SCHOOLS FOR PRE-ADOLESCENTS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE
9-13 MIDDLE SCHOOL IN DORSET

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Abstract

When they first appeared on England's educational landscape, middle schools held the promise of providing a schooling environment ideally suited to the needs of pre-adolescents. This research aims to assess how far they have fulfilled that promise.

As a convenient and cost-effective means of reorganising schooling along comprehensive lines, the number of middle schools steadily increased from the late 1960s through to the early 1980s. Since 1982 their numbers have declined and today they form a small minority of state schools in England. Many of the remaining middle schools are under threat of closure as local authorities opt to reorganise into the more common two-tier schooling system with transfer from primary to secondary school at age 11.

Using Dorset County Council's administrative area as a case study, I examine the educational and social aspects of middle schools for children aged 9-13, and compare these with the equivalent age ranges in the two-tier schooling system.

Employing a mixed methods approach, the views of headteachers, teachers, pupils, former pupils, parents and the local authority were collected via questionnaires, an interview and a discussion group.

My research uncovered evidence that children in middle schools may receive a less rich educational experience than their counterparts in the two-tier system and overall, middle school participants exhibited a more negative attitude towards the academic side of their schooling experience. These findings were particularly notable among those in the upper two years of middle schools, suggesting that children aged 11 and above would enjoy a superior educational experience in secondary schools. A clear trend was evident for middle school pupils to 'out-grow' their middle school as they progressed through the year groups and for many participants the transfer to a new school was well overdue by Year 8. There was little to suggest that children's social development is better nurtured in a middle school environment, though there were indications that social relationships at the middle school are better than those at secondary schools and that children's emotional well-being is better supported.

I argue that the inception, development and downfall of the middle school has been characterised by a lack of clarity and consistency in its form and identity which has failed to make it robust enough to withstand national shifts in educational policy and pedagogy. The future of the middle school is discussed and I conclude that isolating the pre-adolescent years in a separate schooling unit might not be the best strategy, and argue instead that a recognition of the particular needs of the pre-adolescent should be an inherent part of our education system whatever form or structure our individual schools take on.

My research updates our knowledge on what has been an under-researched aspect of England's education system for many years and, unlike many previous studies, addresses the views of multiple stakeholders and compares the opinions and experiences of those associated with both the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems. It provides a broad-ranging examination of the middle school in the context of its probable eventual disappearance and encourages policy-makers and practitioners to consider the 'middle years' above 'middle schools'.

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I would also like to thank the local authority officer, headteachers, teachers, pupils, parents and former pupils associated with Dorset schools who took the time to participate in this research.

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Finally I would like to acknowledge the support and contribution of four wonderful grandparents both to this, and other endeavours in my life. Sadly, only one of them will be here to see me complete my PhD, but my thanks, love and thoughts will always be with all of them. They have all been inspirational to me, but for her support, strength and passion for her family, and her mantra of 'carry on' which guided me through the most difficult moments of this and other challenges I've faced, I dedicate this to Nana Seymour.

Contents

Introduction

The term 'middle school' in England refers to the second tier in a three-tier schooling structure which caters for children aged 8-12, 9-13, 10-14 or 11-14. The 9-13 middle school which is the focus of this research is usually preceded by a first school for children up to age nine and followed by an upper school (sometimes referred to as a 'high school') for ages 13-16 or 18.

England's educational landscape is changing and the middle school is becoming ever more marginal as local authorities, which in the 1960s, 70s and 80s established three-tier systems, reorganise into the two-tier schooling structure with transfer from primary to secondary schooling at age 11. At the same time, the relative newcomers to the education scene such as academies, Free Schools and University Technical Colleges look as though they will set the tone for the coming years and consign the middle school to the history books. This research examines the middle school in the knowledge that its eventual disappearance is a distinct possibility and aims to learn from the "middle school experiment" (as Edwards (1972) referred to it in his book of that title) and to assess what these schools do well and what they are perhaps not doing so well so that we can apply the lessons from the 'experiment' to schooling children in their pre-adolescent years, no matter what schooling structure or type they are educated within.

I should explain from the outset why I have an interest in middle schools. I was a pupil at a 9-13 middle school in the Windsor and Maidenhead area from 1982-1986, in fact my entire schooling experience was within the three-tier system. Many years later I conducted research into the demise of the middle school as my master's degree dissertation topic. My master's research explored the likely reasons for the demise of the middle school, but it was somewhat backwards looking in that it relied heavily on a documentary analysis of existing school reorganisation documents (some dating back to the early 1980s) and a survey of former middle school pupils. I was keen to extend this research into today's middle schools in order to conduct an assessment of the pros and cons of these schools before they disappear. The documentary analysis I

conducted as part of my master's research indicated that many stakeholders made positive claims about middle schools on the basis of the social aspects of the schooling experience and the extent to which they support children's emotional well-being, but there was little evidence of any substantial body of opinion claiming that they offered a superior educational experience. I wanted to explore whether there was any basis for this widely held assumption that middle schools are a sound social and emotional environment but perhaps not so highly regarded from an educational perspective. This then, formed the basis of my application to conduct doctoral research into the topic.

When I first approached the University of Nottingham's School of Education with my research idea the initial reaction was a little cautious, particularly in the context of the demise of the middle school. Despite this, I was fortunate enough to find two willing supervisors and as this document proves, the research went ahead albeit with a certain amount of reigning in of my overly ambitious research plans. I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this thesis, why researching middle schools was a useful and enlightening exercise which has made a contribution to our knowledge of middle years schooling.

I have stated that I am a former middle school pupil, and I admit that however much I went into this research with my unbiased professional head firmly screwed on, I cannot completely divorce myself from my personal experience of the middle school and the three-tier system more widely. I should also confess that beneath the exterior of the unbiased researcher, I secretly hoped I would find some compelling reason to support the middle school and defend them against 'unjustified' widespread closures. As is so often the way in life, things did not entirely work out the way I had envisaged and many of my findings were completely unexpected and have led me to rethink my own opinions on middle schools and middle years schooling. This research has taken a close look at the social, emotional and educational aspects of the middle school and in addressing the views of a variety of stakeholders I have found that as well as the external pressures and influences which have helped to push the middle school to the precipice, there have also been fundamental issues with the design, ideology and

implementation of the middle school as a separate unit of schooling which appear to be major contributors to its struggle to survive well in to the 21st century. Some might be tempted to adopt the thinking of Andy Wright, headteacher at a Northumberland upper school who, when interviewed for an article in *The Guardian* about the proposed closure of middle schools in the area, summed up his feeling about the impending reorganisation as: "The Mark Two Cortina was an excellent car in its day, but we aren't driving around in them any longer." (cited in: Hetherington, 2004). This simplistic view misses the point, we cannot afford to simply dismiss a schooling system which has been with us for over four decades as just having had its day. Just as there must have been parts of the Mark Two Cortina that were carried forward into the Mark Three model, there must be elements of the middle school which should be carried forward into whatever schooling structure and school types we adopt, whether it be state-run comprehensives, academies, Free Schools, private schooling, all-through schools, subject-specialist schools or University Technical Colleges. We must therefore attempt to learn from middle schools which have been largely neglected by educational researchers for many years and ensure that we do not get carried away with innovations in schooling types and systems and lose track of what we have learned from previous innovations and what really works for our pre-adolescent children.

Before I discuss the structure of the thesis, it seems appropriate to define some of the concepts and ideas that lie at the heart of this research and are reflected in the title of this thesis. First, the term 'pre-adolescent'. The age range that constitutes 'pre-adolescence' and 'adolescence' is something of a moveable feast, there is little consensus on the exact ages associated with these phases, however, for the purposes of this research, I see 'pre-adolescence' as referring to the age range approximately 7 or 8 to 13 (Corsaro, 1997). Second, the extent to which this is a 'comparative study' lies in the fact that I have included schools in both the three-tier and two-tier schooling systems to enable a comparison of the experiences across both systems. Third, I have centred my research on the middle school for children aged 9-13. I did not have the resources to conduct a comparison within the three-tier system by looking at different types of middle school as well as comparing with the two-tier

system, so I had to decide which type of middle school to focus on. In the end, this decision was made entirely due to the fact that there are more 9-13 middle schools remaining in England than those for other age ranges, this meant there was a larger potential population to select from for inclusion in the fieldwork. I also felt that since the 9-13 middle school has survived in greater numbers and looks likely to outlive the 8-12 model, there would potentially be more scope for identifying good practice and the lessons we can learn from the middle school, based on the (perhaps naïve) assumption that if they are out-surviving their 8-12 sibling, the 9-13 middle school must be doing something right. Finally, the research focuses on the Dorset County Council administrative area only, the reasons for selecting this area are discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.4, but for now it is important to stress that this in essence makes the work a case study of this area, but, as is discussed in Chapter 9, section 9.1, while we cannot confidently generalise the findings to all areas with middle schools, there is nothing on the surface of it to suggest that Dorset has any special characteristics which makes it especially unrepresentative of the wider middle school areas.

This thesis begins with a brief look at the middle school from an international, national and local (Dorset) point of view. The international perspective looks at middle schools as they exist in other countries (focusing on Europe and English-speaking countries), the discussion of the national picture describes the rise and fall of the middle school in England and then the local perspective presents a summary of the situation in Dorset County Council's administrative area. Chapter 2 presents a review of existing research on middle schools and, where appropriate, details how these previous studies have influenced my research, it ends with the stating of my research objectives and questions. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology and includes details of which stakeholders were consulted and how, the philosophical approach to the work, the selection of Dorset as my case study area, the ethical issues and concerns associated with the research and the way in which the data were handled. Chapters 4 to 7 present the findings of the fieldwork in themed chapters: the teaching and learning environment, the social environment, school to school transfer issues and overall perceptions of the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems. In Chapter 8 I

draw together the findings from all elements of the fieldwork and the various themes covered and provide an assessment of the future prospects of the middle school. The final chapter comprises my personal reflections on the research process, including a discussion of what I see as the limitations of the study, the scope for improvements and further research and I end with a description of the personal journey the research has taken me on over the last six years.

In most of the chapters, there are boxes at the end of each section summarising the main points raised. Throughout this document I refer interchangeably to 'pre-adolescents' and children in their 'middle years' of schooling. These terms are intended to apply to children aged approximately 8-13, though I acknowledge that, as Badcock et al. (1972) point out, this age group might represent the middle years of the 5-16 schooling age range, but if we include post-16 and even higher education, those are not strictly speaking the middle years.

Chapter 1: The International, National and Local Perspectives on Middle Schools

Middle schools are not unique to England. In England they have arisen in various forms and in a range of geographical locations and likewise, they exist in a variety of forms in other countries. This chapter provides a brief overview of middle schools in a selection of other countries and then discusses the picture across England, before turning to the area which is the focus of this research, Dorset County Council's administrative area.

1.1 International perspective

Middle schools exist in many countries, however they do not always take on the same shape and form as England's middle schools. Generally speaking, middle schools in other countries tend to cover an older age-range than the 8-12 and 9-13 middle schools typical of the English system. This section briefly outlines some of the middle school systems in operation in other countries and focuses on selected European and English-speaking countries where the comparative schooling experience is less influenced by cultural differences which other researchers have found to be a more dominant factor in any differences between countries than the arrangement of the schooling system itself (e.g Shen, 2005).

In the USA there are junior high schools (usually for grades 7-9, corresponding for most pupils[1] to ages 12-14) and middle schools which most commonly cover grades 6 to 8 (ages 11-13) (US Department of Education, 2005), though middle schools can cover any grade span from grade 4 (age 9) to grade 8 (age 13) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). The number of junior high schools in the USA has more than halved in the period 1970-2009 (from 7,750 to 3,037) while the number of middle schools has increased from 2,080 to 13,060 in the same period (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Table 97). The American middle school arose from an apparent discontent with the junior high schools which some claimed had simply become "scaled-down versions" of the senior high (Overly, 1972, p.19), perhaps an

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[1] In American schools it is more common place than in English schools for pupils to be kept down a year if they are not achieving adequately, or if they miss a substantial amount of schooling, therefore not all pupils will be at these 'standard' ages.

unfair criticism given that the original intentions behind these schools were to provide earlier preparation for college subjects and teaching styles (Alexander, 1984). While some commentators claimed that the terms 'junior high' and 'middle school' could essentially be seen as interchangeable (e.g. Popper, 1967) others contend that the middle school is distinctive in its ethos and approach to schooling (e.g. Alexander et al., 1969). While the junior high may have failed to provide a middle years specific schooling experience, middle schools generally adopted their own style of pedagogy and social relationships aimed at meeting the specific needs of what came to be referred to by many as the "transescent" (Eichhorn, 1966, p.3), that is, "the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence" (Eichhorn, 1968, p.111).

New Zealand inherited a two-tier primary/secondary schooling system from British colonists in the mid-1800s (Dowden et al., 2009) and this has remained influential on the country's education system to this day, which is predominantly two-tier (even where 'intermediate' schools are in operation). As early as 1894, a 'central' school opened which covered Years 5 to 9, but this model failed to spread across the country and the school was closed in 1911 (Dowden et al., 2009). In the 1920s New Zealand adopted a system based on, and using the same nomenclature of the American system and introduced junior high schools for Years 7-9 or Years 7-10, however, most were attached to high schools so did not represent a standalone middle tier. In the early 1930s, intermediate schools were established for Years 7-8, these adopted a primary pedagogy and again, failed to represent a distinct tier in the schooling system because they were tacked on to the end of the primary school years (Dowden et al., 2009). The introduction of the intermediate schools saw the end of junior highs which were being led in the opposing directions of primary-style "exploration" and secondary-style "early specialisation" (Dowden et al., 2009, p.140). Research conducted by the New Zealand Council of Educational research in the mid-1930s into the new intermediate schools recommended the expansion of the existing two-year schools to cover three or four years (Years 7-10 or 7-11) (Beeby, 1938, cited in Neville-Tisdall, 2002, p.45) but this was never put into practice due mainly to the extreme pressure

from primary and secondary unions who feared the shrinkage of their own schools (Neville-Tisdall, 2002, p.46). The mid-1970s saw the peak in intermediate schooling with around three-quarters of Years 7 and 8 pupils attending this type of school, but their popularity declined in the late 1970s and 1980s and by 2006 less than half of Years 7 and 8 pupils were in an intermediate school (Dowden et al., 2009). The intermediate school had failed to establish a strong identity as a distinct stage in the schooling process and this led many to once again search for alternatives such as an extended middle school phase forming the middle tier in a three-tier structure. Policy changes in the 1980s enabled a greater degree of local decision-making in schooling structures and this led to an influx of applications to set up extended intermediate schools, that is, middle schools covering three or four years of schooling (Neville-Tisdall, 2002), but very few have been accepted and there are currently just five middle schools in New Zealand[2], four covering Years 7-10 and one for Years 7-9.

In Australia, the middle years of schooling are recognised as a separate clearly defined stage in children's education (Dowson, 2009), and initiatives and publications during the 1990s including the *In the Middle* report (Schools Council, 1993, cited in Prosser, 2008) extended these principles by advocating separate schooling for middle years children (Prosser, 2008). Middle schools as a separate unit of the schooling structure are more common in the private sector but they do exist in the state system in some territories where they cover between one and four years of schooling across the age-range of 10-14. In some instances, middle schools exist as "sub-schools" (Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations, 2005, p.5) or "clusters" (Chadbourne, 2003, p.5) formed from a large primary, secondary or all-through school but which have their own teaching staff and resources, and in some cases, their own name.

Across Europe schools tend to transfer pupils from primary to secondary education at age 12 or (less commonly) age 11, and where there is considered to be a theoretical lower secondary period (referred to by some as 'orientation' years), this is rarely

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[2] Source: New Zealand Government's 'Education Counts' website:
http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/find-a-school [Accessed: 11/11/2011]

organised into separate school units but is generally formed of the early years of the secondary school (Eurydice, 2011). Perhaps the closest to a middle school system exists in Italy where their *Scuola Secondaria Di Primo Grado* (lower secondary school) covers the age range 11-14 (Eurydice, 2011), but again this is seen more as an early secondary phase rather than a distinctive middle phase in the education system. Similarly, in Germany, the term 'middle school' usually refers to two of the three strands of their selective tripartite system: the *Hauptschule* and the *Realschule*, which cater for less-able children and have a more vocational slant than the grammar school equivalent, the *Gymnasium* (Blomeke et al., 2009). The *Hauptschule* covers ages 10-14, while the *Realschule* extends to age 15, but they are both followed by a period of part-time vocational training (Tillman, 1988) so strictly speaking, these 'middle' schools form the period of secondary education rather than a specific middle years period which other middle schools represent (notably those in England and the USA).

This brief review of middle schools and middle schooling in other countries has shown that the middle school as it evolved in England differs markedly from that developed elsewhere, specifically in the age range covered, most middle schools or their equivalents in other countries cater for an 11+ age range.

1.2 The national perspective

The inception and early years of the middle school in England have been well documented by various authors (e.g. Blyth and Derricott, 1977, Burrows, 1978) and it is not intended to restate here in great detail the somewhat complex set of circumstances which led to their arrival on the English educational scene. Instead, this section will briefly outline any specific events, policy decisions and contextual factors surrounding the introduction of the middle school which have had an influence on the current form and status of middle schools or which are related to the future prospects of these schools.

The first middle schools opened in 1968 in the West Riding of Yorkshire and the London Borough of Merton (Taylor and Garson, 1982) and a change in the law had been required to allow for transfer to secondary schooling at an age other than 11 via

the 1964 Education Act (Tidd, 2007, p.135). Though plans for the middle school in areas such as West Riding had begun before they reported, the Central Advisory Council for Education, under the chairmanship of Lady Plowden, had in 1963 been asked to "consider primary education in all its aspects and the transition to secondary education" (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967, p.1). The Council reported in 1967 in what has become known as the 'Plowden Report' and recommended the formation of middle schools on the grounds that this structure would better accommodate the stages of child development and that it would enable the extension of good primary practice beyond age 11 (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). However, their recommendations never became the subject of national policy, middle schools simply became one of a number of school organisation options available to local authorities in the move towards comprehensive education as set out in DES Circular 10/65 (cited in Burrows, 1978, p.30).

Another defining moment for the middle school was the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1973 (Badcock et al., 1972, p.8) which left the prospect of very large secondary schools which were seen by many as neither desirable nor practical if accommodated in existing buildings.

Given what might be seen as a long and protracted labour, the birth of the middle school was in the event rather over shadowed by these other (albeit related) major shifts in education policy (Stillman and Maychell, 1984). To further complicate matters, the infancy of the middle school was marked by a period of economic difficulties and uncertainty which further inhibited its development since local authorities were faced with the prospect of reorganising schooling along comprehensive lines with little funding available to implement these plans.

Population changes also contributed to the rise of the middle school (Tidd, 2007, p.137), as the post-War baby boomers had children of their own who were at or approaching school age by the 1970s and coupled with the rise in the school leaving age, this presented many local authorities with no option but to reorganise their schooling at minimal cost.

An area of uncertainty and in which there was a lack of guidance from policy makers was the preferred age range of the new middle schools. The Plowden Committee (1967) favoured the 8-12 middle school but admitted that there was little to choose between that and the 9-13 model, and at the same time, schemes such as the Leicestershire plan were based on middle schools for children aged 10-14. In some (mostly rural) areas, combined first and middle schools arose usually catering for 5-12 year olds (HMI, 1985).

Despite the lack of consensus over a favoured age range and the refusal of successive governments to state and commit to policy a preference for either the two-tier or three-tier schooling system, the numbers of middle schools in England increased rapidly throughout the 1970s; it was even predicted at this stage that by 1980 a quarter of 11 year-olds would be taught in a middle school of some description (Gannon and Whalley, 1975). In reality 18% of 11 year-olds in state-funded schools were attending middle schools in 1980 (Department of Education and Science, 1980) and by 1994 (the last year for which statistics for middle schools by age group were published separately) this had fallen to 12% (Department for Education, 1994).

Figure 1.2.1 shows the total number of state maintained middle schools in England from 1969 to 2011. The total number of middle schools (for any age range) in England reached a peak of 1413 schools in 1982 (Department of Education and Science, 1982). The number of middle schools began to decrease after 1982, initially this decline was relatively gradual but by 1992 the year-on-year decreases became more dramatic with in excess of 100 middle schools a year closing between 1993 and 1995 (Department for Education, 1993, 1994, Department for Education and Employment, 1995); see Appendix 1 for a chart showing the year on year net gain or loss of middle schools.

The DfE 'deem' middle schools either primary or secondary. Where there are more year groups catering for children below the age of 11, the school is usually deemed primary with all others being deemed secondary; where there are equal numbers of year groups above and below age 11 the Secretary of State for Education makes the

decision based on information provided by the local authority or other stakeholders (Department for Education, 2011f). In most cases, 8-12 schools are deemed primary and 9-13, 10-14 and 11-14 schools are deemed secondary. Figure 1.2.2 shows the number of middle schools according to their 'deemed' status (based on annual schools census data for the relevant years) from 1975-2011 (figures for middle schools as deemed were first published in 1975). The figures for middle deemed secondary schools are predominantly those catering for ages 9-13, though a small number of schools for other age ranges (such as 10-14) will also be included. It can be seen that the rise and fall of the middle deemed primary school has been rather more dramatic than that of the middle deemed secondary school. In 2011 there were just 56 middle deemed primary schools and 224 middle deemed secondary schools remaining in England (Department for Education, 2011j).

Figure 1.2.1: Number of middle schools in England 1969-2011
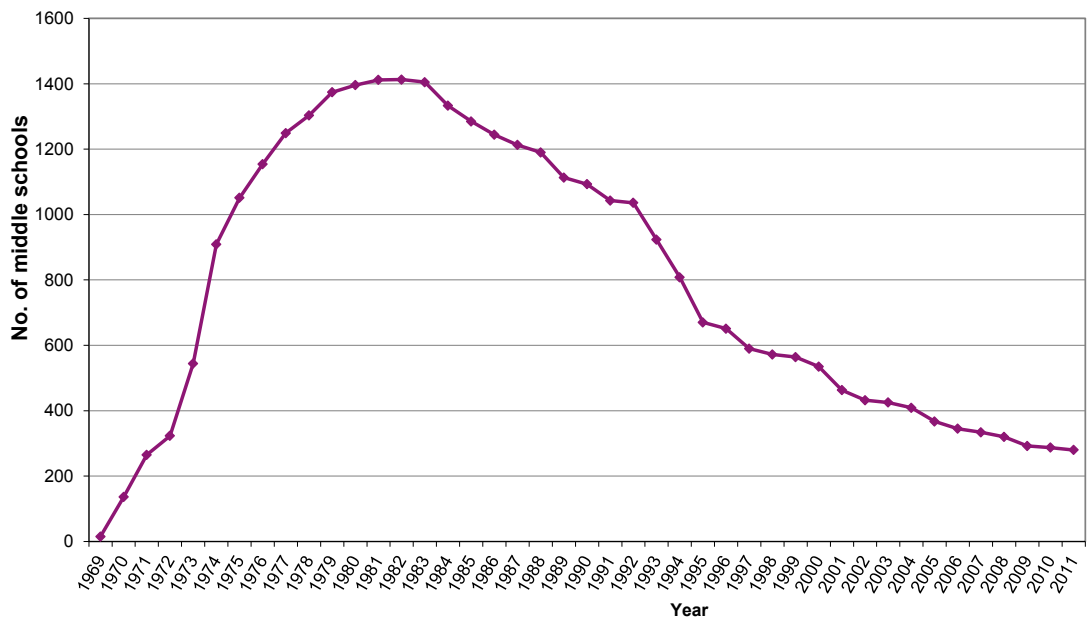
(Source: DFE Annual Schools' Census statistics 1969–2011)

Figure 1.2.2: Number of middle deemed primary and middle deemed secondary schools in England 1975–2011
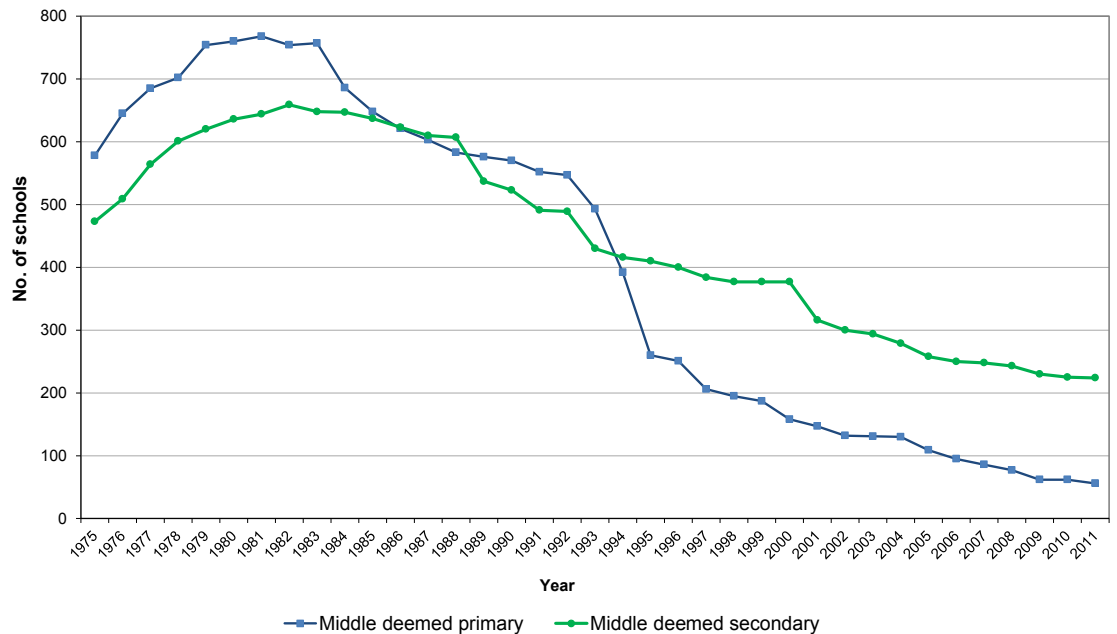
(Source: DFE Annual Schools' Census statistics 1975–2011)

1.3 The local perspective

This research focuses on the Dorset County Council area (the reasons for selecting this area are discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.4). Dorset is a predominantly rural, sparsely populated area with a relatively high population of the post-retirement age group (29.5% compared to 19.5% across England and Wales), a low school-aged population (12.4% of the population are 5-15 year olds compared to 12.6% in England Wales) and the lowest proportion of children under the age of five (4.7% compared to 6.1%) (Simons, 2010). Dorset is a relatively high achieving area with 59.2% of children in maintained schools achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 58.3% across England (Department for Education, 2011d). The local authority operate both the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems with the latter including middle schools for the 9-13 age range which opened in the 1970s. As of 2011, Dorset's schooling structure is arranged in areas known as 'pyramids', of the 17 pyramids, five operate a three-tier system and the remaining 12 are two-tier (Dorset County Council, 2011). Of the five areas which still operate a three-tier system, one (Purbeck) was reviewed

between 2008-2010 and the decision taken to reorganise into a two-tier structure with middle schools closing in 2013. Prior to this the Blandford and Shaftesbury areas had also been reviewed and in both cases the decision was made to reorganise into a solely two-tier arrangement[3].

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[3] Source: Dorset County Council website http://www.dorsetforyou.com/purbeckreview [accessed 25/11/2011]

Chapter 2: Middle School Research

Middle schools in England are in an apparently inexorable decline and their demise has been accompanied by a corresponding down-turn in research into the middle school as a system of schooling pre-adolescents. There has been little published research in the last two or three decades about the English middle school and bringing our knowledge of middle schools up to date is one of the justifications for conducting this research. This chapter reviews some of the literature on middle schools. I draw out any gaps in the literature which my own research aims to fill and identify areas which informed my work either because they required further exploration or because I felt that they should be re-examined in the context of today's middle schools. The results chapters (Chapters 4-7) and the concluding chapter (Chapter 8) also refer to the literature at appropriate points so this chapter aims to provide a brief overview of the main pieces of work relevant to my research.

The chapter is arranged by theme, the first two sections correspond to the two aspects of middle schools my research is particularly concerned with assessing: the educational environment and the extent to which middle schools support children's social development and emotional well-being. The final section reviews some of the research into school to school transfers and is presented in a separate section because the issues cut across both the educational and social-emotional aspects of the schooling experience. Issues around school transfers have been widely researched and it would not be appropriate to present a broad-ranging review of the literature on this topic here, instead, research into transfers which included middle schools, and any work which was particularly influential in the design and implementation of my research are discussed.

2.1 The educational experience in middle schools

A relatively recent piece of research commissioned by the National Middle Schools' Forum (NMSF) and undertaken by Keele University's Department of Education (Denning et al., 1998) attempted to assess the middle school's contribution to the educational landscape.

Denning et al.'s study involved three methods: a postal survey for headteachers in all middle schools on the NMSF's database (this achieved a 24% response rate) collecting data on staffing, curriculum issues and facilities, a secondary analysis of Ofsted data to address issues of achievement in middle schools, and a pupil attitude survey carried out in 52 middle schools. The headteachers' survey elicited information on the current status of participating schools including reports of high levels of subject-specialist teaching and specific timetabled sessions for each subject. In many cases the proportion of subject-specialist teaching and discrete timetabled sessions increases as pupils progress through the year groups. The recruitment of curriculum co-ordinators for many National Curriculum subjects was common, especially for English, maths and science and particularly in the case of middle deemed secondary schools where almost all reported having a curriculum co-ordinator for each of the core subjects. It should be noted, however, that only middle schools who were on the NMSF's mailing list were sent a questionnaire, suggesting that only those who are members of the NMSF were approached; it is not clear how representative these schools are of the middle school population and whether this might introduce bias. Denning et al. did not extend this questionnaire to cover the two-tier schooling system, therefore this particular element of their research serves as a useful stock-taking exercise but because there is no comparative element, it does not address how the middle school experience might differ from that of the same age groups being educated within the two-tier schooling system.

This issue is addressed in Denning et al.'s secondary analysis of Ofsted inspection data (for schools inspected between 1993-1996) where middle deemed primary and middle deemed secondary schools are compared with primary and secondary schools in the two-tier system in terms of achievement at Key Stages 2 and 3 and in terms of more general school issues such as ethos, value for money, teaching quality, curriculum content and the leadership and organisation of the school. Denning et al. found that middle deemed secondary schools were generally graded higher for average pupil achievement at Key Stage 2 in all three core subjects than primary schools, however, there was no evidence of any significant difference between the

schooling systems at Key Stage 3. For more general school matters, Denning et al. found that at Key Stage 2, middle schools were particularly strong in terms of the "content, breadth and balance of the curriculum" and there was evidence of marginally better "pupil progress" (1998, p.4), however, at Key Stage 3, middle schools were more likely to receive satisfactory or better ratings from Ofsted in terms of 'expectations' and 'accommodation' than were their counterparts in the two-tier system. Middle schools were also found to be more likely to receive good grades for their 'ethos' than 11+ secondary schools, and 98% of middle schools for which Ofsted data were analysed were assessed as offering satisfactory or better 'value for money'. As Denning et al. point out in their report, some of the Ofsted data were based on very small sample sizes and this means caution should be exercised when interpreting the results as it cannot always be assumed that the findings can be said to be representative of the general middle school population.

The final strand of the study was a pupil attitude survey administered to children in Years 5 to 8 in 52 middle schools across 18 different local authority areas. A comparison with primary and secondary schools in the two-tier system is presented as a "benchmark" (Denning et al., 1998, 'Pupils' section p.3) but direct comparisons are to be treated with caution because the surveys within the two-tier schooling system were not administered for the purposes of this research and hence were not subject to the same sampling and administration conditions as the middle schools, they have been taken instead from Keele's database of pupil attitude survey responses. Few significant differences were found between middle schools and other schooling systems though there was some evidence of marginal differences in pupils' views across the different systems, for example, responses from middle deemed secondary Years 5 and 6 pupils were slightly more positive than those from Years 5 and 6 in the two-tier system. Conversely, responses from Years 5 and 6 primary schools were slightly more positive than those in the same year groups in middle deemed primary schools. Year 7 pupils in 11+ secondary schools were slightly more positive than Year 7 in middle schools and when the two types of middle school are compared, Year 7 pupils in middle deemed secondary schools were slightly more positive than those in

middle deemed primary. In secondary schools and middle schools which include a Year 8, there was a negative trend in pupil attitude between Years 7 and 8, however, this is "less pronounced" in middle schools than in secondary schools (Denning et al., 1998, 'Pupils' section p.20). These findings on pupils' attitudes prompted the inclusion of attitudinal questions in my own pupils' survey in order to explore further whether there are notable differences between the schooling systems (though in my research the comparison between middle deemed primary and middle deemed secondary schools was not possible due to the focus on 9-13 schools which are usually middle deemed secondary schools). There were some notable differences when individual LEAs were compared, this perhaps suggests that three-tier schooling is appropriate in some areas but not in others, though Denning et al. do not explore this further in the context of characteristics of the local authority or catchment areas (such as socio-economic characteristics or type of area).

My research addresses the educational environment but not specifically the question of whether the middle school produces better academic achievement than other schooling arrangements (though arguably the educational environment will have an effect on performance). Some researchers have attempted to assess performance across different systems, for example, research by the National Middle Schools' Forum explored issues of academic performance and progress (Wyatt, 2004). This study compared various Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and GCSE performance indicators based on the age of entry to the schools. It was found that in 2002 and 2003, average progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and the average value added score was marginally higher for schools where entry to secondary school takes place at age 13, with schools where transfer takes place at age 12 achieving marginally lower average points scores than all other school types but slightly higher average value added scores than 11+ secondary schools. Similar findings were evident in the comparison of Key Stage 4 achievements with schools with an age of entry of 13 showing marginally higher average points scores and percentage 5+ A*-C GCSE grades than those with transfer ages of 11 and 12 in both 2002 and 2003. In all instances the difference between school types is small and no attempt is made at assessing the

significance of these differences. Given that the number of schools in the dataset with an age of transfer other than 11 is small (maximum n=121) these figures should be interpreted with caution and tests of association and statistical significance would be highly recommended.

Wyatt draws some tentative conclusions from the performance indicators examined and suggests that the figures would indicate that there is no detrimental effect associated with Key Stage 3 being split over two schools where the schooling system includes 9-13 middle schools. However, the figures do not corroborate this notion for systems involving transfer at age 12 (i.e. with 8-12 middle schools) where average Key Stage 3 points scores are slightly lower for schools where transfer occurs at age 12 (Wyatt, 2004). Wyatt's analysis does not take into account other factors which might contribute to academic performance, such as the socio-economic characteristics of the local area, the organisation and leadership of the school, the quality of feeder schools and so on. Therefore, the results must not be interpreted as conclusive evidence of any association (or otherwise) between school type and academic standards, further analysis, perhaps through the use of multi-level modelling which could account for other contributory factors would help to provide a fuller picture. It should also be noted that this analysis was done for and by the NMSF who would have a vested interest in portraying the middle school in a favourable light as is perhaps exemplified by the absence of discussion of the results for schooling systems involving 8-12 middle schools which collectively achieved marginally lower average point scores at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in both 2002 and 2003.

While Wyatt's study can be criticised for failing to account for other contributory factors and for not addressing issues of statistical significance, it is notable that Wyatt's approach is similar to that undertaken by some local education authorities when undertaking a review of their three-tier schooling system, particularly those authorities which operate both three-tier and two-tier schooling; a simple difference in national test performance can be enough to encourage the reorganisation of the schooling system, or least, initiate the debate.

Suffolk County Council (2006b) attempted to compare academic performance across the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems in their review of the schooling arrangements in the County. They undertook such a comparison because, they argued, the two-tier and three-tier areas are similar in both their socio-economic characteristics and in terms of the numbers of pupils in each system. In their analysis of end of Key Stage test results and value-added data, the Suffolk researchers found evidence of a variety of differences between the systems including: particularly strong evidence of comparably poor performance of three-tier pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 which (though some progress is made) is not made up by the end of Key Stage 4 (despite the two extra years of exposure to subject-specialist teaching and facilities in the three-tier system) and which manifests itself in poorer post-16 staying on rates and results in the three-tier system. While the three-tier system achieved good Key Stage 1 results when compared to the national averages, it was found that a substantially higher proportion of three-tier than two-tier system schools recorded below national average progress from Key Stage 1 to 2.

While it is difficult to fully assess the validity of the claims made as a result of the Suffolk research on the basis of the information presented, the evidence of comparatively poor performance in the three-tier system seems convincing and they claim the research was "externally validated by nationally renowned education researchers (including the Universities of Cambridge, Durham and York)" (Suffolk County Council, 2006b, p.5), though it is not clear what this validation process entailed.

Suffolk's Policy Development Panel conclude that the differences identified between the two and three-tier systems are attributable largely to the schooling system; this is a somewhat problematic claim. While it must be recognised that many of the issues three-tier system schools, especially middle schools, are facing are undoubtedly a consequence of the schooling system (for example, the problems of recruiting and retaining teaching staff into a system that is in decline and the lack of funding opportunities for new buildings available to the three-tier system) other issues are not proven to be the product of the schooling system and we should be cautious about unquestioningly accepting that reorganisation into a two-tier structure would resolve

these issues. However, what lies at the heart of Suffolk's research are the claims that the two-tier and three-tier system areas are similar enough to enable straightforward comparisons and while the findings must be interpreted with caution as the exact basis for this assumption is not explicit in the report, the findings have been influential in sealing the fate of Suffolk's middle schools which the Council voted to close (BBC, 2007b).

In a piece of research which was fairly influential on the design of the headteachers' survey in my own research (in so far as it gathered information on the teaching and learning environment at the schools and includes a comparative element), Taylor and Garson aimed to assess current practices in middle schools, to conduct a "stock-taking exercise" (1982, p.28) of the current situation in these schools and to gather comparative data on the different types of middle school in existence at the time of their research.

They administered a postal survey to headteachers at all middle and combined first and middle schools (for ages 5-12) between October 1978 and March 1979. Responses were received from just over half of all middle schools and from nearly a third of combined schools. Participating schools were broadly representative of the middle school population in terms of type of middle school and school size. The questionnaire sought information on a variety of aspects of the schools including curriculum organisation, staffing, grouping of pupils, liaison arrangements with feeder and destination schools, school buildings and facilities, assessment procedures and some general questions on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the middle school.

Many of the findings from Taylor and Garson's research are discussed in my results chapters under the appropriate topics, and some of the findings are not applicable in today's educational context (for example much of the data on curriculum and assessments has been rendered somewhat irrelevant by the National Curriculum), however, there are some key messages on the educational environment in their research of particular relevance to my study. Subject-specialist teachers and facilities

feature in Taylor and Garson's discussion of their findings, and even though nearly three decades separate their research from mine, there are some common themes across both. Taylor and Garson found that headteachers reported problems with recruiting subject-specialist teachers when they were constrained by the facilities available at the school, the funding available to middle schools (particularly because they are smaller than 11+ secondary schools) and the difficulties in pitching a subject-specialist role at a suitable level to attract high calibre staff but also to ensure the efficient running of the school and reflect the realities of such a role in the middle school environment (e.g. because there will inevitably be some need to perform primary-type 'generalist' duties rather than focusing solely in the subject-specialism). They did, however, find that this was a greater problem for combined and 8-12 middle schools (most likely due to the smaller size and 'primary' status of these schools), though the problems also exist to some extent in 9-13 schools. Similarly, the use of setting pupils by ability for teaching certain subjects was easier in middle schools catering for older children than for the combined and 8-12 schools and Taylor and Garson contend that this has much to do with the size of the school enabling greater flexibility in the arrangement of teaching groups. Even among participating 9-13 schools, grouping by ability was more commonly employed in the top two years of the school rather than among the younger children. To explore this further in today's middle schools, my questionnaire for headteachers included questions on the extent of subject-specialist teaching, the availability of specialist facilities at the schools and the way in which pupils are grouped for teaching purposes.

Taylor and Garson's research was comparative in terms of generating data which enabled an assessment of the situation across the different types of middle school, but they did not extend their study to the two-tier system (a weakness that my research attempts to address), however, they did administer a postal questionnaire to all upper schools (totalling approximately 500 at the time) which asked about issues such as curriculum, staffing, links and liaison arrangements with feeder middle schools and views on the main advantages and disadvantages of the three-tier schooling system. Their aim was to focus primarily upon those aspects of the upper schools which might

affect links with feeder middle schools. In their assessments of the pros and cons of the three-tier system, many of the participating upper schools described issues of educational continuity, for example, pupils arriving at the upper schools with widely varying foundations in many of the subjects (due in part to the high number of schools feeding in to each upper) and given the short age range, there was little time in the upper school to make up for this inconsistency. There were also frequent complaints among the upper schools about the lack of time for pupils to make informed and experience-based decisions on which subjects to take forward and study at what was then O level or CSE (now GCSEs and their equivalents), in these schools children have just one year of study before the decisions must be made. Taylor and Garson describe an "undeniable drift" of comments from headteachers in upper schools favouring a transfer at age 11 to alleviate many of these problems (1982, p.84).

In 1974, the Assistant Masters' Association (AMA) conducted a survey (via a postal questionnaire) of middle and upper schools at which members worked with the main objective of investigating "the effect of the introduction of middle schools on the education of pupils aged 11 to 13 years" (AMA, 1976, p.1). Just 40 9-13 middle schools, 11 8-12 middle schools and 36 upper schools completed the survey and as Taylor and Garson point out in their critique of the research, only schools with AMA membership were included in the survey and this was not one of the larger teachers' organisations, so in reality only 5% of middle schools in existence at the time were involved in the research (Taylor and Garson, 1982). The AMA report makes no attempt to assess how representative responding schools were of the middle and upper school populations in terms of school size, age range, geographical area and so on, so results must be interpreted on the basis of the relatively small respondent base and assumptions cannot be made about the extent to which findings might be representative of middle and upper schools more widely.

In common with much of the research conducted in the early years of the middle school (e.g. Taylor and Garson, 1982), the AMA's questionnaires elicited detailed information about the staffing, curriculum and organisation of the schools thus providing a snapshot of the particular arrangements in place at the time.

Of greater relevance to my research was the inclusion of questions asking middle school respondents to describe the main advantages and disadvantages of the middle school. Advantages stated which relate to the educational experience included: the alignment of the middle school age range with a distinct phase in child development, middle schools are able to tailor the educational offering to the interests and intellectual development of middle years children, children enjoy earlier access to specialist teachers and facilities and the phasing in of exposure to these provides a gradual transition to secondary schooling, middle schools are free from "being tied slavishly to an O level or CSE exam syllabus" (AMA, 1976, p.9) and enjoy greater autonomy and freedom over teaching styles and methods.

The disadvantages in terms of the educational experience cited included: the extension of a primary teaching and learning environment some claimed was adversely affecting academic performance / standards, a perceived lack of academic challenge for more able children, while middle schools provide earlier access to specialist teaching for those aged up to 10, those aged 11+ experience less access to specialist teaching than their equivalents in secondary schools, problems associated with protracted use of mixed ability groupings and the system provides upper schools with little time to prepare for (what was then) O levels and CSE examinations at age 16.

Upper school teachers were also asked what they consider to be the pros and cons of the middle school system and were far more negative in their views compared with middle school respondents, the main advantages described were: the introduction of middle schools in many areas allowed the continued use of buildings which would have otherwise outgrown their purpose, the fact that reorganising along comprehensive lines and the increase in the minimum school leaving age would have made many 11+ secondary schools unacceptably large, in rural areas where very small primary schools were in operation it was considered advantageous to transfer pupils on at age nine rather than 11 because some children would be taught in schools with just two or three general class teachers up to this age thus providing little introduction to the secondary teaching and learning environment.

The main educational disadvantages raised by upper school teachers were: prolonging the primary school ethos to age 13 was considered detrimental to the children and some expressed the view that 13 was too late to try and instil a secondary school attitude into the pupils, the length of time upper schools have to prepare pupils for external examinations at age 16 was considered too short and meant that those who transferred at 13 had only one year at the school before they had to decide on their subject 'options', poor arrangements for liaison between the feeder and destination schools was considered a major negative point of the system as were issues of curriculum continuity.

When upper school respondents were asked whether they would recommend the middle school system to those areas operating the two-tier system, respondents to the AMA survey were again overwhelmingly negative and levelled particular criticism at the system involving 9-13 middle schools for the reasons described above. Many respondents would recommend an 11-18 system provided the secondary schools could be kept to a reasonable size, or a three-tier system with 8-12 middle schools.

It would have been interesting if the AMA survey had been extended to first schools so that the views of those at the opposite end of the three-tier system could be gathered and compared to the other tiers, and this weakness has been addressed in my research where tiers of schooling adjacent to the middle school have been included.

The AMA report includes a section based on feedback received at their conference held in September 1975 and there was less consensus in members' views here than in the survey responses. While most agreed that the introduction of middle schools had been "on the grounds of administrative convenience […] and not on educational grounds" (AMA, 1976, p.16). Many teachers also criticised the literal interpretation of the Plowden philosophy (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) of extending all that is good about primary education, particularly in 9-13 schools were it was considered inappropriate to educate 12-13 year olds in a primary style, however they noted that where middle schools treated their phase as a transition to secondary schooling rather than an extension of primary schooling (as was most likely to be the

case in 9-13 middle schools), there was a "much better chance of developing a truly middle school philosophy" (AMA, 1976, p.17).

In their discussion of the research, the AMA acknowledge that their report is based on a small-scale study and that they would have liked to have built in a comparative element across the two-tier system if resources had allowed, but they make some concluding statements which are of importance in the context of my own research. They stress that the middle school is viable provided adequate resources are directed to the system in terms of suitably qualified teaching staff and appropriate buildings and facilities. They also pick up on the notion of conflict and tension which other researchers describe (e.g. Blyth and Derricott, 1977, Hargreaves, 1986) but in their study, this stems almost entirely from professional tension between teachers from the middle and upper schools (they did not include first schools or the two-tier system in their study so could not comment on tension from these areas), however, they put this down to teething problems with a relatively new system and suggest that given time the issues will be resolved and a more cooperative working relationship will be developed.

In their 1979 report on middle schools, written primarily in an attempt to allay the fears of members working in middle schools about the potential impact of falling roles and cutbacks in public spending (though whether it achieved this aim is debatable), the National Union of Teachers (NUT) described middle schools as "one of the most exciting products of [comprehensive] reorganisation" (NUT, 1979, p.3). The NUT's review of middle schools looks briefly at the differential development and future prospects of the 8-12 and 9-13 middle schools, they describe particular problems of offering subject-specialist teaching in small 9-13 middle schools thus undermining one of the main benefits of this type of school and turning it into an unnecessary extension of primary education beyond an age where it could provide any benefit to the children. The possibilities for educating those over the age of 16 in separate establishments (such as sixth form centres and further education colleges), the NUT argue, also makes 9-13 middle schools an unattractive option as it condenses the upper school age range to almost unviable levels.

Despite these issues with 9-13 schools and despite that fact that 8-12 middle schools were the most economical option for many authorities in their reorganisation plans, the NUT stress that it was (when the report was written in 1979) highly unlikely that local authorities will continue to opt for a three-tier system in preference to the two-tier arrangement and that the 8-12 middle school will most likely decline in numbers due to the primary ethos and lack of specialist teaching and facilities. In the event this was somewhat prophetic, the middle deemed primary school (mostly 8-12 middle schools) which once outnumbered the middle deemed secondary school (mostly 9-13 schools but also including some 10-14 and 11-14 schools) has seen a more dramatic demise and the middle deemed secondary school now outnumbers the middle deemed primary by four to one (Department for Education, 2011j, see also Chapter 1, section 1.2).

The NUT report argues that if the middle school was to continue to develop "both national and local government will have to be persuaded of the educational value of teaching the middle age ranges in separate institutions" (NUT, 1979, p.6). This statement was a key driver in my research, it was hoped that in assessing the advantages and disadvantages of middle schools within the Dorset system, it might become apparent whether this is in fact a superior arrangement for young adolescents on either educational or social grounds – or both.

A survey of 9-13 middle schools conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) between 1979 and 1980 involved the inspection of 48 of the 610 such schools in existence at the time (HMI, 1983). Schools were selected so as to represent a diverse range of characteristics including a variety of school sizes, different types of catchment areas and those occupying either purpose-built or adapted school buildings. Despite efforts to ensure a spread of school characteristics, participating schools "are not a statistically representative sample of all such schools" (HMI, 1983, p.3). The inspections involved observation of activities in the school, discussions with staff and the collection of information on the organisation of the school. The report's authors admit that a fuller exploration of issues surrounding continuity on transfer to and from the middle school would have been possible if resources had been available to

conduct work in the first and upper schools but this was not feasible. My research includes the 'adjacent' tiers within the three-tier system in an attempt to address concerns of feeder and destination schools within the three-tier system.

Some of the findings from the HMI survey which relate to the educational offering in middle schools are discussed in Chapter 4, but there were issues raised in the research which prompted the inclusion of questions on specific topics in my own research instruments. For example, questions were raised over the extent to which middle schools were providing academic challenge, particularly for gifted and talented pupils and the extent to which independent problem-solving was encouraged was also criticised. My pupils' survey therefore included questions about how difficult children find their school work and how much help they receive from teachers, and the headteachers' survey included questions on meeting the needs of gifted and talented children. The HMI survey was widely criticised at the time of its publication and media coverage tended to focus on the negative aspects of middle schools described in the report, though on reading the document it is clear that many good points of middle schools are described and praised. A lack of transparency on the data collected and how judgements were made was key source of criticism (Williamson, 1984) and others claimed the inspectors had completely missed the point of middle schools, seeing them instead as "mini-secondary schools" (Henley, 1984, p.90). In a shift in opinion from their 1979 report on middle schools (discussed above) the National Union of Teachers produced a 19 page document in defence of the 9-13 middle school detailing what they perceived to be the flaws in the HMI survey and argued that the middle school was being unfairly persecuted and that many of the criticisms levelled at middle schools were widespread across other school types so were issues for our education system as a whole rather than one part of that system (NUT, 1984).

In his study based on case studies of both the historical and present-day contexts of middle schools in West Riding (a former administrative area in Yorkshire which was the first to open middle schools), Hargreaves (1986) aimed to assess the extent to which practice in middle schools (specifically those for the 9-13 or 10-13 age range) aligns with the policy and ideology that grew around their inception and introduction.

Hargreaves argues that the idealism that characterised the planning and inception of middle schools was never fully supported by the realities of implementing a new educational structure at a time of economic austerity and in the context of the move towards comprehensive secondary education. This is ironic given that middle schools were seen by many authorities as an inexpensive way of reorganising along comprehensive lines (Burrows, 1978) and that they arose as a solution to the problems of going comprehensive (Simpson, 1973) (and to accommodate the increase in the school leaving age (Davies, 1973)). However, Hargreaves (1986) contends that what we might see as the birth and childhood of the middle school is characterised by conflict and a lack of unity and on a number of levels. First the "decentralised" (Hargreaves, 1986, p.205) nature of the British education system in the 1960s and 70s left too many decisions on both policy and practice to be made at a local level, that is, at school level and at the local authority level, resulting in wide variations in middle school practices, ethos and even form (as demonstrated by the wide variety of age ranges middle schools in England cover). Second, Hargreaves argues, there were major divisions within middle schools due in part to the transfer and recruitment of teaching staff trained as either primary or secondary teachers to the new middle schools but also in many cases as a consequence of the physical arrangement of school buildings. This left a sharp divide, particularly in 9-13 middle schools, between the lower and upper two years with the former being primary-based and the latter secondary-based. This was contrary to the notion of a gradual transition from primary to secondary schooling which was argued by many, including the Plowden Committee (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), to be a potential benefit of middle schools.

With these issues in mind, my own research aimed to identify differences in provision within middle schools between the lower and upper years of the school by including questions on this topic in the headteachers' survey and in the discussion group for former pupils. Hargreaves also touches upon the increased emphasis on parental choice in education and points out that the middle school was already an innovation for most parents in the 1970s and 80s and that if the schools become too drastically

different from those experienced by parents, they might look elsewhere for their own child's schooling. This notion has been picked up in my own research and the survey for parents and carers asked which system they attended in order to gain some insight into whether this might affect perceptions of schools for their own children.

Box 2.1: Key points from research on the educational experience

- Much of the existing research on middle schools does not incorporate a comparison with the two-tier system and fails to address the adjacent tiers in the three-tier structure (first and upper schools).

- Case study approaches (at a school level) were prevalent in the early research on middle schools and a focus on curriculum rather than on the overall educational experience was common.

- Some of the research questioned the extent to which middle schools provide a gradual transition to secondary schooling and there was evidence of a split between the teaching and learning environment in the upper and lower two years at middle schools.

- There has been little research on England's middle schools which directly addresses the educational value of schooling pre-adolescents in separate schools.

2.2 Social development and emotional well-being in middle schools

Much of the research on middle schools in the first decade or so of their existence explored aspects of the curriculum and school organisation. Blyth and Derricott (1977) shifted the focus onto the social aspects of this new type of school and conducted a primarily qualitative study of the middle school as a social institution which involved interviews with staff and discussions with pupils at a small number of middle schools as well as discussions with stakeholders, reading on the subject and their own experiences as educationists. Many of their specific findings are discussed in subsequent chapters of this report in the context of evidence gathered during the course of my research, but their views on the origins of middle schools are of particular interest and were a key motivation in the inclusion of an exploration of some of the social factors of middle schools in my research.

Blyth and Derricott contend that middle schools are "not an administrative convenience" (thus disagreeing with others, such as Hargreaves (1986) and Edwards (1972)) and unlike Burrows (1978) who describes the local and regional influences on the establishment and character of middle schools, claim that neither can they be regarded as "the distinctive product of any one region or type of environment" (Blyth and Derricott, 1977, p.1). Instead they put forward three driving forces behind the introduction and rapid increase in numbers of middle schools: first, they concur with the views of the Plowden Committee's (1967) Piagetian view of the stages of child development and argue that the age at which children transfer to middle schools (around age eight) marks the beginning of a specific developmental period (Piaget's "concrete operational knowledge" stage (Campbell, 1973, p.67)) which requires a specific approach to teaching and learning which does not entirely fit with the primary class-based teaching style focusing on, for example, the acquisition of basic numeracy and literacy skills, but which neither would the secondary ethos of subject-specialist teaching and frequent switches between classes, teachers and subjects be well suited to. They argue that it is not just their educational needs that are best met in an environment tailored to the needs of the middle years of schooling but also their social and emotional development is best accommodated in a limited age range environment (for example, their tendency around this age to start forming social groups and the expansion of their search for a "personal identity" outside of their immediate family (Blyth and Derricott, 1977, p.8)).

Blyth and Derricott's second driving principle behind the introduction of the middle school stresses the flexibility of child development and the extent to which their social and emotional development can be influenced by external factors such as the environment and culture. They argue that the interaction between the school environment and a child's social, emotional and intellectual development is a two-way process in that the school can influence the child just as much as the children can influence the school organisation and ethos by their developmental needs. The middle school is therefore attractive because it can offer an almost bespoke social environment for middle years children but, Blyth and Derricott contend, there are limits

to the flexibility and they emphasise that the youngest age of a middle school pupil should be eight (as in 8-12 middle schools) and the upper limit should be 14 (as in the 10-14 or 11-14 schools characteristic of the Leicestershire scheme).

The final argument Blyth and Derricott put forward in favour of the middle school is the size of the schools, they argue that restricting the middle school's coverage to four years is a positive move because it avoids the situation where children as young as 11 are taught in the same environment and often by the same teachers as those aged 16 and sometimes above (where there is on-site sixth form provision), but also that it keeps the schools to a "moderate size" and helps in "avoiding impersonality" (1977, p.11).

The three principles Blyth and Derricott put forward have been influential in my research, for example, their claims about the size of middle schools fostering a more personalised environment prompted the inclusion of questions about the suitability of school size in the pupils' questionnaires and their arguments about the stages of development covered by the middle school were key motivators in questions about how ready children are for transfers in the different systems and how far the children feel they are treated in an appropriate manner for their age. Some of the weaker points of Blyth and Derricott's research design were also influential in the design of my research, in particular they did not address the first and upper schools which provide the feeder and destination schools in the system: this might have provided a fuller assessment of the middle school, for example, does dissecting the schooling years into three tiers have a detrimental effect on the ability of the first and upper schools to form solid social institutions? This prompted the inclusion of 'adjacent tiers' in my own research.

Two middle school headteachers (Gannon and Whalley, 1975) conducted case study research in four middle schools (two of which they worked in and both of these were purpose built middle schools) during the early 1970s. In common with much of the other research into middle schools, their study set out to provide an illustration of the different features and characteristics of these newcomers to the education system.

Their research presents a positive and optimistic view of the schools in the small time since their inception. They are realistic about the lack of educational reasoning behind their introduction but they celebrate the eclectic nature of middle schools and see strength in their diversity, something which with the benefit of hindsight, might have contributed to the downfall of these schools. I have referred to some of Gannon and Whalley's findings in relevant sections of the results chapters of this report, and it is not intended to summarise what is a very detailed and school-specific study here (a large proportion of their report details the approach to the curriculum and how each specific subject is taught which is not an intended focus of my own research). The study lacks the academic rigour of some of the other research into middle schools and many of their claims seem to be based on unsubstantiated anecdotal evidence from their own headships. However, there are some aspects of their views which informed my research: they are critical of the dominant system of transfer at age 11, partly due to what they think is a curtailing of the "have a go approach of the middle years' child" (1975, p.4). They describe concerns that once 11 and 12 year olds are sharing an environment with 16 to 18 year olds and are more overtly within reach of external examinations at age 16, they become more inhibited than they would perhaps naturally be. To explore this further, my research included an attempt to gauge the extent of this inhibition: the pupils' survey asks whether children feel comfortable putting their hand up and speaking in class and in the questions about participation in extra-curricular activities, those who do not participate were asked to explain why in an attempt to explore whether the presence of older pupils was cited as a deterrent.

In the survey of middle and upper school headteachers conducted by the Assistant Masters' Association (AMA, 1976) – described in more detail in section 2.1 above – respondents were asked what they thought were the main advantages and disadvantages of the middle school. Those advantages stated which relate to children's social development and emotional well-being included: any difficulties associated with the children's social and physical development can be dealt with in one supportive environment and claims that the small size of middle schools affords security and stability and avoids having 11 year-olds in very large schools; this is

addressed in my research through questions in the pupils' surveys on their perceptions of the size of their school. The main disadvantage cited on this topic were concerns over middle school children being less mature on leaving middle school than their counterparts in the two-tier system. In their survey responses, upper school headteachers were primarily concerned that age 13 was considered a difficult time in the social and emotional development of children to be transferred into a senior school environment and this had an impact on the support demands on staff and on the effectiveness of integration among children from different middle schools.

Though not based on middle schools, a study by the New Economics Foundation commissioned by Nottingham City Council was a major influence on my research since it highlighted some of the inherent problems in trying to measure well-being and in attempting to assess how far the schools children attend contribute to this (Marks et al., 2004). They attempted to measure young people's well-being in order to assist the authority in meeting their new responsibilities of promoting and improving economic, social and environmental well-being within their area as set out in the Local Government Act 2000 (cited in Marks et al., 2004, p.18). As well as measuring well-being among young people in Nottingham, the project was a pilot because they were also aiming to investigate exactly what is meant by well-being and how it can be measured. Additionally, the project aimed to explore which factors affected young people's well-being and what the policy implications were. The fieldwork involved questionnaire surveys of children ranging in age from nine to 15 in five primary schools and two secondary schools, and street interviews with young people aged 16-19. The model of well-being adopted in this research was a two-dimensional model involving 'life satisfaction' and 'personal development' described as follows: "Life satisfaction: captures satisfaction, pleasure, enjoyment, and contentment. Personal development: captures curiosity, enthusiasm, absorption, flow, exploration, commitment, creative challenge and also, potentially, meaningfulness." (Marks et al., 2004, p.4)

The research aimed to measure young people's well-being on these two dimensions in the following domains: family, friends, living environment, school and self. Personal

development (or 'curiosity' as Marks et al. refer to it interchangeably) is the dimension of well-being which is of greatest relevance to issues surrounding school and education and this was borne out in the results reported by Marks et al. in which they assessed the relative importance of each of the five domains in terms of life satisfaction and then personal development. School ranked first in relative importance in terms of personal development whereas it was fifth in terms of life satisfaction, so a child's school and perhaps more broadly, the education system appears to be an important influence on children's well-being in terms of the personal development related aspects of well-being. There was also evidence that well-being decreases with age; average life satisfaction scores fell by 5% when comparing 9-11 year olds with those aged 12-15 and curiosity fell by 10% (though it is not clear how much weight we should attach to these quantities, e.g. how significant is a 5% decrease?), and, more strikingly, 65% of primary school children were positive about their school experience compared to just 27% of secondary pupils. Given that the research was conducted within primary schools catering for those up to age 11 and 11+ secondary schools, this suggests that children within the two-tier system are likely to experience a downturn in levels of well-being once they move on to secondary schools, because there was no evidence of well-being rising again after age 11 the researchers suggest that this is due to something more than just the transition effect of moving from primary to secondary school. As Marks et al. point out, it is difficult to establish a causal effect, for example, is this an inevitable drop in well-being associated with getting older or is the environment at secondary school a causal factor? A comparative study with children in both the three-tier and two-tier schooling systems could help to address these questions.

Marks et al. discuss the policy implications of these findings and argue that "the state's primary aim should be to promote those conditions that allow us to pursue well-being" (2004, p.7). With specific reference to educational policy, Marks et al. recommend that the school curriculum should be rethought to provide the sort of education that will enable children to "live flourishing lives and to enjoy high levels of well-being" (2004,

p.7) which they contend, will result in adults who can make a positive contribution economically and socially.

Marks et al. admit that their study is limited from the perspective that it is a pilot of the well-being indicators (whose validity and reliability presumably cannot be confirmed), and due to the fact that just five primary schools and two secondary schools were involved in the study. There is also little information on the exact questions asked and which dimension of well-being they were designed to measure, thus making it difficult to assess the validity of the instruments as a genuine indicator of well-being. The educational policy recommendations tend to focus too narrowly on the curriculum and fail to address issues such as school structure and age range, pastoral support within the schools, extra-curricular opportunities and other aspects of the school experience which may influence both children's satisfaction and the extent to which their personal development is facilitated and encouraged.

Box 2.2: Key points from research on the social and emotional aspects of middle schools

- Some researchers who have explored the social and emotional aspects of middle schools have claimed it provides a more supportive environment for pre-adolescent children.

- The smaller size and limited age range of middle schools is seen by many as beneficial to children's social and emotional development.

- Research on children's well-being suggests the school environment is very influential and that secondary school children reported substantially lower levels of well-being than primary children, this calls into question whether a three-tier system might minimise this effect.

2.3 School to school transfer issues

Whilst published research specifically about middle schools is in short supply, one related area which has been the focus of a great deal of attention is that of pupil transfer and transition experiences. Most notably the ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) study which evaluated aspects of primary schooling and was initially conducted in the late 1970s but then followed-up

20 years later, included a strand of research on the effects of school to school transfers (Galton and Willcocks, 1983, Hargreaves and Galton, 2002).

The original ORACLE study on school transfers adopted a mixed methods approach (participant and non-participant observation, questionnaires, interviews and an analysis of performance on standardised tests) and pairs of schools in three local authorities were involved representing middle schools for 9-13, 8-12 and the 11-14 age range and within the LEAs, schools adopting both a primary and a secondary ethos were recruited. It was found that in academic terms, there was a strong likelihood that pupils' progress would be interrupted in the year following transfer and that it made little difference at what age the transfer took place, there was also evidence of a slight dip in pupils' attitudes throughout the first year at the new school, again regardless of age of transfer (Galton and Willcocks, 1983).

In the follow-up study (which adopted similar methods albeit on a slightly smaller scale and with an expanded set of instruments for gauging pupils' attitudes) the local authority which had middle schools for the 8-12 age range was excluded (on practical grounds) and in the meantime the local authority with middle schools for 11-14 year-olds had changed the age of entry in some middle schools to 10, so the updated study comprised schooling systems with middle schools covering the 9-13, 10-14 and 11-14 age ranges. The findings of the follow-up study indicated that there is still a drop in pupils' attitudes on transfer, but that this most noticeable among the high attaining pupils (which was not the case in the original study), and that there was evidence of a persistence of the slowing of academic progress on transfer, but that this was less marked than it had been in the first study (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002).

One area in which there had been substantial improvements since the 1970s research was in the liaison arrangements and transfer activities on offer to both children and their parents, brought about most likely by the increased accountability and, possibly as a result of these improvements, children's reported anxiety levels over the transfer had fallen (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002).

The age of transfer (9, 10 or 11) was once again found to have no significant relationship to pre- and post-transfer academic attainment and attitudes, though it was found that there were slight differences in patterns of pupils' attitudes since the original study (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002). The inclusion of attitudinal questions in my own pupils' surveys was in part inspired by the ORACLE work, but it was beyond the resources of the project to look at academic attainment in terms of test scores or levels, so instead questions were included in the pupils' surveys which gauged respondents' perceptions of how well they do in their school work.

Research commissioned by the Isle of Wight local authority and conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) sought to examine arrangements on the island for liaison initially between their 9-13 middle schools and the 13+ upper schools, but later expanded to include the first to middle school transfer (Stillman and Maychell, 1984). The research also involved a postal survey of a sample of schools across England to provide some benchmarking data with which to compare the situation on the Isle of Wight. The research focused on the implications for educational continuity rather than the social and emotional aspects of school transfers and, of particular relevance to my research, they audited the different activities in place to ease the transfers between schools. Most Isle of Wight schools offered visits for pupils and open evenings for parents and pupils to see the new school and find out about day to day life in the school. Less commonly implemented activities included teachers from the destination schools teaching some sessions in the feeder schools and question and answer forums for pre-transfer pupils to ask questions of a staff member at the new school before the move. This aspect of Stillman and Maychell's research prompted the inclusion of questions in my own headteachers' survey to assess the extent and variety of transfer activities on offer and to see whether there are differences between the two schooling systems.

In their case study of transfer from an 8-12 middle school to the upper school, Measor and Woods (1984) found that the process was an extremely complicated one with many "phases and sub-phases" (1984, p.160) to be negotiated and that the "status passage" (1984, p.159) can take up the majority of the first academic year in the new

school. Measor and Woods stress that children must undergo such a process within both the "formal culture" (1984, p.161), that is, the aspects of the school experience relating to the educational, bureaucratic and disciplinary context of the school, and the "informal culture" (1984, p.161) which relates to the expectations and behaviour of peers and to the wider social influences such as the media. Measor and Woods found that these two cultures are inextricably linked and cannot be successfully negotiated in isolation, and when the additional pressures of puberty are also thrown in to the mix, it creates potential for an extremely unsettling time in children's lives. In their conclusions Measor and Woods suggest that schools and parents must bear in mind the turmoil that the transfer can entail and they provide suggestions for ways in which the passage can be eased for children.

Measor and Woods accept that a case study involving transfer from just one middle school to one upper school cannot be considered to represent the experiences of all children undergoing a transfer, however, they emphasise that a particular strength of their study is the broad coverage of children's experiences of transfer rather than simply focusing on one particular aspect of the move. From the perspective of the current study, this research provides an interesting backdrop to the social, emotional and educational issues of transfer, but it does not address the specific issues of the age of transfer (which in Measor and Woods's study was 12) or of the number of transfers within the three-tier system (they focused only the middle to upper transfer and not on the first to middle move).

My own research could not address the subject of school transfers in anything like the depth of Measor and Woods's due to practical limitations and the chosen methodology, but it is hoped that the issue of the suitability of specific ages for transfers is addressed (for example, do stakeholders such as headteachers believe 11 is a better transfer age than 13?) and that a comparative element has been built in by gathering the views of children from both schooling systems who are due to transfer or who have recently transferred.

The Assistant Masters' Association (1976) research into middle schools also touched on the subject of the most suitable age for transfer to secondary schooling and in the feedback obtained from attendees at their September 1975 conference, opinion was divided on an appropriate age of transfer from the middle school. Some "women teachers" (AMA, 1976, p.17) commented that transfer at age 13 was ill suited to girls who were physically, socially and intellectually ready for an earlier transfer, while many 13 year old boys were considered too immature for the transfer suggesting that 13 is an age at which the differences in maturity between the sexes is most marked.

Hargreaves and Galton (2002) argued that while the introduction of the National Curriculum should have done much to aid educational continuity across school to school transfers, their research has uncovered little convincing evidence of any major improvements on this front. Research carried out by the NFER (Schagen and Kerr, 1999) set out to establish how developments in educational policy (in particular, the introduction of the National Curriculum and its associated testing and assessment regimes) may have affected transfer from primary to secondary school at age 11. Schagen and Kerr focused on curriculum continuity and individual progression in their research and deliberately omitted pastoral concerns from the research aims due to the plethora of research evidence which they claim provides proof that pastoral concerns are being adequately addressed on transfer to secondary school. This is an interesting claim in itself, research by Ofsted confirmed that among the 48 schools their inspectors visited for the purposes of evaluating transfer arrangements at age 11, the practical arrangements and those which addressed the pastoral aspects of the primary to secondary transfer were superior to those that should ensure a smooth transfer from an educational point of view (OFSTED, 2002). However, evidence from the New Economics Foundation (Marks et al., 2004) suggests that in their research in Nottingham, pupils' emotional well-being dips significantly on transfer to secondary school at age 11, so there might still be room for improvement on both the educational and the social and emotional effects of school to school transfers.

Schagen and Kerr's (1999) research was a mixed methods design involving telephone interviews with LEA officers and school staff and a small number of case studies of

11+ secondary schools. The findings supported the view that schools are generally providing good transfer arrangements in terms of helping to prepare and settle children into the new school, but that liaison on curriculum matters between the primary and secondary schools is less successful (Schagen and Kerr, 1999). Schagen and Kerr conclude that the National Curriculum has, in the view of their research participants, eased curriculum continuity across the primary to secondary transfer, particularly in science, but that it still does not mean that teachers can assume a standard level of knowledge and coverage of topics from transferees due to the flexibility allowed by the National Curriculum. In my research, liaison and transfer activities are covered but it was decided not to include specific attempts to gather data on curriculum continuity due to the existence of the National Curriculum and the influence this has on curriculum content and coverage, and due to the existing research on the topic both pre-National Curriculum (e.g. Gorwood, 1986) and post-National Curriculum (e.g. Schagen and Kerr, 1999).

Box 2.3: Key points from research on school to school transfers

- Research on the age of transfer has found no conclusive evidence to suggest that one age is preferable than any other in terms of educational progress.

- There has been little research focusing specifically on the impact of the number of scheduled transfers children must undergo on their educational progress, social development and emotional well-being.

2.4 The influence of existing research on the current study

One of the overriding messages in this review of the literature on middle schools must be that there has been little *recent* research into these schools and their effectiveness.

While it might be easy to ignore middle schools because of their dwindling numbers, there is also an argument that this is a good reason for researching them before they potentially disappear from the English education system altogether. It cannot be denied that they were a major part of England's education system during the 1970s and 80s and that their persistence in some areas must say something for the merits of this system. If middle schools are to survive, then surely our knowledge of these

schools needs to be updated, and if it is inevitable that they will eventually disappear from England, then we should attempt to learn from the "middle school experiment" (Edwards, 1972).

Some of the authors of middle school research (e.g. Gannon and Whalley, 1975) emphasised the need to view the middle years of schooling as a separate stage in children's educational, social and emotional development which exerts very different demands on those charged with educating them at this point in their lives. This has also been a driving force behind my research, while the probable 'failure' of the middle school to survive well into the 21st Century might lend credence to the dominant system of transfer to secondary education at age 11, there might be lessons we can learn from these schools which, while they might not necessitate a change in our schooling structure and the age range of the units within the system, might require us to adapt how we approach the schooling of middle years children.

Very little of the research on middle schools is truly comparative with much of it focusing instead on describing the situation as it is (or was) in middle schools, I therefore hoped to address this by building a comparative element into my research.

Another aspect of the existing research which I felt had not been adequately addressed was in consulting with a wide range of stakeholders, staff and pupils were the most common participant groups (probably rightly so), but I felt a fuller picture might be provided by also consulting with parents and carers, with a representative of the local authority and in order to get a more reflective view, with former pupils.

A large volume of work has been conducted on the curriculum at the middle school. Given that this has already been widely covered, and that the introduction of the National Curriculum left less scope for a distinctive 'middle school curriculum', I decided not to include a full examination of this in my research and to focus instead on the overall educational experience in terms of facilities on offer, the arrangement of teaching groups, the teacher-pupil relationships and so on.

This research, then, examines the advantages and disadvantages of the system as it stands today both in terms of the educational environment and the extent to which it supports children's social development and emotional well-being and aims to update our knowledge on the middle school and to draw from this any overall lessons that we might learn from the system and which can be applied to today's schools, whatever form or structure they might take. Based on this, the following research objectives and questions have been developed:

Research objectives:

- To assess whether there are differences between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system in terms of:

  a) educational experiences

  and

  b) children's social development and emotional well-being

- To investigate the extent to which any differences identified between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system can be attributed to the schooling structure or whether there are other contributory factors

- To draw conclusions as to the educational and social advantages and disadvantages of different middle years schooling systems and to identify areas of good practice which can be applied to middle years schooling more generally.

Research questions:

- Are there differences in educational experiences between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

- Are there differences in children's social development and emotional well-being between those attending 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

- What are the lessons from middle schools for middle years schooling more generally?

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The research objectives and questions set out at the end of Chapter 2 attempt to cover a broad range of aspects of the schooling experience and to assess the pros and cons of two different schooling systems. While these questions were developed with reference to the literature and the gaps I had identified in the existing research, the broad framework I had set myself left me with the challenge of designing an appropriate research strategy to meet all the objectives and hopefully answer the questions with very limited resources.

I have worked in social and educational research for most of my career to date and I have employed a range of methods, but a great deal of my research has involved the use of self-completion questionnaires to obtain data. I was therefore keen to employ this method in my own research, but having used questionnaires so often in my work, I was aware of the limitations of this method, particularly when used in isolation. It became apparent to me that a mixed methods approach might be appropriate given the broad scope of my research questions. I therefore planned to employ qualitative methods to complement the quantitative aspects of the research design and to provide a more in-depth perspective on what had the potential to be some quite complicated issues around schooling children in their middle years.

During the process of designing the research objectives and questions, it was clear that these questions could not be answered fully with reference to only one stakeholder group due to the complexity of the issues being addressed and the need to conduct a fair and wide ranging assessment of the schooling system. Very early on in the process I decided that I would need to do more than just ask, say, headteachers what their views are, instead a variety of people who have an involvement and interest in schools and the schooling experience would have to be consulted.

I therefore set about designing a research strategy which involved both quantitative and qualitative methods and which would allow the collection of data from a variety of stakeholders. This chapter sets out the research design process and the reasoning behind many of the decisions made, I also discuss the methodological, philosophical

and ethical issues surrounding the design and give an overview of how the data were handled and analysed.

3.1 Research methods

As described above, I felt that the research objectives and questions would be best met by consulting with a variety stakeholders. Originally I intended to canvass the views of headteachers, teachers, pupils, parents or carers, the local authority and school governors. On reflection I felt that there might be problems in accessing school governors; I would have to rely on staff at the school to pass questionnaires to the governors, who only meet periodically, so it could have proved difficult to obtain data from this group. In addition, some parents are school governors and they could have participated by completing a parents' survey. I wanted to avoid the possibility of overlap between my respondent groups so the idea of surveying school governors was therefore abandoned. As part of my master's degree research on middle schools I had conducted a questionnaire among former middle school pupils and this had provided an interesting insight into people's retrospective views on their schooling experience. I therefore decided to include in my design a discussion group for former pupils of state schools in the Dorset County Council area.

I chose the methods of data collection based on a number of factors, but of prime concern was convenience (for both me and the participants) and the available resources. This led to a fairly heavy reliance on postal and online questionnaires which are easily administered at a distance and allowed me to obtain a reasonable volume of responses. I knew that I did not have the time to conduct a great deal of qualitative research (such as interviews and discussion groups), and that in terms of demands on the participants, these methods are a 'big ask' of people. I was also conscious, though, that in order to gather the depth of data I required, it would be helpful to include an element of qualitative data collection in my research design in addition to the qualitative data collected via the open-ended survey questions. On weighing up these considerations I opted to use questionnaires (available both as paper and online versions) for headteachers, teachers and pupils, an online

questionnaire for parents and carers of children currently at Dorset schools, a face to face interview with an officer from the local authority and a discussion group with former Dorset school pupils. I briefly describe below the main features of each of these elements of the fieldwork.

Headteachers' questionnaire: A postal questionnaire for headteachers or deputy / assistant headteachers at each school. Paper versions of the questionnaire were sent to each headteacher along with a covering letter and an information sheet. The questionnaire was also made available as a web survey and the web address was provided in the covering letter and again at the top of the questionnaire for those who preferred to complete the survey online.

Teachers' questionnaire: A questionnaire for teaching staff at each school, again offered as both a paper version and as an online survey. Paper questionnaires were distributed to schools alongside the headteachers' questionnaire and the web address for the online survey was provided at the top of the questionnaire. Headteachers were asked to distribute the teachers' questionnaires to any two members of teaching staff at their school.

Pupils' questionnaire: The headteachers' questionnaire offered the opportunity for respondents to volunteer to participate further by agreeing to administer a questionnaire to pupils in either paper or online format. Pupils' questionnaires were developed for each year group from Year 4 to Year 9 with the questions altered slightly to make them age-appropriate and there were different versions for schools in the two-tier and three-tier system to allow for the various transfer ages.

Parents' questionnaire: An online questionnaire was developed for parents or carers of children at Dorset schools. The parental consent form seeking permission for pupils to participate in the pupils' questionnaire invited parents or carers to complete the questionnaire and there were three advertisements placed in the local newspaper, the *Dorset Echo*, as well as a link from my own website.

Face to face interview with local authority officer: Permission had been sought

from Dorset County Council early on in the process to involve Dorset schools in this

research and in granting permission an officer had been nominated as my main

contact at the authority. This contact later agreed to an interview which was conducted

at the council offices. The officer interviewed had a great deal of experience both in

his current role at the council and as a teacher and headteacher in the Dorset area.

Discussion group with former pupils: This was an hour long structured discussion

with former pupils from state schools in Dorset who at the time were studying as

undergraduates at The University of Nottingham (there is further discussion of the

selection of participants in section 3.8.4).

Figure 3.1 presents a summary of the different elements of the fieldwork and

summarises the recruitment method and the timeline.

Figure 3.1: Summary of elements of the fieldwork

Method	Stakeholder group	Recruitment method	Date
Questionnaire	Headteachers and teachers	Letter with surveys and information sheets posted to headteacher	October 2007 – March 2008
Questionnaire	Pupils	Volunteered via the headteachers' questionnaire	January – June 2008
Questionnaire	Parents or carers of Dorset pupils	Via parental consent form associated with pupils' surveys, then by three advertisements in the Dorset Echo in July 2008	January – August 2008
Discussion group	Former Dorset pupils	Email to students at The University of Nottingham known to come from Dorset	May 2008
Interview	Local authority	Email to nominated contact at the Council	June 2008

3.1.1 Questionnaires

The majority of the data collection for this research was carried out using self-

completion questionnaires, either in paper or online format. The option of either paper

or online completion was offered as an attempt to achieve the highest possible

response rate and because the Department for Education (then known as the

Department for Education and Skills) was encouraging agencies such as LEAs to

communicate with schools in electronic form wherever possible so many potential respondents would be used to (and may even prefer) to complete the questionnaire online. A decision was taken not to offer the survey solely in online format because due to the nature of their work, headteachers and especially class and subject teachers do not spend large proportions of their day in front of a computer so a paper questionnaire was considered more likely to elicit a good response rate among some of the target population. In the event, the paper completion method was favoured more than online completion, four of the 55 completed headteachers' surveys and two of the 36 teachers' surveys were completed online (overall 7% of headteachers' and teachers' surveys were completed online). The pupils' surveys were also offered in both online or paper format, though in the case of pupils, it was left to the judgement of the administering teacher as to whether paper or electronic methods were the most convenient in their particular setting. Once again, paper was preferred with just one school choosing to administer these as online surveys, but this school subsequently dropped out of the research (due to time constraints) so in the event none of the pupils' surveys were completed online. The parents' questionnaire was offered primarily as an online survey in order to minimise the project costs and for ease of publicising the survey. In an attempt to ensure that parents or carers who did not have internet access were not excluded from participating, potential respondents were invited to contact me if they preferred a paper survey (though none did this).

While offering the questionnaire as both an online and paper version may be a convenient and cost effective method of meeting the different preferences of the potential respondents, this "mixed-mode" administration (Dillman, 2000, p.217) can introduce problems in itself. For example, each method of administration has its own potential for what de Vaus terms "mode effects" (2002b, p.131) in which people's responses might be affected by their mode of response. For this survey, this phenomenon perhaps has greatest potential to affect any open-ended questions which are included in the questionnaire since a paper questionnaire must allocate a specific amount of space for textual responses and this gives the respondent a cue as to what might be expected of them in terms of the length of their comment (though

invariably not all respondents will keep their comments within the box, neither will all

fill the box). For online surveys, such boxes can be set with a large limit on the number

of characters that can be input, thus leaving it to the respondent's discretion as to the

length of their comments. Conversely, text boxes can be set with a low character limit

to ensure only brief answers can be given.

Online questionnaires can also be interactive by utilising conditional enabling and

disabling of questions to show or hide any specific questions dependent on the

response to a preceding question. This gives the online survey an advantage over the

paper version which must include all questions but then verbally and visually filter and

navigate respondents around the questions depending on their answers; the online

survey can do this filtering and navigating on the respondent's behalf, thus making it

easier to complete and less likely that inappropriate questions will be answered. This

can make a paper questionnaire look rather more daunting to complete than an online

version because respondents can see the length of the questionnaire before they

answer any questions, and even though it might transpire that substantial sections of

the questionnaire are irrelevant to them, it can deter them from completing it in the first

place.

Many of the arguments against using the internet to administer a questionnaire are

either somewhat outdated in today's 'connected society' or are of little relevance to

most elements of my research. For example, Coomber (1997) contends that the

generalisability of web surveys is compromised since questionnaires administered in

this way can only ever been seen as surveys of internet users and not of a wider

population who may not be defined by their ability to access the internet. Similarly, de

Vaus (2002b) warns that those with internet access tend to be more likely to be middle

class, thus the achieved sample may be skewed on this basis alone. Neither of these

cautions are particular concerns for the headteachers', teachers' and pupils' surveys

since all schools have internet access and by offering the same survey in paper format,

those who prefer not to complete it online are offered an alternative method of

participation. The parents' survey may be slightly biased in the way de Vaus describes,

and although parents were asked to contact me to request paper versions if they did

not have internet access, this may have been too much of an 'ask' of them and many may have opted not to complete the survey rather than request a paper version. In order to minimise the potential impact of mode effects the questions were worded in exactly the same manner in both the online and paper versions of all surveys. At the analysis stage, it was intended to treat mode of completion as a variable in order to explore any possible discrepancies between those who completed the questionnaire electronically and those who returned a paper version, but in the event there were not enough online respondents to the headteachers' and teachers' surveys (and all participating parents completed their survey online) to make this a useful exercise.

For all questionnaires used during this fieldwork (except the parents' survey), it was necessary to create different versions for different school types and, in the case of the pupils' surveys different versions to account for both school type and year group. This necessitated the creation of 24 different questionnaires: five versions of the headteachers' survey, six of the teachers' survey, 12 variants of the pupils' surveys and one parents' survey. Though the differences were subtle across the teachers' and headteachers' surveys, the pupils' surveys differed to account for the age of the pupil (simpler question structures and a different look, such as the font and use of graphics, were employed for younger children), the type of school they were in, and a sub-set questions were asked of the cohorts in each system who were due to transfer to a new school or had recently undergone a scheduled transfer. It would not be appropriate to include all questionnaires as an appendix to this report, however, as examples, the Year 5 and Year 8 middle school pupils' questionnaires, the middle school headteachers' questionnaire and the parents' questionnaire form Appendices 2-5. Appendix 6 presents a 'question matrix' for the questionnaires used in this research. This lists all questions asked and specifies which of the research questions they were intended to address. It also details instances where items have been directly lifted or adapted from other questionnaires (for example, from Ofsted pupil surveys).

3.1.2 Discussion group

The discussion group or focus group with former students was an attempt to gauge opinions of the schooling system from those who had relatively recent experience but who could also look back on these experiences with the benefit of hindsight. It is well recognised that respondent recall can be a major issue for researchers asking participants about a past behaviour or experience and as Clarke et al. (2008) point out in relation to survey research, there is a trade-off to be made between breadth of data (i.e. gathering information based on a long time span), and the potential for recall error on the part of the respondent which can affect the accuracy of the data collected. The impact of this on the data gathered during the discussion group has been minimised both by including participants aged between 18-21 whose opinions will be based on a relatively recent experience, and by gathering data from this stakeholder group via a discussion group rather than a questionnaire. While conducting the group it became apparent that participants were providing each other with cues and prompts to aid their memory and were actively 'bouncing' ideas and opinions among the group. I feel this aided their recall and provided more insightful data than a survey completed in isolation could have done.

3.1.3 Interview

The interview with an officer at the local authority was an attempt to gather the views of what might be seen as the administrators of the schooling system. I once worked in the education department of a county council and during my time there, the small pocket of middle schools that existed in one part of the county was closed down, and I have to admit, it made some aspects of our work much easier because we no longer had to make special provision for the different schooling arrangement in that area. That said, there were many aspects of our jobs that it made no difference to, but from my experience of seeing things from the local authority perspective, I can understand why there might be efficiency savings at that level in having a uniform schooling structure. It was not appropriate to conduct a widespread survey of local authority officers' views on the schooling system, primarily because I felt that it was a sensitive time to attempt such an exercise given the area by area reviews of the three-tier

schooling system, and the officers might feel obliged to express the 'official' views of the Council on the subject of middle schools. In addition, in order to gain an understanding of the impact of the schooling arrangements on the authority, I would also need to understand the complexities of the different roles of the officers in order to place their views in an appropriate context (i.e. to understand exactly how and why the existence of middle schools affected their job) which would be a time consuming and complex task. To overcome these difficulties I decided to interview one officer which would provide a greater depth of data but at the cost of the breadth of data (in terms of covering lots of different views from within the authority).

The interview was a semi-structured interview, in that an interview schedule was developed but there was no need to follow a precise order or wording of the questions, it was simply intended as a guide and there was nothing to stop me from asking additional questions or omitting questions during the interview (Bryman, 2001).

Box 3.1: Key points on research methods

- This research comprises questionnaire surveys for headteachers, teachers, pupils and parents or carers of Dorset pupils, a semi-structured interview with an officer from Dorset County Council's education department and a discussion group with former pupils of Dorset schools.

- Decisions on which stakeholder groups to include and which methods to employ were based largely on practical concerns such as the resources available and any limitations on accessing different participant groups.

3.2 Mixed methods design

Mixed methods research designs are particularly suited to research problems which are "complex and multi-faceted" (Doyle et al., 2009, p.175). This applies to my research questions where it was potentially difficult to identify contributory factors or causal relationships with any degree of certainty due to the variety of influences on the educational and social experience offered by schools and the schooling system more generally. In an attempt to minimise this problem, a mixed methods approach has been adopted to enable a broad coverage of stakeholders, to allow for the different

methods of accessing these stakeholders and to facilitate the collection of "converging evidence" (Henn et al., 2006, p.19) in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues than a single method approach may have provided. The use of mixed methods is becoming increasingly common in health (Doyle et al., 2009), social (Symonds and Gorard, 2010) and educational research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), though its precise definition is somewhat contentious. Johnson et al. (2007) asked 31 'leaders' in the field of mixed methods (i.e. those who were known to be actively working in and publishing on the field of mixed methods) to provide their current definition of mixed methods research. Nineteen leaders provided a definition and unsurprisingly all were different, though the main area of consensus (which 15 definitions directly referred to) was the mixing of quantitative and qualitative research; there was less agreement on the exact stage in the research at which the 'mixing' should take place (e.g. at the data collection stage, analysis stage or at all stages).

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) discuss the subtle differences between terminology which has come to be used interchangeably by some researchers and commentators. They define the term "multimethod design" (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p.11) as referring to the utilisation of more than one method or data collection procedure, but confining the methods to either the quantitative or the qualitative tradition. "Mixed methods designs" (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p.11) on the other hand, employ a mix of both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

As de Vaus (2002b) points out, it is unhelpful to label individual methods (such as a questionnaire survey or an in-depth interview) as being either quantitative or qualitative; instead we should consider the data collection and analysis procedures and the nature of the data collected. De Vaus argues that questionnaire data are often regarded as quantitative when what we really mean is that the data are collected and usually analysed in a "systematic" (2002b, p.6) and structured manner. To apply de Vaus's distinction to my research, both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected: the closed-choice questions in the questionnaire surveys are of a quantitative nature, but the open-ended survey questions, discussion group and interview with the LEA officer elicit qualitative data. This research therefore falls into

the second category identified by Teddlie and Tashakkori, that is, a *mixed methods design*, because the data collected and analysed are of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. There is one proviso I would want to attach to this, however, that is that few definitions of mixed methods research make any mention of the weighting of the qualitative and quantitative data and data collection techniques, both in terms of the volume and of the relative importance attached in analysing and interpreting the results. Johnson et al. draw attention to this and describe a "qualitative-quantitative continuum" (2007, p.123). As my research progressed, it became apparent that there was a definite imbalance between the quantitative and qualitative elements in terms of the number of participants in the solely qualitative aspects and in terms of the weighting I felt I could apply to the results from the qualitative elements of the research. I therefore feel that my research evolved into a "quantitative dominant mixed methods" (Johnson et al., 2007, p.124) design.

Mixed methods designs are particularly appropriate for research questions which cannot be answered by employing lone quantitative or qualitative methods and/or where the project involves more than one research question (Mertens, 2005). These conditions apply to this research since it involves multiple research questions and whilst some of the outcomes can be adequately measured by the collection of quantitative data (e.g. the gathering of factual information about teaching arrangements and facilities), other aspects require a more qualitative approach (e.g. attempts to gauge the impact on children's social and emotional well-being) because there is no fixed, tangible measure for such phenomena. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) also put forward the view that mixed methods research can often provide a better basis for making inferences for a number of reasons: First, where weaknesses exist in a selected method, the other method(s) employed can compensate for this; second, the use of more than one method can provide confirmatory and/or complementary findings (for example when the strands of research are carried out sequentially rather than simultaneously, findings from one element may inform the next) and finally, even when the different methods elicit divergent rather than confirmatory findings this can be a strength because it "reflects different voices and

perspectives" (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p.17). This final point is particularly

relevant to my research because a key aspect of the research design is that it

addresses the views of a variety of stakeholders, thus making a mixed methods

approach a necessity due to the different needs and methods of accessing the

research participants and to ensure that all participant groups are provided with an

appropriate means by which to express their views.

Box 3.2: Key points on the mixed methods design

- A mixed methods research design has been adopted since it allows for the complexity of the subject matter and of the different stakeholder groups being consulted, it also enables the collection of data at a suitable depth and breadth to address the research questions.

- The research is a quantitative dominant mixed methods design due to the heavy reliance on quantitative data collected via closed choice questions in the surveys.

3.3 Philosophical approach

The rise of mixed methods research has ignited a debate about which research

paradigm such studies and researchers fit with. The traditional split between the

positivist or post-positivist and the constructivist or interpretivist paradigms with the

former tending to be associated with quantitative methods and the latter with

qualitative methods (Henn et al., 2006) does not apply in mixed methods research

since by its very nature it combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Alternative paradigms are often adopted such as pragmatism (Morgan, 2007), multiple

paradigms (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), or the transformative-emancipatory

paradigm (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, Mertens, 2005). In some instances, mixed

methods researchers claim to adopt no paradigmatic approach, something Teddlie

and Tashakkori have labelled "the a-paradigmatic stance" (2003, p.18). Whilst there

may be some merit in taking such a stance and an argument that in 'real life'

researchers are more likely to be constrained by practicalities such as resources (time,

staffing, finances etc.), the accessibility of potential research participants and the

demands of the project sponsors or audience, it is helpful as a researcher to at least

question your own assumptions about the nature of knowledge and "what constitutes acceptable knowledge" (Henn et al., 2006, p.10) in order to critically assess a piece of research and to be aware of potential for bias and interference stemming from the researcher's paradigmatic framework.

In conducting this research, I have been largely guided by the 'real life' constraints mentioned above (some of the discussion in the remainder of the chapter on how and why various decisions have been made will confirm this), but this does not imply that I have worked in some kind of vacuum constrained only by practical decisions. Indeed, the statement I have just made in itself has much in common with the pragmatic approach to research with its emphasis on "common sense and practical thinking" (Mertens, 2005, p.26). So while I would not want to mislead the reader into believing that I commenced this research from a pre-determined philosophical standpoint and designed and shaped my research design, analysis and interpretation around this, it has become evident that my research has been framed by an approach most closely aligned to pragmatism.

The definition of a paradigm is a much debated issue (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). At its broadest level a paradigm can be considered to be our "worldview" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p.21) and is influenced by our epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology (Doyle et al., 2009). It is this 'worldview' notion that I find difficult to align with my experiences in designing and conducting this research. I cannot say that I was heavily influenced (at least at anything other than a subconscious level) by concerns over ontology, that is, our notions of what constitutes reality (Pring, 2000), other than in a general recognition that different individuals experience different 'realities' (again, this is a feature of pragmatism (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007)). My experience of this research with reference to a paradigmatic framework makes more sense to me if I adopt Morgan's narrower view of paradigms as "systems of beliefs and practices that influence how researchers select both the questions they study and methods that they use to study them" (2007, p.49). This definition of a paradigm, coupled with Morgan's acceptance of pragmatism as the philosophical framework for mixed methods research, leads us to view methodology

as a central concern and encourages the exploration of links between methodology

and epistemology (how we gain knowledge of the world (Biesta and Burbles, 2003))

and between methodology and methods (with a distinction being drawn between

methodology at an "abstract level" and methods at the practical or "mechanical level"

(Morgan, 2007, p.68)). Pragmatism is a practical approach to empirical inquiry and

centres upon solving problems and assessing what works or is effective (Mertens,

2005) in the context in which the research is conducted, while accepting that there

might be a single reality or even multiple realities (Feilzer, 2009). Teddlie and

Tashakkori describe the role of the pragmatic researcher's values (or axiology):

> "Pragmatists decide what they want to study based on what is important within their personal value systems. They then study that topic in a way that is congruent with their value systems, including units of analysis and variables that they feel are likely to yield interesting responses." (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p.90)

The pragmatic approach connects theory with data via abduction (as opposed to

induction which is characteristic of a qualitative approach and deduction which is

linked to the quantitative approach), whereby the researcher can move between

induction and deduction techniques, for example, where a preliminary qualitative

exercise might inform a subsequent quantitative inquiry (Morgan, 2007). Morgan also

contends that rather than being predominantly subjective or objective, the pragmatic

approach requires the researcher to be "intersubjective" (2007, p.71), again implying a

degree of movement between the positions traditionally associated with the qualitative

and quantitative traditions, and finally, while qualitative research approaches tend to

be seen as very context-specific (as in a case study) and quantitative research is more

likely to be generalised (as in a large-scale survey) the pragmatic approach falls into

neither camp and findings tend to be transferable (Morgan, 2007, p.72). This final

point is particularly relevant to my research, the research centres on the Dorset

County Council area which in an over-arching sense makes it a case study, however,

it would be wrong to assume that the findings have no implications for middle schools

and middle years schooling outside of Dorset (unless I was able to identify a particular

characteristic or set of characteristics unique to Dorset, or to the research participants

which might lead me to question this), and it is my final research question which

addresses any lessons or areas of good practice we can identify among middle schools which particularly lends itself to this pragmatic approach.

In summary, the paradigm (based upon Morgan's (2007) view of a paradigm as a system of beliefs and practices rather than the metaphysical notion of a paradigm as a worldview) in which this research is located is pragmatism. This aligns with the following features of my approach to this research which I believe are typical of the pragmatic framework: my recognition of the role of the values, norms and experiences of both the researcher and the researched in constructing a reality and or theories (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), the establishment of research objectives and questions largely centred upon a notion of 'what works' (i.e. for children in the middle years) (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), my selection of a mixed methods research design (Feilzer, 2009) and the fact that this decision is based on an assessment of what methods would work best for each strand of the research, my recognition of the role of both subjectivity and objectivity in the research process on the part of the researcher and participants (Morgan, 2007) and my acknowledgement that it is difficult to identify causal relationships (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) – such as whether any differences identified are attributable to the schooling system.

Box 3.3: Key points on the philosophical approach

- The research has been conducted within the pragmatism paradigm commonly associated with mixed methods research design. The overall approach has been a practical one and there has been an emphasis on the complementarity of the quantitative and qualitative data.

- Aligning to Morgan's (2007) definition of pragmatism, methodology has been central to the research design and approach and the role of the values of the researcher and the research participants are recognised throughout the process.

3.4 The selection of Dorset as the focus of the research

This discussion centres on how Dorset came to be the focus of my research, then I will turn to the selection of participants for the various strands of the fieldwork.

Initially it was intended to make this a national study of middle schools and to draw a sample of schools from across England (in those areas that still have middle schools) to invite to participate in the research. However, this would have been an expensive and time consuming exercise so I had to find a way of making the project work within the resources available and one way of doing this was to focus on one local authority area only. On further investigation of the current status of those areas which operate three-tier systems with 9-13 middle schools, it was found that many of these areas were conducting or had recently undertaken authority-wide reviews of the schooling structure with a view to reorganising from a three-tier into a two-tier schooling structure, therefore the subject matter of my research was politically sensitive. It was not considered appropriate to include such areas in the research since the very fact that they are being reviewed may have influenced respondents' opinions and they may have been tempted to respond in a way which would achieve the desired outcome of reorganisation. It was also possible that respondents may be suspicious as to the auspices of the research in areas undergoing reorganisation and that it might be seen as part of the review process rather than an independent research project.

A further constraint on the notion of a national sample of schools was that three-tier schooling structure areas included in the sample must operate only middle schools for the 9-13 age range (because these are the focus of my research and in order to avoid any 'interference' caused by the fact that middle schools for different age ranges are operated within one area), this excluded many local authority areas where middle schools for other age ranges also exist. Given these constraints, the number of LEA areas which could feasibly be included in the research was somewhat limited. Figure 3.4.1 shows those LEA areas which, in 2006, operated three-tier schooling systems with middle schools only for the 9-13 age range and presents the reasons for excluding them from the research where applicable. Note that the sample selection was carried out early in 2007, therefore the table is based on Annual Schools Census data from January 2006 (Department for Education and Skills, 2006).

**Figure 3.4.1: Number of schools by LEA area, 2006 –
Areas with both 9-13 middle schools and two-tier schooling systems**

Local Education Authority	No. primary schools (excluding middle deemed primary)	No. secondary schools (excluding middle deemed secondary)	No. 9-13 Middle schools	Total no. schools	Sample selection notes
Suffolk	254	38	40	332	Undergoing reorganisation – decision taken to close middle schools
Staffordshire	306	54	14	374	Invited to participate but declined
Dorset	137	20	14	171	Agreed to participate
Somerset	223	30	9	262	Relatively small number of middle schools, also geographically close to Dorset who are already participating
Hertfordshire	408	76	6	490	Relatively small number of middle schools – possible reserve choice
North Tyneside	56	11	4	71	Invited to participate but declined
Windsor and Maidenhead	46	9	4	59	Kept in reserve, or as possible pilot area
Kent	470	100	3	573	Too few middle schools in proportion to total number of schools
Newcastle upon Tyne	72	11	3	86	Invited to participate but declined
Northampton-shire	268	37	2	307	Too few middle schools
Cambridge-shire	203	30	1	234	Too few middle schools

Staffordshire, Newcastle upon Tyne and Dorset LEAs were invited to take part, and only Dorset agreed to participate. It was intended to invite schools in either Somerset or Windsor and Maidenhead LEAs to participate if Dorset withdrew from the research, or if insufficient returns were received from schools in this area; in the event this was not necessary. The selection of Dorset was essentially a convenience sample (Aldridge and Levine, 2001, p.79), since it fitted my criteria (detailed above) and the local authority were willing to allow me to conduct the research, so my choice was determined by accessibility and convenience. In one aspect, though, Dorset was not

ideal: an area by area review of the schooling structure had been commenced and in 2002 the three-tier system in Blandford had been reorganised into a two-tier system followed by Shaftesbury schools in 2004. During my research a review of the Purbeck area was conducted (though fortunately the public consultation was announced in December 2008 after my fieldwork had been completed) and that too has resulted in plans to reorganise into a two-tier arrangement. While my fieldwork, which was conducted in 2007-2008, did not take place at the same time as any review of three-tier schooling in Dorset, memories may still have been fresh of the Blandford and Shaftesbury reviews and some stakeholders may have been aware of plans to review the Purbeck area, and those involved with middle schools will undoubtedly have felt somewhat under threat based on the middle school closures both locally and nationally (this is discussed further in Chapter 9).

The following types of school in the two-tier and three-tier systems were included in the research in order to provide the comparison between the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems:

- Primary / junior schools for ages up to 11 (two-tier system)

- Secondary schools for ages 11+ (two-tier system)

- First schools for ages up to 9 (three-tier system)

- Middle schools for ages 9-13 (three-tier system)

- Upper / high schools for ages 13+ (three-tier system)

The advantages and disadvantages of this approach to the sample design and the decisions made during the process as outlined above are as follows:

Advantages:

- Because the County Council had been approached in the first instance to seek participation in the research, this opened up the opportunity to conduct interviews with one or two officers in order to incorporate the local authority

perspective into the work. The support of the local authority for the research project could add weight and legitimacy to the request for schools to complete the surveys.

- There were potential cost savings for the parent survey associated with studying just one local authority area; the survey could be advertised in the press and because this option would mean focusing the research in one defined geographical area, advertisements could be placed in local newspapers for the area at a cheaper price than advertising in national press or in local papers across several areas.

- Confining the research to just one geographical area left it feasible to visit to administer the pupil survey if required (though in the event none of the participating schools asked me to do this). It also meant I could conduct the interview with a local authority officer face to face and it involved travelling to just one location, had several local authorities been involved this task might have been impractical and alternative methods such as telephone or online interviewing might have been necessary.

Disadvantages:

- The generalisability of any findings is compromised by the narrow focus on just one area. In doing this, the project effectively becomes of case study of this area and findings must be interpreted with this in mind.

- It could also introduce bias, particularly over aspects which the local authority had some control or influence in, for example, liaison activities to ease the transition from one phase of schooling to the next are often co-ordinated or guided by the local authority.

- There was a possibility that the support of the local authority (in as much as they gave me permission to conduct the research in their schools) could be a deterrent to some schools and may arouse suspicion as to any agenda behind the research, particularly in the current climate of local and national reviews of

the three-tier system. Participants (especially headteachers and teachers) may have been discouraged from being entirely open in their responses if they are concerned about findings being reported back to the local authority.

- The project could have been jeopardised if for any reason the local authority withdrew support for the research, whereas if several local authorities had been involved, it would not have been so much of a problem.

Box 3.4: Key points on the sample design

- To keep the research manageable it was decided to focus on one local authority area and Dorset was selected due to the characteristics of the schooling system, the fact that they have a reasonable number of middle schools, because there was no authority-wide review of the three-tier system taking place and they were willing to grant permission for the research to be conducted in their schools.

- All types of schools except infant schools were included in the fieldwork.

- Confining the research to one administrative area was beneficial from a resources and feasibility point of view but it is acknowledged that this compromises the generalisability of findings somewhat and that it was perhaps a risky strategy to rely on the cooperation of just one local authority.

3.5 Instrument design

It is important that instruments used to gather data during research projects are both valid and reliable. Validity relates to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure while reliability refers to whether a research instrument or measure produces the same results each time it is administered (Burton and Bartlett, 2009). Kumar states that the extent to which an instrument is measuring what it is supposed to "is primarily based upon the logical link between the questions and the objectives of the study" (1999, p.138). In designing my research instruments I ensured that every question I asked of participants was linked to at least one of my research questions and Appendix 6 shows for the survey questions, which specific research question(s) each item on the questionnaires aimed to address. In terms of reliability, the ideal way to assess the reliability of items such as survey questions is to administer the survey to the same people on different occasions and then check

whether similar answers are given, this is known as "test-retest reliability" (Field, 2009, p.12). I did not have the resources to do this in my research, but where some of the questions I have used are lifted from other surveys, it might be assumed that reliability of these has already been measured though this is not guaranteed. In addition, for the pupils' survey where I have aggregated a set of questions to create a 'score' on certain attitudes towards the schooling experience, I have conducted a statistical test to ascertain how reliable my set of measures are (see Appendix 7).

Below I describe how the research instruments were constructed. Each instrument is discussed in its own section and as a supplement to this, sample surveys and copies of the interview and discussion group schedules are provided in Appendices 2-5 and 8-9.

3.5.1: The headteachers' questionnaire

The questionnaire for headteachers attempted to serve two purposes, first to canvass the views of headteachers as experienced education professionals on the suitability of the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems and second, to obtain some background information on the characteristics of their school, for example, how extensive the use of subject-specialist teachers is, what facilities and equipment are available to pupils and so on. The purpose of collecting background information about the school was to allow for comparisons between the two-tier and three-tier systems in terms of what types of teaching and educational facilities children are exposed to in the different systems. In their survey of middle schools Taylor and Garson (1982) argued that the type of teaching pupils experience and the availability of specialist facilities are crucial elements which help to give the middle school its special character and distinguish it from a mere extension of primary education. I therefore constructed survey questions with the intention of assessing whether children in middle schools are exposed to such educational stimuli at an earlier stage than those at 11+ secondary schools as Taylor and Garson had claimed, or whether those in the two-tier system were just as well or better served on this front. These factual questions on the characteristics of the school were not asked of teachers in order to avoid duplication of effort, and to allow more

space on the teachers' questionnaire to ask questions about their opinions of the educational and social experience the schools are offering children.

There were five different variants of the headteachers' questionnaire, one version for each type of school involved in the research: first, middle, upper, primary (or junior) and secondary schools. It was necessary to create separate versions due to the differences in practices at the various school types. For example, it made little sense to ask secondary and upper schools whether they have subject-specialist teachers since all should answer 'yes' to this question, however, subject-specialists are not necessarily a definite feature of primary, first and (to a lesser extent) middle schools

Some of the questions about school ethos were lifted or adapted from questions asked in Ofsted questionnaires administered to both pupils and parents as part of the inspection process[4].

There were initially some questions for headteachers about staffing issues, for example, whether middle school heads had experienced problems in recruiting staff for middle schools and whether middle schools were able to offer a similar career path to secondary schools. In order to keep the length of the questionnaire to a minimum it was decided to remove these questions because while these are important issues, they were not directly addressing the research questions.

3.5.2: The teachers' questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaires were primarily designed to obtain teachers' opinions on the merits of the two-tier and three-tier systems, though there were also some questions duplicated from the headteachers' questionnaire about their own school's ethos and the extent to which policies and practice nurture children's social development. In addition teachers were asked to provide some background information about the year groups they teach, the type of teacher training they underwent and any experience they have of teaching in other types of school. There

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[4] See parents' questionnaire at: http://www.Ofsted.gov.uk/resources/letter-parents-for-maintained-school-inspections-september-2009-includes-parents-questionnaire and pupils' questionnaire at: http://www.Ofsted.gov.uk/resources/letter-parents-for-maintained-school-inspections-september-2009-includes-parents-questionnaire (Accessed 16/12/2011)

were six different versions for each of the different school types (as opposed to five versions for the headteachers' questionnaire; a separate version for junior schools was necessary for the teachers' questionnaires to allow for the different year groups in primary and junior schools) to reflect the subtle differences in practices and procedures at schools for children in different age ranges.

3.5.3: The pupils' questionnaire

The questionnaire for pupils asked a variety of questions about their experiences at school and, for those who had recently undergone or were about to go through a scheduled transfer to or from another school, information about their opinions on the transfer. Some questions were lifted from or adapted from Ofsted pupils' questionnaires, and some were also adapted from questionnaires conducted as part of Suffolk County Council's Learners' Survey (Suffolk County Council, 2006a) which formed part of their school organisation review. While initially this was done in order to facilitate comparisons between the different surveys, the extent to which the questions were adapted meant that this was not feasible, but it did mean that some of the items in the survey were 'tried and tested' in other contexts (albeit in a slightly different form in many cases). Appendix 6 includes details of which questions this applies to.

Pupils in Years 4-9 were surveyed and Figure 3.5.1 shows which years were surveyed in each type of school. A core set of questions were developed to gauge pupils' attitudes towards their school and elements of both the educational and social experiences and opportunities offered by their school. All surveys contained the core questions, but with some minor adjustments to the use of vocabulary and tone to accommodate the different ages of respondents. Those pupils who were in year groups adjacent to a scheduled transfer (i.e. in their final or first year in the school) received slightly longer questionnaires which included both the core questions and questions on their attitudes and opinions of the transfer; those who were not in year groups adjacent to transfer were asked the core questions only. The purpose of surveying pupils who had not recently or were not about to transfer schools was to allow comparisons between the two-tier and three-tier systems, for example, Year 7

pupils across both systems could be compared to assess any differences in attitudes and experiences of pupils who had recently transferred to an 11+ secondary school against those who were in their third year at middle school.

Figure 3.5.1: Year groups eligible to complete pupils' questionnaires by school type

Schooling system	School type	Year group to be surveyed (adjacent to scheduled transfers)	Year group to be surveyed (no recent or imminent scheduled transfer)
Two-tier	Primary / Junior	Year 6 (age 10-11)	Year 4 (age 8-9) and Year 5 (age 9-10)
Two-tier	Secondary	Year 7 (age 11-12)	Year 8 (age 12-13) and Year 9 (age 13-14)
Three-tier	First school	Year 4 (age 8-9)	
Three-tier	Middle school (9-13)	Year 5 (age 9-10) and Year 8 (age 12-13)	Year 6 (age 10-11) and Year 7 (age 11-12)
Three-tier	Upper school	Year 9 (age 13-14)	

A major challenge in the design of the pupils' questionnaire was attempting to achieve an appropriate style, language and presentation to appeal to children aged 8-13. In addition, it was important to ensure that this did not feel like a test or an exam so that children felt free to express their opinions honestly without fear of giving 'wrong' answers. I chose the fonts used in the survey to be as attractive as possible to children but without making it seem that survey was not to be taken seriously, and for the younger children, clipart images depicting school-related items were used to make the survey look more attractive.

3.5.4: The parents' questionnaire

The parents' questionnaire sought to gauge parental opinion on the suitability of the school their child attends in terms of encouraging educational and social development. There was one questionnaire version for all parents but an early question asked which school type their child currently attends, those who had more than one child in a Dorset school were asked to answer the survey based on the oldest child.

3.5.5: The interview schedule for LEA officers

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed for the interview with the local authority officer based on topics that had come up in my review of existing research. It addressed the different themes raised in the other research instruments (such as the educational offering, the support for social development and emotional well-being) but also included a more specific line of questioning on the effect of operating two schooling systems on the local authority and the authority's stance on reorganisation.

3.5.6: The discussion group schedule

The schedule for the discussion group was essentially a more open-ended version of the questionnaires used with current pupils and teachers. The schedule was divided into themed sections covering the educational experience, the social and emotional experience, feelings about transfers and overall preferences for either schooling system. The schedule comprised a set of key questions to ask and then prompts to ask alongside each main question if the group needed them. For example, if little discussion was forthcoming following the general question, the prompts were used to help focus responses. Participants were being asked to think about a past experience throughout most of the discussion so I reminded them at certain points to think back to their schooling, for example, by preceding questions with phrases such as 'looking back on your school experience…'. This approach helped to ensure participants were basing their discussion on their own experience rather than on what they have heard about schools since then, or what they might have seen or read in the media. This helps to improve the reliability of responses because it situates their discussion in the relevant context (Krueger and Casey, 2000). That said, it must be recognised that it is impossible to get participants to completely disconnect from outside influences such as the media and from their life experiences since the occasion they are being asked to think back to, but at least by specifying that they should consider their own schooling experience I minimised the extent to which they might consciously represent views which have been influenced in this way.

Box 3.5: Key points on instrument design

- Research instruments (questionnaires, interview schedule and focus group schedule) were designed with close reference to the existing literature and resources and my research questions.

- There were several variants of the headteachers', teachers' and pupils' surveys (to account for different school types and year groups) and special attention was paid to ensure the pupils' surveys were age-appropriate in their content, length and look.

3.6 Instrument piloting

Piloting research instruments is an important stage in research design and one which can help to test many aspects of the design, for example, the distribution method, what instructions need to accompany the materials, the clarity and 'workability' of questions and the data entry and analysis stages.

It is perhaps useful to distinguish between 'pretesting' (whereby draft questions and groups of questions were trialled on appropriate individuals) and 'piloting' (in which full drafts of the questionnaires were trialled on individuals with characteristics closely matching those of the target population) of the survey instruments used in this research (Bourque and Fielder, 1995). Pretesting of all research instruments was conducted via discussions with my supervisors, colleagues, friends and family about the suitability of questions. This procedure also provides a check on the 'face validity' of the questions because it forms a "casual assessment of item appropriateness" (Litwin, 1995, p.35). Piloting is discussed in more detail under the relevant headings below.

3.6.1: Piloting the headteachers' and teachers' questionnaires

Some of the suggestions made during the pretest stages were incorporated into the question design, however, some involved adding questions or whole new topics to the questionnaire and it was decided that in order to minimise the burden on respondents, only questions which focused very specifically on the research questions were to be included. Once a near-final version of each of the teachers' and headteachers'

questionnaires had been produced, a small-scale pilot was conducted by posting
questionnaires to a sample of 30 schools outside of the Dorset area. Each school was
sent a covering letter, an information sheet, one copy of the headteachers'
questionnaire, two copies of the teachers' questionnaire and stamped addressed
envelopes for return of the questionnaires (one per questionnaire). The covering letter
explained that this was a pilot phase of the project and that their responses would help
to shape the final version of the survey, and a space was added to the end of the form
for respondents to write any comments they had on the suitability of the questions and
suggestions for amendments. Figure 3.3 shows the number of surveys sent out and
the number returned.

**Figure 3.6: Piloting the headteachers' and teachers' questionnaires –
number distributed and returned**

Schooling system	Survey type	Number distributed	Number returned
Three-tier	First school – Headteachers	2	1
	First school – Teachers	4	0
Two-tier	Primary school – Headteachers	2	1
	Primary School – Teachers	4	2
Three-tier	Middle school – Headteachers	2	1
	Middle school – Teachers	4	2
Two-tier	Secondary school – Headteachers	2	1
	Secondary school – Teachers	4	2
Three-tier	Upper school – Headteachers	2	1
	Upper school – Teachers	4	1
Total		**30**	**12**

In the event at least one survey of each type (with the exception of first school
teachers) was returned. The pilot was carried out close to the end of the summer term
which may have affected the response rate (this is a particularly busy time in schools)
and this meant that there was insufficient time to send reminders or to select
alternative schools for inclusion in the pilots, therefore I decided (particularly since
many of the first school teachers' questions are similar to those in the first school
headteachers' or those in the primary school teachers' questionnaires) that this pilot,

together with the earlier informal feedback received on the questionnaires, provided adequate evidence of the suitability of the questions.

The piloting raised a couple of issues: when asked whether they had experience of teaching in different types of school and presented with a list of school types *excluding* the one they currently worked in, many respondents used the 'other please specify' option to write in their current school type. This was resolved by rewording the question to make it clearer that they are being asked about any *other* types of school they had worked in. Despite this, a small number of respondents still wrote their current school type in the 'other' box, these were handled at the data cleaning stage to avoid double counting when analysing the responses to this question. A second amendment following the pilots was the addition of a 'not applicable / no experience' response category to the question about how effectively the school catered for individual needs. It emerged during the pilots that some respondents had no experience of catering for certain categories of individual need, particularly children whose first language is not English.

As a final check on the surveys, copies of the middle school versions were sent to both a representative of the National Middle Schools' Forum (NMSF) and to the officer I had been in contact with at Dorset County Council. This process raised the issue of the exact meaning of 'subject-specialist teachers' and in response to a suggestion from the NMSF an additional question was added asking those middle school teachers who indicate that their role involves subject-specialist teaching, how many different subjects they teach.

3.6.2: Piloting the pupils' questionnaires

Following pretesting two pilot stages were conducted. In the first, the questionnaires were piloted with three children of friends and family. These children completed questionnaires appropriate to their year group and school type and they were asked to describe as they went along what they were thinking about while they answered the questions as a gauge as to whether the questions were being interpreted in the intended manner. A second phase of piloting was carried out by administering the

questionnaires at local Cubs and Scouts groups which covered the 8-13 age range of the surveys. Although all Cubs and Scouts who completed the pilot were attending schools in the two-tier system, this still allowed for testing of most of the different questions (since the questions are repeated between the two-tier and three-tier versions as appropriate). As a result of these pilots, changes were made to the question about how friendly their school is; in its original form the question offered the responses 'friendly' or 'unfriendly' but two respondents wrote in their own middle option ('quite' friendly) so the options were changed to 'very friendly', 'fairly friendly' and 'not friendly'. Some of the open-ended responses to the question which asked two-tier pupils whether they would have preferred to go through the three-tier system instead, indicated that some children misunderstood what the three-tier system involved and had not grasped the concept of a 'middle school'. To assist in their understanding of the alternative system, a graphic was added to the verbal description to illustrate the exact nature of the system, so for example, the three-tier system was represented by pictures of three different schools with details of the age ranges covered by each presented as captions below the picture.

3.6.3: Piloting the parents' questionnaires

The parents' questionnaire was piloted by administering it to seven acquaintances with children at various school types. There were no specific problems identified with the questions during the piloting of this instrument.

3.6.4: Piloting the interview schedule

The interview schedule was piloted with a former colleague who had been an education officer at a nearby local authority at the time when it had middle schools. This proved particularly useful in ensuring I had covered all relevant aspects of the local authority's role and in ensuring the correct terminology was used throughout. There were a few minor amendments made to the wording of some of the questions following this pilot but the overall content and structure remained unchanged.

3.6.5: Piloting the discussion group schedule

It was not possible to create a 'dummy run' of the discussion group due to time constraints and difficulties in finding a suitable group with whom to conduct such an exercise. Instead I ran through the schedule with a friend who attended a middle school and this helped to identify a couple of areas where follow-on questions were necessary to probe a little deeper into the experiences and feelings about specific aspects of the schools. It was difficult to tell from the pilot (because I was interacting with only one person rather than a group and because we were simultaneously discussing changes to the questions) whether the schedule provided an appropriate amount of material for a discussion of 45-50 minutes. To help deal with this, I identified a number of questions which, while interesting, were less directly related to my research questions so I was able to use these if we were running through the schedule too quickly, or abandon them if we were in danger of over-running.

Box 3.6: Key points on instrument piloting

- All research instruments were piloted in some form. In some instances ambiguities with questions and enhancements to response options were made following comments made during the pilots.

- In addition to the piloting, the instruments were also checked over by others including my supervisors, colleagues, friends and interested parties (such as a representative of the National Middle Schools' Forum).

3.7 Ethical issues

This research was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines drawn up by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and before I could begin my fieldwork, my plans had be approved by the University's School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator. Due to the involvement of children in my research (specifically because the pilots of the pupils' surveys required face to face interactions with children, and because I wanted to offer schools the opportunity to have me there when they administered the surveys) I also obtained an enhanced disclosure Criminal Records Bureau check before commencing the fieldwork.

Self-completion questionnaire surveys are a comparatively unobtrusive means of collecting data, however there are still some ethical concerns which must be considered in the research design such as confidentiality, non-participation, informed consent and the use of incentives to participate. Interviews and focus groups have their own ethical concerns due to their face-to-face nature. These concerns and the ways in which I addressed them in my research design are discussed below.

3.7.1: Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a key issue and it is helpful to make the distinction between confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality implies that the identity of a respondent (and in some cases, the organisation / group the respondent represents) will not be revealed to anyone outside of the research team, for example, in any published reports; anonymity on the other hand suggests that not even the researcher will be able to identify a given respondent (Aldridge and Levine, 2001). In this research a choice had to be made as to which level of obscurity to offer respondents, whilst anonymity might be considered a useful incentive to those who wish to put their views forward without fear of identification, assuring just confidentiality also offers some benefits. For example, if the identity of the school to which the questionnaire had been sent was known, this would facilitate the addition of information to the responses such as characteristics of the school and/or the area in which it is situated if needed. Confidentiality also allows for the targeting of reminder letters to just those schools from which a reply has not been received; if respondents were offered complete anonymity reminders would have to be sent to all schools as it would not be possible to filter out those which had made a return.

In the event I opted to ensure confidentiality rather than anonymity and included an identifier on each questionnaire which corresponded to the school to which the questionnaire had been sent. This did not necessarily mean I could identify the individual respondents to the teachers' survey, but for the headteachers' survey, there was a question asking whether the respondent was the headteacher or the assistant or deputy head, so in theory it might have been possible to identify the respondent. I

was also concerned that if a headteacher agreed to take part in the pupils' survey, they might not fill in the 'school name' field correctly, or the name of the school as it was written in might have been ambiguous (e.g. where abbreviations are used or where another school has a similar name) or even illegible. It was too big a risk to take that I might lose volunteers for the pupils' survey in this way. It was also important to avoid causing unnecessary work and irritation among school staff by sending reminders to schools that had already completed a survey – and this additional paperwork would contravene the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association which suggest that the "bureaucratic burden" of the fieldwork should be kept to a minimum (BERA, 2004, p.8). There were also resource savings inherent in targeted rather than blanket reminders for the surveys.

Similar concerns over identifying participants exist in face to face interviews and discussion groups. The interview was particularly problematic because only one interview was conducted and in writing up this interview I have tried not to provide information that might be considered identifying (such as the exact role the officer has at the Council) in order to avoid identifying him as it only seems fair that he is offered the same confidentiality assurances as other participants and indeed, never signed up to the research on the basis that his identity would be revealed. Likewise, participants in the discussion groups were assured that they would not be identified in any reports resulting from the group and I deliberately did not ask them to introduce themselves to the rest of the group at the beginning of the discussion, all that each participant was asked to reveal to the rest of the group was the type of schooling system they attended, and this was purely to facilitate the discussion.

Both the interview and the discussion group were recorded using a digital recorder. All participants were notified that this would be the case before the event, and then on the day and on the information sheets provided, I explained that the recordings would be used only by me for the purposes of referring back to the discussion, and that neither the recording nor any transcripts would be made available to anyone outside of the University, and then it would only be shared within the University if I was asked to do so as part of the assessment of my PhD.

3.7.2: Non-participation

The covering letter accompanying the survey for headteachers and teachers stated that completing a questionnaire is entirely voluntary, however, the pupil survey required sensitive handling because in effect, headteachers were volunteering on behalf of the pupils therefore the issues surrounding non-participation had to be addressed. Nardi summarises the concerns in these situations:

> "…volunteers for research must participate of their own free will. Being part of a captive audience – whether in a classroom or a prison – can be a form of coercion unless there are opportunities to decline involvement" (2006, p.35).

To overcome this concern, in my administration instructions I advised that the teacher offers pupils the choice as to whether to complete the questionnaire and alternative activities such as silent reading (at the discretion of the teacher) were offered to those who did not want to whilst the remainder of the class completed the questionnaires. It is important that those who chose not to complete a questionnaire did not feel stigmatised in any way which could constitute a "covert penalty for non-participation" (Robson, 1993, p.31), and as a result feel coerced into participating. However, this is something that was difficult for me to control or monitor because I was not present when the surveys were administered, as Morrow and Richards point out: "children who are required to participate in research in schools may not feel in a position to dissent, simply because most (if not all) tasks and activities in school are compulsory" (1996, p.101). Those who did agree to complete the questionnaire were not asked to identify themselves by writing their name on the form and were instructed to leave blank any questions which they prefer not to answer.

De Vaus (2002b) warns that voluntary participation can bias the sample (for example, children with lower levels of reading and/or writing ability may be more likely to opt out of completing the survey), though he stresses that compulsory participation is not an acceptable solution and advocates instead making adjustments where possible at the analysis stage to take into account any known biases which might be introduced by non-participation. It seems, however, that non-participation was not at all widespread, in most instances, each year group used the number of questionnaires they had asked

for, and only a very small number of teachers added a note to their completed questionnaires notifying me of non-completion, and those who did specified that it was mainly due to absences on the day the survey was administered. Without knowing the extent of non-participation due to refusals and the exact reasons, it is not possible for me to make any assessment of bias, and given that there was apparently very few non-participants, it seems highly unlikely that my findings would have been skewed in any way by this.

Non-participation in the discussion groups might be a more significant factor since only a small number of former-pupils took part, and, as is the case with most small-scale qualitative research, the extent to which generalisations can be made is limited by this small participant base. Non-participation may confound this, I do not know whether I happened to attract, for example, just those who had a very positive schooling experience and felt that they would enjoy spending time talking about it with others. Findings from this element of the research are therefore handled with this concern in mind throughout my discussion of results. Due to the mixed methods research design, I feel that both the focus group and interview with the local authority officer provide some background and context for the survey findings as well as providing the perspective of different stakeholder groups.

3.7.3: Informed consent

The issue of informed consent is related to that of voluntary participation; potential respondents can only make the decision as to whether to participate if provided with adequate information about the research upon which to base their decision. All participants (including those who piloted the instruments) were provided with an information sheet explaining the research and what they were being asked to do and why. It is important that such information sheets and other materials associated with the research strike an appropriate balance between adequate information provision and telling potential respondents so much about your research aims and objectives (and if appropriate, any hypotheses) that you "distort responses and undermine the validity of the findings" (de Vaus, 2002b, p.60). This might be a particular concern for

this research; in many areas (including parts of Dorset) the existence of middle schools has been or is being reviewed and it provokes strong responses from those involved. Those who might feel that the research serves as a threat to the existence of middle schools might provide skewed responses as a means to an end, thus affecting the validity of the research findings. In an attempt to minimise this effect, the research was 'badged' as an investigation into the suitability of schools for children of different age-ranges with a specific focus on comparing the more common two-tier system with transfer to secondary school at age 11 to the three-tier system involving middle schools for ages 9-13. Every attempt was made to avoid referring to the research as 'middle school research' and all communications with participants made it clear that the research was being conducted by an independent researcher and was not being done on behalf of any agency or decision-maker with a vested interest in presenting middle schools in either a positive or negative light.

3.7.4: Research involving children as participants

Research involving children as participants often requires specific ethical safeguards, some of which are linked to the notion of informed consent. The BERA ethical guidelines state that children should be "facilitated to give informed consent" (BERA, 2004, p.8), to this end, I produced guidance for teachers who were administrating the pupils' surveys which specified the information to be given to children about the research and stated that children should be offered the opportunity to opt out of completing the survey. Parental consent was also required for pupils to take part, and parents in turn were provided with an information sheet explaining the purposes of the research and how the information gathered would be treated and presented. This approach is advocated by Robson (1993) who stresses that parental consent should be sought in addition to the consent of the children themselves, and that all but the very youngest children should be fully informed about the research and given the opportunity to make the decision as to whether to participate or not. It is also important to ensure that the materials presented are appropriate for the age of the children and will not cause any stress to the children either by being too difficult to complete or by

asking questions of a sensitive nature; these issues were addressed during the instrument design and piloting stages.

3.7.5: Incentives to participate

The main incentive to participate was an emphasis in the covering letter to potential participants of the value of their contribution to this research and on the purposes and rationale of the research itself (Aldridge and Levine, 2001). In addition, headteachers and teachers were offered anonymised summary reports of findings in return for their participation. Those schools which took part in the pupil survey were offered a school-specific report, that is, one showing how responses from pupils in their own school compared to the remaining participating schools. Whilst it is tempting to offer a more substantial incentive in order to boost response rates such as the option of entering a prize draw, or awarding a small gift to each participating school. This is sometimes considered morally dubious and does not always elicit quality data, for example, it may indirectly encourage responses from non-eligible participants; this is a particular problem for internet surveys which are not accessed via a password or a login system. Dillman (2000) suggests that the most effective use of incentives in terms of increasing the response rate is to pre-pay respondents by sending the financial (or other) reward along with the request to complete the survey as this seems to compel people to return the questionnaire. However, Robson (1993) warns against attempting to reward every participant in some way as this can lead to the development of employer / employee roles which in turn encourages an expectation of conformity and may pressurise the participant to respond or react in a way that they believe the researcher would want them to.

On balance, it seems that the roles of the researcher and potential participants must be taken into account when deciding on an incentive. For this research, teachers and headteachers are being approached in their professional capacity to give their opinions on a system within which they work and it would therefore be inappropriate and possibly ineffective to attempt to reward respondents with financial or other material gestures. Instead, a more equal relationship should exist and in return for

respondents providing information to me as a researcher, it seems a fair exchange to offer to send information (in the form of a summary report of results) back to those who express an interest.

The one exception made to this was in the discussion group, participants were being asked to give up an hour of their time to come and talk to me so I felt it only fair to offer some kind of reimbursement for their time (and in some instances, travel costs). I therefore offered a payment of £5 to each participant. When the initial response to my request was poor, I increased this to £10 and while I did attract more participants, on chatting with those who attended informally at the end of the session, they all said there had been no need to increase the payment and that £5 would have been an adequate 'ex gratia' payment for most of them!

3.7.6: Researcher safety and professionalism

For the interview and discussion group, issues of researcher safety were primarily addressed through the selection of the locations for these events. The interview with the local authority officer was arranged some weeks in advance and I travelled to the Council's education offices to conduct the interview rather than holding it in, say, a café or other off-site location. I felt this was most appropriate since it caused minimal inconvenience for the interviewee and also meant I would be in a safe and professional environment when conducting the interview. I also confirmed the interview date, time and location by email a couple of days beforehand to ensure that I would not have a wasted journey and that the interviewee knew that I would be there at the arranged time and place.

The discussion group was held at the University of Nottingham's main library in a bookable group work room, this is in a central location on the University's campus and it was felt that this offered the most convenient arrangement for all attendees, and in conducting the group in a booked room rather than, say, a coffee bar, it provided a more professional feel to the event and meant that participants were not distracted by ambient noise and passers-by. Before the group, I emailed all volunteers confirming the location and time of the group and provided an information sheet about the

research and their participation in the research which included a photograph of me so that they knew who I was on the day. I also showed my University identity card at the beginning of the group.

Although postal and online surveys offer fewer challenges in terms of ensuring researcher safety than face to face data collection methods, there are still some issues to consider along these lines. In order to avoid giving out my home address and in an attempt to enhance the professionalism of the project, completed paper questionnaires were returned to a freepost address rather than a residential address. This was intended to instil confidence in the respondents that their data is going to a reputable researcher and will be treated in a professional manner. In addition, I considered the option of setting up an email address specifically for this project rather than advertising a personal email address for respondents to use for enquiries and to be used when sending out summary reports, however, I felt that the use of my university email account with its '@nottingham.ac.uk' address may be a better strategy as this reaffirms my affiliation to the University.

Box 3.7: Key points on ethical issues

- The research was conducted in line with BERA's (2004) ethical guidelines.

- Issues of participants' anonymity or confidentiality were considered at every stage and it was always made clear to participants that they would not be identified in any reports or other outputs resulting from the research.

- All participants (including those who helped with the pilots) were given information sheets explaining the research and what their involvement would entail and what they could expect to receive in return for their participation (in most cases this was a summary of research findings).

- Special attention was paid to the ethical issues around children as research participants, for example, parental consent forms were provided to each school taking part in the pupils' survey as well as the children themselves consenting to take part.

- Issues of researcher safety and professionalism were important concerns across all strands of the fieldwork and appropriate measures were put into place to ensure there was no risk attached to the fieldwork activities and that the research was undertaken in a professional manner under the auspices of the University of Nottingham.

3.8: Participation in the fieldwork

This section briefly summarises the exact nature of participants in the research and, in the case of the surveys, details the response rates achieved (where available).

3.8.1: The surveys of headteachers and teachers

All of Dorset's schools (excluding infant schools) were invited to complete the headteachers' and teachers' surveys. Initially, to avoid over-representing schools in the two-tier system, just 50% of primary and junior schools were invited to participate in the headteachers' and teachers' surveys whereas all other school types were contacted, these were selected using a stratified sampling technique (Fowler, 2002). Electronic lists of schools in Dorset were obtained from the then DCSF's (now the DfE) 'Edubase' database of schools during September 2007, the lists of primary and junior schools were sorted in Excel by postcode. Then every other school on the list was selected for inclusion in the sample. Schools were sorted by postcode in order to attempt to achieve as broad a geographical coverage as possible, this strategy was aimed at ensuring a reasonable mix of suburban and rural locations and a reasonable coverage of areas based on proximity to the three-tier areas. However, following a poor response rate from primary and junior schools, it was later necessary to invite the remaining 50% to participate in order to boost the overall response so in the event all schools in Dorset (except infant schools) were invited to participate.

Figure 3.8.1 shows the number and type of schools that returned at least one completed survey and shows that overall, 36% of schools who were invited to participate did so. The lowest response rate was among primary schools (32%) while the highest was from upper schools (50%), though note that in some instances, the actual number of participating schools is low, for example only two upper schools and just five middle schools took part. So while the overall proportion of such schools taking part seems reasonable, the actual numbers need to be borne in mind when looking at results.

I did not offer any monetary incentive or a prize draw (as discussed in section 3.7.5) but I did try to encourage participation by offering all respondents the opportunity to

receive a copy of the summary report on the survey findings by providing their email address at the end of the questionnaire (in the event 34 of the 91 headteachers and teachers opted to receive the report). Response rates were initially quite low, so following the initial dispatch of questionnaires to schools on 10th October 2007, reminder emails were sent to non-responding schools on 26th November, then on 9th January 2008 a further letter was posted to non-respondents enclosing copies of the questionnaires (this was also the point at which I decided to include all remaining primary and junior schools that had not been selected originally due to concerns about over-representing these school types), then a final reminder letter (again enclosing copies of the questionnaires) was posted on 2nd March 2008. Attached to each questionnaire was a freepost return envelope for posting the completed survey back to me, and at the top of the questionnaires the web address for the online version was included for those who preferred online completion. Any headteachers who contacted me to say that they were unable or unwilling to participate were removed from the mailing list so that they received no further reminders (three headteachers did this and these are noted in Figure 3.8.1).

Figure 3.8.1: Participation in the headteachers' and teachers' surveys – by school type

	School type						All schools
	First	Junior	Primary	Middle	Second-ary	Upper	
No. returning at least one questionnaire	18	2	23	5	6	2	**56**
No. invited to participate	50	5	71	14	16	4	**160**
No. unable to participate	1	0	0	0	2	0	**3**
Response rate (%)	37	40	32	36	43	50	**36**

Figure 3.8.2 shows the overall response rates for the headteachers' and teachers' surveys and shows that a much higher response rate was achieved for the headteachers' survey (35%) than for the teachers' survey (12%). This is likely to be due to the method of distribution, with two teachers' surveys being sent to each school it is possible that headteachers might have decided to only pass on one copy, or that

while they may have been willing to complete the survey themselves, they might have wanted to protect their staff from additional work and opted not to pass any questionnaires on. Figures 3.8.3 and 3.8.4 show responses for each of the headteachers' and teachers' surveys by type of school and it can be seen that there were no teachers' surveys completed by staff at junior or upper schools.

Figure 3.8.2: Overall participation in the headteachers' and teachers' surveys

Survey type	Total dispatched	No. unable to participate	No. returned completed	Response rate (%)
Headteachers	160	3	55	35
Teachers	320	8	36	12
All	**480**	**11**	**91**	**19**

Figure 3.8.3: Participation in the headteachers' survey – by school type

School type	No. dispatched	No. unable to participate	No. returned completed	Response rate (%)
First	50	1	18	37
Junior	5	0	2	40
Primary	71	0	22	31
Middle	14	0	5	36
Secondary	16	2	6	43
Upper	4	0	2	50
Total	**160**	**3**	**55**	**35**

Figure 3.8.4: Participation in the teachers' survey – by school type

School type	No. dispatched	No. unable to participate	No. returned completed	Response rate (%)
First	100	2	13	13
Junior	10	0	0	0
Primary	142	0	13	9
Middle	28	0	5	18
Secondary	32	4	5	18
Upper	8	0	0	0
Total	**320**	**6**	**36**	**12**

As well as knowing what type of school respondents currently work in, the surveys included a question asking whether respondents had any experience of working in

another type of school, and for the teachers' survey, there was a question asking whether their initial teacher training was as a primary, middle or secondary teacher. This provides something of a respondent profile which is presented in Appendix 10, and shows that around three-quarters of those currently working in the three-tier system have some experience in the two-tier system, and approximately half of respondents currently within the two-tier system have also worked in the three-tier system. This suggests that a relatively high proportion have experience within both systems on which to base their views.

3.8.2: The pupils' surveys

Headteachers were invited to volunteer to take part in the pupils' surveys at the end of their questionnaire, though the take-up rate was very low. I made several attempts to boost participation, such as enclosing sample pages of the individual school report they would receive as a result of taking part in with the reminders for the headteachers' and teachers' questionnaires. I also emailed and then followed up with a telephone call those schools who had completed the headteachers' questionnaires but had not signed up for the pupils' survey and I offered to go to the schools and help administer the surveys to reduce the workload on the schools. In a targeted attempt at boosting responses from middle, secondary and upper schools I sent letters seeking their participation along with copies of the questionnaires and sample report pages, finally, all upper schools were telephoned to encourage them to volunteer (unfortunately none were persuaded to do so). As Figure 3.8.5 shows, 13 schools took part in the pupils' survey and Figure 3.8.6 shows the distribution of completed surveys by school type and year group. Appendix 11 provides further details of the pupils' survey response rates and includes a breakdown by the gender of respondents.

Figure 3.8.5: Participation in the pupils' surveys - by school type

Type of school	Number of participating schools	Number of such Dorset County Council schools (Jan 2008)	% of schools of each type participating in pupil survey
First	5	50	10
Primary	4	73	5
Middle	3	14	21
Secondary	1	16	6
Upper	0	4	0
All*	**13**	**157**	**8**

* Excluding infant schools

Figure 3.8.6: Participation in the pupils' survey – number of completed surveys by year group and school type

Type of school	Number of participating schools	Number of completed questionnaires						Total completed questionnaires for each school type:
		Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	
First	5	104						**104**
Primary	4	15	37	56				**108**
Middle	3		287	300	198	234		**1019**
Secondary	1				18	26	14	**58**
Upper	0						0	**0**
Total completed questionnaires for each year:		**119**	**324**	**356**	**216**	**260**	**14**	**1289**

All of those who participated received a report (both a paper and electronic version) on the findings showing their pupils' responses for each year group surveyed against aggregated responses from other participating schools. While this seemed a reasonable return for the efforts the schools had put in to administering the survey, it turned out to be a very labour intensive task which took several months to complete and in the event, only one school contacted me to say the report had been useful so I have no clear indication of how valuable the reports were for the schools. With hindsight an individual report for each school was probably too big a commitment

given my limited resources and if I were to repeat the exercise, I would either provide just one overall report (as was the case for the other survey reports sent to participants), or I would need to streamline the reports and the reporting process substantially as it diverted my efforts away from the overall project work. Middle schools represent the vast majority of completed pupils' questionnaires: 79% of completed pupils' surveys were from middle schools. While this might be useful because the focus of my work is on the middle school, the uneven distribution of completed surveys across the school types has somewhat limited the types of analyses I can conduct on these data.

3.8.3: The survey of parents and carers of Dorset school children

As was described in section 3.1, parents and carers of children at Dorset County Council schools were asked to complete the online survey via a request on the parental consent form associated with the pupils' survey and then through three advertisements placed in the local paper, the *Dorset Echo*, on three dates in July 2008. When the survey was closed in August 2008, there had been 29 completed submissions. This was somewhat lower than I had hoped for and I had envisaged that the parental consent form would be the most effective way of promoting the survey, and given that 1289 pupils completed a pupils' survey this held the possibility of a relatively large potential respondent base for the parents' survey. In the event, the majority of my parents' survey responses were submitted in the days following the advertisements in the local paper suggesting either that many schools did not use the parental consent forms I provided (for example, because they chose to use their own or did not use one) or that parents did not see the request for completion of the parents' survey, or perhaps saw it, but then did not have the form handy when they were at a computer and able to complete it online.

This final point is a pertinent one for web surveys, publicising the survey can be difficult and an email with a clickable link seems to be the most direct way of obtaining online responses since the respondent is already online when they view the email and there is no need to type in a long URL (web address) to reach the survey. In this

instance there was no way of obtaining email addresses for all parents so this direct promotion was not possible. Since the survey was conducted in 2008, technology has moved on and many more people now access the internet via their mobile phones. This would perhaps overcome this concern about people needing to have details of the survey's web address when they are next at a computer, in addition, the use of 'tags' (similar to bar codes) which the mobile phone can read might also transform how we access online surveys with people scanning the tag from, say, a flyer or advertisement, with their phone and then going straight to the survey page and completing it from their mobile phone.

The small number of respondents to this survey again limits what can be done with the data, but as Figures 3.8.7 and 3.8.8 show, based on the school their child attends, respondents were fairly well distributed across the different school types and different schooling systems.

Figure 3.8.7: Parents' survey - type of school child currently attends

School type child attends	n	%
Infants school (nursery or reception - age 7)	6	21
Secondary school (ages 11 - 16 or 18)	6	21
Middle school (ages 9-13)	5	17
Upper school (ages 13 - 16 or 18)	5	17
Primary school (nursery or reception - age 11)	3	10
Junior school (ages 7-11)	2	7
First school (nursery or reception - age 9)	2	7
Total	**29**	**100**

Key: Yellow = three-tier schooling system, blue = two-tier schooling system

Figure 3.8.8: Parents' survey - schooling system respondent's child currently attends
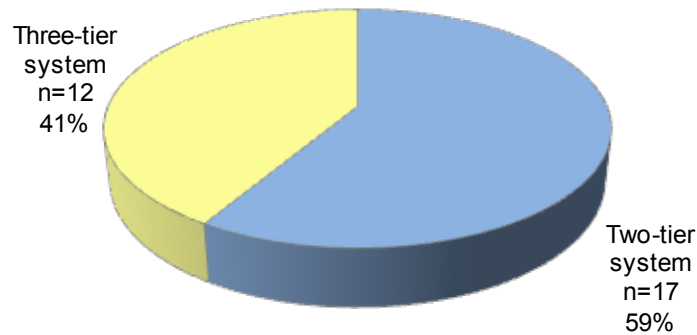
3.8.4 The interview and discussion group

The selection of a participant for the interview with the officer from the local authority was very much outside of my control, I relied on the authority to nominate someone who would be willing and well-placed to talk about the different schooling systems within the county.

For the discussion group, a list of email addresses for all students with Dorset registered as their 'domicile' on the University of Nottingham's student database was obtained, which comprised 67 undergraduates and seven postgraduates. It was not possible to ascertain from the database whether they had attended a state maintained or private school, neither was it possible to check whether they attended schools run by the unitary authorities of Poole or Bournemouth which are not covered by my research. An email was sent to all 74 students seeking volunteers for the group (but stating that it was not applicable to those who went to independent schools, or schools in Poole or Bournemouth) and asking them to volunteer via a short web form. Two emails were sent seeking participation and five students (all undergraduates) volunteered. Of the five who participated, four had attended schools in the two-tier system and one had experienced both systems having spent some time in a middle school. It should be remembered that selecting a sample in this way means that all participants have at least two things in common: they are all studying at the University

of Nottingham and they are all likely to be relatively high achievers because they are studying at degree level, so this limits the generalisability of their views.

There is a further discussion of how response rates and the characteristics of participants might affect our handling of and interpretations of the findings in the results chapters (Chapters 4-7) and in the concluding chapters (Chapters 8 and 9).

Box 3.8: Key points on participation in the fieldwork

- The headteachers' survey achieved a response rate of 35% while 12% of teachers' questionnaires were completed.

- Respondents to the headteachers' survey were fairly evenly distributed across the different school types, though among the teachers' survey respondents, primary schools were underrepresented and there were no responses from upper school teachers.

- Overall 1289 pupils' surveys were completed but participation was heavily skewed towards the middle schools which represented more than three-quarters of completed pupils' surveys.

- Twenty-nine parents of children at Dorset schools completed a survey and there was fairly even representation of the range of school types and schooling systems which the respondents' children attend.

- Four of the five discussion group participants had been through the two-tier system and the remaining participant had experience of both systems.

3.9: Data handling and analyses

Here I briefly outline how the data were handled and analysed for each element of the research. The surveys are dealt with together and then I outline the methods employed to process the data gathered during the interview and discussion group.

3.9.1: Handling and analysing the survey data

The paper versions of the surveys for headteachers and teachers were created in Microsoft Publisher and then web versions of the survey were produced in Keypoint survey software. The pupils' surveys were created entirely in Keypoint survey software which allowed for the simultaneous design of a paper and online version of the survey, which looked the same. It was not possible to create the paper versions of the

teachers' and headteachers' surveys in Keypoint because the software did not allow such efficient use of space as Publisher, and in Keypoint the paper survey would have taken up several pages which would have increased photocopying costs and might have deterred respondents from completing the survey as it might have looked too long. The parents' survey was produced as an online survey in Keypoint, and had any respondents asked for a paper copy, it would have been possible to print this off direct from the software.

The means of producing the questionnaires influenced the data entry method. For the paper versions of the headteachers' and teachers' surveys I created a Microsoft Access database and typed the responses directly into the database via a form. For the parents' survey which was completed online by all respondents, I downloaded the data from the web host and transferred it into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) ready for data checking, cleaning and analysis.

For the pupils' surveys, which were all completed on paper, I attempted to make use of the optical character recognition (OCR) technology available in Keypoint's data entry module. This involved scanning all completed questionnaires through a scanner and then within the Keypoint software, a verification process could be conducted whereby the software highlighted any entries or text which were ambiguous or unclear, and then I was able to amend or confirm the correct entry. This caused several problems, the first being that the questionnaires kept getting stuck together as they passed through the scanner, or caused jams in the scanner because in some instances they were creased or crumpled. This made the task of scanning the questionnaires very time consuming. A further problem was encountered in reading the text responses to the open-ended questions, the software struggled somewhat to decipher the children's handwriting in many cases and I ended up typing in quite a high proportion of the written responses. Having scanned in the pupils' questionnaires for the first couple of schools, I felt that it was actually more time consuming to scan and then verify the pupils' questionnaires and resorted to manual data entry (which could be done directly into Keypoint without the need to create a separate data entry database). While scanning the questionnaires created problems of accuracy, manual

data entry can be similarly problematic, in order to try and minimise inaccuracies in the data entry I spot checked one in ten questionnaires for accuracy of data entry (for the teachers and headteachers' surveys I conducted checks on half of the questionnaires).

Once all data entry and checking was completed for each survey, the data were cleaned which included checking of spelling in free text fields, common sense checks on the responses, removal of empty records (among the online responses there were a couple of completely blank submissions) and other checks to ensure the data were accurate and useable. The clean data were transferred into SPSS and in the case of the headteachers' and teachers' surveys, the data from the paper and online completion modes were merged together. One SPSS file was created for each survey version, but then common fields across survey types (e.g. common questions across all pupils' questionnaires) were merged together to form data files of as many variables as possible for ease of analysis.

The data were then analysed within SPSS using frequency tables, descriptive statistics, crosstabulations and where appropriate, statistical tests of significance were applied. The number of respondents for the headteachers' (n=55), teachers' (n=36) and parents' (n=29) surveys were too low for appropriate use of statistical tests but I still wanted to report the findings of these surveys because a key principle behind the research design and rationale was to address the views of multiple stakeholders. I also felt that it was ethically problematic to seek participation in the research on the basis that responses would help to advance our knowledge on the subject and to then decide not to use a whole dataset simply because the number of respondents was relatively low. Participants spent time and energy providing their views and I felt duty-bound to report those views. This left me with the problem of how to report on the views of all stakeholder groups without attributing disproportionate weight to the findings of surveys with very small respondent numbers. In an attempt to overcome this, I have reported survey findings based on small respondent numbers verbally in the text of this report and have generally used charts and tables where the number of respondents is high enough to warrant such presentation. This means that the pupils' survey responses tend to be presented in graphs or tables whereas the results from

other surveys are, in most instances, described in the text and not represented in a figure. It is hoped that this approach avoids the potential for attributing equal weighting to all surveys where the respondent base is so variable across the different stakeholder groups.

For the pupils' survey responses, where appropriate, inferential statistics have been employed. Specifically, chi-square tests have been applied to look at associations between variables (such as school type and views on a given topic), and t-tests or one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests have been employed to further explore the significance of differences between groups, for example, between middle and secondary school respondents (Pallant, 2010). It must be borne in mind that these tests merely provide evidence of how far findings might have been attributable to sampling error (or chance) rather than representing the population being studied (de Vaus, 2002a). The tests have been applied where the frequencies suggested a difference or association (for example, where the proportion of middle school pupils giving a certain response was considerably higher or lower than another school type) in order to test the significance of any difference or association. Where appropriate, my reporting of test findings includes an indication of effect size to aid the interpretation of any significant associations or differences. It must be remembered that though the overall number of respondents to the pupils' survey was high (n=1289), the different school types were not evenly represented (for example, there were 1019 middle school respondents) and that this was not a truly randomly selected sample - a pre-requisite of the use of inferential statistics (de Vaus, 2002a) - so the data were far from perfect for the application of statistical tests, but it was felt that these would provide some guidance in interpreting the data as to which findings we could place more confidence in. The statistical tests were conducted using SPSS, the full SPSS output from these tests has not been included in this report, but the relevant figures resulting from the tests have been presented in tables alongside the discussion of findings.

The responses to open-ended survey questions were transferred into NVivo software for handling qualitative data. Once in NVivo, written comments were 'coded' into

common themes to allow for a basic analysis of the prevalence of different themes and for ease of retrieval of themed comments. In writing up the results of the open-ended survey questions throughout Chapters 4-7 I have in some instances provided tables detailing each theme or code that arose among the comments and the number of respondents who mentioned that topic. This might appear to be an attempt to turn qualitative data into quantitative data, which some might argue misses the point of the qualitative research, but I argue that this provides a more comprehensive 'snapshot' of the data, free from my own judgements on what were the most salient issues. Silverman defends this method of presenting qualitative data because "[i]nstead of taking the researcher's word for it, the reader has a chance to gain a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole" (2000, p.185) and he argues this approach acts as confirmation as to whether the researcher's impression of the data is accurate or not. To complement this tabular presentation of open-ended responses, I have in some places in my results chapters included illustrative quotes, this ensures that the content and the tone (e.g. strength of feeling) do not get subsumed in my themes or codes used for the purposes of summarising the data, and where illustrative quotes are used, I have made every attempt to ensure they represent the broad spectrum of views and tone of the comments.

3.9.2: Handling and analysing the interview and discussion group data

Both the interview and discussion group were recorded on a digital recorder and then transcribed to create Word documents which were then transferred into NVivo software. Once in NVivo the content of the transcripts was 'coded' according to several overarching themes (known as 'nodes' within NVivo), such as 'facilities and equipment', 'transfer arrangements', 'subject specialist teaching' and so on. The coding allowed for extracts of text from each transcript to be viewed according to the theme which aided the writing up of results since it enabled me to find all comments made on a specific topic together rather than having to skim read an entire document to find the relevant parts.

One of the main criticisms of data gathered through qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups is that of "anecdotalism" (Silverman, 2000, p.177), this occurs where the researcher depends on specific memorable elements of their data in writing up or reporting their findings rather than basing their conclusions on a more systematic exploration of the data collected. By coding the transcripts of both the interview and discussion group in NVivo I aimed to minimise the extent of anecdotalism by retaining an overview of my data via the coding process, and as a by-product of this process I was able to check that the issues which seemed salient in my memory, were as salient as I thought by checking the coding reports which gave an indication of the number of 'mentions' of each topic. Of course, this is still dependent on the accuracy and consistency of my coding, and this is a major concern for the reliability of qualitative research. Reliability can be compromised at the data processing stage by inconsistencies between different people conducting the coding, or between the same person carrying out coding on different occasions (Silverman, 2000). The former is not an issue for my research because I was the only person conducting the data processing, and I minimised the possibility of inconsistent coding across different points in time by always ensuring that an entire set of data were coded in one sitting, for example, the entire interview transcript was coded in one day.

Box 3.9: Key points on data handling and analyses

- Data entry from the surveys was conducted either manually, or for the first batches of pupils' surveys, by OCR technology, though the latter did not yield the time-saving benefits I had hoped for. Data submitted via online completion of surveys was downloaded directly into SPSS.

- Following data checking and cleaning, the survey data were analysed in SPSS. Frequencies, crosstabulations and descriptive statistics were used as appropriate, and for the pupils' survey dataset which was large enough to sustain such analyses, tests of significance were applied.

- The qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions, the interview and the discussion group were processed in NVivo software for ease of retrieval and simple analyses of salience.

Chapter 4: The Teaching and Learning Environment

This is the first of four themed chapters describing the findings from this research and setting them in the context of the literature and the current educational landscape in England. Throughout these results chapters, where percentages are quoted they are usually rounded to the nearest whole number, and the abbreviation 'n' is used in tables and charts to denote the number of participants. In this and all of the results chapters, a summary of key findings is presented in a box at the end of each section with findings which are statistically significant and those which are based on a low number of respondents highlighted to aid interpretation.

This chapter discusses findings relating to the teaching and learning environment. Issues such as school size and the availability of facilities and equipment are discussed as well as the teaching arrangements (such as the use of subject-specialist teachers and grouping pupils by ability). Later in the chapter participants' views of the learning environment are presented, including perceptions of academic challenge, evidence of 'dips' in performance and an overall measure of pupils' attitudes to the educational environment their school provides.

4.1 School size

One argument often put forward in favour of middle schools (for example in the 'Plowden Report', Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) is that it keeps children in a smaller school environment for longer, thus providing a gradual introduction to a larger school rather than a sudden jump from a small primary or junior school to a large secondary school at age 11. Concerns over school size were heightened during the 1960s when the move towards comprehensive secondary education coupled with the raising of the school leaving age presented the possibility of very large secondary schools (Fenwick, 1976). It is no coincidence that this is when the notion of the middle school was first raised as a way of restructuring the schooling system into three tiers. Alec Clegg (Chief Education Officer of the West Riding where the first middle school opened) cited the avoidance of overly large secondary schools as a major advantage of the middle school (Clegg, 1967, p.2) and Blyth and Derricott

contend that middle schools were an attractive option because of their "moderate size and greater likelihood of avoiding impersonality" (1977, p.11). Gannon and Whalley (1975) point out that the extent to which large schools can meet the welfare and pastoral needs of children is limited but that there is little evidence that the size of the school has a direct effect on the quality of the educational offering. However, the size of school does have a bearing on other educational factors such as the number and type of teachers (i.e. subject-specialists versus generalist class teachers) the school can employ, the facilities available and of course, the funding the school receives. These factors, it could be argued, have a more direct impact on the quality of the educational experience on offer.

Burrows (1978) identified three critical factors relating to the size of schools: the impact size can have on staffing, the effective use of school buildings and facilities and, of particular relevance to this research, the response of children to the school size. It is difficult to establish direct links between school size and the quality of the educational experience. For example, when the Plowden Committee reviewed research on attainment and school size they found the results inconclusive because it was impossible to discount other factors which can dictate school size, such as the characteristics of the area in which the school is situated, but which can also influence educational outcomes (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). Research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Spielhofer et al., 2002) explored the relationship between performance and school size in both primary and secondary schools while controlling for other factors at pupil, school and local authority level. They found that there was no significant relationship between school size and attainment at primary level once very small schools (of up to 50 pupils) were excluded and that at secondary level there was evidence of a positive relationship between school size and performance up to a certain size (year groups of around 180-200 pupils) but then performance declined slightly for larger schools. The relationship proved statistically significant but the researchers point out that it does not imply causality, in fact there are many possible reasons for this relationship, and that "in terms of average GCSE scores, the difference between schools of optimum size, and

the very smallest or largest schools, was no more than 0.15 of a grade" (Spielhofer et al., 2002, p.45).

Accepting that measuring the impact of school size (in isolation from other influential factors) on educational quality and outcomes is a difficult task, the pupils' survey that formed part of my research attempted to gauge pupils' *perceptions* of the size of their school. A child who thinks their school is too large might be feeling generally overwhelmed and unable to get the best out of the school, while someone who sees their school as too small may be lacking in stimulation and challenge they need from an educational environment. The pupils' survey included a question on the overall size of the school and on both the number of teachers and the number of other children at their school.

Figure 4.1.1 reports respondents' views on the size of their school according to the type of school attended and shows that respondents from first schools were the most likely to say that their school is too small, though this is perhaps unsurprising since Year 4 was the only year that participated in the survey within first schools and this is the final year of the school, so perhaps they are more likely to perceive the school as too small by this stage. Just 5% of secondary school respondents thought their school was too small, compared to 17% of middle school respondents. Figure 4.1.2 further breaks down these data and shows the percentage of 'too small' responses by year group and school type and provides evidence that middle school respondents become increasingly more likely to view their school as 'too small' as they progress through the year groups (the proportion of 'too small' responses increases with each year group from 5% for Year 5 to 30% for Year 8). While just 18% of pupils in the top year at a primary school (Year 6) consider their school to be 'too small', 30% of respondents in the top year of middle school (Year 8) felt this way – a substantial difference.

Based on the survey responses it seems possible that while the middle school is often considered a means of keeping children in a supportive small-school environment for longer, this is not always seen as a positive feature of the school by the pupils themselves, particularly for the older pupils in the school; this point of view seems to

have been neglected by those who championed the smaller school environment for middle years children (e.g. Burrows, 1978). Interestingly, responses from Year 7 pupils at secondary schools show the vast majority were satisfied with the size of their school (94% said it was 'about right') so there does not seem to be a great deal of evidence from this survey that the larger size of secondary schools is a particular source of anxiety for children in their first year at the school (though note that data for the pupils' survey comes from just one secondary school). The surveys were administered during the Spring Term, after pupils have had a full term to settle in to secondary school; had the resources for this project allowed, it might have been interesting to have two waves of survey completion for children in their first year at a new school (one early in the Autumn Term and a second during the Spring Term) to gauge whether views on school size change following a period of adjustment to the new environment.

Figure 4.1.1: Pupils' views on the size of their school – by school type
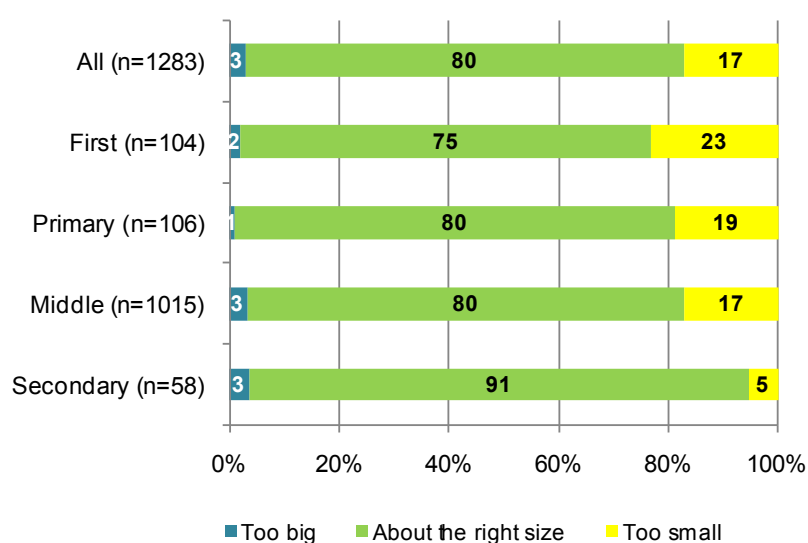
Figure 4.1.2: Pupils' views on the size of their school – by year group and school type, 'too small' responses
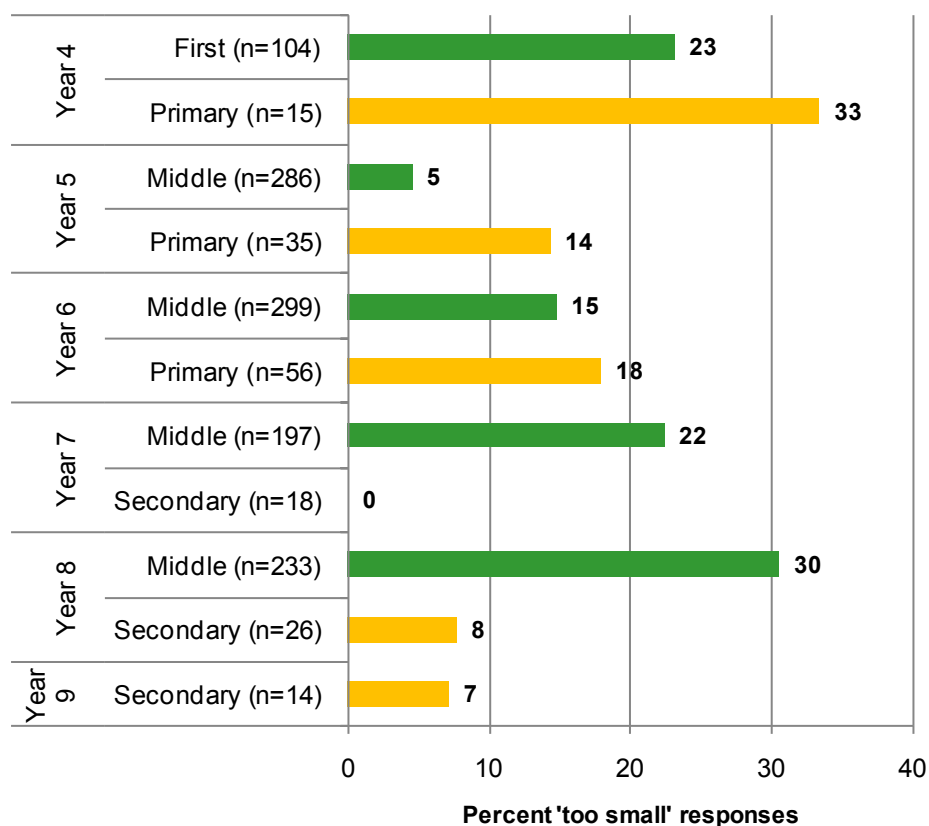
Figure 4.1.3: Pupils' views on the size of their school – Years 5&6 and Years 7&8 by school type
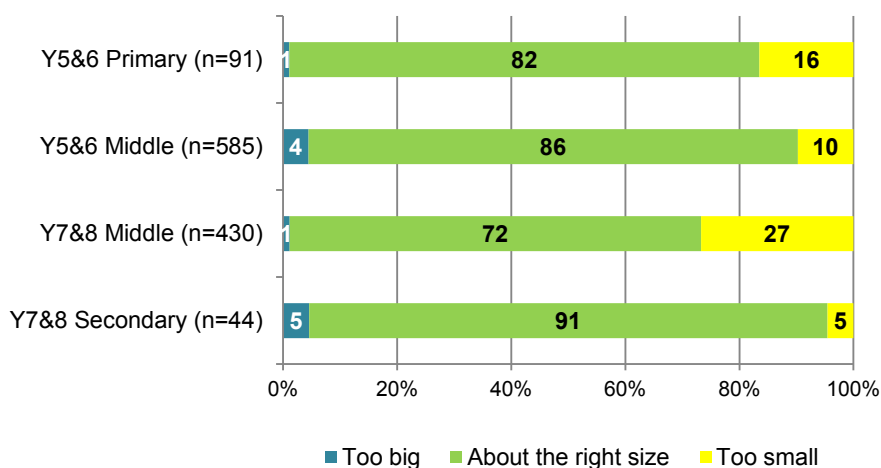
Figure 4.1.3 shows responses to this question comparing primary and middle school respondents for Years 5 and 6 and middle and secondary pupils for Years 7 and 8. The pattern of responses confirms that it is the pupils in their upper years at middle school who are the most likely to say their school is 'too small' (27% compared to

between 5 and 16% for the other groups). A chi-square test for independence (Pallant, 2010) was used to further explore the extent to which there might be a relationship between school type and propensity to perceive the school as too big or too small and Cramer's V was used to indicate the strength of any relationship (Field, 2009). Grouping Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 pupils together provided a larger number of respondents in each group than would have been the case if individual year groups were compared which made the data more suitable for statistical testing, however it must still be borne in mind that the respondent groups are not of equal size and that the secondary school pupils' responses represent just one school.

The chi-square tests suggested that there was no significant association between perceptions of school size and the type of school attended for Years 5 and 6 pupils, but that there was a significant relationship (at the p.<.01 level) between perceptions of school size and school type for Years 7 and 8 pupils, with those at middle school more likely to say their school is too small than those at secondary school, though the Cramer's V statistic indicates a "small" effect size (Pallant, 2010, p.220). Figure 4.1.4 summarises the results of the chi-square test.

Figure 4.1.4: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and perceptions of school size

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	5.67	.059 Not significant	2	676	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	12.98	.002 Significant	2	474	.165	Small effect

Pupils were also asked whether they thought their school had too many or too few teachers. Figure 4.1.5 shows the percentages saying there were 'too many' different teachers by year group and school type. There was no equivalent question in the survey for Year 4 first school pupils and in the secondary school version, the question

was worded: *during a typical school week, are you taught by too many or not enough different teachers?* Whereas the middle and primary version of the question was: *what do you think about the number of teachers there are in your school?* This difference was necessitated by the different arrangement and organisation of teaching across the different school types, it made little sense to ask primary and (in most schools) those in the lower years of middle school whether they were taught by too many teachers given the predominance of class-based teaching, conversely it seemed unfair to ask secondary school pupils whether there were too many teachers at their school because there will always be a large number of teachers in a secondary school due to the age range they cover and the broad range of subject specialists employed, though pupils will not have contact with many of these. With hindsight, it might have been more useful to ask all pupils whether they are taught by too many or not enough different teachers, rather than attempting to use question wording that was sensitive to the different teaching arrangements likely to be in place.

In the event, the responses from middle school pupils suggest that younger children at these schools were more likely than older pupils to consider there to be too many different teachers at the school, but due to the way the question was worded, it is not apparent whether this is an indication that as they progress through the year groups, children become more comfortable with the exposure to different teachers, or whether it is simply a reflection of the school size. The different question wording used in the primary and middle school surveys compared to that used in secondary schools has created something of a validity problem, it is not clear if what the primary and middle school version of the question is actually measuring is the pupils' perceptions of school size, rather than their views on the number of teachers they are exposed to as part of their timetabled lessons.

Year 7 pupils at secondary school were more likely than their counterparts in middle schools to believe there are too many different teachers at the school, though the difference is less marked than that between the Year 8 respondents where 27% of secondary school respondents said there were too many different teachers compared to just 10% of middle school respondents. This high proportion of 'too many'

responses from Year 8 secondary school pupils could also be attributable to the slightly different wording of the question on the middle school and secondary school questionnaires. It might be that in secondary schools Year 7 pupils are taught by a smaller number of teachers in an attempt to ease them in to the secondary environment and then in Year 8 exposure to different teachers increases as teaching patterns adapt to predominantly subject-specialist teaching (this is discussed further in section 4.2). It should also be borne in mind when interpreting these results, that the actual numbers of respondents in each year group in the primary and secondary schools is very small, making percentages susceptible to wide fluctuations on the basis of a small number of responses.

Figure 4.1.5: Pupils' views on the number of teachers at their school – by year group and school type, 'too many' responses
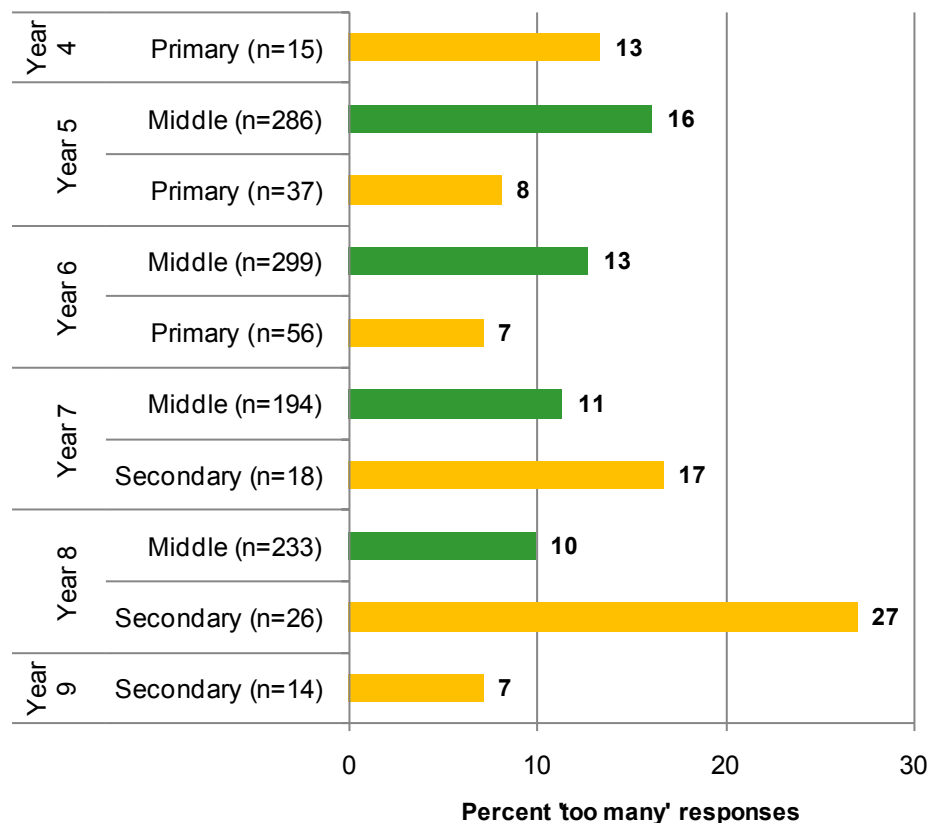
A chi-square test of independence was conducted on these data, once again with Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 grouped together allowing for an assessment of the significance of any differences between middle and primary and middle and secondary

school pupils' views. Figure 4.1.6 shows the distribution of responses from these groups of pupils and indicates that the most marked differences are apparent between the Years 7 and 8 cohorts with secondary pupils a lot more likely than middle pupils to say there are too many teachers.

Figure 4.1.6: Pupils' views on the number of teachers at their school – Years 5&6 and Years 7&8 by school type
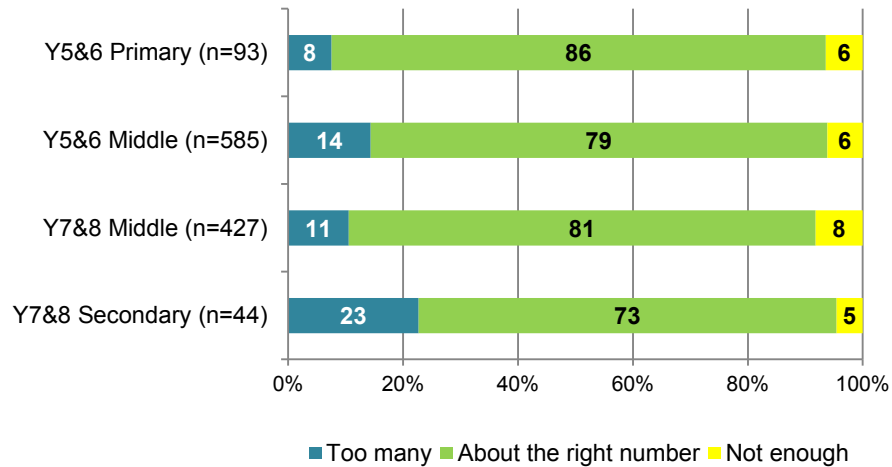
The chi-square test of independence aimed to explore the extent to which this findings may have occurred if there was no association between the variables, and as Figure 4.1.7 shows, the finding was significant for the Years 7 and 8 cohorts, suggesting that there is a relationship between school type and perceptions of the number of teachers (p<.05) and that there is a small effect or strength to this association. The Years 5 and 6 test shows no significant association between views on the number of teachers and type of school attended (p=.199). This finding must be interpreted in the context of both the small sample size for secondary pupils and the fact that only one secondary school participated in this survey.
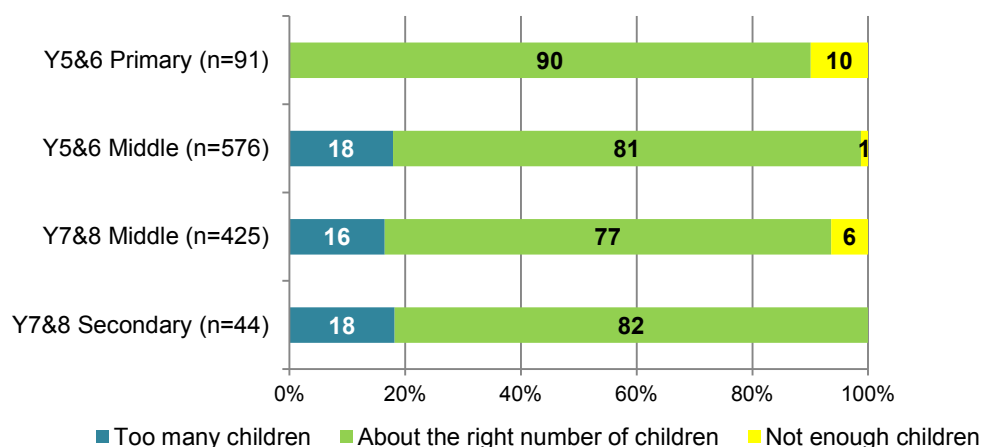
Figure 4.1.7: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and perceptions of the number of teachers

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	3.23	.199 Not significant	2	678	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	6.11	.047 Significant	2	471	.114	Small effect

Pupils' opinions of the number of children at their school are presented in Figure 4.1.8. Primary respondents were the least likely to say there are 'too many children' at their school. When responses were examined by year group, there was a slight trend for children in middle schools to become increasingly likely to feel that there are 'not enough children' at the school as the year groups progress but in other school types, responses were more mixed across the year groups (not shown in a figure).

Figure 4.1.8: Pupils' views on the number of children at their school – by school type
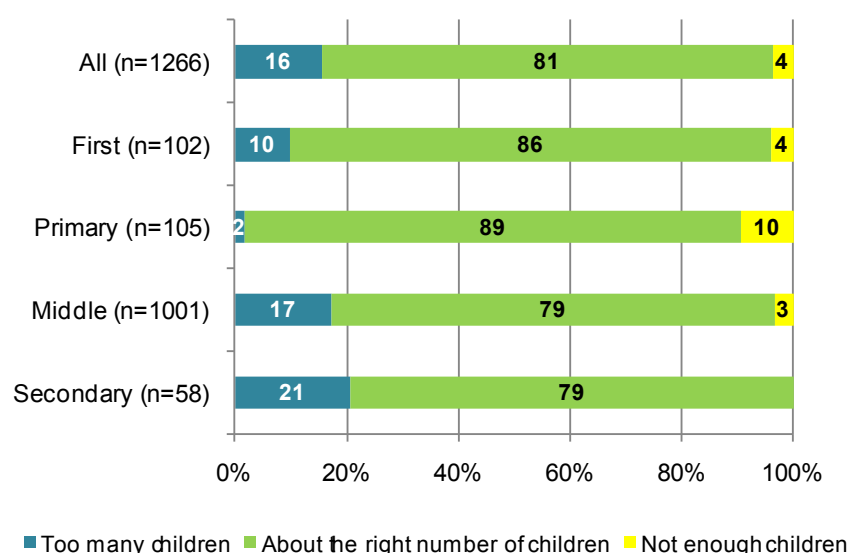
Figure 4.1.9 presents the findings by school type with Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 aggregated and again, it is the primary school findings that are notably different from the other school types. A chi-square test of independence (Figure 4.1.10) confirmed

that the differences between middle school and primary school respondents in Years 5 and 6 were significant and the effect size was small (Cramer's V = .250) but nearing the .30 threshold for a medium effect (Pallant, 2010, p.220).

Figure 4.1.9: Pupils' views on the number of children at their school – Years 5&6 and Years 7&8 by school type

Figure 4.1.10: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and perceptions of the number of children

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	41.74	.000 Significant	2	667	.250	Small effect
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	2.98	.226 Not significant	2	469	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)

As a final analysis of the questions which relate to pupils' perceptions of the size of their school, I decided to check how far pupils' perceptions might be related to the actual size of the school. The sample size for middle schools was the only subset of the pupils' survey data which was large enough to sustain these analyses. The three middle schools involved in the pupils' survey were allocated to either a 'small school' or 'large school' category based on the numbers on roll (NOR) at the time the sample

selection was conducted[5]. School A had a total NOR of 590, school B, 616, and school C, 388. At this time Dorset's middle schools ranged in size from 274 – 637 pupils, therefore I decided to allocate school C to the 'small school' category and schools A and B to the 'large school' category. Unfortunately, school C had only administered the survey to selected classes so although their total on roll was 388, only 86 pupils completed a survey, though they did represent classes across all four year groups. Schools A and B completed 420 and 513 surveys respectively giving a total of 933 responses from large middle schools. This has skewed my data somewhat when attempting any analyses based on school size with the 'large school' category outnumbering the 'small school' category by more than ten to one, but I felt it would still be interesting to explore any associations between actual school size and survey responses which relate to perceptions of school size.

To this end I conducted chi-square tests for independence on the following survey questions:

- What do you think of the size of your school? (too big / about the right size / too small)

- What do you think about the number of teachers at your school? (too many / about the right number / not enough)

- What do you think about the number of children there are at your school? (too many / about the right number / not enough)

An initial exploration of the data suggested that there was little difference in the proportion of respondents from large and small schools giving each response to the first two of these questions, and the chi-square test confirmed that the differences were not significant (χ^2=3.05 and p=.218 for the size of school question and χ^2=.108 and p=.947 for number of teachers). A greater proportion of pupils from small schools than large schools said there were not enough children at their school (Figure 4.1.11)

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[5] Source: DCSF Annual Schools Census data, January 2006

and the chi-square results confirmed that the finding was significant at the p<.05 level

and the Cramer's V statistic suggested a small effect (Figure 4.1.12).

Figure 4.1.11: Middle school pupils' views on the number of children at their school – by size of school
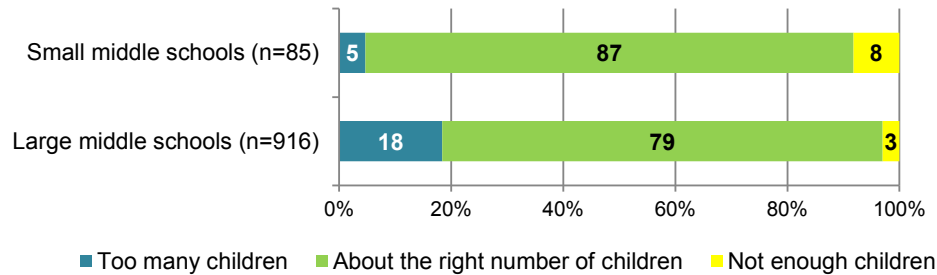

Figure 4.1.12: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between middle school size and perceptions of the number of children

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Large / small middle schools	15.61	.000 Significant	2	1001	.125	Small effect

These findings seem to suggest that, other than for the number of other children at the

school, actual school size is not directly associated with children's perceptions of

school size. It must be remembered that my data are heavily skewed towards the

larger middle schools so failure to attain significance might be related to the unequal

sample sizes, also while the smallest school in my sample has been categorised as a

'small school', the numbers on roll are more than 100 above what was the smallest

middle school in the county at the time, so it might be that my data does not genuinely

represent a small school – merely that that school is the smallest participating school.

Box 4.1: Key findings on school size

- Years 7 and 8 pupils in middle schools were more likely than those at secondary school to say that their school is too small.**

- When viewed by year group, there was a clear pattern among middle school respondents for the proportion saying the school is too small to increase as the year groups progressed, rising from 5% of Year 5 pupils to 30% of Year 8s.

- There was evidence of a slight trend for middle school pupils to become increasing less likely to say that there are too many teachers in their school as the year groups progressed, and a chi-square test confirmed that there is an association between school type and views on this issue for the Years 7 and 8 cohorts with middle school pupils less likely than secondary pupils to say there are too many teachers.**

- Years 5 and 6 primary pupils were less likely than their counterparts at middle school to say their school has too many children.**

** Denotes findings confirmed as significant by statistical tests.

4.2 Teaching staff

Headteachers were asked about the extent to which children at their school are taught by subject-specialist teachers as opposed to general class teachers. It should be noted, however, that this is regarded as one of the more contentious aspects of the middle school, even defining a 'specialist teacher' in the context of middle school is problematic given the multiple functions, both pastoral and subject-related, teachers are expected to perform (Taylor and Garson, 1982). A key issue facing middle schools during their inception (and ever since) has been how they can remain small enough to provide all that is good about primary education, as advocated by the Plowden Report, (1967), but also be large enough for subject-specialist teaching to be viable (Gorwood, 1994). This dilemma was described by a participant in Hargreaves's case study work as "the agony of the middle school" (1986, p.117). This is illustrated by the description given by the headteacher of a 9-13 middle school in Bradford of the thinking at the time of the school's establishment on the recruitment of subject-specialist teachers: "It is obvious from the number of posts available that there is no place in the school for the single-subject teacher, though we do need the specialist knowledge he has at his command. He will play many roles at the school." (Nicholson, 1970, p.169).

The headteachers' and teachers' survey in my research attempted to gauge the extent of subject-specialist teaching across the different school types and, for middle schools, across the year groups that make up the school. There was little difference in the extent of use of subject-specialist teachers between first schools and primary or junior schools. Middle, secondary and upper school headteachers were asked which subjects were taught by subject-specialists. Unsurprisingly, all subjects listed were taught by subject-specialist teachers in both secondary and upper schools.

A survey of 9-13 middle schools conducted by HMI during the 1979-80 academic year found that the majority of the 48 schools surveyed, provided children with a transition to subject-specialist teaching by reducing the use of class teachers and increasing the exposure to subject-specialist teaching as children progress through the year groups and the authors suggested that it would be beneficial to introduce a greater proportion of subject-specialist teaching for children as young as 10 (HMI, 1983). Responses from middle school headteachers to the current survey suggest that this is still the case in today's middle schools. Subject-specialist teaching in participating schools is generally phased in as children move from the lower to upper years at the school, particularly for core subjects where most middle school headteachers indicated that subject-specialists taught children in the upper years at the school (Figure 4.2.1 – note though that the data presented in the figure is based on responses from just four middle schools). Children in some participating middle schools are not taught by subject-specialist teachers for religious education, history and geography and all headteachers said subject-specialists teach design and technology, music and physical education across all year groups.

Figure 4.2.1: Extent of use of subject-specialist teachers - middle schools only

Subject	No subject-specialists	Subject specialists in <u>upper</u> years only	Subject-specialists in <u>all</u> years
English		✓✓✓	✓
Maths		✓✓✓	✓
Science		✓✓✓	✓
History	✓	✓✓	✓
Geography	✓	✓✓	✓
Religious education	✓✓✓	✓	
Modern foreign languages		✓	✓✓✓
ICT		✓	✓✓✓
Design and technology			✓✓✓✓
Physical education			✓✓✓✓
Art and design		✓	✓✓✓
Music			✓✓✓✓

Each tick represents one of the four participating middle schools

The extent to which this 'phasing in' of subject-specialist teaching forms a gradual introduction is debatable, as Hargreaves puts it: "Have [middle schools] secured a smooth transition in curricular experience at age 11, or have they perpetuated a sudden break?" (1986, p.118). More recent research by researchers at Keele University on behalf of the National Middle Schools' Forum indicates among middle schools participating in their research, this sudden step up between Years 6 and 7 is less evident than in the 1983 HMI research (Denning et al., 1998). In the Keele research, the extent of use of subject-specialist teachers (measured by the proportion of participating schools that used subject-specialist teachers half the time or more) increased apparently fairly smoothly with each year group, though there was substantially more widespread use of subject-specialist teachers in each comparable year group reported among middle deemed secondary schools (usually for the 9-13 age range) compared to middle deemed primary schools (usually for children aged 8-12).

It is possible that the introduction of the National Curriculum and other changes in educational policy over the last two or three decades have necessitated a more secondary school approach to middle years schooling, and this might also explain why there are now more middle schools for the 9-13 age range than for 8-12 year olds –

which at one stage had outnumbered the 9-13 schools. In their follow-up work to the research on school to school transfers which formed part of the original ORACLE work, Galton and Pell (2002) found an increasingly secondary-influenced teaching style among Year 6 pupils at primary schools. This is the opposite reaction to easing the transfer at age 11 than would have been advocated three or four decades ago when there was more likely to be a primary ethos in Year 7 to help pupils adjust to the transfer rather than a downward spread of secondary pedagogy to prepare pupils for the secondary environment (Galton et al., 2002, p.131).

In the middle school I attended in the 1980s, the first two years of the school were taught by class teachers (except for PE and music) and we were physically located in a specified area of the school, and then the final two years were taught predominantly by subject-specialists, and we were moved to a different part of the building; in all but name and site it was as if we were starting a different school at age 11 when we moved up to the third year (what would now be called Year 7). This is the type of arrangement Hargreaves (1986) is suggesting falls short of a *gradual* introduction to secondary teaching, however, while teaching arrangements might suddenly change for the 11 year old, this still does not represent the complete change the 11 year old must go through in the two-tier system. Even where lower and upper years of the school are separated in this sense, the middle school pupil deals with the shift to subject-specialist teaching within a familiar environment among staff and peers they know, in a school size they are used to and on a site (if not the same parts of the site or building) they have been attending for two years. This must provide the familiarity and reassurances needed to cope with this change better than they might have done if it was accompanied by a whole raft of changes which form part of moving to a new school.

The extent to which the middle school provides a gradual transition to secondary schooling is discussed further in Chapter 7, but a question in the headteachers' and teachers' surveys sought to establish how far participants in this research felt the three-tier system was achieving this gradual introduction. Overall nearly two-thirds of headteachers and teachers agreed to some extent with the statement: *the three-tier*

system helps to gradually introduce children to the teaching and learning environment of a secondary school (n=91). Respondents who currently work in the three-tier system were more likely to agree with the statement than those in the two-tier system (81% of three-tier compared to 44% of two-tier system respondents), though the issue of respondent motivation needs to be considered here, it is not clear how far respondents tend to defend their own system (especially in the context of area-by-area reviews of the three-tier system being conducted across Dorset), this issue is discussed further in Chapter 9.

It is interesting to note that even within the three-tier schooling system, in practice the major turning point for introducing subject-specialist teaching seems to be around age 11. This was also evident in the Keele research (Denning et al., 1998) which found that Year 7 marked the point where for core subjects the vast majority of teaching is undertaken by subject-specialists. In my research, the headteachers' and teachers' questionnaires asked respondents to state the age at which they believe children are generally ready to be taught by subject-specialists rather than class teachers for most subjects. Figure 4.2.2 illustrates that while the range of responses was from 7 to 13 years old, the majority of responses fell between ages 9-11 (both the median and mean values were 10 and the mode was 11). Respondents from schools in the three-tier system gave a slightly higher average (mean) age at which they felt children were generally ready for increased subject-specialist teaching of 10.2 years, compared to 9.8 years among two-tier system respondents. Among three-tier system respondents there was a large constituency of support for age 11 as the ideal age for introducing subject-specialist teaching (38% - higher than the 32% of two-tier system respondents), this provides further support for the notion of a split at age 11 regardless of the schooling system. Note that 81 respondents provided a valid answer to this question, and where an age range rather than a specific age was provided, e.g. "age 9-10", the lowest value was taken as the response, and where a year group was provided, e.g. "Year 6", the age of children at the beginning of that year was taken as the response.

Figure 4.2.2: Age at which children are generally ready to be taught by subject-specialists - headteachers and teachers, by schooling system
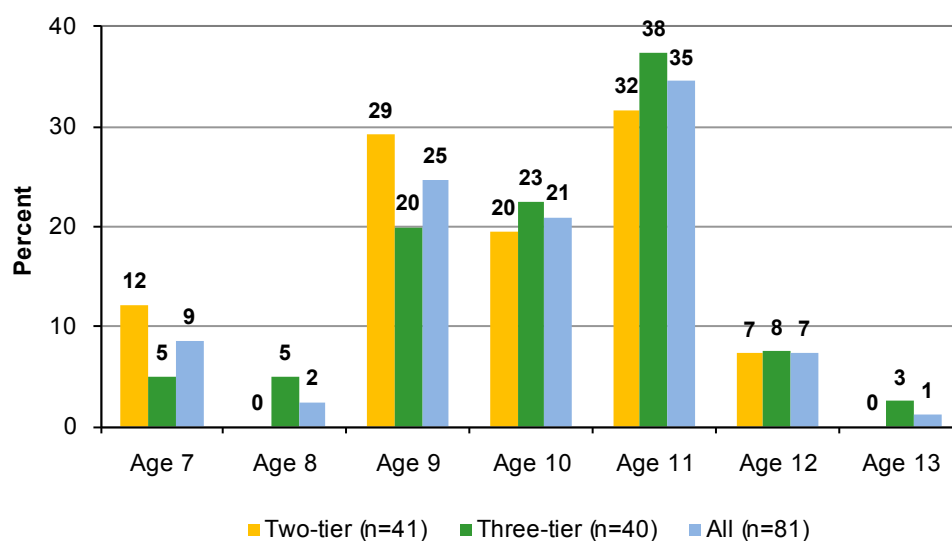
In the questionnaire for parents of children at Dorset schools, respondents were asked how far they agree with the statement: *my child is taught by teachers who are experts in their subjects.* The majority of respondents agreed to some degree with the statement, and only a couple of parents of children in primary phase schools in the two-tier system disagreed (n=29).

Box 4.2: Key findings on teaching staff

- Among the four participating middle schools humanities subjects were the least likely to be taught by subject-specialists and the core subjects of English, maths and science were taught by subject-specialists in the upper years only of middle school in three of the four schools, suggesting a notional divide within the middle school between Year 6 and Year 7, mimicking to some extent the transfer from primary to secondary in the two-tier system.*

- Age 11 was the most frequently cited age at which teachers and headteachers thought children were generally ready for increased subject-specialist teaching - regardless of which schooling system respondents work in, providing further evidence of a perpetuation of the marked change in the educational environment at age 11 within the three-tier system (n=81).*

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

4.3 The arrangement of teaching groups

Government guidelines recommend the use of ability-based teaching groups for secondary aged children (e.g. Department for Education and Employment, 1997), but it is argued that such advice is aimed at improving attainment at the neglect of other aspects of children's schooling experience (Ireson and Hallam, 2005). Hallam and Ireson (2007) conducted a survey of secondary school pupils which found that large proportions of children who were set by ability were unhappy with their allocated grouping, many of whom wished to move upwards due to the perceived unsuitability of the work. So while it is tempting to view ability-based groupings as an inherent part of secondary style education, it must be considered in the context of inconclusive evidence as to its role in raising achievement (Hallam and Ireson, 2007) and in the light of suggestions that it does not always provide the most satisfactory educational experience for the pupils involved.

These concerns aside, the fact that setting by ability in some form or another seems to be embedded in our schooling system makes it a useful exercise in comparing the educational experience offered by different school types to gauge the extent of use of such teaching arrangements. In their survey of middle schools, Denning et al. (1998) found evidence of widespread setting by ability in English and maths across all year groups, and also in science and modern languages for Key Stage 3 pupils. The headteachers' survey in my research also sought information on the extent to which children are taught in groups set by ability rather than in mixed ability groups across all school types. For headteachers at first and primary schools (n=42), the question asked whether children were set by ability for all or most subjects, taught in mixed ability groups for all or most subjects, or whether they were taught in both mixed ability and ability-based groups. None of the primary or first school headteachers reported widespread setting by ability but respondents were split roughly half and half between predominantly mixed ability teaching groups and a fairly equal combination of mixed ability and setting; there was little difference in the proportions of responses from each school type. Those headteachers who reported a mixture of teaching arrangements were asked to specify which subjects were taught in groups set by ability and their

comments indicated that literacy and numeracy classes were the most likely to be taught in groups set by ability in these school types.

Middle, secondary and upper school headteachers (n=11) were asked to indicate for each of the main subjects, whether they were taught mostly in mixed ability groups, mostly in ability-based groups or a combination of both. A variety of arrangements were reported with no discernible patterns relating to school type, and given that respondent numbers were so low (four middle school headteachers, five from secondary schools and just two upper school headteachers), responses are not reported here since it is likely that teaching arrangements are dictated by individual circumstances at the school (such as numbers on roll and staff numbers and expertise) rather than down to the particular type of school, it would therefore be unwise to make generalisations about the typical arrangement of teaching groups at each type of school based on data from this survey alone.

Teachers were asked at what age they felt children were ready to be taught in groups set by ability for most or all subjects rather than mixed ability groupings. This elicited a wider range of responses (from 5 years to 14 years old) than the question about subject-specialist teaching (shown in Figure 4.2.2), though the mean value was 9.7 and both the median and mode values were 11. There was little variation in the responses given to this question when viewed by whether respondents worked in the two-tier or three-tier system: the mean age for those in the two-tier system was 9.7, and for those in the three-tier system, 9.6. Note that 31 teachers provided a valid answer to this question, and (as was the case for the similar question on the age at which children are ready for subject-specialist teaching) where an ambiguous answer was provided by a respondent (such as an age range or a year group), the lowest value was taken as the response.

Teachers were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their views on the age at which children are generally ready to be taught primarily in groups set by ability. While many took the opportunity to explain the situation at their school, some more general comments were made on the desirability of such arrangements in the context of

schooling systems involving middle schools. Two teachers pointed out that the middle school provides a gradual introduction to ability-based teaching groups throughout the four years at the school. The surveys of middle schools conducted in the early 1980s (Taylor and Garson, 1982, HMI, 1983) found that overall the use of teaching groups set by ability increases quite dramatically in the third year of 9-13 middle schools (Year 7), this again suggests that the notion of a *gradual* introduction to secondary teaching methods might not reflect the reality given that in many middle schools there are substantial changes in the teaching and learning environment at age 11.

Box 4.3: Key findings on the arrangement of teaching groups

- Headteachers reported a variety of arrangements for the grouping of children for teaching purposes with primary and first schools (n=42) tending to set by ability for literacy and numeracy sessions and middle, secondary and upper schools (n=11) employing more predominantly ability-based groupings.*

- When asked at which age children were generally ready to be taught in groups set by ability for most subjects, there was further evidence of a watershed at age 11, nearly a third of teachers opted for this age though responses varied between five and 14 years and there were no discernible trends according to the schooling system or type of school the respondents worked within (n=31).*

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

4.4 Equipment and facilities

Headteachers were presented with a list of facilities and asked to indicate which were available to all children at the school, which were not available, and which were available only to children in specific year groups. The aim of this question was to assess whether children may have access to more specialised facilities at an earlier stage in either the three-tier or the two-tier system, however, headteachers' responses indicate that among the respondent schools at least, there is little difference across the two systems and the low number of schools involved (especially middle, upper and secondary schools) makes it difficult to draw any conclusions based on these data. Middle schools were also asked to indicate whether any of their facilities were made available only to pupils in the upper years. Of the five participating schools just one said that their science laboratories were used by Years 7 and 8 pupils only, thus there

was little evidence of differential provision of facilities between the upper and lower years among participating middle schools.

Denning et al. (1998) also gathered data on facilities in their survey of middle schools and found similar levels of provision as the current survey, though sports and ICT facilities were more widely available among middle schools participating in the current survey than among those in the 1998 research. There has been massive investment in school buildings since the 1998 research (most notably via the then Labour Government's *Building Schools for the Future* scheme launched in 2004, which has since been abolished by the incoming Coalition Government (Curtis, 2010)), so improvements are to be expected. It should also be noted when interpreting these findings that while nationally, on their inception many middle schools were accommodated in existing school buildings which had been adapted from primary or junior use (Edwards, 1972), according to my interview with an officer from the local authority, a substantial number of Dorset's middle schools were purpose-built, therefore might be more likely to report good and suitable facilities than perhaps middle schools across the country are.

The survey for teachers asked respondents whether they thought children aged 9-13 were more likely to have 'access to a range of specialist facilities' in the two-tier schooling system or the three-tier system. Opinion was divided (just over one-third of teachers thought such access was more likely in the two-tier system and just under half thought it more likely in the three-tier system – n=36), and there was little difference in proportions giving each response when viewed by the schooling system they currently work in.

The survey for parents or carers of children currently in Dorset schools asked them to evaluate a variety of aspects of their child's school including 'the facilities and equipment available'. All parents (n=29) rated the facilities at their child's school as 'good' or 'fair' with the exception of one parent of a primary school pupil who said facilities were 'poor'.

In the discussion group held with former pupils at Dorset schools, the issue of specialist facilities was discussed and it emerged that the participant who had attended a middle school had access to specialist facilities (such as science laboratories) at an earlier age than those who had gone through the two-tier system; the middle school she attended allowed access to all facilities across all year groups so she did not experience the sudden change at age 11 when other facilities are made available which many middle school pupils experience. Those who attended a secondary school from age 11 commented that they were not at all intimidated by the range of specialist facilities available to them which they had not experienced in their primary schools, this sudden change in their teaching environment had not caused any anxiety, indeed, most were excited at the prospect of being taught with access to specialist facilities and equipment. The quality of facilities available in the secondary schools attended by discussion group participants was to some extent determined by the subject specialist status of the school; one went to a performing arts specialist school and a couple of others attended sports specialist schools and they described what they felt to be superior facilities provided for these subjects.

Box 4.4: Key findings on equipment and facilities

- A comparison of the availability of specialist facilities and equipment across the five participating middle schools provided little evidence of widespread limitation of certain facilities to the upper years of middle schools only.*

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

4.5 The learning environment

A number of questions across the different surveys aimed to assess the learning environment and to identify any notable differences between the different schooling systems.

The pupils' survey started with a series of questions on pupils' attitudes towards their school. The set of seven questions was used to derive a scale which attempts to gauge how positive pupils are about their school. The set was then further divided into

four questions which addressed educational aspects of the school and four questions which related to the extent to which children felt the school supported their social development and emotional well-being (one of the seven questions addressed both aspects of the school so is included in both scales). The questions that make up the educational scale are:

- Do you find out new things in lessons?

- Do you do well in your school work?

- Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with your work?

- Do your teachers know your name? (this question is also included in the social development / emotional well-being scale)

Further details of how this scale was derived and its reliability are included in Appendix 7. Figure 4.5.1 shows respondents' scores on this set of questions, a low score corresponds to more positive responses (i.e. more likely to have responded 'always' or 'most of the time' to each question) while a high score indicates more negative responses (more likely to have answered 'never' or 'hardly ever' to each question). Only pupils who had answered all four questions were allocated a score, 98% of respondents had done so, therefore very few respondents were excluded from this analysis. It appears from Figure 4.5.1 that children in schools in the two-tier system are slightly more likely to have lower scores on educational aspects of the school, thus they are more positive about these aspects than their counterparts in the three-tier system. However, an examination of the mean scores shows that the difference is relatively small: for respondents in the two-tier system, the mean score is 7.5, while three-tier system pupils recorded a mean score of 8.0 (the overall mean was 8.0). Based on this set of questions, it seems any difference between schooling systems in how positively the educational experience is viewed by pupils is very minor, but does favour the two-tier system. It should be noted that the majority of respondents to the pupil survey represent middle schools so the groups being compared are not of equal size. Figure 4.5.2 shows the mean, standard deviation and number of cases for each

type of school for the educational experience scores, a larger sample size and more

equal numbers across the school types would have produced more robust data and

perhaps enabled a greater degree of confidence in the conclusions drawn.

Figure 4.5.1: Distribution of pupils' 'scores' on educational aspects of their school – by schooling system
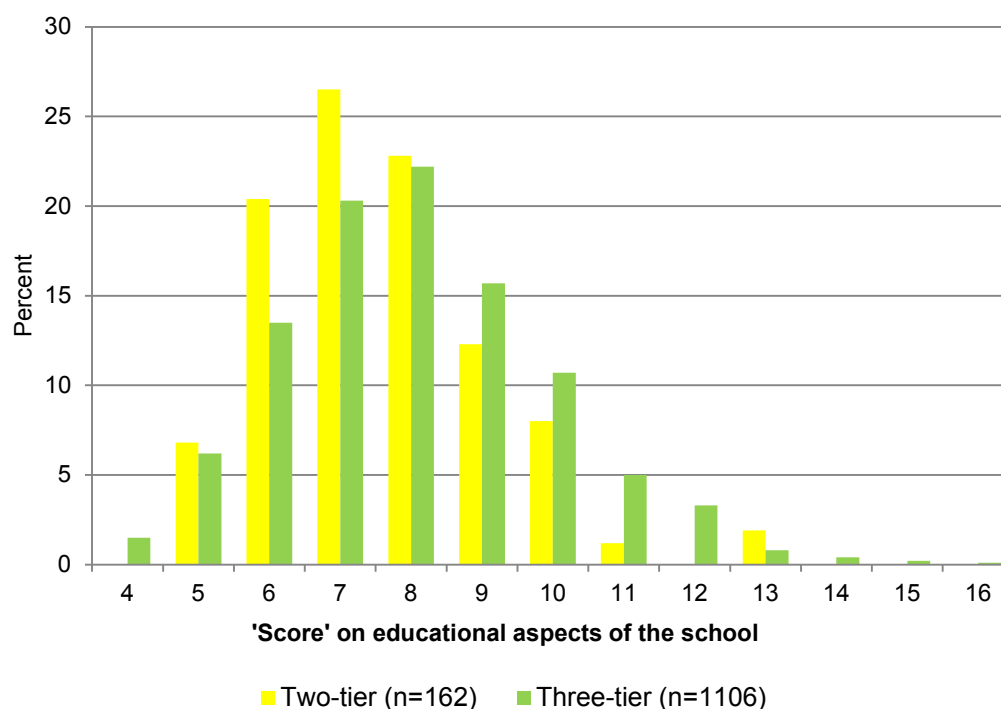

Figure 4.5.2: Means, standard deviations and number of cases for pupils' scores on educational aspects of their school – by school type

School type	Mean	Standard deviation	No. of cases (n)
First	7.56	1.64	101
Primary	7.35	1.693	105
Middle	8.06	1.916	1005
Secondary	7.88	1.31	57
All schools	**7.95**	**1.867**	**1268**

The data generated by the educational scale were further analysed by conducting a

one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the extent to which any variance

between the school types compares to variance *within* the school types, thus providing

an assessment of how far we can attribute differences to the type of school (the

independent variable) or whether they are simply due to chance (Pallant, 2010, p.249).

Figure 4.5.3 presents the findings of the ANOVA and it can be seen that middle school

responses were significantly different at the $p < .05$ level from both first and primary

respondents, though the mean differences are relatively low, particularly for the middle

against first schools comparison. The difference between middle and secondary

schools was not found to be statistically significant. The direction of the mean scores

suggests that middle school pupils achieved slightly higher mean scores which

corresponds to a less positive attitude towards this aspect of their school experience.

The effect size using eta squared was 0.015 which can be interpreted as a small effect

(Cohen, 1988, cited in: Pallant, 2010).

Figure 4.5.3: One way analysis of variance of the educational scale by school type

Description of difference	Mean difference	Significance (p)	Degrees of freedom (df)
Middle school mean scores are different from **first** school mean scores on the educational scale	.495	.026 Significant	3
Middle school mean scores are different from **primary** school mean scores on the educational scale	.707	.001 Significant	3

The mean scores were calculated for Years 5 and 6 pupils and Years 7 and 8 pupils

grouped together. Figure 4.5.4 shows the scores and it can be seen that Years 7 and

8 middle school pupils recorded the highest mean score suggesting that they are

slightly more negative about the educational aspects of their school experience. The

Years 5 and 6 middle school pupils achieved the next highest mean score – higher

than either the primary or secondary cohorts – though the actual difference is quite

low.

Figure 4.5.4: Means, standard deviations and number of cases for pupils' scores on educational aspects of their school – by school type, Years 5&6 and Years 7&8 grouped

School type / year groups	Mean	Standard deviation	No. of cases (n)
Y5&6 Primary	7.31	1.680	90
Y5&6 Middle	7.89	1.804	578
Y7&8 Middle	8.29	2.038	427
Y7&8 Secondary	7.74	1.364	43

To further explore the nature of differences between the educational scale scores, independent samples t-tests were used to compare the mean scores for Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 pupils by school type. For both the Years 5 and 6 and the Years 7 and 8 groups a significant difference (at the $p<.05$ level) was found in the mean scores between the two school types being compared (Figure 4.5.5). While the ANOVA based on school type groupings found no significant difference between middle and secondary schools, the t-test found that when the middle school is further grouped into lower and upper years, the difference between middle schools and secondary schools is significant, and the difference between primary and middle schools evident in the ANOVA is confirmed. Note though that the actual differences in terms of scores is relatively low and when the effect size is taken into account, only a small effect is evident – in both cases just over 1% of the variance in scores is accounted for by school type.

Figure 4.5.5: Independent samples t-test of the educational scale for Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 mean scores by school type

Description of difference	Mean difference	Significance (2-tailed)	t value (df)	Effect size (eta squared)
Y5&6 middle school mean scores are different from **Y5&6 primary** school mean scores on the educational scale	.580	.004 Significant	2.862 (666)	0.012 Small effect
Y7&8 middle school mean scores are different from **Y7&8 secondary** school mean scores on the educational scale	.544	.021 Significant	2.362 (62.7)	0.012 Small effect

Looking separately at the responses to the four questions that make up the educational experience scale according to school type (Figures 4.5.6, 4.5.9, 4.5.12, 4.5.15), it can be seen that middle school pupils were the least likely to say they find out new things in lessons 'always' or 'most of the time' (when these two responses are combined), suggesting that they may not be experiencing the same levels of academic challenge as children in other schools. Middle school respondents were also less likely to say they do well in their school work 'always' or 'most of the time' than their

counterparts in secondary schools, but those in primary schools recorded the smallest proportion of such responses: 63% said they did well in their school work 'always' or 'most of the time'. As might be expected, the proportion of respondents saying their teachers 'always' know their name decreases as the school size increases (Figure 4.5.12), though the difference between two-tier and three-tier schooling systems was less marked than was the difference between primary-phase schools (first and primary) and secondary-phase schools (middle and secondary). The differences in response patterns to these four questions between the different school types were examined further with a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test and in none of the four questions was there found to be a statistically significant difference between the school types.

Figures 4.5.7, 4.5.10, 4.5.13 and 4.5.16 show responses to these questions by school type but with Year 5 and 6 grouped together and Years 7 and 8 grouped to enable a direct comparison of responses by school type for the same age ranges. The graphs indicate that there might be some differences between the school types so chi-square tests of independence were then applied to explore whether there was an association between school type and responses to each of the four questions when grouped by age range. The results are shown in Figures 4.5.8, 4.5.11, 4.5.14 and 4.5.17. Note that in many instances a Fisher's exact test was used rather than chi-square due to the data failing to meet the criteria necessary for a chi-square test that no more than 20% of cells have an expected count of less than 5. A significant association was evident between school type and responses for the question *do your teachers know your name?* where among the Years 5 and 6 group a small effect was noted (with primary school respondents more likely than middle school respondents to say this is the case). A significant association was also apparent among the Years 5 and 6 group for the question *do your teachers help you if you are stuck with your work?* Again, primary pupils were more likely to say they received help.

Figure 4.5.6: Do you find out new things in lessons? Pupils' responses – by school type
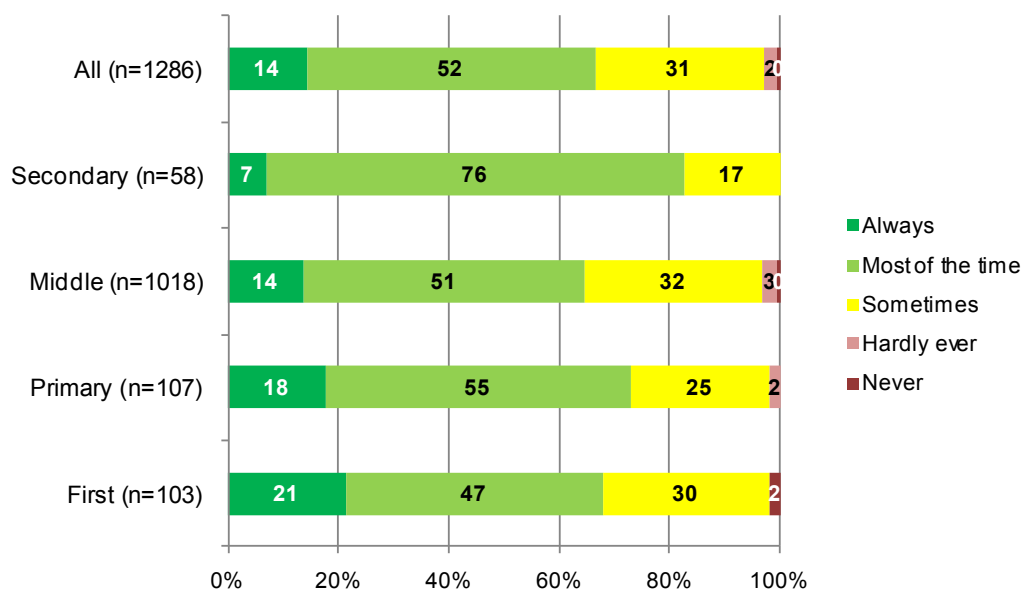
Figure 4.5.7: Do you find out new things in lessons? Pupils' responses – by school type, Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 aggregated
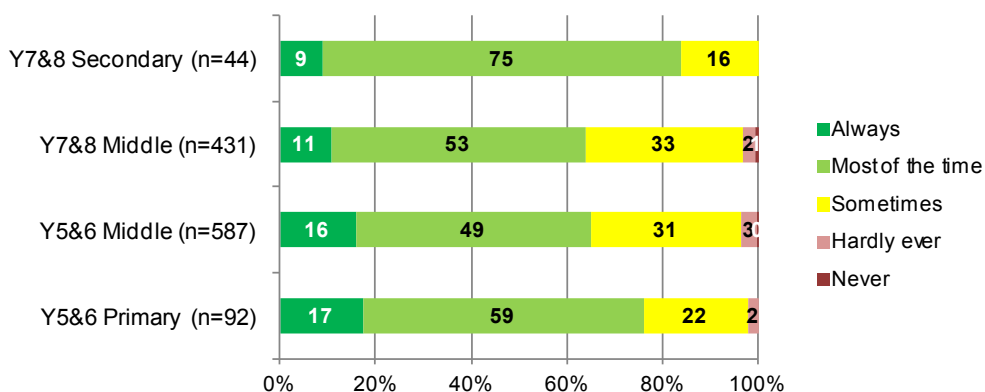
Figure 4.5.8: Results of Fisher's exact test to measure the association between school type and pupils' views on whether they find out new things in lessons
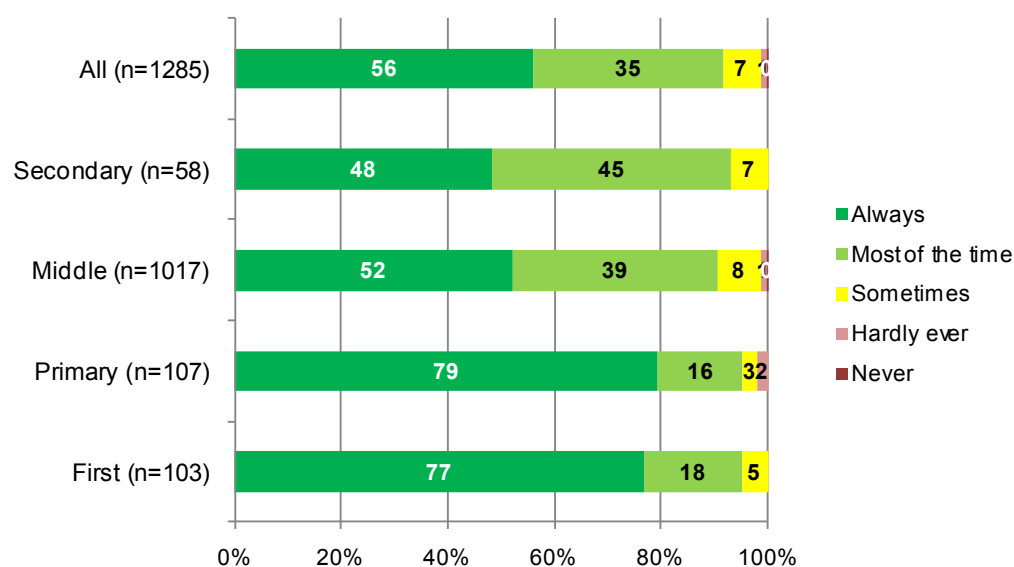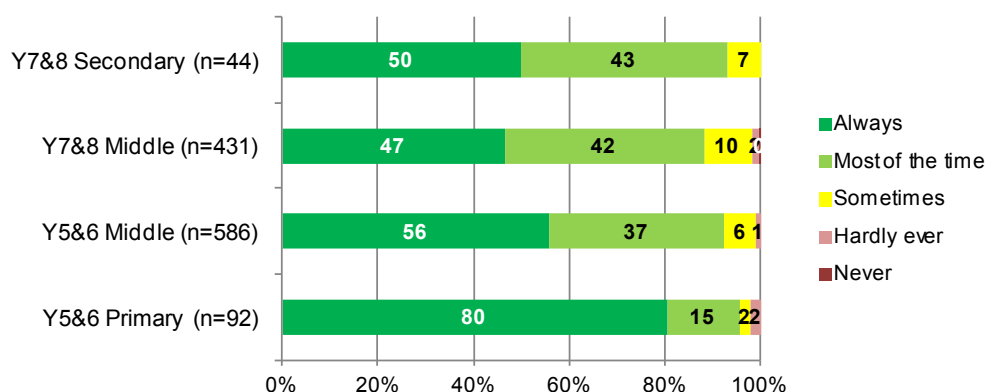
Categories tested	Fisher's exact test value	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	4.677	.358 Not significant	679	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	7.580	.091 Not significant	475	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)

NB Fisher's exact tests have been used rather than chi-square where more than 20% of cells had an expected count of <5

Figure 4.5.9: Do you do well in your school work? Pupils' responses – by school type
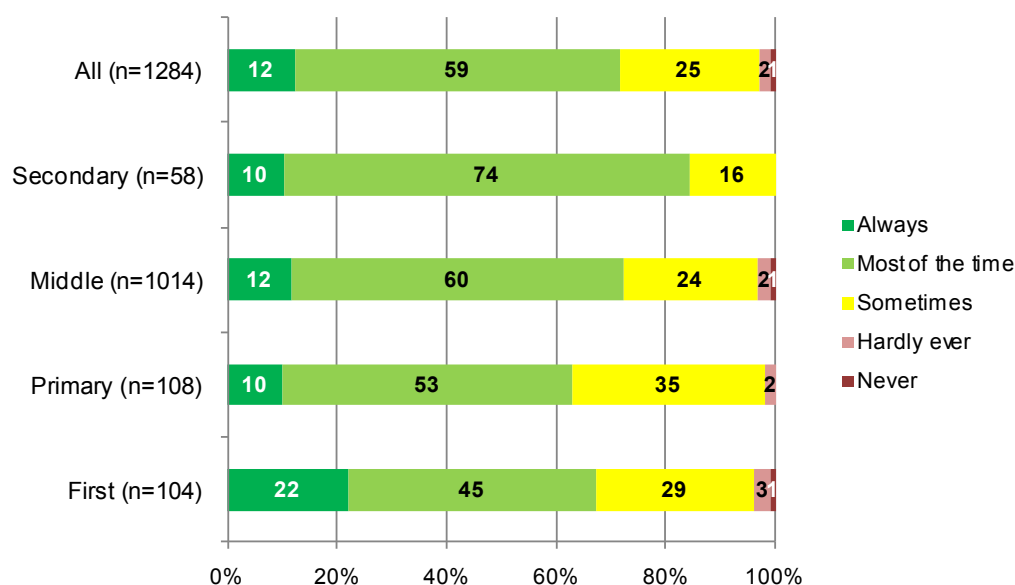
Figure 4.5.10: Do you do well in your school work? Pupils' responses – by school type, Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 aggregated
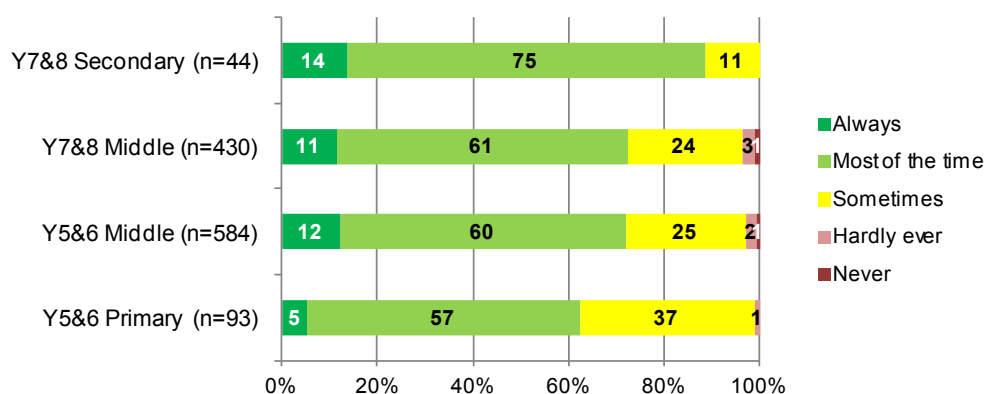
Figure 4.5.11: Results of Fisher's exact test to measure the association between school type and pupils' views on whether they do well in their school work

Categories tested	Fisher's exact test value	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	7.635	.085 Not significant	677	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	4.820	.255 Not significant	474	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)

NB Fisher's exact tests have been used rather than chi-square where more than 20% of cells had an expected count of <5

Figure 4.5.12: Do your teachers know your name? Pupils' responses – by school type

Figure 4.5.13: Do your teachers know your name? Pupils' responses – by school type, Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 aggregated

Figure 4.5.14: Results of chi-square / Fisher's exact test to measure the association between school type and pupils' views on whether teachers know their name

Categories tested	Fisher's exact / chi-square test value	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	22.150 (chi-square)	.000 Significant	678	.181	Small effect
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	1.296 (Fisher's exact)	.941 Not significant	475	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)

NB Fisher's exact tests have been used rather than chi-square where more than 20% of cells had an expected count of <5

Pupils' responses to the question 'do your teachers help you if you are stuck with work?' (Figure 4.5.9) illustrate the argument put forward by some that middle schools keep children in a primary environment for longer: 47% of primary pupils answered 'always' to this, as did 31% of middle school respondents, but just 12% of those from a secondary school said this was 'always' the case. Whether this is down to teachers being unwilling to help, pupils being afraid to ask for help or whether it is a reflection of a greater emphasis on independent learning in secondary schools (or a combination of these) would require further research. Interestingly, when parents were asked to evaluate the help and support their child is offered with their school work, the reverse of the trend evident among pupils' responses was observed: parents of children at upper and secondary were more likely than those at middle, primary or first schools to rate this support as 'good', indeed, none of the parents of children at either primary or first schools said the help and support they receive is good. This suggests a difference between learners' and parents' perceptions of academic support on offer at school, though the small participant base for the parents' survey (n=29) makes it inadvisable to draw conclusions based on these data.

Figure 4.5.15: Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with work? Pupils' responses – by school type
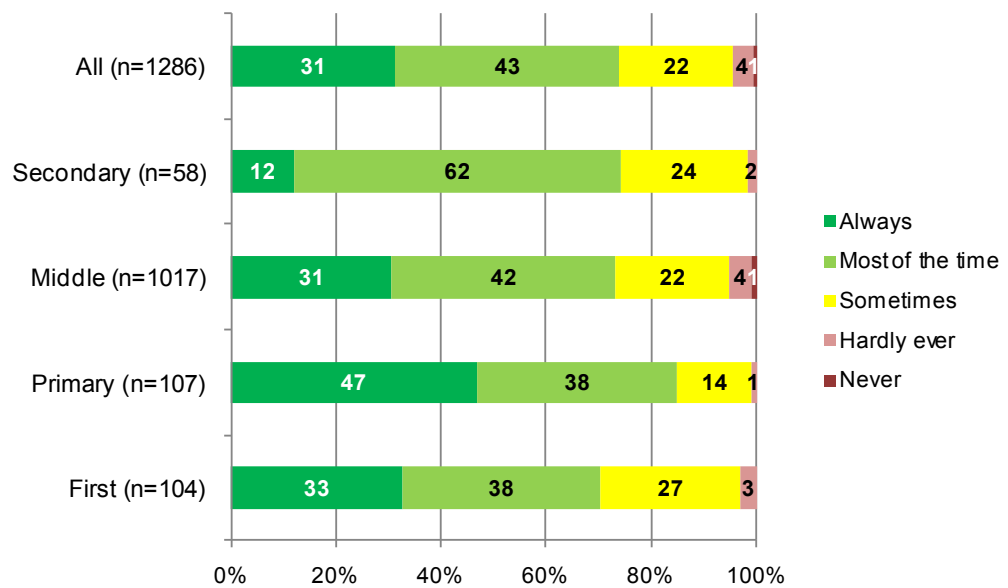
Figure 4.5.16: Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with work? Pupils' responses – by school type
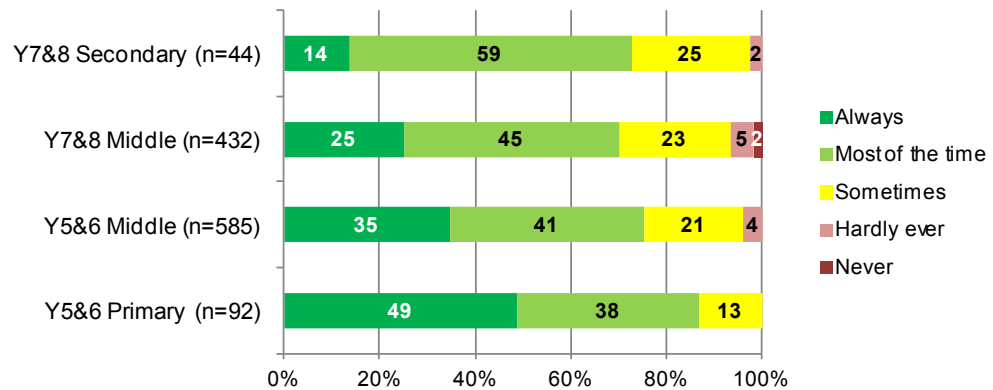

Figure 4.5.17: Results of chi-square / Fisher's exact test to measure the association between school type and pupils' views on whether teachers help them if they are stuck with their work

Categories tested	Fisher's exact / chi-square test value	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 (middle compared to primary)	10.888 (Fisher's exact)	.023 Significant	677	.125	Small effect
Years 7&8 (middle compared to secondary)	5.323 (chi-square)	.256 Not significant	476	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)

NB Fisher's exact tests have been used rather than chi-square where more than 20% of cells had an expected count of <5

Overall, those who completed the parents' survey tended to disagree to some extent with the statement 'the work my child is given is generally too easy for him/her', though parents of children at primary schools were the most likely to agree with this statement (just under a third agreed or strongly agreed). Once again though, there is little discernible evidence of any marked differences in parents' views between the three-tier and two-tier schooling systems, particularly when the small number of respondents is taken into account (n=29).

The teachers' survey presented a list of school-related concerns or experiences and respondents were asked to indicate whether each was more likely in the two-tier

schooling system, the three-tier system or whether they thought there was no difference. Two of the statements apply to the learning environment topic: 'disinterest in school work' and 'a 'dip' in performance on commencing Key Stage 3'. The majority of the 36 teachers who answered this question felt there was no difference in experiences of 'disinterest in school work' between the different schooling systems, though nearly a quarter of teachers currently working in a school within the three-tier system, thought that such disinterest would be more likely among 9-13 year olds going through the two-tier system. In terms of an alleged 'dip' in performance at the beginning of Key Stage 3 (sometimes referred to as the 'Year 7 dip' or 'Key Stage 3 dip'), respondents were more convinced that there are differences across the systems, with just under half of the 34 respondents saying this phenomenon was more likely among children in the two-tier system (as opposed to around one in five saying it was more likely in the three-tier system). When responses are viewed by the system the respondent works in, it is interesting that teachers in the three-tier system expressed more mixed views than two-tier teachers, among whom approximately half thought the Key Stage 3 dip is more likely among two-tier system pupils (compared to around a third of three-tier system teachers who thought this was the case).

Evidence from other research relating to the alleged dip in performance on commencing Key Stage 3 suggests that there is a link between the scheduled primary to secondary transfer and the Key Stage 3 dip (for example, Whitby et al., 2006), but there has been little research done specifically to explore whether the later age of transfer in the three-tier system avoids, minimises or delays the Key Stage 3 dip. In the ORACLE study follow-up, it was found that the age of transfer had less of an impact on pupils' attitudes and attainment than did the nature and characteristics of the destination school (Galton et al., 2002).

In my research, there was some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the Key Stage 3 dip is not so pronounced in the three-tier system and that it is simply delayed a little. This 'delay' is not a good thing with the transfer coming so close to the commencement of GCSEs given that there is little time to 'recover' before the start of Key Stage 4, particularly when much of the research evidence suggests that any

"bounce back" can take two to three years following a transfer dip (Whitby et al., 2006, p.39). During the interview I conducted with the LEA officer, it was acknowledged that in Dorset schools this is a greater issue for secondary schools but that there was potential for a similar dip to occur in the three-tier system at Year 5 and Year 9 when transfers take place.

Teachers were asked which schooling system they thought was most beneficial for the majority of children in terms of encouraging their educational / academic development. More than half of the 35 teachers who answered the question thought that a two-tier system with transfer to secondary school at age 11 was the most beneficial arrangement from an educational perspective. There were marked differences in opinions on this topic between teachers working in the two-tier system and those in the three-tier system. Among the latter group, approximately one-third thought the two-tier system was better while just over three-quarters of those working in the two-tier system felt that it is a superior system from the point of view of the educational offering. Interestingly, among respondents from schools within the two-tier system, there were more responses in favour of a three-tier system involving middle schools for ages 8-12 than for the system with middle schools for children aged 9-13. Of those who cited an 'other arrangement' one argued for a two-tier system but with the primary school separated into infants' and juniors' schools and the other respondent favoured a middle school system but had no preference between 8-12 and 9-13 middle schools.

Box 4.5: Key findings on the learning environment

- Based on a score derived from a set of four questions aimed at measuring how positively pupils view the educational aspects of their school, those from two-tier system schools recorded marginally more positive attitudes (based on the mean score) than those in three-tier system schools. Middle school respondents recorded the highest mean score on this scale, corresponding to more negative attitudes towards the educational experience at their school.

- A one-way analysis of variance on the mean scores on the educational experience scale compared the different school types and middle schools were found to be significantly different (p<.05) from both first and primary schools, but not significantly different from secondary schools, though in terms of actual scores the differences were fairly small.**

- Independent samples t-tests found that when Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 pupils were grouped together, there was a significant difference between the mean scores among middle and primary schools (for Years 5 and 6) and middle and secondary schools (for Years 7 and 8). In both instances the middle school pupils were more negative about the educational experience than their counterparts at other school types though again, the actual differences in terms of mean scores were quite small.**

- Years 5 and 6 primary pupils were more likely to say that their teachers know their name and that their teachers help them when they are stuck with their work than were their counterparts at middle schools.**

- The majority of teachers who completed the survey felt there was no difference between the two schooling systems in terms of the likelihood of children aged 9-13 experiencing *disinterest in school work* (n=36)*, however, relatively high proportions though it likely that children would experience *a dip in performance on commencing Key Stage 3* (n=34) and more teachers thought this was likely in the two-tier system than the three-tier, this might be due at least in part to the well-publicised and documented claims of a 'Year 7 dip' (or sometimes 'Year 8 dip').*

- When asked which schooling system they have a general preference for in terms of encouraging children's educational development, there was a much greater constituency of support for the system they currently work in from teachers in the two-tier system than those in the three-tier system – around a third of whom said they preferred the two-tier system. Only a small minority of two-tier system teachers preferred the three-tier system, and those who did, were more likely to favour an arrangement with 8-12 middle schools above that with 9-13 middle schools (n=35).*

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10
** Denotes findings confirmed as significant by statistical tests.

Chapter 5: The Social Environment

This chapter reports fieldwork findings which relate to the extent to which schools offer a supportive social environment and provide for children's emotional well-being. It begins with a discussion of the findings relating to relationships with pupils, teachers and other adults at the school and then goes on to review the assignment of responsibilities to pupils, issues of trust and pupils' perceptions of whether they are treated in an appropriate manner for their age. Meeting individual needs, behavioural issues and the availability and take-up of extra-curricular activities are also covered and the chapter ends with a discussion of the extent to which different school types might foster children's emotional well-being.

5.1 Relationships with pupils, teachers and other adults at the school

The survey for headteachers and teachers asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement: *most children treat staff with respect*. None of the 91 respondents disagreed to any extent with this, but the smallest proportion of 'strongly agree' responses came from staff at secondary schools within the two-tier system (just over a third of the secondary school respondents strongly agreed – representing four of the 11 secondary school respondents). Seven of the 10 middle school headteachers and teachers who answered the question strongly agreed with this statement. The HMI survey of 9-13 middle schools picked up on this issue and described good relationships in the middle schools both between pupils and teachers and among the pupils (HMI, 1983). In his response to the HMI survey, Michael Henley (who at the time was Northamptonshire's County Education Officer) claimed HMI had seriously understated this aspect of middle schools and described the situation in Northamptonshire's schools:

> "Central to our thinking in Northamptonshire about the middle school has been a view of the importance of children's attitudes and in turn group relationships and the inter-personal skills, all of which need to be expressed in circumstances that promote trust, self-esteem, group esteem and good images of adults in the minds of pupils" (Henley, 1984, p.90)

More recent research (Symonds, 2010) has corroborated this view of middle school pupil-teacher relationships, where there was a marked difference in pupils attitudes towards and perceptions of their relationships with teachers between the Year 7 participants at a middle and those at a secondary school. Middle school pupils described a friendly but respectful relationship with most of their teachers (what one respondent described as a cross between a friend and a parent) and familiarity was an important aspect of this relationship (both in terms of the fact that middle school children were in their third year at the school whereas secondary school Year 7s were new to the school, and due to the smaller number of teachers middle school pupils come into contact with on a day to day basis), and it is the quality of this relationship which emerged as a major contributor to pupils' attitudes towards school (Symonds, 2010).

Though the middle school in the USA covers a slightly different age range to most English versions (typically ages 11-14, though they can cover any age range between 10 and 15), it is notable that the American National Middle School Association singled out as one of their fundamental principles of successful middle level schools: "an adult advocate for every student" (NMSA, 2003, p.7) and in their companion publication stress that a cornerstone of this is "students being known and knowing that they are known by adults in the building" (Burkhardt and Kane, 2005, p.67). A series of questions in my research attempted to gauge the extent to which this is put into practice in the English middle school, and in turn, compare this to the situation in the two-tier schooling system. To this end, questions about whether teachers know the names of children, and about the extent to which children have an adult they could talk to at the school about non-academic issues and problems were included in the surveys.

Headteachers and teachers were asked how far they agree with the statement: *teaching staff know the names of the majority of children they come into contact with*. Most of the 91 respondents agreed to some extent but as might be expected the proportion of 'strongly agree' responses decreases as the age ranges of the schools increase. This is most likely due to the move away from class teaching and towards

subject-specialist teaching as children get older and due to the larger size of schools. A similar pattern of decreased likelihood of teachers knowing their name as the school age range increases was evident in a parallel question asked of pupils in their survey: *do your teachers know your name?* This is reported in Chapter 4, Figure 4.5.12.

A question was included in the teachers' questionnaire which asked whether children might be more likely to experience *a teacher or other adult at the school they feel they can talk to if they have a problem* in schools in the two-tier or the three-tier system. Overall teachers expressed mixed views on this issue with approximately a third of the 36 respondents giving each response ('more likely in the three-tier system' / 'no difference' / 'more likely in the two-tier system'). When viewed by the system the teachers currently work in, as might be expected, a high proportion of teachers say access to an adult pupils feel they can talk to when they have a problem is more likely in their own system (just over half of three-tier teachers said it was more likely in that system and just under half of two-tier teachers saying this was more likely in the two-tier system).

Figure 5.1.1 reports responses to a parallel question asked of Years 7 and 8 pupils which sought to establish whether the pupils felt that there is an adult at the school they could speak to if they had a problem. A slightly higher proportion of middle school pupils than secondary school pupils said that there was an adult they could talk to. To explore the significance of any association between school type and pupils' views on whether there is an adult at the school they could talk to, a chi-square test for independence was conducted. This found that there is a significant association (at the $p < .05$ level) between school type and whether pupils thought there was an adult they could talk to at the school with middle school pupils being more likely to say this is the case than secondary respondents (Figure 5.1.2). A chi-square test for independence was also conducted on the middle school data only to explore whether the size of middle school children were at was associated with their views on whether there was an adult at the school they could talk to if they had a problem and this was found to be non-significant, results are reported in Figure 5.1.2.

Figure 5.1.1: Pupils' responses to 'is there an adult at your school you could speak to if you had a problem?' – Years 7 and 8 pupils, by school type
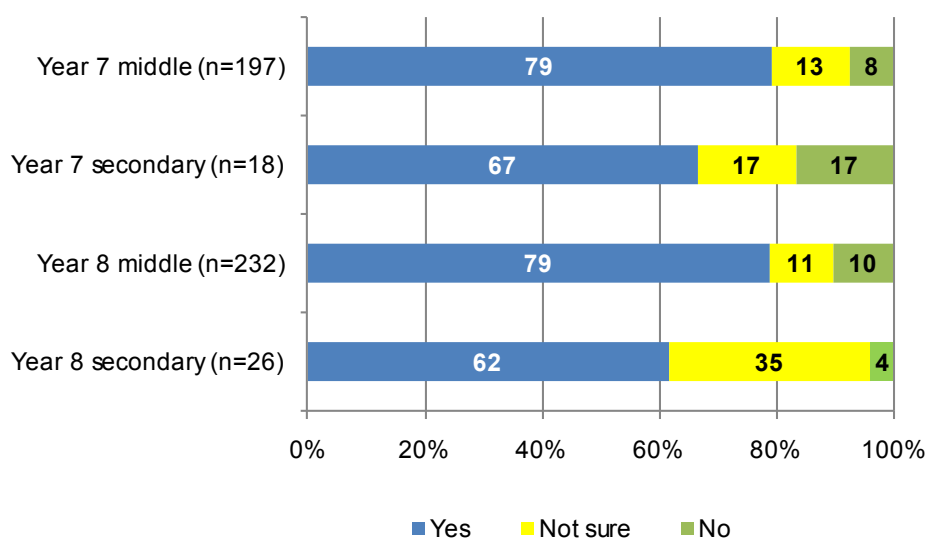

Figure 5.1.2: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and size and pupils' views on whether there is an adult at the school they can talk to about problems – Years 7 and 8 only

| Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Y7&8 by school type (middle and secondary)	8.31	.016 Significant	2	473	.133	Small effect
Y7&8 by large or small middle school	4.84	.089 Not significant	2	429	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)-

Parents or carers of children in Dorset schools were asked to evaluate the help and support offered with non-school work related issues at their child's school. Overall just over one-third of the 28 respondents evaluated this as 'good', a further third said it was 'fair' with four respondents awarding a 'poor' rating (the remaining three parents ticked 'don't know'). When responses were viewed by schooling system the proportions of different ratings were almost the same across the two systems (and the numbers of respondents were too low to enable any meaningful analysis by individual school type). The mixed views expressed and the fact that three respondents said

they 'don't know' what this type of support is like at their child's school could be due to their child not needing this type of support, or because when they do, the parent might not always know about it.

A question on the surveys for headteachers and teachers asked the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement: *children are encouraged to express their views and opinions in front of teachers and peers*. All 91 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement – as might be expected as it is unlikely that this would ever be discouraged. It might have been more useful in attempting to identify differences between school types to have qualified this statement somehow, for example, by adding the phrase 'in all or most situations in the school'. In addition it might have been interesting to explore the extent to which children are encouraged to express their views and opinions in different contexts, perhaps by having separate evaluations of the extent of this in teaching situations and in social situations at the school.

In order to gauge pupils' views on this aspect of their schooling experience, the pupils' survey asked whether they feel comfortable putting their hand up and speaking in class. Figure 5.1.3 shows responses to this question and shows that there is little difference in responses between middle and secondary school pupils and likewise, between first and primary school pupils. The more obvious trend evident in this graph is that the proportion of 'always' responses decreases as the school age range increases, so first schools which cater for the youngest age range record the highest proportion of 'always' responses (49%) and secondary schools the smallest (28%). This might be down to an increasing feeling of self-consciousness as children get older and/or due to the learning environment perhaps becoming less conducive to such contributions to lessons as the school types change; this might be an interesting area for further exploration.

Figure 5.1.3: Do you feel comfortable putting your hand up and speaking in class? Pupils' responses – by school type
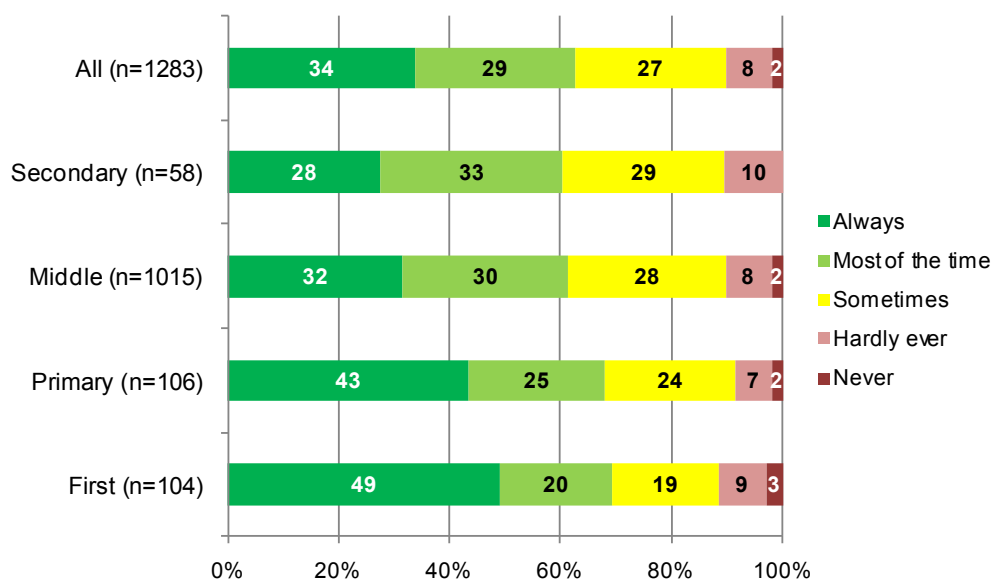
Responses to this question were viewed by year group, and again there was little difference between two-tier and three-tier respondents (e.g. Year 8 in the middle schools recorded similar responses to Year 8 at secondary). A chi-square test of the association between school type and responses to this question for the Years 5 and 6 pupils and the Years 7 and 8 pupils confirmed that there is no significant association between school type and the extent to which pupils feel comfortable speaking in class (Figure 5.1.4).

Figure 5.1.4: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and pupils' views on whether they are comfortable putting their hand up and speaking in class

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)
Y5&6 by school type (middle and secondary)	1.51	.826 Not significant	4	677
Y7&8 by school type (middle and secondary)	1.12	.890 Not significant	4	473

Headteachers' and teachers' perceptions of levels of interaction between children in different year groups suggest that this is more likely to occur in first and primary schools with around half of the 68 respondents from these types of school strongly

agreeing with the statement *there is a great deal of social interaction between children in different year groups*. Two of the ten middle school respondents and one of the two upper school respondents strongly agreed with this statement, none of the 11 secondary school headteachers and teachers strongly agreed.

Headteachers and teachers can only provide an answer about the extent of social interaction between different year groups based on what they witness at school, so to provide additional evidence on the extent of cross-year group friendships, pupils were also asked whether they have friends in other year groups. Figure 5.1.5 shows that pupils' responses somewhat contradict those of the teachers and headteachers (though note that the two data sets do not cover the same schools: every school who took part in the pupil survey had completed a headteachers' and in most cases teachers' surveys, but only selected respondents to the headteachers' and teachers' survey administered the pupils' survey). Among pupil respondents, those in the two-tier system recorded a higher percentage of 'yes, lots of friends in other years' responses than those in the three-tier system: 36% of primary pupils and 40% of secondary, compared to 31% of middle school pupils and 20% of first school pupils. It should be noted that the number of respondents is not evenly distributed across the school types, in particular, just 58 secondary pupils are represented in the data and these all attend the same school, however, this is still an interesting finding in the context of the headteachers' and teachers' views.

Chi-square tests for independence were conducted on pupils' responses to this question and there was found to be no significant association (at the p<.05 level) between either the type of school attended and responses to the question, and between whether pupils attend a large or small middle school and their responses to this question (Figure 5.1.6).

Figure 5.1.5: Do you have friends in other year groups? Pupils' responses – by school type
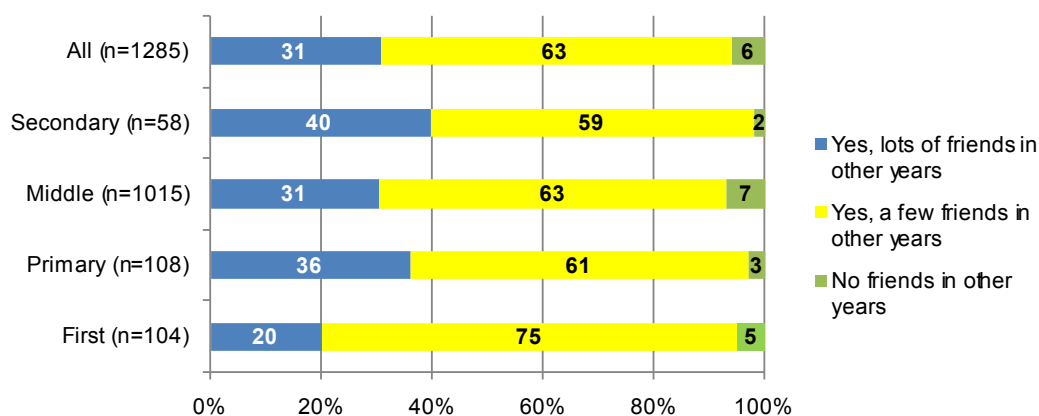

Figure 5.1.6: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and size and whether pupils report having friends in other year groups

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)
Y5&6 by school type (middle and secondary)	3.97	0.137 Not significant	2	678
Y7&8 by school type (middle and secondary)	2.20	0.333 Not significant	2	474
Years 5-8 large or small middle school	2.21	0.332 Not significant	2	1015

Responses to this question were viewed by year group (not shown in a figure) and while there were no notable trends when comparing, say, Year 7 at secondary with Year 7 at middle schools, one trend evident in pupils' responses was for those in the top year of each school type to be less likely to say they have lots of friends in other year groups. This might simply be due to the reluctance on the part of the oldest pupils at the school to admit that they have lots of friends among the younger children. This might also have suppressed the proportion of 'lots of friends' responses in primary and middle schools where the top year was surveyed (and in first schools where only the top year participated) whereas in the secondary school only pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 completed the survey so there might be less reluctance to admit to having friends in other year groups because they could be older friends.

Both the headteachers' and teachers' surveys and the parents' survey asked to what extent respondents agree with the statement: *there are few problems with bullying or harassment between children.* Among headteachers and teachers (n=90), fewer respondents from secondary schools strongly agreed with this statement than any other school type (just one of the 11 secondary respondents strongly agreed – compared to around a third of middle school respondents and approximately two-thirds of both primary and first school respondents). Among parents (n=29), those with a child at secondary school were the most likely to disagree with the statement (three of the six parents of a child at secondary school disagreed). Taken together, these responses suggest bullying or harassment is more likely to be evident in secondary schools though the small 'n' for both surveys makes it inadvisable to draw firm conclusions based on these data.

The number and distribution of 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' responses to this statement in both surveys is somewhat unexpected; two first school respondents to the headteachers' and teachers' survey and one of the two parents of children at first schools strongly disagreed with the statement. With hindsight, the wording of this statement could be ambiguous; if there are *no* instances of bullying or harassment at the school, respondents might want to disagree with a statement that suggests there are *few* instances. The statement should perhaps have been worded: *there are no or very few problems with bullying or harassment between children* in order to avoid this potential for misunderstanding.

Teachers were also asked whether they thought bullying and harassment from other children was more likely to occur in the two-tier or three-tier system. As has generally been the case for this style of question, teachers tend to be defensive of the system they currently work within. One-third of those in the two-tier system said bullying or harassment was more likely in the three-tier system, and just over a third of teachers working in the three-tier system said it was more likely in the two-tier system (n=36). The number of respondents saying children aged 9-13 were more likely to experience bullying or harassment within their own system were low, just one of the 18 three-tier teachers said it was more likely in their system, while four of the 18 two-tier system

teachers said it was more likely to be experienced within their system. Overall half of

teachers said there was no difference in the likelihood of experiencing bullying or

harassment between the two systems.

Box 5.1: Key findings on relationships with pupils, teachers and other adults at the school

- Years 7 and 8 pupils in middle schools were more likely to say there was an adult at their school they could talk to if they had a problem than were their counterparts at secondary schools. A chi-square test for independence confirmed that there is a significant association between school type and responses to this question for Years 7 and 8 pupils.**

- Headteachers and teachers in the three-tier system were more likely than those in the two-tier system to report substantial levels of interaction between children in different year groups*, though this was contradicted by pupils' responses where two-tier attendees were the most likely to report friendships among pupils in other year groups (though this was found to be non-significant).

- Teachers', headteachers' and parents associated with secondary schools were the least likely to say that *there are few instances of bullying and harassment among children at the school.**

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10
** Denotes findings confirmed as significant by statistical tests.

5.2 Responsibilities, trust and age-appropriate treatment

In their research on middle schools Denning et al. (1998) asked middle school

headteachers whether they agreed that middle school pupils are given more

responsibility than their counterparts in the two-tier system. In Denning et al.'s study

approximately 90% of headteachers in middle deemed secondary schools

(predominantly 9-13 middle schools) agreed that this was the case, though their

research did not provide comparable responses from headteachers in the two-tier

system. In order to explore whether the three-tier system might offer children greater

opportunities to take on positions of responsibility than the two-tier system my surveys

for headteachers, teachers and pupils included a question to this effect.

Pupils in Years 7 and 8 were asked whether children in their year groups have the

chance to take on responsible roles such as prefects, house captains and student

representatives. Since only one secondary school took part in the pupils' survey, caution should be exercised when generalising these findings, but while just over half of Year 7 respondents in middle schools said 'yes' only one in five secondary respondents said they had these opportunities (not shown in a figure). Likewise, more than three-quarters of middle school Year 8 respondents said they do have the chance to take on roles of responsibility, but just under half of Year 8 secondary pupils did, though this is perhaps to be expected given that Years 7 and 8 form the top two years at 9-13 middle schools so the responsibilities tend to go hand in hand with seniority within the school structure. This suggests the possibility that children aged 12 and 13 in middle schools are more likely to have the opportunity to adopt responsible roles than those of the same age within the two-tier system – even if this is primarily due to the fact that they are the oldest in their school at this age. Though it must be borne in mind that the number of respondents from secondary school is small (Year 7 n=16 and Year 8 n=24) and all secondary participants come from one school.

Almost all of the 91 headteachers and teachers who completed a survey agreed to some extent with the statement: *children have the opportunity to take on responsibilities.* Middle school headteachers and teachers recorded the smallest proportion of 'strongly agree' responses (five of the 10 middle school respondents strongly agreed). This contradicts the findings of the pupils' survey described above and in the context of the relatively high proportion of 'strongly agree' responses among secondary school respondents (nine of the 11 secondary respondents strongly agreed), suggests that the argument put forward by some that the three-tier system increases the chances children have of taking on responsible roles because they reach the top of their school three times as opposed to twice in the two-tier system (for example, the National Union of Teachers pointed out that additional responsibilities for 12 and 13 year olds "is often an important gain from a middle school education" (NUT, 1984, p.10)), might not reflect the reality of the three-tier system. It is possible though, that while this question attempted to measure the opportunities for *formal* roles of responsibility, the *informal* roles that being in the top year of a school require still apply, so even from the perspective of being role models for the younger children, those in

the three-tier system do have to adopt this informal role more frequently simply because they reach the top year more often.

Parents were also asked about opportunities to take on responsible roles and parents of children at secondary schools were the most likely to evaluate such opportunities as good (four of the six parents of a child at secondary school did so). None of the 10 middle school parents said the opportunities to take on responsible roles at their child's school were 'good'. The evidence from the surveys that form part of this research suggests that opportunities for taking on roles of responsibility are generally no better within the three-tier system than in the two-tier system, and the findings for middle schools were particularly inconclusive with different stakeholder groups offering contradictory views on the extent of this.

Parents indicated how far they agree that their child is treated fairly by staff at the school. Though the respondent base is low (n=29) there is some evidence to suggest that parents of children at schools in the three-tier system are more likely to 'strongly agree' with this statement (seven of the 12 parents of a child at a three-tier system school strongly agreed, compared to six out of 17 parents of children at two-tier system schools). The only 'disagree' responses came from two parents of children at primary schools within the two-tier system.

Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 indicated whether they feel teachers and other staff at their school treat them in a manner appropriate to their age, or whether they are treated as if they are older or younger than they actually are. The majority of respondents felt they are treated about right for their age (Figure 5.2.1). When viewed by year group and school type, the differences between the school types (for example, Year 8 middle compared to Year 8 secondary pupils) were very small suggesting that there is little evidence of differences in the age-appropriate treatment of pupils between the school types. One potential difference might lie within the middle schools where 30% of Year 7 middle school pupils said they are treated as if they are younger than they are and 21% of Year 8 middle school pupils said 'I am treated as if I am older than I really am'. A chi-square test for independence found there was no significant association

between year group (Year 7 and Year 8) and views on age-appropriate treatment among middle school respondents (χ^2= 5.15, df=2, n=426, p=0.076 – not significant at the p<.05 level).

Figure 5.2.1: Pupils' views on age-appropriate treatment by teachers and other adults at their school – Years 7, 8 and 9, by school type
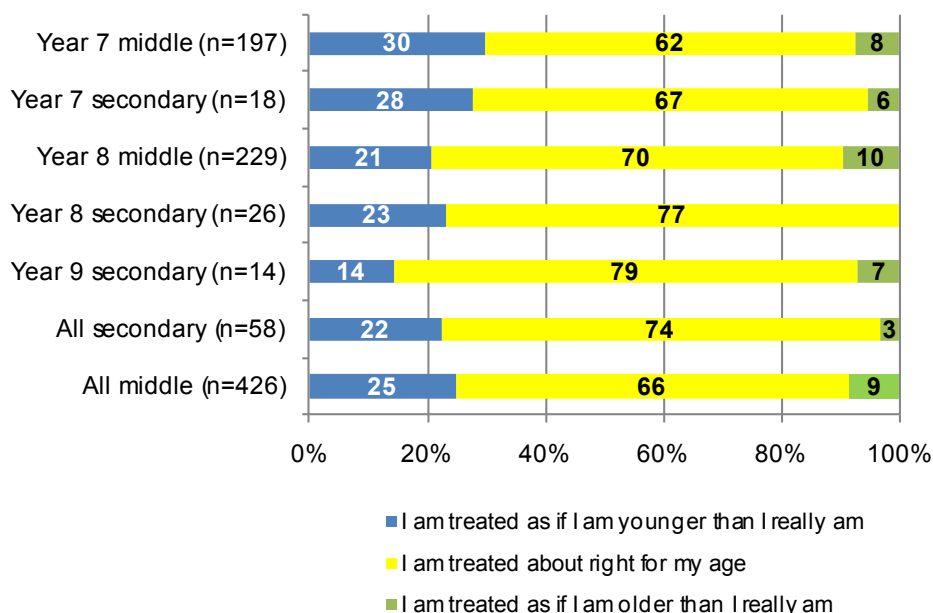
Headteachers and teachers indicated the extent to which they agree or disagree that the three-tier schooling system keeps children in a primary environment for longer than is necessary. Overall just under two-thirds of the 90 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed and unsurprisingly those working within the three-tier system were the most likely to disagree and least likely to agree: just three of the 42 three-tier system respondents agreed to some extent compared to 13 of the 48 respondents from within the two-tier system.

Box 5.2: Key findings on responsibilities, trust and age-appropriate treatment

- There was little evidence among the survey responses from teachers, headteachers and parents to suggest that middle schools offer better opportunities for pupils to take on responsible roles.

- There were no significant differences between Years 7, 8 and 9 pupils' views on whether they are treated in a manner appropriate to their age across the different school types.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

5.3 Individual needs

This section reports those aspects of this research which address issues surrounding the extent to which schools are able to meet pupils' individual needs. This is intended to have a broader definition than just special educational needs (SEN) which refers specifically to learning difficulties and disabilities (Department for Education, 2010). Headteachers were asked to indicate how effective arrangements at their school are for meeting the individual needs of the following children: children with SEN, gifted and talented children, children whose first language is not English and children with a disability. While headteachers in the two-tier system were more likely to be confident in their effectiveness at accommodating the needs of SEN children (29 of the 30 two-tier headteachers judged their school to be 'very effective' at meeting the needs of children with SEN compared to 19 of the 25 three-tier system headteachers), headteachers in the three-tier system were more likely to say their school is 'very effective' in accommodating the other types of individual need (gifted and talented children, children whose first language is not English and children with a disability). Responses by school type were examined and with the exception of SEN, middle school and secondary school headteachers' responses followed similar patterns across the remaining areas of individual need assessed (though note the number of respondents is low for middle, secondary and upper schools). This suggests that among participating schools at least, there is little evidence that middle schools are better able to meet children's individual needs. In the HMI survey of 9-13 middle schools areas of good practice were identified in meeting the needs of SEN children at many of the 48 surveyed schools (HMI, 1983) and in their response to the survey the National Union of Teachers agreed that this is an area in which middle schools had been particularly innovatory (NUT, 1984). On the issue of gifted and talented children, however, the HMI survey was rather more critical and many of the surveyed schools were accused of failing to offer adequate levels of academic challenge for these children (HMI, 1983).

The survey for headteachers offered respondents the opportunity to comment on the extent to which their school can cater for children with individual needs. The most

frequently recurring complaint among these comments was the lack of funding allocated to this aspect of pupil support while others explained that they have limited experience of some types of individual need, particularly disabilities and children whose first language is not English.

The issue of funding for meeting individual needs was discussed during the interview with the officer from Dorset LEA and he explained that funding for external support to meet individual needs was allocated on a needs basis so was surprised that this was a specific complaint, but that the way the overall funding allocation works (at the time of the interview) means that within middle schools, Years 5 and 6 probably benefit more than they would if they were at a large primary school (because they attend a school which includes Key Stage 3 children and the funding formula provides for greater funding for Key Stage 3), whereas Years 7 and 8 are probably worse off in terms of funding (and this could have an effect on all areas of the curriculum, including meeting individual needs) than they would be at a secondary school, particularly one with a sixth form (because 14-19 funding is allocated to the secondary schools which can be spread across the whole school).

Teachers were asked whether they thought children aged 9-13 were more likely to experience *a high standard of provision for meeting individual needs* within the two-tier or three-tier system. Two-thirds of the 36 teachers who answered this question thought there was no difference. Overall a greater number of respondents who thought there was a difference said this was more likely in the three-tier system (eight respondents) than in the two-tier system (four respondents), and as might be expected, teachers working within the three-tier system were the most likely to say pupils within that system were more likely to experience a high standard of provision for individual needs (five of the 18 three-tier respondents).

Box 5.3: Key findings on individual needs

- There was little evidence among the headteachers' survey responses to suggest that middle schools are better able to meet pupils' individual needs and in their comments some headteachers complained of a lack of funding to support this provision*. The interview with an officer at the local education authority revealed the likelihood of children in the lower two years at middle school being better off in terms of resources for meeting individual needs than their counterparts at secondary schools, while those in Years 7 and 8 were probably worse off than equivalent pupils at secondary schools, due to the way funding is allocated.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

5.4 Behavioural issues

The research conducted by researchers at Keele University on behalf of the National Middle Schools' Forum included a secondary analysis of data collected during Ofsted inspections of primary, middle and secondary schools between 1993 and 1996 (Denning et al., 1998). Under the inspection regime in place at the time, schools were evaluated on a series of aspects of their academic and social environment. One of these aspects was the behaviour of pupils. Denning et al. found that middle deemed secondary schools were slightly more likely than primaries at Key Stage 2 and secondaries at Key Stage 3 to achieve a satisfactory or better rating on the behaviour of pupils. In order to explore this further in my research, all surveys (headteachers', teachers', pupils' and parents' surveys) included one question aimed at assessing how well behaved children generally are in the schools.

Research from America might help provide suggestions as to why the middle school might be an environment in which there are fewer behavioural problems than the alternative schooling arrangements. In their study of eight middle schools for the 11-14 age range in America, Wang et al. (2010) examined the relationship between pupils' perceptions of school climate, measured using a variety of indicators, and the incidence of and pupils' propensity towards problem behaviour. When controlling for prior tendencies towards problem behaviour and demographic characteristics (such as gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity) they found that among those who had previously exhibited problem behaviours, there was a decreased tendency to do so

where there was perceived to be higher levels of discipline at the middle school and – of particular relevance to my research given the discussions in section 5.1 around the evidence of good social relationships within participating middle schools – where student-teacher relationships were considered to be particularly positive (Wang et al., 2010).

Headteachers and teachers were asked how far they agree with the statement: *children are generally well behaved* in the context of their school (n=91). Responses from secondary school headteachers and teachers were less positive than those from any other school type, just under a third of secondary headteachers and teachers strongly agreed and one of the 11 secondary respondents disagreed.

Pupils were also asked whether other children behave well – *always, most of the time, sometimes, hardy ever* or *never*. Overall approximately one-third said either 'always' or 'most of the time', around half said 'sometimes' and one in eight said 'hardly ever' or 'never' (overall n=1284, not shown in a figure). There was barely any difference in the proportions of responses when viewed by school type, and when responses from each of Years 5, 6, 7 and 8 were compared from both middle schools and their two-tier counterparts (primary for Years 5 and 6 and secondary for Years 7 and 8) again, there was little difference between the percentage giving each response. It should be noted, however, that the number of pupils from primary and secondary schools was relatively low compared to the number of middle school respondents, so the two-tier results do not represent the variety of schools that middle school respondents do.

The officer from Dorset County Council's education department who was interviewed as part of this research said that his general feeling (based on his experience across Dorset schools) was that there is more of an issue with behaviour across Years 7 to 9 in secondary schools, than across Years 7 and 8 in middle schools and into Year 9 in upper schools. However, he attributed this to a number of factors including the quality of leadership within individual schools but described perceptions of greater pastoral care within smaller middle schools (as opposed to large secondary schools) in Years 7 and 8 and being among peers and school staff who know them well during what is for

many children a particularly difficult period in their physical and emotional development. He also pointed out, however, that school size is not necessarily a crucial determinant of quality of pastoral care and social and emotional support, for example, one of the largest schools in the area is an upper school at which, he said, they offer exceptional levels of support to children due to both the distribution of leadership and the way in which the school is organised which ensures that children are within areas of the school in which they are known to staff and in a familiar environment.

Parents of children at Dorset schools were asked to evaluate *the general behaviour of children at the school.* Unlike the pupils' survey responses, there was a slight trend discernible in parents' answers, middle and upper schools attracted a higher proportion of 'good' responses than did secondary or primary phase schools within the two-tier system, though note that the small number of respondents (n=29) makes it problematic to draw conclusions from these data.

Box 5.4: Key findings on behavioural issues

- Survey responses suggest that while secondary headteachers and teachers reported the least positive views on the general behaviour of children at their school*, there was little difference in pupils' views of other children's behaviour across the different school types.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

5.5 Extra-curricular activities

Research by the New Economics Foundation suggested that children's well-being increased where they are offered and take up activities outside of lessons, especially sports, but they also found that take-up of such activities is generally lower in secondary schools than primaries (Marks et al., 2004). The surveys for headteachers and teachers in my research therefore included a question which attempted to gauge whether there are differences in the offering of extra-curricular activities across different school types.

Headteachers and teachers were asked how far they agree with the statement: *children are offered a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and activities*. While

the proportions who 'strongly agree' were almost identical for primary, first and middle schools (just over two-thirds of each group strongly agreed), secondary school staff were more likely to 'strongly agree' (all but one of the 11 secondary respondents strongly agreed), suggesting that perhaps children are more likely to experience a broad offering of extra-curricular activities at an earlier age in the two-tier system than in the three-tier system. Note that the small number of respondents overall (n=91) and from some school types (e.g. secondary school n=11) makes it difficult to draw conclusions based on these data.

A question in the teachers' survey measured respondents' views on this potential difference between the two systems by asking whether they thought children aged 9-13 were more likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities in the two-tier or the three-tier system. Unlike the question described above which focused on the offering, this question is somewhat broader as it measures the interaction of both the opportunities available and children's willingness to participate in these activities. While nearly two-thirds of the 36 teachers who answered the question thought there was no difference, as might be expected, those teachers who said there was a difference tended to say this was more likely within their own system, however, it is notable that while none of the teachers working in the three-tier system thought involvement in extra-curricular activities was more likely in the two-tier system, two of the 18 teachers from the two-tier system thought this was more likely in the three-tier system.

In their research into middle schools Denning et al. (1998) asked middle school headteachers whether they agreed that *middle school pupils have less access to extra-curricular activities* and one in ten respondents agreed to some extent, while this is a relatively small proportion, when viewed in the context of the findings from my research (described above) where none of the respondents from the three-tier system suggest that the extra-curricular offering is inferior to that in the two-tier system it is perhaps of note that the earlier research achieved a negative response on this subject from 10% of respondents. It must be borne in mind that a decade separates the two research projects so things might very well have changed within the three-tier system

and extra-curricular activities might have improved, but another important point is that the middle school has become even more vulnerable in the intervening years between the two research projects and in the context of reviews of schooling arrangements across many parts of Dorset, the difference in responses might provide evidence of a phenomena alluded to at various points in my discussion of findings: that respondents have a vested interest in defending the system in which they currently work when decisions are being made about the possibility of reorganising schooling arrangements.

Another situational factor to consider when comparing the research by Denning et al. with the current work is the auspices of the research: Denning et al. were commissioned to conduct the research by the National Middle Schools' Forum (NMSF) and questionnaires were only sent to schools on the NMSF's mailing lists, indeed, all schools had been asked to make a small financial contribution to help fund the research, so respondents perhaps felt 'safe' to respond honestly within the relative security of an NMSF-commissioned project. My research on the other hand, was a self-funded PhD project but participants were aware that the research was comparative (i.e. between two-tier and three-tier system schools) and while it was made clear that Dorset County Council had not commissioned the research and had no input into the research design, it was explained that the research was being done with the knowledge and permission of the local authority and that, if requested, summary findings would be shared with both participating schools and officers at the local authority.

In the pupils' survey, Years 7 and 8 pupils were asked to indicate whether they take part in extra-curricular activities, as Figure 5.5.1 shows, proportions of pupils across both year groups and in both middle and secondary schools who said they take part in out of lesson activities were almost identical (varying between 78 and 81%).

Figure 5.5.1: Percentage of Years 7 and 8 pupils who take part in extra-curricular activities – by school type
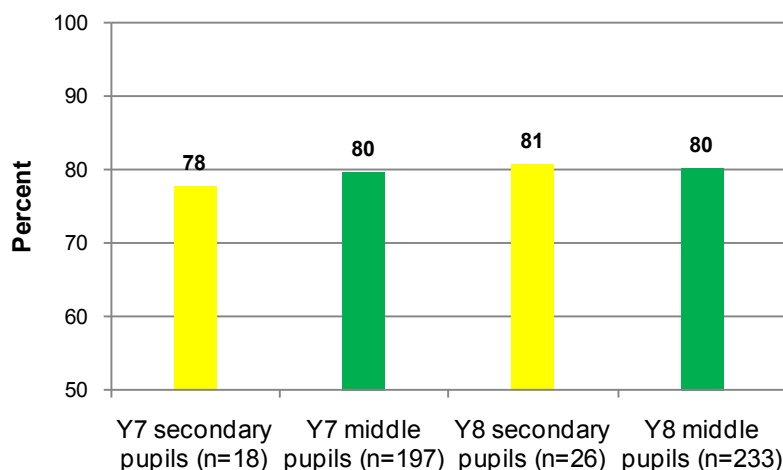
Those pupils who said they did not take part in extra-curricular activities were asked to briefly explain why this was the case. Figure 5.5.2 summarises the main themes of the comments made. For many children practical concerns precluded participation, for example, problems getting transport home after normal school finishing time and a lack of spare time. Other frequently cited reasons reflected a conscious decision on the part of the pupils not to participate, for example, some simply did not want to take part and others said there was nothing on offer that interested them. Due to the small number of secondary school respondents it is not possible to draw any conclusions about possible differences between middle and secondary pupils in terms of their reasons for not taking part in activities outside of lessons, though it is of interest that while only one of the 78 middle school pupils who gave a reason said it was because they thought they would not be good at the activities, two of the five secondary school pupils who answered the question cited this reason, suggesting a possible heightened concern among secondary pupils over performing well, possibly in front of much older children (though this was not explicitly identified by any respondents to this survey as an underlying concern).

Figure 5.5.2: Summary of reasons given for not participating in extra-curricular activities – Year 7 and 8 pupils

Reason given for not participating	No. of middle school respondents	No. of secondary school respondents	Total no. of respondents
Don't want to	14		14
Transport home problems	12	1	13
Not interested in what's on offer	13		13
No time / too busy with school work	10		10
Do activities outside of school	9		9
Not willing to give up lunch break / after school time	7	2	9
Friends don't participate	4		4
Want to get out of school at home time	3		3
Wouldn't be good at it / perceived lack of ability	1	2	3
Other	3		3
Deterred by the people who take part in these activities	2		2
Total	**78**	**5**	**83**

Parents were also asked to evaluate the out of lesson activities available at their child's school (n=29), and while the majority overall rated such opportunities as 'good', respondents with a child at primary school in the two-tier system were the least likely to be satisfied (four of the 11 respondents said out of lesson activities were 'poor' and just two said they were 'good'). When middle and secondary school responses are compared, the proportion of 'good' responses is almost identical with just over three-quarters of each respondent group rating it in this way.

Box 5.5: Key findings on extra-curricular activities

- There was little evidence from either the headteachers and teachers surveys* or the pupils survey of any notable differences in either provision of and take-up of extra-curricular activities. Secondary and upper school headteachers and teachers were slightly more confident about the broad range of activities they offered but this is likely to be a product of the size of the schools*. When compared with findings from similar survey research, the possibility of staff defending their own system emerged. This suggests that self-reporting might not be the best way to glean information on this topic.

- Just over three-quarters of Years 7 and 8 pupils said they take part in out of lesson activities and there was little difference in responses across school types. Those who do not participate cited a variety of reasons for this but lack of interest, time and transport home outside of normal school finishing time were predominant concerns.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

5.6 Supporting children's social development and emotional well-being

As part of their survey, pupils indicated whether they like being at their school. Figure 5.6.1 shows responses to this question by school type and shows that there is little difference in the proportions giving each response between the different school types (except for first schools where pupils were more likely to say 'always' than were pupils at the other school types). The percentage of 'always' responses to this question are presented by year group as well as school type in Figure 5.6.2 with schools in the two-tier system represented in yellow and the three-tier system in green. There is no discernible trend in the two-tier system responses (though it is interesting that Year 7 secondary pupils were the most likely within the two-tier system to say they 'always' like being at their school), this might be due to the small number of respondents from these schools. There is however, evidence of a trend in three-tier pupils' responses, the proportion of 'always' responses declines as the year group increases, up to Year 7 and then there is a small increase in Year 8 middle school 'always' responses. The difference in Year 4 pupils' responses is also notable, a quarter of first school respondents said they 'always' like being at their school whereas none of the Year 4 primary school pupils felt this way. This, coupled with the slight increase in positive

responses among Year 6 primary and Year 8 middle school pupils, suggests there might be some sort of 'top year of school effect' whereby children feel more positive about their school when they are the oldest year group.

It seems from the results of this survey that within the three-tier system, the first school seems to be viewed more positively by Year 4 pupils than Year 4 pupils at primary school, but there is evidence of a decline in positive perceptions of the middle school as the year groups progress – though the number of responses from secondary schools is not sufficient to provide any sort of check on whether this might be a natural decline as children get older or whether it is more pronounced in the middle school than in the two-tier schooling system. Responses from middle school pupils were examined using a chi-square test for independence and a significant association was found between whether pupils are in the lower or upper two years of the middle school and their views on whether they like being at the school, with those in Years 5 and 6 at middle school showing a greater propensity to like being at the school than those in Years 7 and 8. The same test was applied to Years 5 and 6 primary pupils' responses and Years 7 and 8 secondary pupils' responses and this was found to be non-significant, suggesting that we cannot attribute the shift in attitude entirely to the increasing age range of children. There does seem to be a more significant decline in attitudes towards the schools, measured by the extent to which pupils like being there, across participating middle schools. Figure 5.6.3 shows the results of these chi-square tests.

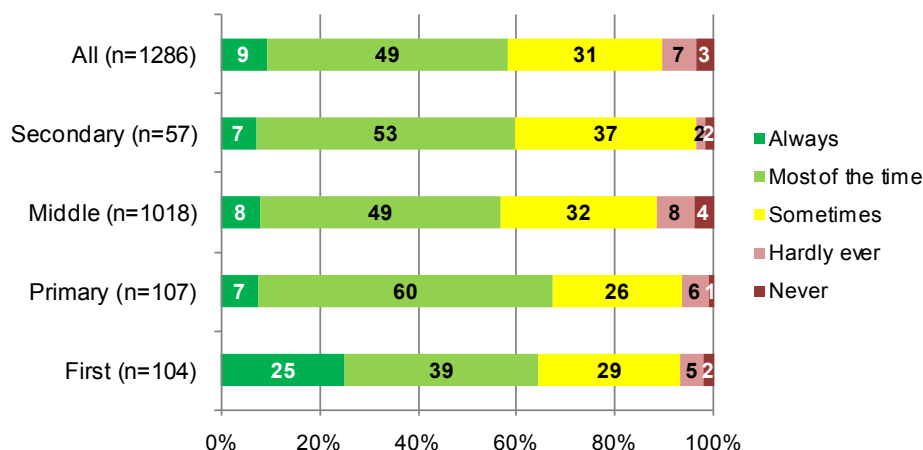**Figure 5.6.1: Do you like being at your school? Pupils' responses – by school type**

Figure 5.6.2: Do you like being at your school? Pupils' responses – by school type and year group, percent of 'always' responses
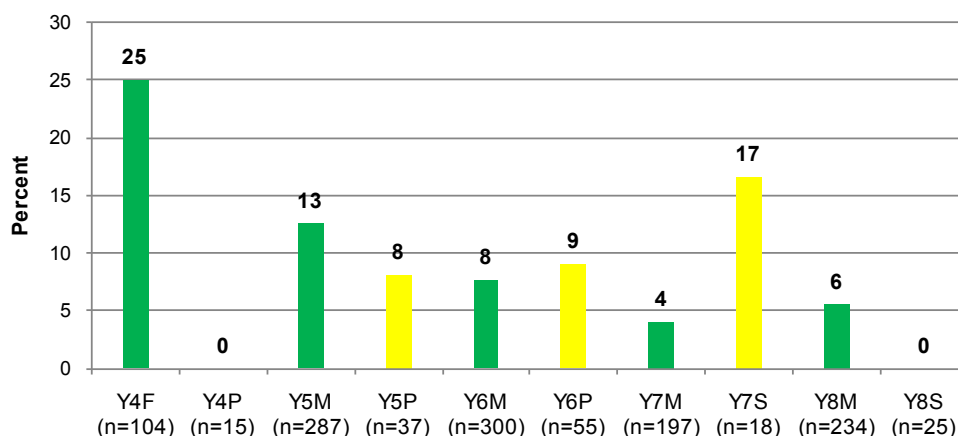

Figure 5.6.3: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between being in Years 5&6 and Years 7&8 and the extent to which pupils like being at their school – by school type*

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Years 5&6 **middle** compared to Years 7&8 **middle**	24.62	.000 Significant	2	1018	.156	Small effect
Years 5&6 **primary** compared to Years 7&8 **secondary**	3.70	.157 Not significant	2	135	(Not applicable as p>.05)	(Not applicable as p>.05)

* Note that in order to avoid violating the chi-square assumption that fewer than 20% of cells have an expected count of <5, for the purposes of these tests the five response categories were aggregated into three: 'almost or most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever or never'.

Parents were also asked in their survey whether their child likes their school. Parents of pupils at first and middle schools were the most likely to 'strongly agree' that their child likes their school (all first school respondents and just over three-quarters of the middle school respondents strongly agreed), while around a third of primary school respondents and half of those with a child at secondary school strongly agreed. Note that the number of responses for each school type is low and the overall respondent base is just 29 for this survey so findings must be interpreted with caution.

Teachers' judgements as to whether children aged 9-13 are more likely to experience *feelings of unhappiness while at school* in the two-tier or three-tier schooling system indicate that where respondents believed there was a difference, they were more likely to favour the system they currently work in (n=35). While more than two-thirds of respondents overall thought there was no difference, approximately a quarter of teachers from each system said that feelings of unhappiness were more likely in the alternative system (the one they do not currently work in).

Parents were asked how far they agree with the statement *the school encourages the personal and social development of my child.* Although the actual number of respondents representing each school type is low (total n=28), the type of school least likely to elicit a 'strongly agree' response to this statement is the middle school (just one of the five respondents strongly agreed), though the other two tiers in the three-tier system, first and upper schools, received the higher proportions of strongly agree responses (one of the two first school respondents and three of the five secondary school respondents strongly agreed).

The teachers' survey asked which schooling arrangement respondents thought was most beneficial for the majority of children in terms of encouraging their social and emotional development and well-being (n=33). Approximately one-third of respondents opted for the three-tier system involving middle schools for 9-13 year-olds, but more than half thought the two-tier system was superior from this perspective (similar proportions to those that thought each system was more beneficial on educational grounds – reported in Chapter 4, section 4.5). As might be expected,

when responses are viewed by the schooling system teachers currently work within, there is a great deal of support for their own arrangement. However, the three-tier respondents were slightly less emphatic in their support of their own arrangement, and while only two out of 17 teachers in the two-tier system said they preferred the system with 9-13 middle schools, five out of 16 teachers within the three-tier system felt that the two-tier system is better from the social and emotional development perspective.

Overall headteachers' and teachers' opinions on the assertion that *the three-tier system is better able to provide good pastoral care than the two-tier system* were mixed. However, when viewed by school type it is clear that, perhaps unsurprisingly, those within the three-tier system were the most likely to agree that their system is better able to provide good pastoral care – eight of the 10 middle school respondents agreed as did 14 of the 31 first school respondents, though interestingly, both upper school respondents said they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. None of the secondary school respondents agreed that the three-tier system is better in this respect than the two-tier, but six of the 36 primary respondents agreed to some extent.

Headteachers' and teachers' levels of agreement overall with the statement: *the age-ranges of schools within the three-tier system align more closely with children's social and emotional development* were mixed, but when viewed by school type it is once again apparent that those within the three-tier system were predictably the most likely to agree with the statement, for example, all of the middle school (n=10) and upper school (n=2) respondents agreed. It is notable though that approximately a quarter of the 37 respondents from primary schools agreed to some extent and two of the 11 secondary school respondents agreed suggesting that the view put forward by the Plowden Committee that middle schools better align with children's developmental stages (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) is shared by some of today's practicing teachers and headteachers.

The pupils' survey began with a set of seven questions which were asked of all pupils in all participating schools. Responses to these questions were used to derive a scale which attempts to gauge how positive pupils are about their school. The set was then

further divided into four questions which addressed educational aspects of the school (this is reported in Chapter 4, section 4.5) and four questions which related to the extent to which children felt the school supported their social development and emotional well-being (one of the seven questions addressed both aspects of the school so is included in both scales). The questions that make up the social/emotional scale are:

- Do you like being at your school?

- Do you feel comfortable putting your hand up and speaking in class?

- Do other children behave well?

- Do your teachers know your name? (this question is also included in the educational scale)

Further details of how this scale was derived and its reliability are included in Appendix 7. Figure 5.6.4 shows respondents' scores on this set of questions, a low score corresponds to more positive responses (i.e. more likely to have responded 'always' or 'most of the time' to each question) while a high score indicates more negative responses (more likely to have answered 'never' or 'hardly ever' to each question). Only pupils who had answered all four questions were allocated a score (98% of pupils had done so). It appears from Figure 5.6.4 that children in schools in the two-tier system are slightly more likely to have lower scores on this social/emotional scale, thus they are more positive about these aspects than their counterparts in the three-tier system. However, an examination of the mean scores shows that the difference is relatively small: for respondents in the two-tier system, the mean score is 8.5, while three-tier system pupils recorded a mean score of 9.0 (the overall mean was 9.0). Mean scores and standard deviations for this scale are presented in Figure 5.6.5 according to the type of school respondents attend. These show that middle school pupils achieved the highest overall mean on this scale and hence were generally more negative about the social/emotional aspects of their school than pupils at other school

types (though note that the 'n' for middle schools is much higher than for other school

types so we are not comparing similar sized groups of respondents).

Figure 5.6.4: Distribution of pupils' 'scores' on social/emotional aspects of their school – by schooling system
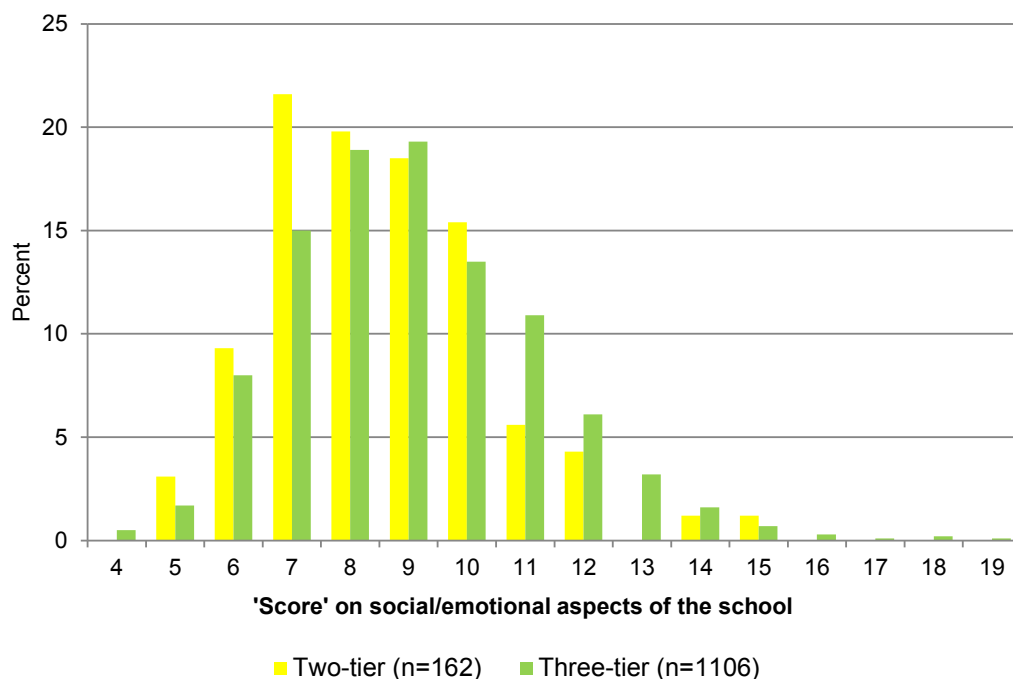

Figure 5.6.5: Means, standard deviations and number of cases for pupils' scores on social/emotional aspects of their school – by school type

School type	Mean	Standard deviation	No. of cases (n)
First	8.5	1.8	101
Primary	8.3	2.0	105
Middle	9.1	2.2	1005
Secondary	8.9	1.7	57
All schools	**9.0**	**2.1**	**1268**

Based on this set of questions, it seems any difference between schooling systems in

how positively the social experience is viewed by pupils is very minor, but does favour

the two-tier system – as was the case for the educational scale. To further explore the

significance of any differences a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was

conducted to examine the variance between and within these groups and hence

provide an indication of whether any differences are attributable to the school type or

are due to chance. Figure 5.6.6 summarises the findings from the ANOVA test and

shows that middle school responses were significantly different from primary school responses and the direction of the mean difference indicates that middle school pupils tended to be less positive about the social and emotional aspects of their schooling than were primary respondents. No other differences between school types attained statistical significance. The effect size using eta squared was 0.015 which corresponds to a small effect (Cohen, 1988, cited in: Pallant, 2010).

Figure 5.6.6: One way analysis of variance of the social / emotional scale by school type

Description of difference	Mean difference	Significance (p)	Degrees of freedom (df)
Middle school mean scores are different from **primary** school mean scores on the social / emotional scale	.788	.002 Significant	3

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to assess the significance of differences between Years 5 and 6 at middle and primary schools and then Years 7 and 8 at middle and secondary schools. Figure 5.6.7 shows the mean scores for each of these groups and the stand-out figure here is the higher mean for Years 7 and 8 middle school respondents (which corresponds to a less positive attitude towards this aspect of their schooling). The t-test results are summarised in Figure 5.6.8 and it can be seen that the differences between school types are significant (p<.05) though it must be remembered that in practical terms, the degree of difference between the groups (particularly the Years 5 and 6 groups) is small and as the eta squared figures show, the effect size if very small with less than 1% of the variance in social / emotional scores for both groups explained by school type.

Figure 5.6.7: Means, standard deviations and number of cases for pupils' scores on social / emotional aspects of their school – by school type, Years 5&6 and Years 7&8 grouped

School type / year groups	Mean	Standard deviation	No. of cases (n)
Y5&6 Primary	8.27	2.108	90
Y5&6 Middle	8.72	2.010	578
Y7&8 Middle	9.55	2.296	427
Y7&8 Secondary	8.84	1.675	43

Figure 5.6.8: Independent samples t-test of the social / emotional scale for Years 5 and 6 and Years 7 and 8 mean scores by school type

Description of difference	Mean difference	Significance (2-tailed)	t value (df)	Effect size (eta squared)
Y5&6 middle school mean scores are different from **Y5&6 primary** school mean scores on the educational scale	.458	.046 Significant	1.998 (666)	0.006 Very small effect
Y7&8 middle school mean scores are different from **Y7&8 secondary** school mean scores on the educational scale	.708	.049 Significant	1.97 (468)	0.008 Very small effect

Box 5.6: Key findings on social development and emotional well-being

- Among middle school pupils, the proportion who said they 'always' like being at their school decreased as the year group increased, with a very small increase in the top year (this was also evident among the oldest pupils in other school types). A chi-square test for independence found a significant association between whether pupils are in the lower or upper two years of the middle school and their views on whether they like being at the school, with those in Years 5 and 6 at middle school showing a greater propensity to like being at the school than those in Years 7 and 8**. The same test was applied to Years 5 and 6 primary pupils' responses and Years 7 and 8 secondary pupils' responses and this was found to be non-significant, suggesting that we cannot attribute the shift in attitude entirely to the increasing age range of children.

- Pupils' scores on a scale created by aggregating responses to questions on the extent to which children felt supported in their social development and emotional well-being indicated a slightly greater propensity for two-tier pupils to view this aspect of their school positively. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that the only significant difference on this scale (when looking at all surveyed age-groups across the school types) was between middle and primary school respondents, with the middle school pupils tending to be slightly more negative.**

- Independent samples t-tests were conducted on the social development / emotional well-being scale by grouping Years 5 and 6 respondents and comparing primary with middle school responses, then grouping Years 7 and 8 respondents and comparing middle with secondary schools. In both instances the differences between school types were found to be significant with the middle school pupils being slightly more negative than their counterparts in primary and secondary schools.**

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10
** Denotes findings confirmed as significant by statistical tests.

Chapter 6: School to School Transfers

This chapter reports findings which relate to scheduled transfers from school to school. It begins with a discussion of the variety of activities and arrangements in place to ease the transfer to a new school and then moves on to focus on pupils' perceptions of aspects of forthcoming or recent school to school transfers. The chapter concludes with a brief description of findings relating to the number of scheduled transfers and parents' views on the most appropriate age for moving to a secondary school environment.

6.1 Transfer arrangements and activities

In their research into the primary to secondary transfer, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) administered questionnaires to Year 6 pupils in five primary schools prior to their transfer, and then followed this up with a similar questionnaire for the same pupils who had transferred to one of the five main destination secondary schools. They found that pupils reported a very positive attitude towards the forthcoming transfer (just 3% said they were not looking forward to the move), and almost as positive reactions to the move six months after it had taken place: only 10% said they did not enjoy the move (Chedzoy and Burden, 2005). Chedzoy and Burden conducted further qualitative research among participants and found that this predominantly positive attitude towards the transfer had been fostered largely by the standard of transfer activities and arrangements which helped to prepare children for the change. Research conducted in the 1980s (based on fieldwork in the Isle of Wight's three-tier system schools but also drawing upon national survey data) found that activities aimed at easing school to school transfers were somewhat limited in their nature (mainly comprising pupil visits to the new school and a visit by a teacher from the middle school to the feeder school) and were rather impeded by a tendency for teaching staff to view colleagues in adjacent tiers of the system in a somewhat negative manner (Stillman and Maychell, 1984). Since then, the value of transfer activities seems to have been recognised and more recent research has provided evidence of a more varied programme to ease the transfer from both a social and educational perspective,

though it is often difficult to ensure consistency for all pre-transfer pupils where the destination school has a large number of contributory schools (OFSTED, 2002). Indeed, Murdoch (1986) points out that the sheer numbers of schools a middle school must liaise with in respect of transfer activities and arrangements actually disadvantages the middle school more than any other because as the middle tier, these schools have both feeder and destination schools to deal with for their new intakes and leavers. In their research into transfers between schools and transitions between year groups within schools, Galton et al. (2003) found the social and pastoral support available to children during school to school transfers was generally very good and that a wider variety of activities and events were employed over the two years between the first and second phases of their research.

To assess the extent to which Dorset schools were helping to ease the transfer between schools, and to explore whether there was differential provision within the two-tier and three-tier systems, my headteachers' survey asked whether their school undertakes any of a list of activities to prepare pupils for transfer from their school (for first, primary and middle schools) and into their school (for middle, secondary and upper schools). All headteachers said their school offered open days for children to visit their new school and open evenings for parents. All but one school (a secondary) said that teachers at the destination school visited feeder schools to meet children prior to the transfer. 'Buddy' or mentoring systems (whereby pupils due to transfer are able to contact children already at the school to find out more about the school and providing a known contact at the school when they transfer) were used by the majority of responding schools in the three-tier system, thus confirming findings by Galton et al. (2003) that these arrangements are increasingly popular during school to school transfers. However, my research has found that among schools in the two-tier system, the use of buddying arrangements was a little more patchy: five of the six participating secondary schools said they operated such a system for pupils transferring to their school but just 12 of the 24 primary schools said the system was used for outgoing pupils. Among participating middle schools, buddy systems were more commonly used during the transfer *to* the school rather than on transfer *from* the school, the

reasons for this were not clear, and it would warrant further exploration to assess whether the destination upper schools were unenthusiastic about such arrangements, and if so why this is the case. When asked to describe any other activities undertaken to help ease the transfer a wide variety of initiatives were described including: joint sports or social events between feeder and destination schools, residential trips for children from feeder schools, teachers from the destination school visiting feeder schools to teach lessons and/or take assemblies, children from feeder schools attending lessons or extra-curricular programmes at the destination school prior to transfer, liaison and coordination between schools to ensure continuity of teaching and sharing of information on the new intake. Overall, a wide range of transfer activities were used by participating schools and any differences between systems or school type were not substantial enough to suggest a better provision in either schooling system.

In the discussion group conducted with former pupils from Dorset schools, participants expressed mixed views about the effectiveness of organised visits to the destination school. There was a general feeling that the visit made them more excited about the move from the point of view of getting to see the range of facilities they would experience, but others pointed out that spending a day alongside existing pupils made them more anxious about the social side of the new school, as one respondent explained:

> "Well, when we went on induction days it did make me a little bit more cautious because some of the older kids were there showing off and telling you about the stupid things that happen and you were just terrified that you would get 'bog washed' on your first day!"

Measor and Woods (1984) picked up on the myths surrounding transfer to a new school in their qualitative research conducted in 1979 which followed the transfer of a cohort from an 8-12 middle school to upper school. Myths such as the 'bog washing' story which seem to have accompanied generations of transferees appear to serve a number of purposes including a warning (albeit via somewhat extreme and caricatured image) of the reality of life in a secondary school setting and a lesson in discretion and maintaining a closed and hence less vulnerable public persona than may have been

the case at previous schools (the story often refers to the act taking place on the victim's birthday, so not revealing the date is the moral of the story), but, more convincingly, this and many of the other perennial myths about going to 'big school' serve to reaffirm the "status inversion" that the move from being the oldest to being the youngest in a school entails (Measor and Woods, 1984, p.21).

For two of my discussion group participants, the fact that the visit day was spent in their new class groups rather than remaining in groups with existing class mates was a particularly welcome arrangement and helped them prepare for the forthcoming change by mixing with potential new friends ahead of the first day at the school. One participant who attended schools in the two-tier system complained that the one day visit to the new school did little to allay fears about the transfer:

> "We did an induction day but as a whole year group and we didn't really meet other students, you'd see other older students but didn't mix with them. You didn't really get a proper feel for the place because you were only there for a day so it didn't really ease any worries."

This corroborates evidence from other research, such as Graham and Hill's (2003) study of the primary to secondary transfer in Scottish schools where the majority of pupils said visits and induction days were useful, but many of them suggested there was scope for improvement, particularly by having more visits, or by making the visits longer.

Box 6.1: Key findings on transfer arrangements and activities

- Schools involved in the headteachers' survey employed a variety of activities and events to help ease the transfer, the most popular of which being induction days for pupils and open evenings for parents and pupils.* In the discussion group, former-pupils tended to agree that induction days and one-off visits could be ineffective at alleviating anxiety over the move because they are somewhat 'staged' and do not allow enough time to get a feel for the new school.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

## 6.2 Pupils' perceptions and expectations of transfers

6.2.1: Anxiety over transfers

Much of the research into school to school transfers attempts to gauge pupils' anxieties over both forthcoming and recent transfers, for example, the original ORACLE project measured anxiety levels in pupils transferring in a variety of different school arrangements (including the three-tier system with 9-13 middle schools) and found that anxiety levels reached a peak in the June before the transfer but had declined again by November following the transfer (Galton and Willcocks, 1983). They also found that in destination schools that maintained a primary ethos during the first year at the school, pupils' anxiety levels rose again towards the end of that year, most likely because of the forthcoming switch to secondary style teaching and the implications of this on, for example, class arrangements due to impending setting or streaming by ability (Galton and Willcocks, 1983). The ORACLE study also found that the way in which teachers at the pre-transfer school framed the transfer, for example, the way it was talked about and how they built expectations, affected anxiety levels immediately before and after the transfer.

While the ORACLE research employed a questionnaire specifically designed to measure anxiety, in my research, the questionnaire for pupils who were due to transfer to a new school (Year 6 pupils at primary school, Year 4 pupils at first schools and Year 8 pupils at middle schools) asked them directly how worried they were about the transfer. While there may be arguments for a less direct and perhaps more sophisticated approach to measuring anxiety levels, my resources did not allow for the administration of a separate questionnaire, and perhaps the only caution to exercise in interpreting pupils' responses to this survey is to note that survey respondents, particularly children and young people, might give responses which they believe the researcher wants to hear, or which will portray them in a more favourable light, either to the researcher or to their peers, or both (Oppenheim, 1966). If resources had allowed, it might have been interesting to employ both direct and indirect questioning when gauging attitudes in order to obtain data at different levels and facilitate cross-checking of the reliability of pupils' responses. That said, the direct questioning used in

the pupils' survey kept the questionnaire simple and ensured completing the questionnaire was not a prohibitively large task for either the individual pupils or the schools who devoted time to the project, and it still provides useful data on pupils' reactions to forthcoming or recent tranfers.

Figure 6.2.1 shows that in schools that participated in this research, pupils in the Year 8 cohort about to transfer to upper school were the least likely to report feeling 'very worried' about the move. This might in part be due to the fact that three-tier system pupils will have already experienced one transfer (first to middle school) in their schooling careers so are perhaps less anxioous the second time round. A chi-square test was applied to examine the significance of any association between the school type the pre-transfer cohorts attend and the extent to which they report feeling worried about the transfer. A significant relationship was identified (p<.01 – see Figure 6.2.2) and from Figure 6.2.1 it can be seen that being in Year 8 at a middle school is associated with lower levels of anxiety over the transfer. The responses from Year 8 middle school pupils were also examined according to whether the middle school feeds into the largest upper school in the county or not (one of the three participating middle schools fed into this large upper school), and this was found to have an association with levels of anxiety about the transfer with those due to transfer to the large upper school being more likely to say they are worried about the move (Figure 6.2.2). Note though, that there may also be school-level factors influencing this, for example, the transfer preparation activities may also differ depending on which school pupils currently attend and are due to transfer to so we cannot attribute this association solely to the size of the destination upper school, though in the context of pupils' comments on the sources of anxiety, it seems that many of the things they worry about (such as 'getting lost') are related to the size of the destination school.

Figure 6.2.1: Extent to which pupils are worried about the forthcoming transfer to a new school
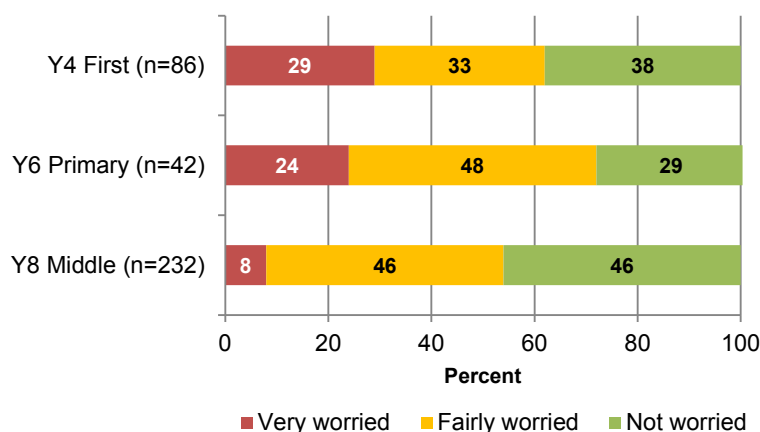
Figure 6.2.2: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and year group and whether pupils report being worried about the forthcoming transfer

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Y4 first, Y6 primary, Y8 middle	27.92	.000 Significant	4	360	.197	Small effect
Y8 middle – feeds to a large upper school or not	10.07	.007 Significant	2	232	.208	Small effect

Figure 6.2.3: Extent to which pupils were worried about the recent transfer to a new school
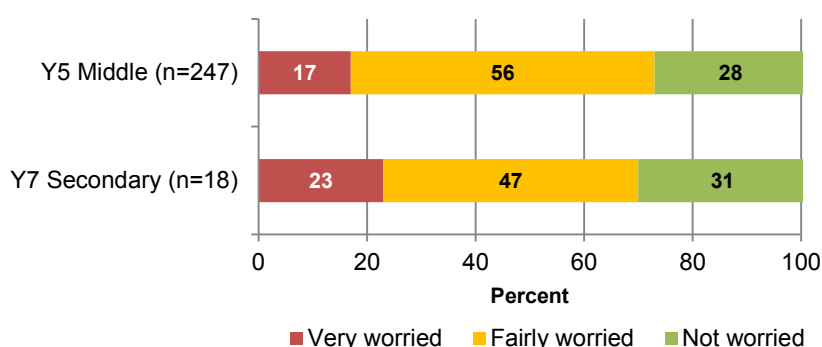
Pupils who had recently undergone a scheduled transfer to a new school were asked how worried they were about the move before it took place. Figure 6.2.3 shows responses and there is little difference in the proportions giving each response across

middle and secondary school respondents. It might be that respondents felt inclined to underplay the extent of their anxieties now that the transfer is over and given that the surveys were conducted during the spring term, it's possible that children's recall of their feelings up to a year ago might not be completely accurate.

A follow-up question for those about to experience a transfer asked Year 6 primary and Year 8 middle school pupils to write down one thing they were most worried about in relation to the forthcoming transfer (Year 4 first school pupils were not asked this question in order to keep their questionnaire appropriately short and simple). Figure 6.2.4 presents a summary of the concerns raised by respondents and shows how many mentioned each issue, the issues raised were consistent with those identified by other researchers such as Hargreaves and Galton (2002) who asked children to look at a picture of pupils arriving at the gates of their new school and describe what the characters might be talking about and Brown and Armstrong (1986) who analysed essays written by 89 pupils shortly before and just after their transfer to secondary school. Despite the different methodologies employed in these and my research, the lists of topics produced are very similar. One aspect raised by many of the participants in Brown and Armstrong's research but not by any of my research participants, was the fear of detentions and punishments; this might be due to changes in the disciplinary context of schools since the mid-1980s when Brown and Armstrong conducted their research. Worries about getting lost at the new school were mentioned by nearly a quarter of Year 8 middle school pupils and almost a third of Year 6 primary pupils. Middle school pupils were more likely to express concerns about the amount of homework they would receive than were primary school pupils, but this might be due to the stage they are at in their school careers (that is, more likely to receive a lot of homework than pupils two years younger than them).

Some of the issues raised by pupils are interesting when considered in the context of the claims that the middle school provides a gradual introduction to secondary schooling (Gannon and Whalley, 1975). For example concerns over moving around the school for different lessons was mentioned by both middle and primary school pupils, even though in most middle schools this would have been normal procedure

for some, if not all lessons by the end of their four years at the school. Year 8 middle school respondents were also less likely than Year 6 primary pupils (for whom this was the second most frequently stated concern) to mention older or bigger children at the new school as a source of anxiety, this suggests that there might be a sense in which the shorter age range of the upper school is less intimidating for those in the lowest year – an often cited advantage of the middle school (see for example Blyth and Derricott, 1977).

Figure 6.2.4: Summary of pupils' descriptions of the one thing they are most worried about in relation to the forthcoming transfer

	Year 8 Middle		Year 6 Primary	
	n	%*	n	%*
Amount of homework	51	25	5	9
Getting lost	47	23	17	31
Being split up from friends	25	12	2	4
Large school size / too many people	21	10	4	7
Teachers being strict and/or unfriendly	19	9	1	2
Being bullied	18	9	5	9
Making friends	18	9	5	9
Older / bigger children	11	5	8	15
Academic performance (e.g. not doing as well at new school)	6	3	4	7
Being the smallest / youngest in the school	5	2	0	0
Work will be too difficult / too much work	5	2	4	7
Tests / exams	5	2	0	0
Moving around the school for different lessons	4	2	4	7
Getting used to new teachers	4	2	3	6
Remembering equipment / kit etc. for lessons	2	1	0	0
Fighting with other (older) pupils	2	1	0	0
Getting used to a change of school / new environment	2	1	0	0
Less help/ support with school work	1	0.5	0	0
Being set by ability	1	0.5	1	2
Choosing GCSE subjects	1	0.5	0	0
Conflict between schools	1	0.5	0	0
Getting things stolen	1	0.5	0	0
Going swimming	1	0.5	0	0
Lots of different lessons	1	0.5	1	2
Being at the same school as other family members	1	0.5	0	0
School bus	1	0.5	0	0
The food	1	0.5	0	0

*Percentages are based on the total number of pupils who answered the question (Y8M n=204, Y6P n=54) and do not total 100% because some respondents mentioned more than one source of anxiety

6.2.2: Excitement over transfers

Lucey and Reay (2000) point out that transferring from school to school evokes feelings of excitement as well as anxiety among transferees, and in a questionnaire study of pupils nearing the end of Year 6 in County Durham schools, Featonby (2001) found that nearly three-quarters of respondents said they were looking forward to moving to the new school. This sense of optimism was evident in both the survey and discussion group strands of my research. Almost all of the former Dorset pupils who participated in the discussion group described feelings of excitement about the scheduled transfer to a new school and the one middle school attendee described her first to middle school transfer as being particularly stress-free and exciting. Those who did admit to some feelings of anxiety said that it was outweighed by the excitement surrounding the move and a couple of participants agreed that it seemed futile to worry about the transfer as it was inevitable and was something that you go through alongside your peers so did not have to be handled in isolation.

Respondents to the pupils' survey who were about to transfer to a new school were also asked how excited they felt about the move. Figure 6.2.5 shows that first school respondents were the most likely to be 'very excited' about the move and that while the proportion of respondents who were 'very excited' is identical for Year 6 primary and Year 8 middle school pupils (38%), the middle school children were the most likely to be 'not excited' (17%). A chi-square test confirmed that these findings are significant (p<.01 – see Figure 6.2.5) so there is an association between school type and cohort and levels of excitement over the forthcoming transfer, but the effect size was small. A chi-square test was also performed on the Year 8 middle school pupils' responses to this question to assess the relationship between levels of excitement over the transfer are associated with whether the middle school feeds to the largest upper school in the county, this was found to be significant (p<.01) with those due to move to the large upper school less likely to be excited than other pupils and a medium effect size was recorded (Figure 6.2.6).

Figure 6.2.7 presents recently transferred Year 5 middle and Year 7 secondary children's views on how excited they were about the move before it happened and broadly reflects the responses of the soon to transfer Year 4 first and Year 6 primary school pupils, with the younger cohort slightly more likely to report feeling 'very excited'. Again, some of this variation might be attributable to changes in attitude as children get older, for example, older children might be less willing to admit that they feel 'very excited' about the forthcoming transfer, however, it is interesting that the middle school cohort are the most likely to be 'not excited'. Assuming that age does not account entirely for this difference in attitude, it would be interesting to investigate why those children who experience the greatest number of scheduled transfers are the most likely to report feeling 'not excited' about the prospect of their second transfer, such an exploration might probe into whether the experience of the first transfer was particularly negative, or perhaps there is a general desire not to leave the middle school environment, or perhaps there are other issues.

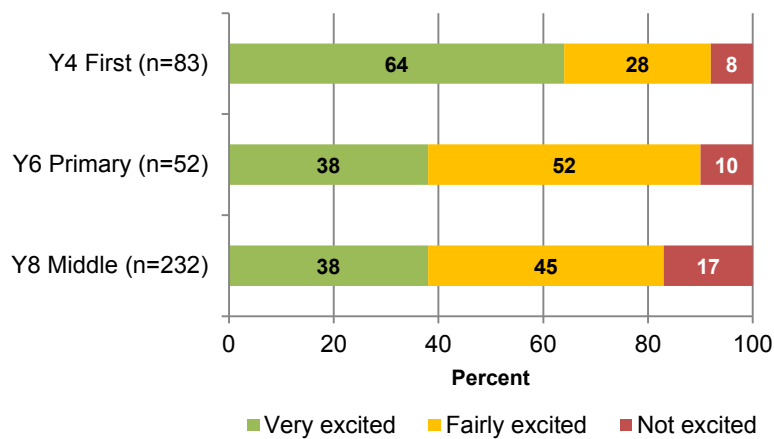**Figure 6.2.5: Extent to which pupils are excited about the forthcoming transfer to a new school**

Figure 6.2.6: Results of chi-square test to measure the association between school type and year group and whether pupils report being excited about the forthcoming transfer

Categories tested	Chi-square value (χ^2)	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Degrees of freedom (df)	Number of cases (n)	Cramer's V (effect size)	Effect size interpretation
Y4 first, Y6 primary, Y8 middle	20.14	.000 Significant	4	367	.166	Small effect
Y8 middle – feeds to a large upper school or not	32.04	.000 Significant	2	232	.372	Medium effect

Figure 6.2.7: Extent to which pupils were excited about the recent transfer to a new school
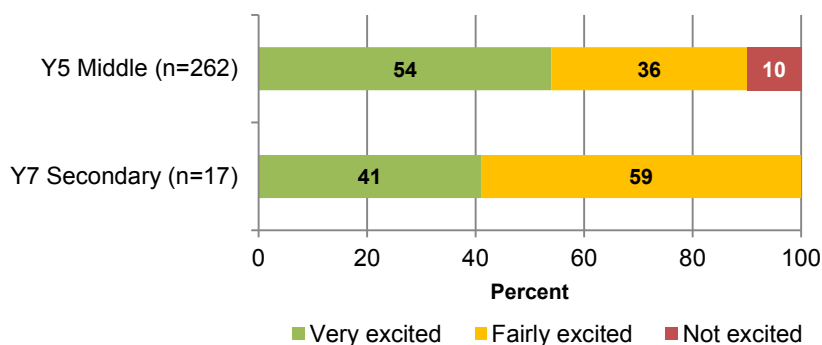
When pupils who were due to transfer were asked to describe the one thing they are most excited about in relation to the transfer, making new friends was the most frequently cited aspect for both middle and primary school respondents (Figure 6.2.8). The second most frequently mentioned source of excitement for those due to transfer out of a middle school was the opportunities for extra-curricular activities (such as clubs and sports teams); those about to transfer from primary to secondary school did not mention this at all. This suggests that middle schools might be somewhat lacking in their provision of extra-curricular activities, leaving children looking to their upper school to meet the demand for a range of activities outside of formal lessons (this echoes the views expressed by middle school headteachers in their survey results reported in Chapter 5, section 5.5 – middle school heads were less likely than

secondary headteachers to 'strongly agree' that their school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities).

Another aspect of the transfer some middle school pupils said they were excited about but none of the primary school respondents mentioned was that it represented a fresh start or welcome change of environment and a couple of middle school respondents said they were most excited about the fact that they will be leaving their middle school. This suggests that despite their shorter period at middle school (compared to the time two-tier system pupils spend at primary school) some children do feel ready to move on by the end of their four years. Perhaps this is an inevitable consequence of a school geared towards pre-adolescence, it is natural that children moving on into their teens are ready for a new environment and to be treated more like an adult (indeed, several respondents specified that being in a more mature environment was a particular source of excitement surrounding the transfer). So while this can be seen in one sense as the middle school doing its job of preparing middle years children for the move to a mature secondary environment, interpreted another way, it might be that the move to a full secondary school environment is overdue by Year 8. The Plowden Report (1967), expressed a marginal preference for 8-12 middle schools exactly for this reason, it was felt that by age 13 some children, particularly girls, might have outgrown their middle school and might have benefitted both academically and socially from a slightly earlier transfer. The desire among some of the respondents to my survey for a fresh start in a new 'grown up' environment suggests either that the middle school system does what it is supposed to do in terms of preparing children for the shift to a secondary environment, or it might indicate that age 13 is too late for some pupils to transfer. Further exploration of exactly when children started to feel the need to move up to the secondary school environment might shed further light on the conclusions which can be drawn from this.

A couple of other notable issues raised by respondents when describing what they were most excited about are the higher proportions of primary than middle school pupils who mentioned both the access to specialist facilities and equipment and the range of different subjects they will be able to study at secondary school.

Figure 6.2.8: Summary of pupils' descriptions of the one thing they are most excited about in relation to the forthcoming transfer

	Year 8 Middle		Year 6 Primary	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**
Making new friends / meeting new people	111	53	32	60
More extra-curricular activities (clubs, sports teams etc.)	18	9	0	0
Access to specialist facilities and equipment	17	8	7	13
Sports lessons	16	8	2	4
Friends or family members already at the school	11	5	2	4
School trips	11	5	0	0
A new school / change of environment / a 'fresh start'	10	5	0	0
More opportunities / new experiences	10	5	1	2
More mature environment / treated more like an adult	9	4	2	4
New teachers	7	3	2	4
Different lessons / subjects	7	3	5	9
Moving away from current school	5	2	0	0
Being at a bigger school	4	2	1	2
Canteen / food	4	2	1	2
Moving up a year / one step closer to leaving school	4	2	0	0
Drama lessons	4	2	1	2
Learning new things	3	1	0	0
Doing tests / exams	2	1	0	0
Doing well academically	2	1	0	0
Having a locker	2	1	1	2
More choice in what to study	2	1	0	0
Being among older pupils	1	0.5	0	0
Music lessons	1	0.5	0	0
The uniform	1	0.5	0	0
Boarding (due to move to state boarding school)	0	0	1	2

*Percentages are based on the total number of pupils who answered the question (Y8M n=210, Y6P n=53) and do not total 100% because some respondents mentioned more than one source of excitement

6.2.3: Academic aspects of transfer

Interviews conducted with middle school pupils in the term prior to their transfer to upper school by Measor and Woods (1984) found that concerns about the level of difficulty of the work at the new school were among the major sources of anxiety over the transfer. In my research, questions were included in the pupils' surveys which attempted to gauge the extent to which participants were worried about the academic challenge they might face at their new school. The surveys for Year 4 first and Year 6

primary pupils asked respondents to indicate how difficult they expect the work to be at their new school. Approximately two-thirds of Year 4 first pupils thought the work would be 'hard' compared to less than half of the Year 6 primary pupils, the majority of whom expected the work to be 'just right' (Figure 6.2.9). A parallel question asked the Year 4 first, Year 6 primary, and Year 8 middle school pupils whether they thought they would do well in their school work at the new school, and as Figure 6.2.10 shows, very few respondents thought they would not do well, but levels of uncertainty were high, particularly among the younger cohorts. An examination of the responses to this question cross-tabulated with responses to an earlier question (*do you do well in your school work? – always / most of the time / sometimes / hardly ever / never*) showed that unsurprisingly, there was an association between how well students perceive they are performing academically at their current school and how well they are likely to perform at their new school with no notable differences across the three school types this question was asked at.

Perhaps of greater interest on this topic are the findings presented in Figure 6.2.11 which presents recently transferred pupils' views on how well they are doing at the new school compared to their previous school. Year 5 middle school pupils were more likely than Year 7 secondary respondents to say they are doing better at their new school, but they were also more likely to say they are doing worse, or that they don't know. Only a relatively small proportion of Year 5 middle school respondents thought they were doing 'just as well' as at the previous school suggesting that while the majority felt they are doing better, for the minority of pupils the transfer has been slightly more disruptive of their perceptions of their academic performance. Note that the small number of respondents for the Year 7 secondary cohort must be borne in mind when interpreting these findings and it might be that the substantially higher number of middle school respondents is more likely to produce varied responses.

Figure 6.2.9: Views of pupils due to transfer on how difficult the work will be at their new school
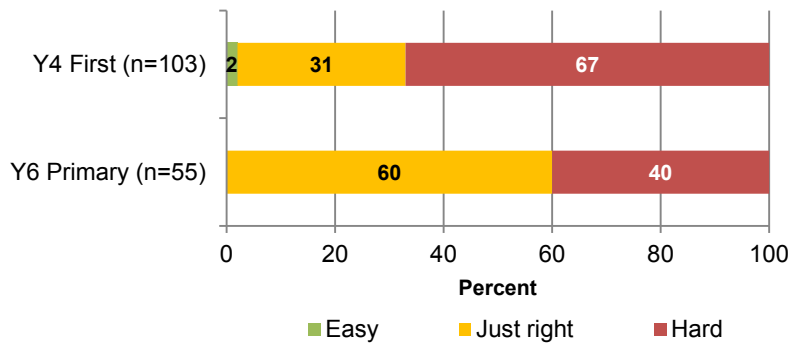

Figure 6.2.10: Views of pupils due to transfer on whether they will do well in their school work at the new school
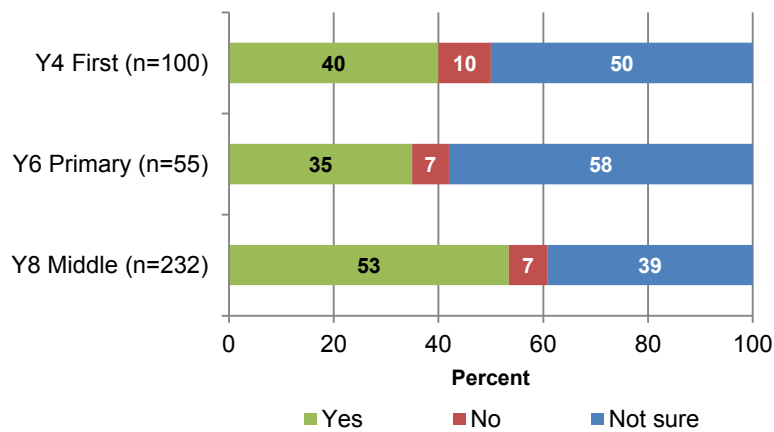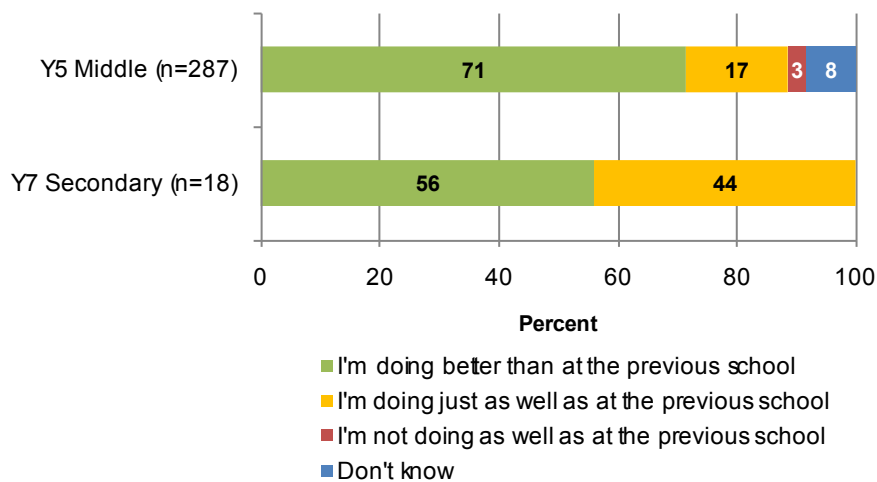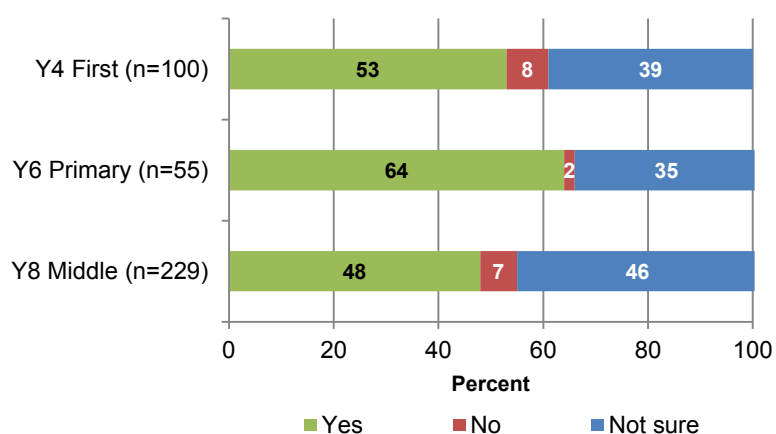

Figure 6.2.11: Extent to which recently transferred pupils think they are doing well in their school work since moving to the new school

Those who were due to transfer in the term after completing the survey were asked whether they thought the teachers at the new school would be helpful. Of the three

cohorts asked this question, Year 6 primary school pupils recorded the highest proportion of positive and lowest proportion of negative responses to this question (Figure 6.2.12) suggesting the possibility that something in the transfer preparations for these pupils might have provided greater reassurance about the amenability of the teachers than was the case for first and middle school respondents (see also the discussion in section 6.1 above about transfer preparation activities).

Figure 6.2.12: Views of pupils due to transfer on whether teachers will be helpful at their new school

Y4 First (n=100): Yes 53, No 8, Not sure 39
Y6 Primary (n=55): Yes 64, No 2, Not sure 35
Y8 Middle (n=229): Yes 48, No 7, Not sure 46

Percent

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Not sure

**6.2.4: Social aspects of transfer**

Other research projects which have explored pupils' perceptions prior to transferring school have found that the social side of the move is both a source of anxiety (e.g. fears about bullying) and excitement (e.g. the potential for making new friends). For example, questionnaire research among pupils due to transfer to secondary school in Scotland revealed that factors relating to the social rather than the academic aspects of the transfer were the most frequently cited causes of anxiety and excitement (Graham and Hill, 2003). Chedzoy and Burden's research found almost two-thirds of Year 7 pupils reported that their new school was a friendly place to be (2005). With this in mind, my surveys measured pupils' expectations prior to the transfer about how friendly the new school would be.

Year 4 first and Year 6 primary school pupils gave similar responses to the survey question on whether they expected other children at their new school to be friendly, however, Year 8 middle school pupils were the least likely to be confident that other pupils will be friendly (just 30% said 'yes' and 11% said 'no' – Figure 6.2.13). This finding is perhaps unexpected, since middle school pupils are two years older than primary school attendees when they have to transfer to an environment with other pupils aged up to 16 or 18 so it might be expected that the younger primary school pupils are more intimidated by the social side of the transfer and more worried about how friendly their peers will be, but based on these data, this does not necessarily appear to be the case.

The data were further analysed by school and it was found that of the three middle schools who took part in the pupils' survey, one school (which accounted for approximately 60% of the total middle school responses to the pupils' surveys) feeds into an especially large upper school - one of the largest schools in the county[6] so it is possible that the size of this school (and the relative influence the 60% of pupils from this particular middle school have on the overall pattern of responses) could be influencing results on topics such as the perceptions and expectations of aspects of the school pupils are due to transfer to. This must be considered when interpreting the findings, but can also be seen as a finding in itself; it raises the likelihood that the three-tier system works best (at least from the perspective of ease of transfer, and possibly on other grounds as well) when the upper schools are not too large (for further discussion of school size see Chapter 4, section 4.1).

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[6] Total number on roll in 2011 = 2283 [Source: Dorset County Council website: http://www1.dorsetforyou.com/Learning/SIS.nsf/Home?ReadForm accessed 21/06/2011]

Figure 6.2.13: Views of pupils due to transfer on whether other children will be friendly at their new school
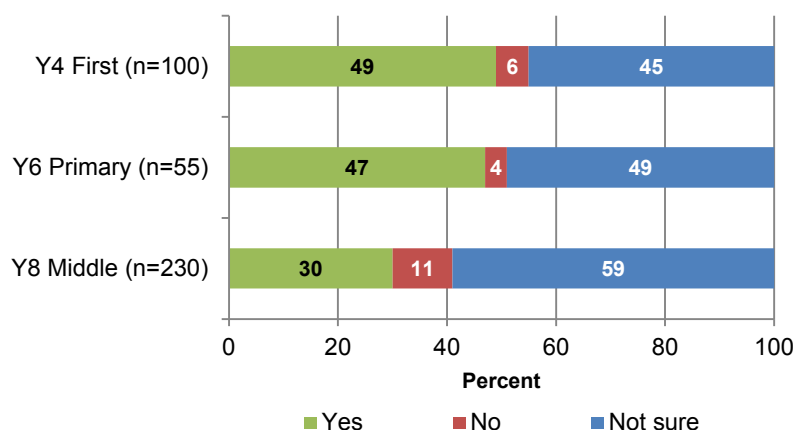
6.2.5: Expectations of school size prior to transfer

Figure 6.2.14 shows the perceptions of pupils due to transfer on how big the school will be and while Year 6 primary and Year 8 middle school pupils gave similar responses with just over half of each cohort saying that the school will be 'about the right size', responses from Year 4 first school pupils were slightly more positive with nearly three-quarters saying the school size would be 'about right'.

These pupils were also asked about their expectations of the number of pupils at their new school (reported in Figure 6.2.15). In this instance, the views of Year 4 first and Year 6 primary school respondents were similar with nearly three-quarters saying there would be 'about the right number of pupils', however, the Year 8 middle school respondents were split almost in half with 47% believing there would be too many pupils and the remaining 53% saying the number of pupils would be about right. Once again, it must be pointed out that more than half of middle school respondents came from one school which feeds into an especially large upper school (as discussed under section 6.2.4 above) so overall results are likely to be influenced by this. Indeed when results were viewed by the middle school respondents attend, the school which feeds to the large upper received 55% 'too many children' responses while the remaining two schools achieved 38% and 33% - a marked difference. A Fisher's exact

test confirmed that there is a significant association (p<.05) between whether the middle school children were at when they completed the survey feeds to the particularly large upper school or not and their perceptions of both school size and whether there will be too many other pupils at the school (Figure 6.2.16). A Fisher's exact test was used in this instance because more than 20% of cells had an expected count of less than 5, making a chi-square test inappropriate.

Figure 6.2.14: Views of pupils due to transfer on the size of their new school
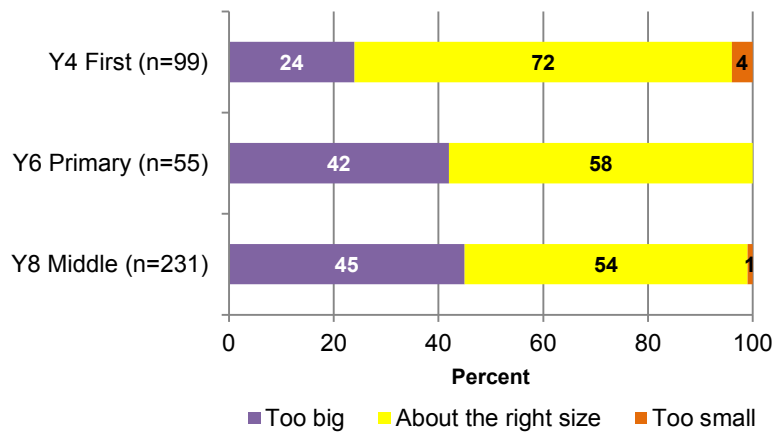
Figure 6.2.15: Views of pupils due to transfer on the number of children there will be at the new school
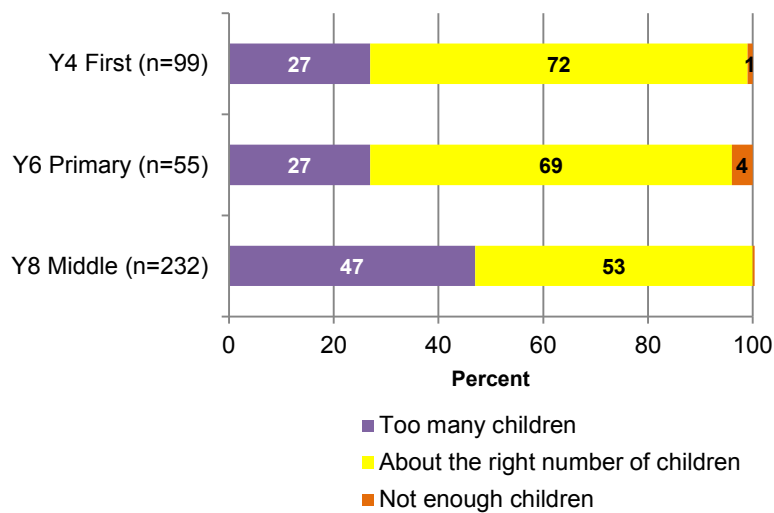
Figure 6.2.16: Results of Fisher's exact test to measure the association between size of destination upper school and Year 8 middle school pupils' perceptions of size prior to the transfer

Categories tested	Fisher's exact test value	Significance level (p) and interpretation	Number of cases (n)
Size of destination upper school and perceptions of size of destination school (Y8 middle pupils)	5.29	.047 Significant	231
Size of destination upper school and perceptions of the number of pupils at the school (Y8 middle pupils)	11.66	.002 Significant	232

6.2.6: Overall perceptions of recent transfer

Year 7 secondary pupils were asked how easy they found their recent transfer to secondary school (it was intended to also ask this of Year 9 upper school pupils but no upper schools took part in the pupil survey). As Figure 6.2.17 shows, more than half of respondents said the transfer was easier than they had expected it to be.

Figure 6.2.17: Recently transferred pupils' perceptions of the ease of the move to the new school

	n	%
It was easier than I thought it would be	10	56
It was just as I expected it to be	7	39
It was more difficult than I thought it would be	1	6
Total	18	100

Box 6.2: Key findings on pupils' perceptions and expectations of transfers

- Among the pupils' survey respondents who were due to undergo a scheduled transfer, Year 8 middle school pupils recorded the smallest proportion of 'very worried' responses. A chi-square test for independence confirmed that this is statistically significant.**

- A statistically significant association was also found between levels of anxiety and whether pupils were due to transfer to a particularly large upper school with higher levels of anxiety being associated with transfer to the large school, though it is not entirely clear whether the size of school is the main influence here or whether other school-level factors might have contributed (such as transfer preparation activities).**

- 'Getting lost' at the new school was one of the most frequently described anxieties among pupils due to transfer from primary or middle school, and among Year 8 middle school survey respondents, the amount of homework was the most commonly cited source of worry.

- Among both the pre- and post-transfer pupils, middle school survey respondents were the most likely to report feeling 'not excited' about the move, an issue which warrants further exploration.

- A chi-square test for independence provided confirmation that there is an association between school type and cohort and levels of excitement over the forthcoming transfer (with Year 4 first school respondents the most likely to be excited) and an association was also noted between the size of upper school Year 8 pupils were due to transfer to and levels of excitement (with those going to the largest upper school the least excited about the move).**

- In response to an open-ended survey question asking which aspect of the move to a new school pupils were most excited about, Year 8 middle school pupils were particularly keen on the increased opportunities for extra-curricular activities: none of the primary transferees mentioned this, suggesting that the extra-curricular offering at middle schools may be inferior to that available to children of the same age within the two-tier system.

- Other aspects of the transfer middle school pupils said they were excited about but which barely feature in the primary respondents' comments included the opportunity for a fresh start and a new environment, being treated more like an adult and moving away from the current school; this calls into question whether pupils were in fact ready for the move earlier than Year 8.

- Relatively high proportions of Year 8 middle school survey respondents said they were concerned that at their new school the other pupils would not be friendly, that there would be too many pupils and that the school would be too big. Closer examination of the data revealed that one of the three participating middle schools feeds to an extremely large upper school and a Fisher's exact test confirmed that there is a statistically significant association between the size of the destination upper school and pupils' perception of both school size and whether there will be too many pupils at their new school.**

** Denotes findings confirmed as significant by statistical tests.

6.3 The number of scheduled transfers and appropriate age at transfer

When middle schools were first introduced to England in the late 1960s the resulting additional transfer necessitated by the three-tier system received little attention, this might be due to the inception of middle schools being linked with the more controversial move towards comprehensive education which might have somewhat overshadowed some of the consequences of the proposed changes to the schooling structure (Stillman and Maychell, 1984). However, as many commentators point out (e.g. Hargreaves and Galton, 2002), even what we term the 'two-tier' system can involve more than one school to school transfer where the primary-phase school is split into separate infant and junior schools or where the secondary school has a separate sixth form centre or college. In Dorset, the separation of primary-phase schools into separate infant and junior schools is relatively rare[7], so it can be assumed that most of those who participated in my research based their views on issues surrounding the number of transfers on a 'minimal' transfer model whereby the first scheduled change of school most pupils in the two-tier system experience is at age 11.

Headteachers and teachers were asked to what extent they agree with the statement *the number of scheduled school to school transfers in the three-tier system causes unnecessary anxiety for children* (overall n=89). None of the middle (n=10) or upper (n=2) school respondents agreed with this statement and only a small minority of first school headteachers and teachers agreed (four of the 29 first school respondents). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the proportions from primary and secondary schools who agreed were relatively high, nearly half of respondents from within the two-tier system agreed to some extent and while none of the 11 secondary respondents disagreed, five of the 37 primary respondents disagreed.

Age 11 has been the general age of transfer from primary schooling in England ever since local authorities were first obliged to provide secondary schooling (initially for

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[7] In 2011 there were 6 infant and 5 junior schools compared to 73 primaries [Source: Dorset County Council website: http://www1.dorsetforyou.com/Learning/SIS.nsf/Home?ReadForm Accessed 10/07/11]

more able children) in the early 1900s; while many continued to educate children in elementary schools from ages five to 14, those that set up dedicated secondary schools adopted an age range of 11 to 16 or 18 (Burrows, 1978). Then the report of the committee chaired by Sir Henry Hadow on educating adolescents recommended that at age 11, "all normal children should go forward to some form of post-primary education" (Board of Education, 1926, p.173) and this was formalised through the 1944 Education Act which required state run schools to incorporate a transfer to secondary schooling between the ages of 10½ and 12 (Burrows, 1978).

The most appropriate age at which children should transfer to a secondary school environment has long been debated and many commentators agree that the setting of age 11 in England was a decision based more on practical considerations than on educational or social grounds (e.g. Hargreaves and Tickle, 1980). There is a general consensus that children are now physically maturing earlier (Carrington, 2006) than they were when the 1944 Education Act set the transfer age at 11. Indeed, the Plowden Committee (1967) cited evidence for the earlier physical development of children but then went on to argue that it was more appropriate to extend the primary education phase for middle years children. Some opponents of the middle school during the late 1960s argued for the retention of a uniform system of transfer to secondary school at age 11 and suggested it made little sense to extend the primary phase of education when children are maturing earlier (for example, Pulman, 1967).

In their work on an appropriate age of transfer for Scotland's schools where children transfer to secondary school at age 12, Nisbet and Entwistle (1966) maintained that it is impossible to set a standard cut-off point which will suit all children and recommended instead a gradual introduction to secondary schooling between ages 10 and 13. This is a view that has been supported by more recent research, Hargreaves and Galton (2002) also concluded that from the perspective of aiding or impeding academic progress, there is no one 'ideal' age of transfer. Writing shortly after the peak in middle school numbers, Youngman (1986) observed that there has been little research into an appropriate age of transfer and that in areas where middle schools

had been introduced, it was usually justified on grounds other than an alleged inappropriateness of transfer at age 11.

My survey asked parents at what age they think their child was, is or will be ready to transfer to a secondary school environment and their responses (particularly among those who had a child at a school in the two-tier system) were mixed, supporting the evidence discussed above that there is little consensus as to which age is best for moving to secondary schooling. While the overall mean age cited was 12 (n=24), respondents' views varied according to which system their child is currently within. Those with a child in a three-tier system (n=11) all agreed on either age 12 or 13 as a suitable age, but responses from parents of children in the two-tier system (n=13) were more varied, ranging from 10 to 14 but with age 11 the most frequently cited preferred age.

Box 6.3: Key findings on number of transfers and appropriate age at transfer

- Headteachers' and teachers' views on the assertion that the number of scheduled school to school transfers in the three-tier system causes unnecessary anxiety for children were unsurprisingly loyal to the system within which they work, the only dissenting voices were evident among first and primary school respondents.*

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

Chapter 7: The Two-Tier and Three-Tier Systems

This chapter presents the views of participants on the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems. It examines views on the costs of each system and the extent to which the different systems might represent administrative inconvenience for local authorities. General preferences for either system among the various stakeholders who participated in this research are also presented and there is a brief discussion of reviews of the three-tier system which have been undertaken in some parts of Dorset.

7.1 Financial and administrative considerations

In a somewhat ironic twist in the middle school's history, one of the key influences underpinning its dramatic rise during the 1970s is now one of the main arguments put forward for closing middle schools and reverting back to the two-tier system: the cost. It has been claimed that at its inception, the middle school presented the most cost effective way of accommodating the increase in the school leaving age implemented in 1973 and the shift towards comprehensive secondary schooling, particularly in the context of an absence of additional funding for the reorganisation (Hardcastle and Bryan, 1977). In more recent years, middle schools have been perceived as expensive not just because of the additional infrastructure costs (such as buildings and facilities, staff and the potential for an additional administrative load for the local authority necessitated by a three-tier system) but also because of falling rolls and hence an increase in surplus places across many three-tier areas (Bryan, 1984).

In an analysis of the Department for Education's school spending data[8] the National Middle Schools' Forum (NMSF) compared the expenditure per pupil for middle schools as opposed to primary and secondary schools (National Middle Schools' Forum, 2011). The NMSF's analysis was based on (an admittedly far from perfect) method of forming one pupil expenditure figure for primary and secondary schools by calculating for each local authority the mid-way point between the primary median spend and the secondary median spend. Using these figures, they found that in the

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[8] Available at:
http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b0072409/background/
[Accessed: 18/11/2011]

majority of authorities which have middle schools, the figure representing mid-way between the primary and secondary expenditure figures was higher than the middle school expenditure figures, thus suggesting that middle schools cost less per pupil than alternative schooling types. This analysis (as the NMSF suggest) is somewhat flawed since it does not take into account the fact that the schools in the two-tier system cover a much wider age range than the middle school, so for example, this disadvantages those secondary schools with expensive sixth forms as it inflates their overall expenditure per pupil.

Dorset usually receives a slightly lower amount per pupil of central funding for schooling children than the England average, for example, in 2008/09, Dorset County Council received £4352 of central funding per pupil compared with £4695 per pupil across England (Dorset County Council, 2009). The introduction in 2011 of the 'Pupil Premium', an additional payment made to schools based primarily on free school meals eligibility, though looked after children and children of families serving in the armed forces also attract this funding, (Department for Education, 2011g) has complicated school funding even further. The Pupil Premium is an attempt to redress the inequalities that are believed to exist between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from better off families, this is pertinent in the Dorset context as it is classed as having 'low' levels of free school meals eligibility (20% or less) (National Middle Schools' Forum, 2011) so as a county there will not be a large increase in funding, this picture will be replicated across most authorities with middle schools since 88% of middle schools in existence in 2009/10 were in this 'low FSM' category (National Middle Schools' Forum, 2011).

In my research, the survey for headteachers and teachers asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement *the three-tier system is an expensive way to educate children.* Predictably those working within three-tier system schools were the most likely to disagree with this statement (10 of the 41 three-tier respondents disagreed compared with three of the 47 two-tier system respondents). The fairly high levels of 'neither agree nor disagree' responses (nearly half of all respondents) might signify that respondents do not feel knowledgeable enough about comparative costs

for each system to make a judgement, and as the discussion above indicates, it is a highly complex area and it is difficult to draw comparisons given the wide range of factors (outside of the type or age range of the school) which influence funding and expenditure levels.

In the interview with the officer from the County Council's education department, the issue of administrative convenience was raised, he was asked whether operating a three-tier system alongside the two-tier system added to the administrative burden of the local authority and whether reducing this was a motivation for reorganising areas into a two-tier structure. The officer emphasised that having two systems had been managed for years and has become a seamless part of the way the authority works with the schools. He stressed that the authority works with schools to empower them to carry out many tasks traditionally conducted by the authority (such as data analysis) and so it becomes almost irrelevant what age-range the schools they cater for. The main aspect of the authority's work which required specific treatment for the middle schools was training provision but this was considered a minimal demand on resources. For Dorset County Council at least, administrative convenience is not a major motivation for reorganising into a solely two-tier arrangement, primarily due to the decentralised way in which the authority works with its schools.

Since middle schools were first conceived the role of the local education authority has changed significantly, where previously they had control over matters such as finances, curriculum policy, school inspections and staffing issues (Letch, 2000), their role has become increasingly marginalised over the intervening decades. The Education Reform Act of 1988 brought to our education system the Grant Maintained school (Letch, 2000), one which opted out of local authority control and which, along with the City Technology Colleges (CTCs) introduced in 1986, paved the way for the academy that is an increasingly common feature of today's education system (Curtis, 2009, p.113). Under the New Labour government elected in 1997, local education authorities saw their autonomy further eroded and the emphasis shifting towards a role in improving school standards (Letch, 2000). The incoming coalition government of 2010 has so far continued to drive the power relationship in this direction with an

expressed wish to increase the number of academies and Free Schools (BBC, 2010)

– both of which are outside of local authority control.

Box 7.1: Key findings on financial and administrative considerations

- Teachers and headteachers expressed mixed views as to whether the three-tier system is an expensive arrangement with those who work in that system the least likely to consider it expensive (n=88). There were relatively high levels of 'neither agree nor disagree' responses suggesting that many respondents might not be adequately informed to make a judgement.*

- The interview with an officer from Dorset County Council revealed that issues of administrative burden and inconvenience are not key drivers in any decision to abolish the three-tier system in areas of Dorset due to the fact that procedures have been adapted over the years to accommodate middle schools and to the decentralised way in which the LEA works.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

7.2 Overall preferences for either schooling system

One of the key reasons cited by local authorities in support of decisions to reorganise their schooling structure from a three-tier to a two-tier system is the mismatch between the key stages which form part of the National Curriculum framework and the age ranges of schools within the three-tier system (see for example, Suffolk County Council, 2006b, Dorset County Council, 2008). To gauge how far teachers and headteachers in schools participating in this research felt this was a disadvantage, the survey asked respondents how far they agree with the statement *the three-tier system is inappropriate as it does not fit with the National Curriculum key stage structure*. There was once again a high level of support for the three-tier arrangement from those who work within that system, with 21 of the 43 three-tier system respondents disagreeing with the statement (compared with just four out of 48 two-tier respondents). Among the three-tier respondents, those from first schools were the most likely to agree that the system is inappropriate because it does not fit with the key stage structure (11 out of 31 first school respondents agreed); this might be due to a desire to keep children at the school for the entire Key Stage 2 rather than transferring them to the middle schools part way through.

Headteachers and teachers also indicated in their survey responses whether they are generally in favour of the three-tier schooling system involving middle schools for ages 9-13 (n=89). Middle (n=10) and upper (n=2) school respondents were unanimous in their support of their system and the majority of secondary school respondents (eight of the 11 respondents) were not in favour of the three-tier system (the remaining three were 'undecided'). However, among respondents from primary-phase schools there were a few more dissenting voices with a small proportion of both first (five of the 31 first school respondents) and primary (six out of 35 primary respondents) school respondents favouring the system they do not currently work in.

Teachers and headteachers were invited to give brief reasons as to why they were in favour of or against the three-tier schooling system. Their responses were analysed by theming or coding the content of each comment in NVivo software as described in section 3.9 of Chapter 3. This elicited comments on a wide variety of issues, some of which are summarised below with illustrative quotes selected so as to represent the general 'flavour' of comments on each theme discussed (the type of school the commentator currently works in and their response to whether they are generally in favour of the three-tier system is given in brackets alongside each quote).

Six of the 64 headteachers and teachers who made a comment said that they preferred the three-tier system because of its perceived benefits to children's social and emotional development and a further four respondents mentioned the academic advantages of the system:

> "Having had experience of both systems I prefer the experiences on offer especially through social and emotional development in 3 tier system." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

> "Have only been in first school for just over a year, following many years in infant school in two-tier system - where moves match end of key stages. Am becoming more aware of how more suited three-tier system is to social / emotional development." (First, undecided)

> "The system works well with good systems and procedures in place. Data and evidence show children perform well above national average in current system. Although there is

evidence that some KS2 scores are better in primary (2 tier) than in middle schools (3 tier) this is counter balanced by KS3 results." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

"Having worked in both systems, I feel the benefits of 3 tier system, particularly academically in Yr 5, 6 and 7 are extensive." (Primary, yes in favour of three-tier)

Issues of transfer and transition were salient among respondents' comments. There were equal numbers of comments both in favour and against the three-tier system on the grounds of transfer; those against felt the number of transfers were unsettling for children and those in favour explained that they provided a gradual transition to secondary schooling rather than one big step up at age 11:

"Movement between 3 schools is less efficient and more turbulent than 2 schools. Transfer of info more complicated. More time needed dealing with transition issues. Not a neat fit to the NC and assessment either." (Secondary, not in favour of three-tier system)

"I can see the arguments in favour, but overall I feel that the system adds an unnecessary layer to pupils' education. Perhaps the transition to secondary school is a little more daunting at 11, but the benefits in terms of specialist teaching and facilities are greater." (Secondary, not in favour of three-tier system)

"Much less stress moving from a small village first school to a 350 pupil middle then to a large upper school (1500 pupils)." (Middle, yes in favour of three-tier)

"I also remember my move from primary to secondary school which felt like such a big leap - although 3-tier means two moves I feel they are less disruptive and daunting." (Middle, yes in favour of three-tier)

While four respondents expressed concerns that the three-tier system perhaps introduces children to the secondary teaching and learning environment too early, one was of the opinion that this system is advantageous because it delays the transition to the secondary environment. Two commentators noted that where the primary phase of a two-tier system is split into separate infant and junior schools, there are equal numbers of transfers in both systems:

"I have seen the benefits of both systems, however I feel the primary age children are moved too quickly to the secondary style in the three tier system." (First, undecided)

"I believe the 3-tier system actually puts the children in a secondary school environment for longer than necessary." (Primary, not in favour of three-tier system)

"It keeps children in a primary environment for longer." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

"Transfer to middle school at age 9+ is preferable to infant-junior transfer at 7+ because children are emotionally and socially much better able to cope at 9+." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

Three respondents pointed out that the three-tier system enables children to take on responsibilities to a greater extent than the two-tier arrangement:

"In Years 7 and 8 children benefit from our more secondary approach to their timetable. The expectations placed upon them are also greater and they are expected to take more responsibility. We find this prepares them very well for upper school. (Middle, yes in favour of three-tier)

"Middle school allows children to grow in responsibility." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

Though four respondents favoured the three-tier system for exposing children to specialist teaching and facilities at an earlier age than the two-tier system, a further four were concerned that children in their upper years at middle school can be taught by non-specialists when their counterparts at secondary school would not be:

"Years 5 and 6 can be challenging for the generalist class teacher in a primary school but can be taught by specialists at middle school." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

"Three-tier is better, for fitting academic and psychological development but sometimes Y7 and 8 can still be treated as primary with little regard for emotional and social development. I find this concerning coming from secondary." (Middle, yes in favour of three-tier)

Opinion was divided as to whether either system was more likely than the other to contribute to a 'dip' in performance during Key Stage 3, and three respondents reiterated that the three-tier system does not align with the key stages:

> "[In a middle school] the gradual transformation in Years 5-7 from class teacher to subject-specialist prevents the Year 7 dip common in the two-tier system." (Primary, yes in favour of three-tier)

> "[The three-tier system] causes a dip in academic performance for KS3 SATs, has a negative impact on Y9 development (social / personal)." (Secondary, not in favour of three-tier system)

> "KS3 does not fit with NC at present however I feel that moving the KS3 tests would mean middle and secondary able to accommodate KS3." (Middle, yes in favour of three-tier)

Eight respondents were of the view that different schooling systems work well in different contexts, in particular rural settings often necessitated one schooling arrangement over another, however, one respondent warned that having different systems operating in one local authority area can lead to confusion:

> "In this local authority, both systems work equally effectively." (Primary, undecided)

> "In Dorset the 3 tier system and 2 tier system creates confusion. It would be better to adopt a single system. There are advantages and disadvantages to both and both can work equally as well. However, due to Dorset's rural nature, first schools are often too small to be financially viable therefore the 2 tier system would suit Dorset." (Primary, not in favour of three-tier system)

Financial concerns were the subject of four comments and there was evidence of a perception among some that the 'more expensive' three-tier system diverts funding away from the two-tier system:

> "From a purely financial position middle schools are expensive but in practice there are good ones that do well just as there are poor primaries that don't." (First, undecided)

"[The three-tier system] costs too much money. Primary schools are the poor relation. Performance (CVA) of primary schools is generally high, much better value for money." (Primary, not in favour of three-tier system)

"In favour on educational grounds, but not in favour on grounds of impact on funding for 2-tier schools." (Secondary, undecided)

Finally, four respondents expressed their preference for the three-tier system having experienced it themselves as children, or having seen their own children go through the system:

"For all the positive points I have ticked in this survey and because I was a three-tier student, and I choose to teach in this system because through experience I know it works." (Middle, yes in favour of three-tier)

"My children have all benefitted from the 3 tier middle school system. They have not had to experience a sudden complete change as would have been the case in a 2 school primary system." (First, yes in favour of three-tier)

"My children were educated in a three-tier system and benefitted from being taught by specialists, with facilities, and enjoyed the experience in the middle school phase best." (Primary, yes in favour of three-tier)

The survey for parents and carers of children at Dorset schools also asked which system they would ideally prefer for their child (n=29). The majority (10 of the 12 three-tier system respondents) of parents of children in the three-tier system with middle schools for ages 9-13 prefer that system with just one respondent favouring the two-tier system and one opting for the arrangement involving middle schools for 8-12 year olds. The pattern of responses from parents of children within the two-tier system is interesting, around half of the 17 respondents opted for the two-tier system, but among those who favoured the three-tier system, there was more support for the 8-12 middle school (six respondents associated with the two-tier system preferred the arrangement with 8-12 middle schools) than for the 9-13 middle school (preferred by just three of the respondents which a child currently in the two-tier system). Dorset does not have any 8-12 middle schools so it is interesting that there is such a small

constituency of support for the 9-13 schools among parents of children in the two-tier system. It is possible that the area-by-area reviews of the schooling system in Dorset taking place while the research was conducted have influenced parents' perceptions, since these have resulted in the abandonment of the three-tier system in all areas reviewed to date. Another factor at play could be that the 8-12 middle school represents a less dramatic deviation from the two-tier transfer age of 11 which most parents are familiar with and which many would have experienced themselves.

A subsequent question asked respondents which schooling system they went through themselves. When parents' preferred system for their child was cross-tabulated against the system they went through it was apparent that while opinions were mixed among parents who attended schools in the two-tier system, all of those who went through a three-tier system with 9-13 middle schools preferred this system for their child.

Parents had the opportunity to explain their reasons for their preferred schooling system for their own child. The bulleted lists below present a summary of the main points raised in respondents' comments (note that there was nothing specific in parents' comments to explain the preference among some parents of children at two-tier schools for the 8-12 middle school):

Parents' reasons for preferring the three-tier system:

- Pupils are more mature when they reach senior school and are better able to cope with the academic challenges and decision making expected of them

- Due to the narrow age range at upper schools, the school can expect more grown-up behaviour and mutual respect between pupils and staff

- Pupils arrive at upper school having already dealt with many of the challenges of puberty, and when they do move on, they are among children at a similar stage in their physical and social development

- Those disaffected by school only have a short period (3 years minimum) at upper school

- Narrower age ranges at schools within each tier can allow for greater interaction and support between children at the school and makes it easier for schools to treat children in a manner appropriate to their age

- More opportunities to develop leadership skills as children become the top year in the school one more time in the three-tier system

- Provides a gradual transition from primary to secondary schooling

- Children have greater opportunities to mix with new people and make new friends due to additional school transfers

- Children are exposed to a variety of teachers at an earlier age and are more likely to be taught in set or streamed groups earlier

Parents' reasons for preferring two-tier system:

- Fewer school-to-school transfers, therefore greater continuity and less traumatic for the children

- Children spend longer at each school and therefore become more comfortable and familiar with it

- Longer periods spent at each school means it is more likely that children spend some time at the same school as siblings – they are therefore supported by other family members at the school and it can be more convenient for parents in terms of practical issues such as transport to school

- Lower costs of buildings and infrastructure

Many of the reasons cited above for preferring the three-tier system reflect some of the principles of the ideal middle school which have been discussed in other chapters, for example, the idea of providing a gradual transition to secondary schooling, the notion that children are physically and socially more mature when they reach upper school and so are perhaps in a better position to deal with the academic decisions and challenges that lie ahead and the opportunities for taking on responsible roles afforded by being in the top year of the school three times. However, as some of my research findings have highlighted, sometimes the reality of the middle school does not always reflect these ideals. Most of the reasons given by parents for favouring the two-tier system relate to academic and social continuity and practical issues such as costs and convenience.

In the pupils' survey, children who were just about to or had recently transferred schools were asked whether they would prefer to go through the alternative schooling system. Figure 7.2.1 shows responses from pupils in the three-tier system and Figure 7.2.2 presents the views of children in the two-tier system. Overall the majority of respondents either preferred the system they were in or were undecided. However, across both systems, the cohort which had recently undergone a scheduled transfer (Year 5 middle and Year 7 secondary pupils) were more likely than the pre-transfer cohorts to say they would prefer to go through the alternative system: 20% of Year 5 middle pupils would have preferred to be within the two-tier system and 28% of Year 7 secondary respondents said they would have preferred the three-tier system. On the face of it, these findings might suggest that having recently undergone the upheaval of a transfer, pupils might just be wishing they were in the alternative system so that they could have avoided the move at this point in time, it might also be linked to the sudden switch in status the recently transferred pupils had undergone from being the top year at a school to being the youngest.

Figure 7.2.1: Three-tier system pupils' preferred schooling system – by year group, pre and post-transfer cohorts only
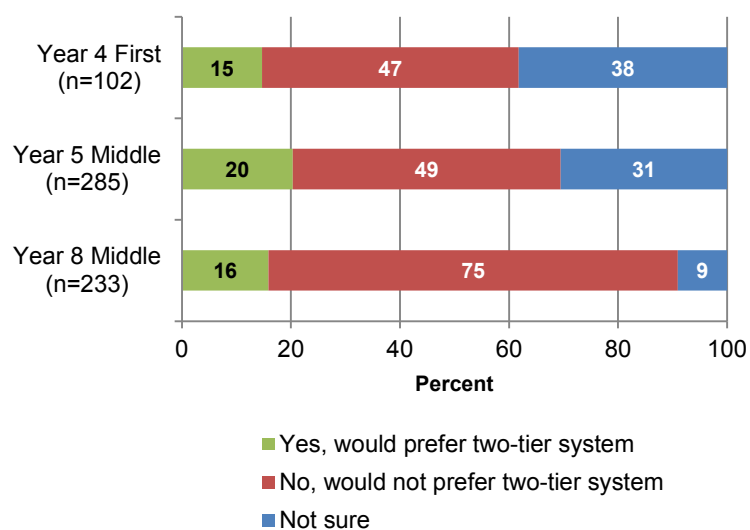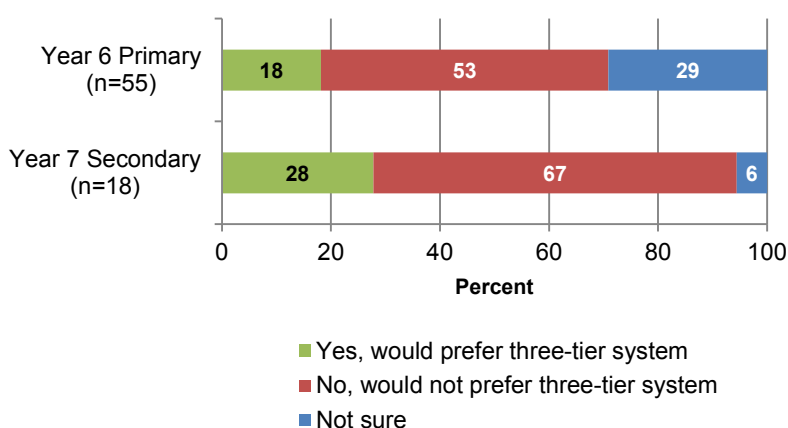
Year group	Yes, would prefer two-tier system	No, would not prefer two-tier system	Not sure
Year 4 First (n=102)	15	47	38
Year 5 Middle (n=285)	20	49	31
Year 8 Middle (n=233)	16	75	9

- ■ Yes, would prefer two-tier system
- ■ No, would not prefer two-tier system
- ■ Not sure

Figure 7.2.2: Two-tier system pupils' preferred schooling system – by year group, pre and post-transfer cohorts only

Year group	Yes, would prefer three-tier system	No, would not prefer three-tier system	Not sure
Year 6 Primary (n=55)	18	53	29
Year 7 Secondary (n=18)	28	67	6

- ■ Yes, would prefer three-tier system
- ■ No, would not prefer three-tier system
- ■ Not sure

Pupils (except for those in Year 4 at first school) were asked to give brief reasons for their answer to this question, Figures 7.2.3-7.2.6 show a summary of the issues raised. Friendships were an important issue for relatively large proportions of pupils who gave a reason for their preferred system; those who favoured the three-tier system liked the additional opportunities to make new friends, while those who preferred the two-tier system were appreciative of the opportunity to stay with existing friends for longer. Those who preferred the three-tier system also cited the gradual transition to secondary schooling and being among peers of a similar age-range as positive points to the system. Respondents who preferred the two-tier system seemed content with the stability and continuity associated with the less frequent transfers, but supporters

of the three-tier arrangement were positive about the additional transfer and many welcomed the fresh start it afforded and the perceived opportunities for educational challenge and access to specialist facilities and teachers. Indeed some three-tier respondents pointed out that the shorter length of time spent at each school provides good preparation for later life, for example, when moving jobs.

Some responses to this opportunity to explain the reasoning behind their preferred system indicate that a minority of pupils were perhaps unable or unwilling to look outside of their own immediate circumstances rather than assessing the issue of which schooling system suits them best on a more conceptual level. For example, many respondents said they prefer the system they are in just because they like their current school and clearly would not have wanted to have missed the opportunity to go there. While this is perfectly understandable and still provides interesting data, a deeper exploration of these issues would have been possible if this research had involved a more qualitative approach to collecting information from pupils, for example through discussion groups or interviews. The issues around the alternative schooling system could then have been fully explained and discussed and pupils could have been encouraged to look outside of their immediate circumstances in attempting to judge which system (if any) they prefer.

Figure 7.2.3: Summary of reasons given by three-tier system pupils for preferring the three-tier system

Summary of reasons given	n	%
Extra opportunities to make new friends in three-tier system due to extra transfer	74	25
Do not want to be at a school with much older or younger children / prefer shorter age range and/or smaller schools	50	17
Gradual transition to secondary schooling / transition takes place in stages	34	11
Learn more or do new things at middle school / better facilities	31	10
Too long at one school in two-tier system / potential for boredom	24	8
Wanted to move from the old school / ready for a change	22	7
Like trying new things / moving to new schools	16	5
Prefer three-tier system because they like their middle school	13	4
Treated as more grown-up at each new school	13	4
General preference for three-tier (no reason specified)	10	3
Prepares you better for dealing with change and new environments in later life	5	2
Enjoy having a fresh start - new teachers etc.	2	1
Have been to schools in the two-tier system and did not like it	2	1
Move would have been more difficult after an extended period at primary school (would be more attached to the primary school)	1	0
Early KS3 SATs (middle school operates condensed KS3)	1	0
Total	**298**	**100**

Figure 7.2.4: Summary of reasons given by three-tier system pupils for preferring the two-tier system

Summary of reasons given	n	%
Get to stay with old friends for longer	22	25
Would be more comfortable / familiar to stay longer at each school	17	19
Generally preferred old school (more fun, easier work etc.)	16	18
Prefer fewer transfers in the two-tier system	7	8
Would be able to deal with the transfer better if you were a bit older	6	7
Better teachers or facilities at old school	5	6
Prefer primary teaching style (e.g. not moving around for different lessons)	5	6
First school less strict / fewer rules so would prefer to stay there for longer	4	4
General preference for two-tier system (no reason specified)	3	3
Wouldn't need to buy as many new school uniforms	2	2
Dislike the middle school	1	1
Most areas don't have middle schools - would prefer to match the more widespread schooling arrangement	1	1
Total	**89**	**100**

Figure 7.2.5: Summary of reasons given by two-tier system pupils for preferring the two-tier system

Summary of reasons given	n	%
Dislike the additional transfers in the three-tier system	14	42
Having to leave old friends / make new friends at each change of school	7	21
General dislike of three-tier system (no reason specified)	5	15
Age 9 is too young to move schools	3	9
Prefer to stay at each school for longer	1	3
School work might suffer due to lack of continuity	1	3
Prefer a wider age range at each school (better mix of younger and older pupils)	1	3
Difficult for parents to get children of different ages to separate schools - less likely to happen in two-tier system	1	3
Total	**33**	**100**

Figure 7.2.6: Summary of reasons given by two-tier system pupils for preferring the three-tier system

Summary of reasons given	n	%
Being around children of a similar age (shorter age-range)	4	36
General preference for three-tier system (no reason specified)	2	18
Extra opportunities to make friends	2	18
Provides a gradual transition to secondary schooling rather than a big step up	2	18
Smaller schools	1	9
Total	**11**	**100**

In the discussion group held with former Dorset pupils, participants were asked which system they would have preferred to go through and only one person expressed a definite preference and that was for the two-tier system (the person concerned had attended the two-tier system). A similar question asked them which system they would prefer for their children if/when they became parents and again, there was no definite preference but two of the participants who had attended the two-tier system were attracted to the three-tier system because of the "concentrated attention" they thought middle schools could offer and because one participant observed that the middle school pupils who joined her school in Year 9 seemed more mature than the existing Year 9s. However, all participants were keen to stress that they would be more concerned with issues such as academic standards, facilities and so on and that the system was almost irrelevant to them.

Box 7.2: Key findings on overall preferences for either schooling system

- Teachers and headteachers who work in the three-tier system were predictably less likely than those in the two-tier system to agree that the misalignment with National Curriculum key stages renders the three-tier system inappropriate (n=91). The main body of dissent from three-tier respondents was evident among first school teachers and headteachers.*

- When asked whether they have an overall preference for the two-tier or three-tier system, teachers and headteachers were overwhelmingly supportive of the system they currently work in, however, those in primary-phase schools in both systems were slightly less emphatic in their support of their own system (n=89).*

- Pupils who had recently undergone a scheduled school to school transfer were more likely than pre-transfer cohorts to say they would prefer to go through the alternative system, but overall a substantial proportion of pupils favoured the system they were currently in. The difficulties inherent in expecting pupils to conceptualise an alternative schooling system to the one they are currently experiencing, particularly through a survey question, must be borne in mind when interpreting responses to this question.

* Denotes summary findings from questionnaires where one or more of the respondent groups has n<10

7.3 Reviewing and reorganising schooling arrangements

As the decline in middle school numbers described in Chapter 1 indicates, most local authorities are opting to reorganise into a two-tier structure. Dorset is no exception, they are (and have been since before this research was instigated) undertaking an area-by-area review of provision where both the two and three-tier arrangements are in place. To date reviews have been conducted in the Blandford, Shaftesbury and Purbeck areas and in all cases the decision has been made to revert to a two-tier system across the area.

The strand of this research which directly addressed the issue of reorganisation was the interview with the officer from the County Council. He explained that Dorset has no overarching policy to convert to two-tier throughout and that each area reviewed would undergo a thorough consultation process before conclusions are reached. However he did mention the reorganisation to a two-tier arrangement in the Blandford and Shaftesbury areas (the Purbeck review had not been completed at the time of the interview) and described cross-border issues (a nearby county had recently converted

back to a two-tier arrangement) and demand for school places (primarily a surplus

places issue) as key drivers in the decision to revert to solely two-tier provision. The

reasons given by Dorset and other local authorities for reorganising from three-tier to

two-tier schooling arrangements are discussed further in Chapter 8.

Box 7.3: Key findings on reviewing and reorganising schooling arrangements

- While Dorset has no overall policy to abolish the three-tier system, in those areas where reviews have been conducted the result has been reorganisation into a solely two-tier system.

- Key motivators for the reorganisation have been surplus places and the perceived need to align the arrangement of schooling systems with surrounding areas which are under the control of other authorities.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This chapter draws together the results reported in Chapters 4-7 and summarises the main messages from this research in terms of the research questions and the extent to which it adds to our existing knowledge of middle schools. It begins with an examination of the main advantages and disadvantages of middle schools identified during the course of the research (in terms of both the educational experience and the extent to which they support and encourage children's social development and emotional well-being). The lessons we might learn from middle schools are discussed in section 8.2 and then section 8.3 views the research findings in terms of the multiple stakeholder approach and briefly examines where the constituency of support for middle schools might lie. The middle school's prospects for the future are the subject of section 8.4.

As has been indicated throughout my discussion of the results, some of the questionnaire findings are based on fairly small numbers of respondents (notably, only one secondary school participated in the pupils' survey, just two upper schools completed the headteachers questionnaires – though this represents half of the total number of upper schools in Dorset – and the overall respondent base for the parents' survey is low, n=29). The implications of this are discussed further in Chapter 9 but this limitation should be considered when drawing conclusions.

To assist with relating the conclusions drawn in this chapter to the original research objectives and questions, these are re-stated in Box 8.1.

Box 8.1: The research objectives and questions

The research objectives are as follows:

- To assess whether there are differences between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system in terms of:

    a) educational experiences

    and

    b) children's social development and emotional well-being

- To investigate the extent to which any differences identified between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system can be attributed to the schooling structure or whether there are other contributory factors

- To draw conclusions as to the educational and social advantages and disadvantages of different middle years schooling systems and to identify areas of good practice which can be applied to middle years schooling more generally.

The following specific research questions were formulated from the above objectives:

- Are there differences in educational experiences between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

- Are there differences in children's social development and emotional well-being between those attending 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

- What are the lessons from middle schools for middle years schooling more generally?

8.1 The advantages and disadvantages of the 9-13 middle school

On commencing this research, it was intended to conduct a study of the merits of the 9-13 middle school within the Dorset County Council administrative area by consulting a wide range of stakeholders. In order to assess the relative merits of the system, it was necessary to include a comparative element in the research which required data collection from stakeholders in the two-tier schooling system. It became apparent when designing the research and the data collection instruments that this was only

possible by including those schools which cover the year groups adjacent to the range of the middle school as well as the 9-13 age range (primarily because it allowed the collection of data from the pre and post-transfer schools and pupils), that is, from Year 4 to Year 9. The inclusion of schools from all tiers of the two schooling systems means that in some senses, the project has become a comparison of the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems in the Dorset area, however, the main focus is on the 9-13 middle school and it must be borne in mind that if middle schools did not exist, then the three-tier system would not exist so the two issues are inextricably linked. Some of the findings were pertinent for middle schools only, but others related to the entire system (two-tier or three-tier) so in the following discussion of findings there is some switching between discussing the good and bad points of middle schools and those of the entire systems.

8.1.1: The educational experience

This section discusses the implications of the findings which relate to the following research question:

Are there differences in educational experiences between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

On viewing the findings on the educational context (discussed in Chapter 4) together, it becomes apparent that there two main themes arising. First, the idea of a notional divide at age 11 in the middle school which mimics the two-tier system's transfer to secondary schooling at age 11 and arguably provides a differential educational experience across the lower and upper two years of the school. The second theme is that of a generally more favourable view of the educational experience on offer in the two-tier system expressed by many of the stakeholders who participated in this research, particularly for pupils in Years 7 and 8.

These themes are interlinked and the conclusions that can be drawn from this and the implications are discussed below.

This phenomenon of a notional divide within the middle school at age 11 (discussed further in Chapter 4) is one of the key messages from my research and was noted by many of the earlier commentators on middle schools, for example, Burrows (1978) and Hargreaves (1986). Indeed, in earlier work, Hargreaves pointed out that this was an inevitable consequence of the widespread adoption of the administratively convenient 9-13 middle school above the 8-12 school recommended on "educational grounds" (1980, p.83) which meant middle school staff were formed from both primary and secondary teachers from the reorganised schools who found themselves teaching the lower and upper two years respectively. It seems that the passing of time has done little to minimise this split at age 11 and that it goes beyond the allocation and expertise of teaching staff. The prevalence of this pattern of organisation in middle schools led Burrows to question whether the middle school has become something of a "pantomime horse [with] one pair of primary legs and one pair of secondary legs" (1978, p.117). Those specific findings in my research which lend weight to this notion are:

- Middle school Years 7 and 8 pupils were more likely than secondary Years 7 and 8 pupils to perceive their school as being too small and this was found to be statistically significant. Note this is not simply a top year of the school effect for Year 8 pupils: when compared with those in the top year at primary school, a much smaller proportion of Year 6 pupils at primary schools thought their school was too small (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1.3).

- The proportion of middle school pupils saying that there are too many teachers at their school decreases with each year group, so again, there is evidence of middle school pupils generally feeling their school is small particularly towards the end of their time at the school. There was a statistically significant association between school type and views on the number of teachers at the school for Years 7 and 8 pupils, with middle school

pupils less likely then secondary pupils to say there are too many teachers (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1.4).

- Respondents in Years 5 and 6 at middle school were more likely than their counterparts at primary school to say that there are too many children at their school, again this was found to be statistically significant (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1.10).

- Three of the four participating middle schools said the core subjects were taught by subject specialists only for the top two years of the school, and in some, there were no subject-specialists for the humanities subjects (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.2.1).

- Teachers and headteachers tended to favour age 11 as a suitable point for the introduction of increased subject-specialist teaching (n=81) and for the introduction of widespread grouping by ability (n=31 – teachers only were asked this question). While it was not appropriate to apply statistical tests to these data they still represent a substantial proportion of school staff seeing age 11 as a watershed year – regardless of the schooling system they currently work in.

In relation to the research question, this is an area where the two schooling systems are *similar* rather than different since the middle school arrangement in this instance aligns with the primary/secondary divide at age 11, but it can be seen as a negative point against the middle school: If middle schools are such a good idea, why are so many of them mirroring the two-tier system by reinforcing a switch in the educational environment at age 11? There are also clear trends for the experience within the middle school to be perceived differently by the lower (Years 5 and 6) and upper (Years 7 and 8) years. The findings which relate to pupils' perceptions of school size suggest that while those in the lower years are likely to feel everything is too big, the reported perceptions of Years 7 and 8 pupils suggest they might be outgrowing their middle school as they approach the end of their four year tenure. In one aspect of the educational offering, there was no evidence of differential provision between the lower

and upper years at the school and that was in the equipment and facilities pupils have access to. Most participating middle schools said that pupils in all year groups had access to all facilities and equipment.

Sir Alec Clegg, who was Chief Education Officer at the West Riding when the first middle school was opened and is regarded by many as one of the architects of the middle school (e.g. Crook, 2008) alluded to this notional divide in a piece written shortly before the first middle schools opened:

> "It would be unfortunate if [middle schools] came to be regarded simply as the last two years of what we now know as primary education joined to the first two years of the secondary school" (Clegg, 1967, p.2)

But Clegg then goes on to detail how teams of teachers could teach children in the upper years and specialist facilities and equipment could be made available to those children, thus reinforcing that split at age 11 before the first middle school had even opened its doors.

A major reason why this 'pantomime horse' effect is still evident in today's middle schools could be due to the (increasingly) minority status of the middle school, when the predominant schooling system is based on a transfer from primary to secondary schooling at age 11, surely it is inevitable that this will filter through to the much smaller three-tier system because of the infrastructure that is built around the arrangement of the dominant system. An example of this is the now defunct *Building Schools for the Future* programme for investment in secondary school buildings which implicitly deterred middle schools from applying for funding by specifying that the money could only be used for Year 7 and above schooling (Suffolk County Council, 2006b). Another issue with England's educational infrastructure which is problematic for the middle school is the structure of the National Curriculum key stages, with Key Stage 2 ending at Year 6 and Key Stage 3 commencing at Year 7, corresponding with the move from primary to secondary school within the two-tier system. England seems wedded to the notion of transfer at age 11 for whatever reason. Transfer at age 11 was an arbitrary decision with no grounding in either child development or educational theories, rather it was an attempt to engineer a secondary phase of education that

was long enough to be worthwhile when most children left school at age 14 (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). Even with the peak in middle school numbers in the 1980s they never reached a critical mass whereby they could exert a powerful influence on our educational landscape before the advent of the National Curriculum sounded the death knell for them.

My research findings also suggest a more favourable view of the educational experience on offer among participants from the two-tier system. When questions on the pupils' survey which measured attitudes towards the educational offering were combined to create a 'score' there was a significant difference between pupils' attitudes in middle and primary schools (for Years 5 and 6) and between middle and secondary schools (for Years 7 and 8). In both cases the middle school respondents exhibited a propensity to be more negative about their educational experience (see Chapter 4, section 4.5).

A closer examination of the responses to the questions that made up this attitudinal scale suggests that one area of discontent might lie in the lack of academic challenge perceived by some middle school pupils (as measured by responses to the question *do you find out new things in lessons?* - though note that the differences between the school types did not achieve statistical significance). Lynch (1980) suggested that middle schools are not necessarily meeting the needs of gifted and talented children (primarily, he claimed, due to the lack of subject-specialist teachers). In a survey of middle and comprehensive secondary schools conducted in the infancy of the middle school, HMI complained that, though there were some notable exceptions, middle school headteachers and teachers were generally less aware than secondary staff of what 'giftedness' meant and seemingly gave it little thought in their day to day teaching, and as a result were inadequately equipped to react to it (HMI, 1977, p.9). The HMI survey did also criticise secondary schools for their neglect of or indifference towards the education of gifted and talented children, so many of the issues raised in their report are undoubtedly tied in with the move towards comprehensive schooling, but it is notable that even then, middle schools were considered to be bigger offenders than secondary schools on this front.

In the context of the American middle school, there are even greater concerns over the capacity of this schooling unit to adequately cater for gifted children. The central middle school tenets of equity and "equal opportunity to succeed" (Tomlinson, 1995, p.2) are in direct competition with the principle associated with educating gifted and talented children that each pupil "should be assisted in developing his or her maximum capacity" (Tomlinson, 1995, p.2). As Tomlinson points, out, this tension is only exacerbated when "scarce resources" (1995, p.2) are added to the mix. In his case study work of middle schools in England during the 1970s, Burrows (1978) described a scenario of more able children being taken out of classes for periods of specialised teaching to provide the academic challenge they need, but this would require a level of resource most likely not available in today's schools.

Overall there was little convincing evidence from my research to suggest that middle schools provide a superior educational experience, particularly when the Years 7 and 8 experience is compared between middle and secondary schools. Perhaps the one potential difference in favour of the middle school is the possibility of the absence or minimising of the Key Stage 3 dip in the three-tier system (see Chapter 4, section 4.5), but evidence from my own and others' research is somewhat inconclusive and this is an area which might warrant further exploration.

What is of particular interest is an aspect of the research findings which I had not anticipated and that is that the differences in pupils' views and attitudes *within* middle schools (that is, between the lower and upper years) are in many instances more notable than the differences *between* different school types or systems. It is of concern if Years 7 and 8 pupils begin to feel frustrated by the size of their school and the exposure they have to various educational stimuli within the middle school system and this is an area which deserves further investigation. This is discussed further in section 8.4 in the context of the founding principles of the middle school and its subsequent struggles with a unique identity in the face of overbearing pressure from the more dominant two-tier schooling system.

8.1.2: The social and emotional experience

This section discusses the implications of those findings which relate to the following research question:

> Are there differences in children's social development and emotional well-being between those attending 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

Looking across the range of findings discussed in Chapter 5 it is apparent that the main areas in which the middle school fares better than the two-tier system alternatives are in the quality of social relationships at the school and encouraging emotional well-being. It must be acknowledged that the large proportion of time children in middle schools spend with one class teacher, particularly in the lower two years, must contribute something to the quality of social relationships (Nias, 1980) and possibly also to their emotional well-being – particularly when measured via the items on my survey which related primarily to concerns such as whether the teachers know the pupils' names and whether there is an adult at the school the child can talk to.

Those findings which are of particular note on this topic are:

- There was a significant association between school type and the extent to which Years 7 and 8 pupils felt there was an adult at their school they could talk to about non-academic problems – middle school pupils were more likely to say this was the case than secondary pupils (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.1.2).

- There was a significant difference in the views of middle school pupils in the lower two years (Years 5 and 6) and the upper two years (Year 7 and 8) in how much they like being at their school; the younger pupils showed a greater propensity to like being at school than the older pupils – the same analysis of Years 5 and 6 primary compared with Years 7 and 8 secondary school responses returned a non-significant response suggesting that this is not due

entirely to the increasing age range of the children (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.6.3).

- On a scale derived from the pupils' survey questions which related to social development and emotional well-being, middle school pupils were overall slightly more negative in their views than those from other school types. The differences between middle and primary (for Years 5 and 6) and middle and secondary (for Years 7 and 8) were statistically significant with middle school pupils being more negative than their counterparts in the two-tier system (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.6.8).

- Social relationships at the middle school were also viewed positively by a variety of stakeholders – particularly where middle and secondary schools are compared: middle school headteachers and teachers recorded a higher proportion of 'strongly agree' responses to the statement *most children treat staff with respect* than did secondary school staff and both parents and staff associated with middle schools reported lower levels of bullying at the school than did those associated with primary schools (note though that an assessment of statistical significance of these findings was not possible due to the small number of participants).

Once again many of the findings presented above are linked to or directly caused by the notional divide at age 11 within the middle schools with pupils in the upper years of the middle school showing signs of 'outgrowing' the middle school as they progress through the years discussed in section 8.1. It is clear again that this had led to the differences between pupils within the middle school being more marked than differences between particular school types.

This seems to contradict what the original architects of the middle school system saw as the purpose of the middle school, the Plowden Committee (1967) acknowledged that children were maturing earlier but opted to keep them in a primary school environment for longer, the Committee also built many of their recommendations around the Piagetian view of child development and envisaged middle schools as

suitable platforms for accommodating the concrete operations stage. Piaget theorised that this stage was evident in most children around the ages 7-11 (Boyle, 1969), and it seems that the Plowden Committee suggested 8-12 (the preferred option) or 9-13 middle schools to ensure that the switch from concrete operations to the formal operations phase of cognitive development was handled within a supportive and familiar environment, and that even when individual differences in the rate of development are accounted for, most children would pass from one stage to another within the middle school (Coltham, 1978).

However, Piaget's ideas on the phases of child development have largely fallen out of favour (Wray, 2010, p.47) and today's developmental landscape is even more complex than we had once thought with a trend for earlier physical maturation and massive shifts in how our children develop socially due to the influence of media (social networking websites, mobile phones, magazines for pre-adolescents and so on) (Carrington, 2006).

If we were to accept Piaget's stages of cognitive development, and aimed to accommodate each stage in a separate schooling unit rather than supporting the transition between stages, then the existing two-tier structure actually fits Piaget's stages better, and where the primary phase schooling is split into separate infant and junior schools, the intuitive thought and concrete operational thought stages are accommodated within separate schools (Badcock et al., 1972). This separation of the primary phase schooling into separate infant and junior schools is what the Hadow Report of 1931 advocated (King, 1989), but, given the middle school experience, perhaps it is the case that the more we fragment our education system, the more vulnerable it is, for example, to surplus places, to financial austerity and so on.

To further confuse matters, there is some evidence that even if we accept that there are distinct stages in child development (Piagetian stages or otherwise), some studies of children as learners suggest that their development can differ across different subject matters. Much of the work on establishing phases in children's development as learners used science or mathematics materials since this enabled the assessment

of manipulation and reported observations, however, when subjects such as history are used, the phases or stages in development are still in evidence but generally appear at a later stage (Coltham, 1978). The potential weaknesses of a fragmented schooling structure are summed up by Coltham: "whatever yardsticks we use to select the best age for this transfer, we are bound to be wrong for some children" (1978, p.24). Arguably then, perhaps it is the case that the more transfers we incorporate into our schooling system, the more likely it is that we get it wrong for some pupils. Perhaps a solution to this lies within the movement towards all-through schooling being seen in some areas where children attend the same school (often arranged as separate buildings on one site) from age five (or three where nurseries are included) until 19 (Paton, 2009). This arrangement results in less demarcation of the separate stages of schooling, and potentially offers greater stability for children whatever their stage and rate of cognitive development.

Some of my research findings which relate to children's emotional well-being came out particularly positively for middle schools (for example, middle school Years 7 and 8 pupils were more likely than their counterparts at secondary school to say their was an adult at the school they could discuss non-academic problems with). In recent years there has been a plethora of research and policy initiatives aimed at helping our schools to achieve 'emotional well-being' for our children (McLaughlin, 2008). In my research, it was not feasible given the already broad scope of the investigation and the limited resources available to attempt an in-depth examination of the extent to which middle schools and other school types might support children's emotional well-being, instead I opted to include a variety of indicators which when put together, might be seen as tapping in to the extent to which children are supported on non-academic issues and concerns, whether they feel they are 'known' at the school, whether children are happy at the school and how much they like being at school. Admittedly this is a somewhat crude measure of emotional well-being but it does provide some insight into the general ethos of the schools from this perspective and is perhaps an area which would warrant a more detailed examination using rather more sophisticated tools. Given that most government policies and initiatives in this area

have a more wide ranging scope (e.g. the SEAL – social and emotional aspects of learning – programme which was divided into the primary strategy (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) and secondary strategy (Department for Education and Skills, 2007)), it might be useful to explore further the specific emotional needs of the pre-adolescent, or 'middle years' child and how our schools can meet these needs.

In a piece of work which critically assesses the extent to which social policy interventions, including educational policy, should be expected to strive to support and nurture emotional well-being, Ecclestone (2007) makes an interesting point about what she argues is becoming the "normalising" (2007, p.467) of interventions in our social and educational care systems aimed at promoting emotional well-being and preserving high levels of self-esteem. She warns that this can come at the cost of distracting "professionals and students from educational experiences that encourage risk, challenge and discomfort as part of striving for autonomy" (Ecclestone, 2007, p.467). Contrast this view with a recent news item quoting Richard Layard as suggesting (in his role as government advisor) that teachers should give pupils lessons in "happiness" and "emotional intelligence" (BBC, 2007a). While Ecclestone's work is not concerned directly with schooling structures I believe it strikes a chord with some of the qualitative research on the middle school in its early days, specifically that which aimed to capture something of the atmosphere and ethos around these newcomers to the educational scene. For example, Gannon and Whalley (1975) recount an anecdote about a headteacher from a grammar school who on a visit to a middle school, criticised the middle school's headteacher whose main objective seemed to be keeping the children happy. Perhaps this criticism was a little harsh and it would be wrong to suggest that any school should disregard children's emotional well-being, but it does provoke questions on the extent to which emotional well-being can and should override educational concerns, while the two are clearly not incompatible aims of our schools and schooling system, it is a question of achieving the right balance and it is possible that the middle school did not quite get the balance right.

Returning to my own research findings on emotional well-being, while it is apparent that middle schools performed well on this aspect of the schooling experience, it would be interesting to explore this further in terms of whether this is adversely affecting educational opportunities and experiences, and in terms of broadening the indicators used to measure emotional well-being since those used in this research (e.g. the extent to which a child likes their school, whether children feel there is an adult at the school who they can talk to and the pastoral care available) fall short of examining the entire range of factors which can contribute to emotional well-being. Arguably, all aspects of the schooling experience can affect a child's emotional well-being, including the academic side of school life (e.g. children who constantly receive low marks for their work might become disaffected and this has a whole range of implications for their emotional state), so it would be wrong to assume from this research alone that middle schools are better for children from an emotional perspective than the primary or secondary school.

My research has found some evidence to suggest that the middle school has certain strengths in the areas of social relationships and supporting children's emotional well-being but once again, among the pupils the differences between the upper and lower two years at the middle schools was perhaps of greater note than the differences between the two schooling systems.

8.1.3: School to school transfers

While there was no specific research question addressing the scheduled transfers from school to school that children must undergo, because a defining difference between the two-tier and three-tier systems is the number of scheduled transfers, an exploration of the implications and effects of these moves is an unavoidable feature of any research comparing the two systems. Findings on the topic of transfers are presented and discussed in full in Chapter 6, but the main findings on this issue were:

- Year 8 middle school pupils were the least anxious of the pre-transfer cohorts about their forthcoming move to a new school (see Chapter 6, Figure 6.2.1).

- Among Year 8 middle school pupils, a statistically significant association was found between both levels of anxiety and levels of excitement surrounding the move and whether pupils were due to transfer to a particularly large upper school with higher levels of anxiety and correspondingly lower levels of excitement being associated with transfer to a large school (see Chapter 6, Figures 6.2.2 and 6.2.6).

- In their comments made in response to open-ended questions about the forthcoming transfer, Year 8 pupils made particular mention of aspects of the move relating to making a fresh start, experiencing a new environment and being treated more like an adult – topics which barely featured in the Year 5 primary pre-transfer cohorts' comments – this suggests the possibility that the move to a new school may be overdue by Year 8 for many middle school pupils (see Chapter 6, Figure 6.2.8).

The key messages from these findings appear to be that while there is some evidence that the transfer from middle to upper school is a less worrying move for pupils than the first to middle, or primary to secondary transfer, it is not clear whether this is due to a 'rehearsal effect' whereby the transfer is inherently less stressful because pupils have undergone a previous transfer from first to middle school, or whether it might be easier to deal with at age 13 than at a younger age, or whether there might be school-specific factors contributing to this (for example, activities in place to ease the transfer). Likewise there is an association between levels of anxiety among Year 8 pre-transfer respondents and the size of upper school they are likely to be moving to (with the larger upper school seeming to elicit greater anxiety), again this cannot be assumed to be a causal relationship since there might be school-level factors influencing opinions, but an association exists nonetheless.

Though the middle to upper transfer seemed to be the least anxiety inducing transfer of those covered by this study, there were still just over half of Year 8 middle school respondents who said they were worried to some extent and there is little evidence to say that the additional transfer inherent in the three-tier system is a good thing.

However, it must be borne in mind that within the two-tier system where the primary phase is divided into an infant and junior school the number of transfers is the same as the three-tier system – though admittedly the infant to junior transfer is usually to a linked school (sometimes on the same site) and pupils remain with the same cohort of children without an influx of pupils from a variety of feeder schools. I once flippantly boasted to a friend that I had not stayed in a job for more than four years before moving on and she replied that this was because I went through the three-tier schooling system where I only spent a maximum of four years at any school – suggesting that my staying power had been adversely affected by the structure of my schooling! Joking aside, it could be argued (and five respondents to my pupils' survey mentioned this) that the increased transfers in the three-tier system are good preparation for life in today's job market where a job for life is fast becoming a thing of the past, but this would be difficult to prove or disprove. The number of transfers necessitated by the three-tier system continues to be cited by local authorities as a reason for reorganising into the two-tier arrangement, and my own research has provided little evidence to suggest that they are wrong to view it in this way since it is still an anxiety inducing experience.

8.2 The lessons from middle schools

This section addresses the final research question:

> What are the lessons from middle schools for middle years schooling more generally?

The middle school is likely to disappear from our education system sooner or later (see section 8.3 for a further discussion of the future of the middle school) so this research question was formulated in the hope that by researching these schools at this point in time, something positive could be drawn from the experiences of the last four decades which could be applied to today's educational landscape. Given the discussion in section 8.1 above, it seems the main areas in which middle schools

continue to be successful in terms of the schooling experience on offer, is in the social relationships at the school and in encouraging emotional well-being among children at the school. Exactly what they are doing right which other school types might not be doing so well is not entirely clear from this research, the evidence points to a general perception of fair and respectful treatment among pupils and between pupils and staff and of a rather more supportive environment in terms of pastoral care, than that on offer in secondary schools.

In a recent report on children's well-being at school, Sodha and Margo (2008) suggest that the school plays a considerable role in children's social and emotional well-being and they express concerns over the sudden shift at age 11 from primary teaching styles that involve one class teacher teaching the same class for much of the day to the secondary environment where children can be taught by around a dozen teachers in as many different rooms in one week. This, they claim, is doing nothing to support and nurture well-being during what is already a difficult time in a child's development. They recommend that we adopt a more gradual transition whereby schooling for children aged 11-14 is rearranged into "learning communities of around 100-120 students within larger schools" (Sodha and Margo, 2008, p.13) and where each community is taught all National Curriculum subjects by a team of four or five teachers. This would require (as Sodha and Margo acknowledge) a restructuring of teacher training and in my view, age 14 seems a little late to be taught by some sort of half-way house between class teachers and subject-specialist teachers, but perhaps this is the model the middle school should have followed in order to provide a genuine gradual transition to secondary schooling and to avoid the 'pantomime horse' effect whereby the experience shifts quite markedly from primary to secondary at age 11.

It is also possible that the findings from my research on social relationships and emotional well-being might (at least in part) be a function of the smaller size of middle schools rather than just due to the fact that they are 9-13 middle schools. The best way to explore the exact grounds for these perceptions would be to go in to the schools and observe and talk to a selection of staff and pupils in an attempt to gather evidence to indicate what middle schools are doing that other schools might not. This

is an aspect of the research which, with hindsight and if more resources had been available, I would have changed and this is discussed further in section 9.2, however, on reflection, the absence of any real experience in the schools has left this particular research question difficult to answer since the evidence gathered via the surveys, interview and discussion group does not present any specific policies or procedures within the middle schools which other schools could adopt. Perhaps all we can say is that the success of middle schools in terms of the social relationships and in supporting the emotional well-being of pupils suggests that at very least, there are social and emotional advantages in acknowledging that pre-adolescents might benefit from a recognition of that phase in their schooling as a separate and specific stage and that the social environment needs to be tailored to support this stage in a way that younger and older children might not require.

Interestingly, some of the literature on middle schools (especially the American middle school) questions whether the middle school necessarily has to be a distinct physical schooling unit, or if it is really enough to meet the needs of young adolescents by recognising the middle years as distinct phase within whatever schooling structure happens to be in place. For example, Hough and Irvin ask whether the middle school is "an organizational structure, a philosophy, a curriculum, a set of policies [or] specific practices" (1995, p.69) and conclude that it is probably all of these things. Further evidence of this shift in focus away from middle schools and towards a middle phase in schooling is apparent in the fact that since I started this research in 2006, the American *National Middle School Association* has changed its name to the *Association for Middle Level Education*[9]. Given that, as has already been discussed, there is little consensus as to the precise ages which align with the various stages of child development coupled with the fact that individual children develop at different rates (both physically and mentally) is a rigid schooling structure with clearly defined steps up from one type of school to another a good thing? If we accept that we cannot accurately assign developmental stages to specific ages (Stewart, 1984), then it must be time to also apply this 'blurring' of the boundaries to our schooling structure by

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[9] See: http://www.amle.org

abandoning attempts to rigidly delineate children in different phases of their development and turning our efforts instead to adapting our schools (whatever their age range) to meet the needs of pre-adolescents in an appropriate way. Eccles, Lord and Midgley sum this up in their exploration of the effect of the American schooling structure on early adolescents: "what is critical is the nature of the school environment – not the grade-span configuration or the timing of the transition" (Eccles et al., 1991, p.539).

8.3 Who supports and opposes the middle school?

This section looks briefly at the evidence collected in terms of the different stakeholder groups involved in the fieldwork in an attempt to establish whether there is a propensity for a particularly strong constituency of support or opposition among particular stakeholders. An overriding feature of the views of the participants in this research is the extent to which stakeholders tended to support the schooling system they are associated with (e.g. that they teach in or have a child within), this phenomenon is discussed further in Chapter 9, however, the following discussion needs to be interpreted with this in mind since it complicates any assessment of who supports or opposes middle schools.

Across the headteachers and teachers surveys, opinion was fairly evenly divided on the issue of which schooling system participants prefer overall and the most striking trend in evidence was the tendency for a substantial majority to support the system they currently work within. This is undoubtedly linked to the recent and impending reorganisations within Dorset which to date have all seen the abolition of the three-tier system and, as is discussed in Chapter 9, respondents are likely to be motivated by a sense of self-preservation and will very likely support the system they work within. However, a question in the survey asked whether respondents had any previous experience of working in a school in the alternative system. Half of two-tier system respondents and three-quarters of three-tier system respondents had worked in the alternative system which suggests that a substantial proportion of respondents were able to base their opinions on experience within both systems. This may lend further

legitimation to their views and possibly help to counteract any bias introduced by motivations of self-preservation (see Appendix 10 for more details on respondents' experience of the alternative system).

Parents or carers of children at Dorset schools who completed the survey were rather more likely to favour a three-tier schooling system, though the preferred arrangement among those who have a child within the two-tier system was that involving the 8-12 middle school, when this finding is viewed in conjunction with their views on the most appropriate age of transfer it becomes apparent that rather than supporting a three-tier schooling system per se, what many parents would actually like is to delay the transfer to secondary school, perhaps by just a year. This fits with the schooling systems in many countries where transfer to secondary schooling is more likely to take place at age 12 than 11 (see Chapter 1, section 1.1 for further discussion of arrangements in other countries).

Among pupils who completed a survey, there was again a fairly solid basis of support for the system they are currently in, but there were between 15-28% of each year group cohort who preferred the alternative system. The question is quite a complex one for children, especially the younger age groups, to understand and answer and this may have been further complicated by the fact that only those cohorts who had recently undergone or were about to undergo a transfer were asked the question, so (as is discussed in Chapter 7) the relatively high proportions of respondents expressing a desire to be schooled within the alternative system may simply have been attracted by the prospect of avoiding the transfer at this particular point in time.

The interview with the local education authority officer predictably portrayed the Council's overall position that they have no preference for either system but that they simply want to ensure they operate a system which suits the needs of pupils, parents and the existing infrastructure while remaining economically viable (e.g. avoiding issues of surplus places). The discussion group with former pupils similarly failed to bring about anywhere near a consensus on which system was better, though participants did not evenly represent previous attendance across the two systems.

A particularly interesting finding was that in many instances, stakeholders representing the first and upper schools which form the first and third tiers of the three-tier system were not especially supportive of the middle school. On the surface of it, this could be interpreted as 'empire building' since in most cases the abolition of middle schools would result in the expansion of the age ranges of first and upper schools, however, many teachers and headteachers expressed real concerns over the feasibility of the three-tier system and there were genuine frustrations inherent in the system for those working within the first or third tier.

8.4 The future of middle schools

I will begin this assessment of the future prospects for the middle school by referring back to its founding principles (as set out in the Plowden Report and various DES circulars and working papers) and to the characteristics of the 'ideal' middle school as identified by Nias (1980) and I will argue that based on this, the middle school has deviated so far from its origins and ideal form that its continued existence is becoming unsustainable.

Growing as it did out of the move towards comprehensive secondary education, the middle school is characterised by (among other things) the notions of egalitarianism and democracy (Nias, 1980). It should be noted here, that the term 'comprehensive' schooling is ambiguous, it often refers to the intake or make up of a school on the grounds of aptitude but is sometimes a reference to the social balance (Heath, 2004). In this context, I adopt the definition of comprehensive education as laid down in the Education Act 1976, that is, the absence of the selection of pupils on the grounds of aptitude or ability (Great Britain, 1976 s.1(1)). Today, our education system has become more diverse with the introduction of academies, subject specialist schools, foundation schools and so on. A by-product of this has been what some have termed "creeping selection" (e.g. Hattersley, 2001), whereby there has been a gradual relaxation of rules regarding the selection of pupils by ability or aptitude resulting in (in some school types at least) a relatively high proportion of pupils being admitted on this basis. The government is currently consulting on a new admissions code but existing

legislation permits selection by aptitude or ability of up to 10% of the intake in some schools (Department for Education, 2011b).

With an increase in parental choice and a greater than ever emphasis on school performance indicators (notably national test results), which will invariably be better for schools which select even a proportion of their pupils based on their aptitude, is there room for the egalitarian middle school in today's education system? In the context of my research findings, if a lesser educational experience is on offer at the middle schools, how many parents will choose these schools over the 11+ secondary school, even if, as my research suggests, many parents believe the middle school is better because it delays transfer to a wholly secondary orientated school until age 12 or 13? The reality is that the geographic dispersal of middle schools is such that very few parents are faced with a choice of sending their child through either the two-tier or three-tier system, but this can be the case where nearby areas operate different systems. This is also a concern where local authorities are consulting on reorganisation from three-tier to two tier schooling, are parents likely to be more attracted to the two-tier system if it is likely that results are better?

Nias cites "innovation" (1980, p.76) and "integration" (1980, p.78) as other key characteristics of the ideal middle school, the former, it could be argued is stifled somewhat by the National Curriculum, and more indirectly, so too has the latter. In an attempt to avoid completely suffocating curriculum innovation and experimentation, the 1988 Education Reform Act included provision for schools to seek disapplication from some requirements of the National Curriculum, though in the first decade following its implementation, very few schools had applied and none had been granted disapplication (Campbell, 1998).

Integration in the context of the ideal middle school, can be seen to operate on a number of levels, for example, it relates to cooperation and harmony between middle schools (and arguably the contributory and destination first and upper schools), between staff within the school, between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves. At the level of teaching arrangements within the school, this notion

involves less rigid teaching structures such as teachers forming teams or pairs for teaching pupils, classes being joined together for teaching purposes and the use of vertical groupings where children of different age groups are taught side by side, in short, the emphasis is on "consultation and collaboration" (Nias, 1980, p.79). Nias points out that the school buildings themselves were often designed or adapted to suit this ethos with 'open-plan' and 'multipurpose spaces' being the architectural buzz words of the time. (I have not too fond memories of the classrooms at my middle school with dividing screens between them that could be drawn back to enable larger group teaching, these provided little soundproofing and more often than not, were inoperable following abuse by unsupervised pupils!). The National Curriculum left less time and opportunity for what might be seen as the 'luxury' of these shared teaching and learning experiences, though the Cambridge Primary Review research suggests that there is little evidence of mixed age teaching groups, where they are used, affecting attainment (Alexander et al., 2010, p.379). At the curriculum or subject level, integration in the sense in which the Plowden Committee (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) intended it was to break free from the confines of rigid subject teaching with specified blocks of time devoted to one subject, but to integrate teaching with a more thematic approach which required a move away from a "content-led curriculum" (Kerry, 2007, p.81). This idea of integration has fallen out of favour somewhat and the National Curriculum (particularly in its early forms) has done little to help keep this type of integration alive and well in today's schools (Kerry, 2007).

The National Curriculum with its key stage structure which aligns precisely to the schooling structure in the two-tier system has been widely linked to the middle school's demise (e.g. Tidd, 2007), but it is possible we might see an erosion of the strength of these key stages in future. The government launched a review of the National Curriculum in January 2011 (Department for Education, 2011h) and has previously made changes to the testing arrangements which placed greater emphasis on teacher assessments rather than national tests for some subjects (see, for example, Department for Education, 2011e). Whether this "slimming down" (Department for Education, 2011i) of the National Curriculum will result in the watering down of the key

stage structure is doubtful, but in the recent Cambridge Primary Review, concerns were expressed about the rigidity of the key stage divisions and the effect this can have on "continuity and flow in learning" (Alexander et al., 2010, p.369).

The discussion above suggests that many of the principles of the ideal middle school and the foundations upon which it was built have been undermined by national policy developments and pedagogical shifts. The middle school needed to adapt to these changes in order to survive and it appears to have failed to do so, and this, coupled with the rising tide of surplus places, has left the future very bleak.

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the introduction of the middle school to our education system was based on an innovative concept for schooling middle years children, yet on reviewing much of this discussion as part of this research, I can see lots of good intentions but little consensus on exactly what these schools should stand for. It could therefore be argued that the middle school did not establish a unique and positive identity from the outset and this is perfectly summed up in an HMI report which looked at the provision for gifted children in middle and comprehensive secondary schools:

> "[Middle schools] vary widely in internal organisation and ethos. One school may adopt a substantially undifferentiated non-specialist organisation which is virtually indistinguishable from that found in the majority of primary schools. In another, the school organisation and ethos may closely approximate to the early years of secondary schooling. Yet in others there may be neither a primary nor a secondary tradition, but an attempt to establish a special response to the rapid physical, intellectual and social development of children as they pass through the middle years of schooling." (HMI, 1977, p.8)

In his conclusions, Hargreaves attempts to assess the fate of middle schools and predicts "a story of a weakening school, starved of resources and struggling to survive in a robust world of tough expectations and uncompromising demands" (1986, p.219) he goes on to describe middle schools as "reacting to change, never shaping it" (1986, p.219). In the event this was a fairly accurate prediction: the misfit of the National Curriculum with the structure of middle schools, the 'league table' culture which grew up out of national testing and moves towards greater accountability and parental choice certainly fit Hargreaves's vision. Where his predictions were not quite met was in the type of middle school that would fare best, he felt that the 8-12 middle school was the safer option with transfer at age 12 representing only a small deviation from

the two-tier norm of transfer at age 11, today, however, there are more 9-13 middle schools than 8-12 schools and the demise of the latter has been far more rapid than for 9-13 schools (see Figure 1.2.2 in Chapter 1 for evidence of this). Hargreaves suggests ways in which the middle school could adapt to survive, but these largely run contrary to today's educational policies, for example, a reduction in setting by ability (the government recommend setting in secondary environments, (see for example: Department for Education and Employment, 1997)).

If middle schools had adapted sufficiently to overcome these problems, the prognosis might be better, but their apparent failure to establish a unique and strong identity in their own right which could have withstood the shifts in pedagogy and national educational policy over the last few decades and thus ensured their longevity must surely be at the heart of their downfall. The authors of the HMI survey of 9-13 middle schools (HMI, 1983) were accused of failing to see the middle school as a separate entity with its own ethos and ideology and as a result they criticised middle schools for their shortcomings when compared to secondary schools (Henley, 1984, NUT, 1984), even though they are not (or were not intended to be) secondary schools. If Her Majesty's Inspectorate were unable to conceptualise the middle school in the way the architects of the system were, what hope was there that the rest of the country would understand and accept this new breed of school? The DfE's system of 'deeming' middle schools as either primary or secondary again provides further confirmation of our inability (or unwillingness) to shift from the traditional primary – secondary structure of our schooling.

To place this discussion in the context of what is going on 'on the ground', I now briefly turn to some current or recent examples of reorganisation in various local authorities. As discussed in Chapter 1, Dorset County Council have been reviewing the schooling structure in certain areas for several years. The most recent review was in the Purbeck area and as a result of the review, a reorganisation of the current three-tier system into a two-tier system will begin in 2012 and the middle schools in the area will close from September 2013. In the documentation which accompanied the review (Dorset County Council, 2008), several disadvantages of the three-tier system were

detailed, many of which correspond to issues raised in the process of my own research, for example:

- Misalignment with the National Curriculum key stages.

- The alleged effects on pupils' academic progress following school to school transfers – the additional transfer in the three-tier system might exacerbate this.

- Recruiting and retaining staff – as the middle school becomes increasingly rare, teacher training focusing on middle school teachers is also in decline, this can create problems with recruiting suitably qualified staff, and in the context of the demise of the middle school, it is likely that fewer trainee teachers will want to train as middle school teachers as it might be perceived as a risky career move given the vulnerability of remaining middle schools.

- The prevalence of the two-tier system nationally means that the educational context (e.g. policy, resources etc.) is geared towards the primary / secondary model, this makes it difficult for middle school teachers to implement or conform to any national guidance without having to make special adaptations.

- In the Purbeck context, increasing surplus places need to be addressed in order to make most efficient use of resources and funding (this is an issue faced by many local authorities).

- Neighbouring areas operate the two-tier system, this necessitates an additional point of entry in these areas to accommodate pupils into Year 9 from nearby middle schools and creates uneven year group distributions.

- Changes to the 14-19 curriculum mean that the upper school in the area will need to continue its current provision but also support and provide other routes (such as apprenticeships and diplomas[10]), it is argued that smaller

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[10] The Dorset County Council report was written in 2008 when diplomas were launched as a serious alternative to A levels; in 2011 fewer than 10,000 diplomas were completed (STEWART, W. 2011. 'Dead' diploma has cost £20,000 per pupil completing it. *Times Educational Supplement*, 26/08/2011, p.6.)

schools might struggle to deliver such a diverse offering and reorganising into a two-tier system will create a larger secondary school.

- Reorganisation into a two-tier structure would allow Years 5 and 6 pupils to remain in a supportive primary environment and would mean that Years 7 and 8 pupils will have access to more specialist facilities and subject-specialist teachers than they would have experienced at middle school.

- Retaining a three-tier system would leave schools vulnerable and in an uncertain position given the national context of declining middle school numbers, the very fact that most authorities have reverted to two-tier provision, would leave the area susceptible to future (and potentially disruptive) reviews and reorganisations.

- It is suggested that parental confidence in the education system in the area might be enhanced if the system employed across much of the country was implemented in Purbeck.

Set against this, the document also lists the advantages of retaining the three-tier system:

- Reorganisation is expensive. While savings should be made in the longer term, the initial costs and the need for change to existing school buildings make it a costly process.

- Reorganisation can be disruptive to students in the schools during the changeover.

- Closure of middle schools can mean that communities lose valued facilities provided by the schools.

- The change is likely to generate controversy, particularly over the issue of 11 year old pupils having to go to a large secondary school (but the report's authors argue that this is done throughout most of England and procedures are in place to ease the transition as best as possible).

- It is recognised that the strengths of the middle school include the individual attention children can receive which can be tailored to meet the needs of children in their middle years of schooling and claims that middle schools provide better pastoral support for their pupils (though as the authors point out, this claim is difficult to quantify).

- Children in Years 5 and 6 experience access to a wider range of specialised facilities than they would otherwise have had at a primary school.

- The middle school is valued as a gradual introduction to secondary schooling by many.

The concerns raised in Dorset about the three-tier system have also been raised by many other local authorities when consulting on reorganisation from a three-tier to two-tier structure.

Suffolk County Council have stated that "if all of the authorities which currently have plans to withdraw middle schools achieve their aims, by 2015 there could be as few as 100 middle schools remaining" (Suffolk County Council, 2011). But is their eventual demise inevitable? I would argue that it is likely, but perhaps not as inevitable as it may have seemed when I first started this research in 2006.

The Cambridge Primary Review, which took place at the same time as my research, advises caution with regard to the wholesale abolition of the three-tier system included as one of its recommendations (though note these have not formed part of government policy to date):

> "Local authorities responsible for England's remaining first and middle schools should not lightly dismiss the case for their retention based on the developmental benefits for their pupils" (Alexander et al., 2010, p.503, Recommendation 107)

There have been some notable issues arising from some recent reorganisations and some parallel developments in education policy which might offer a ray of hope for the remaining middle schools. For example, in 2005 Suffolk County Council commenced a review of the three-tier system operating in some parts of the county and in 2007

decided to reorganise into a two-tier structure (BBC, 2007b). The closure of middle schools began in 2011 with further closures due at the end of the 2011/12 and 2012/13 academic years, but the Council have had to put on hold plans to close the remaining 13 of the original 40 middle schools beyond 2013 due to funding cuts (BBC, 2011b). Indeed, the *Building Schools for the Future* programme of funding for new secondary school buildings was central to many local authority's plans to reorganise three-tier systems into two-tier arrangements, and its withdrawal (along with other cuts in public spending) appears to have stalled the plans of authorities such as Suffolk, and no doubt made reorganisation less attractive for those who have yet to undergo reviews.

The introduction of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) might also have an effect on the structure of our schooling systems if it is successful. UTCs are sponsored by universities and offer a practical or vocational curriculum with less emphasis on academic studies, they cater for 14-19 years olds because it is felt that age 11 is too young for children to opt to specialise (BBC, 2011a). It is likely that by the end of 2014 there will be 18 UTCs across England, but the government hope that this figure will reach 70 over the next few years (Paton, 2011). Studio Schools are a similar innovation; these are small schools with a strong focus on employability skills and qualifications which deliver the curriculum largely through project-based learning (Department for Education, 2011a). As of December 2011 there were six Studio Schools in England with a further 13 in the pre-opening stage (Department for Education, 2011k). Like UTCs, Studio Schools cater for the 14-19 age range. The reason UTCs and Studio Schools are of relevance to middle schools or middle years schooling, is that in starting the age range at 14, this leaves a mismatch with the remainder of the system. Existing 11+ secondary schools could potentially lose a proportion of their pupils at age 14, so where such schools exist, would it be better to have middle schools for ages 11-14, and then divide pupils between the 'traditional' schooling route, or the UTC or Studio School at age 14? At the very least, even if these new 14+ schools do not necessitate a new schooling structure, it is possible that

they will require us to rethink the way in which 11-14 year olds are educated in order to prepare pupils for either route through the remainder of their compulsory education.

Free Schools also present opportunities for our schooling structure. These are schools funded by the state but independent of local authorities which groups of interested parties (such as parents, charities, businesses and so on) can apply to establish (Department for Education, 2011c). There is little evidence to date that these are being used as a way of retaining middle schools where local authorities have opted to reorganise, but there is some evidence that it is a means of saving schools from closure as part of reorganisation by forming small 11+ secondary schools. For example, in the Purbeck area of Dorset, the former middle school in Swanage will reopen in 2013 as a Co-operative Free School, but, it will cover the 11-16 age range and will be a small secondary school with places for just 420 pupils (The Co-operative College, 2011). Presumably the option of retaining the 9-13 age range was impossible due to the structure (or proposed structure) of the surrounding schools; there would be no feeder or destination schools to fit with this age range. But it will be interesting to see how well such a small secondary school overcomes many of the problems middle schools faced which were attributable in part to their small size, such as an alleged lack of subject coverage for the older children.

In Central Bedfordshire which has a predominantly three-tier schooling arrangement, reviews are being conducted across four areas. The first area review has been completed and the recommendation made to retain the current schooling structure but to encourage the formation of strong partnerships between schools, for example, through academy trusts (Central Bedfordshire Council, 2011). This development is notable on two fronts, first because the Council's School Organisation Plan marks a shift in emphasis from some other authority's plans in that it emphasised unity across the 0-19 age range rather than attempting to sell the benefits of a two-tier system to align with most of the rest of the country, so in some senses, this suggests the actual structure of the units within the schooling system is less important than retaining continuity and a sense of a seamless transition throughout the years of education. It is also of note because there is an explicit encouragement to form academy trusts

(among other suggestions), and by forming academies, schools will opt out of local authority control, and hence, the local authority's power to dictate the schooling structure in future is extremely limited.

It would seem, therefore, that the current economic climate has left wholesale reorganisation an expensive and, for many authorities, an unviable option. While this, together with some recent developments in national education policy, may have thrown the remaining middle schools something of a lifeline, what we seem to be seeing across our education system is a move towards seeing the entire schooling years in a more holistic way and with far less emphasis on separate schooling units for specific age ranges. This paves the way for a notional divide in whatever schooling structure or school types exist rather than a physical divide (in the sense of different schools) for the middle years. Meanwhile, there is increasing diversity in our schooling system with the different school types, the rise in all-through schools and the increasing numbers opting out of local authority control. England's education system looks set to become ever more diverse, and for the middle school the question remains as to whether they will survive as a small minority, or whether it is simply a question of waiting to see whether they get replaced by the two-tier schooling arrangement or whether the rising tide of alternative schooling types and arrangements subsumes them.

Box 8 summarises the key conclusions my research has led me to draw, but in considering these it is useful to remain practical and realistic about what makes education systems work, as Sir Alec Clegg, the driving force behind the first 9-13 middle schools put it:

> "Changes in the quality of education rarely come about simply because of a change in the organisation of schools. It is on what each staff and each teacher does within that system that this depends" (Clegg, 1967, p.2)

Box 8: Summary of conclusions

- There is little evidence that the middle school provides a superior educational offering than two-tier system schools, particularly for Years 7 and 8 pupils.

- One of the original rationales for the middle school was to retain all that is good about primary education, but my research findings question the value of this and suggest that many children feel the transfer to secondary school is long overdue by Year 8.

- There was some evidence of better social relationships in middle schools than in secondary schools characterised by respectful and fair treatment between staff and pupils.

- In some respects middle schools emerged as better equipped to nurture emotional well-being than schools within the two-tier system. This appears to be due (at least in part) to the fact that children feel they are 'known' at their school. Whether this is a product of the generally smaller school size of middle schools or something inherent in their policies, practice and ethos requires further investigation.

- The differential experience within the middle school (between the lower and upper years) emerged as a key theme of my research findings

- My research suggests that, unsurprisingly the main constituency of support for middle schools comes from those working within, educated within or otherwise directly associated with these schools. This raises interesting issues over participant motivation when researching an under-threat schooling system, but it also makes it even more significant when those within or associated with middle schools express negative views on their own schooling system.

- Middle schools face an uncertain future and one reason for this seems to lie within their apparent failure to establish a unique and strong identity as a separate unit of schooling.

- Changes to our educational landscape over the last two to three decades have done little to secure the position of the middle school in our schooling system, but a lifeline may have been thrown to some of the remaining middle schools by cuts in public spending, the advent of new school types covering the 14-19 age range, an increasingly diverse education system and an erosion of the powers of local authorities in administering our schooling.

- In today's diverse educational landscape, the issue of the middle school as a separate unit of schooling is perhaps just one aspect of the broader issue of how best to school pre-adolescents. We should be focusing our efforts on ensuring the needs of pre-adolescents are recognised and met whatever schooling structure they are educated within.

- This research has updated our knowledge of a schooling structure which has been left largely unresearched for many years. It also incorporates the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders from both the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems.

Chapter 9: Reflections on this Research

In this chapter I discuss the research process overall and reflect on the limitations of the research, the changes I would make to the research process if I repeated the study, the scope for further research and the personal journey this research has taken me on.

9.1 Limitations of the research

Like many doctoral students, I conducted this research as a lone self-funded researcher, so there were some compromises to be made in the light of restricted resources. There were also limitations imposed by both the nature of participation in the project and by external factors and events that were outside of my control. As a result there are several considerations that must be borne in mind when interpreting the results of the fieldwork, these include:

1. The boundaries and limitations of the project, specifically the fact that it focused on 9-13 middle schools only and on the Dorset County Council administrative area only.

2. The uneven distribution of participants in some elements of the research (for example, the small number of upper schools participating in the headteachers' survey, the fact that just one secondary school administered the pupils' survey).

3. The effects of the on-going reviews of the three-tier schooling system across Dorset on respondents' views and perceptions, for example, the possibility that those associated with the three-tier system (especially within the middle schools which are the tier that is removed when areas are reorganised into a two-tier arrangement) will engage in some sort of self-preservation exercise in expressing their views of their under-threat system.

Points 1 and 2 above are particularly important when assessing the generalisability of the findings. Here we need to distinguish between "statistical generalisation" and "theoretical generalisation" (de Vaus, 2002a, p.147). Statistical generalisation refers to

the assessment of the extent to which findings from a sample can be generalised to the population using inferential statistics, whereas theoretical generalisation is used in research where the use of statistical tests of significance is not appropriate (for example, case study research) and centres on the extent to which the findings can be generalised to a theory rather than a population by focusing on whether the findings would be replicated if the study were repeated (de Vaus, 2002a). My research primarily falls under the latter category so theoretical generalisation is all we can hope to achieve, so here we would be concerned as to whether any conclusions drawn from the research might be replicated if we repeated the study. It is not possible to repeat the study in this situation, but in my discussion of findings throughout this thesis attention is drawn to those findings which confirm those of other researchers (thus lending some strength to how far we can accept that a finding is a true picture of the situation) and those where other research findings contradict my own (suggesting that perhaps a further exploration of the issues is required, or that things have changed, or even that I've uncovered something unique to my own participants). It must be remembered though, that this research is essentially a case study of the Dorset County Council area so we cannot assume the findings accurately represent the situation across all middle school areas in England, and the focus on 9-13 middle schools means we cannot confidently generalise findings to middle schools catering for other age ranges.

One further point to make on the subject of generalisability is that of non-response and to warn that the findings represent those who responded to the surveys, attended the focus group and were interviewed during the research. We do not know if we would have achieved the same results had a different set of stakeholders participated in the research, as Nardi puts it: "we can only safely generalise about those we actually surveyed, or at best, those similar to the people we studied" (2006, p.215). To address this concern, in Chapter 3 and Appendices 10 and 11 details are provided of how the respondent profile compares to that of the population (where available) in an attempt to gauge the likely representativeness of the research participants.

The limitations imposed by the uneven representation of different school types means that we must exercise some degree of caution in interpreting the results, but it does not necessarily invalidate them, particularly as the uneven distribution was not mirrored across all elements of the fieldwork.

The third point to be considered when drawing conclusions from this research is rather more difficult to control for or overcome. The Dorset area was chosen as a focus for my research because it was one of the few local authorities with 9-13 middle schools which was not undergoing a review of the entire three-tier system at the time the research was designed in 2006, however, the authority had commenced an area by area review of the three-tier system so a small number of middle schools were potentially under threat, and stakeholders associated with others may have been aware that their area would be reviewed in the coming years. This means that the research was conducted with stakeholders in a schooling system which to their mind was under threat, whether it be the possibility of their own school being shut down, or the threat of the closure of other middle schools within the authority. It would be wrong to assume that these events did not affect the views and perceptions of all participants and it must be accepted that there was something a little deeper than a "response bias" (Aldridge and Levine, 2001, p.181) at work where, for example, respondents might have a tendency to answer in a particularly positive or negative way, or simply to answer in the most socially desirable way. More than this, the threat to middle schools both in Dorset and across the country, might have influenced respondents' motivations in providing certain answers to survey or interview questions. A headteacher of an upper school who is faced with the prospect of the expansion of his or her school to become an 11-18 secondary if middle schools are closed might have a vested interest in downplaying the benefits of the three-tier system, whereas a middle school teacher who might be faced with the possibility of losing his or her job might be motivated by a desire for 'self-preservation' to exaggerate any positive aspects of the system. In an attempt to pre-empt the possibility of this happening, when respondents were invited to participate it was emphasised that the research was being done solely for the purposes of my PhD research which was self-funded and had not been commissioned

by the local authority or any other outside body. Despite this, respondents would most likely have been aware that it is in the nature of academic research to disseminate findings and many of them would have participated in the knowledge that there was the potential for decision-makers (such as local authority officers) to see the research findings.

Despite these limitations, the work still provides interesting findings and the results have been presented throughout this report in an open and transparent manner to ensure that where there are issues such as small participant numbers, or questionable respondent motivation these are highlighted and findings are discussed in this context. I aimed to address the views of multiple stakeholders in this mixed methods research design and this led to the generation of a great deal of data, therefore the uneven distribution of participants in some elements of the fieldwork should be seen in the context of a large amount of data overall and a wide spread of participant types across the project as a whole.

9.2 Aspects of the research to change or requiring further exploration

I have highlighted throughout my discussion of this research some aspects I would with hindsight have done differently, for example, survey questions that did not quite work and some specific findings which in my view, require further investigation, so I do not propose detailing these again here. However, I have now had the opportunity to reflect on the research overall and to consider the influence my methodology might have had on my findings and conclusions, and from this there are some overarching changes I would make that might have made enhanced the research and the extent to which I was able to answer my research questions.

First, I felt somewhat limited by the fact that only Dorset County Council schools and stakeholders were included. This made it difficult to extrapolate findings to the rest of the middle school population and it was always difficult to make any kind of assessment as to whether the finding I was discussing was unique to Dorset. The decision to focus the study on Dorset has been explained in Chapter 3 and it was the

most practical option available to me given the limited time and funding available for the research.

Second, the uneven distribution of participants in some elements of the fieldwork restricted the type of analyses I could do and the confidence I could have in the conclusions I could draw. This is linked with my choice of a 'case study' approach, since despite strenuous efforts on my part to redress the balance of participants, there reached a point when I had to accept that nothing further could be done, for example, there are only four upper schools in Dorset, so once all four had declined to take part in my pupils' survey there was no option but to accept that these schools would not be represented in the findings. I am happy that I did all I could to improve response rates and the balance of participants, but I feel this might have been easier to rectify had I used a national sample and would therefore have had the possibility of a back-up sample.

My final main change I would make to the methods employed would be to actually go into some schools and observe and/or speak to the staff and pupils about their experiences and views. I rejected this idea early on in the research design process on the basis of a lack of time (which was a reasonable decision given that I work full-time and have been studying part-time), but I now see that it has made it hard for me to contextualise some of my findings due to my lack of recent experience within a school environment.

As far as areas for further exploration are concerned, again specific details have been described throughout my discussion of the findings, but overall, I feel that if I was to conduct any further study based on what I have discovered through this research, I would focus on the concept of 'middle years' and how different school types make provision for pre-adolescents in terms of both their educational and social needs. It would be interesting, for example to explore how all-through schools approach this, or the academy partnerships. With an increasing blurring of the distinctive schooling units in our education system, it would be interesting to attempt an assessment of the

extent of any unity in the treatment of pre-adolescents, and how they are responding to such provision.

9.3 My personal journey

This project began in January 2006 when I first became a registered part-time PhD student in the School of Education. The first thing that strikes me when I look back at the research process is how long it has taken (though I did suspend my studies twice for personal reasons) and how much has changed in those six years. I detail later in this section how I have developed on a personal level over this period, but it should also be borne in mind that the country has changed: we've experienced a serious economic recession, a change of government, a further decline in the number of middle schools (as detailed in Chapter 1) and the expansion and emergence of new types of schools (discussed in Chapter 8). In my professional research career, I would never have the opportunity work on projects which take so long, but it has been an interesting experience to have what might be seen as the 'luxury' of doing so. The experience has taught me many things, but one of them is that things are always changing in the world of education, it is a very 'fluid' area of social policy and ideas about what is right or desirable in terms of schooling structures, child development and pedagogy can come and go in a relatively short time span (the middle school perfectly embodies this notion). In addition, our schooling system is very much at the mercy of politicians who in turn seem to pass through and move on in the blink of an eye. Perhaps at some point in the future someone like me might be conducting similar research but this time into the demise of the academy or the Free School.

My personal journey over the course of this work has also been characterised by change. I am a former middle school pupil. I have always looked back on my middle school years as among the happiest of my schooling career. I was shocked when a few years ago I discovered how rapidly middle schools were being closed down and schooling systems reorganised into the two-tier arrangement. This prompted me to research the decline of the middle school as my master's degree dissertation topic,

but I found this left me with more questions than answers which I then set about addressing via this doctoral research.

In the light of the findings my own research has generated, I have been forced to consider what it was about my middle school experience that I look back on so fondly. I realise that whenever I cast my mind back, I am taken back to a social situation at the school (the playground, school discos, school outings, even just chatting with friends on the walk to and from school), but I rarely look back on the lessons, I rarely think about the things I learned, the skills I acquired or the facilities provided to aid our learning. Perhaps it is just human nature to remember social situations above others, but it leads me to question whether my education was enhanced by a spell at middle school or whether I would have been better off in a secondary school; perhaps my mixed bag of A-C grades at GCSE would have been nearer to the full house of A grades I was probably capable of.

Some of my conclusions discussed in Chapter 8 are critical of the middle school for failing to establish a strong and consistent identity to enable them to rise above the tide of reorganisation, and likewise, much of my personal journey through this research has centred around the concept of identity, in terms of my own identity. I started this research as a middle school supporter, my master's research had led me to believe that it was an injustice that middle schools were in decline and I was fairly certain that further research would establish exactly those areas in which middle schools excelled and, while I accepted it was unlikely I would find huge educational benefits, I did expect to find fairly substantial evidence to support them from the point of view of children's social development and emotional well-being. As the preceding discussions have stated, this has turned out not to be the case, or at least, not to be the emphatic victory for middle schools that I had anticipated. I was also surprised at the body of evidence within the pupils' surveys of how the middle school experience is apparently perceived differently by lower and upper year groups within the schools. I have been converted from 'middle school supporter' to 'middle school doubter'.

When I started my doctoral research I had no children; six years on I am the proud mum of a daughter and son, my identity has changed from 'interested researcher' to 'interested researcher and concerned parent'. In a few years my daughter will be faced with the prospect of transferring to a secondary school, followed one year later by my son. I worry for them having to deal with this big new environment surrounded by children much older than them, experiencing different teaching methods and learning subjects they might not have tackled before, I worry that they will be influenced by the older children and led astray (too many hours spent watching Grange Hill as a child may have contributed to this anxiety!), and, yes, I even worry about them being 'bog-washed'! I feel relieved that as a former middle school pupil I did not have to make the move until age 13. But somewhere at the back of my mind, I cannot forgive my schooling system for the way in which, just as the Eleven Plus examination did for my parents, my schooling system dictated the future career decisions of every single pupil who passed through the schools in our area. For example, my upper school was not large enough to offer pupils the option of studying all three science subjects at GCSE, thus preventing anyone at that school from aspiring to become a doctor, a vet or any other career that required GCSEs in all three sciences. If the demise of the middle school leads to greater opportunities for children then it should be welcomed, but at the same time I truly believe we should not lose sight of the specific needs of pre-adolescents and that however we structure our schooling system and whatever type of school these children attend, there must always be a recognition of the needs and demands of this age group and this should inform practice and policy at each and every school in terms of the educational, social and emotional aspects of schooling.

My identity has shifted during the course of this research on a number of levels and perhaps it is time that the identity of 'middle years schooling' shifted too, and this might require us to stop clinging to the remains of an outmoded middle school concept and embrace the range of alternative schooling options while ensuring that pre-adolescents are adequately catered for whatever school structure or type they are educated within.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Chart showing the net gain (in green) or loss (in red) of middle schools each year between 1970 and 2011.

[Source: DfE Annual School Census data for each year]
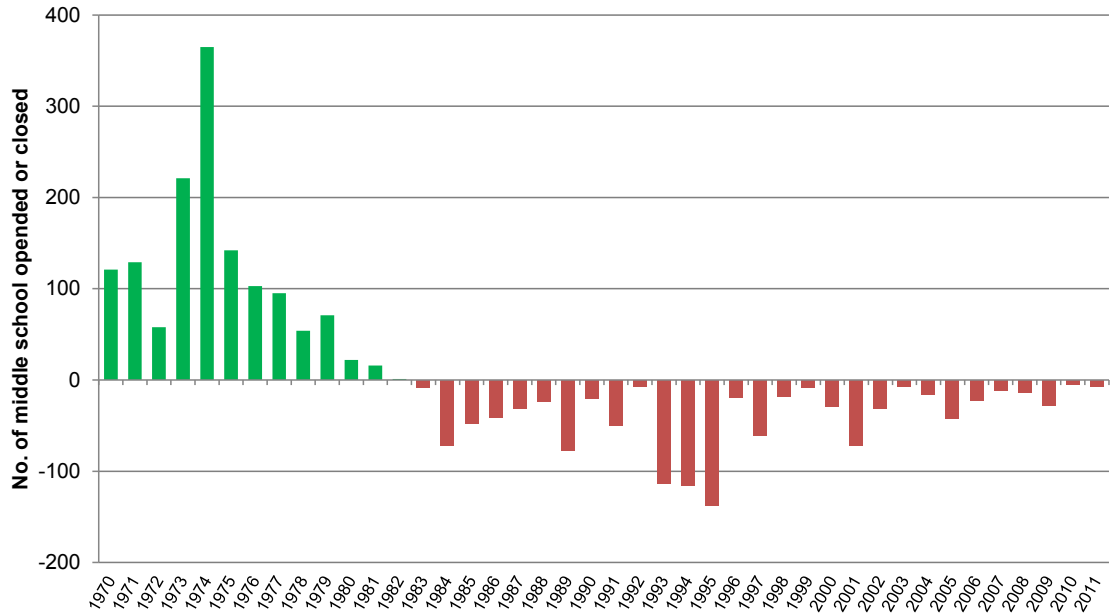
Appendix 2

The Year 5 middle school pupils' survey

You and your school
Questionnaire for Year 5

This questionnaire is about what you think of your school.
Please answer the questions below using a black pen.
Put a tick in the box which matches your answer like this: ☑
If you cannot answer any question, please leave it blank.

Q1. Are you a boy or a girl? ☐ Boy

☐ Girl
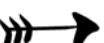
Q2. Please answer the questions below by ticking one box for each question. The example below shows how you would fill in the first row if you wanted to say that you like being at your school 'sometimes':

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Example: *Do you like being at your school?*	☐	☑	☐
a. Do you like being at your school?	☐	☐	☐
b. Do you find out new things in lessons?	☐	☐	☐
c. Do you do well in your school work?	☐	☐	☐
d. Do you feel comfortable putting your hand up and speaking in class?	☐	☐	☐
e. Do your teachers know your name?	☐	☐	☐
f. Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with work?	☐	☐	☐
g. Do other children behave well?	☐	☐	☐

Q3. What do you think about the number of children there are at your school?

☐ Too many children at your school

☐ About the right number of children at your school

☐ Not enough children at your school

Please turn over ⟫⟶

Y5M

Q4. What do you think about the size of your school?

☐ Too big

☐ About the right size

☐ Too small

Q5. Is your school friendly or unfriendly?

☐ Friendly

☐ Unfriendly

Q6. Do you have friends in other year groups at your school?

☐ Yes, lots of friends in other years

☐ Yes, a few friends in other years

☐ No friends in other years

Q7. What do you think about the number of teachers at your school?

☐ Too many teachers at your school

☐ About the right number of teachers at your school

☐ Not enough teachers at your school

In September last year, you moved to this school from your first school. Please answer the questions below thinking about how you felt about moving to your middle school:

Q8. Were you <u>worried</u> about moving to your middle school last September?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Q9. Were you <u>excited</u> about moving to your middle school last September?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Y5M

Q10. How well do you think you are doing in your school work since moving to your middle school last September?

☐ I'm doing <u>better</u> than I was at first school

☐ I'm doing <u>just as well</u> as I was at first school

☐ I'm <u>not doing as well</u> as I was at first school

☐ Don't know

Q11. Would you have preferred to stay at your old school until you are 11, and then move on to a secondary school in Year 7?

☐ Yes » If yes, please answer **question 12**

☐ No » If no, please answer **question 13**

☐ Not sure » If not sure, that is the end of your questions

Q12. Please tell my why you would have preferred to stay at your old school until age 11:

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That is the end of your questions

Q13. Please tell me why you would <u>not</u> have preferred to stay at your old school until age 11:

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Thank you for answering these questions.

Appendix 3

The Year 8 middle school pupils' survey

You and your school
Questionnaire for Year 8

This questionnaire is about what you think of your school.
Please answer the questions below using a black pen.
Place a tick in the box which matches your answer like this: ☑
If you cannot answer any question, please leave it blank.

Q1. **Are you male or female?** ☐ Male ☐ Female

Q2. **Please answer the questions below by ticking one box for each question.**
The example below shows how you would fill in the first row if you wanted to say that you like being at your school 'sometimes':

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Example: *Do you like being at your school?*	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
a. Do you like being at your school?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Do you learn new things in lessons?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Do you do well in your school work?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Do you feel comfortable putting your hand up and speaking in class?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Do your teachers know your name?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with work?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Do other pupils behave well?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q3. **What do you think about the number of pupils there are at your school?**

☐ Too many pupils at your school

☐ About the right number of pupils at your school

☐ Not enough pupils at your school
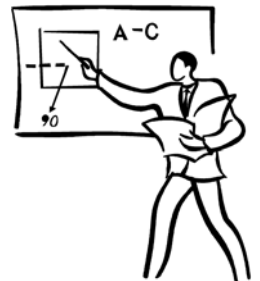
Q4. **During a typical school week, are you taught by too many or not enough different teachers?**

☐ Too many different teachers

☐ About the right number of different teachers

☐ Not enough different teachers

Please turn over ⟫⟹

Y8M

Q5. What do you think about the size of your school?

☐ Too big

☐ About the right size

☐ Too small

Q6. Is your school friendly or unfriendly?

☐ Friendly

☐ Unfriendly

Q7. Do you have friends in other year groups at your school?

☐ Yes, lots of friends in other years

☐ Yes, a few friends in other years

☐ No friends in other years

Q8. Do you take part in any clubs or activities outside of lessons, such as sports clubs / teams, hobby clubs, school plays, music, choirs, school magazines, school council?

☐ Yes, I do take part in out of lesson activities *[Now please go to question 10]*

☐ No, I don't take part in any out of lesson activities *[Now please go to question 9]*

Q9. If no, please tell me why you don't take part in any of these activities:

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Q10. Do Year 8 pupils at your school have the chance to take on a responsible role such as prefect, monitor, house captain, student representative?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure
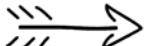
Q11. Is there an adult at your school you could speak to if you had a problem?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Q12. How do you feel you are treated by teachers and other staff at your school?

☐ I am treated as if I am younger than I really am

☐ I am treated about right for my age

☐ I am treated as if I am older than I really am

Continued ⟩⟩⟩⟶

Y8M

In September next year, you will move from your middle school to an upper or high school. Please answer the questions below thinking about how you feel about the move to your upper or high school:

Q13. How worried are you about moving to upper/high school in September?

☐ Very worried

☐ Fairly worried

☐ Not worried

Q14. How excited are you about moving to upper/high school in September?

☐ Very excited

☐ Fairly excited

☐ Not excited

Q15. Do you think you will do well in your school work at your new school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure
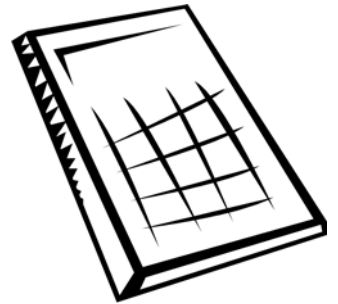
Q16. Do you think the teachers at your new school will be helpful?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure
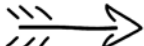
Q17. Do you think the pupils at your new school will be friendly?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Q18. Do you think your new school will be too big or too small?

☐ Too big

☐ About the right size

☐ Too small

Y8M
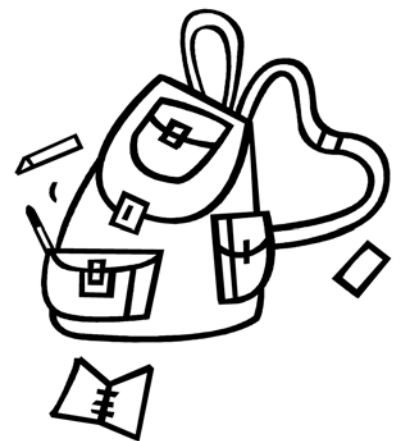
Q19. Do you think there will be too many or too few pupils at your new school?

☐ Too many pupils

☐ About the right number of pupils

☐ Too few pupils

Q20. Would you have preferred to stay at your primary or first school until the end of Year 6, and go to a secondary school when you were aged 11 (Year 7), instead of coming to a middle school for Years 5-8?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

Q21. Please tell me your main reasons for giving the answer you gave to question 20:

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Q22. Please tell me one thing you are <u>most looking forward to</u> about going to upper or high school in September:

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Q23. Please tell me one thing you are <u>most worried about</u> when you go to upper or high school in September:

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Thank you for answering these questions.

Appendix 4

The middle school headteachers' survey

Investigation into the age-range of schools

Questionnaire for middle school headteachers

This questionnaire forms part of my PhD research into the advantages and disadvantages of schools catering for different age ranges with particular focus on the 9-13 middle school. Please complete the questions below and then return the form to me using the freepost envelope provided to: Kathy Seymour, c/o Survey Unit, University of Nottingham, University Park, FREEPOST NG6687, Nottingham, NG7 1BR by **30th November 2007.** If you would prefer to complete this survey online, a web version is available at the following address: http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/survey-unit/middleheads

The responses you provide will be treated in confidence and used solely for the work of this investigation. The identity of individuals and their schools will not be revealed to anyone outside of the research project and all data will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Section A: You and your school

1. What is your role at the school?

Headteacher ☐1   Other (please specify) ☐3

Deputy or Assistant Headteacher ☐2

2. Do you have any experience as a teacher, deputy headteacher or headteacher in any other types of school? *[Please tick all that apply]*

Primary (ages 3, 4 or 5 to 11) ☐1   Upper or High (ages 12 or 13 to 16 or 18) ☐1

Infant (ages 3, 4 or 5 to 7) ☐1   Secondary (ages 11 to 16 or 18) ☐1

Junior (ages 7 to 11) ☐1   Other (please specify) ☐1

First (ages 3, 4 or 5 to 9) ☐1

Middle for ages other than 9-13 (eg 8-12) ☐1

3. For the following list of subjects, please indicate:

a) Whether children are taught each subject by subject-specialist teachers (and if so, whether this applies to all year groups or just upper years)

b) Whether children are generally taught this subject in mixed-ability groups or groups set or streamed by ability

	a) Are children taught by subject-specialist teachers?			b) Are children taught in mixed or set by ability groups?		
	Subject-specialists in **all** years	Subject-specialists only in **upper** years	No subject-specialists	Mixed ability only	Set by ability only	Both mixed and set by ability
English	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Maths	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Science	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
History	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Geography	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Religious education	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Modern foreign languages	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
ICT	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Design and Technology	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Physical education	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Art and design	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3
Music	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐1	☐2	☐3

[HTM]

Continued →

4. At what age do you think children are generally ready to be taught by subject-specialist teachers for most subjects rather than by class teachers?

[   ]

5. Does your school operate a condensed key stage 3 (where key stage 3 covers two rather than three years of schooling)? *[Please tick one only]*

Yes, currently ☐ 1
Yes, in the past but not currently ☐ 2
} *Please go to Q6*

No, but we intend to ☐ 3
No, and we don't intend to in the foreseeable future ☐ 4
} *Please go to Q7*

6. If yes, please briefly describe any benefits or problems with the condensed KS3 to your pupils and/or the school more generally:

[   ]

Section B: School ethos and nurturing social development

7. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Children have the opportunity to take on responsibilities (eg prefects, monitors, house captains etc)	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Children are offered a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and activities	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Most children treat staff with respect	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Children are encouraged to express their views and opinions in front of teachers and peers	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
There is a great deal of social interaction between children in different year groups	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Teaching staff know the names of the majority of children they come into contact with	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Children are generally well behaved	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
There are few instances of bullying or harassment among children at this school	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Children are involved in the way the school is run and are consulted on policy changes when appropriate	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5

Section C: Pastoral support and meeting individual needs

8a. How effective are arrangements at your school for meeting the individual needs of the following children?

	Very effective	Fairly effective	Not effective	Not applicable / no experience
Children with special educational needs	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Gifted and talented children	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Children whose first language is not English	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Children with a disability	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4

8b. Please use the space below to elaborate on any of your responses to Q8a (eg any limitations to meeting individual needs which are outside of the school's control):

Section D: Facilities at your school

9. Are the following facilities available to children of all ages at your school?

	Available to **all** children	Available to **lower** years only	Available to **upper** years only	Do not have this facility
Library	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Science lab(s)	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Computing / ICT rooms	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Language lab	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Music equipment	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
A separate, dedicated sports hall	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
D&T areas / rooms	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Drama / performing arts areas	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4
Indoor social spaces (eg common rooms)	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4

Section E: Transfer between schools

10a. How often do you accept children transferring to your middle school from schools in the two-tier primary/secondary system rather than from feeder schools within the three-tier system?

Every year ☐ 1
Occasionally ☐ 2
Rarely ☐ 3
Never ☐ 4

10b. If known, what are the **main** reasons behind these cross-system transfers (eg standards at nearby schools, parental preference etc)?

11. Does your school undertake any of the following activities to prepare children for scheduled transfers…
   a) Into your school at age 9?
   b) On to the upper or high school at age 13?

	a) Offered during transfer <u>to</u> this school	b) Offered during transfer <u>from</u> this school	Not offered
Open days for children to see their new school prior to transfer	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
Open evenings for parents held at feeder and/or destination schools	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
Visits from teachers at the destination school to feeder schools during the year prior to transfer	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
'Buddy' systems whereby children due to transfer can contact existing pupils to talk about the change of school	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3

Continued →

12. Please briefly describe any other activities you arrange to help ease the transfer to or from your school:

Section F: The two-tier and three-tier schooling systems

13. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the two-tier schooling system involving 11+ secondary schools and the three-tier schooling system involving 9-13 middle schools:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The age-ranges of schools within the three-tier system align more closely with children's social and emotional development than those in the two-tier system	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
The three-tier system is an expensive way to educate children	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
The three-tier system keeps children in a primary school environment for longer than is necessary	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
The three-tier system helps to gradually introduce children to the teaching and learning environment of a secondary school	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
The number of scheduled school-to-school transfers in the three-tier system causes unnecessary anxiety for children	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
The three-tier system is better able to provide good pastoral care for children than the two-tier system	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
The three-tier system is inappropriate as it does not fit with the National Curriculum key stage structure	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5

14a. Are you generally in favour of the three-tier system involving 9-13 middle schools?

Yes ☐ 1   No ☐ 2   Undecided ☐ 3

14b. Please give brief reasons for your response to question 14a:

Further information about and participation in this research

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings from this survey, please provide an email address to which the summary can be sent:

The second phase of this research will involve a short questionnaire (available in either paper or web format) for pupils to complete early in the 2008 Spring Term. Further information on what this involves and what your school will receive in return is provided in the covering letter.

If your school is willing to participate in this survey, please indicate below the approximate number of pupils who will take part in each year group, and whether they will be completing the survey on paper or online. Further details will be forwarded to volunteering schools in January 2008.

Please indicate below whether you would like to participate in the pupil survey:

No. of pupils

		Prefer <u>paper</u> surveys	Prefer <u>web</u> surveys
Year 5		Y5 ☐	Y5 ☐
Year 6		Y6 ☐	Y6 ☐
Year 7		Y7 ☐	Y7 ☐
Year 8		Y8 ☐	Y8 ☐

Yes, we would be willing to take part in the pupil survey ☐ →

No, we would prefer not to take part in the pupil survey ☐ ↓

Now please indicate for each year which format you would prefer to use →

School name:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire, your assistance with this research is much appreciated.
Please return your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided to:
Kathy Seymour, c/o Survey Unit, University of Nottingham, FREEPOST NG6687, Nottingham, NG7 1BR

Appendix 5

The parents' survey

Research into the two-tier and three-tier schooling systems

As part of my PhD research I would like to find out what **you** think about **your child's** school and your views on the suitability of schools covering different age-ranges. If you would like to view an information sheet about this research and the purposes of this questionnaire, please click <u>here</u>.

This questionnaire is intended only for parents or carers of children currently attending a state school in Dorset (i.e. Dorset County Council schools). **If you have more than one child currently attending a Dorset school, please answer with reference to the oldest child.**

Please answer each question by ticking in the box or typing your answer in as appropriate, when you reach the end of a page, please click on 'next' to move to the next page.

Many thanks,

Kathy Seymour

PhD Researcher
School of Education
The University of Nottingham

To begin the survey please click 'next' below, if you cannot see the 'next' button, please scroll down the screen.

Remember, if you have more than one child currently attending a Dorset school, please answer these questions with reference to the oldest child.

Q1. Which type of school does your child <u>currently</u> attend?

☐ Infants school (nursery or reception – age 7)

☐ Junior school (ages 7-11)

☐ First school (nursery or reception – age 9)

☐ Primary school (nursery or reception – age 11)

☐ Middle school (ages 9-13)

☐ Secondary school (ages 11 - 16 or 18)

☐ Upper school (ages 13 - 16 or 18)

☐ Unsure (if unsure, please write the name of your child's school in the box below)

School name: [_____]

Q2. How would you rate the following aspects of your child's school?

	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
The out-of-lesson activities available (e.g. sports teams/clubs, school plays, choirs, school magazine, hobbies clubs etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
The general behaviour of children at the school	☐	☐	☐	☐
The opportunities children have to take on responsible roles (e.g. house captains, prefects, student representatives, school council etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
The help and support offered with school work (e.g. individual help with class work, additional tutoring if required etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
The help and support offered with non-school work related issues (e.g. help with personal problems etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
The facilities and equipment available (e.g. science labs, sports facilities, library, design & technology equipment etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q3. **How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your child's school:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child is treated fairly by staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child is taught by teachers who are experts in their subjects	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There are few problems of bullying or harassment between children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school encourages the personal and social development of my child	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My child likes this school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The work my child is given is generally too easy for him/her	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Your child attends a school in an area which operates both a 'two-tier' and a 'three-tier' schooling system.
The <u>two-tier system</u> involves primary schools (or infants and juniors) for children up to age 11, and then a secondary school for ages 11+.
The <u>three-tier system</u> in your area involves first or primary schools for children up to age 9, and then a middle school for ages 9-13 followed by an upper school for ages 13+.

Q4a. Ideally, which system would you prefer for your child? [Please tick one only]

☐ Two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11

☐ Three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13

☐ Three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12

☐ Other system (please detail below)

Q4b. Please give brief reasons for your preferred system for your child:

Q4c. Which system matches most closely the schooling system <u>you</u> went through?
[Please tick one only]

☐ Two-tier with transfer to secondary school at age 11

☐ Three-tier with middle schools for ages 9-13

☐ Three-tier with middle schools for ages 8-12

☐ Other system (please detail below)

Q4d. If you would like to comment on the suitability of the system you went through (e.g. did you feel you transferred to secondary school too early / too late?) please use the space below:

Q5a. At what age do you think your child is/was ready for transferring to a secondary school environment?

Q5b. Please give brief reasons for your answer to Q5a:

If you would like to receive a summary report on the findings from this survey by email, please provide an email address below:

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.
Please click 'submit' at the bottom of the page.

Appendix 6

The 'question matrix'

The following tables show the questions included on all questionnaires used in my research arranged according to which research question, or combination of research questions they aim to answer. The research questions referred to are as follows:

A. Are there differences in educational experiences between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

B. Are there differences in children's social development and emotional well-being between those attending 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?

C. What are the lessons from middle schools for middle years schooling more generally?

Questions addressing research question A: *Are there differences in the **educational experiences** between 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?*

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
Which of the following statements about the arrangement of teaching groups best describes the situation at your school?	Headteachers	First Primary	Aims to establish whether children are more likely to be set or streamed by ability at an earlier age in two-tier or three-tier. Also links to notion of middle school keeping children in a primary environment for longer.
If you ticked option B above [both mixed ability and set or streamed by ability], please list below those subjects which are taught in groups set or streamed by ability:	Headteachers	First Primary	As above.
For the following list of subjects, please indicate whether children are generally taught this subject in mixed ability groups or groups set or streamed by ability:	Headteachers	Middle Secondary Upper	Aims to establish whether children are more likely to be set or streamed by ability at an earlier age in two-tier or three-tier systems, and if so, in which subjects.
Which of the following statements about subject-specialist teaching best describes the situation at your school?	Headteachers	First Primary	Aims to establish whether children are exposed to subject specialist teaching at an earlier age in either the three-tier or two-tier system. Also links to notion of middle school keeping children in a primary environment longer.
If you ticked option B above [some subject specialists / some class teachers], please list below those subjects which are taught by subject-specialist teachers:	Headteachers	First Primary	Aims to establish whether children are exposed to subject specialist teaching at an earlier age in either the three-tier or two-tier system – and if so, which subjects are affected. Also links to notion of middle school keeping children in a primary environment longer.
For the following list of subjects, please indicate whether children are taught each subject by subject-specialist teachers [for middle schools, also asked whether this applies to upper years only]	Headteachers	Middle Secondary Upper	Aims to establish the extent of subject-specialist teaching, e.g. for core subjects only. May provide evidence of a gradual introduction to secondary schooling in middle schools if only a small selection of subjects are taught by specialists, or if there are some which are taught by subject-specialists in upper years only).
Are the following facilities available to children of all ages at your school?	Headteachers	All	Access to specialist facilities and equipment is a frequently cited advantage of middle schools, but it might be the case that although 9-13 schools have these facilities, children do not have access to them until they are in the upper years of middle school, this would mean that access to these facilities actually occurs at the same age as in the two-tier system (11+), thus weakening the argument for middle schools on this basis. NB first, primary and upper have a linked open-ended for comments – no room to

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
			include this in Middle and Secondary versions.
Please us the space below if you wish to elaborate on any of the responses given above or comment on any aspect of the school's facilities [open-ended linked to ID 29, Q on which facilities are available]	Headteachers	First Primary Upper	Not asked in Midd and Secondary Qs due to space problems.
Which of the following best describes your initial teacher training?	Teachers	All	
Does your school undertake any of the following activities to prepare children for scheduled transfers… a) into your school, b) on to the next school [middles asked both a and b, pri and first asked about transfer from, and secondary and upper asked about transfer to their school]	Headteachers	All	Transfer activities in this context will impact primarily on children's emotional well-being, e.g. aiming at reducing stress and worry surrounding transfer to a new school – though 'behind the scenes' this also ensures educational continuity so arguably this question could address both A and B.
Please briefly describe any other activities you arrange to help prepare children for scheduled transfers	Headteachers (21)	All	As above
[Agree/disagree] The three-tier system helps to gradually introduce children to the teaching and learning environment of a secondary school	Headteachers Teachers	All	
[Agree/disagree] The three-tier system is inappropriate as it does not fit with the National Curriculum key stage structure	Headteachers Teachers	All	
Which of the following schooling systems do you think is most beneficial for the majority of children in terms of encouraging their educational / academic development?	Teachers	All	Space below the tick box question for elaboration (ID 46)
Access to a range of specialist facilities (eg science labs, design and technology facilities, separate sports hall etc.) [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
A 'dip' in academic performance on commencing KS3 [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
Disinterest in school work [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
Do you find out new things in lessons?	Pupils	All	Lifted from Ofsted's primary pupil survey
Do you do well in your school work?	Pupils	All	This links to a later question which asks children who have just transferred 'do you think you are doing well in your school since moving to xxxx school?', and a question for those about to transfer which asks: 'do you think you will do well in your school work at your new school?' – the idea is to gauge children's perceptions of their educational performance currently and progress since moving school (or expected progress for those about to move school), this is based on Suffolk County Council's 'Learners' Survey' which asked the extent to which pupils agreed with the statement *I think I will do well at a new school*.
Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with work?	Pupils	All	Based on Ofsted's pupil question: 'Do you get help when you are stuck?'.
What do you think about the number of teachers at your school? [too many / about right / not enough teachers]	Pupils	All	
How easy or hard do you think the work will be at your new school? [For Y4F & Y6P]	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: Y4F Y6P	Not asked in Y8M version due to lack of space and overlaps slightly with Q below.
Do you think you will do well in your school work at your new school?	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: Y4F Y8M Y6P	This question is adapted from Suffolk County Council's 'Learners' Survey' which asked respondents the extent to which they agree with the statement "I think I will do well at a new school" (See also similar question below for those who have recently transferred)
How well do you think you are doing in your school work since moving to xxxx school?	Pupils	Recently transferred cohorts: Y5M Y9U Y7S	Xxxx = 'middle' for Y5 3-tier Xxxx = 'secondary' for Y7 2-tier Xxxx = 'upper or high' for Y9 3-tier This question is adapted from Suffolk County Council's 'Learners' Survey'

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
			which asked respondents the extent to which they agree with the statement "I think I will do well at a new school"
The help and support offered with school work [Rate]	Parents	All	
The facilities and equipment available [Rate]	Parents	All	
My child is taught by teachers who are experts in their subjects [Agreement scale]	Parents	Middle Secondary Upper	Not for first and primary
The work my child is given is generally too easy for him/her [Agreement scale]	Parents	All	

Questions addressing research question B: *Are there differences in **children's social development and emotional well-being** between those attending 9-13 middle schools and their counterparts in the two-tier system, and if so, can these be attributed to the schooling structure or are there other contributory factors?*

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
[Agree/disagree] Children have the opportunity to take on responsibilities (eg prefects, monitors, house captains etc.)	Headteachers Teachers	All	The additional tier of schools in the three-tier system might mean that children have more opportunities to take on such roles (because they reach the top year in their school one more time than children in the two-tier system); this in turn might be seen as advantageous to children's personal and social development. There is also evidence that such roles are becoming more common in the primary sector, hence all school types will be asked this question.
Children are offered a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and activities	Headteachers Teachers	All	The New Economics Foundation report on pupil well-being (NEF, 2004) indicated that children's well-being increased where they are offered and take up activities outside of lessons, especially sports. But the NEF research did find that although such activities were offered, take-up was lower in secondary schools than primary.
Most children treat staff with respect	Headteachers Teachers	All	This is intended as a general indicator of social relationships in the school which in turn can influence children's social and emotional well-being and development.
Children are encouraged to express their views and opinions in front of teachers and peers	Headteachers Teachers	All	As above
There is a great deal of social interaction between children in different year groups	Headteachers Teachers	All	This is an attempt at gauging how 'segregated' the different school types are, this is based on an assumption that it's likely that the larger size of year groups and the wide age range of pupils in 11+ secondary schools might make inter-year group friendships less common.
Teaching staff know the names of the majority of children they come into contact with	Headteachers Teachers	All	Large 11+ secondary schools are sometimes criticised for being anonymous and failing to provide individual care and attention because of the large number of pupils and due to the large number of different teachers children come into contact with, this question aims to assess the extent of this in different school types.
Children are generally well behaved	Headteachers Teachers	All	This aims to establish whether behavioural problems might be more common in certain types of school, this in turn might affect children's emotional well-being and social development (it could also have an indirect effect on their educational experiences if teachers are spending

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
			disproportionate amounts of time dealing with behaviour problems).
There are few instances of bullying or harassment among children at this school	Headteachers Teachers	All	Bullying can affect children's emotional well-being, this question seeks to assess whether it is more common in certain types of school.
How effective are arrangements at your school at meeting the individual needs of the following children? [Children with SEN, gifted and talented children, children whose first language is not English, children with a disability]	Headteachers	Primary First Middle Secondary Upper	Smaller schools are often thought to be better at meeting individual needs because of the individual knowledge teachers can build up of their pupils, middle schools are generally smaller than 11+ secondary schools so this question aims to compare the two, and to establish whether there is a difference between the primary and secondary phases [see linked open-ended asking for comments on ability to meet individual needs]
Please use the space below to elaborate on any of your responses to Qxx (eg any limitations to meeting individual needs which are outside of the school's control)	Headteachers	Primary First Middle Secondary Upper	
[Agree/disagree] The age-ranges of schools within the three-tier system align more closely with children's social and emotional development than the two-tier system	Headteachers Teachers	All	
[Agree/disagree] The number of scheduled school-to-school transfers in the three-tier system causes unnecessary anxiety for children	Headteachers Teachers	All	Could also include a similar statement next addressing research question B – e.g. The number of scheduled school-to-school transfers in the three-tier system adversely affects the continuity of education children receive.
[Agree/disagree] The three-tier system is better able to provide good pastoral care for children than the two-tier system	Headteachers Teachers	All	
Which of the following schooling systems do you think is most beneficial for the majority of children in terms of encouraging their social / emotional development and well-being?	Teachers	All	Space below the tick box question for elaboration (ID 46)
Involvement in extra-curricular activities [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
Bullying or harassment from other children [are children more likely to experience in the	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
two-tier or three tier system?]			
A teacher or other adult at the school they feel able to talk to if they have a problem [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
Feelings of unhappiness while at school [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
A high standard of provision for meeting educational needs (eg special educational needs, gifted and talented children etc.) [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
Do you like being at your school?	Pupils	All	Lifted from Ofsted's primary pupil survey
Do you feel comfortable putting your hand up and speaking in class?	Pupils	All	It is accepted that the answer to this question will vary from individual to individual and is probably down to individual personality more than school type, however, this attempts to tap into the notion that children lose confidence on transfer to 11+ secondary schools because they are plunged into a new way of teaching and learning without a gradual introduction.
Do other children behave well? [For Yrs 7, 8 & 9 worded as: Do other pupils behave well?]	Pupils	All	Based on Ofsted's question: 'Do other children behave well?'
Is your school friendly or unfriendly?	Pupils	All	
Do you have the chance to take on a responsible role such as prefect, monitor, house captain, student representative?	Pupils	Yrs 7, 8 and 9 only	
Do you take part in any clubs or activities outside of lessons such as sports clubs / teams, hobby clubs, school plays, music, choirs, school magazines, school council?	Pupils	Yrs 7, 8 and 9 only	Open-ended follow-on Q asks if not, why not? (See below)
If no [to Q about whether they take part in out of school activities], please tell me why you don't take part in any of these activities	Pupils	Yrs 7, 8 and 9 only	This aims to establish whether those who go to secondary school at age 11 feel inhibited in any way from taking part in these activities, perhaps by the presence of much older children, or just because it's 'uncool' to be seen to

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
			be doing these activities.
Is there an adult at your school you could speak to if you had a problem?	Pupils	Yrs 7, 8 and 9 only	
How do you feel you are treated by teachers and other staff at your school?	Pupils	Yrs 7, 8 and 9 only	Aims to assess whether children at certain school types are treated in an appropriate manner for their age, ie some have criticised middle schools for keeping children in a primary environment for too long, this aims to gauge the children's own feelings about the way they are treated.
Do you have friends in other year groups?	Pupils	All	
Are you worried about moving to xxxxx school in September? (for Y8+: 'How worried are you…?')	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y4 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	Xxxx = 'middle' for 3-tier Y4. Xxxx = 'upper / high' for 3-tier Y8 pupils Xxxx = 'secondary' for 2-tier Y6 pupils For Y4 and Y6 pupils, responses are yes, no, not sure; for Y8 pupils responses are 'very worried', 'fairly worried', 'not worried'
Are you excited about moving to xxxxx school in September? (for Y8+: 'How excited are you…?')	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y4 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	Xxxx = 'middle' for 3-tier Y4. Xxxx = 'upper / high' for 3-tier Y8 pupils Xxxx = 'secondary' for 2-tier Y6 pupils For Y4 and Y6 pupils, responses are yes, no, not sure; for Y8 pupils responses are 'very excited, 'fairly excited, 'not excited'
Do you think other pupils / children will be friendly?	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y4 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	
Please tell me one thing you are most worried about when you go to xxxx school in September	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	Xxxx = 'upper / high' for 3-tier Y8 pupils Xxxx = 'secondary' for 2-tier Y6 pupils Not asked to Y4 transfer cohort as was felt it made questionnaire too long.
Please tell me one thing you are most excited about when you go to xxxx school in September	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	Xxxx = 'upper / high' for 3-tier Y8 pupils Xxxx = 'secondary' for 2-tier Y6 pupils Not asked to Y4 transfer cohort as was felt it made questionnaire too long.
Were you worried about moving to xxxx school last September? (For Y7+: 'How worried were you…?')	Pupils	Recently transferred cohorts: 3-tier Y5 3-tier Y9 2-tier Y7	Xxxx = 'middle' for Y5 3-tier Xxxx = 'secondary' for Y7 2-tier Xxxx = 'upper or high' for Y9 3-tier For Y5 pupils, responses are yes, no, not sure; for Y7 and 9 pupils responses are 'very worried', 'fairly worried', 'not worried'

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
Were you excited about moving to xxxx school last September? (For Y7+: 'How excited were you…?')	Pupils	Recently transferred cohorts: 3-tier Y5 3-tier Y9 2-tier Y7	Xxxx = 'middle' for Y5 3-tier Xxxx = 'secondary' for Y7 2-tier Xxxx = 'upper or high' for Y9 3-tier For Y5 pupils, responses are yes, no, not sure; for Y7 and 9 pupils responses are 'very excited', 'fairly excited', 'not excited'
Was the move to xxxx school…? [Easier / as expected / more difficult]	Pupils	Recently transferred cohorts: 3-tier Y9 2-tier Y7	Xxxx = 'secondary' for Y7 2-tier Xxxx = 'upper or high' for Y9 3-tier
The out-of-lesson activities available [Rate]	Parents	All	Adapted from Ofsted's parents' questionnaire which asks the extent to which they agree with the statement "There is a good range of activities that my child finds interesting and enjoyable"
The general behaviour of children at the school [Rate]	Parents	All	Adapted from Ofsted's parents' questionnaire which asks the extent to which they agree with the statement "Children, pupils or students behave well"
The opportunities for children to take on roles of responsibility [Rate]	Parents	All	
The help and support offered with non-school work related problems [Rate]	Parents	All	
My child is treated fairly by staff [Agreement scale]	Parents	All	Adapted from Ofsted's parents' questionnaire which asks the extent to which they agree with the statement "Staff treat my child fairly"
There are few problems with bullying or harassment between children [Agreement scale]	Parents	All	Adapted from Ofsted's parents' questionnaire which asks the extent to which they agree with the statement "My child is not bullied or harassed at school"
The school encourages the personal and social development of my child [Agreement scale]	Parents	All	Adapted from Ofsted's parents' questionnaire which asks the extent to which they agree with the statement "Staff encourage my child to become mature and independent" – not sure that my wording is better, might revert to using Ofsted's wording.
My child likes this school [Agreement scale]	Parents	All	Adapted from Ofsted's parents' questionnaire which asks the extent to which they agree with the statement "My child likes school"

Questions addressing research question C: What are the lessons from 9-13 middle schools for middle years schooling more generally?

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
At what age do you think children are generally ready to be taught by subject-specialists for most subjects rather than by class teachers?	Headteachers Teachers	All	Addresses issue of suitable age ranges of schools, might indicate whether the age at which children are generally considered ready for subject-specialist teaching matches with any of our existing schooling structures. Teachers have an open-ended for any explanation of their response [See ID 26].
At what age do you think children are generally ready to be taught in groups set by ability for most subjects rather than in mixed ability groups?	Teachers	All	Addresses issue of suitable age ranges of schools, might indicate whether the age at which children are generally considered ready for ability-based teaching groups matches with any of our existing schooling structures. Teachers have an open-ended for any explanation of their response [See ID 26].
If you would like to elaborate on the answers given to i) or ii) above, please use the space below [Qs on age at which children are ready to be taught by subject-specialists and in groups set by ability]	Teachers	Teachers	
Children are involved in the way the school is run and are consulted on policy changes when appropriate	Headteachers Teachers	All	Literature on middle school in the USA suggests that a feature of successful middle schools is involvement of the community and creating a sense of ownership among pupils and parents, this question attempt to gauge this.
[Agree/disagree] The three-tier system is an expensive way to educate children	Headteachers Teachers	All	LEAs often cite the expense of middle schools as a reason for reverting to the two-tier system, this question aims to gauge whether heads and teachers also see it in these terms.
Are you generally in favour of the three-tier system involving 9-13 middle schools?	Headteachers Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 43)
Please give brief reasons for your response [to ID 42, whether generally in favour of three-tier system]	Headteachers Teachers	All	Follow-up to whether they are generally in favour of the three-tier system involving 9-13 middle schools

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
Would you prefer wait until you are 11 years old before moving to a different school?	Pupils	Y4 3-tier	
Would you prefer to have moved to a middle school at the end of Year 4 (age 9), and stay there until you are 13 (Year 8), and then move to a secondary school at age 13 (Year 9) instead of 11?	Pupils	Y6 2-tier	Follow-on question asks why
Would you have preferred to stay at your old school until you are 11, and then move on to secondary school in Year 7?	Pupils	Y5 3-tier	Follow-on question asks why
Would you have preferred to stay at your primary or first school until the end of Year 6, and go to a secondary school when you were aged 11 (Year 7), instead of coming to a middle school for years 5-8?	Pupils	Y8 3-tier	Follow-on question asks why
Would you have preferred to leave your primary or junior school at the end of Year 4, and go to a middle school for Years 5-8, and then move to a secondary school in Year 9 (age 13)?	Pupils	Y7 2-tier	Follow-on question asks why
Would you have preferred to stay in primary school until the end of Year 6, and then go to a secondary school at age 11 (Year 7) instead of going to a middle school?	Pupils	Y9 3-tier	Follow-on question asks why

Questions addressing research questions A & B:

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
[Agree / disagree] The three-tier system keeps children in a primary environment for longer than is necessary	Headteachers Teachers	All	
Anxiety about school work [are children more likely to experience in the two-tier or three tier system?]	Teachers	All	See also linked open-ended (ID 56)
If you wish to comment on any of the responses given to Qxx, please use the space below	Teachers	All	Open-ended for comments on the range of statements about children's experiences at school and whether they are more likely to experience these in the two-tier or three-tier system
Do your teachers know your name?	Pupils	All	This aims to test the notion that large secondary schools sometimes lack the individual attention pupils may need, it will also check whether claims made by many middle schools that they do offer this are actually corroborated by their pupils.
What do you think about the number of children there are at your school? [too many children / pupils, about the right number, not enough children / pupils]	Pupils	All	
What do you think about the size of your school [too big / about right / too small]	Pupils	All	
Do you think the teachers will be helpful?	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y4 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	
Do you think your xxxx school will be too big or too small? [Too big / about right / too small]	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y4 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	Xxxx = 'middle' for 3-tier Y4. Xxxx = 'upper / high' for 3-tier Y8 pupils Xxxx = 'secondary' for 2-tier Y6 pupils
Do you think there will be too many or not enough children at your new school? [Too many pupils / children, about the right number of pupils / children, not enough pupils / children]	Pupils	Transfer cohorts: 3-tier Y4 3-tier Y8 2-tier Y6	

Questions addressing research questions A & C:

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
Does your school operate a condensed Key Stage 3?	Headteachers Teachers	HT: Middle Secondary Teachers: Middle Secondary	The fact that KS3 isn't self-contained within 9-13 middle schools has been a major criticism of the three-tier system, if condensed KS3 is considered a successful strategy, this criticism is less powerful.
If yes, please briefly describe any benefits or problems with the condensed KS3 to your pupils and / or the school more generally	Headteachers Teachers	HT: Middle Secondary Teachers: Middle Secondary	As above, this open-ended may also identify and specific strengths / weaknesses of condensed KS3.

Questions addressing research questions B & C:

Question	Which questionnaire?	Version (Q number)	Notes
Please use the space below to elaborate on any of your responses to q6/7/8a [question on meeting individual needs] (eg any limitations to meeting individual needs which are outside of the school's control)	Headteachers	All	Aims to establish any specific constraints on meeting individual needs which can affect children's social and emotional development and well-being and which in turn can help to inform the development of policies and procedures for meeting individual needs of middle years pupils more generally.

Questions addressing research questions A, B & C:

Question	Which questionnaire?	Which version?	Notes
How often do you accept children transferring to your middle [or secondary] school from schools in the two-tier primary/secondary [or three-tier] system rather than from feeder schools within the three-tier [or two-tier]system?	Headteachers	Middle Secondary	This question could go if questionnaire need to be shortened because it doesn't relate very strongly to the research questions and because it is difficult to analyse in comparison with other types of school. Also, because the research will be carried out in LEA areas operating both the two-tier and three-tier systems, proximity is likely to be the main reason for frequent cross-system transfers.
If known, what are the main reasons behind these cross-system transfers (e.g. standards at nearby schools, parental preference etc)	Headteachers	Middle Secondary	See above
Which system would you prefer for your child? [Follows a description of two-tier and three-tier systems]	Parents	All	
Please give brief reasons for your preferred system for your child	Parents	All	
At what age do you think your child is / was most ready for transferring to a secondary school environment?	Parents	All	
Please give brief reasons for your answer [to question on which age they think child is most ready for transfer to secondary school]	Parents	All	

Respondent characteristics:

Question	Which questionnaire?	Version (Q number)	Notes
What is your role at the school? (HT, deputy, other)	Headteachers	All	
Which year group(s) do you teach?	Teachers	All	
Do you have any experience as a teacher ['deputy HT or HT] in any other types of school?	Headteachers Teachers	All	
Which of the following best describes your teaching role at this school? (class, subject-spec, both)	Teachers	Middle	
If your role involves subject-specialist teaching, approximately how many different subjects do you currently teach?	Teachers	Middle	
Are you? (Male / Female) (A boy / a girl)	Pupils	All	

Appendix 7

Testing the reliability of the 'scores' derived from attitudinal questions in the pupils' survey

One aspect of reliability is to ensure the "internal consistency" (Pallant, 2010, p.100) of a scale derived from a series of survey questions, that is, to check the extent to which they are measuring what we intend them to measure.

My pupils' survey began with seven questions aimed at gauging pupils' attitudes to their school, of these, three could be said to relate to the educational experience, three relate more to the social/emotional aspects of the schooling experience and one overlaps with both elements.

The questions that make up the educational scale are:

- Do you find out new things in lessons?

- Do you do well in your school work?

- Do your teachers help you if you are stuck with your work?

The questions that make up the social scale are:

- Do you like being at your school?

- Do you feel comfortable putting your hand up and speaking in class?

- Do other children behave well?

And the question which is included in both scales is:

- Do your teachers know your name?

Scores were calculated on each scale by adding up each respondent's total score across the two scales, this was only done for those who had answered all questions in the scale (98% of respondents had done so). The numeric values that were summed equate to the response categories as follows:

1 = Always

2 = Most of the time

3 = Sometimes

4 = Hardly ever

5 = Never

The calculation resulted in an 'educational' score and a 'social/emotional' score for each respondent who had answered all questions. Because of the way the numeric values correspond to the verbal response options, a lower score represents a more positive attitude while a higher score represent a more negative attitude. The maximum score achievable on either scale was 20 (five 'never' responses) and the minimum was 5 (five 'always' responses).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated within SPSS as a measure of the internal consistency of the scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is very sensitive to the number of questions that make up a given score, and in this case, just 4 items contributed to each score so I expected to achieve a fairly low Cronbach value (Pallant, 2010, p.100).

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the educational scale was .477 and for the social/emotional scale, .496. Ideally a value of .7 or above would be desirable, so based on this statistic, it would appear that the reliability (or extent to which my scales work together in measuring what I want them to measure) based on internal consistency measures is fairly weak (Pallant 2010).

Given the sensitivity of the Cronbach statistic to a small number of items in a scale mentioned above, Pallant (2010, p.97) suggests looking instead at the inter-item correlations for each scale, and suggests that values between .2 and .4 are optimal to

allow an assumption of internal consistency. The inter-item correlation for the educational scale was .186 and for the social/emotional scale, .198. Since these were so close to the ideal figure of .2, I opted to continue with an analysis based on these scales rather than abandon it, but the figures presented based on these scales must be considered with it in mind that the internal reliability might not be as strong as we would have liked it to be. I tested the inter-item correlations by removing one item at a time and it made little difference to the strength of the reliability so rather than this lack of strength being due to a particular question measuring something other than what it was intended to, it's possible the best way to improve the reliability would have been to include more items in each scale.

Appendix 8

The interview schedule for the face to face interview with the LEA officer

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Explain purposes of research and interview.

Switch on recorder

1) Background

Why three-tier in some areas and not others?

Does the three-tier system work better in rural areas?

Have any areas of Dorset converted back to two-tier?

> If yes, what was the reason, and what has the outcome been (e.g. better performance?)?

2) Educational outcomes

Has the LEA noted any differences in educational outcomes / performance across the two-tier system?

Is there evidence of a Year 7 dip in Dorset schools, and if so, is this more pronounced in wither the two-tier or three-tier system?

Is pupil behaviour and discipline a bigger problem in either system? If yes, please explain, and why do you think it might be different across systems?

3) Pupils' social and emotional well-being

Do you think either system provides a better environment for nurturing pupils' social and emotional well-being, or is there little difference?

> If yes, in what ways does one system do better?

Do you think the size and/or age-range of the school can affect children's social and emotional well-being, and if yes, in what ways? EG are bigger schools more impersonal, and could this lead to children with problems 'falling through the net'?

Is there any difference in schools' abilities to cater for pupils' individual needs across the systems such as SEN, children whose first language is not English, children with a disability etc.? (e.g. in Heads' survey, some frustration was expressed at lack of resources to meet such needs – particularly among the three-tier schools)

4) The LEA perspective

It is often said that three-tier schooling systems are more expensive to run, is this the case in Dorset? If yes, why? Is this because there are more separate schools and therefore more staff, more buildings etc?

School buildings and facilities: Are there any issues within Dorset over schools within the three-tier system having inferior buildings, access to lesser facilities etc? (IE many middle schools were converted juniors or primaries – are they really 'fit for purpose' for the middle years of schooling?)

Are there issues with falling rolls that might be affecting the three-tier system in Dorset?

Is the three-tier system an 'administrative inconvenience'? Explain: When I worked at an LEA operating both, it did place extra demands on administrative resources, also, my Master's research indicated that many LEAs that decided to close middle schools cited administrative convenience as a reason for reverting to all two-tier schooling.

5) The future

Is the LEA currently undertaking a review of school organisation?

> If yes, find out more, e.g. what prompted the review, what stage is it at, where can I find further information etc.

> If no, have any reviews been undertaken in the past, and what was the outcome?

Are there any plans to introduce all-through schools in Dorset? If yes, will these be notionally divided so that middle years are treated almost as an entity in its own right?

Thank you. Switch off recorder.

Appendix 9

The discussion group schedule for the discussion with former pupils

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Hand out information sheets.

Introduction:

Explain research – two-tier compared to three-tier system involving middle school for 9-13 year olds.

Research is mixed methods design, also includes:

- Survey of heads and teachers
- Questionnaires for pupils in Y4-Y9
- Parents' web survey
- Interview with Dorset County Council education officer

Purpose of today's group is to incorporate the perspective of people who attended schools in Dorset and to see how they feel about the system they went through with the benefit of hindsight.

I have a rough list of topics to discuss and questions I'd like to ask, people should feel free to respond and chip in as and when they want to.

I will be recording the session but this is for my records only and no one will be identified in any reports resulting from the research.

Before switching recorder on, confirm what system each attendee went through.

SWITCH RECORDER ON

1) Academic / educational aspects of your school experience

i) **Facilities and equipment**:
I'd like you to think about the different facilities you had access to at your primary and secondary schools (or at first / middle / upper school), and tell me how the following were different at the different school types:

   a. Science facilities (e.g. specialist labs at secondary?)
   b. Design Technology facilities
   c. Computing or ICT facilities
   d. Sports facilities
   e. Drama / performing arts

- Did you find it intimidating at first have access to these facilities and to be taught in this environment?

- Were you given enough support and assistance from your teachers to use the specialist facilities and equipment?

- Were there any facilities or equipment at secondary or middle school that you weren't allowed to use until your later years at the school? If yes, how did this make you feel? Did you feel you were ready to use them?

ii) **Academic work**:
- How did you find the switch from primary to secondary (or first to middle / middle to upper) in terms of:

   a. The level of difficulty of the work
   b. Teacher's expectations of you and your abilities
   c. The amount of individual help your teachers were willing / able to give you

- How much pressure do you think exams and assessments have placed on you (i.e. end of key stage assessments / tests, GCSEs etc.)?

- Was there more in secondary than primary school?

- Did your teachers give you the support and assistance you needed to cope with exams, and was there more or less support in primary or secondary school?

iii)   **Teaching methods**:

- Were you taught mainly by a general class teacher in primary school and then subject-specialists in secondary? (If three-tier, ask when they were taught by SS teachers) If yes, was this too great a jump, would they prefer a more gradual introduction?

- If not, what arrangements were there? Was there a gradual introduction to subject-specialist teaching? Was this beneficial?

- Do you think the switch from general class teacher to SS teachers happened to early or too late for you personally?

- When did you start being taught some or all subjects in groups set by ability rather than mixed ability? Was this too early or too late for you, and why?

- Did you feel happy speaking up in class (e.g. to answer questions)? Was there a difference in this between secondary and primary school? Why?

- Teachers: Do you think your teachers were generally 'good'? Was there any difference between primary and secondary (or between first – middle – upper) – did either have 'better' teachers than the other(s)? If so, what makes you think they were better teachers?

- Did all of your teachers know your name? (Compare primary / secondary or first / middle / upper)? If not, how did this make you feel? If in three-tier – do you think this is because you didn't spend long enough in any one school?

2) Social / emotional / child development aspects of your school experience:

- Friendships

   - Did you have friends (other than relations) in year groups above or below you at school, if yes, was this more common in primary or secondary school? If no, was it common for other children to be friends with those outside of their current year group?

- Did your school encourage social interaction between year groups in anyway, e.g. inter-house social or sporting events, field trips / outings for more than one year group etc. If yes, was this more common in primary or secondary school? Were they successful at encouraging integration?

- Bullying / harassment

- Was bullying among children widespread at your school? Was there more or less bullying / harassment at primary or secondary school?

- Did teachers deal with it effectively or turn a blind eye? Was there a difference in the way teachers dealt with bullying at primary and secondary school?

[Discipline systems: was there a big difference, which was more effective?]

- Was there a teacher or other adult at your school you would have felt comfortable talking to if you had a non-school work related problem? Was this more likely at primary or secondary school?

- Were you offered adequate opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities like sports teams/clubs, school council, hobbies clubs, school magazine etc.? Were you more likely to take part in these at primary or secondary school? If yes, why the difference? E.g. was it 'uncool' at secondary school?

3) Transferring schools:

- How did you feel about transferring from a primary to secondary school?

- What worried you about the transfer (e.g. size of school, older pupils, moving from class to class etc)? What did you look forward to about the new school?

- Were you given enough support from your school, e.g. did they undertake activities such as open days, taster lessons from teachers at the secondary school etc.? If so, were these effective at alleviating some of the anxiety surrounding the transfer, or did they make it worse?

- If anyone went to infant and junior school, what were their experiences of transfer then? Was it less of an upheaval than later transfers?

- Ideally, for you personally, what would have been the best age to transfer to a secondary school environment? Why? Academic reasons, or social / emotional reasons?

4) The three-tier vs. the two-tier system:

- What system do you think you would have preferred to go through if you had been given the choice, and why?

- If all else was equal (e.g. school standards, travel to school distance etc.) which system would you prefer for your own children, and why?

- Any further comments / observations?

SWITCH OFF RECORDER

Hand out payments

Appendix 10

Background characteristics of respondents to the headteachers' and teachers' surveys

Number and percentage of respondents to the headteachers' and teachers' surveys who have previously worked in a schooling system other than their current one

Experience outside of current system - respondents currently in the three-tier system					
Respondent type	**No. who have worked in a two-tier system school**	**No. of respondents in this group**	**%who have worked in a two-tier school**	**No. who have worked in an 8-12 middle school**	**No.who have worked in a 9-13 middle school**
First school headteachers	14	18	78	1	0
First school teachers	12	13	92	0	1
Middle school headteachers	2	5	40	1	*
Middle school teachers	3	5	60	1	*
Upper school headteachers	1	2	50	0	0
Three-tier overall	**32**	**43**	**74**	**3**	**0**

Experience outside of current system - respondents currently in the two-tier system					
Respondent type	**No. who have worked in a three-tier system school**	**No. of respondents in this group**	**%who have worked in a three-tier school**	**No. who have worked in an 8-12 middle school**	**No. who have worked in a 9-13 middle school**
Primary school headteachers	16	24	67	3	10
Primary school teachers	3	13	23	1	2
Secondary school headteachers	3	6	50	0	0
Secondary school teachers	3	5	60	0	0
Two-tier overall	**25**	**48**	**52**	**4**	**12**

* Not applicable since all respondents currently work in a 9-13 middle school

Teachers' survey respondents – type of initial teacher training

Type of initial teacher training	First teachers		Primary teachers		Middle teachers		Secondary teachers		All teachers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Trained as primary teacher	11	85	11	85	2	40	0	0	24	67
Trained as middle school teacher	1	8	1	8	1	20	0	0	3	8
Trained as secondary teacher	0	0	0	0	2	40	5	100	7	19
Other	1	8	1	8	0	0	0	0	2	6
Total	**13**	**100**	**13**	**100**	**5**	**100**	**5**	**100**	**36**	**100**

Appendix 11

Pupils' surveys response rates and respondent profile

Responses by school type – pupils' survey

School type	n	%
First	104	8
Primary	108	8
Middle	1019	79
Secondary	58	4
Total	**1289**	**100**

Responses by year group and school type (questionnaire version)

Questionnaire version	n	%
Y4 First	104	8
Y4 Primary	15	1
Y5 Primary	37	3
Y6 Primary	56	4
Y5 Middle	287	22
Y6 Middle	300	23
Y7 Middle	198	15
Y8 Middle	234	18
Y7 Secondary	18	1
Y8 Secondary	26	2
Y9 Secondary	14	1
Total	**1289**	**100**

Responses by gender

	n	%
Boy	626	50
Girl	618	50
Total	**1244**	**100**

Responses by gender, school type and year group

Year group	Male	Female
Y4 First (n=101)	48	52
Y4 Primary (n=15)	47	53
Y5 Primary (n=33)	45	55
Y6 Primary (n=51)	45	55
Y5 Middle (n=282)	46	54
Y6 Middle (n=293)	53	47
Y7 Middle (n=191)	55	45
Y8 Middle (n=221)	54	46
Y7 Secondary (n=18)	33	67
Y8 Secondary (n=25)	36	64
Y9 Secondary (n=14)	43	57

Percent