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Ref

REPORT TO LEEDS ADMISSION FORUM

Date

Venue: Civic Hall

Time: 4.00pm

Subject: Outcome into research into school preferences

Summary

The Leeds Admissions Forum requested that the Choice Advice Service carry out a research project into why parents preference popular schools. Two schools were identified as being popular and the primary schools in the same cluster were approached to take part in the research. There were 7 schools who took part, 270 questionnaires were handed out and 48 parents completed the questionnaire. Parents reported more influences for preferencing popular schools than non-popular schools. The most frequently reported reason for preferencing a popular school was it's reputation. Parents were also more than twice as likely to report, working near the school, the feel of the school and the schools facilities as influences for preferencing a popular schools.

Introduction

Leeds have 38 high schools: 4 of these are Catholic Voluntary Aided schools, 1 is a Church of England Voluntary Aided school, 4 are Academies, 3 are Foundation Schools. In 2010, the Leeds Admissions Forum identified 16 high schools as being oversubscribed. With 2 of those being oversubscribed on 1st preferences by more than 50%. These schools were Pudsey Grangfield School and Roundhay School.

Parents have to complete a preference form in the autumn term when their child starts year 6, in line with the co-ordinated admission dates across England. The closing date this year for the Secondary Common Preference forms to be completed was the 31st October 2010. National Offer Day when children and parents find out what schools they have been offered is 1st March 2010. This process is handled by The Admissions Team in Education Leeds.

The Choice Advice Service is a statutory service that offers independent and impartial advice and support to parents, when looking at applying or appealing for a secondary school place. It sits within the Parent Partnership Service, and is independent of The Admissions Team. The Choice Advice Service will use this research, to better understand parents reasons for wanting to preference and appeal for schools.

The Admissions Forum provides a vehicle for admission authorities and other key interested parties to discuss the effectiveness of local admissions arrangements, consider how to deal with difficult admission issues and advise admission authorities on ways in which their arrangements can be improved. Their main focus is to consider the fairness of arrangements in their local context.

The Admission Forum, at their June meeting requested that the Choice Advice Service carries out a research project to find out why parents preference popular schools and what can influence their decision.

Method

The three community schools which were the most over subscribed schools, on first preferences (from applications in autumn 2009) were Pudsey Grangefield School (63%), Roundhay School (60%) and Allerton High (47%). Primary Schools were identified in the extended services clusters, which these schools were in (Inner Pudsey Cluster, N.E.X.T Cluster and Alwoodley Cluster) as the best place to carry out this research.

Parents of year 6 children were contacted during the time when they would have been preferencing high school options for September 2011. This was hoped to give accurate feed back as to what was being considered at the time when parents preferencing schools. Every effort was made to make it clear to parents this was not a secondary common preference form, and that they still needed to make a preference by 31st October 2010.

Due to the time constraints from when the research was started, and the cost of carrying out the research, primary schools in the Alwoodly cluster were not contacted.

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was developed to find out what schools the parents were thinking of preferencing, and their reasons for wanting to preference these schools. No identifying information was requested from parents. An envelope was provided for all parents so questionnaires could be kept confidential and only be read by the Choice Advice Service. The questionnaire and accompanying letter were consulted on with parents and approved by the Head of Service of the Admissions Team.

E-mails were sent to head teachers on Friday 17th September 2010, with replies requested by Monday 20th September. A reminder was sent out on Monday 20th September, to remind head teachers of the opportunity of their involvement. There were 7 schools contacted from the N.E.X.T Cluster, with 1 school replying, and 8 schools contacted in the Inner Pudsey Cluster, with 6 schools replying.

Questionnaire packs were sent out to the primary schools on Tuesday 21st September. These included a letter to the year 6 teacher (Appendix 2) and for each of the year 6 parents: a letter (Appendix 3), a questionnaire and an envelope.

It was requested that all schools collect completed questionnaires by Friday 1st October. Completed questionnaires were collected by the Choice Advice Service on Monday 4th October.

The information was inputted into a spreadsheet and the answers analysed for any trends.

Results

There were 270 questionnaires sent out to 7 different primary schools, from that 48 forms were received, a response rate of 17.7%.

The follow table illustrates what responses were received from what school.

School	Cluster	Number
Greenside Primary School	Inner Pudsey	5
Pudsey Lowtown Primary School	Inner Pudsey	3
Pudsey Primrose Hills Primary School	Inner Pudsey	8
Pudsey Southroyd Primary	Inner Pudsey	10
Roundhay St John Church of England Primary School	N.E.X.T	4
St Joseph's Primary, Pudsey	Inner Pudsey	13
Swinnow Primary School	Inner Pudsey	5

The ethnicity of those who responded is as follows:

Any other White Origin	1
Bangladeshi	1
Kashmir Pakistani	1
Mixed Black Caribbean and White	1
Other	1
Unknown	1
White British	41
White Eastern European	1

All 48 of the parents who responded said that they had or were planning to visit the schools they were preferencing. There were 33 (68%) parents who had read the admissions policy for community schools, and 41(85%) parents felt they understood the policy. Most parents, 32 (66%), had both read and understood the admissions policy. There were 9 parents (18%) who had not read the admissions policy but felt they understood how places were allocated in Leeds. There were 4 parents (8%) who had not read the admissions policy and did not feel that they understood how places were allocated in Leeds.

When parents were asked who would make the decisions about what school to preference the following responses were given:

Decision	Number	%
Child	6	12.5
Parent	35	72.91
Other	4	8.33
No answer	3	6.25

There were 5 parents who felt their child has special needs, and 2 of these children have statements of special educational needs.

There were 5 parents who identified their children as having free school meals.

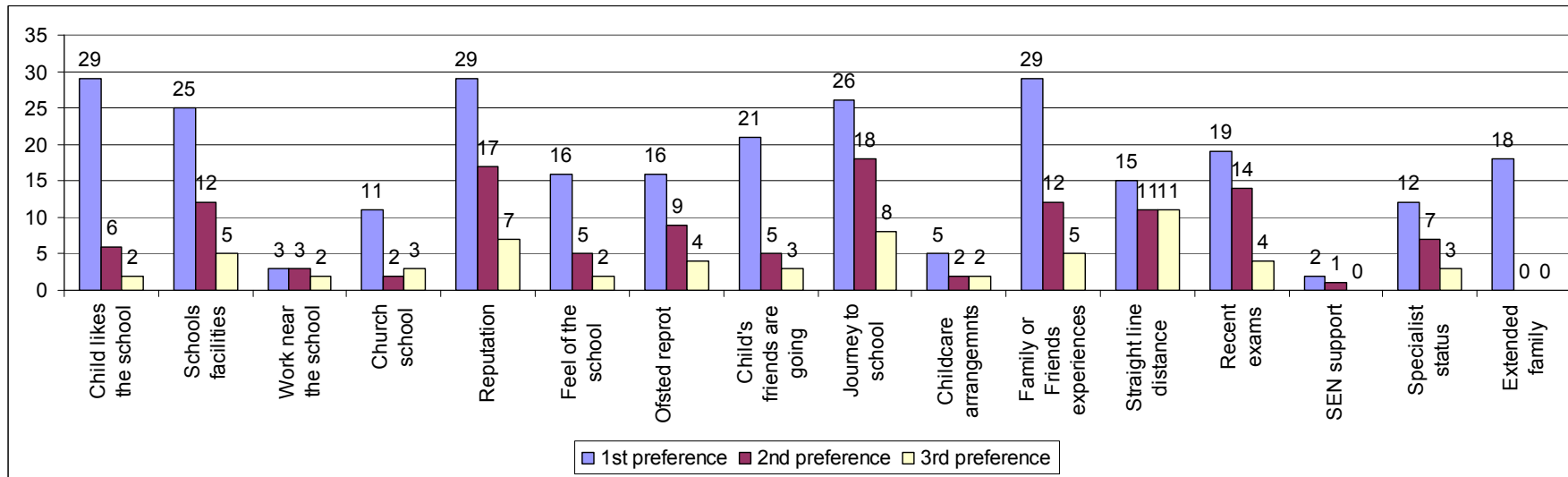
Number of parents preferencing a high schools as 1st , 2nd or 3rd preferences is:

School	Cluster	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
Abbey Grange Church of England School	Inner NW	1	0	1	2
Allerton Grange School	N.E.X.T	0	1	0	1
Benton Park School	Aireborough	0	1	0	1
Boston Spa School	EPOS – Boston Spa	0	1	1	2
Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School	Alwoodley	0	0	2	2
Crawshaw High School	Inner Pudsey	15	9	4	28
Laisterdyke High School	Bradford LEA	0	0	1	1
Leeds West Academy	Bramley	0	2	0	2
Mount St Mary's Catholic High School	Richmond Hill	0	1	0	1
Pudsey Grangefield Maths & Computing College	Inner Pudsey	15	20	0	35
Priesthorpe School	Outer Pudsey	1	0	17	18
Ralph Thoresby School	ESNW	1	0	0	1
Roundhay School	N.E.X.T	2	1	1	4
St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive	Aireborough	11	1	0	12
Wetherby High School	EPOS - Wetherby	1	1	1	3
Total		47	38	28	113
<i>No School Named</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>31</i>

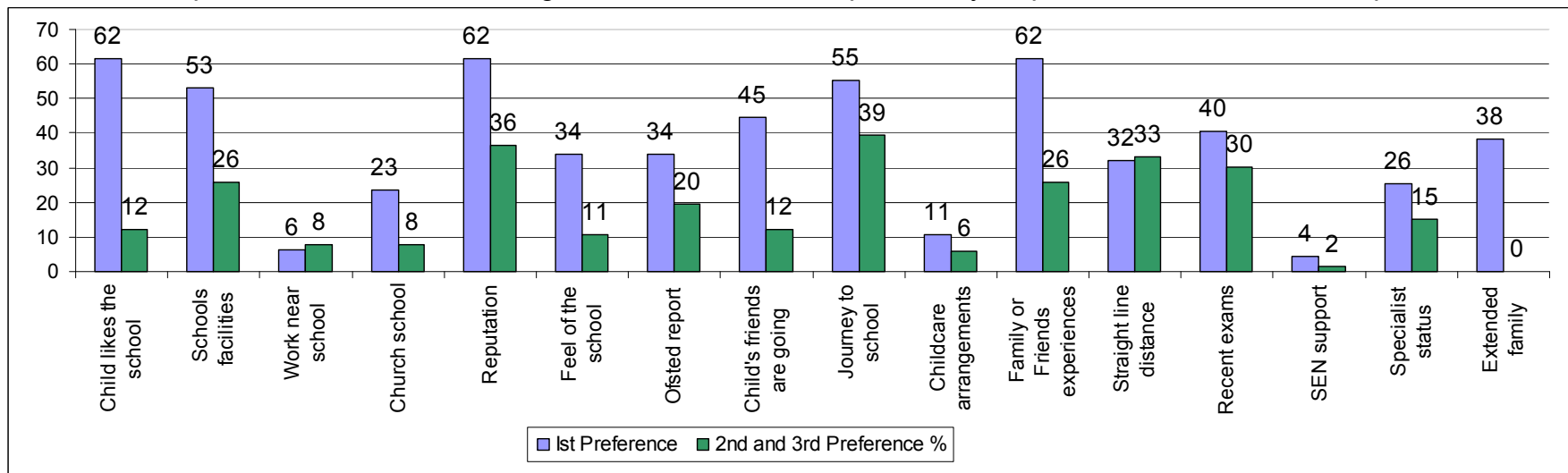
The number of reasons given for preferencing each school were:

	Popular	Popular Mean	Non-popular	Non-popular Mean	Totals	Total Mean
No. of 1 st preference reasons	122	7.18	153	4.35	275	5.85
No. of 2 nd preference reasons	68	3.4	54	3	122	3.21
No. of 3 rd preference reasons	4	4	55	2.03	59	2.10

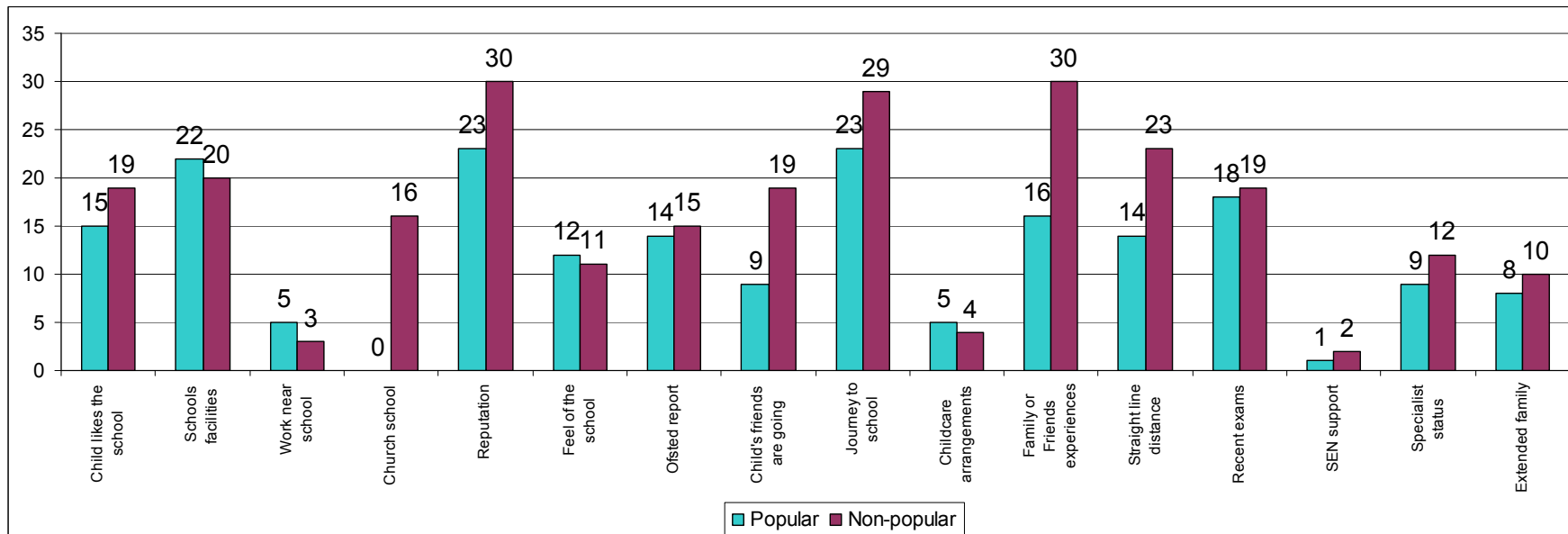
The distribution of influences for choosing preferences separated by 1st, 2nd and 3rd preference is:



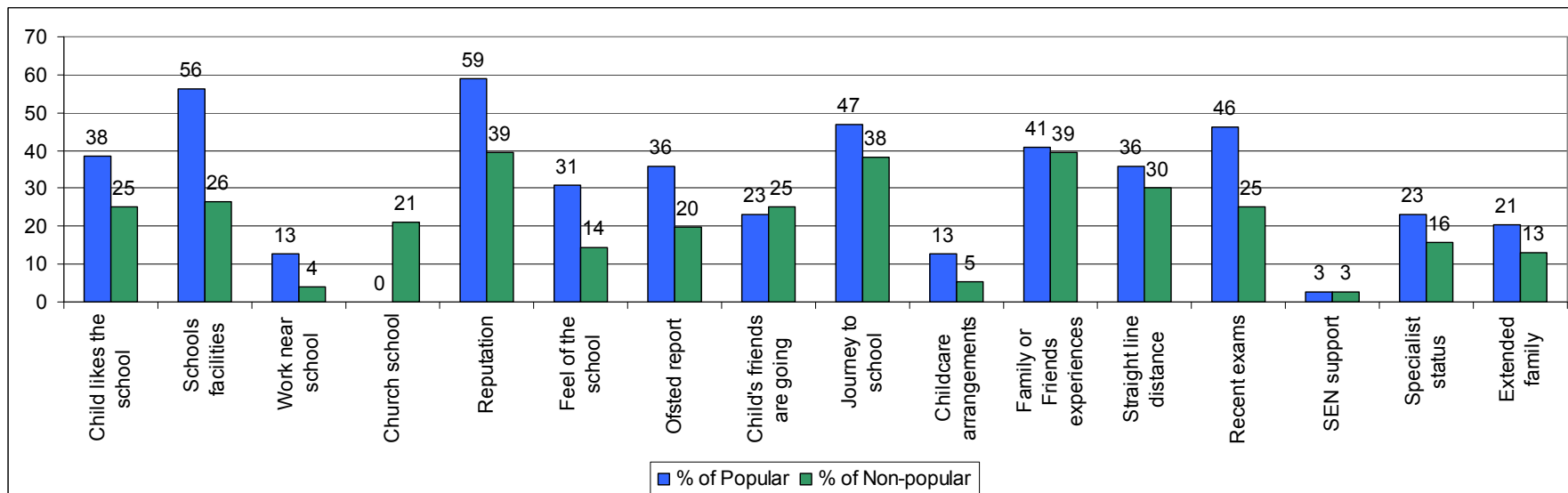
The % of what parents chose as influencing their decision most, separated by 1st preference and 2nd and 3rd preferences:



The distributions of influences for choosing preferences separated for popular and non-popular schools are:



The % of what parents chose as influencing their decision most, separated by popular and non-popular schools:



First preference,

Ratios of

% of parents reasons for 2nd and 3rd Preferences : % of parents reasons for 1st preferences

Child likes the school	1 : 5.09
Childs Friends are attending	1 : 3.69
Church School	1 : 3.09
SEN support	1 : 2.80
Family or Friends	1 : 2.39
Schools facilities	1 : 2.06
Childcare arrangements	1 : 1.75
Ofsted report	1 : 1.73
Reputation	1 : 1.70
Specialist Status	1 : 1.69
Journey to school	1 : 1.40
Recent exams	1 : 1.33
Straight line distance	2 : 1.90
Work near the school	2 : 1.68
Extended Family	0

Ratios of

% of parents reasons for preferencing non popular schools : % of parents reasons for preferencing popular schools

Work near school	1 : 3.25
Childcare arrangements	1 : 2.45
Schools facilities	1 : 2.14
Feel of0 the school	1 : 2.13
Recent exams	1 : 1.85
Ofsted report	1 : 1.82
Extended family	1 : 1.55
Child likes the school	1 : 1.54
Reputation	1 : 1.49
Specialist status	1 : 1.46
Journey to school	1 : 1.23
Straight line distance	1 : 1.19
Family or Friends experiences	1 : 1.04
SEN support	2 : 1.94
Child's friends are going	2 : 1.84
Church school	0

Evaluation

When deciding on a method to carry out this research, different methods were considered in how to get the most accurate results.

Contacting year 7 parents would have had the advantage of knowing that the parents did preference a popular school, it would mean contacting fewer schools, and it would gain the parents view over the whole process, including National Offer Day and appeals.

However, it would not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the reasoning for wanting a school at the time of applying, as circumstances may have changed in the past year. A parent having been through the appeals process, will have potentially more reasons why they want a school than their reasoning's for preferencing it when they put it on the form 6 months previously.

If we contacted year 7 parents, we would have to contact the popular schools as we would know parents preferenced that school. However we would potentially have to look at contacting parents from a non popular school that may have preferenced the popular school but were unsuccessful.

This would collect a lot of unnecessary data if the aim is to find out why parent's preference popular schools. Targeting only popular schools would also mean that many parents may state that distance is the main reason for wanting it, as they are likely to live near to the school, which would provide biased results from those who were successful.

The year 6 option had the advantage of gauging what influences a parents decision at the time of making a preference, as opposed to what parents thought had influenced them, although it does loose out on a more comprehensive study on parents view of the whole process. By targeting clusters with a popular school there was potential to find parents who are likely to preference a school due to it's close proximity, but also those parents who are not likely to be offered a place. Although there is still the potential for parents who will not preference the popular school in the cluster, the potential for this could be less so than targeting an alternative high school.

Targeting year 6 parents through primary schools, also gave the option that more vulnerable families would respond as they could be chased up by the primary school, in comparison to the high school.

Although the questionnaire, provided parents with a range of options for what influenced them in preferencing high schools, it failed to gain any information on whether this was the parents first time applying for high school, and if the year 6 child had any siblings at the school. Though this information may have been lost on there reasons for preferencing high schools.

The study had a response rate of 17%, which while a good response rate, was not high enough to make a comparison across the city for reasons for preferencing high schools. There was a low uptake of schools in the NEXT cluster, with only one agreeing to take part in the questionnaire. In Pudsey the uptake by schools was higher with 6 out of 8 schools contacting agreeing to take part. The information collected on ethnicity and those who have free school meals, is not representative of the city. A higher uptake of schools over a more diverse area, may have improved this.

From the parents questioned the majority had read the admissions policy for Leeds community schools and understood it. However 21% of those who said they understood the admissions policy, had not read it. This may be as a result of the year 6 child having older siblings already at school, or it may be due to the parents mis-information about the process.

Comparing the mean average, parents reported there being 2 more influences for choosing their 1st preference schools, then their 2nd or 3rd preference schools. When comparing the mean on popular and non popular schools; parents preferencing popular schools, reported on average there being more reasons for preferencing it as 1st, 2nd or 3rd preference compared to the non popular schools 1st 2nd or 3rd preferences. The greatest difference in the mean was the 1st preference where parents reported 65% more influences with a mean average of 7.18 influences for popular schools in comparison of 4.35 to non-popular.

The most reported influences for 1st preference schools is that their “child likes the school”, “the past reputation of the school” and “Family or Friends Experiences at the school”. Parents were more than 5 times as likely to report the child liking the school as an influence for the 1st preference than for a 2nd or 3rd preference. They were twice as likely to report “friends or families experience at schools” as an influence for preferencing a school 1st. “The past reputation of the school”, was frequently reported as a 1st preference influence however it was also frequently reported for 2nd or 3rd preferences, the difference is smaller with a ratio of 1:1.70 for 2nd and 3rd preferences : 1st preferences.

Parents reported that extended family attending the school was an influence for 1st preferences but not for 2nd or 3rd, this could be due to the sibling priority, where the information was not collected.

The most reported influence for preferencing a popular school was its reputation, however this was still the most popular influences for preferencing a non-popular school, with a low ratio of 1:1.45 for non-popular : popular influences. The second most reported influence for popular schools was the schools facilities, parents were twice as likely to report this as an influence in preferencing a popular school. The third most popular reason for preferencing a popular school was the schools exam results, this had a ration of 1 : 1.84 to parents who preferenced it for non-popular : popular schools.

Parents were also more than three times as likely to report that working near a school and twice as likely to report the feel of the school and childcare arrangements as an influence of preferencing a popular school than a non-popular school, although their were not the most reported reasons.

Parents were more likely to report that the “SEN support available”, where their “child’s friends are going” and “it is a church school”, for non-popular schools in comparison to popular schools.

Conclusion

The research carried out was successful in answering the question why parents preference popular schools. However the results cannot be generalised for the population due to the low uptake of the questionnaires by schools.

From the parents who responded nearly 1 in every 5 parents (18%) had not read the admissions policy but felt they understood how school places were allocated in Leeds. It was reported that most parents would be making the decision about what schools to preference, and only 12.5% of the children would decide what schools to preference.

Parents reported more influences for 1st preference schools as well as the popular schools. Parents were more than twice as likely to report working near the school, the feel of the school and the schools facilities as influences for preferencing a popular school. The schools reputation, facilities and exam results were influences most reported by parents for popular schools.

The research gives an impression of what influences a parent when they are preferencing high schools in the Inner Pudsey and N.E.X.T. clusters. From this further research could be undertaken if stronger and statistically significant results were required.

It is hoped that the information collated will be of benefit to the Admissions Forum and the Choice Advice Service in their future work.

The Choice Advice Service is here to offer independent and impartial advice and support to families when they are applying or appealing for a High School Place. We are conducting research into the reasons parents preference schools.

This Questionnaire will not affect the school place your child is allocated.

What schools do you think you will preference?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For the first school, what factors most influenced your decision?

Your child likes the school		The schools facilities		You work near the school		It is a church school	
The past reputation of the school		The "Feel of the school"		What the schools ofsted report says		Your child's friends are going	
The journey your child would take to school		Current and future childcare arrangements		Family or friends experiences at the school		How far you live from the school in a straight line	
How the school did in recent exams		The SEN support available		The schools specialist status		Your extended family attends the school	

For the second school, what factors most influenced your decision?

Your child likes the school		The schools facilities		You work near the school		It is a church school	
The past reputation of the school		The "Feel of the school"		What the schools ofsted report says		Your child's friends are going	
The journey your child would take to school		Current and future childcare arrangements		Family or friends experiences at the school		How far you live from the school in a straight line	
How the school did in recent exams		The SEN support available		The schools specialist status		Your extended family attends the school	

For the third school what factors most influenced your decision?

Your child likes the school		The schools facilities		You work near the school		It is a church school	
The past reputation of the school		The "Feel of the school"		What the schools ofsted report says		Your child's friends are going	
The journey your child would take to school		Current and future childcare arrangements		Family or friends experiences at the school		How far you live from the school in a straight line	
How the school did in recent exams		The SEN support available		The schools specialist status		Your extended family attends the school	

Are there any other reasons for you preferencing a school that hasn't been suggested?

Have you visited or do you plan to visit the schools you will preference?

Yes No

Have you read the admissions policy for Leeds Community Schools?

Yes No

Do you understand how school places are offered in Leeds?

Yes No

Who will make the final decision on what schools will be preferenced?

You Your child Other

Is there any school(s) you are worried about being offered that you will not put on your form?

Does your child have Special Educational Needs?

Yes No

If Yes, do they have a statement?

Yes No

Does your child have free school meals?

Yes No

What would best describe your ethnic origin?

Bangladeshi		Traveller - Irish Heritage	
Chinese		White British	
Indian		White Eastern European	
Kashmir Pakistani		White Western European	
Kashmir other		White Irish	
Other Pakistani		Any other white Background	
Other Asian		Mixed Asian and White	
Black African		Mixed black African and white	
Black Caribbean		Mixed black Caribbean and white	
Any other black background		Any other mixed background	
Gypsy Roma		Any other ethnic group	
		Refused to answer	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

All answers will remain confidential; they will not be shared with any Primary or High Schools, or the Admissions Team. At no point in the presentation of results will you be identified. The results of this research will be used to advise the Education Leeds Admissions Forum.

Choice Advice Service
Contact: Caron Tribble
Telephone: (0113) 39 51224
Mobile: 07891 277518
E-mail: choice.advice@leeds.gov.uk

Date:

School Name / Year 6 Teacher

The Choice Advice Service offer independent advice and support around the admissions service and work as part of the Parent Partnership Team. We are carrying out research to find out what factors are considered when preferencing high schools. This information gained from the research will allow the Choice Advice Service to better support parents and will also be fed back to the Leeds Admissions Forum.

We are inviting parents of year 6 parents in the Inner Pudsey cluster to take part, as well as year 6 parents in other clusters in the city. We would be grateful if you could support us in this. We have provided each parent / carers with a covering letter, questionnaire and envelope to return the questionnaire in. The results are to remain confidential and are only to be looked at by the Choice Advice Service; we would appreciate your cooperation with this.

The success of this research depends on parents / carers responding. We have asked the parents to return the questionnaire by **Friday 1st October**, and return it to your primary school. We will then collect the completed questionnaires on **Monday 4th October**.

The report of the results will be available from the Parent Partnership Service website from the 1st December 2010.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me on the details above. Thank You for your support and cooperation with this project at this busy time of year.

Kind Regards

Caron Tribble
Assistant Choice Adviser

Choice Advice Service
Contact: Caron Tribble
Telephone: (0113) 39 51224
Mobile: 07891 277518
E-mail: choice.advice@leeds.gov.uk

Date:

Dear Parent/Carers

The Choice Advice Service offer independent advice and support around the admissions service and work as part of the Parent Partnership Team. We are carrying out research to find out what factors are considered when preferencing high schools. This information gained from the research will allow the Choice Advice Service to better support parents and will also be fed back to the Leeds Admissions Forum.

We are inviting parents of year 6 parents in the NEXT clusters to take part, as well as year 6 parents in other clusters in the city.

The information you provide will remain confidential. It will not be shared with any school or the admissions team. You or your child will not be able to be identified from the results. **The information will only be seen by the Choice Advice Service**, we are separate to the Admissions Team who will make the offer of a school place for your child. **The information you provide will not effect the schools you preference, you still need to complete a common preference form.**

The success of this research depends on parents / carers responding. We would be grateful if you could complete the short questionnaire by **Friday 1st October**, and return it to your primary school in the envelope provided.

The report of the results will be available from the Parent Partnership Service website from the 1st December 2010. If you would like a copy and do not have access to the internet please contact the Choice Advice Service after this date.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me on the details above.

Kind Regards

Caron Tribble
Assistant Choice Adviser