



*Building the  
Evidence Base  
Strand 1  
Student Data  
Final Report*



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



# Building the Evidence Base – Strand 1

## Student data

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### Final report

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## Introduction and summary

This is the final report of the Student Data element of Strand 1 of the Building the Evidence Base project. This strand of the project set out to capture student<sup>1</sup> feedback on their experience of the curriculum. The primary method used was a web-based survey between February and April 2008. This was supported by a number of focus groups which were used a) to explore issues which could not effectively be dealt with via a survey; b) explore in greater depth interesting or ambiguous findings from the survey; and c) draw out the views of some students who were unlikely to participate in the survey.

This report summarises and describes the data and illustrates them graphically. A separate document shows the results in full.

These data capture the perceptions of a large and reasonably representative group of students at a point in time (Spring/Summer 2008). They tell us something about how they felt about some aspects of their school experience – and we have tried throughout to report the results in terms of students' 'thoughts', 'comments', 'feelings'. They do not, of course, present a picture of how the curriculum actually was. We believe these data help QCA exercise its curriculum monitoring role in 'taking the pulse' of the system.

We are hesitant to draw any substantial conclusions from a survey without triangulating evidence. With that caveat, we think the data suggest:

- no great surprises about the school system in England, at least as revealed by asking students;
- a majority (but sometimes a bare majority) of students in both primary and secondary phases feel positive about most aspects of the curriculum – at least those that we asked them about;
- primary pupils were generally more satisfied with their school experience than their secondary counterparts;
- there were no significant variations in satisfaction by gender, ethnicity or attainment levels;
- older secondary students wanted more influence over and choice about their curriculum experience than a) they felt they got, and b) younger students; and
- there are substantial minorities who felt less positive about some aspects of learning. These are highlighted below and noted at appropriate points in the report.

Within this broad message of overall satisfaction with the curriculum diet, some interesting minority concerns do surface:

- more students (primary and secondary) feel that their lessons are too easy than feel they are too hard;

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, we have used the term "student" throughout to refer to both primary pupils and secondary students.

- secondary students thought that maths was both the hardest and third easiest subject. Focus group respondents were generally critical of the teaching of maths whilst also recognising the importance of the subject;
- apart from maths, there was no strong correlation, in the perceptions of these students, between the subject and the manner of its teaching;
- a number of the features of the secondary curriculum reforms being implemented formally in September 2008 are already experienced by significant numbers of students;
- student responses suggest that drugs, alcohol and healthy eating education is well established in both primary and secondary schools. But secondary students – at least those who participated in our focus groups – were more influenced by the sight of overweight people on television and on the street than by school activities;
- students reported that dealing with stress was the least developed aspect of lifestyle and personal wellbeing education;
- secondary schools were reported as more pressured environments than primary ones though parental expectations were high in both. Substantial minorities of students felt that they were under too *little* pressure from teachers or parents, although parents (at 24.5%) did worse than teachers (17%)<sup>2</sup>; and
- there were few significant differences in responses when examined by gender or Key Stage level. Age had a bigger impact – but still not a very big one – particularly in the areas of choice and autonomy.

## The sample and demographic data

Our main target group was secondary school students. We wanted, but had no great expectations of getting, a reasonable number of older primary students too. Our targets were 1200 responses across at least 20 schools. Happily we were able to beat these targets by a substantial margin. A total of 2819 survey responses were received split approximately 2:1 between the secondary and primary phases (secondary = 1807; primary = 1012). A total of 66 schools participated (37 = primary; 29 = secondary). See appendix 1.

Logistical and ethical issues limited the focus groups to secondary students only. We conducted 8 focus groups in total, of which three were specifically exploring 14 – 19 and diploma issues and two were conducted with students in pupil referral units. (See appendix 16 for focus group report).

We did not attempt to stratify the sample at the response stage, expecting to extract from the total a representative sub-set. In practice, when we tested the total secondary sample for its match with the English school population, we found that it was very close in terms of gender, disadvantage, student achievement and value added. The only significant discrepancy was school size where the mean for secondary schools in England is 728 and our sample is 925. On ethnicity, the survey sample was close to the national average for the overall proportion of ethnic minority students but appeared to be

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<sup>2</sup> selecting the response ‘my parents don’t put enough pressure on me’.



underrepresented in Asian and black students and overrepresented in the ‘other’ category. This could, however, simply be the consequence of students choosing to be non-specific in their replies to this question. See appendix 2.

## The questions

The survey (separate primary and secondary) asked approximately 100 questions in 4 domains chosen to inform QCA’s curriculum priorities:

- 1. challenge and inspiration:**
  - students’ current experience of learning;
  - what they would like in the future;
- 2. flexibility and choice:**
  - the characteristics of particular subject teaching;
  - student autonomy and influence over their learning;
- 3. student lifestyles and health;**
- 4. motivational influences on students.**

The primary survey (appendix 17) had slightly fewer questions (omitting 3. above). The secondary survey (appendix 18) had an additional separate section for 14+ students asking questions around the 14-19 reforms with a specific focus on the Diploma. The 14-19 specific elements of the student data are reported separately.

The survey was designed to:

- be quick and easy to complete (not more than 20 minutes);
- have questions which looked for impressions, opinions and feelings rather than statements of fact (which were unverifiable);
- have the fewest possible free text answers;
- make extensive use of lists of possible answers (e.g. a list of subjects); and
- be delivered entirely online.

A large proportion of the questions were posed as bi-polar (sometimes called ‘semantic differential’) choices with students asked to choose either pole or a position in between. This was explained as follows:

**How to fill in the survey**

Most of the questions ask you to move a slider towards one of two choices to reflect your view.

You can move the slider to different places on the scale.

You can move it to the end of the scale, or part of the way towards one of the two options.



Figure 1

To avoid systematic bias or the accidental imposition of a particular value position, some questions were ‘reversed’ e.g. with the ‘good’ or ‘positive’ answer being on the right of the range, such as:

Figure 2



The questionnaire was field tested (first in paper format and again in its online form) with three groups of students for language register, ease of understanding of the questions and clarity of explanation.

A large number of schools were approached to encourage and support their students to participate. Happily many did (and others were very interested but were prevented by logistical problems).

The bipolar form of question adds a complication when trying to represent the data graphically. For simplicity and economy of space in this report, the charts give only one (the left side) of each pair of statements. Each line represents the percentage of responses at each of 5 positions away from the left hand statement. The central one is the neutral or balanced response which is sometimes a significant answer in its own right (for instance to the question ‘are your lessons too hard or too easy?’) but it might represent no opinion being expressed. This works well enough but the occasional ‘reversal’ of questions (see above) means that the charts require careful interpretation – which we have attempted to supply. We have analysed and reported the responses in their original groupings which sometimes produce large clusters of data. We strongly advise looking at the charts in colour as they are much easier to interpret than black and white versions. For readers more comfortable with numbers than graphs, all the data are reported as tables in the detailed technical appendix, available separately

## Primary

### Challenge and inspiration

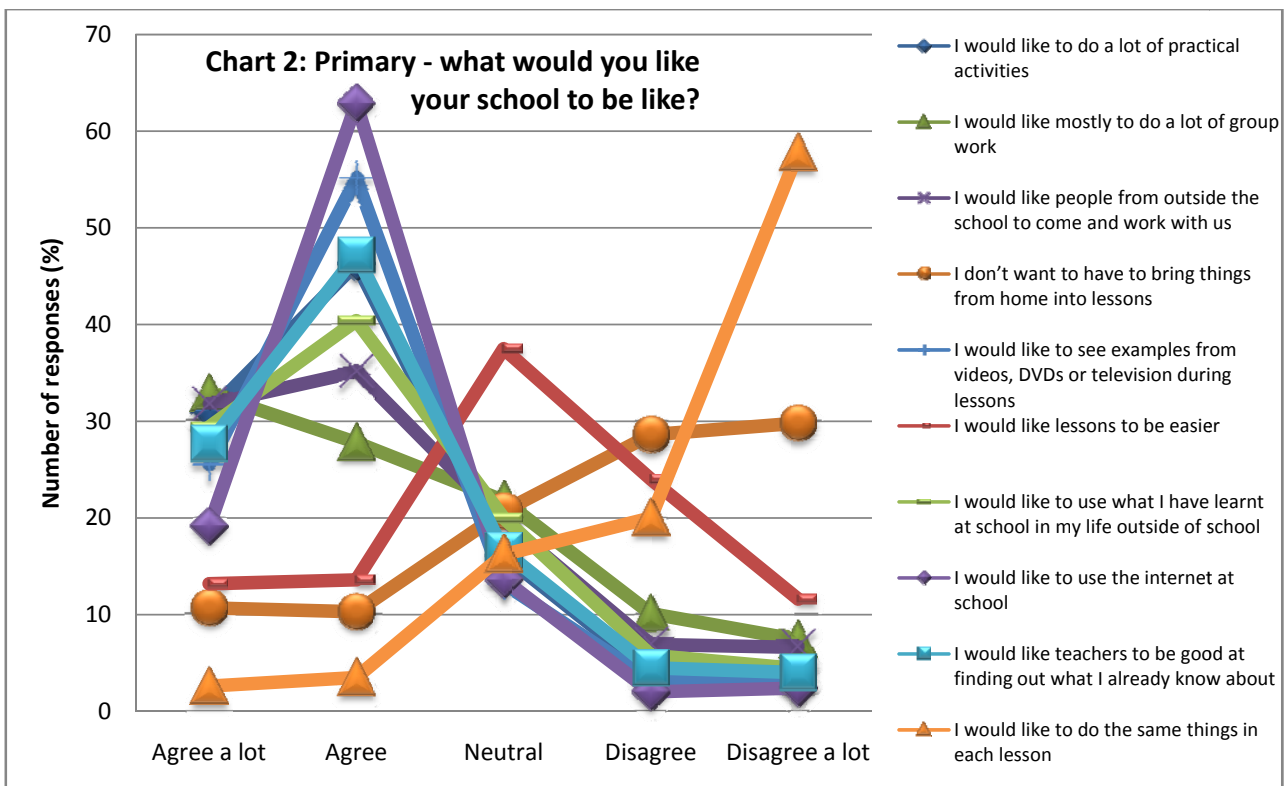
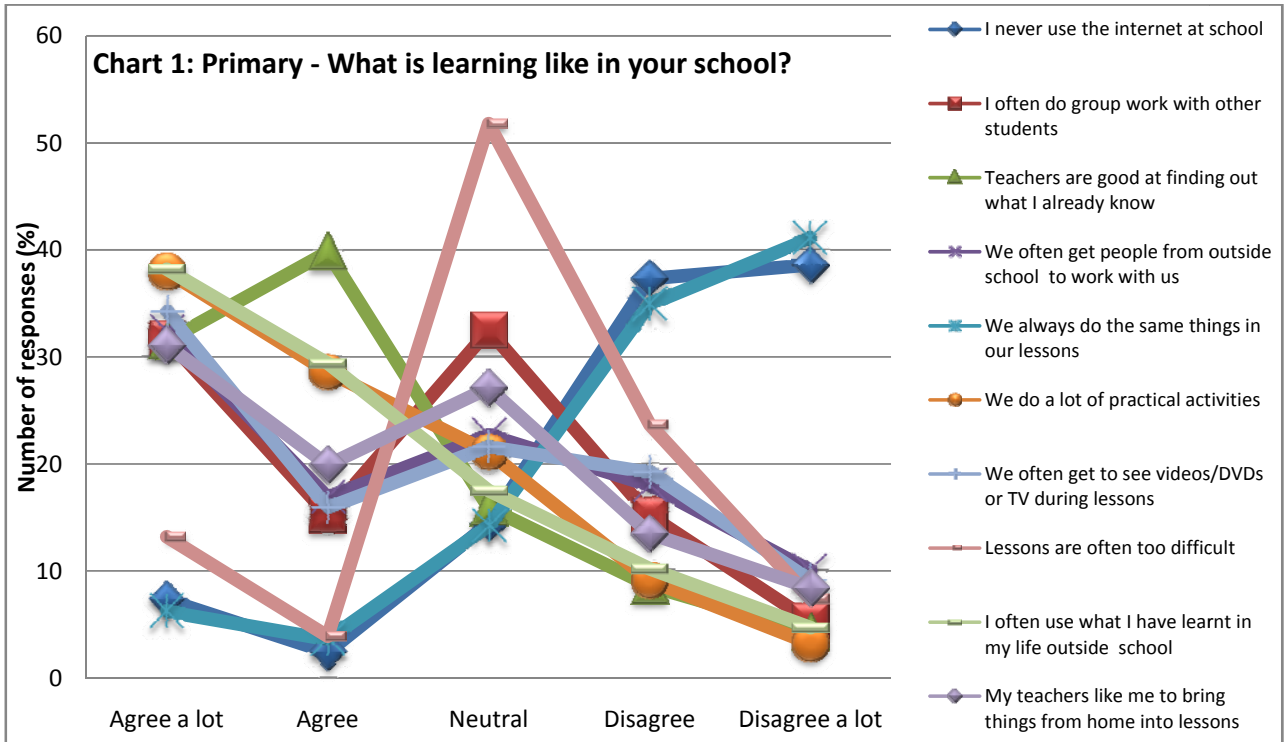
The data for the primary phase were all derived from the survey. On many issues, primary students in our sample have relatively uncontroversial things to say about their experience of the curriculum. A majority say it:

- is varied;
- takes account of what they know already;
- contains a lot of practical activity;
- involves a substantial amount of group/collective working;
- draws on out-of-school experiences; and
- is useful to them out of school.

But, in some contexts, the data offer more pause for thought. Over 70% said that their teachers were good at building on their existing knowledge and skills. When asked how they would like it to be in the future, a majority of primary students want broadly what they now get but with more of the features they experience positively such as varied lessons, practical activities, use of the internet and working with people from outside school.

Over 50% think that lessons are just the right level of challenge with a total of approximately 20% saying that they are much too hard or too easy. It is worth noting that more (31.1%) find lessons somewhat or a lot too *easy* while only 17.1% found them somewhat or a lot too *hard*. This might suggest that the level of challenge in the primary curriculum is less than students expect or are capable of. However, when asked specifically if they would like lessons to be easier or harder, 27% said harder but 36% said easier.

These points are illustrated graphically in Charts 1 and 2 below and are set out in greater detail in appendices 3 and 4).





We tested the data for gender differences (94% provided gender data – see appendix 8) and generally found few statistically significant differences. Those we found were generally weak and in line with common differences in attitude between boys and girls. Boys were more likely to say that lessons were often too easy for them; that they worked with the teacher and not each other; and that teachers did not want them to bring things in from home. Girls were more likely to say they did a lot of different things in lessons and worked in groups rather than on their own or in whole class activities. As the majority of primary students would be taught in mixed classes, these differences in perception are unlikely to be a simple reflection of different experiences. It is improbable, for instance, that girls worked in groups while boys didn't. Differences were even less marked in relation to student views on the future. Girls were more likely to say that they wanted to bring things in from home, and would like to do a lot of different things. They were also more likely to say that they would like the teacher to be good at finding out what they already knew.

### Autonomy and influence

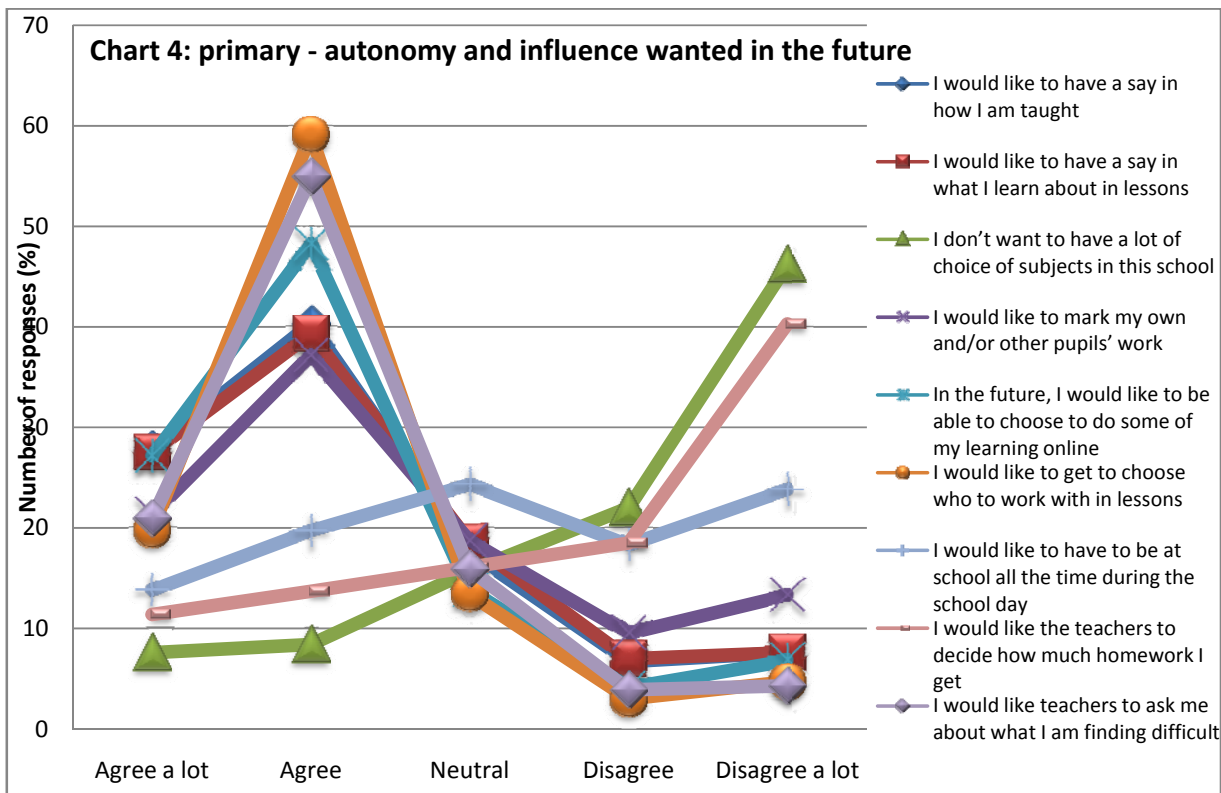
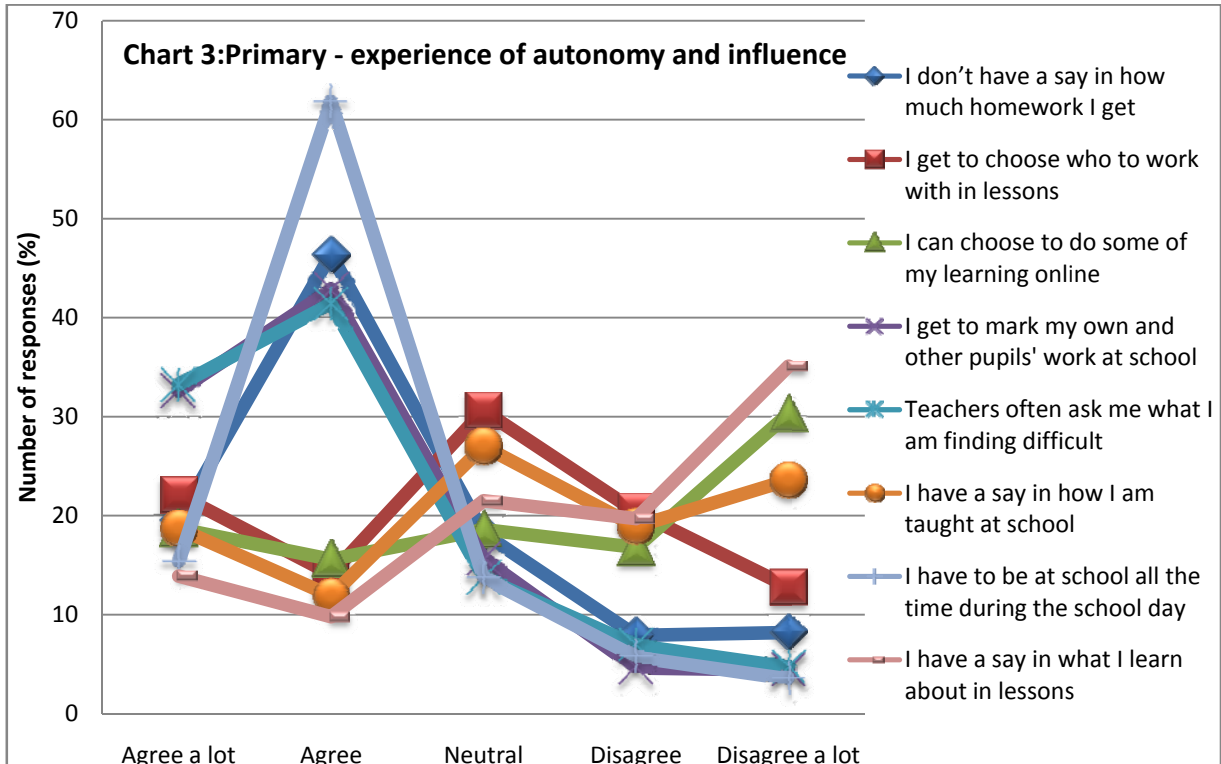
Answers in this area suggest that primary students experience the curriculum as something largely directed by the teacher but with some specific areas of high student involvement. A majority (55%) feel that what they learn and where they learn it is decided by the teacher. Quantity of homework is also dictated by the teacher for a majority (66%) of respondents.

Responses are more evenly spread about how students are taught, who they get to work with and how online resources are used. Three quarters reported substantial involvement in marking their own or others' work – perhaps reflecting a widespread use of peer assessment in this phase.

When responding to questions about how they would like it to be in the future, it is probably unsurprising that significant majorities wanted greater autonomy and/or influence than they now experienced. Over three quarters wanted more say in how they are taught, what they are taught, who they work with and how much homework they get. They were a lot less sure that they wanted to be able to learn from home (42.1% would like to do some learning at home while 33.5% were happy to do this at school).

Testing these data for gender differences revealed even fewer than in the previous section. Such differences as there were suggest that girls were more likely to report that they marked their own or others' work and would like to do some lessons online. They were also more inclined to let the teachers decide what to do in lessons.

Charts 3 and 4 illustrate these responses graphically below. The tables are shown in appendices 5 and 6.



## Lifestyles and health

Students in the primary phase seemed to be well informed about health. Around 56% acknowledged that they had been told about healthy eating (and less than 5% said they hadn't). Over 42% said that this information had led to them eating more healthily (though 53% said they were doing it anyway) and 40% said some of their friends were eating more healthily too. We included the 'what are your friends doing?' form of question partly to get an impression broader than just the individual but mostly to give the respondent a proxy whose behaviour they might be able to report more honestly than their own. The reporting of the behaviour of 'friends' might be a more reliable guide to actual behaviour change. In fact, in the primary phase, the 'friends' figure is close to the self-report percentage.

<b>Do I eat healthily at school?</b>	Disagree	Agree
I've never been told about healthy eating at school	95.3	4.7
I've been told about healthy eating at school	44.0	56.0
I have started eating more healthily because of what I have learnt at school	57.8	42.2
I already eat healthily	47.0	53.0
Some of my friends are eating more healthily because of what they have learnt at school	69.0	31.0

Table 1

Four fifths (78.5%) of our respondents said that they had a lot of encouragement to take exercise at school and 38% reported that their friends had started doing exercise as a result of what they had learned in school. Again, this 'friends' report might be a more reliable guide of behaviour change than self report.

<b>What have I learnt about exercise?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't encourage us to take exercise	88.0	12.0
In my school we have had a lot of encouragement to take exercise	21.5	78.5
Some of my friends have started to do more exercise outside of school because of what they have learnt about it at school	62.3	37.7

Table 2

The figures on physical well being are quite reassuring while those on psychological health are more mixed. Some 71% of students said they had learned a lot about bullying (and only 7% said that their

teachers knew nothing about it). The data on stress are more polarised. So, 43.4% claimed they had learned about stress and how to deal with it but 49% said that their teacher didn't talk about stress at all.

<b>What have I learnt about stress?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't talk to us about stress	51.0	49.0
In my school we have learnt about stress and how to deal with it	56.6	43.4
Some of my friends have started to deal better with stress because of what they have learnt in school	78.0	22.0

Table 3

<b>What have I learnt about bullying?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't know a thing about bullying	93.0	7.0
In my school we have learnt a lot about bullying	29.0	71.0
I know how to help other students if they are being bullied	35.5	64.5

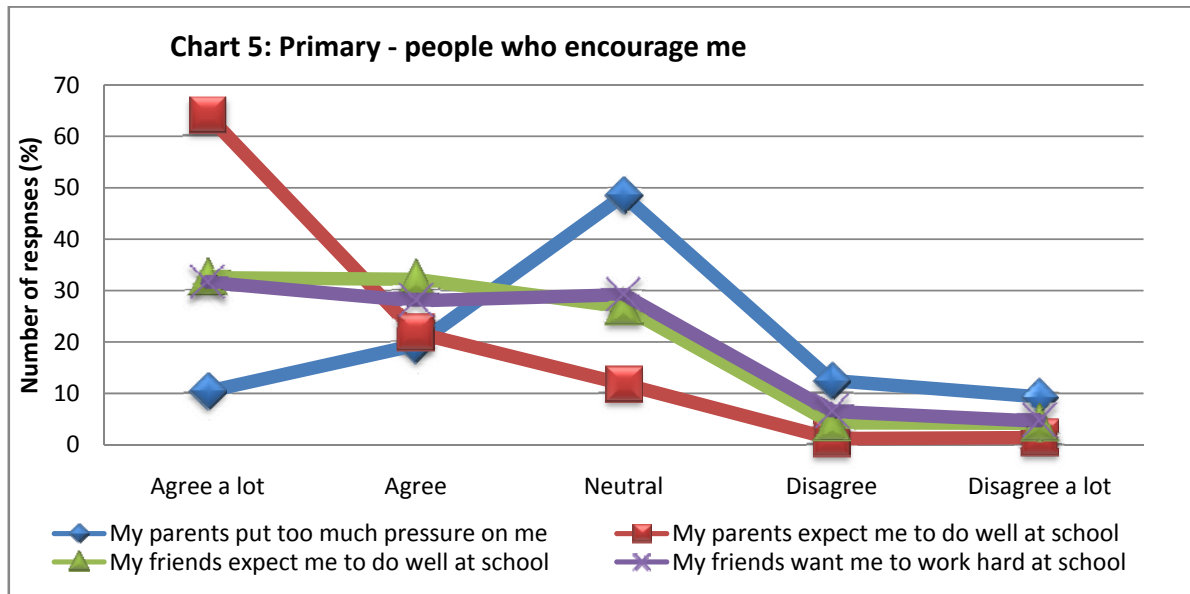
Table 4

An analysis of gender differences here indicated that boys were significantly more likely to claim they had not been told about healthy eating, or encouraged to take more exercise, or been told anything about bullying. Girls were less likely than boys to say that some of their friends were dealing better with stress. As noted earlier, these gender differences were very unlikely to be a reflection of real difference in experience but they might say something about the kinds of activities and experiences that grab the attention and impress on the memory of boys or girls differently.

### Motivational influences

The majority of students in this phase experienced high expectations from their parents and friends. In excess of 60% thought that friends wanted them to work hard and to do well at school. This rose to 85% for parents' expectations. Just under half felt that their parents put just enough pressure on them to succeed. Around 30% felt that parental pressure was a bit or a lot too much while 22% felt that parents put too little pressure on them. These data are shown graphically in the chart below.

Few differences emerged from an analysis of responses by gender those which did are in line with conventional differences. So boys were more likely to say that their friends didn't want them to work hard or thought they would do well at school.



## Secondary

### Challenge and inspiration

Secondary phase students were generally neutral or positive about their experience of the curriculum although, in most categories, they felt less challenged and inspired than the primary cohort. This might follow the usual pattern of increasing questioning which comes with age.

More than 50% of secondary respondents to the survey felt a lot or somewhat that:

- they did a lot of practical activities;
- they often used what they learned in school in their lives out of school (but a substantial minority – 23.2% thought otherwise);
- they did a mix of different things in lessons (but, again, a substantial minority – 26.2% - thought the opposite); and
- they used the internet often in school.

Nearly 50% thought that:

- teachers often made connections between different subjects;
- teachers were good at finding out what the students already knew; and
- they often worked in groups with other students.

But, for this second group of responses, a quarter or more of the sample took the opposite position.

Secondary students were generally not very positive about:

- the connection between lessons and their own experiences; and

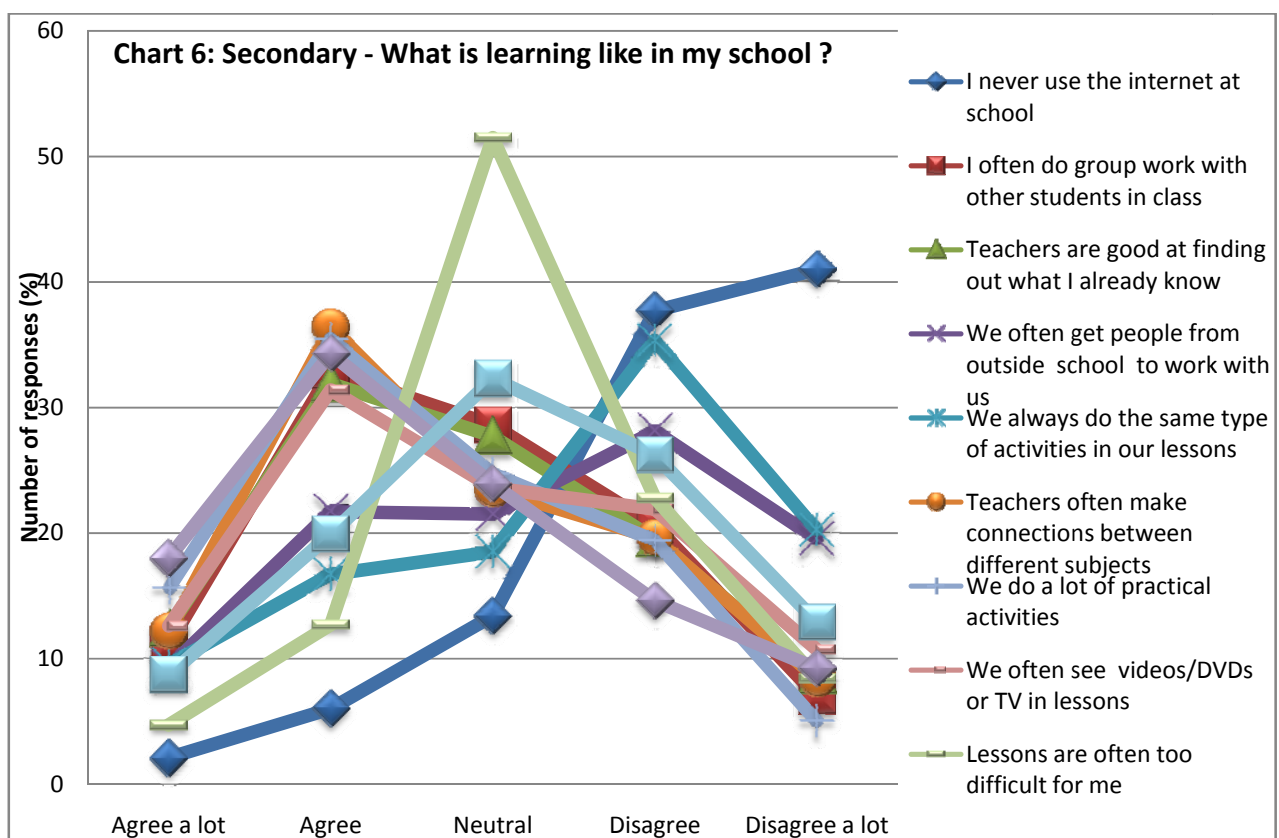


- the use of audio-visual resources.

In these two areas, student views were balanced or spread across the spectrum. Views about the level of challenge in school work were similarly diverse but just over half (51.5%) said they were neither too difficult nor too easy. As for the primary cohort more (31.2%) said they were too easy than said (17.4%) they were too hard.

The secondary cohort was broadly less positive about the school experience than primary students (a phenomenon common to many other issues and in other surveys).

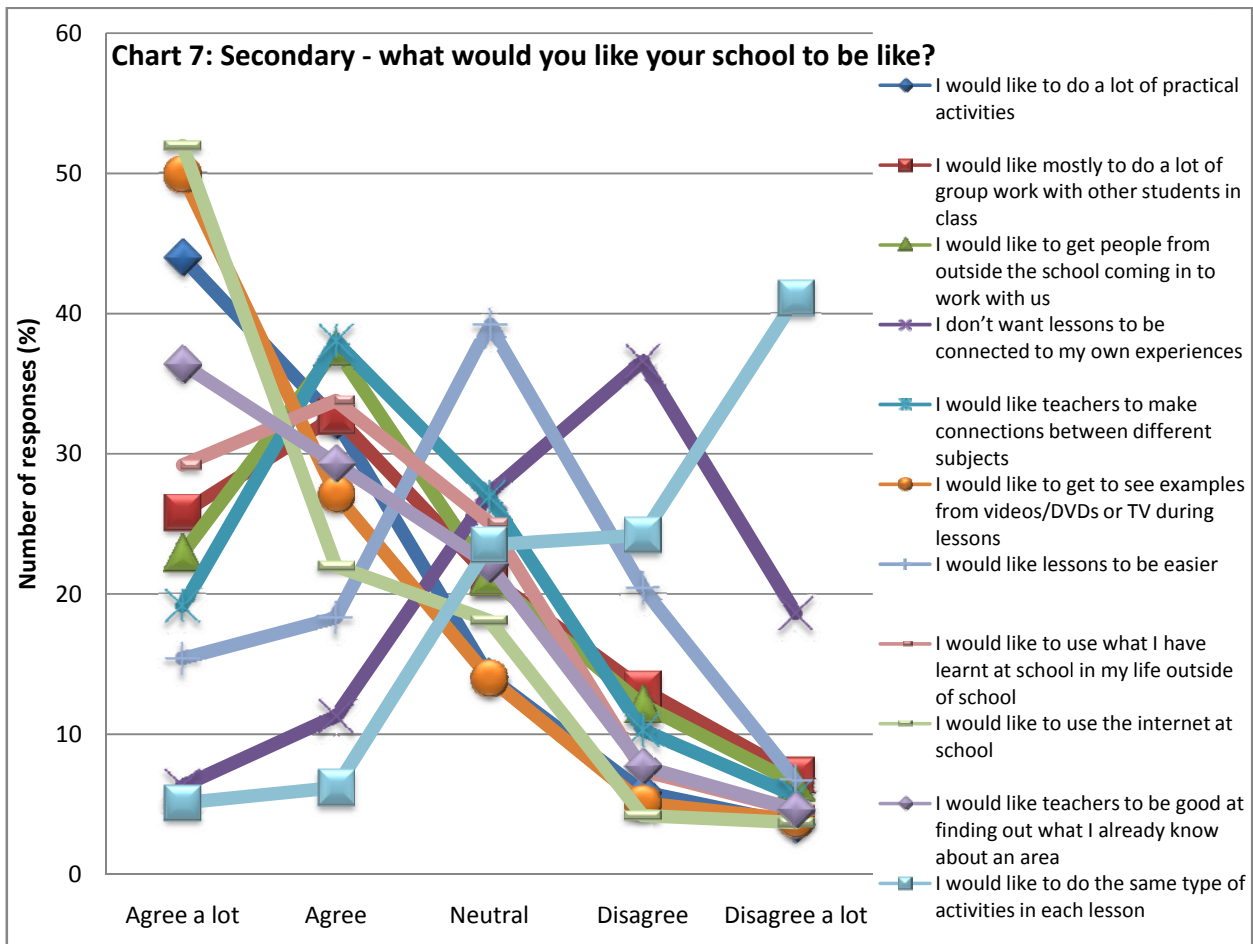
These results are represented in full in the following chart (also appendix 9)



When asked what they would like the curriculum to be like in the future, most secondary students wanted to have more of what they experienced as positive now. So, around three quarters wanted a lot of practical activities and use of audio-visual resources. Two thirds wanted teachers to be good at spotting what the students knew already. Despite a substantial minority of students claiming to find lessons too easy, only 27% wanted them to be harder (and 33.7% wanted them easier).

The biggest gaps (greater than 20%) between students' reported experiences of the curriculum and their hopes for the future were in relation to the use of audio-visual resources and the internet, opportunities to links lessons to their own experiences, the amount of practical activity and the mix of activity.

The following chart shows the full responses, table shown in appendix 10.



### Flexibility and choice

For secondary students, we asked them for their feelings about individual subjects. The results of this section are set out in table 5 below. Students were asked to select the subjects they thought were most and least like a particular characteristic (e.g. 'we mostly learn from books'). The table displays these selections as the three highest ranking choices *most like* and the three *least like* the specified characteristic. Many of these results are unsurprising. Thus, PE is seen as practical with a lot of group work. It is also seen as the least hard subject. Art and Design and D&T are the next most practical subjects. PSHE and RE, along with English, are most seen as the subjects involving people from outside the school. ICT is the most and History the least relevant to life outside of school. English and History are most likely to be connected with other subjects.



Paradoxically, maths was seen simultaneously as the hardest and also the third least hard subject. In a similar fashion, maths was identified by students as the subject in which teachers are good at finding out what the students already knew. At the same time, it was chosen as the third *least* like this. It was also, according to our respondents, least likely to involve audio visual resources, practical activities and use group work.

No.		Subject <b>most</b> like this			Subject <b>least</b> like this		
		<b>Most frequent</b>	<b>Second most frequent</b>	<b>Third most frequent</b>	<b>Most frequent</b>	<b>Second most frequent</b>	<b>Third most frequent</b>
23	We do a lot of practical activities	PE (24.2)	Art & Design (20.6)	D&T (16.3)	Maths (20.5)	English (19.0)	RE (10.7)
24	We often do group work with other students	PE (17.5)	English (15.9)	Music (12.7)	ICT (16.2)	Maths (14.6)	Art & Design (9.5)
25	We mostly learn from books	Maths (17.0)	English (13.7)	History (13.5)	PE (19.6)	ICT (17.7)	Art & Design (14.9)
26	I often find this subject hard	Maths (18.8)	MFL (17.3)	English (11.0)	Maths (12.0)	Art & Design (11.7)	PE (11.0)
27	We often get people from outside the school coming in to work with us	PSHE (19.3)	English (11.6)	RE (5.4)	Maths (12.0)	ICT (8.7)	English (7.9)
28	I use what I have learnt at school in my life outside of school	ICT (15.6)	PE (13.3)	Maths (11.5)	RE (10.7)	MFL (9.9)	History (7.6)
29	The Internet is most useful in...	ICT (73.6)	History (2.5)	Geography (1.9)	PE (17.6)	Maths (10.1)	Art & Design (9.0)
30	I usually find this subject easy	Maths (13.8)	PE (12.7)	Art & Design (11.8)	Maths (15.4)	MFL (13.1)	English (10.6)



No.		Subject <b>most</b> like this			Subject <b>least</b> like this		
		<b>Most frequent</b>	<b>Second most frequent</b>	<b>Third most frequent</b>	<b>Most frequent</b>	<b>Second most frequent</b>	<b>Third most frequent</b>
31	Teachers often make connections between different subjects	English (13.9)	History (8.2)	ICT (6.9)	Maths (11.5)	PE (7.2)	Art & Design (7.2)
32	We often get to see examples from video's, DVD's or television during lessons	English (13.3)	History (13.2)	Geography (12.6)	Maths (18.5)	PE (9.0)	Art & design (8.9)
33	Teachers are good at finding out what you already know about an area	Maths (14.5)	Science (10.7)	History (6.6)	Maths (9.6)	RE (7.8)	Science (7.7)

Table 5

We further explored issues of challenge and inspiration through a short series of focus groups. The picture that emerged was one of idiosyncratic practice which varied by teacher and institution rather than by subject. Participants were positive in describing practice in science, English, maths and PSHE but they also said they experienced unimaginative and teacher-dominated learning in those same subjects. While the focus group students felt that the maths they experienced had few practical activities, they did acknowledge that it was often challenging, citing high level problem solving as an example.

During the focus group discussions in two schools, students consistently agreed that English was a subject where student-centred practice took place and were quoted saying:

*“There are a lot of practical activities in English- speaking, listening, role-playing.”*

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On the other hand it seemed that in English too not all teachers exploited the opportunity for interaction:

*“The teacher usually gives us exercise and book work.” (male, Y9)*

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Students’ perceptions of levels of engagement in ICT were mixed too:

*“It is good when we use computers to solve a problem on the board.” (female, Y8)*

*“ICT is boring because we are doing things over and over again.” (male, Y9)*

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An intriguing finding from the survey was the polarity of student opinions about mathematics. It was a subject which they managed to find simultaneously the easiest and one of the least easy subjects. The subject teachers were thought to be best and worst at finding out what students already know about the subject. Students said they were least likely to use audiovisual media, do practical activities, get outside people into the classroom, or make connections with different subjects in maths. Group work was also not seen as common.

We explored this further in the focus groups. While the question of how students experienced the maths curriculum was posed in a neutral way, only one of the comments we recorded revealed a positive attitude. All other comments suggested students felt more should be done to make maths a more enjoyable subject. This may have something to do with the time of year, June, in which the focus groups were carried out. This was certainly the case for two students from different schools who felt maths became more boring in the approach to examinations:

*“When you learn something the teachers make you do it over and over to make sure it’s in your head.” (male, Y7)*

*“Maths gets more boring the closer we get to end of term tests – we spend time cramming.” (male, Y10)*

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In contrast, four other male students complained that their maths teacher progressed too fast in some subjects, leaving students too little time to understand the concepts:

*“The teacher goes through one or two examples and then expects us to do the problems straight.” (Y9)*

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One student’s comments suggested that students were not always being prepared well enough for problem-solving in mathematics where questions are not set in a way that they have been trained to recognise:

*“We need more guidance on applying methods. We learn processes in the classroom but the questions are disguised in exams.” (male, Y10)*

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Another student (Y9) illustrated how teachers can miss opportunities to discuss with students the nature of maths processes. In class the student couldn’t understand why one group was allowed to use calculators and another group not. In this case the teacher had simply said that these were the instructions in the textbook.

Classroom management was also touched upon by a male, Y9 student:

*“Our maths teacher skips things we should be learning because he spends a lot of time concentrating on those who are talking.”*

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When asked what could be done to help students get more out of maths lessons, the focus group offered a variety of suggestions:

- more problem solving “there could be more problem-solving which takes you outside of the classroom to make maths more fun.”;
- trips on a maths theme;
- more practical work; and
- more explanations.

These rather negative views about maths did not seem to arise from students dismissing it as unimportant. Maths, along with ICT and English, were the subjects students most mentioned as being relevant to them outside of school. Four groups spoke about the importance of maths in helping you deal with money, finances and tax.

While most students spoke enthusiastically about the need for ICT skills, they had mixed views about the value of ICT instruction in schools. Three groups said that learning how to operate Microsoft programmes, the internet and email was useful at home or in the workplace. However, one student (female, Y10) questioned the value of learning how to use spreadsheets.

Three groups spoke about the importance the English they learned at school had to their lives outside of school, in terms of:

- speaking (formally);
- spelling – “English helps you to spell right so you don’t look like an idiot.” (male, Y10);
- having an expanded vocabulary; and
- being able to write letters and invoices in a business context.

We looked to see if there was any significant relationship between students’ Key Stage (KS) level and their views about individual subjects. What correlations we found were quite weak and hard to interpret, particularly given the complex relationship between KS level and age. We think we might tentatively assert that students felt that they had greater choice in some subjects, e.g. Art and Design, English at the less advanced KS levels. The converse of this appears to be true in relation to maths and MFL, that is, students at more advanced KS levels felt that they had more choices and greater say over how they were taught in maths and MFL.

We tested the data for gender differences (91% provided gender data- see appendix 14) and generally found few statistically significant differences between boys and girls. Those we found were generally weak and in line with common differences in attitude between boys and girls. Boys were more likely to assert that they never used TV, DVD or videos in lessons and were more likely to say that lessons were

easy for them. As with gender differences in the primary cohort, boys and girls are generally taught in mixed gender groups so the variation in views between the two are more likely to be perception than actual experience. Differences were even less marked in relation to student views about the future. Girls were more likely to say that in the future they didn't want to have to do practical activities and that they would like to work more frequently with people from outside the school.

We tested the data for age differences (96% provided age data) and some significant but weak relationships were found between age and students' perceptions of learning in their schools. There was a tendency for older students to be more negative in their responses to the questions than younger students. Older students were less likely to say that they do a mix of different activities in lessons, less likely to say their teachers tried to find out what they already know, and less likely to say they do a lot of practical activities. They were more likely to say that they never use anything they have learnt outside of school.

Correlations between age and what students would like their school to be like were weak. Older respondents were slightly more likely to say in future that they don't want to have to do practical activities, that in future they would prefer to work on their own or with the whole class rather than in groups, but were more likely to say that in future they would like to do different activities.

We also looked for any significant correlations between student views on different aspects of the curriculum and their Key Stage levels in English and maths (Appendix 15). No strong correlations were found but there were some weak to modest, if also unsurprising, ones. So higher attaining students were more likely to assert that lessons were too easy, that teachers did not try to find out what they already knew and that they always did the same things in lessons

### Autonomy and influence

Questions about student autonomy concerning learning and teaching showed strong differences depending on the issue examined. Two thirds of survey respondents said they have the opportunity to mark their own or others' work and just under half (47%) report that teachers ask them what they are finding difficult. But, less than 20% said that they had a choice in how much homework they get and less than 11% a choice in what homework they do.

Responses to some of the other items were mixed, 41% claiming they have to be in school all the time, while 32% claim they can do some of their learning at home. Just over 40% agree they have to be in school all the time during the school day, and about the same number say they can do some of the learning at home. More respondents (43%) say that they don't have a say in what they are taught at school than say they do (39%).

Responding to questions about what they would like in the future, students generally – and not very surprisingly – expressed a preference for greater levels of choice and autonomy than they currently experience.

Over 70% of students would like to:

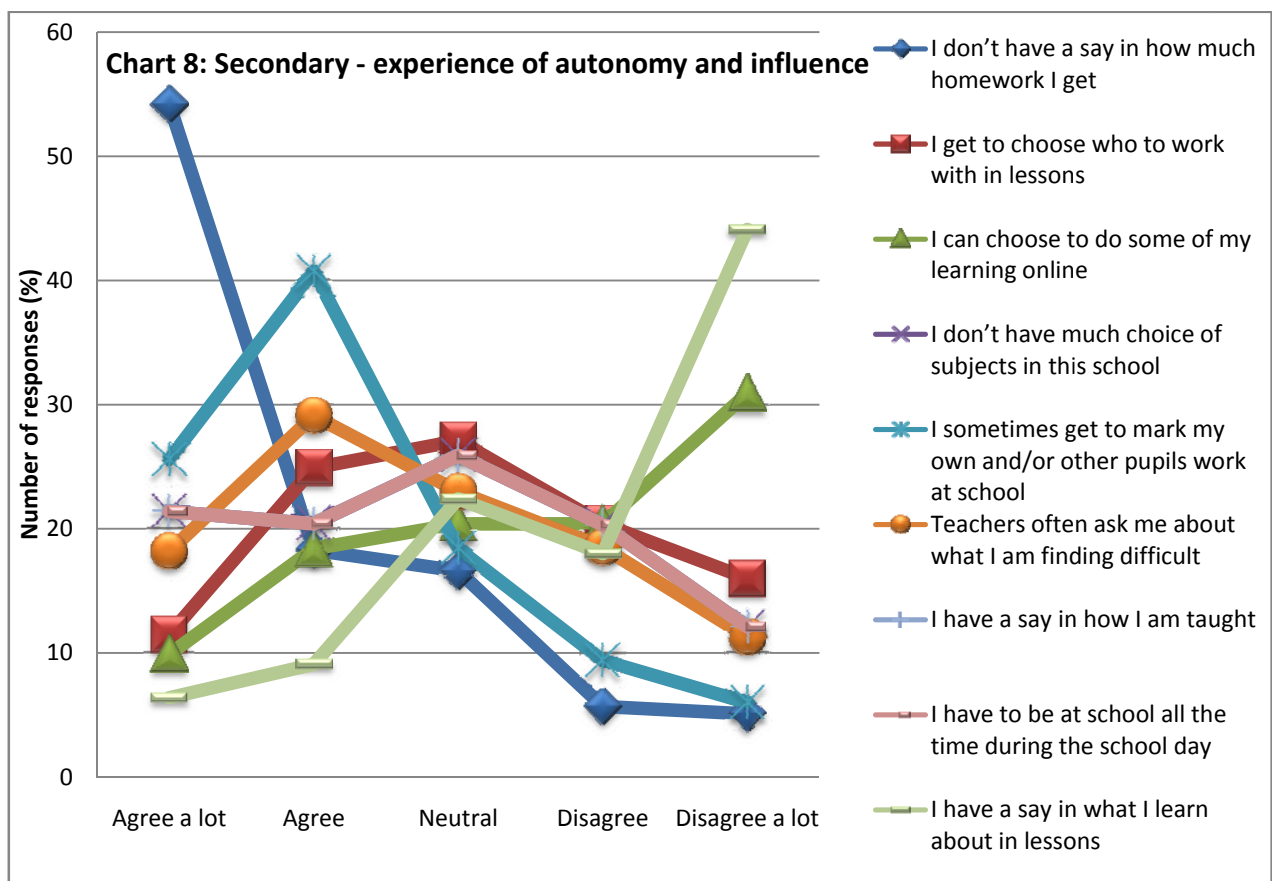
- be able to choose who they work with;
- have a say in how they are taught; and
- have a say in what they learn about in lessons.

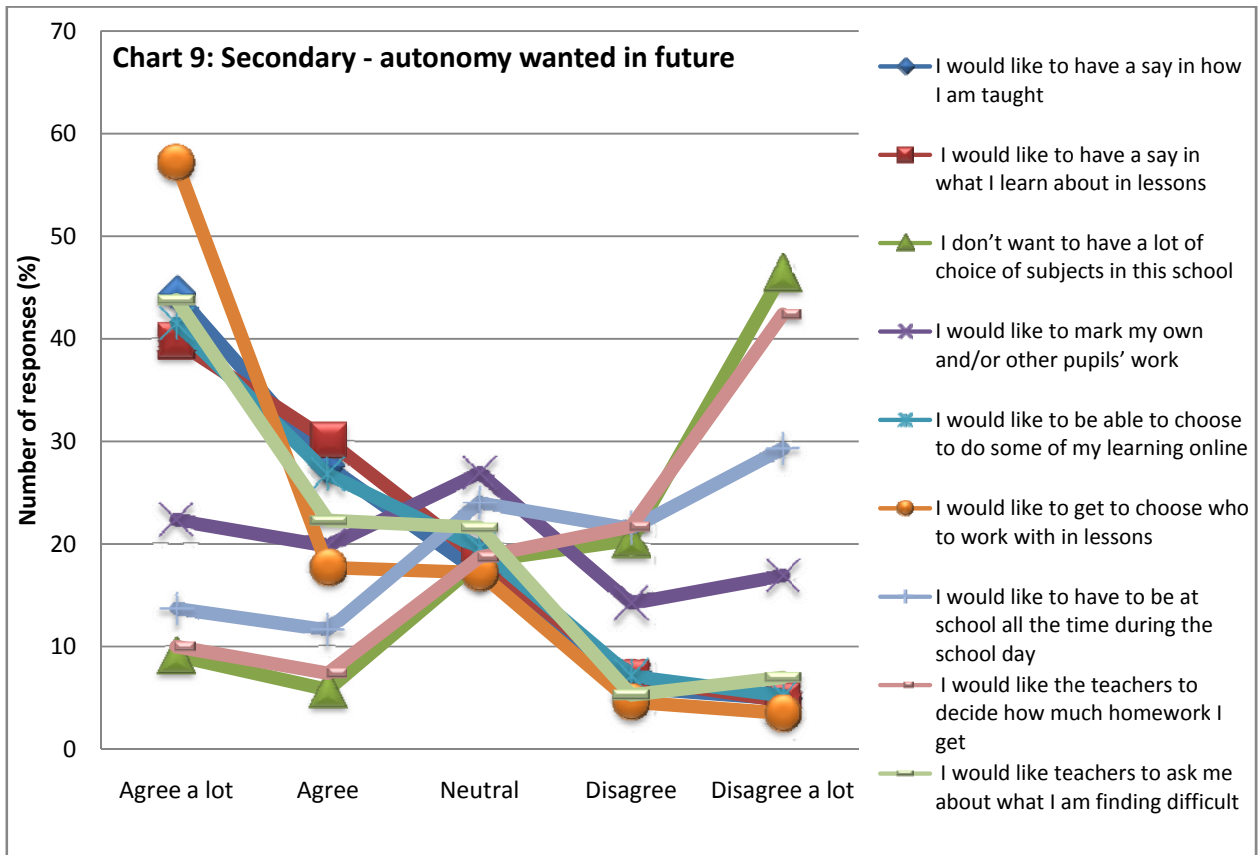
Nearly 70% of students would like:

- to have a greater choice in what subjects they want to do; and
- more say in how much homework they get.

Students were least enthusiastic about the possibility of more self- and peer marking with 42% being in favour of this while 31% are against, though this could be because students already experience this quite widely.

These results are represented in full in the following chart and table (see appendix 11):





During the focus groups, students were clearer that choice and variety in the classroom were important elements in making school experiences engaging. One student (male, KS4, PRU) said

*“School would be easier if you had more choice over what you did.”*

The discussions also revealed the variety of what students understood by the concept of ‘choice’ in school. They were broadly:

#### options for KS4

- students typically named subjects such as MFL or art as ones in which they experienced most choice in what they did, because they had the option to drop them at age 14.

#### choosing who they worked with in groups

- “It is better if we can choose our own group – you need to be with friends to be comfortable.”
- One student (female, Y9) had not enjoyed a maths project because she had had to work with someone she did not like.

#### deciding which materials/resources to work with

- “We can choose which instrument we play with in music.”



**vocational learning/increased flexibility via options for study at college**

- “Plumbing and bricklaying would be useful skills to learn in school for the outside.” (male, KS3, PRU)
- One student (male, KS4, PRU) had said that attending college once a week on an increased flexibility programme had been good, and that he had made progress. He said that had been taken off the programme, however, because of his misbehaviour in school.

We tested the data for gender differences (91% provided gender data) and generally found few statistically significant differences between boys and girls. Boys are more likely to say they don’t get to choose who they work with in lessons and that they never get to mark their own and other students’ work.

Some more differences were found when students were asked about the desired future. Girls are more likely to say they want a lot of choice of subjects in future and have a say in how much homework they are to do while boys are more likely to want a say in who they work with in future. Girls are also more likely to want teachers to ask them about what they are finding difficult.

We tested the data for age differences (97% provided age data). A modest correlation was that older students were more likely to agree that they get a lot of choice in the subjects they want to do.

Older students were less likely to say they had a choice in how much homework they get and more likely to agree that teachers never ask them what they find difficult. Correlations with desired futures were weak and low. Older students were more likely to say that in future they:

- would like to have a greater choice of subjects;
- would like to be able to do some of the learning online; and
- do not want to be involved in marking their own or others’ work.

**Lifestyles and health**

In the secondary sample, 57% acknowledged that they had been told about healthy eating (and 10% said that they hadn’t). One fifth (21%) claimed that this information had led them to eat more healthily (though nearly two fifths (39%) claimed that they were eating healthily anyway) and 12% said their friends were starting to eat more healthily too. As with the primary cohort, this ‘proxy’ report about friends might be a more reliable indicator of behaviour than the self- report.

<b>Do I eat healthily at school?</b>	Disagree	Agree
I’ve never been told about healthy eating at school	90.4	9.6
I’ve been told about healthy eating at school	56.6	43.4
I have started eating more healthily because of what I have learnt at school	78.6	21.4



I already eat healthily	60.9	31.1
Some of my friends are eating more healthily because of what they have learnt at school	87.8	12.2

Table 6

There was some evidence that students were aware of attempts to manipulate their attitudes by commercial interests. For instance, one student (female Y12) said that advertisements on television were powerful and made her think about what to eat. Another student (male, Y10) talked about the cynicism of sponsors of sports events whose products had nothing to do with a healthy lifestyle.

Over half (53%) say that they have had a lot of information about drugs at school, with only 13% claiming their teachers don't know anything about drugs. Just over two thirds (43%) claim they are now less likely to take drugs because of what they have learnt at school, while 5% say some of their friends have stopped taking drugs because of what they have learnt at school.

<b>What has my school taught me about drugs?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't know anything about drugs	86.7	13.3
In my school we have had a lot of information about drugs	46.4	53.6
I'm less likely to take drugs because of what I've learnt about them at school	56.8	43.2
Some of my friends have stopped taking drugs because of what they have learnt about them at school	95.4	4.6

Table 7

In the focus groups, there was a consensus in three out of the four groups that what their schools were doing was not perceived as very effective. One group (mixed, Y9) said there was a need for better PSHE lessons, as they believed this focused too much on sex education and not enough on drugs education. A second group (mixed) believed that drugs education was too dry and needed graphic images of the damage drugs can do. They also suggested it would be more effective if a student in the school who was on drugs would speak to their peers during PSHE lessons. When this suggestion was put to a third group (mixed, Y9), they agreed but felt it would be better if an ex-student came into the school. They believed that if the school knew of a particular pupil who was taking drugs, the school would report him to the police.

Over half (56%) said they have received a lot of information about alcohol in their school, with 14% claiming their teachers didn't know anything about alcohol. 30% said they were less likely to drink



alcohol because of what they had learnt at school, while 6% said some of their friends had stopped drinking alcohol because of what they learnt at school.

<b>What has my school taught me about alcohol?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't know anything about alcohol	85.7	14.3
In my school we have had a lot of information about alcohol	44.1	55.9
I'm less likely to drink alcohol because of what I've learnt about it at school	70.3	29.7
Some of my friends have stopped drinking alcohol because of what they have learnt about it at school	93.8	6.2

Table 8

68% of pupils acknowledge that they have had a lot of encouragement to take exercise at school, with 17% saying that they haven't. 19% said they had friends who started doing more exercise out of school because of what they learnt in school.

<b>What have I learnt about exercise?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't encourage us to take exercise	82.8	17.2
In my school we have had a lot of encouragement to take exercise	32.6	67.4
Some of my friends have started to do more exercise outside of school because of what they have learnt about it at school	80.1	19.9

Table 9

During the focus groups, when discussing nutrition and exercise the thing that the largest number of students said influenced their thinking was seeing overweight people, either on the street or on television. One male Y10 said:

*"If you go past fat people it makes you conscious of being healthy"*

One student mentioned Coronation Street in which a man died of a heart attack because he was so overweight.

Learning about stress appeared to be less common, with just over a quarter (29%) claiming they had learnt about stress and how to deal with it at school, while over half (55%) said their teachers didn't talk about stress at all. 10% said some of their friends learnt to deal with stress better because of what they learnt at school.



<b>What have I learnt about stress?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't talk to us about stress	44.8	55.2
In my school we have learnt about stress and how to deal with it	71.2	28.8
Some of my friends have started to deal better with stress because of what they have learnt in school	90.0	10.0

Table 10

Nearly three fifths (57%) of pupils said they have learnt a lot about bullying in their school, with 15% claiming that their teachers didn't know anything about bullying. 38.3% said they knew how to help others when they were being bullied.

<b>What have I learnt about bullying?</b>	Disagree	Agree
Teachers don't know a thing about bullying	85.0	15.0
In my school we have learnt a lot about bullying	42.8	57.2
I know how to help other students if they are being bullied	61.7	38.3

Table 11

We tested the data for gender differences (91% provided gender data) and boys were more likely than girls to say they had never been told about healthy eating in school. No significant differences were found on actual impact of school healthy eating policies and practices.

Boys were also more likely to say that their teachers didn't know anything about drugs, while girls were more likely to say that they were less likely to take drugs because of what they had learnt at school. By contrast, boys were more likely to say that some of their friends had stopped taking drugs because of what they had learnt about them at school.

A similar pattern emerges in the questions about alcohol. Boys were more likely to claim that their teachers didn't know anything about alcohol, while girls were more likely to claim they had stopped drinking alcohol because of what they had learnt at school. Again, boys were more likely to say that some of their friends had stopped drinking alcohol because of what they had learnt at school.

Boys were also more likely to claim that teachers didn't encourage them to take exercise, while girls by contrast were more likely to claim that they were encouraged to do exercise. No gender differences were found with respect to behaviour.

Following the pattern, boys were more likely to claim that teachers never talked to students about stress, though they were also more likely to claim that some of their friends had started to deal better with stress because of what they had learnt in school.

Boys again were more likely to claim that their teachers didn't know anything about bullying, while girls were more likely to say they knew how to help other students if they were being bullied.

We tested the data for age differences (97% provided age data) and younger students were more likely to claim they had started to eat more healthily because of what they had learnt at school, and a bit more likely to claim that some of their friends were eating more healthily because of what they had learnt at school.

Older students were more likely to say that their teachers knew nothing about drugs. Younger students were more likely to claim they were less likely to take drugs as a result of what they had learnt at school, and somewhat more likely to claim they had friends who have stopped taking drugs because of what they had learnt at school.

Older students were more likely to claim that their teachers didn't know anything about alcohol. 13 and 14 year olds were more likely than either younger or older students to claim they had learnt a lot about alcohol use at their school. Young students, in particular 11 and 12 year olds were more likely to claim they were less likely to drink alcohol because of what they had learnt at school.

Older students were also more likely to claim that teachers didn't encourage them to take exercise, while younger students by contrast were more likely to claim that they were encouraged to take exercise.

Following the pattern, older students were more likely to claim that teachers never talked to students about stress, while younger students were more likely to claim they had learnt about how to deal with stress at school; and that some of their friends had started to deal better with stress because of what they had learnt in school.

Older students again were more likely to claim that their teachers don't know anything about bullying, while younger students were more likely to claim they had learnt a lot about bullying. Younger students were more likely to say they know how to help other students if they are being bullied.

### Motivational influences

Secondary students clearly experienced secondary school as more stressful and more demanding than primary school. Over 56% felt that their teachers expected more of them than their primary teachers did and 64% felt more pressured by their secondary teachers. Nearly 39% thought this pressure was just right but a slightly larger proportion (44%) thought it was too much. However, 17% thought they weren't pressured enough by their teachers.

When asked similar questions about the influence of parents, 73% of students said that their parents expected them to do well at school and 48% of them felt that the degree of pressure from their parents was just about right. Around 28% of secondary students thought they were under too much pressure from parents. There were, nevertheless, a substantial minority of students who thought they experienced too little pressure from teachers (17%) and even more so from parents (24.5%). This last figure is broadly in line with the answers from primary students (although primary students generally felt that their parents' expectation were high).

Secondary students' experience of peer pressure was fairly balanced. Nearly half (46.8%) felt that their friends expected them to do well at school – whilst only 16% thought the opposite. Around 36% felt that their friends expected them to work hard – but 46% had no strong view one way or the other.

An analysis of gender differences in responses revealed nothing startling. Boys were more likely than girls to report that their friends didn't expect them to do well at school and they were also more likely to say that their friends don't expect them to work hard.

Comparing responses to their self reported key stage levels, lower attaining students were more likely to say that their parents did not expect them to do well. They were also more likely to say that more was expected of them in primary school than secondary. They also felt under more pressure, a) than in their primary school and, b) from their teachers. These data are illustrated in the figure below.

In focus groups, students (all secondary) more commonly described support and pressure from teachers than parents. Some experienced this as stress but it was more generally viewed as positive. Students in Pupil Referral Units, in particular, stressed the important role of teachers in motivating them – positively through high expectations, active support and sometimes protection and intermediation. Teachers could be demotivating too; through what the students thought was 'unfair' or aggressive behaviour.

