

Almost a third of professional parents have moved home for a good school

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Research conducted by Professor Becky Francis, Department of Education and Professional Studies at King's, has found that around one in three (32 per cent) professional parents with children aged five to 16 has moved to an area because they thought it had 'good' schools. It also found that 18 per cent have moved to live in the catchment area of a specific school, according to a new Sutton Trust report, *Parent Power?*, published on 18 December.

Professor Francis worked alongside Professor Merryn Hutchings of London Metropolitan University on the study, which draws on YouGov interviews with 1,173 parents of [school](#)-age children and shows the extent to which parent power is dependent on ability to pay.

Their research found a much bigger gap between different social classes in the extent to which they employed strategies that cost money, including moving home or hiring a private tutor, to help their children.

A minority of parents with children at state schools also admitted to working the system:

- 2 per cent of parents admitted to buying a second home and using that address so that their children could gain access to a specific school, including 5 per cent of the upper middle classes
- 3 per cent admitted using a relative's address for that purpose, including 6 per cent of the upper middle classes

- 6 per cent admitted attending church services when they didn't previously so their child could go to a church school, including 10 per cent in the upper middle classes

In addition, the research found that all parents rely more on school visits or open days (70 per cent) and talking to other parents (62 per cent) in choosing schools than Ofsted reports (57 per cent) and school prospectuses (53 per cent).

The report identifies different approaches to [school choice](#), with 'hyper choosers' using five or more sources to choose a school and 'limited choosers' relying on one or none of the main sources.

Working class parents were significantly more likely to be 'limited choosers' than those in other classes, with 17 per cent of the lowest income parents saying they looked at none of the listed sources. By contrast, 38 per cent of professional parents were 'hyper choosers', consulting at least five information sources, compared to 13 per cent of working class parents.

Professional parents were also more likely to pay for weekly music, drama or sporting lessons and activities outside school, with more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of professionals doing so compared with 47 per cent of working class parents and 31 per cent of the lowest income parents.

The gap was narrower for free cultural activities such as a visit to a museum or gallery than for paid cultural activities like attending a play or a concert.

Professor Becky Francis said: 'Our research shows just how far equality of opportunity is being undermined by the greater purchasing power of some parents. The ability for some parents but not others to use financial

resources to secure their children's achievement poses real impediments for social mobility, which need to be recognised and addressed as detrimental to society.

'However, our findings also demonstrate the extent to which some working class parents are enacting 'informed choice', and policymakers may also learn from their practices.'

Sir Peter Lampl, chairman of the Sutton Trust and of the Education Endowment Foundation, said: 'This research suggests that those with money actively choose to live near good schools, employ tutors and ensure their children have extra lessons and enrichment activities that are often too expensive for other families to afford.'

'This provides a significant advantage in school choice and in developing the cultural capital that is so important to social mobility and later success. Education is about more than what happens at school, and providing a more level playing field in school choice and out-of-school activities is essential if every child is to achieve his or her potential.'

'School admissions need to be fairer so that the best schools aren't just for those who can afford to live nearby, with ballots used particularly in urban areas. And the Government should consider extending its pupil premium to provide means-tested vouchers to enable working class parents to provide the extra lessons and cultural activities that many of better off families take for granted.'

The report recommends several steps towards a more level playing field, including:

- Government should introduce means-tested vouchers for working class parents to spend on extra tuition, books and cultural activities for their children

- Better information about schools and about the right for poorer pupils to free transport to a choice of schools should be made available to parents
- Schools should be expected to publish socio-economic data on applications and admissions
- Government should encourage ballots (random allocation) and banding for fairer admissions

About the report

The researchers analysed the results of an online survey of 1,173 parents of children aged 5-16 years who attended school, conducted in November 2012 by the polling organisation YouGov. The sample included a larger than average number of parents from the upper middle class social group A to enable clearer comparisons.

The researchers used a social grading scale A-E where A is upper middle class (professionals);

B is middle class; C1 is lower [middle class](#); C2 is skilled working class; D is [working class](#); E is those at the lowest levels of subsistence (including casual workers, unemployed).

The sources of information on school choice offered to parents by YouGov were school visits/open days; talking to other [parents](#) at the school; Ofsted reports; league tables and attainment data; school prospectuses; local authority websites and advisers; other websites; other sources.

More information: Read the complete report:
www.suttontrust.com/our-work/research/download/251

Provided by King's College London

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