

An investigation into schools for different age ranges

## **Parents' and Carers' Survey Report**

**Kathy Seymour**

PhD Researcher  
The University of Nottingham  
School of Education

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### Contact details:

If you would like to contact me about this research, my email address is: [txks3@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:txks3@nottingham.ac.uk)

If you would like to find out more about my research, please see my website:

<http://www.middleschoolresearch.org.uk>

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## Key Findings

- This report is based on an online survey for parents and carers of children attending Dorset County Council schools. The survey was publicised via various methods and 29 responses were received. Just over half of respondents had a child in a school within the two-tier schooling system (with transfer to secondary school at age 11) and the remainder had a child in the three-tier system with middle schools for ages 9-13. The findings described in this report should be considered in the context of this relatively small respondent base.
- Parents or carers were asked to evaluate several aspects of their child's school and overall were most likely to rate 'the out of lesson activities available' as 'poor' (21%) and the highest proportion of 'good' responses was given to 'the facilities and equipment available' (66% - Chapter 1).
- All respondents with children at upper school evaluated the 'out of lesson activities available' as 'good' compared to 83% of those with a child at secondary school (Chapter 1).
- Secondary schools attracted a lower proportion of 'good' ratings with respect to the general behaviour of children than either upper or middle schools (67% for secondary schools compared to 80% for both middle and upper schools) suggesting that behavioural problems are perceived to be more of an issue within the two-tier system. It is notable that regardless of schooling system, those with children in primary phase schooling were less likely to rate behaviour at the school as 'good' than those with children in secondary schooling (i.e. middle, upper or secondary schools - Chapter 1).
- Parents or carers of children at middle schools were the least satisfied with the opportunities children have to take on roles of responsibility (such as prefects, house captains, student representatives etc.) than other respondents – this runs counter to the argument sometimes put forward that the three-tier system offers more opportunities of this nature because children reach the top year in the school one more time than those within the two-tier system (Chapter 1).
- While the majority of respondents whose children attend either an upper or secondary school considered the help and support offered with school work to be 'good', just 40% of middle school respondents expressed this view and no one with a child in a primary phase school felt this way (Chapter 1).
- Around two-thirds of parents with children at upper and secondary schools said the help and support offered with non-school work related issues (such as help with personal problems) was

'good', however only one in five of middle school and primary school respondents gave this type of support the highest rating (Chapter 1).

- When respondents' evaluations of the six different aspects of their child's school are viewed according to whether the child is at a school in the two-tier or three-tier system, the three-tier system received a greater proportion of 'good' ratings for every aspect expect for 'the opportunities children have to take on responsible roles' (Chapter 1).
- Question 3 asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with six different statements about their child's experiences at school. Overall the statement which respondents were most likely to agree with was 'the school encourages the personal and social development of my child' (79% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with this – Chapter 1).
- While 60% of those with a child at middle or upper school 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'my child is treated fairly by staff', just one in three respondents with a child at secondary school did so (Chapter 1).
- Respondents whose children attend either an upper or middle school were the most likely to 'strongly agree' that their child is taught by teachers who are experts in their subject (Chapter 1).
- Responses to the statement 'there are few problems of bullying or harassment between children' suggest that among respondents to this survey, parents or carers of children at secondary school are the most likely to believe there is bullying or harassment at the school (50% of secondary school parents disagreed with the statement – Chapter 1).
- All parents or carers of children at schools within the three-tier system either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the school encourages the personal and social development of their child but a small proportion of parents of children in the two-tier system ticked 'neither agree nor disagree' and one respondent (with a child at primary school) disagreed (Chapter 1).
- Parents of children in primary phase schools within the two-tier system were the only respondents to disagree with the statement 'my child likes this school' (Chapter 1).
- None of the respondents with children at either middle or first schools felt that the work is too easy for their child; schools in the two-tier system attracted the only 'strongly agree' responses to this statement (Chapter 1).
- When the proportion of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses to these statements are viewed according to whether the child is within the two-tier or three-tier schooling system, schools in the three-tier system attracted the highest proportion of positive responses to each statement with the

exception of 'the work my child is given is generally too easy for him/her': the most notable difference is evident in responses to the statement 'the school encourages the personal and social development of my child' which all three-tier respondents agreed with compared to 63% of two-tier respondents (Chapter 1).

- When asked which schooling system they would ideally prefer their child to go through, around two-thirds opted for the three-tier system but among these, some preferred such a system with middle schools for ages 8-12 and others preferred the 9-13 middle school arrangement (Chapter 2).
- When respondents' preferred system for their child is cross-tabulated with the system their child currently attends, almost half of those with a child in the two-tier system expressed a preference for that system, whereas 83% of those in the three-tier system said that was their ideal system. Among those parents with a child in the two-tier system who expressed a preference for three-tier schooling, an arrangement involving 8-12 middle schools was more popular than that with middle schools for 9-13 year-olds (Chapter 2).
- Two-thirds of respondents went through the two-tier schooling system themselves, one in ten went through the three-tier system with middle schools for ages 9-13 and 17% attended a middle school for 8-12 year-olds. When parents' preferred system for their child is cross-tabulated against the system they went through, it is apparent that while opinions are mixed among parents who attended schools in the two-tier system, all of those who went through a three-tier system with 9-13 middle schools preferred this system for their child (Chapter 2).
- When asked at what age they believe their child is or was ready to transfer to a secondary school environment, around half of respondents said age 13 was ideal and one in five thought 11 was the best age to move up (Chapter 2).



## Introduction:

This report summarises the findings from an online questionnaire completed by parents or carers of children currently attending Dorset County Council schools. The questionnaire forms part of my PhD research into the suitability of schools catering for children of different age ranges, with a particular focus on the social, emotional and educational advantages and disadvantages of schooling systems involving middle schools for children aged 9-13. The research adopts a multi-method approach and attempts to gather the views of a variety of 'stakeholders'. In addition to the parents' surveys, the fieldwork has involved questionnaire surveys for pupils in Years 4-9, a headteachers' and teachers' survey and qualitative research involving an officer from the local authority and former pupils. The project focuses only on Dorset County Council and is, as such, a case study of this area.

A web questionnaire was developed for parents or carers who have at least one child currently attending a Dorset County Council school, a copy is presented in the Appendix. Respondents were sought by a variety of methods. Initially the survey was mentioned on the parental consent form which was issued to schools taking part in the pupils' survey early in 2008; this method elicited just two responses. To publicise the survey more widely, advertisements were placed in the Dorset Echo on three separate days in July 2008 and a short article about this research also appeared in the same paper with details of the survey URL at the end. The survey was 'live' between 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008 and 4<sup>th</sup> August 2008. As an incentive to participate, respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a prize draw for £30 in Amazon vouchers and in addition, any participant could request a copy of this summary report by providing an email address at the end of the survey. By the official closing date of 4<sup>th</sup> August 2008, 22 responses had been received, but by the time the data were analysed in May 2009 (due to a break in my studies) a further seven responses had been submitted (most likely by people following the link from my own website for this research) giving a total of 29 responses.

This report presents a summary of the findings from this survey, though it must be borne in mind that the total number of respondents is relatively low and that findings cannot therefore be assumed to be representative of all parents and carers of children in Dorset County Council schools. Results are presented in both tabular and graphical form with an accompanying narrative describing the key features of the findings. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number throughout and the number of respondents, or respondent count, is represented by 'n' in each table. Where open-ended questions were asked requiring textual responses, the comments are summarised in the narrative.

Throughout this report reference is made to the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems, both of which operate in different parts of Dorset County Council's administrative area. The two-tier system refers to the more widespread arrangement of primary (or separate infant and junior) schools for children up to the age of 11 (Year 6) and then secondary schools for ages 11+ (Year 7 onwards). The three-tier system for this purpose refers to a system with first schools for children up to age 9 (Year 4)

followed by middle schools for ages 9-13 (Year 5 – Year 8) and then upper or high schools for ages 13+ (Year 9 onwards). For simplicity the schools for age 13+ will be referred to as 'upper schools' throughout this report.

## Chapter 1: Opinions of the child's current school

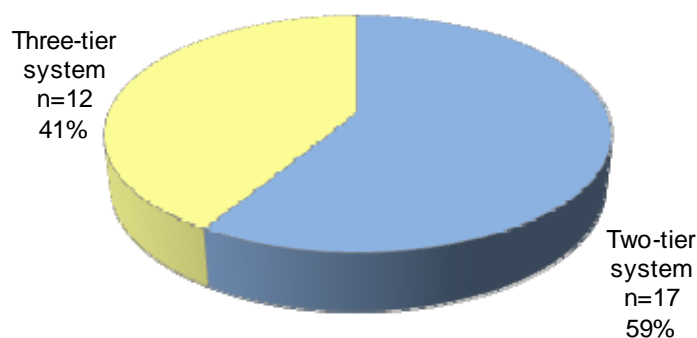
Respondents indicated the type of school their child was currently attending in Dorset; note that parents or carers with more than one child currently attending a Dorset school were asked to answer the questions with reference to the oldest child. Figure 1.1 shows the type of school each respondent said their child was at and shows that infants and secondary schools were the most commonly attended. Figure 1.2 shows the break-down according to whether the child attends a school within the two-tier system with transfer to a secondary school at age 11, or the three-tier system with middle schools for children aged 9-13 and shows that there were slightly more respondents with children in the two-tier system (59%) than in the three-tier (41%).

**Figure 1.1: Type of school child currently attends (Q1)**

	n	%
Infants school (nursery or reception - age 7)	6	21
Secondary school (ages 11 - 16 or 18)	6	21
Middle school (ages 9-13)	5	17
Upper school (ages 13 - 16 or 18)	5	17
Primary school (nursery or reception - age 11)	3	10
Junior school (ages 7-11)	2	7
First school (nursery or reception - age 9)	2	7
Total	29	100

Key: Yellow = three-tier schooling system, blue = two-tier schooling system

**Figure 1.2: Schooling system respondent's child currently attends (derived from Q1)**



Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions of six different aspects of their child's school. Figure 1.3 reports responses to each and reveals that the element most likely to be rated as 'poor' was 'the out of lesson activities available' while the highest proportion of 'good' evaluations was given to 'the facilities and equipment available'. Figures 1.4 to 1.9 presents these findings by school type with schools within the primary phase of the two-tier system (infant, junior and primary schools) aggregated for ease of interpretation.

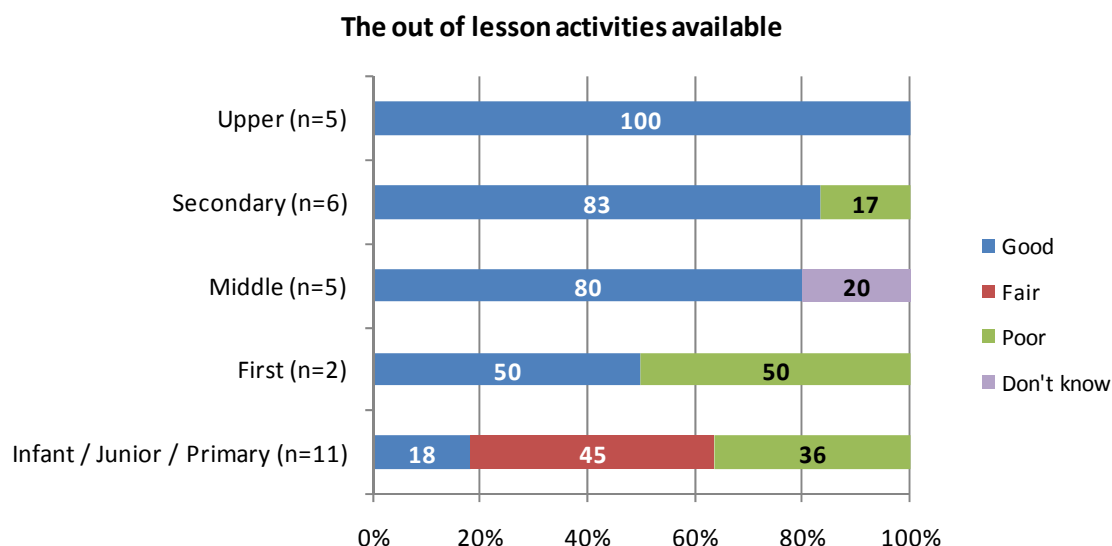
**Figure 1.3: Parents' opinions on aspects of their child's school (Q2)**

	The out of lesson activities available		The general behaviour of children at the school		The opportunities children have to take on responsible roles	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Good	17	59	18	62	11	39
Fair	5	17	9	31	8	29
Poor	6	21	2	7	4	14
Don't know	1	3	0	0	5	18
Total	29	100	29	100	28	100

	The help and support offered with school work		The help and support offered with non-school work related issues		The facilities and equipment available	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Good	12	41	11	39	19	66
Fair	12	41	10	36	9	31
Poor	2	7	4	14	1	3
Don't know	3	10	3	11	0	0
Total	29	100	28	100	29	100

Figure 1.4 shows that parents of children in upper schools are more likely to rate the out of lesson activities as 'good' than those at secondary school within the two-tier system.

**Figure 1.4: Parents' evaluations of the out of lesson activities available - by school type (Q2)**



Secondary schools attracted a lower proportion of 'good' ratings with respect to the general behaviour of children than either upper or middle schools suggesting that behavioural problems are perceived to be more of an issue within the two-tier system (Figure 1.5). It is notable, however, that parents of children in both the three-tier and two-tier arrangements were less likely to rate behaviour at the school as 'good' in primary phase schooling than in secondary phase (middle, upper and secondary schools).

**Figure 1.5: Parents' evaluations of the general behaviour of children at the school - by school type (Q2)**

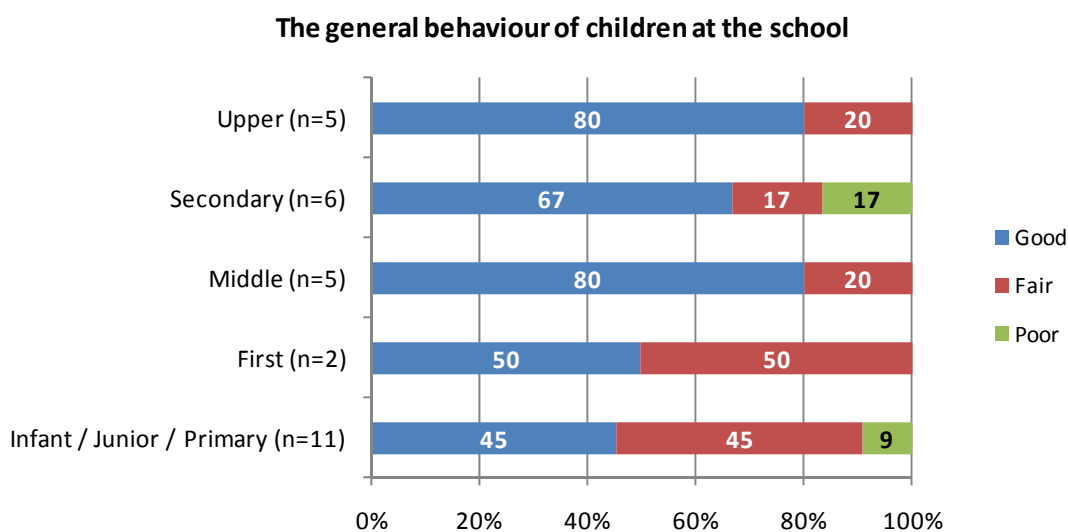
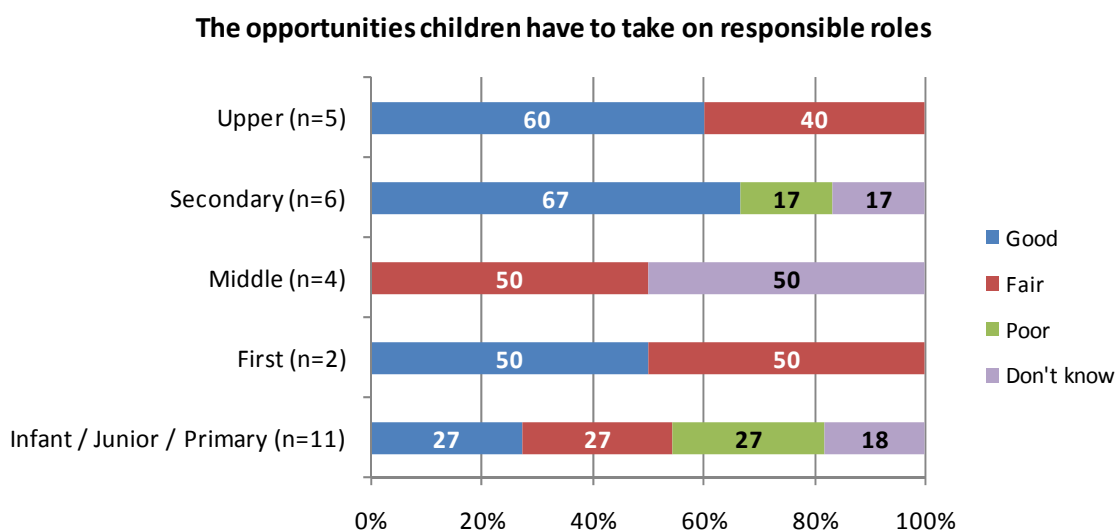


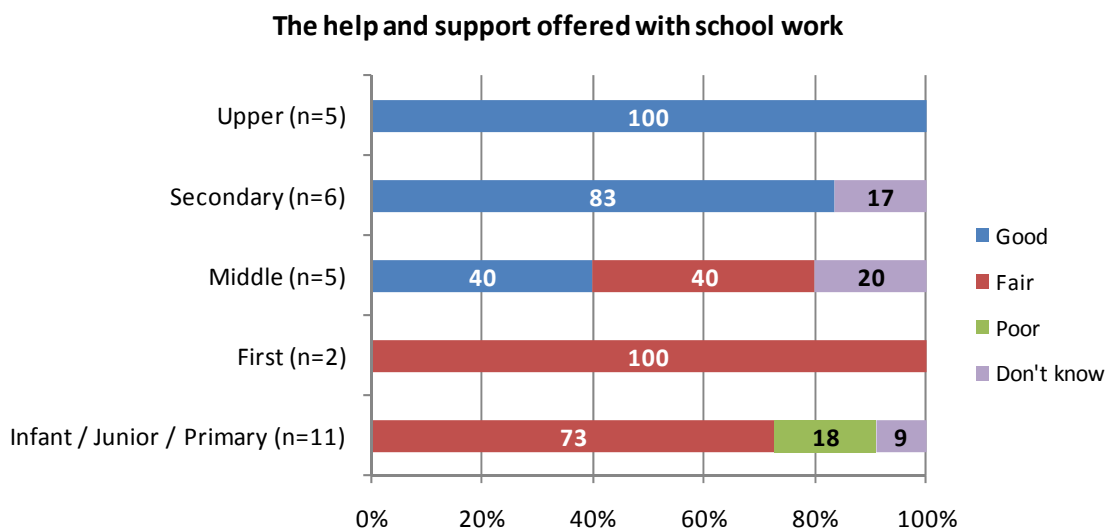
Figure 1.6 illustrates that among respondents to this survey, parents of children at middle schools were the least satisfied with the opportunities children have to take on roles of responsibility (such as prefects, house captains, student representatives and so on).

**Figure 1.6: Parents' evaluations of the opportunities children have to take on responsible roles - by school type (Q2)**



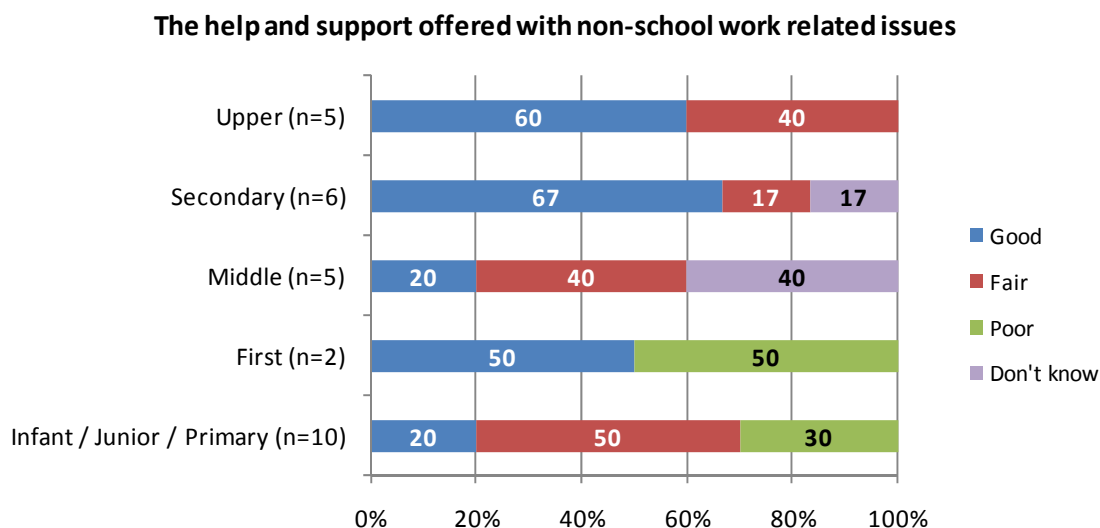
While the majority of respondents whose children attend either an upper or secondary school considered the help and support offered with school work to be 'good', just 40% of middle school respondents expressed this view and no one with a child in a primary phase school felt this way (Figure 1.7).

**Figure 1.7: Parents' evaluations of the help and support offered with school work – by school type (Q2)**



Around two-thirds of parents with children at upper and secondary schools said the help and support offered with non-school work related issues (such as help with personal problems) was 'good', but only one in five middle school and primary school respondents gave this type of support the highest rating (Figure 1.8).

**Figure 1.8: Parents' evaluations of the help and support offered with non-school work related issues – by school type (Q2)**



The facilities and equipment available at upper, secondary and middle schools were evaluated as 'good' by the majority of respondents. Primary phase schools within the two-tier system received the lowest proportion of 'good' ratings (36% - Figure 1.9).

**Figure 1.9: Parents' evaluations of the facilities and equipment available – by school type (Q2)**

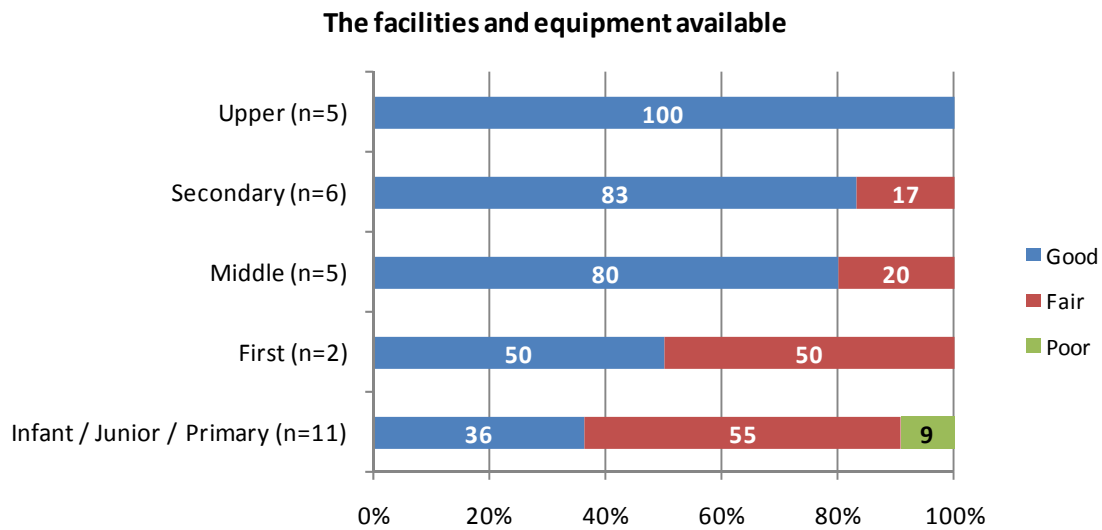
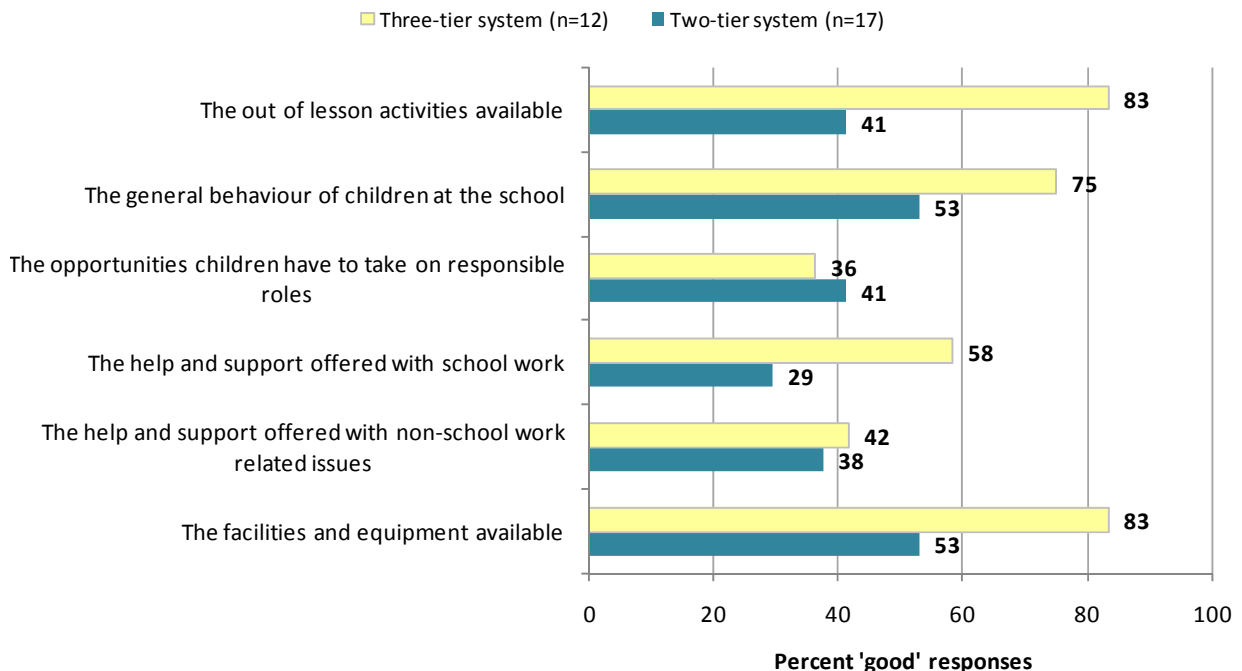


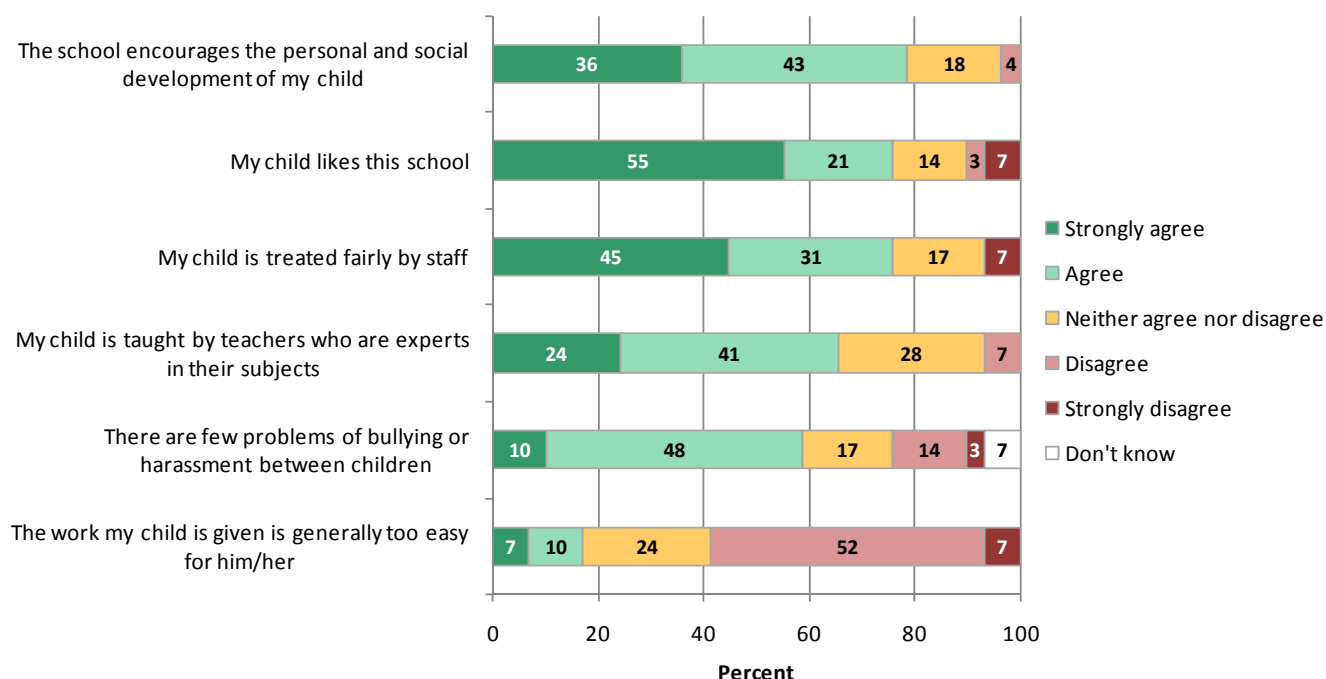
Figure 1.10 shows the percentage of 'good' evaluations for each aspect of the schools according to whether the school is within the two-tier or three-tier system. The three-tier system received a higher proportion of 'good' ratings for each aspect evaluated except for 'the opportunities children have to take on responsible roles'.

**Figure 1.10: Percentage 'good' evaluations of aspects of the schools – by schooling system (Q2)**



Question 3 presented a series of statements about the school and their child's experiences and parents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each. Figure 1.11 shows the proportion agreeing or disagreeing with each statement and shows that respondents were most likely to agree with the statement 'the school encourages the personal and social development of my child' (79% strongly agreed or agreed), and were most likely to disagree that 'the work my child is given is generally too easy for him / her' (59% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

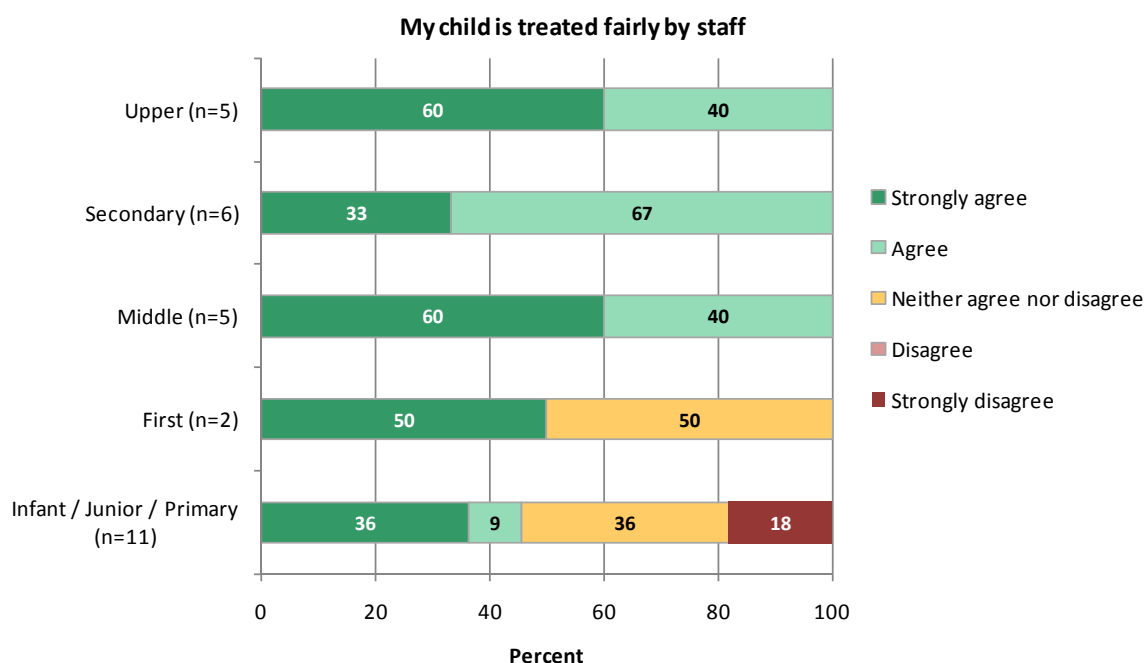
**Figure 1.11: Levels of agreement with statements about child's current school (Q3)**



Figures 1.12 to 1.17 report levels of agreement with each statement according to the type of school the respondent's child attends (primary phase schools in the two-tier system have been aggregated to form one category of infant, junior and primary schools).

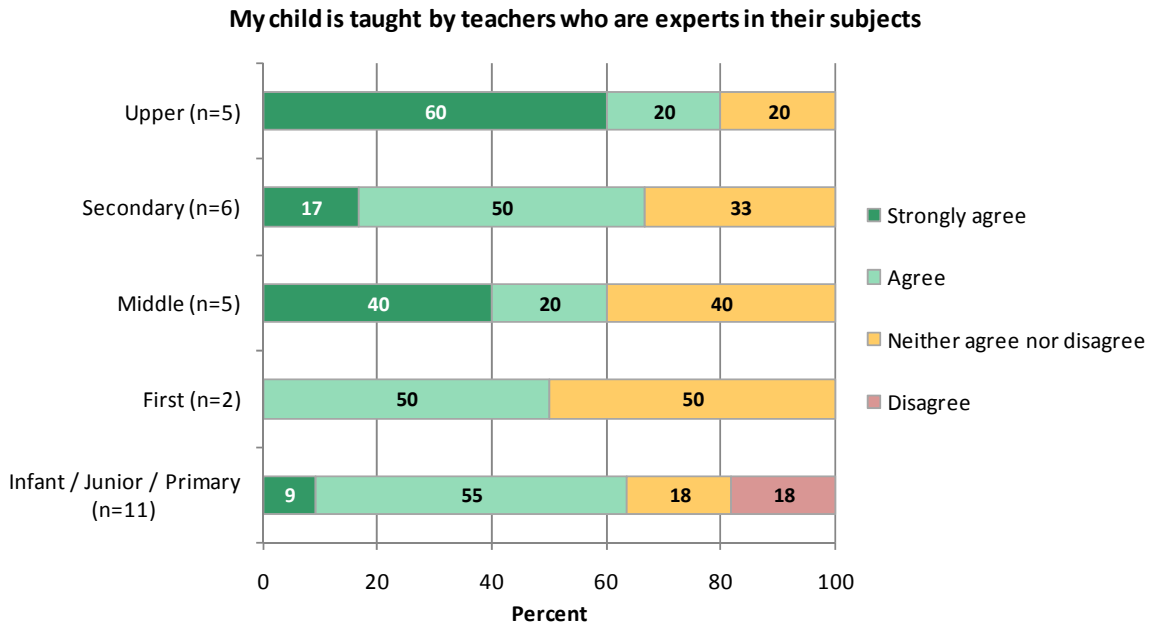
Figure 1.12 shows that most respondents agreed that their child is treated fairly by the school. Primary phase schools within the two-tier system attracted the smallest proportion of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses and while nearly two-thirds of respondents with child at middle and upper schools strongly agreed with the statement, just a third of those with children at a secondary school did so.

**Figure 1.12: Levels of agreement with the statement 'my child is treated fairly' – by school type (Q3)**



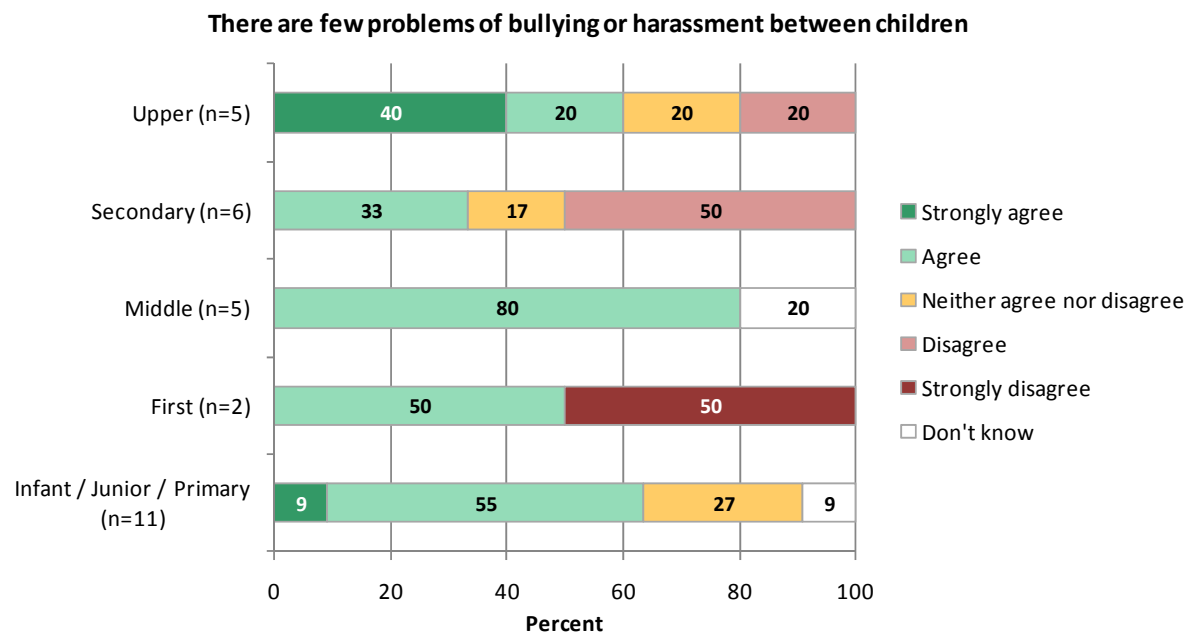
Respondents whose child attends either an upper or middle school were the most likely to 'strongly agree' that their child is taught by teachers who are experts in their subject. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the lack of subject specialism within primary phase schooling, those with children at first or primary school were the least likely to 'strongly agree' with this statement (Figure 1.13).

**Figure 1.13: Levels of agreement with the statement 'my child is taught by teachers who are experts in their subjects' – by school type (Q3)**



Responses to the statement 'there are few problems of bullying or harassment between children' suggest that among respondents to this survey, parents and carers of children at secondary school are the most likely to believe there is bullying or harassment at the school (50% disagreed with the statement – Figure 1.14). One respondent with a child at first school 'strongly disagreed' with the statement, though this could mean that they believe there are *no* instances of bullying and harassment rather than *few*, hence they disagreed with the statement.

**Figure 1.14: Levels of agreement with the statement 'there are few problems of bullying or harassment between children' – by school type (Q3)**



All parents or carers of children at schools within the three-tier system either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the school encourages the personal and social development of their child (Figure 1.15).

**Figure 1.15: Levels of agreement with the statement 'the school encourages the personal and social development of my child' – by school type (Q3)**

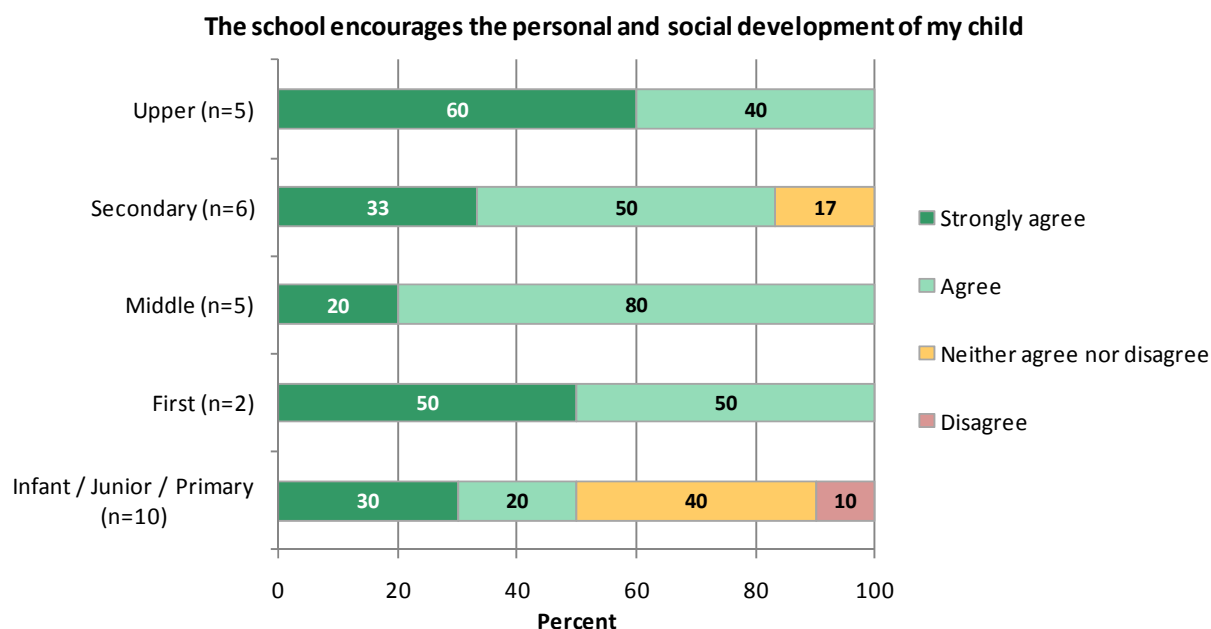
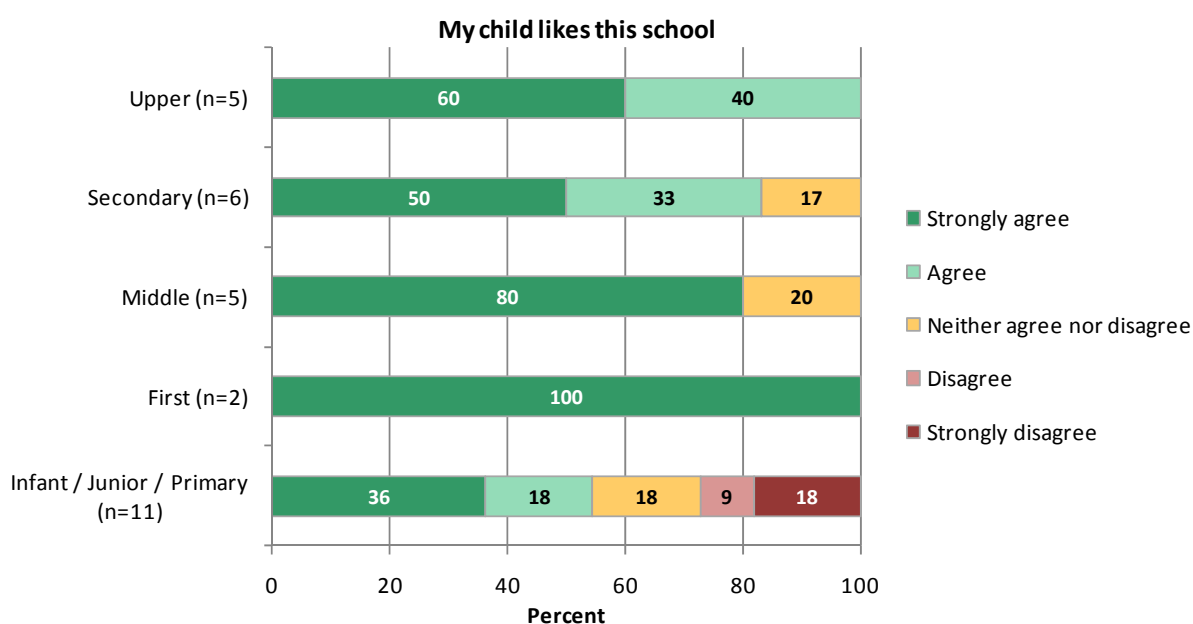


Figure 1.16 shows that parents of children in infant, junior or primary schools were the most likely to disagree with the statement 'my child likes this school', for all other school types respondents either agreed or ticked the 'neither agree nor disagree' option.

**Figure 1.16: Levels of agreement with the statement 'my child likes this school' – by school type (Q3)**



None of the respondents with children at either middle or first schools felt that the work is too easy for their child; schools in the two-tier system attracted the only 'strongly agree' responses to this statement (Figure 1.17).

**Figure 1.17: Levels of agreement with the statement 'the work my child is given is generally too easy for him/her' – by school type (Q3)**

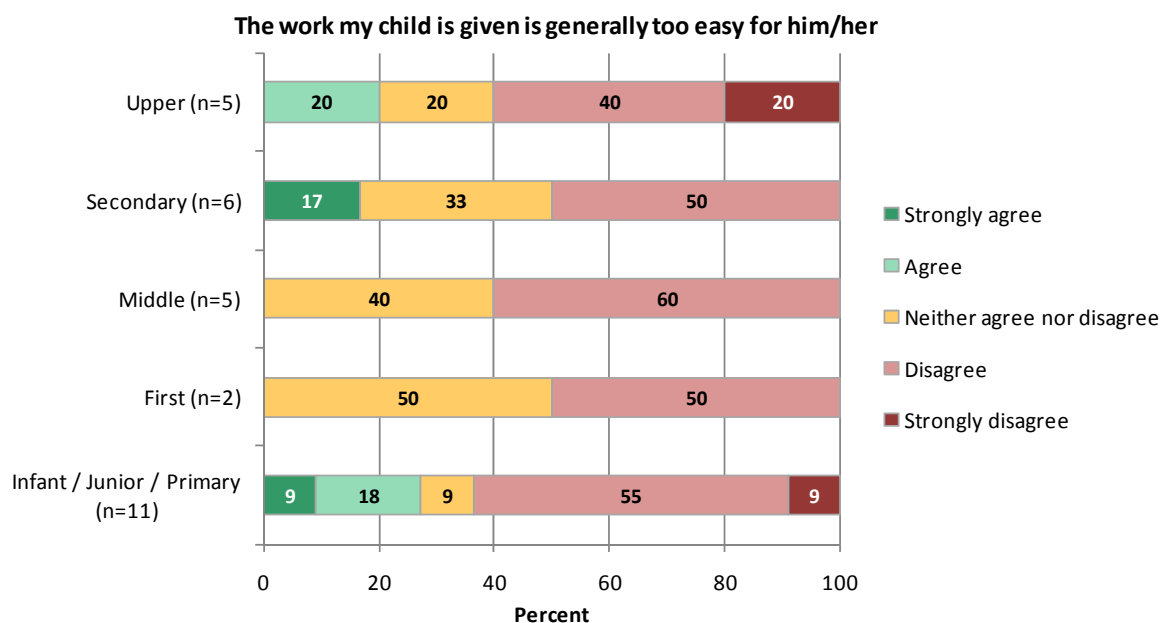
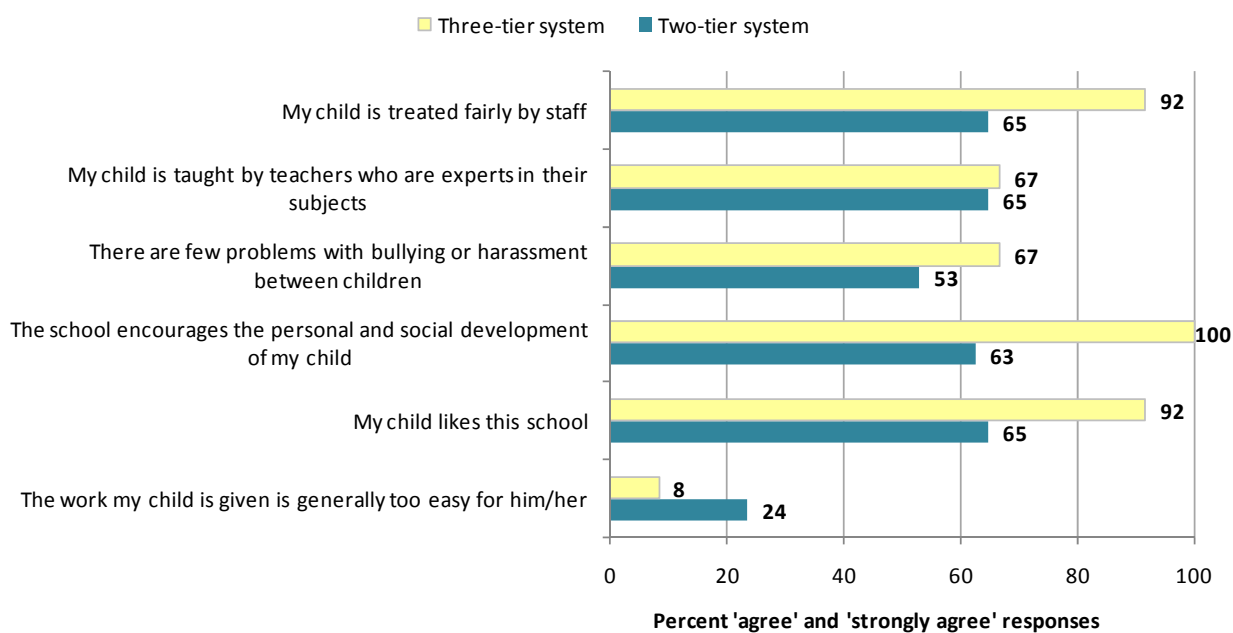


Figure 1.18 reports the percentage of respondents saying they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with each statement according to whether their child is in the two-tier or three-tier system. It shows that schools in the three-tier system attracted the highest proportion of positive responses to each statement, with the exception of 'the work my child is given is generally too easy for him/her' which those with children in the two-tier system were more likely to agree with.

Perhaps the most notable difference between the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems is in responses to the statement 'the school encourages the personal and social development of my child': all respondents with children in the three-tier system agreed or strongly agreed with this statement as opposed to approximately two-thirds of those with children in the two-tier system.

**Figure 1.18: Percentage of respondents agreeing with statements about their child's school – by schooling system ('agree' and 'strongly agree' responses aggregated – Q3)**



## Chapter 2: Opinions of the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems

The remaining survey questions focused on respondents' opinions of the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems more generally rather than just on their views of their child's current school. When asked which system they would ideally have preferred their child to go through, opinions were divided: while overall just over two-thirds preferred the three-tier system, some of these expressed a preference for such a system involving middle schools for ages 8-12 rather than 9-13 (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Parents' or carers' preferred schooling system for their child (Q4a)**

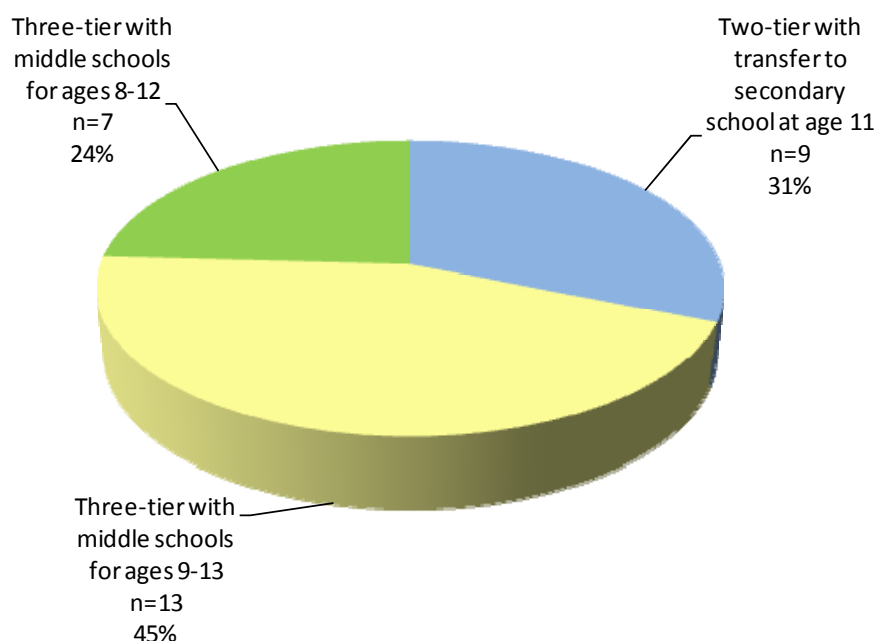


Figure 2.2 reports respondents' preferred schooling system according to whether the child is currently within the two-tier or three-tier system. Almost half of those whose child is currently attending a school within the two-tier system said that this was their preferred system, but a greater proportion of those with a child in the three-tier system preferred the three-tier system (83% favoured the three-tier system involving 9-13 middle schools). Interestingly, among those parents with a child in the two-tier system who said that they would prefer the three-tier system, the three-tier system involving middle schools for 8-12 year-olds was more popular than that with middle schools for 9-13 year-olds.

**Figure 2.2: Parents' or carers' preferred schooling system for their child by schooling system child is currently within (Q4a)**

	Child currently within two-tier system		Child currently within three-tier system	
	n	%	n	%
Prefer two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11	8	47	1	8
Prefer three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13	3	18	10	83
Prefer three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12	6	35	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>

A subsequent question asked respondents which schooling system they went through themselves. When parents' preferred system for their child is cross-tabulated against the system they went through (Figure 2.3) it is apparent that while opinions are mixed among parents who attended schools in the two-tier system, all of those who went through a three-tier system with 9-13 middle schools preferred this system for their child.

**Figure 2.3: Parents' or carers' preferred schooling system for their child by schooling system parent or carer went through (Q4a by Q4c)**

	System that parent went through							
	Two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11		Three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13		Three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12		Other system	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Prefer two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11	7	37	0	0	2	40	0	0
Prefer three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13	8	42	3	100	0	0	2	100
Prefer three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12	4	21	0	0	3	60	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>

Respondents were asked to explain their reasons for their preferred schooling system for their own child. The bulleted lists below present a summary of the main points raised in respondents' comments:

**Reasons for preferring the three-tier system (Q4b):**

- Pupils are more mature when they reach senior school and are better able to cope with the academic challenges and decision making expected of them
- Due to the narrow age range at upper schools, the school can expect more grown-up behaviour and mutual respect between pupils and staff
- Pupils arrive at upper school having already dealt with many of the challenges of puberty, and when they do move on, they are among children at a similar stage in their physical and social development
- Those disaffected by school only have a short period (3 years minimum) at upper school
- Narrower age ranges at schools within each tier can allow for greater interaction and support between children at the school and makes it easier for schools to treat children in a manner appropriate to their age
- More opportunities to develop leadership skills as children become the top year in the school one more time in the three-tier system
- Provides a gradual transition from primary to secondary schooling
- Children have greater opportunities to mix with new people and make new friends due to additional school transfers
- Children are exposed to a variety of teachers at an earlier age and are more likely to be taught in set or streamed groups earlier

**Reasons for preferring two-tier system (Q4b):**

- Fewer school-to-school transfers, therefore greater continuity and less traumatic for the children
- Children spend longer at each school and therefore become more comfortable and familiar with it
- Longer periods spent at each school means it's more likely that children spend some time at the same school as siblings – they are therefore supported by other family members at the school and it can be more convenient for parents in terms of practical issues such as transport to school
- Lower costs of buildings and infrastructure

Respondents were asked to indicate which schooling system they attended and as Figure 2.4 shows, the majority (66%) went through the two-tier system.

**Figure 2.4: Schooling system parents or went through (Q4c)**

	n	%
Two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11	19	66
Three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12	5	17
Three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13	3	10
Other system*	2	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Of the two respondents who specified 'other' systems, one grew up in Germany and the other was at school during the change-over from a two-tier to a three-tier arrangement.

When asked to comment on the schooling system they went through, respondents described a number of positive and negative elements of their experiences. The lists below summarise the comments made:

**Summary of comments made by parents and carers who went through the three-tier system**

**(Q4d):**

- Begrudged having to stay on at an 8-12 middle school rather than move up to secondary school at age 11, felt "too old" for middle school – e.g. having to sit on floor in assembly. Felt studies also suffered, fell behind in maths at the middle school and did not recover following that.
- Period of schooling most enjoyed was being at (9-13) middle school

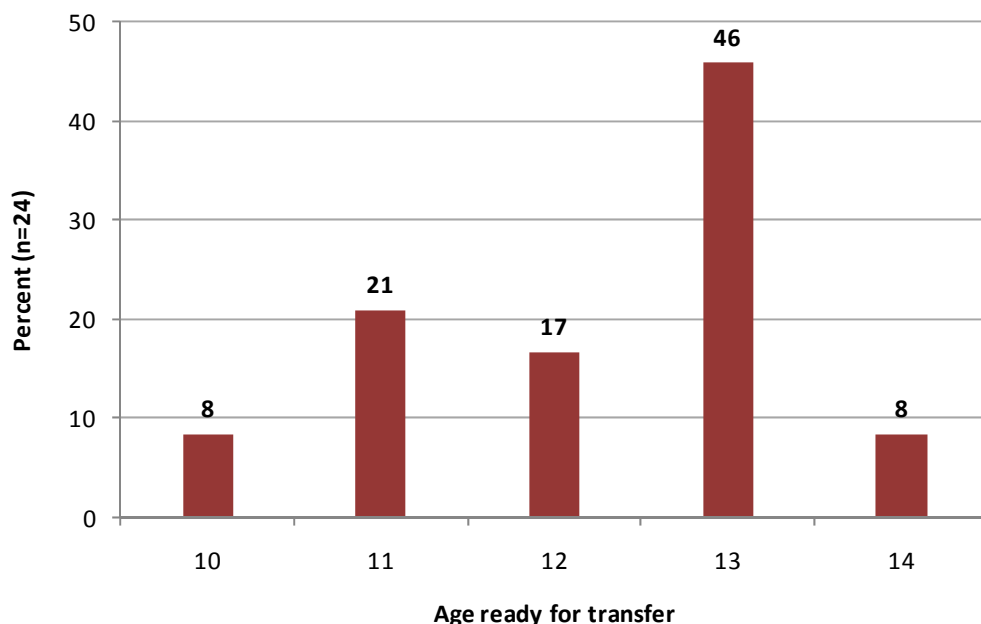
**Summary of comments made by parents and carers who went through the two-tier system**

**(Q4d):**

- Passed 11 plus a year early so went to secondary school at age 10, but recalls problems with being taken out of their peer group
- Were prepared well by teachers for the transfer to secondary school at age 11, and feels that own children have also been well prepared so transfer at age 11 does not present a problem
- Felt transfer at age 11 was the right time
- It is the individual rather than the school that dictates whether children have a good or bad time at school
- Went from a small school to a large secondary at age 11 and within a couple of years performance suffered – little individual attention and no incentive to achieve. Believes if had transferred later this might have prevented the problem.
- Was not ready for transfer to secondary school at age 11
- Would have preferred a system with a 9-13 middle school, feels that the additional change of school would have given confidence and helped them to make more friends. Staying in the same school for so long was "very cosy" and "not very challenging"

Parents were asked at what age they think their child was or will be ready to transfer to a secondary school environment. As Figure 2.5 shows, almost half of those who answered this question thought that 13 was a suitable age for transfer.

**Figure 2.5: Age at which respondents think their child is/was ready for transfer to secondary school environment (Q5a)**



Respondents were asked to provide reasons for the age at which they think their child is or was ready to transfer to a secondary school environment, comments are summarised below:

**Summary of comments made by parents or carers who felt that age 10 was a suitable transfer age (Q5b):**

- Spending Year 6 in primary school holds children back socially – children had lots of visits to the secondary school which eased the transfer
- System is not flexible enough, e.g. not easy to transfer more able child early

**Summary of comments made by parents or carers who felt that age 11 was a suitable transfer age (Q5b):**

- At age 11 child was ready for the responsibility of a secondary school and settled in quickly
- Children are well prepared in their primary school for transfer to secondary. Feels that 9-13 middle schools are too big a change for children at age 9, i.e. move to a bigger school with much older children who have very different academic and social needs.
- At age 11 children are ready to be treated more independently and in a more academic environment
- Daughter is ready for a more challenging environment, feel she “stagnates” at primary school and that teachers concentrate their efforts on helping less able pupils

**Summary of comments made by parents or carers who felt that age 12 was a suitable transfer age (Q5b):**

- Child was keen to embrace “a wider and more extensive learning programme” at age 12
- While daughter was ready for upper school at age 12, son needs the extra year at middle school before being ready to move up

**Summary of comments made by parents or carers who felt that age 13 was a suitable transfer age (Q5b):**

- Child will be better able to cope with the challenges (especially social challenges) of upper school at age 13
- Good preparation for transfer eased the move to upper school so happy with age 13 for transfer
- Children develop at different rates, the jump to a secondary school at age 11 where they must mix with 16-18 year-olds is too much to handle
- Son has “additional educational needs and the three-tier system seems to suit this”
- Happy with the three-tier system in Dorchester, and it is well established so would be very disruptive to children’s education to change that system
- Before age 13, son “was not emotionally mature enough to understand the implications of his behaviour, or to appreciate the importance of his schooling and the resulting effect it would have on his future prospects in life.”
- At age 13 children are better able to cope with a secondary school environment, 10 year-olds are too young to transfer and the process can be daunting and stressful.
- Middle schools prepare children for secondary schooling; age 11 is too young to be in a senior school environment.
- At age 13 children are ready to be in a “teenage environment”. Moving to a large secondary school from a small village school at age 11 is a huge step, “a gradual progression is best”
- At age 13 children want to be more responsible and be treated more like an adult, “moving schools is a perfect way to do this”

**Summary of comments made by parents or carers who felt that age 14 was a suitable transfer age (Q5b):**

- Daughter has learning difficulties and is youngest in her class and is due to transfer to secondary school shortly after turning 11. Worried that she will not receive the attention she needs in order to meet her full potential at secondary school
- Own son found transition very difficult at age 11, has only started to gain confidence and fit in now that he is in Year 10

## Concluding remarks

As mentioned in the introduction, the small number of respondents to this survey means that findings presented in this report cannot be considered representative of the views of all parents and carers of children in Dorset schools. However, the research has provided some useful indicative findings which may warrant further exploration.

The responses to this survey have been on the whole very positive about the three-tier system in general, however, when the responses are viewed by school type rather than schooling system, it becomes apparent that the views of those with a child at middle school are not always so positive and that it is the upper school responses which have inflated the overall three-tier figures in some instances. For example, looking at the evidence relating to the educational experience on offer, two of the aspects of schools evaluated in question 2 relate to this: 'the help and support offered with school work' and 'the facilities and equipment available': in both instances upper schools elicited 'good' responses from all respondents, but secondary schools received a higher proportion of 'good' responses than middle schools (see Figures 1.7 and 1.9).

In terms of the social environment and emotional support on offer, findings from this survey also present a very positive picture of three-tier schooling but again, on some indicators, the middle school falls behind the 11+ secondary school. For example, 'the help and support offered with non-school work related issues' was considered 'good' by 67% of parents of secondary school pupils but only 20% of middle school respondents felt this way (see Figure 1.8). Similarly, 'the opportunities children have to take on responsible roles' was rated as 'good' by 67% of respondents with a child at secondary school, but none of the middle school parents evaluated such opportunities as 'good' (see Figure 1.6). Further evidence of strong support for upper schools and of the secondary school attracting a greater proportion of 'good' evaluations than the middle school is provided in the statement 'the school encourages the personal and social development of my child': 60% of upper school respondents strongly agreed but only 20% of middle school respondents did – a smaller proportion than the 33% of parents of secondary school pupils who strongly agreed (see Figure 1.15).

While there are some aspects of middle schools which parents and carers rate very highly, caution should be exercised in interpreting the findings from this survey as providing supporting evidence for the middle school since the upper schools have played a significant part in the generally positive evaluations of the three-tier system overall. It is likely that parental preference of schooling system is highly complex and several factors contribute to such a view, many of which are not explored by this survey (e.g. the suitability of schools for different age ranges in the context of the area lived in, such as urban / rural areas). In addition, as one respondent points out in his or her comments, it is often less a case of preferring one schooling system over another but more to do with the quality and characteristics of an individual school which can lead to a positive educational and social experience.

## **Appendix: The Questionnaire**

## Questionnaire for parents or carers

As part of my PhD research I would like to find out what **you** think about **your child's** school and your views on the suitability of schools covering different age-ranges. If you would like to view an information sheet about this research and the purposes of this questionnaire, please click [here](#).

This questionnaire is intended only for parents or carers of children currently attending a state school in Dorset (i.e. Dorset County Council schools). **If you have more than one child currently attending a Dorset school, please answer with reference to the oldest child.**

Please answer each question by ticking in the box or typing your answer in as appropriate, when you reach the end of a page, please click on 'next' to move to the next page.

Many thanks,

*Kathy Seymour*

PhD Researcher  
School of Education  
The University of Nottingham

**To begin the survey please click 'next' below, if you cannot see the 'next' button, please scroll down the screen.**



*Remember, if you have more than one child currently attending a Dorset school, please answer these questions with reference to the oldest child.*

Q1. Which type of school does your child currently attend?

- Infants school (nursery or reception - age 7)
- Junior school (ages 7-11)
- First school (nursery or reception - age 9)
- Primary school (nursery or reception - age 11)
- Middle school (ages 9-13)
- Secondary school (ages 11 - 16 or 18)
- Upper school (ages 13 - 16 or 18)
- Unsure (if unsure, please write the name of your child's school in the box below)

School name:

**Q2. How would you rate the following aspects of your child's school?**

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
The out-of-lesson activities available (e.g. sports teams/clubs, school plays, choirs, school magazine, hobbies clubs etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The general behaviour of children at the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The opportunities children have to take on responsible roles (e.g. house captains, prefects, student representatives, school council etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The help and support offered with school work (e.g. individual help with class work, additional tutoring if required etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The help and support offered with non-school work related issues (e.g. help with personal problems etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The facilities and equipment available (e.g. science labs, sports facilities, library, design & technology equipment etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





Your child attends a school in an area which operates both a 'two-tier' and a 'three-tier' schooling system.

The two-tier system involves primary schools (or infants and juniors) for children up to age 11, and then a secondary school for ages 11+.

The three-tier system in your area involves first or primary schools for children up to age 9, and then a middle school for ages 9-13 followed by an upper school for ages 13+.

**Q4a. Ideally, which system would you prefer for your child?** [Please tick one only]

- Two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11
- Three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13
- Three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12
- Other system (please detail below)

**Q4b. Please give brief reasons for your preferred system for your child:**

**Q4c. Which system matches most closely the schooling system you went through?**

[Please tick one only]

- Two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11
- Three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13
- Three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12
- Other system (please detail below)

**Q4d. If you would like to comment on the suitability of the system you went through (e.g. did you feel you transferred to secondary school too early / too late?) please use the space below:**

Q5a. At what age do you think your child is/was ready for transferring to a secondary school environment?

Q5b. Please give brief reasons for your answer to Q5a:

*If you would like to enter the prize draw for £30 in Amazon.co.uk vouchers, please provide an email address below:*

Closing date for prize draw is 4th August 2008, the winner will be notified by email by 15th August 2008

*If you would like to receive a summary report on the findings from this survey by email, please provide an email address below:*

***Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.  
Please click 'submit' at the bottom of the page.***