

**VIEWS OF THE IRISH PUBLIC ON
EDUCATION:
2004 SURVEY**

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SUMMARY

The views of a quota sample (N=1,511) of the Irish population aged 15+ years were sought on a range of key and topical education issues in interviews carried out in June-July 2004.

The findings provide evidence of broad public support for the education system and general satisfaction with the performance of schools as well as with respondents' own educational experience. Pluralities of respondents agreed that the emphasis placed on a variety of goals in both primary and second-level schools was just right. Exceptions to this were teaching foreign languages in primary school and preparing students for the world of work and to achieve financial success in second-level schools, in which the emphasis was considered to be too little. Considerable minorities thought that a number of non-cognitive goals received too little emphasis.

Respondents' views on teaching reflect a perception of a good deal of variation among teachers. While large proportions expressed positive views about the interest teachers take in their students, in teachers' ability to assess students, and in teachers' acceptance of parents who come to visit them, there was less general agreement about teachers' ability to maintain discipline, to make school interesting, to motivate students, or to help students who are struggling.

Majorities of respondents identified nine problems in schools, including binge drinking, lack of student discipline, and lack of adequate funds and facilities to deal with learning difficulties, as being very serious or somewhat serious.

A number of questions in the interview were related to possible reforms in the education system; all received considerable support. Large majorities favoured the publication of information about the facilities and performance of schools. Majorities also supported changes in school curricula and public examinations, and support was in evidence for parents and students having a greater say in the education system. Respondents were less in agreement on the proposition that groups of parents should have a right to be provided with separate schools that reflect their culture and/or their views on religion. A majority, though not strongly, supported the idea of nondenominational schools with provision for religious instruction.

Large majorities of respondents supported a range of actions that would require greater investment of resources in schools. The actions that attracted the largest percentages of support were the provision of more learning support and special education teachers for students with learning difficulties; the provision of more equipment (e.g., computers); and improving the training of teachers. Majorities were of the view that government should pay the bulk of the cost of education at all levels. However, there was also strong support for the view that employers and industry should contribute more money to on-the-job and off-the-job training and education. A majority disagreed with increasing taxation, though a third of respondents would countenance it if it were earmarked to improve education. In the event that increased funding was not available for education, respondents would favour an increase in spending for children with learning difficulties and a decrease in spending on educational activities outside the school in any redistribution that might be envisaged. While respondents' preference for traditional school-based education was implicit in these views, there was support elsewhere in the survey for a broader concept of education involving the community and non-traditional forms of provision.

The national survey of the public's perceptions of Irish education described in this paper was carried out in the context of the Your Education System process which was initiated by the Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey T.D., at the beginning of 2004. The process, which is grounded in the belief that education is the property of the people as a whole, was designed to provide the opportunity to any individual who wished to do so to contribute his or her views about the education system and its future development (*Your Education System*, 2004). To date, 17 public meetings have been held throughout the country, as well as a number of meetings of special interest groups. A report on the meetings is available on www.youreducation.ie, which is also open to receive comments.

While the meetings and the website were open to individuals and interest groups to express their views about education, such views cannot necessarily be taken as representative of the views of the general public. To extend the range of topics on which views were sought and to ensure that views reflect those of the general population, the more structured and controlled procedures of a national survey were required.

Although not the only basis for policy formation, the values and attitudes of the general public reflected in such a survey play a role in the formation of education policy (see Markel, 1972). This is recognised in a number of countries where surveys of public opinion concerning educational issues are carried out from time to time. Probably the best known of these are the annual surveys which have been conducted in the United States since 1969 by the Gallup organisation (see Rose & Gallup, 2003). Such surveys have not been a feature of education in Ireland. While some education issues have from time to time been included in more general surveys, and views have been sought in less controlled ways, as far as we are aware the survey described in this paper is the first to elicit the views on educational issues of a national sample since the 1970s.

The survey comprised a face-to-face interview with a nationally representative sample of 1,511 individuals aged 15+ years, and was carried out in June/July 2004 by Millward Brown IMS. The interview, which lasted about half an hour, was based on a questionnaire which was designed at the Educational Research Centre and sought information on respondents' perceptions of a number of key and topical issues in Irish education: the emphasis placed on the goals of education; conditions in schools; the availability of information about schools; teachers and teaching; curricula and examinations; education and the community; management; improving education; the

funding of education; and respondents' evaluation of schools and satisfaction with their own education.

A small number of items in the 2004 survey relating to the emphasis placed on the goals of education and respondents' satisfaction with education had been included in a 1974 survey and so provided the opportunity of comparing present-day views with views expressed 30 years ago (Madaus, Fontes, Kellaghan, & Airasian, 1979). It should be noted, however, that the surveys differed somewhat in that in 1974 the sample comprised 994 individuals aged between 16 and 69 years.

METHOD

Interview Schedule

Responses of participants were sought on the following topics:

Goals of Education. For 13 goals of primary schools and 19 goals of second-level schools, respondents were asked whether they considered the emphasis placed on them as too much, too little, or just right.

Conditions in Schools. For 11 problems facing schools, respondents were asked if they considered them to be very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious. They were also asked, separately for primary and second-level schools, if they considered the length of the school day and of the school year to be too short, too long, or about right; whether there were too many one-day and half-day closures of schools during term time; whether in second-level schools too much time was taken up by mock and oral/practical examinations; and, also in second-level schools, if too much time was lost due to teachers' absence for training.

Information about Schools. Respondents were asked how important they thought it was that certain kinds of information (e.g., courses on offer, facilities) should be publicly available about schools; if they thought that schools provided enough information to parents about how well their own children were doing; if schools provided enough information to parents on their performance; and if they thought that a number of types of evaluative information (e.g., evaluation reports by inspectors) should be available about schools (primary and second-level separately). They were also asked if a number of factors (e.g., the resources available to schools) should be taken into account in making comparisons between schools.

Teachers and Teaching. Respondents were asked to indicate if, in their view, 11 statements about teachers and teaching applied to very few, some, many, or most teachers (e.g., Teachers are skilled at their job).

Curricula and Examinations. Respondents were asked if five specified changes to curricula and examinations would be better for students, make no difference, or be worse (e.g., divide the Leaving Certificate course into two parts, with an examination at the end of each part).

Education and the Community. Respondents were asked if they considered the influence of eight stakeholders in the education system to be too much, too little, or just right.

Management. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction (completely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not satisfied) with the way schools (primary and second-level separately) are managed; if they thought that parents are involved enough in primary and second-level schools (separately); and if they agreed that students should have a place on the management boards of second-level schools (agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly). Respondents were also asked to express their degree of agreement with four statements about meeting the religious and cultural needs of parents in the education system.

Improving Education. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of importance (very important, important, neither important nor unimportant, unimportant, very unimportant) they would attribute to 15 proposals designed to achieve the objectives of schooling (e.g., reduce the size of classes in primary schools). They were also asked if they agreed or disagreed with making school buildings available outside school hours for use by local communities and with giving parents a greater say in what is taught in schools.

Funding. Respondents were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed (agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly), separately for preschool education, primary and second-level education, university/third-level education, and second-chance education, that a variety of stakeholders should bear the costs of education. They were also asked to express their degree of agreement with four statements about the funding of education (e.g., The Department of Education and Science should continue to provide funding for fee-paying schools); with spending some of the education budget on community resources outside the school; and with having employers and industry contribute more money to training

and education. They were asked if taxation should be increased specifically to provide more money for education, and if they would agree to an increase if it were earmarked to improve education. An effort was made to determine the priorities of respondents on the sharing out of the education budget by asking them to identify two items from a list of eight that most merited an increase and two items that most merited a decrease if choices had to be made.

Evaluation of Education. Respondents were asked to rate schools in Ireland today as excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor; to say whether, compared to a few years ago, schools are better, about the same, or not as good; and if they thought that during the next few years schools would get better, stay the same, or get worse. They were also asked whether or not they would have preferred to have stayed longer in education and if, looking back on the education they had received, they were generally satisfied or dissatisfied.

Sample

A sample of 1,511 individuals aged 15+ years was selected on a quota sampling basis to represent the general public in the Republic of Ireland. Quota controls were set for gender, age, and region, based on the Central Statistics Office Population Estimate of April 2003, and for social class, based on AIMRO-agreed guidelines (based on the 2002/2003 Joint National Readership Survey). There were 108 sampling points which were distributed in urban and rural regions in proportion to the distribution of the national population. Fourteen interviews were conducted at each sampling point. Interviewers were given an address at which to start and in urban areas they followed a random route calling at every fifth house. In rural areas, the selection of interviewees was based on quota controls only. The numbers in the sample, by gender, age, social class, and region are provided in Table 1.

Analysis

In this paper, statistics are provided for the total sample only. Tables referred to in the text are provided at the end of the report. In future analyses, data will be disaggregated (e.g., by gender, age, and parental status of respondents).

All surveys are subject to errors of sampling. However, as these cannot be estimated in quota samples, it is not possible to specify the 'significance' of differences associated with responses. Frequently, confidence limits based on

probability samples are used to provide an indication of what might be expected in a quota sample. In the case of a sample of 1,500 chosen by simple random sampling, the 95% confidence limits for 50% would be ± 2.53 ; for 30% and 70%, it would be ± 2.32 ; and for 10% and 90%, ± 1.52 (see Kish, 1965). However, in considering the results presented here, these figures cannot be taken as anything more than a rough guide. In analyses, we will focus on large differences and trends. We shall also frequently combine adjacent categories of response (e.g., agree strongly and agree somewhat).

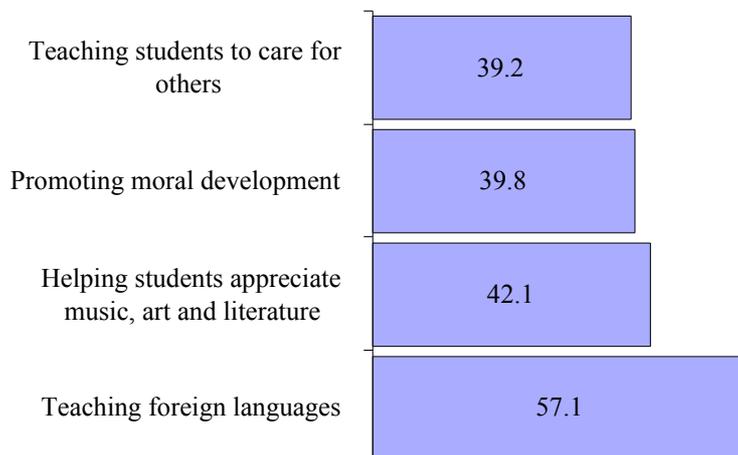
RESULTS

Goals of Education

a) *Primary Schools.* When asked about the emphasis placed on 13 scholastic and non-scholastic goals in primary schools, the ‘just right’ category attracted the largest percentage of responses for all except one (teaching foreign languages) (Table 2). Teaching basic skills of literacy and numeracy attracted the highest percentage (71.6) of such responses, teaching foreign languages the lowest (31.1). Respondents who did not say the emphasis was ‘just right’ were more likely to say that it was ‘too little’ rather than ‘too much’. In fact, considerable proportions of respondents said too little emphasis was accorded nine goals. Teaching foreign languages (57.1%), helping students to appreciate music, art, and literature (42.1%), promoting moral development (39.8%), and teaching students to care for others (39.2%) attracted the largest percentages of respondents who considered the emphasis placed on them to be too little (Figure 1).

Figure 1

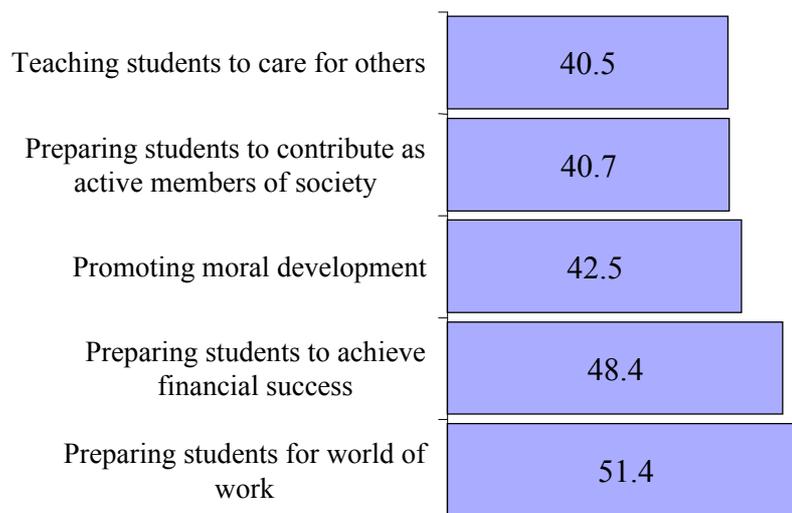
Percentages of Respondents Saying That Too Little Emphasis is Placed on Goals in Primary Schools



b) *Second-Level Schools*. Additional goals were included in the list to make a total of 19 goals when respondents were asked about the emphasis placed on them in second-level schools. At this level, a plurality of respondents considered the emphasis to be ‘just right’ for all except two goals (Table 3). About half thought that too little emphasis was given to preparing students for the world of work (51.4%) and to preparing students to achieve financial success (48.4%). Considerable percentages also thought that not enough emphasis was placed on promoting moral development (42.5), preparing students to contribute as active members of society (40.7), and teaching students to care for others (40.5) (Figure 2). As was the case at primary level, respondents were more likely to say that schools placed too little rather than too much emphasis on all the goals. In fact, only a small proportion considered the emphasis placed on any goal to be excessive. The goals which the largest percentages of respondents thought received too much emphasis were preparing students for public examinations (11.0), giving students an understanding of their religion (8.9), and transmitting Irish language and culture (8.6). There was little difference between the percentages that considered the emphasis accorded giving students the skills to ensure the country will be economically competitive to be ‘just right’ (42.2) and ‘too little’ (38.8), though it should be noted this goal attracted a high percentage (16.9) of don’t know/no opinion responses.

Figure 2

Percentages of Respondents Saying That Too Little Emphasis is Placed on Goals in Second-level Schools



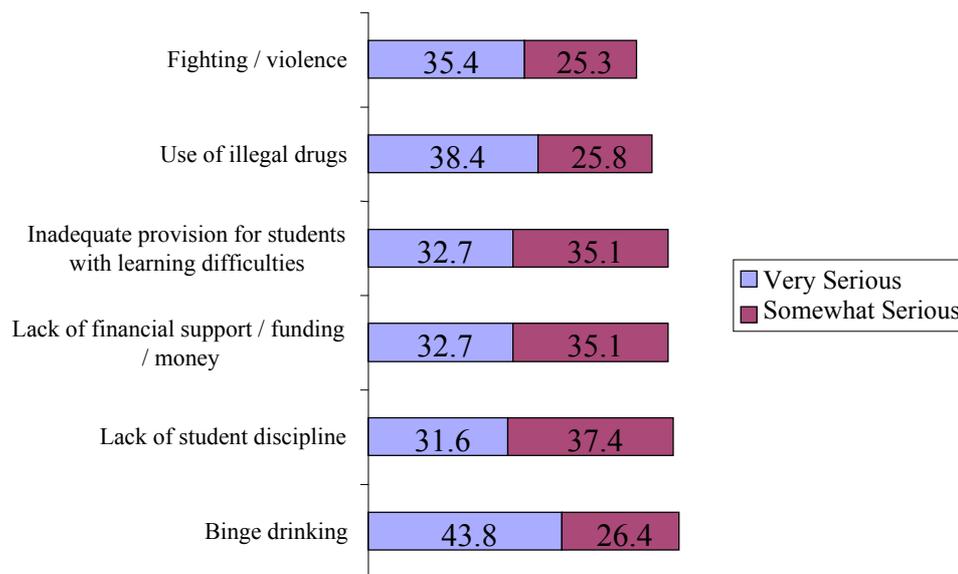
For the 11 goals which were common to the primary and second-level school lists, differences in responses were slight, with the exception of teaching foreign languages. At second level, 58.6% thought that the emphasis was just right, compared to 31.1% at primary level.

Conditions in Schools

a) *Problems Facing Schools*. Nine of 11 problems facing schools which were presented in a list were identified by more than half of respondents as either very serious or somewhat serious (Table 4). Binge drinking, use of illegal drugs, and fighting/violence were considered to be *very* serious by 43.8%, 38.4%, and 35.4% of respondents respectively (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Problems Facing Schools were Somewhat Serious or Very Serious



b) *Time in School*. In response to items about the length of time students spend in school, majorities considered the school day (81.1%) and the length of the school year (73.8%) at primary level to be ‘about right’. Figures were similar for second-level schools: 77.7% judged the school day and 69.8% the school year to be ‘about right’ (Table 5).

However, half of respondents (50.3%) thought that there were too many one-day closures of schools during term time, and 2 in 5 (42.4%) thought that the number of half-day closures was excessive (Table 6).

Time for teaching may also be lost to examinations or to teacher inservice. A majority of respondents did not think that mock examinations (62.6%) or oral/practical examinations (68.1%) take up too much time. More than 2 in 5 respondents (44.0%), however, did think that too much time is lost to allow teachers to attend training (Table 7).

The Availability of Information About Schools

In response to questions relating to information about schools in general, as well as about the particular practices and facilities of schools, majorities of respondents favoured making a range of items of information publicly available. Smaller percentages thought that the amount of information that schools provide at present is adequate.

a) *Availability of Information about School Practices and Facilities.* Large majorities (over 90%) considered it important that schools should make information publicly available on the courses they offered, their facilities for dealing with students with learning disabilities/problems, and their code of discipline (Table 8). Somewhat smaller majorities (79.4% to 89.1%) thought that information should be available about school facilities, method of admitting students, and provision for parent-teacher communication and pastoral care and guidance.

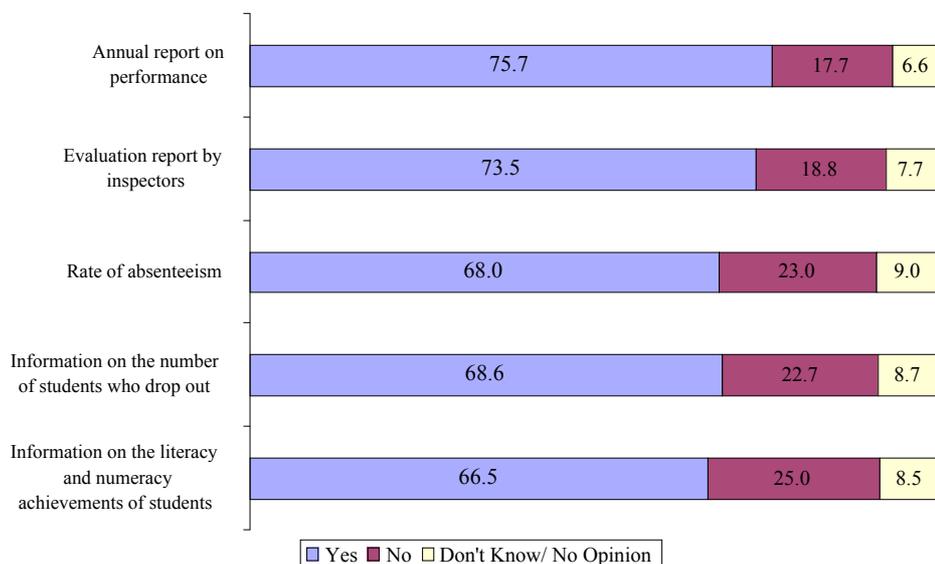
b) *Information about Individual Children.* Just half of respondents (50.7%) thought that schools provided enough information to parents about how well their children were doing; thirty-eight percent thought that they did not (Table 9).

c) *Performance of Primary and Second-Level Schools.* Figures were similar for percentages of respondents who thought that primary (48.1) and second-level (46.7) schools provided enough information to parents on the school's performance (Table 10).

d) *Evaluation Information on Primary Schools.* A majority of respondents thought that evaluation information should be publicly available about primary schools in an annual report on performance (75.7%) and in the evaluation reports of inspectors (73.5%) (Table 11). About two-thirds thought that information should be available on absenteeism rates, number of drop-outs, and the literacy and numeracy achievements of students (Figure 4).

Figure 4

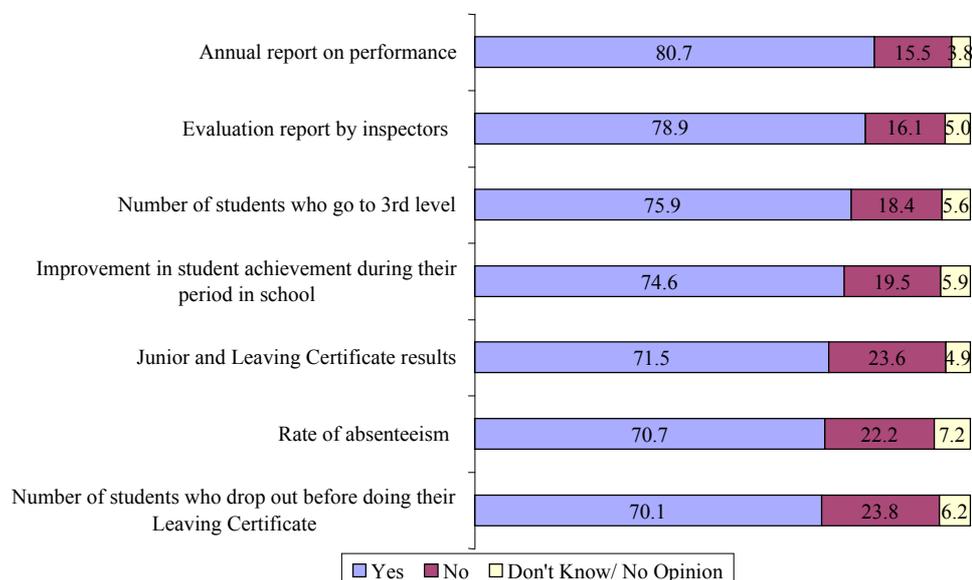
Percentages of Respondents Saying Yes or No to Making Information About Primary Schools Publicly Available



e) *Evaluation Information on Second-Level Schools.* Somewhat higher percentages of respondents thought that information similar to what should be available for primary schools should be publicly available for second-level schools (e.g., annual report on performance, evaluation report by inspectors) (Table 12). More than 7 in 10 also said that Junior and Leaving Certificate results (71.5%), the number of students from a school that go to third level (75.9%), and information on improvement in students' achievement during their period in a school (74.6%) should be made public (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Percentages of Respondents Saying Yes or No to Making Information About Second-level Schools Publicly Available



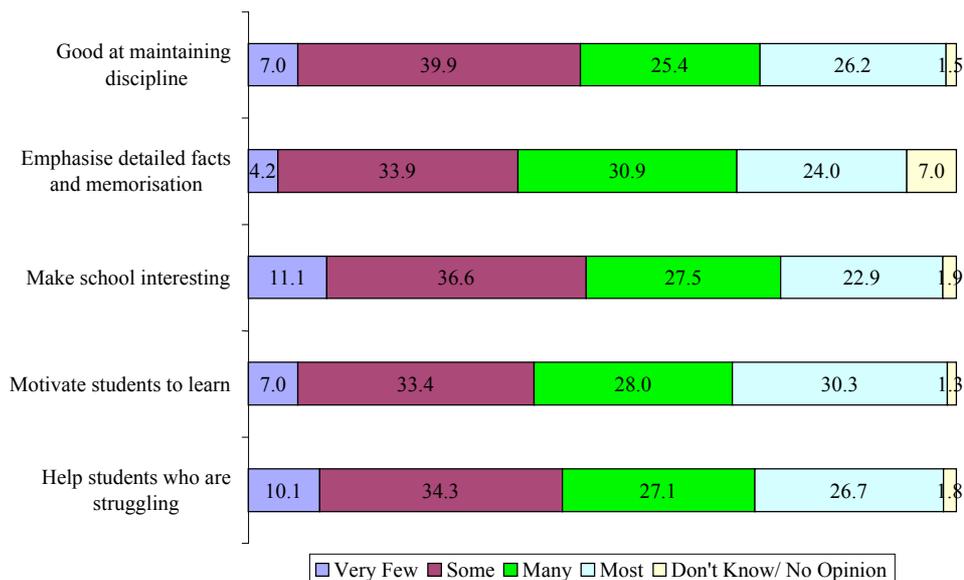
f) *Comparisons between Schools.* The provision of evaluative information about individual schools can lead to comparisons between schools. When asked if account should be taken of a number of factors in making such comparisons, a large majority (86.8%) identified the resources available to schools (Table 13). Smaller majorities thought that differences in students' ability levels (74.4%) and the financial circumstances of the families of students (59.3%) were relevant. It is of interest that a third (33.0%) did not think that students' financial circumstances should be considered in making comparisons.

Teachers and Teaching

Respondents were asked, based on their own experience or what they knew, to consider 11 statements about teachers and teaching and to say whether it was true of very few, some, many, or most teachers. The questions evoked mixed views (Table 14). While recognising that many or most teachers have a difficult job (according to 66.0% of respondents), majorities also considered that many or most teachers are skilled at their job (64.6%) and are committed (66.0%). Considerable majorities said that only very few or some teachers did not take an interest in each child in their class (77.7%), were not pleased when parents came to see them (72.7%), or were not good at assessing students' learning (75.9%).

Figure 6

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Proportion of Teachers Displaying a Range of Characteristics / Practices



Responses to other items reflect a perception of a good deal of variation among teachers. Respondents were fairly evenly divided between saying that some, many, or most teachers (with the greatest numbers saying some) were good at maintaining discipline; placed a great deal of emphasis on detailed facts and memorisation; made school interesting for children; motivated students to learn; and helped students who are struggling. Only 26.2% of respondents thought that most teachers are good at maintaining discipline; 22.9% thought that most teachers make school interesting to students; 30.3% thought that most teachers motivate students to learn; and 26.7% that most teachers help students who are struggling (Figure 6).

Curricula and Examinations

A number of possible reforms to curricula and examinations were on the whole endorsed in the survey. First, in response to a request to consider whether a number of changes to public examinations would be better for students, make no difference, or be worse for them, about two-thirds of respondents (67.9%) thought that dividing the Leaving Certificate course into two parts, with examinations at the end of each part, would be for the better (Table 15). Secondly, a similar percentage (66.1) thought that dividing the course into a number of modules which would be taken at different times, and would be examined as they were completed, would be for the better. Thirdly, just over half the respondents (50.5%) thought that having marks given by a student's own teacher contribute to his/her Leaving Certificate Examination grades would be for the better, but a fifth (20.4%) thought it would be for the worse. Finally, less than half of respondents (46.4%) thought it would be for the better if teachers assessed their own students as part of the Junior Certificate Examination, but again a fifth (21.1%) thought it would be for the worse.

The problem of excess demand for some third-level courses was raised in a question that asked if it would be an improvement (or for the worse) if all students who achieved a specified level on the Leaving Certificate Examination were regarded as eligible, and a random selection made from among them for admission to a course. Four in 10 respondents (40.6%) thought this would be a change for the better, and half that number (19.2%) thought it would be for the worse. Almost a quarter of respondents (23.6%) did not express an opinion on the issue (Table 15).

Education and the Community

When asked to consider the influence of a number of groups on the education system, the influence of the Department of Education and Science was judged to be ‘just right’ by 47.8% of respondents; that of school management groups by 44.5%; and that of teacher unions by 37.8% (Table 16). The influence of students (59.6%) and of parents (56.7%) was considered ‘too little’ by majorities of respondents, and that of politicians ‘too much’ by over a third (35.4%).

Management

a) *Satisfaction with Management of Schools.* Majorities of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the way primary schools (18.5% were completely satisfied and 50.9% somewhat satisfied) and second-level schools (16.7% were completely satisfied and 55.3% somewhat satisfied) are managed (Table 17).

b) *Involvement of Parents in Management.* About half of respondents (49.0%) were of the view that parents are sufficiently involved in the management of primary schools, and a somewhat smaller percentage (41.1%) thought that they are sufficiently involved in the management of second-level schools (Table 18; Figures 7 and 8). Actually, a slight plurality (41.5%) were of the view that parents are not involved enough in the management of second-level schools; a somewhat smaller percentage (36.1%) considered parental involvement in primary schools to be inadequate.

Figure 7

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Parents Are Sufficiently Involved in the Management of Primary Schools

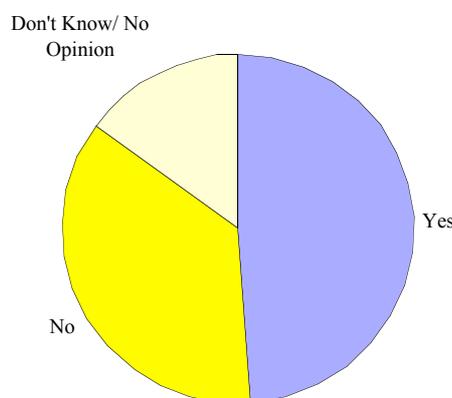
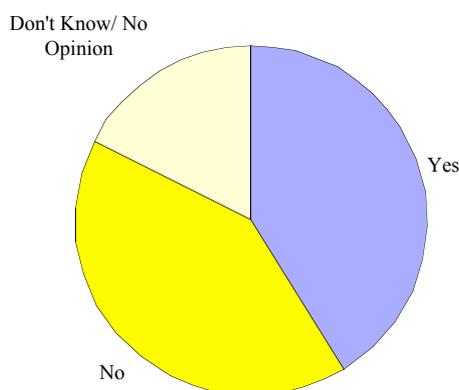


Figure 8

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Parents Are Sufficiently Involved in the Management of Second-level Schools



c) *Involvement of Students in Second-Level Schools.* There was over-all agreement that students should have places on the management boards of second-level schools (Table 19). A quarter agreed strongly, and 2 in 5 respondents agreed somewhat.

d) *Cultural and Denominational Issues.* Respondents showed some uncertainty in dealing with issues relating to the educational needs of religious and cultural groups as evidenced in the relatively low percentages that expressed strong views (agreeing or disagreeing strongly) regarding a number of propositions that were put to them.

Respondents were split evenly in their agreement with present arrangements (though they may not have adverted to the fact that they represented the present situation): somewhat under half (44.8%) agreed (strongly or somewhat) that groups of parents should have a right to be provided with separate schools that reflect their culture and/or their views on religion, while an almost identical percentage (44.7%) disagreed (somewhat or strongly). However, the balance may be regarded as somewhat negative, as the percentage expressing strong disagreement is twice the percentage expressing strong agreement (Table 20).

A majority of respondents (60.5%) agreed (strongly or somewhat) that some schools should be non-denominational. A similar number (61.0%) were of the view that such schools should provide for religious instruction. About half of respondents (49.6%) were of the view that schools should be non-denominational, with provision for religious instruction being made outside school hours. However, over a third (35.5%) disagreed with this position.

Improving Education

Respondents did not show a great deal of variation in their views when presented with 15 statements which represented ways in which education might be improved. The statements ranged from proposals about class size to ones about teacher training, from ones about curricula to ones about disciplinary measures, and from ones about parenting programmes to ones about examinations. It is not possible to get much sense of priorities from responses as majorities of respondents considered all the proposals to be either ‘very important’ or ‘important’. The statements that attracted the greatest degree of support were: provide more learning support and special education teachers for students with learning difficulties (93.8%); provide more equipment in schools (e.g., computers, science labs) (92.0%); and improve teacher training (87.0%) (Table 21). The statements that attracted the least support (though majorities still favoured them) were to make Irish an optional subject after the Junior Certificate Examination (66.8%) and to provide new subjects at Leaving Certificate level (71.9%).

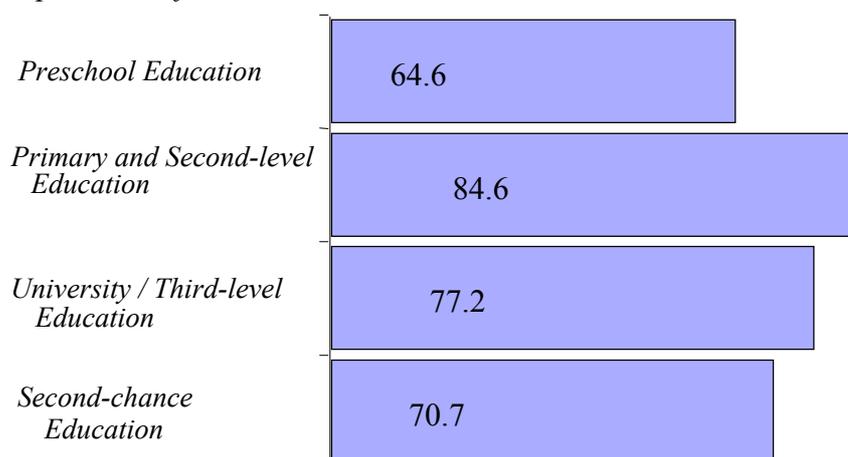
In a separate question in which respondents were asked if they agreed with making school buildings available to local communities outside school time, 85.0% agreed (strongly or somewhat) (Table 22). When asked if they thought that parents should have a greater say in what is taught in schools, about three-quarters (74.2%) agreed (strongly or somewhat) (Table 22).

The Funding of Education

a) *Who Should Pay?* When asked about paying for education at its varying levels, majorities of respondents thought that the major costs should be borne by government/ Department of Education and Science (Figure 9). The majority was largest in the case

Figure 9

Percentages of Respondents Indicating (Agreeing Strongly or Somewhat) that the Department of Education and Science Should Meet All the Costs of



of primary and second-level education and smallest in the case of preschool education (Tables 23, 24, 25, 26). Respondents also thought that some costs should be borne locally and by parents and, in the case of second-chance education, by employers.

b) *Alternative Provision*. There was considerable support for the view that the Department of Education and Science should fund alternative provision for students who lost interest in school with 4 out of 5 respondents (79.4%) agreeing strongly or somewhat (Table 27). Majorities, but smaller ones, agreed that individuals should be given vouchers/credits which they could use to avail of education at any time during their lives (62.8%); that second-level schools should be organised to facilitate senior students who want to work part-time and attend school on a part-time basis (57.8%); and that the Department should fund fee-paying schools (54.3%). However, almost 1 in 5 disagreed strongly with the funding of fee-paying schools and with facilitating students to work part-time.

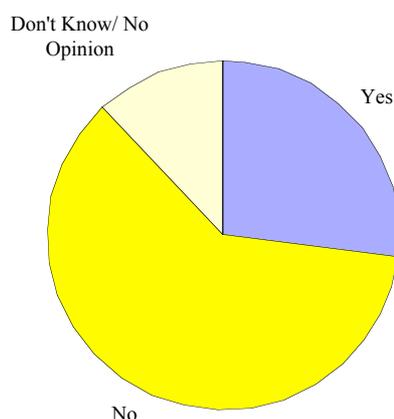
c) *Expenditure on Non-School Resources*. In recognition of the fact that education is not confined to the formal activities of schools, respondents were asked if they agreed with spending some of the education budget on community resources outside the school (youth clubs, libraries, etc.). Just over two-thirds (68.7%) agreed with this proposition (Table 28). However, over a quarter (27.2%) disagreed.

d) *Role of Employers/Industry*. A very large majority (87.8%) agreed (strongly or somewhat) that employers and industry should contribute more money to on-the-job and off-the-job training and education (Table 29).

e) *Taxation*. Asked if taxation should be increased specifically to provide more money for education, 61.1% said no, and 27.0% said yes (Table 30; Figure 10).

Figure 10

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Taxation Should be Increased to Provide Money for Education



Asked if they would agree with an increase in tax if it were earmarked to improve education (even if the increase affected the respondent or his/her family), 36.7% agreed and 53.2% disagreed (33.6% strongly) (Table 31).

f) *Priorities for Increased/Reduced Expenditure*. In an effort to determine priorities among competing demands for funding, respondents were asked to identify two areas that they considered to merit an increase, and two areas that they considered to merit a decrease if there was to be no change in the overall education budget. The areas identified most frequently for an *increase* were provision for students with learning difficulties (favoured by 51.1% of respondents) and provision for students in poorer areas (favoured by 35.6% of respondents); areas identified least frequently were education activities outside the school (e.g., libraries, educational TV) (favoured by 5.7% of respondents), education in later life (especially for adults with poor literacy skills) (favoured by 18.1%), and third-level education (favoured by 18.6%) (Table 32). Educational activities outside the school and third-level education were also identified most frequently as areas where funding should be *decreased* (by 62.4% and 37.7% of respondents respectively), together with early childhood education and care (identified by 38.8% of respondents) and education in later life (identified by 34.9% of respondents).

Evaluation of Education

Respondents were asked to evaluate schools in general as well as to indicate whether or not they were satisfied with their own education.

a) *Evaluation of Schools*. One in six respondents (16.4%) rated schools in Ireland today as 'excellent'. Almost two-thirds (65.5%) rated them as 'pretty good'. Only 2.8% thought that they are 'poor' (Table 33). More than half (56.2%) thought that schools are better than they had been a few years ago; just under a third (31.8%) that they are about the same (Table 34). More than half of respondents (47.9%) also expected schools to improve in the coming years; again just under a third (31.6%) thought that they would remain the same (Table 35).

b) *Satisfaction with Own Education*. Almost 2 in 5 respondents (38.9%) would have liked to have stayed in school longer; a somewhat larger proportion (43.0%) would not (Table 36).

Almost three-quarters of respondents (72.6%) expressed satisfaction with the education that they had received. Almost a quarter (23.9%) were not satisfied (Table 37).

A Comparison of Views in 1974 and 2004

Responses to items that were common to the interviews conducted in 1974 (Madaus et al, 1979) and 2004 (or were closely related) provide evidence of both consistency and difference over time.

In considering data relating to the adequacy of emphasis placed on seven goals of education, it should be noted that a distinction was not made in 1974 between primary and second-level schools. The main differences between views expressed in 1974 and 2004 (set out in Table 38) relate to the appreciation of music, art, and literature and to the Irish language. In the case of the former, the emphasis is perceived to have increased and a greater proportion of respondents (47% at primary level and 52% at second-level) now consider it to be 'just right', compared to 37% (for primary and second-level combined) in 1974. The comparison of views about the Irish language is problematic in that the questions differed in the two years. Insofar as they can be regarded as equivalent, while pluralities in both years considered the emphasis just right, what was in the 1970s considered to be too great an emphasis (by 38% of respondents) is now considered to be too little (by 35% in respect of primary schools and 34% in respect of second-level schools).

Differences are more obvious in responses to items which involved an evaluation of schools. While a similar percentage rated schools as excellent in the two years, a greater percentage in 2004 (66) than in 1974 (56) regarded schools as 'pretty good' and smaller percentages regarded them as 'only fair' or 'poor' (28 in 1974; 17 in 2004) (Table 39). The perception of change was greater in 1974 than in 2004, which is not surprising given the introduction of a new curriculum to primary schools and major expansion of provision at second level in the 1960s and 1970s. While 80% in 1974 thought that schools had improved in recent years, only 56% thought so in 2004 (Table 40). Furthermore, the expectation of further improvement was greater in 1974 than in 2004: in 1974, almost three-quarters of respondents (74%) expected schools to 'get better' in the future, compared to less than a half (48%) in 2004 (Table 41). A greater percentage of respondents expressed satisfaction with the education

they themselves had received in 2004 (73) than in 1974 (64), figures which are reflected in the percentages expressing dissatisfaction (Table 42).

CONCLUSION

The findings of the survey may be interpreted as providing evidence of broad public support for the education system and general satisfaction with the performance of schools as well as with respondents' own educational experience. Furthermore, the level of satisfaction expressed by respondents increased over the past three decades. However, problems in the system were also recognised (e.g., dealing with student learning difficulties; student behaviour, such as binge drinking and lack of discipline; and high stakes examinations).

Support for the system is evidenced in findings relating to the goals of schooling. Pluralities (in many cases majorities) of respondents agreed that the amount of emphasis placed on a variety of goals in schools, particularly their traditional cognitive goals, was just right. Exceptions were the teaching of foreign languages in primary school and, in second-level schools, the preparation of students for the world of work and to achieve financial success, on all of which the emphasis was considered to be inadequate. The perceived need for greater emphasis on teaching foreign languages in primary school may seem surprising given that schools already teach two languages. It may also seem surprising that a large proportion of respondents regarded the emphasis on teaching basic skills of literacy and numeracy to be just right given the problems identified in studies of pupils' achievement (see, e.g., Cosgrove, Kellaghan, Forde, & Morgan, 2000; Shiel & Kelly, 2001; Weir, 2001).

A conclusion that there is general agreement that schools are working well may also need to be tempered by findings regarding three goals relating to students' non-cognitive development which considerable minorities of respondents thought did not receive sufficient emphasis at either primary or second-level: promoting moral development; teaching students to care for others; and developing the ability to adapt to new situations. Furthermore, at second level, in addition to the preparation of students for the world of work and to achieve financial success, a further four goals, also related to life after school, attracted large minorities who thought the emphasis accorded them was insufficient: preparing students to contribute as active members of society; developing interpersonal skills and relationships; giving students the skills to

ensure the country will be economically competitive; and developing the ability to locate information that students will need in their work and in other activities in later life.

Other problems identified in schools obviously implicate student behaviour and point to circumstances outside the school that impinge on what happens in schools. More than half of respondents identified 9 of 11 problems, including binge drinking, lack of student discipline, and lack of adequate funds and facilities to deal with learning difficulties, as being very serious or somewhat serious.

It was perhaps with such problems in mind that majorities (two-thirds) of respondents thought that many or most teachers have a difficult job. Despite this, teachers were perceived to be committed and skilled. Large proportions also had positive views about the interest teachers take in their students, in their ability to assess students, and in their acceptance of parents who come to visit them. However, there was less agreement about the ability of all teachers to maintain discipline (only a quarter of respondents thought that most teachers were good at this); to make school interesting for children (less than a quarter thought that most teachers did this); to motivate students to learn (less than a third thought that most teachers did this); or to help students who are struggling (just over a quarter thought that most teachers did this).

To address perceived problems and inadequacies in the education system, large majorities of respondents supported a range of actions that would require greater investment of resources and teachers. The largest percentages favoured the provision of more learning support and special education teachers for students with learning difficulties; the provision of more equipment (e.g., computers); and improving the training of teachers, both before they begin to teach and during their professional lives.

A number of other specific reforms also attracted considerable support. In response to a question about proposed changes in curricula and public examinations, pluralities of respondents thought that greater teacher involvement in the assessment of their own students for the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations would be an improvement on the present situation, while majorities supported a division of Leaving Certificate courses by year or into modules, with a similar change in examinations.

While segmenting Leaving Certificate courses and spreading the examination burden might go some way towards easing the pressure to which the present system of

terminal examining gives rise, they would be unlikely to affect very much the pressure to obtain high points for entry to some courses. To address this issue, respondents were asked their views about a practice (followed in some countries) involving the random selection of course entrants from students who reach a specified level of achievement. It is perhaps surprising that 4 in 10 respondents thought that this would be a change for the better. Less surprising, given the complexity of the issue, is that almost a quarter did not express a view.

Respondents showed greater agreement in their support for a redistribution of power in the education system. More than half thought that parents have too little influence on what happens, and were of the view that they should have a greater say in what is taught in schools. Respondents were evenly divided regarding the involvement of parents in the management of second-level schools. In the case of primary schools, a majority thought that parents are sufficiently involved, but a third did not. The proportion expressing dissatisfaction with the way schools are managed (1 in 10) was small.

The survey findings also provide support for greater student involvement. Three out of five respondents thought that students have too little influence on what happens in the education system. Agreement with the view that students should have places in the management of second-level schools was somewhat tentative (2 out of 5 respondents 'agreed somewhat'), but less than 1 in 5 disagreed with this proposal.

While meeting the needs of students (and families) in a society in which multiculturalism is on the increase and religious allegiance on the decrease can be problematic and may require altered arrangements, survey respondents seemed reluctant to express strong views on the issues involved, preferring to 'agree somewhat' or 'disagree somewhat', or to offer no opinion on a series of proposals which would affect denominational schools as well as schools associated with cultural objectives (e.g., *gaelscoileanna*). Under present arrangements, it is open to any religious or cultural group, if it meets certain conditions, to set up a school and obtain financial support from government. A continuation of this trend could lead to a considerable increase in the number of schools and a decrease in the efficiency of the system. On the other hand, there is the problem, especially in rural areas where it would be difficult to justify the provision of more than one school, that the only school available might not be considered suitable by some parents. Respondents were equally divided in their agreement with the view that groups of parents should have a

right to be provided with separate schools that reflect their culture and/or their views on religion. However, this proposition also evoked the strong disagreement of a substantial proportion (about a quarter). A majority (3 in 5) supported (though not strongly) the idea of nondenominational schools with provision for religious instruction, while about half agreed (again not strongly) that religious instruction should be outside school hours.

If respondents were somewhat tentative in addressing issues that arise in accommodating the value positions of parents, this was not the case when it came to making information about schools publicly available. Only half of respondents thought that schools currently provide enough information to parents about how well their children are doing, and less than half thought that schools provide enough information about the performance of schools. When asked what information should be available, very large majorities considered it important that information be provided about a range of topics, including the courses on offer in a school, the facilities available for dealing with students with learning disabilities/problems, and the school's code of discipline. Majorities also expressed the view that evaluative information on a range of matters (including evaluation reports of inspectors and public examination results) should be made available to the public. This, of course, could lead to comparisons between schools which would appear to be contrary to the spirit of the 1998 Education Act which specifies that the Minister may refuse access to information which would enable the compilation of information (that is not otherwise available to the general public) in relation to the comparative performance of schools in respect of the academic achievement of students. In the event that the performances of schools are compared, a majority of survey respondents were of the view that the resources available to the schools and students' ability levels should be taken into account.

While survey respondents showed little reluctance to support the provision of additional resources to schools to improve the quality of education, they do not appear to have seriously considered the financial implications of their position. At any rate, most respondents did not favour an increase in taxation, although a third would countenance it if it were earmarked to improve education. At the same time, majorities of respondents thought that government should pay the bulk of the cost of education at all levels, though there was some support for the view that parents and students should also contribute. Large majorities also thought that employers/industry

should meet some of the costs of second-chance education and of on-the-job and off-the-job training and education. If increased funding were not available for education, and the need arose to redistribute funds, half of respondents indicated they would support an increase in funding for students with learning difficulties, while a much smaller number favoured an increase for students in poorer areas. Yet smaller percentages would support increased expenditure for primary and second-level education. A majority would support a decrease in funding for educational activities outside the school, and, perhaps surprisingly, over a third identified early childhood education and care and third-level education for a decrease.

These views suggest a preference for traditional school-based education. However, there was also some support in response to other items in the interview for a broader concept of education that would allow for more flexible provision. Thus, there was support for spending some of the education budget on community resources outside school, for making school buildings available to local communities outside school hours, for alternative provision for students who lose interest in school, for facilitating students to work and attend school on a part-time basis, and for the idea that all individuals should be given vouchers/credits which they could use to avail of education at any time during their lives. It may well be that circumstances will dictate a greater role for such less traditional activities if the education system is to address not only problems that are currently recognised but also the challenges to which changing cultural, economic, and demographic factors can be expected to give rise in the future.

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Table 1

Numbers (and Percentages) of Respondents in Sample, by Gender, Age, Social Class, and Region

	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	741	49
Female	771	51
<i>Age</i>		
15-20	314	21
21-24	302	20
25-34	302	20
35-49	398	26
50-64	285	19
65+	213	14
<i>Social Class</i>		
AB	196	13
C1	393	26
C2	348	23
DE	416	27.5
F	159	10.5
<i>Region</i>		
Dublin	434	29
Rest of Leinster	378	25
Munster	420	28
Connaught/Ulster	280	18

Table 2

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Adequacy of Emphasis Placed on Goals in Primary Schools

	Too Much	Too Little	Just Right	Don't know/ No opinion
Giving students an understanding of their religion	10.7	27.4	53.4	8.5
Helping students appreciate music, art, and literature	2.3	42.1	46.9	8.7
Encouraging students to have opinions of their own	5.4	32.5	53.5	8.6
Transmitting Irish culture & language	8.2	35.0	50.5	6.2
Teaching basic skills of literacy & numeracy	2.2	20.4	71.6	5.8
Teaching students to work cooperatively	1.7	26.5	61.8	10.0
Teaching foreign languages	2.5	57.1	31.1	9.3
Developing communication skills	1.1	34.2	56.9	7.8
Developing the ability to adapt to new situations	1.0	38.0	50.3	10.7
Developing interpersonal skills and relationships	1.3	35.5	53.4	9.9
Promoting physical development, sport, and healthy lifestyles	3.6	35.7	55.7	4.9
Promoting moral development	1.2	39.8	48.2	10.7
Teaching students to care for others	0.9	39.2	52.2	7.7

Table 3

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Adequacy of Emphasis Placed on Goals in Second-Level Schools

	Too Much	Too Little	Just Right	Don't know/ No opinion
Preparing students for the world of work	2.3	51.4	40.0	6.4
Preparing them to achieve financial success	5.9	48.4	33.8	11.9
Giving students an understanding of their religion	8.9	33.5	49.0	8.5
Preparing them to contribute as active members of society	1.3	40.7	50.4	7.6
Developing independent learning skills	1.3	36.0	55.4	7.3
Helping them to appreciate music, art, and literature	2.5	36.9	52.2	8.5
Encouraging them to have opinions of their own	5.6	30.1	58.0	6.2
Transmitting Irish culture and language	8.6	34.0	50.8	6.6
Preparing them for examinations (the Junior and Leaving Certificate)	11.0	15.2	68.3	5.5
Teaching students to care for others	1.1	40.5	51.1	7.4
Teaching foreign languages	2.7	32.5	58.6	6.2
Giving students the skills to ensure the country will be economically competitive	2.1	38.8	42.2	16.9
Developing leisure interests	3.9	33.1	55.7	7.3
Developing communication skills	1.0	33.7	57.7	7.6
Developing the ability to locate information that they will need in their work and in other activities in later life	0.9	38.3	49.3	11.5
Developing the ability to adapt to new situations	0.8	38.3	50.5	10.4
Developing interpersonal skills and relationships	0.9	38.1	52.8	8.2
Promoting physical development, sport, and healthy life-styles	4.4	33.3	57.3	5.0
Promoting moral development	1.3	42.5	47.3	9.0

Table 4

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Degree of Seriousness of Problems Facing Schools

	Very Serious	Some what Serious	Not too Serious	Not at all Serious	Don't know/ No opinion
Lack of financial support/funding/money	32.7	35.1	21.1	5.5	5.6
Lack of student discipline	31.6	37.4	19.7	7.4	3.8
Use of illegal drugs	38.4	25.8	18.6	9.7	7.4
Binge drinking	43.8	26.4	14.9	8.7	6.2
Fighting/violence	35.4	25.3	21.7	12.3	5.2
Difficulty getting good teachers	21.6	31.1	26.5	13.1	7.8
Inadequate provision for students with learning difficulties	32.7	35.1	17.2	5.7	9.2
Lack of facilities for physical education	18.3	32.6	30.4	13.3	5.4
Lack of extra-curricular activities or activities after school (e.g., games)	19.6	31.5	29.5	13.8	5.6
Poor accommodation	15.9	27.8	30.3	19.4	6.6
Subject matter that is not interesting	13.8	28.2	30.7	13.8	13.5

Table 5

Percentages of Respondents Expressing Views About the Adequacy of the Length of the School Day and School Year

	Too Short	Too Long	About Right	Don't know/ No opinion
Primary				
School Day	7.1	8.5	81.1	3.2
School Year	13.0	10.2	73.8	3.0
Secondary				
School Day	6.3	12.8	77.7	3.2
School Year	18.3	9.1	69.8	2.8

Table 6

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with School Closures During Term Time

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Too many one-day closures?	50.3	37.7	12.0
Too many half-day closures?	42.4	43.6	14.0

Table 7

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with Views that Too Much Time is Lost Because of Examinations and Teacher Absence to Attend Training

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Mock examinations take up too much time?	24.1	62.6	13.3
Oral/practical exams take up too much time?	19.5	68.1	12.4
Too much time is lost due to teachers' absence to attend training?	44.0	39.0	17.0

Table 8

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Importance of Making Various Items of Information About Schools Publicly Available

	Important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Unimportant	Don't know/ No opinion
Method of admitting students	79.4	11.8	6.3	2.5
Courses (and levels) on offer	92.9	4.6	1.1	1.4
Facilities (e.g., assembly hall, science labs, computer equipment)	89.1	8.2	1.1	1.6
Provision for pastoral care/counselling/guidance	82.2	11.8	2.8	2.6
Facilities for dealing with students with learning disabilities/problems	92.5	4.9	0.9	1.8
Arrangements for parents to communicate with teachers	88.5	8.2	1.8	1.5
School code of discipline	91.9	5.7	1.0	1.4

Table 9

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with Statement that Schools Provide Enough Information to Parents About How Well Their Own Children are Doing

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Do you think that schools provide enough information to parents about how well their own children are doing?	50.7	38.0	11.3

Table 10

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with Statement that Schools Provide Enough Information to Parents on the School's Performance

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Do you think that individual schools provide enough information to parents on the school's performance?			
Primary Schools	48.1	37.7	14.1
Second –Level Schools	46.7	39.3	14.0

Table 11

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with Statements Indicating that Evaluation Information About Primary Schools Should be Publicly Available

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
An annual report on performance	75.7	17.7	6.6
Evaluation reports by Inspectors	73.5	18.8	7.7
Rates of absenteeism	68.0	23.0	9.0
Information on the literacy and numeracy achievements of students	66.5	25.0	8.5
Information on the number of students who drop out	68.6	22.7	8.7

Table 12

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with Statements Indicating that Evaluation Information About Second-Level Schools Should be Publicly Available

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
An annual report on performance	80.7	15.5	3.8
Evaluation reports by Inspectors	78.9	16.1	5.0
Junior and Leaving Certificate results	71.5	23.6	4.9
The number of its students who go on to 3rd level	75.9	18.4	5.6
The number of students who drop out before doing their Leaving Certificate	70.1	23.8	6.2
The improvement in student achievement during their period in school	74.6	19.5	5.9
Rates of absenteeism	70.7	22.2	7.2

Table 13

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Agreement/Non-Agreement with Statements Indicating that Certain Factors Should be Taken into Account in Comparing Schools

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Differences in students' ability levels	74.4	18.5	7.2
The financial circumstances of students' families	59.3	33.0	7.7
The resources available to schools	86.8	8.7	4.5

Table 14

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Proportion of Teachers Displaying a Range of Characteristics/Practices

	Very Few	Some	Many	Most	Don't know/ No opinion
Teachers are skilled at their jobs	4.0	30.2	22.1	42.5	1.3
Teachers are good at maintaining discipline	7.0	39.9	25.4	26.2	1.5
Teachers do not take an interest in each child in their class	37.4	40.3	11.2	6.2	4.9
Teachers place a great deal of emphasis on detailed facts and memorisation	4.2	33.9	30.9	24.0	7.0
Teachers make school interesting for children	11.1	36.6	27.5	22.9	1.9
Teachers are not pleased when parents come to see them about their child	32.9	39.8	10.3	8.6	8.5
Teachers motivate students to learn	7.0	33.4	28.0	30.3	1.3
Teachers help students who are struggling	10.1	34.3	27.1	26.7	1.8
Teachers are not good at assessing students' learning	34.1	41.8	11.8	5.6	6.7
Teachers have a difficult job	5.7	26.0	24.8	41.2	2.3
Teachers are committed	3.2	29.0	30.1	35.9	1.8

Table 15

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Changes to Examinations Would be Better for Students, Make No Difference, or Be Worse for Them

	Better	No Difference	Worse	Don't know/ No opinion
As part of the Junior Cert Exam, have teachers assess their own students	46.4	18.4	21.1	14.1
Have marks given by a student's own teacher contribute to a student's Leaving Certificate Exam grades	50.5	15.4	20.4	13.7
Divide the Leaving Certificate course into two parts, with an examination at the end of each part	67.9	11.3	9.1	11.7
Divide the Leaving Certificate course into a number of modules which would be taken at different times and would be examined as they were completed	66.1	11.4	9.5	12.9
For each third-level course for which there are more applicants than places, regard all students who achieve a specified level for that course on the Leaving Certificate Examination as eligible and randomly select from among them	40.6	16.6	19.2	23.6

Table 16

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Appropriateness of the Influence of Various Stakeholders on What Happens in the Education System

	Too Much	Too Little	Just Right	Don't know/ No opinion
Politicians	35.4	26.3	19.2	19.1
Department of Education & Science	14.7	27.3	47.8	10.1
Parents	4.8	56.7	32.9	5.6
Teacher unions	22.1	22.6	37.8	17.5
School patrons and trustees	15.6	23.0	39.4	22.0
Students	3.2	59.6	27.7	9.5
Business interests	9.0	32.4	26.6	32.0
School management groups	11.6	23.6	44.5	20.3

Table 17

Percentages of Respondents Indicating Their Degree of Satisfaction with the Way Schools are Managed

	Completely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Don't know/ No opinion
Primary Schools	18.5	50.9	10.7	19.9
Second-Level Schools	16.7	55.3	10.5	17.5

Table 18

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Parents Are/Are Not Sufficiently Involved in the Management of Schools

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Parents are involved enough in primary schools	49.0	36.1	15.0
Parents are involved enough in second-level schools	41.1	41.5	17.4

Table 19

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with the View that Students Should have Places in the Management of Second-Level Schools

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
To what extent do you agree that students should have places on the management boards of second-level schools	25.9	41.3	10.9	8.1	13.8

Table 20

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements Regarding the Management of Schools

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
Groups of parents should have a right to be provided with separate schools that reflect their culture and/or their views on religion	11.1	33.7	21.0	23.7	10.5
Some schools should be nondenominational	18.2	42.3	16.4	9.5	13.7
Schools should not be denominational but should provide for religious instruction	17.0	44.0	19.1	6.5	13.4
Schools should not be denominational, and religious groups should make provision for religious instruction outside school hours	14.2	35.4	24.7	10.8	14.8

Table 21

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Importance They Attach to a Series of Proposals to Achieve the Objectives of Schooling

	Very Important	Important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	Don't know/ No opinion
Reduce the size of classes in primary schools	46.1	40.5	6.3	3.8	0.7	2.7
Reduce the size of classes in second-level schools	46.6	41.3	5.8	3.0	0.7	2.7
Provide more equipment in schools (e.g., computers, science labs)	53.8	38.2	4.5	1.2	0.2	2.1
Provide more learning support and special education teachers for students with learning difficulties	65.6	28.2	4.3	0.5	0.1	1.4
Improve the training of teachers before they begin to teach	51.6	35.4	6.4	2.7	0.7	3.2
Improve the training of teachers during their professional lives	49.7	41.1	4.7	1.7	0.3	2.5
Provide parenting programmes so that parents will be able to support their children's educational development	47.2	41.2	7.9	1.2	0.3	2.2
Improve school buildings	45.1	41.7	9.1	2.7	0.3	1.3
Make more places available on third-level courses that have a very high points requirement	48.0	34.5	8.6	4.0	0.6	4.3
Make more money available in universities and institutes of technology for research and development to maintain the country's economic competitiveness	44.3	33.8	9.1	2.7	0.6	4.5
Make it easier to expel students who are causing serious disciplinary problems	44.3	35.3	9.6	5.3	1.2	4.3
Make Irish an optional subject after the Junior Certificate Examination	34.0	32.8	13.3	10.7	5.2	3.9
Introduce more practical and project work to curricula in second-level schools	39.0	47.0	7.0	2.3	0.5	4.1
Teach continental language in primary school	40.7	38.0	9.5	7.0	1.7	3.1
Provide new subjects at the Leaving Certificate level (e.g., psychology, political science)	31.3	40.6	10.9	7.3	3.2	6.6

Table 22

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements Regarding Use of School Buildings and Parental Involvement

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
School buildings should be available during evenings, weekends and holidays for use by local communities	44.9	40.1	8.1	3.5	3.3
Parents should have a greater say in what is taught in schools	34.3	39.9	14.6	6.3	5.0

Table 23

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements About the Funding of Preschool Education

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
The Government/ Department of Education and Science should meet all costs	35.9	28.7	18.9	9.5	7.0
The Government/ Department of Education and Science should meet some of the costs	23.2	42.6	13.9	12.5	7.7
Some of the funds should be raised locally	6.7	41.5	21.3	20.5	10.0
Parents should meet all of the costs	4.3	13.7	27.4	47.6	7.0
Parents should meet some of the costs	8.1	51.1	17.2	16.5	7.1

Table 24

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements About the Funding of Primary and Second-Level Education

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
The Government/ Department of Education and Science should meet all the costs	55.9	28.7	8.6	3.4	3.3
Some of the funds should be raised locally	7.1	39.6	20.8	26.4	6.0
Parents should meet some of the costs	5.5	40.6	20.6	28.3	4.9

Table 25

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements About the Funding of University/Third-Level Education

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
The Government/ Department of Education and Science should meet all the costs	42.8	34.4	13.6	5.8	3.4
Parents should meet some of the costs	6.9	49.7	19.0	19.5	4.9
Students should meet some of the costs (for example, by working or through a state-organised work system)	11.7	43.0	17.5	22.0	5.7

Table 26

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements About the Funding of Second-Chance Education

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
The Government/ Department of Education and Science should meet all the costs	31.9	38.8	17.6	6.9	4.8
Some of the funds should be raised locally	4.8	40.1	21.6	25.7	7.8
Employers should meet some of the costs	20.1	56.0	7.2	10.2	6.6
Students should meet some of the costs	13.5	53.7	11.8	14.4	6.6

Table 27

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Statements About the Provision of Education

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
There should be alternative provision funded by the Department of Education for the education of students who lose interest in school	31.4	48.0	8.5	5.8	6.3
Second-level schools should be organised in such a way as to facilitate senior students who want to work part time and attend school on part time basis	18.0	39.8	15.7	18.9	7.6
All individuals should be given vouchers/credits which they can use to avail of education at any time during their lives	23.6	39.2	13.4	11.4	12.3
The Department of Education and Science should continue to provide funding for fee-paying schools	20.5	33.8	16.0	19.1	10.6

Table 28

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with the View that Some of the Education Budget Should be Spent on Community Resources Outside the School

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
Some of the education budget should be spent on community resources outside the school (youth clubs, libraries, etc.)	22.5	46.2	15.0	12.2	4.1

Table 29

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with the View that Employers and Industry Should Contribute More Money to Education/Training

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
Employers and industry should contribute more money to on-the-job and off-the-job training and education	40.7	47.1	5.1	1.9	5.3

Table 30

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that Taxation should be Increased Specifically to Provide More Money for Education

	Yes	No	Don't know/ No opinion
Should taxation be increased specifically to provide more money for education?	27.0	61.1	11.9

Table 31

Percentages of Respondents Agreeing/Disagreeing with Increasing Tax if Earmarked to Improve Education

	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Don't know/ No opinion
Would you agree with increasing tax if it were earmarked to improve education, even if the increase affected you or your family	11.8	24.9	19.6	33.6	10.1

Table 32

Percentages of Respondents Who Identified Areas for Increase and Decrease in Education Budget

	Increase	Decrease
Early childhood education and care	20.6	38.8
Primary education	26.5	10.7
Second-level education	23.3	8.9
Third-level education	18.6	37.7
Education in later life (especially for adults with poor literacy skills)	18.1	34.9
Education activities outside the school (e.g., libraries, educational TV)	5.7	62.4
Education of children with learning difficulties	51.1	0.3
Provision for students in poorer areas	35.6	8.6

Table 33

Percentages of Respondents Assigning Ratings to Schools in Ireland Today

	Excellent	Pretty Good	Only Fair	Poor	Don't know/ No opinion
How do you rate the schools in Ireland today? Would you say that schools in general are	16.4	65.5	13.7	2.8	1.6

Table 34

Percentages of Respondents Indicating How Schools Today Compare to Schools a Few Years Ago

	Better	About the same	Not as good	Don't know/ No opinion
Based on your own experience, or from what you've heard or seen, how do you feel the schools compare to a few years ago?	56.2	31.8	7.8	4.2

Table 35

Percentages of Respondents Indicating How Schools in the Future will Compare to Schools Today

	Get better	Stay the same	Get worse	Don't know/ No opinion
How about the next few years – do you think the schools are going to get better, stay the same, or get worse?	47.9	31.6	10.7	9.8

Table 36

Percentages of Respondents Indicating that they Would/Would Not have Preferred to Have Stayed Longer in School

	Preferred to stay longer	Not preferred to stay longer	Still in school	Don't know/ No opinion
Would you have preferred to have stayed longer in school than you did?	38.9	43.0	5.4	12.8

Table 37

Percentages of Respondents Indicating they were Satisfied/Not Satisfied with their Education

	Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Don't know/ No opinion
Looking back on the education you received, would you say you are generally satisfied or dissatisfied with it?	72.6	23.9	3.5

Table 38

Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Adequacy of Emphasis Placed on Goals of Education, 1974, 2004

		Too Much	Too Little	Just Right	Don't know/ No opinion
Giving students an understanding of their religion	1974	14	25	58	2
	2004 P	11	27	53	9
	2004 S	10	34	49	9
Helping students appreciate music, art, and literature	1974	2	52	37	9
	2004 P	2	42	47	9
	2004 S	3	37	52	9
Encouraging students to have opinions of their own	1974	7	38	49	7
	2004 P	5	33	54	9
	2004 S	6	30	58	6
Maintaining and fostering the Irish language. Transmitting Irish language and culture	1974	38	18	42	3
	2004 P	8	35	51	6
	2004 S	9	34	51	7
Preparing students for the world of work	1974	7	53	36	4
	2004 S	2	51	40	6
Preparing students to achieve financial success	1974	9	44	37	10
	2004 S	6	48	34	10
Preparing students for public examinations	1974	24	11	61	4
	2004 S	11	15	68	6

P: Primary schools; S: Second-level schools

Table 39

Percentages of Respondents Assigning Rating to Schools in Ireland, 1974, 2004

		Excellent	Pretty Good	Only Fair	Poor	Don't know/ No opinion
How do you rate the schools in Ireland today?						
Would you say that schools in general are	1974	16	56	23	5	1
	2004	16	66	14	3	2

Table 40

Percentages of Respondents Indicating How Schools Today Compare to Schools a Few Years Ago, 1974, 2004

		Better	About the Same	Not as Good	Don't know/ No opinion
Based on you own experience, or from what you've heard or seen, how do you feel the schools compare to a few years ago?	1974	80	9	10	1
	2004	56	32	8	4

Table 41

Percentages of Respondents Indicating How Schools in the Future will Compare to Schools Today, 1974, 2004

		Get Better	Stay the Same	Get Worse	Don't know/ No opinion
How about the next few years – do you think the schools are going to get better, stay the same, or get worse?	1974	74	16	6	5
	2004	48	32	11	10

Table 42

Percentages of Respondents Indicating they were Satisfied/Not Satisfied with their Education, 1974, 2004

		Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Don't know/ No opinion
Looking back on the education you received, would you say you are generally satisfied or dissatisfied with it?	1974	64	35	1
	2004	73	24	4