

Knowing Works®

My Health, Our Future

Phase nine (2025)

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Acknowledgements

The success and achievements of the My Health, Our Future (MHoF) programme rely greatly on the ongoing support of the Suffolk and north east Essex integrated care system and collaboration of various partners working with young people. Above all, we extend our thanks to school and college leaders, along with students from the following schools and colleges, for their support of MHoF 2024/2025.

- Abbeygate Sixth Form College
- Breckland School
- Castle Manor Academy
- Chantry Academy
- Churchill Special School
- Claydon High School
- County High School
- Farlingaye High School
- Felixstowe School
- Kesgrave High School
- Mildenhall College Academy
- Northgate High School
- Samuel Ward Academy
- Sir John Leman High School
- Suffolk New College
- Suffolk ONE
- Sybil Andrew Academy
- Thomas Gainsborough School
- West Suffolk College
- Westbourne Academy
- Woodbridge School

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

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For more information about ***My Health, Our Future*** (MHoF), or to download previous reports and insights, please visit: www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof

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Introduction

My Health, Our Future (MHoF) is a unique research programme that explores the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people.

Since 2015, the MHoF programme has offered yearly insights into the wellbeing of young people in Suffolk. The data has supported schools, colleges, and integrated care systems to improve support for children and young people, make decisions about services, attract funding for local support, and inform strategies around young people's health and wellbeing.

The programme has recorded **nearly 75,000** responses from young people on topics like bullying, body image, anxiety, and many others. Topics in the survey may vary according to co-production with local young people and professionals, which helps to ensure the findings remain relevant and supports maximum impact from sharing the data. Some aspects of the survey remain consistent across years.

This report presents findings from phase nine of the MHoF programme. To learn more about MHoF and access our reports, please visit www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof.



Using and interpreting our data

The MHoF programme uses an online survey to reach thousands of young people, providing valuable insights across sectors. When interpreting these findings, it's important to keep the following in mind:



A snapshot in time – The survey reflects the views of young people at a specific moment. It can highlight patterns, relationships, and associations, but cannot conclude one factor directly influences another.

Example: If large numbers of young people report both low wellbeing and concerns about body image, this shows the two issues often occur together and may be linked, but it does not confirm that poor body image causes low wellbeing.



Small numbers need caution – Findings from small groups, or very small differences between groups, should be interpreted carefully.

Example: If only a few students from a particular demographic respond, their results may not represent the wider population. Similarly, small differences in responses between groups (e.g., different gender identities) may be meaningful or simply due to chance.

Young people's wellbeing, behaviours, and experiences are shaped by many complex influences. Survey data should be used carefully and considered alongside other evidence.



Who took part?

Demographic summary

A total of 9,717 young people took part in the online survey between January and July 2025.

Year group:

- Over one third of students were in Year 7 or Year 8 **(38%/ 3,651)**.

Ethnicity:

- Most students **(74% /7,228)** identified as 'White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British', followed by **6% (567)** who identified as 'White - Any other White background'.

Additional Support Needs:

- **39% (3,779)** reported having one or more 'additional support needs'. Within this group, **9% (876)** had 'attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD]' **and 9% (827)** were young carers.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND):

- **21% (2,053)** of students were categorised as SEND. This is inclusive of students who self-selected statements from a list including: 'I have autism, Asperger's syndrome or ASD', 'I have ADHD', 'I have a sensory disability', 'I have a physical disability', or 'I have special educational needs'.

	Count	%
Year 7	1,846	19%
Year 8	1,805	19%
Year 9	1,631	17%
Year 10	1,297	13%
Year 11	467	5%
Year 12	1,606	17%
Year 13	960	10%
Year 14/15	55	1%
No answer	50	1%

Please see the following pages for more detail about the demographic profile of students.

Student gender

This page features a full breakdown of students' gender.

Gender	%	Count
Female	52%	5,030
Male	44%	4,272
Describe gender another way	1%	101
Prefer not to say	3%	314

52%
Female



44%
Male



1%
Described gender another way



Other ways students described their gender

- "Non-conforming"
- "Pangender"
- "Intersex"
- "Bigender"
- "Transgender"
- "Neutral"
- "They/them"
- "Demi boy"
- "Xe/Xem/Xyn"
- "Agender"
- "Demi girl"
- "Fem boy"
- "Gender nonconforming"
- "Gender queer"
- "Undefined"
- "Trans male"
- "Gender diverse"
- "Gender fluid"
- "Non-binary"
- "Xenogender"
- "Ze/Zem"
- "Trans-femme"

See glossary for definitions (pg. 92)

Sexuality

The largest proportion of students identified as heterosexual/straight **(80%/ 7,712)**, followed by **8% (725)** of students who identified as bisexual. The table below shows a full breakdown of students' sexuality.

Sexuality	%	Count
Heterosexual/straight	80%	7,779
Bisexual	8%	731
Gay male	1%	117
Gay female/lesbian	2%	201
Described sexuality another way	2%	177
Prefer not to say	7%	712

Other ways students described their sexuality

- "Acesexual"
- "Abrosexual"
- "Aroace"
- "Aromantic"
- "Asexual"
- "Demisexual"
- "Panromantic"
- "Omnisexual"
- "Sexually fluid"
- "Biromantic
- "Queer"
- "Aegosexual"
- "No attraction"
- "Unlabelled"
- "Questioning"
- "Graysexual"
- "Pansexual"
- "Unsure"
- "Arospec"
- "Bi-curious"
- "Furry"
- "Cupiosexual"
- "Demiaroace"

See glossary for definitions (pg. 94)

1,248

responses were from LGBT*Q+ students (13%). This compares to 14% in 2024, 13% in 2023, and 22% in 2022.

Each year, MHoF reveals consistent differences in emotional, mental and physical health between LGBT*Q+ young people and non-LGBT*Q+ peers.

Our findings have previously shown that LGBT*Q+ young people are more likely to report lower levels of wellbeing, experience higher rates of anxiety, and feel less optimistic about their future. They are also less likely to feel close to others.

In this report, the findings for LGBT*Q+ students are presented as a group, inclusive of responses to questions about sexuality and gender unless otherwise stated.



Ethnicity

Most students identified as 'White – English/Welsh /Scottish/Northern Irish/British' (74%/ 7,228). There were 76 (1%) students who did not answer. The tables show a full breakdown of students' ethnicity.

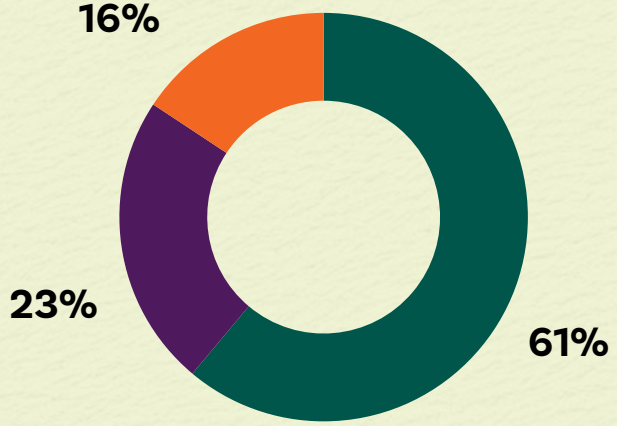
Ethnicity	%	Count
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British	74%	7,228
Any other White background	6%	567
Polish	2%	216
Indian	2%	170
African	2%	161
Any other Asian background	2%	159
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic backgrounds	1%	143
White and Black Caribbean	1%	130
White and Asian	1%	129
White and Black African	1%	113
Irish	1%	89
Romanian	1%	88
Portuguese	1%	88
Bangladeshi	1%	68
Any other Black/African/ Caribbean background	1%	58
Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	1%	65
Caribbean	<0%	44
Pakistani	<0%	38
Chinese	<0%	37
Arab	<0%	27
Other ethnic background	<0%	23

Additional support needs

Additional support needs have been shown to influence student wellbeing across the MHoF programme. The table below shows a full breakdown of students' additional support needs reported this year.

	%	Count
Receiving free school meals	14%	1,340
Diagnosed mental health difficulty	9%	858
Young carer (under 18)	9%	827
ADHD	9%	876
Autism, Asperger's syndrome, or ASD	8%	766
Special educational needs	7%	696
Sensory disability	4%	425
Physical disability	4%	414
Has been in care	3%	325
Carer (over 18)	1%	109
Has been a refugee	1%	67

Note: *This data is self-reported.*



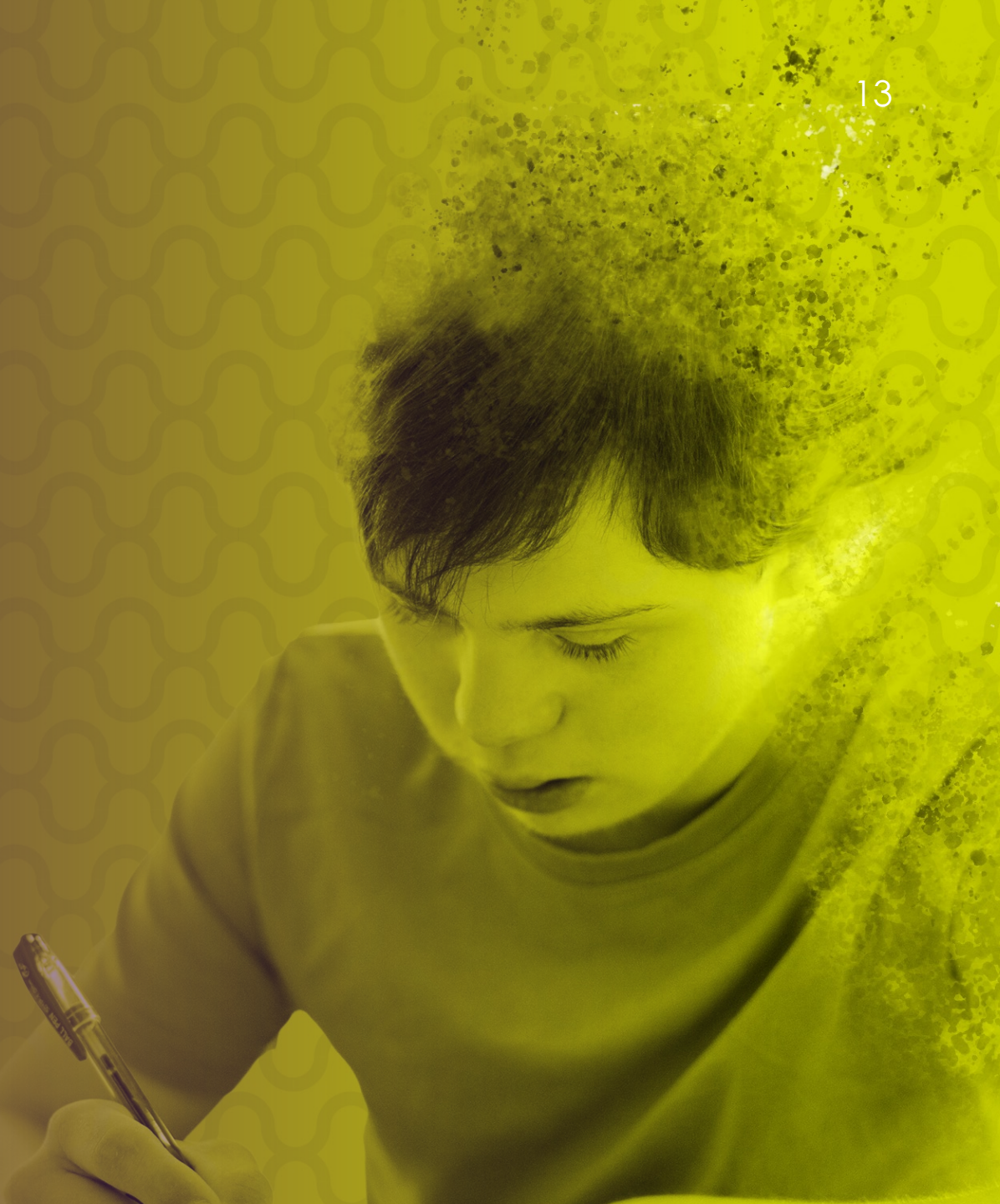
39% (3,779) had an additional support need.

2,053

responses were from students with SEND (21%). This compares to 21% (1,765) in 2024 and 16% (2,120) in 2023.

These young people self-selected statements from a list that included ‘I have autism, Asperger’s syndrome or ASD’, ‘I have ADHD’, ‘I have a sensory disability’, ‘I have a physical disability’, and ‘I have special educational needs’.

Year after year, MHoF data has shown that students with SEND are considerably more likely to experience lower levels of wellbeing. Further insights into the experiences of students with SEND can be found throughout the report.





Our results

How school/college samples vary

The information below illustrates the range of scores reported by schools and colleges that participated in MHoF this year. This provides valuable insights into the variation in wellbeing measures across schools in Suffolk.

Wellbeing



Average wellbeing scores ranged from a high of 24.4 to a low of 21.2.

The whole-sample average wellbeing score in 2024 was **22.8.**

Lower average scores indicate poorer wellbeing amongst students.

Worthiness

Average worthiness scores ranged from 5.6 to 6.9.

Higher scores indicate stronger feelings that the things done in life are worthwhile.

Happiness

Average happiness scores varied from 5.4 to 6.5.

Higher scores indicate greater levels of happiness amongst students.

Life satisfaction

Average life satisfaction scores ranged from 5.7 to 7.2.

Higher average scores reflect greater life satisfaction amongst students.

Anxiety

Average anxiety scores ranged from 3.5 to 4.6.

Higher scores reflect greater levels of anxiety amongst students.

The information below illustrates the range of scores reported by schools and colleges that participated in MHoF this year. This provides insights into the variation in wellbeing measures across schools in Suffolk.

Sleep and safety at night



Getting enough sleep:

The proportion of students reporting that they never get 8-10 hours of sleep ranged from **7% (lowest)** to **25% (highest)**.

Feeling safe at night:

The percentage of students reporting that they never felt safe at night ranged from **8% (lowest)** to **35% (highest)**.

Witnessing harmful sexual behaviours

The proportion of students who reported witnessing or hearing harmful sexual behaviours ranges from **26% (lowest)** to **63% (highest)**.



Wellbeing (SWEMWBS data)

Overall wellbeing was measured using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS), which asks students to respond to seven statements. Responses are combined to give a score between seven and 35, where a lower score indicates lower wellbeing.

Scores of 7-19.3 reflect low wellbeing, 20-27 reflect medium wellbeing, and 28.1-35 reflect high wellbeing.

- A total of **9,630** students completed the SWEMWBS questions.
- The average wellbeing score for young people in Suffolk is **22.8**, the same as recorded in 2024.

There is currently no up-to-date national dataset for children and young people in England using SWEMWBS.

When applying the scale's thresholds, Suffolk students fall within the medium wellbeing category overall.

Suffolk students' average wellbeing (22.8) remains the same as recorded in 2024.

This indicates that the average wellbeing of young people in Suffolk has stabilised at just above a level recorded by the MHoF programme in 2017 (see graph on the next slide).

This sustained increase follows a COVID-19 pandemic low recorded in 2021 of 19.9.

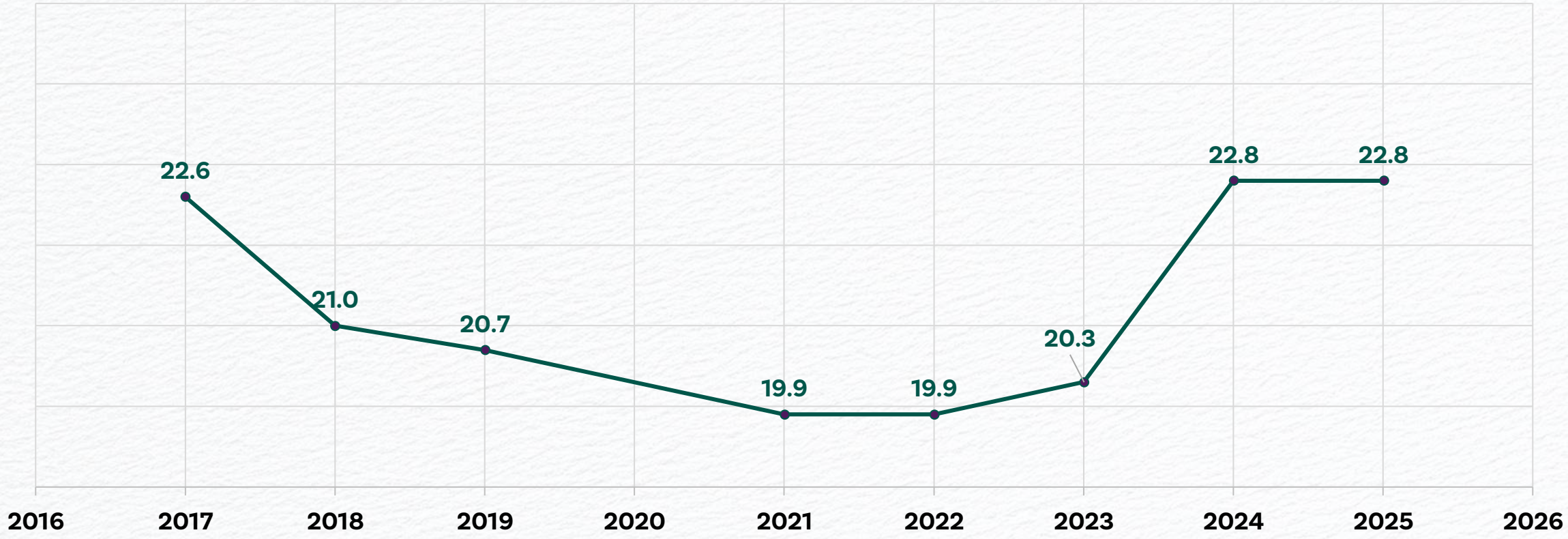
Wellbeing scores range between seven and 35. Lower scores indicated poorer levels of wellbeing amongst students.



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 seven and 35, with lower scores reflecting poorer wellbeing. In Suffolk, average wellbeing has returned to the level recorded previously in 2017, following declines seen during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.



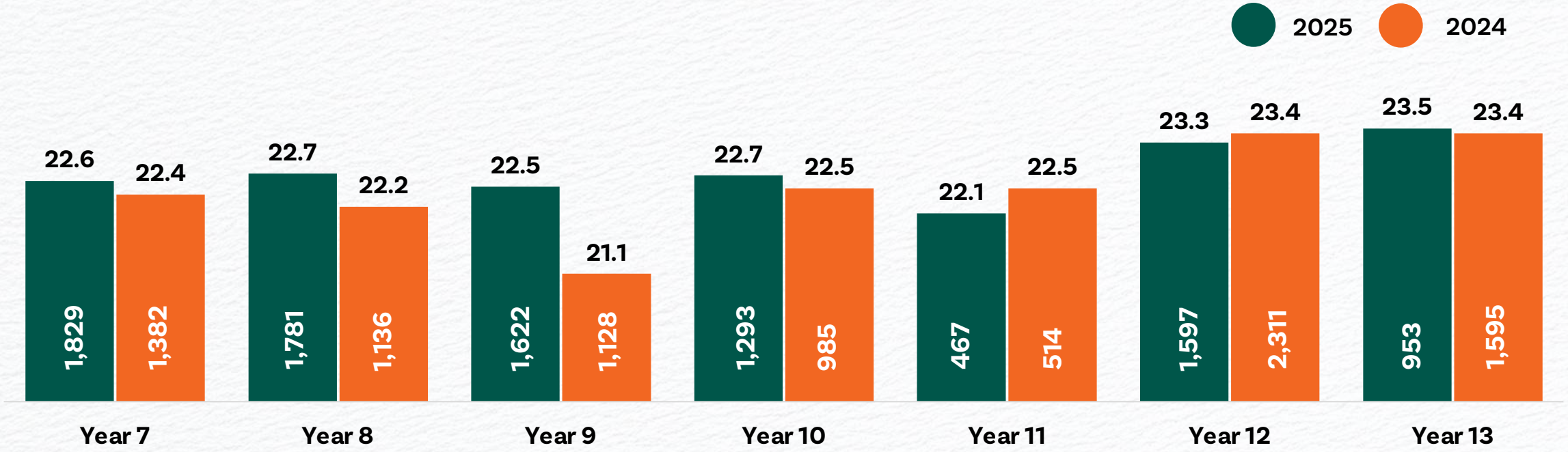
Year group & wellbeing

The chart compares the average wellbeing scores of young people in Suffolk from the 2024 and 2025 surveys.

- The number inside the bars show the number of student responses in each year group.
- The number above the bars indicate the average wellbeing score for that group.

Last year, students in **Years 12** and **13** reported higher wellbeing scores than their younger peers. This trend continued in 2025.

Overall, wellbeing improved across most year groups, with the most notable increase seen in **Year 9**. However, **Year 11** and **Year 12** students showed a slight decline compared to the previous year. While this cannot be attributed solely to the lower number of responses in these groups, it is likely to have had some effect.



Wellbeing and demographics

Gender differences

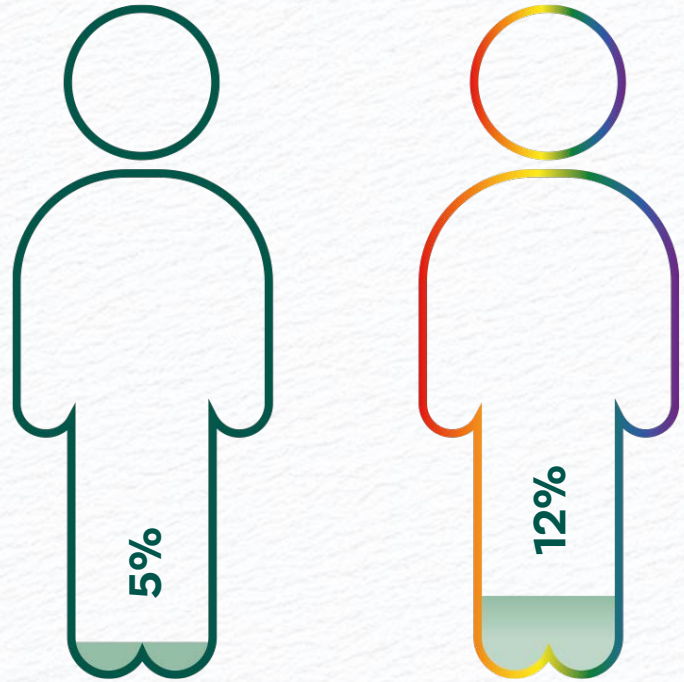


Students describing their gender another way were most likely to report low wellbeing (21%).

Female students were almost twice as likely to report low wellbeing than male students (8% vs. 4%).

LGBT*Q+ students

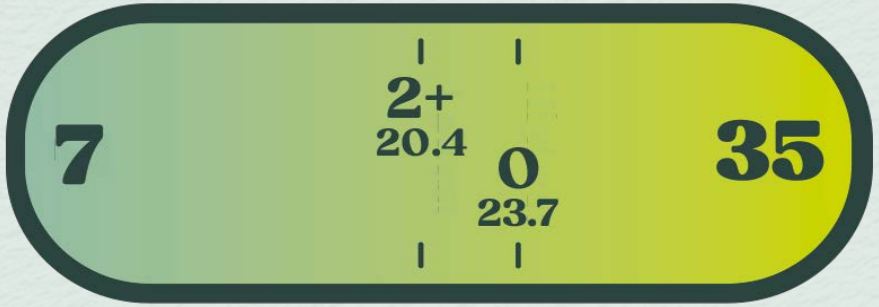
LGBT*Q+ young people were more than twice as likely to have 'low wellbeing' than heterosexual peers (12% vs 5%).



Students with additional support needs

The table shows the average wellbeing scores of students who self-reported having additional support needs.

- Overall, students with support needs reported lower wellbeing scores compared to those who had none **(21.3 vs 23.7)**.
- Students identifying as refugee or asylum seekers had the lowest average wellbeing score **(16.1)**, followed by those with a sensory disability **(19.4)**, a mental health diagnosis **(19.8)**, or caring responsibilities (over 18) **(19.8)**.
- The data also suggests a cumulative effect: the more additional support needs a student reported, the lower their average wellbeing score. For example, students with no additional support needs scored an average of **23.7**, compared with **22.0** for those with one support need and **20.4** for those with two or more.



Students reporting more support needs also had lower average wellbeing scores.

Additional Support Needs	Average	Count
None of these apply	23.6	5,820
Receiving free school meals	21.4	1,329
Special educational needs	20.9	691
Autism, Asperger's, ASD	20.5	760
Physical disability	20.3	412
ADHD	20.2	872
Young carer (under 18)	20.1	819
Been in care	20.0	321
Carer (over 18)	19.8	106
Mental health diagnosis	19.8	854
Sensory disability	19.4	423
Refugee or asylum seeker	16.1	67

Student ethnicity

The table to the right illustrates the average wellbeing score for students and their ethnicity. The average wellbeing score for the whole sample was 22.8.

- Romanian students had the highest wellbeing score **(24.1)**, followed by Indian students **(23.8)** and students from any other Asian background **(23.6)**.
- Pakistani students had the lowest wellbeing score **(20.5)**, followed by Irish students **(20.8)** and Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller students **(20.8)**.

Ethnicity	Average	Count
Romanian	24.1	87
Indian	23.8	170
Any other Asian background	23.6	159
African	23.5	158
Portuguese	23.1	88
White and Black African	23.0	112
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British	22.9	7,184
White and Black Caribbean	22.8	128
Any other Black/African/ Caribbean background	22.7	56
Caribbean	22.7	42
Any other White background	22.6	562
White and Asian	22.5	128
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic backgrounds	22.3	142
Bangladeshi	22.1	68
Polish	22.1	214
Chinese	21.9	37
Other ethnic background	21.8	22
Arab	21.6	26
Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	20.8	63
Irish	20.8	89
Pakistani	20.5	38

Ethnicity & wellbeing over time

The tables illustrate the two highest and the two lowest wellbeing scores for students, by ethnicity, across the past three years.

- Overall, wellbeing scores have increased over time. Indian students have consistently ranked among the highest-scoring groups, having either the highest or second highest average wellbeing scores in each of the last three surveys. Romanian students also appeared among the top scoring groups in the most recent two years.

- Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller students recorded the lowest scores in both 2023 and 2024. This pattern changed in 2025, when Pakistani and Irish students had the lowest scores, although Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller students remained among the lower scoring groups.

2025 Data	Ethnicity	Average	Count
Highest Wellbeing Scores	Romanian	24.1	87
	Indian	23.8	170
Lowest Wellbeing Scores	Pakistani	20.5	38
	Irish	20.8	89

2024 Data	Ethnicity	Average	Count
Highest Wellbeing Scores	Indian	23.7	125
	Romanian	23.6	88
Lowest Wellbeing Scores	Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	19.7	51
	Arab	20.5	24

2023 Data	Ethnicity	Average	Count
Highest Wellbeing Scores	Any other Black /African / Caribbean background	21.8	64
	Indian	21.4	188
Lowest Wellbeing Scores	Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	18.8	106
	Portuguese	19.5	120



16% (1,579)

of students felt close to others ‘rarely’ or ‘none of the time’.

Personal Wellbeing Scale

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) Personal Wellbeing Measure (PWB) asks people to rate their wellbeing across four questions. Using the same standardised scale in the MHoF survey allows us to understand young people's wellbeing and compare it with national data.

Each question is scored from zero to ten. The first three questions assess life satisfaction, feelings that the things done in life are worthwhile, and happiness. Responses are grouped into the following categories:

- 0 to 4: Low
- 5 to 6: Medium
- 7 to 8: High
- 9 to 10: Very high

The fourth question relates to anxiety, which is categorised differently to reflect that higher anxiety is associated with lower personal wellbeing. The scores are grouped as follows:

- 0 to 1: Very low
- 2 to 3: Low
- 4 to 5: Medium
- 6 to 10: High

More details are available on the ONS website: here.

Note: Comparison should be treated with caution due to differences in sample sizes.

Average personal wellbeing

Between January and March 2025, the Office of National Statistics collected approximately 23,490 responses from across the UK, including 285 from people aged 16 to 24. You can explore more on the ONS website here.

Students in the MHoF survey reported lower levels of life satisfaction, and their sense things they do are worthwhile. They also had lower levels of happiness and higher levels of anxiety than young people aged 16 to 24 across the UK.



21% (1,989)

reported low levels of satisfaction with life.

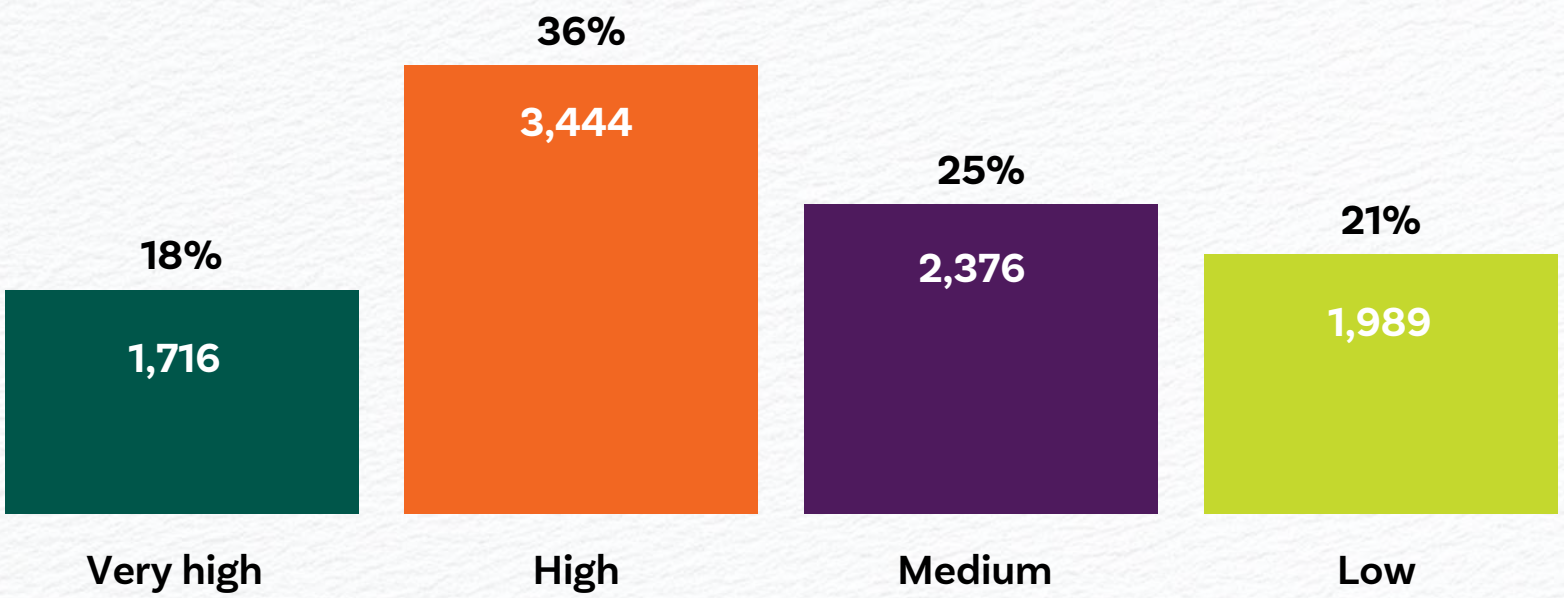
This compares to just 3% of a national ONS sample of young people.



Satisfaction with life

The graph below shows the percentage of young people who fell into each wellbeing category in response to the question, *"How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?"*

- The largest proportion of young people in the MHoF sample reported high levels of life satisfaction (score 7-8) **(36%)**.
- However, **21%** reported low life satisfaction, compared with just **3%** of 16 to 24 year olds in the national ONS sample.
- This suggests that young people in Suffolk may be experiencing lower levels of life satisfaction than their peers in the wider population.



ONS DATA	%
Very high	27%
High	53%
Medium	17%
Low	3%



21% (2,025)

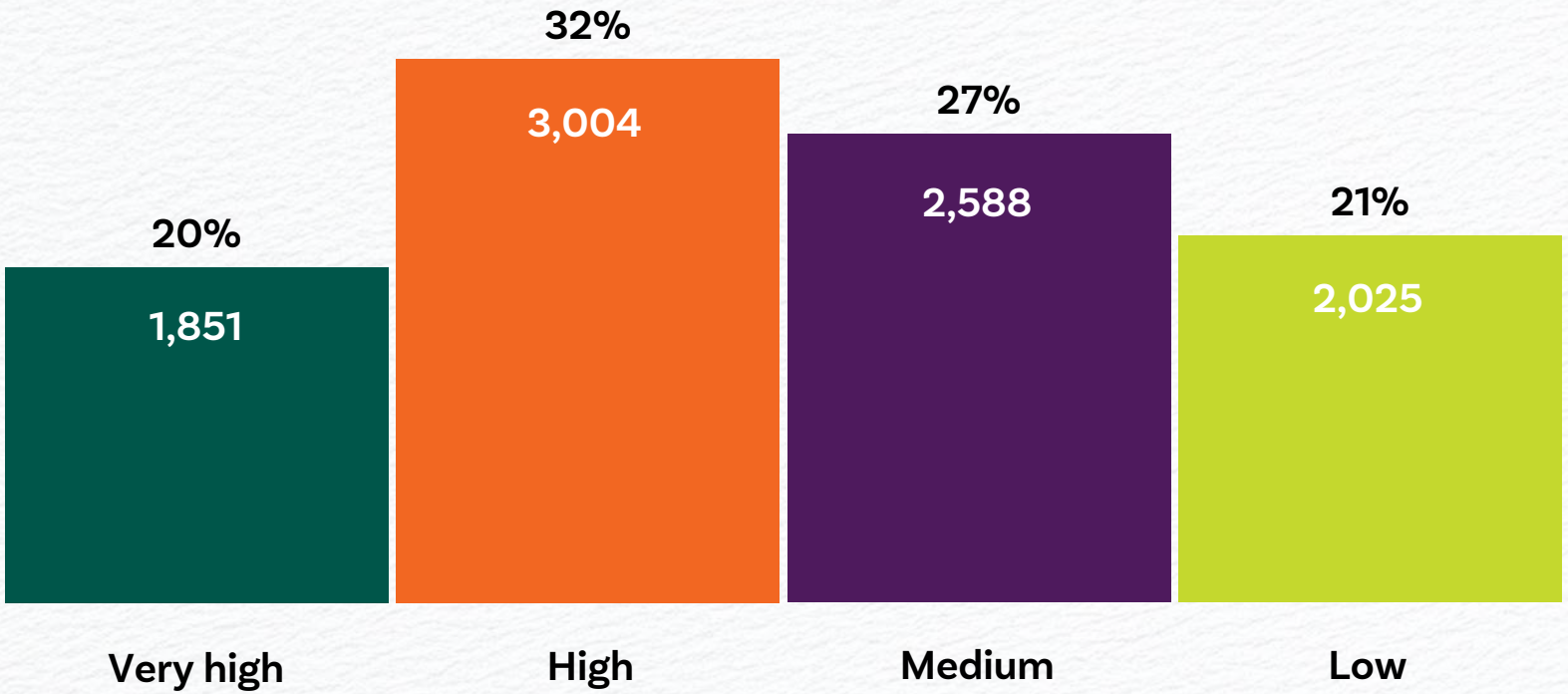
reported a low sense that things they do in life are worthwhile.

This compares to just 4% of a national ONS sample of young people.

Sense things done in life are worthwhile

The graph below shows responses to the question, *"To what extent do you feel the things you do in life are worthwhile?"*

- The largest proportion of students in the MHoF sample reported high levels of worthiness (scores of 7-8) **(32%)**. This was followed by over a quarter of students reporting medium levels of worthiness **(27%)**.
- Notably, **21%** of the MHoF sample reported low levels of worthiness, compared with just **4%** in the ONS sample.



ONS DATA	%
Very high	28%
High	53%
Medium	15%
Low	4%

49% (4,612)

reported ‘very high’ or ‘high’ levels of happiness.

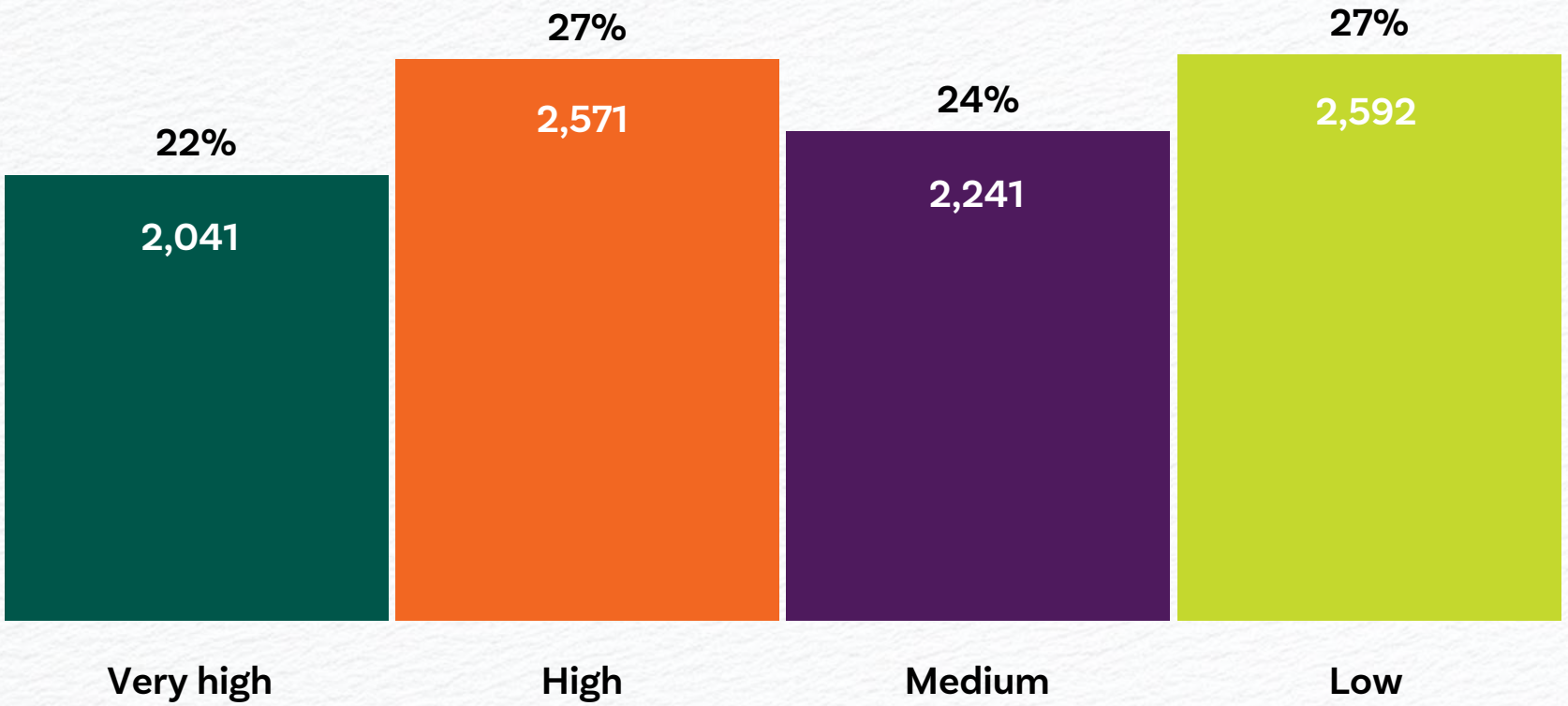
This compares to 81% of a national ONS sample of young people.



Happiness

The graph below shows responses to the question, *"How happy were you yesterday?"*

- The largest proportion of students in the MHoF sample reported low levels of happiness (scores 0-4) **(27%)**. This was very closely followed by those reporting high levels of happiness (scores 7-8) **(27%)**.
- In contrast, significantly more young people in the ONS national sample reported high levels of happiness **(53%)**.



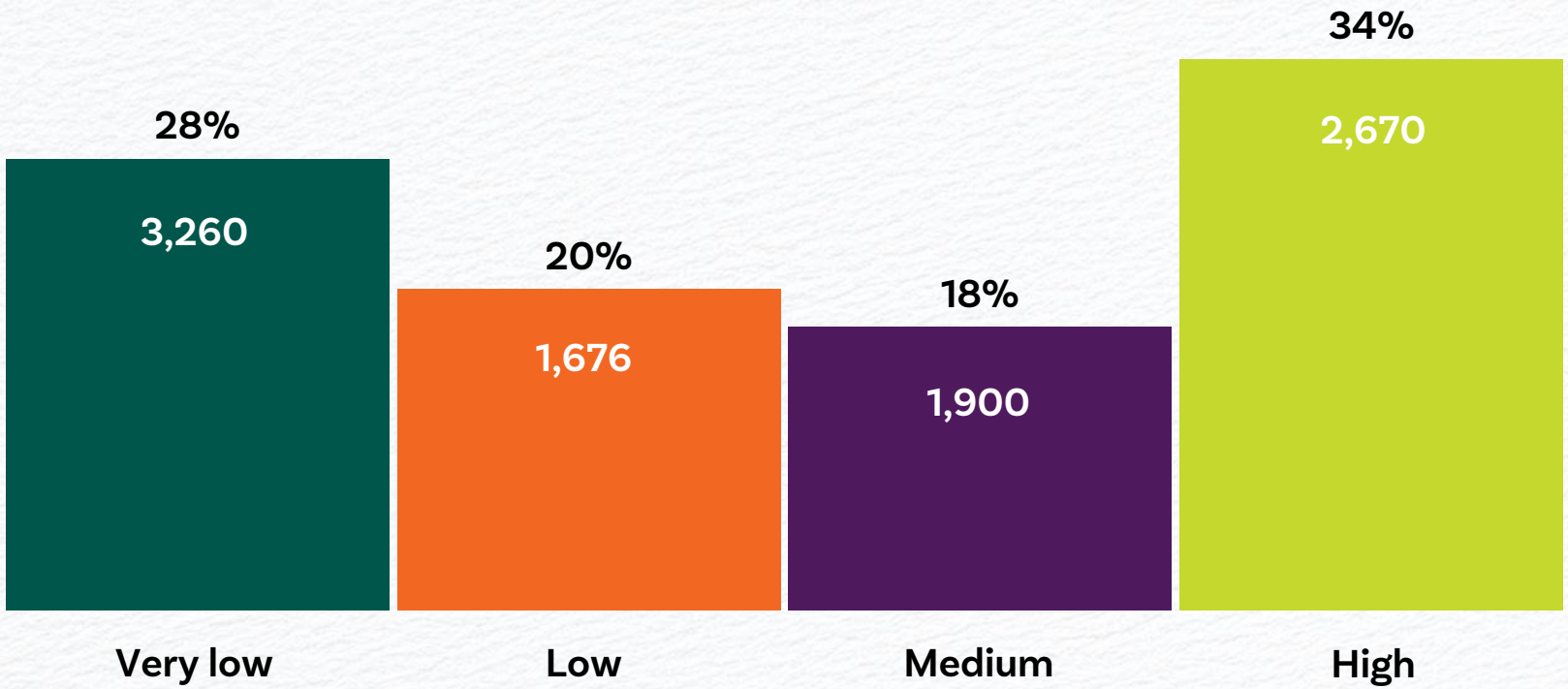
ONS DATA	%
Very high	28%
High	53%
Medium	15%
Low	4%

Anxiety

The graph below shows responses to the question, *"How anxious did you feel yesterday?"*

(Note: Anxiety scores are categorised differently to reflect that higher anxiety is associated with lower personal wellbeing)

- The largest proportion of students in the MHoF sample reported high levels of anxiety (scores 6-10) **(34%)**, compared to **25%** of the ONS sample.
- This was followed by **28%** reporting very low levels of anxiety, which is almost identical to the ONS sample of **27%**.

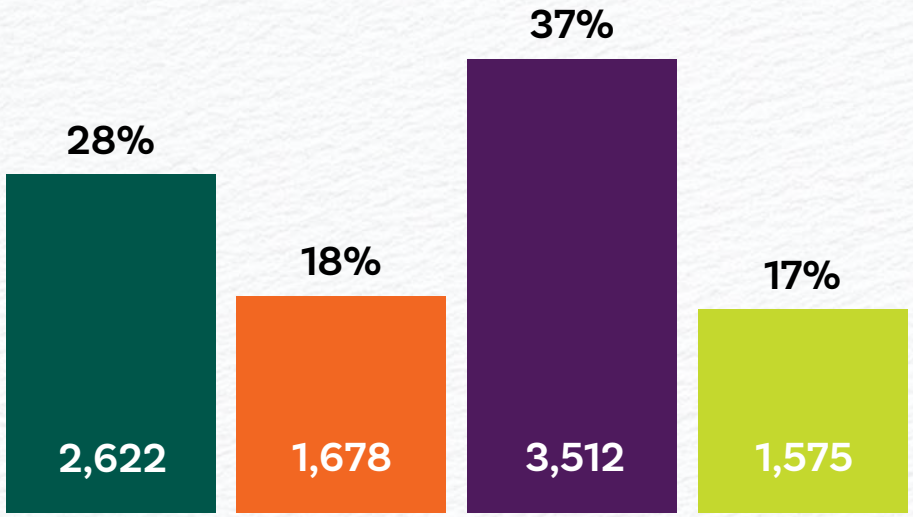


ONS DATA	%
Very low	27%
Low	27%
Medium	22%
High	25%

Sleep

Sleep is essential for supporting physical and mental development (Sleep Foundation, 2024).

We asked, **'How often have you got between 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night?'**. Of **9,387** who answered, most students got between eight and ten hours of sleep 'several days' or 'nearly every day'.





Nearly every day | More than half of the days | Several days | Not at all

Are young people getting less sleep?

The MHoF programme has explored the topic of sleep three times, but in a couple of different ways.

In MHoF 2024 and 2025, young people were asked about how often they got the daily recommended hours of sleep. Whereas in 2020, young people stated a bed and wake up time on their school or college days.

- In **2025**, **46%** of students reported getting 8 – 10 hours of sleep ***'nearly every day'*** or on ***'more than half of the days',*** while **17%** said they '***never'*** achieved this and **37%** managed it on ***'several days'***.

- Compared with **2024**, there was a **2%** increase in the proportion of students who got 8 to 10 hours of sleep '***nearly every day'***, but also a **2%** rise in those who '***never'*** got this amount of sleep.

- In **2020**, data showed that **67%** of students reported getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep on an average school or college night, while **30%** slept less than the recommended amount.

Taken together, the findings suggest many young people are not consistently getting their recommended daily sleep, and there may have been a shift over time in the numbers of young people reporting 8 – 10 hours of sleep most days. However, differences in how questions were asked across surveys limits direct comparability.

2020



In 2020, 67% reported generally getting 8 – 10 hours of sleep most nights based on an estimation of their bed and wake up times on school nights.

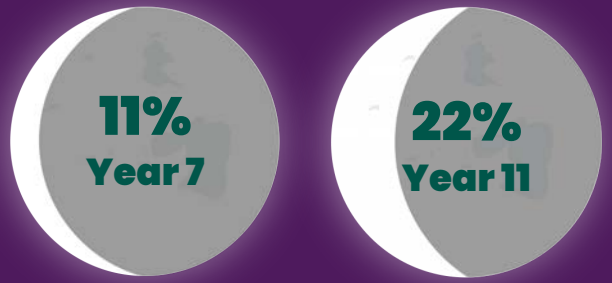
2025



In 2025, just 46% of students told us they got 8 – 10 hours of sleep 'Nearly every day' or on 'More than half of the days'. A further 37% achieved it on 'Several days'.

Who is getting poor sleep?

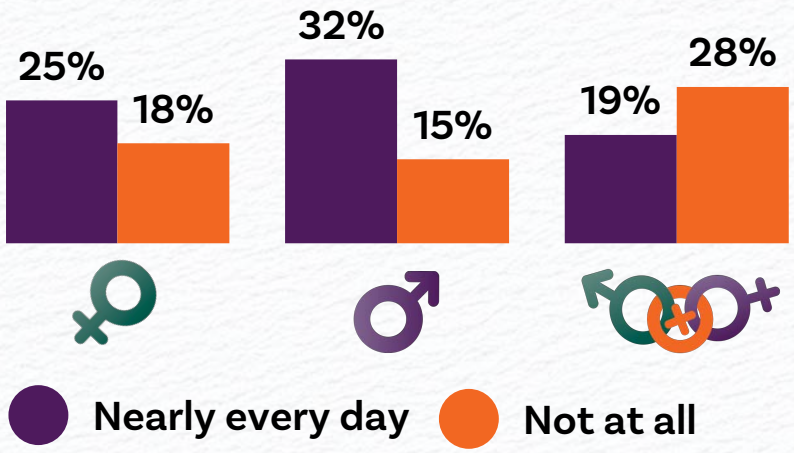
Getting 8-10 hours sleep 'Not at all'



Year Group: The data reveals a downward trend in sleep duration between Year 7 and Year 11, with Year 11 students least likely to report regularly achieving 8 to 10 hours of sleep (see table).

	Nearly everyday	Not at all
Year 7	38%	11%
Year 8	33%	16%
Year 9	29%	18%
Year 10	26%	19%
Year 11	22%	22%
Year 12	18%	18%
Year 13	20%	19%
Year 14/15	21%	21%

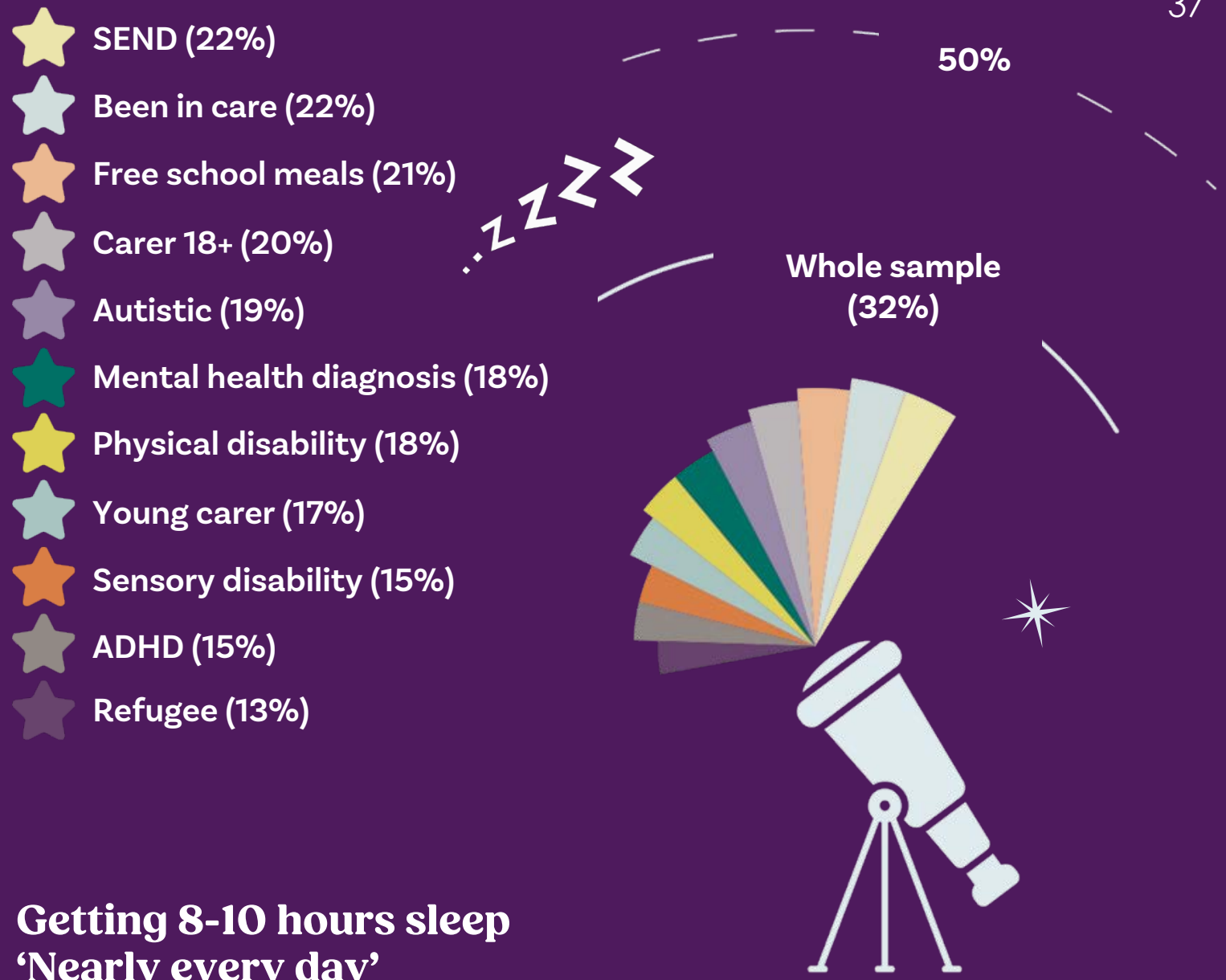
- **Gender:** Students who described their gender another way were the least likely to report getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night, followed by female students and male students (see graph right).
- **LGBT*Q+ Community:** Students within the LGBT*Q+ community were considerably less likely to report getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep compared with heterosexual peers **(17% vs 29%)**.
- **Ethnicity:** White – Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller students were the least likely to report getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep **(13%)**, followed by Portuguese students **(20%)**. In contrast, Asian/Asian British students **(33%)** and White students **(28%)** were more likely to report getting this amount of sleep.



Sleep: Additional support needs

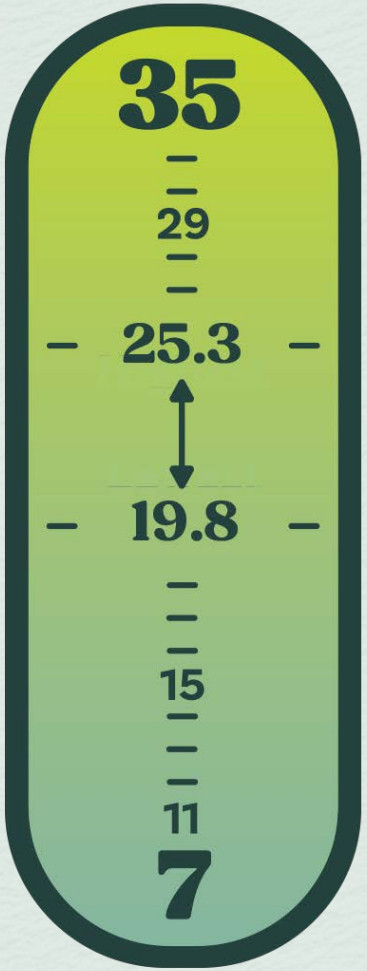
Students with additional support needs were less likely to report getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night compared to students without such needs (22% vs 32%).

- **Refugee students** (13%), students with a **sensory disability** (15%), and those with **ADHD** (15%) were the least likely to report getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep every night.
- Across every category of additional support needs included in the survey, young people were consistently less likely to report 8 to 10 hours of sleep compared to peers without support needs.



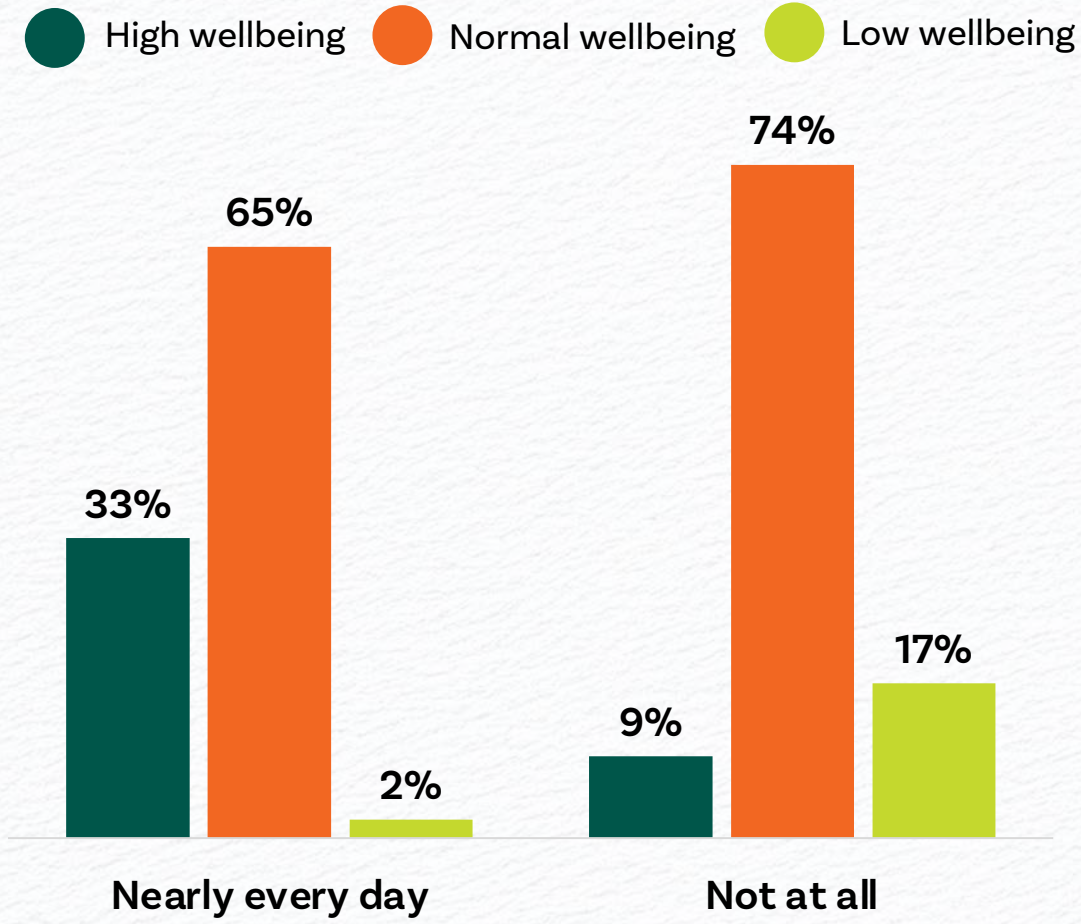
Getting 8-10 hours sleep 'Nearly every day'

Sleep: Wellbeing scores



Students who got more sleep had higher average wellbeing scores

Students who got between 8 and 10 hours of sleep **'nearly every night'** had higher average wellbeing scores **(25.3)** than students who **never** got between 8 and 10 hours of sleep **(19.8)**.



The chart compares wellbeing categories for students who sleep 8 to 10 hours nearly every day with those who do not. It shows that students who got sufficient sleep were much more likely to report high wellbeing than those who never achieved 8 to 10 hours of sleep.

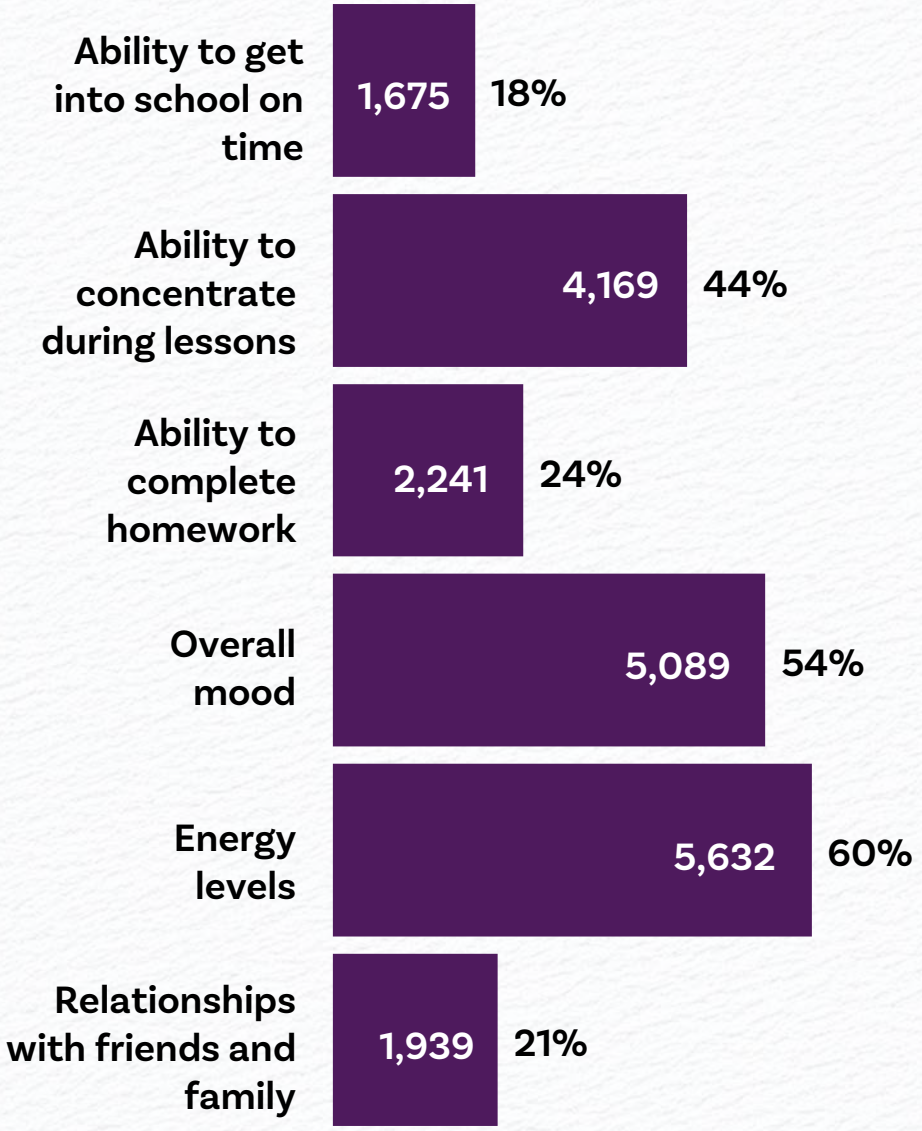
The impact of not getting enough sleep

A lack of sleep can impact young people's attention, behaviour, learning, memory, emotional regulation, mental health and physical health. Research has suggested that students with poor sleep will likely have worse academic and athletic performance (AASM Foundation, 2022).

We asked students whether a poor night's sleep had affected different aspects of their lives over the last two weeks, such as their overall mood, energy levels, and relationships with friends and family. It also included their ability to get into school on time, concentrate in lessons, and complete homework,

The results are shown in the graph (right).

- The largest proportion of students reported that a poor night's sleep has affected their energy levels **(60% or 5,632 people)** over the past two weeks. This was closely followed by their overall mood **(54%)** and ability to concentrate during lessons **(44%)**.
- Although fewer, a notable **1,675 (18%)** students reported that a poor night's sleep has affected their ability to get into school on time over the past two weeks.



Feelings of safety (Day and night)

Always Sometimes Never



61%
'Always' felt safe

How safe did students feel outside in their local community during the day?

Of **9,079** students, **61% (5,570)** reported always feeling safe and **36%** felt safe sometimes. However, **3% (251)** never felt safe in their local community during the day.



26%
'Always' felt safe

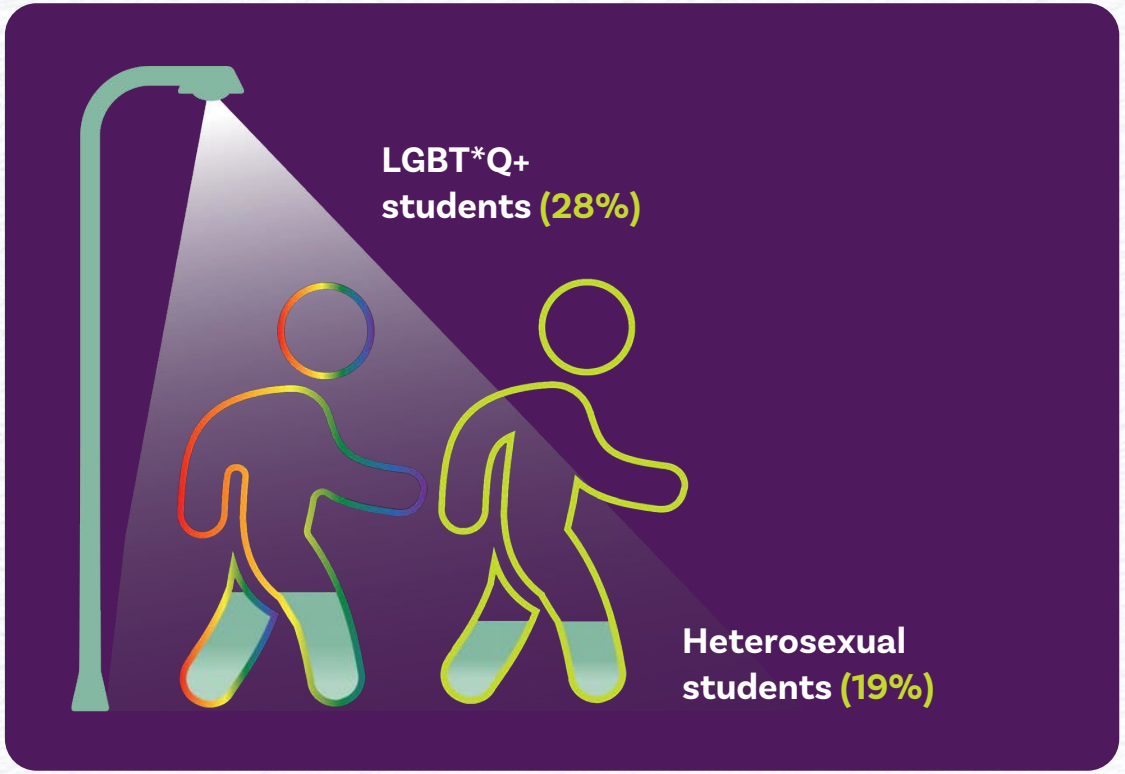
How safe did students feel in their local community during the night?

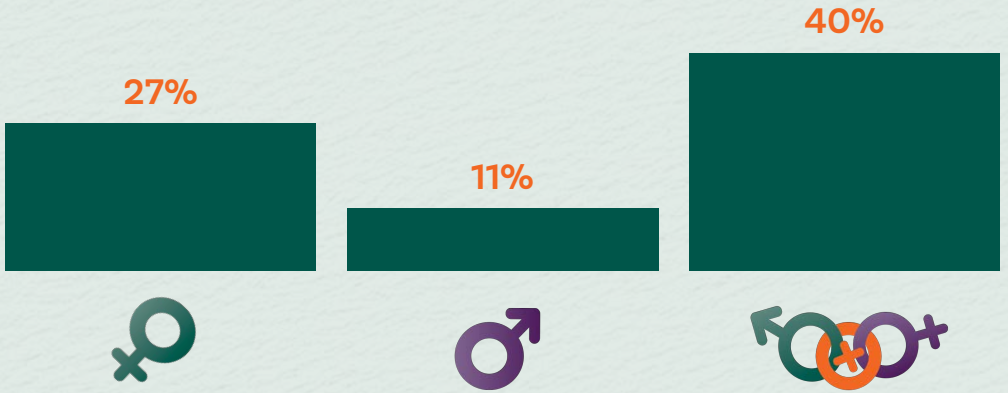
Of **9,029** students, the majority reported sometimes feeling safe **(53%/4,815). A fifth of students (20%, 1,848)** never felt safe at night.

Who never felt safe at night?

The following students were amongst the most likely to report never feeling safe in their community at night.

Arab students (48%) and White – Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller students (31%) were more likely to report never feeling safe at night compared to their peers.





Students who described their gender another way were much more likely to report never feeling safe at night (2 in 5), compared to female and male peers. Just over a quarter (27%) of female and 11% of male students felt this way.

Students with additional support needs (25%) were more likely to report never feeling safe than peers without additional support needs (17%). In particular, 70% of refugee students reported never feeling safe at night.

Feeling unsafe in the community - area

The table shows the percentage of students who reported never feeling safe at night in their community, alongside the number of crimes recorded by the corresponding police team between January 2025 and August 2025.

- **Alexandra police team** recorded the highest number of crimes in 2025 to date, while the **Bury Rural police team** recorded the lowest. Despite Alexandra's higher crime rate, students in that area were not the most likely to report feeling unsafe in their community. Students in the Gipping area were the most likely to report feeling unsafe at night (the fifth highest area for reports of crime).

Perceptions of safety may not align with crime reports for several reasons:

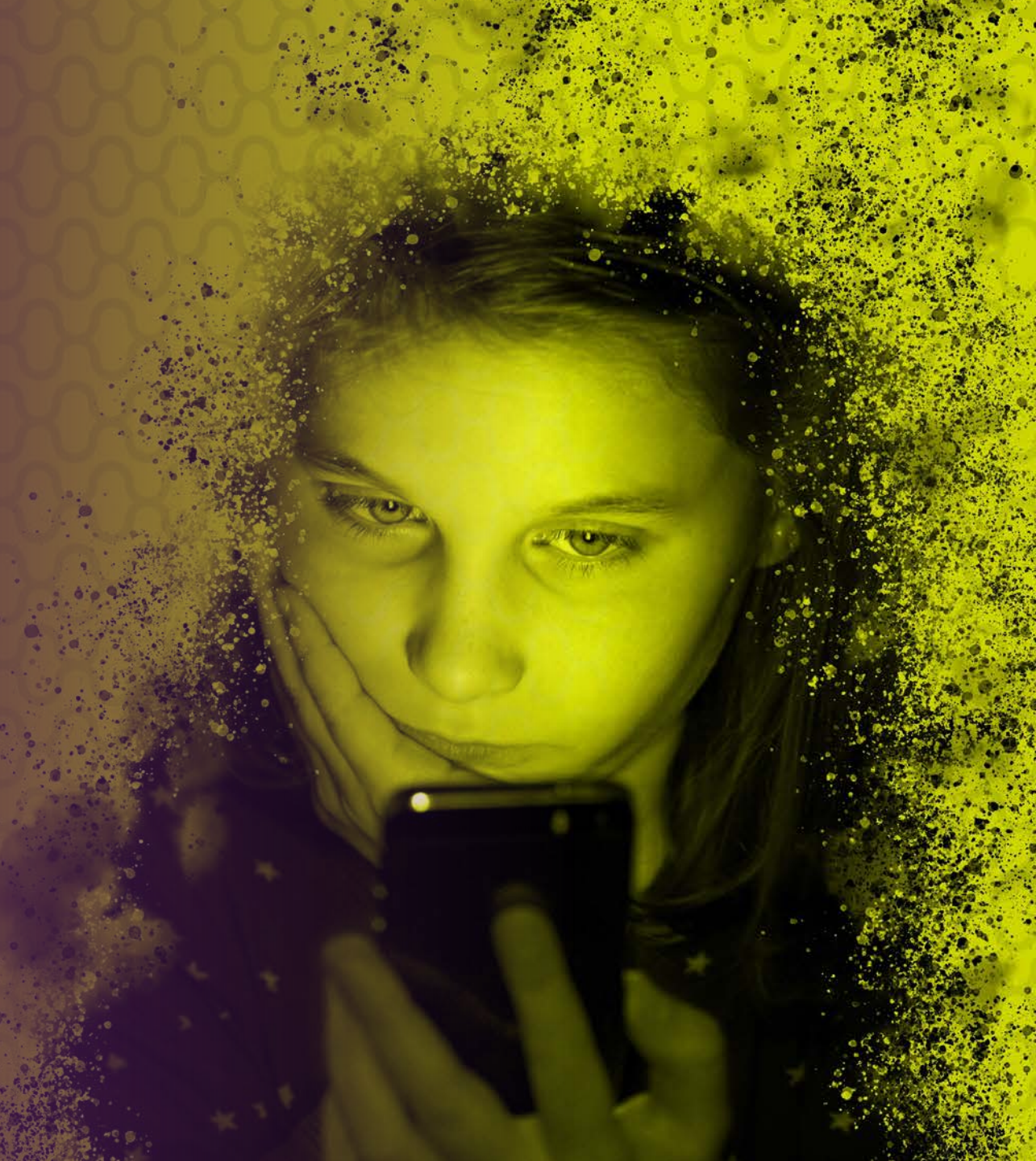
- **Perception vs. reality:** Fear of crime often reflects what people hear or believe rather than actual crime levels (Duffy et al., 2008).
- **Underreporting & invisible offences:** Many crimes go unreported, so police data may not reflect real community risk (McLeoad, 2025).
- **Environmental factors:** Poor lighting, quiet areas, and visible signs of disorder like graffiti and broken windows can increase feelings of danger, even when crime rates are low (Ruhl, 2025).
- **Demographics :** Age, gender, and prior experiences influence perceived safety. For example, female students in our sample frequently report higher levels of fear compared to male peers. Additionally, many young people travel to school and college from different areas, meaning the police team linked to their school may not cover their home community.

Police team	Number of crimes reported	% who 'Never' felt safe at night
Alexandra	1,849	22%
Bury St Edmunds (Town/North)	1,307	14%
Felixstowe	944	28%
Stoke Park & Sprites	899	21%
Gipping	832	35%
Haverhill Town (South & East)	788	28%
Claydon, Copdock & Peninsula	730	19%
Rushmere & St Johns	629	20%
Beccles & Worlingham	569	16%
Woodbridge & Wickham Market	555	16%
Brandon	549	24%
Whitehouse	525	25%
Mildenhall	524	21%
Haverhill Town (North & West)	507	30%
Kesgrave & Bixley	458	19%
Great Cornard	322	23%
Bury Rural	256	21%

31%

indicated that bullying caused them to feel unsafe in their community.

This figure increased to 41% of students with any number of additional support needs identified in the survey.

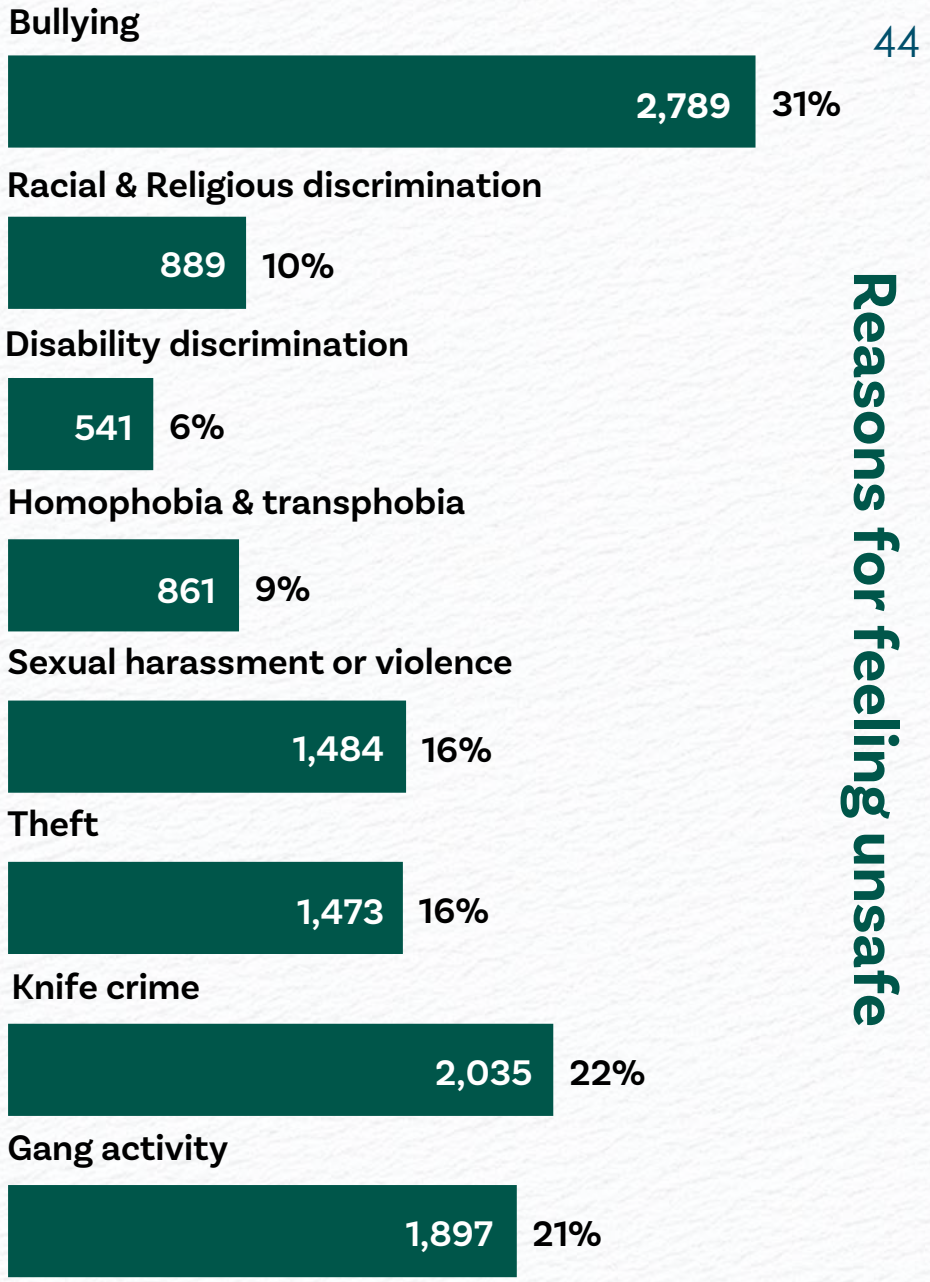


Reasons for feeling unsafe

We asked, ***"Have any of the following caused you to feel unsafe in the community?"***

9,091 students answered.

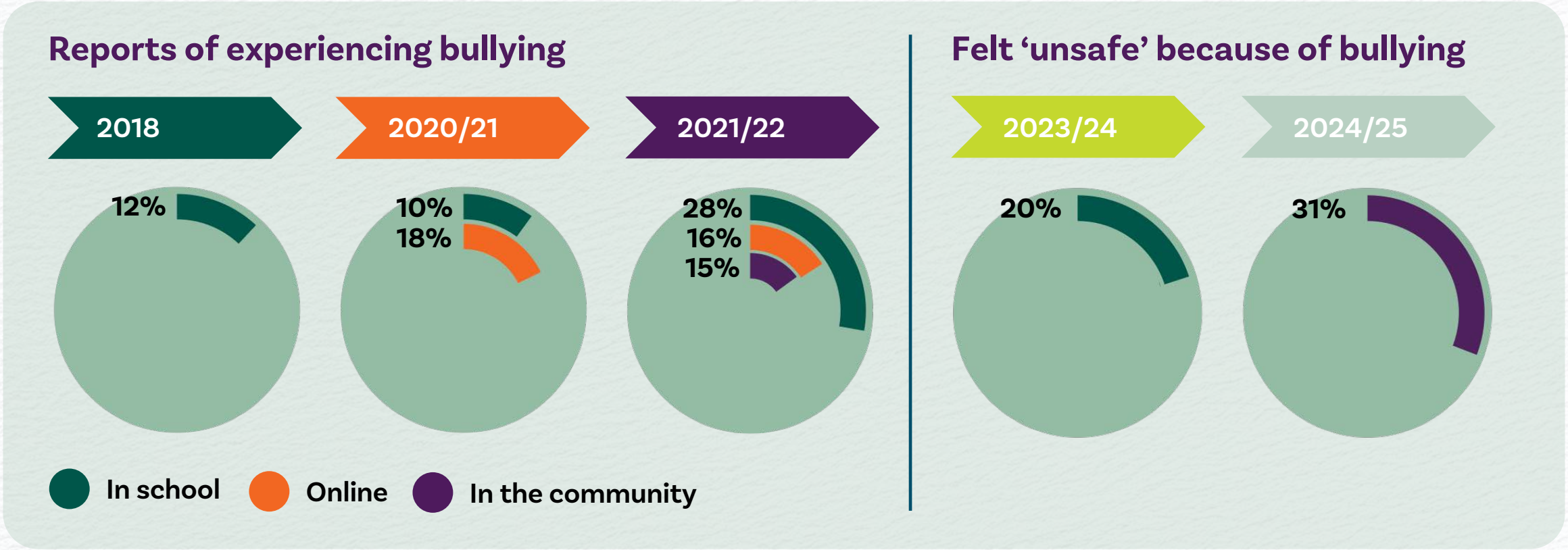
- Students identified **bullying (31%)** as the leading cause for feeling unsafe in their local community, followed by knife crime **(22%)** and gang activity **(21%)**.
- Both male and female students selected bullying as their primary concern. However, among students who described their gender another way**,** **70%** identified homophobia or transphobia as their primary concern.
- LGBT*Q+ students were more likely than heterosexual peers to report feeling unsafe for all listed reasons. For example, **29%** of LGBT*Q+ young people cited sexual harassment and violence as a concern, compared with **14%** of their peers.
- Similarly, students with additional support needs were more likely to report feeling unsafe across all categories. For instance, **41%** of these students identified bullying as a concern, compared to **24%** of students without additional support needs.



Feeling unsafe - bullying

Bullying remains a significant and growing issue, affecting young people online, in school, and within their communities, with many young people reporting a direct impact on their sense of safety.

Bullying has been explored across the MHoF programme since 2018 in a couple of different ways. They are shown in the graphics below.



It is clear bullying has been a consistent cause of concern for many young people taking part in our surveys (2,789 students in 2024/25).

Feeling unsafe: Year groups

The table below presents the reasons students feel unsafe in their community, broken down by year group.

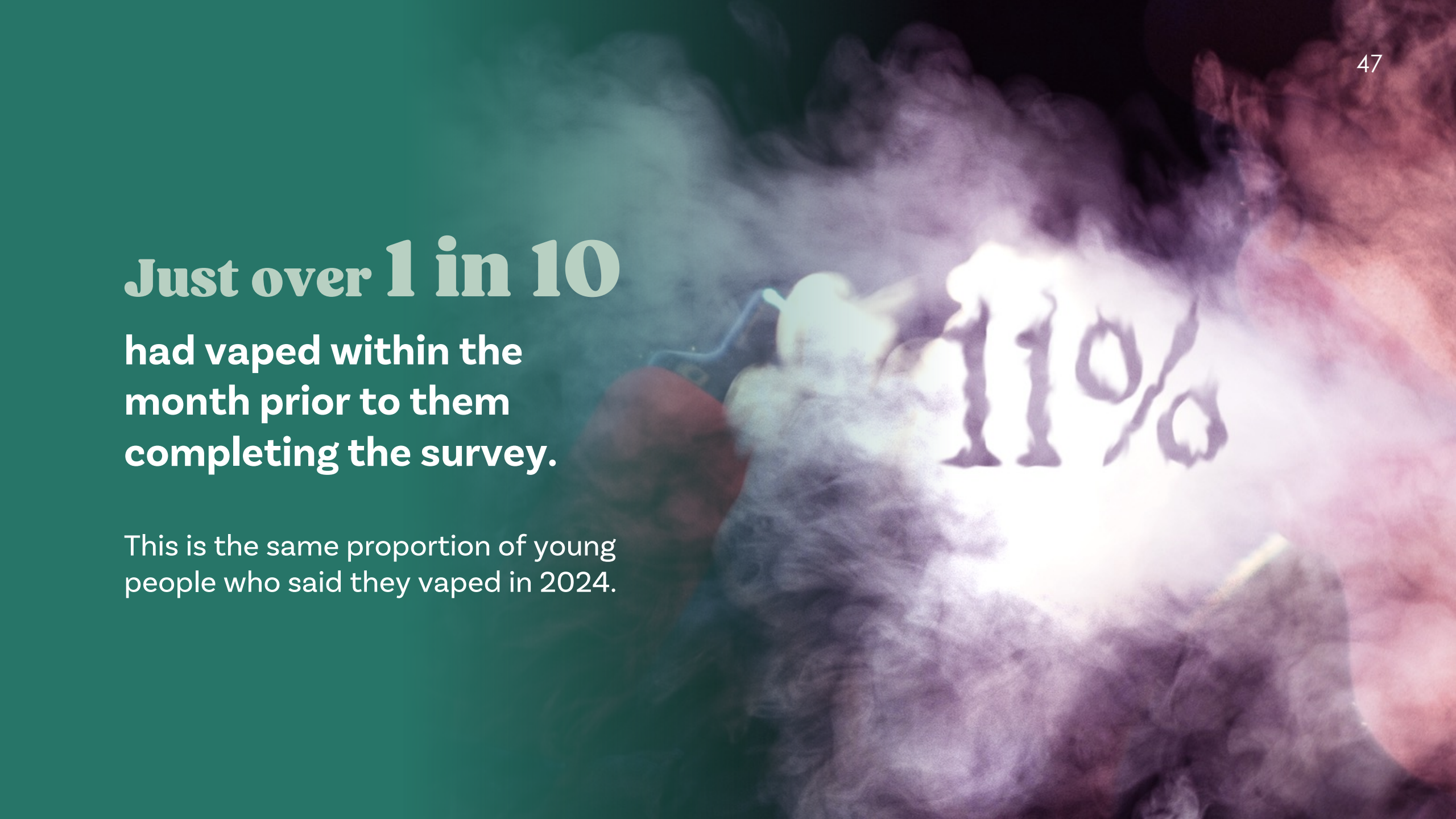
- Bullying was the main concern across all year groups. Year 13 students were slightly more worried about sexual violence and harassment, while Year 14/15 students were most concerned about theft.
- Older students (Year 11-13) reported higher concern about sexual violence and harassment than younger students. This aligns with data that suggests younger students worry more about these behaviours in school, while older students worry more about them outside of school/college.
- Knife crime and gang activity were also notable concerns, with around a quarter of students from Year 7 to Year 11 reporting being concerned.

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Year 14
Bullying	37%	35%	34%	32%	27%	23%	18%	15%
Racial or religious discrimination	11%	10%	12%	10%	14%	7%	5%	8%
Disability discrimination	7%	5%	8%	6%	8%	3%	3%	4%
Homophobia or transphobia	7%	9%	11%	10%	12%	9%	10%	11%
Sexual violence or harassment	13%	11%	17%	19%	24%	18%	19%	19%
Theft	18%	17%	17%	16%	19%	13%	13%	26%
Knife crime	25%	21%	24%	25%	26%	19%	16%	23%
Gang activity	22%	22%	24%	25%	23%	15%	14%	8%

Just over 1 in 10

had vaped within the month prior to them completing the survey.

This is the same proportion of young people who said they vaped in 2024.

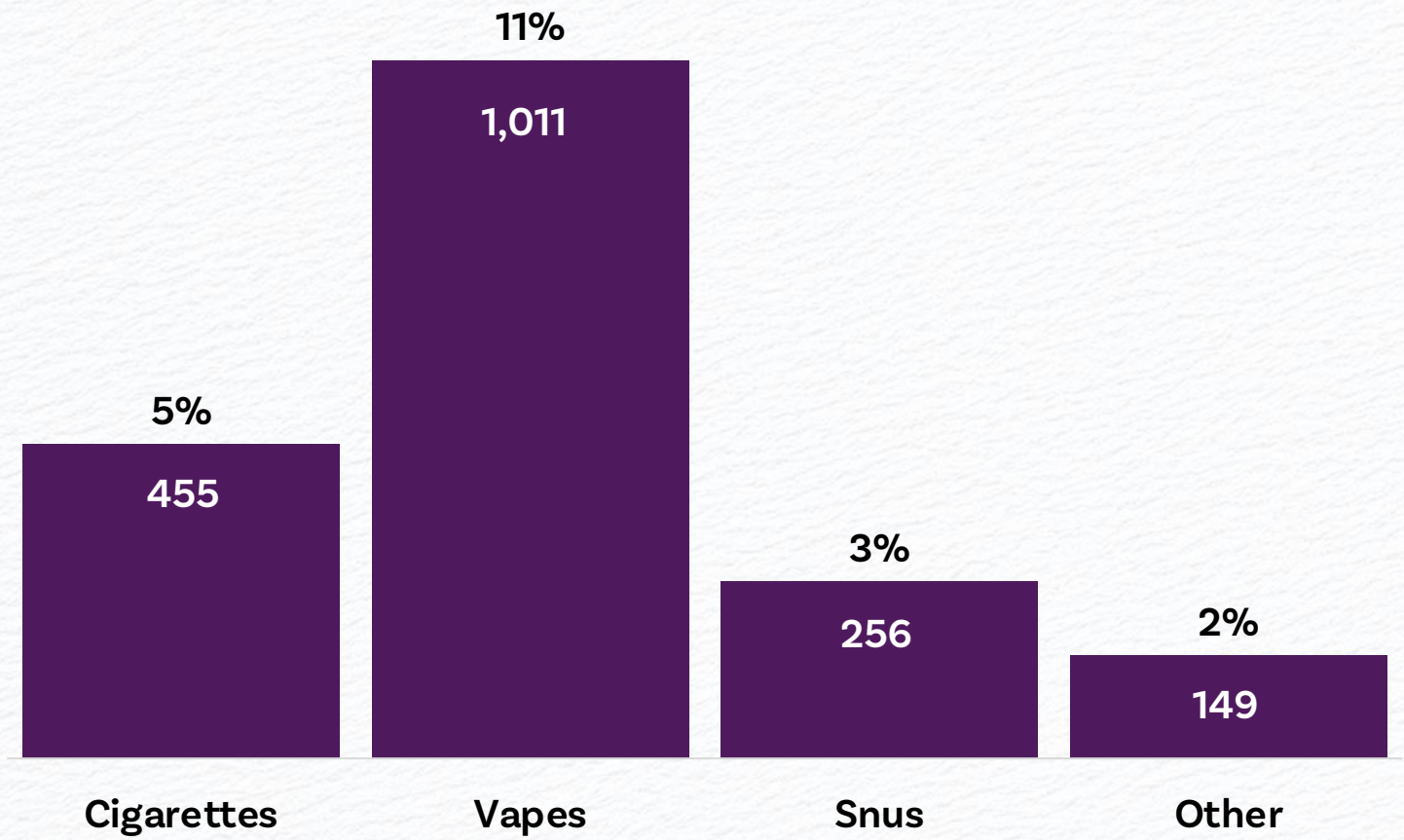


Using nicotine

Research suggests vaping is becoming a gateway to cigarette smoking among young people, with 20% of 11 to 17 year olds (1.1 million) having tried vaping (ASH, 2025; Mongilio, 2025). Nicotine use overall is also rising, with BBC (2025) reporting a nearly four-fold increase in nicotine pouch (snus) use among 13 to 24-year-olds in the UK since 2022.

We asked students, *"In the last month, have you used any of the following?"*

- Out of 8,921 students surveyed, 88% (7,873) said they had not used any nicotine products in the last month.
- Among those who did report nicotine use, the largest proportion indicated that they had vaped (11%), followed by those who had used cigarettes (5%).
- In addition, 3% reported using snus (nicotine pouches) and 2% reported using other nicotine products.



Who is using nicotine?

The following students were amongst the most likely to say they had used nicotine products in the last month.

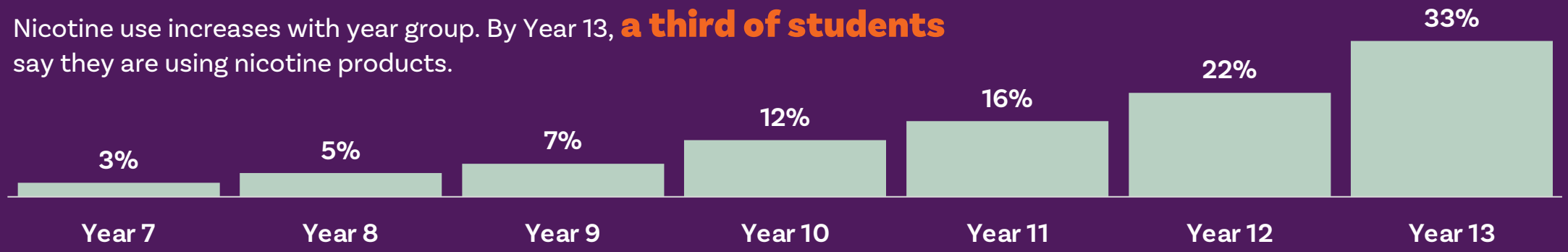
Students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were more likely to report nicotine use than peers (18% vs. 11%).

LGBT*Q+ students were more likely to report nicotine use (19%), compared to heterosexual students (11%).



Students that described their gender in another way were the most likely to report nicotine use (18%), followed by female students and then male students.

Nicotine use increases with year group. By Year 13, **a third of students** say they are using nicotine products.



Reasons for using nicotine

Students that reported nicotine use were asked a fixed answer question of which best describes their reason for using nicotine products in the last month.

Reason	%	Count
To fit in with other groups	14%	160
To control my emotions (e.g., stress, anxiety, anger)	49%	536
To feel more focused or energised	28%	314
To give it a try or out of curiosity	18%	196
Because of boredom or having nothing else to do	28%	304
Because it's a habit or addiction	40%	440
Peer pressure or influence from friends	10%	110
To relax or unwind	53%	587
None of the above	9%	103

- Out of **1,105** students who reported using nicotine in the last month, the most common reason given was to help them relax and unwind, with over half of these students selecting this option **(53%/587)**. This was closely followed by students using nicotine to manage their emotions such as stress, anxiety, and anger **(49%/536)**.
- A significant proportion of students also indicated that their use of nicotine was driven by dependence, **40% (440)** reporting they used nicotine simply out of habit or because they felt addicted.
- **Over a quarter** of students stated that nicotine helped them feel more focused or energised, and a similar proportion said they used it when they were bored or had nothing else to do.
- These patterns demonstrate the multiple functions nicotine appears to serve for young people from emotional regulation and stress relief to habit and coping with boredom, highlighting the importance of support that addresses both wellbeing and daily routines.

Just over half

of students felt nicotine had no negative impact on their lives.

This highlights the need for education of young people as to the health risks associated with using nicotine.



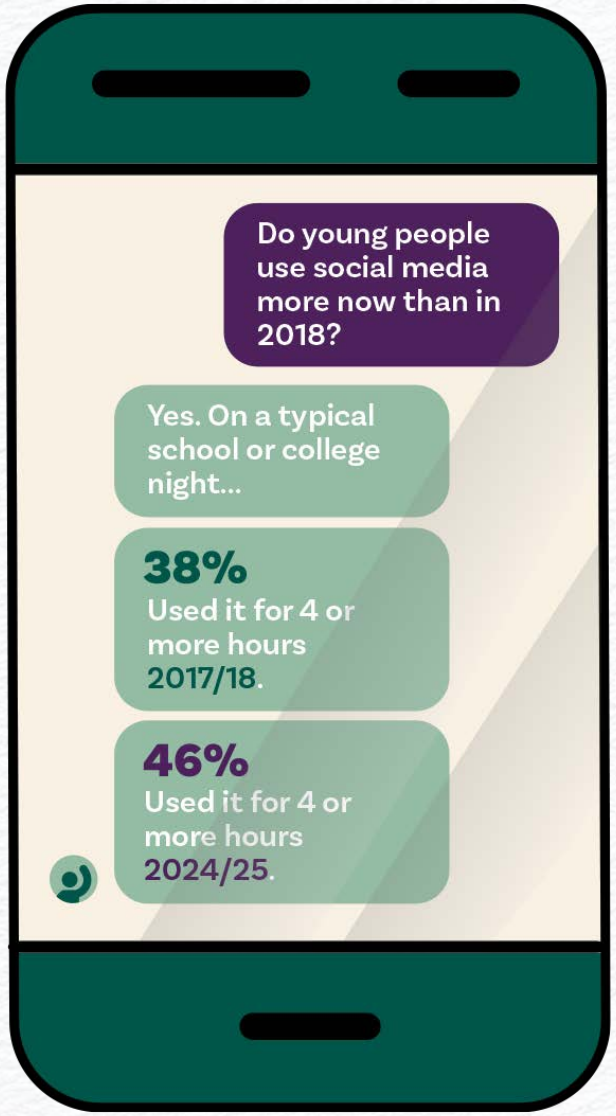
The impact of using nicotine

Nicotine use among young people poses serious risks, affecting brain developing, mental health, and long-term wellbeing (NHS, 2025). Despite this, many young people are not aware of the dangers of nicotine, with nearly one in three believing nicotine is no more harmful than a cup of coffee (Truth Initiative, 2022).

- Out of 1,105 students that reported nicotine use, just over half of students (51%/ 565) felt that using nicotine had no negative effect on their lives. This highlights the need for increased awareness and education around the potential harms of nicotine use.
- Among those who did report negative effects, the most common was physical health such as breathing difficulties and reduced energy levels (27%/ 296).
- This was followed by effects on their financial circumstances (17%/ 185) and dental health (15%/ 163).
- A total of 86 (8%) students felt their use of nicotine may be affecting their academic performance at school or college.

Impact of nicotine use	%	Count
Nicotine has no negative effect on me	51%	565
Physical health (e.g., breathing, energy levels)	27%	296
Financial situation	17%	185
Teeth, gums, or overall dental health	15%	163
Self-esteem or how you see yourself	13%	144
Mental health	13%	139
Relationships with friends and family	9%	103
Sleep	11%	118
Academic performance	8%	86

Using social media



According to WHO (2024) there has been a sharp rise in problematic social media use among young people. This raises concerns about the impact of digital technology on the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

We repeated the question from MHoF Phase 2 (2017/18): *"On a typical school or college day, how long do you spend using social media?"*

A total of 8,968 students answered.



0 to 2 hours (20%) | **2 – 4 hours (34%)** | **4 – 6 hours (27%)** | **6+ hours (19%)**

Over **4,000** students (46%/4,136) reported using social media for more than four hours, while 20% (1,793) used it for less than 2 hours.

Social media: wellbeing & other measures

Student average wellbeing

The chart on the right compares students' wellbeing scores with the amount of time they spend on social media each day. It shows a clear downward trend across all genders, with wellbeing decreasing as social media use increases.

Students who described their gender another way showed the greatest decline. Although their wellbeing score starts lower than other groups, it drops more sharply as time spent on social media increases.





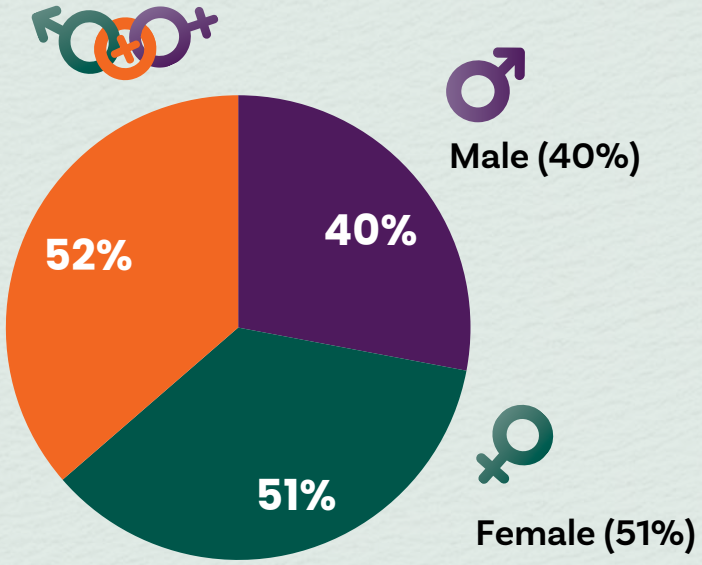
Student sleep

Students who reported getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep nearly every day were much less likely to spend more than four hours a day on social media compared to **students who never got the recommended amount of sleep (31%** vs **61%)**.

Social media: gender and age/year group

Over half of students who described their gender another way (52%/48) and female students (51%/2,298) reported spending more than four hours a day on social media, compared to 40% (1,548) of male students.

Described gender another way (52%)



More than half of students in Years 8, 9, 11, and 14/15 reported using social media more than four hours daily, with the highest proportion in Year 9 (52%). In 2024/25, more young people are using social media for this length of time with less differentiation between year groupings.



UK and US law should prevent young people under 13 from using global platforms. Yet 724 students in Year 7 said they were using social media for more than four hours on a typical school or college night. A further 827 students in Year 8 indicated this. Most students are not 13 until Year 9.

Social media: demographics

Over half of LGBT*Q+ students (53%/ 612) reported using social media for more than 4 hours a day, compared with 45% (3,251) of heterosexual/cisgender students.



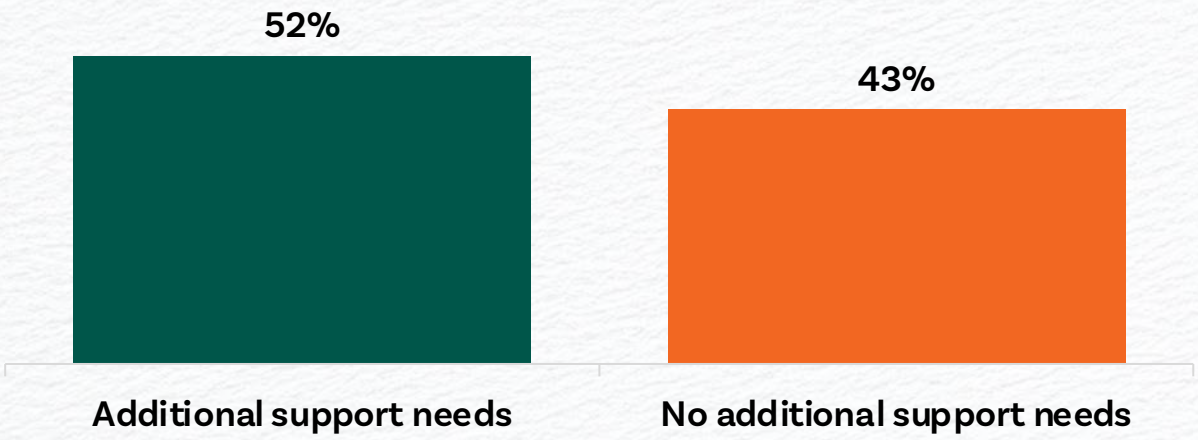
White – Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller students were the most likely to report using social media for more than 4 hours a day (82%/44).

	%	Count
White – Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	82%	44
Polish	58%	100
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	58%	132
Arab	54%	11
Portuguese	54%	52
Romanian	50%	39
White	44%	3,282
Asian/Asian British	41%	190
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	38%	234

Social media: additional support needs

The data shows the percentage of students spending more than **4 hours per day on social media** and if they reported additional support needs.

- **Over half (52%)** of students with an additional support need reported more than four hours of daily use, compared with **43%** of their peers.
- Refugee or asylum seekers students were the most likely group to report **4 + hours of daily use (65%)**.
- Other groups reporting higher levels of social media use included students with ADHD **(57%)**, those eligible for free school meals **(57%)**, and those with a sensory disability **(56%)**.



	%	Count
Diagnosed mental health disorder	53%	426
Been in care	54%	157
Autism	50%	351
ADHD	57%	446
Refugee or asylum seeker	65%	37
Physical disability	53%	197
Sensory disability	56%	218
Special educational need	51%	326
Free school meals	57%	684
Carer (over 18)	53%	52
Carer (under 18)	53%	400
None of the above	43%	2,324

Experience on social media

Social media can have both positive and negative impacts on the mental health of young people. For example, a 2019 review by the UK Parliament's Science and Technology Committee found that most teenagers reported that social media had strengthened their friendships.

	%	Count
Bullying online	16%	1,545
Has seen harmful content	17%	1,670
Can't stop using social media	24%	2,355
Received unwanted attention	16%	1,552
Lost sleep	34%	3,281
Has felt left out	20%	1,950
Has made new friends	26%	2,540
Found new hobbies	45%	4,387
Learnt something new	45%	4,388

We therefore asked young people about their experiences of social media.

- Out of **8,968** students, **62% (5,559)** reported at least one positive experience with social media, while **55% (4,937)** reported at least one negative experience.
- The most common positive experiences were learning something new **(45%/ 4,388)** and gaining new hobbies **(45%/ 4,387)**.
- The most common negative experiences were losing sleep due to social media use **(34%/3,281)** and feeling unable to stop using it **(24%/2,355)**.
- Although reported less frequently, thousands of students still indicated experiencing bullying, exposure to harmful content, unwanted attention, or feeling left out because of social media use.



2,316 (43%)

students indicated they had seen or heard at least one form of potential sexual harassment or violence in their school or college.

This compared to 35% in 2023/24 and 57% in 2022/23.

Sexual harassment & violence

End Violence Against Women (2022) highlights that there is a national crisis of sexual violence and harassment within schools and colleges. Such incidents can occur between children of any age and gender, both inside and outside of educational settings. The impact of child sexual violence and harassment can be devastating, often resulting in significant psychological and emotional trauma for victims (Safeguarding Network, 2025).

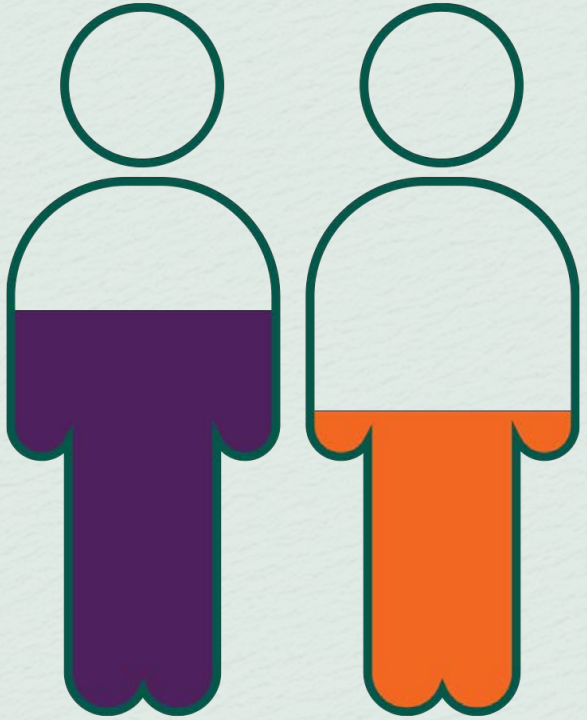
Our survey asked students in Year 9 and above whether they had heard or seen any of the listed behaviours at their school or college. A definition of sexual harassment was provided to ensure clarity.

A total of 5,367 students responded to the question about sexual harassment and violence in school or college.

- Of these, 43% (2,316) reported that they had heard or seen at least one form of sexual harassment or violence at their school or college.
- In contrast, 57% (3,052) had not witnessed such behaviours in their school setting.
- This represents an increase in the percentage of students witnessing sexual harassment and violence compared to 2023/2024 MHoF results (35% up to 43%).

43% (2,316) witnessed at least one form of sexual harassment.

57% (3,052) did not witness potential sexual harassment.



How we asked about sexual harassment

Our survey included a definition of sexual harassment: ***"Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual behaviour that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way."***

Within this context, young people responded to a series of statements about forms of harassment they may have seen in school or college, ranging from people 'making sexual jokes' toward other students, to 'sexual threats' and 'unwanted sexual behaviour'.

Our results have been similar to with the findings of Ofsted in 2021. It found incidents of sexual harassment are now so commonplace in schools that young people may see no point reporting them.

Our data raises awareness of this issue and encourage whole-system approaches to tackling sexual harassment locally.

Fiona Ellis OBE (Co-Founder and CEO of Survivors in Transition) said:

"We are so pleased MHoF has included questions around sexual harassment in Suffolk. From our service provision we have seen the numbers of young people needing support around sexual violence, especially peer on peer abuse and harassment increasing year on year at alarming rates.

"We also see large numbers of young people disengaging from the criminal justice processes, or just not reporting incidents of sexual violence. Sadly, for many young women in particular this is becoming a cultural norm as was reported in Ofsted's 2021 rapid review of sexual abuse in schools. This has now been widely reported on, recommendations made and discussed in the media – locally these responses need to be a call to action.

"In order to be able to respond effectively and provide the kind of support young people need, when they need it we need to open up the conversation and allow young people a safe and supportive platform to talk about what's happening – and this is a big step in the right direction. We hope that these stark findings will inform a different kind of conversation, and that as a system we begin to acknowledge the knock-on effect this abuse will have on these young people in years to come, and how we support them and challenge these behaviours in our schools and communities."

Types of harassment witnessed

The table shows the percentages of students who reported hearing or seeing different types of sexual harassment or violence at their school or college.

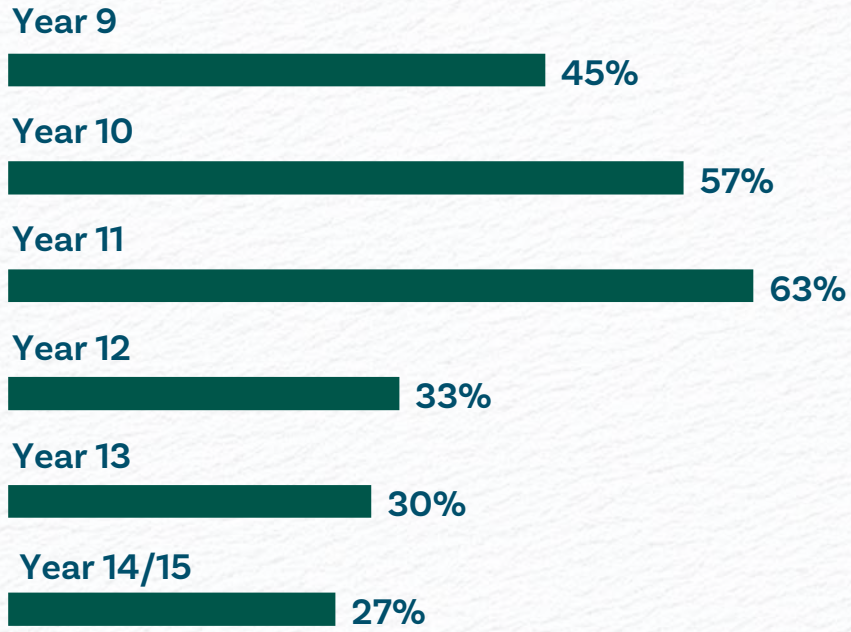
- Most students reported that they had not witnessed any form of sexual harassment or violence at their school or college **(57%/ 3,052).** However, the number of students who had witnessed harmful sexual behaviours still represents a substantial proportion of the student population.
- The most witnessed behaviour was sexual name calling directed towards another student **(28%/ 1,552)**. This was closely followed by sexual comments about another student's appearance **(27%/ 1,446)**.
- A quarter of young people reported witnessing the sharing of sexual images or videos of another student **(25%/ 1,338)**. Although less common, **almost 1,000** students reported witnessing unwanted sexual touching **(18%/ 945)**, highlighting the seriousness of such incidents even when reported by a smaller proportion of students.
- These findings show sexual harassment and violence is a significant issue that occurs in both physical and digital spaces.

	%	Count
Sexual name calling towards another student	28%	1,522
Sending unwanted messages of a sexual nature	22%	1,184
Sharing images or videos of other students of a sexual nature	25%	1,338
Making sexual comments about other students' appearance	27%	1,446
Making sexual threats	13%	707
Unwanted sexual touching	18%	945
Other unwanted sexual behaviour	13%	703
None of the above	57%	3,052

Who witnessed sexual harassment?

Consistent with findings in 2023/24, students in Year 9 to 11 were more likely to report sexual harassment and violence within their school, compared to older students in Years 12, 13, and 14/15.

- While the exact reasons for this are unclear, several factors may contribute. Older students may become more desensitised to such behaviours over time, spend less time in group settings due to the structure of post-16 education, and are more likely to encounter these issues outside of school as they gain greater independence. Data from the 'Feeling Safe' section supports this, indicating that older students were more concerned about these behaviours outside of educational settings.
- Students who identified their gender in another way (67%) were most likely to report witnessing sexual harassment, followed by female students (51%), and then male students (32%).
- LGBT*Q+ students were also more likely to report witnessing these behaviours, compared to their heterosexual/cisgender peers (54% vs 41%).
- Students with additional support needs were more likely to report witnessing sexual harassment than those without (49% vs 39%). More than half of students with SEND (54%/585) and nearly three-quarters of refugee or asylum-seeking students (73%/19) reported witnessing such behaviours.





Students who reported witnessing sexual harassment at school or college were slightly more likely to spend over 4 hours a day on social media than those who had not **(51% vs. 45%).**

Sexual harassment and year groups

	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Year 14
Sexual name-calling towards another student	29%	40%	44%	20%	18%	20%
Sending unwanted messages of a sexual nature	18%	32%	39%	17%	15%	18%
Sharing images or videos of other students of a sexual nature	24%	38%	42%	16%	15%	16%
Making sexual comments about other students' appearances	24%	36%	44%	22%	20%	22%
Making sexual threats	13%	21%	25%	8%	6%	8%
Unwanted sexual touching	19%	27%	30%	10%	9%	14%
Other unwanted sexual behaviour	14%	19%	22%	9%	6%	12%

The table shows the percentage of students in each year group (Year 9 to Year 14) who reported witnessing different forms of sexual harassment or violence.

- Across all harmful sexual behaviours listed, the highest percentages are seen in Year 10 and Year 11.
- Students in these year groups were also considerably more likely to report witnessing more serious behaviours, such as unwanted sexual touching, compared to students in older year groups.
- From Year 12 onwards, reports decline across all behaviours listed.



2 in 5 (42%)

Year 11 students had seen or heard the sharing of images or videos of other students of a sexual nature.

This highlights the critical need to educate young people about the risks associated with this behaviour, including matters of UK law.

Sexual harassment and gender

	Female	Male	Described gender another way
Sexual name-calling towards another student	35%	19%	51%
Sending unwanted messages of a sexual nature	27%	14%	38%
Sharing images or videos of other students of a sexual nature	31%	16%	37%
Making sexual comments about other students' appearances	33%	18%	48%
Making sexual threats	14%	10%	41%
Unwanted sexual touching	19%	14%	38%
Other unwanted sexual behaviour	15%	10%	30%

The table shows the percentage of students who reported witnessing different forms of potential sexual harassment or violence and their gender.

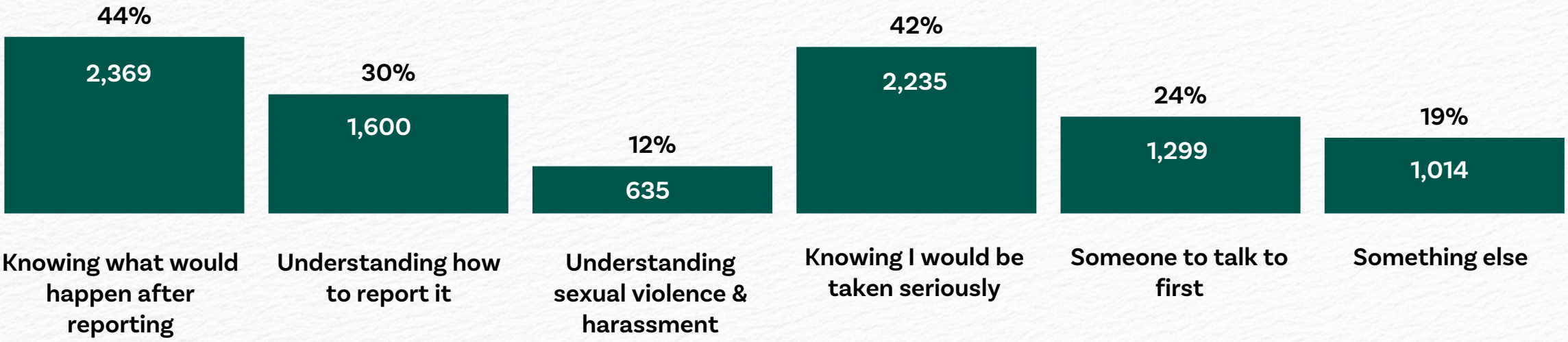
- Students who described their gender another way consistently reported the highest levels of exposure to every behaviour listed.
- Students who described their gender another way were also more likely to report witnessing more serious forms of harmful sexual behaviours compared to peers, including making sexual threats and unwanted sexual touching.
- Across various behaviours listed, female students reported roughly double the levels of male students.

Reporting harmful behaviours

There are many reasons why students may choose not to report experiences of sexual harassment or violence. To help schools and colleges understand how they can encourage young people to speak up if it happens to them, we asked students what would make them feel more confident about reporting.

- 44% (2,369) of students who said that knowing what would happen after reporting incidents of sexual violence and harassment would encourage them to come forward.
- This was closely followed by 42% (2,235) of students who said that knowing they would be taken seriously would make them more likely to report incidents.

These findings reflect themes also identified by Ofsted (2021), which highlighted that young people often feel there is little point in reporting lower-level incidents because they are so common, together with concerns they will not be believed or taken seriously.

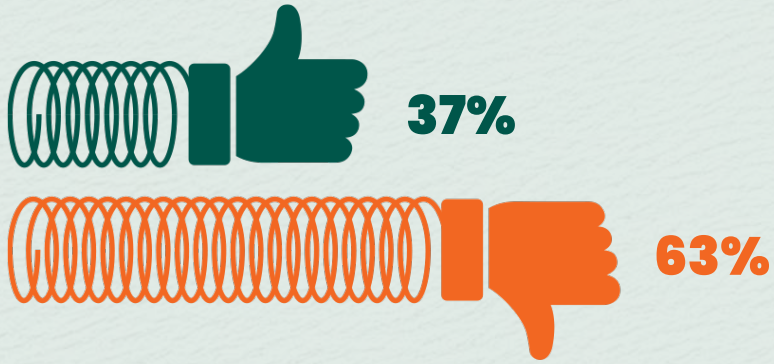


Healthy relationships and consent

The survey explored the extent to which students wanted to learn more about healthy relationships and consent.

- Most students did not want to learn more about healthy relationships and consent, although **37%** were interested in learning about this topic.
- Students who had witnessed sexual harassment and violence were more likely to want further learning than those who had not **(46% vs 31%)**, suggesting an awareness may lead to greater recognition of the need for education.
- Male students were the least likely to report wanting to learn more about this topic **(39%)**, followed by female students **(42%)**. In contrast, three-quarters of students who described their gender in another way wanted to learn more.
- Students in Year 9 to 11 were the most likely to express interest in learning about this topic.

The reasons behind the overall low level of interest in learning about this topic would need further exploration (though it is likely to be a combination of many factors). However, it is clear there is a need to make relationship and consent education feel more relevant and engaging for all students.



Most (88%)

students felt they had control over shaping their future to some extent.

This included options of ‘complete’ control, ‘a lot’ of control, or ‘some’ control.



Feeling in control

Feeling in control helps us feel safe and secure. Autonomy, which means being able to make your own decisions without interference from others, is connected to better mental health and greater motivation (The Positive Psychology People, 2023).

- We asked students ***'how much control they felt they had over shaping their futures'***. A total of 8,560 students responded to this question.
- As shown in the graph, the largest proportion of students felt they had a lot of control over their futures (41%). This was followed by 29% of students who reported feeling they had some control.
- A smaller group felt they had complete control over shaping their future (18%), while 11% felt they had little or no control at all.

These results suggest that while most students feel at least some influence over their future, there is still a notable portion that feels uncertain or powerless about their ability to control and shape their future.



- I have complete control over shaping my future **(18%/1,582)**
- I have a lot of control over shaping my future **(41%/3,507)**
- I have some control over shaping my future **(29%/2,520)**
- I have a little control over shaping my future **(7%/623)**
- I have no control over shaping my future **(4%/328)**

Who felt the least in control?

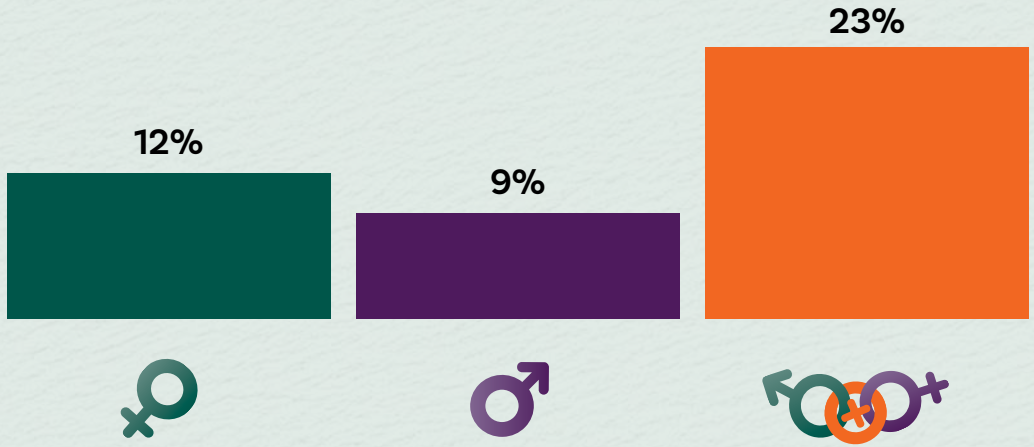
The following students were amongst the most likely to say they had little or no control over their future.

15%
Vs 8%

Students with additional support needs were almost twice as likely to feel they had little to no control in shaping their futures compared to **peers without support needs**.



LGBT*Q+ students were slightly more likely to report having little or no control compared to heterosexual/ cisgender peers.



Students who described their gender in another way were the most likely to report having little or no control over their future (23%), followed by female students and then male students.

17%
Vs 10%

Students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were more likely to report having little to no control than peers **without SEND.**

Relationships in the data

We cannot definitively attribute any variations in the data to feelings of control. However, it is acknowledged that there are differences in the wellbeing of students who feel complete/a lot of control and those with little/no control over their future.

Students who felt they had complete control, or a lot of control, over their future were:

Less likely to indicate levels of anxiety

Students who felt this way had an average anxiety score (within the Personal Wellbeing Scale) of **three**, categorised as 'low'. This compared to those who felt little or no control over shaping their future (**5/10**, categorised as medium anxiety).

More likely to report high wellbeing

The average wellbeing score for students who felt this way was **22.7**. This compared to an average score of **17.3** for those who felt they had little or no control over shaping their future.

More likely to have a higher happiness score

The average happiness score for students who felt this way was **seven**. This compared to an average score of **four** for those who felt they had little or no control over shaping their future.

More likely to have higher life satisfaction

The average life satisfaction score for students who felt this way was **seven**. This compared to an average score of **four** for those who felt they had little or no control over shaping their future.

Students who felt more control over their future had higher average wellbeing.



Worries about the future

In 2022, the Kings Trust reported nearly half of young people in the UK felt anxious about their future on a daily basis, with particular concerns about the cost of living, housing prices, and job prospects.

We asked students in Year 9 and above if they were concerned about any of options listed in our table. A total of 5,337 students responded.

- The largest proportion of students (61%) reported being concerned about finding a suitable or stable job.
- Other major concerns included gaining the skills or qualifications needed for the career they wanted, meeting academic or performance expectations in higher education or the workplace, and being able to afford housing or stable accommodation.
- A smaller group, 14% (768) reported that they were not worried about their future.

	%	Count
Finding a suitable job or stable job	61%	3,279
Gaining skills needed or qualifications for the career I want	49%	2,606
Meeting academic or performance expectations in higher education or the workplace	48%	2,568
Adjusting to new social environments in university or work	37%	1,952
Managing financial pressures or worries over debt	42%	2,237
Being able to afford housing or stable accommodation	48%	2,567
I am not worried about my future	14%	768

Preparing for the future – schools & colleges

We wanted to understand whether students in Year 9 and above felt their school was preparing them for their future, and what could help them feel more prepared.

- Overall, 60% of students felt their school was somewhat preparing them, 29% felt their school was preparing them very well, and 11% felt their school was not preparing them at all.
- The most common support students said would help them feel more prepared was advice on managing money, followed by training in life skills. See the table for more detail.

	%	Count
Information about colleges, university & careers	42%	2,250
Better access to internships and work experience	42%	2,249
Training in life skills	48%	2,576
Advice on managing money	51%	2,741
Access to mental health support	23%	1,209
Regular one to ones	19%	1,014
Support to build confidence	29%	1,568

Transitioning year groups

Times of change and transition can be challenging for young people. Kooth (2025) reported that many young people they support experience periods of anxiety and stress when preparing to move from primary to secondary or from school to college.

We asked Year 7 and 8 students about their confidence in moving to the next year group. Around 3,200 students responded.

- Most students felt neutral (45%/ 1,435).
- 31% (980) felt very confident or confident, and 25% (798) felt somewhat or very worried about transitioning to the next year group.
- When asked what would help improve their confidence, the largest proportion said receiving more information about new subjects and changes to existing subjects would help them feel more confident (31%). This was closely followed by advice on future career pathways and how GCSE choices might affect them (30%).
- Several hundred students wanted mentoring from older students (9%), help in managing workload (14%), and having regular one to one sessions (14%).

What would help?	%	Count
Assemblies or talks to explain what to expect in the next year group	22%	707
Information about new subjects or how existing subjects will change	31%	989
Support or opportunities to make new friends	17%	551
Advice on future career paths and how GCSE choices might affect them	30%	970
Support with manage my workload	14%	449
Opportunities to talk to or be mentored by older students	9%	304
Access to mental health support or wellbeing support	16%	516
Regular one to ones with mentors or teachers	14%	465
Support to build confidence and manage worries about the transition	18%	592

NHS careers

Despite the pressures facing our health services, BBC Bitesize has published results from a survey of 4,000 young people, indicting the NHS is a top choice for careers amongst a list of other major employers. We wanted to understand if young people in Suffolk are currently interested in a career in the NHS.

Out of 5,210 students in Year 9 and above, just over a quarter (26%/ 1,359) wanted to pursue a career in the NHS, meaning 3,851 students did not.

Interest varied across different groups:

- Male students (14%) were the least likely to report interest, followed by students who described their gender in another way (29%), and then female students (36%).
- LGBT*Q+ students (31%) were slightly more likely to consider an NHS career than heterosexual/cisgender students (25%).
- Students with additional support needs were slightly more likely to consider an NHS career (29%) compared to those without such needs (24%).



26% (1,359)

of students wanted to pursue a career in the NHS. Interest was highest amongst students with an ethnicity other than 'White'. However, it is important to consider these findings in the context of the numbers of students taking part (see table below).

Student ethnicity	%	Count
Arab	50%	7
Asian/Asian British	42%	104
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	40%	51
Romanian	30%	11
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	29%	79
Portuguese	26%	11
White – Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	26%	6
Polish	25%	28
White	24%	1,051

Health & social care careers

Out of 5,212 students, just over a quarter indicated they wanted to pursue a career in health and social care (26%/ 1,373). This means that 3,839 young people did not express an interest in pursuing a career in either sector.

Interest varied across different groups but were similar responses to those for NHS careers.

- Female students (39%) were the most likely to express interest in health and social care careers, followed by those who described their gender another way (32%) and then male students (11%). Fewer male students have considered a career in health and social care than the NHS.
- LGBT*Q+ (34%) were more likely to consider a career in health and social care than heterosexual/cisgender peers (25%). Slightly more LGBT*Q+ young people have considered a career in health and social care over the NHS.
- Students with additional support needs were more likely to consider a career in health and social care than peers without such needs (31% vs 23%).

	%	Count
White – Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	43%	10
Asian/Asian British	32%	78
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	30%	38
Polish	29%	33
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	27%	75
Romanian	25%	9
White	26%	1,110
Portuguese	21%	9
Arab	21%	3

1,373 (26%)

students wanted to pursue a career in health and social care. Interest was generally highest amongst students with an ethnicity other than 'White'.

Of **8,268** students, almost half **(46%/ 3,785)** strongly agreed or agreed that climate change would significantly impact their future.

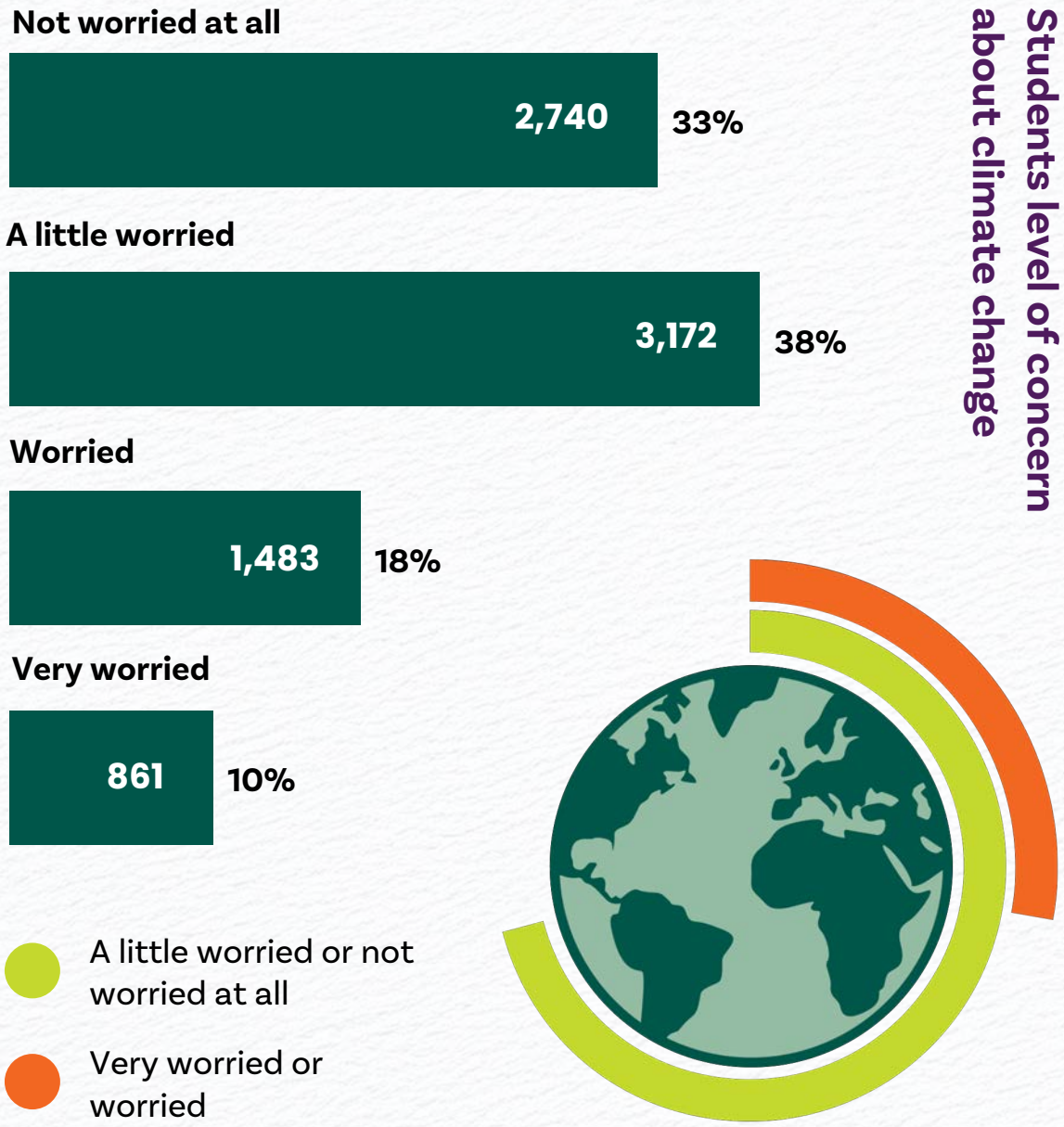
Just **15% (1,236)** strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement.



Climate change

Children and young people are experiencing an epidemic of climate anxiety and concern over the health of the planet is growing. According to YouGov (2023), one in three young people in Britain reported feeling scared (33%) about climate change and a further 28% felt overwhelmed.

- Despite almost half of students agreeing that climate change will have a significant impact on their lives, the largest proportion reported being only **a little worried about climate change** (38%/3,172). A third said they were **not worried at all** (33%/2,740), while just over a quarter felt **worried or very worried** (28%/2,344).
- Students with additional support needs were the most likely to be **very worried** about climate change, particularly refugees or asylum seekers (39%) and those with a diagnosed mental health disorder (19%). See the next page for more detail on which groups were most concerned.
- Level of concern increased with age, ranging from 9% who were very concerned in Year 7 to 20% who were very concerned in Year 14/15.



Who is worried about climate change?

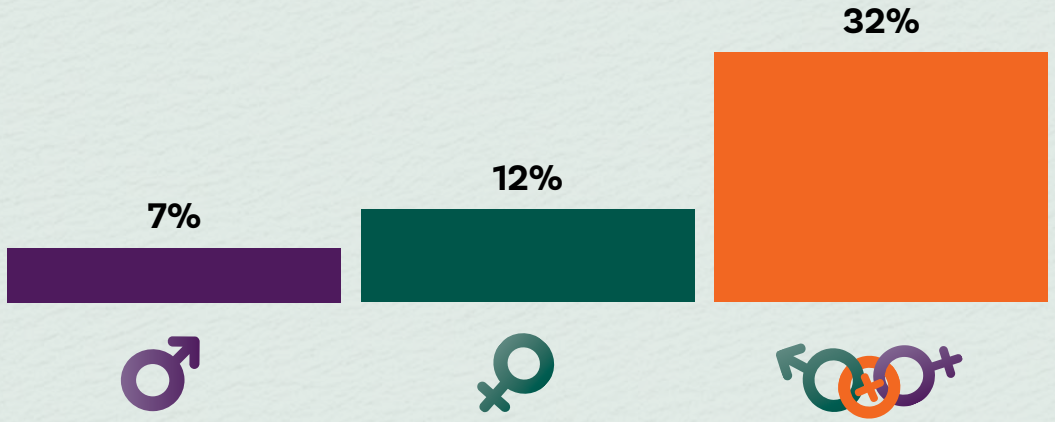
The following students were amongst the most likely to say they were very worried about climate change.

13%

Students with SEND (13%/227) were slightly more likely to report being very worried than peers **(10%/634)**.



LGBT*Q+ students were more than twice as likely to report being very worried compared to heterosexual/ cisgender students.



Students who described their gender another way were the most likely to report being very worried about climate change, followed by female students and male students.

White – Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller students were most likely to report being **very worried** about climate change **(19%)**. Students identified as White **(10%)**, and Romanian **(10%)** were the least likely to report being very worried.

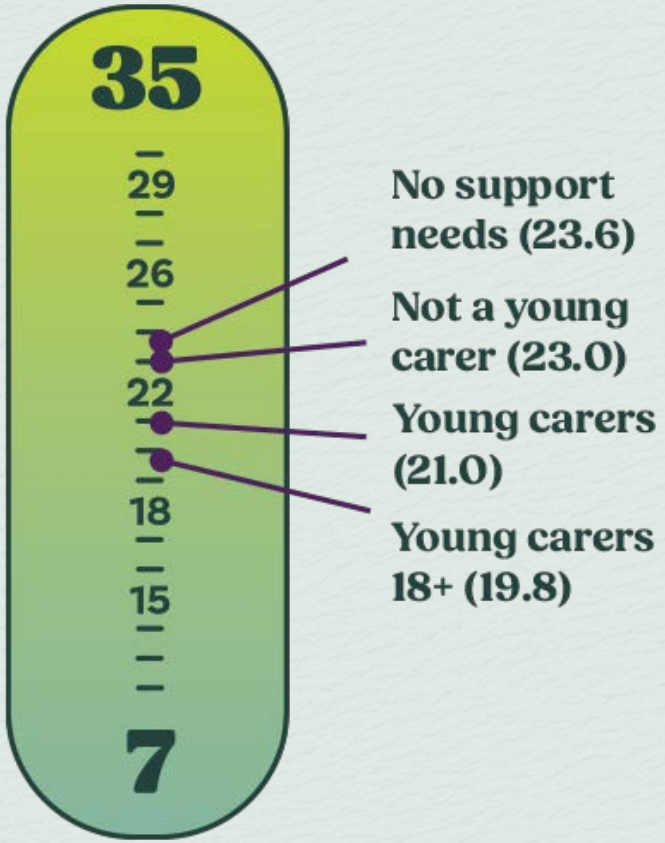


Exploring student groups

Young carers

We asked: "Are you under 18 and responsible for helping to care for a relative with a disability, illness, mental health condition, or drug and alcohol problem?"

- Out of 9,717 students, 9% (827) identified as young carers. This is self-reported, so it may capture hidden young carers who are not officially recorded.
- By contrast, the 2023/24 School Census recorded 2,223 students in Suffolk as young carers, with Suffolk showing a higher percentage than the England average across primary, secondary, and special schools.
- Taken together, these findings suggest there could be far more young carers than officially recognised in the census, highlighting that many remain unrecorded in official data.



Young carers had an average wellbeing score of 21.0 whilst young people that are not carers had an average of 23.0.

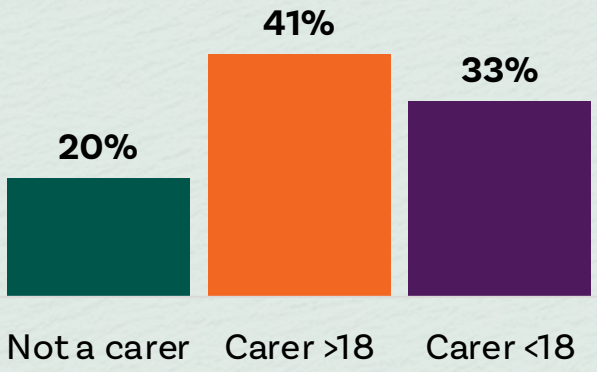
Students that identified as a carer over the age of 18 (109) had an even lower average wellbeing score of 19.8. This places the average wellbeing of this group of students just above the classification of 'low wellbeing', which applies to students with an average score of between seven and 19.3.

The average wellbeing of young carers may be categorised as 'medium wellbeing'. However, the average score of 21.0 is toward the lower end of this range (20.0 – 27.0).

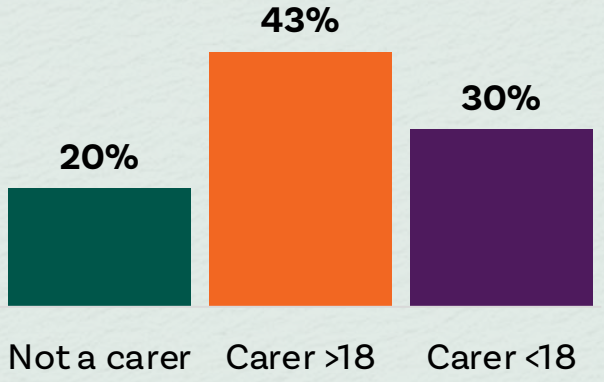
Young carers were:

- **More likely to get less sleep:** 64% of young carers and 63% of carers got 8 to 10 hours of sleep only on some days or not at all, compared with 53% of non-carers.
- **More likely to spend time on social media:** 53% of young carers and 53% of carers said they spend four hours plus on social media each day, compared to 45% of non carers.
- **More likely to feel they have less control over shaping their future:** 61% of non-carers felt they had complete or a lot of control over shaping their future, compared to 50% of young carers and 40% of carers.
- **More likely to indicate overall poorer wellbeing:** Carers reported lower life satisfaction, a lower sense that things they do are worthwhile, lower happiness, and higher anxiety than their peers.

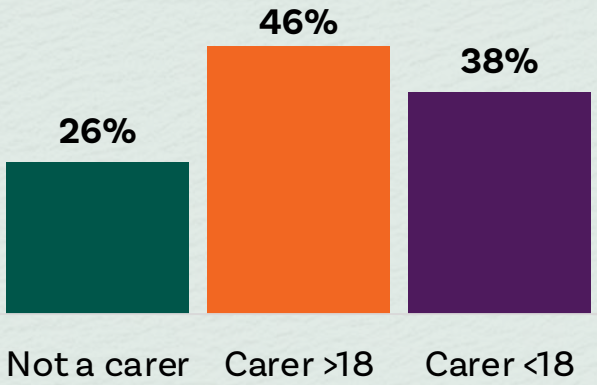
Low life satisfaction



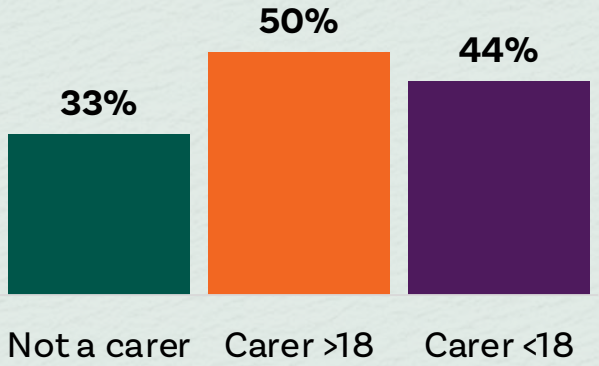
Low sense of worthiness in things done in life



Low happiness



High anxiety



Trans students

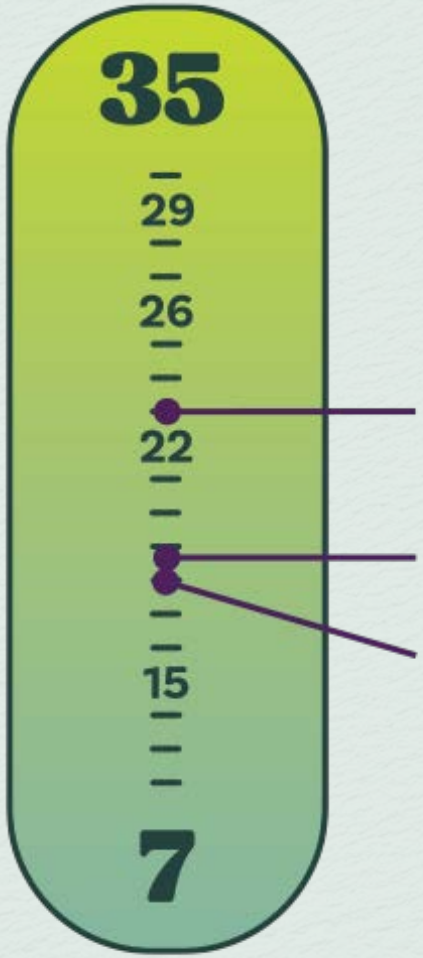
Out of 9,717 students, 101 described their gender in another way other than male or female. Within this group, 15% (15) identified as trans.

They were:

- **More likely to get less sleep:** Trans young people were slightly more likely to report poor sleep (never/some days getting 8 or more hours of sleep), compared with students who described their gender another way (79% vs 74%). Both student groups were much more likely to indicate getting poorer sleep than male and female students (54%).

- **More likely to spend time on social media:** Most trans students (71%) reported spending more than four hours per day on social media. This is a higher proportion than the 49% of students who described their gender another way and 46% of students identifying as male or female.

The small sample size of this group means caution is needed when considering the extent to which the findings may be generalised to a wider population of students in this group.



Trans students had a lower average wellbeing score than other students who described their gender another way, and significantly lower than their male and female peers.

Male or female (23.0)

Described gender another way (18.7)

Trans (18.1)

23%

of trans students felt unsafe in their community during the day.

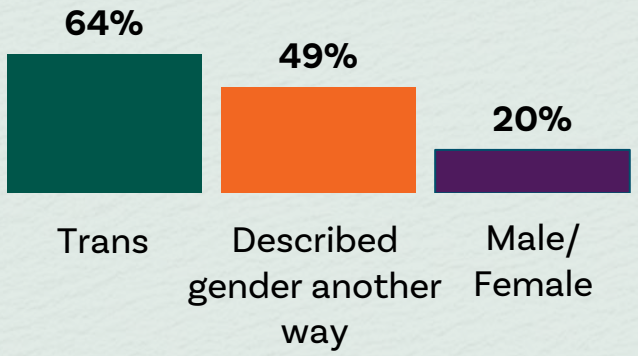
This compared to just 12% of students who described their gender another way, and 2% of male and female students.



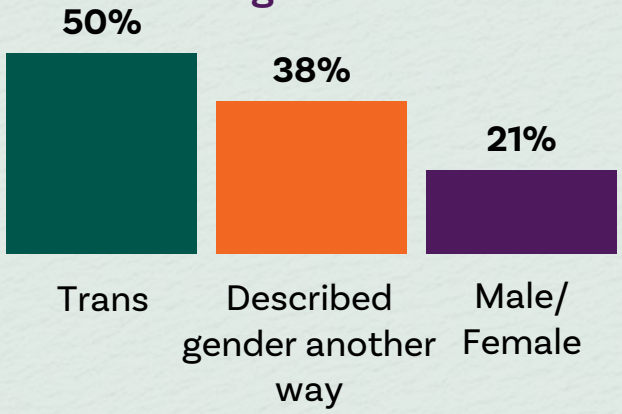
Trans students were:

- **More likely to report lower life satisfaction:** Trans students reported lower life satisfaction than students who described their gender in another way, as well as male and female peers.
- **More likely to have a lower sense that things they do are worthwhile:** Trans students also reported a lower sense that things they do in life are worthwhile compared to all other groups.
- **More likely to report lower levels of happiness:** Students who described their gender another way were slightly more likely to report low happiness than trans students. Both groups reported much lower levels of happiness than male and female peers.
- **More likely to have higher anxiety:** Students who described their gender in another way were slightly more likely to report high anxiety than trans students. Both groups reported considerably higher anxiety levels than male and female peers.

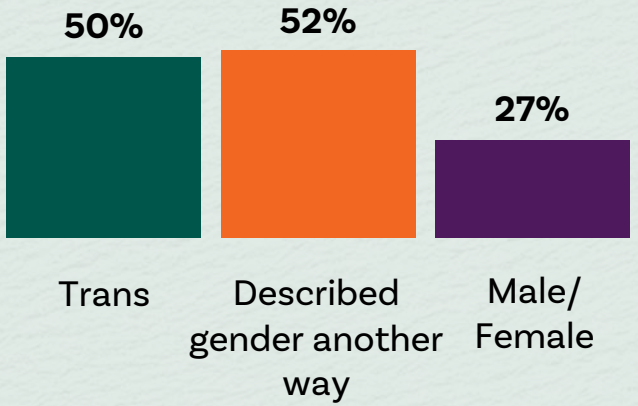
Low life satisfaction



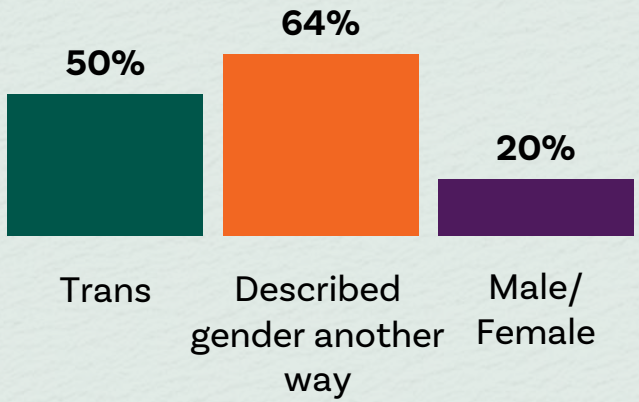
Low sense of worthiness in things done in life



Low happiness



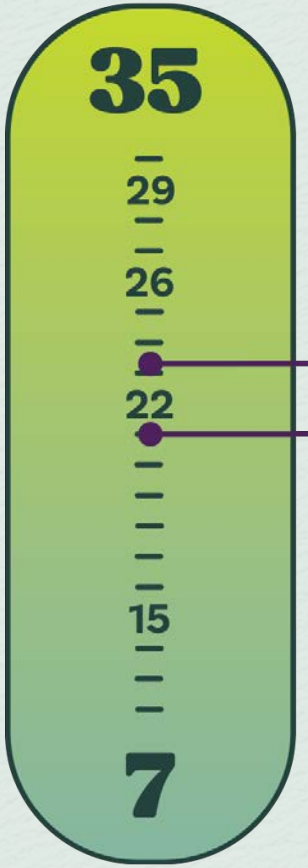
High anxiety



Special educational needs and disabilities

Out of 9,717 students, 2,053 were identified as having SEND. They were:

- **More likely to get less sleep:** Almost a quarter (24%) of students with SEND reported never getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night, compared to 15% of their peers.
- **More likely to feel unsafe:** students with SEND were three times more likely to report never feeling safe during the day than peers (6% vs 3%). They were also more likely to say they never feel safe at night (25% vs 19%).
- **More likely to spend time on social media:** Over half of students with SEND reported spending more than 4 hours per day on social media, compared with 45% of their peers. students with SEND were also more likely to report negative experiences on social media (64% vs 53%).
- **Feel less in control of shaping their future:** Students with SEND were more likely to feel they had little to no control over shaping their future (17% vs 10%).

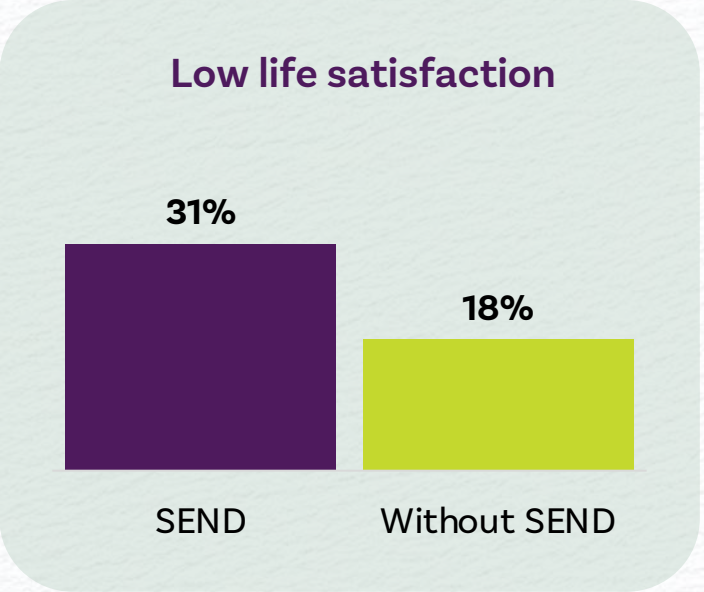


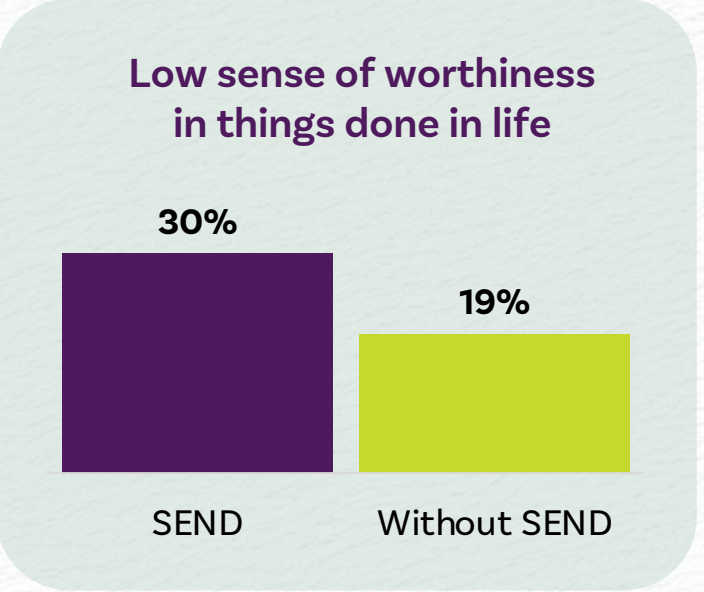
Students with self-identified special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) had a lower average wellbeing score of 21.0, compared to students without SEND 23.3.

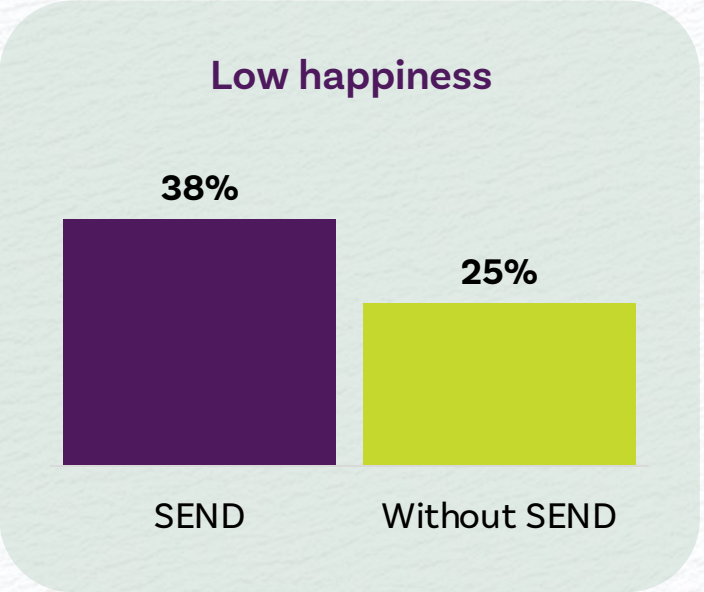
Students with SEND reported an average wellbeing score higher than most other students with support needs. Students who said they were a refugee or asylum seeker had the lowest wellbeing (16.1), followed by students with a sensory disability (19.4) and a mental health diagnosis (19.8).

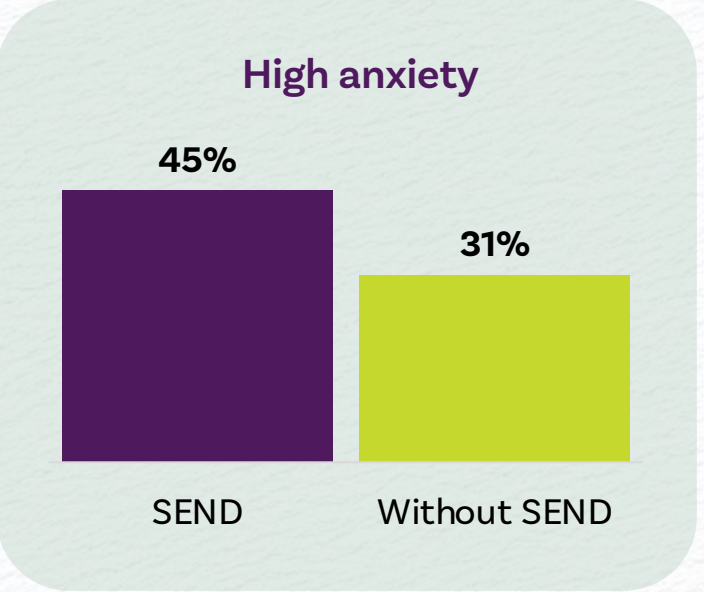
Students with SEND:

- **Had lower levels of life satisfaction:** Students with SEND reported lower life satisfaction than students without SEND.
- **Were less likely to indicate things they do are worthwhile:** Students with SEND reported a lower sense that things they do in life are worthwhile, compared to their peers. Almost a third measured low for this category.
- **Reported lower levels of happiness:** Students with SEND were more likely to report low happiness scores than their peers. This was true of nearly two in five students with SEND.
- **Indicated higher levels of anxiety:** Approaching half of students with SEND reported high anxiety levels.







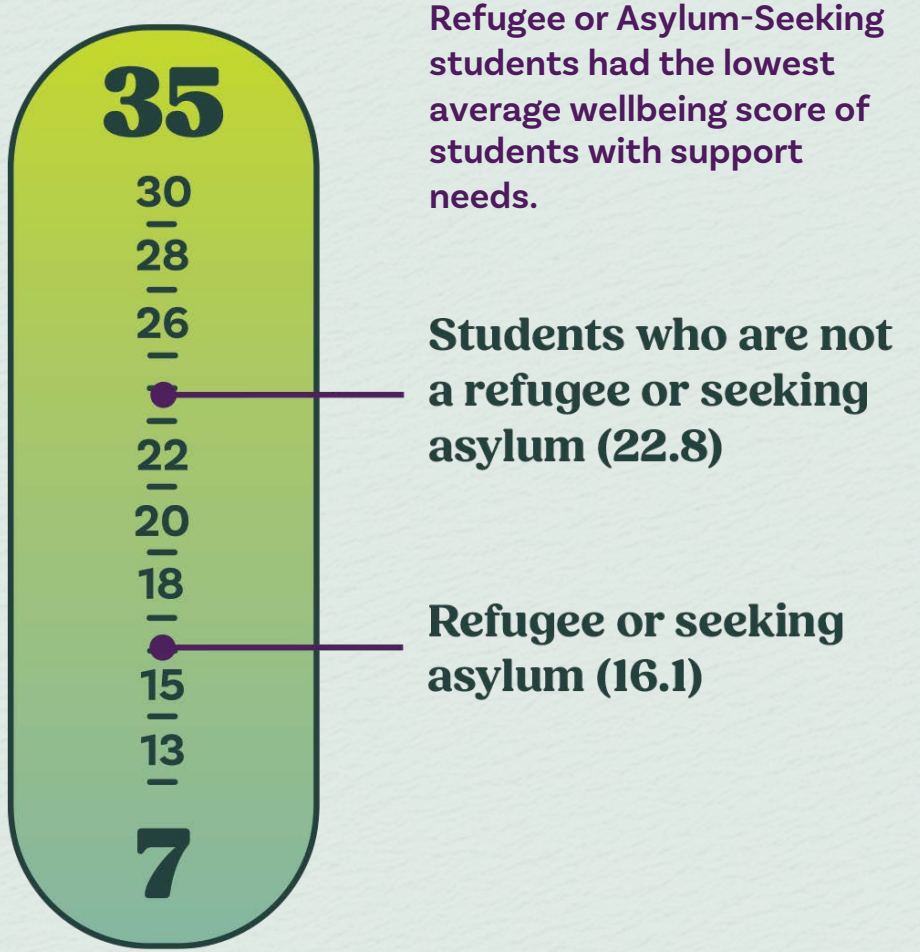


Refugee or asylum-seeking students

Out of 9,717 students, 67 were identified as a refugee or asylum-seeker. They were:

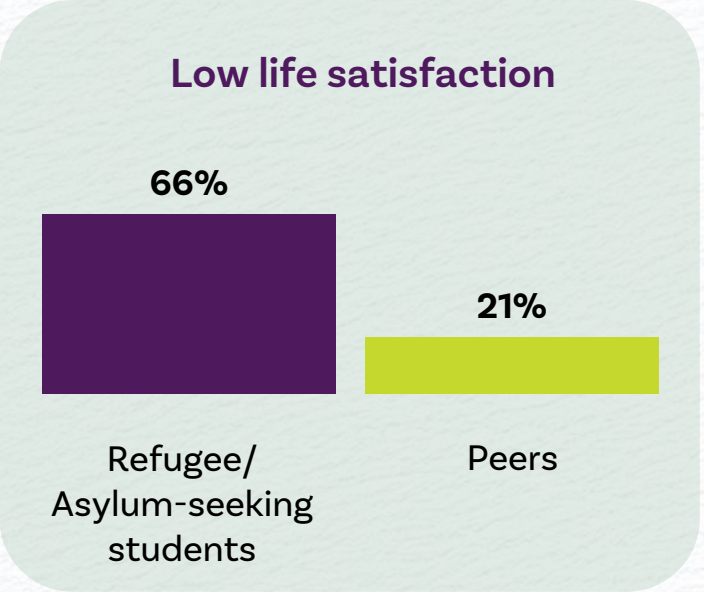
- **The least likely group to report getting enough sleep:** Over half (59%) of refugee and asylum-seeking students reported never getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep daily, compared to 16% of their peers.
- **The most likely group to feel unsafe at night in their local community: Seventy percent** of refugee and asylum-seeking students reported never feeling safe at night in their local community, compared to 20% of their peers.
- **The most likely group to spend four hours or more on social media:** This group of students were far more likely to report four hours plus daily use (65%). This compared to 19% of their peers.
- **Much more likely to feel they had no control over shaping their future:** Over half (52%)of refugee and asylum-seeking students report having little to no control over shaping their future, compared to 11% of their peers.

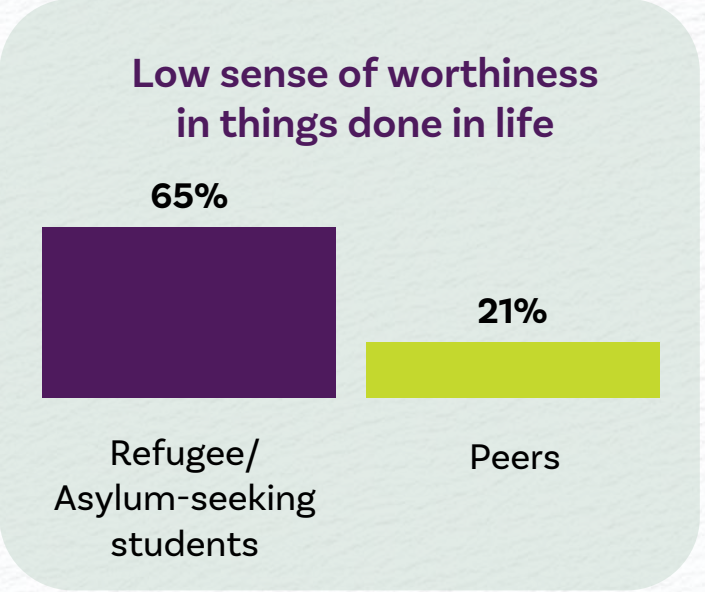
The small sample size of this group means caution is needed when considering the extent to which the findings may be generalised to a wider population of students in this group.

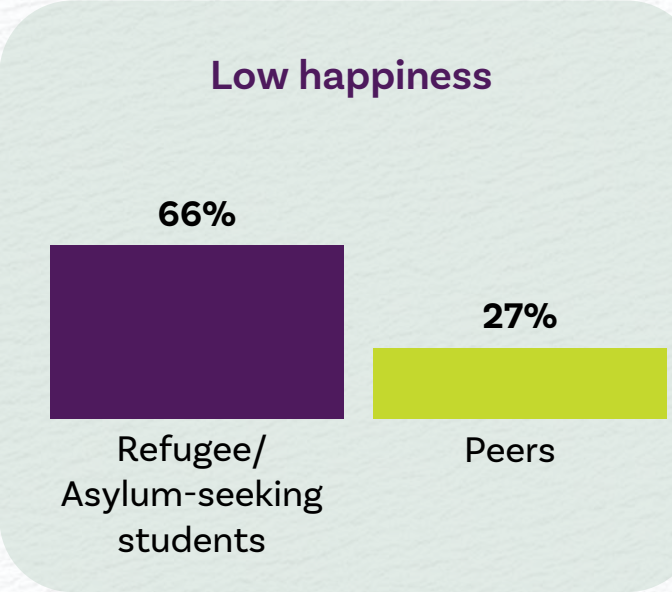


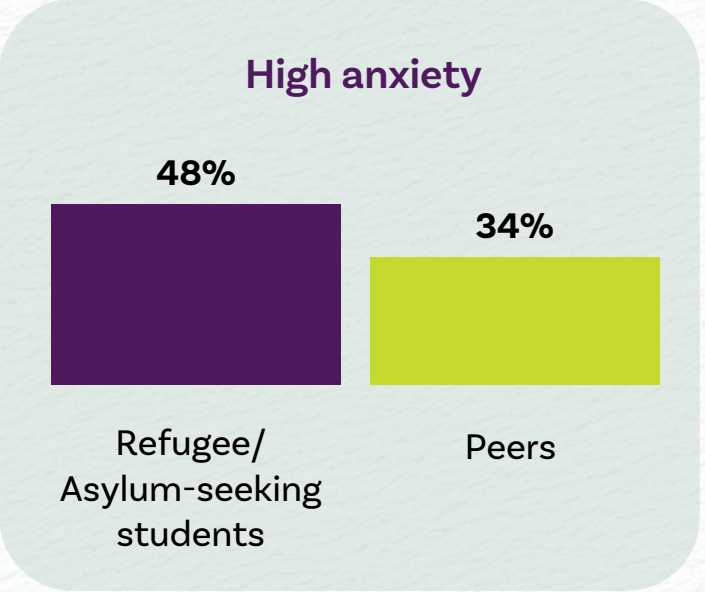
Refugee & asylum-seeking students were:

- **Much more likely to report low life satisfaction:** Two thirds (66%) of this student group indicated this, compared to 21% of their peers.
- **Much less likely to believe things they have done in life have been worthwhile:** In total, 65% scored in the low category for this measure, compared to 21% of their peers.
- **Much more likely to have low happiness:** Two thirds of students (66%) had low happiness, compared to less than a third (27%) of their peers.
- **Much more likely to experience high level of anxiety:** Almost half (48%) reported high levels of anxiety, compared to a third (34%) of their peers.





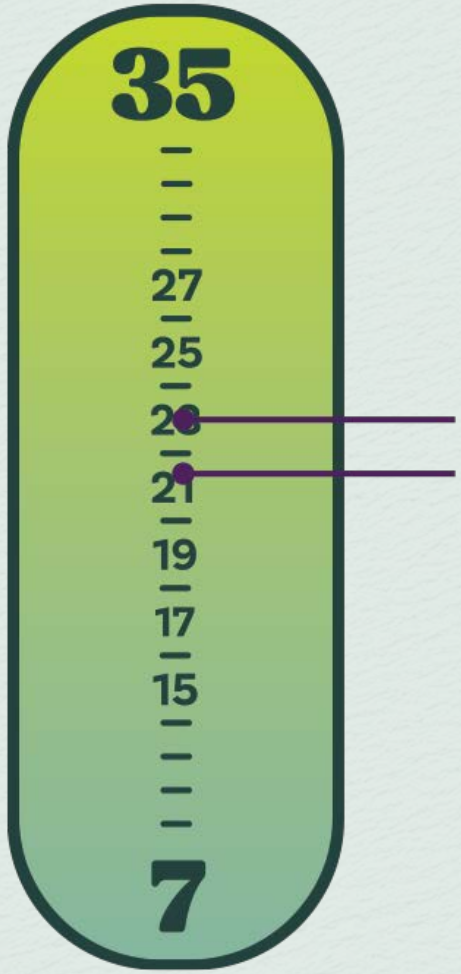




Students eligible for free school meals

Out of 9,717 students, 1,340 (14%) were eligible for free school meals. They were:

- **Less likely to report getting enough sleep:** 63% of students eligible for free school meals got 8-10 hours only sometimes or not at all, compared with 53% of those not receiving them.
- **More likely to spend more than 4 hours on social media:** 57% of students eligible for free school meals spent four hours plus on social media, compared with 44% of those not receiving them.
- **Less likely to feel they had control over shaping their futures:** 50% of students eligible for free school meals felt they had complete or a lot of control over shaping their future, compared with 61% of those not receiving them.
- **More likely to feel unsafe in their community at night:** 28% of students eligible for free school meals said they never felt safe at night, compared to 19% of peers.



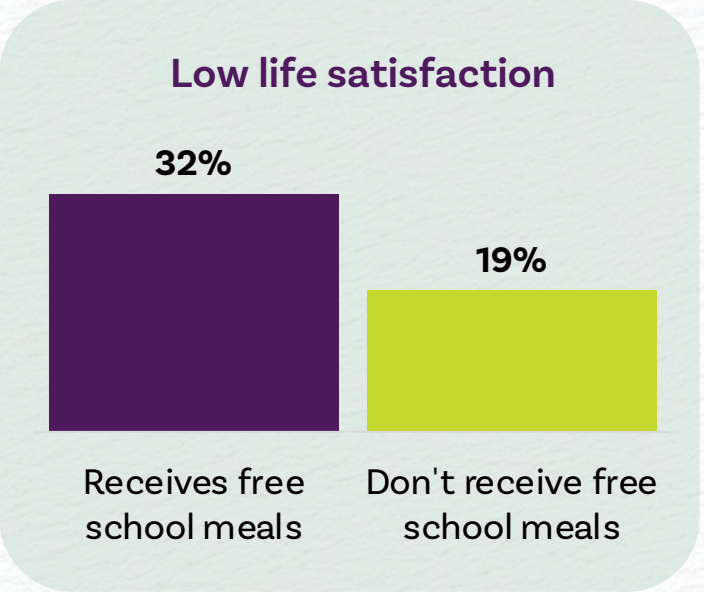
Students eligible for free school meals reported lower wellbeing than peers who do not receive free school meals.

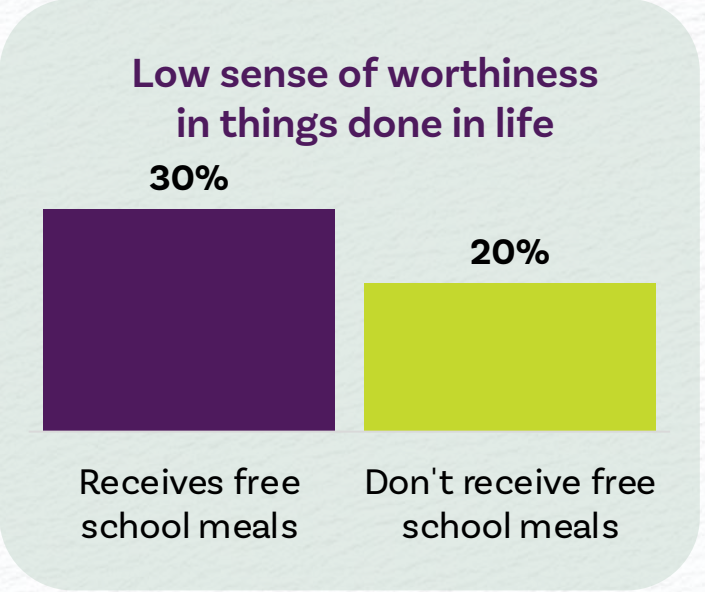
Not getting free school meals (23.0)

Getting free school meals (21.4)

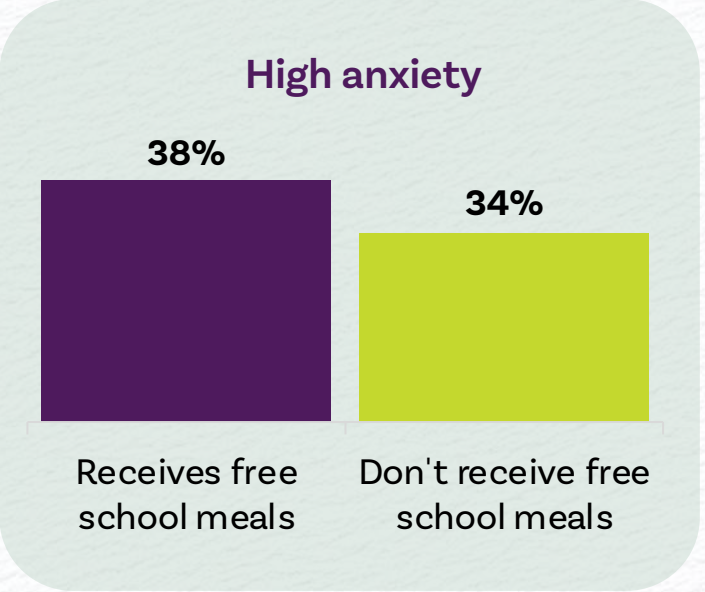
Students eligible for free school meals:

- **More likely to report low life satisfaction:** **Around one in three** (32%) students eligible for free school meals reported low life satisfaction, compared to 19% of their peers.
- **Less likely to believe things they have done in life have been worthwhile:** In total, 30% scored in the low category for this measure, compared to 20% of their peers.
- **More likely to have low happiness:** More than one in three (36%) had low happiness, compared to a quarter (26%) of their peers.
- **Slightly more likely to experience high level of anxiety:** 38% reported high levels of anxiety, compared to 34% of their peers.











Glossary

Glossary (Gender and pronouns)

- **Agender:** A person who does not identify as having a gender.
- **Bigender:** A person who identifies with two gender identifies, which may be experienced alternately or simultaneously.
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identify aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Demi-boy/ Demi-girl:** A person who identifies partially, but not entirely, as a man/boy or women/girl.
- **Femboy:** Typically, a male or non-binary person who presents with traditionally feminine characteristics, such as clothing, mannerisms, or expression.
- **Gender diverse:** A broad term for gender identities, expressions, or characteristics that do not conform to societal norms or the male/female binary.
- **Gender non-conforming/ Non-conforming:** A person whose gender expression does not align with conventional masculine or feminine norms, including mannerisms, appearances, behaviour, or interests.
- **Genderqueer:** A person whose gender identity is not fixed and exists outside the traditional binary of male and female.
- **Intersex:** A person born with sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, gonads, or genitalia) that do not fit typical definitions of male and female bodies.
- **Neutral:** A gender identity or expression that does not align strongly with masculinity or femininity.
- **Non-binary:** People who do not identify exclusively as male or female.
- **Pangender:** A person whose gender identify encompasses multiple genders, experienced either simultaneously or fluidly over time.
- **Trans-femme:** A person assigned male at birth who identifies with or expresses femininity.
- **Trans male:** A person assigned female at birth who identifies and lives as a man.

Gender and pronouns continued

- **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Undefined:** A person who does not use a specific gender label to describe their identify.
- **Xenogender:** A non-binary identify where one's gender is described in ways that go beyond the traditional human concepts of gender, sometimes relating to animals, plants, or abstract concepts.
- **They/Them, Xe/Xem/Xyn, Ze/Zem:** Gender-neutral pronouns used by people who many not identify as male or female.

Glossary (Sexuality)

- **Abrosexual:** A person whose sexual or romantic orientation is fluid and changes overtime, shifting between types of attraction and even a lack of attraction.
- **Aegosexual:** Someone who feels a disconnect between themselves and the subject of arousal. They may experience sexual fantasies or enjoy sexual content but generally feel little or no desire to participate personally.
- **Aroace/ Aromantic/ Asexual:** A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction or romantic attraction to others.
- **Arospec:** Someone on the aromantic spectrum who experiences little to no attraction or whose romantic experiences are atypical, falling somewhere between aromantic and alloromantic (experiencing consistent romantic attraction).
- **Bi-curious:** Someone interested in or curious about sexual attraction to or relationships with a gender different from their usual partners but who does not identify as bisexual.
- **Biromantic:** A person who experiences romantic attraction to more than one gender.
- **Bisexual:** A person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender.
- **Cupiosexual:** Someone who does not experience sexual attraction but still desires a sexual relationship.
- **Demisexual:** A personal who is sexual attracted only to people with whom they share an emotional bond.
- **Furry:** A person who has sexual or romantic interests in anthropomorphic animals (animals with human traits or characteristics).
- **Gay male:** A man who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other men.
- **Graysexual:** A person who experiences sexual attraction infrequently or with low intensity.
- **Heterosexual:** A person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex. This term is also known as “straight”.

Sexuality continued

- **Lesbian or gay female:** A woman who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Omnisexual:** A person who is sexually attracted to people of all sexes and gender identities.
- **Panromantic:** A person who experiences romantic attraction to people regardless of gender identity.
- **Pansexual:** A person who experience sexual attraction to people regardless of gender identity.
- **Queer:** A broad term for someone whose sexual identity is not heterosexual. Often used instead of, or alongside, lesbian, gay, bisexual or other labels.
- **Questioning/Unsure:** A term used to describe someone who is exploring or uncertain about their sexual orientation.
- **Sexually fluid:** A person whose sexual attractions, identify and behaviour are not fixed and may change over time.
- **Unlabelled:** Someone who chooses not to identify under a specific sexual or romantic label.

The Warwick-Edinburgh 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 the report, and specifically within the section about wellbeing.

For more information about WEMWBS, please visit https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/.

Knowing Works®

Thank you for reading this report

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 shared widely with people and services responsible for the delivery of services and strategy, including with schools, colleges, the NHS and Suffolk County Council.

Knowing Works is a social enterprise delivering insights to include people in shaping projects and services that help them. For more information about our services, please visit **www.knowingworks.co.uk** or reach out to our team at **info@knowingworks.co.uk**.

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