

# Centre for Successful Schools

## Parent Survey

An Investigation of Parents' Attitudes to their Children's School

### **Honywood Community Science School**

2007

#### **1. Background to the Survey**

Evidence from school effectiveness research indicates that parental involvement is a key ingredient in children's education. The extent to which parents/carers can reinforce educational values and actively support the teachers' task is crucial for their own children. Seeking the views of parents, along with those of other 'stakeholders' of the school, is also of vital importance for informing the school's self-evaluation process and leading to improved school performance.

This survey, therefore, focuses on parents'/carers' attitudes to their children's school experiences. It seeks their perceptions of a broad cross-section of school life. It examines the way in which parent attitude varies according to the school year of the child.

The survey focuses primarily on parental perception in six broad areas,

- the school and its standards,
- communications between school and home,
- the support which the parents are able to offer to their child's education,
- parent teacher relationships,
- the effectiveness of the teachers and
- the quality of the child's experience in the school.

## **2. Methodology**

The questionnaire is administered to a random sample of 25% to 50% of parents of children in each year group in the target schools. The participating schools are not randomly selected but are, for the most part, maintained secondary schools from a wide range of social and geographical locations in rural, suburban, urban and inner city situations. In the case of Honywood Community Science School, 92 questionnaires were received for analysis, all of which could be analysed by the school year of the child.

Each question in the questionnaire is analysed individually (Appendix 1, Tables 1 to 8) showing the range of response, and tabulating the responses in respect of the age group of the child in the school. Additional information is obtained by analysing groups of questions together. From this information, categories are constructed (Appendix 2, Tables 9 to 14) to identify attitudinal differences in respect of the six areas identified above.

This is done by representing the number of positive responses in each category as a percentage of the maximum number of positive responses possible. This technique allows for a broad-brush approach to interpreting the data, which facilitates comparison between schools and between parents/carers of children in different year groups within schools.

Figures 1 to 6 in Appendix 3 provide the school with comparative data in diagrammatic form. They present the school's data from each of the six categories together with a CSS database average (drawn from all schools surveyed in the last three years). In Appendix 4, schools are provided with a transcript of any written comments from the questionnaires, and in Appendix 5 (Table 15 and Figure 7) there is an analysis of question 7.5, which allows schools to get some measure of how the socio-economic background of their parent sample compares with the Keele CSS database.

## **3. Main Findings of the Survey at Honywood**

*(Analysis is included in Appendix 1, Tables 1 to 7)*

*Figures in brackets following the school figure indicate the average percentage of responses to the relevant question from the CSS database.<sup>1</sup> The first figure is, therefore, your school and the one in brackets the database average.*

### **3.1 The School Standards**

The vast majority of parents in the Keele CSS database are broadly satisfied with their child's school. At Honywood, 100% (82%) of parents responding to the survey consider the school has a good reputation in the community, and 100% (87%) would recommend it to friends. 93% (47%) think that the school is better than most schools, and 99% (73%) agree that it is achieving high educational standards. Examination results are perceived as meeting parental expectation by 95% (70%), with 84% (36%) citing 'the school gets good examination results' as an influence when choosing the school.

Standards of pupil behaviour maintained by Honywood are seen as high by 88% (65%) of parents. The school rules are seen as fair and reasonable by 99% (86%), and 33% (40%) believe that the school has got its policy on exclusions about right. 92% (75%) of respondents agree that the school maintains high standards of school dress among the pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the CSS database figure is an average based on responses from a wide range of schools. Research indicates that parents' satisfaction is generally highest in schools in the most favourable socio-economic circumstances, where the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) is low, although in secondary schools parents' satisfaction is particularly high both in schools with the lowest and the highest FSM entitlement (Ofsted 2005. Parents' satisfaction with schools).

### 3.2 The School Environment

The Honywood environment is seen as a safe and secure environment for the children by 92% (80%) of parents. 90% (75%) think the school buildings are in a very good or reasonable state of repair and decoration, with 79% (65%) saying the school is kept reasonably free of litter. 36% (41%) say that there is good access to the school for pupils with disabilities (e.g. in wheelchairs).

The school is seen as well furnished and resourced by 87% (77%), and 98% (85%) of parents believe it to be well equipped with computers and computer software. 83% (70%) agree that the school has sufficient books and equipment to enable good teaching and learning.

### 3.3 Curriculum Provision

At Honywood, 100% (94%) of parents think a good range of subjects is provided on the curriculum. 99% (73%) say that there is also a wide range of extra-curricular activities available, and 86% (65%) agree that there are opportunities for extra study before school, at lunchtime, or after school. 95% (79%) of parents say that there is ample opportunity to take part in sport at Honywood, and 91% (75%) that there is ample opportunity to take part in music and drama. 67% (65%) of parents think the school makes provision for pupils of all abilities, and 53% (61%) say that it caters for pupils of all ethnic groups.

### 3.4 Communication

A high proportion of parents are satisfied with the quality of communication between school and home. At Honywood, 97% (83%) of parents feel that they have enough information about the school. 84% (62%) say they have been sent information about inspections carried out at the school by Ofsted. 50% (42%) of parents say they are made aware of the teaching methods used by the school, and 66% (58%) say they are

made aware of the pastoral system. 79% (67%) say they have enough information about the curriculum, and 87% (69%) about how pupil progress is measured at the end of each year. At Honywood, 98% (88%) find their child's progress report useful. 91% (88%) say that Parents' Evenings are generally held at suitable times but, when they attend, 25% (22%) say they are not given sufficient time with each teacher to obtain the information they need.

### 3.5 Parental Support

Most parents, 71% (68%), do not feel the need to be more directly involved than they already are in the life of the school. Nevertheless, their responses generally suggest that they take their supportive role very seriously. At Honywood Community Science School, 98% (94%) say they regularly attend school for Parents' Evenings, 54% (49%) for shows/plays/concerts, 27% (21%) for sports events, and 19% (13%) for Parents' Association meetings. The governors' annual report to parents is usually of least interest; at Honywood, 8% (8%) of respondents say they attend.

Most parents think that homework is important, and 99% (93%) take the time, at least sometimes, to check that their child is completing his/her homework. 84% (68%) believe they are able to help the child with all or most of his/her learning.

### 3.6 Relationships with the Teachers

Most parents clearly understand that they are valued by the school. At Honywood, 99% (97%) of them say they are made to feel welcome when they go to the school, and believe that the teachers, 85% (83%), and the headteacher, 78% (56%), are generally approachable and helpful. It can often be daunting for parents to visit the school to discuss their child's progress or welfare. At Honywood, however, 81% (69%) consider that most teachers treat them as a partner in their child's education. When discussing their child's work and progress with the teacher(s), 92% (87%) of respondents believe that they can speak honestly about what concerns them most of

the time, and 88% (84%) say that the teachers always or mostly seem frank and open with them. 86% (71%) feel they are given sufficient opportunity to express their views to the school about important issues, 91% (85%) say they are rarely or never made to feel they are wasting the teacher's time, and 75% (63%) come away thinking they have learned something useful. 60% (48%) feel that any complaints they have are dealt with sympathetically for the most part, and a further 35% (36%) say they have had no reason to complaint or express concern.

### 3.7 Teacher Effectiveness

Parents are generally of the opinion that most teachers are doing a good job. At Honywood, 100% (91%) agree that this is the case. 92% (76%) believe that the standards of teaching are high in most cases, and 57% (43%) agree that teachers keep good control in the classroom. 78% (70%) agree that the teachers praise and encourage the pupils, and 97% (89%) hold the view that teachers expect the pupils to work hard.

In respect of the teachers' dealings with the children, responses are not so positive. Although 99% (94%) of parents feel that their child is well cared for at school, and 69% (62%) think that the teachers treat all pupils fairly and with respect, there is usually some reservation about the handling of bad behaviour. At Honywood, 52% (69%) say that the teachers' are, at least sometimes, too tolerant of bad behaviour, although only 7% (28%) feel that discipline in the school needs to be stricter, and just 2% (11%) believe that the school could do more to deal firmly with bullying.

### 3.8 The Child's School Experience

97% (86%) of parents regard their child as being happy at school all or most of the time. 98% (92%) are generally satisfied with the progress their child is making, and none (3%) of the respondents express actual dissatisfaction with progress. 74% (66%) believe that the school enables every pupil to be good at something, and 92% (81%) are confident that their child will be successful in most things at school. 97% (93%) of

parents know who to contact should they wish to discuss their child's problems/progress.

The overwhelming majority of parents say their child is treated fairly both by teachers 99% (93%), and by other pupils 95% (88%), but usually a persistent, disquieting minority, 4% (20%), perceive that bullying is a particular problem in the school. 14% (20%) claim that their child is sometimes bullied, and 1% (4%) say that this is a regular occurrence.

## 4. Analysis of Questions by Category

*(Analysis is included in Appendix 2, Tables 9 to 14 and Appendix 3, Figures 1 to 6)*

Parent responses are analysed individually (Appendix 1) but also in the groups identified above from which the following categories are derived.

### 4.1 Perception of School

12 questions are included in this category<sup>2</sup>. They are presented in Appendix 2, Table 9 which records the parents' overall view of the school standards and compares it with the parental view of other schools in this respect. Honeywood's figure of 92% compares with a CSS database average of 74%. Figure 1 in Appendix 3 represents, in graph form, the pattern of parent response, viewed in respect of the year group of the child.

### 4.2 Perception of Communications

10 questions are included in this category<sup>3</sup>. They are presented in Appendix 2, Table 10 which records the parents' overall view of the quality of communication between

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<sup>2</sup> Questions 1.3, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6, 2.7, 2.12, 2.13, 3.1, 3.2, 3.7

<sup>3</sup> Questions 6.1, 6.3, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.9a, 6.9b, 6.9c, 6.9d, 6.9e

school and home, and compares it with the parental view of other schools in this respect. Honeywood's figure of 82% compares with a CSS database average of 69%. Figure 2 in Appendix 3 represents, in graph form, the pattern of response from the school's parents, viewed in respect of the year group of the child.

### 4.3 Parental Support

9 questions are included in this category<sup>4</sup>. They are presented in Appendix 2, Table 11. This category focuses on parents' responses about the ways in which they actively support their child in school. Honeywood's figure of 63% compares with a CSS database average of 54%. Figure 3 in Appendix 3 represents, in graph form, the pattern of parent response, viewed in respect of the year group of the child.

### 4.4 Relationship with Teachers

10 questions are included in this category<sup>5</sup>. They are presented in Appendix 2, Table 12 which records the parents' overall view of the quality of parent teacher relationships in the school and compares it with the parental view of other schools in this respect. Honeywood's figure of 87% compares with a CSS database average of 78%. Figure 4 in the analysis represents, in graph form, the pattern of response from the school's parents, viewed in respect of the year group of the child.

### 4.5 Teacher Effectiveness

7 questions are included in this category<sup>6</sup>. They are presented in Appendix 2, Table 13 which records the parents' overall view of the level of teacher effectiveness in the school and compares it with the parental view of other schools in this respect.

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<sup>4</sup> Questions 1.9a, 1.9b, 1.9c, 1.9d, 1.9e, 1.9f, 4.11, 4.12, 6.4

<sup>5</sup> Questions 1.10, 1.11, 2.8, 5.8, 5.9, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, 5.15

<sup>6</sup> Questions 4.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.16

Honywood's figure of 85% compares with a CSS database average of 75%. Figure 5 in Appendix 3 represents, in graph form, the pattern of response from the school's parents, viewed in respect of the year group of the child.

#### 4.6 The Child's School Experience

6 questions are included in this category<sup>7</sup>. They are presented in Appendix 2, Table 14 which records the parents' overall view of the quality of their child's experience in the school and compares it with the parental view of other schools in this respect. Honnywood's figure of 94% compares with a CSS database average of 86%.

Figure 6 in Appendix 3 represents, in graph form, the pattern of response from the school's parents, viewed in respect of the year group of the child.

### 5. Other Areas of Analysis

A number of important questions are put to the parents which are not included in the broad areas so far covered, or in the construction of the above categories. Such questions include the parents' reasons for choosing the school, parental attitudes to testing, and the amount of homework seen to be done by the child.

#### 5.1 Reasons for Choosing the School

Parents choose schools for many reasons, it may be to do with good academic standards, a religious affiliation or simply because this is the nearest school to the family home. At Honnywood, the most common reasons given for parents to choose the school are "the school has high academic standards" 88%, "the belief that the child

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<sup>7</sup> Questions 4.2a, 4.2b, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10

would be happy at the school” 85%, and “the school gets good examination results” 84%.

The most common responses from the database of all parents to the same question are as follows: “the belief that the child would be happy at the school” 65%, “nearest school to the home” 49%, and “impressed by attending an open evening” 46%.

## 5.2 Attitudes to Testing

Responses in this area show a marked contrast between the parents’ perception of compulsory national tests and their view of teachers’ diagnostic testing. 47% of Honywood parents believe that the government’s national tests are helpful to the child’s learning. The response average for all parents in the database is 51%. Tests given by teachers are seen as helpful by 96%. In this case the overall response average is 87%.

## 5.3 Homework

At Honywood, 89% (67%) of parents think that the amount of homework required from their child is about right. 4% (9%) say there is too much, and 7% (24%) say there is too little. 49% (24%) of the parents estimate that their child does more than five hours homework per week.

Generally, there are variations between the school year groups, with the older pupils generally doing most homework, and the lower school pupils doing less. 71% (35%) of the pupils in year 11 at Honywood are seen as doing more than 5 hours homework each week, and 36% (10%) of them are seen as doing more than 10 hours.

## 6. Every Child Matters

The stated aim of Every Child Matters (ECM) is to improve the following five outcomes for children and young people: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being.<sup>8</sup> This section of the report presents responses from the CSS Parent Survey which touch upon each of the five outcomes for their children in school.

### 6.1 Being Healthy

The outcome 'being healthy' is concerned with pupils being taught the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, being given the skills and understanding to make healthier choices, and being encouraged by schools and parents/carers both to eat healthily and to participate in and enjoy school sport and physical education.

At Honywood, 95% (79%) of parents agree that there is ample opportunity to take part in sport, and 99% (73%) agree that there is a good range of extra-curricular activities (clubs, societies) to take part in at lunchtime or after school. 97% (51%) of respondents think that they are given enough information from the school about the range of dinnertime/after-school activities, clubs and societies available for the pupils.

### 6.2 Staying Safe

This area is concerned with the extent of bullying, discrimination, and anti-social behaviour in school, and schools and parents/carers providing protection for pupils. Research shows that high levels of parents' satisfaction are reflected in schools with a very positive ethos, high standards of behaviour and an absence of bullying and racism.<sup>9</sup> At Honywood, 99% (94%) of respondents think that their child is well cared for at school, and 66% (58%) think they are given enough information from the school

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<sup>8</sup> DfES (2004), Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools; Ofsted (2005), Every child matters. Inspection of children's services: key judgements and illustrative evidence.

<sup>9</sup> Ofsted (2005). Parents' satisfaction with schools.

about the pastoral system. 92% (80%) agree that the school is a safe and secure environment, and 88% (65%) agree that the school maintains high standards of behaviour among the pupils.

At Honywood, 4% (20%) of parents responding to the survey believe that bullying is a **particular** problem at the school, although only 1% (4%) claim that their own child has been regularly bullied at school during the past year.

### 6.3 Enjoying and Achieving

The outcome 'enjoying and achieving' is about pupils being enabled and encouraged by schools and parents/carers to attend and enjoy school, and to achieve highly. At Honywood, 97% (86%) of parents say that their child enjoys and is happy at school always or most of the time, and none (3%) of the respondents say that they are not satisfied with the progress their child is making. 86% (65%) agree that there are opportunities for extra study (before school, at lunchtime or after school).

Research shows that parents' satisfaction is highest when school effectiveness and pupils' achievement are very good or excellent.<sup>10</sup> At Honywood, 99% (73%) of parents agree that the school is achieving high educational standards, and 95% (70%) agree that the school's examination results are in line with what parents expect. 93% (47%) feel that Honywood is better than most schools, and 97% (89%) agree that the teachers expect the pupils to work hard.

### 6.4 Making a Positive Contribution

This area is concerned with schools and parents/carers promoting law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school, and encouraging pupils to develop positive relationships with adults and their peers. At Honywood, 69% (62%) of respondents

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<sup>10</sup> Ofsted (2005). Parents' satisfaction with schools.

agree that the teachers treat all the pupils fairly and with respect, 52% (56%) agree that the school deals firmly with bullying, and 57% (43%) agree that the teachers keep good control in the classroom. However, 52% (69%) think that the teachers are, at least sometimes, too tolerant of bad behaviour. On the other hand, only 7% (28%) think that discipline in the school is not strict enough, and 6% (12%) that the school is not sufficiently prepared to exclude badly behaved pupils.

With respect to engaging parents to support their child's education, 29% (32%) of parents say that they are either already involved in the life of the school or would like to be, and 82% (71%) say that they know at least some of the names of the teachers who teach their child. 86% (71%) feel that they have had sufficient opportunity to put their views to the school on standards issues.

## 6.5 Economic Well-Being

This outcome relates to pupils not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life. It involves their perception of the importance of learning at school or college, and their attitude to engaging in further education, employment or training on leaving school. At Honeywood, 74% (65%) of parents responding to the survey agree that the school enables every pupil to be good at something. 67% (65%) agree that the school makes provision for pupils of all abilities, and 53% (61%) that it makes provision for pupils of all ethnic groups.

At Honeywood, 92% (81%) feel that their child is/will be successful in most things at school. 99% (97%) agree that it is/was a good idea for their child to continue in education beyond the age of 16. (62% (55%) of parents completing the survey continued in full-time education beyond the age of 16.)

## 7. Some Implications of the Survey

Guidance to schools, from sources such as DfES and Ofsted<sup>11</sup>, promotes the view that on-going consultation with the whole school community is an essential feature of effective school self-evaluation and a crucial source of information to inform planning for future school development. In this context, 'successful' schools make every effort to communicate with parents about their school improvement priorities and regularly inform them of the success or otherwise of the school's efforts to address these.

There is substantial evidence, from the CSS database of responses, to suggest that parents want to be included in the evaluation process. They appreciate being given opportunities to be involved in discussion of their child's progress and to be considered as partners in their child's education.

The CSS research findings, based on analysis of the surveys, suggest that, when consulted, most parents are extremely supportive of the school their child attends and express a high degree of satisfaction with work the school is doing overall. This is also the case with Honywood parents. Analysis of the questionnaire data obtained from the survey at Honywood indicates a markedly more positive pattern of parent response than average for schools in our database.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, DfES and Ofsted (2006). Improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning: Further guidance.