



What's going on in our schools?

Kenyans' opinions and experiences of the education sector

1. Introduction

Education became a key campaign issue in the 2017 General Elections. On the campaign trail, leaders of the two major party coalitions promised to abolish school fees for public primary schools and day secondary schools¹.

Such pledges are both ambitious and expensive to deliver, but they also have the potential to radically improve access to education. Abolishing fees will likely lead to a large increase in the number of students while removing a major source of schools' funds. These funds will need to be replaced, and indeed topped-up to reflect the increased number of students.

This research brief presents data on citizens' experiences in the education sector, and their opinions on key public policy issues.

What are the main challenges facing schools in their communities? How well do citizens understand recent changes in school funding, curriculum and other matters? How do they feel about the introduction of free education? Do parents and others feel they have a role to play in improving schooling, and how much are they already involved? And what should happen to school girls who become pregnant and boys who impregnate them?

Data for this brief comes from Twaweza's flagship Sauti za Wananchi, which is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. Information on the overall methodology is available at www.twaweza.org/sauti. For this brief, data were collected from 1,703 respondents from Kenya's *Sauti za Wananchi* panel in the

1 <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/education/Confusion-erupts-over-2018-fees-amid-free-education-promises/2643604-4129914-8pbrf1/index.html>

eighteenth round of calls to the panel, conducted between October 7 and November 3, 2017. The poll has +/-2.4% margin of error at 95% confidence level.

The key findings are:

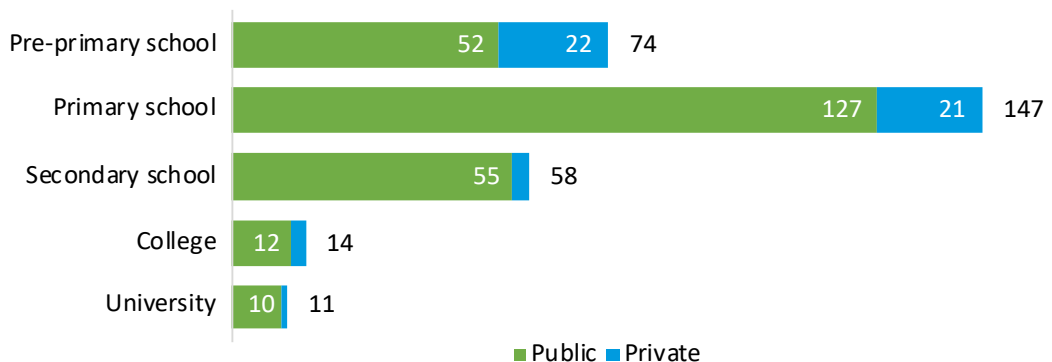
- The average Kenyan household has three children in school, college or university.
- Citizens report teacher shortages as the biggest challenge facing schools.
- Very few citizens know how much funding is provided to schools.
- Four out of ten citizens say the quality of education in public schools has improved since it became free, but three out of ten say it has deteriorated.
- A majority of citizens are not well informed of recent changes in education policy.
- Eight out of ten citizens believe all citizens have a responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of education.
- In four out of ten households, a family member has dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy in the past three years.

2. Seven facts about Kenyans' views on education

Fact 1: The average Kenyan household has three children in education

On average, each Kenyan household has three children in school, college or university. Of these, the average number of children per 100 households in pre-primary school is 74, the average number in primary is 147, and in secondary is 58 per household. Almost all of those in secondary school are in public schools.

Figure 1: Number of children attending school, college or university per 100 households



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

Fact 2: Citizens report teacher shortages as the biggest challenge facing schools

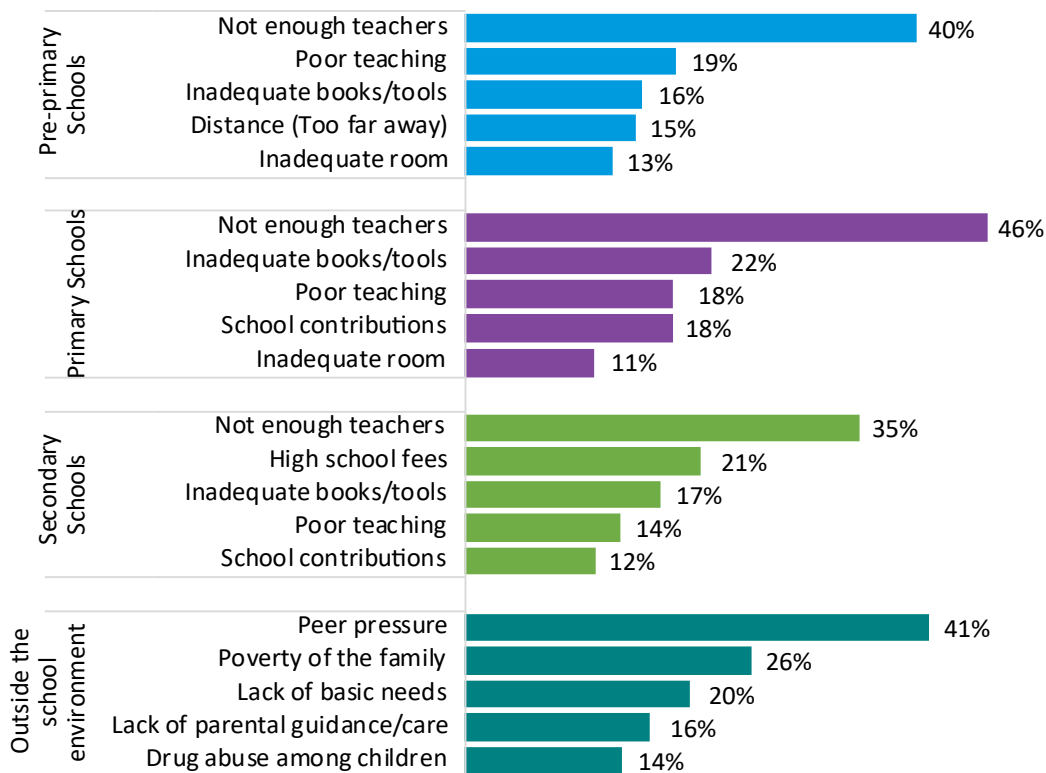
Whether discussing pre-primary, primary or secondary schools, citizens consistently report a shortage of teachers as the biggest problem facing their local schools. Four out of ten citizens (40%) say this is one of the top three problems facing pre-primary schools, while one in three (35%) say the same about secondary schools, and close to half the population (46%) say it is a significant problem in their local primary school.

Other problems commonly cited include a poor standard of teaching, and inadequate books and other supplies.

Financial concerns are also prominent, with one in five citizens (18%) saying school contributions are a big problem in their local primary school, and one in eight (12%) saying the same about secondary schools. A further one in five (21%) say school fees are a problem at secondary school level.

When it comes to problems facing school-age children outside the school environment, the top problem mentioned is peer pressure, raised by four out of ten citizens (41%). This is followed by family poverty (26%) and lack of basic needs (21%).

Figure 2: What, in your opinion, are the three main problems affecting the schools where most children in your locality go to? And what challenges do children face outside the school environment?
 (% mentioning an issue among the top three problems, top five shown)



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18
 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

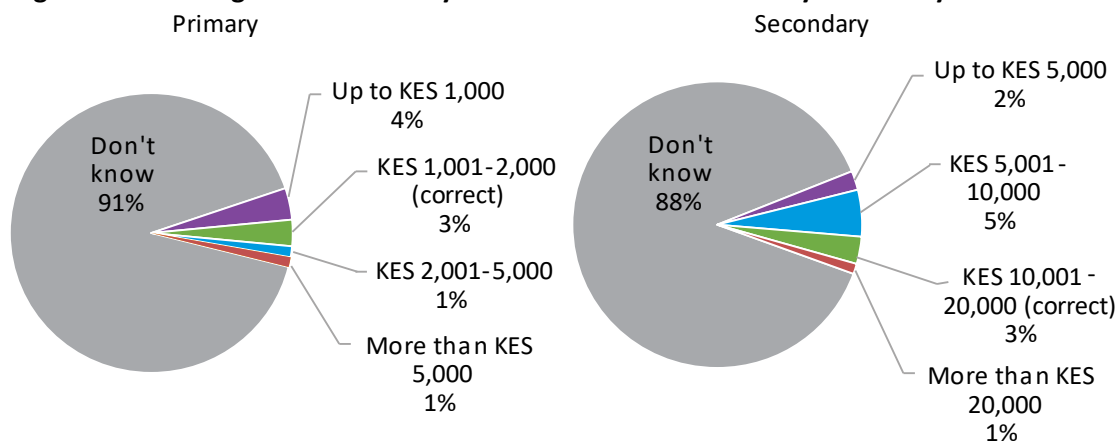
One of the most important measures of a school system is whether it equips its students to manage their own lives. Citizens are clear that primary education in Kenya is not sufficient, with just one in eight (13%) agreeing with the statement that “children who have completed primary education have useful skills to enable them to manage their own lives”, while 78% disagree (not shown in charts).

Fact 3: Very few citizens know how much funding is provided to schools

Fewer than one in twenty citizens (3%) are able to correctly state how much funding is provided to primary schools per child in the Free Primary Education (FPE) fund (KES 1,470 per child in 2017). Nine out of ten (91%) stated that they did not know.

The Free Day Secondary Education Fund is a more recently introduced allocation. However, the same number (3%) are able to correctly state the amount provided per student in 2017 (KES 12,870 per child in 2017, increasing to 22,244 for 2018).²

Figure 3: Knowledge of Free Primary Education Fund and Free Day Secondary Education Fund



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

It is worth also noting here that three quarters of the population (75%) have never visited a local primary school to seek information about the school's finances, and a similar number (76%) say that would not know whether or not their local school has received Free Primary Education or Free Day Secondary Education funds (not shown in charts).

Fact 4: 4 out of 10 citizens say the quality of education in public schools has improved since it became free, 3 out of 10 say it has deteriorated

Four out of ten citizens say the quality of education in public schools has improved since the abolition of school fees (42%) while three out of ten, (32%) say the quality has deteriorated. In some cases, this may be due to differing interpretations of the term "quality".

² See <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-cost-providing-free-secondary-education-kenya/> and <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Special-schools-win-big-in-Kenyan-subsidy-programme/2560-4188546-122endhz/index.html>

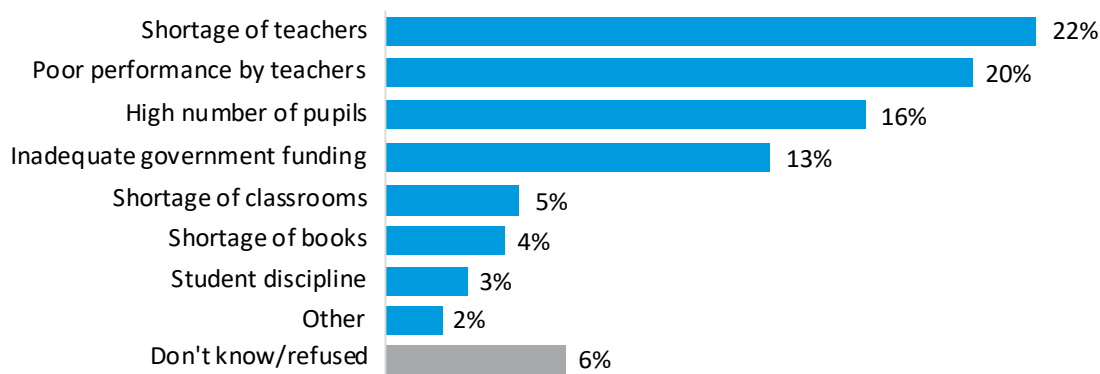
Figure 4: How would you rate the quality of education in public primary/secondary schools since they became free for all?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

Citizens raise teaching as the main challenge facing public schools since they became free. One in five (22%) point to a shortage of teachers, and a similar number (20%) cite poor performance by teachers. High numbers of students (16%) and inadequate funding (13%) are also widely cited, suggesting that abolishing fees and thus increasing access has led to increased pressure on resources.

Figure 5: What is the main challenge facing public schools since the removal of school fees?



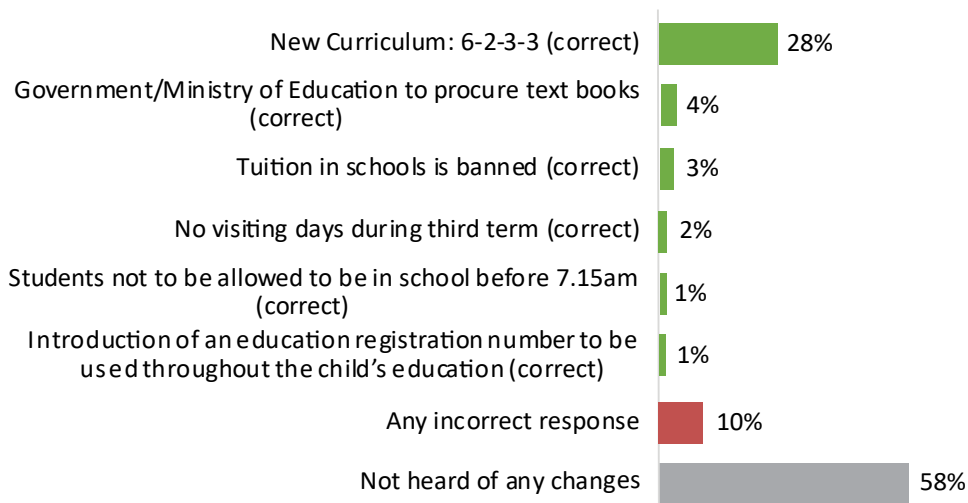
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

Fact 5: A majority of citizens do not know about recent changes in education policy

Six out of ten citizens (58%) say they have not heard about any recent changes in education sector policy, four out of ten (42%) say that they have.

Of those who say that they have heard about changes, the largest number, one in four (28%), know there is a new curriculum. Only very small numbers say they are aware of central procurement of text books (4%), or the bans on tuition (3%) and school visitors during the final term (2%). One out of ten (10%) gave an incorrect response – mentioning changes in policy that have not actually happened.

Figure 6: Have you heard about any changes in the education sector?



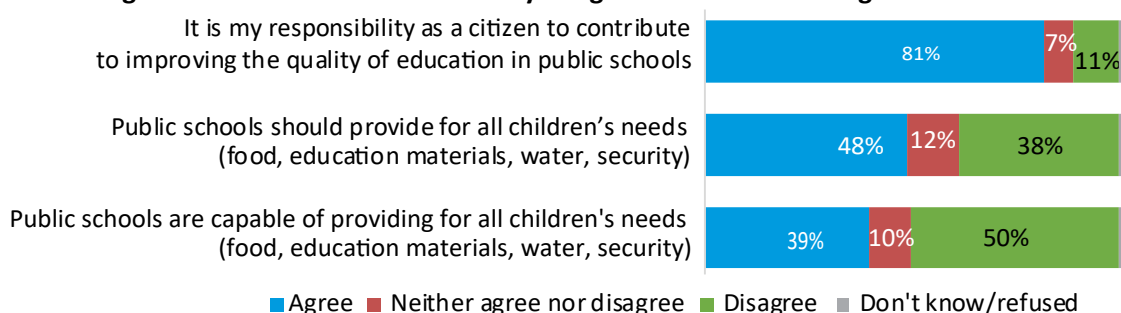
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

Fact 6: 8 out of 10 citizens think they have a responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of education

A large majority of citizens (81%) agree with the statement that “it is your responsibility as a citizen to contribute to improving the quality of education in public schools”. Just one out of ten (11%) disagree with this statement.

Nevertheless, half the population (48%) say public schools should provide students with everything they need (food, materials, water, security, etc.). A smaller number (39%) believe schools are capable of meeting all these needs.

Figure 7: Please tell me how much you agree with the following statements:

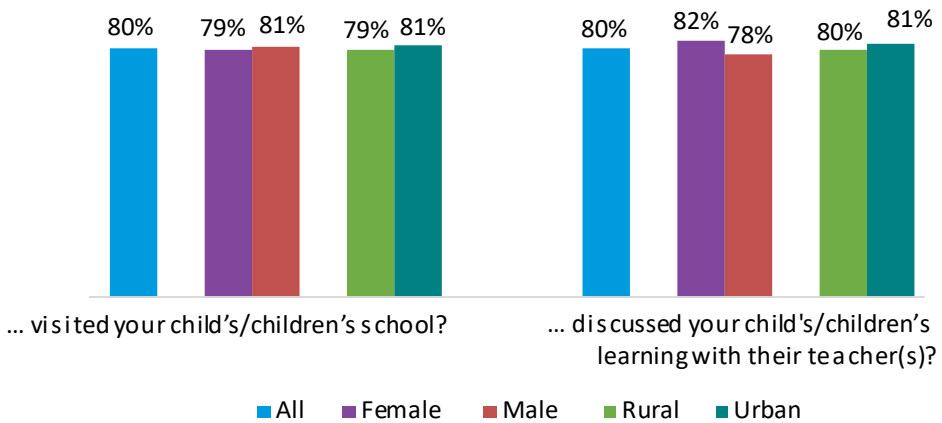


Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

A majority of parents say they are involved in their children’s education. Eight out of ten (80%) visit their child’s school once a term or more, and the same number (80%) say they have discussed their child’s progress with their teacher at least once each term.

These figures are largely consistent between urban and rural areas, and between mothers and fathers of school students.

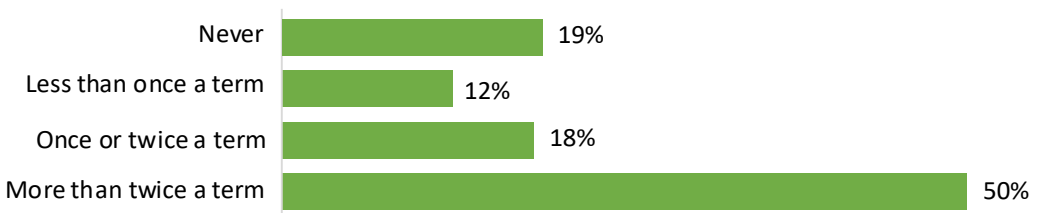
Figure 8: In the past year, how often have you...
 (% answering once a term or more)



Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18
 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)
 Base: Parents of school students, n=1,355

Half of all parents (50%) say they help out with their childrens’ school work more than twice each term. One out of five parents (19%) says they never do this.

Figure 9: In the past year, how often have you helped out with your child’s or children’s school work?



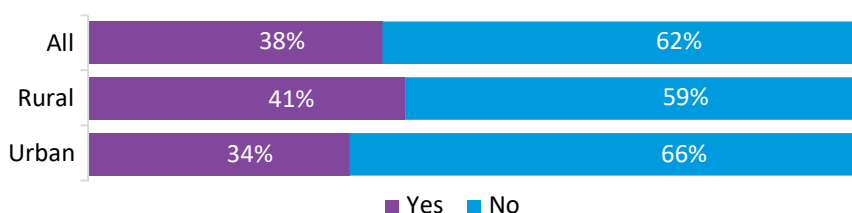
Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18
 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)
 Base: Parents of school students, n=1,355

Fact 7: In 4 out of 10 households, a family member has dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy in the past three years

Four out of ten households (38%) say a family member has dropped out of school in the past three years as a result of pregnancy. This figure is slightly higher in rural areas (41%) than urban (34%).

Among families to have experienced this, three out of ten (30%) say the girl in question is now back in school. A similar number (32%) are now housewives, and some are in formal or informal employment (28%) (not shown in charts).

Figure 10: In the last three years, do you know of any family member who has dropped out of school (primary or secondary) as a result of pregnancy?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

Citizens are unequivocal that school girls who become pregnant should be allowed to continue with their studies either while she is pregnant (20% say they can continue at the same school, 4% say another school) or after giving birth (66%).

These numbers are largely similar to those from a year earlier, though more citizens now say girls should be allowed to stay in school while pregnant (20%) than was the case 12 months earlier (14%).

Citizens are less forgiving of boys involved in such cases. One in six (16%) say a school boy who impregnates another student should be expelled, a similar number (16%) say he should be punished by the school, and one out of ten (8%) say he should face the law. Four out of ten (39%) think he should simply be allowed to remain in school, down considerably from a year earlier (58%).

Figure 11: What should happen to a girl who gets pregnant while she is in school?

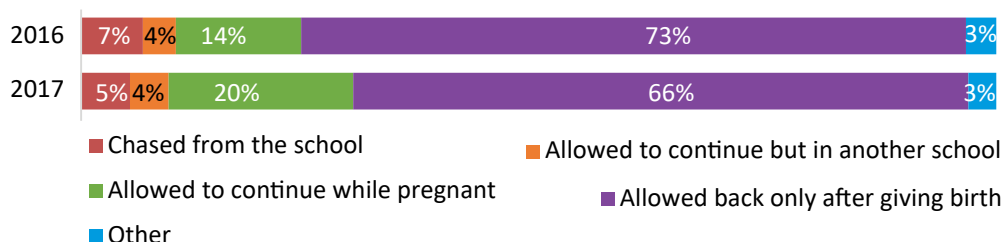
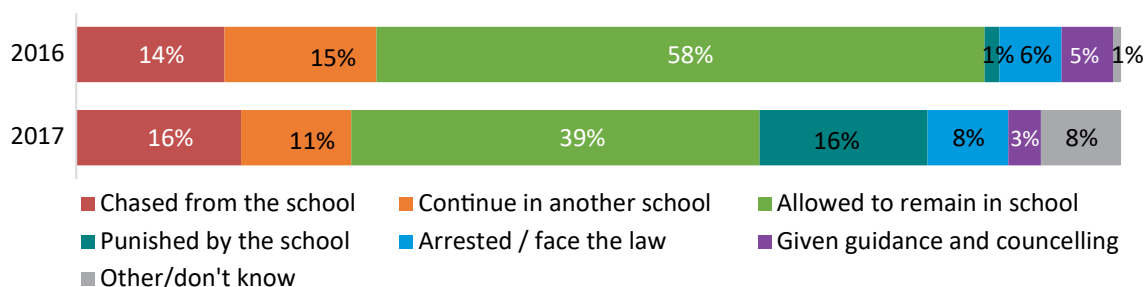


Figure 12: What should happen to a boy who impregnates another student?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 18 (October 7 – November 3, 2017; n=1,703)

3. Conclusion

Ambitious policy promises made during the 2017 election campaign have great potential to increase enrolment by making access to education in Kenya more equitable – mostly obviously the abolition of fees for public schools, covering both primary and day secondary schools. To achieve this potential while maintaining standards and ideally even improving learning outcomes will not be easy, however. Already, citizens report a shortage of teachers as the biggest challenge facing their local schools, and high pupil numbers and shortages of funds, classroom space and teaching materials are also mentioned.

However the experience of rolling out universal primary education needs to be taken into account. While fee-free education can improve access, experience shows that this can put unsustainable pressure on already over-stretched education systems and lead to a crisis. The most recent Uwezo data (2015) show that only 3 out of 10 Class 3 pupils can do Class 2 work³. We need to ensure that we do not face the same issues again.

Further, the ongoing lack of citizen awareness and understanding of key education sector policy matters is a concern. Most citizens are not aware of any recent changes in education

3 Uwezo (2016): *Are Our Children Learning?* Uwezo Kenya Sixth Learning Assessment Report. Nairobi: Twaweza East Africa

policy, though several significant changes have been made. Perhaps most importantly, very few citizens know how much funding is supposed to be provided to schools. Uninformed citizens are unlikely to be able to follow up effectively on school funding and management issues, which means opportunities for mismanagement and even embezzlement are likely to grow.

Finally, it is good news that citizens perceive that they themselves have a responsibility to contribute to improving the quality of education. Similarly, clear majorities of parents say they are involved in their children's education – by visiting their school and discussing progress with teachers. These are useful foundations on which to build greater parental involvement in school management issues.

