



have schools' concerns changed over time?

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: trends in education was one of the areas explored.

1 What issues are investigated annually?

The National Foundation for Educational Research has conducted the Annual Survey of Trends in Education in primary schools each year since 1994. Since 2005, a similar survey has also been carried out with secondary schools. Some questions on current issues in education have been included in the annual surveys over a number of years, allowing an investigation of headteachers' changing perceptions over time (Knight *et al.*, 2005, 2006; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2006). This paper compares findings from the three most recent surveys in relation to headteachers':

- main areas of concern
- priorities for additional funding.

The paper also highlights any changes in headteachers' views over time in relation to:

- local authority (LA) support for school improvement
- developments regarding extended schools
- involving parents in school life.

2 What are schools' concerns and how have they changed?

2.1 What are headteachers' main areas of concern?

Headteachers were asked to indicate, from a list, which four¹ issues caused them most concern. Table 1 (see also Figures 1 and 2) shows the responses from headteachers in primary and secondary schools and, for comparison purposes, presents findings from previous surveys as well.

In line with previous years, budgets were the main concern for headteachers in primary schools, but the level of concern was substantially lower in 2007 than in 2006 (53 per cent compared with 70 per cent in the previous survey). This year, the main reasons cited by primary headteachers as to why budgets were an issue were: the budget not meeting the needs of the school, the budget share declining (in real terms or as a result of falling rolls) and the costs associated with issues such as staffing and workforce reform. In the survey of secondary schools, the level of concern over budgets was also lower in 2007 than in 2006 (54 per cent compared with 63 per cent in the previous survey).

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Table 1 Primary and secondary headteachers' main concerns*

Issues of most concern	% of primary schools			% of secondary schools		
	2007	2006	2005	2007	2006	2005
Budgets	53	70	76	54	63	66
Staffing	50	53	45	63	60	65
Buildings	38	35	40	51	45	--
Inspection	37	50	32	24	34	24
Pupils' attainment on entry to the school	32	29	--	22	21	--
Pupils' attainment on leaving the school	21	25	--	20	25	--
Special educational needs	22	22	29	13	14	12
Pupil attendance	19	19	--	20	17	11
Pupil behaviour	20	18	--	41	47	52
Parental pressures	20	15	14	13	14	12
Specific aspects of the National Curriculum	19	14	6	12	9	5**
N =	347	370	413	854	1155	1224

Notes: -- No data was collected

* More than one answer could be put forward so percentages for each year do not sum to 100

** In 2004/05, this issue was split into concerns regarding the KS3 curriculum and the KS4 curriculum. For the purposes of comparisons, the mean percentage of 'aspects of the KS3 curriculum' and 'aspects of the KS4 curriculum' is shown.

In comparison with the earlier surveys, staffing (63 per cent in 2007) replaced budgets as the main concern for secondary headteachers in 2007. The most frequent reasons cited by secondary headteachers as to why staffing was a main area of concern were to do with difficulties with recruitment (e.g. quality/quantity/experience of applicants).

Primary schools

Other main areas of concern in primary schools this year were staffing (50 per cent of primary schools identified this as a concern, a three percentage point decrease compared with 2006), and buildings (38 per cent of schools, compared with 35 per cent in 2006). Concerns regarding inspections showed a 13 percentage point decrease compared with 2006, reversing the substantial increase recorded in 2006. The main reasons given for staffing concerns were recruitment and retention difficulties, and the most frequent reason given for building concerns was buildings being in urgent need of replacing or refurbishing.

Secondary schools

In secondary schools the top areas of concern this year, apart from staffing, were budgets and buildings. In line with primary schools, secondary schools' concerns regarding inspections also showed a decrease compared to last year. The main reasons given for budgetary and building concerns were the same as in primary schools – budgets not meeting the needs of the school and buildings being in urgent need of replacing or refurbishing.

Differences between primary and secondary schools

The main differences in concerns between primary and secondary headteachers in 2007 were, firstly, that a larger proportion of secondary headteachers rated pupil behaviour as a concern, compared to primary headteachers; whereas, secondly, a larger proportion of primary headteachers rated inspections as a concern, compared to secondary headteachers (see Figure 3).

Figure 1 Primary headteachers' main concerns – changes over time²

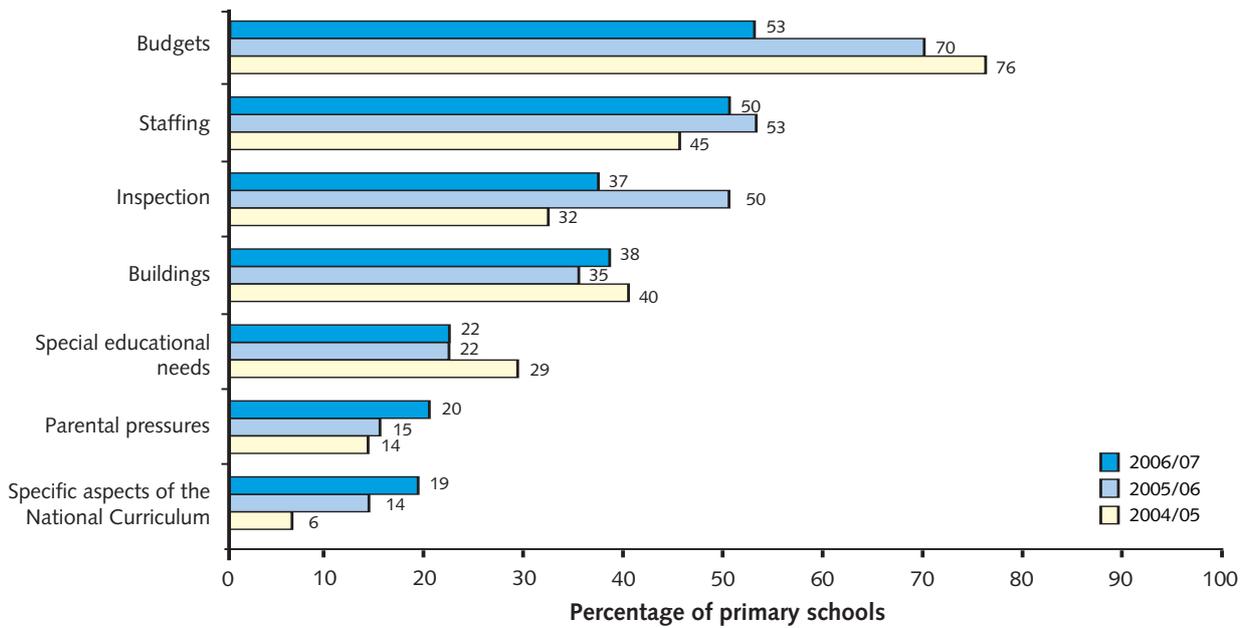
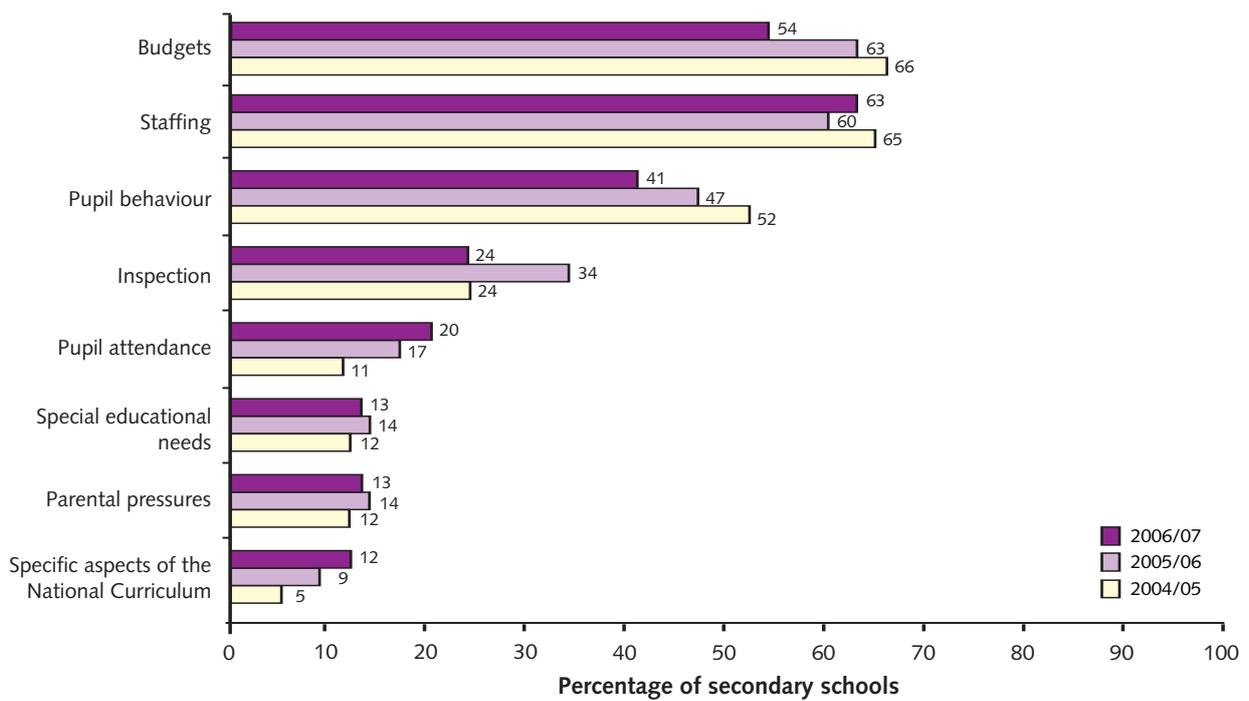
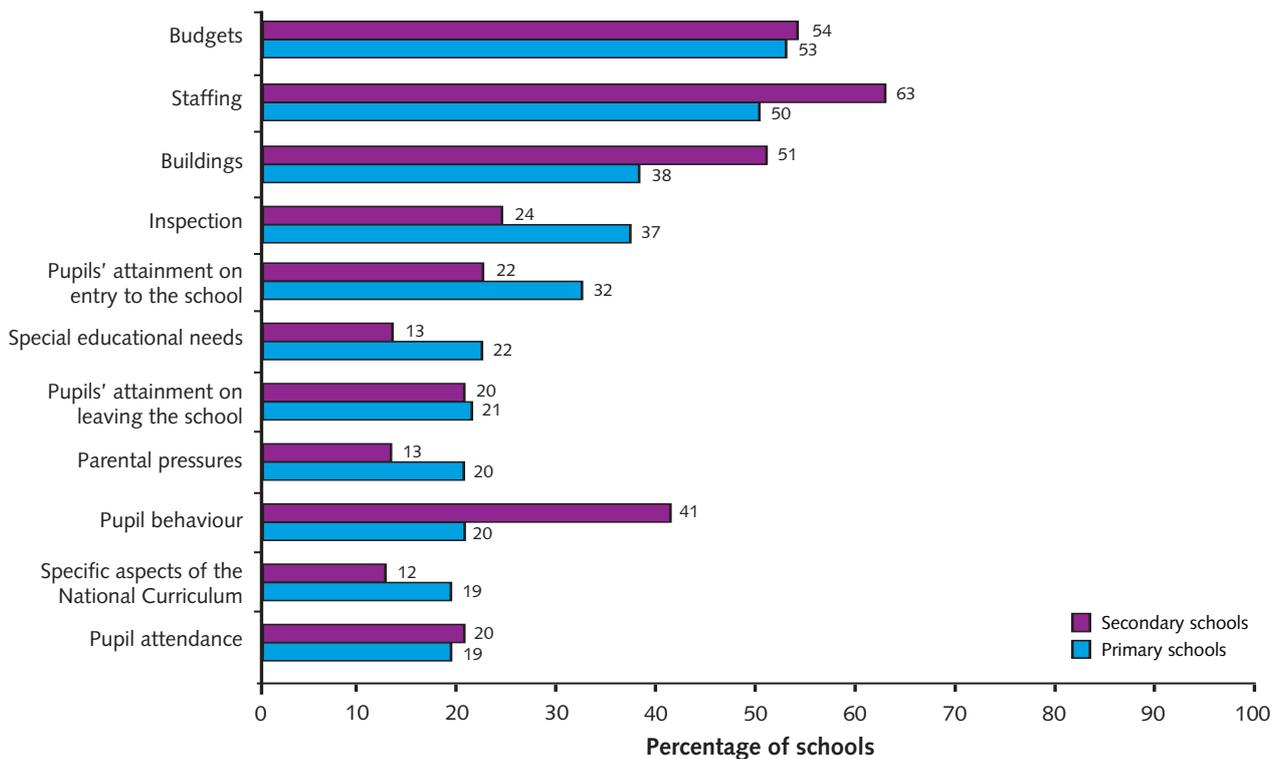


Figure 2 Secondary headteachers' main concerns – changes over time²



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Figure 3 Comparison of primary and secondary headteachers' main concerns in 2007



Differences between groups

Some statistically significant differences emerged between groups of schools. Clear socio-economic divisions were evident: schools in which pupils were *more* likely to be from lower socio-economic groups (i.e. a greater proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)) generally recorded higher levels of concern about pupil attainment and attendance than their counterparts. However, at secondary level they were *less* likely to be concerned about budgetary issues, which may reflect proportionately higher funding for education in more deprived areas.

Other areas of concern

Both primary and secondary schools were given the opportunity to describe other areas of concern. Other responses were given by 13 and 15 per cent of schools, respectively. The other main concerns listed by both primary and secondary schools were:

- initiative overload/too much change
- change of school structure (e.g. school reorganisation or closure).

2.2 What would headteachers prioritise with additional funding?

Schools were asked to select, from a list, up to three types of resource that they would prioritise for increased spending, if they were to receive a five per cent increase in the school budget (see Table 2 and also Figures 4, 5 and 6).

In line with previous years, classroom/welfare assistants remain the top priority for additional funding in both primary and secondary schools. Learning Mentors, Higher Level Teaching Assistants and Teaching Assistants were the types of assistant most frequently mentioned.

Table 2 Primary and secondary headteachers' priorities for additional funding*

Priorities for increased spending	% of primary schools			% of secondary schools		
	2007	2006	2005	2007	2006	2005
Classroom/welfare assistants	69	65	77	52	51	60
Teaching staff	46	51	62	47	43	44
Premises maintenance or furniture	21	27	24	22	24	26
Buildings	32	25	23	36	34	33
Administrative/secretarial staff	32	24	33	30	38	51
ICT hardware	20	24	29**	32	35	46
Equipment (e.g. sports, music)	8	19	11	11	14	10
Out of school learning activities for pupils	20	16	--	19	15	14
Library books	9	13	8	4	4	3
ICT training	5	8	--	7	5	--
ICT software	2	1	--	3	4	3
N =	347	370	413	854	1155	1224

Notes: -- No data was collected

* More than one answer could be put forward so percentages for each year do not sum to 100

** In 2005, this item was listed as 'ICT resources' and included 'ICT hardware' and 'ICT software'.

Primary schools

The second most frequently mentioned priority for additional funding in primary schools in 2007 was teaching staff, although the proportion of respondents identifying this area in 2007 (46 per cent) has fallen substantially since 2005 (62 per cent). Buildings and administrative/secretarial staff were joint third in terms of priority for additional funding (32 per cent) in 2007 and the proportions of headteachers prioritising these areas were larger than in 2006 (25 and 24 per cent respectively).

Secondary schools

In 2007, in secondary schools the second and third most frequently mentioned priorities for additional funding were teaching staff (47 per cent) and buildings (36 per cent). The proportions of headteachers identifying these areas in 2007 were broadly similar to those recorded in the 2006 and 2005 surveys. Since 2005, the proportion of headteachers prioritising administrative/secretarial staff has fallen by 21 percentage points (from 51 per cent to 30 per cent). A similar decline was observed for ICT hardware (from 46 per cent in 2005 to 32 per cent in 2007).

Differences between primary and secondary schools

A smaller proportion of secondary headteachers (52 per cent) compared to primary headteachers (69 per cent) mentioned classroom/welfare assistants as a funding priority, but a higher proportion of secondary headteachers (32 per cent) compared to primary headteachers (20 per cent) mentioned ICT hardware as a funding priority (see Figure 6).

Differences between groups

Out-of-school learning activities and classroom/welfare assistants were more frequently identified as priorities for increased spending in schools that arguably have the greatest need for these forms of provision. For example, primary and secondary schools in the lowest attainment band and those with the highest levels of eligibility for FSM were *more* likely to prioritise out-of-school learning activities for increased spending than other schools. Similarly, classroom/welfare assistants were *more* likely to be highlighted for additional funding both in secondary schools with lower attainment levels and in those with

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Figure 4 Primary headteachers' priorities for additional spending - changes over time³

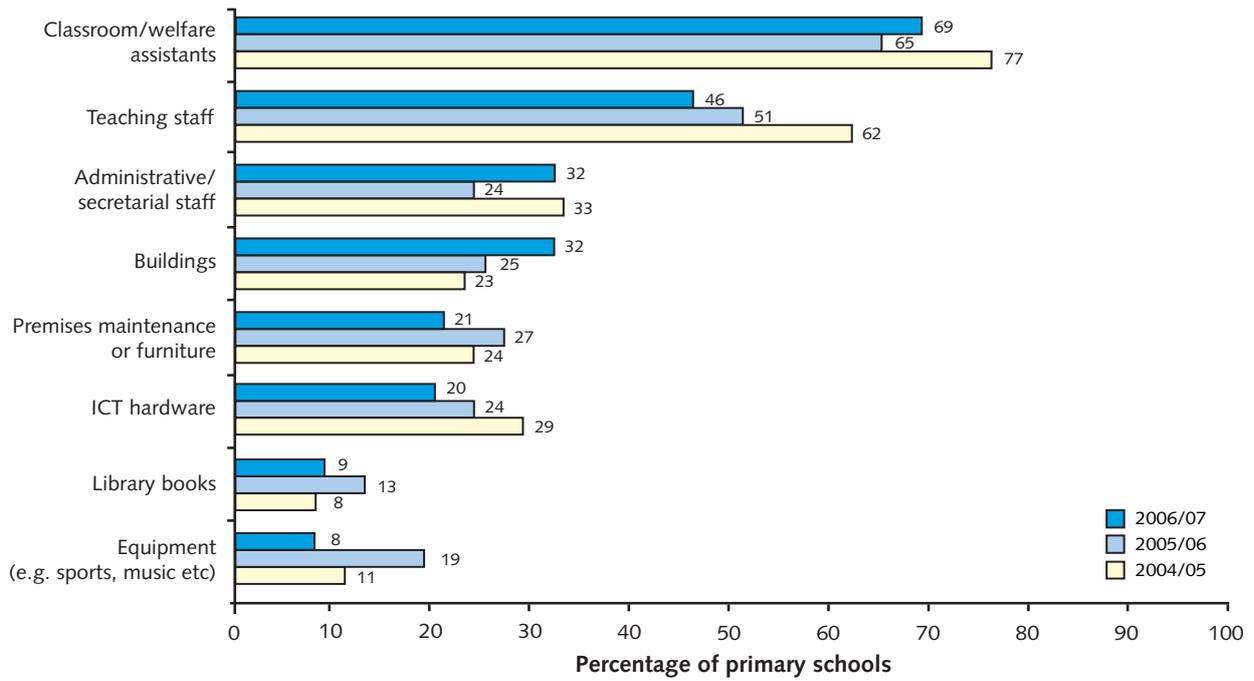
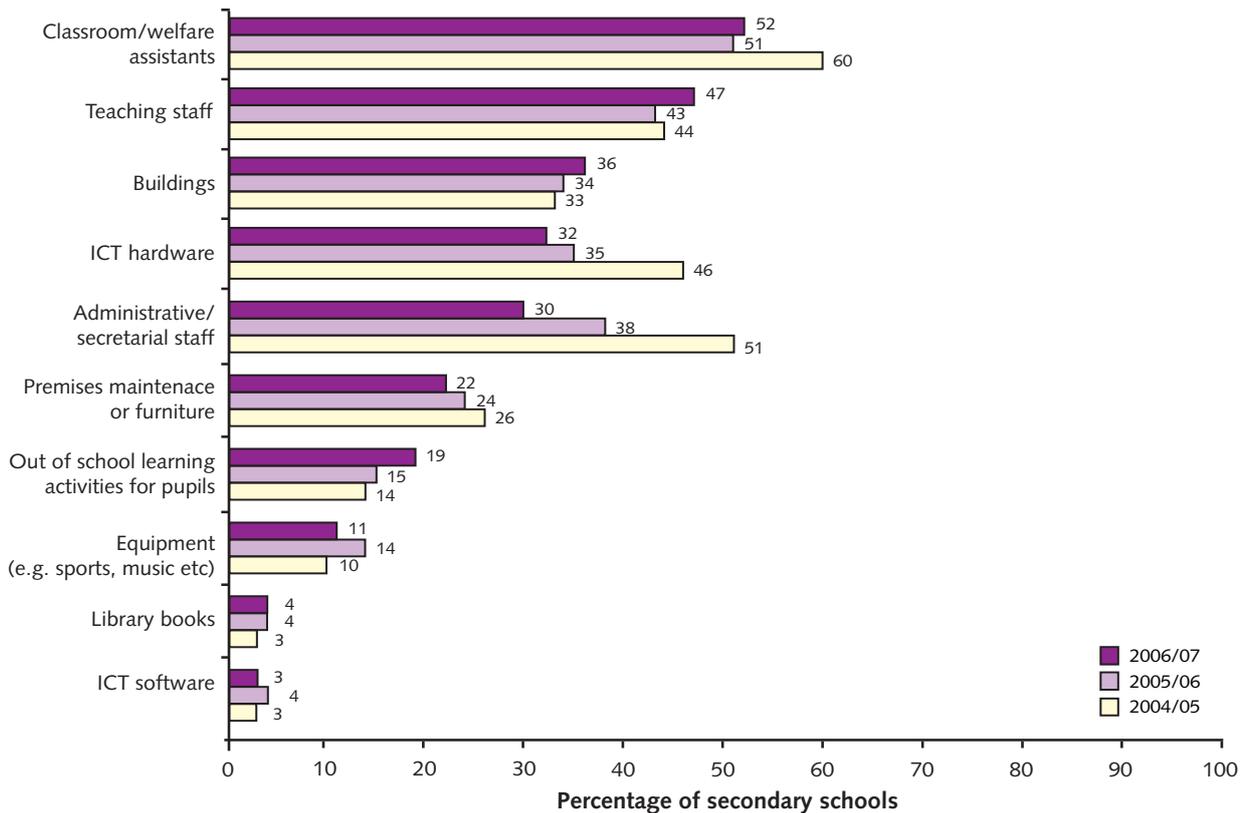


Figure 5 Secondary headteachers' priorities for additional spending - changes over time³



higher eligibility for FSM than in other secondary schools. However, secondary schools in the lowest attainment band were *less* likely than higher attaining schools to prioritise premises maintenance or furniture for increased spending. In contrast, grammar schools were the secondary schools *least* likely to identify out-of-school learning activities and classroom/welfare assistants for increased funding. However, grammar schools, secondary schools with the lowest levels of eligibility for FSM, and those in the highest attainment band were the *most* likely secondary schools to prioritise buildings.

Other differences between groups of primary schools that were statistically significant related to spending on teaching staff: this was more likely to be a priority in small primary schools than in medium- or large-sized schools. Primary schools in the English unitary authorities were also more likely than primary schools in other types of authority to prioritise spending on equipment.

Other priorities for increased spending

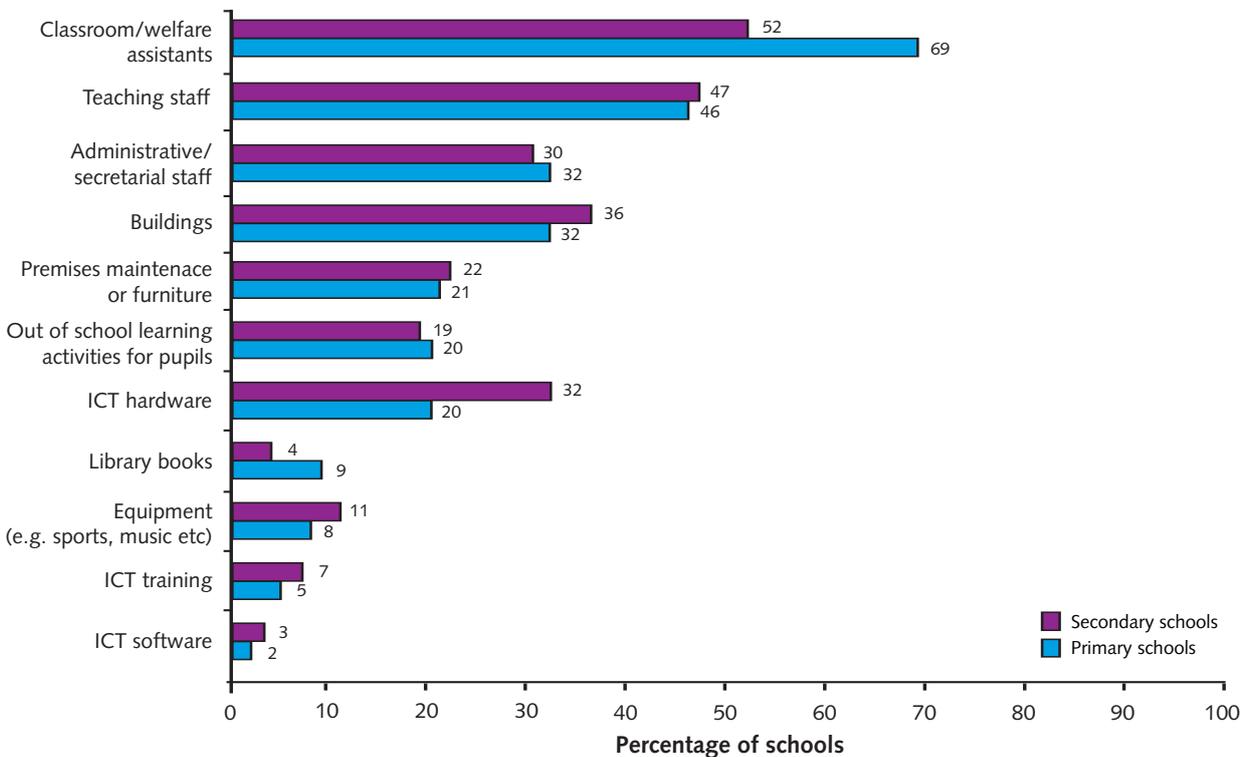
Both the primary and secondary schools were given the opportunity to describe other areas for increased spending. Other responses were given by four and three per cent of schools respectively. The other priorities for funding listed by primary schools included:

- family support worker
- curriculum development.

The other priorities for funding listed by secondary schools included:

- staff development/training
- pupil support unit
- reducing overspend/paying off deficit.

Figure 6 Comparison of primary and secondary headteachers' priorities for increased funding in 2007



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2.6 Have schools' perceptions of local authority support for school improvement changed?

Headteachers were asked how they rated a range of types of LA support for school improvement. Table 3 compares the findings from the 2007 surveys with those from the surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006.

The proportion of primary respondents who rated their LA as *excellent* or *good* at providing training increased by five per cent between 2005 and 2007. However, there were decreases of 11 per cent in both the proportions of primary and secondary respondents who rated their LA as *excellent* or *good* at providing leadership. In the secondary survey there were also decreases of nine, eight and seven per cent respectively, over the same period, in the proportion of respondents who rated LA support as a critical friend, sharing good practice and as a data provider as *excellent* or *good*. The ratings for other forms of support showed little or no overall change.

2.7 Have schools' perceptions of extended schools provision changed?

Headteachers were asked to identify the extended services and activities on offer in their school. Table 4 compares findings from the 2007 surveys with those from 2005 and 2006. In both primary and secondary schools there were successive annual increases in the numbers offering core services and activities, such as breakfast clubs and the utilisation of school facilities for community activities. The largest increase was in the proportion of primary schools offering breakfast clubs, which increased from 31 per cent in 2005 to 46 per cent in 2007. Services that were less common in schools such as health and social services and public libraries showed little or no overall change.

In 2007 about three-quarters of secondary schools and two-thirds of primary schools indicated that they were planning to develop the range of services available on school premises. This represented an increase of about ten percentage points since 2005 in the proportions of primary and secondary schools who said that they were planning to



Table 3 Ratings of LA support for school improvement

Type of LA support/advice or guidance	% of primary schools rating support as excellent/good			% of secondary schools rating support as excellent/good		
	2007	2006	2005	2007	2006	2005
Data provider	89	92	87	75	79	82
Training provider	74	74	69	53	53	56
Budget setting	71	66	68	51	49	51
Critical friend	66	71	71	53	61	62
Sharing good practice	61	65	62	44	47	52
Providing leadership	54	63	65	36	40	47
N=	347	370	413	854	1155	1224

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages for each year do not sum to 100.

Table 4 Extended provision in schools

Type of extended provision	% of primary schools offering service/activity			% of secondary schools offering service/activity		
	2007	2006	2005	2007	2006	2005
Public library	2	2	2	4	2	2
Social services	4	2	4	5	6	6
Health services	12	8	6	15	14	14
Breakfast clubs	46	39	31	62	59	53
School facilities used for community activities	57	54	48	84	81	77
N=	347	370	413	854	1155	1224

More than one answer could be put forward so percentages for each year do not sum to 100.



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Table 5 Strategies for involving parents in school life*

Ways in which schools involve parents in school life schools	% of primary schools			% of secondar		
	2007	2006	2005	2007	2006	2005
School newsletters	99	98	98	97	94	98
Encouraging parents to contact and/or visit the school	98	97	97	94	90	88
Special events for parents (e.g. information/discussion evenings)	96	96	95	94	93	93
Gathering parents' views as part of school self-evaluation	98	95	85	95	92	85
Parental involvement in the classroom	92	92	94**	12	16	--
An active PTA or equivalent	83	84	85	60	63	65
School website	79	73	--	94	85	86
Parental involvement in out-of-school-learning activities	67	73	72	52	53	49
Educational opportunities for parents (e.g. ICT/literacy/numeracy classes or events)	55	57	--	43	46	46
Other	16	14	21	14	10	13
N=	347	370	413	854	1155	1224

Notes: -- No data were collected.

* More than one answer could be put forward so percentages for each year do not sum to 100

** In 2004/05, this item was listed as 'Parental help in the classroom'.



develop their range of services. The main reasons given by schools that were not planning to develop these services have remained consistent since 2005, i.e. budgetary considerations and building constraints.

2.8 Have schools' perceptions of involving parents changed?

Headteachers were asked to identify the range of ways in which they involved parents in school life. Table 5 compares the findings from the 2007 surveys with those from 2005 and 2006. Overall, the frequencies with which schools used particular strategies to engage parents in school life were very similar to those reported in the two previous annual surveys. The only strategy, where comparison data was available in primary and secondary surveys, that showed a marked increase since 2005 was gathering parents' views as part of school self-evaluation. The proportion of schools using this strategy increased by 13 percentage points in the primary survey and ten percentage points in the secondary survey, probably related to the new schools' inspection framework (Ofsted, 2005) (see Table 5).

3 Summary

3.1 Main areas of concern

In line with previous years, budgets remained the main concern for headteachers in primary schools, although the level of concern was considerably lower in 2007 than in 2006. Staffing had overtaken budgets to become the main area of concern in secondary schools in 2007. In both primary and secondary schools, concerns regarding inspection showed considerable decreases, reversing the increases observed in 2006. This suggests that experience of the new inspection framework has allayed the concerns of headteachers regarding the changes. Pupil behaviour remained a main concern for approximately 40 per cent of secondary schools, but only 20 per cent of primary schools cited behaviour as a main concern.

3.2 Priorities for additional funding

Headteachers' priorities in 2007 were similar to those in 2006. Classroom/welfare assistants remain the main priority for additional funding, with the proportion of headteachers identifying this as a priority area increasing slightly compared to the previous survey.

The second most frequently mentioned priority for additional funding in both primary and secondary schools in 2007 was teaching staff. This was also the second most frequently identified area in primary and secondary schools in 2006. In primary schools the proportion of headteachers prioritising this was lower in 2007 than in the previous survey, but in secondary schools there was a small increase in the percentage of respondents identifying teaching staff as an area for increased spending.

3.3 Local authority support for school improvement

Between 2005 and 2007 the proportion of **primary** schools rating LA support for training provision as *excellent* or *good* increased by five per cent. Over the same period there was a decrease of 11 per cent in the proportion of schools (primary and secondary) rating their LA as *excellent* or *good* at providing leadership.

3.4 Extended schools

In primary and secondary schools there were successive annual increases in the numbers offering core services and activities, such as breakfast clubs and the utilisation of school facilities for community activities. Services that were less common in schools such as health and social services and public libraries showed little or no overall change.

3.5 Involving parents

Overall, the frequencies with which schools used particular strategies to engage parents in school life in 2007 were very similar to those reported in 2005. The only strategy that showed a marked increase was in gathering parents' views as part of school self-evaluation, and this was probably related to the introduction of the new schools' inspection framework.



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Notes

1 Surveys conducted prior to 2006 asked headteachers to list up to three issues.

2 Only includes issues where comparison data were available.

3 Only includes issues where comparison data were available.

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