



what are secondary 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 secondary schools was one of the areas explored.

Secondary schools were asked about the following issues:

- changes to the 14–19 curriculum
- the new three-year cycle of funding
- the proposed raised leaving age
- the Building Schools for the Future programme.

1 The 14–19 Curriculum

1.1 How is the 14–19 curriculum changing?

In February 2005, the *14–19 Education and Skills White Paper* (GB, Parliament, HoC, 2005) detailed how the Government would implement changes and reforms to the 14–19 curriculum and qualifications. The White Paper set out proposals which were designed to:

- ensure that every young person masters functional English and mathematics before they leave education
- improve vocational education, including the introduction of diplomas in 14 areas

- stretch all young people and help universities to differentiate between the best candidates
- re-motivate disengaged learners
- ensure delivery of a full range of options including GCSEs, A levels and diplomas.

Changes to the curriculum and new qualification opportunities will be phased in from September 2008 and various forms of training and guidance are planned to support schools in implementing the new curriculum.

1.2 Do schools feel prepared for the new 14–19 curriculum?

Secondary schools were asked about how prepared they felt for delivering the new 14–19 curriculum (see Table 1). About two-thirds of schools felt prepared at least to *some extent*, but seven per cent of schools did not feel ready *at all* for the changes to the 14–19 curriculum. A further 18 per cent were only ready to a *small extent*.

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Table 1 To what extent do you feel your school is prepared for delivering the new 14–19 curriculum?

Extent	%
To a great extent	17
To some extent	51
To a small extent	18
Not at all	7
No response	7
N =	854

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

791 respondents answered this question

Differences between groups

There were some statistically significant differences across school types. A greater proportion of schools with the following characteristics indicated that they felt prepared for

delivering the 14–19 curriculum compared to other types of schools:

- schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)
- large schools
- comprehensive schools (including those who educate pupils until age 16 and those with sixth forms).

1.3 Have schools been involved in a 14–19 consortium bid?

Two thirds of schools (67 per cent) indicated that they had been involved in a 14–19 gateway consortium bid, with just under a quarter (24 per cent) indicating that they had had no involvement. A small minority indicated that they did not know whether they had been involved in a bid (one per cent) or did not respond (eight per cent). Further analysis of responses from the schools revealed that larger schools were more likely to be involved with a bid than smaller sized schools.



1.4 What are the main challenges in preparing for the 14–19 curriculum?

Schools were given the opportunity to describe the main challenges they were facing in preparing for the new 14–19 curriculum. The main challenges secondary schools outlined included:

- working in collaboration and partnership with others, including other schools, colleges and employers
- uncertainty or lack of funding to allow them to make the changes to the curriculum
- the practicalities of implementing the changes to the 14–19 curriculum, including the timetabling arrangements required between different institutions and the complexity of arranging and coordinating the provision.

1.5 What additional support would schools like?

In relation to the delivery of the 14–19 curriculum, schools were asked whether there was any further support from their local authority (LA) that they would like. A range of suggestions were made, although 40 per cent of respondents chose not to answer this question and 11 per cent felt that they already received sufficient support from their LA. The most common responses, in relation to additional support, were:

- funding-related, e.g. for clear, additional funding routes
- for a better coordinated and strategic approach from the LA, e.g. appointment of a dedicated 14–19 partnership officer; better coordination with the Learning Skills Council (LSC)
- for more practical guidance, e.g. with bid writing.

1.6 What are the implications for local authorities?

Overall, the majority of schools felt reasonably prepared for the new 14–19 curriculum, although there was still a small percentage that did not feel this way. It is important that LAs identify this group of schools in order to give them the option of targeted support. From the survey analysis, these schools are more likely to be smaller

schools, those with low proportions of pupils eligible for FSM or selective schools.

The main identified challenges in preparing for the 14–19 curriculum were the need for collaborative working with other partners, an uncertainty about, or lack of, funding and the practicalities of implementing the changes. LAs may wish to consider providing greater support to schools in these three areas. Indeed, schools indicated that they would welcome additional support and advice from their LA, particularly practical guidance and their LA taking on the role of coordinator. They also indicated that they would welcome further funding in order for them to implement the changes successfully.

2 New funding arrangements

2.1 How are the 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 LAs to receive a basic per pupil increase each year and funding for the Government's priorities in addition to this.

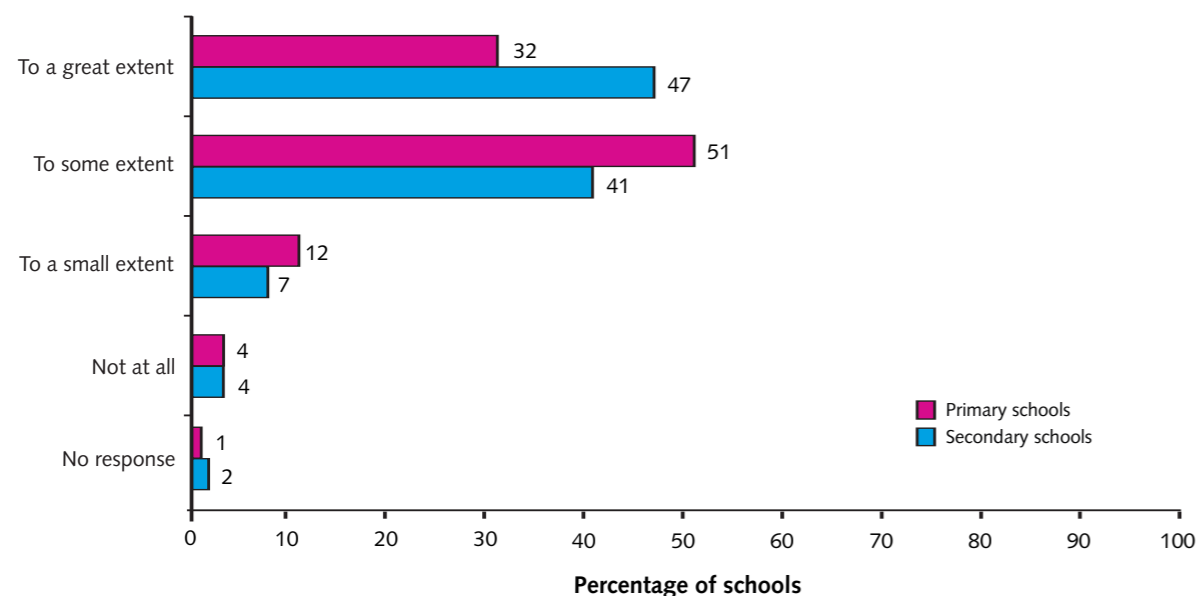
2.2 What do schools think of the new three-year cycle funding arrangements?

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) indicated 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.

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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

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 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’.

2.3 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 these will allow them to 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.

3 Raising the leaving age

3.1 What are the proposals for raising the leaving age?

In March 2007, the Government launched the *Green Paper Raising Expectations* (DfES, 2007), which proposed that from 2015, all young people should be required to participate in some form of education or training until the age of 18. As an intermediate step, the minimum age for leaving education or training would be raised to 17 in 2013. The education or training could be in a school, college, with a work-based learning provider, or as part of a job. The Department for Children, Schools and Families undertook a consultation of the proposed changes, which ended in June 2007, and in November 2007 the Education and Skills Bill (England and Wales. Parliament. HoC, 2007) was announced, outlining the proposed legislative changes.

3.2 What are schools' main concerns if the leaving age is raised?

Secondary schools were given the opportunity to describe their three main concerns relating to raising the leaving age. These were:

- curriculum-related, e.g. the provision of appropriate courses and curriculum planning
- funding-related, e.g. the need for additional funding
- staffing-related, e.g. having the capacity to deliver the new curriculum.

They were also asked to explain the reasons for their concerns: nearly half of respondents did not provide a reason, but for those who did, the main reasons given were as follows:

- that young people would be forced to remain in education and training despite their own wishes
- further facilities and resources would be required because of the practicalities of implementing the changes



- issues associated with offering an appropriate curriculum and choice of qualifications.

3.3 What are the implications for local authorities?

LAs will have an important role to play in ensuring that there are appropriate education and training options available for young people to choose from. Schools indicated that their main concerns related to having the capacity to be able to provide appropriate courses, having the staff to teach the new curriculum, and having access to appropriate funding. Schools will need to be fully supported by their LAs in order for these changes to be successful.

4 Building Schools for the Future

4.1 How is the Building Schools for the Future programme assisting schools?

Building Schools for the Future (BSF) is the Government's secondary school renewal programme that aims to bring together a significant investment in buildings and in ICT (Information and Communications Technology) over the



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coming years to help support the educational reform agenda. The programme began in 2005-6. The intention is that:

- by 2011, every LA in England will have received funding to renew at least the school in greatest need – many will have major rebuilding and remodelling projects (at least three schools) underway through BSF and the remainder will have received resources through the Academies programme or the Targeted Capital Fund
- by 2016, major rebuilding and remodelling projects (at least three schools) will have started in every LA.

4.2 How are schools involved in local BSF planning?

Schools were asked whether their school had been involved in local BSF planning (see Table 2).

Table 2 As far as you are aware, has your school been involved in local BSF planning?

Answer	%
Yes – changes are already underway	11
Yes – plans have been agreed	4
Yes – planning has begun	26
No – no plans	51
Don't know	0
No response	6
N =	854

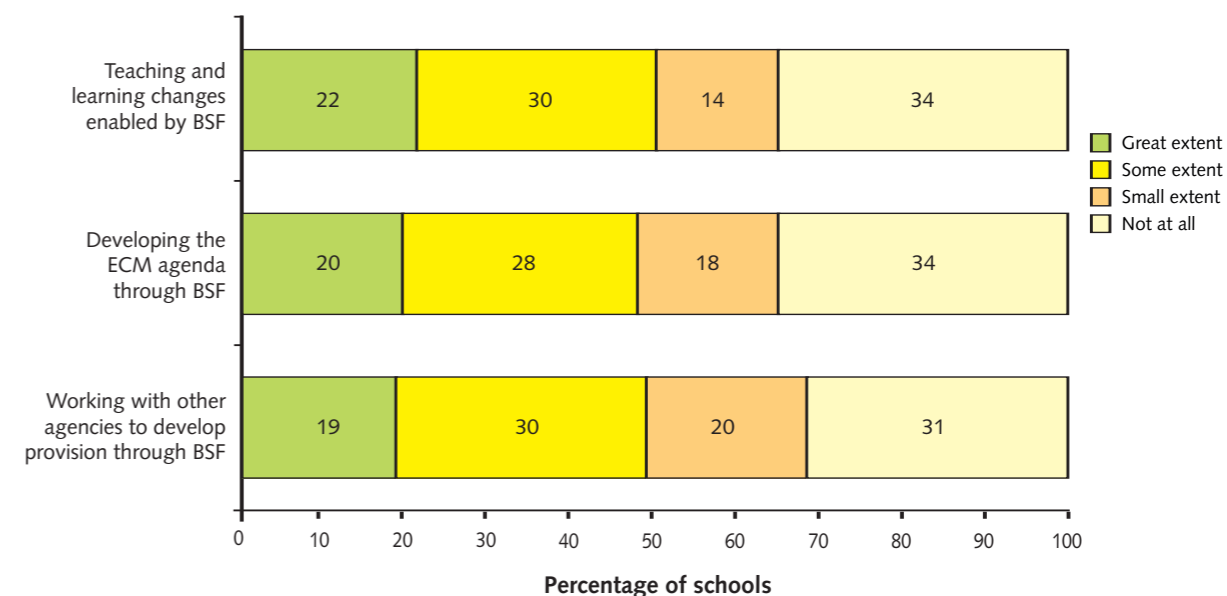
A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

800 respondents answered this question

Approximately 40 per cent of schools had been involved in some way, with most of these schools indicating that the planning had begun but the plans had yet to be agreed. About half of schools had not been involved in any local BSF planning and this is perhaps not surprising, given that the roll-out of the programme is currently still in its relatively early stages.

Figure 2 Changes schools are making through BSF



4.3 Have schools received support or advice from their local authority to prepare for BSF?

Schools were asked whether they had received any support or advice from their LA in order to prepare for BSF. A very high percentage of those schools where changes were underway (96 per cent) or where plans had been agreed (92 per cent) had received support or advice from their LA. For those schools where the planning had begun, approximately three-quarters of schools had received LA support. For those schools where there were no plans in place for BSF, the majority (84 per cent), not surprisingly indicated that they had not received advice from their LA.

Schools that had had no involvement in local BSF planning and had received no support from their LA to prepare for BSF had the following characteristics:

- the lowest proportions of pupils eligible for FSM
- the highest levels of attainment
- location in the County boroughs
- no, or the lowest proportions of, speakers with a first language other than English (EAL).

In summary, as would be expected, secondary schools in more challenging circumstances were more likely to be involved with the BSF programme and to have received support from their LA, compared to other schools.

4.4 What are schools that are already in the BSF programme doing?

Schools were asked to indicate what actions they had already undertaken if they were currently involved in the BSF programme (see Figure 2).

Of those schools which responded, approximately 50 per cent were making changes, to *some* or a *great extent*, in all three of the areas outlined in Figure 2. In approximately a third of schools which responded, no developments had been made in terms of their teaching and learning, collaborative working or the ECM agenda as a result of the BSF programme.

4.5 What further support would schools like?

Schools were asked whether there was any further support from their LA that they would like to help them prepare for BSF. Approximately 40 per cent of schools did not respond to this question and 12 per cent felt that

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their involvement with BSF was so far in the future that they either did not need support yet or did not need to comment. For those who did respond, the most common types of support that schools mentioned were:

- funding-related, e.g. funding for leadership time during the programme; adequate funding for schools for buildings/learning environments while schools wait to be involved in BSF
- a clear strategy for future developments from the LA, allowing for vision and plenty of time to plan
- a plan indicating when their school would be involved with BSF
- more and better information, e.g. awareness and information on the reorganisation; better information about projected pupil numbers.

4.6 What are the implications for local authorities?

Approximately 40 per cent of schools had been involved in some way with BSF, with most of these schools indicating that the planning had begun but the plans had yet to be agreed. Just over half of schools (51 per cent) had not been involved in any local BSF planning. It was evident that schools in more challenging circumstances were more likely to be participating in BSF, and in receipt of support from their LA to prepare for this, than other schools.

In those schools where changes were being made or where planning had been agreed as a result of BSF, the majority reported that they were receiving support or advice from their LA. Of those schools which responded and considered their school to already be involved in the BSF programme, about half were making changes, to *some* or a *great extent*, in relation to teaching and learning, working with other agencies to develop provision and developing the Every Child Matters agenda.

LAs should continue to provide the support they are giving to schools and ensure that they have sufficient capacity to keep up the impetus. Some of the areas where LAs could helpfully provide additional support include:

- setting out a strategic vision so that schools know when they will be involved with BSF

- providing clearer and more information, e.g. awareness and information on the reorganisation; better information about projected pupil numbers.

Given the complexity and scale of the BSF programme, it is vital that schools, LAs, national programme partners and specialist private sector companies work in partnership throughout the project.

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