



what are primary schools' views on issues that are currently affecting them?

annual survey of trends in education 2007

This is one of a series of papers reporting the findings from the Annual Survey of Trends in Education 2007, carried out by the NFER on behalf of the LGA. During the summer term of 2007, 347 primary schools and 854 secondary schools in England took part in the survey covering a range of topics: current issues affecting primary schools was one of the areas explored.

1 How are funding arrangements changing for schools?

In April 2006 new funding arrangements were introduced which meant that maintained schools had access to multi-year budgets, and were guaranteed minimum increases in per-pupil funding each year for all schools. Following a consultation, in June 2007 the Government announced the broad framework for the new funding arrangements for 2008-11. It was announced that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) will continue to be distributed using the 'spend plus' method for the next three years. This allows all local authorities (LAs) to receive a basic per-pupil increase each year and funding for the Government's priorities in addition to this.

1.2 What do schools think of the new three-year cycle funding arrangements?

Schools were asked for their views on the new three-year cycle of funding, which will be introduced in 2008 (see Figure 1).

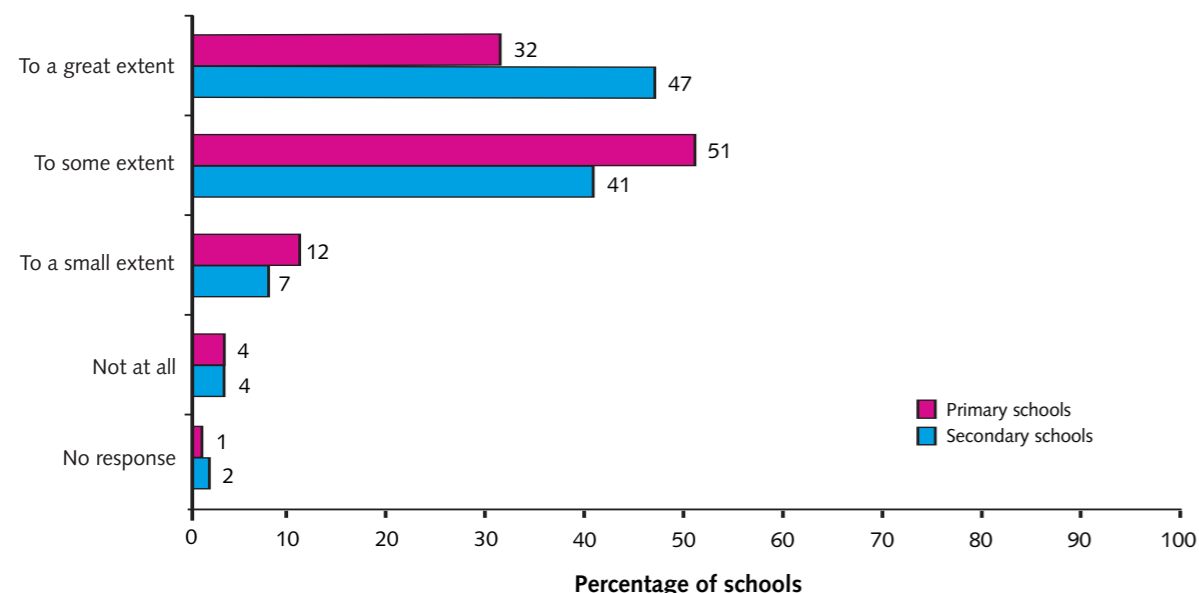
- A high percentage of primary schools (83 per cent) and secondary schools (88 per cent) said that they were in favour of this new cycle of funding to *some* or a *great extent*.
- Only a small percentage of secondary and primary schools (four per cent in both cases) did not agree *at all* with the new cycle of funding.

Of the schools that agreed with the three-year cycle of funding to a *great* or *some extent*, just over half of respondents (52 per cent of primary and 52 per cent of secondary schools) thought it would be a better system as it would help to improve medium- and long-term planning – 'it allows you to develop longer-term financial planning' – and it would assist planning for fluctuating pupil numbers through falling rolls or an influx of migrant pupils (21 per cent of primary and 8 per cent of secondary schools).

Of the primary and secondary schools which were less inclined to agree with the new funding arrangements (responding that they agreed to a *small extent* or *not at all*), the main reasons for this were to do with the difficulties associated with fluctuating pupil numbers (45 per cent of primary and 18 per cent of secondary schools), and because there were too many other changeable factors (13

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Figure 1 Extent to which schools agree with the three-year cycle of funding



Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

per cent of primary and 21 per cent of secondary schools). As one respondent explained, '[it is] very hard to make a prediction because of changes to salary budgets, [and] changes to [the] SEN matrix'.

2 How will introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework affect primary schools?

From September 2008, all schools with children in Reception year will be required to use the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, which sets the standards for development, learning and care of all children from birth to the age of five. The EYFS brings together: *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA and DfEE, 2000), the *Birth to Three Matters* (Sure Start, 2002) framework and the *National Standards for Under 8s Daycare and Childminding* (Sure Start, 2003), with the intention of building a coherent and flexible approach to care and learning.

Primary schools that took part in the Annual Survey of Trends were asked to rate their current links with early years providers on a scale ranging from *excellent* to *poor* (see Figure 2).

Just over two-thirds of primary schools said their links with early years providers were *excellent* or *good*, with only a small minority indicating that these links were poor.

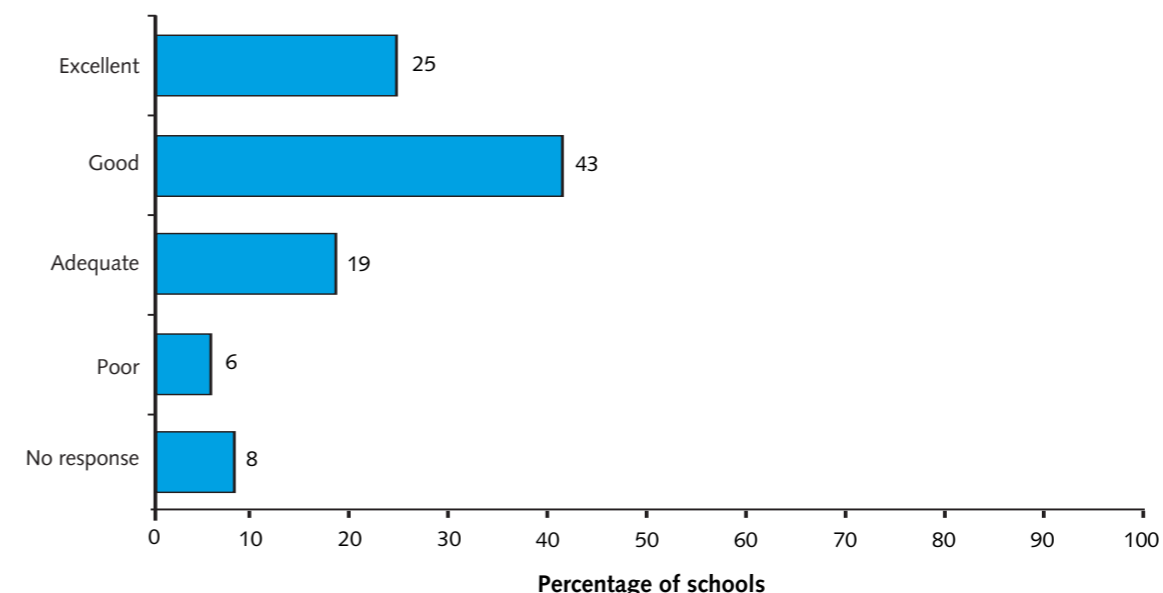
Schools were also asked for their opinions on the anticipated impact that the EYFS will have on children's transition to Foundation Stage. Mixed opinions were expressed by those who answered, but the most frequent responses were as follows:

- 13 per cent of schools felt they did not know (possibly because they were not yet familiar with the EYFS framework)
- 11 per cent felt it would enable a smoother transition
- 11 per cent felt it would generally have a positive impact
- 11 per cent felt it would have no impact.

3 Have standard enrolment points for pupils in primary schools changed?

Primary schools were asked to give the number of time-points for their standard entry for pupils in their school. Figure 3 shows that two-thirds of primary schools operated on a single point of entry (usually the autumn term); a fifth

Figure 2 Primary schools' ratings of their current links with early years providers



Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

operated a two-term entry (most commonly in the Autumn and Spring terms); and just a small minority operated a three-term entry.

There were some differences in the number of entry points for schools in different types of LA: schools situated in counties were more likely to have a single point of entry compared to schools situated in other types of LA, whereas schools located in London boroughs were more likely to follow the pattern of two time points for standard enrolment compared to schools in other types of LA.

Nearly three-quarters of schools reported that, over the last five years, the number of time points for standard enrolment had stayed the same (see Table 1). Where the number of points of entry had changed, more schools reported a decrease (21 per cent) than an increase (2 per cent).

Table 1 Changes in the number of entry points for standard enrolment

Over the last five years, has the number of time points for standard enrolment changed?	%
Yes – it's decreased	21
Yes – it's increased	2
No – it's stayed the same	71
Don't know	2
No response	4
N =	347

A single response item

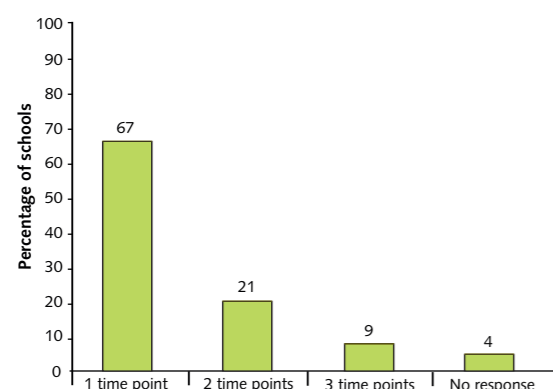
Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

The headteachers who indicated that the number of time points for standard enrolment had changed over the past five years (23 per cent) were asked what the reason was for the change. The most frequent explanations were as follows:

- as a reflection of the local authority's policy (28 per cent)
- to allow children to begin school earlier (16 per cent)
- to give all children in the year group the same length of schooling (15 per cent), (probably referring to a single time point for entry to school).

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Figure 3 Number of time-points for standard entry to primary schools



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4 What are the implications for local authorities?

The surveys indicated that the majority of primary and secondary schools were in favour of the new three year cycle funding arrangements, which will be introduced in 2008 as it will allow them plan in the medium and long term. There were a minority of schools with concerns regarding the three-year cycles. In these cases:

- LAs may wish to offer specific support or advice for schools concerned about planning effectively with three-year budgets due to many changeable factors.

Primary schools were generally positive about their links with current early years providers and some expected the introduction of the EYFS framework to have a positive impact on pupils' transition to Foundation Stage. Some schools indicated that they were unsure what impact the EYFS would have when implemented in September 2008.

- LAs may wish to focus on the links between the EYFS and children's transition to Foundation Stage when undertaking training with schools in relation to the new EYFS framework.

Lastly, the majority of primary schools had a single point of entry whereby the whole year group started school at the beginning of the year they became five, but almost a third of schools operated two- or three-term entries. Where the number of time points for standard entry had changed over the last five years, this was most commonly a decrease in the number of time points in order to reflect the LA's central admissions policy.

- LAs may wish to consider the implications for young children and their families of starting school at age four.

References

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