



The changing education environment in London - a schools' perspective

AUTHORED BY

Daniel Clay, Amie Cox and Nicholas Maybanks (EdComs)

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Acronyms

A number of acronyms are used in quotes from school leaders throughout this report. For ease of reference these are outlined below.

AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
CPD	Continued Professional Development
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIP	School Improvement Partner

Executive Summary

This report sets out the key findings from research undertaken with school leaders across London's 33 local authorities exploring highly topical issues such as school governance, funding and the role of the local authority. London Councils commissioned EdComs, an independent communications and research agency, to engage Headteachers and Chairs of Governors in the research process. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research involving 347 school leaders across London, this report provides insights into how the ongoing reforms of the education sector are being received by schools themselves.

Key findings from our analysis of school relationships with the local authority reveal:

- Three-quarters of school leaders reported **positive working relationships** with their local authority; stability, fairness, commitment and trust were reported as being key elements of a positive working relationship.
- Schools currently access a wide-range of services from their local authority and place a high worth on the expertise available within the local authority, with two-thirds of school leaders believing the local authority **helped to raise standards** and over two-thirds saying local authority support **aided school decision-making**.
- Many school leaders were highly concerned at the anticipated decline in both the independent strategic oversight that local authorities provide and the range of support services, some of which are already disappearing. Going forward, given the reductions in local authority resources, schools felt it is likely that the future local authority role will be one of **commissioner, broker and service provider**.

Where relationships between schools and local authorities worked most effectively there was a strong sense of common purpose, trust, transparency and fairness – the latter, especially, being a common theme that runs throughout this report. Open and honest relationships were also a key element of why many schools valued the School Improvement Partnership services (SIPs) who were previously well placed to act as 'critical friends'. While there is no longer a statutory responsibility for every school to have a funded SIP service the Secretary of State for Education has indicated that local authorities still have a role to play as "champions of excellence"¹ for free schools and academies as well as maintained schools.

Local authorities, as democratically elected and publically accountable bodies, were perceived as being important in helping schools understand and meet the wider needs of the local community, not just the immediate needs of pupils and their families. School leaders participating in this research were almost unanimous in highlighting a range of concerns at diminishing local authority roles in education. Of particular concern was the potential emergence of powerful 'superheads', chains and multi-academy trusts that could bypass these community concerns. Some chains of academies are already assuming functions formerly operated by the local authority (such as a central HR service) to achieve economies of scale. This is likely to increase as the number of academies begins to grow. As these chains

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110711/debtext/110711-0001.htm>

could, theoretically, be quite geographically spread out – certainly more so than the present local governance structure in London – this would present implications for the extent to which centralised decision making will continue to reflect a ‘local’ context. This concerned several respondents, particularly in light of later findings suggesting a ‘tipping point’ of academy conversions where it would no longer be viable for a school to remain being maintained by the local authority.

The research also provides a wider insight into the present range of services that schools access from their local authority, many of which were highly valued, seen to offer good value for money and seen to sit most comfortably within a local authority-type body. Going forward, given the reductions in local authority resources, school leaders variously suggested the local authority role should be one of commissioner, broker, or service provider – but crucially none felt that the local authority role could or should be discarded entirely.

The Government has already indicated that the local authority role going forward is likely to comprise elements of all three of these roles: a commissioner in order to continue to champion excellence and maintain equality; a broker in order to provide co-ordination, oversight and utilise expertise; and a service provider in order to maintain quality assurance in relation to more specialist provisions. Given the expertise that still exists within local authorities in relation to the widespread needs of a changing education system, it will be interesting to see what balance will be achieved between these roles for local authorities going forward.

Key findings from our analysis of governance models and joint working reveal:

- Two-thirds of schools surveyed in London have either considered and rejected, or never considered becoming an Academy. Nevertheless there was recognition that there is likely to come a **tipping point** at which so many schools will have converted it will no longer be viable to continue as a local authority-maintained school without it affecting its financial stability and competitiveness.
- The main benefits of **Academy status** were perceived to be the **increased standards** and **financial advantage** that independence would bring. However there was also acknowledgement that the governance arrangements were such that, operating independently of the local authority, Academies are ultimately answerable to the Department for Education - an arrangement which has more in common with **centralisation** than shifting power to local communities.
- School leaders were very negative about the idea of **free schools**, perceiving it as **ill thought-out** and **undemocratic**. Relating to the quality and stability of educational provisions, concerns were raised about the commitment and motivations of those who were applying to run free schools and of the credentials of those teaching in these institutions.
- School leaders place a **high value on joint working** with other schools and expect this to increase in the future, in spite of the competition that is fostered between schools through funding arrangements and league tables. The co-ordination of collaborative

work between schools may provide a real opportunity for local authorities that are well placed because of their local knowledge and expertise.

- There is a considerable lack of understanding **about the role of the local schools forum** among school leaders. Over three-quarters of school leaders feel they have little or no influence within their schools forum.

While there were a variety of motivations for schools considering Academy status, the primary reasons appeared to be related to finance, security and educational standards. School leaders were acutely aware that more and more schools were becoming Academies and are concerned not to be left behind. These concerns could be seen as prescient in the light of the recent reports that all schools in Lincolnshire are being advised to convert to academy status, as the authority will not be able to provide support to those remaining.² This approach is soon likely to be replicated in some London Boroughs as more schools opt for academy status.

The Academy programme is widely seen to be part of the current Government's policy of radical decentralisation – returning power to local communities. Certainly, on the surface, the decision to become an Academy can result in greater freedoms for schools to manage affairs independently of local government. However, it could also be argued that this does not necessarily equate to providing more power for local people and local communities. As one Secondary school Headteacher noted, schools becoming Academies actually remove themselves from local accountability, instead becoming directly accountable to the Department for Education. In this respect, the Academy programme could be seen as transferring power to the centre whilst giving the illusion of decentralising control.

“This idea of being totally responsible for your own destiny. If you mess up, you’re dealing with the DfE.”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

A range of negative views were also voiced about the Free Schools programme, which many respondents did not feel would operate to the benefit of children, parents or local communities despite government rhetoric to the contrary. Some of these views may be informed by the perceived threat of new competition – nearly half of school leaders felt that the amount of revenue funding they receive would decrease if a free school opened in their local authority and there were similar competitive concerns over the potential effects on staff recruitment and demand for places.

But other opinions, such as that the diversity of pupil intake would decrease (felt by 29% of respondents), betray deeper worries about the effects of free schools on the wider aims and objectives of the education system. One of the key concerns raised about free schools was that teachers do not have to be formally qualified to work in them, providing no guarantee that they will be fit to teach effectively. This was particularly contrasted with the emphasis in the Schools White Paper – *The Importance of Teaching*³ - which focused upon improving

² For the full story, see www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug01/academies-row-divides-schools

³ *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010* (2010). DfE.

teacher/teaching quality and tightening entry requirements to formal teacher training. So, while there are concerted efforts to improve the quality of teaching within maintained schools, this will not apply to free schools and therefore school leaders are concerned about a lack of both quality and equality in the system.

School Leaders also questioned how committed some of the individuals proposing to open free schools would be in the long term – particularly whether parents would wish to continue to be involved once their own child had left the school. Many appeared to feel that the practical demands of running a school were being underestimated.

“I find it insulting that anyone can set up their own school.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

School leaders also highlighted concerns about the effect that the Academies programme will have on the education sector as a whole, such as a perceived lack of equality and an expectation that increased competition will drive down co-operation between schools despite government’s stated intentions. School leaders had a clear sense of the benefits of working with other local schools, particularly in terms of sharing good practice. Most also expected the level of joint working between schools to increase in the future to compensate for an expected reduction in local authority support. A recent ‘think’ piece published by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services highlighted the importance of formal inter-school collaboration in creating a self-improving school system. However there is a real tension in the system in that on the one hand the system of funding and league tables promotes school competition (i.e. better results leads to more demand for places leading to more money and so on), and on the other hand, schools are being expected to collaborate more and more. This is a tension that is likely to come increasingly to the fore as the role of local authorities reduces. A number of school leaders indicated that the local authority should have a role to play in promoting and facilitating a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to joint working.

Local schools forums were established under the Education Act 2002 to give schools a formal structure through which to influence the disbursement of funding for schools. While these forums were reported as highly effective structures for influencing funding distribution by a minority of respondents, over three-quarters of school leaders felt they had little or no influence over the decision making within these forums. A number of school leaders had very little idea what happened at these meetings and expressed grave concerns over the level of power that well-established stakeholders may wield within these. This is particularly significant given government proposals in the recent schools revenue funding consultation to potentially strengthen the powers of schools forums in determining local funding allocations.

Key findings from our analysis of school funding and school places planning reveal:

- The **pupil premium** was seen as having the **potential to drive up attainment** by 42% of schools, but school leaders tended to feel that it would most likely be used to balance budgets or continue valued services that are losing funding, rather than pay for additional support targeted at disadvantaged pupils.

- A substantial proportion (45%) of school leaders felt under **pressure to expand**, with two-thirds claiming to have increased their school roll over the last five years. School leaders cited **lack of suitable space** as the most common obstacle to expanding and there were concerns about the pressures being placed on existing school buildings in London – over one-quarter of school leaders were **very dissatisfied with the current condition of their school buildings**.

School leaders tended to view changes to school funding systems as unclear, with the majority feeling that at least some elements of local flexibility should be incorporated alongside a national funding formula. While one of the headlines in the Comprehensive Spending Review was that schools would be protected from the main thrust of the cuts, the Department for Education as a whole has still had to make savings. This meant, among other things, cuts in the non-schools budget, school capital spending and the scrapping of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (now replaced by the 16-19 Bursary Fund incorporating a c70% saving). Schools were generally aware that even though funding was becoming tighter (primarily due to schools budgets not rising above inflation) they had been relatively protected compared to other areas of state spending.

The government has stated that the pupil premium does not represent new money⁴, and although envisaged as funding to be used in tackling disadvantage and supporting deprived pupils, the government has made it clear that schools will be free to spend it in whatever way they feel best. School leaders responding to this research most commonly stated they were planning to use the pupil premium to continue funding valued services balanced against cuts to other funding sources. Given that the main benefits of the pupil premium were seen to be related to directly supporting more disadvantaged pupils, using these funds to balance against general cuts could possibly negate their intended use and core benefit.

The majority of schools involved in this research had experienced increases in schools rolls over the last five years and almost half felt pressurised to expand further still. Although there will inevitably be differences between and within local authorities in relation to school places, any increase in demand is likely to have implications for school resourcing and infrastructure: lack of space and pressure on existing – often unsatisfactory – school buildings was a key concern reported by school leaders. The Schools White Paper highlighted both that schools require high quality, fit for purpose buildings and that capital spending will have to reduce by 60% in real terms between 2011 and 2015. It is imperative that the capital budget that remains is spent on those schools that are most in need of this support, particularly those having missed out on Building Schools for the Future funding.

Most of all, schools stated they want a fair education sector, where every school and every student is given the same opportunities to excel – the implication being that funding needs to be used effectively to enable this. The possible introduction of different systems for maintained schools and academies (including free schools) in relation to admissions policies was a key cause for concern. Under the previous Government the admissions framework

⁴ Curtis, P. (2010). 'Michael Gove admits pupil premium is not new money'. *The Guardian* 24 October. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/24/michael-gove-pupil-premium>

had become stricter, reputedly in an attempt to increase fairness in admissions. The current coalition Government is presently consulting on changes to the admissions framework with the intention of simplifying admissions. While schools would be likely to favour any changes which make things fairer and simpler, there were concerns from many that “simpler” could mean providing more room for schools to ‘play the system’ and admit the kinds of pupils that will be advantageous for them. School leaders highlighted that local coordination and supervision of admissions was critical, and that the local authority was well placed to continue undertaking this role – particularly in London, which has achieved a large degree of success through co-ordination of admissions for secondary, and more recently primary, schools through the Pan-London Admissions Board.

Research context and objectives

The role of London Councils

London Councils is committed to fighting for more resources for London and getting the best possible deal for London's 33 councils.⁵ It operates as a cross-party organisation that is funded and run by its member authorities to work on behalf of them all, regardless of political persuasion.⁶ The aim of London Councils is to help local authorities make life better for Londoners, through developing policies designed to help boroughs deliver the best possible deal for their residents and in lobbying the government and others to provide London's local authorities with the freedom, resources and powers they need to improve life in the capital.

London Councils plays a critical role in lobbying government and focuses its policy and lobbying activity across a number of areas and the Children and Young People Team, who commissioned this research, is an important part of London Councils' wider policy directorate. In recent years, the team has delivered key initiatives relating to the education system including managing a continuing campaign for securing additional funding for London Boroughs to address the on-going shortfall in primary school places; instituting a key support programme to improve practice in London's Pupil Referral Units (PRUs); and overseeing the creation of 2,000 new apprenticeship places within London Boroughs.

Aims and objectives of this research

Since the formation of the Coalition Government in May 2010, it has been a busy period for the education world, with several major policy announcements that will impact upon the schools sector. Many of these changes, either passed in the Academies Act 2010 or proposed in the Education Bill 2011, are expected to have a large impact on London local authorities and schools. A number of these educational policy changes have a common theme: devolution. The Government is championing devolution to school level and minimising the local authority role, meaning that the political and economic environment for education is changing dramatically and the role of the local authority in education is unclear.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to gauge views from schools across London on how these reforms will affect them and to identify any concerns they have around these changes. In particular, this research aimed to explore the views of Headteachers and Chairs of Governors around issues including:

- The local authority role in education
- Models of school governance
- Partnership working
- Places planning and school rolls
- School funding and the pupil premium

⁵ <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/aboutus/>

⁶ Ibid

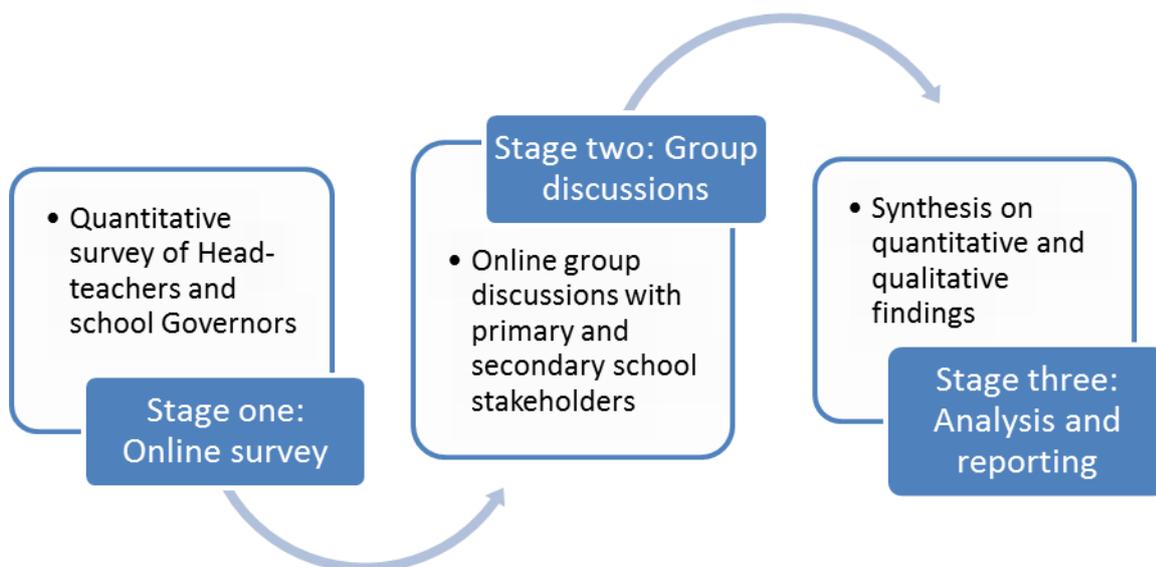
The aim of this research was to gather the views of London schools leaders to complement the voice of London’s local authorities and strengthen the collective calls for greater investment in the city’s educational infrastructure.

The following section outlines the methodology used in undertaking this research. Key findings are then presented thematically: the role of the local authority; Academies, Free Schools and joint working; and school funding and school rolls.

1. The research approach

London Councils appointed EdComs to undertake this research which took place between May and July 2011. The research approach involved an online survey of Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of London schools followed by group discussions and interviews with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Staged methodology



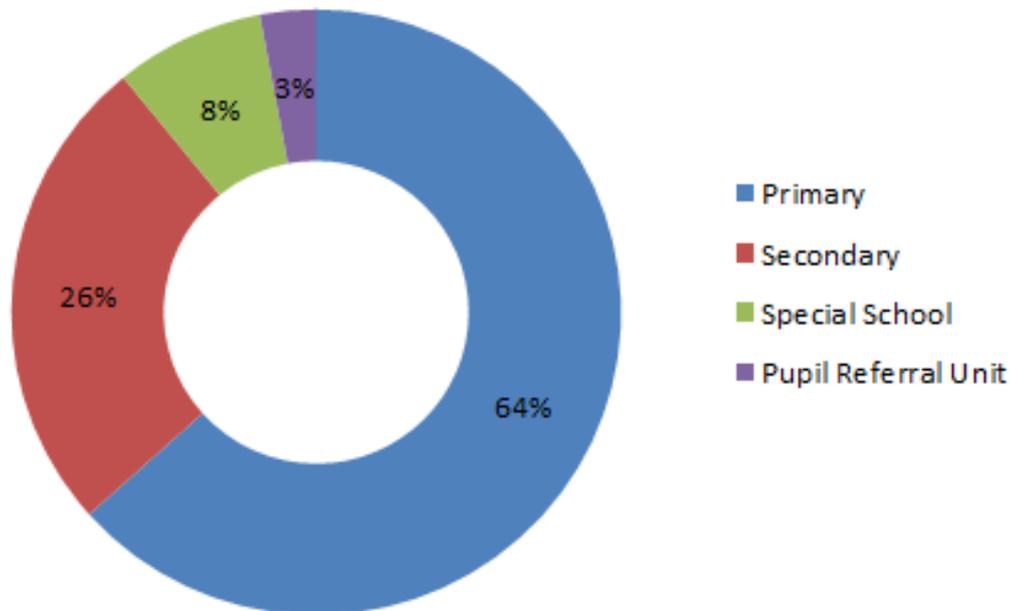
Online survey

Working closely with London Councils, EdComs developed and distributed an online survey to Headteachers and Chairs of Governors at every maintained school in London including Academies, special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Representatives from a total of 2,511 schools were invited to participate in an online survey between 9th June and 11th July 2011. Out of a sample population of 5,022 potential respondents the survey was completed by a total of 347 respondents (equating to a 7% response rate)⁷. Three-quarters of those responding were Chairs of Governors (74%; n=257) and the remainder were Headteachers (26%; n=90).

The breakdown of respondents by school type is illustrated in Figure 2 (overleaf). A total of 12 secondary school Academies responded to the survey⁸. The majority of these Academies achieved Academy status in 2010.

⁷ Standard response rates for online surveys tend to vary between 5-10% depending on the stakeholder group and subject matter. With this sample frame of circa 5,000 potential respondents a response rate of 7% provides a robust sample for analysis and reporting.

⁸ During the period in which fieldwork took place there were 46 Academies in London.

Figure 2: Breakdown of responses by school type

The online survey comprised 32 questions exploring the views and concerns of school leaders relating to current policy reforms. These questions provided respondents with the opportunity to provide both open and closed responses to ensure both a range and depth of information was gathered. Where differences have been reported between groups of survey respondents (e.g. primary and secondary schools; stakeholder role; borough type) these will be statistically significant to a 95% confidence interval.

Group discussions and telephone interviews

In order to explore the divergent views on current and future relationships with local authorities, we undertook online group discussions with three stakeholder groups: primary school Headteachers (n=5); secondary school Headteachers (n=4); and Chairs of Governors (n=6). An online methodology was chosen as most appropriate to maintain the anonymity of participants and to promote an open and honest discussion. In addition to these group discussions, telephone interviews were conducted with three special school Headteachers and three Headteachers of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). All participants were recruited from those responding to the online survey. Participants were purposely selected in order to achieve a group composition that reflected different attitudes, experiences and borough representation based upon their responses to the online survey.

2. The role of the local authority

Summary of key messages

General messages across school types

- Three-quarters of school leaders reported positive working relationships with their local authority, although this varied according to school type. Stability, fairness, commitment and trust were key aspects of a positive relationship.
- The majority of working relationships (55%) between schools and local authorities were not perceived to have changed over the last year. However, for one-quarter of school leaders, relationships were felt to have deteriorated. This was particularly the case for schools in outer London.
- Schools currently access a wide range of services from their local authority ranging from administration-related services to highly specialised support services. A high worth was placed upon the expertise available within the local authority and the vast majority of services were seen to offer good value for money. Of particular value were school improvement services, child protection prevention services and personnel services.
- Two-thirds of school leaders believed that the support of the local authority helped to raise standards within their schools.
- Over two-thirds of school leaders valued the support of the local authority in aiding school decision making.
- Many school leaders were highly concerned at the anticipated decline in the range of services that local authorities are likely to continue providing. In particular, school leaders expected a reduced local authority role in raising attainment and quality assurance.
- Although the future role of the local authority is uncertain, school leaders variously reported that their expertise could be harnessed as a broker, commissioner or service provided. Local authorities were felt to be in a strong position to continue offering a wide range of support services to schools going forward.

Key differences between primary schools and secondary schools

- Primary school leaders were significantly more likely to report positive working relationships with their local authorities than were secondary schools.
- Primary school leaders were also significantly more likely than secondary schools to indicate that input from the local authority was the most valuable form of support in informing school decision making. Conversely, secondary school leaders placed the greatest value on collaboration with other schools.
- Primary schools were significantly more likely to access many local authority support services than were secondary schools.

Key differences for Pupil Referral Units and special schools

- Both Pupil Referral Unit and special school leaders reported relatively autonomous relationships with the local authority, however, the implications of reductions to local authority support and resources were seen to have potentially significant repercussions for these establishments due to their specialist remit and increased accessing of local authority services (as compared to mainstream schools).

School relationships with the Local Authority

In general, schools have very positive relationships with their local authority

"[The relationship is] positive because there is an on-going, open, professional dialogue. The director etc., makes it clear what his, or the authority's intentions are, what they're doing in order to achieve those, and in terms of, if an issue's more to do with [school] specifically, he's accessible, as are other officers."

[Special school, Headteacher]

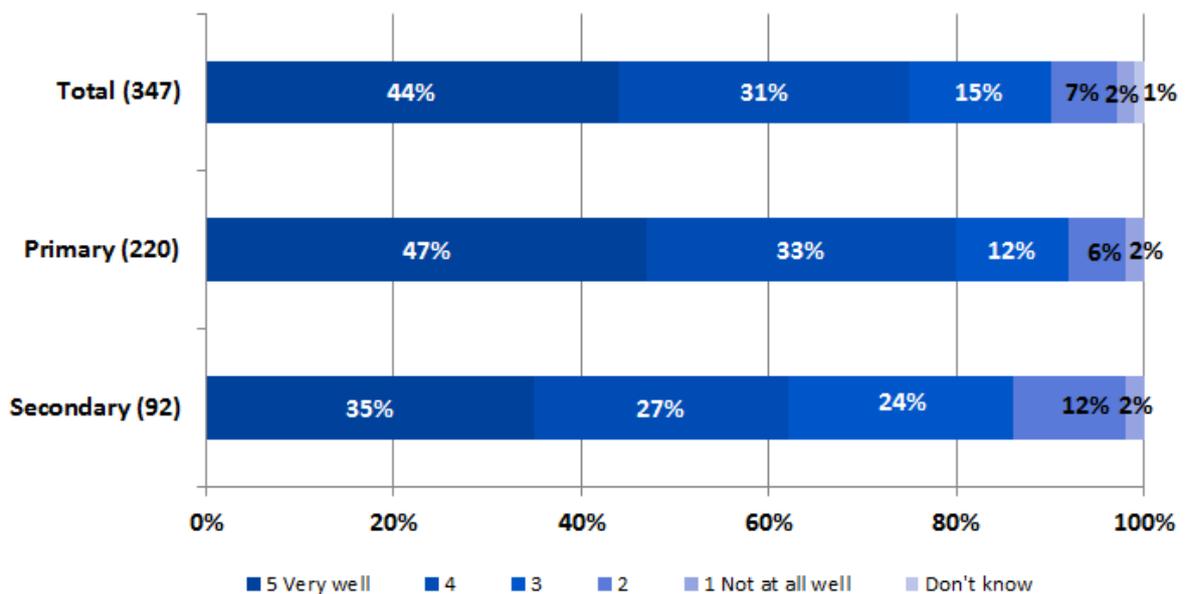
"Our school came out of special measures two years ago directly because of the action and support of our LEA. We might not exist, and certainly would have far poorer standards, without their consistent and valued support."

[Primary school, Headteacher]

When asked about their relationship with their local authority, school leaders and Governors responding to the survey were overwhelmingly positive with three-quarters of respondents (75%) reporting that they considered their school worked well or very well with the local authority. There were no significant differences between the responses of Headteachers or Chairs of Governors however primary school leaders were significantly more likely to report a positive relationship as compared to those representing secondary schools (see Figure 3, below).

Figure 3: 'How well would you say your school works with the Local Authority?'

Base: All respondents (347)



As might be expected, schools that had not considered Academy status or had considered and rejected becoming an Academy were significantly more likely to report a positive

working relationship with their local authority (82%) than those who were Academies or those considering Academy status (60%).

Within the qualitative research we explored schools' current relationships with local authorities in more detail and identified a number of factors that were seen to influence relationships. While a number of these factors relate to experiences of specific services, which we describe in more detail below, the quality of individual, personal relationships between school leaders and key local authority representatives (either at operational or strategic levels) had a strong bearing on how schools perceived their relationship with the local authority as a whole. Where relationships were seen to be strong there were high levels of stability, commitment and trust. This element of consistency was important regardless of whether a school was seen to be performing poorly, adequately or to be excelling.

“There has to be a shared understanding – if schools do not trust the motives of the LA or individuals within the LA, or if the LA does not trust the capacity of the head to lead the school through the ups and downs of a school’s life, then things will not work smoothly.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“Our LA has experienced a great deal of turbulence and instability over recent years – this weakened the relationship with schools – having some stability and commitment to working together has been important.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

Relationships were more strained where individuals within local authorities were seen to differentiate the level and forms of support provided to schools within their authority depending upon performance. A partnership approach, which is what many school leaders and Governors sought in their relationship with the local authority, was facilitated by a sense of trust, fairness, respect and transparency.

The relationships between local authorities and both Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and special schools were quite distinct from that of other primary and secondary schools. Despite the traditionally closer family relationship between local authorities and PRUs/special schools, Headteachers we spoke with from these institutions reported being given quite a large amount of autonomy from their local authority. This was seen to be beneficial in some respects, as it allowed establishments to develop systems that worked within their contexts. However, Headteachers also valued a close working, constructive relationship with their local authority. This was particularly valuable to ensure their input into strategic decision making within the authority and, for special schools, in co-ordinating admissions.

“We went through a period of not being consulted and now they’re looking at that and taking on the views of the professionals and experts dealing with those pupils. It feels more positive.”

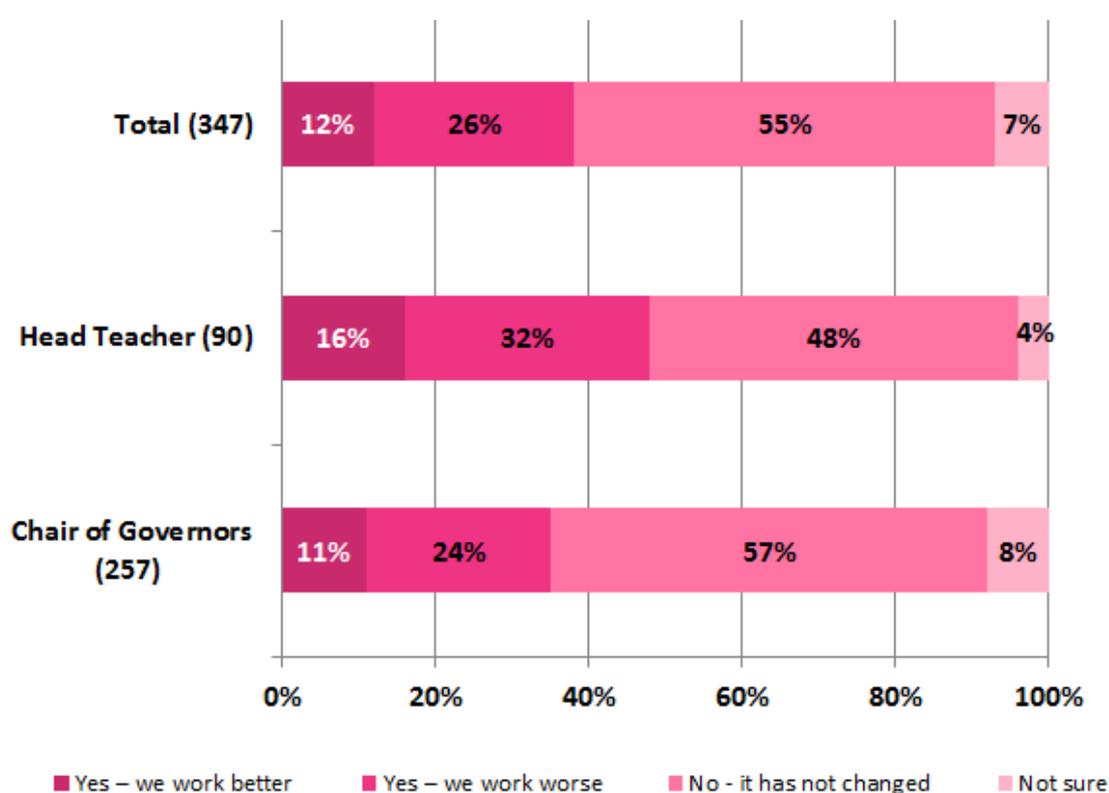
[Special school, Headteacher]

Relationships between many schools and local authorities have changed over the past year

School leaders were asked about recent changes to their schools working relationship with the local authority. Although the majority of survey respondents felt their relationship had changed (55%), over one-quarter believed that their relationship had deteriorated during the past year. This figure increases to almost one-third (32%) when considering the perspective of Headteachers (see Figure 4, below).

Figure 4: ‘Do you feel that the way you work with your local authority has changed over the last 12 months?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Feedback from school leaders and Chairs of Governors participating in the qualitative research largely reflected messages gathered from the online survey: for some, school relationships with their local authority had changed for better or worse, but for most it had remained the same. Despite this finding, virtually all participants reported that their local authority was under considerable pressure to achieve cost savings, which had led to reductions in personnel and in services that provide direct and indirect support to schools.

Although some research participants reported that the reductions in local authority resourcing had been beneficial – through the removal of less effective staff – the vast majority highlighted concerns around the diminishing role of their local authority. This was particularly in relation to the impact of reduced services although in some cases school

leaders reported that the instability within local authorities had a direct negative impact upon their relationships with their local authority.

“Ours is becoming more like a brokerage and less like a resource – they have withdrawn many services...”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

School leaders from PRUs and special schools reported that historically, they had enjoyed a large amount of autonomy in their relationships with their local authority. Nevertheless, both accessed a considerable amount of local authority services, which some reported, had declined considerably over the previous year which significantly affected their own service provision.

“We’ve missed the early intervention from the Youth Inclusion team, the YOT... The work around career guidance, we’ve missed that, and that was through the local authority. They did that really well. The work around working with ethnic minority children, we’ve missed that. “

[PRU, Headteacher]

“[The local authority role is] diminishing over time... A lot of the advisory services have disappeared.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

Headteachers, particularly of primary schools, special schools and PRUs indicated that, in some respects, their relationship with their local authority had become more important in order for them to keep abreast of the latest developments both locally and nationally.

“I value most things that the local authority does given the reduction in funds and staffing. I am just wary about everything now and sometimes feel I need to 'get in' with more officers and councillors to know what is really going on.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

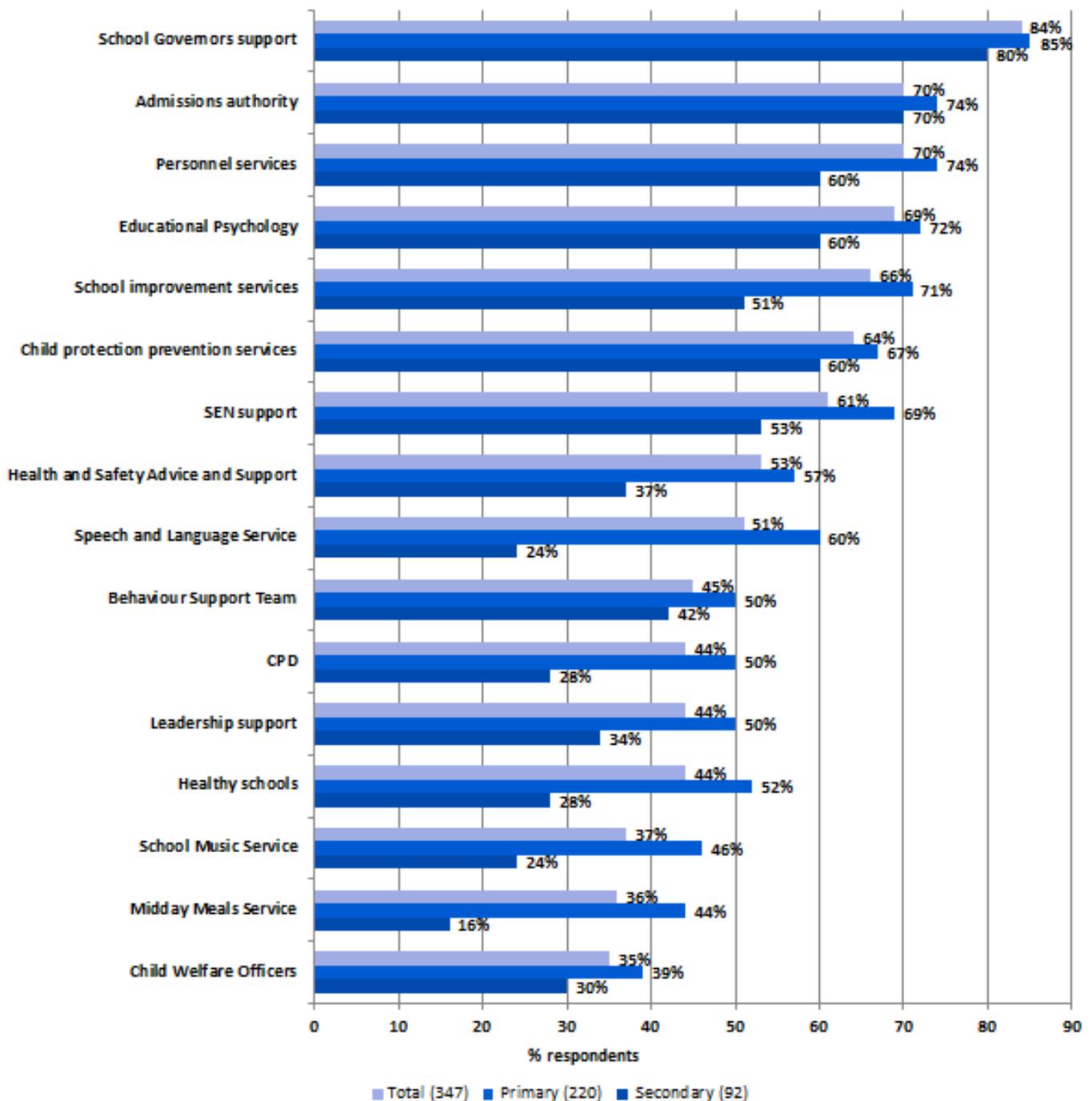
Schools currently access a wide range of services from the local authority

Within the online survey school leaders highlighted the different types of services that their school accessed from their local authority. The range of services reportedly accessed is illustrated in Figure 5 (overleaf). The key services (those accessed by over half of respondents' schools) included:

- School Governor support
- Admissions
- Personnel and Health and Safety support
- Educational Psychology, SEN support, and Speech and Language services
- Child protection prevention services
- School improvement.

Figure 5: ‘Which of the following services do you currently access from your Local Authority?’

Base: All respondents (347)



As the figure above illustrates, primary schools were more likely to access all of the support services provided by local authorities than secondary schools. As primary schools are potentially more likely to have smaller resources, capacity and expertise to undertake many of these functions (as compared to secondary schools), it is likely that any reductions in the role of local authorities will have significant impacts upon the functioning of primary schools. As might be expected, schools that were Academies (or considering Academy status) were

significantly less likely to access virtually all support services than were those were not considering Academy status.

Schools value many of the services provided by the local authority

Figure 5 illustrates the wide variety of services that schools currently access from the local authority. Within the qualitative research with school leaders we explored the perceived value of the services local authorities currently provide. On the whole, school leaders felt that local authorities generally offered excellent value for money.

“I trust the local authority to provide because they're fighting to get the work done efficiently – and economically.”

[Primary school, Chair of Governors]

In particular, school leaders highlighted a variety of services, currently provided by local authorities, as being particularly valued. These included:

- General information, advice and guidance
- School Improvement Partners and School Improvement Teams
- Teacher CPD and Governor training
- Human relations and finance services
- SEN services.

One of the key services valued by school leaders was the provision of information, advice and guidance, across a whole range of issues. Where relationships were positive, the local authority was typically seen to be a source of unbiased support and, where necessary both a facilitator and advocate on behalf of schools. Even where relationships were not positive, some leaders acknowledged that their situation was an exception rather than the rule.

“It's probably true in two-thirds of cases. And not true in one-third. And, sadly, we're in the latter cohort.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

When asked within the online survey to prioritise those services accessed in terms of those valued most, the five key support services highlighted were⁹:

- School improvement services (42%)
- Child protection prevention services (37%)
- Personnel services (36%)
- School Governors support (30%)
- SEN support (29%).

Within the qualitative research, school leaders highlighted what they valued about accessed services. These explanations sat across three broad areas: specialist support with administrative-type activities, specialist support in areas where schools have statutory

⁹ Services ranked 1-3 by over 25% of respondents

responsibilities (including exclusions and SEN), and specialist supporting in improving practice and good governance.

“Get great support re driving up quality in teaching and learning; excellent governor support service; good teacher CPD and good mentoring for new headteachers.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

“I double check all big decisions like permanent exclusions, parental complaints or land ownership through the local authority legal team – SEN matters too.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

“I value the services that can support with improving governance.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“We rely on them for admissions panel, SEN team who look at pupils coming to the school. It’s less about strategy and more about organising pupils across the special schools. Also looking at other services parents can use, social care, social workers and how they can support families.”

[Special school Headteacher]

“SIP was excellent and teams for behaviour support and literacy as well as AST system = lots of local partnerships managed by the local authority.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

Areas for improvement

Where school leaders highlighted areas of local authority support that they felt could be improved, it was notable that these differed considerably by area and tended to relate to specific difficulties that schools had with particular local authority services (e.g. Governing Body clerking, irregular support from advisers, lack of facilitation for joint-working).

“Although I value consultants there is always the issue that a different consultant or adviser each year tells you to do completely different things. This causes frustration and does not support good strategic planning.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

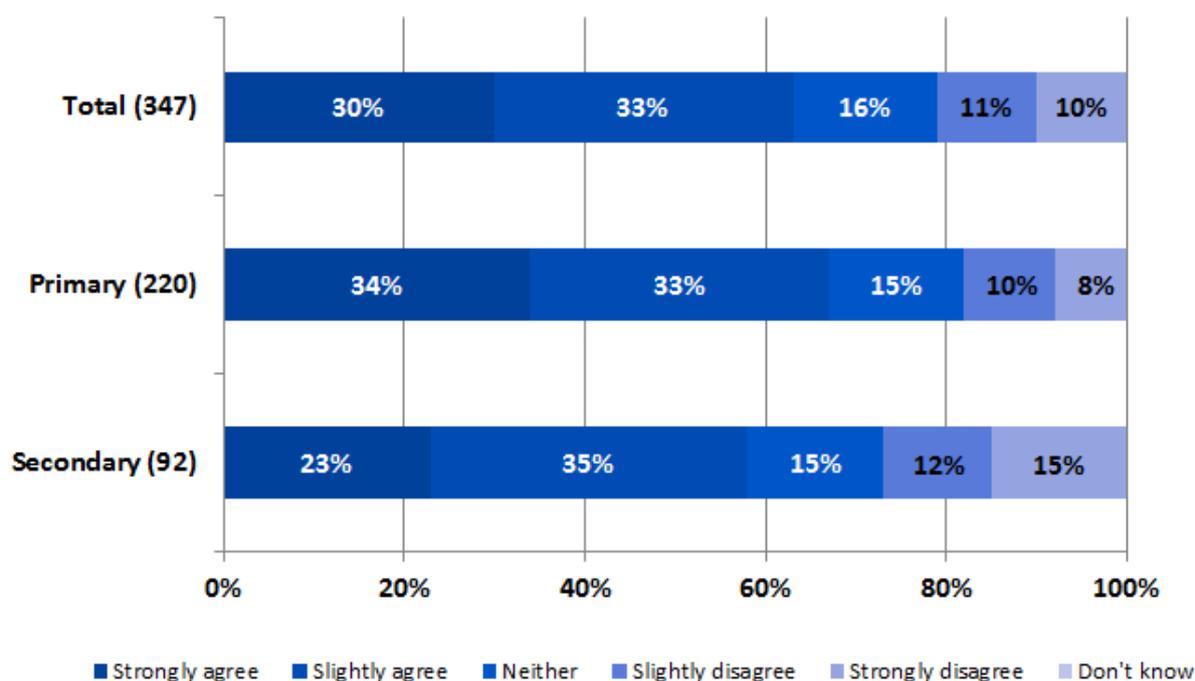
One area in which primary Headteachers in particular highlighted, was a feeling of ‘intrusion’ by the local authority. Some Headteachers voiced displeasure with any attempts by their local authority to engage in micromanagement or to covertly influence provision (either through SIPs or through working with Governors). This was an issue that was mentioned by a minority of school leaders during group discussions.

The support of the local authority helps to raise standards within schools

School leaders were asked a number of questions around the extent to which their relationship with the local authority helped to drive up standards, raise attainment and aid decision-making within their schools. As illustrated in Figure 6 (below), almost two-thirds of school leaders believed that the support of their local authority helped to drive up standards within their school.

Figure 6: ‘To what extent would you agree that the support of your local authority helps to drive up standards in your school?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Although primary schools were more likely to agree that local authority support helped to raise school standards as compared to secondary schools, this was not a statistically significant difference. There was, however, a significant difference between Headteachers and Chairs of Governors, with the latter significantly more likely to agree that local authority support helped to raise standards than were Headteachers (49% Headteacher vs. 68% Chair of Governor). As might be expected, schools that were Academies or were considering becoming an Academy, were significantly less likely to agree that local authorities helped to raise standards (50% Academy vs. 67% non-Academy). Nevertheless, half of those schools that were Academies or were considering becoming an Academy still agreed that local authority support helped to raise standards.

In discussions with school leaders there was clear agreement that local authorities had played a key role in raising attainment within schools. In many cases this was as a result of both strategic and operational support and guidance offered by local authority school improvement teams and SIPs. Several Headteachers reported that the expert support available in accessing and interpreting school and pupil performance data was a key aspect in this. However, for some Headteachers, the local authority role in raising attainment took

the form of applying pressure on schools to improve their exam results. This pressure could take both a positive and negative form (i.e. supportive or critical). Where it worked effectively, there were positive constructive relationships in place where schools and local authorities were both working towards the same agenda.

“I think that the local authority helps you to focus and standards are always the driving force. So I would expect that any intervention would ultimately raise standards.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“I agree about the NQT process and doubt that Teaching Schools will replicate the quality of what the local authority does in this respect.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

“Our current SIP is very supportive & has the confidence of the Head – a constructive relationship which is of benefit to the school.”

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

“Good communication and support with the local authority has been important for raising standards.”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

Many school leaders expressed concern that the role of local authorities in raising attainment was likely to diminish in the future because of the cuts to local authority resourcing and the removal of SIPs. The most common service provided by the local authority that school leaders involved in group discussions reported had been affected over the previous 12 months was that of the SIP, one of the most valued support services. School leaders tended to report that the SIP relationship was what they made out of it – often the more open the relationship, the more valuable it was.

In a minority of cases Headteachers reported that their local authority had very little to do with raising standards and that, instead, this was a result of work by the Headteacher, often alongside other schools. This was particularly the case for some of the special schools who could be seen to benefit most from sharing expertise with other schools working in their specialist area.

“They haven’t had to do a lot to raise standards. We’ve taken school improvement on board ourselves and haven’t had a lot of visitors in from local authorities.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

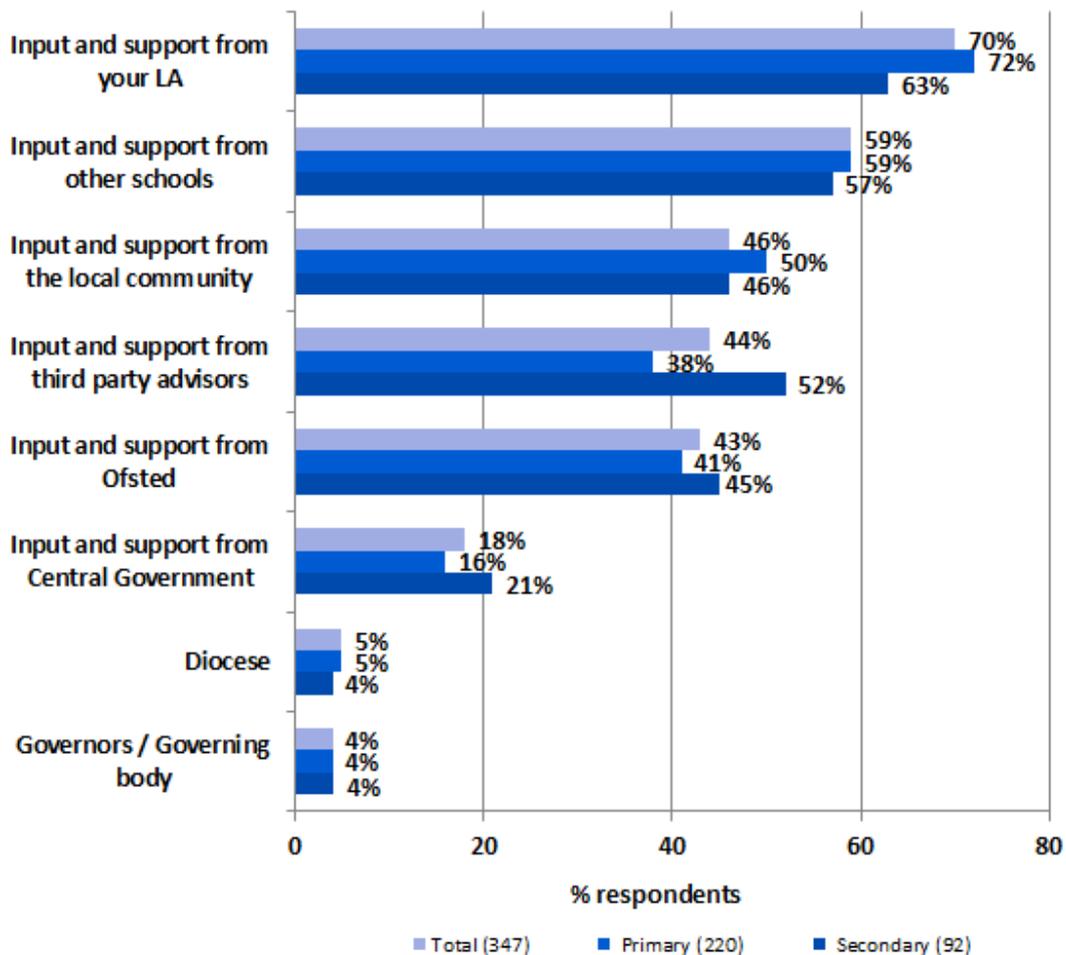
The support of the local authority helps to inform decision making within schools

When asked about the value of different sources of support in relation to school decision making, school leaders responding to the online survey placed the local authority at the top

of their list, above other schools, local communities, third-party advisors and Ofsted (see Figure 7, below).

Figure 7: The value of different sources of support around school decision making

Base: All respondents (347)



There were some notable differences in the value placed on different sources of support around decision making between the school leaders. Primary schools were significantly more likely to rank their local authority as being the most important form of support informing decision making, whereas for secondary schools, this was provided by input from other schools. Interestingly, Headteachers were also significantly more likely to value the support of other schools than were Chairs of Governors (81% vs. 51%) to the extent that, for Headteachers, this was the most valuable source of support.

The particular value of joint working is discussed in more detail within Section Four.

The future role of the Local Authority in education

The diminishing local authority role within education is causing great concern

“I am concerned that the implicit erosion of local authorities is anti-democratic.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

Within the online group discussions school leaders explored in detail their views on the future role of local authorities. There was a consensus that the local authority role is being downsized as a direct result of reduced funding and an educational policy which encourages independence and autonomy of central and local government control. Although the exact role of the local authority going forward was not clear, school leaders anticipated that they would play less of a supportive role in respect to raising standards but would continue to fulfil statutory responsibilities around issues like child protection and SEN. The reduction in services provided by the local authority was already a reality for a number of schools, directly impacting on the quality and breadth of provision available to students.

“I think local authorities are in danger of going into the night.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

“Less & less which I regret since the local authority is at least accountable to local people.”

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

“Their role is reducing by the week.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

The increasing number of Academies was seen to be one of the primary factors which would impact on the role of the local authority. Within authorities where there were a high number of Academies, school leaders believed that the local authority role would be severely curtailed due to a lack of influence over Academies and due to economies of scale, in terms of effective service offerings to the non-Academy schools remaining with the local authority family.

“I think they’ll disappear. The more schools that become academies or free schools, local authorities have to be sustained as well and if you reduce them to a small number of people who can’t affect any real change, it becomes meaningless. I can see them disappearing.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

The vast majority of school leaders interviewed during group discussions, including Academy school leaders, highlighted a wide range of concerns that would result from a reduced local authority role. These included:

- Unease as to what body would hold schools to account, particularly Academies that were seen to be outside the remit of local authorities.

“If it’s not in the local authority then it’s got to be within a body that will hold academies and schools to account, because if the local authority is not doing it, who will fulfil that role?”

[PRU, Headteacher]

“Local authorities are democratically elected & answerable to the people & aware of local issues.”

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

- That there would be a lack of support from the local authority around raising standards and school improvement for all but the worst performing schools (i.e. those where the Children’s Services Director of/Department? could be held to account for not ensuring a good education for all).

“Historically that [raising standards] is the role local authorities played - this will be reduced to just supporting schools in a category - while I have no love for my local authorities they are stuck between a rock and a hard place.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“I don’t think there will be any hands to support us. Just a few fingers that will waggle at us if we do anything wrong in any area.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

- Secondary Headteachers in particular, including those managing Academies, highlighted concerns that the local authority model may be modified to operate around ‘superheads’ and multi-academy trusts. Should this occur, it would lead to a significant power imbalance that would be negative for education as a whole because children would not have equal opportunities to access the same quality of mainstream education provision.

“Without the local authorities we are in bandit country in the hands of Superhead warlords.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

- Many school leaders felt that the Government was trying to apply market economics to the education system. This is a concern as it is fundamentally opposed to the ethos that the majority of Headteachers subscribed to for education. It has led to significant concerns over the quality, accountability and value for money of provision by the private sector that will inevitably fill the gaps left by the local authority. Associated concerns were also raised around the implications on school resources for managing this process. These concerns were even more keenly felt for PRUs and special schools, who have historically relied quite heavily on local authorities for a range of support services.

“Private companies make a profit. There should be no profit in education. If there’s any money left over, spend on some more/better education.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

“I think it’s a shame. It’s the glue that holds communities together. It’s a shame we’ll be commissioning for different services and tendering, spending time on things that were done centrally before. I think it will have a huge impact on schools.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

Broker, commissioner or service provider?

School leaders expressed a high degree of concern over the future role of the local authority and what might take its place, or what gaps in service provision would be left unfilled. School leaders variously suggested that local authorities might become brokers or commissioners of services, with some having already begun to act in this capacity. Other leaders suggested that local authorities may only provide specialist support services that are not available elsewhere (e.g. support for vulnerable families, educational psychology, libraries provision).

“Local authorities are increasingly becoming commissioners of services. They are getting the cash and they are then commissioning providers to deliver services for schools and for other users. Which is fine in principle and in theory, but I have come across examples of where I find it quite dangerous in some ways.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

“Ours have said they will be like a brokerage - putting us in touch with services we will have to buy in e.g. SIPs.”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

Looking forward, school leaders indicated that local authorities were in a strong position to provide schools with a variety of support, some of which has already been highlighted. Services mentioned included:

- Statutory support services such as SEN provision, educational welfare, child protection

“Any area where something that goes wrong could lead to court action needs to have LA services to back up!”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

- HR, legal and payroll services

“This is very complex & demands real legal expertise beyond what an individual school can be expected to have.”

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

“Our budget is controlled centrally and nothing inappropriate can happen, there’s a safeguard for public money.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

- Initial Teacher Training and CPD

“ITT is extremely important and cannot be lost.”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

- Governor training

“Governor support in its various forms is essential.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

- Admissions co-ordination

“I think LAs should provide the admissions process. I think that only they can provide an unbiased clearing function.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

- School improvement services

“SIPs provide a professional, objective assessment of a school's performance - very useful to Governors who are not all educational professionals.”

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

In addition to these specific services, many school leaders highlighted the vast amount of experience and expertise within local authorities that schools can draw upon. The independence and democratic accountability of local authorities was seen to place them in an unparalleled position to provide advice, guidance and support in relation to legislation, policy and practice.

“I think that the local authority still has a crucial role to advise schools about changes in Government policy and frameworks. It also acts as a central body to bring schools together.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“I think there has to be a role for local authorities. They're responsive to the electorate. They've got a built in desire to meet the needs of the locality.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

Summary analysis of findings

The findings from this research illustrate that the majority of school leaders had positive working relationships with their local authority. High value was generally placed on the expertise and experience within local authority, particularly in helping to raise standards and around supporting decision making.

There were, though, interesting differences in opinion between Headteachers and Chairs of Governors in relation to working relationships and the value of local authority input. This

may well relate to the closer and more complex relationships that Headteachers have with local authorities (e.g. those of being employed by the local authority in maintained schools).

Where relationships between schools and local authorities worked most effectively there was a strong sense of common purpose, trust, transparency and fairness – the latter, especially, being a common theme that runs throughout this report. Open and honest relationships were also a key element of why many schools valued the School Improvement Partnership services (SIPs) who were previously well placed to act as ‘critical friends’. While there is no longer a statutory responsibility for every school to have a funded SIP service the Secretary of State for Education has indicated that local authorities still have a role to play as “champions of excellence”¹⁰ for free schools and academies as well as maintained schools.

Local authorities, as democratically elected and publically accountable bodies, were perceived as being important in helping schools understand and meet the wider needs of the local community, not just the immediate needs of pupils and their families. School leaders participating in this research were almost unanimous in highlighting a range of concerns at diminishing local authority roles in education. Of particular concern was the potential emergence of powerful ‘superheads’, chains and multi-academy trusts that could bypass these community concerns. Some chains of academies are already assuming functions formerly operated by the local authority (such as a central HR service) to achieve economies of scale. This is likely to increase as the number of academies begins to grow. As these chains could, theoretically, be quite geographically spread out – certainly more so than the present local governance structure in London – this would present implications for the extent to which centralised decision making will continue to reflect a ‘local’ context. This concerned several respondents, particularly in light of later findings suggesting a ‘tipping point’ of academy conversions where it would no longer be viable for a school to remain being maintained by the local authority.

The research also provides a wider insight into the present range of services that schools access from their local authority, many of which were highly valued, seen to offer good value for money and seen to sit most comfortably within a local authority-type body. Going forward, given the reductions in local authority resources, school leaders variously suggested the local authority role should be one of commissioner, broker, or service provider – but crucially none felt that the local authority role could or should be discarded entirely.

The Government has already indicated that the local authority role going forward is likely to comprise elements of all three of these roles: a commissioner in order to continue to champion excellence and maintain equality; a broker in order to provide co-ordination, oversight and utilise expertise; and a service provider in order to maintain quality assurance in relation to more specialist provisions. Given the expertise that still exists within local authorities in relation to the widespread needs of a changing education system, it will be interesting to see what balance will be achieved between these roles for local authorities going forward.

¹⁰ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110711/debtext/110711-0001.htm>

The next section of the report explores findings from the research relating to governance models and joint working.

3. Academies, Free Schools and joint working

Summary of key messages

General messages across school types

- Around one in four school leaders (28%) reported that they were an Academy, were becoming an Academy or were actively considering becoming an Academy. However two-thirds (66%) said that they have either considered and rejected the idea, or never considered it. The remainder (6%) were not sure.
- The main motivation for schools to apply to become Academies was the expectation of receiving extra funding. There was also a sense though that, even among those schools who are not currently considering converting, there will be a tipping point where so many schools have converted that it will no longer be viable for any school to be maintained by the local authority.
- The main reasons that school leaders gave for not wanting their school to convert to academy status were that they did not see any distinct benefits and that they were concerned about the risks of operating independently of local authority support.
- School leaders were very negative about the idea of free schools perceiving it as ill thought-out and undemocratic. Many also questioned the commitment and motivations of those who were applying to run them leading to concerns over the quality and stability of educational provision.
- School leaders reported working well with other schools in their local area (76% of respondents thought that they worked ‘well’ or ‘very well’ with others in their local authority area). They also valued joint working, particularly in terms of sharing good practice.
- Joint working is anticipated to increase over time in order to compensate for reduced support anticipated from local authorities. Schools highlighted a future role for local authorities in the co-ordination of this future joint working.
- There was no consensus on how well local schools forums currently perform – either in terms of how useful they are in facilitating decision making (33% felt that they were effective at this, 19% that they were ineffective) or on the influence Headteachers and Chairs of Governors felt that they had.

Key differences between primary schools and secondary schools

- Secondary schools were more likely than primary schools to be Academies, or to be considering becoming Academies. Three in five secondary schools (59%) fell into these categories, compared to one in five (17%) primary schools
- Perhaps as a corollary of this, secondary school leaders were more likely to feel that collaboration between schools was being impeded by increased competition.
- Primary school respondents were more likely than those from secondary schools to feel that local schools forums helped with decision-making (38% of primary schools respondents thought so, compared to 25% of those from secondary schools). Primary schools were less likely though, to feel that they had influence over funding decisions made within these forums (just 45% felt that they had influence there, compared to 59% of those from secondary schools).

Key differences for Pupil Referral Units and special schools

- PRUs and special schools were more likely to value joint working as a means of forging relationships between themselves and other local schools.
- PRUs and special schools were particularly concerned about the freedom for Academies and free schools to set SEN or admissions policies, which could have a detrimental impact on children with SEN.

Academies

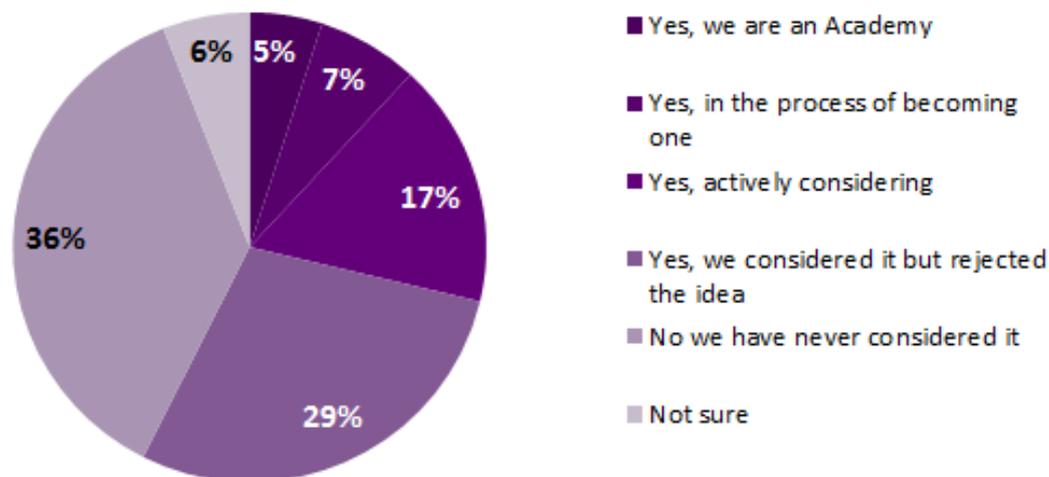
A significant proportion of schools in London will consider becoming Academies, however the majority of respondents do not want to go down that route

Headteachers and Chairs of Governors were asked whether their school had considered, or would consider becoming an academy. As Figure 8 illustrates, 11% replied that they either were an Academy or were in the process of becoming one, and a further 17% were actively considering becoming one. Secondary schools formed the vast majority of those who said that they were Academies, or were in the process of becoming one (of all secondary school leaders and Chairs of Governors we spoke to, 37% of secondary schools as compared to just 2% of primary schools responding to the survey).

The majority of schools, however, are not currently looking at Academy status. Two-thirds of schools (66%) have either considered and rejected the idea of Academy status, or not considered it at all. At primary level, this still accounts for the vast majority of schools (78%), whereas at secondary level the proportion not considering Academy status is smaller (35%), although still applies to more than one in three schools.

Figure 8: ‘Has your school previously considered or are you currently considering becoming an academy?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Converters expect academy status to increase their standards of education

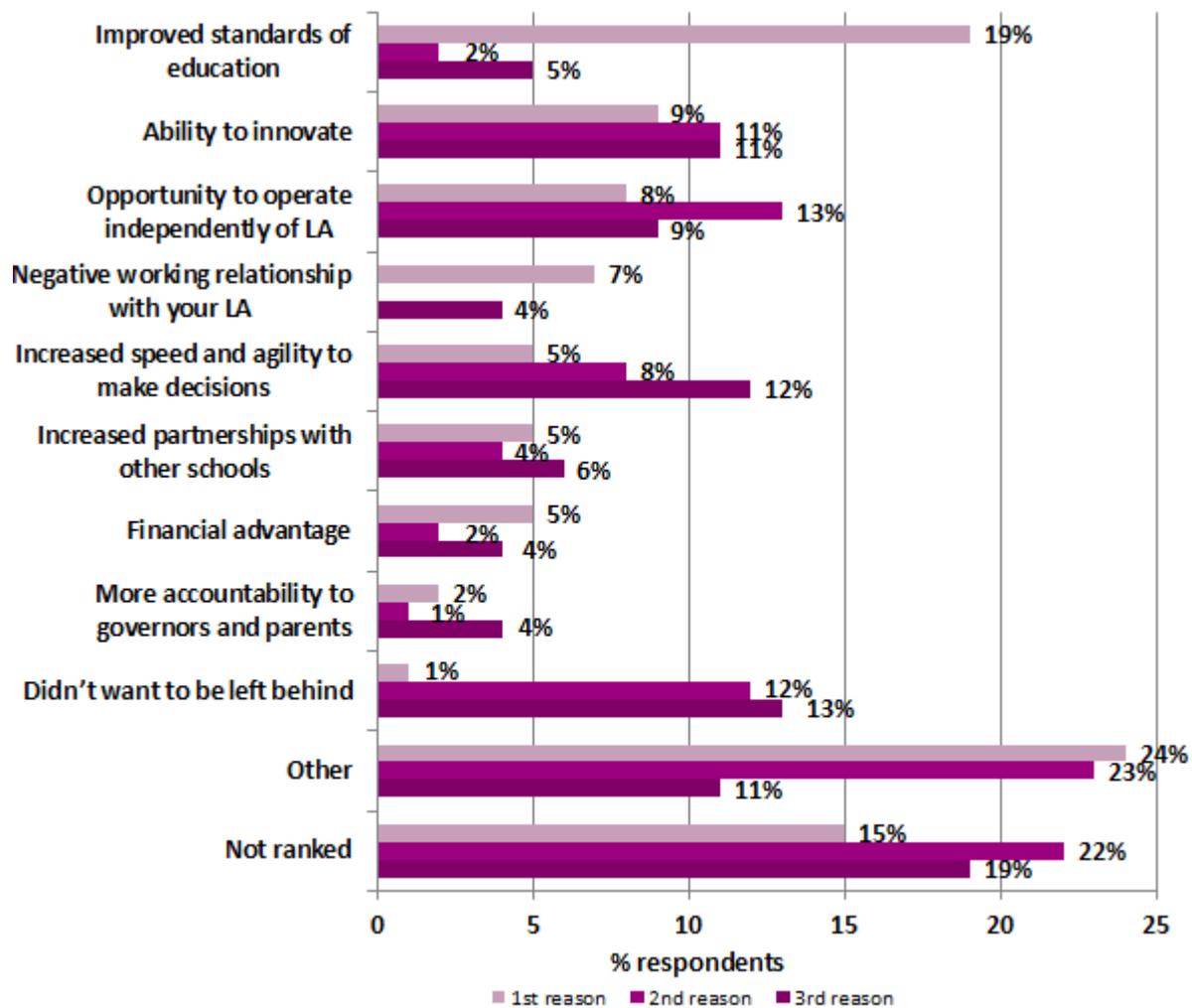
Of those school leaders who had indicated that their school either was an academy, was becoming an academy or was considering becoming an academy, were asked what they saw as the main motivations for moving to academy status. The reason which was most often given as the top priority was that they felt it would improve standards of education (see Figure 9). Other popular reasons included:

- That it offered schools the ability to innovate

- That schools did not want to be left behind
- That it would allow the school to operate independently of the local authority

Figure 9: 'Which of the following are/were your top three motivations to move to academy status?'

Base: All who are already an Academy, are converting to become an Academy or are actively considering becoming an Academy (98)



Money and independence seen as the biggest benefits of converting

Within the qualitative research, those Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of schools who either were Academies or considering Academy status were also asked about their motivation in applying for academy status. Often, the relationship between a school and its local authority played an important part in determining how appealing academy status was.

"If I didn't have a good, positive relationship [with my local authority], I might look elsewhere."

[Special school, Headteacher]

“I am not [an Academy] and would for the additional money if I felt I had no choice. If the LA withered and was useless, I would not want to be last man standing. Where is the tipping point?”

[Secondary School, Headteacher]

A benefit of academy status for a minority of school leaders was freedom from a difficult relationship with their local authority. For those who felt that they were in such a situation, academy status was more attractive than for those with a healthy relationship with their local authority. There were other benefits of independence identified as well. For example, the school would have independence from their local authority and central Government around issues such as staff appointments, pay and conditions, control over building maintenance, as well as freedom from a national curriculum. The biggest benefit that schools identified was a perceived increase in finances that converting to Academy status would offer. Of the school leaders we spoke with all were very clear that their primary motivation for seeking Academy status was financially driven.

A final factor influencing some schools to consider converting – as was mentioned in the quantitative results – was a desire not to be left behind whilst other schools in the area convert. This is an issue which school leaders think will become increasingly important in influencing schools decisions going forward.

“We feel compelled to consider it as we will be all alone soon.”

[Secondary School, Chair of Governors]

There were two main reasons that schools did not want to find themselves left behind in this way. The first was that they expected parents to be more attracted to local Academies and so demand for places in their schools would decrease.

“Those left behind risk being seen as sink schools – parents attracted to these shining examples with fabulous sites and great results.”

[Primary School, Headteacher]

The second reason was that they foresaw that the local authority’s role would diminish, as more schools converted. As the authority has fewer schools to look after, they will receive less funding and so will be unable to afford to offer the range of services that they currently do:

“If the local authority withered and was useless, I would not want to be last man standing.”

[Secondary School, Headteacher]

“I think that I will be put under increasing pressure as other schools in my area convert and the local authority role diminishes.”

[Primary School, Headteacher]

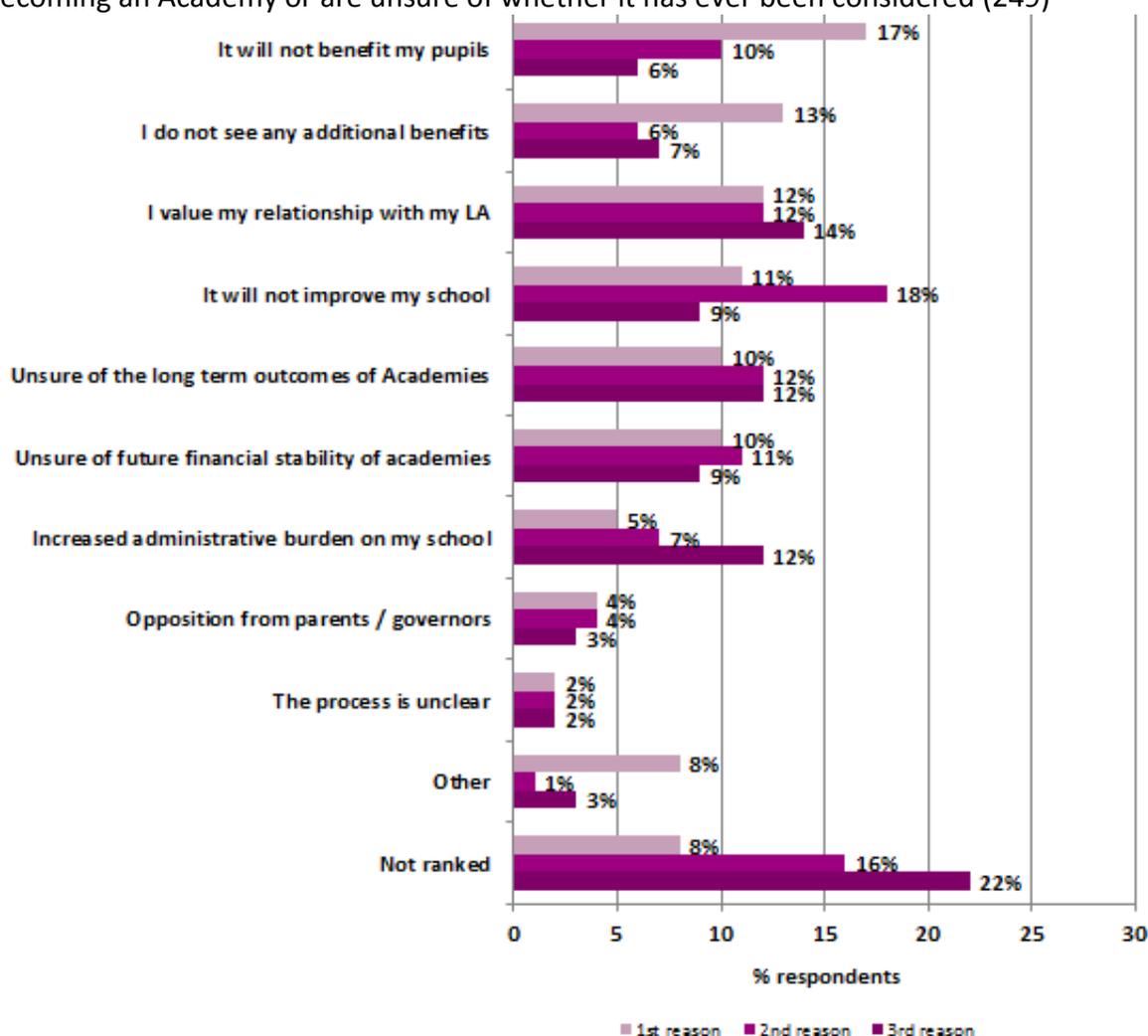
These concerns could be seen as prescient in the light of the recent story that all schools in Lincolnshire are being advised to convert to academy status, as the authority will not be able to provide support to those remaining.¹¹

Non-Academy schools perceive few benefits of converting, but also many risks

Those school leaders who indicated that their school had either rejected the idea of becoming an Academy or never entertained the idea, were asked why it was that they had done so. The reasons most often given were that they did not think it would benefit their pupils (ranked as the top reason by 17% of respondents), that they saw no additional benefits to converting (13%) and that they valued their current relationship with their local authority (12%). Concerns about the long term outcomes of Academies (10%) and their future financial stability (10%), were also a factor for some.

Figure 10: 'Which of the following would you say are the main reasons as to why you are unsure about or uninterested in becoming an academy?'

Base: All who rejected the idea of becoming an Academy, never considered the idea of becoming an Academy or are unsure of whether it has ever been considered (249)



11 For the full story, see www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug/01/academies-row-divides-schools

During the qualitative research, school leaders highlighted a wide variety of concerns they held over the Academy programme, both from the perspective of their own school and with regard to the education sector as a whole.

For participants' own schools, there were concerns about how the school would be able to handle the extra responsibility that independence from the local authority would put on the school. School leaders felt that the school would be less secure without local authority support and there was a particular worry about how they would deal with issues around staff pay and conditions. As mentioned earlier, HR is one of the areas that schools think local authorities are well placed to provide support. They also felt that they would be less able to access the kind of joint working, mentioned earlier in this section.

"This idea of being totally responsible for your own destiny. If you mess up, you're dealing with the DfE."

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

Secondly, there were concerns about the sustainability of the Academy system in the long term. School leaders felt that the changes to the system were being pushed through very quickly, but without long-term guarantees. In particular, they were unsure that the current levels of funding would be sustained:

"There are so many uncertainties and our funding can be so complex there are no guarantees. We're being told we'll get more funding direct from the government, but I think it's a very short-term thing."

[Special school, Headteacher]

"Academies may well find that there is fool's gold at the end of that rainbow as they begin to take full responsibility for the upkeep of their buildings."

[Primary school, Headteacher]

"They are the current flavour of the month but that could soon change."

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

More generally, many schools are uncomfortable with the idea of fragmenting provision across the sector

School leaders also raised concerns regarding the effect that the academy programmes will have on the education sector as a whole.

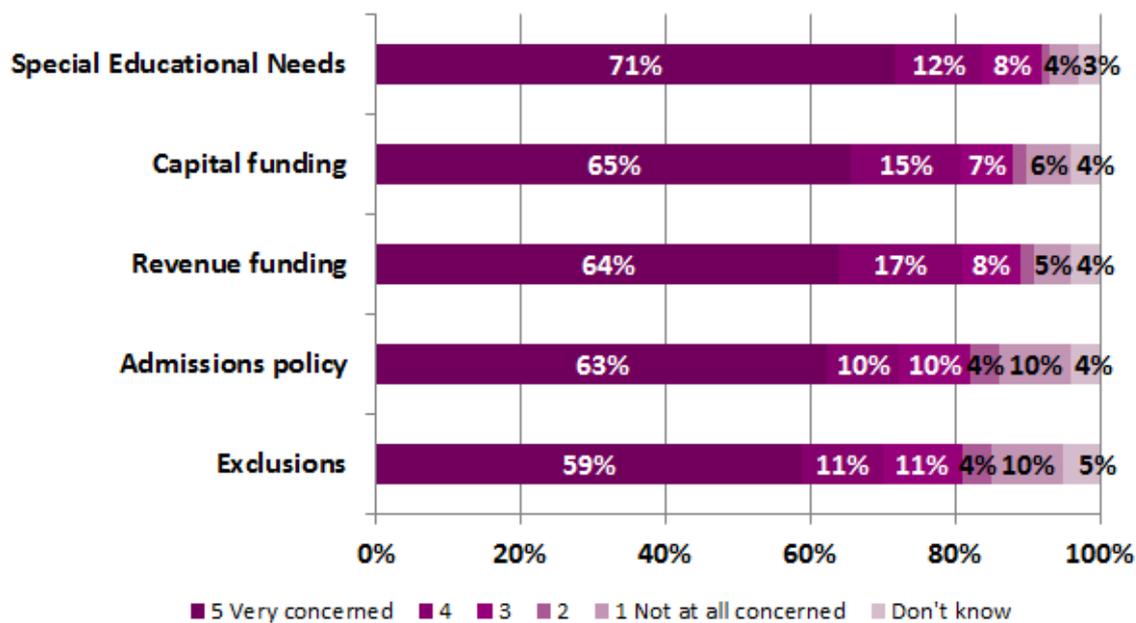
The first of these was that some felt that the freedoms given to Academies meant that *"not everyone [was] playing on an equal field"*. They felt that the way that the system was set up would inevitably lead to the emergence of some schools as winners and others as losers.

The possibility that schools could operate in different ways depending on their models of governance, with some gaining particular strengths over others, created strong feeling amongst school leaders. When asked whether different systems for maintained schools and

academies in relation to issues such as SEN, funding and admissions, leaders articulated a high level of concern (as illustrated in Figure 11).

Figure 11: ‘In some areas of education policy a case may be made for having different systems between maintained schools and academies. How concerned would you be to see the introduction of different systems in the following areas?’

Base: All respondents (347)



A second concern that several school leaders mentioned during the qualitative research, was that the Academy programme will lead to greater fragmentation of the sector, with more providers each providing for fewer pupils. If more free schools and Academy providers enter the market, it was suggested that although this could increase competition, the decrease in school rolls that this would entail would mean a reduction in the amount of services which could be offered under one roof.

“We’re getting a mishmash of provision out there, which on one level is great because it will increase choice, but on another level means that you are diluting the resource in terms of staff, in terms of expertise and in terms of cash that’s going into all the schools.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

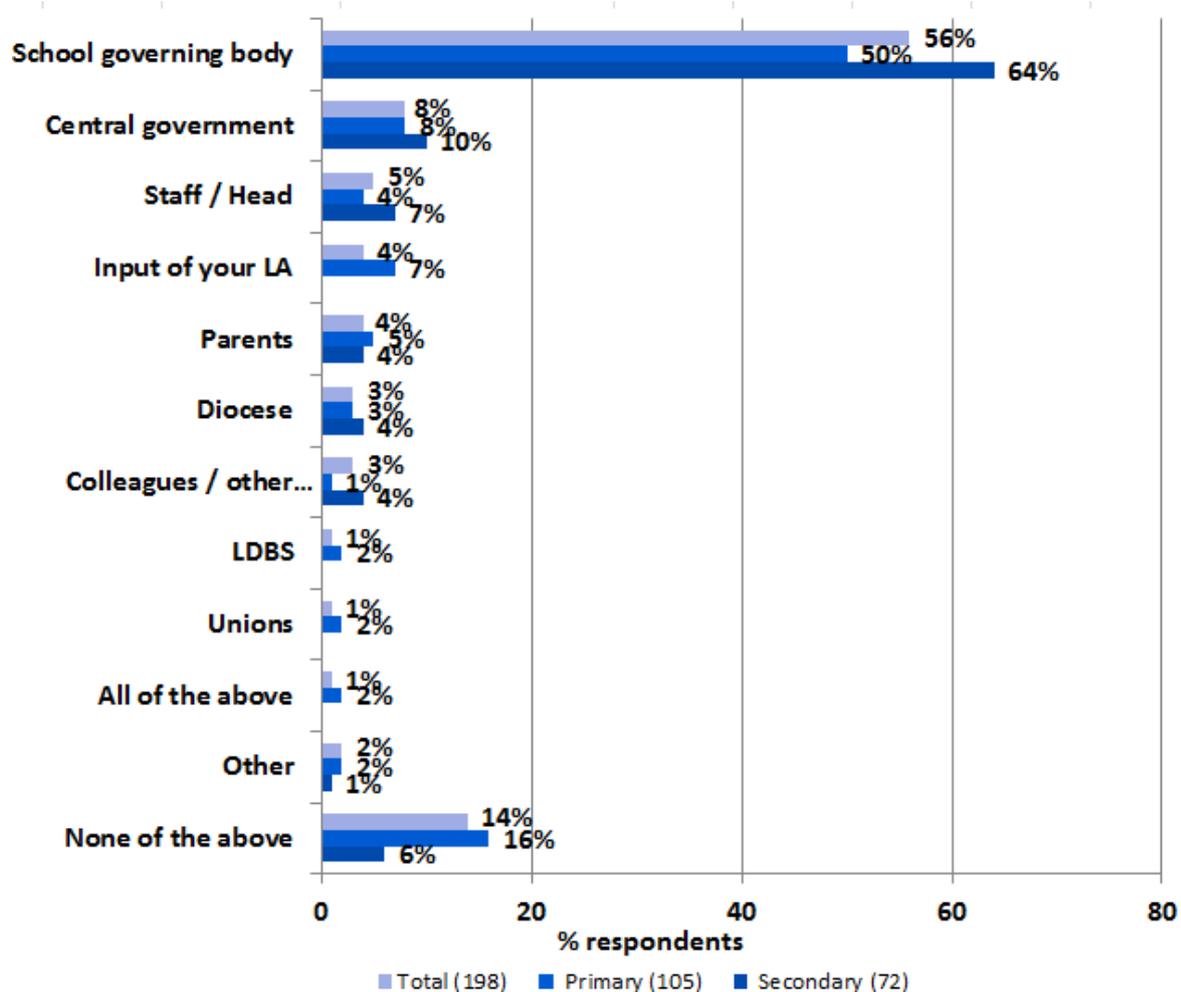
The increasing number of academy providers was of particular concern to PRUs who currently rely on local authorities for their referrals and anticipated that alternative provision may be chosen according to cost rather than what is best for the pupil. For schools working with SEN pupils, there was a related concern that by fragmenting provision this would mean pupils would be forced to take up a particular type of learning support because that was all that their institution could offer – even if this was not the most appropriate form of support for them.

Considerations on whether to become an Academy were largely influenced by the school governing body

Those leaders within schools that had become Academies or had considered becoming academies (even if they had decided not to pursue the idea) were also asked which leaders had most influenced the decision about whether or not to convert. In both primary and secondary schools the leaders who were by far the most likely to have influenced the decision were the school governing body, who were cited by 56% of participants (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: ‘In considering becoming an academy, which leaders most influenced your decision?’

Base: All who are or actively considering becoming an Academy or rejected (198)



Interestingly, those leaders representing schools that had become Academies, or were considering becoming an Academy were much more likely to report that central Government had exerted the greatest influence over their decision (13% as compared to only 3% of those who had considered Academy status but then rejected the idea).

Free Schools

There were concerns about the Free Schools programme

Respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of plans for a free school in their borough and almost half (48%) said that they were. In Inner London, this figure rose to 61%. In general, Headteachers and Chairs of Governors felt that the idea of free schools was ill-thought out, and their reactions to the idea of Free Schools were highly negative.

“It’s a complete abdication of a key government responsibility.”

[Secondary School, Chair of Governors]

“Quite frankly I think it is an appalling idea.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“Deplorable, Dickensian and quite mad.”

[Secondary school Academy, Headteacher]

Almost half of school leaders (45%) thought that the amount of revenue funding they would receive would decrease on the opening of a free school in their area (see Figure 13). Significant proportions of school leaders were also concerned about the impact of a new free school in other areas:

- 29% thought that the diversity of their pupil intake would decrease
- 36% thought that demand for places in their school would decrease
- 34% thought that competition for staff would increase.

Nevertheless, the majority of school leaders were not concerned about any impacts on the standard of educational provision in their own school (67%).

Figure 13: ‘Thinking specifically about your school, how do you think that the following elements might be affected by the establishment of a free school in your Local Authority area?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Although the quantitative survey highlighted a range of concerns that school leaders had these did not cover the extent or breadth of concerns held. A wide range of issues were highlighted by school leaders participating in the qualitative research. These included:

- Free schools could be opened by people with no formal training in teaching or running a school resulting in questionable levels of quality assurance. This was a particular concern for schools working with SEN pupils.

“I can’t see how they’re going to make it work without a knowledge of running schools. If you’ve not been trained it would be a difficult job to do.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

“I find it insulting that anybody could set up their own school.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

- There were concerns about the motivations of those who were applying to run free schools. One worry was that if large chains of free schools were established, this would

potentially give the governing body of those chains too much influence over what was being studied there.

“I’m not aware of it, but my concerns would be they might have a completely hidden or [un]published agenda.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

- There is no guarantee how long-term the founders’ commitment would be. If parents are involved, there is a concern that motivation may be reduced or removed once their children have left.

“They worry me more than academies. They are fundamentally [flawed] as they will be set up by parents who will lose interest once their child has left the school.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“The dynamism comes from a person or group of people and I wonder what will happen two, three, four, five, ten years down the line when that person no longer is involved. Where does that leave the free school?”

[PRU, Headteacher]

- There were also concerns – as there were with Academies – about the potential for inequality within the system. This was a particular issue around providing different systems for funding, and around admissions criteria as highlighted previously.

“By letting them set their own admissions criteria it enables cherry picking and bigotry.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

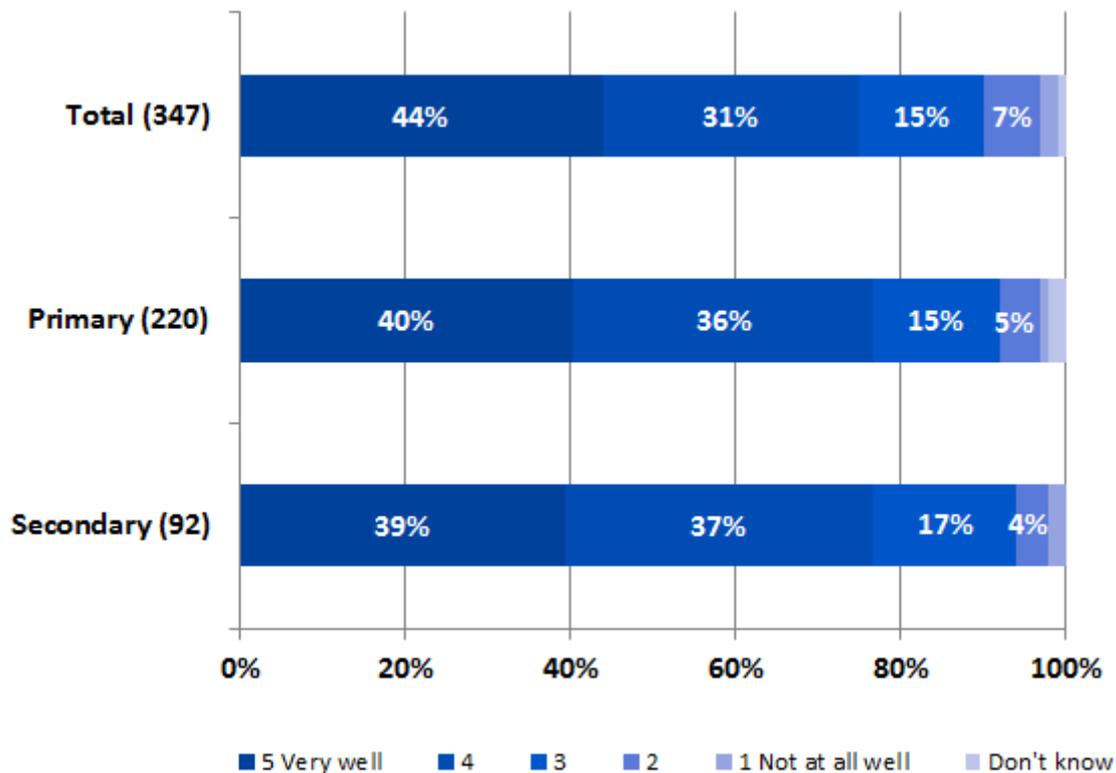
The value of joint working

Schools generally work well with other schools in their locality

School leaders and Governors were asked how well they felt their school worked with others in their local area. As illustrated in Figure 14, the majority (76%) felt that they worked well with other schools.

Figure 14: ‘How well do you feel that your school works with other schools in your local authority area?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Within the group discussions, school leaders also highlighted a number of benefits resulting from effective joint working. The main benefits of joint working were the sharing of good practice and the discussion of policy/practice developments which, in turn, add value to work being undertaken within the school.

“I believe that working with other schools is crucial and value other Headteachers’ opinions above all others. It is important to speak and meet in clusters to make you feel more confident and to gauge the latest thinking.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

“[It’s] important to know how other schools are dealing with the issues we face.”

[Secondary school Academy, Chair of Governors]

There were a number of methods by which good practice could be shared, such as ‘cluster’ meetings, or mentoring schemes. The emphasis was often on using schools which excel in one area sharing this knowledge with others. In addition to senior leader networking, there were also recognisable benefits in sharing good practice between teachers and Heads of Department at different schools, in order to help with staff development at all levels.

A second benefit of joint working was that it offered the possibility for local schools to jointly procure services. As school leaders anticipated that many services which had previously

been offered by the local authority will shortly not be available to schools, the opportunity to save money through joint commissioning was likely to become increasingly relevant.

Finally, for some school leaders – particularly PRUs and special schools – one additional benefit of joint working was helping them to integrate with other local schools. As highlighted in Section Four, PRUs and special schools can operate quite distinctly from the local authority and from other schools. In an environment in which funding and models of operation are under threat, it makes it increasingly important for PRUs and special schools to develop closer relationships with mainstream schools and other specialist provision.

“So collaboration is a very important thing, particularly within alternative provision and Pupil Referral Units, where often professionals can be quite isolated because they’re often smaller sized institutions.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

“It’s about community, working together and getting the school known, knowing other schools and heads.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

Most schools envisage joint working increasing over time, although this will be challenging in the short term

Within the online group discussions, Headteachers and Chairs of Governors were asked whether or not they thought collaboration between schools would increase over time. Most said that they thought it would. As highlighted above, there was an expectation that collaboration between schools would help to fill some of the gaps which would be left by the removal of some local authority support services.

“School collaboration will certainly increase as the local authority role decreases.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

Although school leaders universally recognised a wide number of benefits resulting from joint working, there were also a number of challenges to be overcome to foster these types of relationships. The most immediate barrier was that of competition. In particular, secondary school leaders highlighted that as more schools converted to Academy status, competition between schools for pupils and staff will increase, which will make it more difficult for them to collaborate with one another.

“The fact that some schools are converting is fracturing this atmosphere.”

[Secondary School, Headteacher]

There is a lack of clarity as to the most effective way of co-ordinating joint working. Some school leaders reported that this would be a role well-suited to the skills and experiences of local authorities going forward, however, others felt that this would be better achieved by schools themselves (e.g. through personal contacts).

Current structures for joint working

There is a lack of clarity around the role of local schools forums

Although most school leaders were aware of a local schools forum structure, the extent to which they engaged with this structure or understood its remit, varied considerably. There was a lack of consensus as to how effectively local schools forums currently support schools and how successful school leaders are in having their voices heard through these structures.

Opinion was divided as to whether respondents believed they had influence over funding distribution discussions held at their local schools forum (see Figure 15, overleaf). Headteachers were more likely to feel that they had influence than Chairs of Governors (64% vs. 43%); again this may reflect differing levels of engagement in the forum.

Respondents from secondary schools were more likely to report that they felt they had influence on funding discussions than those from primary schools (59% vs. 45%). In discussions with school leaders, there was a clear sense that the views of larger schools (typically secondary schools) often held more weight within local schools forums.

Through the interviews conducted with PRUs and special schools, it appears that leaders from these institutions may be less likely to actively participate within their local schools forum. Headteachers from both PRUs and special schools held perceptions that the local schools forums held considerable power in funding decisions and that their current position outside of this decision-making circle made their institutions particularly vulnerable.

“I think the forum is potentially very useful. There’s some fear around it in the PRU heads’ group. They could determine our future if they decide they don’t want to buy our services.”

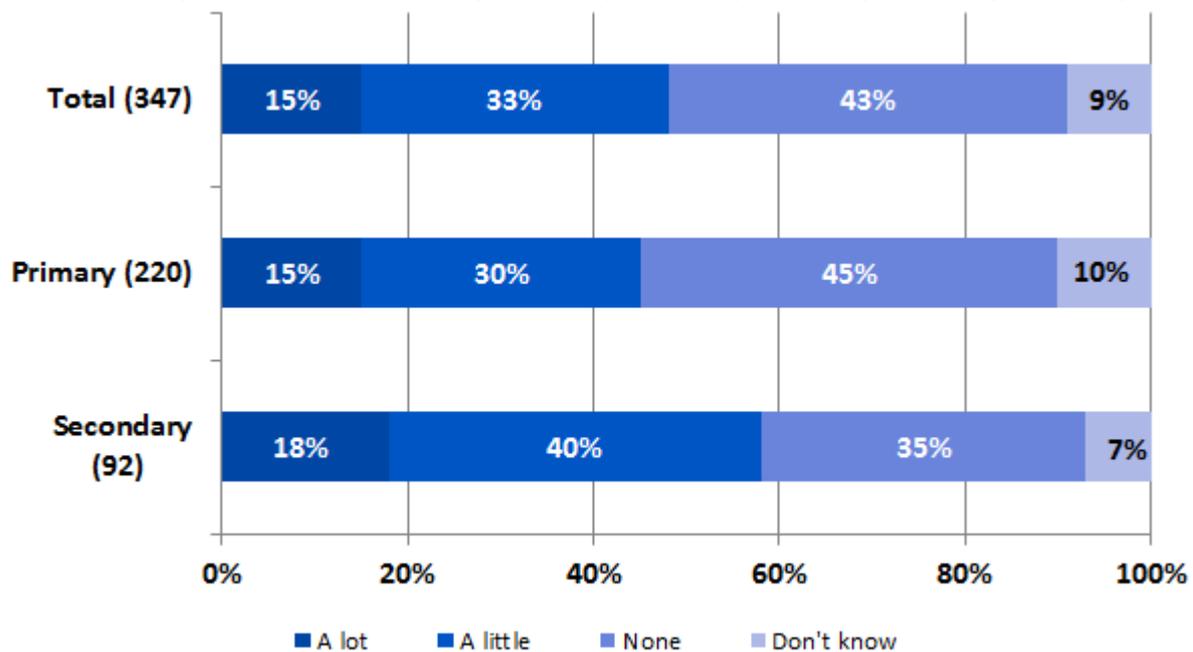
[PRU, Headteacher]

“Who is on the schools forum is suddenly very important to us as heads, whereas two years ago it wasn’t so important. It’s important because they are making significant decisions around the allocation of funding.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

Figure 15: 'How much influence do you feel that you personally have on decisions made at your local schools forum on the following topics? - How funding is distributed'

Base: All respondents (347)



Although many school leaders, in particular Headteachers, reported that they were able to influence collaborative activity through the local schools forum (60% felt that joint working could be influenced within the forum) there was also a sense that the local schools forum would need to change in order to be a viable outlet for collaborative activity. Currently, for many Headteachers and Chairs of Governors, collaborative working was not seen to be the remit of these forums and current membership would not necessarily facilitate this. In fact, as Figure 16 illustrates, school leaders were more positive that these forums provide an increased role in funding decisions, than they were for it to have more influence over joint working arrangements.

There was very little consistency between different schools and local authorities as to the form of collaboration or how this was co-ordinated. In some cases the local authority played a central role in facilitating this joint working, however, in other areas they provided very little input.

One of the PRU Headteachers involved in this research also reported on how London Councils was providing support in facilitating joint work through events¹³ that focused upon strategic developments and networking opportunities. Events such as these were felt to provide stimulating and efficient opportunities for schools to develop partnership approaches.

"I think through the London Councils [project] some collaborative partnerships are beginning to emerge."

[PRU Headteacher]

Summary analysis of findings

This research indicates that the majority of London schools are not currently interested in adopting Academy status with 65% either not having considered, or having considered and rejected, the idea. Smaller schools were most likely to feel this way – with over ¾ of primary schools not actively considering academy status at present. Secondary schools, though, were far more likely to be engaged with the academies programme although over a third (35%) still stated they were not currently considering becoming an academy yet. This split between primary and secondary schools is perhaps unsurprising, though, given a) the option of academy status was only recently extended to primary schools in 2010, and b) the balance between the gains and risks of academy status is perhaps more intimidating for smaller primary schools than the larger secondaries.

While there were a variety of motivations for schools considering Academy status, the primary reasons appeared to be related to finance, security and educational standards. School leaders were acutely aware that more and more schools were becoming Academies and are concerned not to be left behind. These concerns could be seen as prescient in the light of the recent reports that all schools in Lincolnshire are being advised to convert to academy status, as the authority will not be able to provide support to those remaining.¹⁴ This approach is soon likely to be replicated in some London Boroughs as more schools opt for academy status.

The Academy programme is widely seen to be part of the current Government's policy of radical decentralisation – returning power to local communities. Certainly, on the surface, the decision to become an Academy can result in greater freedoms for schools to manage affairs independently of local government. However, it could also be argued that this does

¹³ This Headteacher was referring to London Councils' *Pan-London Back on Track* Project (<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/children/schools/pru/backontrack/>)

¹⁴ For the full story, see www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug01/academies-row-divides-schools

not necessarily equate to providing more power for local people and local communities. As one Secondary school Headteacher noted, schools becoming Academies actually remove themselves from local accountability, instead becoming directly accountable to the Department for Education. In this respect, the Academy programme could be seen as transferring power to the centre whilst giving the illusion of decentralising control.

“This idea of being totally responsible for your own destiny. If you mess up, you’re dealing with the DfE.”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

A range of negative views were also voiced about the Free Schools programme, which many respondents did not feel would operate to the benefit of children, parents or local communities despite government rhetoric to the contrary. Some of these views may be informed by the perceived threat of new competition – nearly half of school leaders felt that the amount of revenue funding they receive would decrease if a free school opened in their local authority and there were similar competitive concerns over the potential effects on staff recruitment and demand for places.

But other opinions, such as that the diversity of pupil intake would decrease (felt by 29% of respondents), betray deeper worries about the effects of free schools on the wider aims and objectives of the education system. One of the key concerns raised about free schools was that teachers do not have to be formally qualified to work in them, providing no guarantee that they will be fit to teach effectively. This was particularly contrasted with the emphasis in the Schools White Paper – *The Importance of Teaching*¹⁵ - which focused upon improving teacher/teaching quality and tightening entry requirements to formal teacher training. So, while there are concerted efforts to improve the quality of teaching within maintained schools, this will not apply to free schools and therefore school leaders are concerned about a lack of both quality and equality in the system.

School leaders also questioned how committed some of the individuals proposing to open free schools would be in the long term – particularly whether parents would wish to continue to be involved once their own child had left the school. Many appeared to feel that the practical demands of running a school were being underestimated.

“I find it insulting that anyone can set up their own school.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

School leaders also highlighted concerns about the effect that the Academies programme will have on the education sector as a whole, such as a perceived lack of equality and an expectation that increased competition will drive down co-operation between schools despite government’s stated intentions. School leaders had a clear sense of the benefits of working with other local schools, particularly in terms of sharing good practice. Most also expected the level of joint working between schools to increase in the future to compensate for an expected reduction in local authority support. A recent ‘think’ piece published by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services highlighted the

¹⁵ *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010* (2010). DfE.

importance of formal inter-school collaboration in creating a self-improving school system. However there is a real tension in the system in that on the one hand the system of funding and league tables promotes school competition (i.e. better results leads to more demand for places leading to more money and so on), and on the other hand, schools are being expected to collaborate more and more. This is a tension that is likely to come increasingly to the fore as the role of local authorities reduces. A number of school leaders indicated that the local authority should have a role to play in promoting and facilitating a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to joint working.

Local schools forums were established under the Education Act 2002 to give schools a formal structure through which to influence the disbursement of funding for schools. While these forums were reported as highly effective structures for influencing funding distribution by a minority of respondents, over three-quarters of school leaders felt they had little or no influence over the decision making within these forums. A number of school leaders had very little idea what happened at these meetings and expressed grave concerns over the level of power that well-established stakeholders may wield within these. This is particularly significant given government proposals in the recent schools revenue funding consultation to potentially strengthen the powers of schools forums in determining local funding allocations.

The next section of the report explores findings from the research relating to school funding and school places planning.

4. School funding and school places planning

Summary of key messages

General messages across school types

- Changes to funding were viewed as unclear and the majority (79%) of school leaders felt that funding needed to take into account at least some aspects of local flexibility.
- The pupil premium was seen as having the potential to drive up attainment (42% thought that it would be effective in this regard in their school), but school leaders tended to feel that it was replacing lost funding, rather than providing additional funds.
- A substantial proportion (45%) of school leaders felt that their school was currently under pressure to expand, with the majority (63%) of respondents claiming that their school roll had increased over the last five years.
- The impact of increased school rolls was most likely to be felt in terms of pressure on existing school buildings and lack of space was the most likely reason that schools had chosen not to expand.
- Satisfaction with current school buildings was fairly low (only 41% claimed to be satisfied with their current condition).
- Although the local authority provided co-ordination for admissions school leaders highlighted that greater use of demographic information in coordinating admissions was key to addressing increasing school rolls.

Key differences between primary schools and secondary schools

- SEN was seen as an area of particular importance to primary leaders in terms of requiring local flexibility of funding (17% of primary leaders who answered this question selected this as an area in which their school needed local flexibility, compared to 4% of secondary leaders).
- Primary schools that had not expanded their school roll over the last five years appeared to feel under more pressure to expand than secondary schools (35% primary leaders vs. 11% secondary leaders).
- Approaches to expanding rolls appeared to differ slightly between primary and secondary schools, with primary schools more likely to use bulge classes (30% primary leaders vs. 4% secondary leaders) and secondary schools more likely to make use of other schools and local facilities (6% secondary vs. 0% primary).

Key differences for Pupil Referral Units and special schools

- Special schools appeared less positive regarding the idea of a pupil premium, feeling that it does not reflect the complexity of special schools' needs and concerns that parents would demand greater accountability.
- School leaders at PRUs were feeling particularly vulnerable, as both private providers and mainstream schools may threaten their current position and offer.
- PRUs felt that they would have to broaden their offer and be more proactive in future to protect their position going forward.

Perceptions of school funding changes

Schools viewed changes to their funding as unclear – and were concerned about spending cuts

Headteachers that participated in interviews tended to view their current funding situation as challenging, due to a combination of changing budget arrangements and the lack of clarity on the services that would be available from the local authority. Secondary Headteachers believed that their schools would need to be very careful in allocating their budgets and also queried whether difficulties in planning would mean that contractual working conditions for teachers may be forced to change in the future.

“I am scared to spend extra money on more permanent teachers because our funding is not guaranteed beyond a year – so I can’t plan!”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

Among primary Headteachers, attempts to simplify funding systems were understood and, to some extent, appreciated. However, one Headteacher who took part in group discussions inferred that a simplified funding system may not reflect the various needs of pupils.

“I can understand the desire for simplicity and transparency, but the needs of children are not simple or homogenous.”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

Primary Headteachers also appeared less clear than secondary Headteachers about how exactly funding at an overall level would change. There was a feeling that it was currently ‘early days’ for these changes and that they were occurring too quickly, with a disregard for longer term planning.

“It is not very clear to me. Cuts, more cuts... Then another pot opens up. How on earth are we supposed to set 3 year budgets when the local authority has not been clear?”

[Primary school, Headteacher]

Headteachers of special schools appeared to view their own funding systems as particularly unclear, with a lack of distinction and definition for the various funds that are received. They appeared concerned around this lack of clarity and also voiced concerns regarding the withdrawal of capital funding.

In the online group discussions, primary Headteachers indicated that they felt that accounting for local needs was important and that funding should be set accordingly. “Equality” in relation to schools, should refer to helping schools to achieve *equality of outcomes and results*, rather than providing *equal resources and funding* (i.e. through setting funding according to a national formula).

“I can't see how anyone can think that children cost the same to educate to the same standard in different parts of the country – if we want our inner city kids to achieve anything like their more privileged peers we are going to have to spend more on them.”

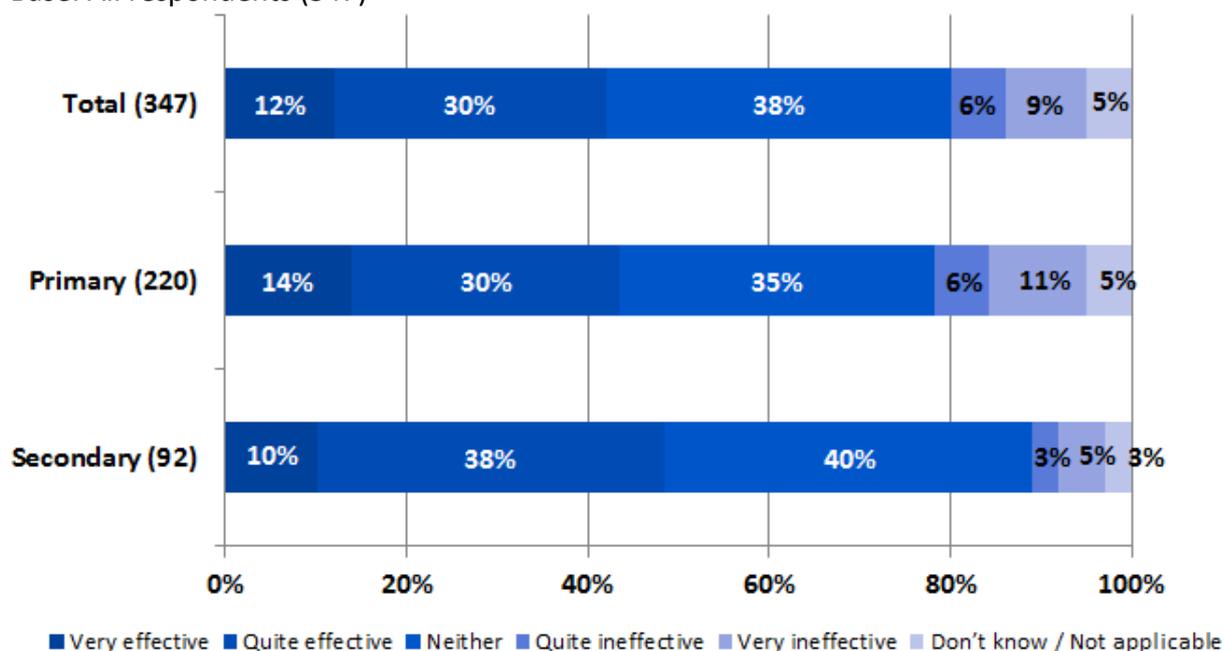
[Primary school, Head teacher]

The Pupil Premium

School leaders who took part in the online survey were also asked their views on the pupil premium (see Figure 17, below). Views on this form of local need-based funding were broadly positive or neutral, with around two in five leaders (42%) feeling that it would be effective in driving up attainment in their school and a further two-fifths (38%) feeling that it would be neither effective nor ineffective. Just 15% felt that it would be ineffective, with no significant differences between primary and secondary school leaders.

Figure 17: ‘How effective do you think the introduction of a pupil premium will be in driving up attainment in your school?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Within the qualitative research, views on the pupil premium were mixed, with many school leaders feeling that there could be funding implications for schools with a substantial proportion of asylum seekers and other groups, who may be less likely to apply for free school meals (and therefore meet the relevant criteria to qualify). For these schools, the pupil premium may not be received for a significant number of children. However, there was a feeling that it had the potential to improve attainment if directed at specific support for the more disadvantaged.

“Greater funding will allow for more focused interventions to run in schools to support pupils who may not receive these opportunities at home.”

[Secondary school, Headteacher]

Special school Headteachers appeared less positive regarding the impact of the pupil premium, feeling that it was not a substantial sum of money and that the concept was not easily, directly transferable from mainstream schools into specialist education. Concerns were also voiced around accountability and whether the fact that the premium was ‘per pupil’ would lead to parents demanding greater information on exactly where the money had been spent.

“The idea of a pupil premium is a nonsense, because what we provide is so specialist. It’s such a complex mix of support, it’s not about going into a classroom with a teacher and learning support assistant and having their lesson.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

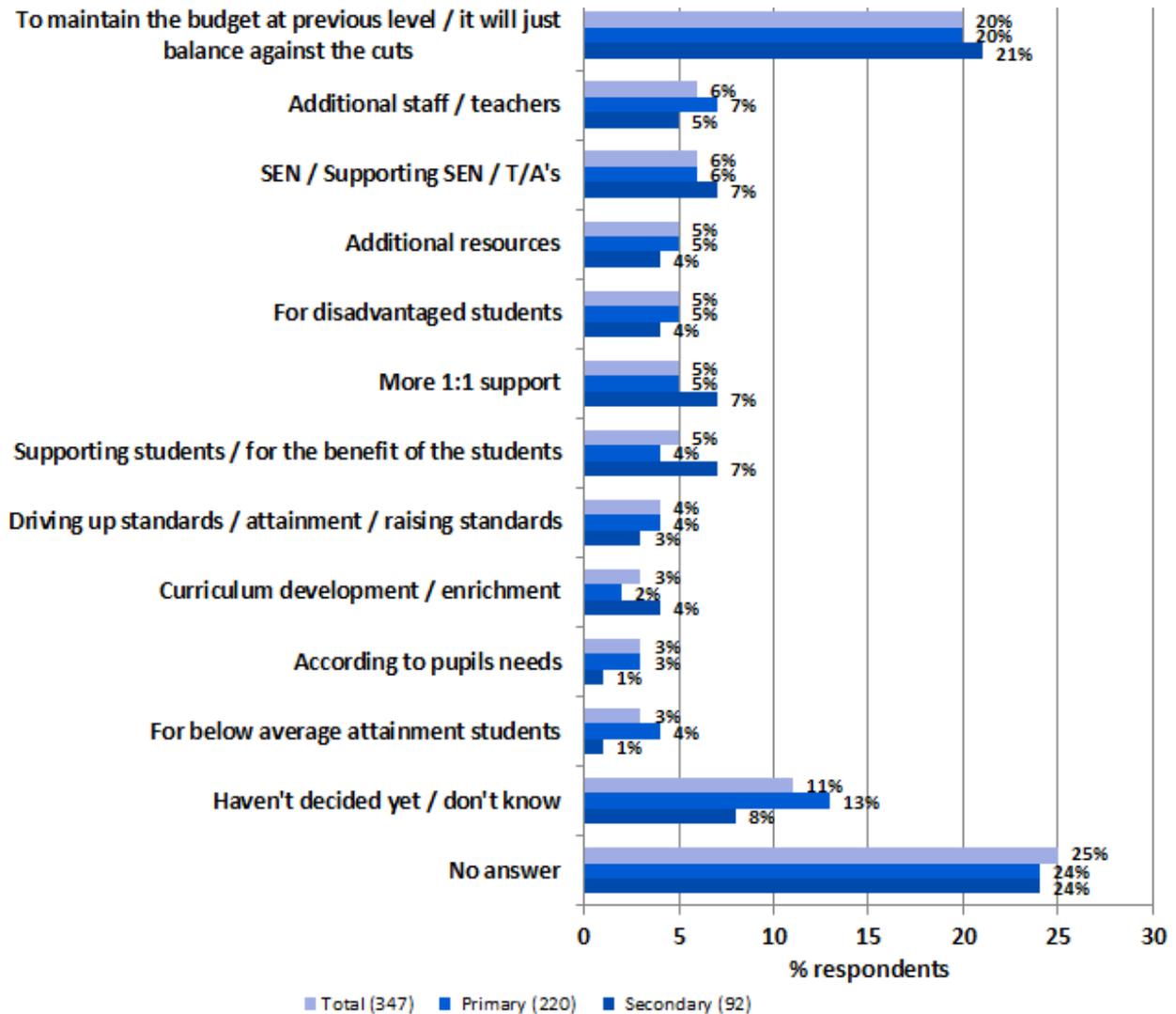
“My concern is that people will want to come back and know how we spent it. It doesn’t work like that in practice, because the structure is so complicated for some pupils.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

When asked how they intended to spend the pupil premium (see Figure 18), school leaders were most likely to claim that they would use it to help them balance schools finances against budget cuts – inferring that the pupil premium would not be viewed as an additional source of school income, but as a substitute for other (now redundant) sources. This was confirmed in the qualitative group discussions where school leaders reported that the pupil premium would be used within the general pot to make-up for the shortfall in other funding sources. Given that the main benefits of the pupil premium were seen to be related to supporting more disadvantaged pupils, using these funds to balance against general cuts would negate their intended use and core benefit.

Figure 18: 'How do you intend to spend the pupil premium?'

Base: All respondents (347) (Responses 3% or over shown)



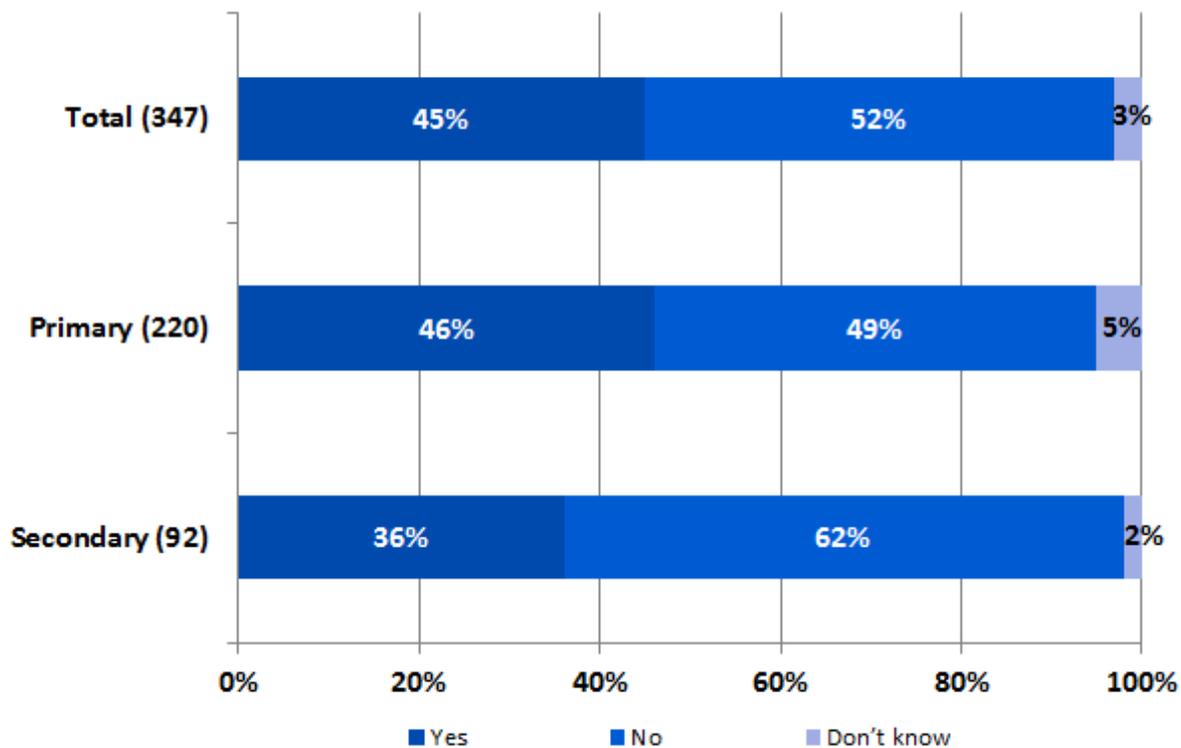
Demand on school places

Pressure to expand has affected a substantial proportion of schools and appears to be a particular issue among primary schools

Almost half of school leaders claimed that their schools were under pressure to expand in size (45%), with secondary school leaders more likely to report that they are *not* currently under this pressure than primary schools leaders.

Figure 19: ‘Do you feel that you are currently under any pressure to expand?’

Base: All respondents (347)



Primary Headteachers expressed concern regarding the expansion of schools in their area, and indicated that they perceived the recent expansion levels of their local schools to be unsustainable in the longer term.

“The demand is overwhelming in our area and nobody has any idea how many children are out there. Lots of schools are expanding like mad, although I can't see it lasting.”

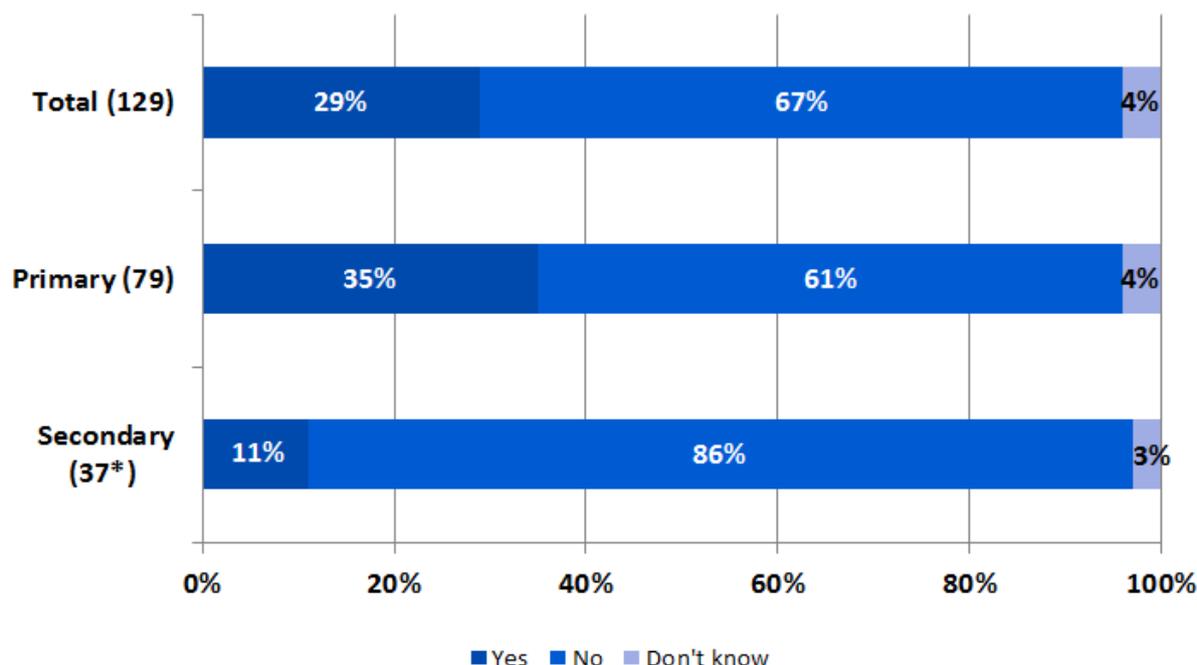
[Primary school, Headteacher]

Almost two-thirds of school leaders claimed that their school roll had increased over the last five years (63%), with almost half of this group (45%) claiming that their roll had increased ‘a lot.’

Those whose school had not increased its roll over the last five years tended not to feel that they were under pressure to expand during this time, indicating that the issue of increased school rolls appears to have affected some schools and not others (see Figure 20, overleaf). However, primary schools appeared more likely to be feeling this pressure than secondary schools (35% vs. 11% – note low base size for secondary leaders).

Figure 20: ‘If your roll has not increased, do you feel that you have been under any pressure to expand your school over the last 5 years?’

Base: All whose school roll has not increased (stayed the same or decreased) over the last 5 years (129)



Among those whose school roll *had not* increased but had felt under pressure to expand¹⁶, the most common reason for not doing so was a lack of space (49%), with lack of support from the local authority (22%), and a lack of clarity/security around funding (16%) also mentioned.

Among those who claimed that their school roll *had* increased over the last five years, the majority (69%) claimed that this had impacted upon their school, with only around one quarter (27%) of school leaders claiming that this had not had an impact. Although any differences in results between the different types of school were directional (and not significant), special schools appeared the most likely to feel that increased school rolls impacted upon their school (16 out of 20 respondents).

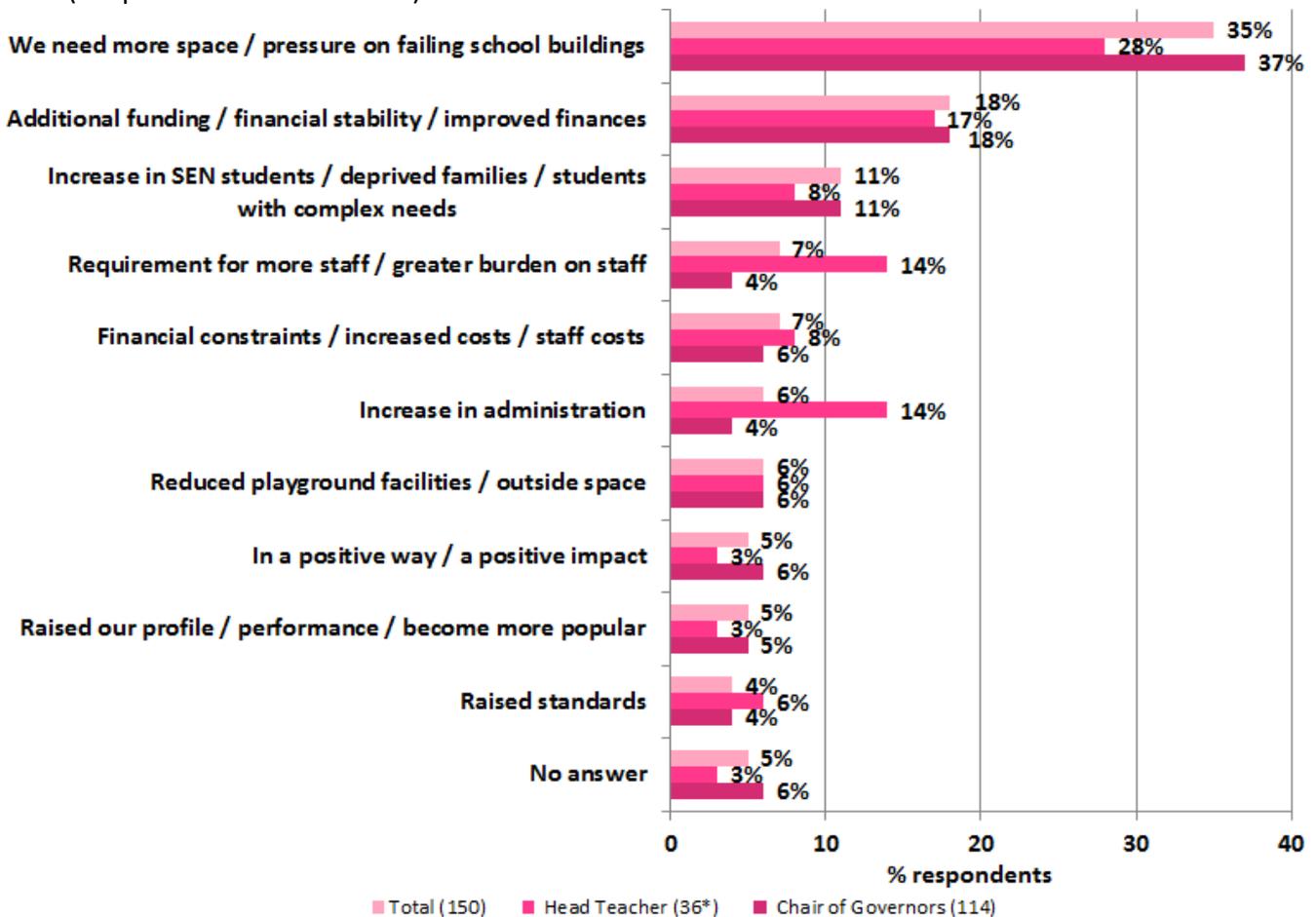
Leaders who claimed that an increased school roll had resulted in impacts, were most likely to claim that these impacts were felt in terms of lack of space and pressure on failing school buildings (see Figure 21, overleaf). However, some positive impacts were also felt, including raising the school's profile and increased standards. Primary and secondary leaders tended to provide similar responses, but differences could be seen between the responses of Headteachers and Chairs of Governors, with Headteachers more likely to refer to staffing issues and an increase in administration. However, both Headteachers and Chairs of Governors were most likely to refer to pressure on school buildings overall. (Note small base size for headteachers).

¹⁶ 37 respondents

Figure 21: ‘In what way has your increased school roll had an impact on your school?’

Base: All who claim that an increase school roll has impacted upon their school (150)

(Responses over 3% shown)



During the group discussions school leaders elaborated on the various impacts of school rolls with many highlighting the challenges of increasing school rolls in relation to resources (staff and physical space) and the quality of teaching. Full school rolls were seen to be beneficial as they afforded a degree of control over intake and maximised the available budgets. Increased school rolls, although presenting management challenges, also increased the funding resource which was reported as a positive implication.

“You’re decreasing play space. Those primary schools have to have bulged classes, or another form of entry.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

“...If I’ve got more children on roll, I’ve got more leverage for getting the new building.”

[Special school, Headteacher]

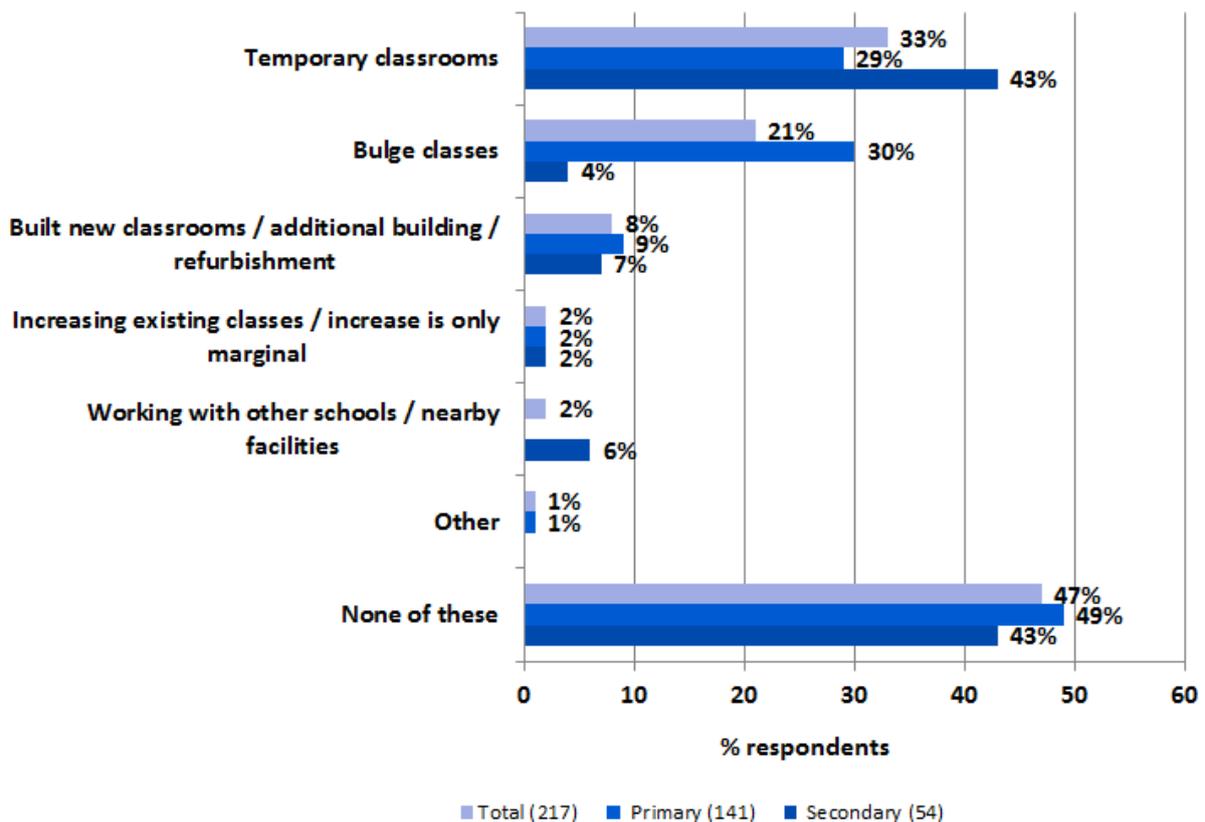
“We like FULL rolls. That way, we can’t have pupils placed into vacancies via panels... those things kill us in terms of performance and behaviour.”

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

Among those who had experienced an increased school roll over the last five years, the most common, immediate solution that was used to address this growth was temporary classrooms. Although primary and secondary school leaders were both likely to have used this solution, some differences could be seen in other approaches taken, with primary schools appearing more likely to use bulge classes and secondary schools appearing more likely to work with other local resources, such as other local schools or nearby facilities (see Figure 22, below). Almost half of school leaders reported not having used any of the temporary solutions listed, suggesting that these measures were not necessary or feasible for those schools.

Figure 22: 'Have you used any of the following temporary solutions to address this increase in growth?'

Base: All whose school roll has increased in the last 5 years (217)

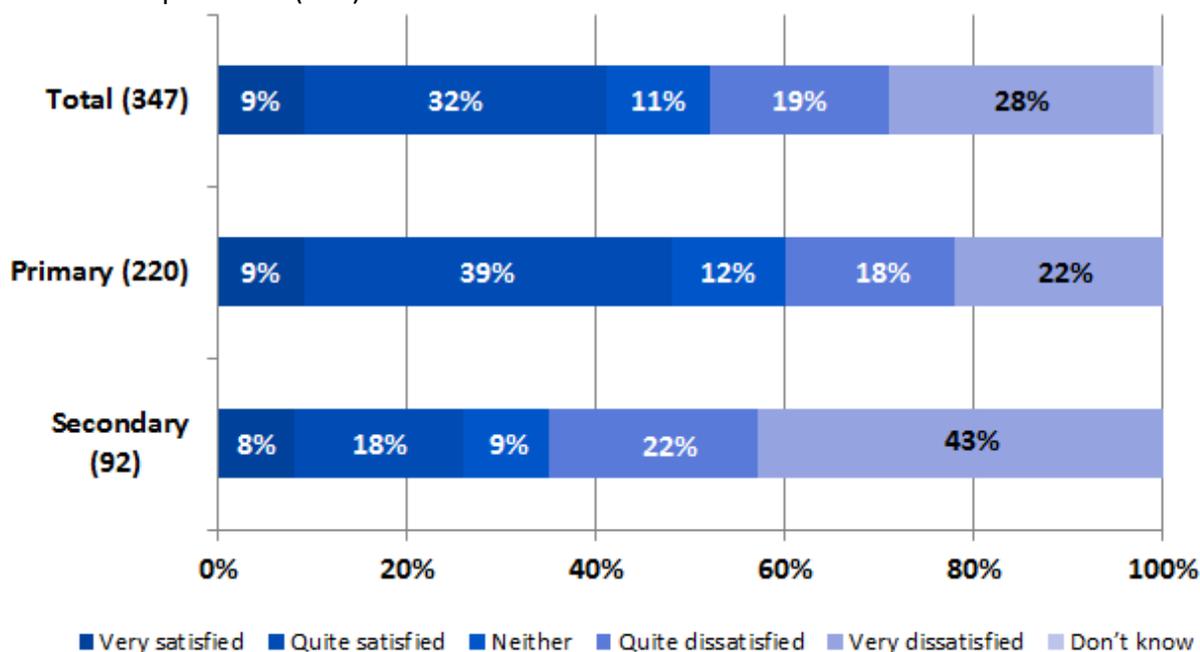


Many schools are dissatisfied with their school buildings

As illustrated in Figure 23 (overleaf) satisfaction with the current condition of school buildings generally was fairly low, with only 41% of school leaders claiming to be satisfied.

Figure 23: ‘How satisfied are you with the current condition of your school buildings?’

Base: All respondents (347)



However, interesting differences could be seen between primary and secondary school leaders, with secondary leaders more likely to be dissatisfied than primary leaders (65% vs. 40%). This dissatisfaction appeared to be linked in some cases to the withdrawal of the Building Schools for the Future programme. In addition, Headteachers were more likely than Chairs of Governors to be ‘very dissatisfied’ with their school buildings’ current condition (38% vs. 25%).

“We are in desperate need of a new building, which was cancelled in the BSF decision last summer. A new academy will open nearby soon. We are working very hard to improve our rolls but, we risk going to the wall, in an unplanned way which will maximise the damage to pupils.”

[All through school, Chair of Governors]

Support needed to meet schools’ needs

Meeting schools’ needs relating to increased pupil roll was seen to require enhanced levels of coordination

“There certainly should be co-operation between schools in relation to admissions & the local authority seems the obvious body to facilitate this.”

[Secondary Academy, Chair of Governors]

Within group discussions, primary and secondary school leaders highlighted a number of ways in which support could be given to help to meet the needs of those schools with

expanded, and often more diverse, school rolls. The local coordination of schools' admissions was seen as key by many leaders. The local authority was perceived to be well placed to coordinate admissions between schools. However, there was some indication that the quality of local coordination could vary and that this impacted upon the success of this support.

"I think local authorities should provide the admissions process. I think that only they can provide an unbiased clearing function."

[Secondary school, Chair of Governors]

"On admissions, local coordination is great if done well. Where it is not, and it is often not here, it can cause huge problems."

[Primary school, Headteacher]

The successful coordination of admissions was also expected to take into account knowledge about the population of intake areas and a more joined-up approach to places planning across early years, primary and secondary schools. Several school leaders perceived that accurate information regarding the number of children in particular areas did not exist and were keen to point out that any support in addressing increasing school rolls would need to take into account the 'type of child', rather than simply numbers.

"It is for local authorities to ensure there are enough spaces across the boroughs – children don't just suddenly appear as 5 year olds."

[Primary school, Headteacher]

Another factor that was seen as key, particularly by secondary school leaders, was that school intakes and increased rolls should be taken into account when allocating resourcing and assessing performance (i.e. particularly by Ofsted). The abolition of contextual value added (CVA) measures was of particular concern in this respect, with some leaders feeling that a lot more resource would need to be placed into aspects such as EAL, mental health and providing mentors to maintain performance.

Among primary Headteachers, admissions were perceived to vary to a large extent, with high demand in richer areas and also among younger age groups – before families moved out of the area. An emphasis on equality among schools was therefore seen to be a desirable way for support to be provided. This equality related to both schools' marketing and also school places.

"...equal distribution of places please."

[Primary school, Headteacher]

"Equal marketing by admissions! Showcase each school – give schools a specific date of the academic year to be open for visits by anyone."

[Primary school, Headteacher]

Pupil Referral Units

Pupil Referral Units appeared to be facing a number of issues relating to funding and rolls, specific to their particular type of school. As a result, findings relating to PRUs are presented separately in this section.

PRUs are experiencing a number of challenges relating to their scope of service and future viability

PRU leaders expressed a high level of concern over the lack of clarity and implications of potential changes to their funding situation. Leaders interviewed as part of this research indicated that their units had adopted a defensive stance and were aware that they would need to be much more proactive in protecting themselves and also diversifying their provision going forward.

“We’re aware we need to develop that more, to reach out so that schools know we’re here and to broaden the range of services on offer.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

Concern was expressed regarding the proposals in the 2010 Schools White Paper which was seen to encourage a marketplace economy whereby schools (rather than local authorities) would be financially responsible for the provision where their excluded pupils would continue their education. While it was acknowledged that Headteachers may be in the best position to make decisions about education provision for the children at their school, this was viewed as creating a lot of pressure for PRUs.

PRU leaders were aware that their education provision was expensive (due to the specialist care provided) and that with cuts in school budgets, this high cost impacts more directly on alternative provision of education being seen as more desirable to Headteachers placing pupils (e.g. schools working together to provide for these pupils, or the use of alternative and cheaper private providers). The higher importance placed on cost by schools meant that PRU Headteachers queried whether the child’s best interests would always be the key consideration in decisions made.

“If places are going to be commissioned on the basis that the funds available to schools are also being squeezed, is a school going to be making a decision on the basis of what’s the best outcome or are they going to be making the decision on the basis of cost?”

[PRU, Headteacher]

“PRU staff are feeling vulnerable, we’re not flavour of the month with the government. There are some negative things about PRU. Nationally, we’re feeling vulnerable. The government would like to see more private providers and we might not exist long-term.”

[PRU, Headteacher]

Further confusion was also reported around which establishment would retain overall responsibility for individual children – particularly when a child may have attended a number of different schools and forms of alternative provision.

“So if a year seven learner is moved into alternative provision, when they leave in year eleven, which school has responsibility for them? Some of my kids will have been to four or five different secondary schools. Which has the results attached to them?”

[PRU, Headteacher]

Summary analysis of findings

School leaders tended to view changes to school funding systems as unclear, with the majority feeling that at least some elements of local flexibility should be incorporated alongside a national funding formula. While one of the headlines in the Comprehensive Spending Review was that schools would be protected from the main thrust of the cuts, the Department for Education as a whole has still had to make savings. This meant, among other things, cuts in the non-schools budget, school capital spending and the scrapping of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (now replaced by the 16-19 Bursary Fund incorporating a c70% saving). Schools were generally aware that even though funding was becoming tighter (primarily due to schools budgets not rising above inflation) they had been relatively protected compared to other areas of state spending.

The government has stated that the pupil premium does not represent new money¹⁷, and although envisaged as funding to be used in tackling disadvantage and supporting deprived pupils, the government has made it clear that schools will be free to spend it in whatever way they feel best. School leaders responding to this research most commonly stated they were planning to use the pupil premium to continue funding valued services balanced against cuts to other funding sources. Given that the main benefits of the pupil premium were seen to be related to directly supporting more disadvantaged pupils, using these funds to balance against general cuts could possibly negate their intended use and core benefit.

The majority of schools involved in this research had experienced increases in schools rolls over the last five years and almost half felt pressurised to expand further still. Although there will inevitably be differences between and within local authorities in relation to school places, any increase in demand is likely to have implications for school resourcing and infrastructure: lack of space and pressure on existing – often unsatisfactory – school buildings was a key concern reported by school leaders. The Schools White Paper highlighted both that schools require high quality, fit for purpose buildings and that capital spending will have to reduce by 60% in real terms between 2011 and 2015. It is imperative that the capital budget that remains is spent on those schools that are most in need of this support, particularly those having missed out on Building Schools for the Future funding.

¹⁷ Curtis, P. (2010). ‘Michael Gove admits pupil premium is not new money’. *The Guardian* 24 October. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/24/michael-gove-pupil-premium>

Most of all, schools stated they want a fair education sector, where every school and every student is given the same opportunities to excel – the implication being that funding needs to be used effectively to enable this. The possible introduction of different systems for maintained schools and academies (including free schools) in relation to admissions policies was a key cause for concern. Under the previous Government the admissions framework had become stricter, reputedly in an attempt to increase fairness in admissions. The current coalition Government is presently consulting on changes to the admissions framework with the intention of simplifying admissions. While schools would be likely to favour any changes which make things fairer and simpler, there were concerns from many that “simpler” could mean providing more room for schools to ‘play the system’ and admit the kinds of pupils that will be advantageous for them. School leaders highlighted that local coordination and supervision of admissions was critical, and that the local authority was well placed to continue undertaking this role – particularly in London, which has achieved a large degree of success through co-ordination of admissions for secondary, and more recently primary, schools through the Pan-London Admissions Board.