

Surveying parents: top tips

There are several challenges with surveying parents, and leaders often ask for advice.

One complaint we often hear is that of the "missing middle" - those surveys that generate some strong responses from the very happy and the very unhappy, with a distinct lack of input from the vast majority of parents who are probably fairly satisfied or perhaps quietly indifferent.

Some leaders may be delighted even to get these extreme responses, struggling to get even into double figure response numbers.

Is there anything that can be done? In this blog post, we've tried to collate a few of the best ideas we've heard from across our surveying community. It's all about making it meaningful and making it easy.

Making it easy

A simple click

First off, leaders say a survey should be easy to complete in just a few minutes, from a simple click of a link or scan of a QR code, without any need for logins or passwords.

But how to access this link, and what can schools do to boost responses?

Is it all about parents' evenings?

Certainly, parents' evening is a tried and tested time for getting parents to complete a survey. Some schools provide laptops or tablets with the survey link already showing, and ask student volunteers to direct waiting parents to complete the survey.

But with mobile phones so ubiquitous, the devices aren't necessarily key, and it's having the link and/or QR code clearly on display at strategic points that is more important: on chairs or walls wherever parents sit waiting for their appointment.

Some schools like to share the link on the doors or in a leaflet at the point of exit, as part of a "thank you for coming" message.

What else can we try?

Of course, not all schools are holding consultations in person anymore, and this isn't the only way to get people to respond. Here are some other suggestions for boosting engagement:

- Targeted communication – rather than adding the survey link to a long newsletter with several calls to action, consider a separate email or text with a short and specific message (and deadline)
- Using incentives: some leaders have told us about using stickers or stamps in return for zapping the code – often popular with the younger siblings in tow. We've heard of some schools offering a prize draw entry for shopping vouchers as an optional final question on the survey – a different twist on the more typical offer of a focus group follow up.
- The playground: particularly for primary schools, school drop-off and pick-up gives the opportunity for laminated posters on the railings or noticeboards, and even for QR codes pinned to the Hi-Vis...



Some headteachers have even told us about pinning survey QR codes to their Hi-Vis and

getting parents to zap it on the playground

Making it meaningful

Aside from being clever about when and how you ask, what else can shift the dial?

The best surveying response rates come when leaders making the overall process meaningful. In two main ways:

1) Asking good questions

We usually suggest only asking a handful of questions (much more than 10 is quite a big ask), making sure they are well written and allowing (some) space for open response feedback. We'll be blogging again shortly on designing good parent surveys.

2) Sharing insights from last time

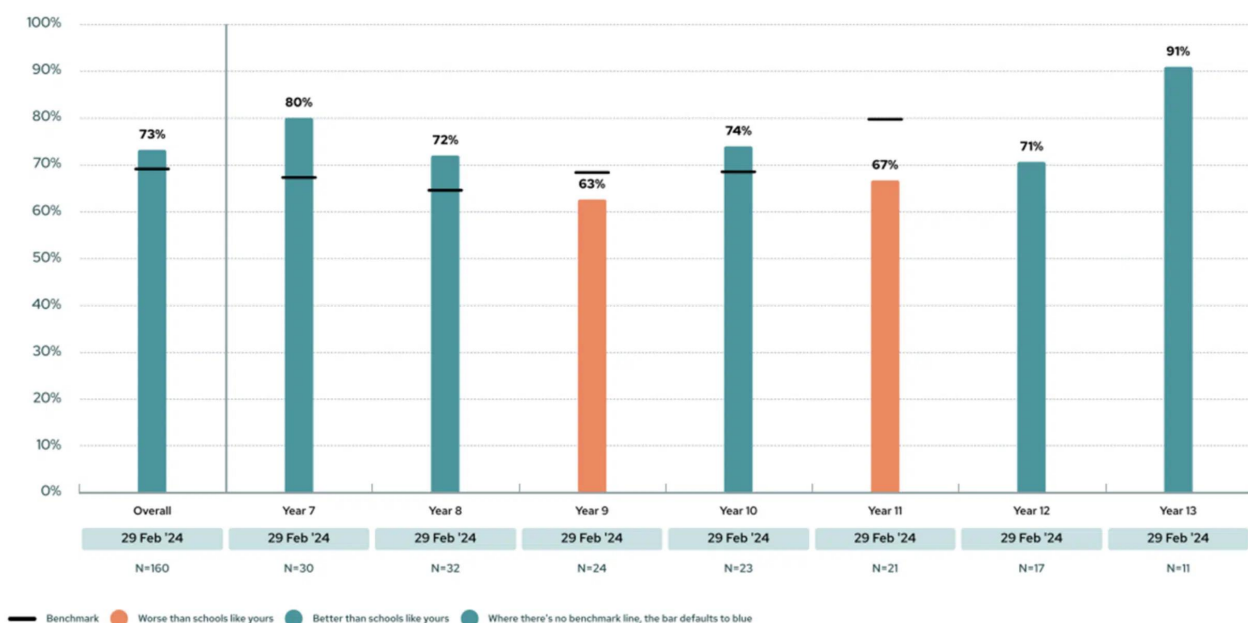
At School Surveys, we always suggest that the best engagement flows in a decent feedback loop. Whether staff members or parents, people are more likely to feel positive about filling in a survey if they recall what happened last time, and the value they got from finding out what others thought.

How do you do this with parents?

It may be through sharing the whole survey report, or more likely, by taking one or two of the most interesting graphs and adding them into a regular newsletter or webpage. This way, you have the opportunity to express gratitude for parents who completed the survey, alongside telling them what areas you want to work to improve.

Parent says their child has an adult in the school they trust

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Sharing snapshots of findings can be a powerful way of telling parents what you are working on next – and celebrating where your school is performing above benchmarks.

You may be inviting further comments or even holding in-person discussions as follow up. You may decide that is definitely not a good use of your time at this stage. Whatever feels right for your situation, by talking about the survey, you are proactively demonstrating that communicating with them matters – and that they matter to you.

Further ideas and support

If you are an existing member of School Surveys, remember that you can always email us or book a call if you'd like any help. If you aren't yet a member and are interested to find out more, please get in touch via hello@schools-surveys.com.