects of education.

Parents were asked about their attitude to the role and importance of learning different subjects at school – in particular, to what extent learning basic skills such as reading and writing was more or less important than learning other subjects. The available statements and proportion of parents who selected each are shown in Table 11.3.

Table 11.3 Attitudes towards the role and importance of learning different subjects at school, birth cohort

Attitudinal statement	Percentage that selected statement
For children, learning about other subjects and life skills is just as important as learning basic skills like reading, writing and maths	55
For children, learning basic skills like reading, writing and maths is more important than anything else	28
For children, learning about other subjects such as science, geography or music is just as important as learning basic skills like reading, writing and maths	17
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3589
<i>Unweighted</i>	3594

Fifty-five per cent of respondents thought that learning about other subjects and life skills is just as important as learning basic skills whilst 28% thought that learning basic skills such as reading, writing and maths is more important than anything else.

Respondents from lower household incomes, those with lower NS-SEC and lower educational qualifications were more likely to support the idea that learning basic skills was most important. For example, this view was reported by 41% of parents with no educational qualifications compared with 23% of parents who were degree educated.

At sweep 4, attitudes to other schooling issues were explored including mixed-faith education and the significance of gender in supporting children's education. To examine attitudes towards mixed-faith schooling, parents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "I would not mind if my child went to school where half the children were of another religion".

A little over three-quarters (77%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement and 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The only significant difference seen was according to the respondent's religion. Sixteen per cent of Roman Catholics disagreed with the statement compared with 11% of Christian (Protestant) respondents, 7% of respondents belonging to no religion and 5% of Muslims.

A further statement explored attitudes towards whether education should have a prominence for girls and boys. Parents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that: “sons in families should be given more encouragement to do well at school than daughters”.

Almost all respondents disagreed with this statement (98%). Despite the overwhelming disagreement, a small difference was evident according to the respondent’s level of education; 7% of parents with no educational qualifications agreed with the statement compared with 2% of those with a degree.

Providing many with their first experience of more formal learning, as well as being a key source of care and support, primary schools are very important places in children's lives. A child's early experience of school can influence the route they take through the education system and their success within and beyond it. It is useful, therefore, to have a detailed understanding of that early experience and how it varies from child to child.

This report has presented descriptive analysis of the considerable data which GUS has collected on children's early experiences of primary school, providing a better understanding of the factors which lead to a positive early experience of school for children, the early engagement of parents with the school and the child's teacher, and the many practical issues associated with starting school such as school choice, transport, and wrap-around care. On the whole, the data show that for most children and their parents, early experiences – across a range of domains – are positive. However, for some children, particularly those in more disadvantaged social circumstances, the experience is less positive. This has important implications for their continuing educational career.

Entry and deferral

As expected, age was found to be a key explanation behind parents choosing to defer their child's entry to school. Almost half of the children born in January or February – those who would be youngest, under 5 years old at the point of starting school – were deferred compared with almost no children whose birthdays were between March and August – those who would be oldest, aged at least 5 years old. However, age was not the only explanation. Both the child's gender and their development (as perceived by the parent) were also factors; deferrals were higher amongst boys and amongst children whose parents had concerns about their development. In fact it is likely that these relationships are themselves linked, as parents of boys are significantly more likely to report developmental concerns than are parents of girls. These findings reflect previous research using GUS which showed that around the time of school entry, parents of boys were more likely to report difficulties with their child's social, emotional and behavioural development²¹ than were parents of girls (Bradshaw and Tipping, 2010) as well as broader findings which show that boys are, on the whole, more likely to be reported with difficulties in health and development during the early years.

Perhaps surprisingly, there were no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of deferral by key parental socio-economic characteristics such as level of income or education. This finding therefore rejects any perception that more affluent parents are more likely to defer their children. However, the type of deferral did differ by parental characteristics. Discretionary referrals (those involving children born between September and December – thus not the

21 As measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997)

very youngest) were more common amongst children in more disadvantaged circumstances. Although the dominant reasons related to age and perceptions of 'readiness' remain, when compared with automatic deferrals, discretionary deferrals were significantly more likely to be for health or developmental reasons. This pattern reflects other findings from GUS which demonstrate consistently poorer health and development – for example, in relation to social, emotional and behavioural development, or cognitive development – amongst more socio-economically disadvantaged children. Indeed, deferrals for children in lower income groups were more likely than for those in higher income groups to be related to health or developmental issues or based on advice received from the child's nursery.

School choice

Proximity is the most common reason given as the main factor influencing choice of school but the school's exam results and academic reputation also appeared to be important – even at this stage. This indicates a long-term interest amongst parents evidenced elsewhere in this report, particularly in relation to aspirations. The importance attached to the exam results/academic reputation was strongly and positively associated with parental social advantage across several indicators (area deprivation, NS-SEC, equivalised income and highest level of parental qualifications). Urban/rural classification had an expected role in the importance of proximity and 'no real choice' as factors for choosing a school.

Results in relation to placing requests were perhaps a little more unexpected. Parents living in more deprived areas and those from a 'non-white' background were more likely to make placing requests, suggesting lower satisfaction with local schools among these groups. The data on satisfaction support this explanation on one count – parents of 'non-white' backgrounds were less satisfied with the child's school than were 'white' parents but there were no such differences by area deprivation. This suggests that the placing requests amongst parents living in more deprived areas are made on some other basis. This trend perhaps goes against common perception that parents in more advantaged circumstances may be more likely to seek out the optimum educational placement for their child. However, such parents are more likely to consider the local school in decisions about where to live, or to be in a position where this consideration is possible. As such, they have less need to make a placing request. Good schools are known to drive up local housing costs which will likely lead to the exclusion of some more economically disadvantaged families from those areas and thus from those schools.

Advice of some sort on enrolment was sought across the spectrum of parental and area characteristics, and although there was some variation by these factors there were no clear patterns to this. There was some indication that those with higher levels of parental qualifications were more likely to use formal sources of advice, a relationship which has been found previously using GUS data in relation to child health and parenting.

Whilst the majority of children in Scotland start Primary 1 at a state school, the variation between these schools, and thus what children experience, in terms of pupil numbers at the whole school, primary stage and class level is substantial and heavily influenced by the area in which they live. For example, children living in less deprived areas are more likely to attend

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a larger school and experience larger class sizes than those in more deprived areas. The schools attended by children living in rural areas are smaller than those in urban areas with smaller classes sizes, but these children are more likely to experience P1 in a composite class alongside children at other primary stages.

Transition to school

Irrespective of social background, children who demonstrated average or above average cognitive ability and those with no social or behavioural difficulties were more likely to have an average or above average school readiness as perceived by their parents. Cognitive and social development are two aspects often used to define school readiness. Whilst the school readiness items used in GUS did not directly measure the child's ability or development in these domains, parents' perceptions of school readiness were closely linked to their understanding of the child's cognitive and social development. The connection between child development and perceived readiness may also explain why those children who were younger than 5 and older than 5 years 6 months (and thus had been deferred) at the point of entry were less likely to receive an average or above average readiness score.

The findings do suggest that pre-school attendance is beneficial, on the whole, in preparing children for school, at least as far as parents' perceptions are concerned. Children who attended fewer hours of pre-school were less likely to have an average or above average readiness score. However, the same logic does not hold for the other group who attended for longer hours and who were also more likely to be perceived as 'less ready'. This group may in fact have other particular characteristics – explaining the greater use of pre-school provision but not otherwise controlled for in the analysis – which may be driving this relationship.

A range of previous analysis in GUS has demonstrated strong links between a child's developmental status around the time they enter pre-school and at the point they start primary school. It appears that perceptions of readiness also follow this pattern – children who were perceived as less ready for pre-school were less likely to be perceived as being ready for school. This is perhaps unsurprising given the association between perceptions of readiness and measures of social development and cognitive ability. Other GUS research has shown that the children's social and cognitive development characteristics at age 3 – around the time they start pre-school – are closely related to the same measures at age 5, when they are about to, or have just started school. This provides further evidence of the importance of early experiences in influencing outcomes and of the ability to identify support needs ahead of primary school entry.

Parental involvement in school activities

Research has shown that parental involvement in children's education from an early age is associated with educational achievement. In addition, it has been found that the more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects. Yet research has also demonstrated large differences between parents in their level of involvement in school activities.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the involvement of parents in their children's education and in the work of schools themselves. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 aims to help parents, carers and schools work together as partners in children's learning. It also places duties on schools, local authorities and the Scottish Government to make it easier for parents to become involved.

For parents with children in P1, involvement in school activities and events is generally high. Most parents reported having participated in at least one school activity or event, although participation in more formal activities such as attending a Parent Council or PTA meeting, or volunteering at the school, were much lower. In addition, there remain differences in the level of participation by various sub-groups of the population. For example lone parents, younger mothers, parents with lower educational qualifications, and parents from more deprived socio-economic circumstances had lower levels of participation. Once other factors were controlled for, measures of socio-economic disadvantage remained significant predictors of lower parental involvement. Thus, although it has been 4 years since the implementation of the Parental Involvement Act, it would appear that there is still a need to encourage and facilitate participation of those from more deprived backgrounds.

Information from and contact with the schools and teachers

Almost all parents reported receiving some information from the school on their child's progress or learning, though there were some differences in the extent to which different parents reported receiving different types of information. For example, parents in more advantaged circumstances were more likely than those in more disadvantaged circumstances to report having received information about their child's progress. Ninety-two per cent of parents in the highest income group said they had received such information compared with 77% of parents in the lowest income group. Similar patterns can also be seen according to area deprivation; those living in deprived area were less likely to receive progress information. This suggests that either the schools which children in more disadvantaged circumstances attend are less likely to provide this information in the first place, or that these parents are less likely to take note of such information when it is distributed, or indeed that it is less likely to reach them by whichever means it is sent.

Parents' evenings were widely attended by all parents, though there were some small differences, again with more disadvantaged parents being slightly less likely to have attended a parents' evening. Such events were unequivocally found to be useful however, by all parents who attended.

Ad-hoc meetings with teachers were less common – around half of parents reported speaking to their child's teacher outside of a parents evening. More variation existed in the extent to which this occurred. For example, degree-educated parents were more likely to have had such a meeting than parents' with lower or no qualifications. This may represent a greater level of interest in and concern about their child's education amongst more highly educated parents – the higher level of involvement in school activities amongst these parents has already been noted.

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The characteristics of the school also influenced these meetings. Parents whose children attended smaller schools were more likely to have spoken to their child's teacher outside of a parents' evening. This contact was also less likely to have been initiated by the parent or the school/teacher – suggesting it occurred on a more informal basis, perhaps in the playground at the end of the school day or at a school event. Such informal contact is likely to be easier when pupil numbers are lower and teachers can more easily build relationships with parents.

Contact with, and information from the school appears to be key in influencing parental satisfaction with the school. The multivariate analysis in Chapter 10 showed that, after controlling for parent and family background characteristics and area deprivation, those parents who had received less information from the school, who found communicating with teachers more difficult or who found their contact with teachers to be less useful were less likely to be 'very satisfied' with the child's school. Whilst satisfaction was generally high, it appears that improvements to channels of communication and openness between schools and parents may improve it.

Attendance and absence

Most children go to school most of the time, but, as may be expected, most also have some absence over the course of a school year. National administrative data on primary school attendance indicate that in 2010-11, 95% of all possible half days at school were attended (Scottish Government, 2011b), but GUS data suggest that 79% of children had been absent from school at least once in the previous 6 months. So whilst most children miss school at some point over the year, they tend to do so for only a short period of time.

The analysis here showed that a higher level of absence was associated with living in an area of higher deprivation, having a parent from a non-white ethnic background and having poorer adjustment to school. Children from more deprived areas also showed relatively high levels of unauthorised absence (including truancy) – 18% of children living in the 15% most deprived datazones recorded 5 or more days of unauthorised absence during their P1 year, more than double the equivalent figure of 7% for children in the remaining 85% of areas. Figures for lateness follow a similar trend. As noted earlier, existing research suggests that a child's early school experience influences their continuing educational career. This early tendency for unauthorised absence and lateness may therefore lead to the establishment of a continuing pattern for these children, leading to a poorer school experience and poorer school outcomes overall.

Additional support needs

Whether a child has Additional Support Needs (ASN) or not can strongly influence their experiences of school, and as such it is important to identify and provide for those who may need additional support.

8% of children at Primary 1 are reported as having ASN by their main carer. Boys (10%) are more likely to have ASN than are girls (4%) reflecting the known developmental differences between the two sexes reported earlier. ASN is also higher amongst children living in the

two most deprived SIMD quintiles, again reflecting patterns in child health and development already reported in GUS data.

The most common ASN reported were speech and language problems (46%), followed by social and/or behavioural problems (23%) and learning disabilities (17%). Nearly one in three (31%) children who had any ASN were reported to have more than one type of need.

Practical arrangements

It is encouraging that around half of all children in P1 and P2 walk to and from school. However, almost all of the remainder make the journey by car – 38% travel to school by car and 33% return home by car. Whilst children living in less deprived areas are more likely than those in more deprived areas to make the journey by car, this is largely explained by greater car ownership amongst families in the former group. When only families with a car are considered, the proportion making the journey by car is more similar across families in all areas. It seems therefore that there is still a significant opportunity to improve ‘active travel’ on the journey to school.

Only a minority of children attend breakfast or after-school clubs, the latter being more widely attended than the former. Whilst both provide a source of before and after-school care for parents, they each have a slightly different focus. The provision of a free or subsidised breakfast in a school or community-based setting is core to the breakfast club and they have featured as key elements in programmes aimed at improving children’s healthy eating. After-school clubs are more geared towards the provision of care for children following the end of the school day until they are able to be collected by parents who may be in employment, education or training.

Given their different focus, it is perhaps unsurprising that patterns of use vary amongst different parents. Use of breakfast clubs was slightly more common in households with no parent employed and in lone parent households suggesting greater use amongst children in more disadvantaged circumstances – though there were no differences in use by household income or parental education level suggesting that the distinction is not simply one of disadvantage. Thus, some further analysis of the circumstances and characteristics of children who use these clubs would be worthwhile if there are plans to broaden their reach.

Children in households where parents had higher levels of education and higher incomes were more likely to attend after-school clubs than those in household where parents had lower qualifications or incomes. These patterns may reflect two issues: parental employment patterns amongst higher income and higher educated households which require the use of after-school care, and the cost of after-school clubs. The analysis showed that use of after-school clubs was not significantly different amongst households where parents worked full-time, part-time or were not working. However, because after-school clubs attract a cost, it may be that only those families where parents work and are higher earners can afford to use them. Further analysis, including of the more detailed childcare data collected on GUS, is necessary to explore and explain these patterns in more detail.

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Satisfaction with the school

Understanding the factors that drive parental satisfaction with schools enables causes of dissatisfaction to be addressed and/or high levels of satisfaction to be maintained. The analysis of this data provided very positive results: 97% of parents were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the school (71% 'very' and 27% 'fairly').

There were few notable variations in levels of satisfaction according to parental background or area characteristics. The few that were initially observed did not remain significant in the multivariate analysis. Instead, as noted above, school related factors appeared to be more important in influencing parents' satisfaction with the school. For example, parents who had not received information from the school on how to help the child's learning were less likely than those that had to say they were 'very satisfied', and those who felt it was or would be less easy to approach teachers were less likely than those who thought it was 'very easy' to say they were 'very satisfied'.

Parental aspirations and attitudes to schooling

Parents' aspirations for their children were high – almost all would like their child to attend college or university. This pattern applied across all key sub-groups, though there were some small variations – for example, parents who were themselves degree-educated, were more likely to want their child to go to college or university (91%) than were those with no qualifications (84%). This may reflect both a wider perception of increased access to further and higher education for children from all backgrounds, but also an understanding amongst all parents that academic or vocational study beyond school will be necessary for their children when they get to that stage.

Parents had a range of broader wishes for what they would like their child to have done by the time he or she had reached early adulthood. Most parents said they would like their child to be in full-time employment but a majority of parents were also hoping their child would have gone travelling before their mid-twenties. Housing costs and difficulties for first-time buyers as well as the expense now associated with further study have perhaps lead most parents to expect their child will still be at home in their mid-twenties – a perception which the current economic situation is also likely to affect.

In terms of differences in aspirations amongst different parents, of particular note are those differences observed by the child's gender. There were some results which suggest that some parents view particular roles for males and females in adult life. For example, parents of girls were slightly more likely to want their child to attend college/university than parents of boys. This may reflect the generally better developmental position which girls have assumed at this early age in terms of their health, cognitive ability and social development. As a result, parents of girls may believe their child has greater academic potential. In contrast, parents of boys were more likely to want their child to have a full-time job compared with parents of girls. Thus girls may be less likely to be seen as being in full-time employment perhaps because they are perceived more likely to be pursuing further or higher education. However, this second finding may also indicate the notion amongst some parents that males will be working full-time because they are more likely to assume the 'breadwinner' role.

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