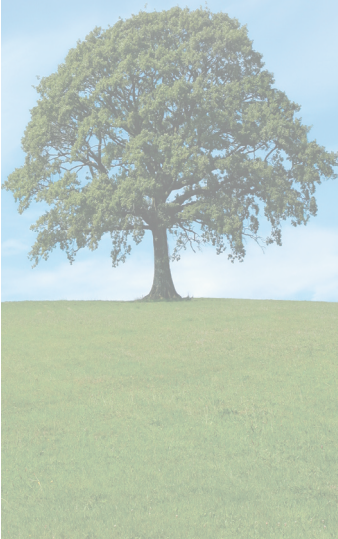




How was it for you?

Pupil perceptions of the primary curriculum

For three years between 2008 and 2010, CUREE surveyed pupils in primary and secondary schools about their experiences of the curriculum. In 2010, over 4000 primary pupils in 65 schools responded. In addition, we conducted a number of focus groups with pupils from whom we gathered deeper, more textured data to round out and help explain the survey analysis. This report summarises their views.



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How was it for you?

Pupil perceptions of the primary curriculum

Introduction

1. For three years between 2008 and 2010, CUREE surveyed pupils in primary and secondary schools about their experiences of the curriculum. In 2010, over 4000 primary pupils in 65 schools responded. In addition, we conducted a number of focus groups with pupils from whom we gathered deeper, more textured data to round out and help explain the survey analysis. This report summarises their views.
2. The schools and the pupils in them were drawn from all regions of England and were very representative of schools generally in terms of locality, size, gender balance and school performance (as measured by Contextual Value Added). The schools were all co-educational and in the state sector. You can find more information about the sample and the process at the end of the report

Main findings

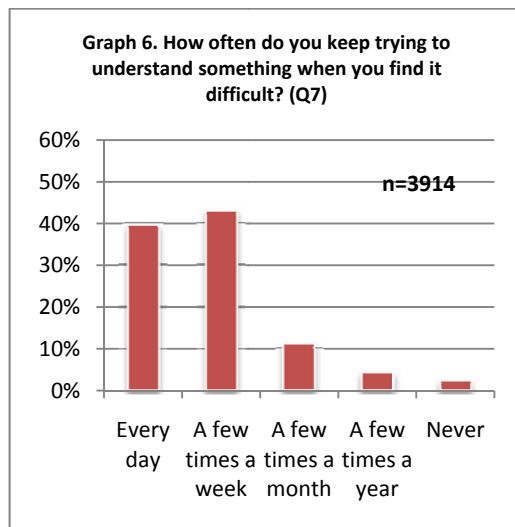
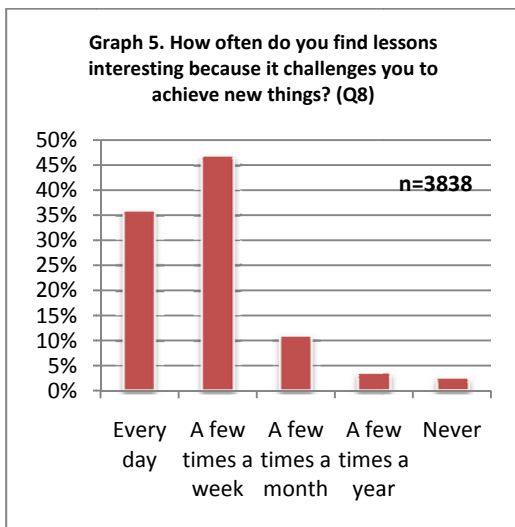
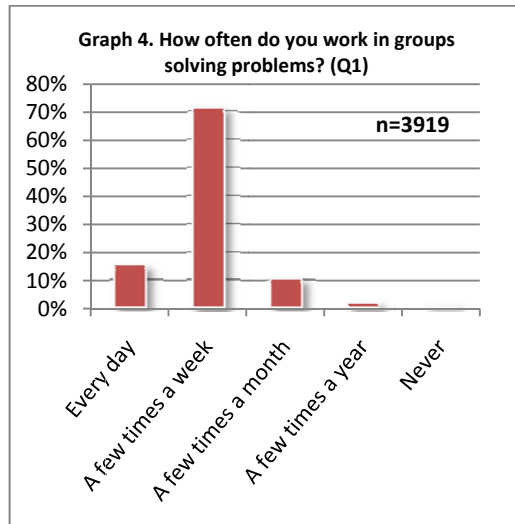
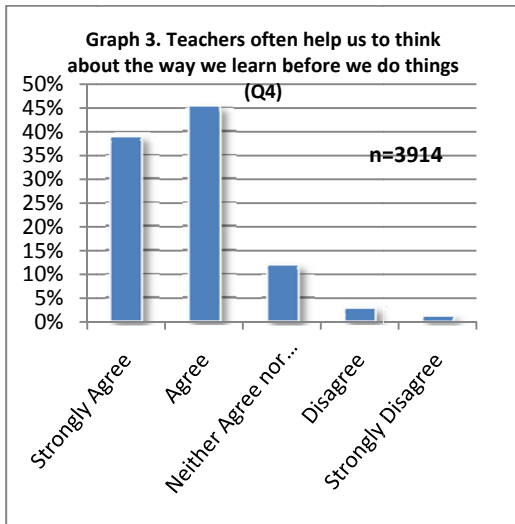
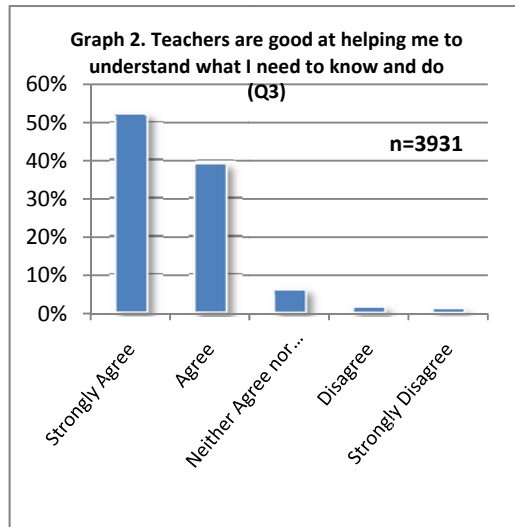
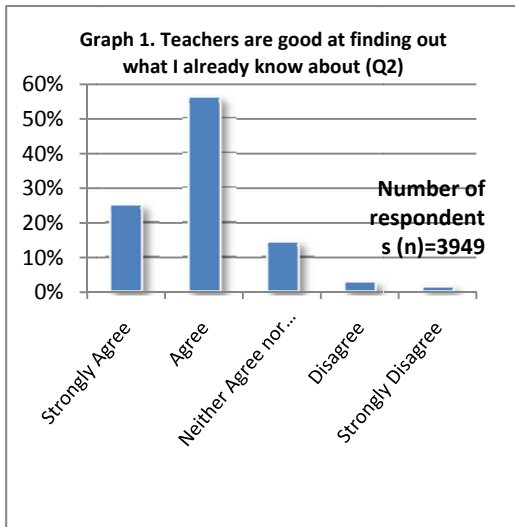
3. The concept of ‘the curriculum’ we were working with was an inclusive one; “the entire planned learning experience”. Our survey questions asked about what pupils learned and how they were taught it; how much they could influence or choose their experiences; and how their school experiences related to home life. These themes are reported below in three groupings:
 - challenge and aspiration
 - influence, flexibility and choice
 - Lifestyles and motivational influences
4. The headline message is that most primary pupils were broadly positive about their experiences as school but issues of interest or concern arose for a minority – sometimes a substantial minority. Most of this report examines those issues

Challenge and aspiration

5. The positives

- Most learners were generally positive about their curriculum experiences. The results in 2010, though generally consistent with previous years’ surveys, show significant increases in learner ‘approval’ ratings in several areas (but note the caution about the changes in question format).
- Over 80% of primary learners agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers understood their starting points, helped them to understand what they needed to know, and to understand how they learned (graphs 1, 2, 3)
- The use of group work seems to be firmly embedded in curriculum delivery (graph 4).
- Active and varied learning practices seem to be widespread.
- A substantial majority of primary and secondary learners said that they were frequently challenged to achieve new things in lessons (graph 5).

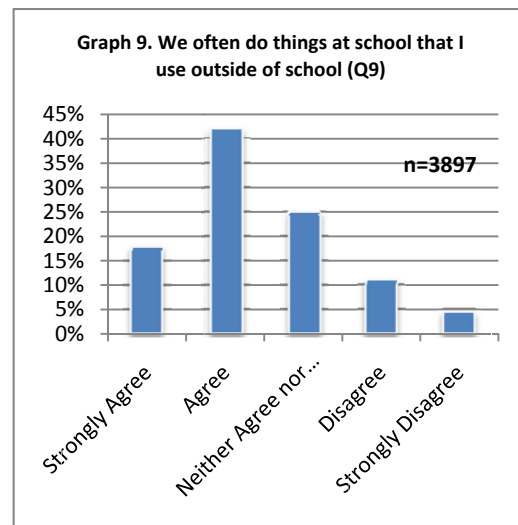
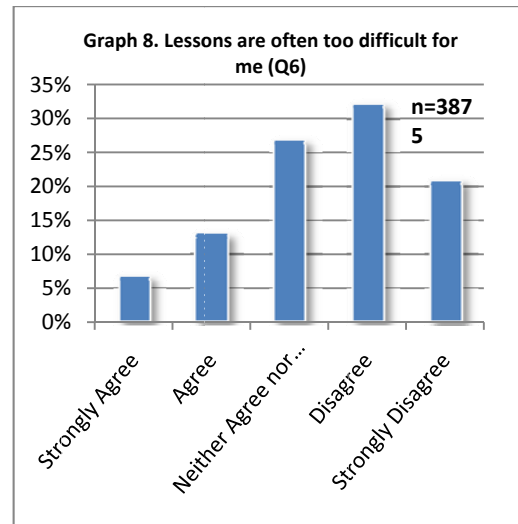
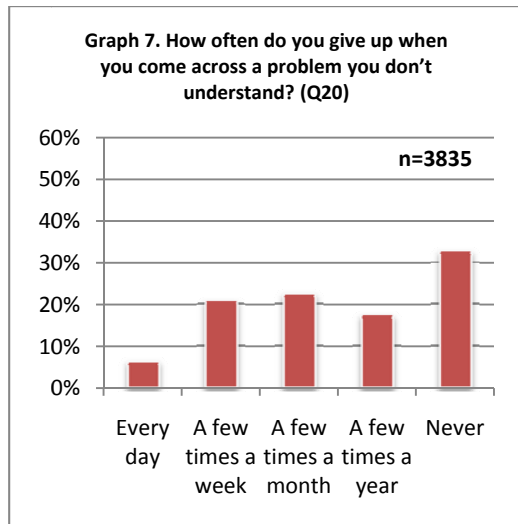
- A similar proportion said that they were persistent in trying to understand something difficult (graph 6).



Note: the blue columns denote 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' responses, the red columns denote 'every day' to 'never' responses, and the purple columns denote responses to a range of statements.

6. The issues

- Primary learners continued to be more positive than secondary learners about school experiences and the gap appears to have widened in some areas (for instance friends' expectations that they will do well at school).
- A third of primary learners said they never gave up trying to solve something they didn't understand (graph 7).



- Whilst there was a generally positive picture about active and varied learning practices, there remained 10-15% of learners in the primary phase who said these practices happened rarely or never.
- When exploring learner responses to challenge we found that a small proportion of learners (around 15%) said that they found lessons too difficult (graph 8). Around a quarter said they found them neither too hard nor too easy but a significant proportion (around 20%) *strongly disagreed* that lessons were often too difficult for them. This may suggest that they found lessons too easy, although it could just mean they found lessons appropriately difficult.
- There is an apparent correlation between learners' assessment of difficulty and their self-reported attainment levels – those reporting higher attainment were less likely to say that they found lessons too difficult. This result is superficially plausible and, if true, might indicate poor differentiation by some teachers - otherwise all learners, regardless of

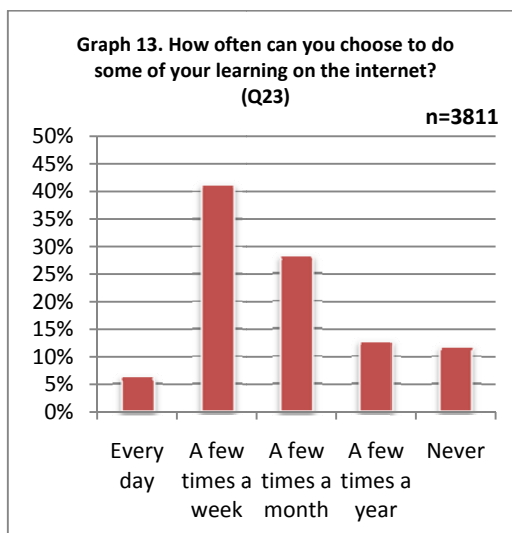
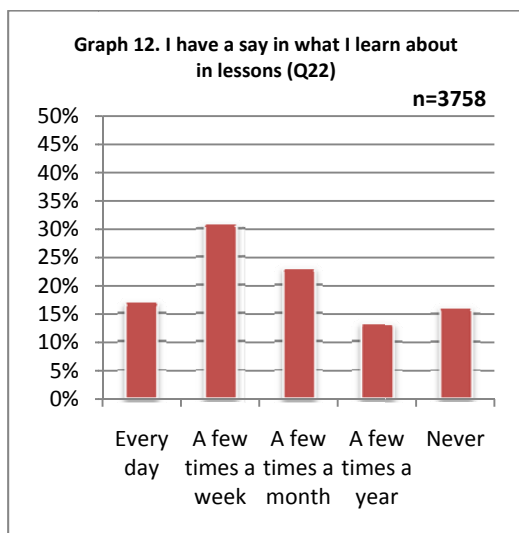
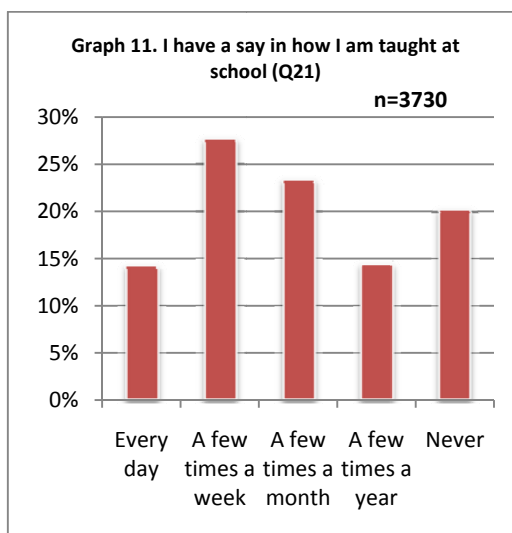
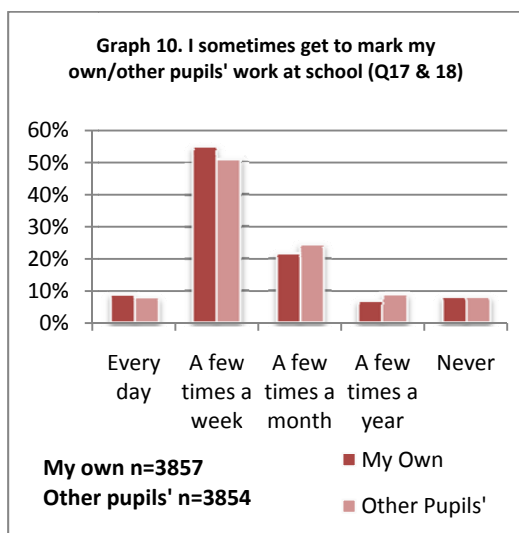
attainment, would find their lessons equally challenging. Note that the attainment information is self-reported and would, in most cases, be based on internal formative assessment. The results should be interpreted cautiously.

- Learners were less positive about the relationship between school work and life outside school. Nearly 15% of primary learners said this was not a feature of their experience (graph 9).

Influence, flexibility and choice

7. The positives

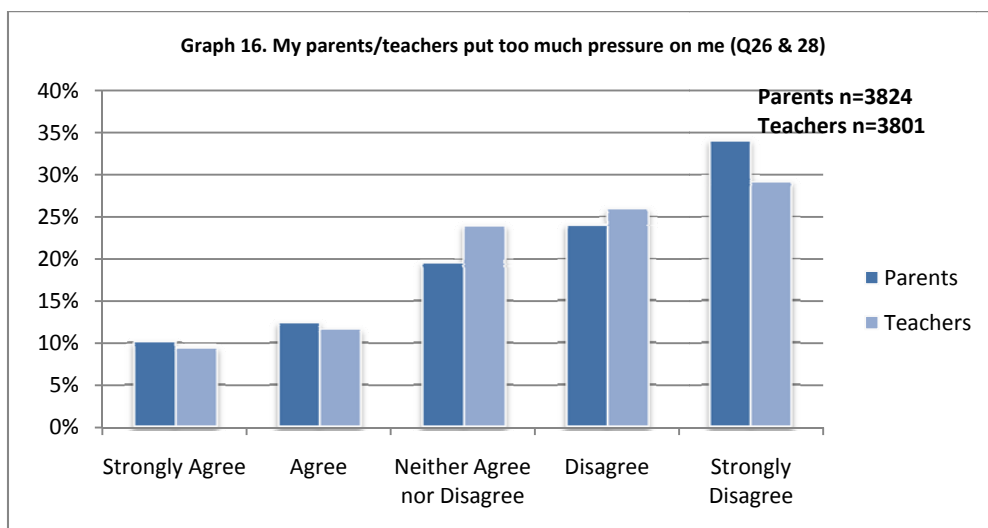
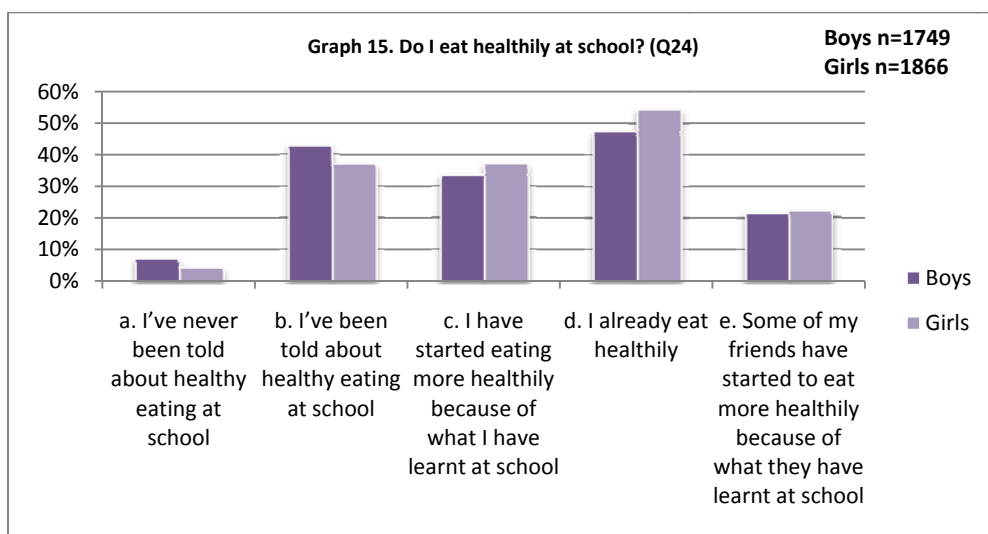
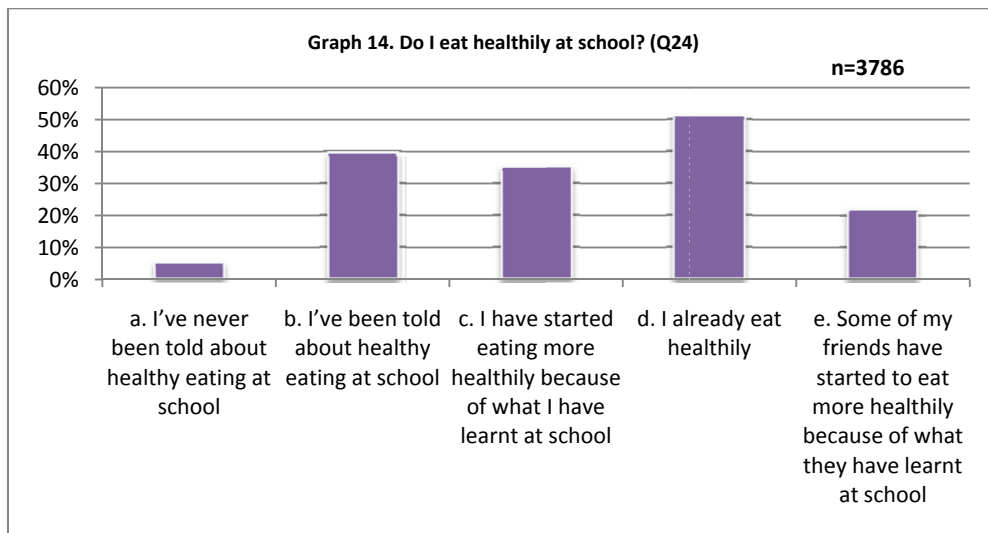
- Our data suggest that that peer and self-marking is now widespread in the primary phase (graph 10).
- Nearly half of primary learners say that they frequently (every day or several times a week) get some say in what and how they learn (graphs 11 and 12).
- Nearly half of primary learners say that they frequently (every day or several times a week) use the internet for learning (graph 13).



Lifestyles and motivational influences

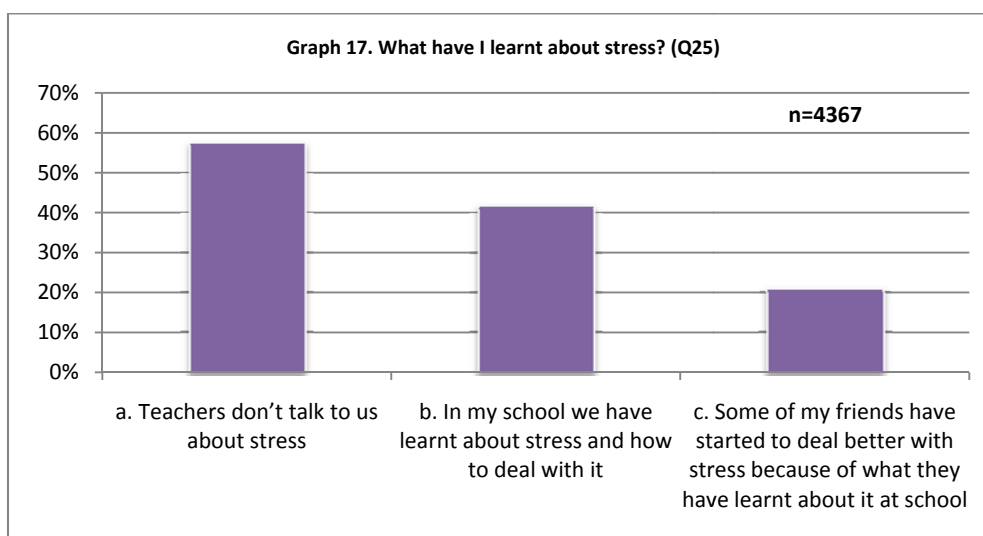
8. The positives

- Learners said they were well informed about healthy eating (graphs 14 and 15).
- Around one third of secondary learners feel little or no pressure from teachers and an even larger proportion (nearly half) felt the same about pressure from home (graph 16). No correlation was found between self-reported attainment and perceptions of pressure.



9. The issues

- Learners said they were less well informed about dealing with stress (graph 17).
- The significant minority (20-30%) of primary learners feeling under no pressure from home or school (graph 16) could suggest that they are insufficiently stretched by their curriculum experience. There was an inverse correlation between self-reported levels of attainment in reading and writing and perceptions of pressure. This might suggest poor differentiation in their teaching.
- In focus groups learners expected, and thought it quite normal, to be under pressure from their teachers and parents/carers but they were critical of the form the pressure from teachers sometimes took. The amount and usefulness of homework was singled out for criticism as was preparation for tests.



Key facts about the 2010 sample and process

- This was an online survey of primary learners conducted in January and February 2010. We achieved around 4100 responses from 65 primary schools¹. The surveyed schools were drawn from all regions of England and were broadly representative in terms of locality, size (but with a slight skew towards larger schools) and performance (as measured by Contextual Value Added ratings). All of our sample schools were drawn from the state sector and were co-educational. The respondents were broadly representative of the school population in England in terms of gender but, this year, appeared to have a larger proportion of those identifying themselves as other than White British than across the school system as a whole².
- In addition to the surveys, we conducted nine focus groups with primary learners. The focus groups allowed us to explore the issues raised in the survey more qualitatively, to add depth and 'colour' to the survey responses. We also gathered responses from some young people who could not have participated in a survey – specifically those excluded or at risk of exclusion. Though this last group probably included a number of young people who would be considered 'vulnerable' (e.g. travellers, cared for children), the survey methods did not

¹ CUREE and University of Wolverhampton (2010) *QCDA Building the evidence base student data – final report*

² A substantial number of respondents withheld ethnicity information. See the Methodology section for a fuller explanation.

generally yield sufficient appropriate data to target or analyse results for vulnerable groups. Generally, though the focus groups included members drawn from the full range of age, geographic distribution, gender and ethnicity of the target school population, they were not in any numerical sense 'representative' of that population. For this reason, and the fact that the total sample size was very small, focus group data have been used to illuminate, extend and explain survey data rather than subjected to quantitative analysis themselves.

- All graphs are displayed as percentages which enables us to show the results on a common scale. The number of respondents for each question is also clearly shown on the graph (as 'n= xxx').