

6 Parents and Schools

Contact

In planning this project, we made the assumption that effective communication between the school and parents should be one criterion of success in secondary schools. We also assumed that communication with parents, as well as being an end in itself, might help the schools to achieve in other ways. This second assumption requires some explanation. It is well established that the progress of children at school is strongly related to basic facts about the family, such as the socio-economic group and standard of education of the parents.¹ Obviously the parents exert a direct influence on their children, and may provide a substantial part of the teaching they receive in reading and number over the early years. Recent research suggests that where primary schools have special schemes to encourage parents to do more to teach their children, there may be significant gains in reading attainment. By the time the children go to secondary school, however, we might expect the parents to be less active in teaching them directly. However, we would still expect the parents to have a powerful indirect influence. Where parents have a knowledge and understanding of what the school is trying to achieve and are sympathetic towards it, they will be likely to encourage their child to adopt the goals, values and outlook implicit in the programme of secondary education that is being offered. On this view, effective communication between the school and parents will lead the parents to motivate and manage the child in ways that the school finds helpful.

Of course, this model of the interactions between parents, children and schools is highly simplified, and leaves out many things. One complicating factor is that the result of communication between parents and schools may well differ, depending on whether the two sides of the relationship share a common outlook, or tend to be in conflict. It is not generally the case that those who have more contact with an institution tend to think better of it as a result. Where encounters tend to involve conflict, those who have the most contact tend to have the lowest opinions, as in the case of the police.² It is possible, therefore, that the effects of contact between schools and parents may vary, depending on whether the parents set a high value on education, or generally approve of the school's approach. Another complicating factor is that there are different sorts of contact with the school; some are consensual and encouraging (such as the parents' evening where the child is achieving well); others focus the minds of the parents on problems or failures (such as the parents' evening where the child is performing badly); and others may involve conflict (such as a meeting to discuss the child's unruly behaviour). These different kinds of contact may

have different effects, and in the case of encounters to discuss a problem or difficulty, the way in which the teacher handles the encounter may be critical.

For these reasons it seemed important to obtain fairly detailed information about the kinds of contacts that parents had had with the schools. In presenting the results in this chapter, the focus of interest is on effective communication as an end in itself. There is a particular interest in whether the schools are able to communicate effectively with parents belonging to ethnic minority groups, whose assumptions and outlook may be substantially different from those implicit in the life of the school. The analysis of school differences with respect to communication with parents is pursued further in Chapter 11. The associations between educational progress and communication with parents are explored in Chapter 10.

The survey of parents included a series of questions about the extent and nature of contact between the parents and the school. These questions cover four main topics: the number of visits that parents have made to the school and the purposes of these visits; whether they have had a talk with a teacher about their child; whether they have been *asked* to go to the school to see the head or a teacher, and for what reason; and whether they have had notes or letters from school about various matters. The first three of these are about personal contact and the last about written communication, and these are the headings under which we consider the findings.

Personal contact

Extent

The findings on the extent of personal contact arise from the following questions.

- Have you or X's father/mother visited the school since September of last year?

If yes

- How many times have you visited the school since last September?

Ask all informants

- Have you or X's father/mother had a talk with a teacher about X since last September?
- Has someone else visited the school or spoken to the head or a teacher since last September?
- Have you been asked to go to the school to see the head or a teacher since last September?

'Visiting' was intended to exclude occasions where the parent went to the school, for example to deliver or pick up the child, without having any significant contact with anyone there. Interviewers were told that trips to deliver and pick up children should not be included.

The findings on the extent of parental contact are summarised in Table 6.1, with an analysis by socio-economic group. In 78 per cent of cases one or other parent had visited the school at some time over the school year; in 26 per cent of cases the parents had made three or more visits, and the average (mean) number of visits per family was 1.84. There was, therefore, a 'hard core' of about one-fifth of parents who had not visited the school during the year; a majority of parents visited the school once or twice during the year, and about one-quarter more often than that. Two-thirds of parents said they had talked with a teacher about their child over the year (so some parents had visited the school without talking to a teacher about their child). In a small proportion of cases (11 per cent) someone had visited the school or talked with teachers on behalf of the parents. In 16 per cent of

cases, parents had been asked to go to school to see the head or a teacher. This was meant to refer to a specific summons of the particular parents, and not to a general invitation (for example, to a parents' evening). From the more detailed answers, it was, in fact, interpreted in this way.

The extent of contact is very strongly related to socio-economic group. The higher the social class of the parent the greater is the contact with school. The pattern of findings suggests that families in which no parent has had a job within the past five years (and which cannot therefore be assigned to a socio-economic group) in fact belong to an 'underclass', since they have even less contact with schools than the families of unskilled manual workers. This is a pattern that is repeated in the analysis of many other variables: in terms of their characteristics and responses, parents who have not worked always seem to belong to a socio-economic group below the lowest group in the conventional classification. The average (mean) number of visits to school is almost three times as high among professional and managerial parents as among parents who have not had a job; the percentage who have talked with teachers about their child is 81 for professional and managerial parents compared with 47 for parents who have not worked. In both cases, there is a consistent pattern among the intervening groups. By contrast, parents in the lower socio-economic groups are slightly *more* likely than those in the higher groups to have been *asked* to visit the school to see the head or a teacher. Answers to the more detailed questions (see below) show that where parents are *asked* to visit this is usually because of a problem (in the progress, attendance or behaviour of the child) so the findings seem to imply that middle-class parents are almost as likely as working-class parents to be summoned to discuss a problem.

West Indian parents have about the same amount of contact with the schools overall as white British parents, but south Asian parents have substantially less (Table 6.2). South Asians are less likely to visit the schools than parents belonging to other ethnic groups, and south Asians with the exception of Bangladeshis are less likely than others to have discussed their child with a teacher. Probably because of language problems it is more common for Bangladeshi than for other parents to have someone else visit or speak to teachers on their behalf. A higher proportion of West Indian parents (29 per cent) than of others have been summoned to see the head or a teacher.

Some further analyses of the mean number of parental visits are shown in Table 6.3. Working parents are considerably more likely to visit the school than those who are out of work, and single parents are somewhat less likely to visit than those living with a partner. The higher their own educational qualifications, the more contact parents tend to have with the school; however, these differences are rather smaller than the differences between socio-economic groups; it seems likely that social class differences are paramount and that differences according to level of qualifications are largely a function of social class differences. There are only minor differences between Asian parents belonging to different religious groups in this respect: Moslem, Hindu and Sikh parents all have a rather low level of contact with schools. Although the sample size is very low, it seems that Jewish parents have a very high level of contact with schools.

There are fairly wide variations between schools in the extent to which parents visit (Table 6.4). The proportion of parents who have been summoned to talk to the head or a teacher is much higher in area 1 (29 per cent) and to a lesser extent in area 4 (18 per cent) than in areas 2 and 3 (11 and 9 per cent respectively). This is not a function of differences in social class profiles between the areas. It may be related to greater behaviour and attendance problems in area 1 than elsewhere. It may also indicate the existence of policy

on this matter at the level of the local education authority; certainly this seems the best explanation of the difference between areas 3 and 4. There are also differences between schools in the same area, so some of the differences between individual schools across areas are large: school 14 has the highest proportion of parents who have been summoned (43 per cent) and school 32 the lowest (4 per cent).

The purpose of parental visits

Parents who had visited the school at all (since 'last September') were asked for what reasons they had made the visits and after they had mentioned one reason were encouraged to mention others. From this question we can show the proportion of parents who have visited the school for various purposes; in principle, informants could mention any number of reasons for visiting school, though many of them mentioned only one (the mean number of reasons mentioned was 1.65 among parents who had visited the school at all). Table 6.5 shows these findings in total and by country of origin. The formally organised occasion of the parents' evening or open day is much the most common reason for parental visits: two-thirds of parents had visited school for such an event. Other special events are also important occasions for visits; 14 per cent of parents had gone to plays or concerts, 5 per cent to special events such as exhibitions or fairs, 3 per cent to sports events. Otherwise, the most common reasons for visits are to talk about the child's progress (15 per cent), behaviour (8 per cent) and attendance (4 per cent). Compared with other groups, a rather smaller proportion of south Asian parents, with the exception of Bangladeshis, had attended parents evenings and open days; many of the Bangladeshis are in one particular school (15) which does succeed in attracting them to parents' evenings. The proportion of all south Asian groups who attended other kinds of special events (plays, concerts, exhibitions, fairs) is low. A higher proportion of West Indian and of Bangladeshi parents than of other groups had gone to the school to talk about the child's progress. Also, a higher proportion of West Indian parents than of other groups had gone to school to talk about their child's behaviour (though not about attendance). The proportion of south Asian parents who had gone to talk about behaviour or attendance is very low. In general terms, these findings suggest a lower than average level of contact of most kinds with south Asian parents and an average or higher than average level of contact with West Indian parents, with more of this contact having to do with problems than is the case for other ethnic groups.

Very considerable differences are shown, both between the areas and between the schools, in the purpose of parental visits (Table 6.6). The proportion of parents who had attended parents' evenings and open days is highest in area 2 (80 per cent) and also fairly high in area 1 (69 per cent) but substantially lower in area 3 (45 per cent) and 4 (40 per cent). In this respect, the variations between schools within areas are relatively small. The proportion of parents who had visited school for other special events such as plays, concerts, exhibitions and fairs, varies very widely between individual schools, presumably depending on whether particular events had taken place. The proportion of parents who had gone to school to talk about their child's progress or behaviour is substantially higher in area 1 than elsewhere: we have already seen that in many cases parents in area 1 were *asked* to visit the school for discussions of this kind. At one school in the area (16), 50 per cent of parents had gone for a talk about their child's progress and 33 per cent for a talk about behaviour, which is much higher than at schools in other areas, but also considerably higher than at other schools in the same area. The high incidence in area 1 of discussions with parents about behaviour problems is understandable in the light of the high proportion of children entering schools in area 1 who have deviant scores on the B2 behaviour scale.

On the other hand, the differences between schools within area 1 in the incidence of talks with parents about behaviour, and in particular the very high incidence of these talks at school 16, are not paralleled by similar differences in the proportion of the intake having deviant B2 scores.

The proportion of parents who have gone to school to talk about their child's progress (but not behaviour) is higher in area 4 than in areas 2 and 3, and this looks like the reflection of a policy at the level of the local education authority.

Overall, 20 per cent of parents have visited the school to discuss a problem (the child's progress, attendance or behaviour). This proportion varies widely between schools, and these variations must be mostly the result of different school policies. A separate analysis shows that there is some relationship between the child's attainment at the end of the second year and whether the parents have visited to talk about problems (the discussions are more likely to take place where the child is a low attainer). At the same time, of course, certain schools have a higher than average proportion of low attainers. But this explains only a small amount of the variation between schools in the extent to which they discuss problems with parents.

The reasons for requests to visit

In a similar way, we asked parents for what reasons they had been asked to visit the school to talk to the head or a teacher. The proportion of parents who had been summoned for any particular reason is small, but discussions about the general progress of the child and about the child's behaviour are the most common reasons (they each apply to 6 per cent of parents). Parents originating from Pakistan, Bangladesh and the West Indies are substantially more likely than others to have been summoned to talk about the general progress of their child. Parents originating from the West Indies are much more likely than others to have been summoned to talk about their child's behaviour. Analysis of these findings by school and area again shows large differences between area 1 and elsewhere: a much higher proportion of parents in area 1 have been summoned to talk about their child's progress, behaviour and attendance. School 15, a girls' school with a very high proportion of Bangladeshis, is like the other area 1 schools in that many parents are summoned to talk about their child's progress, but unlike them in that few are summoned to talk about behaviour. Outside area 1, a summons for any particular reason is a fairly rare event, so that differences between schools are not important, but it is notable that school 41 is more inclined than the others to ask parents to come in for a talk about their child's general progress.

Notes and letters from school

Parents were asked whether they had received notes or letters from school, since last September, about each of a number of specific matters. The great majority of parents (81 per cent) had received notes or letters about some matter or other over the school year. Not surprisingly, a much smaller proportion of Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents (17 per cent and 43 per cent respectively) said they had received written communications, as many of them cannot read English. The most common written communications are ones giving general information about the school (received by 71 per cent of parents). Nearly one-quarter of parents had received notes or letters about the school uniform and about their child's progress, and smaller proportions had received letters about their child's behaviour (10 per cent) and attendance (8 per cent) and about their child being 'put on report' (6 per cent). Putting a child 'on report' is a signal that formal notice has been taken

of bad behaviour (and possibly poor attendance) and that disciplinary measures may follow. Parents of West Indian origin are more likely than others to have received notes or letters about the child's behaviour (West Indians 20 per cent, whites 11 per cent) and about the child being 'put on report' (West Indians 12 per cent, whites 8 per cent). West Indian parents are also slightly more likely than whites to have received notes about the child's progress (31 per cent compared with 26 per cent). South Asian parents are less likely than others to have received notes on all topics except attendance.

Perhaps surprisingly, analysis of these findings by socio-economic group does not in general show a consistent pattern. The only major exception is that parents in the higher socio-economic groups are substantially and consistently more likely than those in the lower groups to have received notes or letters about the school uniform. This is almost certainly because the schools with a relatively high proportion of middle-class children are the ones that have the more demanding uniform requirements and try harder to enforce them.

There are very large differences between schools and areas in the pattern of communication in writing with parents. There are, first of all, some considerable variations in the proportion of parents who have received notes and letters at all. To a limited extent, these differences reflect the variations in the proportion of the families who are south Asian, which is in turn related to literacy in English. However, except in the case of school 15 (which is a mostly Bangladeshi all-girls school) the variations cannot for the most part be explained in this way.

The proportion of parents who have received written communications about various *problems* to do with their child varies very widely between schools. From these findings it seems that uniform matters are given far more attention by some schools than by others: there are two schools where about 70 per cent of parents have received notes about uniform, a middle band where about one-third of parents have received such notes and others where few parents (in one case 2 per cent) have received them. While attention to uniform is more common among schools in some areas than in others, there are wide variations between the schools in the same areas, so it is clear that the school policies do not flow from consistent policies at the level of the local education authority. The schools where a high proportion of parents have received notes about uniform tend to be the ones with a strong middle-class element, hence the general tendency for middle-class parents to have received more notes about uniform than working-class parents. In deciding on a uniform policy, head teachers seem, consciously or unconsciously, to be responding to the social class balance among the children. This could be because middle-class parents tend to expect or welcome stringent uniform requirements; or it could be that uniform requirements were once stringent in all schools but have become impossible to maintain in schools with a very high proportion of working-class children. If the second explanation is the right one then it may be that in the schools where stringent uniform requirements remain, they are tolerated by middle-class parents but not expected or welcomed.

There are very wide variations between the schools in the proportion of parents who have received letters or notes about their child's progress. These variations seem to be almost entirely between individual schools rather than between those in one area and those in another; for example, within area 2 there are two schools (21 and 23) where 58 per cent of parents have received notes about the child's progress and another (24) where only 4 per cent have received them. It seems that the variation between schools in their level of contact with parents about their child's progress is unconnected with variations between schools in the attainment of the children there. Looking at the data at the school level

(rather than at the individual level) there is no relationship between the level of attainment in the second year and the proportion of parents who have received letters about the child's progress. The differences which are large, arise from differences in school policies and not because some schools have more children with learning problems than others.

The schools in area 1 are more likely to write to parents about their child's behaviour and attendance than those in the other three areas, but there are, in addition, important differences here between the schools in the same areas. There are again important differences between schools, but in this case not between areas, in the proportion of parents who have received letters about their child being 'put on report'. Although, as might be expected, the children and parents affected by this are a fairly small minority in all schools, the proportion reaches 17 per cent in two schools (14 and 33), while it ranges between nil and 9 per cent in the others.

Summary

Within our sample as a whole, a majority of parents visit the school once or twice a year, but there is a 'hard core' of about one fifth of parents who have not visited. The extent of contact is very strongly related to social class, the middle class being much more likely to visit than the working class parents; in this respect, as in many others, families where neither parent has been in work over the past five years appear to be an 'under-class': they visit the schools very little. Where parents were specifically *asked* to go to school to see the head or a teacher, this was nearly always to discuss a problem such as the child's poor behaviour or progress. A much smaller proportion of parents (16 per cent) said they had been *asked* to visit, and the proportion was rather higher for working class than for middle class parents.

The schools have substantially less contact with south Asian parents than with other ethnic groups. The amount of contact with West Indians is about the same as with whites, except that a higher proportion of West Indian parents have been asked to visit the school, nearly always to discuss a problem.

There are some notable variations between schools in the proportion of parents who have visited frequently, and there are some very large variations in the proportion who have been *asked* to visit; these latter differences are certainly a reflection of differences in school policies.

The formally organised parents' evening or open day is much the most common reason for parental visits: two-thirds of parents have visited school for such an event. Other special events such as plays, concerts, exhibitions and fairs, are also fairly common. Other common reasons for visits are to talk about the child's progress, behaviour and attendance. The proportion of south Asian parents who have gone to these events, especially plays and concerts, is low. The one exception is the school with a very high proportion of Bangladeshi, which does succeed in attracting them to parents' evenings. There is much evidence from this study and others that south Asians place a high value on education; so it seems likely that they have a relatively small amount of contact with the schools because the style or content of special events does not appeal to them.

Schools also send a considerable number of notes and letters to parents. The great majority (81 per cent) of parents had received notes or letters about some matter or other over the school year. Not surprisingly, parents of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin were much less likely than others to remember receiving written communications, since many of them cannot read English. Parents of West Indian origin are more likely than others to have received notes about problems, such as the child's behaviour or progress.

There are very large differences between schools in the pattern of communication in writing with parents; also, the proportion of parents who have received notes or letters about various *problems* to do with their child varies very widely between schools. This is largely a reflection of differences in school policies and not differences in circumstances. For example, the schools that send out many notes about children's progress are not the ones that have many children with learning difficulties.

Although the survey can tell us something about the amount and pattern of contact with parents, it can tell us little or nothing about the quality of contact – about how far the parents, children and schools benefit from it. The results do show some important variations between schools in the extent and pattern of contact. In Chapters 10 and 11 we shall produce a more precise estimate of the true extent of these variations, and test the hypothesis that the child's progress is related to the amount of contact between parents and the school.

Attitudes and views

One objective of this research was to explore the idea that parents' attitudes and views are somehow bound up with school success. Within one framework of analysis, parental satisfaction might, perhaps, be regarded as a criterion of school success. Of course, schools exist primarily to educate children, not to please parents, but it may be thought that schools ought to satisfy parents that their policies are effective and that the education they are providing is acceptable in the context of the background, assumptions and expectations of the family. Within another framework of analysis, the perceptions and views of parents may be part of the process that determines the success of the school or child in other terms, for example scholastic attainment.

A further criterion of school success that we had in mind at the planning stage was 'appropriate behaviour by children while at school'. Although we did not succeed in obtaining objective and quantitative indicators of standards of behaviour, we did obtain useful information about parents' perceptions, which will be set out in this section. We can also assess parents' views on the teaching of religion, an issue that has particular importance in multi-ethnic secondary schools.

Parents' satisfactions and dissatisfactions

At the end of the interview, parents were asked to explain in their own words in what ways they were satisfied and dissatisfied with the school. They were encouraged to expand their original answer and to give more than one answer if they wished. In fact, 78 per cent mentioned some satisfactory aspect, and 56 per cent mentioned some unsatisfactory aspect. On average those who mentioned any satisfactory aspect mentioned 2.2 satisfactory points; whereas those who mentioned any unsatisfactory aspect mentioned 1.8 unsatisfactory points. Thus, more parents had something to say in favour of the school than against it (78 per cent compared with 56 per cent); also, parents had more things to say in favour than against.

On the positive side it is the academic values of the school that are most often mentioned; 37 per cent of parents praised the teaching or academic standards or said their child was progressing well. By contrast, it was extremely rare for parents to mention the strength of a school in remedial work with below-average children. A substantial proportion of parents (26 per cent) praised the teachers as teachers, and in addition 14 per cent said they were accessible or sympathetic. On the other hand it was quite a small proportion (3 per cent) who made specific mention of the head, and this implies that the head is not an important

feature of the image that parents have of a school. A substantial proportion of parents (14 per cent) said the child was happy or had friends. An equal proportion mentioned firm discipline or good behaviour, whereas only a very small proportion (1 per cent) praised the school for not being too strict. Relatively small proportions of parents mentioned the good reputation or prestige of the school, its location close to home, the buildings or facilities and the extra-curricular activities. An absence of racism and good provision for ethnic minorities were very seldom mentioned by parents as causes for satisfaction.

Among parents of boys at the two boys' schools, very few think it is an advantage that the school is for boys only, whereas among parents of girls at the two girls' schools, the proportion who mention single sex as an advantage is 42 per cent at school 41 and 12 per cent at school 15. Both of these schools have a high proportion of girls from families originating from outside the UK and both have a high proportion of south Asians. The proportion of Moslems is much lower at school 41 than at school 15, though it is at school 41 that parents are most likely to mention single sex as an advantage. Thus, single sex is seen as an advantage for girls' but not for boys' schools, and it is mentioned by a substantial proportion of parents for only one out of the two girls' schools included in the sample. The fact that a school was co-educational was never mentioned as a cause for dissatisfaction by parents of children at other schools.

On the negative side it is bad behaviour and a lack of discipline that is most often mentioned; 24 per cent of parents criticised the school on these grounds. A significant but much smaller proportion (7 per cent) made the opposite criticism that discipline was too strict, inconsistent or inflexible, or that the uniform was insisted on too much. A substantial proportion of parents (13 per cent) criticised the academic values of the school, and in addition a significant proportion (6 per cent) criticised the school for being too narrowly academic, doing too little for the below-average child, or giving too little education in practical subjects.

In contrast to some of the public criticisms that have been made of multi-ethnic secondary schools and of teachers' attitudes towards black children, there is remarkably little criticism from parents that focusses on race relations matters. Just 1 per cent of parents mentioned racial attacks, or that black and white children don't get on. Eight out of 2,074 parents interviewed mentioned racial prejudice among teachers. A much more significant proportion (4 per cent) said that the school did not take account of cultural differences or of the special needs of ethnic minority groups. An appreciable number of parents (3 per cent) made hostile comments about black or Asian children or expressed concern about their number in the school; this was an expression of general feelings rather than a criticism of the way the school was run.

These findings create a different impression from various other reports. For example, the inquiry into the killing of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah, a 13-year old boy of Bangladeshi origin, in the playground at Burnage High School, Manchester, had this to say about the school.

Racism and racial violence existing in the local community is bound to be reflected in the school itself, both among students and teachers, and so it was at Burnage. We received evidence, entirely anecdotal, of daily acts of racial violence and abuse heaped on the Asian and Afro-Caribbean population in the areas of Burnage and Longsight. It is nothing new. Such evidence repeats itself all over Britain, as is indicated by any examination of the growing literature on racial harassment and attacks.³

However, a careful reading of this passage (and others in the same report) shows that the evidence – which is said to be 'anecdotal' – is about racial harassment and attacks in

this part of Manchester, and not at the school itself. The statement that ‘racism and racial violence existing in the local community is bound to be reflected in the school itself, both among students and teachers’ is not based on specific evidence, except that there was evidence of a racial motive for the killing itself. Similarly the CRE report *Learning in Terror* provides anecdotal evidence of racial harassment of schoolchildren mostly on the way to and from school. A few of the reported incidents took place in school, but from this evidence it is impossible to judge how common this kind of event might be.⁴ From case studies of two secondary schools in the Midlands, Cecile Wright reported a few overtly racist remarks by teachers, and described an atmosphere of mistrust between certain teachers and Afro-Caribbean pupils.⁵ More recently, however, Peter Foster, in a study of a school within two miles of Burnage High School in Manchester, found generally harmonious relations between teachers and Afro-Caribbean pupils, with little racial antagonism. Indeed, Foster writes that black pupils regarded concern about racism as eccentric.⁶ Although the present study did not include systematic classroom observation, there was little indication of overt racism in relations among pupils or between pupils and staff.

Thus, although some well-publicised reports have created the impression that overt racism is a serious problem in multi-ethnic schools, or in some of them, on closer examination there is little hard evidence on this matter, and no evidence at all of the size or extent of any problem. The findings from the present study show that race relations issues are not salient among criticisms of schools by parents, whether they are white, Asian or black.

Table 6.7 makes a direct comparison between the satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed by parents. Although the two coding frames were not designed to be exactly comparable, in practice nearly every category of answers among the reasons for satisfaction has its counterpart among the reasons for dissatisfaction. What is most striking is that bad behaviour or lack of discipline is far more salient as a criticism than is good behaviour or firm discipline as a reason for satisfaction. For parents, a good school is one where the children pass examinations while a bad school is one where they break up the furniture. It is also interesting that over-strictness or inflexibility is mentioned as a criticism whereas not being too strict is seldom mentioned on the positive side. Thus, discipline and behaviour is mentioned in a critical more than an approving context; usually the criticism is lack of discipline, though a smaller number parents criticise the school for being too strict. There are two other points that tend to be the subject of criticism rather than praise: provision for the below-average child, and buildings or facilities. Like orderly behaviour, these seem to be things that are noticed when they are not there rather than when they are. Points that are mentioned more on the positive than on the negative side are the happiness of the child (parents do not like to volunteer that the child is unhappy), the reputation or prestige of the school (few parents volunteer that the school has a particularly bad reputation, though a few make generally disapproving comments), the extra-curricular activities and the location of the school close to home.

Analysis by school

Tables 6.8 and 6.9 show that there are large differences between the views expressed by parents of children at different schools. There are dangers in pushing the interpretation of the results of open questions too far. Whether a particular point is mentioned may depend not only on how strongly the respondent feels about the point in question, but also on a number of other things: on how voluble the respondent is (how ready she is to come up

with answers at all), on how easily the particular idea can be put into words, on how many other points there are to be made. Again, responses to open questions are more subject to influence by the manner or implied expectations of the interviewer than are responses to pre-coded questions, and the need to classify the answers introduces a considerable element of error (as shown by experiments in which two people independently code the same material). However, when all of these reservations have been made, it still appears that there are unmistakably large differences between the satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed by parents of children at different schools. For example, there are three schools (31, 34 and 22) where more than half of the parents single out the academic and teaching standards for praise, but three schools (41, 42 and 43) where less than 20 per cent of parents give this answer.

However, some of the complexity of the information can immediately be seen if the second category of answers is also taken into account ('good teachers, interested in children'). The proportion of parents who mention 'good teachers' also varies very widely between schools (from 6 to 49 per cent). But school 16, which gets the highest proportion who mention 'good teachers', gets a relatively low proportion who mention 'teaching or academic standards'. Parents appear to be making a distinction between good or sympathetic teachers on the one hand and teaching that achieves good academic results on the other, and schools are characterised differently in these two respects. There are, however, some schools (such as 12, 43 and 45) that are little praised in either respect, and others (such as 32 and 35) that are fairly often praised in both respects. While there do appear to be two dimensions here, the distinction rests on some difficult coding of open-ended answers, and the classification is probably not very reliable or robust.

Still confining our attention to the expressed satisfactions, there are some large differences between schools in terms of the categories that receive smaller numbers of mentions overall. The proportion of parents who mention that the child is happy varies from 2 to 31 per cent, while the proportion who mention firm discipline or good behaviour varies from 3 to 30 per cent. There are differences of a similar order in the proportions mentioning the reputation of the school, its location or its buildings and facilities.

There are substantial differences between schools in the proportion of parents who mention any cause for satisfaction at all: in fact this proportion ranges between 97 per cent (at school 31) and 55 per cent (at school 15). The inclination to make any answer to a question like this may be sensitive to factors like talkativeness that vary between cultures and to the interviewer's technique and expectations. On the other hand there is a reasonably clear complementarity between satisfactions and dissatisfactions: the proportion of parents who have something positive to say about a school tends to vary inversely with the proportion who have something negative to say. Still, this relationship is far from perfect, and to some extent the proportion of parents mentioning any particular cause for satisfaction or dissatisfaction is therefore a function of the tendency for parents to give answers at all about that school (whether positive or negative).

Turning to the dissatisfactions expressed, we again find a pattern of dramatic differences between the schools. The proportion of parents who criticise the standards of behaviour or lack of discipline varies between 7 per cent and 60 per cent, and in terms of the number of mentions of this point the schools are fairly evenly distributed between the top, the middle and the bottom of this range. There is also sharp variation in the proportion of parents who criticise the academic standards of the schools. On several of the points that are less often mentioned overall, such as general criticisms of teachers and lack of consultation or communication, there are nevertheless sharp differences between schools.

Analysis by country of origin

For the most part, parents' satisfactions and dissatisfactions do not vary very greatly between ethnic groups. There are some variations, but there is some difficulty in understanding the results since differences between schools are, inevitably, confounded with differences of view according to ethnic group. Certain groups are concentrated in particular schools, and the views they express may be either a reflection of the characteristics of those schools, or a reflection of the way of looking at things that belongs to those groups. We have tried to overcome this problem by looking at the views expressed by country or origin within each school, but the results become too complex to be manageable.

The main conclusion to be drawn is that parents belonging to ethnic minority groups do not have radically different perceptions of the schools from white parents. Parents of Pakistani origin are less likely than other parents to mention either satisfactory or unsatisfactory features of the school. No doubt this is because they *know* less about the schools than other parents - they tend to have much less contact with them, as shown in the last chapter. Indian parents are more likely than any other group to mention teaching or academic standards as a satisfactory feature. All of the south Asian groups are less likely than others to mention bad behaviour as an unsatisfactory feature. The answers given by parents of West Indian origin are similar to those given by white parents, except that they are less likely to mention teaching and academic standards as a satisfactory feature.

Analysis by the child's attainment

We might expect that parents' views of the school would differ according to the child's level of attainment. To test this hypothesis, we have analysed the parents' satisfactions and dissatisfactions by the child's second-year reading score.

The *pattern* of satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed is much the same, regardless of the child's attainment. However, as the attainment of the child rises, so does the *amount* that parents have to say both for and against the school. In other words, the parents of higher-attaining children have more to say than the parents of low-attaining children, perhaps because they are more knowledgeable about the schools, but perhaps because they are generally more articulate. Contact with the schools would lead to knowledge about them, but there is no indication that the parents of higher-attaining children have more contact than the parents of low-attaining children (this point is discussed in Chapter 10). Therefore, it seems likely that they express more satisfactions and dissatisfactions because they are more articulate.

Parents' views on four points

At the end of the questionnaire parents were asked how satisfied they were overall with the school. Earlier they were asked to make three more specific assessments: how satisfied they were with standards of behaviour at the school, how happy they thought their child was there, and how well they thought their child was getting on with school subjects. These three specific points are ones that frequently arose in answers to the open questions. All four questions used four-point verbal scales, so that comparable scores can be calculated, using 4 as the maximum, 1 as the minimum and 2.5 as the mid-point.

On the whole, parents' answers tend to be favourable to the schools: the highest proportion giving unfavourable answers on any of the points is 24 per cent (for standards of behaviour). The ratings could, of course, be much higher than they are; the proportion choosing the top point of the scale varies between one-fifth and one-half. The ratings of overall satisfaction and of the child's happiness and progress with school subjects are all

fairly similar, though the child's happiness is rated highest. By contrast, there is distinctly less satisfaction with standards of behaviour, and this fits in with the earlier finding that the most commonly expressed dissatisfaction, at the open question, was poor standards of behaviour or lack of discipline. Nevertheless, three-quarters of parents give broadly approving answers on this point. The proportion who said they were dissatisfied with standards of behaviour when directly asked (24 per cent) is the same as the proportion who mentioned poor behaviour or discipline as a reason for dissatisfaction with the school.

Using the mean scores as the measure, Table 6.10 shows an analysis of these findings by country of origin. Compared with parents originating from the UK, those originating from the West Indies tend to be rather less satisfied overall and less satisfied with standards of behaviour and with the child's progress in school subjects; there is no difference in the assessments of how happy the child is. Bangladeshi parents tend to be considerably more satisfied than those belonging to other groups on the three specific points, but distinctly less satisfied overall. This is because they are dissatisfied about things that were not the subject of these specific questions, certainly the teaching of religion, and possibly a failure to take into account other cultural differences. Pakistanis, Indians and African Asians express about the same level of overall satisfaction as parents originating from the UK and also give similar assessments of their children's progress in school subjects; they give more favourable assessments of the happiness of their children and of standards of behaviour at the school. In short, there are some distinct differences between the views of parents belonging to different ethnic groups, the West Indians being less satisfied than whites, and the south Asians, with the exception of Bangladeshis, more satisfied. However, the relative dissatisfaction of Bangladeshi parents is not connected with standards of behaviour or the happiness or progress of the child, but with the adaptation of the school to their religion and outlook.

To the extent that the different ratings are inter-correlated, they reflect a general attitude towards the school (favourable or unfavourable), while to the extent that they are independent of one another, they reflect distinct dimensions of opinion. To explore the findings further, it is useful to consider these inter-correlations. Table 6.11 shows the correlation coefficients between each pair of ratings: essentially these coefficients are a measure of how accurately one of the two ratings given by an individual parent could be predicted if the other rating were known. A coefficient of 1.0 would indicate a perfect correlation, while a coefficient of 0.0 would indicate that there was no relationship at all. Taking overall satisfaction as the reference point, we find that the assessment of standards of behaviour is very highly correlated with it ($r = 0.713$) and the assessments of the child's happiness and progress much less strongly ($r = 0.419$ and $r = 0.316$ respectively). There is a considerable correlation between the assessment of how happy the child is and each of the other two specific assessments (standards of behaviour and the child's progress) but a lower correlation between the assessment of standards of behaviour and of the child's progress. On the face of it, these findings seem to imply that standards of behaviour are considerably more important in parents' assessments of schools than the happiness or progress of their child, and also that parents give more weight to the child's happiness than to his or her progress in school subjects. While this interpretation may be correct, there is a difficulty in that the assessment of overall satisfaction and of the standards of behaviour are about the *school* while the assessments of happiness and progress are about the *child*. This could explain why correlations among members of the two pairs (standards of behaviour and overall satisfaction, child's happiness and progress) are higher than between one pair and the other. In other words, a parent could without any kind of contradiction be satisfied

with the *school* and with its academic standards while acknowledging that her own child was not progressing well; but there would be more dissonance in being satisfied with the school in general yet not with the standards of behaviour there. Regardless of this complication, the findings do indisputably show that satisfaction with standards of behaviour is an extremely important component of parents' overall satisfaction with schools. This confirms the results of the open questions.

Chapter 7 discusses a measure of the level of enthusiasm for school expressed by the child. Anticipating this discussion, Table 6.12 shows the correlation between the level of enthusiasm for school expressed by the child and the parent's assessment of how happy the child is at school. This correlation is definitely low (0.15) which suggests, on the face of it, that parents do not have an accurate idea of how happy their child is at school. Another possible interpretation is that the children's responses to this particular question are unreliable: for example, they might be influenced by the child's mood or the atmosphere in class on a particular day. This second possibility will be assessed in later chapters which consider the relationships between the child's expressed enthusiasm for school and other factors. The table also shows that the correlations between the child's expressed enthusiasm for school and other aspects of parental opinion (assessment of the child's progress, overall satisfaction with the school) are extremely low.

We have also considered how the parents' ratings on these four points vary according to the child's attainment at the end of the second year in maths and reading. There is a distinct, but fairly small, relationship between parents' views about how the child is getting on with school subjects and the child's actual attainment at the end of the second year. There is also a slight relationship between the parental assessment of the child's happiness and the child's actual attainment. Overall satisfaction with the school and the assessment of standards of behaviour are very little related to the child's attainment. It is, perhaps, surprising not to find a stronger relationships than this. The findings suggest that parents' assessments of their child's performance are largely independent of the actual level of that performance. Perhaps these assessments of the child's performance are made on a scale of expectations adjusted to the child's ability.

Table 6.13 shows how parents' assessments on the four points vary between the schools. Looking first at the level of overall satisfaction, there are some appreciable differences between the schools, although the balance of responses for all schools is favourable. In the case of school 44, which obtains the highest score of 3.51, 65 per cent of parents say they are 'very satisfied', compared with 19 per cent in the case of school 22, which obtains the lowest score of 2.91. These are not large differences, but they are unmistakable ones. An analysis described in Chapter 11 shows that differences in the ratings given to the schools remain when account is taken of their varying ethnic and social class composition.

Since all of the three more specific assessments are correlated with overall satisfaction to a considerable extent, it is not surprising to find that the mean scores for all four assessments tend to vary between schools in a similar way. The most notable exception to this is school 15, which obtains rather a low overall assessment, but high ratings for the happiness and progress of the child and (to a lesser extent) for standards of behaviour. This is, of course, related to the earlier finding that Bangladeshi parents tend to be less satisfied overall than other groups, but more satisfied on the three particular points asked about here (school 15 contains a very high proportion of Bangladeshis). There are other exceptions, too: for example, school 42 obtains a high rating on standards of behaviour, but rather a low rating on overall satisfaction, a particularly noteworthy conflict in view of the high correlation between the ratings on these two dimensions.

Parents' views about the child's problems with subjects

In the last section we considered the results of a general question about how the child was getting on with school subjects. This was immediately followed by a more specific question: 'Do you think the child has problems with arts and crafts ... maths ...' etc. Seven subjects were named altogether, and a definite answer was obtained for each one (that the child had problems or not). The three subjects with which the highest proportions of parents think their children have problems are maths (24 per cent), English (21 per cent) and modern languages (18 per cent). A higher proportion of Bangladeshi parents than of those belonging to other groups think their children have problems with all subjects except arts and crafts and games; these differences are particularly marked in the case of modern languages, science and history or geography. For example, 33 per cent of Bangladeshi parents think their child has problems with history or geography, compared with 11 per cent of all parents; 27 per cent of Bangladeshi parents, compared with 12 per cent of all, think their child has problems with science. As we shall see in Chapter 9, this corresponds in broad terms with differences in test scores between ethnic groups: at both year 1 and year 2, children of Bangladeshi origin on average had substantially lower scores in maths and reading than those belonging to other ethnic groups. The answers given by parents of Pakistani origin are much the same as those given by parents originating from Britain, but other south Asian parents (Indians and African Asians) are less inclined than white parents to feel that their children have problems with maths or modern languages. With the exception of Bangladeshis, Asian parents are no more or less likely than white parents to feel that their children have problems with English. A distinctly higher proportion of West Indian (36 per cent) than of white parents (24 per cent) feel that their children have problems with maths. As we shall see in Chapter 9, West Indian children do on average score lower on maths than children belonging to other groups, with the exception of Bangladeshis, both at year 1 and at year 2. West Indian parents are just slightly more likely than white parents to think their children have problems with other subjects.

We have just seen that differences between ethnic groups in the parents' perceptions of the child's problems with maths and English correspond to actual differences in attainment. An analysis of parents' perceptions of problems by the child's second-year test scores confirms this interpretation. For example, in the case of maths, 34 per cent of parents whose children scored up to 15 think the child has problems compared with nine per cent of parents whose children scored 46 or more. Nevertheless, these findings also show that the connection between the child's performance and the parents' perceptions of problems is fairly weak. Even where the child is doing extremely badly, the parents seem to be unaware of the problem in the majority of cases.

The proportion of parents who think their child has problems with maths and English varies considerably between schools. The variations in parents' perceptions run in parallel to the variations in actual test scores to some extent: for example, school 41 has the highest proportion of parents who feel their children have problems with maths (40 per cent) and it is also the school with the lowest mean maths score at year 1. By year 2 this school had slightly improved its relative position in maths, but was still among the lowest-scoring schools. Yet it is clear that parents' perceptions vary between schools in a way that cannot entirely be explained by the variations in test scores: for example, the school where the highest proportion of parents (33 per cent) think their children have problems with English is school 25, yet this is the one that recorded the second highest average reading score at year 2.

Parents' views about religious education

In schools containing various distinct cultural, religious and racial groups, a number of difficult issues are raised about the style and content of education and the values that it implicitly assumes or explicitly seeks to promote. In the case of religious education these issues are raised in a particularly acute form. This is partly for the obvious reason that religion has explicitly been the expression of a set of values and an outlook that is associated with a particular culture, so that historically the teaching of religion was the transmission of a set of values more than the communication of information or understanding. A less obvious reason is that for the majority of British people Christianity has come to assume far less significance than formerly, and religious institutions have diminished enormously in their importance and influence, whereas for the ethnic minority groups religion is still (perhaps increasingly) of central importance to their identity, outlook and way of life. This means that the people running comprehensive schools, in many or most cases people with no religious commitment and little interest in religion, find themselves catering for the children of Moslems, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and members of the Pentecostal Church and the Church of God, for whose families these faiths are of central importance.

In responding to these new demands, schools have to make a number of choices. At the time of the survey of parents (1983) these responses were within the framework of the Education Act 1944. This required that non-denominational religious education should be provided in accordance with a locally-agreed syllabus, and that there should be a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, again of a non-denominational character. This rather loose framework gave schools some latitude in deciding how much emphasis, time and energy to give to religious education as a whole. Although there were formal arrangements in many areas for agreeing the syllabus for religious education, in practice many schools had considerable latitude in deciding where to place the emphasis as between different religions. The only statutory requirement was that religious education and the collective act of worship should be 'non-denominational'. One possibility was to continue to place the main emphasis on one of the major forms of Christianity; another was to place equal emphasis on one or more of the other religions represented in the school; yet another was to include teaching about a wide range of the world's religions. The schools also had some latitude in choosing style and content. Although religious education, which properly means teaching *about* religion, was required by the 1944 Act to be non-denominational, in practice some approaches were closer to the teaching *of* a religion, which the Swann report described as 'religious instruction', while others were closer to 'religious education' proper. Other possible approaches were more general discussions about moral or social questions, and 'moral instruction' intended to counter religious and racial intolerance and to promote ecumenical sentiments.

Faced with these choices, secondary schools responded in a variety of ways. Here we report the views of parents about what they were doing. Parents were asked whether they were happy with the way religion was taught at the school, and if not were asked to explain their reasons in their own words. Parents who had a religion were also asked whether or not they would like their child to learn more at school about their own religion.

Table 6.14 shows that the proportion of parents who are unhappy about the way religion is taught is fairly low among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, members of the Greek Orthodox Church and families with no religion (12 or 13 per cent in each case) but is considerably higher among Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs and members of the Pentecostal Church and of the Church of God (close to one-third in each case). It is quite clear from Table 6.15 that different schools have had widely varying degrees of success in gaining acceptance for

their religious teaching both overall and among particular religious groups; it is not clear how far this is because of differences in policy and practice between the schools or because different ethnic and religious mixes create different conditions of receptivity for what are essentially the same policies. The most striking feature of the pattern is that school 15, a girls' school with a high proportion of Moslems from Bangladesh, has been extremely unsuccessful in gaining the approval of parents for its religious teaching: 65 per cent of all parents and 85 per cent of Moslem parents are unhappy about it. This helps to explain why the overall level of satisfaction with this school among parents is low, although they are generally satisfied with standards of behaviour and with their girls' progress with school subjects. It is also striking that the acceptance of religious teaching among Moslems varies very sharply from one school to another. There are seven schools with enough children for us to produce useful results, and they register the following percentages of Moslem parents who are unhappy with the teaching of religion: 3, 8, 26, 26, 44, 50, 85.

Inspection of Table 6.15 shows that in several cases the teaching of religion is unpopular among both Moslems and Christians, and in one case (school 22) among all three broadly-defined groups (Moslems, Hindus or Sikhs, and Protestants or Catholics). However, there is one school (12) where the teaching of religion is popular among both Moslems and Christians, a very useful indication that there may be a solution to the problem. Also there is a school (41) where the religious teaching is very popular among Moslems but rather unpopular among Christians, and its mirror image (school 31) where the teaching is unpopular among Moslems but very popular among Christians: these may be schools that place an emphasis that is welcome to one group but not always acceptable to the other. Although we do not know enough about what underlies these large and intriguing differences, it is clear that among each of the religious groups there is considerable concern about religious teaching at certain schools.

Table 6.16 shows the reasons why parents are unhappy with the way religion is taught, analysed by the religion of the family. Unfortunately, because of an ambiguous instruction, this question was not asked in 20 per cent of cases where it applied; these cases have been excluded from the table. Informants could, of course, give more than one reason for being unhappy with the religious teaching; in practice, the total column adds to 111 per cent, which shows that on average informants gave 1.11 reasons. Parents belonging to non-Christian religions were most commonly unhappy that the child was not taught about their own religion but about others. The most common complaint among Christian parents was essentially the same one, but from their own point of view: that there was too much teaching of non-Christian religions. This of course suggests that some of the schools have made considerable initiatives, that have been noticed by parents, to introduce material about non-Christian religions. In the great majority of cases the complaints of Hindus and Moslems are about a failure to teach their own religions, and these groups have few other complaints to make. However, Christians and those belonging to other non-Christian religions also frequently complain that there is too little or no religious teaching or that religion is badly taught or the classes a waste of time. These points are also made by the parents who do not have a religion: in addition, 31 per cent of them (but very small proportions of parents having a religion) said that religious education should not be compulsory (these parents were apparently unaware that they had the right to withdraw their children from religious education classes). One-quarter of parents with no religion (also, a similar proportion of Sikhs) said that all religions should be taught equally.

Parents belonging to different religions differ very sharply as to whether they would like their child to learn more about their own religion at school (see Table 6.17). Very

high proportions of Moslems, Hindus and Sikhs would like this, along with two-thirds of Greek Orthodox parents and over half of those belonging to the Pentecostal Church and to the Church of God. On the other hand, the great majority of Jews, Protestants and Catholics do not wish their child to learn more at school about their own religion. In the case of the Jews, the children do not currently learn about Judaism at school to any significant extent, so the answers mean that parents do not want them to. In the case of Protestants and Catholics the answers could mean that parents think the children already learn a considerable amount about their religion at school and that this is enough, but they probably reflect a general lack of interest in religious education.

Taken together, these findings show that among parents belonging to religious minorities in Britain there is a strong demand for more teaching of their own religion. These demands do not sit comfortably with the idea of multi-faith religious education as it has developed since the Education Act 1944. Probably what many of these parents would like is something closer to instruction in the tenets of their faith. These demands cannot be met through broadly based religious education classes taken by teachers who do not share the faiths of families belonging to religious minorities, and in most cases have only a superficial understanding of them.

The Education Reform Act 1988 creates a new framework both for collective worship and for religious education at school, which may in time allow schools to develop new responses to these problems. In general, collective worship is to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, though not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination (s.7(1)). However, in deciding how collective worship is to be organised, head teachers should have regard to the faiths represented in the school (s.7(5)(a)), and if this conflicts with the requirement that worship should be of a broadly Christian character, the head teacher may apply to the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education to have this requirement lifted or modified (s.12(1)). Parents may in any event withdraw their children from collective worship. Non-denominational religious education must still be provided, as required by the Education Act 1944, in accordance with a locally agreed syllabus. Under the Education Reform Act 1988, however, new locally agreed syllabuses must reflect the fact that religious traditions in Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions (s.8(3)). Parents may withdraw their children from religious education, and the children may receive alternative religious education elsewhere (s.9(4) and (6)) or in some circumstances at the school itself (s.26)). A DES circular interprets these provisions as follows.

Nothing in the Act prevents any maintained school from allowing, at the request of parents, religious education to be provided or religious worship to take place according to a particular faith or denomination where parents have withdrawn pupils from the RE or collective worship provided in accordance with the law. The Secretary of State believes that governing bodies and head teachers should seek to respond positively to such requests from parents:

- i unless the effect would be that denominational worship replaced the statutory non-denominational collective worship;
- ii provided that such arrangements can be made at no additional cost to the school; and
- iii provided that the alternative provision would be consistent with the overall purposes of the school curriculum set out in Section 1 of the Act.⁷

Thus, the Act gives continued support to religious education conceived as a focused study of religious ideas and practices, with some degree of emphasis on Christianity. Our

findings suggest that this will be acceptable to the majority of Christian or agnostic families. At the same time, it allows schools to respond positively to the demands from religious minorities that this study reveals. It remains to be seen how religious education will develop within this new framework; perhaps the schools with the most difficult problems are those having a substantial number of children whose families demand religious education with an emphasis, say, on Islam, but a substantial number of children from Christian or agnostic families as well. Although the path may be difficult for such schools, the Education Reform Act allows them to develop options in religious education that will be acceptable to each group.

Summary

When asked in what ways they were dissatisfied with the school, parents rarely mentioned racial prejudice or hostility of any kind. Just one per cent of parents mentioned racial attacks, or that black and white children don't get on. Eight out of 2,075 parents interviewed mentioned racial prejudice among teachers.

When expressing in their own words their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the school, parents stress the academic values and the qualities of teachers on the positive side, whereas they emphasise bad behaviour and a lack of discipline on the negative side. There are unmistakably large differences between the satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed by parents of children at different schools. For example, there are three schools where more than half of parents single out the academic and teaching standards for praise, but three where less than 20 per cent of parents give this answer. Again, the proportion of parents who criticise the standards of behaviour or lack of discipline ranges between 7 and 60 per cent. Parents belonging to ethnic minority groups do not have radically different perceptions of the schools from white parents. The parents of higher-attaining children have more to say both for and against the schools than the parents of lower-attaining children; this could be because they tend to be more knowledgeable about the schools, or just because they tend to be more articulate.

Parents give generally favourable ratings to the schools, both overall and on three more specific points. The least favourable ratings are for standards of behaviour, and cross-analysis shows that opinions of standards of behaviour are a central component of overall satisfaction with the school. West Indian parents tend to be less satisfied with the schools than whites, but south Asian parents, with the exception of Bangladeshis, tend to be more satisfied. Parents' assessments of the school and of their child's progress are only weakly related to the child's actual attainment. There are some appreciable differences in the assessments between schools, though the balance of responses for all schools is favourable.

The proportion of parents who think their children have problems with specific subjects does not vary widely between ethnic groups, except that it is substantially higher among Bangladeshis. With the exception of Bangladeshis, Asian parents are no more or less likely than white parents to feel that their children have problems with English. A higher proportion of West Indian than of white parents feel that their children have problems with maths. It is striking that parents' perceptions of the child's problems are only weakly related to the actual attainment of the child.

The proportion of parents who are unhappy about the way religion is taught is considerably higher (at about one third) among Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs and members of the Pentecostal Church and of the Church of God than it is among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, members of the Greek Orthodox Church or families with no religion (12 or 13 per cent in each case). Different schools have had widely varying degrees of success in gaining

acceptance for their religious teaching both overall and among particular religious groups. The most common complaint among parents belonging to non-Christian religions was that the child was taught not about their own religion, but about others. The most common complaint among Christian parents was essentially the same one, from their own point of view: that there was too much teaching of non-Christian religions. This survey was carried out in 1983, some years before the Education Reform Act 1988. Within the new framework it should be possible for schools to develop a new kind of response to demands from parents belonging to religious minorities.

Notes

1. See, for example, the review by Mortimore and Blackstone (1982).
2. The more contact people have with the police, the lower their opinion of them tends to be. See Smith (1983).
3. *Manchester Evening News*, 25 April 1988.
4. *Learning in Terror*, Community Relations Commission, 1987. The sources for the information about incidents of racial harassment are not documented. They are presented as cases 'from among the many that have come to our attention'.
5. See Eggleston et al. (1986).
6. See Foster (1989), p.198.
7. Department of Education and Science Circular 3/89, para 42.