

# Experiences of Ethnic Minority Parents Satisfaction with school

## KEY FINDINGS

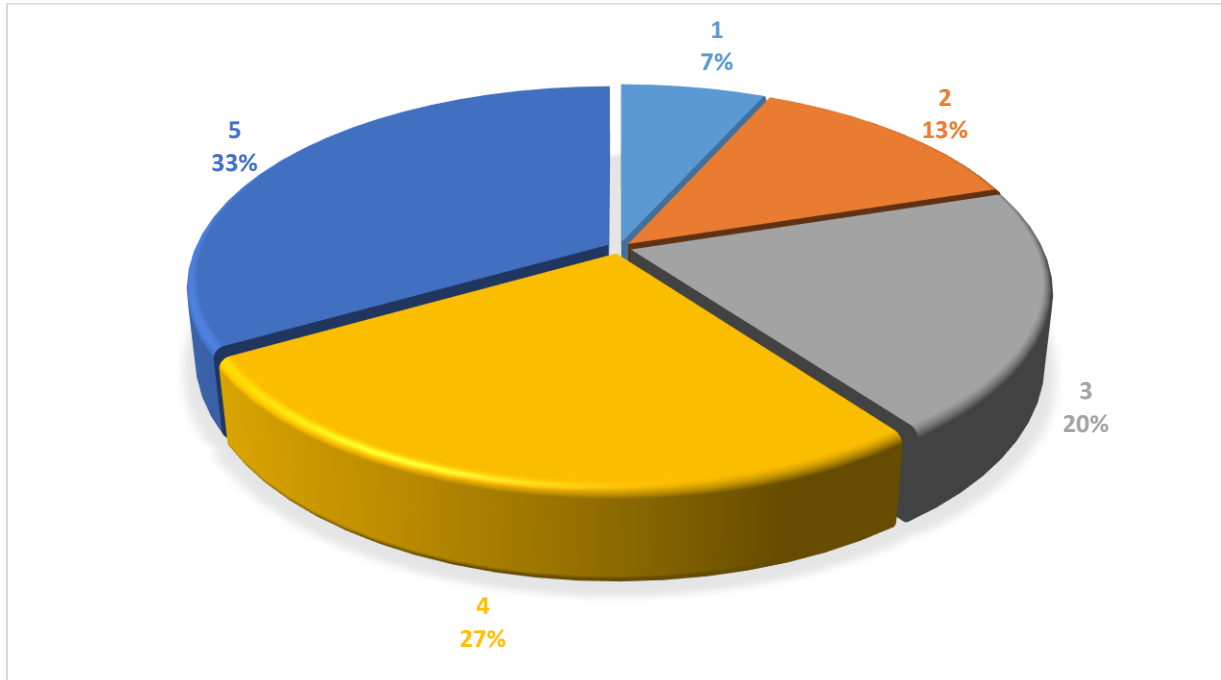
- 60% of parents reported being very or extremely happy with their child's school and 88% thought that their child was extremely happy with school
- 92% of parents felt their child's progress at school was good to excellent
- 56% of parents strongly agreed that the school was welcoming towards other cultures- examples included providing language support, recognizing the cultural diversity in the school and being friendly and respectful towards new families
- 13% of parents felt that the school did not do very much to help parents become involved, several also stated that opportunities to get involved decreased when children moved to secondary
- 76% of parents were positive about parents' evenings, parents cited the opportunity to speak to teachers and see their child's work as well as the chance to get information about how their child was being taught as positives.
- Issues around meetings with teachers included lack of time and infrequent, lack of interpreters and not getting sufficient information about their child's progress

## SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL

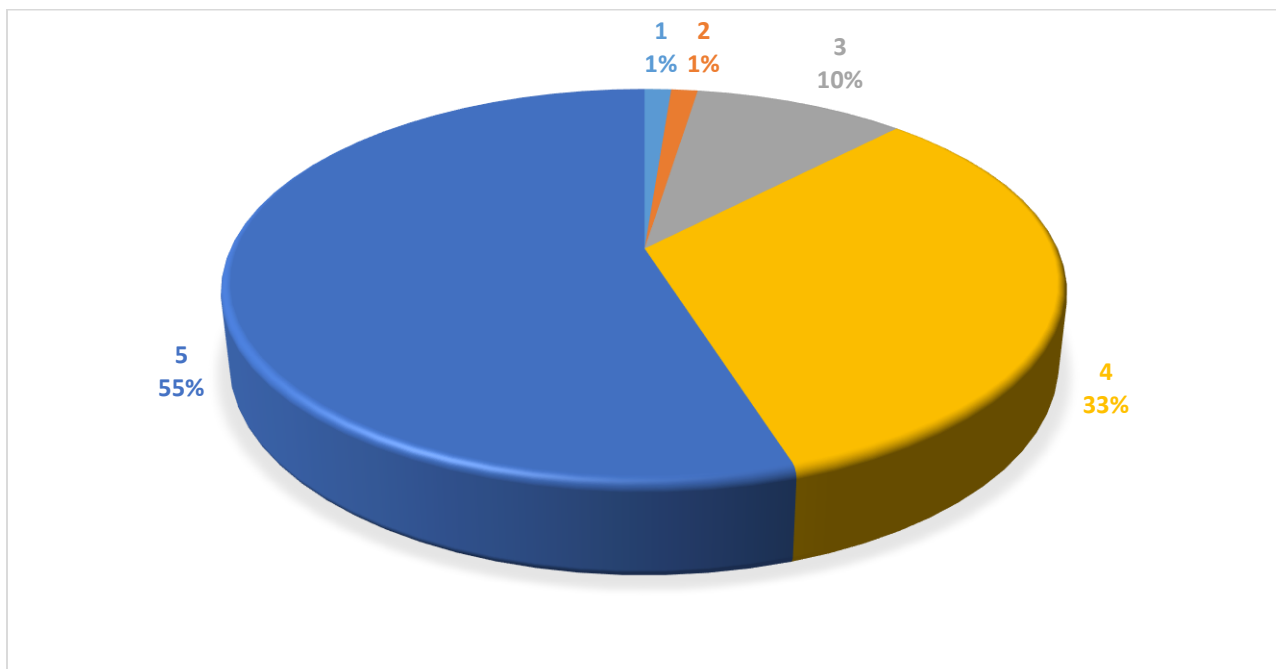
In the survey we asked parents to rate their level of satisfaction with various elements of school life- from generally how happy they were to specifics around how the school makes parents feel welcomed. While this area has been covered by Growing Up in Scotland research there has been no in depth research into what the schools do to make parents feel welcomed or the individual experiences of EM parents on issues like parents' evenings.

## GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL

We asked parents how happy they were with their child's school and how happy they thought their child was.



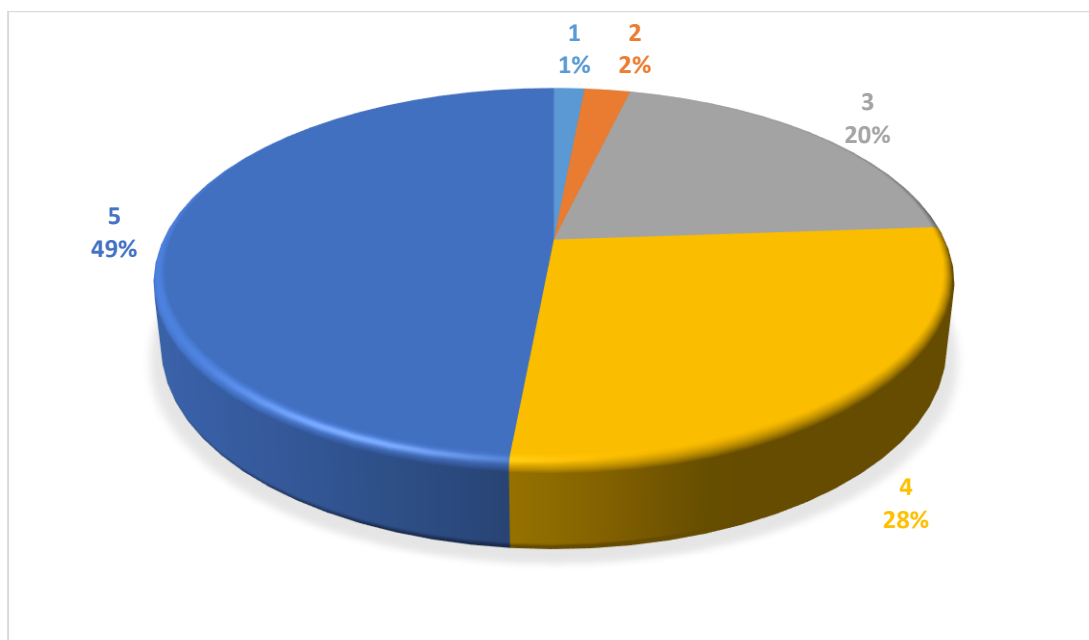
**Figure 1: On a scale from 1-5 (5 being the highest score) how happy are you with the school your child attends? (Sample size: 164)**



**Figure 2: On a scale of 1-5 how happy do you think your child is at school? (Sample size: 164)**

As can be seen ethnic minority parents are happy with their child's school and over half the parents think their child is very happy at school. As Figure 1 and 2 show the parents believe that their children are significantly happier with the school than their parents, with 20% of parents either very unhappy or unhappy, compared to 2% of the children. This suggests that parents' experience of school is not as positive as it is for their children.

The parents were asked if their children have any specific support needs- the most common need identified was around language- 20 respondents mentioned support with language- 19 of these families had arrived in UK between 2006-2014. 8 families mentioned required provision of Halal food, space for prayer and other religious needs- these families were all from Pakistani origin. 4 respondents mentioned physical needs- including asthma, vision and hearing difficulties. 10 respondents mentioned other additional support needs including dyslexia, autism and behavioral issues.



**Figure 3: On a scale of 1-5 how supportive is the school towards your child's needs? (Sample size: 134)**

As can be seen from Figure 3 the vast majority of respondents reported feeling that the school was responsive to their child's needs, although in some cases the school was not able to adequately support their child due to issues with resources

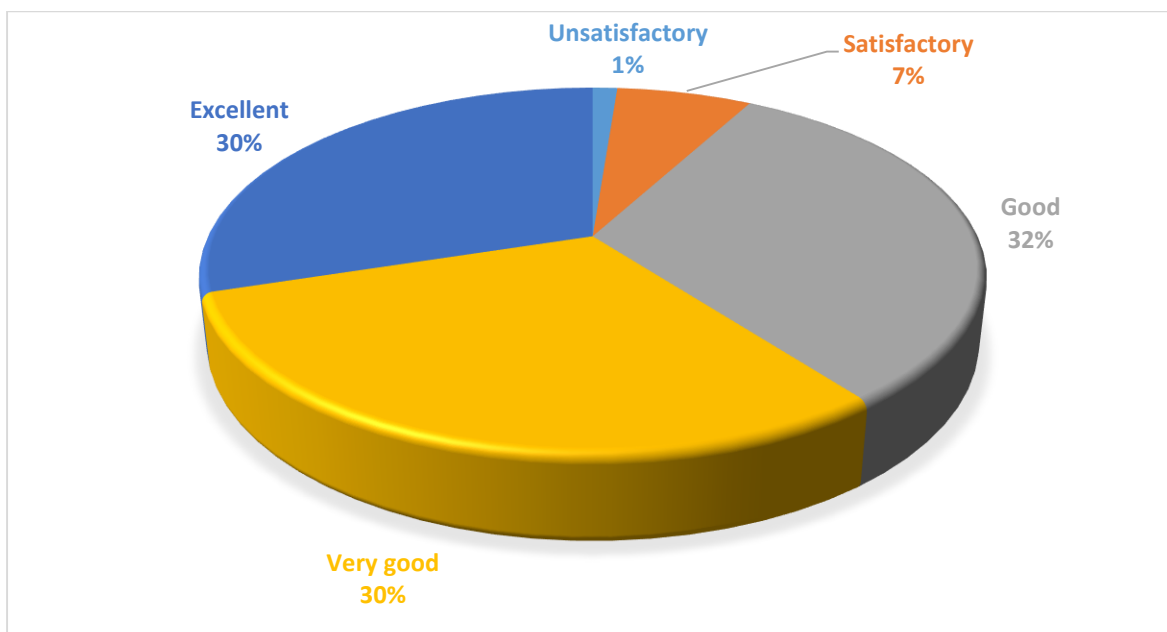
*My younger son needs one to one support in his learning but this is not provided at school due to some shortfall of teachers (Mother, Syria)*

Another parent, with a child with additional support needs, felt that the school did not understand her child and were not able to adapt to his needs

*My son is very active- he needs a lot of support to calm him down. But unfortunately the school is not doing much about it and keeps complaining about him (Mother, Syria)*

One mother, who rated the school as “4” in Figure 3 stated that

*My children don't hate going to school but they don't enjoy it either. I think the school should be more supportive and inclusive of children that are quieter to increase their confidence (Mother, UK born)*



**Figure 4: How would you describe your child's progress at school? (Sample size: 164)**

92% of participants perceived their children's progress as between good and excellent. Two of the parents who felt that progress was just satisfactory also identified racial bullying as an issue within the school

*I do not feel the school does much to be open to other cultures- bullying happens based on skin colour (Mother, Nigeria)*

Another parent who felt their child's progress was only “satisfactory” stated that her child was in a minority at school and that there had not been much effort made to recognise the culture he came from.

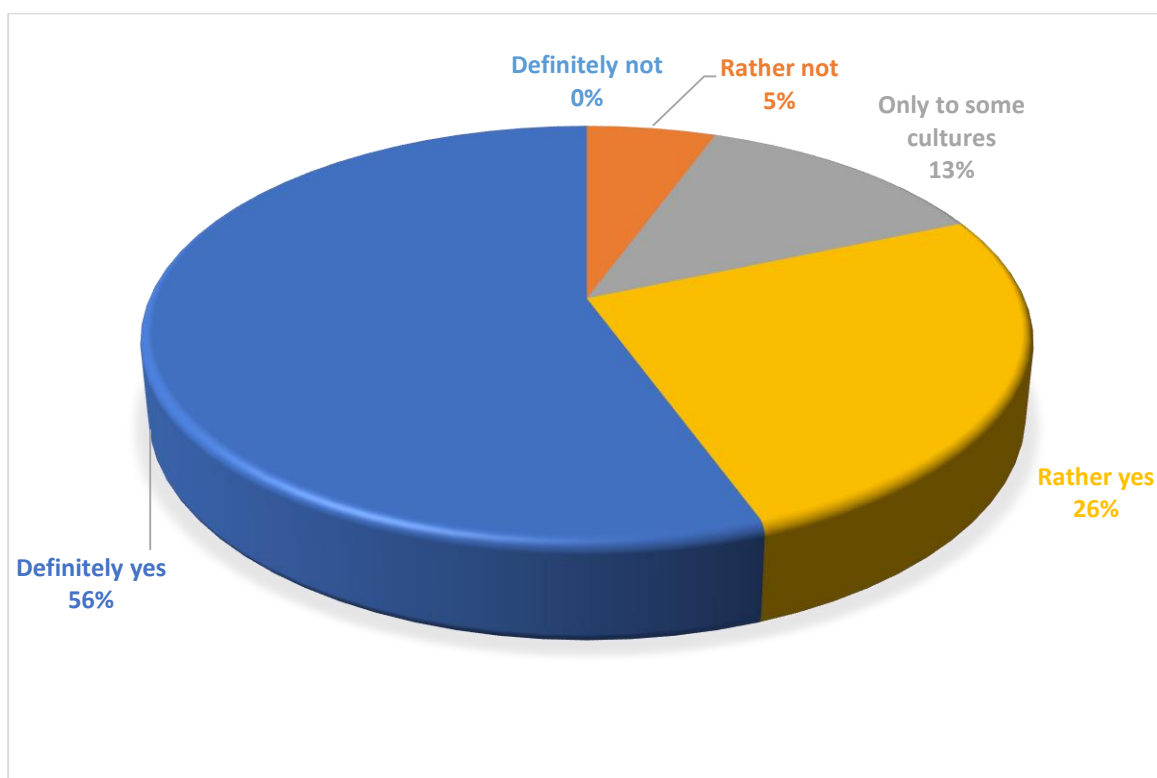
*I do not feel that the school is open to other cultures. I don't know, I don't feel it. I can't tell for sure- the school has 99% Scottish pupils (Mother, Lebanon)*

One parent from Syria highlighted the psychological support that their children need because of past experiences and this traumatic experience is likely to have an impact on their progress within school.

*Both kids need ... emotional support because they are traumatised by their war experiences (Mother, Syria)*

## HOW WELCOMING IS THE SCHOOL?

### Welcoming to other cultures



**Figure 5: Do you feel the school is welcoming towards other cultures and communities?**  
(Sample size: 162)

Over half the respondents felt that the school was welcoming towards other cultures. When asked in what ways the school shows it is open to other cultures the most common answers focused around language and cultural events

*Lots of signs up in school with different languages (Mother, India)*

*Sends out letters in different languages and also has lots of different languages saying "welcome" on the front entrance of the school (Mother, Pakistan)*

*Cultural events eg. European languages day; fundraising events with foods from different cultures (Mother, Romania)*

**Language is regularly cited by ethnic minority parents as the biggest barrier to contact with school and parents really appreciated when the school gave them support with this**

*Communicates in different languages using interpreters (Mother, Pakistan)*

*Special teacher takes care of bilingual children. Also a Polish nursery nurse visits school once a week to deal with any language-specific queries (translation etc)*

*Teacher supportive of organising translation of homework materials into Polish for a parents. No one seems to mind if parents speak Polish to each other and to their children in school (Mother, Polish)*

**Parents really appreciated small efforts to recognise their culture,**

*The teachers and staff try to speak to me with simple words in Arabic. I feel good about this. They smile at me and everyone. (Mother, Iraq)*

**The sense that the school treated the families equally was mentioned by 15 respondents**

*Treat people equally, children didn't feel that they are different from others (Mother Bangladesh)*

**Being treated with respect and dignity were also cited by 14 parents as being important as well as the fact that children in the school are being taught to respect other cultures.**

*The school respects my son and is very aware of the culture and educating children to respect too (Mother, Afghanistan)*

**For Muslim families access to Halal food was cited as an example and welcomed as a sign that the school recognises and respects their faith. Several respondents also spoke about the school recognizing Islamic celebrations and asking parents or children to talk about their customs**

*Ask my daughter to tell about the Eid festival (Mother, Pakistan)*

*School asked at Ramadan to show how you pray (Mother, UK born)*

**The responses were not always positive- 25 respondents were not able to identify anything that the school did to show that it was open to other cultures**

*Don't think the school does anything for that (Mother, Pakistan)*

*Not sure (Mother, India)*

There were a few respondents who gave negative responses, two referred to the language barriers they experienced and stated that they felt the school was not doing enough to support parents with English as an additional language.

*They don't show they are open, as the school is not doing much with parents with language barrier (Mother, Syria)*

As mentioned above two parents spoke about racial bullying and felt that the school had failed to address this

*Nothing really, incidents of racism have occurred in the high school (Mother, Pakistan)*

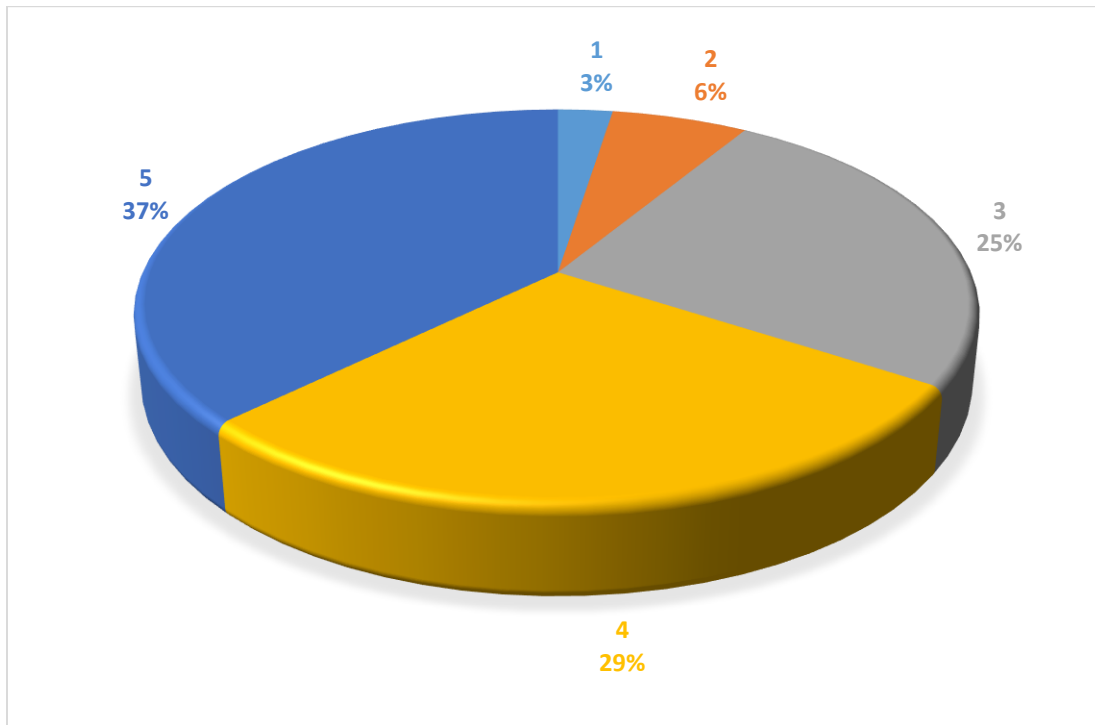
Several parents also stated that they felt their children were not able to take advantage of all the school services and that the white Scottish children were given preferential treatment

*The school is trying to be multicultural but providing multicultural food and celebrating other events such as Chinese New Year. But I feel that white children are favoured than our children- for example breakfast club places are given to more white children (Mother, South Africa)*

One parent also stated that she felt that not all the cultures within the school were being recognised

*They celebrate some cultures but not every culture, like Chinese New Year and Dawali Indian event but they don't celebrate Eid (Mother, Bangladesh)*

## Welcomed to get involved



**Figure 6: On a scale of 1-5 how welcomed do you feel as a parent to get involved in your child's school life? (Sample size: 161)**

Over half the parents interviewed stated that they felt very or extremely welcomed to get involved in the school. When asked what the school does to make parents feel welcomed the most common answers centered around being kept informed of what was happening

*It keeps us in the loop with what's going on & invites us to get involved with the school (Mother, Pakistan)*

*Newsletter; invitations to get involved in P1 class activities on weekly basis (Mother, Greece)*

*Having language support was mentioned by some parents, with this playing an important role in enabling them to be involved*

*When I need to speak to my child's teacher and my English is not good enough to do so they contact Urdu speaker teacher to come to help me with the translation (Mother, Pakistan)*

14 respondents identified the school staff's attitude- smiling, remembering names etc. as being important in making them feel welcomed



*The class teachers makes first impression- they smile, greet every parent, always have time to discuss your child, they try to help everyone regardless of culture (Mother, Poland)*

Events at the school, particularly those run by the Parent Council were also often mentioned as opportunities to become involved in the school. Events recognizing the cultural diversity of the school gave parents a specific opportunity to become involved.

*School invites to take part in various events e.g. school fair, mothers' day parties (Mother, Poland)*

*Coffee morning once a month for parents from ethnic minorities/ bilingual families- chance to meet up. International day once a year, fair- different food involving countries represented in school, organised by Parent Council (Mother, Ghana)*

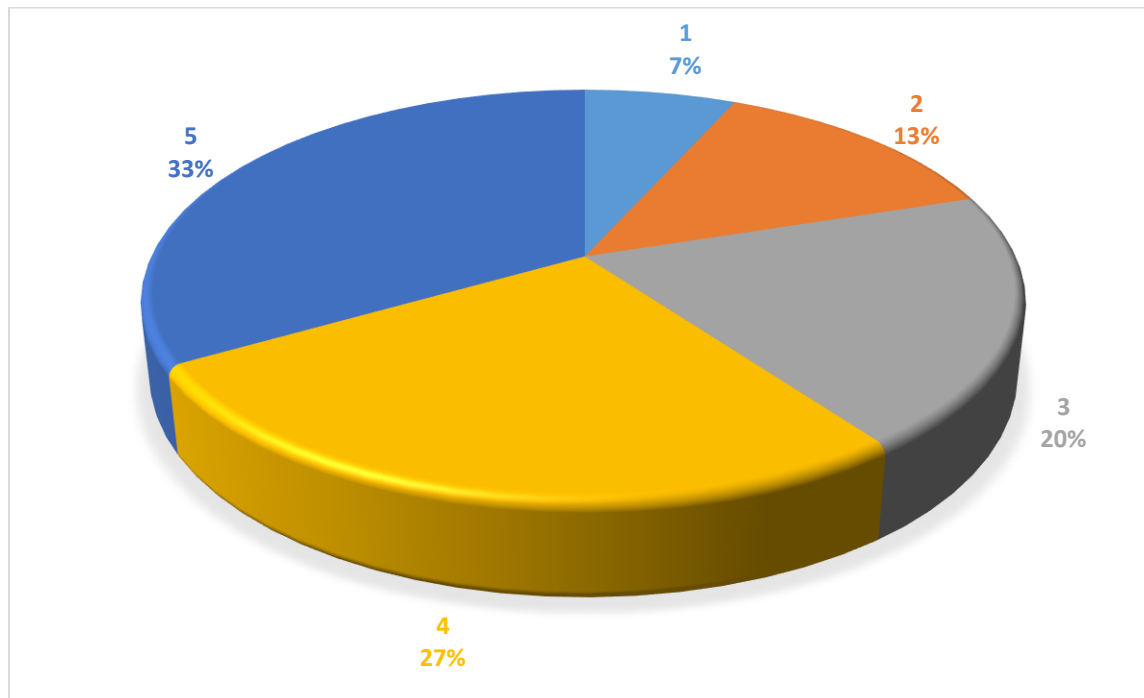
Two parents mentioned the difference between primary and secondary school, they felt there was less contact and fewer opportunities to be involved at a secondary school level

*We receive letters with all the information, invitations to attend meetings. In primary school the contact was more frequent and we were more active. At primary school level there was a lot of activity- garden planning, celebrations etc. (Mother, Poland)*

It should also be noted that 21 (13%) respondents stated that they felt the school did not do much to involve parents

*Not sure, not too much (Mother, Pakistan)*

## COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOL



**Figure 7: On a scale of 1-5 how happy are you with the way the school communicates with you? (Sample size: 162)**

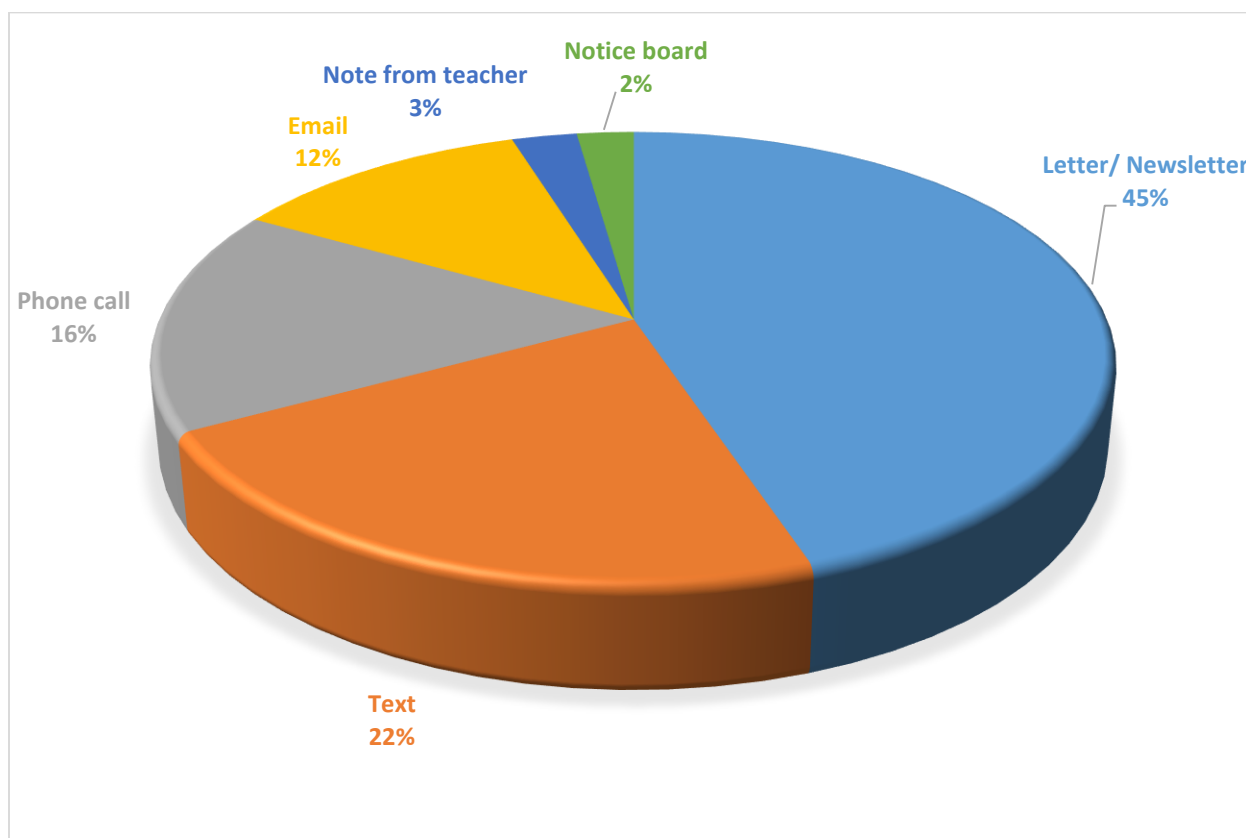
A third of the respondents said that they were very happy with the way the school communicates with them. Communication with parents took various forms, with most parents giving a variety of examples

*By email, phone or text and sometimes they send letter (Mother, Bangladesh)*

The most common form was written communication including letters and newsletters. Schools are also increasingly using technology to communicate with parents- from “group mail” text messages notifying parents to key information to class blogs and school websites.

In the questionnaire emails and letters were used as prompts for parents, this might explain why very few parents cited face to face contact with teachers. A few parents did mention speaking to with teachers at the school gate as an opportunity for teachers to speak to parents about any issues that had arisen

*Mostly in writing (letters) in person occasionally- teacher speaks to parents after school individually if necessary (Mother, Poland)*



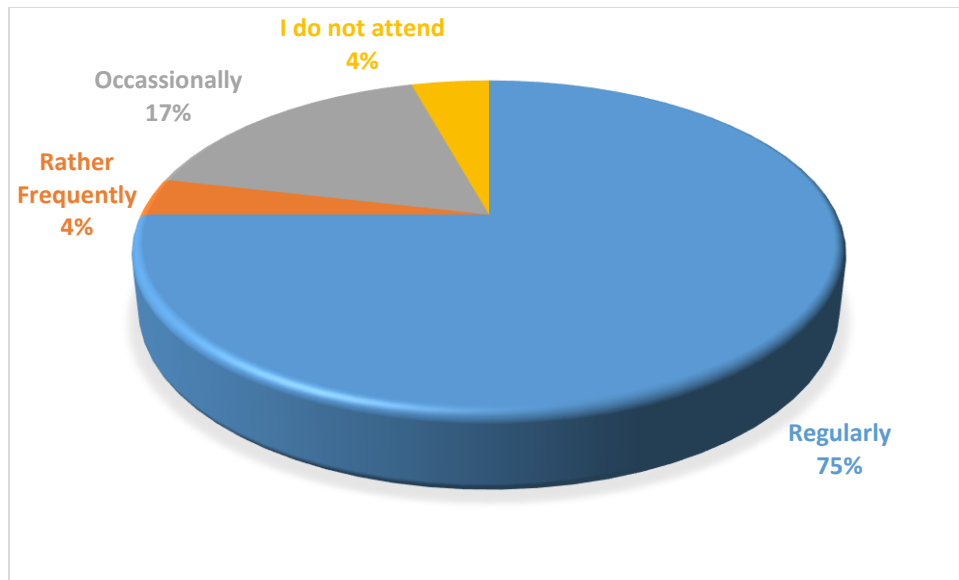
**Figure 8: How does the school communicate with you?**

A few parents also mentioned communication directly from the teacher in the form of notes or messages in homework diaries

*Progress book—daily feedback from teacher entered e.g. smiley, update on behavior (Mother, Greece)*

## **PARENTS' EVENINGS**

Parents' evenings are the main opportunity for parents to speak to their child's teacher and discuss how their child is progressing. Among the parents we interviewed attendance at these meetings was very high. 75% of respondents stating that they attended regularly and only 4% of parents saying that they did not attend (of these 7 parents one stated that there had not been any parents' evenings since her child started school so she had not had the opportunity to attend).



**Figure 9: Describe your attendance at parents' meetings (Sample size: 164)**

Of the parents who did attend the majority (76%) were positive about the way they were conducted, describing them as being informative and well organized. Most parents welcomed the opportunity the meeting gave them to discuss their child's progress

*Very good, it is an opportunity for parents to see their children class work and also we get all the information about our children's progress (Mother, Bangladesh)*

*Very good meetings at my child's school. Lovely parents, teachers. I enjoy being part of the meeting I feel valued (Mother, Ghana)*

The respondents specifically mentioned the opportunity to see their child's classroom and work as being useful to them as well as being able to discuss their child's progress and share their own ideas and concerns

*It's appropriate and teachers listen to parents' ideas and opinions (Mother, Malaysia)*

Several parents, however reported that they had wanted more information around their child's progress. There is often a difference between the way children were assessed in their home country and here and parents expressed frustration that they did not have a clear picture of their child's progress.

*They are informative- I can understand my son's academic progress, teacher tells me if there are weak points, where he's doing well etc. But I would like to see*

*some test results—e.g. in maths, from official tests. Annual report: never contains grades, only vague levels (Mother, Greece)*

*It's good to hear about child's progress and see the materials in class. But it worries me that teachers try to present a positive picture of a child, and I don't understand what they mean. I would prefer them to be more honest, criticism is only in the written report (Mother, Greece)*

Parents also mentioned having limited time to speak to teachers and felt that they needed more time to discuss things with the teacher.

*Too short-even the GP would have more time. They have stop-clocks. No time for discussion (Mother, Ghana)*

Time is a particular issue for parents from another culture, who may need more support to understand how their child is being taught and assessed and also for parents who require an interpreter when meetings are likely to take longer to allow for interpretation.

A few parents also mentioned the frequency of parents' evenings (once or twice a year), they stated that they did not feel that this is enough, particularly parents with children in secondary school who have far less direct contact with the school.

*We have parents' meetings once a year, it would be useful to meet more often, at least twice a year (Mother, Poland)*

Parents are able to request interpreters for meetings with schools, including parents' evenings, however this is not known by all parents and the lack of support around language can limit the value of meetings with parents or prevent parents from attending

*No interpreter provided, I feel quite intimidated when I go and I don't understand the conversation (Mother, Afghanistan)*

*The meetings are fine, it's just I don't attend as I am shy, and not speaking English. So I avoid to be in embarrassing situation (Mother, Iraq)*

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The majority of the parents interviewed expressed satisfaction with their child's school. From the results it is clear that for many parents getting support around language is central to making them feel welcomed, involved and ensuring that they are able to participate fully in events like parents' evenings.

In light of the findings in this report BEMIS makes the following recommendations

- It is important that there are continued opportunities for parental involvement throughout children's time in school. This study found that opportunities for parents to be involved in school are limited once children go into secondary school. Events such as careers nights, parents sharing their work and language skills, talking about cultures and religion etc. benefit the school, the children and help the parents establish closer relations with the school
- Schools need to continue to explore ways show that other cultures are welcome. This can be through events, recognising and celebrating the languages used by the school community- for examples of good practice see the Gathered Together website
- Schools need to establish clear procedures for communication between home and school (particularly in the transition for primary to secondary) so that parents know who to speak to, how best to approach the school with concerns. From this report it is clear that parents value the opportunity to come into their child's class and see their work and this should be supported whenever possible
- Ensure that parents are informed of their right to access an interpreter for key meetings with the school. Resources should be made available to promote this and ensure that the funding for interpreters comes out of a centralised budget rather than penalizing schools with a high ethnic minority population.