



Parents' satisfaction with schools

Better
education
and care

Age group	Published	Reference no.
Primary and secondary	March 2006	HMI 2634

© Crown copyright 2005

Document reference number: HMI 2634

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Contents

Executive summary	1
Key findings	3
Evaluation	4
What are the levels of parents' satisfaction and have they improved over time?	4
What is the link between parents' satisfaction and outcomes for pupils?	8
How do judgements about the effectiveness and ethos of the school relate to parents' satisfaction?	9
Links with parents in schools causing concern	13
Notes	13
Annex. Data to support text	15

Executive summary

A very high proportion of parents are satisfied with the school that their child attends, and the quality of links with parents has improved steadily in recent years. Parents' satisfaction is strongly associated with school effectiveness and the achievement of pupils, but in primary schools especially there is a loyalty to the school, which means that satisfaction can exist even when school effectiveness and pupil achievement are less than good. This loyalty associated with primary schools was also noted in the Ofsted publication *Pupils' satisfaction with their school*.¹ Parents' level of satisfaction is also found to be strongly associated with other aspects of the school, especially the ethos, the quality of the leadership and management, the behaviour of pupils, the welfare of pupils and the handling of issues such as bullying and harassment.

Many features of a school's ethos improve once it has been identified as being in a category of concern (for example, requiring special measures) and appropriate action has been taken. There is a very pronounced and positive change in parents' satisfaction once schools come out of this category.

This publication draws predominantly on evidence from 6,958 inspections conducted between September 2003 and the first week of July 2005. For figures 4 and 5, the period covered is September 1996 to May 2005, covering approximately 38,400 inspections.

¹ *Pupils' satisfaction with their school* (HMI 2494), Ofsted, 2005.

Key findings

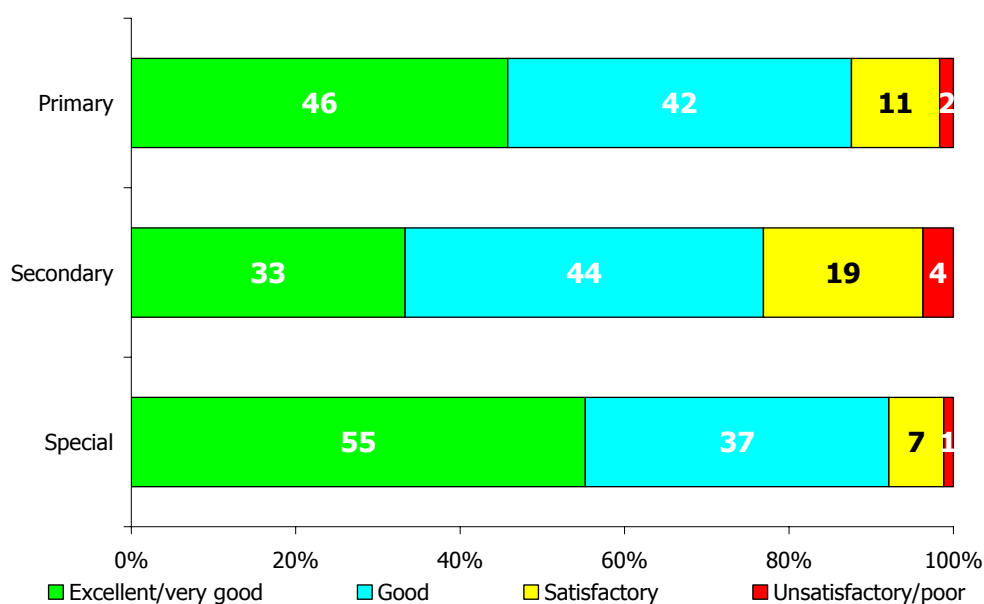
- ❑ Overall, parents are very satisfied with the school their child attends.
- ❑ Since 1997, there has been a steady improvement in parents' links with primary schools.
- ❑ Parents' satisfaction is highest when school effectiveness and pupils' achievement are very good or excellent.
- ❑ When their child's school is rated unsatisfactory or poor in effectiveness, the drop in parent satisfaction is greater at secondary schools than at primary.
- ❑ Schools that are good at consulting parents, telling them about the progress of their children and listening to their concerns, have highly satisfied parents.
- ❑ High levels of parents' satisfaction are reflected in schools with a very positive ethos, high standards of behaviour and an absence of bullying and racism.
- ❑ Parents' satisfaction improves substantially in the time between a school being placed in special measures and being removed from them.

Evaluation

What are the levels of parents' satisfaction and have they improved over time?

1. Parents' levels of satisfaction are higher in the primary phase than in the secondary phase, but nonetheless it remains strong in both phases. Satisfaction levels for special schools are high compared with those in primary and secondary schools.

Figure 1. Inspection judgements about parents' satisfaction with their child's school (percentage of schools inspected).



2. Parents' responses to the questionnaire, which they complete before inspection, are remarkably positive, even when schools are judged by inspectors to be unsatisfactory or poor in aspects of their work such as: how well the school involves them; freedom from bullying, racism and harassment; and pupils' behaviour and use of homework (see annex, figures 7–10).

3. Parents' satisfaction is generally highest in schools in the most favourable socio-economic circumstances, where the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) is low (see figures 2 and 3), although in secondary schools parents' satisfaction is particularly high both in schools with the lowest and the highest FSM entitlement.

Figure 2. Parents' satisfaction with primary schools by free school meals (FSM) band (percentage of primary schools inspected).

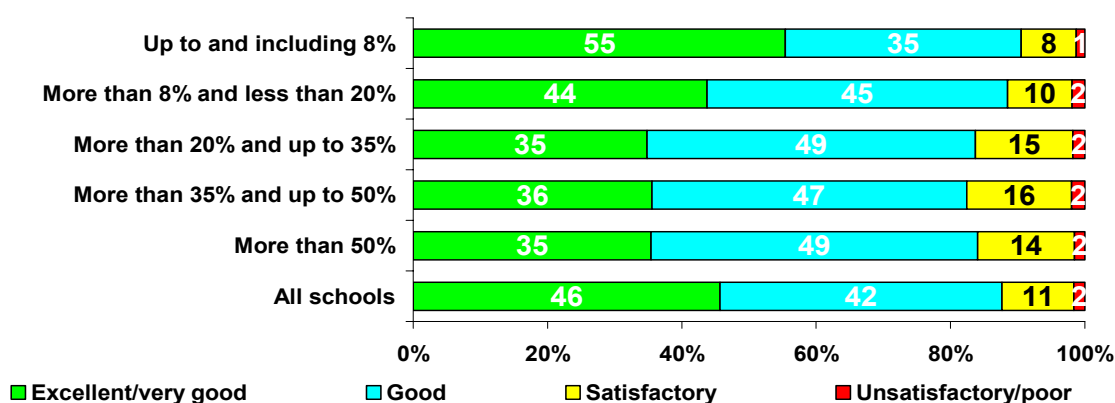
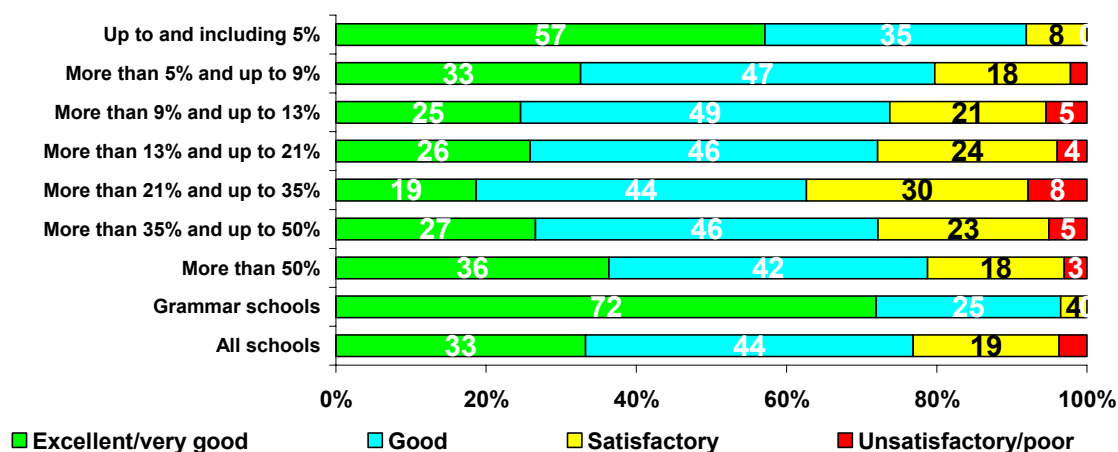


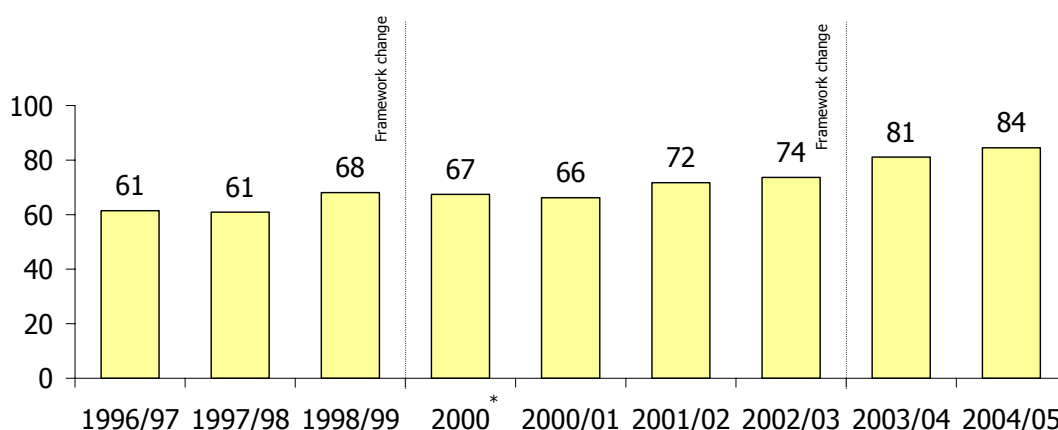
Figure 3. Parents' satisfaction with secondary schools by free school meals (FSM) band (percentage of secondary schools inspected).



4. Inspectors report that the quality of links between schools and parents has improved steadily over the years. The proportion of primary schools where this feature is good or better has risen from 61% in 1996/97 to 84% in 2004/05. The change is less marked in secondary schools, but has still risen from 60% to 69% over the same period (see figures 4 and 5). For both primary and secondary schools, there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of good or better links between 1997/98 and 1998/99. This may be a consequence of Department for Education and Employment circulars.² These circulars gave new guidance on school prospectuses and governors' annual reports and may have taken some time to have an impact.

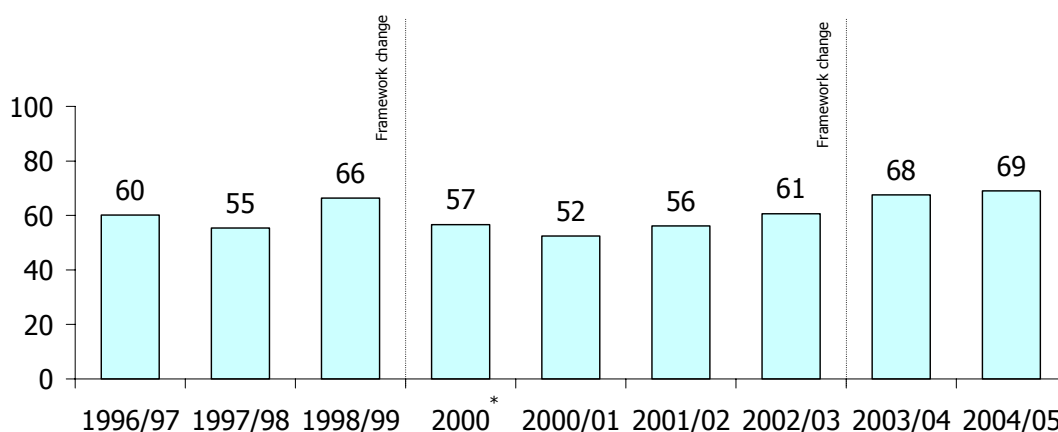
² DfEE circulars 11/96 and 12/96.

Figure 4. Good or better links with parents over time (percentage of primary schools inspected).



Note: *The inspection framework started in January 2000 and so data relates to part of the year.

Figure 5. Good or better links with parents over time (percentage of secondary schools inspected).



Note: *The inspection framework started in January 2000 and so data relates to part of the year.

What is the link between parents' satisfaction and outcomes for pupils?

5. Parents' satisfaction, as judged by inspectors, is strongly and positively linked with the achievement of pupils (see annex, figure 11). The dissatisfaction of parents is judged to be most pronounced in secondary schools where achievement is unsatisfactory or poor. This could reflect a more intense focus by parents on educational outcomes at secondary stage, or to beliefs that broader aspects of education, such as social development, are important at the primary stage. The greater sense of 'loyalty' in primary schools was also seen in the study of pupils' satisfaction with their schools (*Pupils' satisfaction with their school*).

How do judgements about the effectiveness and ethos of the school relate to parents' satisfaction?

6. Where schools are highly effective and have a strong ethos, it is not surprising that parents are highly satisfied. Low levels of satisfaction are generally associated with schools, especially secondary schools, that are ineffective (see figure 6 and annex, figure 12).

Figure 6. Parents' satisfaction in relation to overall effectiveness of school (percentage of schools inspected).



7. The following case study illustrates how parents respond to the ethos of a school.

Case study 1. Urban primary school with very high percentage of children for whom English is not their first language. There is also high pupil mobility and above average levels of special educational needs.

The school does not attract the confidence of its parents. They are unhappy about the leadership and management, the quality of teaching in some classes and the behaviour of a significant number of children. In particular, parents believe their children are harassed and bullied while at school.
Ofsted inspection report

This school was put into special measures and behaviour was identified as a cause for concern in line with parents' perceptions. The lack of confidence of parents was also an acknowledged factor. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was seen to be poor. There was some optimism in the light of positive recent actions by the governors, including the appointment of a new headteacher.

8. Similarly, high and poor quality leadership and management are reflected in high and low levels of parents' satisfaction; the association is strongest in secondary schools. Parents in primary schools are a little more forgiving of weak leadership and management than parents in secondary schools (see annex, figure 13).

Case study 2. Junior school with 290 pupils from urban area. High proportion of Year 6 pupils (24%) joined after Year 3, with majority being low attaining pupils.

A high proportion of parents express concern about the leadership and management of the school. There is a general feeling that their concerns are not well addressed and information about how their children are getting on is limited.

Ofsted inspection report

The school was found to have serious weaknesses, part of which was due to the tensions between the headteacher and the parents and carers. Leadership and governance of the school was found to be unsatisfactory, in line with parents' concerns.

9. High quality teaching is also reflected in high levels of parents' satisfaction (see annex, figure 14). Again, parents appear to be more tolerant, or less aware, of weak provision in primary schools than are parents in secondary schools. Unsatisfactory teaching is associated with dissatisfaction in only 20% of the parents of primary aged pupils compared with to 43% of parents of secondary aged pupils.

Links with parents in schools causing concern

10. A marked strengthening in parents' satisfaction is found in schools after they have been removed from special measures (see annex, figures 15 and 16). In primary schools, the proportion of schools where parents were judged to be dissatisfied with the school fell from 36% to 2%, and for secondary schools it dropped from 40% to 0%. There is a similar pattern for those schools that are moved out of the category of serious weaknesses. Whilst cause and effect cannot be identified with any certainty in this change, it is likely that a greater involvement of parents is one component in the recovery of weak schools.

Notes

1. Since Ofsted inspections began in 1993, inspectors have sought the views of parents on the quality of education provided by their children's school. In the framework introduced in 2003, this was formalised as a judgement about parents' satisfaction with the school. This was in addition to judgements on parents' links and partnership with the school, which were included in inspection frameworks for several years before July 2005.
2. The paper complements *Pupils' satisfaction with their school*, published in July 2005. It also explores how links with parents are associated with pupils' achievements. It draws on evidence from 6,958 inspections between September 2003 and the first week of July 2005.³
3. A review of the national and international literature on parents' satisfaction with schools shows a marked lack of research in this area.⁴

³ For figures 4 and 5 the period covered is September 1996 to May 2005, covering approximately 38,400 inspections.

⁴ More detail of existing literature and a bibliography can be obtained from Ofsted's Research Analysis and International Division.

Annex. Data to support text

Figure 7. Parents' questionnaire responses: percentage of parents agreeing that 'the school seeks the views of parents and takes account of their suggestions and concerns' in relation to 'involves parents through seeking, valuing and acting on their views'.

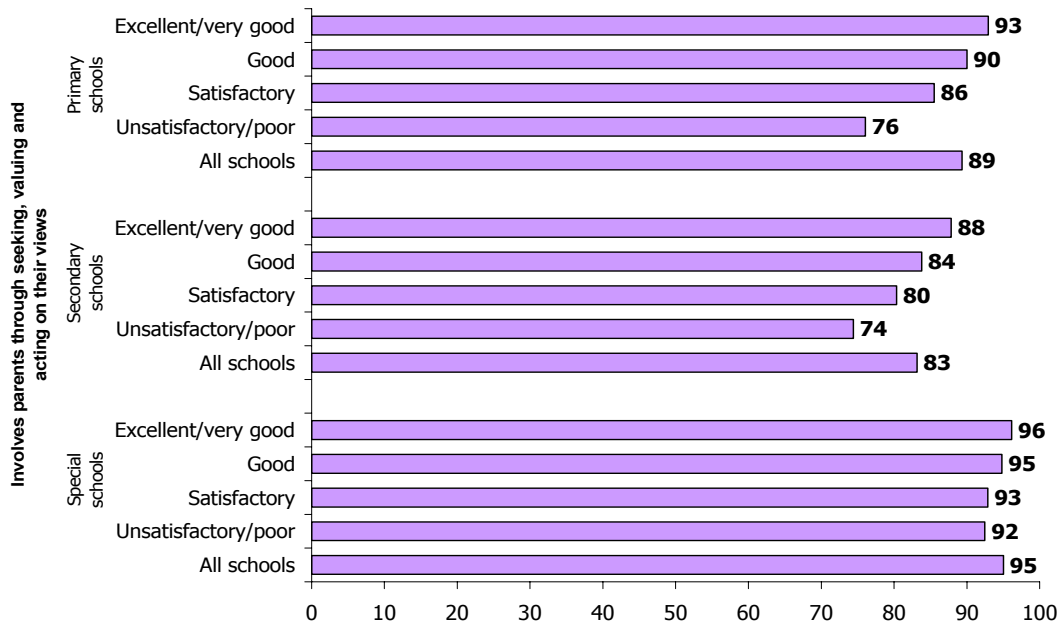


Figure 8. Parents' questionnaire responses: percentage of parents agreeing that 'my child is not bullied or harassed at school' in relation to 'pupils' freedom from bullying, racism and other forms of harassment'.

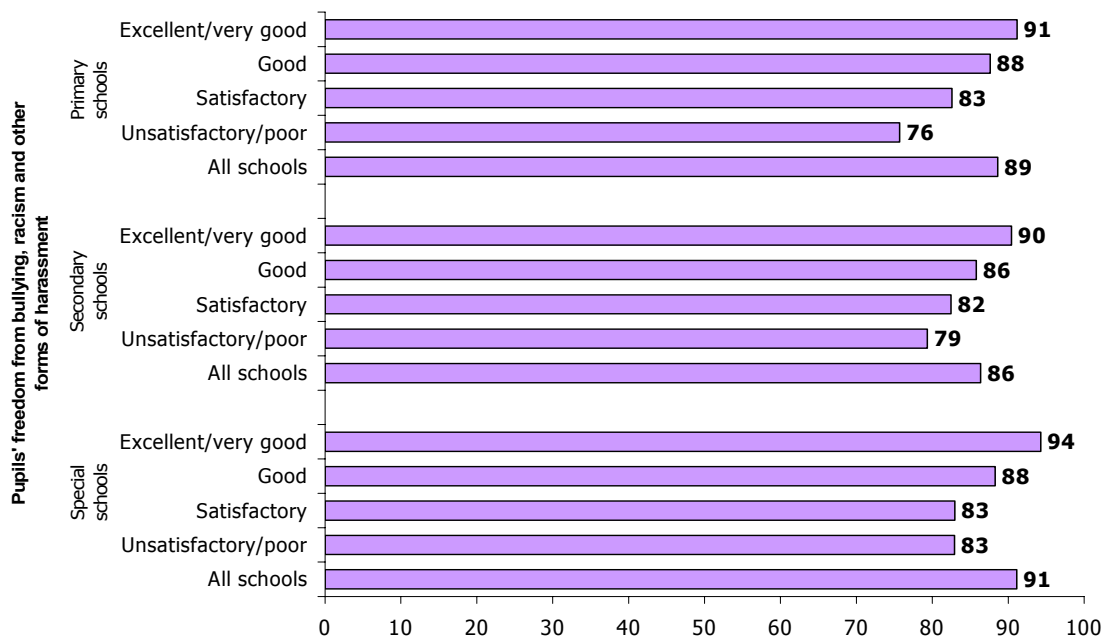


Figure 9. Parents' questionnaire responses: percentage of parents agreeing that 'children, pupils or students behave well' in relation to 'behaviour, including exclusions'.

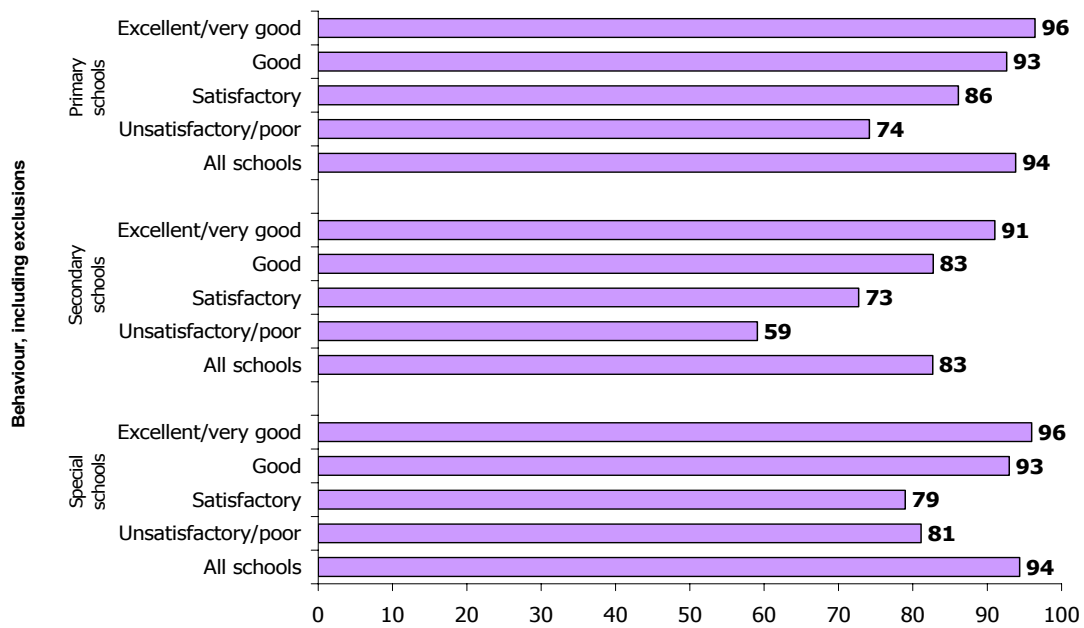


Figure 10. Parents' questionnaire responses: percentage of parents agreeing that 'staff explain how I can help my child at home – or – the school provides appropriate homework' in relation to 'use of homework to reinforce and extend'.

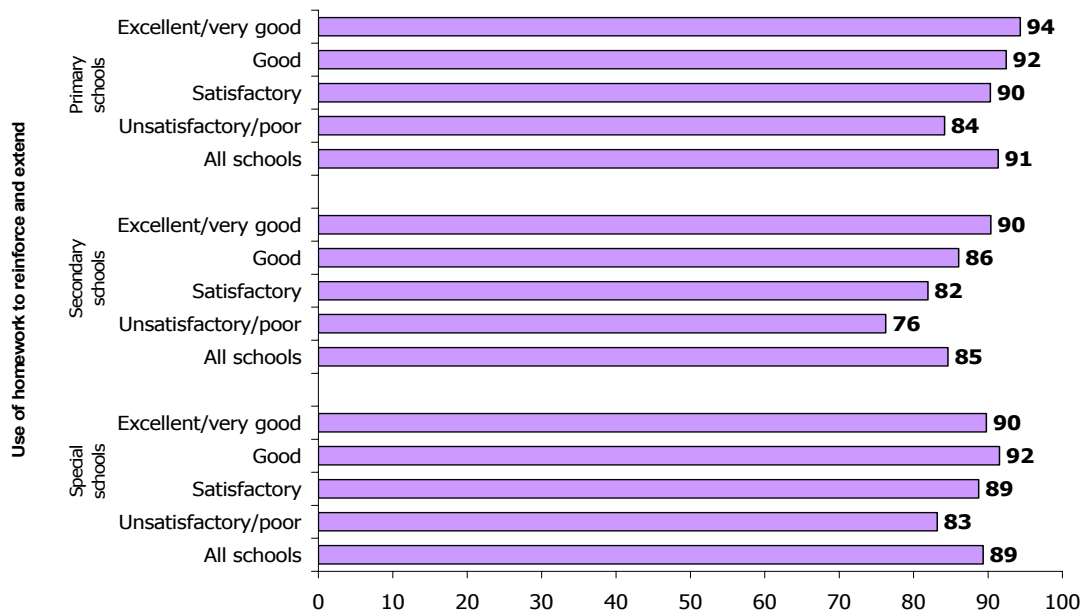


Figure 11. Parents' satisfaction in relation to the achievement of pupils (percentage of schools inspected).

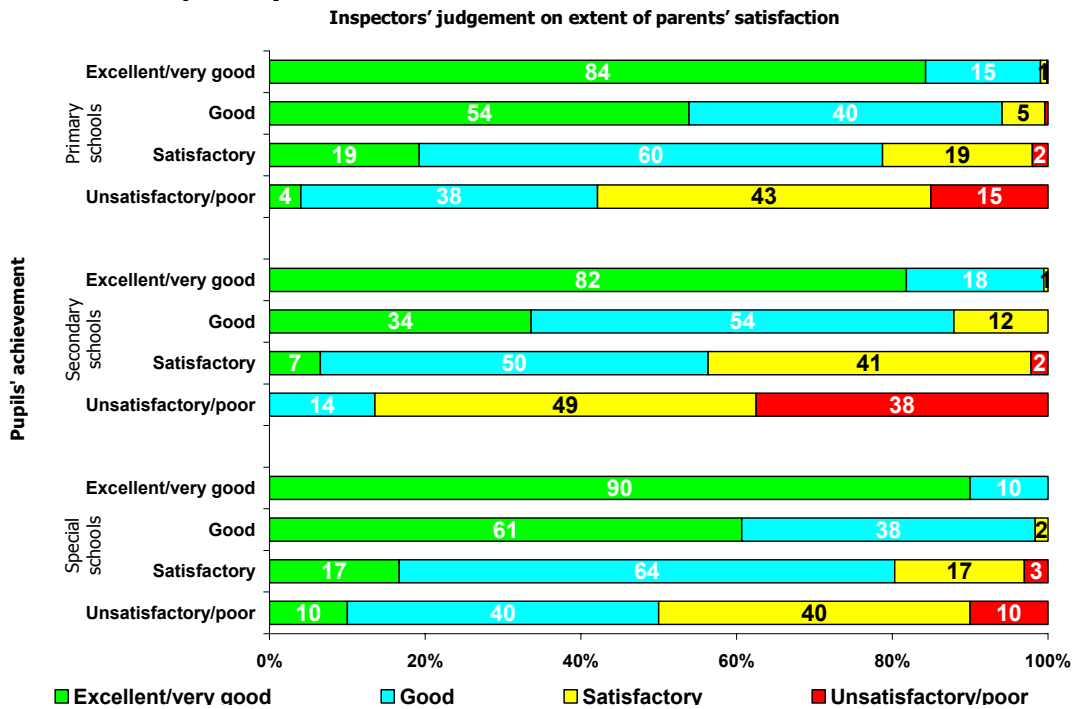


Figure 12. Parents' satisfaction in relation to school ethos (percentage of schools inspected).

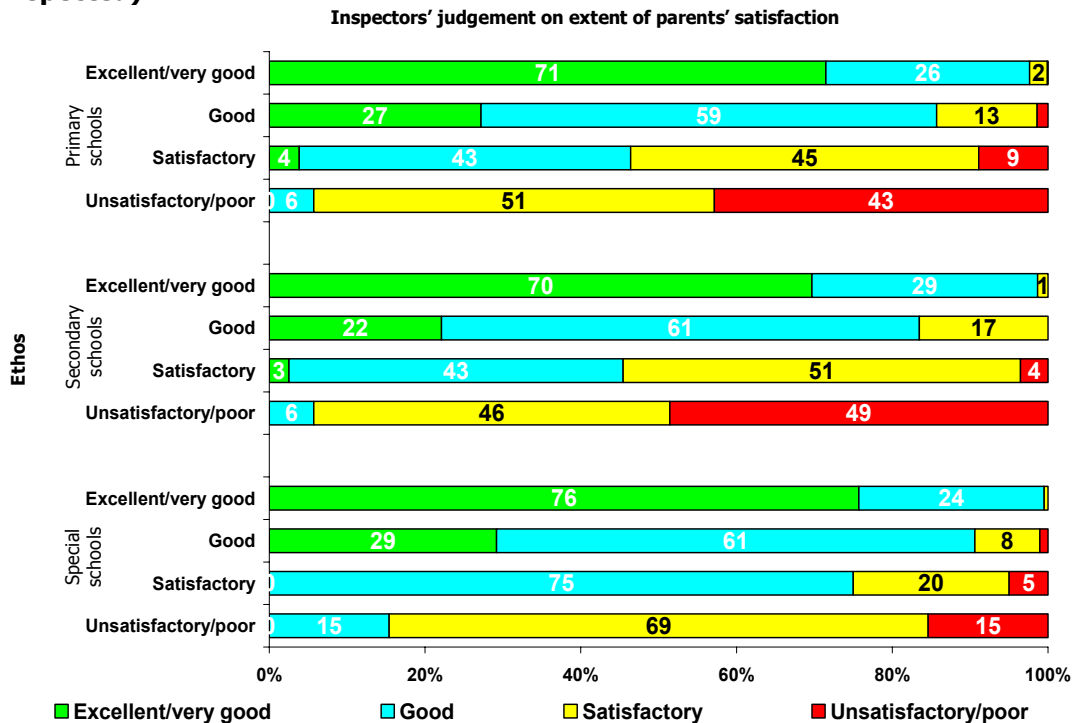


Figure 13. Parents' satisfaction in relation to the quality of leadership and management (percentage of schools inspected).

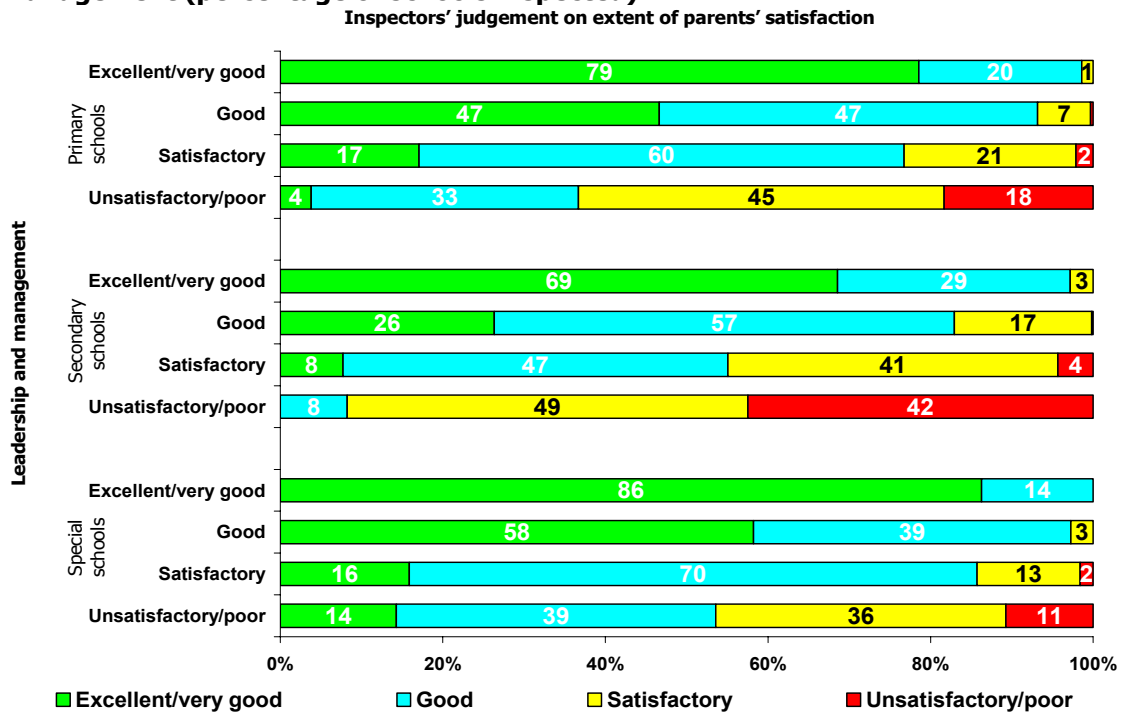


Figure 14. Parents' satisfaction in relation to the quality of teaching (percentage of schools inspected).

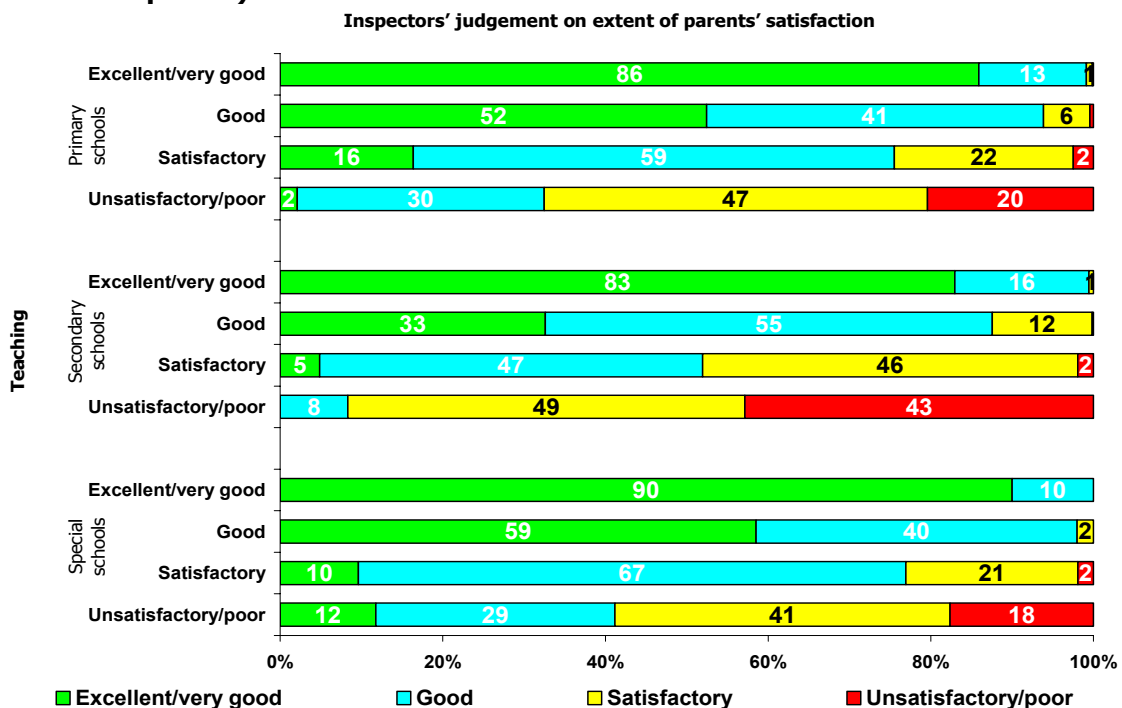


Figure 15. Inspection judgements on parents' satisfaction/views in primary schools before and after special measures (percentage of schools).

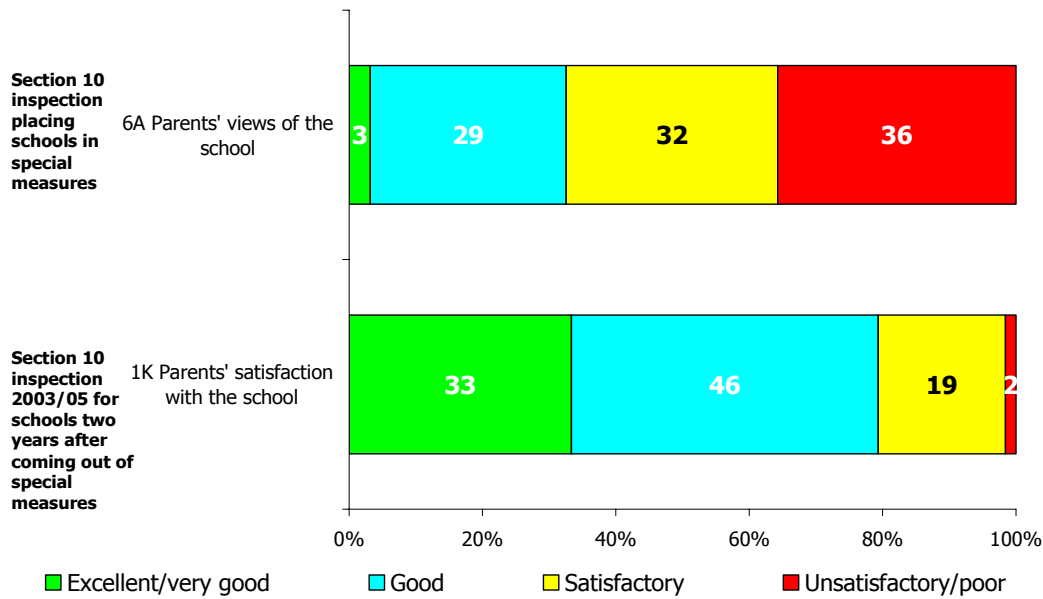


Figure 16. Inspection judgements on parents' satisfaction/views in secondary schools before and after special measures (percentage of schools).

