PARENT POWER 2018

How parents use financial and cultural resources to boost their children's chances of success

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Contents

Foreword

Parents from all backgrounds and walks of life want to do the best for their children. Unfortunately, for many reasons, this is easier for some more than others. Those with more money, education and confidence are more able to give their children the best possible chance of succeeding in the educational system and beyond. This is a key challenge for social mobility, and the focus of today's new report.

Parent power in the school system takes two main forms. Firstly, parents with the experience, savvy and networks to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive education system. Secondly, families with the financial resources to invest in educational success for their child and prevent them from slipping behind.

This report shows how these financial and cultural resources can influence a child's path through education. From choosing the best school to attend, buying homes in the catchment areas of good schools, using private tuition, paying for expensive out of school extracurricular activities, and providing support with their post-18 educational choices, we see how middle class and professional parents gain an advantage for their children at every stage. It is of course natural that parents want the absolute best for their children. But the problem lies in the vastly unequal resources available to families in achieving that goal.

Families in Britain show huge inequalities in the power of parents to promote the educational success of their offspring. Curbing this inequality is vital to tackling this country's stubborn social mobility problem. Schools face a huge challenge when such inequality exists outside the school gates, but it is crucial that our education system seeks to promote a more level playing field, not reinforce the inequalities that exist at home.

The original *Parent Power?* report in 2013, authored by Professors Becky Francis and Merryn Hutchings, was a landmark piece of work demonstrating how social class background influences parents' ability to support their children in their schooling. Five years later, in the wake of significant changes in secondary schools, including changes to school league tables and reforms to the GCSE examination, it is a good time to take stock.

Many of the same patterns are clear, but we also see new challenges in the form of the rising 'hidden' costs of state education. Schools are increasingly reliant on extra financial contributions from parents, and parents feel under more pressure to prevent their children losing out. This has worrying consequences for equal opportunities in the school system.

From access to the best state and independent schools, to private tuition, academic support and advice, to extracurricular activities and cultural visits, children born into better-off homes get opportunities that many children could only dream of. If we are to tackle social mobility, it is key that these unequal opportunities are recognised and confronted. The next step is making sure we create an education that seeks to raise the opportunities in school for those who need them most.

It won't be easy, but this report shows there are many practical measures that can be taken to level the educational playing field: from fairer school admissions, to additional supports in school for those who need them most, to engaging with parents of all backgrounds to support them in getting the best for their child.

I'd like to thank Professors Francis and Hutchings, and the Sutton Trust team for this important research.

Sir Peter Lampl
Founder of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation

Key Findings

- Parents play a significant role in the educational development of their children, in a variety of ways, through organising and managing their route through the school system, supporting them academically and with advice, and through providing them with the financial resources to maximise the impact of their education. These influences differ substantially according to the social class of the parent, limiting the social, cultural and financial capital they can pass on to their children.

- When choosing which school to send their child to, parents with higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to attend open days, read Ofsted reports, speak to parents at the school, read league tables and consult local authority or other education websites. While 76% of professional parents (social group A) used at least one experiential and one independent documentary source while choosing school, just 47% of working class parents (social group D) reported doing so. 'Limited choosers' who used only one or no sources at all when making their choice, were more common amongst lower socioeconomic groupings, 41% in group D, compared to 14% of group A.

- Just one in five parents (20%) reported that they were familiar with Progress 8, the Department for Education's new headline measure for school league tables. Among parents with children in the final two years of primary school, the group most likely to be making imminent school choice decisions, just 14% were familiar.

- Parents in higher socioeconomic groups were much more likely to report a variety of strategies to gain access to their preferred school, such as moving to an area with good schools or to a specific catchment, employing private tutors for entrance tests. 14% of professional parents in group A reported moving to an area with good schools, compared to just 4% of working class group D.

- Parents also reported rule breaking or ethically dubious strategies, such as attending church services purely for the purpose of accessing a school, buying or renting a second home in a catchment area, or using a relative's address to gain access to a particular school. Substantially higher proportions of parents reported knowing someone personally who had used such strategies, compared to those who had done so themselves. Almost a third (30%) of parents in social group A personally knew a parent who used dubious practices such as these.

- Two in five (39%) of school leaders say that extra financial contributions requested by their school have increased in the last two years. A quarter of those in secondary school (26%) indicate that such contributions are being used for general school funding, 26% for IT or sports equipment, and 17% basic classroom materials. This increase is reflected in the views of parents, with half of parents (49%) saying their school has asked them for an extra financial contribution in the last 12 months.

- Affluent parents are more likely to have been asked for contributions (59% of group A compared to 37% in group D). Schools across the socioeconomic spectrum are facing substantial budgetary challenges, but those with more affluent parents are able to draw on those financial resources as a buffer. Schools in more disadvantaged areas are more likely to need to raid pupil premium funds to plug gaps in their budget: 40% in more disadvantaged schools compared to 30% in more advantaged schools.

- Parents in lower socioeconomic groups were more likely to indicate that the cost of travel, and other potential extra financial costs such as uniforms, played a significant role in their decision of what school to choose for their child. Two thirds (65%) of working class parents cited travel costs as an issue, with over half (56%), reporting other financial concerns, compared to 34% in group A.
- The majority of parents report regularly helping with their child's homework; with over 50% of parents in every social class doing so more often than once a week. Parents from higher social backgrounds more likely to report that they help child very regularly (more than once a week - 65% group A vs 54% group D), and children's perception of support from their parents is also greater in more affluent families.

- Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were five times more likely to report that their children had received private tuition, 31% of parents in group A, compared to 6% in group D. BAME parents were also more likely to report their child had private tuition.

- A high proportion of parents in all social groups attend parents' evenings either always or most of the time (all over 85%). Parents from high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to say that either the school, or they themselves had changed something following a parents evening. 37% of parents in group A reported that school staff changed the way they worked with their child after a parents evening, compared to 25-29% in other social groups.

- Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were considerably more likely to report taking on a representative or supportive role in their child's school, including governorships, PTA membership, or sitting on a multi-academy trust (MAT) board; with 36% of parents in group A reporting to have done so, compared to just 13% in group D.

- With the introduction of the new GCSE grading system, fewer than half (47%) of parents questioned were aware that Grade 9 is a better result than Grade 1. 28% of parents in social group A got the answer wrong, and 43% in group D. Parents with children aged 15 and over were more likely to get the answer correct, but even among this group, working class parents were twice as likely as middle class parents to answer incorrectly (14% compared to 29%).

- Three quarters of parents (75%) felt confident advising their child on university choices, while 63% felt confident advising about degree level apprenticeships. While 90% of parents with a degree felt confident giving university advice, just 53% of those with a GCSE level education did. The gap however was notably lower for apprenticeships: 71% of those with a degree compared to 53% of those with GCSEs or below.

- Young people from professional households were much more likely to take part in extracurricular activities. 84% of those in social group A reported participation in at least one after school activity or class, compared to 45% in group D. This reflects cultural capital, but also financial resources in the home, as those in lower social groups were more likely to take part in activities that didn't need to be paid for, 25% of those in group D, compared to 20% in group A. Outings such as museums, plays and historical sites were also more likely and more frequent among parents from higher social backgrounds.

Recommendations

For schools:

1. **Schools should give pupil premium students priority in school applications when places are oversubscribed.** The current Schools Admissions Code currently allows for the use pf pupil premium status as an oversubscription criterion, so more schools, particularly high performing schools, should move to implement this in order to create a more socially balanced intake and better reflect their local communities.

2. **More schools, particularly in urban areas, should take the opportunity where they are responsible for their own admissions to introduce random allocation ballots** to ensure that a wider mix of pupils has access to the most academically successful comprehensives. Reducing the emphasis on geographical proximity will allow fairer access to the best schools and limit socially divisive incentives for house buying and gaming the system. Ballots should be introduced alongside large catchment areas in order to maximise the potential socioeconomic diversity of the catchment.

3. **Schools should establish 'homework clubs'.** Disadvantaged students should have additional encouragement and support to enable them to engage in self-directed study and do sufficient homework. Schools should provide such opportunities where they are unlikely to be available at home, such as through the provision of homework clubs. It is crucial however that such clubs have an academic focus and are taken by good teachers in order to be effective.

4. **Schools should support parental engagement in their child's education.** To support the home learning environment, schools should take a 'whole school' approach to communicating with and involving parents actively through partnership. In particular, this should be supported by a key member of staff and involve use of innovations in digital technology where possible to increase engagement with parents.

5. **Schools should seek to ensure diversity in the representation of parents in school structures.** All schools should seek to have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) with a wide range of parents represented – and to be as open as possible for parents to raise concerns in more informal settings, for example with regular coffee mornings.

For policymakers:

1. **Schools should be well resourced through the new national funding formula.** Funding should reflect the challenges faced by schools with large proportions of disadvantaged pupils and located in areas of high deprivation, such schools should not lose out in any changes to the funding system. It also should be ensured that pupil premium funding is correctly targeted at the students who need it most and is used on evidence-based programmes, rather than schools needing to plug gaps in operational budgets.

2. **Implement a means-tested voucher scheme for tuition and enrichment.** The government should introduce a means-tested voucher system, funded through the Pupil premium, enabling lower income families to purchase additional educational support. Through this, lower income families could access additional support and enrichment, including extra-curricular activities

and one-to-one tuition. Limited trials of such voucher schemes have shown them to be successful. Tutors should be experienced and well qualified.

3. **The Government should improve the range and quality of information available to working class parents.** The Government should find ways, working with community groups, consumer agencies and businesses that are successful in working class communities - to make it easier for all parents to access as rich a range of information to facilitate informed choice-making over their children's education, including through digital innovation.

4. **It is particularly important that parents are aware not just of the school choices available, but of their rights to free transport** to a choice of three schools within six miles of their home (or up to 15 miles for faith schools) if their child is eligible for Free School Meals.

5. **All pupils should receive a guaranteed level of careers advice from professional impartial advisers.** For those facing disadvantage – or who are at risk of not reaching their potential – there should be further support available. Staff training should ensure that key messages are consistent and based on up to date guidelines. The Careers and Enterprise Company should also be resourced and encouraged to trial and identify what works in careers advice for disadvantaged pupils in particular.

6. **A UCAS-style portal should be set up for apprenticeship admissions.** The lack of first-hand experience of teachers and parents make availability of independent information on apprenticeships all the more important. But current information on apprenticeship availability is inconsistent and scattered. A centralised portal where young people could find information about, and apply to, apprenticeships, similar to the UCAS system for university, could be a step-change in the sector.

1. Introduction

A society with high levels of social mobility is one in which an individual's family background has little to no effect on where they themselves end up. However, in the UK, where someone starts is still an extremely strong predictor of what they will go on to achieve; with educational attainment and career outcomes still heavily influenced by family background. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already over four months behind their peers before they even start at school, and this gap widens throughout their education,[1] with access to university,[2] top apprenticeships[3] and the professions[4] all still heavily stratified by socioeconomic background.

While increasingly the education system is seen as the potential great driver of equality of opportunity and social mobility, the reality is far from the case. But these problems go beyond the school gates. Some of the key components of educational inequality are what happens in the home, and actions taken by parents using the financial and social advantages at their disposal. These can take many forms. Parents can directly buy advantages for their children, ranging from paying for them to attend a private school; to paying for a private tutor or extracurricular enrichment activities; to buying a house in the catchment area of a good school; or even just having the ability to shoulder additional travel costs to a school which is further away from their home.

However, educational advantage is not only gained by paying for it. Parents can also have a substantial impact on the outcomes of their children through social and cultural capital; the networks, understanding and experiences which support success. Middle class parents are more likely to have the information and the networks needed to help their children to succeed, allowing them to make informed decisions about the schools that they apply to, take actions to maximise the chances of being accepted in such schools, having the confidence to support their children's schoolwork in the home, and later allowing them to give informed advice on university and career options.

The first *Parent Power?* study was conceived and authored by Professor Becky Francis and Professor Merryn Hutchings and published by the Sutton Trust in 2013. It was the first report to ask parents directly about the strategies by which they use their financial, societal and cultural capital to advantage their children through the education system. This highlighted the many inequalities that face families when trying to secure beneficial outcomes for their own children.[5] The last five years have seen much change in the schooling system, including the growth of Free Schools, increasing academisation, and reforms to school league tables and GCSE exams. Here, we revisit the ways in which parents use whatever power they have available to aid their children's advancement through the educational system, how this is affected by socioeconomic circumstances, and the effect this can have on educational inequality and social mobility.

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[1] Education Endowment Foundation. (2018) The Attainment Gap.
[2] Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2017) Fairer Fees - Reforming student finance to increase fairness and widen access.
[3] Fuller, A., Unwin, L., Cavaglia, C., McNally, S. & Ventura, G. (2017) Better Apprenticeships - Access, quality and labour market outcomes in the English apprenticeship system.
[4] Kirby, P. (2016) Leading People - The educational backgrounds of the UK professional elite.
[5] Francis, B. & Hutchings, M. (2013). Parent Power?

2. Methods

The approach taken in this report is modelled on that of the 2013 report *Parent Power?*, designed by Prof Becky Francis and Prof Merryn Hutchings, and published by the Sutton Trust.

The findings in this report are based on an online survey of 1017 parents in England; who have children aged 5-16 years who attended school. The survey was conducted by polling organisation YouGov, and fieldwork was undertaken between 10th-15th August 2018.

Findings referred to here from the previous 2013 report are from an online survey of 1173 parents in England, conducted by YouGov in November 2012.

Parent Survey

In both surveys, only parents who resided with their children were invited to take part, as many questions generally referred to actions or decisions made by either the respondent or the child's 'other main carer'. The focus of the analysis is on social class or 'social grade'. Social grade is a classification based on occupation, developed for the National Readership Survey, and one of the main measures of social status used by the research and survey industry for over 50 years.[6] It is based on the occupation of the household's main income earner, and divides into six categories, as shown in Table 1. Groups A, B and C1 are frequently combined to represent the 'middle class', with C2, D and E representing the 'working class'. In this report, the more fine-grained groups are used to gain more detail on the patterns of behaviour.

There are no national breakdowns that describe the social grade of all parents with school age children, so quotas or weighting to achieve perfect representation of this population is not possible. Nonetheless, Table 1 gives an indication of the proportions of adults in England in each group. As in 2013, the A group was oversampled in this study in order to have enough participants to robustly describe the behaviour of that group, as the behaviour of upper middle class parents was of particular interest. As can be seen in Table 1, in 2018, the D group was likely somewhat underrepresented. The combination of these factors means that the overall results from respondents should not be taken as representative of all parents. For this reason the focus in each section is on the results *within each social group*.

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[6] National Readership Survey. Social Grade. Available at: http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/

Table 1: Breakdown of sample by social group

Group	Description	Approximate social class	Proportion of English population	Proportion of Respondents
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional	Upper middle class	4%	20.1%
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	Middle class	23%	24.7%
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional	Lower middle class	28%	23.7%
C2	Skilled manual workers	Skilled working class	20%	17.2%
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	Working class	15%	8%
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only	Non-working	10%	6.4%

When the data was analysed, social group E was found to be highly heterogenous. While 45% of the group had a GCSE level or below education (fewer than the D group, but more than the other groups) 15% of group E also had a postgraduate qualification, twice as many as group D. 19% of the group were in the ACORN classification of 'Affluent Achievers', a level more commensurate with the middle class groups. It also included several members who reported incomes of over £70,000 per year. As such, the group appeared to compose of a mix of unemployed parents facing severe challenges, and parents with no occupation or income, but high levels of wealth. As a result of this heterogeneity, in many areas of the survey the results from group E more closely resembled the behaviour of middle class parents rather than working class. Due to this, results from group E are presented in graphs in shaded form for information, but separated from the main groups under consideration. The focus of comparisons are between group A, the 'upper middle class' group of higher managers and professionals, and group D, the 'working class' group of semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers.

Where questions related to a specific child, parents were prompted to consider their oldest child attending school within the 5-16 age range. Parents have to make more significant decisions regarding their first child's education; whereas subsequent children may follow a similar path to their older siblings.

Surveys of children and teachers

References in Section 5 relate to a survey of young people in school from a Sutton Trust commissioned survey of young people, carried out through the Ipsos MORI Young People Omnibus. Ipsos MORI interviewed 2,381 school children aged 11-16 in schools in England and Wales. Pupils were selected from a random sample of schools, and self-completion questionnaires were completed at school and online between February and May 2018. Data are weighted by school year, gender and region to match the profile of school children across England and Wales.

References in Section 8 relate to a survey of teachers commissioned by the Sutton Trust using the National Foundation for Education Research's Teacher Voice survey. A panel of 1,246 practising teachers and school leaders from 1,100 schools in the maintained sector in England completed the survey online in March 2018. The NFER runs Teacher Voice omnibus surveys three times a year, in the autumn, spring and summer terms. The survey achieves responses from over 1,000 practising teachers from schools in the maintained sector in England. The panel is representative of teachers from the full range of roles in primary and secondary schools, from head teachers to newly qualified class teachers.

3. School Choice

Increased school autonomy and parental choice have been central planks of schools policy across governments of different hues over the past thirty years. Parental choice has been a key consideration in the school admissions system since the 1988 Education Reform Act and the subsequent introduction of league tables in the 1990s, designed to help parents to easily compare the performance of schools.

Today, parental choice is a key part of the school admissions process. When applying for school places, parents submit school preferences, and places are then allocated based on those choices. If schools are over capacity based on parental preferences, an algorithm will then prioritise children based on a school's admissions criteria (such as distance to school or whether the child already has a sibling in attendance).

Parental choice has been cited as a reason for many of the school reforms of the past decade, including the expansion of academies and the introduction of free schools, which have in part aimed to give parents more variety in choice between schools. The basic premise of all these reforms has been that parental choice will lead to schools competing against one another for students, and that this will in turn drive up standards. However, the practice has the potential to unfairly benefit children with parents who are best able to evaluate the performance of the schools available to them. 2013's Parent Power report highlighted the differential ability of parents from different social class backgrounds to exercise choice, and the effect this can have on schooling and social mobility. The years since 2013 have seen substantial increases in the number of free schools built; and has also seen a change in the structure of school league tables, from a focus on grade thresholds, to one based on pupil progress.

School choice and educational inequality

State schools vary considerably, in their structure and ethos, their student composition, the teachers they can recruit, the progress that their students make and the facilities that they have available. Therefore, parental choice in which schools to apply to has the potential to make a significant difference to a child's educational experience. Any system which relies on parental choice will necessarily advantage children with parents who are able to make better choices; who are on average, more likely to be those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, middle class parents are more likely to have 'soft' knowledge of local schools from speaking to other parents within their social network.[7] Additionally, better-off parents may be more likely to understand school comparison tools, such as the measures used to evaluate schools including Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

Given that, does the system of parental choice give an advantage to better-off children? Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, more likely to attend lower performing schools than their better off peers. For example, only 4% of children on free school meals (FSM) attend a good school (defined as at least 80% of pupils achieving 5A*-C at GCSE), compared to 17% of non-FSM pupils.[8]

However, the quality of school that children can access within a reasonable commute does not differ substantially by socioeconomic background: 37% of FSM-eligible pupils are able to reach a high performing school, compared to 43% of non-FSM pupils.[8] Additionally, previous research by the Sutton

[7] Allen, R. & Burgess, S. (2014) School performance and parental choice of school: secondary data analysis.
[8] Burgess, S., Greaves, E. & Vignoles, A. (2017) Understanding parental choices of secondary school in England using national administrative data.

Trust has found that the top 500 comprehensive schools (as measured by GCSE attainment), look very different to their catchment areas; with 85% of schools in the top 500 having fewer FSM pupils than there are living in their catchment areas, and over a quarter having a gap of five percentage points or more.[9] Given that less well-off children do live within commutable distances of high performing schools, the fact that they are less likely to attend them must therefore be in large part due to the admissions process, including the choices made by parents.

Sources of information

Given the role parental choice can play in school admissions, the original Parent Power report examined the sources parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds use when making decisions regarding schools for their children. Despite changes to the school landscape over the last five years, findings here paint a similar picture to those found in 2013.

To help make choices regarding school preferences, parents can use a variety of sources. Figure 1 shows the prevalence of different sources of information used in school choice by different social groups. It also serves to demonstrate the unusual nature of social group E, which due to its heterogenous nature, including many well-educated parents, frequently shows similar results to the higher social class categories. For this reason, the main source of social grade comparisons in this report will be between social group A (higher managerial and professional), and group D (semi and unskilled manual workers). Group E is included in all graphs for information but is shaded differently to differentiate it from the main groups under consideration in this report.

Figure 1: Which of the following have you ever used to find out about a possible school for any of your children?

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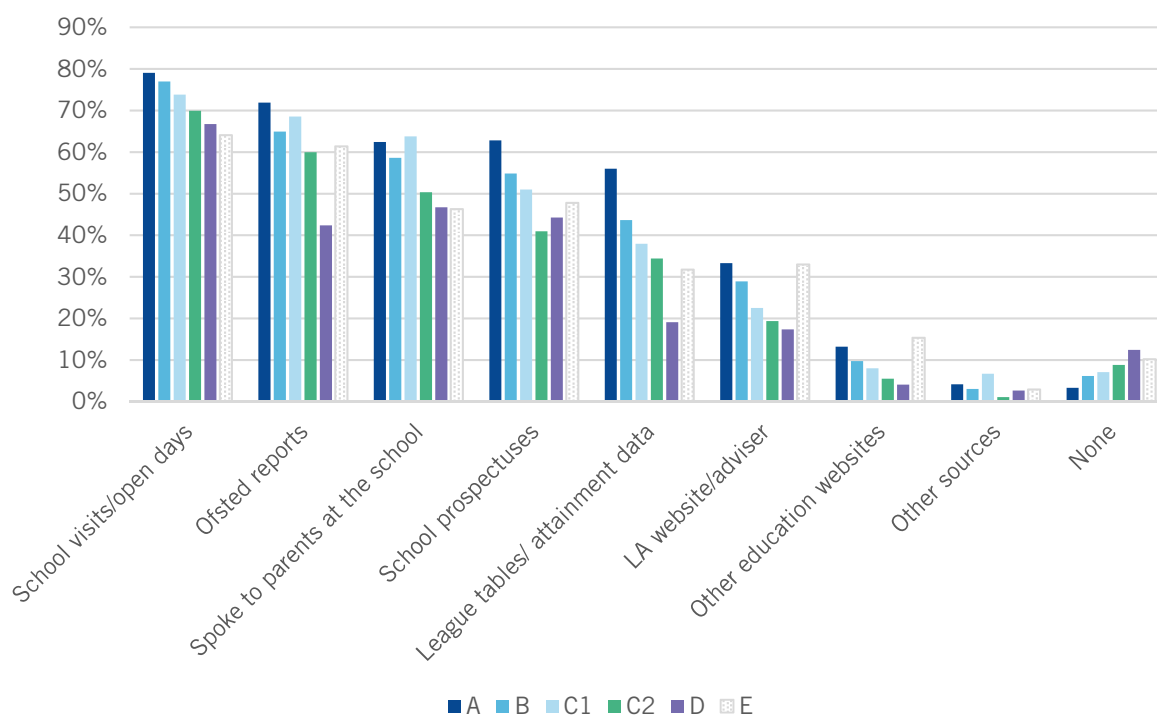
[9] Cullinane, C., Hillary, J., Andrade, J. & McNamara, S. (2017) Selective Comprehensives - Admissions to high-attaining non-selective schools for disadvantaged pupils.

As in 2013, school visits and open days are the most commonly used source of information by those from all social class backgrounds. This is followed by Ofsted reports, speaking to parents at the school and reading school prospectuses. However, only one of these top four information sources could be regarded as providing independent information. Limited use was made of key documentary sources promoted by government, with 64% looking at Ofsted reports, and 41% using league tables and attainment data. [10] There were substantial social differences in use of these sources, with 72% of parents in social group A reading Ofsted reports and 56% looking at league tables, compared with 42% of parents in social group D looking at Ofsted reports and just 19% using league tables.

The social gap in league table use in particular has widened since 2013. While the introduction of Progress 8 as the headline measure for secondary school attainment has meant that schools are now rewarded for how well all pupils make progress during their time at the school, indications thus far are this has not made league table data any more accessible. In fact the move to a complex statistical index, and away from a simple proportion achieving 5 A*-Cs at GCSE may have made this attainment information less accessible.

New league table measures: Attainment 8 and Progress 8

School accountability measures are published by the government to allow parents, as well as researchers and policy makers, to evaluate the performance of schools. The measures are published annually for each school online. Attainment 8 and Progress 8, which were introduced in 2016, are the government's currently favoured accountability measures at Key Stage 4 (KS4).

Attainment 8 replaces the previous attainment measure used to evaluate schools at KS4, which had been the proportion of students achieving 5 A* to C grades at GCSE. Attainment 8 is calculated as the attainment of students across 8 main GCSE subjects, including English and maths. Unlike the 5A*-C measure, Attainment 8 includes the performance of students at all levels, rather than only those who achieve over a certain threshold. This was designed to minimise the focus on students at the C boundary, and to instead encourage schools to improve the performance of their students across the board. Progress 8 is the new headline measure of school quality, introduced to give a measure of the progress that a student has made while at secondary school, by comparing their attainment at GCSE to the performance of students with similar attainment at the end of primary school. The purpose of introducing such a measure was to ensure that schools are measured on the progress that students make when at secondary school, regardless of their differing starting points. [11]

However, there are concerns that parents may not understand these new accountability measures, and therefore will not be able to meaningfully use them to inform their choice of school. In 2017, a TES survey of teachers found that only 1% of teachers believed that parents understood Progress 8. [12]

Here, parents have been asked for their understanding of the new accountability measures, with parents showing an extremely low degree of familiarity with the recently introduced measures. Just 19% of parents considered themselves familiar with Attainment 8, and 20% with Progress 8. Parents with older children were more likely to be familiar with the term (29% for those with children aged 15 to 16).

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[10] It should be noted that in both 2013 and 2018, overall estimates of use of such sources are likely to be overestimated, as the A social group are over-represented in the sample.
[11] Gov.uk. (2018) Secondary accountability measures - Guide for maintained secondary schools, academies and free schools.
[12] TES. (2017) Only 1 per cent of parents understand Progress 8, say teachers. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/only-1-cent-parents-understand-progress-8-say-teachers

However, among parents with their oldest child aged 8-10, who are likely to be the group closest to making school choice decisions, just 14% were familiar with Progress 8, despite its status as the headline measure of school quality in league tables.

Familiarity with the measures also differed by social class, with 28% of parents in the A group considering themselves familiar with Progress 8, compared with just 8% of those in group D. While the statistical quality of the headline measure may have improved, this may have come at the cost of the comprehension of parents, particularly those from less well-off circumstances.

Figure 2: How familiar would you say you are with the terms Attainment 8 and Progress 8?
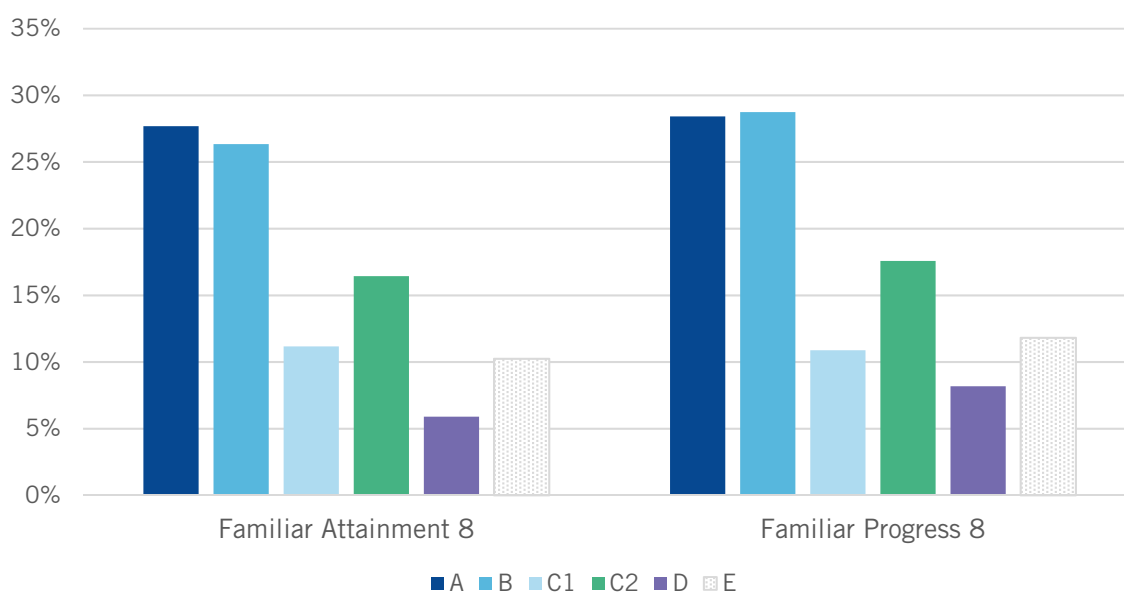

Chooser groups

2013's report categorised each source of school choice information as either 'documentary' or 'experiential'. This was to look at whether parents were using sources in line with what government policy would suggest, which would be to use at least one independent documentary source (for example, attending school open days) and one experiential source (for example, checking Ofsted reports).[13] Based on the number and type of sources used, parents were divided into four categories of 'chooser types', reflecting how they made their school choices. The categories were defined as follows:

- Used *either* experiential *or* independent documentary sources (but not both), or did not use any of the listed sources:
    - *Limited choosers* (used only one or none of the listed sources)
    - *Partially informed choosers* (used more than one of the listed sources)

- Used both independent documentary and experiential sources of information:
    - *Informed choosers* (used less than five of the listed sources)
    - *Hyper choosers* (used five or more of the listed sources)

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[13] School prospectuses are not included as an independent documentary source here, as they are better viewed as marketing materials.

In 2018, as Figure 3 shows, the majority of parents used at least one independent documentary and one experiential source when making their school choices. However, this differed across social groups, with 76% of parents in group A having done so, compared to just 47% of parents in group D.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents in social group who reported using at least one independent documentary source and at least one experiential source to make school choices
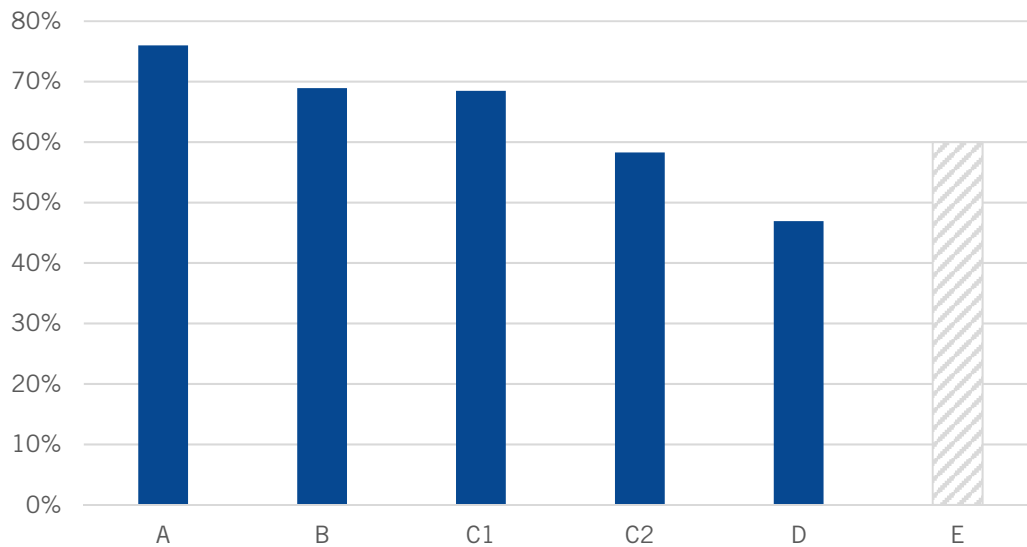
'Limited choosers' comprised those who had used none of the sources (11% of respondents) along with those who had used just one source (14%), making up almost a quarter of all parents in the sample. As Figure 4 demonstrates, this differed substantially between social classes: parents in social group D were almost three times more likely to fall into this group than parents in group A (14% compared to 41%).

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents in social group who are 'limited choosers' or 'hyper choosers'
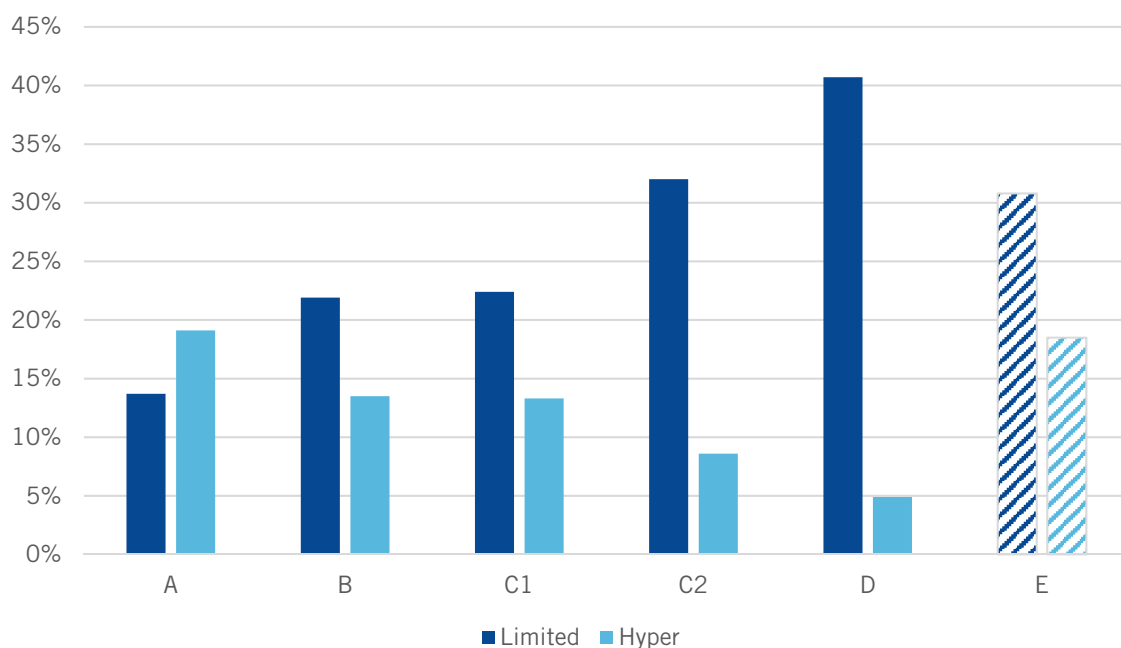
At the other end of the spectrum were the 'hyper choosers', parents who used five or more of the listed sources, and who clearly placed significant effort and importance on making the right school choice for their child. This group comprised 14% of all parents in the sample, and spanned all social groups, but as Figure 4 shows, were more likely to be concentrated in the higher social classes, particularly those in group A (19%). Parents in group D were four times less likely to fall into this group (5%).

Figure 5 breaks down membership of the four chooser groups by a range of background characteristics, including social class, household income, location, along with parental education, ethnicity and gender. For those with an A level education or above, the differences were not substantial. However, those with a highest education level of GCSE or lower had significantly fewer members of the hyper chooser group, and around twice as many members of the limited chooser group as any other category. Those with higher incomes were also more likely to be in the hyper and informed chooser groups. London had fewer of those in the limited chooser group than the rest of the country, potentially owing to the high degree of choice and competition between schools in the capital. Male parents were also more likely to fall in the limited chooser groups than female parents. There were no significant differences found by the gender of the child. These results closely reflect the findings of the 2013 report.

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents in each chooser group by social group, education level, income, region, ethnicity and gender
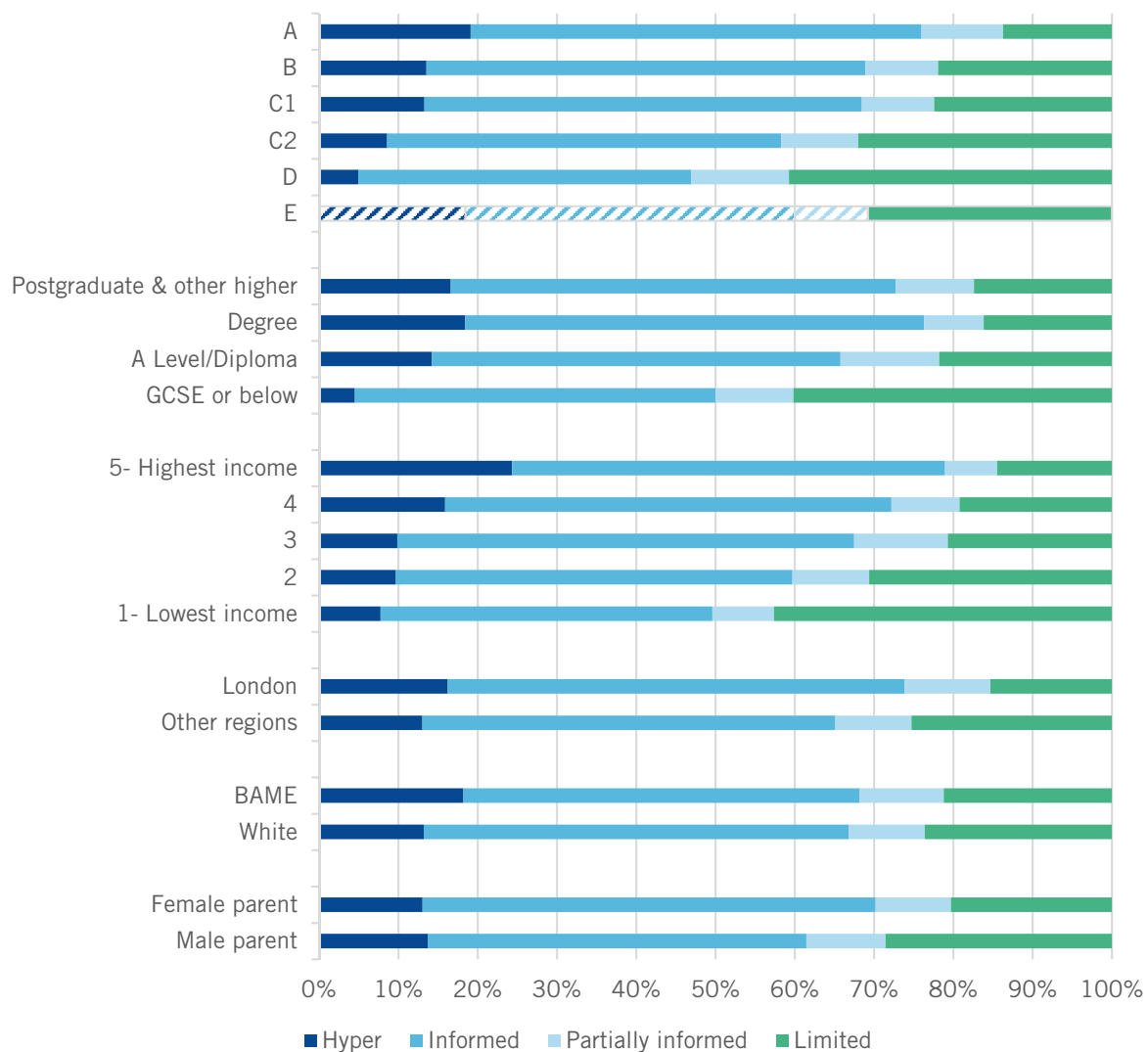
Reasons for choice

Parents were also asked for the reasons they considered when they made their school choice. Local reputation, meeting the particular needs of the child and proximity to the home were the most commonly cited reasons given by parents. Notably, on issues such as reputation, Ofsted rating, or league table results, often thought as middle-class concerns, there was little evidence of substantial differences between social classes. Though this should be understood in the context of differences in actual reported *use* of Ofsted ratings and league tables in Figure 1. While some parents acknowledge the importance of some sources of information, they won't always actively use them.

While financial issues were the lowest ranked of those listed, notably, financial costs were regarded as significantly more important by those in lower social classes. The cost of travel was regarded as an important factor by 65% of parents in social group D, but just 43% of group A. Similarly, worries about extra financial costs in school (such as uniforms, equipment and contributions to facilities), were seen as a factor by 56% of parents in group D, but only 34% of parents in group A. The increasing financial implications of state school attendance are discussed in greater detail in Section 8. Less well-off parents making decisions based on the financial implications of attending certain schools is a worrying development, and one likely to lead to increased social segregation in schools and a negative impact on equity and the attainment gap.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents in social group who reported the following were either very or fairly important in their decision to send their child to their current school
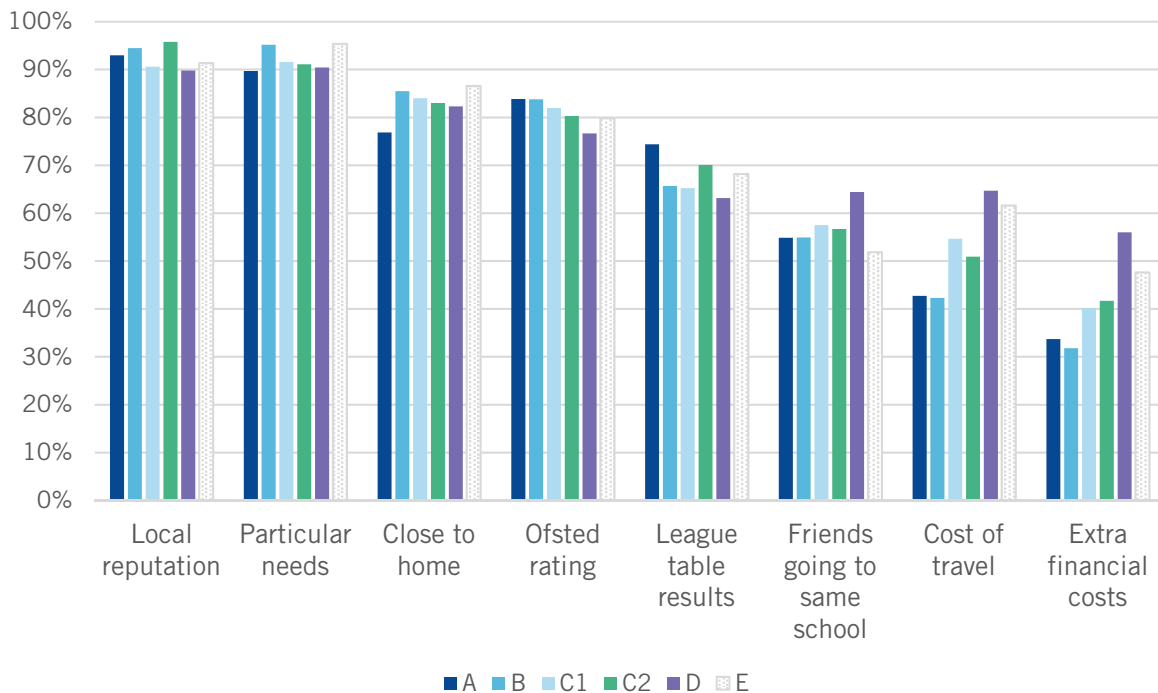
The reasons which were cited as important did vary significantly by chooser group, with many of the listed factors less likely to be considered as important by the partially informed and limited chooser groups. As Figure 7 shows, the biggest gaps between the hyper choosers and the limited choosers were in the importance of Ofsted ratings and league table results. However, limited choosers were more likely to cite friends going to the same school as an important consideration. Financial costs, including travel were also more likely to be cited by limited choosers, reflecting their concentration in lower socioeconomic classes. Travel costs and the choices of friends were much less likely to be regarded as important by the hyper chooser group.

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents in chooser group who reported the following were either very or fairly important in their decision to send their child to their current school
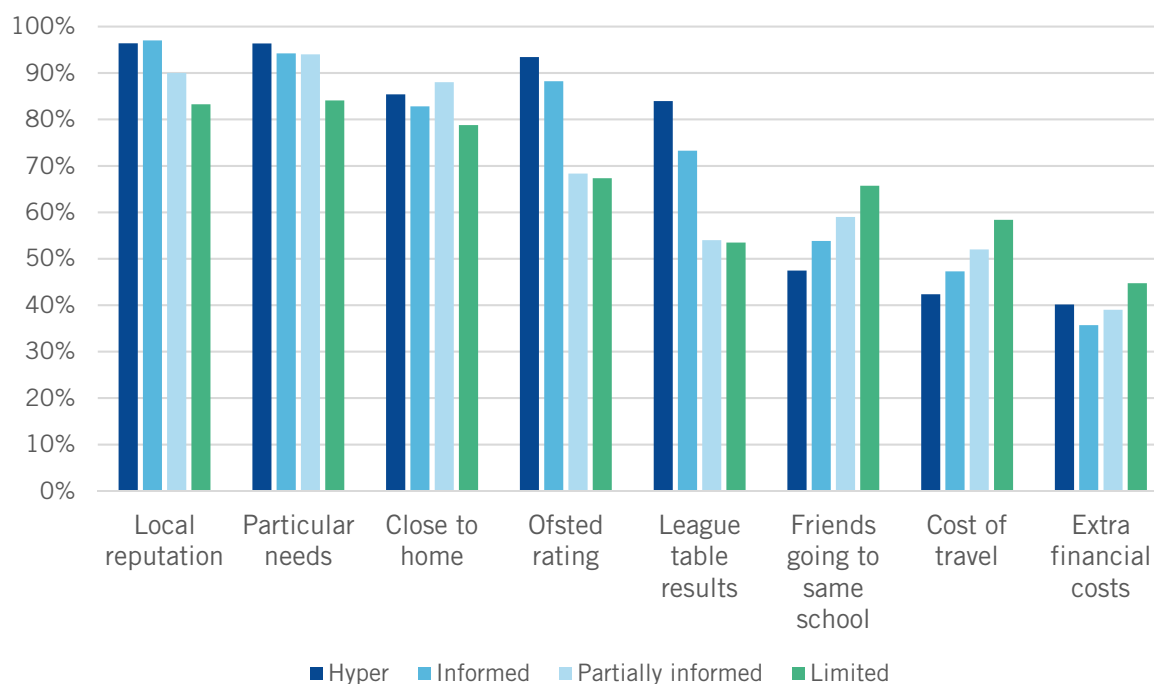
These findings accord with existing research in the area. While better-off parents are able to buy or rent in areas nearer to schools, this alone does not account for the disparity in schools attended by socioeconomic background. Even when comparing students who live on the same street, disadvantaged students are still less likely to go to a high performing school than their more advantaged peers.[14] Much of this discrepancy can be accounted for in differences in choosing behaviour.

When choosing schools, parents of students who do, and those who do not qualify for free school meals make a similar number of school choices in their applications, and are similarly likely to apply to the school nearest to them.[15] However, students who are FSM eligible are estimated to be more likely to attend a worse school despite there being a local higher-performing school which appears to have spare spaces.[16] As these results show, parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate different behaviours when it comes to how they select schools. Parental choice is therefore likely to be factor in the difference in performance of school attended by socioeconomic background.

Importantly, parental "choices" may not always be true choices, but rather ones that are forced by circumstance. Parents may choose certain schools to apply to because they think it is unrealistic their child will gain a place in their truly preferred school, for example due to not believing that they live close enough to the school to be likely to gain a place.[15] Our results also show financial constraints playing a part. A survey carried out by the teaching union NASUWT has also found that nearly a quarter (24%) of parents said that the potential costs associated with attending a particular school affected where they chose to send their child.[17]

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[14]Burgess, S. & Briggs, A. (2010) School assignment, school choice and social mobility.

[15] Burgess, S., Greaves, E. & Vignoles, A. (2017) Understanding parental choices of secondary school in England using national administrative data.

[16] Allen, R. & Burgess, S. (2014) School performance and parental choice of school: secondary data analysis.

[17] NASUWT. (2017) Access to education increasingly on the basis of parents' ability to pay. Available at:
https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/access-education-increasingly-parents-ability-pay.html
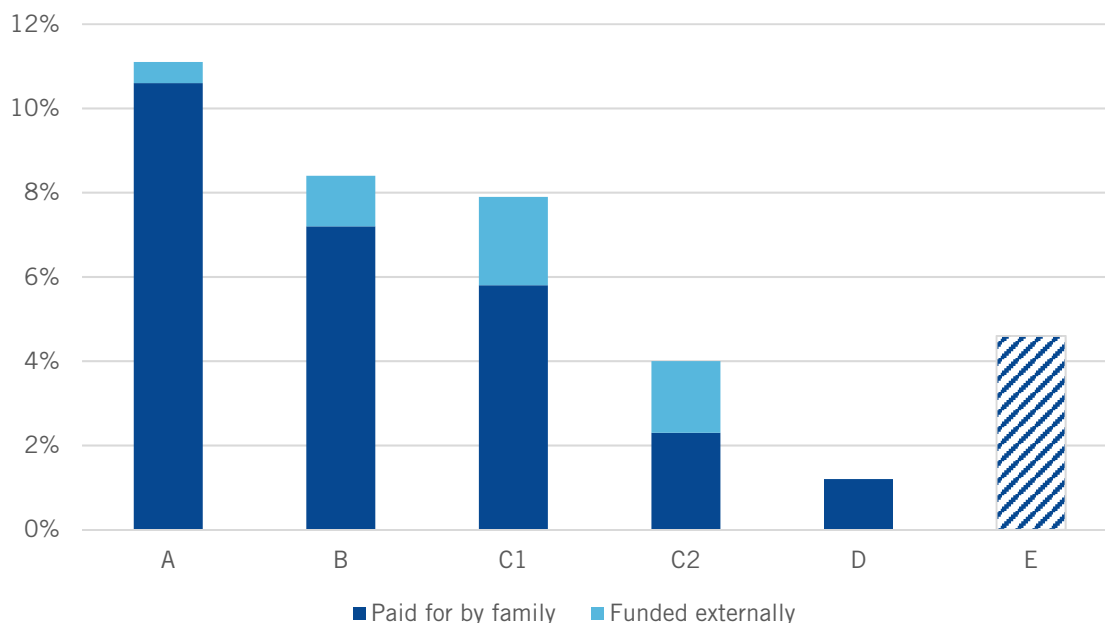
Independent Schools

One key way that parents in higher social classes endeavour to secure the educational success of their children is by sending them to private/independent schools. Many of the United Kingdom's most prestigious schools are independent fee-paying schools, and Sutton Trust research has consistently shown the value of private school attendance for entry to selective universities and access to the most high paying and prestigious careers.

Bursaries and scholarships can reduce the cost of private schooling, and the Independent Schools Council (ISC), which represents over 1,300 private schools in the UK, reports that a third of pupils at schools in its group are on reduced fees.[18] However only 14% of means tested bursaries and scholarships from ISC private schools cover fees completely, and 57% cover only 50% of fees or less.[19] Additionally, many parents may be unaware that such bursaries or scholarships are available to them, especially if they have had no previous experience of private education themselves.

7% of parents in the sample reported that their child was attending private/independent school, consistent with national estimates.[20] As might be expected, attendance rates differed substantially between social classes. Figure 8 shows the proportion within each social group whose oldest child is attending a private/independent school. This ranged from around 12% in the A social group, down to 1% in the D group. However, higher proportions of C1s and C2s reported that their private school attendance had been paid for by bursaries or other sources. As in 2013, social group E reported anomalously high private school attendance, indicative of the heterogenous nature of the composition of the group, including many families with high levels of wealth but low levels of income.

Figure 8: Proportion of parents reporting their oldest child attends a private/independent school, and how this is funded

[18] Scholarships and bursaries - ISC. Available at: https://www.isc.co.uk/schools/information-for-parents/school-fee-assistance-scholarships-and-bursaries/
[19] Independent Schools Council. (2018) Census and annual report 2018.
[20] Ryan, C. & Sibieta, L. (2010) Private schooling in the UK and Australia. Available at: https://www.ifs.org.uk/bns/bn106.pdf

Parents with postgraduate qualifications were most likely to send their children to private school (11%), compared to 4% of those with GCSE level qualifications or below. Parents living in London were also twice as likely to send their children to private school compared to elsewhere (13% compared to 6.5%). As might be expected, those in the top group of household incomes were also more likely to send their child to private school, with 15% of the parents in this group doing so. BAME parents were substantially more likely to send their children to private school; although this should be caveated by the fact the BAME group in the sample were disproportionately likely to belong to the higher social classes.

Parents who sent their pupils to independent school were also asked for their reasons for their choice. As in 2013, perceptions of higher quality teaching, lower class sizes and higher quality facilities were the most important factors. Making contacts for the future, and the social background of fellow pupils were lowest priority, but were nonetheless cited as important by a majority of parents.

Figure 9: How important were each of the following in your decision to send your child to a private/independent school, instead of a state school?
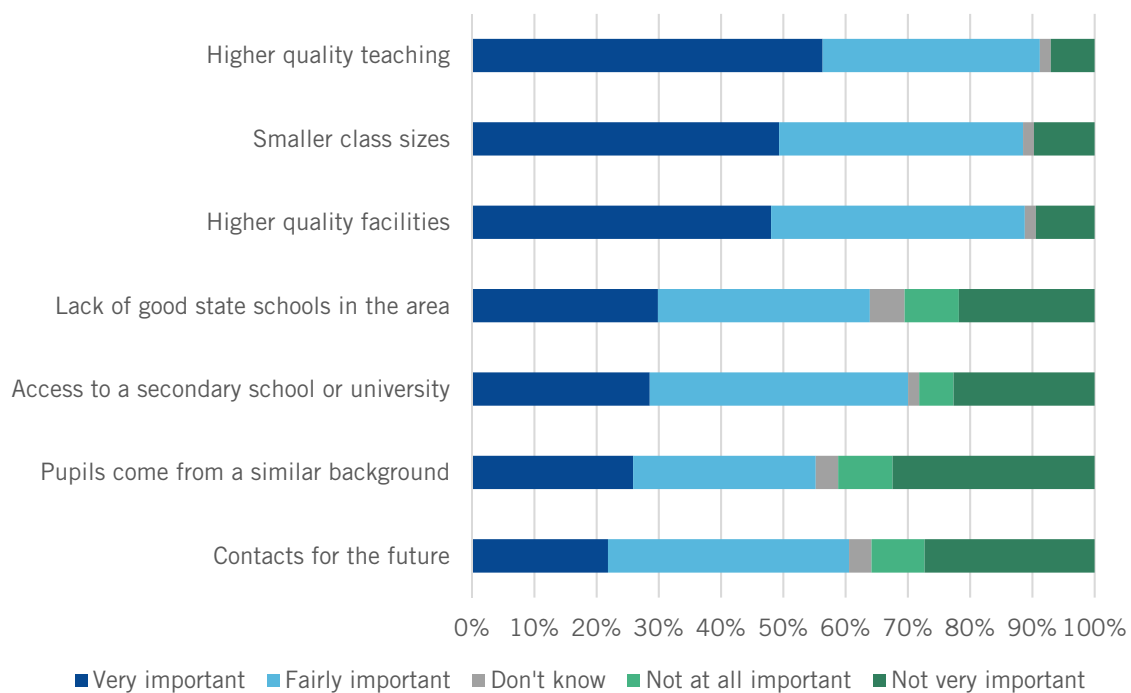
4. Strategies

School admissions are a product of decisions made by both parents and schools. School choice by parents is just the first step, and once parents have determined their preferred school, the next part of the process is to secure a place in that school. As the highest performing state schools in an area are frequently oversubscribed, parents often feel under pressure to take extra steps to give their child the best chance of getting in. Many of the strategies used by parents, such as buying a house in a certain area, are entirely legal, but are so expensive that they will price out many parents. Others are slightly less expensive, like the use of a private tutor for help with passing an admissions test, but still remain out of reach for many parents. Some strategies, while not limited by cost, are still highly morally questionable, such as attending church only to secure admission to a preferred school. Others, such as using a false address in a child's application, depending on the circumstances, may even be illegal.[21]

As many schools are oversubscribed, proximity to school is one of the most important factors in determining whether a parent's application is successful. Previous Sutton Trust research has demonstrated that a house near to one of the top 500 performing comprehensive schools is estimated to attract a premium of 20%, or £45,000 compared to the average in the school's local authority,[22] which many parents will simply be unable to afford. Another strategy often cited is to temporarily rent a house closer to their preferred school, so that the rental property's address can be used on their child's application. Similarly, parents have also been reported to be using the address of a grandparent, other relative, or of a friend on their application, rather than their own.[23] In the most extreme cases, there are even reports that some parents are resorting to faking marriage breakdowns, with a parent moving out to secure a second address nearer to the school, in order to secure admission for their child.[24]

In 2016, the Office of the Schools Adjudicator reported that almost half of all local authorities (LAs) had concerns about fraudulent admissions, with 81 LAs withdrawing offers of places due to fraudulent applications, such as the use of incorrect addresses. Cases where this has been determined and places subsequently withdrawn are still small in number, standing at just 267 in 2015/2016. However, LAs have reported that there are often too many applications to do a full check on each one, and that they therefore rely on random spot checks and reports of possible fraud from members of the public to choose which to investigate.[23]

Public attitudes to the strategies used by parents are variable. 67% of people in Britain approve of paying a private tutor to help a child to pass a school entrance exam, even though this is an advantage only some parents will be able to afford. Fewer people approve of moving to a new house to be near a higher performing secondary school, but the proportion is still relatively high at 36%. Only 16% of the British population approve of parents getting involved in local religious activities to help their children into a high performing faith school, and just 6% approve of renting a second home which the parents do not live in, or using a relative's address to access higher performing schools.[25] 2013's Parent Power report was the first to directly ask parents whether they themselves had undertaken such strategies for their

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[21] For example, the prosecution of a parent for using a false address here:
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/11114438/Mother-prosecuted-for-forging-document-to-win-daughter-school-place.html
[22] Cullinane, C., Hillary, J., Andrade, J. & McNamara, S. (2017) Selective Comprehensives. Admissions to high-attaining non-selective schools for disadvantaged pupils.
[23] Office of the Schools Adjudicator. (2016) Annual Report.
[24] The Telegraph (2018). Parents 'faking marriage breakdowns' to get children into top primary schools. Available at:
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/04/15/parents-faking-marriage-breakdowns-get-children-top-primary/.
[25] Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. & Utting, D. (2012) British Social Attitudes 28.

children. However, there is a danger that asking this question directly to parents about their own behaviour may underestimate certain practices, as parents may be reluctant to admit to them. In this report, parents have also been asked if someone they know personally has ever used any of the strategies, which they may be more likely to report than actions they have taken themselves.

Strategies used by parents

Parents with children attending state school were first asked whether they had personally used a range of strategies employed by parents in order to gain attendance to good schools. Figure 10 shows how responses to this question differed by social class.

Figure 10: Which of the following have you ever done for your child(ren) to get into a school?
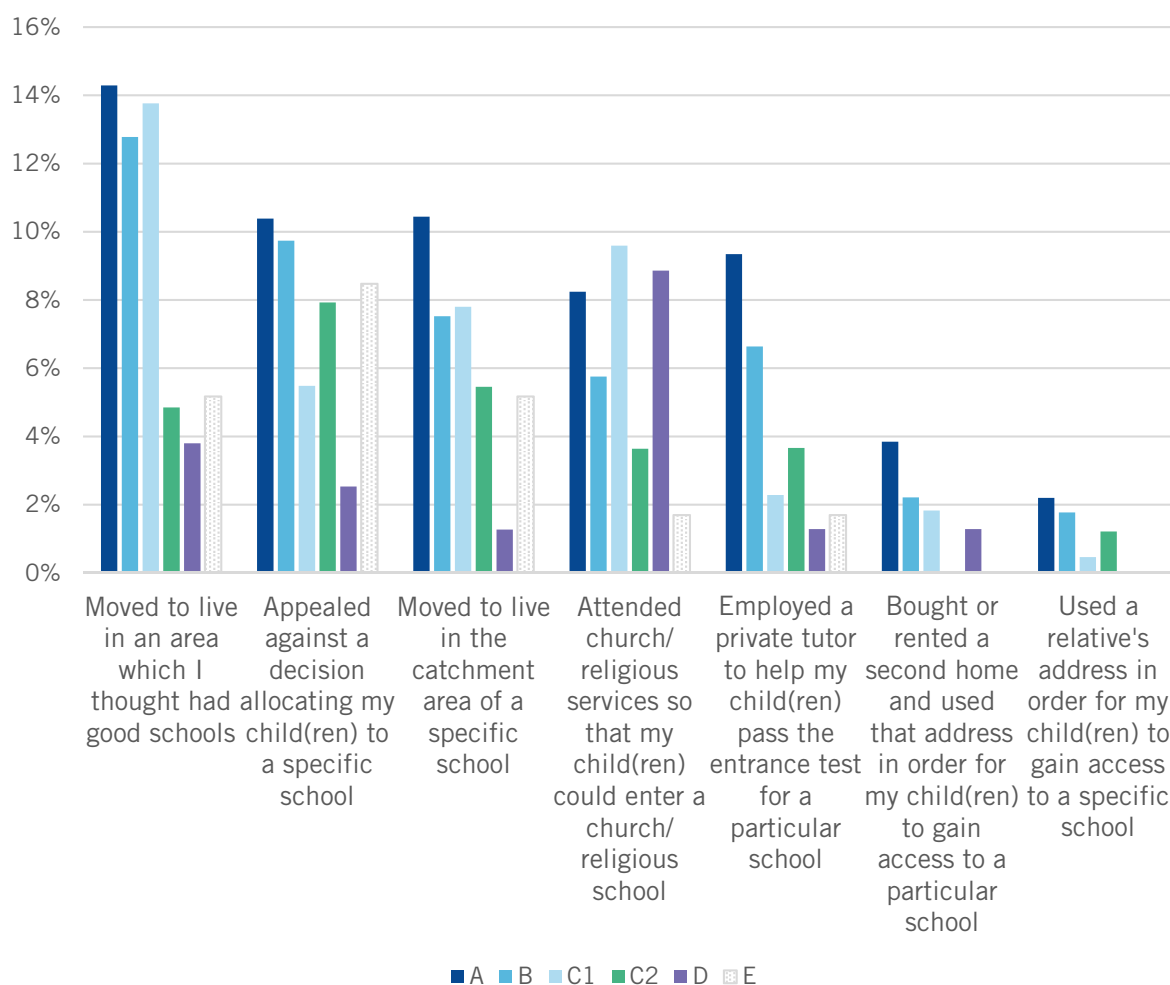
The most common tactic reported by parents was moving to an area perceived as having good schools. As moving house is a financially resource intensive strategy, it is unsurprising that there are big social gaps in use of this tactic, from 14% of parents in social group A, to 4% of parents in group D. A similar pattern is seen for moving house to live in a specific school catchment area, with 10% of parents in group A reporting they used this strategy, to just 1% in group D. Appealing against an admissions decision was the second most commonly cited strategy, although this was not significantly related to

social grouping. The use of private tutors in order to pass entrance tests was also a popular strategy used, particularly by those in the A and B social groups (9% and 7% respectively). Again, given the financial resources required, this was much less likely to be cited by those in lower social classes.

The strategy reported to be used most commonly by those in lower social classes was attendance at religious services, a strategy with no financial costs, with 9% of social group D reporting having done so. Respondents were also asked about some strategies considered ethically dubious and potentially fraudulent. 4% of parents in social group A reported having bought or rented a second home in a specific catchment area in order to gain access to a school. While 2% of group A parents reported having used a relative's address in order to gain access.

Those in the hyper chooser group were more likely to report using a range of tactics than other groups, demonstrating a willingness to take action to secure entry to their targeted school. They were more likely to employ private tutors, appeal against decisions, attend church services, and move house to an area with good schools, or to the catchment of a specific school. 75% of limited choosers had used none of the specified strategies, compared with 61% of hyper choosers. However, those in the hyper chooser group were not more likely to say they have used the more ethically dubious strategies, potentially indicative of a greater awareness around the rules and disapproval of such tactics.

Notably, reporting of all strategies listed was down substantially from the levels reported in 2013. In social group A, the average drop for each strategy was around 40%. This did not seem to be linked to either the ethical status or the financial cost of the activity. It may perhaps reflect increased awareness of the sensitivities around the use of such tactics to get ahead, but there is no apparent straightforward explanation for the change.

Use of strategies by others

Given a hypothesised reluctance for respondents to admit to undertaking certain tactics in a survey, parents were also asked whether they personally knew anyone who had undertaken the named strategies. This resulted in similar patterns, but much higher reported rates, as shown in Figure 11.

Attendance at religious services was the most frequently reported tactic, along with appealing against admission decisions. These were notable as being popular across several social groups, and not merely restricted to the very top, partially owing to the lack of financial implications. Substantial proportions (38%) of social group A also reported knowing parents who had moved house in order to access a good school. The financially intensive behaviours in particular, including house moving and the use of private tutors, saw substantial social gaps in reported use amongst peers. Use of a relative's address however was reported relatively equally across social groups, with 17% of social group A reporting knowing someone who had done this, the same as social group D. Personal acquaintances buying or renting a second home in order to access a school was reported by 20% of parents social group A. In fact, 30% of parents in social group A reported personally knowing someone who had undertaken one of these potentially fraudulent behaviours.

Figure 11: Which of the following has someone you know personally (e.g. friend, family member, colleague etc.) ever done for their child(ren) to get into a particular school?
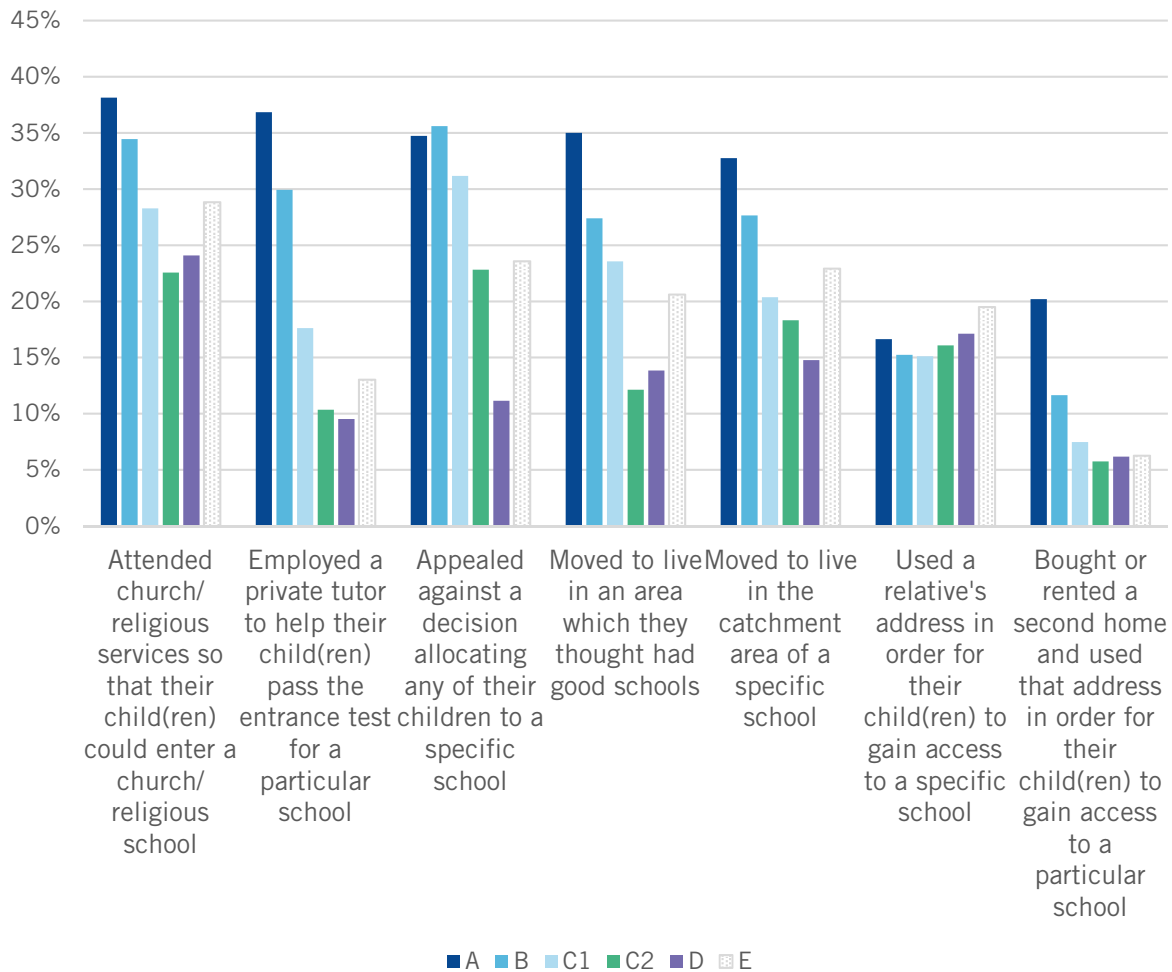
Significantly, the biggest differences between self-reported use and reported use by other people were in these ethically dubious strategies. Almost 8 times as many parents in social group A reported personal acquaintances' use of a relative's home address as admitted doing it themselves, and over 5 times as many for buying/renting a second house. This compares with 3 times as many reporting others moving into a school's catchment area. These differences are indicative of potential under-reporting of parents' own behaviours when it comes to such strategies.

5. Academic Support

Once a child has started at school, parents with the means to do so can continue to help their child to gain an edge, by either helping them with their homework themselves, or by paying for private tuition. Previous Sutton Trust research has found that there is a substantial gap in the proportion of 15-year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds who say their parents help them with their homework, and their more advantaged peers who report the same. Only 50% of disadvantaged 15-year-old said that their parents regularly helped them with their homework, compared to 68% of their more advantaged peers. This gap is much larger than in several other European countries, including Germany, Poland and Belgium.[26] In work which has asked parents from various socioeconomic backgrounds their views on homework, working class parents were found to cite a lack of knowledge or skill as to why they found it difficult to give their children help at home.[27]

Academic help from family members

Here, parents were asked how often they or their child's other main carer had supported their child with their school work in the last year, shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12: How often do you or your child's other guardian support your child with their school work? (e.g. by reading to them, helping them with homework etc.)

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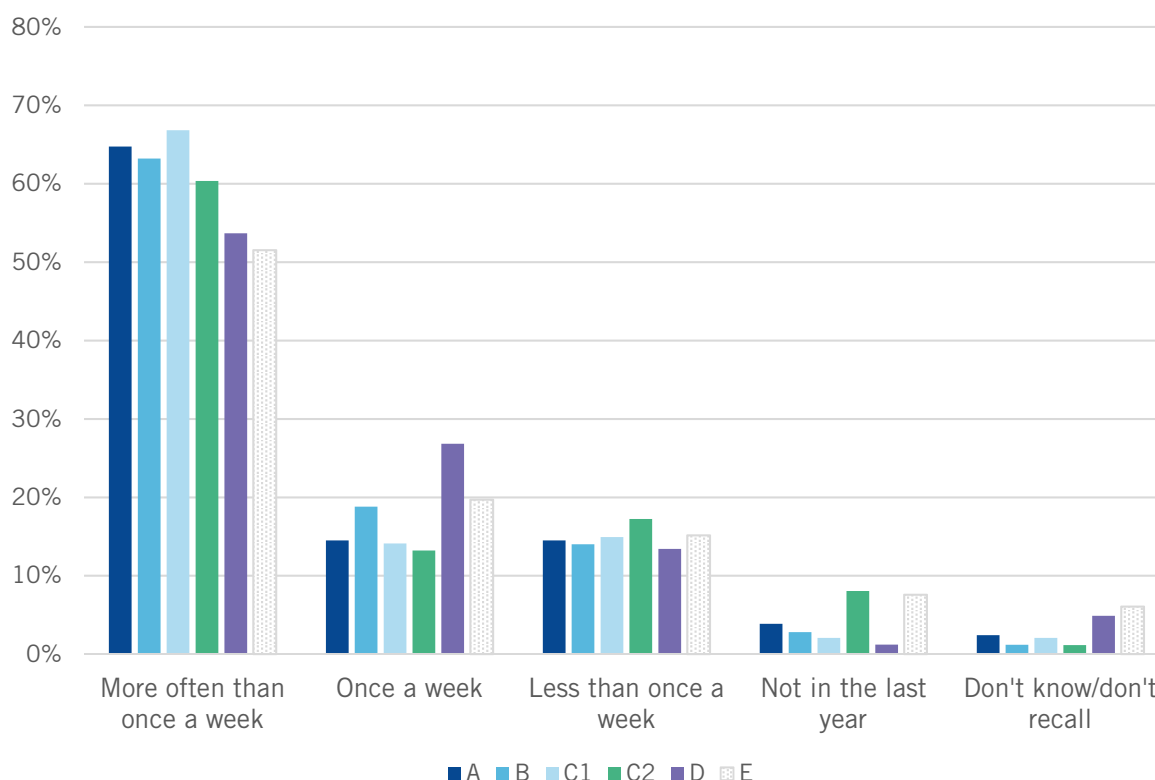
[26] Jerrim, J. Sutton Trust. (2017) Extra Time - Private tuition and out-of-school study, new international evidence.
[27] Lutz, A. (2015) Getting the Homework Done: Social Class and Parents' Relationship to Homework. International Journal of Education and Social Science

Across social classes, the majority of parents do report that they regularly help with their child's homework; with over 50% of parents in every social class doing so more often than once a week. However, those from higher social classes were more likely to help with homework on a *very* regular basis. 65% of parents in social class A reported their child received help with their homework more than once a week, compared to just 54% in group D.

However, parents in groups D and E were much more likely to report helping their child with homework once a week; and when the proportion of parents who reported helping their child with their homework more often than once a week are combined with those who report doing so once a week, no differences were present by social grade; 79% of parents in group A reported that their child receives help from a parent or guardian once a week or more, which likewise is reported by 80% of parents in group D. While a large majority of parents do help their children with their homework regularly, parents from higher socioeconomic groups are doing so more regularly than other parents.

In order to get the perspective of young people themselves, pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 were also surveyed and asked how often their parents helped them with their homework. This suggested somewhat lower levels of overall parental support, with just 21% reporting help more often than once a week, 19% once a week, 20% less than once a week, and 17% not in the last year. These results were also broken down by level of family affluence as either high, medium or low. 23% of children from high affluence families reported their parents helped them more often than once a week, compared to just 15% of young people from low affluence families. Unlike findings from the answers from parents, this socioeconomic gradient remained when examining whether children received help at least once a week or more, with 43% of children from high affluence families reporting they received help this often, but only 28% of children from low affluence families saying the same. Young people were also less likely than their parents to remember whether they had received help with their homework, with 20% of pupils from high affluence families and 33% of students from low affluence families saying they either did not know or couldn't remember whether they had received help with their school work from their family.

Figure 13: How often do your parents help with your school work? By high, medium and low household affluence (Young people age 11-16)
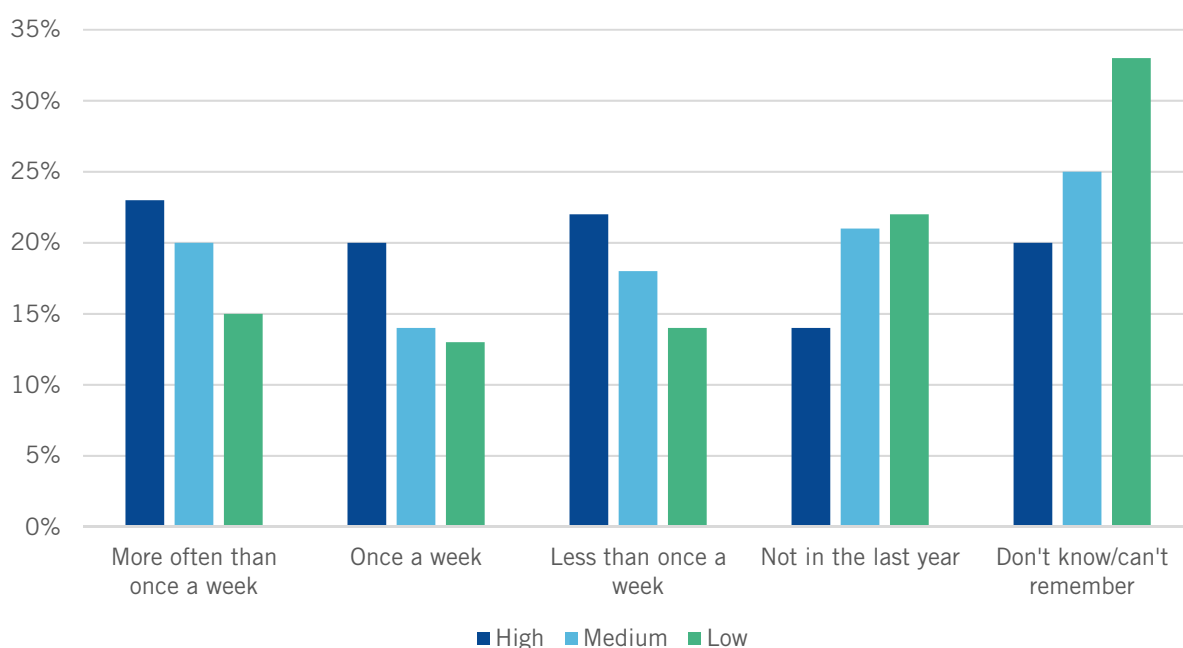
Private tuition

As discussed in Section 4, private tuition can be used by parents to help secure a place at their preferred school, by helping to prepare a child for entrance exams. However, the use of private tuition is not limited to school entrance exams; but is used by parents throughout a child's schooling, from general homework help, to preparation for GCSEs and A levels. Although parents from high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to help with their child's homework, if they don't understand it, middle class parents report turning to private tutors to fill in their own knowledge gaps.[28]

Although the impact of private tuition can be difficult to quantify, evaluation of the evidence on one-to-one tuition in school by the Education Endowment Foundation has found that it is very effective at helping learners to catch up, although the practice is relatively expensive in relation to its impact.[29] It is harder to evaluate the impact of private one-to-one tuition specifically, as the practice occurs in people's own homes, and agencies may differ in quality. However, research suggests overall that private tuition is likely to be beneficial to students.[30]

The Sutton Trust commissions yearly polling of young people aged 11 to 16 in England and Wales, to ask whether they have received private or home tuition. In 2018, 11% of children reported having private or home tuition in the last year, with one in four having received such tuition at some point. Students in London were substantially more likely to have received private tuition, with 41% of young people in London ever having had private tuition. Of all young people who have received private tuition, 33% did so for GCSE exams and 27% for school entrance exams.[31]

For this report, parents were asked whether, either in the last year or previously, their child had been supported with either individual or group private tuition, results from which are shown in Figure 14.

Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were considerably more likely to report that their child had received private tuition: 22% of parents from social group A said that their child had received private tuition in the last year, compared to just 5% of parents in social group D. Indeed, just 6% of parents in group D reported that their child had ever received private tuition, compared to 15% in groups C1 and C2, 23% in group B and 31% in group A. This difference was present but less striking when responses were examined by parents' education level, with 21% of parents with a degree reporting their child had ever received private tuition, compared to 15% of parents with GCSEs or below.

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[28] Lutz, A. (2015) Getting the Homework Done: Social Class and Parents' Relationship to Homework. International Journal of Education and Social Science

[29] Education Endowment Foundation. (2018) One to one tuition | Toolkit Strand. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition/ (Accessed: 15th August 2018)

[30] Kirby, P. (2016) Shadow Tuition - Private tuition and social mobility in the UK.

[31] Sutton Trust. (2018) Private tuition polling. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/private-tuition-polling-2018/

Figure 14: Percentage of respondents from each social group reporting their child had received individual or group private tuition

Legend: ■ Any private tuition in the last year ■ Any previous tuition
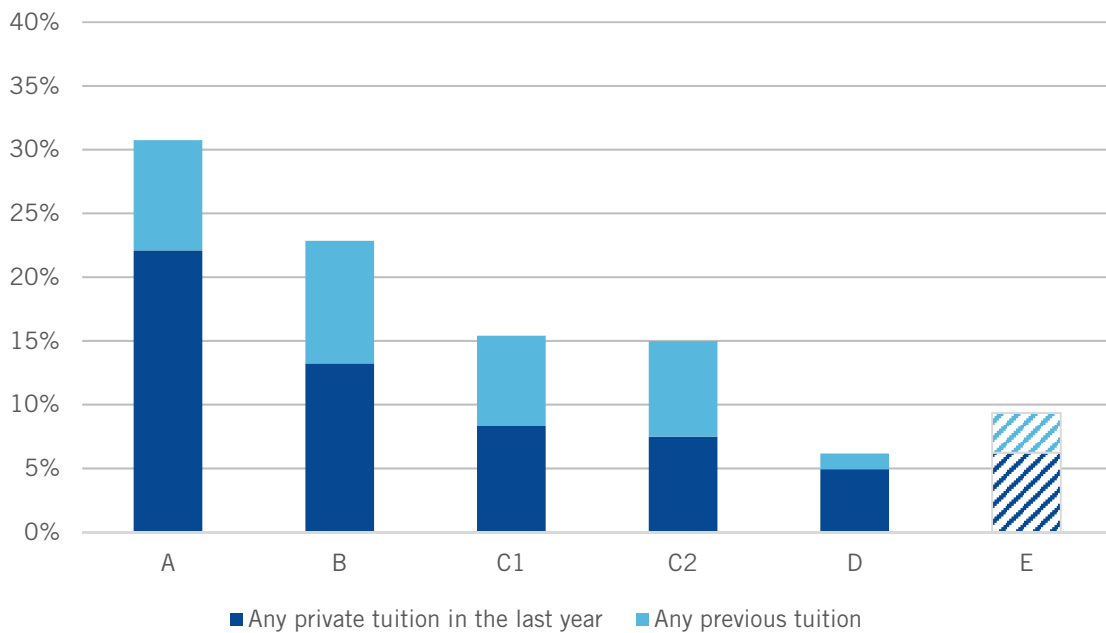
Parents with children in private schools were also more likely to pay for private tuition than those with children in state schools, with 47% of parents with children in private schools reporting their child had either individual or group private tuition, compared to just 20% of parents with children in state schools. Parents from BAME backgrounds were also more likely to report that their children had received private tuition.

Given that many parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will be limited in their ability to pay for a private tutor, parents who had not reported any private tuition were also asked whether they would pay for a private tutor if they could afford to do so (Figure 15). 40% of parents from group A said that they either probably or definitely would do so, a figure which increased gradually through groups B (47%), C1 (48%) and C2 (58%); a trend that likely reflects the proportion of parents in each group who are currently limited in their ability to afford private tuition. However, just 37% of parents in social group D reported that they would pay for a private tutor if they were able to do so. A similar trend was also found when responses were examined by household income, with 45% of parents in the top income bracket who did not currently pay for private tuition saying they would do so if they could afford it, which increased to 48-49% for parents in groups 2 and 3 but decreased to just 42% for parents in the bottom income group. This could be as a result of adaptive preference owing to the cost of tuition being far from reach for such families, it could be a result of a lack of awareness of peers using tutoring services and seeing the benefits, or it could be due to lower levels of general engagement in education and placing a lower value on success in school.

Figure 15: To what extent do you think you would pay for your child to have a private tutor if you could afford to do so?
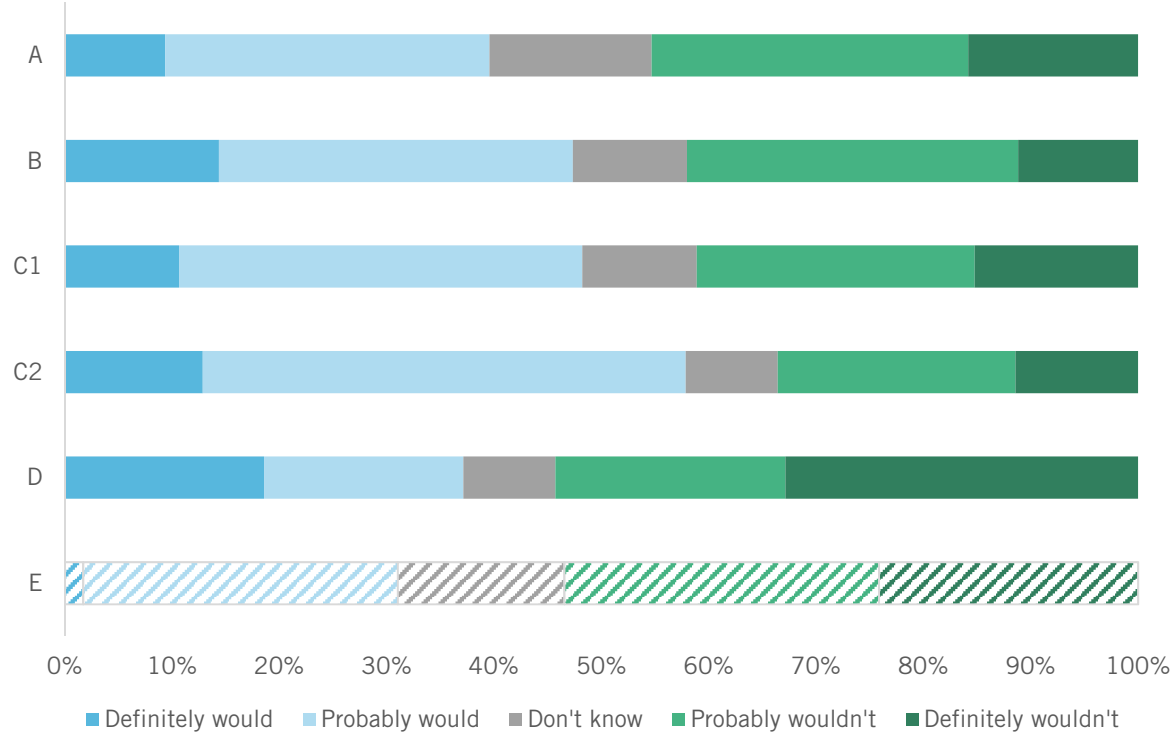
6. Knowledge of schooling

Parental understanding of the education system affects their ability to navigate systems and support their child to achieve to their potential. This understanding is reflective of both social and cultural capital, which are highly unevenly distributed across households of different social classes.

In the time since the 2013 report, the secondary school system in particular has seen substantial changes to how success is measured and represented, including changes to school league table measures, and most recently, in how GCSEs are graded.

GCSE grade changes

Recently the GCSE grading system, previously graded from A* to G, has been altered to a new system with grades given as numerical values between 1 and 9. The new grades were first introduced for English and maths GCSEs in 2017, and have now been brought in for most commonly studied subjects - although will not be fully in place for all subjects until summer 2020. Under the new system, a grade 9 is the highest possible mark, while a grade 1 is the lowest. The new system was put in place to allow for a greater level of differentiation of grades at the top end of the achievement spectrum, to allow higher and further education providers, and employers, better ability to distinguish between students at this end of the achievement spectrum.[32]

However, when the new system was introduced, Sally Collier, the chief regulator of the qualification regulator Ofqual, warned "the biggest risks are [if] those that are using the new 9 to 1s for entrance requirements – whether that be a college, apprenticeship, or a particular course where these qualifications are used as entrance hurdles – don't understand them, or parents don't fully understand what their children need to get to their next stage, then that's the biggest risk".[33] Additionally, a TES and Mumsnet poll carried out in 2017 found that less than a fifth of parents thought that the new grades were a good idea, 44% of parents with children currently studying for them thought the new grades would hinder their prospects, and that three quarters of those parents did not think that enough official information about the grades had been provided.[34] And indeed, in 2017, a survey commissioned by Ofqual found that roughly three fifths of parents with children in year 10 and 11 did not know that 1 is the bottom grade.[35]

Here, to determine whether parents' understanding of the new system has now improved, they have been asked whether Grade 1 or Grade 9 represented a better result. Overall, 47% answered Grade 9 correctly, with 34% answering incorrectly and 19% saying they didn't know. While more parents got the correct answer than not, this nonetheless represented under half of all respondents. With those who answered correctly likely including many who made a correct guess without actually knowing the answer, the proportion answering incorrectly is perhaps more instructive. The likelihood of getting the answer wrong was significantly related to social grade, with 28% of those in group A answering incorrectly, compared

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[32] Ofqual. (2018) GCSE 9 to 1 grades: a brief guide for parents. Available at: https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/03/02/gcse-9-to-1-grades-a-brief-guide-for-parents/
[33] TES. (2017). Parents and employers will be 'confused' by new numerical GCSE grades, Ofqual chief admits. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/exclusive-parents-and-employers-will-be-confused-new-numerical-gcse-grades-ofqual-chief-admits
[34] TES (2017). Less than a fifth of parents think new GCSE grading system is a 'good idea'. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/exclusive-less-fifth-parents-think-new-gcse-grading-system-good-idea.
[35] TES (2018) Exclusive: Most parents and students don't understand new numerical GCSE grades. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/exclusive-most-parents-and-students-dont-understand-new-numerical-gcse-grades.

to 43% in group D. There were also large differences by parental education, with 41% of those with a highest education level of GCSE or below answering incorrectly compared to 27% of those with a postgraduate degree.

Awareness was also closely linked to the age of the oldest child, with parents of children aged 15 or above much more likely to know the answer than the parents of primary school age children. Given the increased relevance to parents of this age group, this would be expected. However, even among parents with children aged 15-18, those in the C2DE group were twice as likely to answer incorrectly as ABC1 parents (14% compared to 29%).

Figure 16: Which one of the following do you think is the higher (i.e. the best) result? (Correct answer: Grade 9)
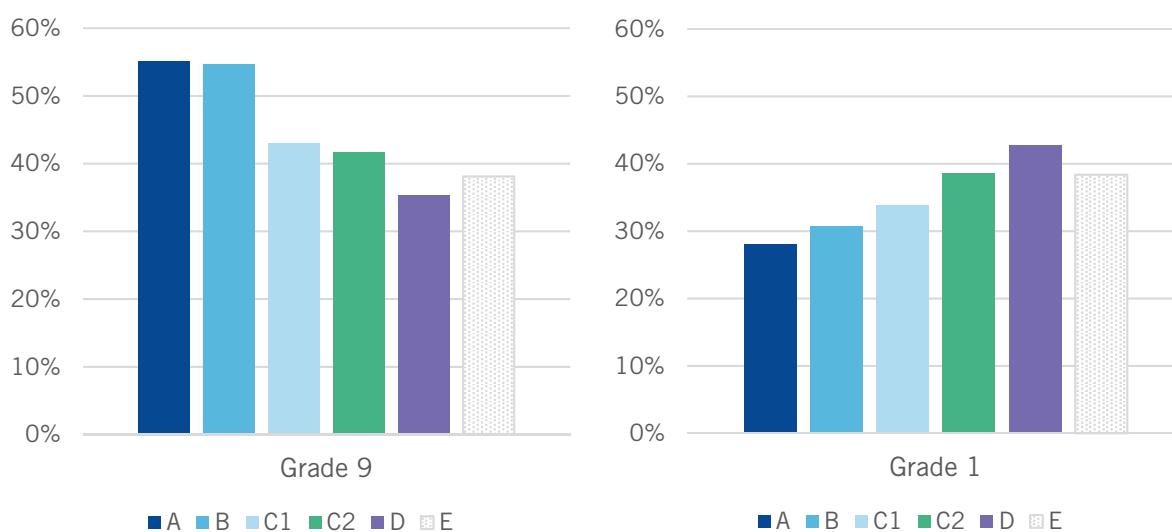
Post-18 advice and support

Parents were also asked how confident they felt advising on the choices their children would make on leaving school. In particular, they were asked about confidence advising on university choice and relating to an equivalent vocational route, degree level apprenticeships. Many young people view their parents as a significant source of help and support when deciding what to do when they finish at school. Polling has found that 22% of school leavers believe advice from their parents is one of the most important factors when choosing university, with 14% going on to say that their parents' views regarding higher education are actually more important than their own.[36]

However, many parents will know little about the university application process themselves. A significantly smaller proportion of the population went to university when the parents of today's young people were in their 20s. In 1970, just 8.4% of the population went onto higher education, a figure which increased to 19.3% in 1990.[37] Now, almost 50% of the population attend university by the time

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[36] Coventry University. (2014) Parental guidance (not always) recommended for university. Available at:
https://www.coventry.ac.uk/primary-news/parental-guidance-not-always-recommended-for-university-applications/.
[37] House of Commons Library. (2012) Education: historical statistics. Available at: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22771/1/SN04252.pdf

they're 30.[38] Today, as the proportion of young people going onto higher education increases, so too does the proportion of students without a parent or guardian who themselves went to university. In 2011-12, 46% of students entering higher education did not have a parent who have been to university, which by 2014-15 had increased to 50%. The figure is also higher for students from less advantaged backgrounds, with just 34% of the most deprived students having a parent who attended university, compared to 67% of the most well-off students.[39]

To give informed advice on university admissions, a huge amount of hard and soft knowledge is required by parents. Information on which universities are regarded highly by employers; which have the highest earnings potential; what is involved in the application process; what makes a high quality personal statement; how to prepare for an interview and what is involved when applying for student finance are just some of the questions which will face a young person during their application. Familiarity with the system is likely to help parents feel more comfortable helping and advising their children with their own applications, and those who went to university themselves may have easier access to networks to ask others for advice. However, this is less likely to be available for pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Indeed, qualitative research which examined how parents who have not been to university themselves go about finding information on the process found that while many parents made use of online sources to try to navigate the process, parents reported being frustrated and overwhelmed by the amount of information available.[40]

Here, parents were asked how confident they would feel giving their child advice regarding university. 48% of parents in the A social group felt 'very confident' offering their children university advice, compared to just 21% of those in social group D. 27% of parents in group D did not feel confident, almost twice as many as in the A social group (14%).

The educational experience of parents was clearly a significant factor, with 90% of parents holding a degree feeling confident giving advice on university, compared to 53% of those with a GCSE level education.

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[38] Gov.uk. (2017) Participation rates in higher education: academic years 2006/2007 - 2015/2016.
[39] HEFCE (2017) Increase in first generation university students. Available at: https://blog.hefce.ac.uk/2017/08/16/increase-in-first-generation-university-students/
[40] Apps, J. & Christie, S. (2018) First in family to attend University: understanding and enabling the parent-child support relationship. Available at:
http://create.canterbury.ac.uk/17125/1/Revised%20FIFU%20parents%20support%20needs%20November%202017%20v2%20%281%29.docx

Figure 17: How confident do you think you would be to personally offer your child help and advice if they were to apply to university?

Legend: Very confident, Fairly confident, Not very confident, Not at all confident, Don't know
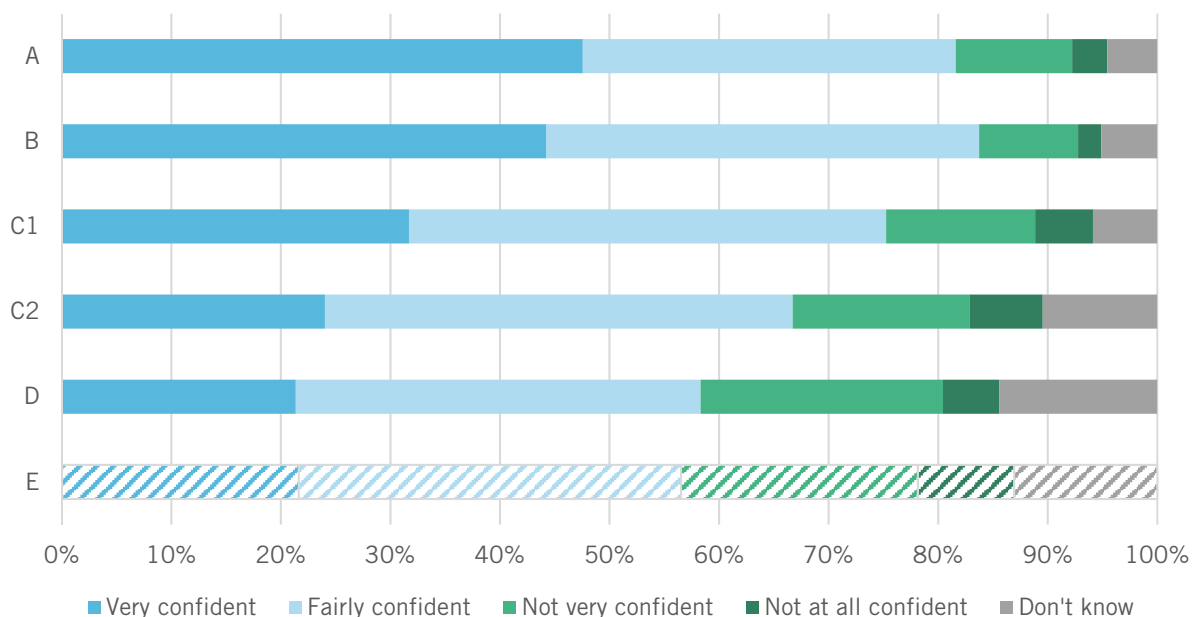
Many young people's parents are even less likely to have previous experience, and likely little knowledge of apprenticeships. Although in the 1950s apprenticeships were the main route into jobs in the manufacturing, engineering and construction industries, apprentice numbers fell substantially during the 1970s and 1980s, and continued to decline until the 1990s when modern apprenticeships launched.[41] A large majority of parents are therefore unlikely to have direct experience of apprenticeships, or information they can gain through networks, so may feel less comfortable giving advice on them to their children.

Unlike university, there is no centralised system for apprenticeships, so the need for advice and support for young people is even higher. In many cases this is not forthcoming from school sources either. Sutton Trust polling has found that 40% of the young people surveyed have never had their teacher discuss the idea of an apprenticeship with them.[42]

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[41] UK Parliament. You're hired. Apprenticeships since the 1950s. Available at:
https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/olympic-britain/education/youre-hired/
[42] Sutton Trust. (2018) Apprenticeship polling. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/apprenticeship-polling-2018/

Figure 18: How confident do you think you would be to personally offer your child help and advice if they were to apply to a degree level apprenticeship?
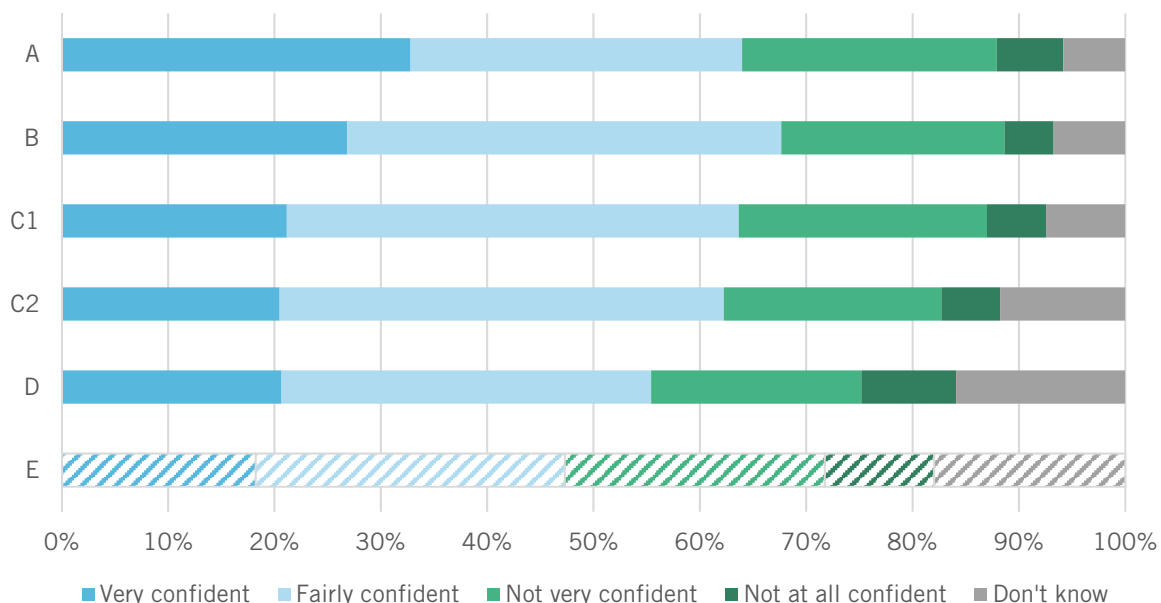

Overall, while 75% of respondents indicated confidence advising their child on university, 63% indicated as such on degree level apprenticeships.

Confidence with offering advice on degree level apprenticeships also differed by social class, with 33% of social group A parents feeling very confident, compared with 21% of parents in group D. However, while confidence with advising on both university and apprenticeships differed by class, the relationship between class and university advice was stronger. While parents in the A group are 18 percentage points more likely to feel comfortable giving university advice compared to apprenticeship advice, they are only 2% more likely to feel comfortable for those in social group D. While those in every social group feel more confident advising on university choices, potentially reflecting assumptions around university attendance, and a lack of available information on apprenticeships, the gaps are much closer for lower socioeconomic groupings, as shown in Figure 19.

This also reflects the educational backgrounds and experiences of those parents. While 90% of parents with a degree felt confident giving advice on university, just 53% of those with a GCSE level education felt similarly. Whereas 71% of those with degrees felt confident or very confident offering apprenticeship advice to their children, while the rate for those with GCSEs was the same, at 53%.

Figure 19: Percentage of social group who are either very or fairly confident in advising on university (solid bars) or apprenticeships (shaded)
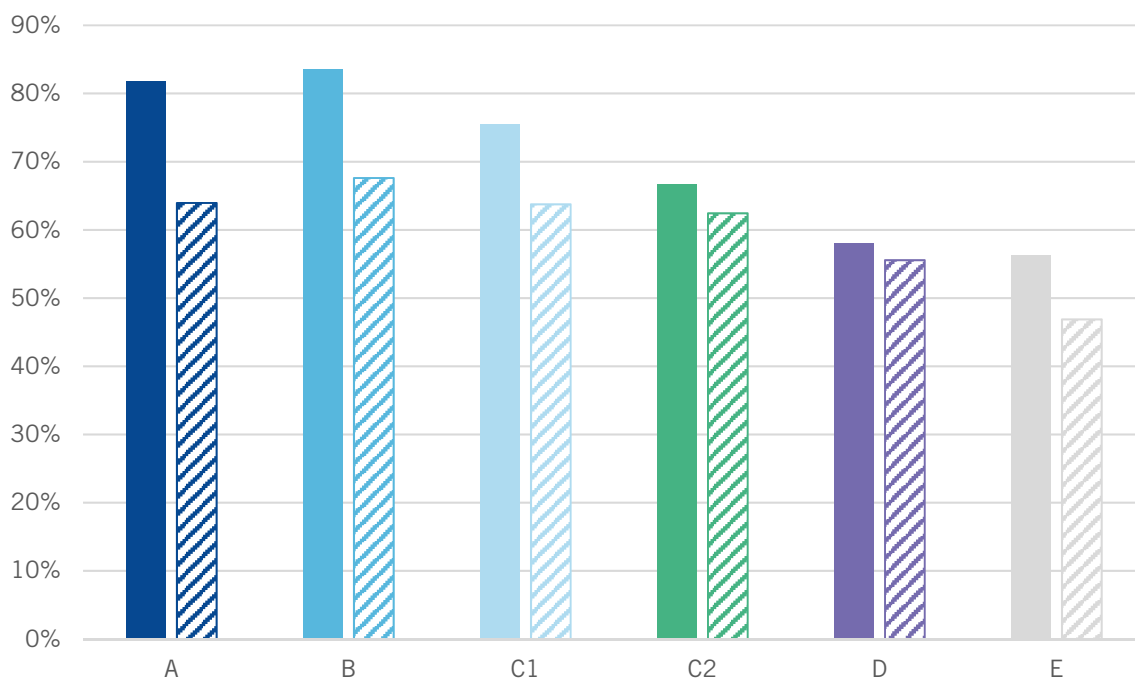
7. Interventions in schooling

As well as supporting their child's education at home, parents can also do so through direct engagement with their school, through formal or informal means. Involving parents more widely in their child's school and in the education of their children is known to be beneficial for students, for example, by helping to ensure any issues pupils are facing are tackled early, and by engaging parents to give more active encouragement and support to their children.[43,44] Additionally, school based parental involvement, for example parents being a part of a parent teacher association (PTA), has been shown to be associated with higher levels of attainment for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.[45] There are various ways in which a parent can be involved and can intervene in a school, from more formal roles such as being a school governor, through to more informal interactions, such as raising concerns at a coffee morning with a teacher.

The most formalised, and also most time demanding way in which a parent can be involved in their child's school is by becoming a school governor. School governors attend regular meetings, make decisions about the school's ethos, vision and strategy, oversee the financial performance of the school, and hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school's students. Parents can play a variety of roles on a governing body, either as parent governors, elected by other parents, or performing another specific role, for example a local authority governor in an LA maintained school.[46] An estimated 12% of parents are school governors.[47]

Parent governors are meant to be "representative parents rather than representatives of parents", meaning that they are not meant to flag operational issues, and they shouldn't be where other parents go to make a complaint about the school; as these are responsibilities which should lie with the school's headteacher. However, it would be natural that in any discussions, parents will be viewing issues from their own perspective, which will be different depending on their own experiences and background.[48] Additionally, by serving on a governing board, parents will have the opportunity to develop relationships with key staff members, such as the headteacher, which may then alter subsequent interactions concerning that parent's child. This can occur, for example, by making a parent feel more comfortable raising an issue, or by making a headteacher more inclined to deal with an issue concerning a school governor's child. Therefore, having more parents from better-off backgrounds on school governor boards is likely to mean that issues affecting children from higher socioeconomic background are given greater consideration.

Parents can also be governors on the boards of multi academy trusts (MAT). The proportion of parents who do so is likely to be much smaller than those who are governors. Polling carried out for the organisation Parentkind, which aims to promote parental involvement in schools, found that parents from higher socioeconomic groups report being more likely to want to have a say at either local government or MAT level, compared to parents from less well-off backgrounds.[49]

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[43] National Foundation for Educational Research. (2008) How are schools involving parents in school life?
[44] Hughes, J. & Kwok, O.-M. (2007) Influence of Student-Teacher and Parent-Teacher Relationships on Lower Achieving Readers' Engagement and Achievement in the Primary Grades.
[45] S. Park & S. Holloway. (2017) The effects of school-based parental involvement on academic achievement at the child and elementary school level: A longitudinal study. The Journal of Educational Research.
[46] Inspiring governance. (2014) Types of Governor Roles.
[47] Parent Teacher Association UK. (2016) Impact report.
[48] The Key for School Governors. (2017) Parent governors: role. Available at: https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/the-governing-body/constitution-and-membership/governing-body-constitution/parent-governors-roles-and-responsibilities/
[49] Parentkind. (2017) Annual Parent Survey - Part 3 - Parent Representation and School Accountability.

Rather than formal governance roles, a potentially more accessible way for a wider range of parents to become involved with their schools is through parent-teacher associations (PTAs). PTAs are separate from their schools and are often registered as charities. They run activities and provide resources to develop relationships between teachers and parents. Parents with higher education levels are more likely to be on a school's PTA.[50] Previous research has also found that schools with a lower level of FSM eligibility were more likely to make use of an active PTA to involve parents.[51] There is therefore scope to encourage PTAs to be set up in less well-off areas, to help parents to become more involved in their children's schools.

The most common way that the majority of parents interact with their child's school however, is through parents' evenings, where parents have a chance to discuss their children's progress with each of their teachers.

Parents' evenings

Parents were asked whether and how often they attended parents' evenings for their oldest school aged child. The majority of parents from all social groups reported that they always attend parents' evenings, with very few parents from each social group never attending. Although attendance rates were high across all groups, parents from higher socioeconomic groups were slightly more likely to report doing so, with 78% of parents in group A reporting that they always attended parents' evenings, compared to 67% in group D (Figure 20).

Figure 20: How often do you and/or the child's other parent/guardian tend to go to parents' evenings?


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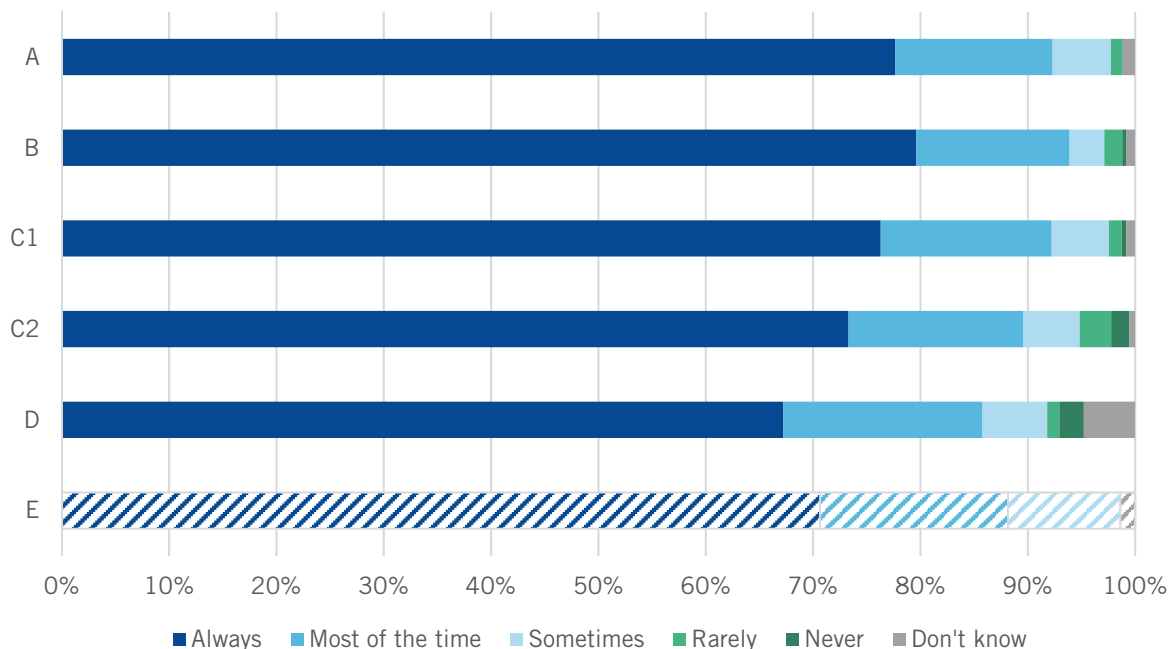
[50] Park, S. & Holloway, S. D. (2017) The effects of school-based parental involvement on academic achievement at the child and elementary school level: A longitudinal study.

[51] National Foundation for Educational Research. (2008) How are schools involving parents in school life?

Parents were also asked about the outcomes of parents evenings; including whether attending a parents evening had ever resulted in either staff changing the way they work with their child (for example, by providing more one-to-one time or by moving their child to a different teaching group), or the parents themselves providing greater support to their child at home (such as reading to them more often, or providing more support with their homework). For both outcomes, parents in group A were more likely to report that a change had occurred; with 37% of parents in group A reporting that school staff changed the way they worked with their child, compared to 25-29% in other social groups. Additionally, 49% of parents in group A reported that they provided greater support at home following a parents evening, compared to 37% in group D (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Which of the following has ever been an outcome as a direct result of a parents' evening meeting about your child at school?
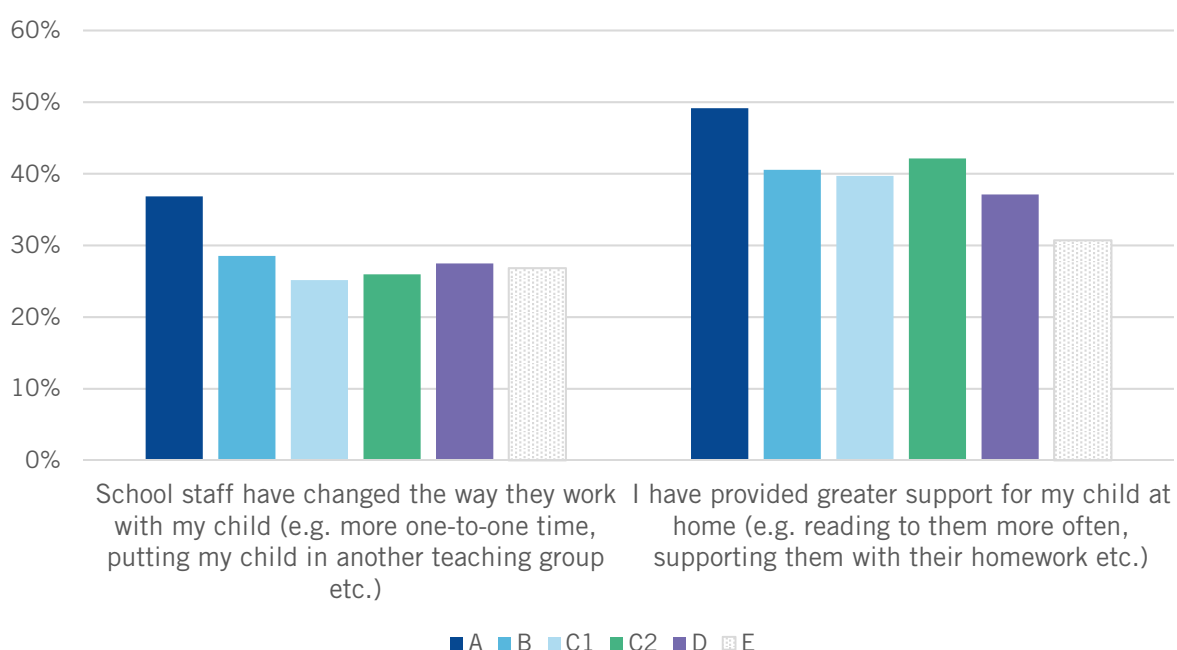

Representative or supportive roles in the school

Parents were also asked about more substantial interactions with the school, in particular whether they had ever been a committee member of a PTA, a school governor, a class representative, or sat on a multi-academy trust (MAT) board. Parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were considerably more likely to report taking on one of these representative or supportive roles in their child's school; with 36% of parents in group A reporting they had done so, in contrast to just 13% in group D (Figure 22). Reported participation across all social groups was notably lower than the 2013 report.

When broken down by the type of role taken on, the largest difference in participation by socioeconomic background was found for parents who had been a committee member of a PTA, with parents in group A four times more likely to do so than those in group D (20% vs 5%). Similar results were also found for parents having served as class representatives and school governors, with parents in group A over 3 times as likely to have been a class representative than those in group D (10% vs 3%), and parents in group A almost 3 times more likely to have been a school governor than those in group D (16% vs 6%; Figure 23).

Figure 22: Percentage of respondents in social group who reported they or their child's other parent/ guardian had ever taken on an official role at their child's school
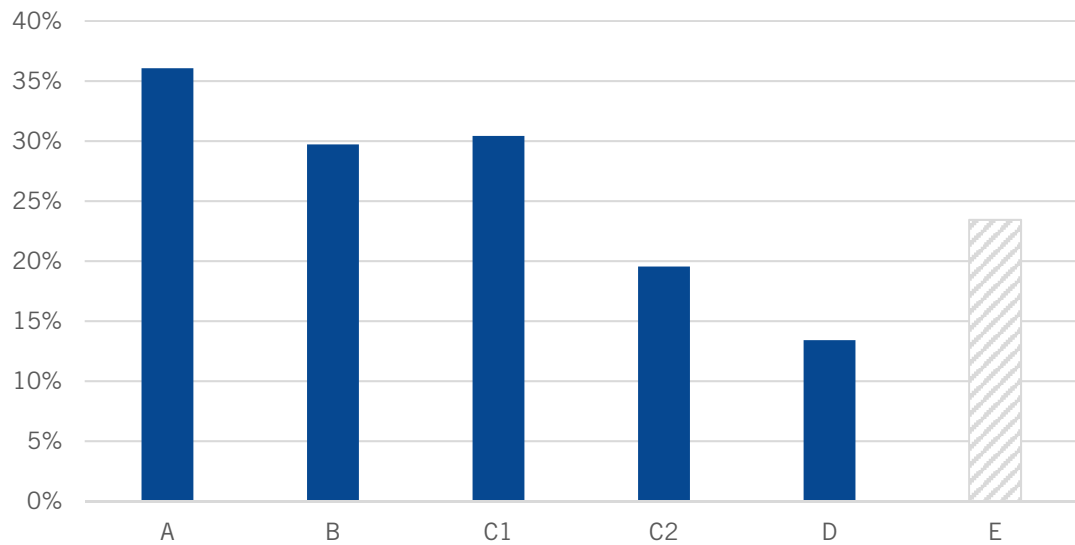
The proportions of parents who had ever been a member of a MAT board were extremely small across social groups, making up just 5% of those in group A, and none of the parents in group D. The small numbers of parents on MAT boards is somewhat expected, given the smaller number of governing opportunities in MATs, which cover several schools each.

Figure 23: Which of the following school roles have you or your child's other parent/ guardian ever taken in a school attended by any of your children?
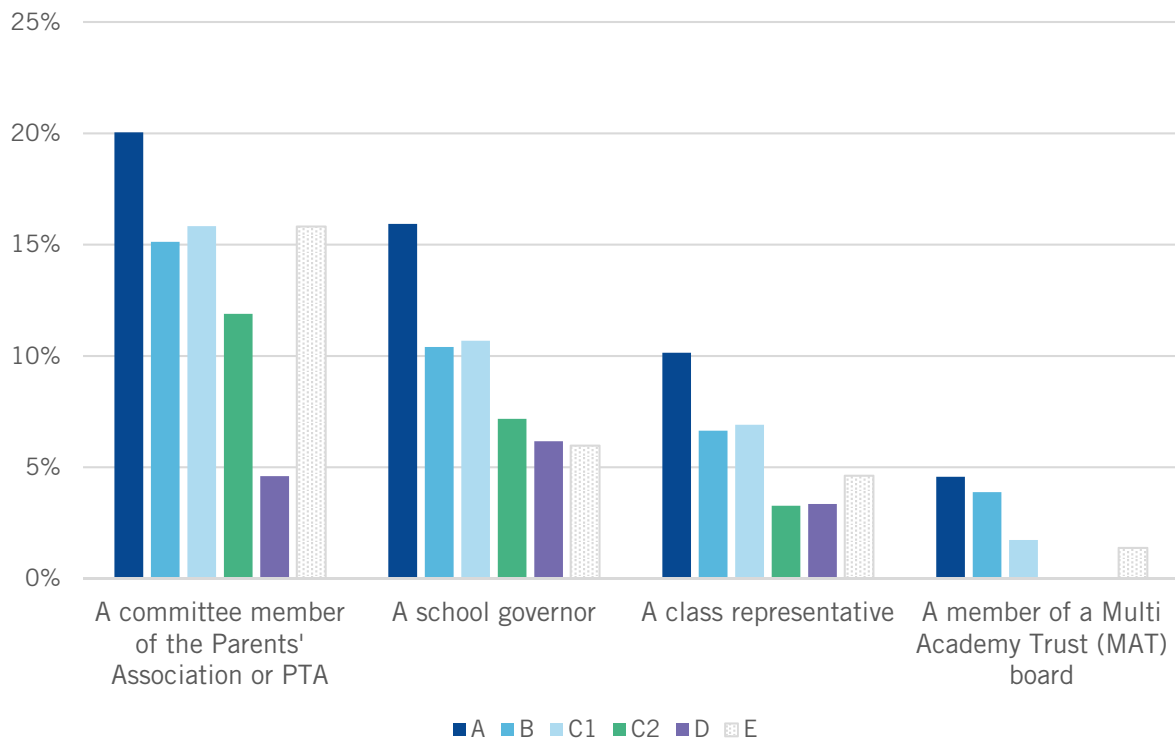
8. Financial contributions

As Section 4 and 5 have shown, financial resources in the home can play a significant role in a child's schooling. These resources could potentially become even more important as school budgets continue to tighten. State funded schools are currently under a substantial amount of financial pressure and school budgets were high on the agenda during the 2017 general election campaign. Analysis carried out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that school budgets fell by roughly 8% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2017/18,[52] and Sutton Trust work has consistently highlighted the effect of cuts on pupils. Research carried out for the Trust in 2017 found that 30% of head teachers are using premium funding to plug gaps in the school's budget, and that almost 65% of secondary school head teachers have cut back on teaching staff to save money. Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students were also more likely to report cuts to staff.[53]

In response to these financial pressures, there has been increasing evidence that schools are approaching parents for help to plug gaps in school budgets. As early as 2015, a school near Bristol asked all parents to make either a one-off donation or a monthly payment to help the school cope with reductions in funding.[54] In Manchester, after first both increasing class sizes and asking students to take fewer A levels, a school asked families for a donation of £1,000 a year to prevent further cuts;[55] which roughly half of the parents were reported to have agreed to pay.[56] A survey carried out for the organisation Parentkind found that the proportion of parents asked to contribute to their child's school in 2017 stood at 42%, up from 37% the previous year. Parentkind also reported that the proportion of parents then going on to donate to their school had also gone up, from 29% in 2016 to 34% in 2017.[57] An estimate calculated by Channel 4 at the start of 2018 found that the average school may receive as much as £10,000 each a year in donations, or £33 on average per pupil.[58]

Particularly concerning is a report of students being denied access to items paid for by parental donations if their own parents did not themselves contribute. Earlier this year a school in the West Midlands received a considerable amount of press coverage after asking parents to make a financial contribution to sports equipment, but only allowed children whose parents had paid to access that equipment. Following the coverage, this policy was quickly reversed by the school.[59] It has not been clear however if this was an isolated case, or if this may be occurring in other schools.

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[52] Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2018). School funding per pupil falls faster in England than in Wales. Available at: https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13143

[53] Sutton Trust. (2017) Teacher Polling. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/pupil-premium-polling-2017-teachers-school-budget/

[54] The Daily Mail (2015). Chew Valley School asks parents to plug budget shortfalls with donations. Available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3323656/Head-cash-strapped-state-school-asks-parents-plug-budget-shortfalls-donations-monthly-standing-orders.html

[55] The Times (2018). Parents asked for £1,000 to pay for pupils' basics. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/parents-asked-for-1-000-to-pay-for-pupils-basics-x2rp22dcx

[56] Manchester Evening News (2018). Parents are paying £1,000 each to help a top state school maintain its standards of 'excellence'. Available at: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/parents-paying-1000-help-top-14943010

[57] Parentkind. (2018) Annual Parent Survey 2017 – Part 1, School Funding. Available at: https://www.parentkind.org.uk/uploads/files/1/Parent Insight 2017 FINAL.pdf

[58] Channel 4 News (2018). Schools collect millions in donations as state funds stagnate. Available at: https://www.channel4.com/news/schools-collect-millions-in-donations-as-state-funding-tightens

[59] Mirror (2018). School creates playground 'rich and poor zones' separating kids whose parents didn't pay £6 donation for new sports equipment. Available at: https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/school-creates-playground-rich-poor-11828453?_ga=2.228633684.916629834.1533651677-1421466173.1528457436.

Importantly, students in some schools will have considerably better-off parents than those in others. Additionally, PTAs are often the body who fundraise for schools, but schools with higher proportions of FSM eligible children are less likely to have PTAs to do so,[60] further reducing those schools' potential to raise additional funds. The Department for Education, when previously asked to respond to ongoing funding concerns, have commented that "we are clear that no parent can be required to make financial contributions to a school. No policies have been introduced by this government to allow schools to charge for education provided during school hours. Schools are welcome to ask parents for donations but must make clear these are voluntary."[61] However, it appears likely that, in many cases, schools are asking for donations to prevent a reduction in the quality of the education that occurs during school hours, given concerns about cuts to teaching staff, and some of the schools involved citing this as their reason directly. Additionally, even if parents are not required to donate, many may feel pressure to do so, if they are concerned that the quality of their child's education will be otherwise affected.

Evidence on extra financial contributions

A Sutton Trust survey of teachers in 2018 shows that two in five (39%) of school leaders say that extra financial contributions requested by their school have increased in the last three years. This varies by type of school however, with 44% of school leaders in the schools with the lowest proportions of FSM reporting an increase in contributions, compared to 34% of leaders in the most disadvantaged schools. This is reflected by the perceptions of parents. Almost half (49%) of the parents surveyed with children in state schools reported having been asked for an extra financial contribution over the last year, with a further 7% reporting contributions over the past five years. While state schools are banned from asking for compulsory donations from parents, 31% of those who had been asked for a financial contribution felt that there would have been negative consequences for their child if they had not done so. Many parents clearly feel under substantial pressure to make these donations.

While a majority of teachers and school leaders indicate that extra contributions are used for one-off events or building projects, a quarter of secondary school senior leaders (26%) indicate that such contributions are being used for general school funding, 26% for IT or sports equipment, and 17% for basic classroom materials.

Notably, those in higher social classes were more likely to report such requests, with 59% of those in social group A reporting extra financial contributions in the past year, compared to 37% in social group D. Depending on the socioeconomic background of parents in the school, this is likely to have differential effects on school budgets.

The fact that more advantaged schools are asking for more money from parents is not however indicative of a particular lack of funds in those schools. The vast majority of state schools are facing significant budget constraints, with 72% of leaders reporting having cut teaching staff (teachers or assistants) over the past 12 months. Disadvantaged schools were just as, if not slightly more, likely to report having cut staff as the most advantaged schools, yet are less likely to ask parents for money. In fact, the most disadvantaged schools instead appear to be using other methods, including using pupil premium money designated for disadvantaged pupils to plug gaps in their general budget; 40% of school leaders in more

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[60] National Foundation for Educational Research. (2008) How are schools involving parents in school life?

[61] Channel 4 News (2018). Schools collect millions in donations as state funds stagnate. Available at: https://www.channel4.com/news/schools-collect-millions-in-donations-as-state-funding-tightens

disadvantaged schools report using pupil premium to plug gaps in their budget, compared to 30% in the most advantaged schools.

Figure 24: When was the last time you were asked to make an extra financial contribution to any of your children's schools?
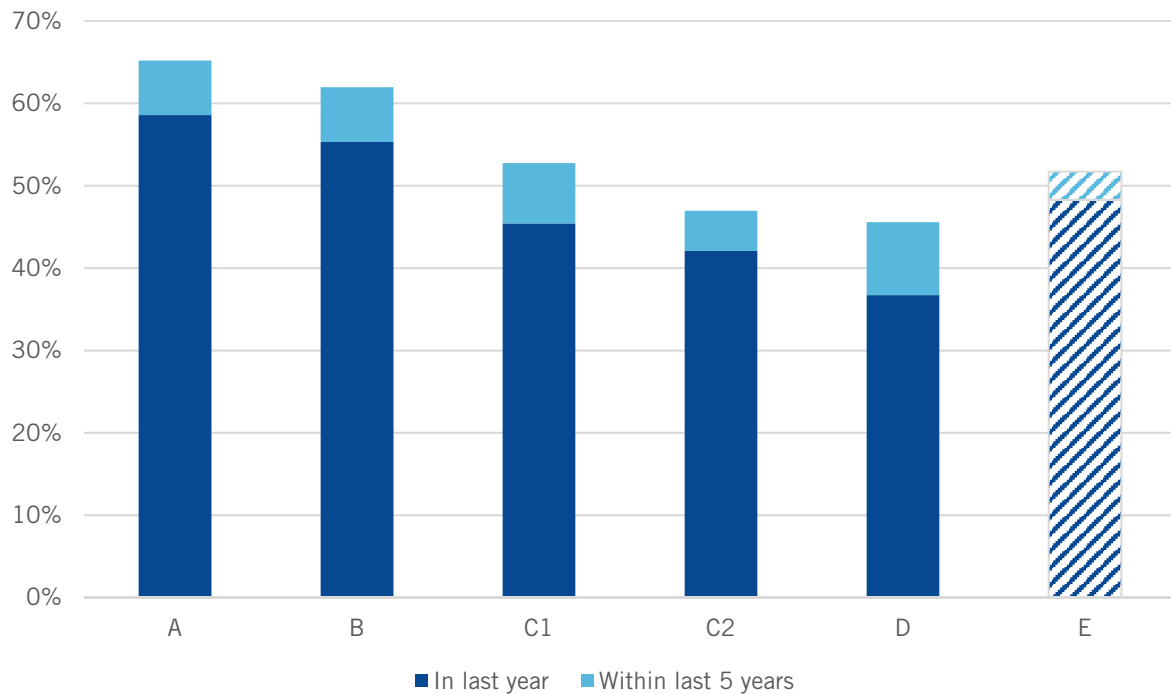
Thus schools located in better-off areas with more affluent families are able to draw on the financial resources of those parents, while more disadvantaged schools do not have this luxury. Instead, money designated for closing the attainment gap and improving the results of the most disadvantaged pupils are being used for regular running costs. This could have significant consequences for social inequalities in school.

9. Cultural capital

Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, behaviours and skills relevant to a specific culture or society. The term can be used to refer to specific knowledge, for example information which will be advantageous in education and access to the workplace, such as the issues addressed in Section 6. However, the concept can also include broader cultural awareness, including knowledge of the arts, politics or history, or having a strong grasp of language. Cultural capital is closely related to but not the same as social capital, which refers to the networks of people that someone has access to. As cultural capital can refer to such a large variety of different skills and knowledge, it can be difficult to measure, and studies use a variety of different methods to do so.

Cultural capital has been found in several studies to be associated with higher academic performance. For example, a study which measured several aspects of cultural capital, including cultural participation (defined as going to the museum or to musical/theatrical performance), reading habits (how many books the child has, how much they read), and participation in extracurricular activities found largely positive effects of higher levels of cultural capital on education attainment. However, high cultural capital was more strongly associated with higher educational attainment for young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and found to be less beneficial comparatively for students from less advantaged backgrounds.[62] Nonetheless, another study has found that cultural capital, as measured by the type and amount of books children read, the types of television programmes they watch, and whether they go to art galleries or museums, are positively related to their GCSE attainment, over and above the gain they would have from their parents' socioeconomic background alone.[63]

Additionally, having a wide range of experiences can help students directly with accessing higher education. As part of the university application process, students are required to write a personal statement, which the Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS) states should document "your ambitions and what interests you about the subject, course providers and higher education" and describe "what makes you suitable – any relevant skills, experience or achievements gained from education, work or other activities." Previous analysis of personal statements carried out for the Sutton Trust found that private school students are more likely to refer to cultural capital in their personal statements, and while it is not known how far this directly aids with their university applications, private school students are known to be accepted to university at higher rates than their state school counterparts.[64]

Extracurricular activities

Here, parents were asked about their child's participation in some of the activities which can help to build cultural capital, such as taking part in after school clubs, or visiting historical sites and other places of cultural interest.

Extracurricular classes and activities such as music lessons, language classes, sports and performing arts clubs can both help to build cultural capital, and also help to build essential life skills such as confidence, motivation, resilience and communication; skills which are associated with better academic

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[62] Jaeger, M. M. (2010) Does Cultural Capital Really Affect Academic Achievement?
[63] Sullivan, A. (2001) Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment.
[64] Wyness, G. (2017) Rules of the Game.

outcomes and prospects in the workplace.[65] Parents were asked how often their eldest child took part in extracurricular activities outside of school hours, results which varied considerably by social group. Just 45% of parents in group D reported that their child took part in such activities, compared to almost twice as many (84%) parents in group A (Figure 25).

Table 2. Which of the following out of school hours activities does your child currently take part in?

Activity	Percentage
A sports/ fitness club (e.g. football, rugby, cricket, rounders, netball, gymnastics etc.)	39%
Music classes (e.g. violin, guitar, piano etc.)	20%
A performing arts club (e.g. dancing, singing, acting etc.)	19%
A swimming club	19%
A science club	8%
A crafts club	7%
Choir	7%
A language club	5%
Other	12%
Don't know	1%
None	29%

Children may not take part in extracurricular activities for a variety of reasons. For example, for students in areas without good access to public transport, pupils may be unable to take part if their parents can't take them home after school transport has ended, something which may be more of a problem for parents who do shift work, or who do not own a car. Financial considerations can also be a problem, as many extracurricular activities will have costs associated. Indeed, parents in lower social groups were more likely to report their child took part in activities that didn't need to be paid for, 25% of those in group D, compared to 20% in group A; suggesting that the cost of some activities may be acting as a barrier for parents in lower socioeconomic groups (Figure 25).

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[65] Cullinane, C. Montacute, R. (2017). Life Lessons. Improving essential life skills for young people.

Figure 25: Does your child take part in after-school activities, and do you or your child's other parent/ guardian have to pay to take part? By social group
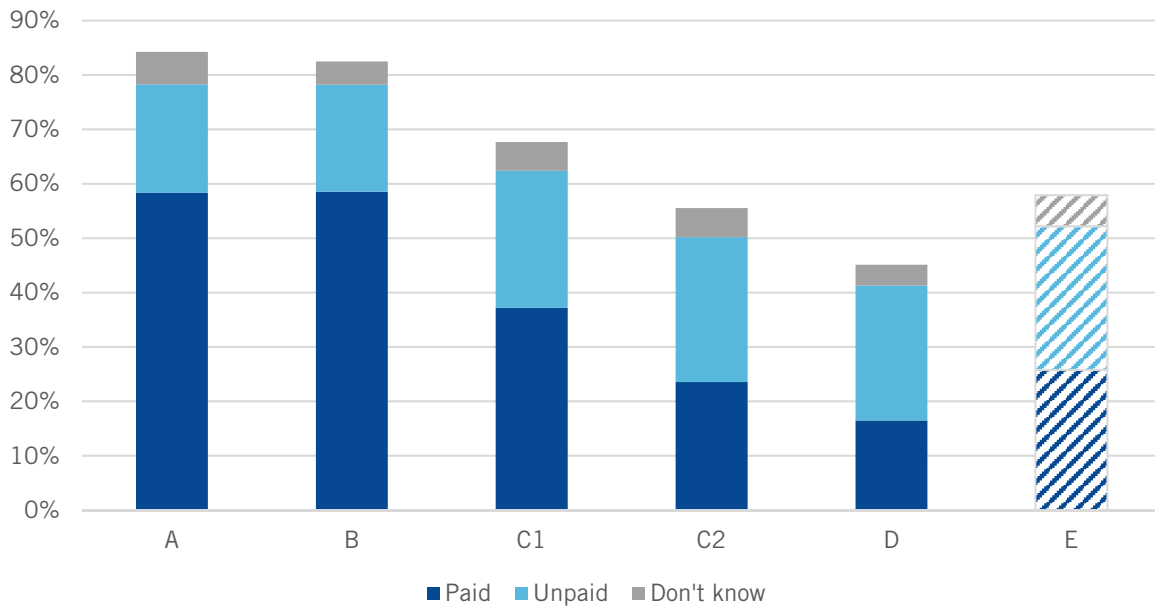
As well as more likely to take part in activities, children with parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were likely to take part in a higher number of activities. 73% of parents in group A reported 1 to 3 regular activities, and a further 10% reported 4 or more. In comparison, just 43% of parents in social group D reported 1-3 activities, with no parents in this group reporting four or more. 57% of parents in group D said their child took part in no activities at all, compared to just 17% of parents in group A (Figure 26).

Figure 26: How many activities out of school hours does your child take part in?
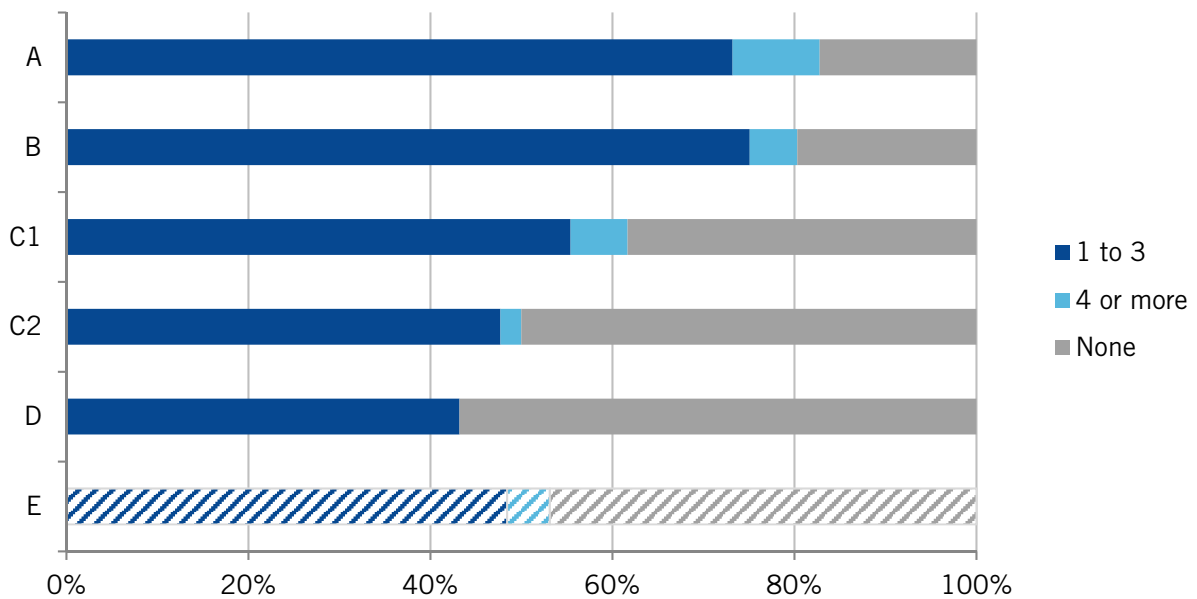
Cultural visits

Taking children on cultural visits can also help them to build cultural capital. Here, parents were asked whether they had taken their oldest school-aged child to a museum or gallery; play, concert or other performance; or to a historic site (such as a castle or a stately home) in the last six months. Parents were asked not to include any trips their children had taken which were run by their school, but to only include trips they had taken their children on themselves.

Parents from higher social groups were more likely to have taken their children on cultural visits, and to do so more often. Indeed, parents from higher social groups were more likely to take their children on all of the types of cultural visits asked about in this survey. Advantaged parents were more likely to have taken their child to visit a museum or gallery, with 85% of parents in group A having done so at least once in the last six months, in contrast to only 55% of the parents in group D (Figure 27).

Figure 27: In the last six months, how many times have you/your child's other parent/guardian taken your child to a museum or gallery?
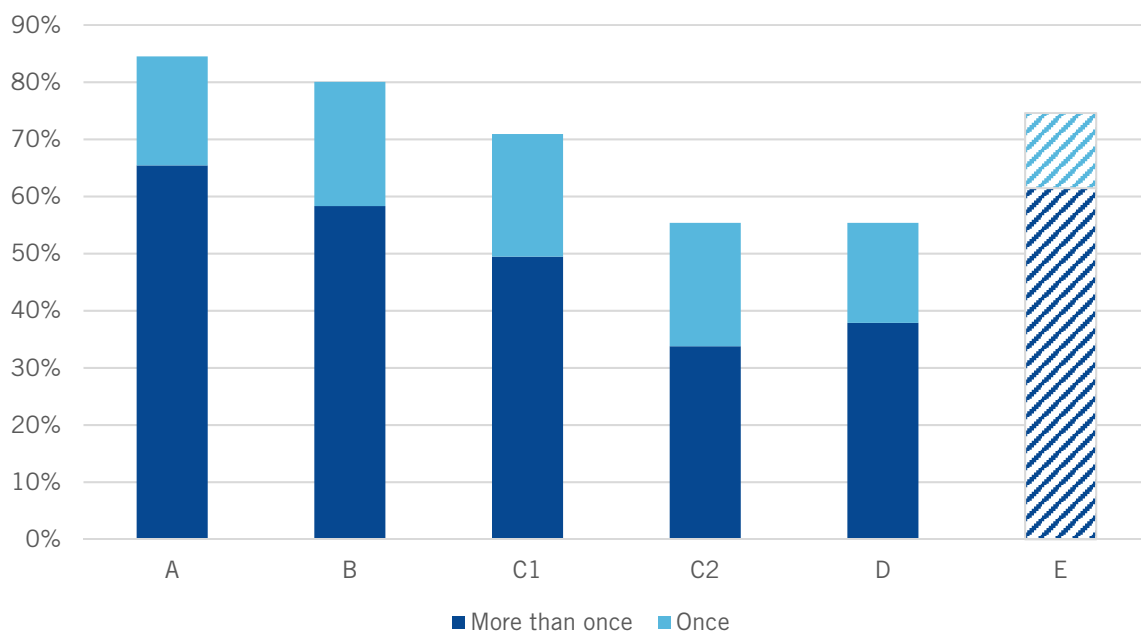

Similarly, parents from group A were also much more likely to take their children to a play or concert, with 73% of parents in this group saying they had done so in the last 6 months, compared to just 38% of parents in group D (Figure 28). It is notable that the differences between classes is greater for attendance at plays and concerts, which likely need to be paid for, than museums or galleries, where entrance is often free.

Figure 28: In the last six months, how many times have you/your child's other parent/guardian taken your child to a play, concert or other live performance?
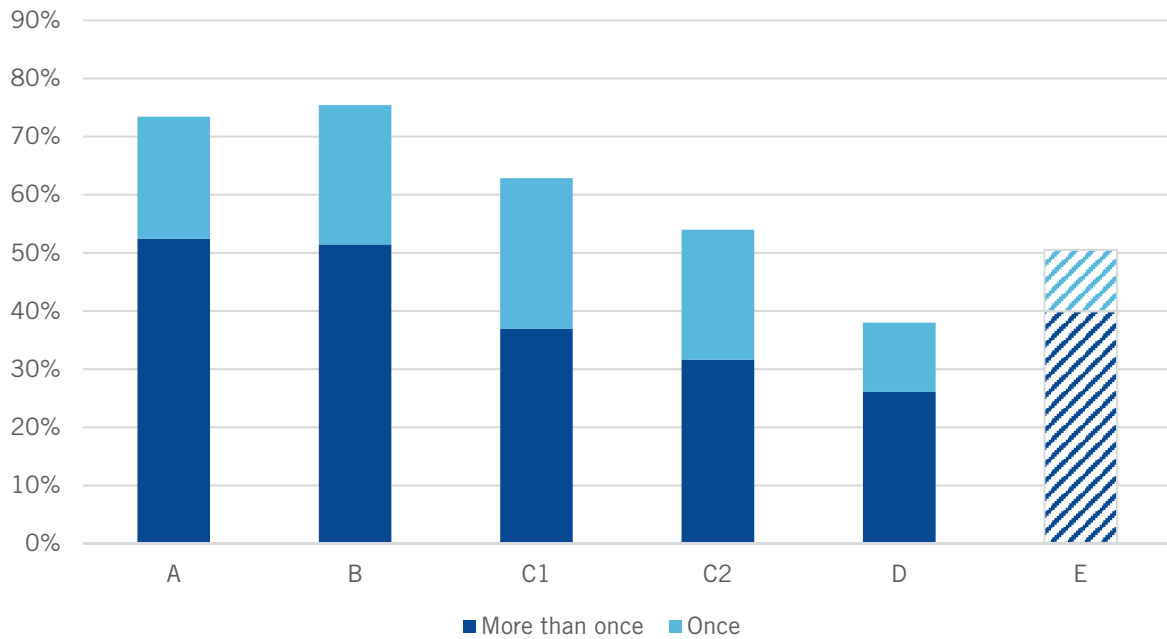
Parental trips to historical sites was also divided by social class, although the difference was smaller than for the other cultural activities asked about here. 86% of parents from social group A had taken their child to a historical site at least once in the last six months, but only 59% of parents in group D had done so (Figure 29).

Figure 29: In the last six months, how many times have you/your child's other parent/guardian taken your child to a historical site?
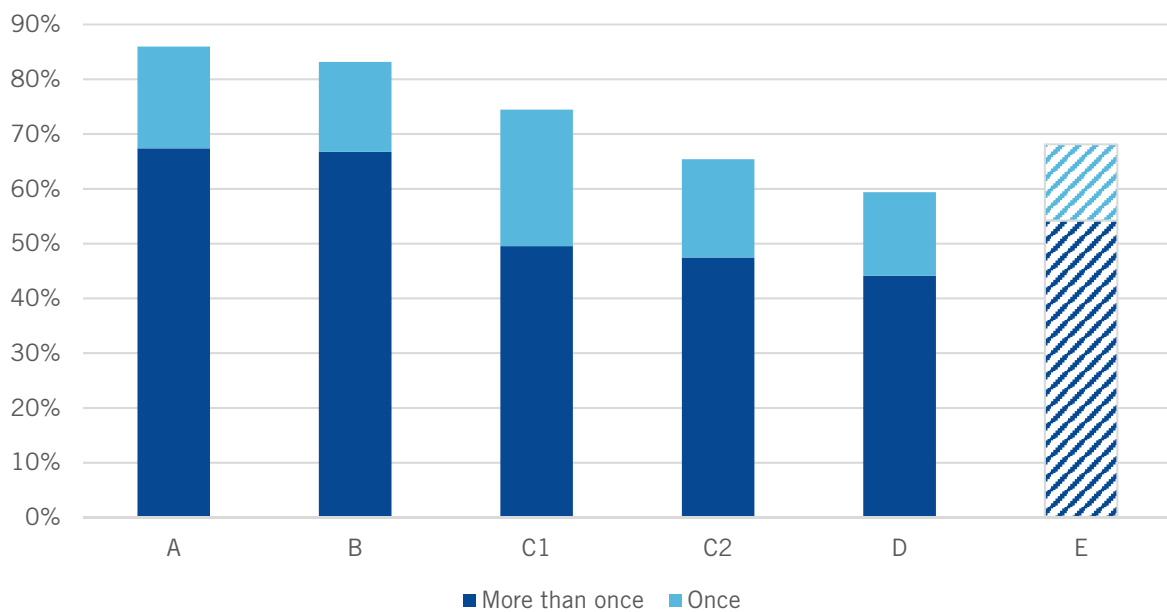

Across the three sets of activities, it is noticeable that reported participation has risen since 2013, though much of these rises are among the more middle class groups.

Computers and internet access

Parents were also asked about the access their children have to their own smartphones, which can be a way for children to access information and resources. Over half (56%) of respondents reported that their child owned their own smartphone. While this was not significantly related to class background, it is notable that the largest growth in parents reporting their children have their own smartphone since the last iteration of this report in 2013 was among parents from lower socioeconomic classes. In group D, the proportion of parents reporting their child had their own smartphone went from 36% in 2013 to 62% in 2018 (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Percentage of respondents in social group who reported their child owns their own smartphone
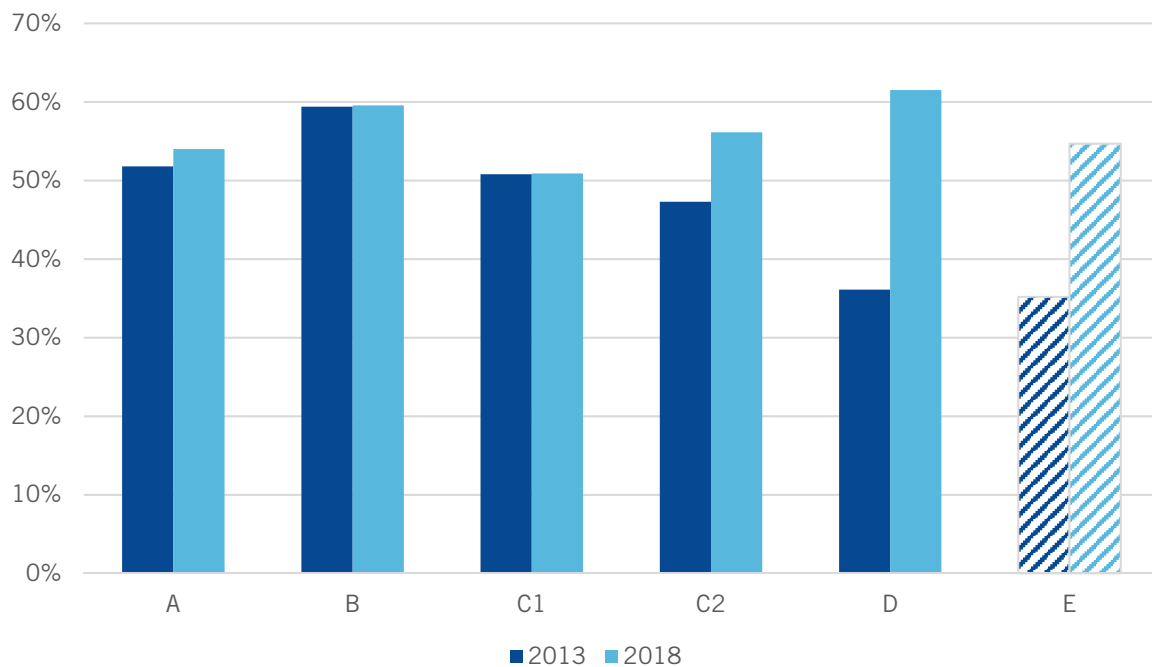
10. Discussion

Parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds want to do the best for their children. However, it is clear that parents from higher socioeconomic groups have considerably greater financial and cultural resources with which to do so. Findings in this report demonstrate that the decisions, advice and support parents can give their children are heavily stratified along socioeconomic lines; limiting the ability of parents without money, networks or knowledge to give their children the best possible chance of succeeding in the educational system.

Here, the largest social differences found in parental behaviours were those in which finance was a limiting factor. For many children, the income of their parents is likely to have a substantial impact on several parts of their education, including where they go to school, whether they receive private tuition, and if they can access extracurricular activities. However, the cultural capital of parents can also play an important role; from how well parents understand the relevant grades and measures of success in schooling, to their confidence offering advice on apprenticeship and university options after school; all of which were found here to be influenced by socioeconomic status.

School admissions

School admissions in the state sector are substantially influenced by parents' financial resources, with better-off parents more likely to move home to secure a place in a good school, employ private tutors to prepare their children for school entrance tests, or even engage in rule-breaking behaviour. The only way to limit the effect many of these strategies have on less well-off families is to alter the school admissions process, so that distance to school is no longer the most important element of admissions criteria. The Sutton Trust's series of reports on state school admissions *Selective Comprehensives*, and the in-depth report, *Ballots and Banding*,[66] make the case for the introduction of a system using either random allocation ballots or pre-entry banding examinations which guarantee places for applicants from across the ability spectrum. This report highlights the need for more schools and local authorities, especially in urban areas where children can travel to multiple schools, to introduce such systems to limit the power that parents' financial resources can have on school admissions. As increasing numbers of academies and free schools act as their own admissions authorities, this requires concerted and collaborative effort on a local level to achieve.

However, there are also other steps high performing schools can take to improve the access of disadvantaged students, and to diversify the socioeconomic make-up of schools across the country. The School Admissions Code currently allows for students who are eligible for the pupil premium to be given priority in schools' admissions.[67] This could supersede distance to school as an oversubscription criterion and help to reduce the impact of parental finance on school admissions. Disadvantaged pupils are likely to benefit from such a policy, as it could help to spread out the proportion of such students. Schools with high proportions of disadvantaged students face a variety of issues, including being less likely to have positive Ofsted ratings and score highly in league tables;[68] and having lower proportions of specialist science[69] and maths[70] teachers.

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[66] West, A., Hind, A., Noden, P. (2014) Ballots and Banding.
[67] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2
[68] Hutchinson, J. Education Policy Institute. (2016). *School inspection in England: Is there room to improve?*
[69] Kirby, P. & Cullinane, C. (2017) Science Shortfall.
[70] Allen, R. & Sims, S. (2018) How do shortages of maths teachers affect the within-school allocation of maths teachers to pupils?

Also important in tackling the disparity in school admissions is by improving the information available to parents, as some of the disparities in school attendance are due to the choices of parents themselves. Improved outreach and information for parents is key to reducing barriers to accessing better schools, in particular concerning travel costs, cited by many working class parents in this study. The right of children eligible for free school meals to free transport to a choice of three schools within six miles of their home (up to 15 for faith schools) in particular should be widely emphasised. Social differences in the understanding of league table measures, along with the generally low understanding of Progress 8, are also concerning. While the new measures may be more useful from a research or bureaucratic accountability perspective, they are not designed with easy comprehension to the layman in mind, resulting in their being less accessible to many parents and likely to exacerbate information inequalities.

Previous governments have attempted to influence choices; for example, 'school choice advisers' were introduced by the New Labour government to offer advice and encourage disadvantaged families to apply to high performing schools. However, a previous analysis of their effectiveness found that while they did help some parents, the proportion of families helped was small, and therefore unlikely to make a significant impact on the schools which disadvantaged students attend.[71] The government should trial and robustly evaluate further ways to improve the access that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds have to information to facilitate informed choice over their child's education, for example by working with existing community groups, consumer agencies and businesses embedded in disadvantaged communities. King's College London and Citizens UK have trialled a 'community organising' approach to widening participation to higher education through working with parents.[72]

Support during school

Findings in this report demonstrate that parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are considerably more likely to pay for private tuition, which can have an effect throughout their children's time in school. Indeed, research has found that when affluent parents don't understand homework themselves, they use private tutors to fill the gaps. With children from more deprived backgrounds less likely to receive help with their homework from family members, this is compounded by the use of private tuition. Private tutoring can also have a substantial impact on school admissions tests, of particular concern given governmental plans for the expansion of grammar school places.[73] To level the playing field, more one to one tuition needs to be made available to less well-off children in schools, potentially through a means-tested voucher system. Additionally, schools could establish 'homework clubs' for disadvantaged students, to encourage and support them to engage in self-directed study, and vouchers could also be provided to ensure all young people can take part in extracurricular activities. These schemes could be provided using pupil premium funding.

In this study, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were also found to be considerably less likely to take on a representative or supportive role in their child's school, such as a school governor or member of a PTA. Due to the professional skills - such as accountancy - required for many school governor positions, which parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have, it is

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[71] Coldron, J., Cripps, C., Shipton, L., Stiell, B. (2009) Fair school admissions: what is the contribution of the choice advice initiative.

[72] Citizens UK. Community Organising for better access to higher education. Available at: http://www.citizensuk.org/parent_power_community_organising (Accessed 11th September 2018)

[73] Jerrim, J. and Sims, S. (2018). Why do so few low and middle-income children attend a grammar school? New evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study. UCL Institute of Education and Education Datalab.

potentially difficult to significantly alter the makeup of these boards. However, this limitation could be taken into account by school governance boards, who should be aware of their likely biases and work to engage with parents from all backgrounds. Additionally, given that schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students are less likely to have PTAs (which may help to explain the disparity in PTA involvement by social class observed in this report) there is significant scope for increasing the involvement of parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in schools. This could be achieved by having an active drive to support and set up PTAs in these schools. All schools should seek to have a wide range of parents represented, and to be as open as possible for parents to raise concerns in more informal settings, for example with regular coffee mornings with teachers at the school.

The engagement parents have with their child's education can be vital and has been consistently associated with success at school. However, evidence on how best to improve the attainment of pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, by increasing parental engagement is mixed. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) have tested several interventions on parental engagement; and found promising results in a trial using text messages, for example to inform parents of upcoming exams; an intervention which is also relatively cheap to implement. Other ways to try to increase parental engagement include having a key member of staff to support parental engagement, such as a specialist community teacher, or a home/school liaison teacher who can work with families.[74]

Educational establishments and government also have an important role in improving the information and advice that students have access to on their options when they leave school. Many parents, and especially those who have had lower levels of education themselves, do not feel confident advising their children on either university or on apprenticeships. The government needs to ensure that every young person has access to high quality information on university choices and apprenticeships through their school or college, so that students don't lose out if their parents are unable to provide this advice themselves.

The coalition government placed a legal duty on schools and colleges to provide careers guidance, and set up the Careers and Enterprise Company in 2015 to help schools and colleges work together with employers to provide this guidance to young people.[75] However, MPs have raised concerns about the evidence the company has to demonstrate its impact and effectiveness.[76] It's vital that young people, in particular those from less-well off backgrounds, should have a guaranteed level of careers advice from professional, impartial advisors.

Financial contributions

The growing reports of additional financial contributions sought by schools in the state sector is a concerning development. Parents, particularly those from less well-off backgrounds, are concerned about the rising costs of school, but what is also clear is that these contributions are often being sought by schools with the wealthiest catchment areas. This leads to two potential worrying consequences: increased segregation through working class parents' worries about being pressured by certain types of

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[74] Education Endowment Foundation. Parental Engagement. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement
[75] Gov.uk. New careers and enterprise company for schools. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-careers-and-enterprise-company-for-schools
[76] TES. (2018) Careers and Enterprise Company under fire from MPs. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/careers-and-enterprise-company-under-fire-mps

school to make extra payments for uniforms from designated suppliers[77] or donations for school facilities; and also the exacerbation of resource inequities between schools, as those with the most affluent parents will be able to raise more money than those in more deprived areas.

The pressure on school budgets is set to continue. According to the IFS, school funding will be frozen in cash terms between 2015-16 and 2019-20, which in real terms equates to a cut in funding of 6.5%.[78] All schools must be adequately resourced, and pupil premium funding must be secured and used for its designated purpose of closing attainment gaps by targeting disadvantaged pupils, rather than to plug school funding gaps elsewhere.

Additionally, the Sutton Trust have raised concerns that the new National Funding Formula does not do enough to address the 'double disadvantage' faced by disadvantaged pupils living in deprived areas.[79] Given these schools are less likely to be able to raise funds by parental contributions, it is particularly pressing that the government ensures such schools do not lose out in any changes to the funding system.

In the context of high levels of social inequality outside school gates and the natural desire of all parents to do the best for their children, schools undoubtedly face an uphill battle. Schools cannot be expected to rectify social problems and deep inequalities that begin from birth. But education has huge power to provide opportunity, and if the purpose of the education system is to give children the best chance of a start in life, then it is imperative that it does what it can to mitigate those inequalities. If a level playing field remains out of reach, then it still possible to better empower those who need it most.

About the report

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[77] BBC news (2015) School uniform prices raised by supplier contracts, says CMA. Available at:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-34537127
[78] Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2017). The short- and long-run impact of the national funding formula for schools in England.
[79] Sutton Trust. New school proposals will not address the 'double disadvantage' faced by poor pupils in deprived areas. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/new-school-funding-proposals-will-not-address-the-double-disadvantage-faced-by-poorer-pupils-in-deprived-areas/

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