

Ofsted Parents Panel

Annual report 2017

Ofsted Parents Panel is a virtual panel that is made up of parents of school-aged children, and younger, in England.

This second annual report gives an overview of the panel and its activities during the 2016/17 academic year. It summarises the main findings and how parents' views continue to contribute to the work of Ofsted.

Published: February 2018

Reference no: 180014



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Acknowledgements

Thank you to members of the Ofsted Parents Panel for sharing their views and experiences with us during the 2016/17 academic year. What they told us continues to inform and shape our work and we look forward to working with parents in this coming year.

Introduction

Parents have a valuable contribution to make to our work. We seek their views in a number of ways. For example, via a parents' attitudes survey, organised discussion groups, user research and consultation on specific topics and ongoing engagement at conferences, events and by social media.¹

The Ofsted Parents Panel was established in July 2015. It:

- is a virtual panel of parents/carers of school-aged children and younger, in England
- provides parents/carers with a channel to regularly feed in their views so that they can help shape how Ofsted works for their benefit and their children's
- gives Ofsted a rapid response mechanism to ascertain parents' views
- does not statistically represent the parent population, but indicates parents' views based on responses to our questions.

This second annual report gives an overview of the panel and its activities during the 2016/17 academic year. It summarises the main findings and how parents' views have contributed to the work of Ofsted.

About the Ofsted Parents Panel

Currently there are over 900 members on the panel (up from 517 in the previous year) representing all Ofsted regions.

In the academic year 2016/17, we made 11 requests to the panel, ranging from short questions to more detailed online surveys. Members have given us their views on topics such as: mathematics and English, early years reports, homework, private tutoring, and extra-curricular activities. We have received over 1,800 responses from parents on the panel during this period.

These views have fed directly into specific areas of Ofsted's work. For example, a special study on the curriculum and research into mathematics and English and the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Responses have also fed directly into formal consultations and helped inform changes to the way we inspect 'good' schools. They have also helped shape our wider engagement programme with parents as well as providing continual insight for all our work.

¹ Annual parents survey, (2016), Ofsted; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-parents-survey>

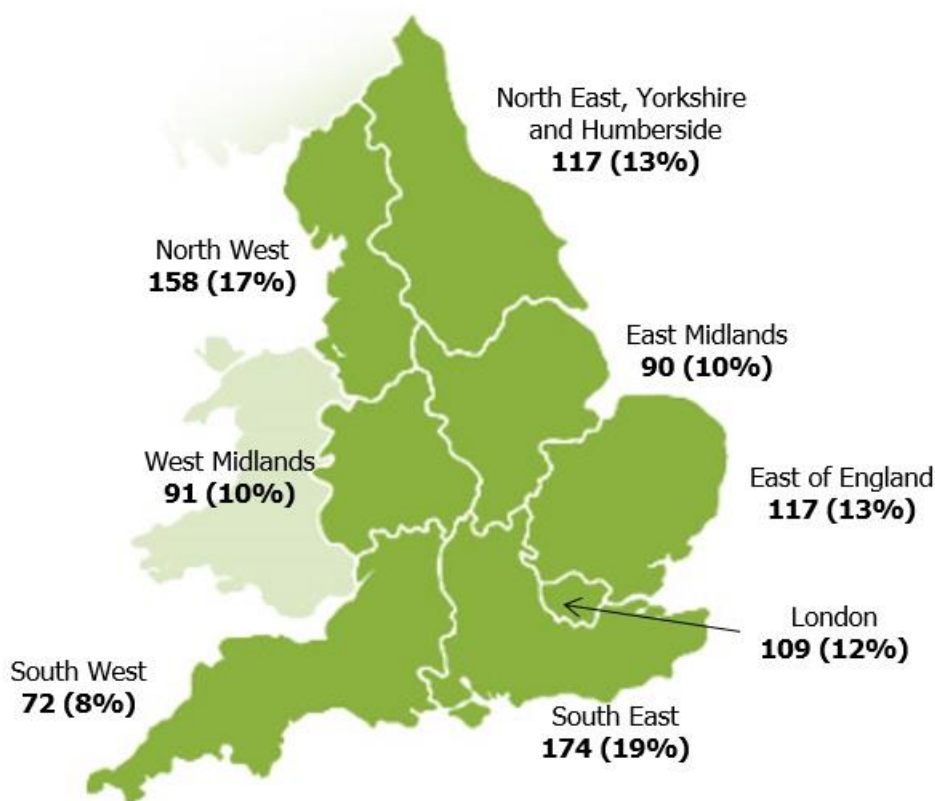
Profile of the Parents Panel

During the year, we welcomed our 938th member to the Ofsted Parents Panel, increasing membership by 57%. Some parents, 10 in total, left the panel during the year because they no longer have school-aged children. Currently, there are 928 members on the parents panel and between them they have 1,698 children who are school-aged or younger. This year, we extended the panel to include parents of children in the early years phase.

About the parents

When parents join the panel, they complete a short questionnaire that helps us create a profile of members. This questionnaire asks for information about where they live, their ethnicity and their involvement in their child's school, such as being a school governor. We use this information to make sure that the panel is inclusive and to target groups of parents when questions are more relevant to them.

Figure 1: Regional spread of members – total membership (%) by region



* Percentages have been rounded and may not add up to 100%

Figure 2: Gender of Parents Panel members

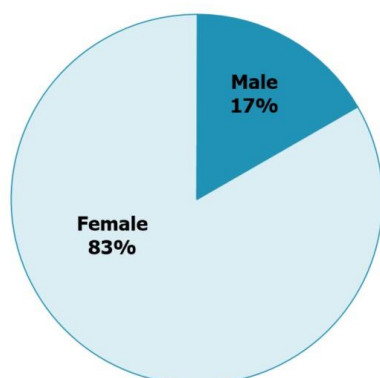


Figure 3: Ethnicity of Parents Panel members

Ethnicity	Members	%
White	842	92
Asian/Asian British	27	3
Other ethnic group	18	2
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	17	2
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	12	1
No response	12	1
Grand total	928	100

* Percentages have been rounded and may not add up to 100%

Twelve per cent of parents indicated that they have a disability.

The Parents Panel is designed to provide us with qualitative insight into a range of issues and is one of our many engagement activities, with the public, that take place throughout the year. With a self-selecting membership, the panel is not designed, or able, to be a statistically representative sample of parents. We are keen though to establish a membership that broadly reflects Ofsted regions, different school phases and ethnic groups and therefore monitor membership constantly targeting recruitment at specific groups as necessary.

Parents' experience in a range of areas in the school allows us to build a detailed profile of the panel.

Figure 4: Experience of Parents Panel members

Experience	Members	%
Being a school governor	386	42
Being a member of a parent association	373	40
Special educational needs	400	43
Ofsted school inspections	335	36
Free school meals	138	15
Being a foster carer	44	5

Parents also told us to what level they would like to get involved or engage with us.

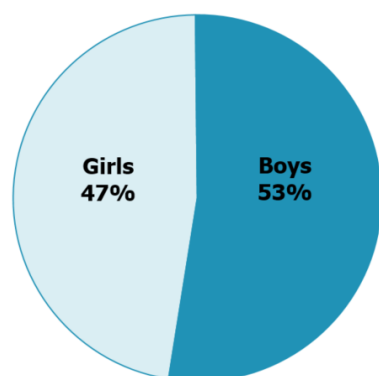
Figure 5: Level of involvement preferences as indicated by parents

Involvement	Members	%
Email questions	893	96
Online surveys	832	90
Reviewing and commenting on Ofsted materials	698	75
Mobile phone text questions	510	55
Regional events	493	53
Telephone discussions	377	41
Facebook	363	39
Webinars	358	39

About the children

To protect the identity of individual children, we gather minimal information about members' children – gender and school year.

Figure 6: Gender of children of Parents Panel members



Of the 1,812 children identified by parents, 46% were in the secondary school phase of education while 48% were in primary school and 6% were in the pre-school years.

What parents told us

Over the past year, the panel gave us its views on a variety of topics. These have been invaluable and continue to inform and shape our work.

What follows is a summary of the topics we covered during the 2016/17 academic year, what parents said and how we used the information. A full list of the topics that we contacted the Ofsted Parents Panel about, is given at Annex A. This includes the date asked, topic and total number of responses received.

Review of the curriculum

Early in 2017, Ofsted's Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman commissioned an Ofsted-wide review of the curriculum. The aim of the review was to provide fresh insight into the curriculum, how it is being applied and the impact it has on outcomes for children. During 2017, the Parents Panel fed into two areas of this review providing valuable insight on the key stage 2 curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

Key stage 2 curriculum

To inform the wider review of the curriculum, we wanted parents' views on the key stage 2 curriculum and the impact of key stage 2 examinations on their children's learning. This is what the panel told us.

- Parents frequently suggested that English and mathematics dominated their child's curriculum, while humanities and art were often missed out.
- There was often an excessive amount of preparation for key stage 2 examinations and parents felt that this affected the teaching time spent on subjects that weren't tested.
- The impact of the key stage 2 examinations on their child was mostly perceived as negative with reports of some children having severe reactions to the experience.
- Key stage 2 examinations were not appropriate for some children with special educational needs or disabilities.

'The curriculum is currently too narrow and the focus tends to be on writing and maths.'

'[The] curriculum changes in Year 6 to be more assessment subject based. After SATs this changes back, but there is not much time and they are ready to leave the school by then, so less interest is taken in any topics.'

Extra-curricular activities

The review was interested in parents' views about extra-curricular activities. In particular, the range of extra-curricular activities available to children at school, whether these activities supplemented learning or were something different.

We wanted to know how well-informed parents felt about extra-curricular activities, how much children benefited from participating in extra-curricular activities and whether activities with an associated cost affected participation. This is what parents on the panel told us.

- The majority of parents said there was between a fair to large range of extra-curricular activities available to their children at both primary and secondary school.
- Sports, both indoor and outdoor, were by far the most popular extra-curricular activities for children in both primary and secondary schools.
- Parents felt much more informed about the extra-curricular activities available to their children in primary school than in secondary school.

- More than half of the parents said that the extra-curricular activities their children participated in were something completely different to their classroom studies. Typically any overlaps were with music, arts, maths clubs and sports.
- Although the majority of parents said associated costs of extra-curricular activities had not prevented their children participating in activities, costs were twice as likely to be a barrier to children accessing extra-curricular activities in primary school than in secondary school.
- The majority of parents felt that both primary and secondary schools gave the right amount of encouragement to their children to take part in extra-curricular activities.
- The majority of parents said extra-curricular activities benefited their children.

'Curriculum is so narrow this [extra-curricular activities] gives some scope for a wider education that seems to be lacking through school.'

'The benefits of extra-curricular activities are immense: they boost the child's creativity, engage them in physical activity as well as help them socialise with other kids of other ages, not just their classmates; teach them a skill, giving them a sense of purpose; prepares them for the world in helping them to communicate with other people in other languages and understand other cultures.'

Early years reports

We were reviewing the content and format of early years inspection reports in order to understand how we might improve them. We invited parents to complete a survey to tell us about their experience of early years reports and to share their views on some specific aspects of a real example of a recent inspection report.

More than eight out of ten parents panel members who responded to our questions said that all of the information given in the report was relevant to them. They said the report was just about the right length and they found it easy to understand.

While the parents said that they would not fundamentally alter the structure of our reports, they did provide some advice that has been taken forward in our training for inspectors on report writing. These include views that:

- the language in the report was sometimes overcomplicated and contained jargon/technical terms that parents found hard to understand

- there should be an even balance in the report on text relating to children's care and to their education; in particular reports should include more reference to children's emotional development and to nurturing
- reports should be written for parents, not for the setting; some parents said the report read as if it was meant for staff in the nursery rather than for parents.

'Bullet points are easier to read as a parent.'

'It would be better if it also looked at whether the children appeared happy and how they interacted with each other, staff and inspector.'

'Need to be easier to understand by people who don't work in education.'

Homework

We were interested to know the degree to which parents think homework helps their children in both primary and secondary schools and whether 'prep' at school would be a better alternative.

- The majority of parents said homework is helpful to their children, more so in secondary (87%) rather than primary schools (64%).
- More than a third of parents (36%) said homework isn't helpful at all to their children in primary school while only 12% said it wasn't helpful in secondary school.
- The majority of parents (72%) thought prep at school (allowing pupils' time to plan and get ready for lessons through research) was a better alternative to homework.

Parents gave some very clear messages about homework, both positive and negative. Those who spoke positively said that homework enables them to feel part of their child's learning and that it helps them to support that learning with other activities, such as visits to museums and home projects. The discipline, planning and time management skills that homework gives children were welcomed and they viewed homework as a way of promoting independent learning.

For some though, homework was a problem. Many parents said homework was a huge cause of stress for the whole family and had a negative impact on home life.

'Homework is a good opportunity for parents to be aware of what is being taught in schools.'

'It [homework] causes more unhappiness and arguing in my house than anything else.'

The impact of homework on children with SEND

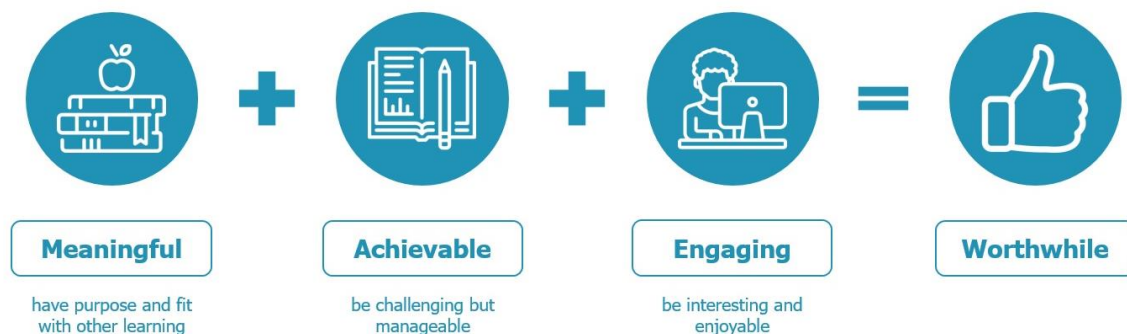
Some parents highlighted the negative impact that homework can have on children with disabilities or special educational needs. These parents said their children often:

- struggle with the concept of homework
- have to put in more effort than their peers just to get through a school day, so homework can become exhausting for them
- find that the stress homework causes is overwhelming and becomes detrimental to their health, self-esteem and confidence.

'Many children and young people with SEND really struggle with home/school compartmentalisation; home is home and school is school and never the twain shall meet.'

Although we didn't specifically ask parents, many of them had clear views on how homework should be if it is to be worthwhile for their children.

Figure 7: How parents think homework should be



Mathematics and English

Ofsted national subject leads for English and mathematics were conducting some research into the practice around the transition from primary to secondary school in those subjects.

Preparing for Year 7

We invited parents of children who had recently left Year 6 to tell us about their child's experiences of learning English and mathematics in Year 6 of primary school and how they were being prepared to continue with their studies in Year 7.

- Around half of the parents who responded felt that their children were being well prepared to continue their learning of mathematics and English in Year 7 at secondary school. A common measure for their conclusion was good SATs results.
- Some parents felt that SATs had hindered preparation for the next level of study. Their view was that teaching had concentrated solely on passing the exams.
- Very few parents said that their children had taken part in activities (e.g. sample lessons) relating to their future learning of mathematics and English during their official visit to their future secondary school.
- Few parents said that their child had completed pieces of work to take with them to secondary school.

'SATs results reflected the effort by both child and teaching staff.'

'They did nothing but sample SATs papers for 2 terms in y6.'

Building on Year 6

Later in the year, we invited the same parents to tell us about their child's experiences of learning English and mathematics in Year 7 and how well their previous studies were being built on.

Of the parents who shared their views about their child's learning in secondary school:

- the majority of parents described their child's learning in both mathematics and English as challenging, although in most cases this was mixed with easier work

- their view was that secondary schools were more likely to group their children into ability sets for learning mathematics whereas children were more likely to be taught in mixed-ability classes or tutor groups for English
- ability sets were chosen based on test results, including but not always exclusively, from key stage 2 SATs.

'So far, the work has been appropriate and reasonably challenging. My son seems happy and engaged.'

'The level of challenge is not significantly different from the end of Year 6 but there is a much greater expectation of their ability to manage longer-term projects, with multiple elements, for homework.'

Ofsted email alerts

The Ofsted email alert service keeps subscribers up to date with important announcements from Ofsted, including the publication of new inspection reports.²

The re-design of our reports site was a major piece of work in this time period.³ To help inform decisions around the development of the email alerts service aspect of the site, we asked parents about the kinds of information that is important to them, how they'd like announcements communicated to them and how frequently they wanted to hear from Ofsted.

- Parents were most interested to know about inspection activity at their child's school or nursery. Ninety two per cent of the parents on the panel said that they like to be informed when an inspection report is published and 86% when an inspection is about to happen.
- Of the responses received, 83% of the parents said that they'd like to know when the outcome of a complaint against their child's school or nursery was published, while 71% said they'd like to know when a complaint investigation had begun.
- Ninety two per cent of the parents said that they would prefer to hear this kind of news directly via email rather than social media channels, which was the preference of 5 to 10% of the parents.

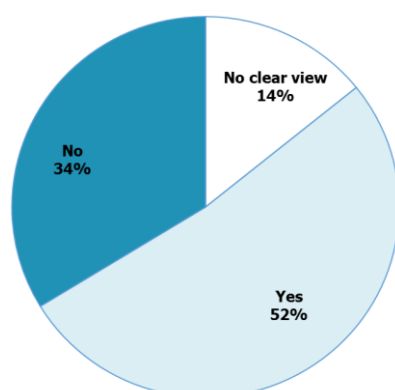
² Ofsted email alerts service: https://www.gov.uk/government/email-signup/new?email_signup%5Bfeed%5D=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fannouncements.atom%3Fdepartments%255B%255D%3Dofsted

³ Ofsted reports website: www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk

Private tutoring

We were interested to know whether parents thought information about the levels of extra tutoring, arranged privately by parents, should be considered during an Ofsted inspection. Most of the parents who responded to our request had a clear opinion on this.

Figure 8: What parents think about whether Ofsted should consider the level of private tutoring in schools during inspections



Parents who believe that the levels of private tutoring should be considered during an Ofsted inspection commonly felt that high levels of private tutoring could reveal weaknesses in the education provided by schools.

Typically, their view was that private tutoring could inflate exam results and, by monitoring it, inspectors would get a more accurate reflection of the school. As parents, they too would be interested to have this information about any prospective school their children might attend.

'Yes, because it's not an accurate reflection of the school as extra tutoring is bound to affect the results!'

Many of the parents who said that the level of private tutoring should not be considered during an Ofsted inspection considered the choice to be a private family matter. They felt that it had little bearing on the performance of the school, rather it reflected parents' affluence. These parents also said that the quality, and level of private tutoring, was out of the school's control and so the school should not be judged by this. They suggested that there were many reasons why parents opt for private tutoring, for example, specific coaching around the 11-plus examination.

A lot of parents also expressed concerns about practicalities around collecting the information and its accuracy. This concern came across regardless of their view whether Ofsted should consider levels of private tutoring or not.

'No because the school has no control over the quality of this teaching so it should not be assumed that the extra tuition is adding any value.'

Short inspections of good schools

Good schools receive short inspections. When there is insufficient evidence to confirm, during an inspection, that a school remains good or, if there is evidence to suggest they may be outstanding, the inspection will convert to a full inspection to determine the grade. In these instances, full inspections would originally take place within 48 hours.

To improve the inspection experience for schools as well as our delivery of inspection, we launched a formal consultation setting out two proposed changes to the way we undertake short inspections of good schools.⁴

The proposed changes were to:

1. Extend the window of conversion of a short inspection to a full inspection from 48 hours to a period of up to 15 days.
2. Undertake a full inspection of some good schools where there is evidence to suggest that the short inspection was likely to convert to a full inspection.

During the consultation period, we were getting a good understanding of the impact the proposed changes would have on those working in the education system but very few responses from parents. We therefore invited the parents panel to give us their views on the proposed changes. What they told us fed directly into the wider consultation, helping to shape the way forward.

Parents, as well as education practitioners, were generally in favour of a full inspection when local intelligence (such as statutory warning notices, qualifying complaints from parents and any other significant concerns brought to the attention of Ofsted) would suggest that the short inspection is likely to convert to a full inspection anyway. They were of the opinion that this would both reduce stress levels in some schools and inspection pressures. The change was implemented in October 2017.

Reservations were expressed about extending the window of conversion of a short inspection to a full inspection from 48 hours to within 15 working days. As a result of the views we received, we were able to refine initial thinking and further improve the

⁴ Short inspections of good schools: Consultation document , Ofsted (2017); www.gov.uk/government/consultations/short-inspections-of-good-schools.

way short inspections are conducted. A follow up consultation with new proposals was launched in the autumn 2017.⁵

'If it is likely from the beginning that the inspection will convert to a full one, then this should be carried out as soon as possible - both for the sake of the school staff, children and parents, but also for the inspectors to know what is required.'

'I'm concerned that a 15 day window means that a) schools have opportunity to 'hide' issues and b) puts on unnecessary pressure on school staff which directly impacts on children.'

Teaching, learning and assessment graded judgement

Ofsted has a common inspection framework that sets out how we inspect early years, schools and further education and skills providers.⁶ Following an inspection, inspectors give an overall effectiveness grade on a four-point scale: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

To support the overall effectiveness judgement, inspectors also make the same graded judgements on the following areas:

- effectiveness of leadership and management
- quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- personal development, behaviour and welfare
- outcomes for children and learners.

For inspections of schools, it was suggested, in a White Paper 'Education excellence everywhere', that Ofsted should no longer grade teaching, learning and assessment but should instead report on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment as part of the other judgements.⁷

⁵ Short inspections of good schools: maintained schools and academies, Ofsted (2017); <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/short-inspections-of-good-schools-maintained-schools-and-academies>

⁶ Common inspection framework: education, skills and early years from September 2015, Ofsted (2015); www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015.

⁷ Education excellence everywhere, DfE (2016); www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-excellence-everywhere,

We were interested to know what parents thought about this suggested change. What they told us has provided valuable insight that will inform our thinking during any future reviews of the inspection framework.

Over three quarters (76%) of the parents who gave us their views said that a specific graded judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was important to them. They saw this as a core function of the school and the main purpose of Ofsted. Specifically, the graded judgement:

- helps ensure children are being taught well
- highlights progress and identifies areas for improvement
- holds teachers and leaders to account.

'The quality of consistent teaching and learning is more important than any other judgement. It shows how dedicated the staff are, and how well the school is led and managed. Happy, content staff teach well.'

'That is what education is all about.'

Around a quarter of the parents who answered the survey said that the specific graded judgement was not important to them. Typically, they viewed impact and outcomes as more important. The common reason being that the limited time an inspector has to measure quality and arrive at the judgement could not give an accurate picture, only progress over time could do that.

'Teaching can be amazing for a short period of time, but may not be sustained over a longer period. Impact is what matters.'

Webinar topics

We wanted to know what topics were important to parents and what they would be interested to learn more about. These themes have helped us shape content for our programme of regional engagement and have formed the basis of webinars for parents on mythbusting around inspection and safeguarding. Regional engagement with parents is ongoing.

Figure 9: Most common topics parents would be interested in (the larger the word, the more popular the topic)



Future direction of the Ofsted Parents Panel

Our objectives for the Ofsted Parents Panel are to:

- continue asking parents for their input in areas where they can have the most impact and enhance the work of Ofsted
- encourage membership of underrepresented groups by targeted recruitment
- explore potential opportunities for panel members to become more closely involved with regional teams.

Our commitment to the members is to:

- listen to what they have to say and value all comments
- maintain regular contact
- feedback what parents have told us and how their views have helped to shape the work of Ofsted.

Annex A: Questions asked of the Ofsted Parents Panel

Requests made to the Ofsted Parents Panel – date asked, topic and total number of responses received.

Date asked	Topic	No of responses
05/08/2016	Teacher learning and assessment graded judgement	110
09/09/2016	Mathematics and English - Part 1	34
18/10/2016	Mathematics and English - Part 2	28
26/10/2016	Early years reports	164
02/12/2016	Homework	327
20/12/2016	Webinar topics for parents	65
06/03/2016	Private tutoring	169
13/04/2017	Ofsted Email Alerts	281
14/06/2017	Extra-curricular activities	295
21/07/2017	Key Stage 2	239
09/08/2017	Short inspections of good schools	161

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