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It's the exams, not the values, church schools are told

by a staff reporter

PARENTS who choose a church school are not attracted by its values, a survey has suggested. Instead, they are looking for high academic standards.

Parents overwhelmingly ranked results above ethos — 77 per cent to 23 per cent — when asked in a YouGov survey what was important to them when choosing a school for their child.

Discipline in the school, and its location, were also ranked above ethos.

The parents in the survey were also against government funding for faith schools. Yet, when asked specifically about Church of England schools, 42 per cent were in favour of government funding as opposed to 38 per cent against.

Younger people were more positive about faith schools than older people: 18-24 year olds were in favour by 43 per cent (36 per cent against), compared with those aged 40-59: 28 per cent in favour, 47 per cent against.

The survey of more than 4000 adults was carried out as part of the Westminster Faith Debates, organised by Professor Linda Woodhead of Lancaster University.

She said: "Our poll shows that, when choosing a school, most parents aren't concerned with religion. They are concerned with academic standards.

"So long as parents want their children to get the best qualifications, so long as politicians of Left and Right support parental choice and high academic standards, and so long as faith schools maintain

these standards, the debate can rage; but faith schools are not going away."

The head of school policy and deputy general secretary of the National Society, Nigel Genders, said: "Parents choose church schools for a wide variety of reasons. For some, it is because they want to have their children educated in accordance with their Christian belief.

"For others, it is due to high academic standards or because it is the nearest school. Whatever the reason, Church of England schools offer high-quality education to the whole community and are part of the Church's commitment to serving the common good."

About one million children are currently educated in C of E schools.

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No distractions: Nicola Holmes, a young woman with severe learning difficulties, raised more than £400 for St Paul's, Blaenavon, in the diocese of Monmouth, on Tuesday, by conducting a sponsored silence inside the church