



# Brookhurst Parent Forum Communications Survey Report October 2012

## Background

In July 2012, the Brookhurst Parent Forum carried out a communications survey on behalf of the school. This was part of a wider piece of work on parental engagement carried out by schools across the Leamington North cluster. The aim was to find out, from as many parents and carers as possible, what they thought about two types of communication:

- i) general communication about school life and all the things happening at Brookhurst
- ii) communication direct to parents/carers about the learning and progress of their child/children.

We used the end of year learning review meetings as the main opportunity for distributing the questionnaire. It was also emailed out with the weekly newsletter. We received 111 replies, which suggests a response rate of 33%, based on a figure of 328 families within the school.

The key findings of the survey are summarised below, along with our recommendations about how communications policy and practice might be developed in future. The annex provides an overview of the responses to every question in the survey.

## Key findings

- A significant majority of parents/carers agree or strongly agree that they know what is happening in school and where to get the information they need. A number of respondents made the point that communication has improved over the last couple of years.

*"Generally very good."*

- The preferred method of general communication is the school newsletter. This suggests that people appreciate the steps that have been taken to introduce this system, and the effort that is required to publish it on a weekly basis. There were a number of suggestions for improving the newsletter. The majority of these requested that the newsletter become more succinct and focused on weekly school-wide news.

*"Communication has definitely improved with the introduction of the weekly newsletter by email."*

*"Could be more streamlined to focus on key messages. Currently too long-winded and not always clear. Often most relevant info is at the end; should be the first thing you read."*

- Related to this, parents and carers appreciate the wider system of email communication. However a significant number of commentators felt that an excessive number of emails are sent out and that some streamlining is required.

"Too many small emails leads to items not being read."

- People also like being able to use the school website. It was praised by one respondent for its visual impact, though others said they did not use it because the information on it was not kept sufficiently up to date.

"Lovely layout, good information available."

"Needs to be properly updated and could be more comprehensive."

- Three quarters of parents and carers are satisfied with the information they receive about what their child is learning at school. This is reinforced by the finding that more than 70% find information evenings helpful, and 65% find Topic Web helpful. There was also overwhelming support and praise for class assemblies. The issues raised included:
  - a small number of people being unable to find information they need (for example learning policies on the website, or indeed not being aware of Topic Web)
  - requests for more information evenings (for example to show how the school teaches maths / literacy).

"Maths workshops were very useful."

Class assemblies: "Always excellent."

"Meet the teacher evenings are very informative."

- Although nearly two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with information they receive about their child's learning and progress, one-third are not. Based on the evidence available in written comments and answers to other questions, dissatisfaction falls into two main areas:
  - frustration about the home-school diary system and how it is used across the school
  - dissatisfaction with the timing of school reports and learning review meetings.
- The home school diary system was the biggest area of concern for parents and carers, as indicated by the number who commented on this in the 'free text' area of the questionnaire (51% of those making comments). Concerns centred on the following issues:
  - querying the purpose: e.g. Is it a diary for the child to remember what to bring in? Is it for the teacher to pass on regular information about the child's learning and progress? Is it looked at by the teacher on a regular basis? How is a parent/carer supposed to use it?
  - lack of consistent use across the school (e.g. some parents/carers write notes that are not acknowledged by teacher)
  - a feeling that it has the potential to be a useful vehicle for letting parents/carers know how they can support their individual child's learning, but frustration that it is not being used as such.

"I find the diary system very frustrating. Having one sets up the expectation that there will be dialogue between home and school in this way... I know there are a lot of pupils and a comment a day is not possible, but one a week is. If there isn't time, then don't have a diary!"

"Nothing is ever written in the diaries - seems like a waste of money as they aren't used."

Someone who rated it as 'useful' said: "But only if used regularly. After a long time with no notes, you stop checking."

- Related to this, a number of respondents were keen to find out more on a regular basis about what their child is learning and how they are getting on, either through the home school diary or other methods such as the learning platform.
- Nearly 20% of comments concerned the timing of the school report and the final learning review meeting. All of them suggested that it would be better to switch the dates. The effect of this would be:
  - to have a learning review meeting in the spring term, at which parents/carers could find out whether their child is on course to achieve their targets for the end of the year. If the child is not on course, they can find out what they can do to provide support at home.
  - to have a final, summative report at the end of the school year. This would show whether previous targets have been achieved, and provide a more useful and up-to-date record to pass onto the class teacher in the next year.

"This should be an end of year report, recording the status of child's attainment at that point, after a year of learning. No point whatsoever having it in Spring term."

"[The report is] very useful - but at wrong time of year!"

"Half way through the academic year is a good time to discuss next steps to help your child's learning; July is too late. A report in July to summarise the year would be better."

"Would be better to have a meeting in the second term rather than two weeks before the teachers change."

- A related point is that two respondents with reception-age children queried why their child's report came out two days before the end of term, not giving them enough time to follow up with their child's teacher.
- Less than half of respondents felt that there was a clear channel for making suggestions or comments, and only a quarter felt that there was an effective 'feedback loop' for finding out the school's response to suggestions or comments.
- Over 40% of respondents find the school noticeboards useful or very useful. There were requests for them to be kept more up-to-date and consistent.

"Could be made better use of."

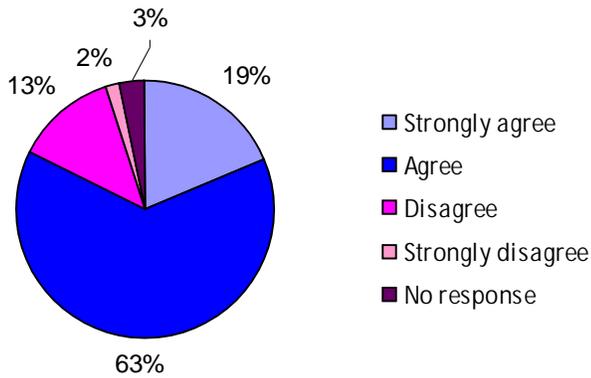
"Information that's up is good, but they often look tatty; not a good impression to the outside world."

## Recommendations

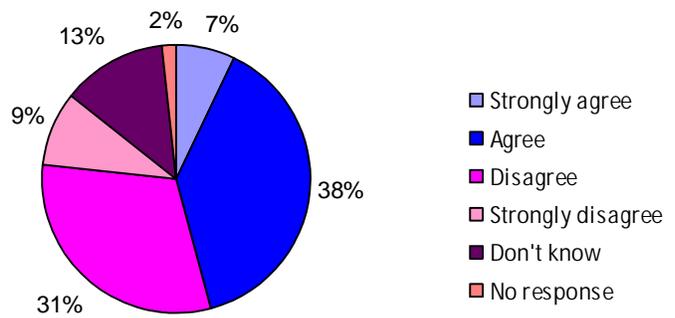
- To continue to provide and develop the school's current, well-regarded forms of communication such as the weekly newsletter, the website, Topic Web, class assemblies and learning information evenings.
- Review the home-school diary system to clarify its purpose and the expectations on parents/carers, teachers and pupils. The system should be embedded consistently across the whole-school, with all parties clear about how it is intended to support pupils' learning and progress. One suggestion is that it could be used as a record for individual merits (e.g. a sticker-based system).  
Action: Present proposals for discussion at the Parent Forum next half-term.
- Review the timing of the school report and the final learning review meeting. The parents/carers who commented on this issue felt strongly that a spring meeting / summer report would give them a better picture of their child's progress, help them support their child better, and be a more relevant document to take into the following year.  
Action: Update at Parent Forum next half-term.
- Review the newsletter / email system, to ensure that these are as focused as possible. One approach would be to ensure that all key news and diary dates are put into a regular, weekly 'need-to-know' newsletter; that additional emails / texts are only sent out in an emergency or on a targeted basis; and that the reports about visits, matches etc are included in summary format in the main newsletter, and in full in a half-termly 'round up' for each year group. A number of parents/carers requested that emails with attachments include a summary of what the attachments are in the body of the email. Some also requested that more than one person in a household could be put on the mailing list.  
Action: Present proposals for discussion at the Parent Forum next half-term.
- Ensure that there is a clear and widely-understood system for parents and carers to make suggestions or comments, along with a clear feedback 'loop' for how they are dealt with.  
Action: Present a possible approach for discussion at the Parent Forum next half-term.
- Although no question was asked about the structure of the Parent Forum, the low numbers reporting having attended a meeting suggest that it would be helpful to bolster publicity for it. Our final recommendation is therefore to include a 'Parent Forum' page on the school website, to contain minutes and action from meetings as well as relevant news.  
Action: Consider proposal and update at the next meeting of the Parent Forum.

# Annex: Summary of responses

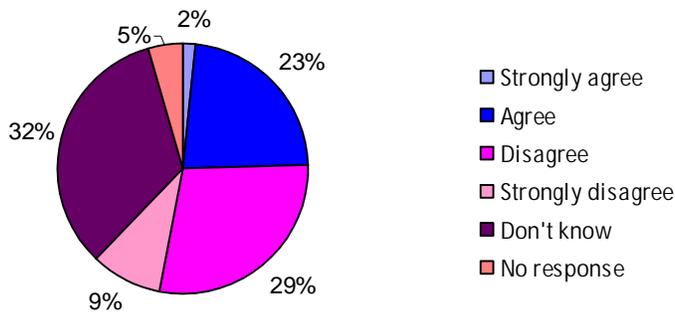
1) I know what is happening in school and where to get information:



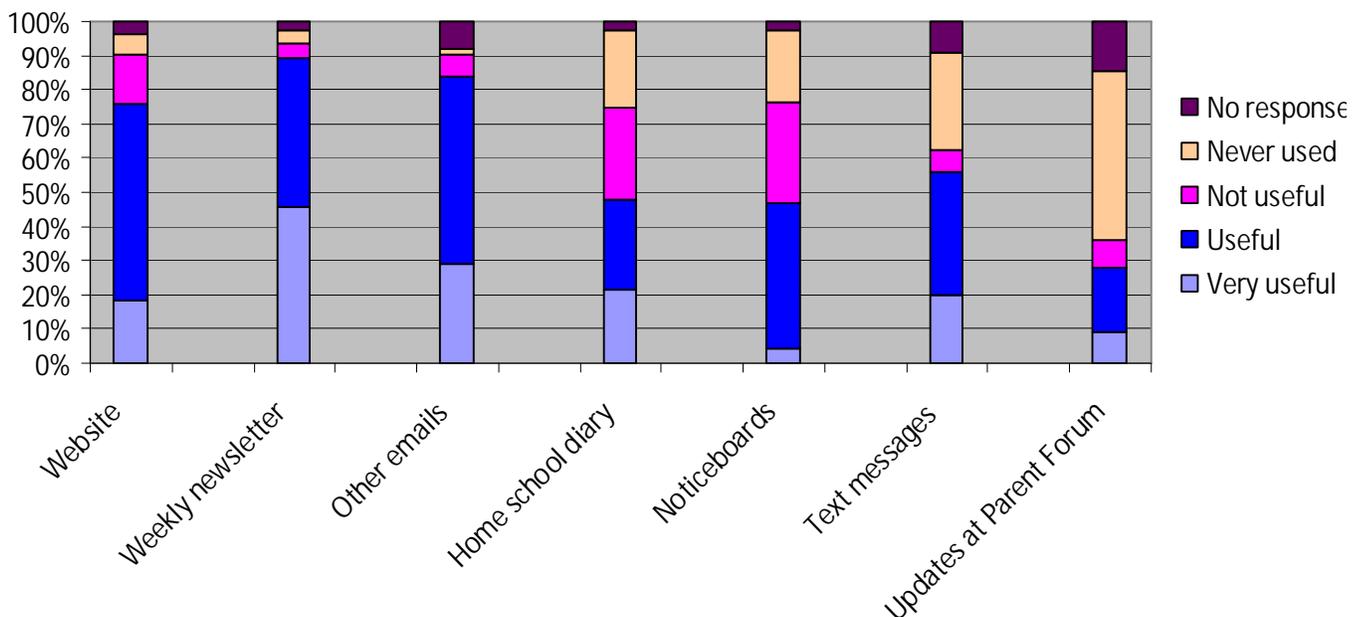
2) There is a clear channel for making suggestions and comments:



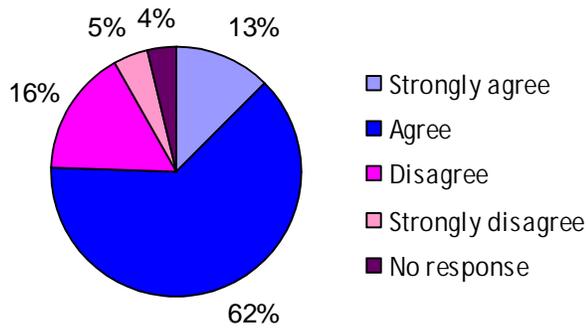
3) There is a 'feedback loop' so I can find out how my suggestions or comments are dealt with:



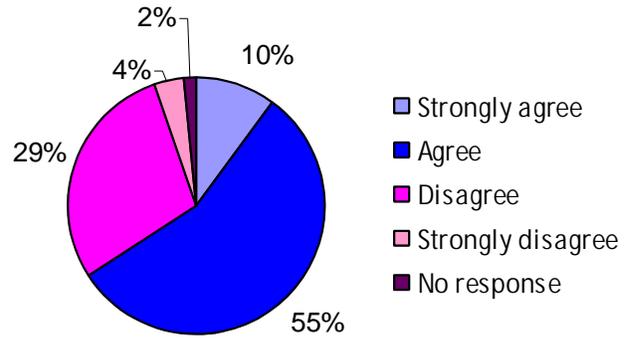
4) How useful do you find these forms of communication?



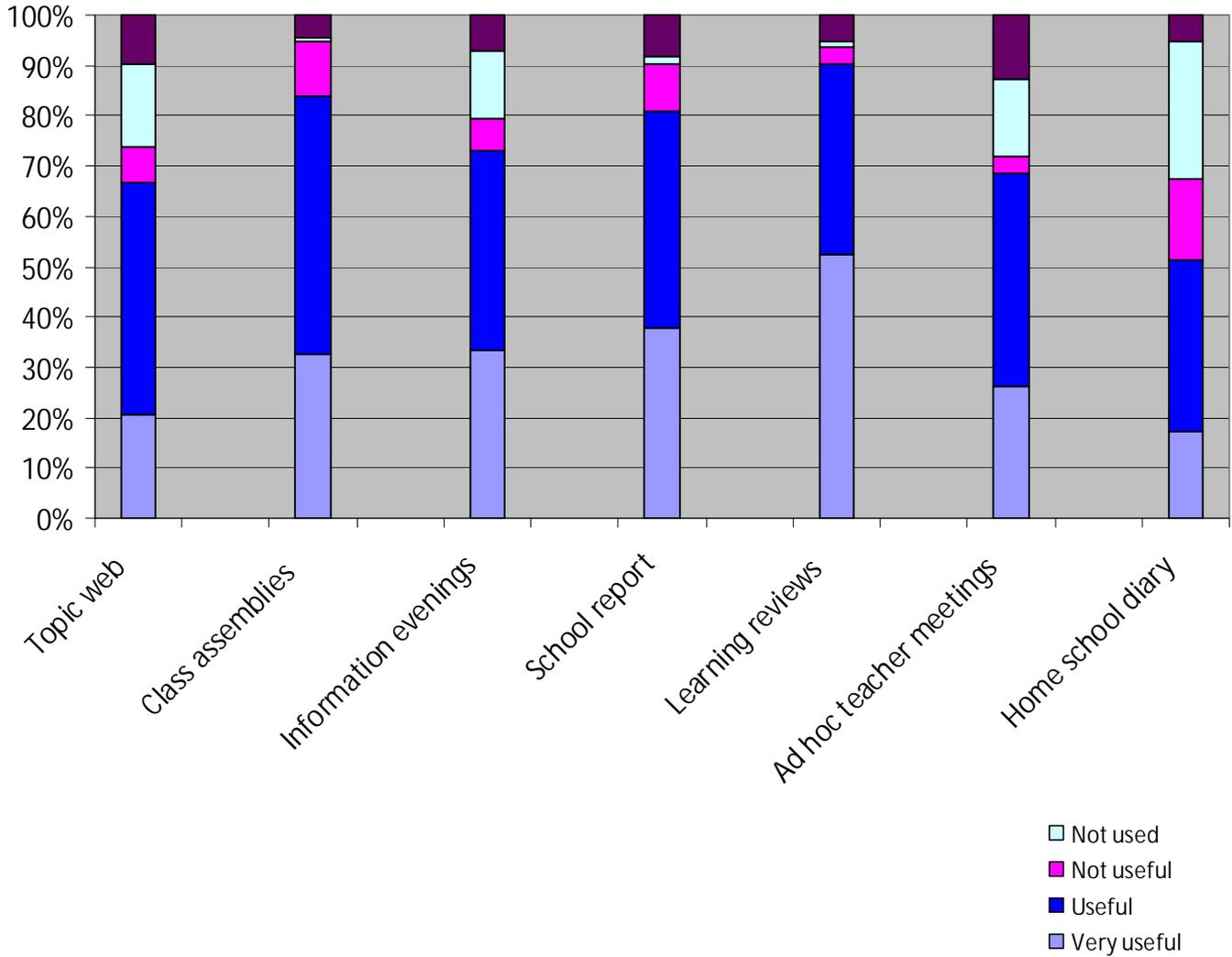
5) I am satisfied with information about what my child is learning:



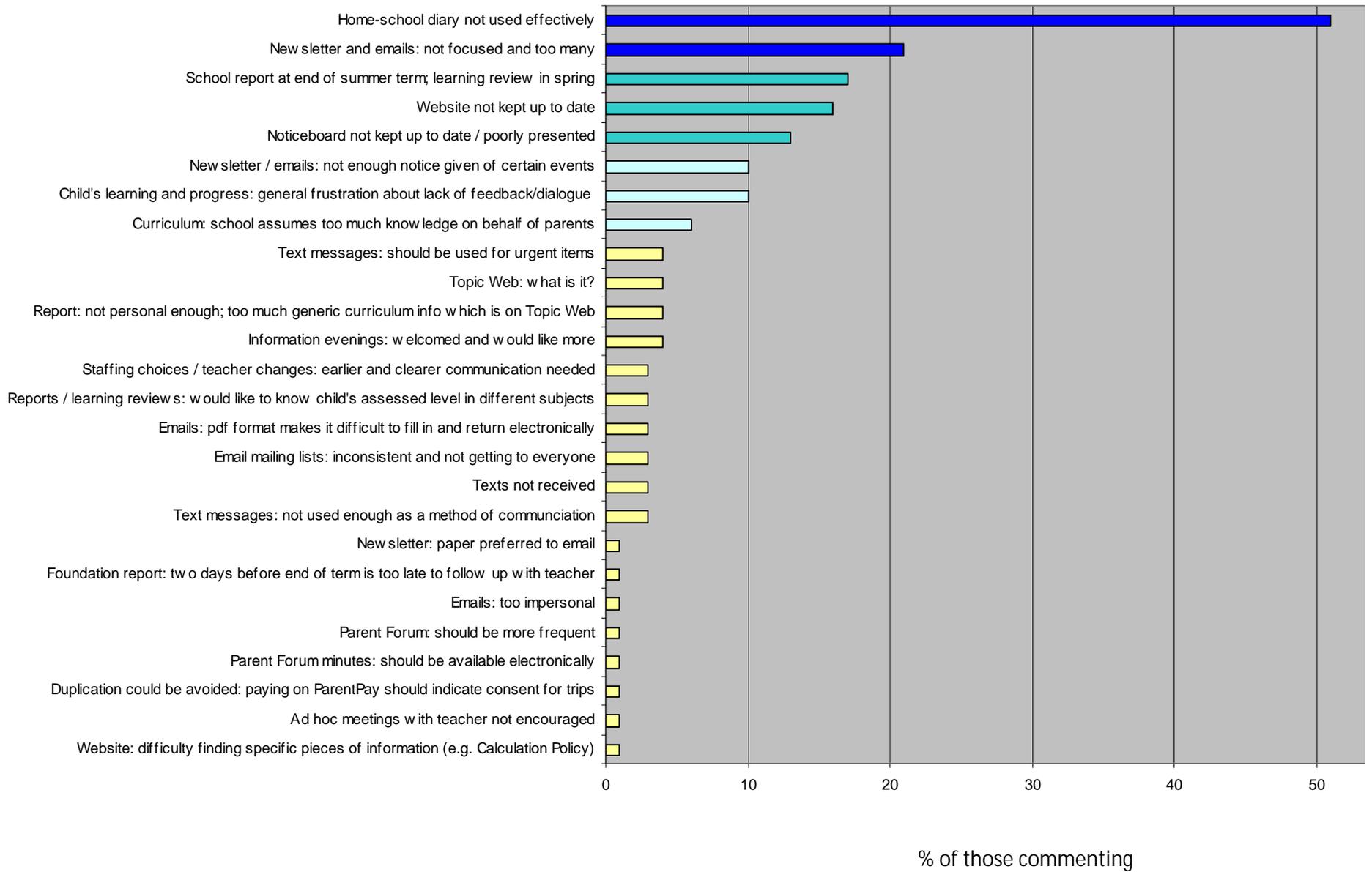
6) I am satisfied with the information I receive about my child's progress:



7) Communication about my child's learning and progress:



## 8) Analysis of comments



9. Specific requests and practical suggestions:

"Emails would be better if subject line stated which year group it applies to."

ParentPay: "Consider implementing email or text notification for debit on ParentPay account, instead of paper letter."

Trips: "When a parent volunteers to help on a school trip could it be acknowledged and explained that they may or may not be needed? Twice now I have volunteered, made arrangements to have time off work, then to be told I am not required - frustrating and hurtful."

After school clubs: "It would be really helpful to have an idea / plan about after-school clubs at the beginning of each term. Plans may be unconfirmed, but [even so] it would help parents plan and help children decide what they are most interested in."

Request to ensure that all parents know what the different assemblies are – e.g. that a Class Assembly means that parents are invited; that you are only invited to a well-done assembly if your child is receiving a certificate.