

Published December 2023

healthwatch Suffolk

My Health, Our Future (Phase 7)

Children and young people's wellbeing in Suffolk (2022/23) - Summary

Acknowledgements

The continued support of the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System, and various partners collaborating with young people in Suffolk is essential to the success and achievements of the 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF) programme. Above all, we thank school and college leaders, and students, at the following schools and colleges for supporting MHoF 2023:

- Abbeygate Sixth Form College
- Castle Manor Academy
- Chantry Academy
- Claydon High School
- County High School
- Copleston High School
- East Bergholt High School
- Felixstowe Academy
- Holbrook High school
- Horringer Court Middle School
- Ipswich High School
- Ipswich School
- King Edward VI School
- Mildenhall College Academy
- Newmarket Academy
- Northgate High School
- Ormiston Denes Academy
- Pakefield High School
- Samuel Ward Academy
- St Joseph's College
- Sir John Leman High School
- St Alban's Catholic High School
- Suffolk ONE Sixth Form College
- Thomas Gainsborough School
- West Suffolk College
- Westley Middle School
- Westbourne Academy
- The survey was also open to the public, gaining **77** responses.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond and share their experiences with us.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

This report includes reference to, and use of, a widely used measure of wellbeing known as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). It was developed by the Universities of Warwick, Edinburgh and Leeds in conjunction with NHS Health Scotland (©University of Warwick, 2006, all rights reserved).

Results related to the use of a shortened format of this scale can be found throughout, and within our section about wellbeing from page 5. For more information about WEMWBS, please visit https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/.

Demographic summary

- In total, **13,084** responses were recorded.
- The majority of young people, encompassing high school and college students, were in **Years 7, 8** and **9**.
- There were also a small number of responses from university students and young people not in mainstream education.
- Out of the total, **73% (9606)** were White – English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British. Followed by White – Any other background **(5%/ 598)** and Polish **(3%/ 331)**.
- Furthermore, **31% (4048)** identified one or more 'additional support needs, in the survey including receiving free school meals **(12%/1364)**.

Year Group	Count	%
Year 7	2303	18%
Year 8	2227	17%
Year 9	2497	19%
Year 10	1838	14%
Year 11	1000	8%
Year 12	1909	15%
Year 13	1115	9%
University	2	0%
Not in education	8	0%
Home schooled	4	0%
EOTAS	2	0%
No answer	179	2%

Got a question about our MHoF data? Contact research@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk

Average wellbeing

The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale was used to measure wellbeing. 12,959 people completed the SWEMWBS questions.

- Young people's wellbeing in Suffolk has increased following record low scores in the last two years. Despite this increase in wellbeing scores, the wellbeing of young people in Suffolk remains lower than the national average.
- Students who described their gender another way **(29%)** were the most likely to have low wellbeing, compared to female **(11%)** and male **(3%)** peers.
- LGBT*Q+ students **(19%)** were the most likely to have low wellbeing, compared to heterosexual peers **(7%)**.
- Students with 'additional support needs' were almost **three times as likely** to have low wellbeing compared to students with no additional support needs **(16% vs. 6%)**.



Suffolk

20.3 (2023)

19.9 (2022)

20.0 (2018)

19.9 (2021)

20.7 (2017)

20.7 (2019)

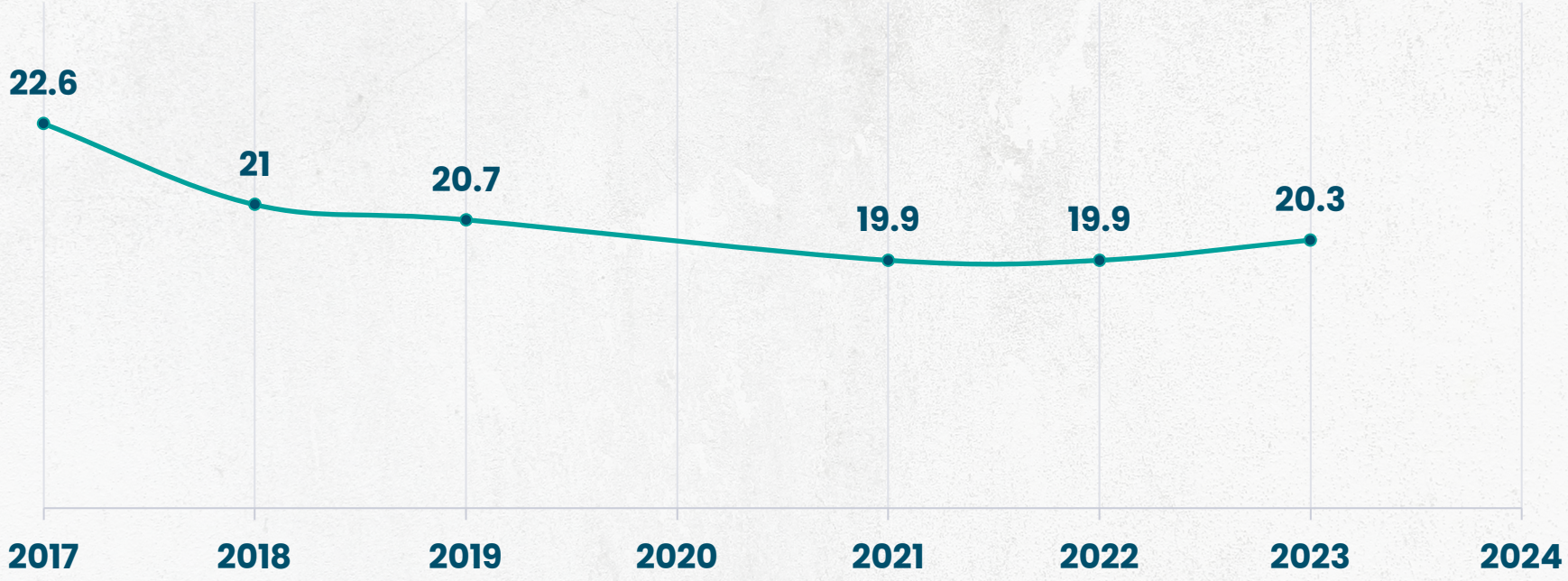
National

24.6 (2020)

Young people's wellbeing has improved after record low scores in 2021 and 2022.

Average wellbeing (since 2017)

The chart below shows how the average wellbeing score of young people in Suffolk has changed over time. Scores range between 7 and 35.



Anxiety

The Generalised Anxiety Assessment (GAD-7) was used to measure anxiety.

- The percentage of young people in Suffolk with moderate to severe anxiety levels has decreased since 2022, whilst the percentage with mild or low anxiety has increased.
- Almost half of female students **(47%)** and **23%** of male students reported 'moderate to severe' anxiety levels.
- LGBT*Q+ students were twice as likely to report moderate to severe anxiety levels compared to heterosexual peers **(62% vs. 31%)**.
- Over half **(54%)** of young people with additional support needs had moderate to severe anxiety levels compared to **28%** if peers.

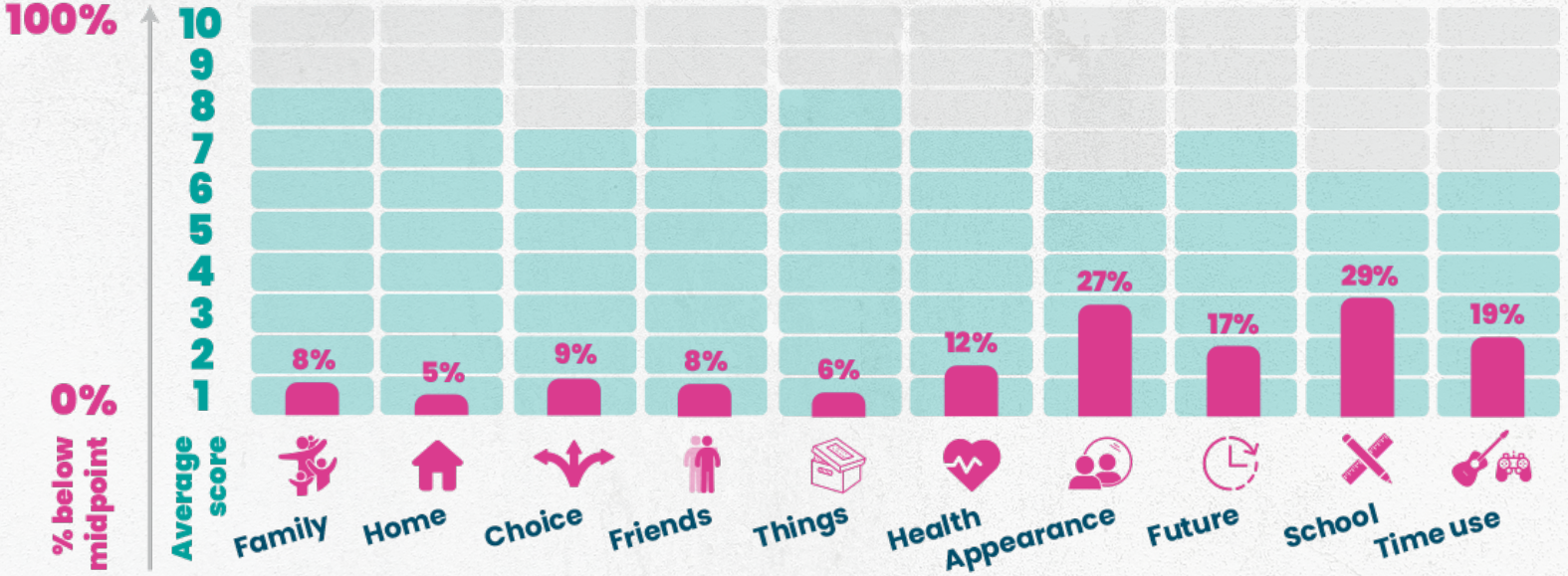
Students with 'moderate' or 'severe' anxiety reduced in 2023.



Happiness

The graphic below shows the average GCI score for each aspect of life, and the percentage of people scoring below the midpoint on the 0-10 scale. Higher percentages of scores below the midpoint, and lower average scores overall indicate higher levels of unhappiness.

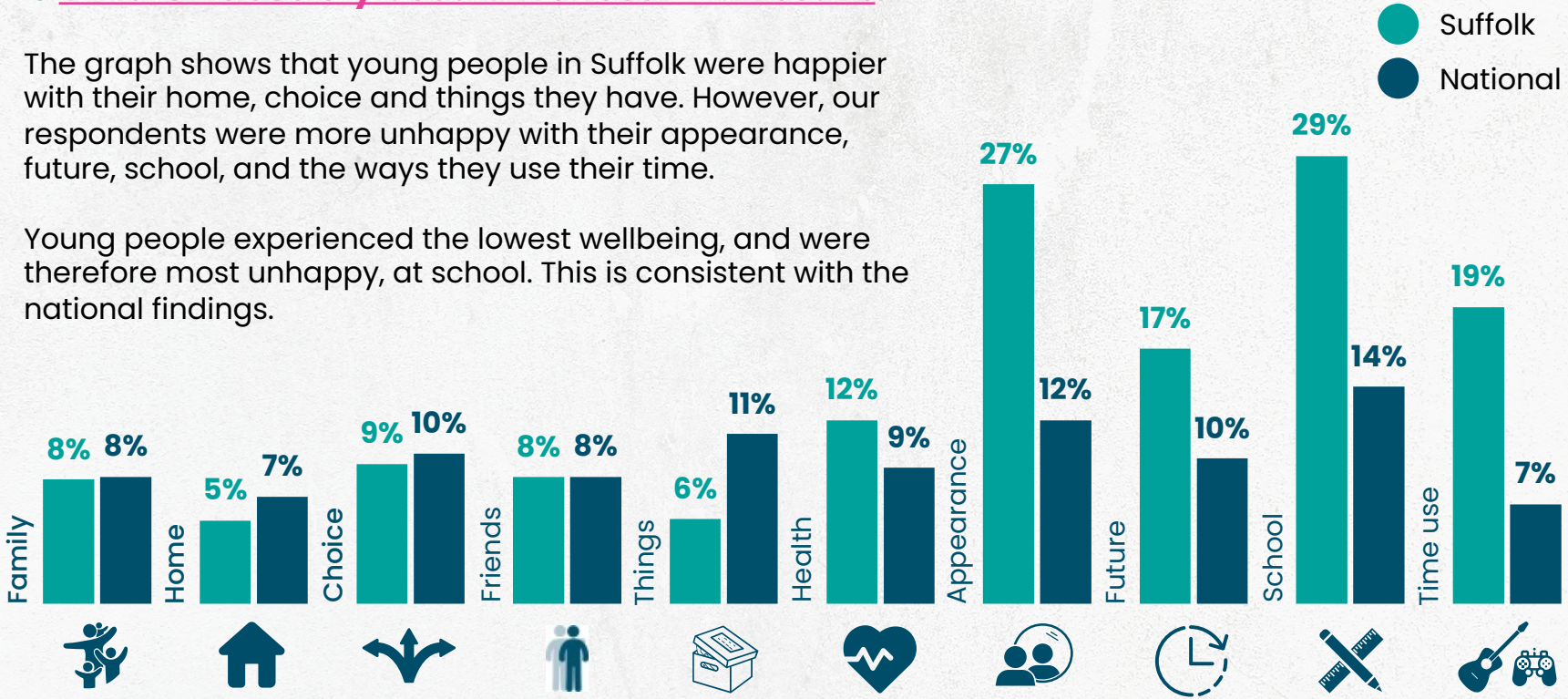
13,084 students responded to these questions.



National comparison

The graph below shows a comparison between the MHoF (Phase seven, 2023) results and the Children's Society Good Childhood 2022 results.

- The graph shows that young people in Suffolk were happier with their home, choice and things they have. However, our respondents were more unhappy with their appearance, future, school, and the ways they use their time.
- Young people experienced the lowest wellbeing, and were therefore most unhappy, at school. This is consistent with the national findings.



What can help?

12,137 people responded to the question.

- The response choices were recommendations proposed by young people in the MHoF 6 survey regarding what could be improved.
- The most favoured suggestion for improvements in their school or college was an increase in after school activities such as sports, dance, arts, and music **(45%).** Followed by, **44%** of students who wanted a greater awareness of mental health among staff or students.
- While somewhat less popular, a significant proportion of respondents still expressed interest in the following options: guest speakers with expertise in mental health **(26%)** and breakfast clubs providing nutritious foods **(25%).**

What would be helpful?	%	Count
Access to counsellors/ someone to talk to.	34%	4155
Guest speakers with knowledge about mental health.	26%	3161
More awareness of mental health among staff and students.	44%	5312
More information about support options and where to access them.	38%	4543
More frequent access to lessons on mental health.	31%	3797
More time to discuss mental health.	34%	4143
An after school or breakfast club that provides healthy food.	25%	2954
School lunches to offer healthier food options.	34%	4053
More after school activities (sports, music, art, dance).	45%	5371



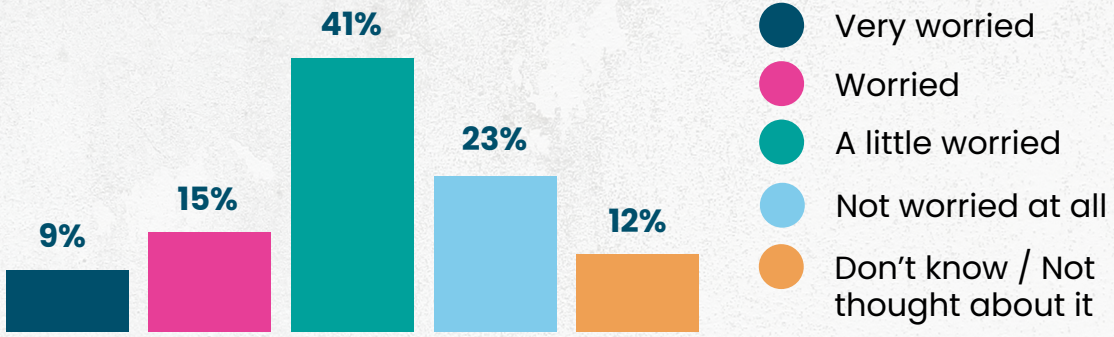
Fifty-five %

...said they had someone to talk to about their mental health at school or college.

Cost of living

Cost of living pressures are an increasing concern for many people across Suffolk. Recent research by the youth charity ERYICA has shown children as young as eleven are expressing apprehension about how increasing living costs are affecting their households.

- **12,137** answered our question.
- **2 in 5 (41%/ 4,860)** were 'a little worried' about the impact of the rising cost of living on themselves and their families.
- **Almost a quarter (23%, 2,784)** were not worried at all.

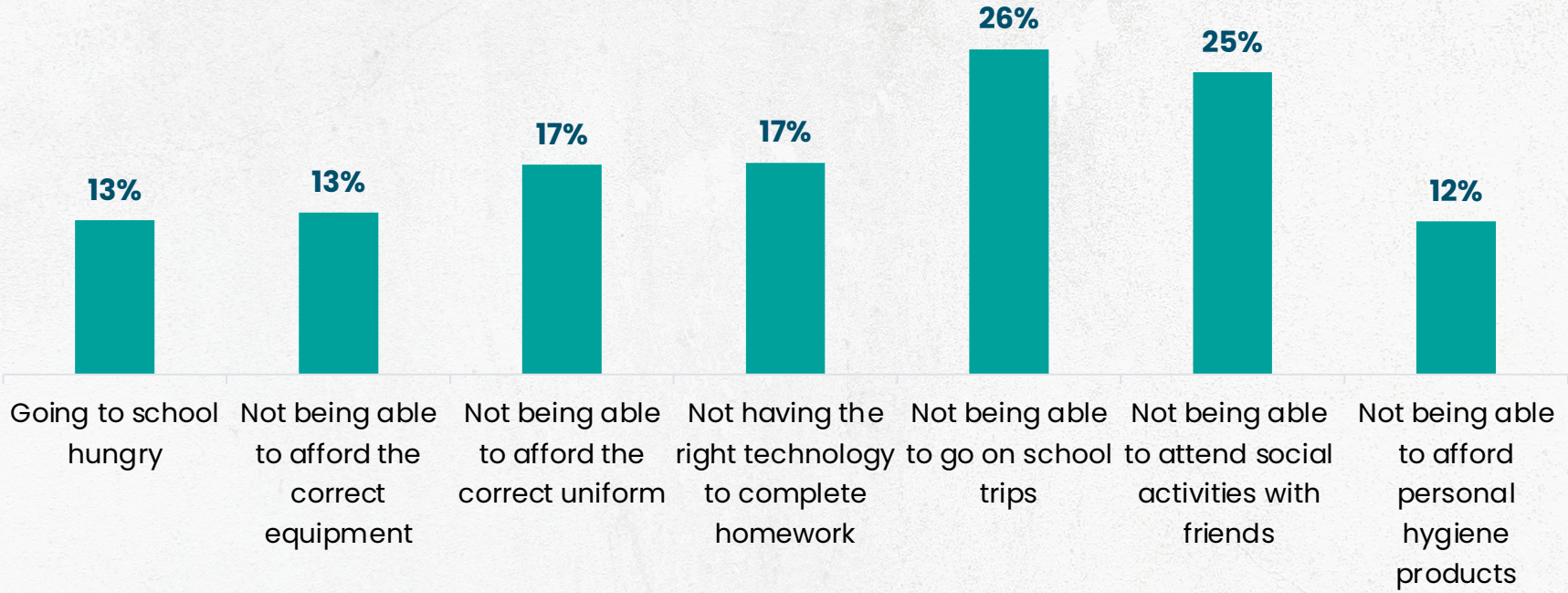




Nearly a quarter (24%/ 2,895) were either 'worried' or 'very worried' about the rising cost of living on their lives, and the lives of their families.

National comparison

Below shows the percentage of young people that said they were concerned about this now or in the future. The primary concern among young people revolved around their ability to participate in social activities with friends (26%/ 3,140) and go on school trips (25%/ 2,913).





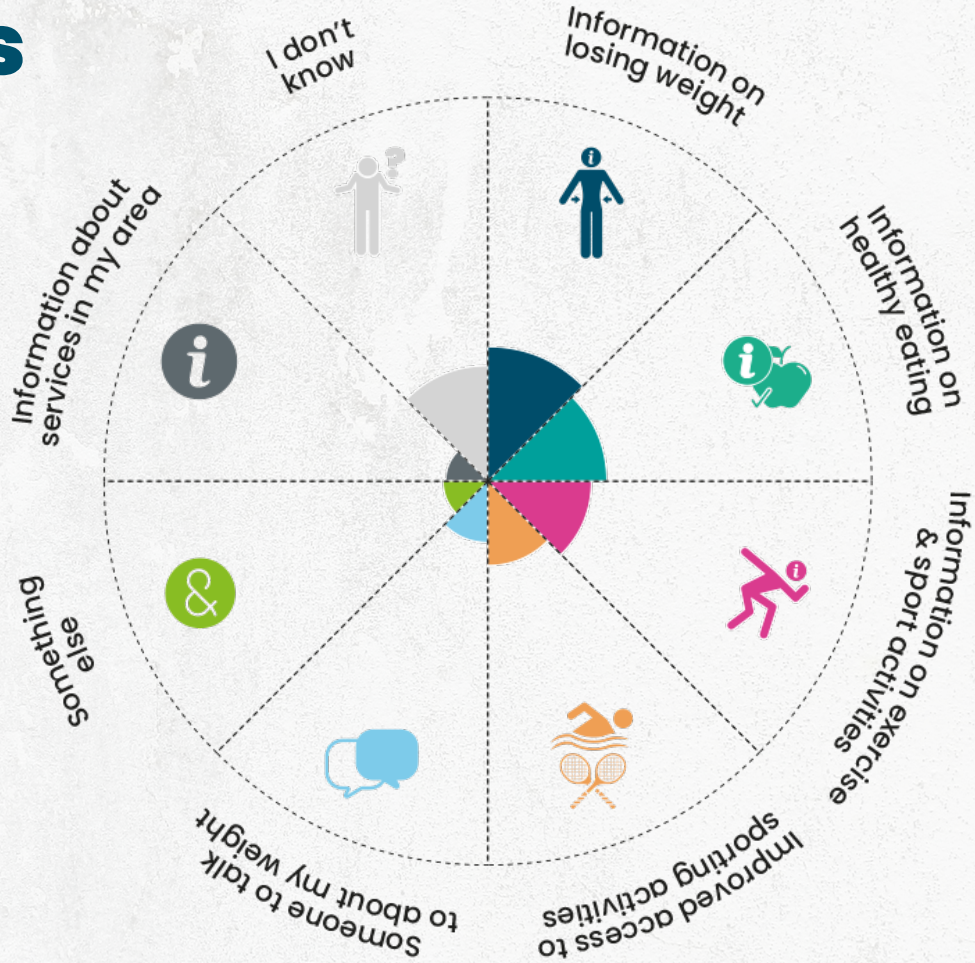
Four

...young people in every classroom were worried about going to school hungry now or in the future.

Healthy lifestyles

We asked young people if they were concerned about their weight.

- **Nearly half (46%/ 5,388)** of students indicated that they had no worries regarding their weight.
- Meanwhile, **21% (2,455)** of students expressed concern about being overweight, and an additional **8% (951)** voiced concern about being underweight.
- Among the **3,405** people who expressed weight concern. The most favoured response for what would help them manage their weight was information on losing or gaining weight (35%), closely followed by information about healthy diets (31%).

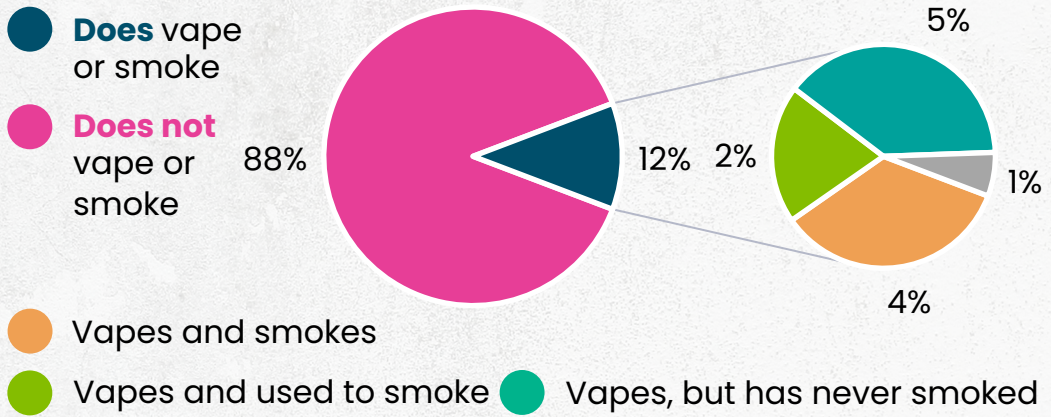


Vaping

In the UK, it is illegal to sell vapes to people under the age of 18. However, data shows that the proportion of children experimenting with vaping is growing by 50% each year (Ash, 2023).

We asked young people whether they currently vaped or smoked. **11,758** answered the question.

- **88% (10,486)** do not vape, although some **(86)** did smoke.
- **12% (1,272)** had vaped.
  - **5% (531)** vaped but never smoked.
  - **4% (469)** vaped and smoked.
  - **2% (272)** vaped and used to smoke.

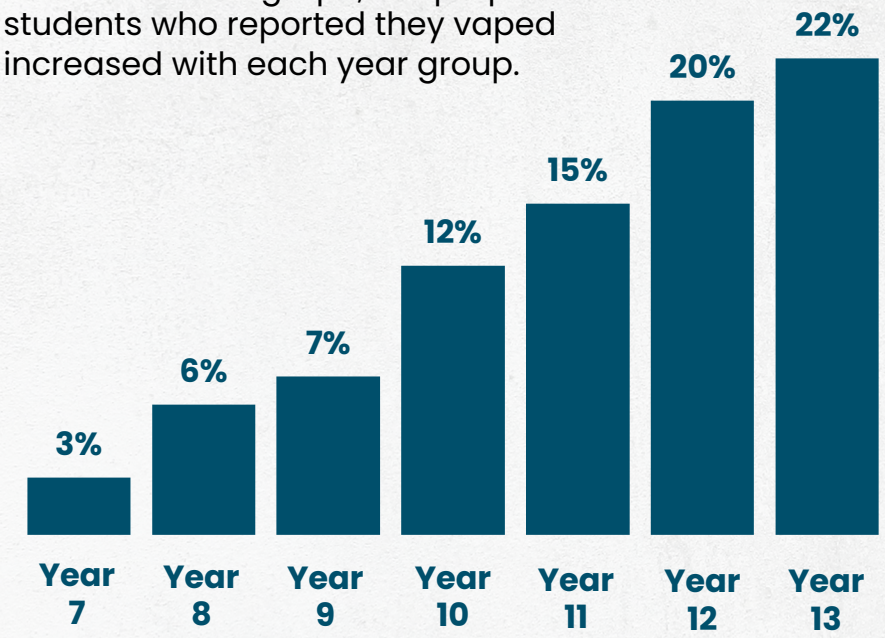




Who is vaping?

Certain students had a higher propensity for engaging in vaping compared to their peers. There were variations in the likelihood of vaping according to different factors.

As shown in the graph, the proportion of students who reported they vaped increased with each year group.



Additional support

Students who reported at least one additional support need were more likely to vape than their peers **(16% vs. 8%)**.

Gender

Female students were more likely to vape than male students **(12% vs. 8%)**. Those who preferred to describe their gender another way were the most likely to vape **(17%).**

Ethnicity

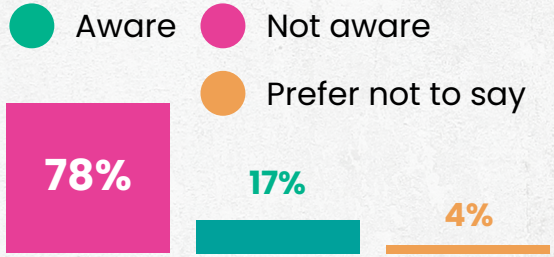
White –Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller **(29%)** and Arab **(21%)** students were more likely vape compared to other ethnic groups. For example, **6%** of Asian/ Asian British students vaped.

Sexual health

Increased awareness regarding sexual health is important within the context of rising national rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Compared to 2021, the number of new STI diagnoses in 2022 among young people (15 to 24) increased by 26.5% (129,938 to 164,337), largely due to a near doubling of cases of gonorrhoea over the same period.

We asked young people *in Year 9 and above* about their awareness of iCaSH. It is a free local service that provides sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, STI testing and treatment. **7,264** people answered this question.





Just 1 in 6 (17%) young people in year 9 and above were aware of iCaSH services and support, though awareness increased with year groupings.

- Female students were slightly more likely to be aware of iCaSH than male students. **(20% vs. 15%)**.
- Awareness of iCaSH increased with year group. In total, **11%** of Year 9s were aware, compared to **25%** of Year 13s.
- Students with additional support needs were slightly more likely to be aware of iCaSH than students with no additional support needs **(18% vs. 17%).**



Almost 2,000

...had seen ‘unwanted sexual behaviour’ in school or college, and *2,132* had seen students sharing ‘images or videos of other students of a sexual nature’.

Sexual harassment

In 2021, Ofsted reported that the frequency of harmful sexual behaviours at school or college means many young people considered them 'normal'.

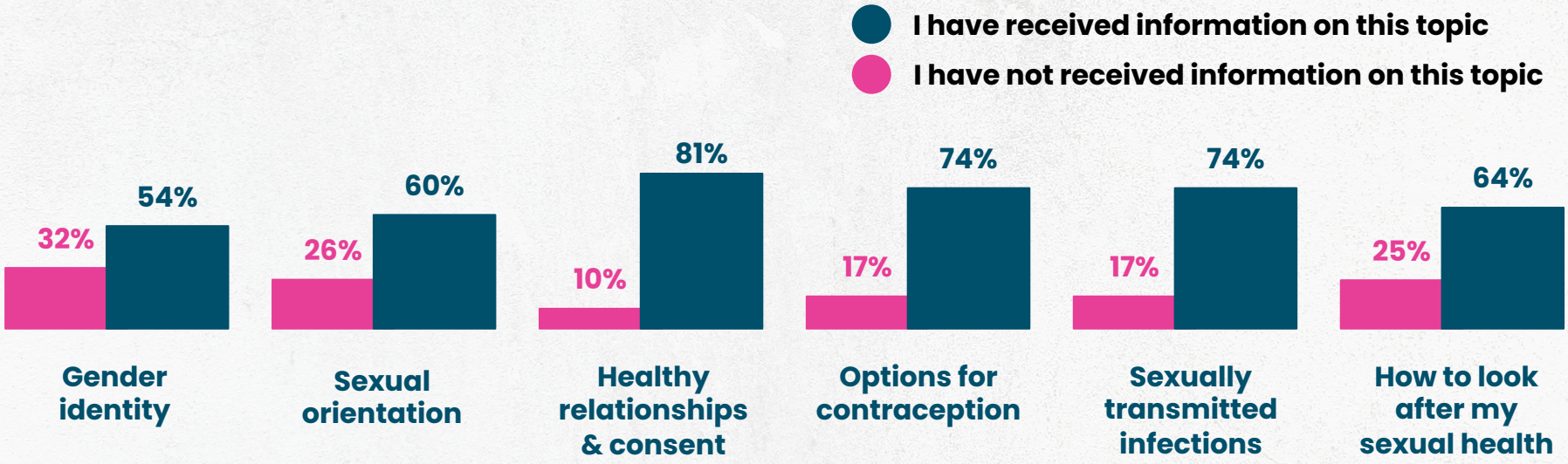
- Between **8,449** and **7,444** students answered questions in this section.
- We asked young people whether they had heard or seen any of the following forms of sexual harassment at their school or college.
- Over half of students had heard or seen sexual jokes **(59%/ 4305)** and use of homophobic or transphobic language **(53%/ 3896).**
- We then asked students if they would feel confident to report sexual harassment at their school. The largest proportion of students said they don't know **(42%/3,155).** This was followed by **36% (2650)** stating they would feel confident and **22% (1639)** stating they wouldn't feel confident.

Statements	%	Count
Making sexual jokes	59%	4,305
Using homophobic language or transphobic language	53%	3,896
Sending unwanted messages of a sexual nature	29%	2,115
Sharing images or videos of other students of a sexual nature	29%	2,132
Making sexual comments about other students' appearances	38%	2,775
Making sexual threats	21%	1,509
Other unwanted sexual behaviour	24%	1,768
None of the above	35%	2,532

Relationship & sex education

We asked students if their school/college gave them information about the following relationship and sex education topics. 7,013 answered the question.

Most students had received information about all topics in the survey. However, thousands of students felt they had not received any information about the various topics, including information about gender identity **(32%/ 2,235)**, sexual orientation **(26%/ 1,797)**, and how to look after sexual health **(25%/ 1,763)**.



Hormones

The questions on hormonal changes were designed and developed with the support of Youthwatch Suffolk.

- Most people said they were given information about the physical and emotional changes and at the right time.
- More students reported that they were not given enough information or provided any information about the emotional changes their body may experience, compared to physical changes.
- Awareness of hormonal changes appears to have a positive influence on various aspects of wellbeing. For instance, people who were given enough information were less likely to be concerned about their weight, and less likely to suffer with 'moderate' to 'severe' anxiety.

Information on the physical changes	Your school	Count
I was given enough information and at the right time	61%	6,715
I was given information, but not at the right time	16%	1,789
I wasn't given enough information	14%	1,585
I haven't received any information about this	8%	905

Information on the emotional changes	Your school	Count
I was given enough information and at the right time	53%	5,906
I was given information, but not at the right time	14%	1,583
I wasn't given enough information	21%	2,316
I haven't received any information about this	12%	1,334

Going to the GP

We asked students about their experience of visiting the GP surgery about concerns with their physical and emotional health. 2,382 answered this question.

Experiences...	%	Count
I felt listened to	38%	906
They really tried to help	35%	844
I felt relieved after seeing the medical practitioner	23%	541
I was not taken seriously	22%	524
I was dismissed because of my age	16%	370
I was dismissed because of my gender	5%	123
I was told that what I was experiencing was normal during puberty, even though I felt it wasn't	25%	584
I wasn't believed about the level of pain I was experiencing	19%	462
I didn't feel involved in discussing options about treatment	17%	399

This table shows the percentage of students who selected each answer choice.

Our question was:

'If you have approached your GP surgery with a concern about your physical or emotional health, have you experienced any of the following (please tick all that apply).'

This question was asked within a part of the survey dedicated to understanding students' experiences of support for emotional and physical changes during puberty. The answer choices, determined in co-production with our Youthwatch network, included three positive statements and six negative statements.

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This report has been produced to support the ongoing development and implementation of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing support in Suffolk. It will be publicly available on the Healthwatch Suffolk website. It will also be made available to Healthwatch England, and bodies responsible for the commissioning, scrutiny or delivery of local health and care services.

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