MY HEALTH, OUR FUTURE (PHASE SIX)

Focus on:

The wellbeing of young people with Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk

Published February 2023



healthwatch Suffolk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of the 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF) research programme would not be possible without the continued support of the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System, and partners working with young people across Suffolk (e.g., youth-led networks, Public Health Suffolk, and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations across Suffolk).

Above all, we thank school and college leaders, and students, at the following schools and colleges for supporting MHoF in 2022:

- Abbeygate Sixth Form College
- Castle Manor Academy
- Chantry Academy
- Claydon High School
- Copleston High School
- East Point Academy
- Mildenhall College Academy
- Newmarket Academy
- Northgate High School
- Samuel Ward Academy
- Sir John Leman High School
- Suffolk One
- West Suffolk College

We also opened the survey to the public this year, gaining over 150 responses. A huge thank you to everyone who took the time to respond, and share their experiences.

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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 – SEND IN FOCUS

My Health, Our Future (MHoF) is a unique research programme exploring the wellbeing of children and young people in Suffolk.

Since 2017, more than 43,000 responses have been received to MHoF surveys about important topics like wellbeing, self-harm, resilience, bullying, and many other topic areas.

MHoF uses a consistent survey methodology (co-produced with young people, schools, colleges, and local partners) in schools and colleges.

This report presents findings from 'phase six' of the MHoF survey for young people in secondary schools and colleges. In particular, this report is focused on the wellbeing of young people who self-identified as having a special educational need or disability (SEND). It is important to note that the MHoF survey did not ask about young people's experience of SEND provision, or whether they were accessing SEND support.

Young people completed the survey between April and July 2022.

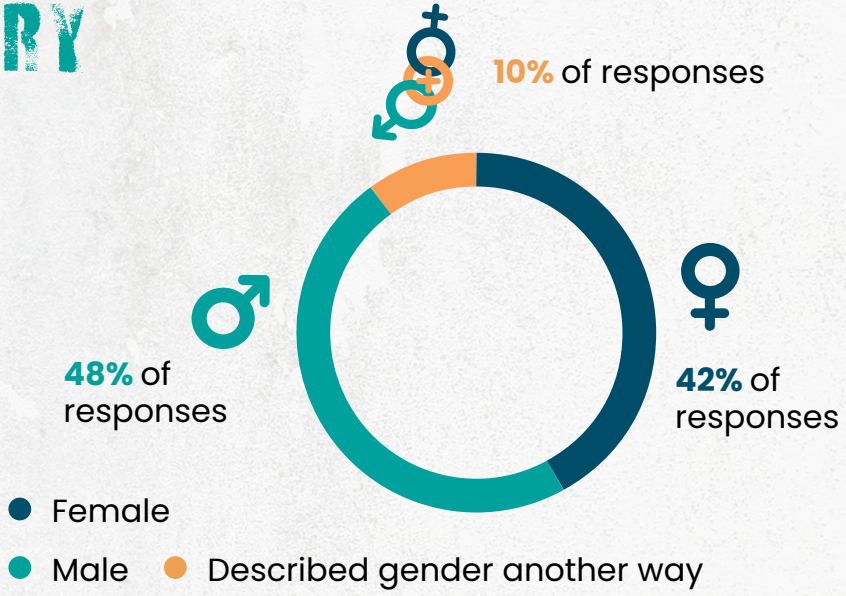
This report is part of a series. It is possible to access all MHoF (Phase Six) reports from: www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof/phasesix

Learn more about MHoF on the Healthwatch Suffolk website: www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof


WHO TOOK PART?

OUR SAMPLE - SUMMARY

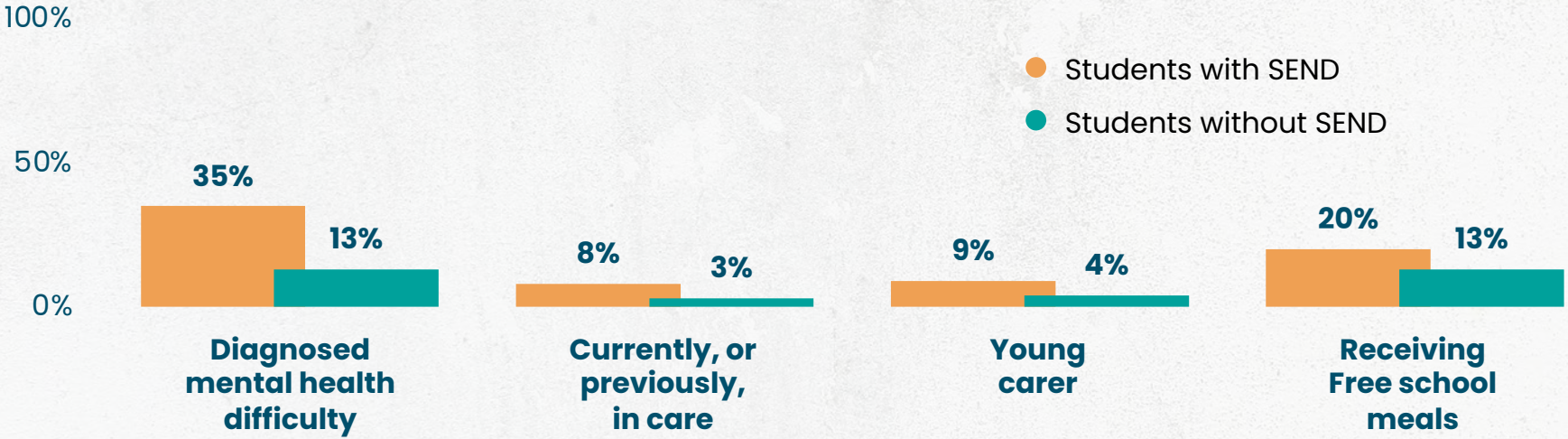
- **600** responses were recorded from young people who self-selected statements that read "I have a special educational need" and "I have a disability". That is **13%** of the total MHoF sample of **4,737** young people.
- The majority of responses were from young people in Year 7 - 11 (**63%**). However, there were over **100** responses from students in Year 12 and Year 13 in school or college.
- A majority of SEND respondents were male (**48%**). **42%** were female, and **10%** of young people with SEND preferred to describe their gender in another way.
- Young people with SEND were more likely to identify as LGBT*Q+ than their peers (34% compared to 22%).



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

OUR SAMPLE – OTHER 'VULNERABILITIES'

Students could self-identify with a number of other 'vulnerabilities' within the MHoF survey (e.g., being a carer). They are a series of unique factors known from previous MHoF surveys to influence the subjective wellbeing of students responding to the survey. Some key findings are highlighted in the chart below.



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



OUR RESULTS

"I HAVE A SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED"

“My teachers never had any idea how to help with my autism or dissociation, and I couldn't inform them when I was dealing with symptoms of a psychotic episode for a few months.”

- A young person with SEND

WELLBEING (SWEMWBS DATA)

- Wellbeing was measured using the 'Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale' (SWEMWBS).
- Students responded to seven statements about their wellbeing and received a score ranging between seven and 35.
- A higher score indicates better wellbeing.
- Students with SEND reported lower wellbeing scores on average than their peers.

National SWEMWBS data
NHS research in 2020 reported the average SWEMWBS score for young people in England (aged 11 to 16) as **24.6.**



Suffolk (2022)

- **21.4** (Does not have SEND)
- **19.1** (Does have SEND)

National

- **24.6** (2020)

Young people with SEND have a lower wellbeing scored (poorer wellbeing) than the Suffolk average, and a national average recorded in 2020.



1 IN 4

young people who said they had special educational needs felt loved ‘none of the time’ or ‘rarely’.

MEASURING ANXIETY

- Students were asked about their experiences of anxiety using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) - a scale of seven statements to identify probable cases of Generalised Anxiety Disorder.
- Like SWEMWBS, the scale asks the respondents to rate the severity of their symptoms over the past two weeks. Response options include 'not at all', 'several days', 'more than half the days', and 'nearly every day'.
- The possible score across the seven statements ranges from 0-21. A score of less than 5 indicates mild anxiety, 10 indicates moderate anxiety and 15 indicates severe anxiety.

IN OTHER RESEARCH...

Prince's Trust (2021) reported a 19% increase in the percentage of young people aged 16 to 25 feeling anxious "always", "often", or "all the time" since 2009.

See https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/youth-index-2021

RESPONSES TO GAD-7 INDICATED...

57% of young people with SEND have 'moderate' to 'severe' levels of anxiety.

This compares to **40%** of their peers.

554 young people with SEND responded to the GAD-7 scale.



“I am anxious all of the time. It [anxiety] has taken all my life away from me with no hope for the future.”

- A young person with SEND

SELF-REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH

We asked students about their mental health at particular times of the year. Their responses offer an insight into young people's self-assessed state of mental health this academic year and currently.

Students were presented with a graphic (see right) that asked them to assess their mental health against four possible categories. They were 'healthy', 'coping', 'struggling' and 'emotionally unwell'.

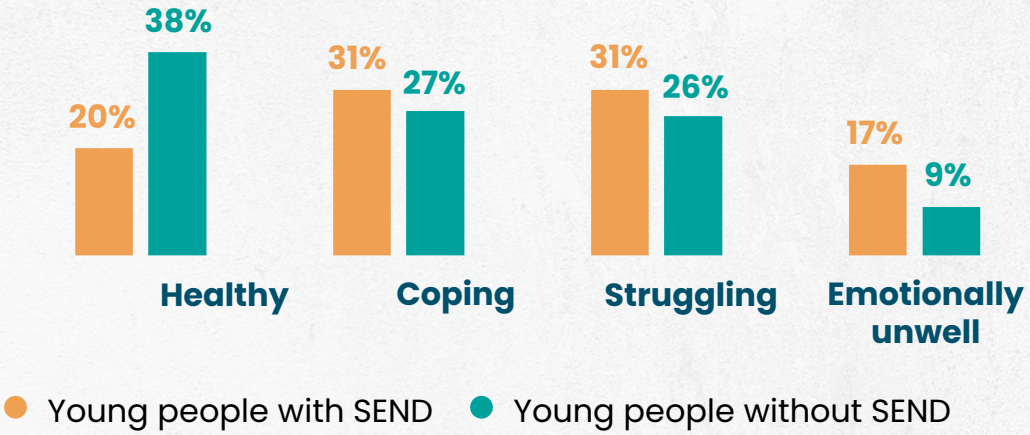
4,491 students responded to these questions. **550** self-reported SEND.

Emotionally unwell ★	Struggling ★★	Coping ★★★	Healthy ★★★★
My mental health is impacting on daily functioning	My mental health regularly impacts on daily functioning	My mental health has minimal impact on daily functioning	My mental health has no impact on daily functioning
I am very anxious or depressed	I get angry and anxious	I have good and bad days emotionally	I have normal mood changes
I am extremely stressed	I am highly stressed or emotional	I am sometimes stressed but coping	I am not stressed
I am socially withdrawn	I avoid social activity	I do not feel like being social	I am socially active
My sleep is very poor	I regularly do not get enough sleep	I get enough sleep some of the time	I have normal sleep patterns
I have professional support for my mental health	Sometimes I need support for mental health from school	I get advice from friends or family when I feel low	I usually do not need support for my mental health
I experience panic attacks, hopelessness & struggle at school	I sometimes struggle at school and have low mood	I cope at school, but sometimes I have bad days	I always cope with school demands and workload



SELF-REPORTED MENTAL HEALTH

- Students with SEND were more likely to indicated they were struggling on average, but they were not the most likely group to suggest this.
- **54%** of students with SEND reported feeling that they were currently struggling or unwell, compared to **41%** of their peers.



OTHER GROUPS FOR COMPARISON:

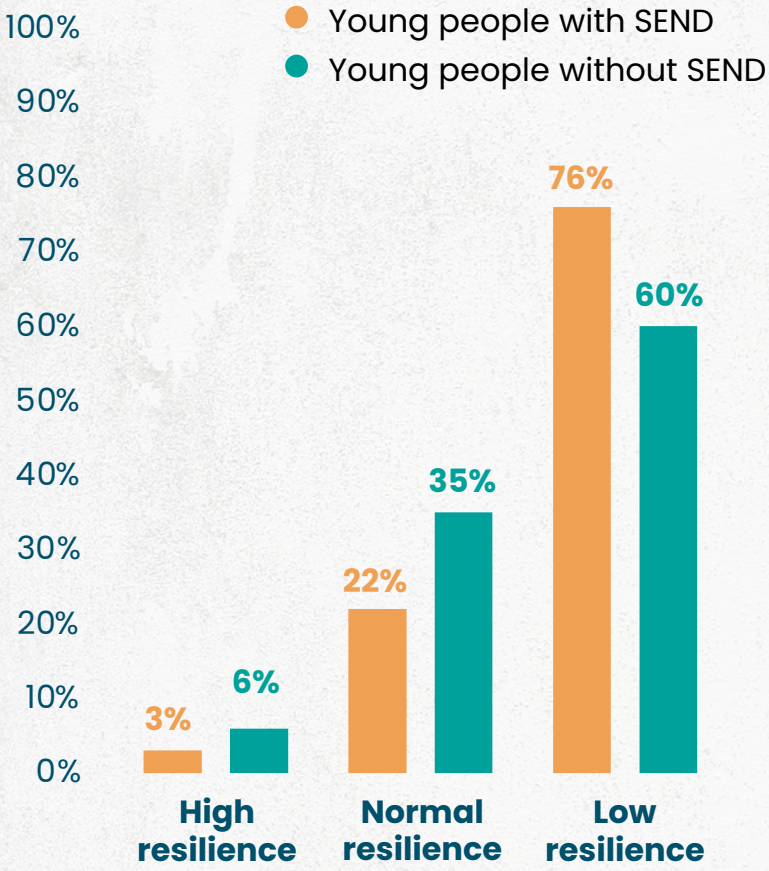
- Young female students were twice as likely to say they were currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' **(61%)**, compared to male peers **(31%).** However, those who preferred to describe their gender another way were much more likely to report this **(86%).**
- LGBT*Q+ young people were amongst the most likely to say they were 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' **(76%)**, compared to peers **(41%)**.

RESILIENCE

Resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). It was created to assess the perceived ability to 'bounce back' or recover from stress. More information available from: www.whatworkswellbeing.org.

There are six statements on a five-point scale ('Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree'). An average score across these statements of 0 - 3 is considered 'low resilience', 3 - 4.3 is 'normal' and 4.3 - 5 is considered 'high resilience'.

- Students with SEND reported a slightly lower average resilience score than their peers (**2.7**, compared to **3.0**).
- A higher proportion of students with SEND fall into a 'low' resilience classification (**76%**, compared to **60%** of their peers).



SELF-HARM

Young people were asked whether they had ever self-harmed, and whether they currently self-harm. The following definition was included in the survey:

"Self-harm is when someone hurts their body on purpose. They might do this by cutting or burning their skin, punching or hitting things, poisoning themselves with tablets or other dangerous substances, using drugs and alcohol too much, not eating enough or eating too much."

Students with SEND were more likely to report both current or previous experience of self-harm.

- **13%** of students with SEND currently self-harm, compared to **7%** of their peers.
- **36%** of students with SEND said that they have previous experience of self-harm, compared to **23%** of their peers.

OTHER GROUPS FOR COMPARISON:

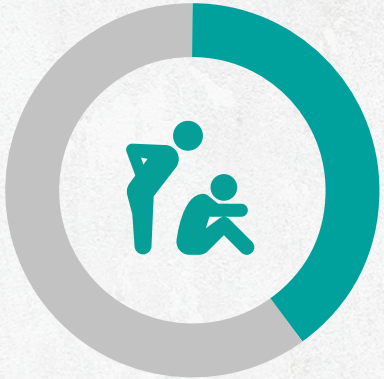
- Students with 'vulnerabilities' were more likely to report current self-harm than their peers. Young people with a diagnosed mental health difficulty were most likely to report this **(19%).**
- Those who described their gender another way were the most likely to report self-harm. **61%** had experienced self-harm before, compared to **31%** of female, and **14%** of male students.
- **1 in 5 (20%)** LGBT*Q+ students said they currently self-harm, compared to **4%** of their straight and cisgender peers.

BULLYING

- Young people with were asked whether they had experienced bullying. The types of behaviour that would be considered bullying were also explained to students.
- The graphs below show how young people with SEND responded to our questions about bullying.



22% had been bullied online. This compares to 15% of their peers.



40% had been bullied in school. This compares to 27% of their peers.



24% had been bullied outside of school (new for 2022). This compares to 15% of their peers.

SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Our MHoF data suggests feeling like you have somebody to turn to for support can have a positive influence on wellbeing. In general, young people with nobody to turn to were more likely to have low wellbeing, low resilience, and higher levels of anxiety.

Young people with SEND were slightly more likely to indicate they had no one to turn to for mental health support (20%, compared to 17%).

- **18% (94)** felt parents or carers were unable to support them, compared to **13% (489)** of their peers.
- **18% (94)** felt friends were unable to support them, compared to **12% (431)** of their peers.
- **22% (112)** felt that a teacher was unable to support them, compared to **18% (659)** of their peers.
- **21% (108)** felt their online community had supported them, compared to **16% (601)** of their peers.



Note: This graphic is not specific to students with SEND, and relates to all student responses.

MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Students were asked if they had been taught about mental health at school or college.

- Young people with SEND were slightly less likely than their peers to report being satisfied with education on mental health and wellbeing provided by their school or college.
- **16% (83)** said their school did not give them information about mental health, compared to **12% (253)** of their peers.
- **36% (184)** said their school or college gave them information, but not the topics they would like to learn about. This compared to **34% (1,298)** of their peers.
- **48% (251)** said their school gave them the information they would like about mental health, compared to **54% (2,029)** of their peers.



16%

said their school/college did not give them information about mental health. Of those who did, 36% felt it did not always cover things they wanted to learn about.

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

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