

A report into pupils' perceptions of their lessons



Are you doing better than you think you are?

The Hay Group Ltd

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Executive Summary

1. Teachers often feel that their performance is being examined, inspected and evaluated from all sides – parents, managers, inspectors, the media. Given the importance of their role, a fair degree of attention is justified, from society's point of view, but it's tough on the receiving end. The NASUWT, for example, calculated that a teacher is currently held accountable to 28 different systems or bodies!
2. The Government's recent White Paper also offered a new angle – suggesting a heightened role for **pupil feedback** in the running of schools. Even that "*Ofsted will seek out the views of a school's pupils as part of its inspection.*" Is this merely another source of criticism, or will teachers find a positive and constructive insight into what actually happens in the classroom?
3. The Hay Group is working with over 11,000 teachers on Transforming Learning. As part of this initiative, teachers have gathered extensive feedback from their pupils on what it feels like to be in their class.
4. Children offer their perceptions – through questionnaires – on a range of issues that we found to be relevant to their learning and achievement. We also ask the teacher, before they receive the feedback, to estimate how they *think* their pupils feel.
5. We have reviewed the experience of a group of 400 teachers and **3,000 pupils** who have progressed furthest on this exercise. The findings are surprising and inspiring:

On a wide range of important issues, pupils frequently regard their lessons *more positively* than teachers do themselves.

6. Areas where pupils usually thought that lessons were as good or better than the teacher expected include **Interest** and **Clarity** for primary teachers, **Support** and **Participation** for secondary teachers.
7. Areas where pupils tended to think lessons were worse than the teacher expected include **Fairness** for primary teachers and **Safety** for secondary teachers.
8. The **conclusions**:
 - a. Teachers are not always able to anticipate their impact upon pupils' motivation. Seeking pupils' views can enable better self assessment.
 - b. Pupil participation can often reveal strengths a teacher was not aware of.
 - c. There are two vital areas where teachers and pupils sometimes fail to connect – Fairness in primary schools, Safety in secondary schools.

Main Findings

Most teachers, in both secondary and primary schools, are underestimating their positive impact on pupils on a variety of issues of importance to their education. In short, for many teachers, their pupils perceive a more positive, more engaging, more motivational climate in their classes than their teacher thinks they are creating.

This is not to say that pupils perceive a uniformly positive climate – there are a very small number of issues where teachers sometimes neglect important concerns of their pupils.

The results suggest that we should be recognising the achievements of many teachers in creating an atmosphere of high Clarity and Interest in their classes. This applies to both secondary and primary schools.

Primary school teachers are also found to be more Supportive than they themselves expected. Secondary school teachers create more opportunities to Participate actively in lessons and are seen to set higher Standards than they expected.

These results suggest that the climate of inspections and assessments has led many teachers to have a very guarded view of their performance in the classroom. This combines with an inherent 'perfectionism' in many people, who prefer to focus on their gaps or weaknesses rather than their strengths. While a readiness to receive tough feedback is crucial for self and school improvement, it is also important to acknowledge strengths.

The study does reveal two areas where teachers are out of tune with their pupils in the other direction – where they assume pupils are more positive than they actually are. In primary schools, this surrounds the issue of Fairness. In secondary schools the issue is Safety. This suggests areas for further study into pupils' needs and expectations.

Two suggestions for areas to work on:

- Perceptions of Fairness are strongly influenced by the way reward and recognition are linked to actual, individual achievement. Blanket praise or criticism are both equally demotivating.
- Safety relates as much to emotional as physical security. And pupil attitudes towards Safety are as strongly influenced by their perceptions of other pupils' experiences as by direct threats to themselves.

Primary Schools

On most issues primary teachers were more closely in tune with their pupils than secondary teachers but on a few areas they almost always underestimate how positive children are feeling.

On two issues (out of nine measured*), they *usually* underestimate their impact. On a further two issues they *often* underestimate their impact. On one issue they often *overestimate* their impact.

Points of Pride (Almost Always Better):

- 84% of primary teachers create lessons that are as **CLEAR** or clearer (in the estimation of their pupils) than the teachers themselves rated them.
Clarity: the transparency and explicit relevance of what goes on in class.
- 83% of primary teachers create lessons that are as or more **INTERESTING** than they expected.
Interest: a sense of fascination and excitement in class.

Areas to be More Confident (Often Better):

- For 65% of primary teachers, pupils find their class as or more **SUPPORTIVE** than their teachers expected.
Support: encouragement to try new things and learn from mistakes.
- For 62% of primary teachers, pupils find their physical **ENVIRONMENT** as good as, or better, than their teachers expected.
Environment: the comfort and attractiveness of the physical environment.

Point of Concern (Occasionally Worse):

- 55% of primary teachers believe their classes are **FAIRER** than their pupils do.
Fairness: 'justice' and recognition within the classroom.

* See page 7 (Research Methodology) for a full list and definition.

Secondary Schools

While primary school teachers have a few issues where they *almost always* underestimate their impact, but are largely in tune on the others, secondary school teachers are a more mixed group. On eight out of the nine issues measured, more than 57% of secondary teachers *underestimate* their performance. Again, on only one issue did more teachers overestimate their performance than underestimate it.

Points of Pride (Almost Always Better):

- 67% of secondary teachers create an environment their pupils find as or more **SUPPORTIVE** than they themselves expected.
Support: encouragement to try new things and learn from mistakes.
- 68% of secondary teachers create as many or more opportunities to **PARTICIPATE** actively in their lessons than they expected.
Participation: opportunities to get involved and influence the way the class works.

Areas to be More Confident (Often Better):

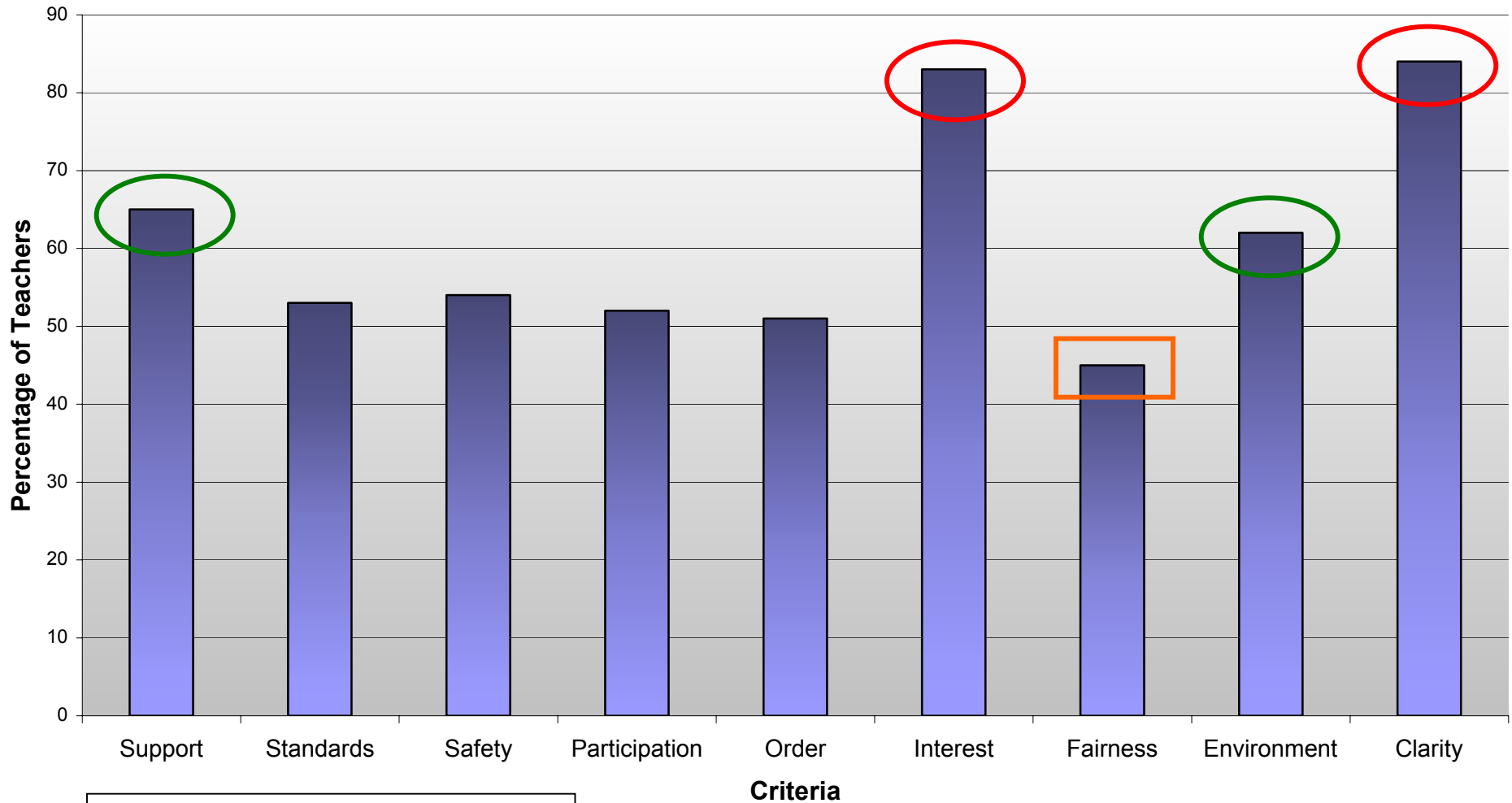
- 64% of secondary classes feel there are higher expectations and **STANDARDS** placed upon them than their teachers expected.
Standards: high expectations for achievement and improvement.
- 64% of secondary teachers create lessons that are as or more **INTERESTING** than they expected.
Interest: a sense of fascination and excitement in class.
- 65% of secondary teachers create lessons that are as **CLEAR** or clearer than they themselves expected.
Clarity: the transparency and explicit relevance of what goes on in class.

Point of Concern (Occasionally Worse):

- 51% of secondary teachers overestimated the level of **SAFETY** that their pupils experienced.
Safety: absence of threat or fear (physical or emotional).

Supporting Evidence: Primary School Teachers

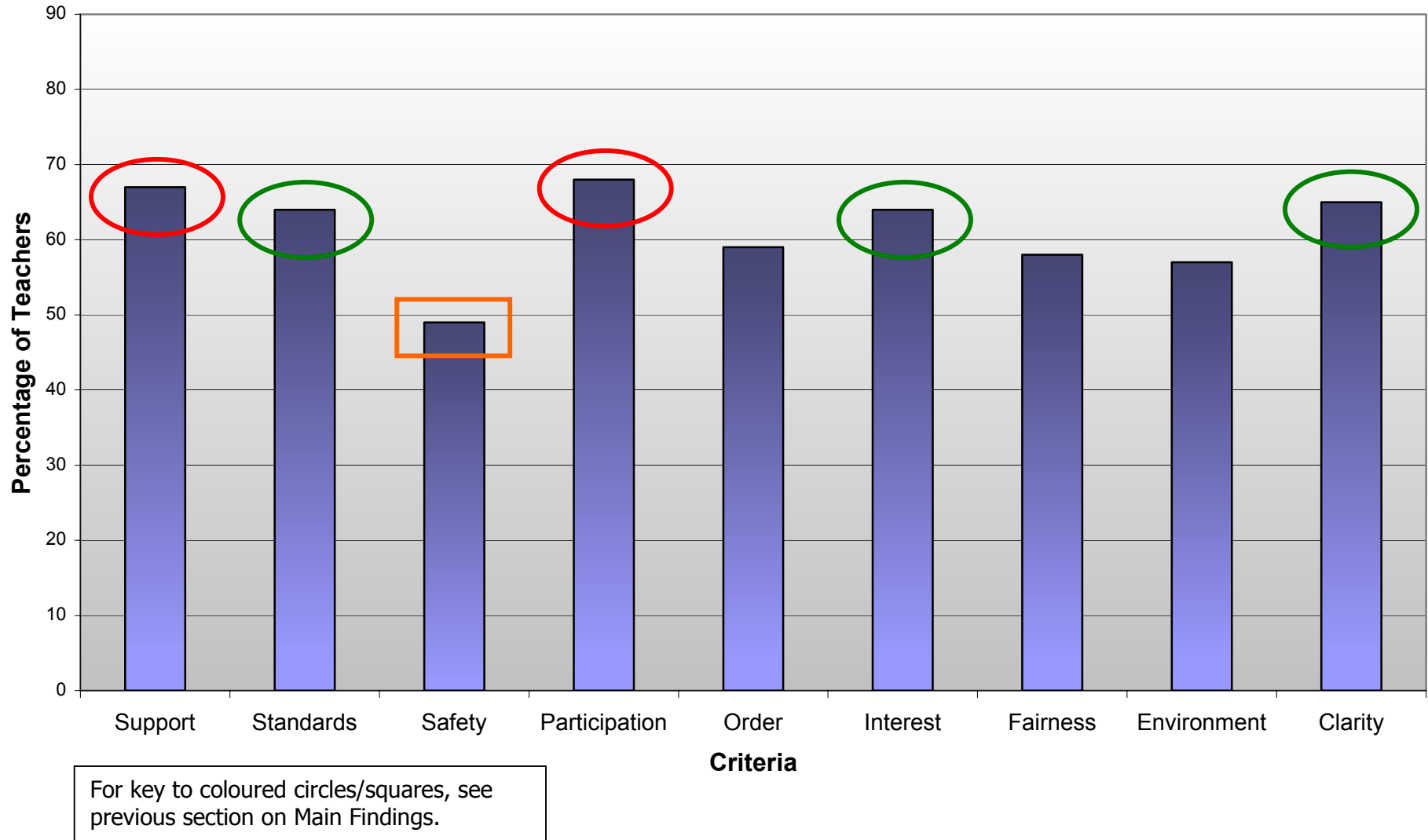
(Bar shows % of teachers whose pupils' perception of Climate was as good as or better than their own)



For key to coloured circles/squares, see previous section on Main Findings.

Supporting Evidence: Secondary School Teachers

(Bar shows % of teachers whose pupils' perception of Climate was as good as or better than their own)



Research Methodology

Defining Climate

As part of our research for the DfES into what makes an effective teacher (see www.transforminglearning.co.uk/research) we outlined a model of Classroom Climate. This describes key aspects of the classroom experience that have been proven to affect children's learning. They include:

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Clarity | The transparency and explicit relevance of what goes on in class |
| Environment | The comfort and attractiveness of the physical environment |
| Fairness | Justice and equality within the classroom |
| Interest | Stimulation and fascination in class |
| Order | Discipline and structure in the classroom |
| Participation | Pupil involvement and influence in the running of the class |
| Safety | Absence of threat or fear |
| Standards | Expectations of achievement and encouragement to improve |
| Support | Encouragement to try new things and learn from mistakes |

Measuring Climate

In order to discover the climate of a classroom, we ask both the teacher and their pupils to complete questionnaires. The teacher nominates seven pupils from their class to complete the questionnaires.

The questionnaires take the criteria for climate outlined above and translate them into concrete experiences which the children can rate on a six point scale. For example:

The screenshot shows a questionnaire interface with a purple header bar containing 'Transforming Learning' and 'Questionnaires'. Below the header, the question 'how do you see this now?' is displayed. The main content area shows a Likert scale for the statement 'Students in Ms Osborne's class often work together in groups'. The scale consists of six circles, with the first circle on the left filled with a blue dot and labeled 'NOW'. The text 'Students in Ms Osborne's class often work together in groups' is on the left, and 'Students in Ms Osborne's class do not often work together in groups' is on the right. A 'Skip Question' button with a downward arrow is located below the scale. The entire interface is enclosed in a grey border with large square brackets on the left and right sides.

We ask several questions about each dimension (there are 50 questions in all) and cross check the responses for errors in completion.

In scoring each dimension, we average the responses from all seven pupils for every related question, to provide an aggregate view of the climate experienced by most children in that class.

From extensive testing, we have found that a sample of seven pupils (taken from a cross section of the class) can provide a representative view of the whole class.

For example, during the original design of the questionnaires, we administered them to all thirty-odd pupils for 40 teachers, then asked each teacher to select the seven pupils they *would* have chosen. When we compared the views of the seven to the whole class, they were substantially similar in almost all cases.

(This makes using the questionnaires more practical for schools where pupils are taught by more than one teacher at a time – ensuring that pupils don't have to complete lots of questionnaires at once.)

The questionnaires for both pupils and teachers (which are identical) are completed on a computer, which sends the results to Hay for processing. The teacher is not present when their pupils complete the questionnaires.

The crucial features of this framework are:

- The data is **confidential** to the teacher administering the questionnaires. It is not used for appraisal or evaluation of the teacher, nor do any of their colleagues see it. This reduces any incentive to 'brief' pupils or select pupils who will give an unusually favourable view of the class.
- The submissions of the pupils themselves are also **anonymous** and the pupils are aware of this fact. The teacher is not able to look at the responses of an individual pupil. This reduces the desire to please or avoid confrontation on the pupil's part.
- The computer automatically checks the **statistical validity** of the responses as the questionnaires are being completed. If, for example, a pupil contradicts themselves frequently, we are able to query or ultimately reject their questionnaire.

These factors combine to give us substantial confidence that the results neither exaggerate nor underestimate pupils' perceptions – that we are gaining a fair and accurate picture of what it feels like to be in a class.

The Transforming Learning Initiative

The data used in this study was collected as part of the Transforming Learning initiative. Transforming Learning uses the Internet to enable teachers and schools to collect feedback for use in professional development.

All individual data is held in confidence and is not released to any third party. From time to time we analyse the data in aggregate to spot trends that may be of interest to teachers or policy makers (as we have done in this report).

Transforming Learning rests on a number of principles:

- Pupils' perceptions of their class and school (e.g. Is this work interesting? Do I need to try hard? Do I know what's expected of me?) affect their **motivation and engagement**, and hence their learning and achievement.
- Teachers have a powerful influence upon these perceptions. Their skills, their experience, but most importantly their **characteristics** and values, shape a climate of perceptions.
- If teachers can accurately discover this climate, and analyse their strengths and weaknesses, they have a fascinating insight into their impact on learning and some **practical objectives** for their professional development.
- Professional development does not work, over the long term, if it is forced upon people. People need to commit to the goals, sustain that **commitment** through obstacles and learn at their own pace and style. Hints of appraisal and evaluation are damaging to this commitment.
- Teachers care about their pupils. If you provide evidence on what works and what doesn't in their class, they will want to do something about it.

Transforming Learning attempts to convert these principles into a practical system. Teachers are in control of gathering feedback from pupils, setting priorities and creating an action plan for change. The Internet means they can access the necessary resources anonymously and at their own pace.

To date, over 11,000 teachers are registered with Transforming Learning, in over 500 schools across the UK.

Note on the Hay Group

The Hay Group is the UK's leading educational management consultancy and a global organisation specialising in people issues. We have researched and designed models of how people motivate their colleagues (or pupils) for a variety of organisations in the public and private sector.

In education in the UK, our expertise stems from a number of projects:

The Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers

Europe's largest management development programme. Eight thousand headteachers have been through this development course, based on researched models of excellence for leadership in schools. Over three quarters of participants rate it as *the best training they have ever received*. Follow up work demonstrates marked improvements in school climate as a result.

We are now delivering an FE College Principals Leadership Programme and FE College Senior Management Team Development Programme.

Teacher Effectiveness Research

The DfES asked us to investigate what makes a highly effective classroom teacher. As well as building models of excellence for teaching, we were also able to test the applicability of climate to the individual classroom. In a significant breakthrough, we were able to create a model of Classroom Climate that *predicts* the academic progress of pupils.

From this background we are now working on professional development and school improvement programmes around the world.

For more information, please visit:

www.transforminglearning.co.uk

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