



Speaking Out Survey 2021

The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing
- a summary report



Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

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The images of Western Australian children and young people used in this report are generic and do not infer a particular school or student's involvement in the Speaking Out Survey.

Message from the Commissioner

A record 16,532 children and young people have taken part in this landmark survey for Western Australia.

Their perspectives on physical health, mental health, education, safety, community life and hopes for the future give an insight into how Western Australian children are faring and highlight the priority areas that need to be better understood and acted upon.

Our state is home to 610,000 children and young people under the age of 18 – they all have the right to be heard on issues impacting their lives and the onus is on us all to do what we can to ensure that children and young people are safe, supported, healthy and learning so that they can reach their full potential.

The first Speaking Out Survey was tabled in State Parliament in February 2020 as the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to become clear in Australia. To assist in informing WA's social recovery, I brought forward the planned second survey to ensure we had strong evidence to understand how children and young people were impacted.

Despite various short-term restrictions in place during early 2021, triple the number of children and young people have participated in this Speaking Out Survey compared to 2019.

The majority of WA's children and young people have reported that they are mentally and physically healthy, that their basic material needs are met and that they feel loved and supported. While these are very positive findings, this report also shows continuing evidence of the key concerns raised in our inaugural survey.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact on our whole community, with children and young people expressing understandable anxiety and stress as a result, the concerning findings on mental health, the gender gap in wellbeing and perceptions of safety were all evident in the inaugural survey and predate the pandemic.

WA is a prosperous state with a strong economy, and yet we have too many young people reporting that they cannot access the mental health supports they need, that they do not feel safe and that they have poor life satisfaction.

Aboriginal children and young people continue to fare less well than their non-Aboriginal peers in terms of their material needs, family stability and expectations for further education.

Recent funding increases for mental health services in both the health and education systems are welcomed, however this survey is continued evidence of the need to target early intervention services and ensure that they are available to children and young people right across WA.

I would like to personally acknowledge the leadership and staff of the three education sectors, the Department of Education, Association of Independent Schools WA and Catholic Education WA for recognising the value of this survey and supporting its administration through their schools.

With grant support from Lotterywest, the Speaking Out Survey project has been expanded to reach more students outside of mainstream schooling such as those with

disability and Aboriginal students in remote parts of WA. The fieldwork for this extension is currently underway and results are set to be published in 2022.

While my term as Commissioner ends this year, the value of this survey is clear and warrants continued government support to build an ongoing body of evidence to track changes over time.

This office had a team of 17 and a total annual budget of \$3.37million in the last financial year. To conduct a survey of this size has been no small feat: 16,532 children and young people were reached within a shortened time frame, with every member of staff taking part in the fieldwork across WA to introduce the survey and ensure children and young people felt safe and supported to take part.

This is testament to everyone in the team who know the importance of this work and all share a commitment to ensuring children and young people are heard.

I thank every young person who shared their views in what has been an unusual year. Your time, your willingness to speak out and your trust in doing so are greatly appreciated.

You have all provided invaluable feedback for the decision-makers of this state to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people.

We must honour this and take action.



Colin Pettit

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Executive summary

*"I liked this survey because it made me feel like us students have a say in things and people care about our opinion."
(13 year-old)*

The Commissioner for Children and Young People undertook the second Speaking Out Survey in 2021 (SOS21) as a follow up to the inaugural survey carried out in 2019 (SOS19). Designed as a triennial survey series, the aim of the Speaking Out Survey is to capture the views of a representative sample of children and young people in Western Australia (WA) to develop a robust data source relating to the wellbeing of children and young people in our state.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commissioner brought forward the planned second survey from 2022 to 2021. Despite various short-term restrictions in place during 2021, triple the number of children and young people have participated in this Speaking Out Survey compared to 2019. The inaugural SOS19 established not only a baseline of data on WA children and young people's wellbeing but also a pre-COVID data set of their views and experiences. Undertaking the survey again in 2021 has delivered a strong evidence base of how children and young people's wellbeing has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the planning for the government's social recovery phase.

SOS21 was funded and facilitated by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. The inaugural survey tool and methodology were developed in collaboration with Telethon Kids Institute and with funding contributions from the Departments of Education, Health, Justice and Communities.

In SOS21, a total of 16,532 Year 4 to 12 students from 94 schools in all regions of WA consented to participate. After removing responses from students in the additional sample and incomplete responses, the main

sample included 4,582 Year 4 to 6 and 9,106 Year 7 to 12 students across all three sectors (total of 13,688).

Aboriginal students are represented in the main sample proportionate to their population in WA. In total, 1,206 or 8.8 per cent participating students identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Student responses were weighted so that survey results are representative of the population of students enrolled in Years 4 to 12 in government, independent and Catholic schools throughout WA.

SOS21 is fully representative and has a significantly larger sample size than SOS19, allowing for reliable disaggregation of data.

A unique strength of this survey is its independent administration by the Commissioner and his staff which prevented any potential influence on students' responses from teachers or other school staff.

The successful completion of SOS21 and SOS19 has demonstrated the value of current and robust data in monitoring wellbeing. The Commissioner will now advocate for the commitment and future funding on a triennial basis for this comprehensive survey that will provide much needed trend data and information on the wellbeing of children and young people and that will allow for the tracking of progress and change over time.

This report summarises SOS21 results for most survey questions disaggregated by year group and gender. Additionally, this report includes separate chapters with information and key findings for students in regional and remote areas as well as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Further in-depth analysis and exploration of SOS21 (and SOS19) results will be carried out in 2021 and beyond.

Key findings

Children and young people in WA report generally positive outcomes

As anticipated, most students report they are physically and mentally healthy, their basic material needs are met and they like school. Many children and young people also say their relationships with family, friends and teachers are positive, that they feel loved and supported by the people around them and feel connected to their community.

In many cases, students' self-reported views on their wellbeing are broadly consistent for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, male and female students and for students living in regional and remote areas.

Younger students have a more positive outlook

Across most indicators, SOS21 results affirm the finding that Year 7 to 12 students report less positive wellbeing outcomes than Year 4 to 6 students. For example, younger students rate their life satisfaction more highly, find it easier talking to their parents about problems and they have much more positive views of school and learning than students in high school.

COVID-19 has affected many children and young people

One-third of students reported their life has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and they are experiencing emotions such as anxiety and stress or not feeling confident about the future. A small proportion of high school students – less than five per cent – reported being strongly affected by feelings of hopelessness and the experience of high levels of anxiety due to the pandemic.

Mental health is a critical issue for many children and young people

The SOS21 results have affirmed previous SOS19 findings that across all essential wellbeing outcomes for children and young people, there is a considerable percentage of children who do not view their lives so positively with both older students and female students more broadly reporting low wellbeing scores. Mental health is a critical issue with a substantial number of Year 7 to 12 students reporting poor life satisfaction, low self-esteem, high levels of stress and the feeling they can't cope with life's challenges.

Female students rate their wellbeing less favourably than male students

SOS21 has affirmed this clear and deeply concerning result from the SOS19 survey. Female students, and particularly those in Years 7 to 12, rate their wellbeing less favourably than male students, particularly in areas relating to mental health where 1-in-4 girls report poor life satisfaction, self-perception, conflict, relationships, personal safety and independence.

Perceptions of safety

Many children and young people continue to say they do not always feel safe at home, at school or in their community. The survey findings offer important insights into students' views of their personal safety. For the first time, SOS21 asked about perpetrators of physical violence against children and young people and the results reveal a disturbingly high proportion of students reporting experiences of physical harm by adults.

Healthy nutrition and lack of physical activity are a concern for many older students

Many older students said they worry about their weight, skip regular meals and do not participate in any sport activities outside of school. Daily engagement in screen-based activities is the norm particularly for older students and this stands in contrast to the amount of time students spend 'hanging out' with family and friends or doing physical or other leisure activities.

Some students feel they do not belong in their community

Some students again indicated that there were no fun things to do for them in their community both in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas and that they have little autonomy over their lives. Often this has to do with access, independent mobility and the need to be driven places by an adult.

Engagement in school and learning

The SOS21 results have affirmed the significant difference that was measured between younger and older students' views on school and learning. While the majority of students in Years 4 to 6 reported liking school and learning, many students in Years 7 to 12 said they do not like learning, do not feel like they belong at school and feel it's less important to attend regularly.

Aboriginal students feel largely positive about their lives

Aboriginal students fared less well than non-Aboriginal students in terms of their material needs, family stability, or expectations for further education, but otherwise they were broadly on par with their non-Aboriginal peers on most wellbeing indicators and overall, positive about their lives. The survey found that more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students felt negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional and remote students

Across most wellbeing areas, students in regional and remote areas reported very similar views and opinions about their wellbeing as students in the metropolitan area and students overall.

Comparison SOS19 and SOS21

Preliminary comparison of results shows that students in 2021 report lower rates of good physical health, lower life satisfaction and greater exposure to mental health worries. Students also report greater engagement in sedentary indoor activities such as gaming, internet use and reading.

Comparison of data shows that families are less likely to get along very well in 2021 and more likely to get along neither good nor bad. In regard to school and learning, fewer students think being at school every day is very important and a lower proportion feel safe at school all the time.

Summary

Overall, SOS21 provides further invaluable insights into the lives of WA children and young people which is even more critical now as we are living in a pandemic. The survey responses provide current and robust data to inform the Commissioner's Wellbeing Monitoring Framework and work more broadly. It is hoped that the unique value of this second volume of information will be recognised across the government and non-government sectors by those working to support and improve the wellbeing of children and young people and that their voices and views will be closely considered in policy planning and service delivery.

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Introduction

1

1 Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) developed the Wellbeing Monitoring Framework (the Monitoring Framework) in 2012 to monitor and report on the wellbeing of Western Australian children and young people.¹ The Monitoring Framework is informed by the long-term vision of the Commissioner:

All children and young people are heard, are healthy and safe, reach their potential and are welcomed as valued members of the community and in doing so we build a brighter future for the whole community.

The Monitoring Framework establishes key wellbeing indicators for children and young people that influence and guide the work of the Commissioner's office, other key agencies and broader policy, service and program development for children and young people. The Monitoring Framework is informed by existing data sources where possible and uses measures that have a short causal chain to provide timely information. It is focused around the outcomes of three interlinking wellbeing domains: Healthy and connected, Safe and supported and Learning and participating.

While some elements of the Monitoring Framework can be informed by existing data sources, many have insufficient data available to adequately monitor progress over time. The 2019 Speaking Out Survey (SOS19) was developed to address these data needs and to develop a robust evidence base relating to the wellbeing of children and young people across Western Australia (WA). Following its successful completion, the 2021 Speaking Out Survey (SOS21) is a follow up survey and the second in a proposed triennial survey series.

Listening to the voices of children and young people through their self-reported views is critical to our understanding and monitoring of their wellbeing.

Established as a 'proof-of-concept', SOS19 was a whole-of-government initiative undertaken by the Commissioner with funding contributions from the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and the Department of Communities. The Commissioner contracted Telethon Kids Institute to develop the survey methodology and to provide the analysis of the data. The survey was designed to capture for the first time in WA the self-reported wellbeing of children and young people in Years 4 to 12 involving a sample of students large enough to generate reliable estimates of wellbeing of the full student population in WA.

SOS19 was successfully completed with the participation of 4,912 students from 125 schools with feedback from both schools and students being overwhelmingly positive. The summary results were met with a strong response from both government and non-government organisations highlighting the value and need of this data.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commissioner brought forward the next survey from 2022 to 2021. The inaugural SOS19 established not only a baseline of data on WA children and young people's wellbeing but also a pre-COVID data set of their views and experiences. Undertaking the next survey in 2021 has delivered a strong evidence base of how children and young people's wellbeing has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the government's planning for the social recovery phase.

SOS21 was funded and independently facilitated by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. It employed a fully representative sample that is also significantly larger than the proof-of-concept study in 2019.

The modules and questions of the Speaking Out Survey are guided by the Monitoring Framework, focusing on obtaining data on outcomes, indicators and risk and protective factors for children and young people that are not available in other data sources.

The survey questions were also informed by what children and young people have told the Commissioner in consultations across WA about what is important to their wellbeing. Feedback from students about the survey questions was gathered and a summary of their responses were included in the SOS19 summary report. In response to student feedback, SOS21 included a number of open text questions about essential wellbeing topics such as mental health and safety. The prevalent themes from students' open text responses will be summarised in a separate publication.

To gather information about children and young people's experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, questions relating directly to the pandemic were included in SOS21.

The students' responses in SOS21 have generated a second set of wellbeing data across three interlinking domains that are representative of the study population of WA children and young people.

Further analysis of the data will be conducted by the Commissioner to inform both the future work of his office and broader policy and service development relating to the wellbeing of children and young people in WA.

Following the successful completion of both SOS19 and SOS21, the Commissioner will now advocate for future funding on a triennial basis for this comprehensive survey that will provide much needed trend data and information on the wellbeing of children and young people and that will allow for the tracking of progress and change over time.





Methodology

2

2 Methodology

2.1 Sampling strategy

2.1.1 Overview

A sampling methodology was designed to select a random and representative sample of students in Years 4 to 12 across WA, with a sample size large enough to generate reliable and representative estimates of wellbeing for these students, and to understand changes in these estimates over time. Additionally, a key aim of the 2021 survey was to understand changes in wellbeing that may have occurred following the COVID-19 pandemic.

To maximise fieldwork efficiency, a two-stage stratified random sampling methodology was employed. This was carried out separately for Years 4–6 schools and Years 7–12 schools (i.e. a school servicing Years 4–12 could be selected twice – once for its Years 4–6 students, and once for its Years 7–12 students). In the first stage, schools were randomly selected and invited to participate. Schools were stratified by sector (government, Catholic, independent) and by region (major cities, inner/outer regional and remote/very remote). In the second stage, applicable only to the Years 7–12 sample, classrooms were randomly selected, with all students in selected classrooms invited to participate. For the Years 4–6 sample, all students in the eligible year levels in selected schools were invited to participate.

To reduce burden on schools and to cap the number of students included in any one school, sampling rates were reduced as school size increased for schools selected to participate in the survey with their Years 7–12 students.

As in 2019, opt-out consent procedures were adopted for the survey, where parents and caregivers were notified about the survey and could withdraw consent for their child to participate. Written parental consent was not required for students to participate. Opt-out consent was an integral part of the study design to ensure that survey responses were representative of the student population.

2.1.2 Survey frame and scope

The sampling frame was based on a school list that was created by merging publicly available information from the Department of Education Western Australia and the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The frame included a full list of schools in WA, along with the number of enrolled students in each year level and the proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students.

Education Support Centres and schools that only served students in Kindergarten to Year 3 were out of scope and excluded from the frame.

Students in Education Support Centres and additional remote Aboriginal students will be considered in a survey extension in the latter part of 2021.

2.1.3 Student sampling

For Years 7–12 students, sampling rates were reduced as school size increased to reduce school burden and to cap the number of students included in any one school to approximately 600 students, or approximately 28 survey sessions (~6-7 per year level).

The same sampling rates were applied for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In other words, a higher sampling rate for Aboriginal students (as applied in SOS19) was not applied in SOS21. As a consequence, the results reported for Aboriginal students are not fully representative of the overall population of Aboriginal students in WA.

2.1.4 Classroom sampling

The second stage of sampling, applicable only to the Years 7–12 sample, was to randomly select classrooms within schools, with all students in selected classrooms invited to participate.

Classrooms were randomly selected from a list of English classrooms as English is a mandatory subject for all students. This allowed the possibility of any student, in a given year level, to be included in the survey.

For schools selected to participate in the survey with their Years 4–6 students, all classrooms were selected, with all students within those classrooms invited to participate.

2.2 Survey development

SOS21 survey questions have largely remained unchanged from SOS19, with minor modifications made to specific items that were not understood by students, or the inclusion of some items specific to COVID-19 experiences and a number of open text questions about essential wellbeing topics such as mental health and safety. The SOS19 survey was adapted from the New Zealand Youth2000 Survey series² with input from a local Steering Group and an Expert Panel. Where it was identified that additional or more appropriate questions were needed, these were either provided by members of these groups or sourced from alternate existing surveys with similar participant ages. All questions were mapped to the Commissioner's Monitoring Framework.

Given the employment of additional questions in SOS21, there was a need to re-pilot the survey and this was undertaken in late 2020. The SOS21 survey was finalised based on responses to the pilot, with fieldwork commencing in early 2021.

As with SOS19, SOS21 had separate surveys for Years 4–6 and Years 7–12. For Years 4–6 (Child Survey), the maximum total number of questions asked of a student was 119; for Years 7–12 (Young People Survey), there maximum total number was 203 questions. The survey employed standard survey response filter mechanisms.

2.2.1 Ethics and research approvals

Approval for the research to be undertaken on their respective school sites was granted by the Department of Education and Catholic Education WA. The Association of

Independent Schools WA supported the research. Participation in the survey was the decision of the individual principal of the selected schools.

The SOS21 research was also supported by the following organisations:

- Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC)
- Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum (KAHPF)
- Pilbara Aboriginal Health Planning Forum (PAHPF)
- Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
- Yamatji Aboriginal Health Planning Forum.

Independent ethics advice for the inaugural research was sought from the Research Ethics Department at Murdoch University.

2.2.2 Governance

The Speaking Out Survey is a research project undertaken by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. The inaugural survey in 2019 was approved by the WA Government as a 'proof of concept' study for a statewide children and young people wellbeing survey. Following its successful completion, the second survey was conducted in 2021 and funded by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

A Project Steering Group, Expert Panel and Research Working Group were established for the planning, development and administration of SOS19.³ These groups were not reconvened for regular meetings in relation to SOS21 but were kept informed about the progress of the project.

2.3 Data collection and fieldwork

The SOS21 survey has retained a key strength where the Commissioner and staff administer surveys to encourage independent participation from students without school involvement, and to advocate for the purpose of the survey – for children and young people to have their say about the things that are important to their wellbeing.

Staff from the Commissioner's office contacted all selected schools by email and phone to invite them to participate in the survey. Upon receiving school consent, a mutually suitable time for staff from the Commissioner's office to visit the school and administer the survey was scheduled. The random selection of classrooms within schools (where applicable) was undertaken by the individual principal or coordinator of the school. Schools distributed information to eligible students and their parents/carers about the survey and its purpose.

The survey was implemented online through a customised survey platform. This platform enabled survey branching, audio recordings of questions and response options as well as the capability to link individual students to their school. Due to survey branching, students only saw the base questions and questions that were relevant to their previous answers.

To conduct the surveys, the Commissioner's staff attended the schools with tablets and Wi-Fi modems. Each participant completed the survey on a mobile tablet. All data transferred between the mobile tablet and the survey server were encrypted. Students also received headphones so that they could choose to hear questions and response options read aloud.

These survey administration processes were an important element of the survey methodology and integrity of the survey data. The introduction to the survey, survey supervision and responses to any questions from students were all carried out by the Commissioner's staff.

At least one member of school staff was also present in the room for duty of care purposes and to assist with behaviour management.

For the most part, students completed the survey in rooms enabling an exam-like setup. There was no pressure from teachers or staff for students to answer questions in particular ways and the students were confident that their responses were private. These processes reduced the likelihood of students responding in socially desirable ways⁴.

Some of the fieldwork was impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions and lockdowns. A number of consenting schools in remote locations were not able to be visited due to the restrictions.

2.3.1 Consent

SOS21 employed the use of an opt-out consent procedure. Invited students and their parents or carers were provided with detailed information about the survey, including parental and student non-consent forms. If the parent or caregiver did not wish their child to participate in the survey, they could return the form to the school and the student would be removed from the selection list. The same applied to completed student non-consent forms. At the start of each survey session, students were advised that they could opt-out of the survey at any time if they wanted to without giving any reasons.

2.4 Data analysis

2.4.1 Data processing

Data collection was monitored on a weekly basis to reconcile the number of surveys in the database with the headcounts taken at each school as well as to examine open-text responses for any concerning comments (as per ethics protocol). Sample demographics were monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure they were as expected – this included monitoring the number and proportion of participating students by region, sector, year level, gender and Aboriginal status.

After the conclusion of fieldwork, all data was exported from the survey platform and imported into a statistical software application. The data was cleaned and wrangled in RStudio⁵ before being analysed using the 'srvyr' package.⁶

This summary report provides the distribution of survey questions (e.g. the proportion of students saying they 'strongly agree' or 'strongly disagree' to a given question). These proportions are what is statistically referred to as 'estimates', however for the purpose of this report they are called 'results'.

In all surveys, when drawing a sample from a population of students, there is a degree of uncertainty associated with the results, meaning they would be somewhat different if a different sample of students had been selected. Therefore, there is also a margin of error around the results that needs to be considered. These are referred to as confidence intervals.⁷ The confidence intervals for the survey results have not been included in this summary report, however they will be published online at a later stage as part of further reporting and are also available on request.

2.4.2 Survey weights

Considerable effort has been made to ensure that the information collected represents the views of children and young people across WA. However, as some schools and student groups may be more likely or less likely to have participated in SOS21, a weighting strategy was necessary to rebalance estimates that may have been influenced more heavily by students more likely to respond.

In other words, reporting on all students would be biased and would not provide an accurate representation of the wider Year 4 to 12 student population in WA. The survey weighting strategy that was developed for SOS21 (and SOS19) uses probability methods to assign more weight to students who are

under-represented and less weight to students who are over-represented, allowing inferences to be made about the broader student population.

The weighting approach and outcomes for the Child Survey were straightforward, with minimal impacts on the wellbeing estimates. The Young People Survey had a slightly more complex sampling methodology that required more detailed adjustment. The weights therefore had a greater impact on the wellbeing estimates than observed for the Child Survey.

The weighting strategy was developed by an external consultant.

2.5 Strengths and limitations

A unique strength of the survey is its independent administration by the Commissioner and his staff which helped mitigate against potential influence from teachers or other school staff on students' responses. At least two and sometimes more than five staff, on occasion the Commissioner himself, travelled to each participating school to administer the survey. This ensured consistency in process and delivery and also provided an opportunity for students and school staff to give direct feedback about the survey to the Commissioner's staff.

One limitation of the survey was it only provided an opportunity for students who attended school on the day the Commissioner's staff visited the school. Because of this, the survey may have missed capturing the voices of some of the more vulnerable students, particularly at schools with lower than average attendance rates.

The sample size was large enough to generate results (estimates) across subgroups of interest for most questions.



Participants

3

3 Participants

3.1 Schools

The survey included a random sample of 176 schools across WA, stratified by school sector and region, of which 86 schools consented to participate. This represents a school participation rate of 48.9 per cent, close to the expected 50 per cent. Forty-nine schools participated in the Child Survey (52.1% participation rate), 43 schools participated in the Young People Survey (47.7% participation rate), with six schools participating in both surveys (85.7% response rate).

The schools participating in the survey had a similar sector (government, Catholic or independent) distribution to the full sample frame of schools in WA. There was a slightly higher proportion of remote participating schools compared to the full frame.

Schools serving both primary and secondary year students that had been selected for only one of the year level groups were given the opportunity to participate in both the Child and the Young People Survey. Results from students in the non-selected year levels are being used for reporting outside of the main sample.

An additional eight schools were selected non-randomly and accepted the invitation to participate in the survey. These schools' results are being used for separate reporting and have not been included in this summary report.

3.2 Students

A total of 16,532 Year 4 to 12 students from 94 schools in all regions of WA consented to participate. After removing responses from students in the additional sample (2,435) and incomplete responses, the final main sample included 4,582 Year 4 to 6 students and 9,106 Year 7 to 12 students (total of 13,688 students).

The representation of female students was slightly larger in the Young People Survey with 51.6 per cent of students identifying as female, 45.3 per cent as male and 3.1 per cent as other, compared to the Child Survey where 49.8 per cent of students identified as female, 47.4 per cent as male, and 2.8 per cent as other (see further under Section 3.2.2. Gender).

Nearly three-fifths (56.2%) of respondents attended government schools, while 19.9 per cent attended Catholic schools and 23.8 per cent attended independent schools. Across both the Child and the Young People Survey, approximately two-thirds (68.5%) of students attended schools in the metropolitan area, while just under one-third attended regional (18.0%) and remote (13.5%) schools. In the Child Survey, 9.7 per cent of respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, for the Young People Survey this was 7.7 per cent.

These are the unweighted numbers and proportions of all students who consented to participate and answered the first three (demographic questions) of the survey, regardless of active response percentage or completion (see further under Section 2.4.2. Survey weights).

3.2.1 Participation rates

Based on observed participation rates in SOS19, the expected participation rate was 75 per cent for the Child Survey and 50 per cent for the Young People Survey.

For the Child Survey, the participation rate was slightly higher than expected, with 78.4 per cent of invited students participating. Participation was lower in remote schools (65.5%) than for those in regional and metropolitan locations (75.2 % vs. 82.2 % respectively). Participation was similar for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

For the Young People Survey, the overall participation rate was significantly higher than expected at 78.5 per cent. This was largely due to the changes made in the 2021 survey methodology, whereby the selection of students was through random selection of entire classrooms rather than individual students.

Participation rates for Year 7 to 12 students were markedly higher for metropolitan-based students (91.4%) than for regional or remote students (67.7% and 53.4% respectively). Participation among Aboriginal students was lower than for non-Aboriginal students (50.3% Aboriginal vs. 82.4% non-Aboriginal). The student weighting strategy accounts for the differential in response rates.

The average time to finish the survey was 21 minutes for Year 4 to 6 students and 26 minutes for Year 7 to 12 students. For each survey, nearly all students finished within 40 minutes (98.1% for Years 4 to 6 and 97.7% for Years 7 to 12).

3.2.2 Gender

The survey provided three gender options for students to select how they described themselves, Boy, Girl, or Other. The proportion responding Other was too small to produce estimates by this student group. These students are therefore excluded from the gender disaggregations but are included in totals and disaggregations by year level, region and Aboriginal status.

A separate report will be produced with results for students who selected gender option Other at a later stage.



Summary of findings

4

4 Summary of findings

4.1 Main findings

Most Year 4 to 12 students ('students') report they are physically and mentally healthy, their material needs are covered and they like school. Many children and young people also say their relationships with family, friends and teachers are positive overall and that they feel like they belong in their community.

Across all essential outcomes for children and young people however, there is a substantial percentage of students who do not view their lives so positively, with older students and female students in particular reporting lower wellbeing scores. The 2021 data suggests that the proportion of students feeling less positive about their lives has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Physical and mental health

Survey responses show that 15 per cent of students rate their health as 'fair' or 'poor', one-quarter have a long-term health problem and nearly 30 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students do not get enough sleep. Three-quarters of female Year 10 to 12 students worry about their weight and are much less likely than male students to eat regular meals. Year 4 to 6 students are more likely to care very much about being physically active and eating healthy food than older students. Among Year 7 to 12 respondents, less than one-half of female students reported a high score for life satisfaction compared with two-thirds of male students. One-in-four girls reported poor life satisfaction. Overall, fewer students rate their life the best possible in 2021 compared to 2019 and more students rate it the worst possible.

Healthy behaviours

Three-quarters of high school students think people their age should not use alcohol and drugs, nearly two-thirds of Year 7 to 9 students and one-third of Year 10 to 12 students feel they don't know enough about sexual health and pregnancy and among Year 9 to 12 students, 56 per cent of female and 30 per cent of male students have been sent unwanted sexual material. One-quarter of Year 10 to 12 students either don't know or aren't sure where to go if they needed help for something about smoking, drinking, or other drugs. One-in-five female students in Years 7 to 12 said they often go without eating or sleeping because of their mobile phone.

Feeling connected and respected in culture and community

Two-thirds (64%) of students say they spend time with family every day and the same proportion (64%) hangs out with friends at least once a week. More than three-quarters (77%) regularly play or practise a sport. More than one-half (57%) of male students and 38 per cent of female students play electronic games every day but among Year 10 to 12 students, 32 per cent rarely or never spend time being active outdoors and 25 per cent of females don't do sport. One-quarter of high school students said they can't always access support for health worries when needed. Among Year 7 to 12 students, 57 per cent agreed they feel like they belong in their community but one-in-four think where they live there is nothing fun to do.

Safe and healthy relationships

More than one-half (53%) of students feel they are very good at making and keeping friends and 40 per cent say they are okay at it. Yet one-in-five Year 10 to 12 students feel they do not have enough friends. Seventy-two per cent of students feel their dad and 82 per cent feel their mum cares about them a lot. Among Year 7 to 12 students, one-in-ten said they cannot talk to their parent(s) about their problems and for female students, 30 per cent said they often don't feel listened to if they have something to say. Compared to 2019, in 2021 a smaller proportion of students reported their family gets along very well. One-in-ten Year 10 to 12 students reported their family gets along badly.

Material needs

Most (78%) Year 4 to 6 students and 92 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students have their own bedroom. Thirty per cent of Year 4 to 6 students moved home in the last 12 months. Eight per cent of students reported that there is only sometimes enough food for them to eat at home and one per cent said never. One-in-ten students said their family does not have enough money for them to go on school excursions or camp. Nearly all (97%) Year 10 to 12 students own a mobile phone but fewer remote students own a tablet or phone and have access to the internet at home.

Feeling safe

Survey responses show that three per cent of students feel safe at home only a little bit of the time or never. Among Year 7 to 12 students, one-half worry that someone in their family will be fighting with one-in-ten worrying a lot about this. For female students, one-in-ten reported feeling safe at home only sometimes or less and one-in-three reported feeling safe in their local area only sometimes or less. Nearly

one-half (44%) of Year 9 to 12 students had been hit or physically harmed by someone on purpose with female students being more likely to have been harmed at home and male students at school or other public places. In 2021, one-third (33%) of Year 9 to 12 students who had been physically harmed on purpose reported they had been harmed by an adult. Female young people were twice as likely as male young people to have been harmed by an adult.

Engaged and supported in education

Fewer students in 2021 than in 2019 think being at school every day is very important. Survey responses confirm that more than twice as many students in Years 4 to 6 than in Years 7 to 12 like school a lot. Among Year 7 to 12 students, more than one-third of female students say they do not like learning or do not feel like they belong at school and more than one-quarter (28%) say they do not like school. Only two-thirds of high school students feel teachers care, believe and listen to them. More students felt unsafe at school in 2021 than in 2019 and the data suggests this may be related to feelings of anxiety around COVID-19. Reports of experiences of bullying have remained largely the same with 40 per cent of bullied students reporting they were bullied in the last three months.

Having an active voice and being listened to

Four-in-five high school students agree they are involved in making decisions affecting them, however female students agree less. Most Year 7 to 12 students are allowed to go some places other than school without adult supervision but some students are not, especially female students.

4.2 Year group differences

The 2021 data confirms the year group response patterns first observed in the 2019 data. Across most wellbeing indicators, older students report less positive outcomes than younger students. When asked to rate their life satisfaction on a scale of 1-to-10, for example, the proportion of students rating their life satisfaction between 7 and 10 was 76 per cent for Years 4 to 6, 58 per cent for Years 7 to 9 and only 48 per cent for Years 10 to 12. The decrease in the proportions measured when comparing 2021 with 2019 data was observed for all three year level groups.

Year 4 to 6 students had much more positive views of school and learning than students in Years 7 to 12. For instance, nearly three times as many Year 7 to 12 than Year 4 to 6 students reported not liking school (25% vs. 9%).

In some circumstances, students in Years 10 to 12 responded more positively than those in Years 7 to 9. For example, students in Years 10 to 12 were more likely to feel safe in their local area and positive about their relationships with classmates than those in Years 7 to 9. These differences could reflect higher levels of maturity or their opportunities for greater independence.

4.3 Gender differences

Male and female students in Years 4 to 6 had very similar responses to most survey questions. For Year 7 to 12 students, however, the 2021 data affirms that there are substantial and consistent differences across multiple wellbeing domains. As per the year group differences, these patterns are consistent with developmental expectations and the findings of surveys in other settings and the Speaking Out Survey 2019. Some examples include:

- Female students were less likely than male students to rate their health as 'excellent' and instead more likely to rate it as 'good'.
- Female students were less likely than male students to eat regular meals every day.
- Female students had lower ratings of mental wellbeing than male students. Fewer female than male students reported a life satisfaction score of 7 to 10 (45% female vs. 65% male). Correspondingly, female students in Years 7 to 12 were more likely to rate their life satisfaction a 5 or 6 (29% female vs. 22% male) or between 0 and 4 (26% female vs. 13% male).
- More female than male students reported being affected by various sources of stress with the top three stressors for girls being school or study problems (93%), body image (63%) and mental health and wellbeing (61%).
- Female students were less likely than male students to say that their parents listen to them or that they can talk to parents about problems.
- Fewer female than male students reported feeling safe at home all the time (61% female vs. 72% male), and more female than male students said they felt safe at home sometimes or less (11% female vs. 5% male).
- More male than female students reported they had ever been hit or physically harmed on purpose (52% male vs. 35% female). Of those who had been harmed, male students were more likely to have been harmed at school (57% male vs. 31% female), whereas female students were more likely to have been harmed in the home (75% female vs. 32% male).
- Female students were more than twice as likely as male students to have been harmed by an adult.
- Among Year 7 to 12 students, female students are less likely to feel like they belong at school (65.9% female vs. 78.8% male) or feel happy at school (63% female vs. 75% male) compared to male students.

4.4 Responses to COVID-19

Many students reported their life has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with one-third (32%) reporting they experience feelings of anxiety or stress when thinking about the pandemic and 15 per cent feeling not at all confident about the future. A small proportion of students – less than five per cent – reported being strongly affected by feelings of hopelessness and the experience of high levels of anxiety due to the pandemic.

4.5 Comparison between SOS19 and SOS21

Preliminary comparison of results shows that the key findings of the Speaking Out Survey 2019 were affirmed by the follow-up survey in 2021:

- Children and young people in WA report generally positive outcomes and have thereby shown great resilience in the face of an unprecedented global pandemic.
- Mental health is a critical issue for many children and young people and the proportion of students experiencing emotional distress continues to rise.
- The gender wellbeing gap has been affirmed with female students rating their wellbeing less favourably than male students across most indicators.
- Perceptions of safety continue to be a critical issue in 2021 particularly for female students. Evidence from students is that the perpetrators of physical violence against them are often adults.
- Older students continue to hold much less positive views than younger students of many aspects of school and learning.

Comparison of results also shows:

- Students' ratings of their overall physical health in 2021 are less favourable when compared to the data for 2019.
- Students in the 2021 survey reported higher engagement across a range of indoor activities, including using the internet, gaming, reading a book and doing homework.
- The proportion of students reporting having been sent unwanted sexual material like pornographic pictures, videos or words has increased among male and female respondents.
- Family cohesion may be affected by the pandemic with fewer students reporting their family gets along very well.
- More students rate their life the worst possible, especially in high school.
- Fewer students believe it is very important to be at school every day, possibly due to the disruptions to schooling caused by the pandemic.
- A greater proportion of students reported not feeling safe at school all the time and this may be related to feelings of anxiety around COVID-19. An increase in the proportion of students being bullied was not found.
- More female students disagreed that they get to make and are involved in decisions that affect them.

4.6 Aboriginal children and young people

In general, Aboriginal students fared less well than non-Aboriginal students in terms of their physical health, material basics, family worries, or expectations for further education. In other respects, Aboriginal students were on par with non-Aboriginal students in terms of life satisfaction and level of self-perception, and many Aboriginal students reported feeling safe and connected in their community especially in remote areas.

With respect to COVID-19, Aboriginal students in the metropolitan area were more likely to feel negatively impacted by the pandemic than Aboriginal students in regional and remote areas and non-Aboriginal students.

4.7 Children and young people in regional and remote areas

Across most wellbeing areas, students in regional and remote areas reported very similar views and opinions about their wellbeing as students in the metropolitan area. The 2021 survey found that students in remote areas were more likely to hang out with friends and be active outdoors every day and know where to go for support. The survey also found that similar proportions of students in remote, regional and metropolitan areas reported feeling supported by their family and their friends, however non-metropolitan students reported somewhat less positive relationships with classmates or teachers at school.

Students in remote areas reported having greater independence with respect to mobility and travel while remote and regional students were more likely to have worked for pay.



**Speaking
Out Survey
2021 results**

5

5 Speaking Out Survey 2021 results

The results presented in this report are structured according to the Commissioner's Monitoring Framework and its three interlinking domains of Healthy and connected, Safe and supported and Learning and participating. These three domains are important because children and young people across WA have told the Commissioner that these things make a big difference to their lives and make them well and happy. It is important to note that the indicators in each of the domains are linked to each other and that the data in one domain cannot be fully considered without also considering the information in the other two domains.

The results shown in graphs represent percentages unless otherwise stated. Total percentages in graphs may not add up to 100 due to rounding or if certain response options (i.e. 'Prefer not to say') have not been included.

5.1 Healthy and connected

Physical and mental health, as well as connection to culture and community are critical to a child or young person's wellbeing. The essential outcomes in this domain are that children and young people are physically and mentally well, that they develop and engage in positive healthy behaviours and that they feel connected and respected in their culture and community.

The survey used a range of indicators to measure these outcomes including questions about students' physical health and activity, their mental wellbeing, resilience, stress and use of alcohol and drugs. It also asked respondents to report on their cultural background, their activities outside of school and their access to support.

15% of students in Years 4-12 rated their health as fair or poor. Highest for Year 10-12 students: **21% said their health was fair or poor.**

5.1.1 Physical health

“I believe if we had youth encouraging healthy habits and getting help more youth would; because teenagers don’t always listen to adults but they might listen to other teenagers.” (17 year-old)

“I’ve learnt that if you don’t get enough exercise, daylight, fresh air and if you don’t eat nutritional foods, drink plenty of water and consume positive information then you’re not giving yourself a fighting chance.” (15 year-old)

“I can’t sleep properly and struggling with my eating habits but am too ashamed to talk about it.” (15 year-old)

Physical health is a basic building block for children’s current wellbeing as well as future life outcomes. Being physically healthy includes being physically active, having a good diet and being in the healthy weight range.

Students in Years 4 to 12 are in a critical phase for establishing positive health behaviours to support strong wellbeing outcomes over the course of their lifetime and deter negative health practices.

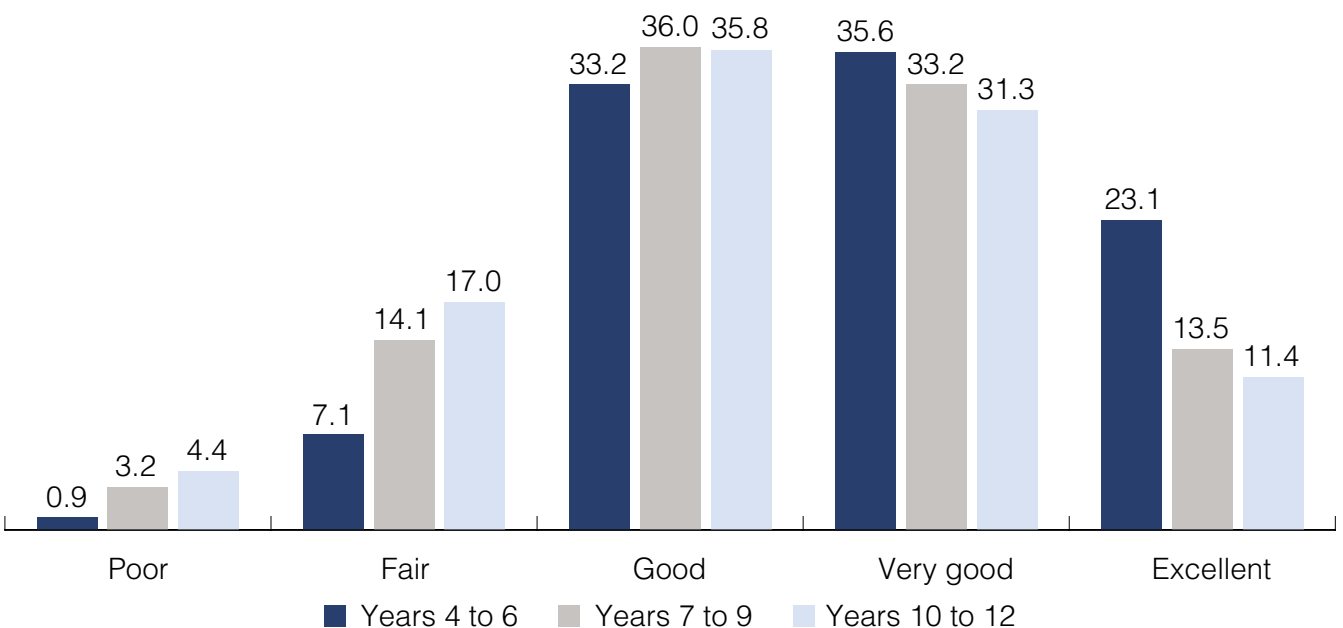
General health

One-half of students in Years 4 to 12 rated their health as excellent or very good (16.1% excellent and 33.5% very good) while 15.4 per cent said their health was only fair or even poor (12.6% fair and 2.8% poor).

Students in Years 4 to 6 were more likely than students in Years 7 to 12 to rate their health as excellent or very good (58.7% Years 4–6 vs. 45.0% Years 7–12).

Female students in Years 7 to 12 were less likely than male students to report that their general health was excellent or very good (38.1% female vs. 53.5% male).

Graph 5.1.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor, by year group, 2021



Dental health

Good oral health is fundamental to overall health and wellbeing. Without it, a person’s general quality of life and the ability to eat, speak and socialise is compromised, resulting in pain, discomfort and embarrassment.⁸

Less than one-half of students (45.1%) in Years 4 to 12 reported having ever had a filling. The proportion was highest for Year 10 to 12 students (52.6% vs. 45.9% Years 7–9 and 37.8% Years 4–6) and was also higher for female than male students in older year groups (Years 7–12: 52.9% female vs. 44.6% male). This is despite female students being more likely to report brushing their teeth twice daily (Years 7–12: 71.9% female vs. 62.0% male).

Overall, two-thirds (66.0%) of students in Years 4 to 12 reported brushing their teeth twice the previous day. One-quarter (25.5%) brushed once and 4.2 per cent said they did not brush their teeth.

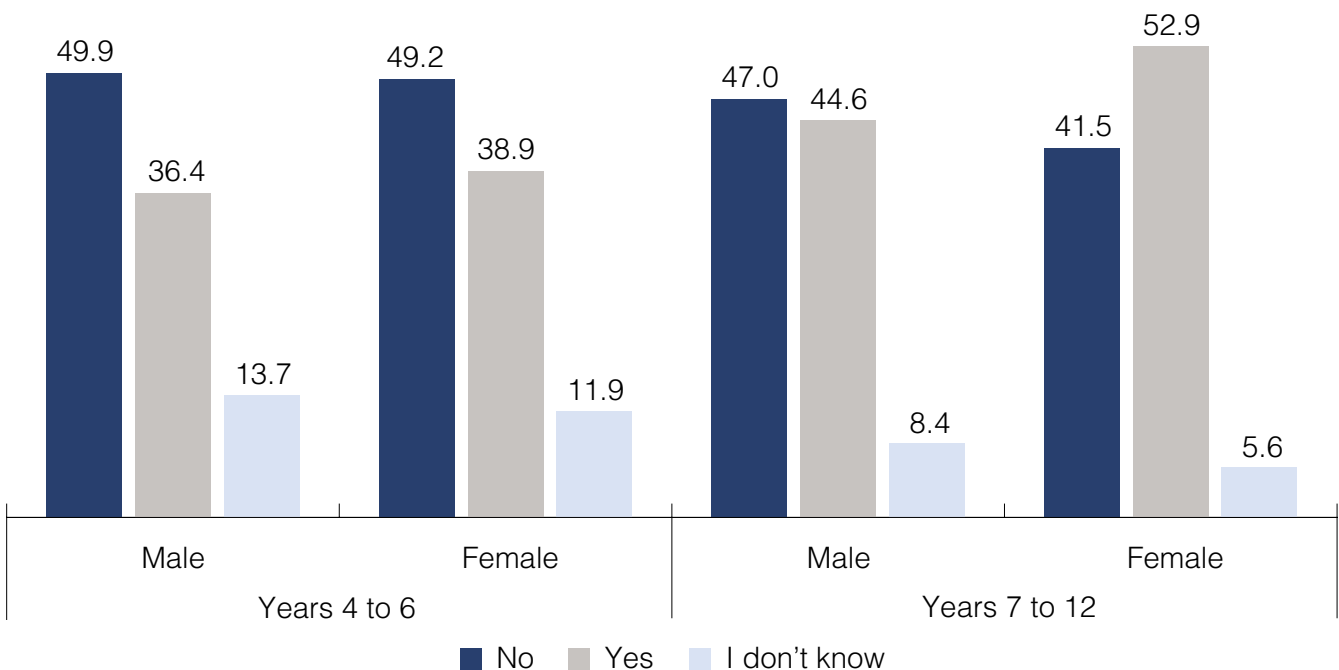
45% of students in Years 4-12 reported having a dental filling.

Female students are more likely than male students to brush their teeth twice daily and are more likely to say they have ever had a filling.

Long-term health problems or disability

Long-term health conditions and disability are often inter-related. Long-term health issues and disability can both result in a functional limitation which impacts everyday life for children and young people. People with disability are also more likely to develop long-term health conditions and people with long-term health conditions are more likely to develop disability.⁹

Graph 5.1.2: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they have or have not ever had a filling, by year group and gender, 2021



Students in Years 7 to 12 were asked if they had any long-term health problems or a long-term disability and whether this caused difficulties with everyday activities, communicating, other activities, or no difficulties. It should be noted that students at Education Support Centres, those with a condition that prevents them from participating in mainstream education programs, or students who were absent on the day of the survey because of a health condition did not participate in the survey. The true proportion of students with disability and/or a long-term health problem is therefore higher than the proportions calculated based on the responses of students in this survey.

The most common long-term health issues reported by students in the survey were asthma, anxiety and depression. The most commonly reported type of disability was ADHD.

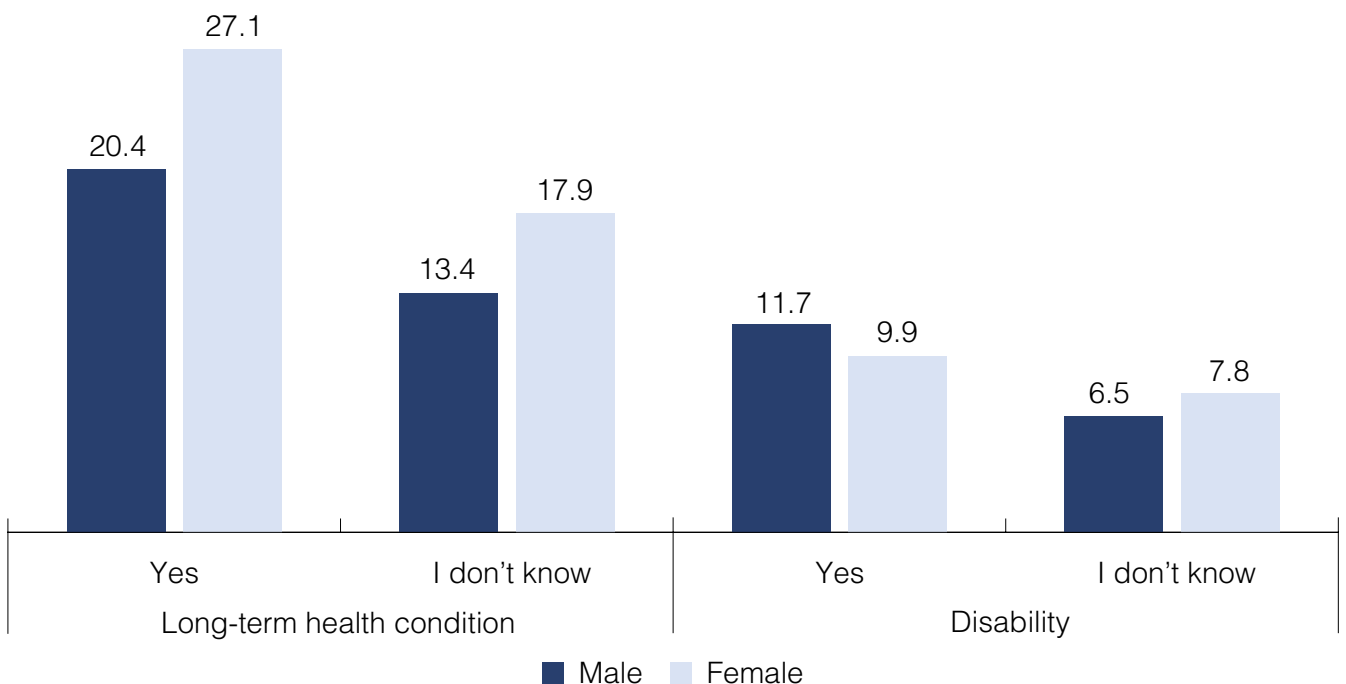
One-quarter (24.8%) of students in Years 7 to 12 reported having a long-term health

problem or condition lasting six months or more and 11.6 per cent reported having long-term disability. In addition, 16.0 per cent were unsure if they had a long-term health problem and 7.5 per cent were unsure if they had disability.

A higher proportion of female than male students reported suffering from a long-term health condition(s) (27.1% vs. 20.4%) while a somewhat higher proportion of male than female students reported having disability (11.7% vs. 9.9%). Substantial proportions of both male and female students were unsure whether they had a long-term condition or disability, thereby suggesting some level of undiagnosed problems and conditions.

1-in-4 high school students in mainstream education say they have a long-term health problem and 1-in-10 say they have a long-term disability.

Graph 5.1.3: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting a long-term health condition(s) or disability, by gender, 2021



Sleep patterns

Regular and sufficient sleep is especially important for children and young people as it directly impacts mental and physical development. In general, school-aged children and young people need between eight and 11 hours of sleep. Students in the survey were asked about what time they usually went to bed on a school night and what time they usually woke up on a school day.

Most students in Years 4 to 6 reported usually going to sleep by 9pm (69.4%) on a school night and waking up by 8am (97.7%) on a school day. One-in-10 (11.0%) Years 4–6 students go to sleep after 10pm.

For Year 7 to 12 students, less than one-half of students (41.4%) reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night and one-third (30.4%) said they go to sleep later than 11pm.

Among Year 10 to 12 students, 42.7 per cent reported going to sleep after 11pm including 14.1 per cent who reported going to sleep after midnight. Considering that nearly all (97.0%) Year 10 to 12 students reported waking up before 8am, this suggests that many Year 10 to 12 students do not get enough sleep. Further analysis of the SOS21 data shows that 28.7 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students report getting less than the recommended minimum amount of sleep (at least 8 hours).

29% of Year 10-12 students report getting less than 8 hours of sleep.

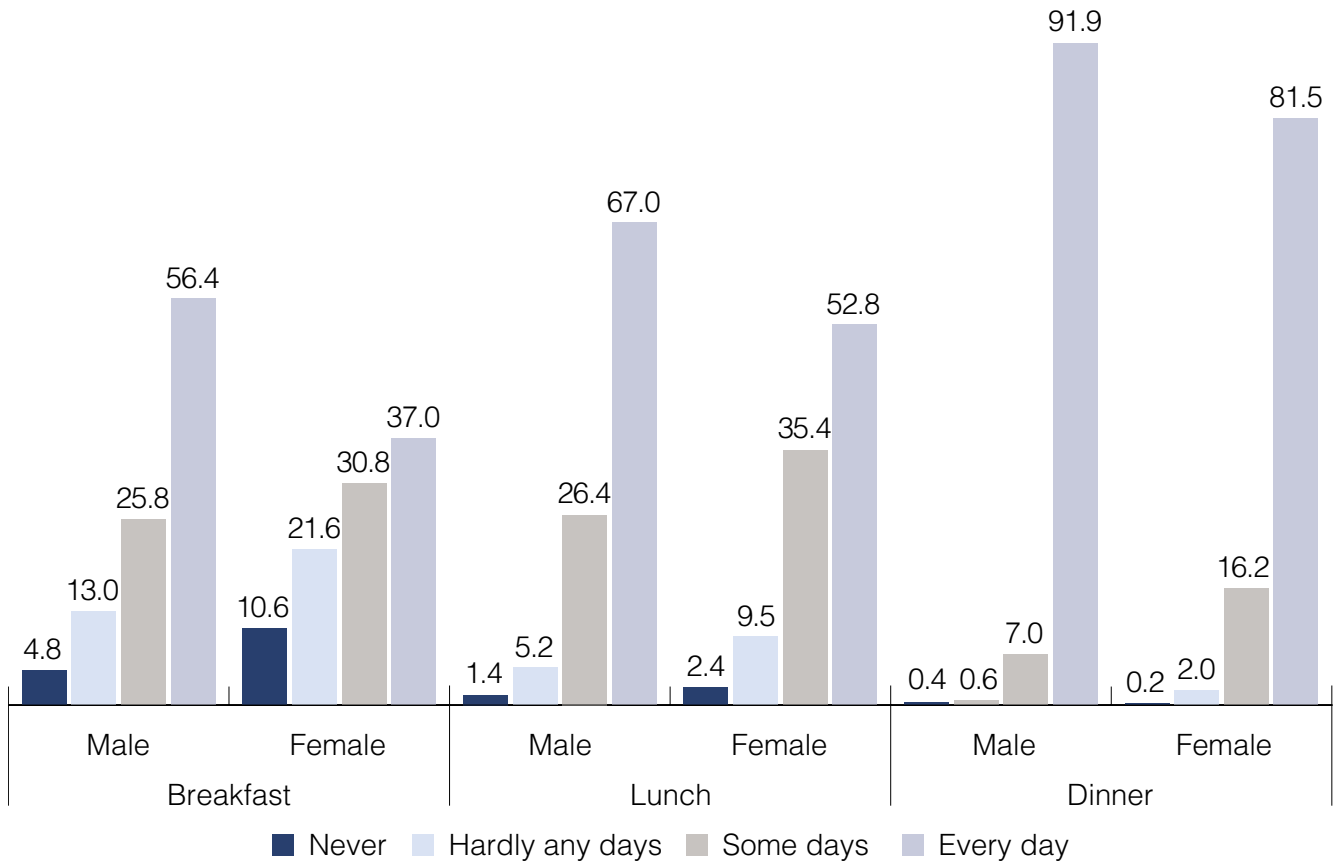
Usual meal consumption

Eating regular meals is important because eating irregularly can have an adverse impact on general health and wellbeing, can increase risk of the development of an eating disorder¹⁰ and has been linked with a higher risk of diseases such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and obesity.¹¹ Students in the survey were asked how often they usually ate breakfast, lunch and dinner.

For all students in Years 4 to 12, 54.5 per cent reported eating breakfast, 64.7 per cent reported eating lunch and 87.9 per cent reported eating dinner every day. Generally, the proportion of students eating regular meals was higher for students in Years 4 to 6 than Years 7 to 12 especially for breakfast and lunch (breakfast: 71.7% vs. 45.9% and lunch: 76.8% vs. 58.8%).

Across all three regular meal categories, female students in Years 7 to 12 were less likely than male students to say that they usually ate these meals every day. Most noticeably, 63.0 per cent of female students do not eat breakfast every day and 47.2 per cent do not eat lunch every day.

Graph 5.1.4: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they eat breakfast, lunch and dinner every day, some days, hardly any days or never, by gender, 2021



Male high school students are significantly more likely than female students to eat regular meals every day.

2-in-3 female high school students do not eat breakfast every day.

Caring about eating well, being active and looks

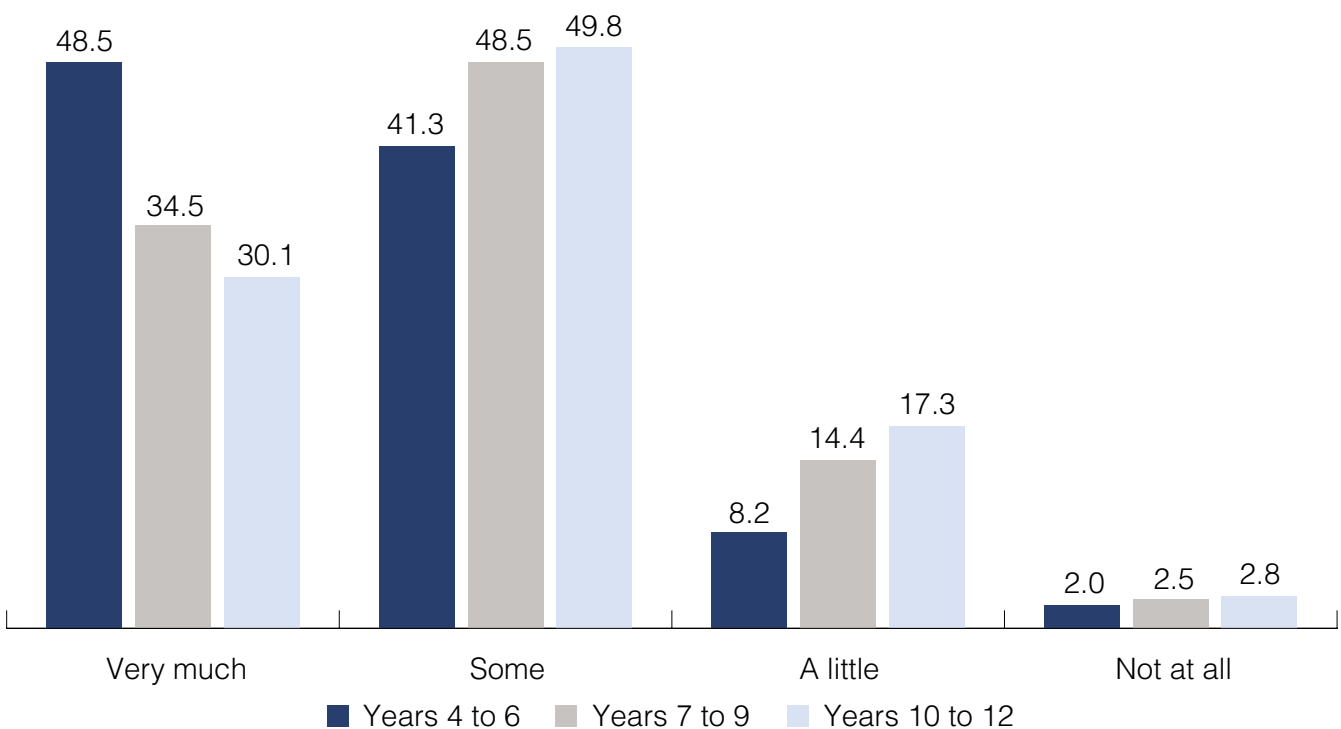
Students were asked how much they cared about eating healthy food, being physically active and how they looked.

For all students in Years 4 to 12, 38.0 per cent reported caring about eating healthy food very much and a further 46.5 per cent reported caring some. With regard to staying fit and

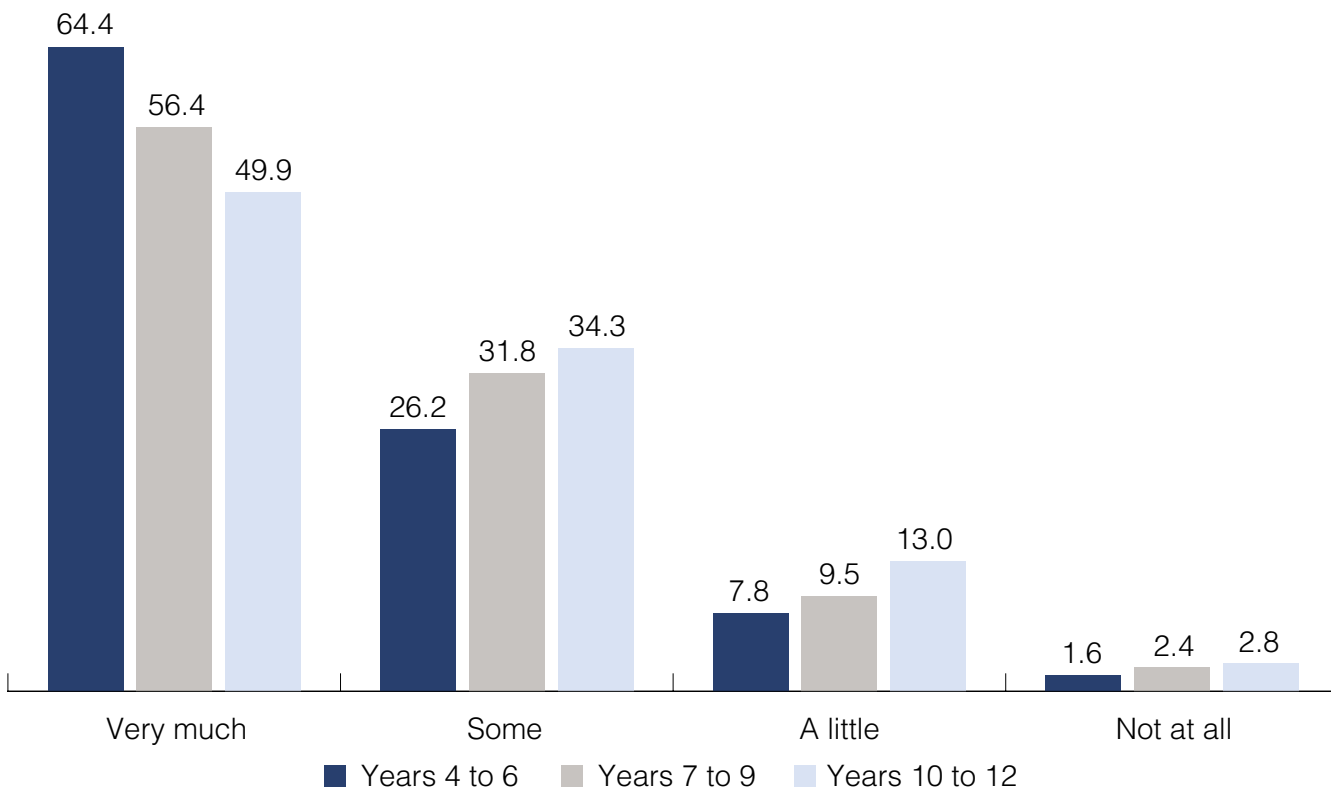
being physically active, 57.2 per cent reported caring about this very much and a further 30.6 per cent said they cared some.

The proportion of students caring very much about each of these factors was significantly higher for students in Years 4 to 6 than Years 7 to 12 (healthy eating: 48.5% Years 4–6 vs. 32.7% Years 7–12, being physically active: 64.4% Years 4–6 vs. 53.7% Years 7–12).

Graph 5.1.5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they care about eating healthy food very much, some, a little or not at all, by year group, 2021



Graph 5.1.6: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they care about being physically active very much, some, a little or not at all, by year group, 2021



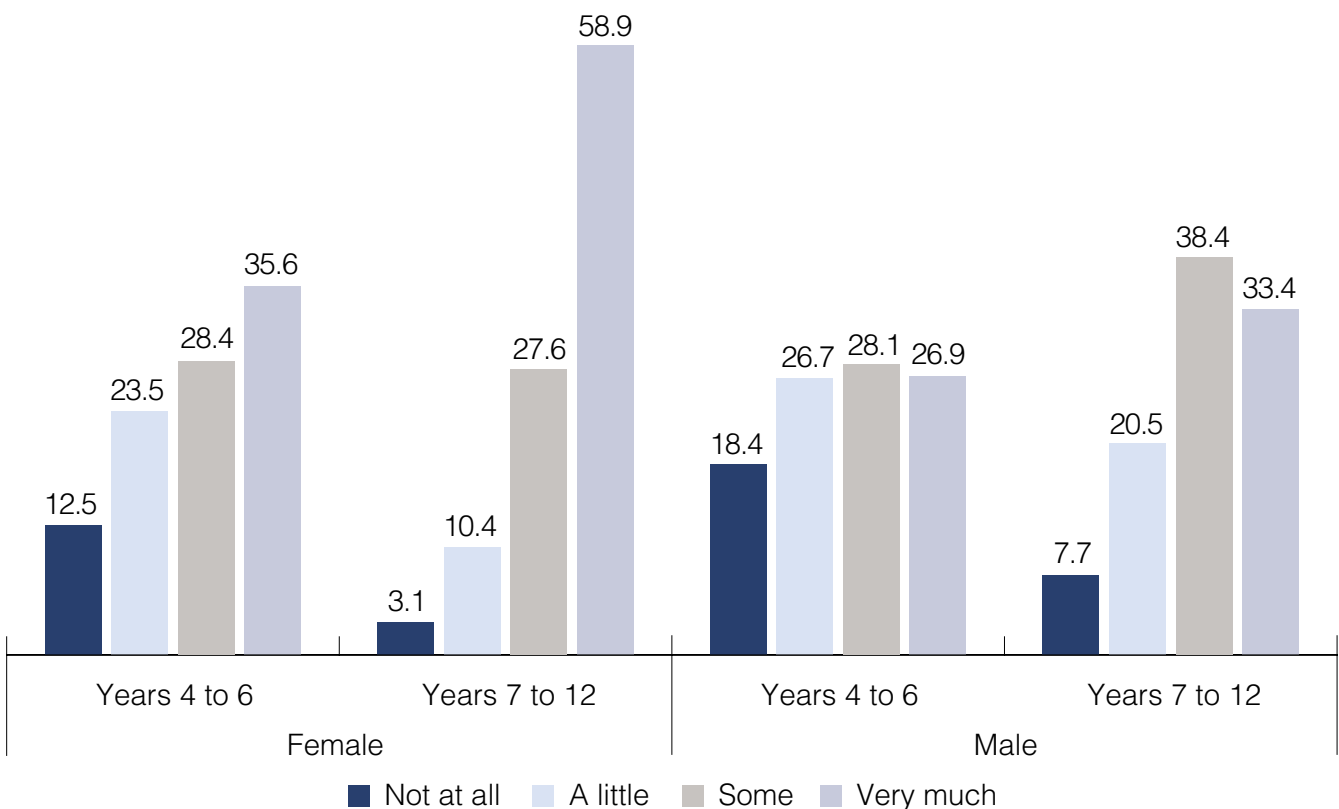
The survey found that 41.4 per cent of all Year 4 to 12 students cared very much about how they look with a further 31.1 per cent caring some.

Female students were more likely than male students to care very much about looks (51.0% female vs. 31.3% male). The difference across genders was present in Years 4 to 6 (35.6% female vs. 26.9% male) and increased further in Years 7 to 12 (58.9% female vs. 33.4% male).

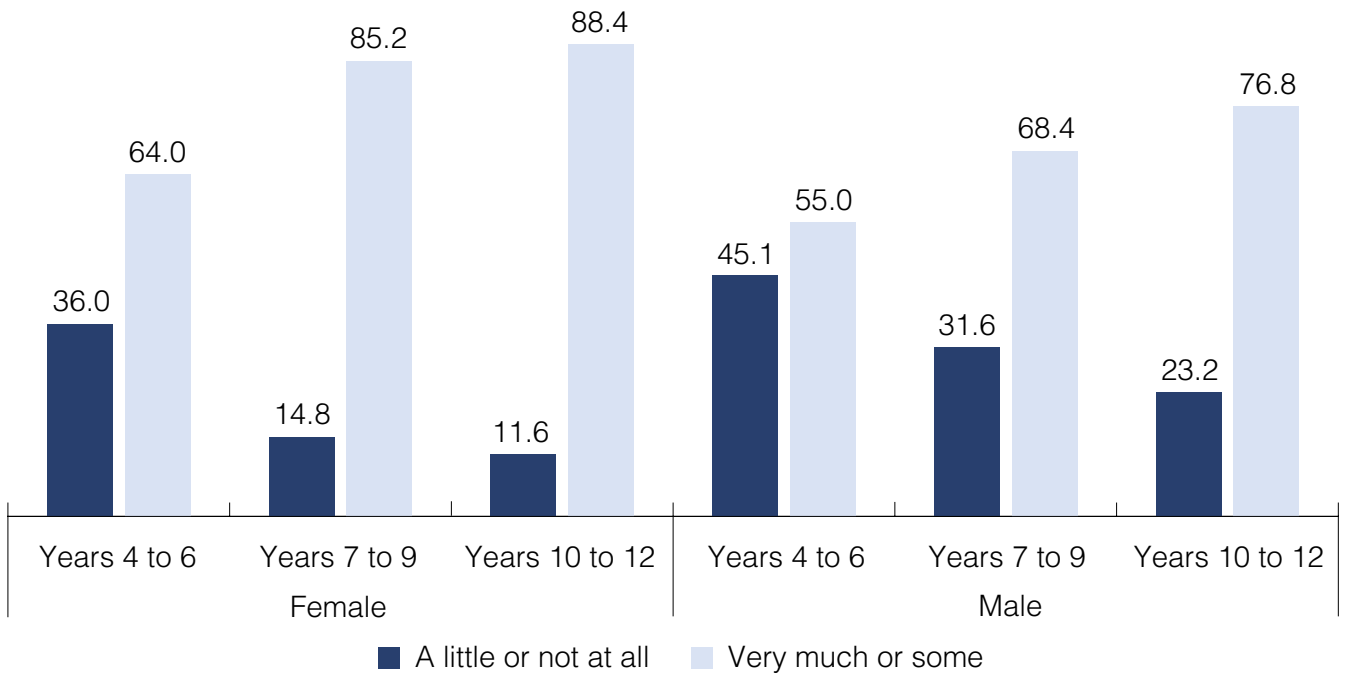
Further analysis (Graph 5.1.8) shows that the proportion of male students caring about their looks continues to increase all through high school, while for female students it is at a very high level from Year 7 onwards. Three-quarters of male students say they care about their looks at least some when in Years 10 to 12.

Year 4-6 students are more likely to care very much about being physically active and eating healthy food than older students.

Graph 5.1.7: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they care about the way they look very much, some, a little or not at all, by year group and gender, 2021



Graph 5.1.8: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they care about the way they look, by year group and gender, 2021



Most male and female high school students care about the way they look with almost **9-in-10 female** and around **7-in-10 male students** saying they care at least some.

Physical activity

Overall, one-half (53.9%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported that physical activity, sport or exercise is 'definitely' an important part of their life. Another one-third (32.3%) answered 'sort of'. The proportion of male students reporting that sport is definitely an important part of their life was largely consistent across all year groups in high school (dropping slightly from 63.6% to 60.6%), however the proportion of female students saying the same was lower than this and also declined more significantly through the high school years (dropping from 51.3% to 40.6%).

The proportion of students reporting that sport or physical exercise are 'not really' an important part of their life was largely consistent for across genders for Year 7 to 9 students (11.1%) but increased significantly for female students in Years 10 to 12 (from 10.9% to 21.3%).

Female students were less likely than male students to report being vigorously active every day. In response to the question 'In the

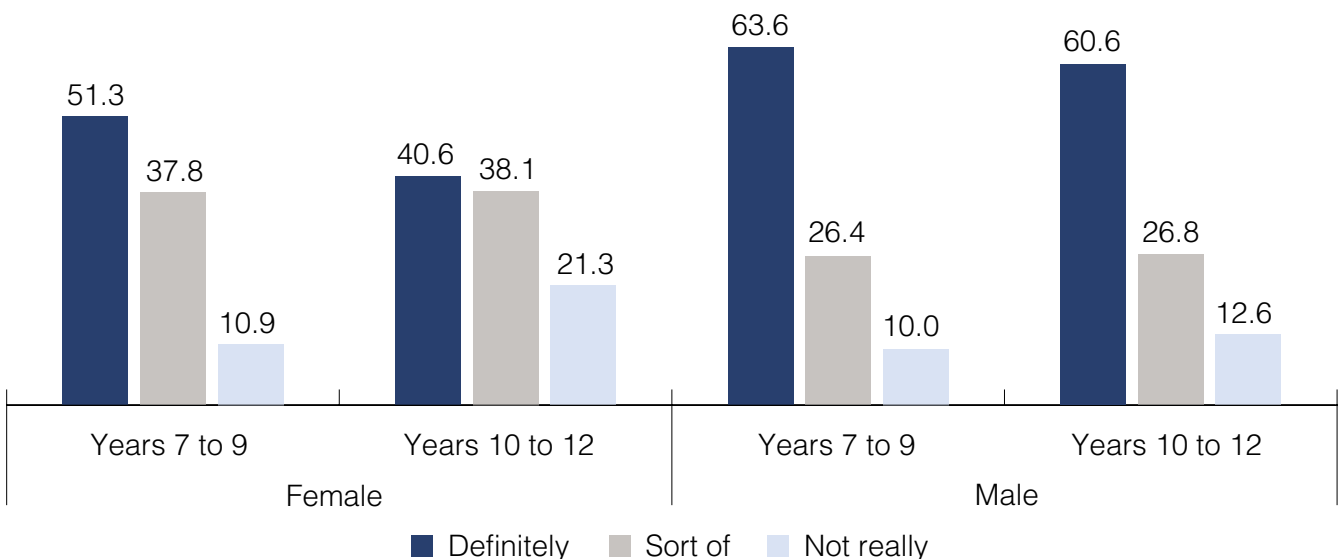
last 7 days, how many times have you done any exercise or activity that makes you sweat or breathe hard, or gets your heart rate up?', 28.5 per cent of male Year 7 to 12 students responded '7 or more times' compared to 12.6 per cent of female students. Largely the same proportion of male and female students said '3 to 6 times' (44.5% male vs. 41.6% female).

Overall, almost three-quarters (73.0%) of male students and over one-half (54.2%) of female students in high school exercise vigorously at least three times a week.

Six per cent (5.8%) of female and three per cent (2.8%) of male students answered that they don't exercise.

3-in-4 male students and 1-in-2 female students in high school exercise vigorously at least 3 times a week.

Graph 5.1.9: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting that physical activity, sport or exercise is an important part of their life definitely, sort of or not really, by year group and gender, 2021



Fruit and vegetable consumption

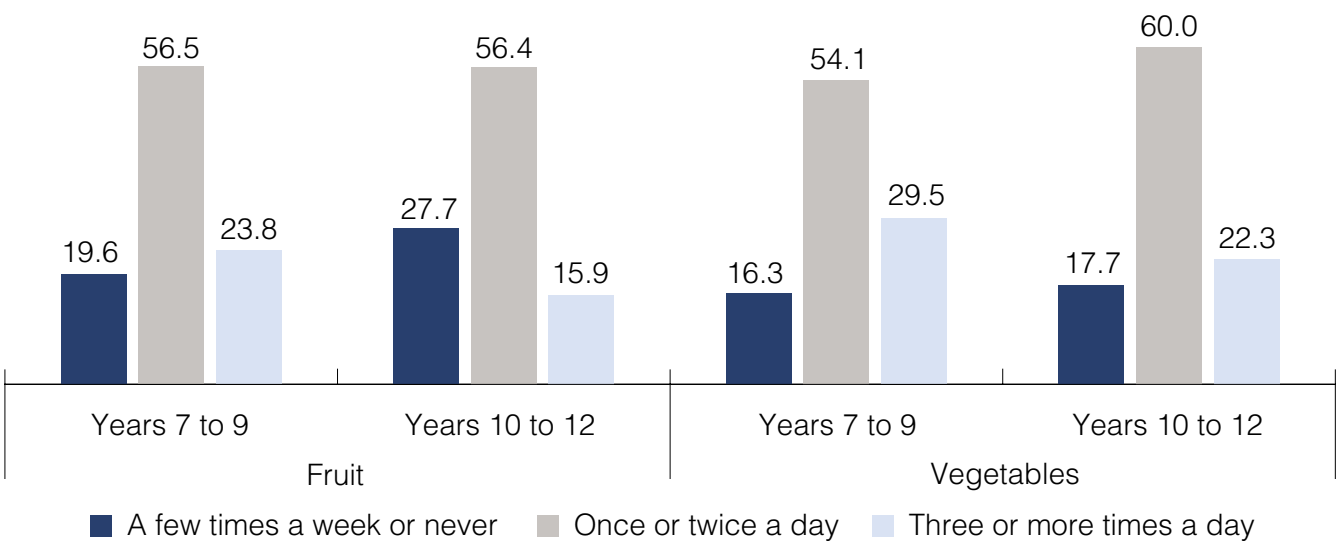
Children and young people need a nutritious and balanced diet that allows them to grow and develop in a healthy way and to reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases later in life. Research shows that eating a wide variety of nutritious foods and limiting consumption of fatty and sugary foods is critical to healthy development and growth.¹²

With respect to fruit consumption, three-quarters of students (77.0%) in Years 7 to 12 said they ate fruit at least once a day but 20.1 per cent ate it only a few times a week and 2.9 per cent never.

With respect to vegetable consumption, most Year 7 to 12 students (83.1%) ate vegetables at least once a day but 14.8 per cent ate them only a few times a week and 2.1 per cent never.

Reports of fruit and vegetable consumption varied by year group with older students being less likely than younger students to eat fruit or vegetables twice a day or more.

Graph 5.1.10: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they eat fruit and vegetables three or more times a day, once or twice a day, a few times a week or never, by year group, 2021



1-in-4 Year 10-12 students do not eat fruit every day and almost 1-in-5 do not eat vegetables every day.

Body weight and obesity

Being overweight or obese increases a child’s or young person’s risk of poor physical health in both the short and long term. Children and young people who are overweight or obese are more likely to be overweight or obese in adulthood¹³ and face a higher risk of developing coronary heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, gall bladder disease, osteoarthritis and endocrine disorders.¹⁴

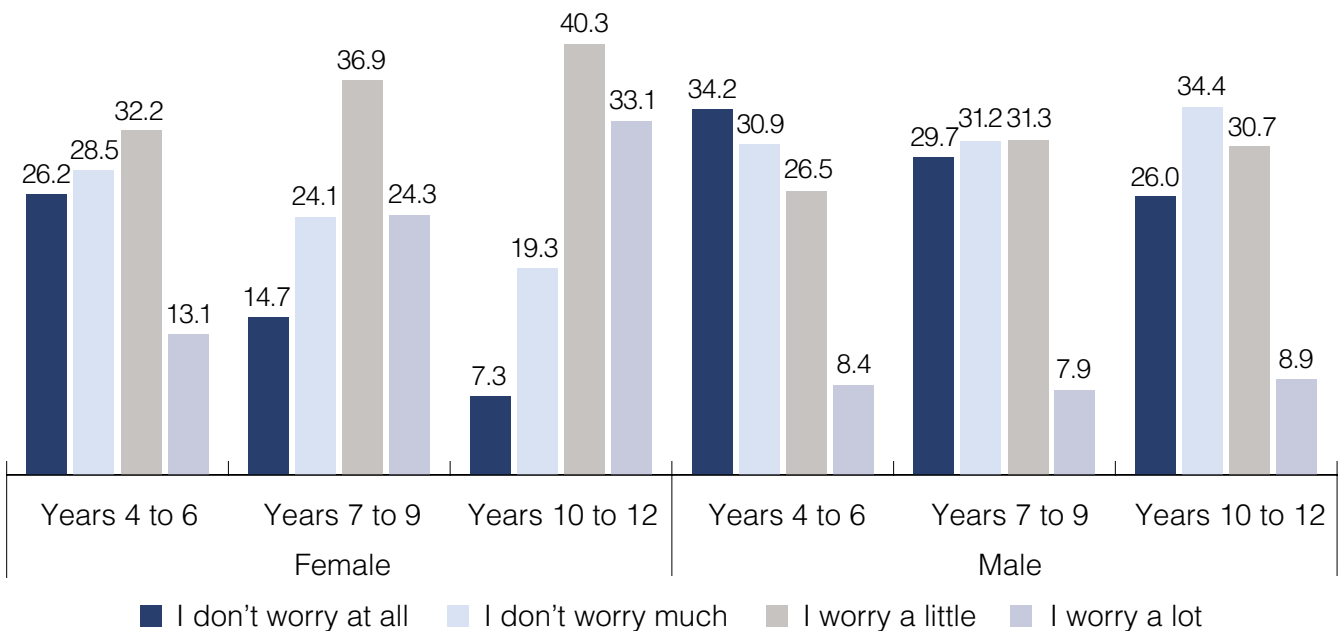
Obesity in young people is also associated with a number of psychosocial problems, including social isolation, discrimination and low self-esteem.¹⁵

On the other end of the spectrum, some children and young people who are underweight are experiencing difficulties related to poor body image and eating disorders.

For all students in Years 4 to 12, one-half reported they either don’t worry at all about their weight (23.3%) or they don’t worry much (27.9%), while 32.6 per cent worry a little and 16.2 per cent reported they worried a lot about their weight.

The proportion of Year 7 to 12 students who worry a lot about their weight was significantly higher for female than male students (28.0% female vs. 8.3% male).

Graph 5.1.11: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they worry a lot, a little, not much or they don’t worry at all about their weight, by year group and gender, 2021



With respect to body weight perception among Year 7 to 12 students, 52.7 per cent thought they were about the right weight, 22.8 per cent thought they were slightly overweight and 18.0 per cent reported thinking they were slightly underweight.

Female students were somewhat more likely to think they were slightly overweight (26.0% female vs. 19.5% male) while male students were more likely to say they were slightly underweight (21.1% male vs. 14.9% female).

More than 1-in-4 female Year 7-12 students worry a lot about their weight as do 1-in-10 male students.

Table 5.1.1: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students responding to the question ‘Which of these do you think you are?’, by year group and gender, 2021, in per cent

		Very underweight	Slightly underweight	About the right weight	Slightly overweight	Very overweight
Year group	Years 7 to 9	3.7	17.9	52.2	23.1	3.1
	Years 10 to 12	2.5	18.2	53.4	22.4	3.5
Gender	Male	3.7	21.1	53.6	19.5	2.2
	Female	2.3	14.9	53.4	26.0	3.5

5.1.2 Mental health

“Families should get taught more about mental health because they don’t see it as an issue and don’t understand what we’re going through. Adults in general could start talking about these topics and then students might open up and think they aren’t alone.” (16 year-old)

“There is such a stigma around men’s mental health. If I ever admit to being sad or reach out, it is used against me and I feel weak, this is painful for me.” (16 year-old)

“I think it’s important that schools put more effort into dealing with bullying and mental health issues.” (17 year-old)

Good mental health is an essential component of wellbeing and means that children and young people are more likely to have fulfilling relationships, be able to cope with adverse circumstances and adapt to change.

Poor mental health is associated with behavioural issues, a diminished sense of self-worth and a decreased ability to cope. This has adverse effects on a child or young person’s quality of life and emotional wellbeing as well as their capacity to engage in school and other activities.¹⁶

Positive outlook - life satisfaction

Research shows that an optimistic or positive outlook on life can be a protective factor for mental health issues, in particular anxiety and depression.¹⁷ A positive outlook is also important for children and young people as they develop their identity and imagine their future selves. Evidence shows that having the ability to imagine a positive version of a future self is linked to better health and educational outcomes, including reduced drug use, less sexual risk-taking behaviours and less involvement in violence.¹⁸

Students were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 10 where they felt their life was (at the time of answering) from the worst to the best possible life. For all students in Years 4 to 12, the mean life satisfaction was 6.8. Average ratings were higher for students in Years 4 to 6 than in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 12 (7.7 Years 4–6 vs. 6.6 Years 7–9 and 6.1 Years 10–12).

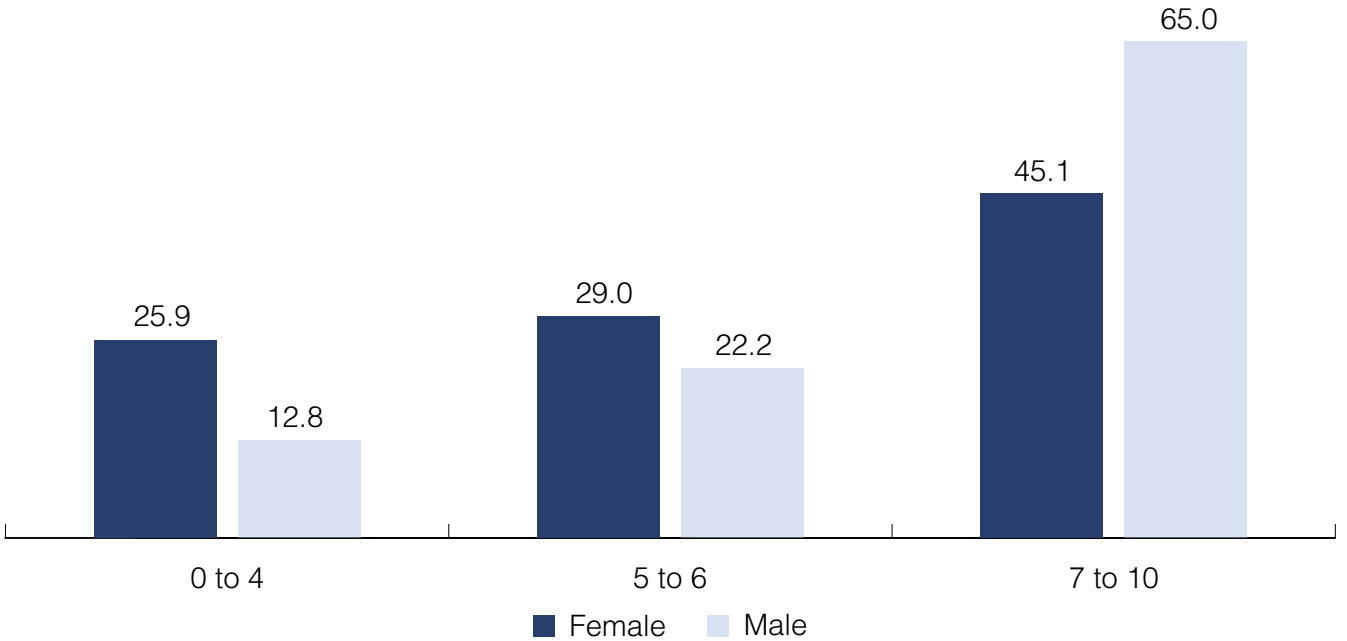
Female students in Years 7 to 12 recorded the lowest average rating for life satisfaction with a score of only 6.1 (compared to 6.9 for male students).

With respect to grouped ratings (0 to 4, worst; 5 or 6; and 7 to 10, best), the proportion of students reporting a life satisfaction score of 7 to 10 was significantly higher for Year 4 to 6 than Year 7 to 12 students (76.0% Years 4–6 vs. 54.1% Years 7–12).

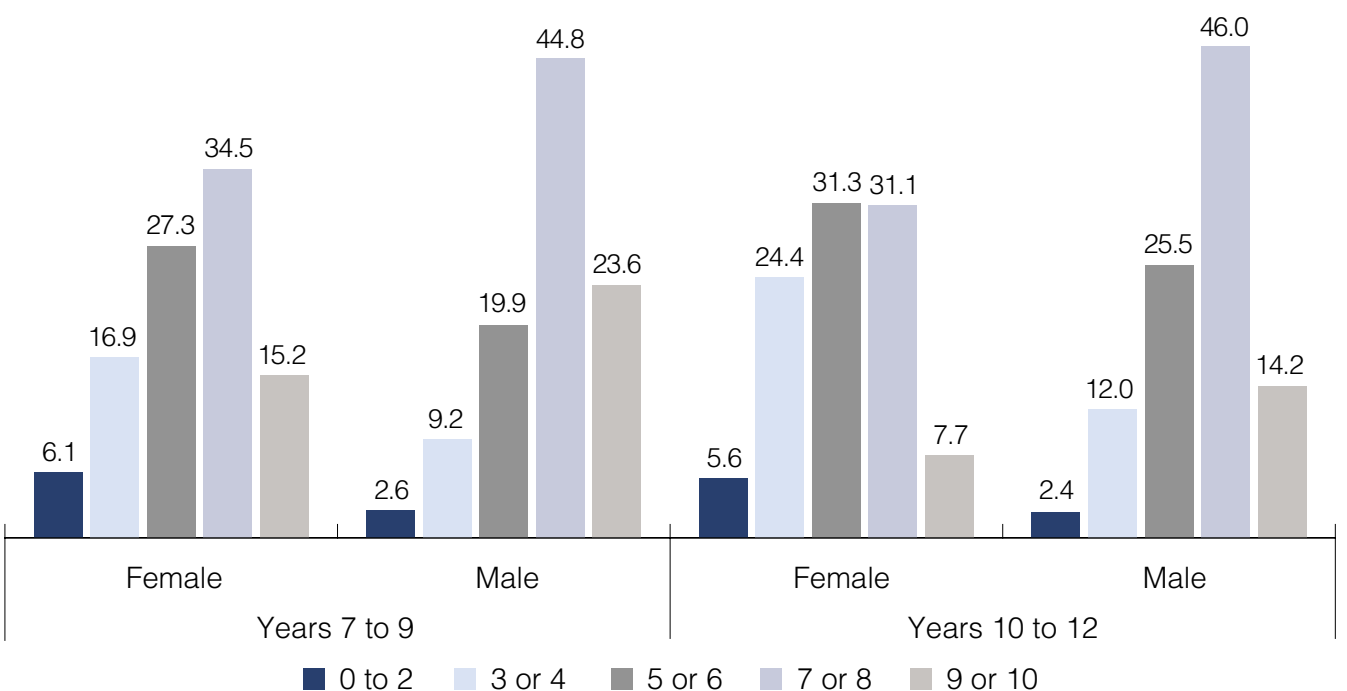
Less than one-in-two female Year 7 to 12 students reported a score of 7 to 10 compared to two-in-three male students (45.1% female vs. 65.0% male). Of great concern is the 25.9 per cent of female Year 7 to 12 students who rated their life satisfaction 0 to 4.

45% of female high school students reported high life satisfaction compared with 65% of male students. One-quarter (26%) of female students reported poor life satisfaction.

Graph 5.1.12: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of '0' to '10' where '0' is the worst possible life and '10' the best possible life, grouped responses by gender, 2021



Graph 5.1.13: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of '0' to '10' where '0' is the worst possible life and '10' the best possible life, grouped responses by gender and year level, 2021



Most students feel resilient but 10% of female students and 5% of male students say they cannot achieve their goals or cope with life's challenges.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to cope and thrive in the face of negative events, challenges or adversity. Key attributes of resilience in children and young people include social competence, a sense of purpose or hope for the future, effective coping style, a sense of self-efficacy and positive self-regard.¹⁹

Year 7 to 12 students were asked a range of questions about their resilience. Most students agreed with each of the following statements:

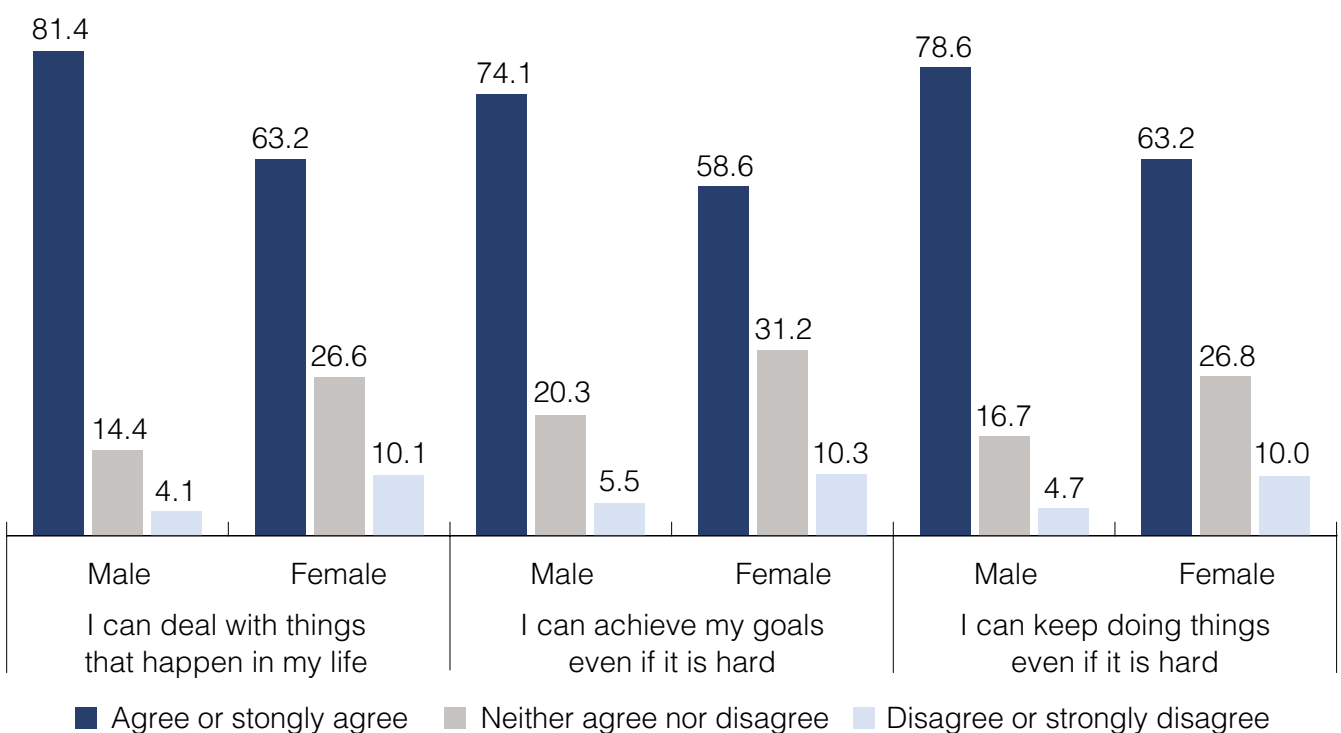
- 49.3% agreed and 22.1% strongly agreed they could deal with things that happened in life.
- 45.4% agreed and 20.1% strongly agreed they could achieve their goals even if it is hard.
- 46.5% agreed and 23.5% strongly agreed they could keep doing things even if it is hard.

A higher proportion of male than female students agreed or strongly agreed with each of the three statements about their resilience:

- 63.2 per cent of female students feel they can deal with things that happened in life, compared to 81.4 per cent of male students.
- 58.6 per cent of female students agreed they can achieve their goals even if it is hard, compared to 74.1 per cent of male students.
- 63.2 per cent of female students can keep doing things even if it is hard, compared to 78.6 per cent of male students.

These 2021 results are in line with results from 2019 and no significant change has been recorded.

Graph 5.1.14: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students agreeing, disagreeing or neither with statements about their resilience, by gender, 2021



Depression

Emotional disorders commonly emerge during adolescence. Multiple physical, behavioural, emotional and social changes can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems. In addition to depression or anxiety, adolescents with emotional disorders can also experience excessive irritability, frustration or anger. Younger adolescents may additionally develop emotion-related physical symptoms such as stomach-ache, headache or nausea.²⁰

Over the past decade, it has been increasingly recognised that while media devices provide significant opportunities for learning and development, high levels of screen-based activities can be detrimental to children's health and wellbeing.²¹ Although evidence is mixed, screen time is also increasingly being linked to mental health issues for young people, including anxiety and depression.^{22,23}

Emotional health issues such as depression impact children and young people's ability to form healthy relationships, participate in learning and cope with adversity.²⁴

Students in Years 9 to 12 were asked if during the past 12 months they had ever felt sad, blue or depressed for two weeks or more in a row.

For all students in Years 9 to 12, 58.0 per cent reported they had felt sad, blue or depressed for two or more weeks in a row in the last 12 months. Female students were more likely than male students to report a recent episode of sadness or depression (67.9% female vs. 47.0% male).

It is noteworthy that in addition to these proportions, 8.3 per cent of female and 6.0 per cent of male students said they prefer not to answer this question.

It is important to note that the question used in the survey is not a tool used for diagnosing depression and only provides an indicator of possible experiences of depression.

Sources of stress

Children and young people learn how to respond to stress as they grow and develop. Many stressful events that an adult can manage will cause stress in a child or young person. As a result, even small changes can impact a child or young person's feelings of safety and security.

Common stressors may include worrying about schoolwork or grades, juggling responsibilities, problems with friends, bullying, going through body changes, family conflict or experiencing material and social disadvantage.

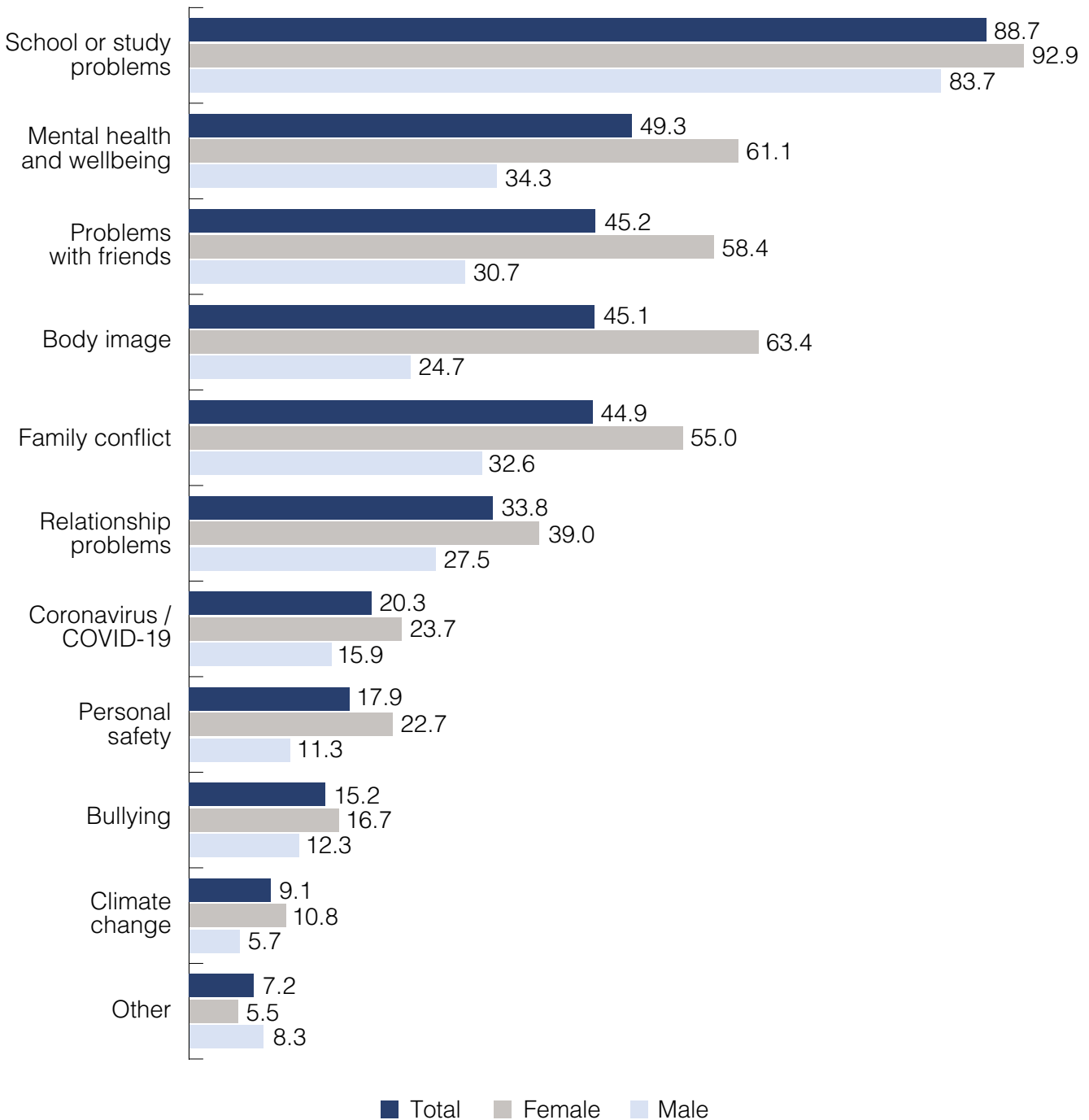
The survey found that school or study problems were by far the most frequently reported source of stress for students in Years 9 to 12 with 88.7 per cent of students saying they were affected by this. This was followed by mental health and wellbeing concerns (49.3%), problems with friends (45.2%), body image (45.1%) and family conflict (44.9%).

A higher proportion of female students compared to male students reported being affected by all listed sources of stress (except other) with the top three stressors for girls being school or study problems (92.9%), body image (63.4%) and mental health and wellbeing (61.1%).

58% of Year 9-12 students reported they had felt sad, blue or depressed for two or more weeks in a row in the last 12 months.

School and study problems are the single most common source of stress for students in Years 9-12 with 9-in-10 students affected.

Graph 5.1.15: Proportion of Year 9 to 12 students selecting multiple response items that were a source of stress for them in the past year, by gender, 2021, in per cent



Body image is a source of stress for 2-in-3 female students in Years 9-12.

Positive outlook - identity

Year 4 to 12 students were asked a range of questions about their view of themselves. On average, around 80 per cent of students agreed with each of these statements:

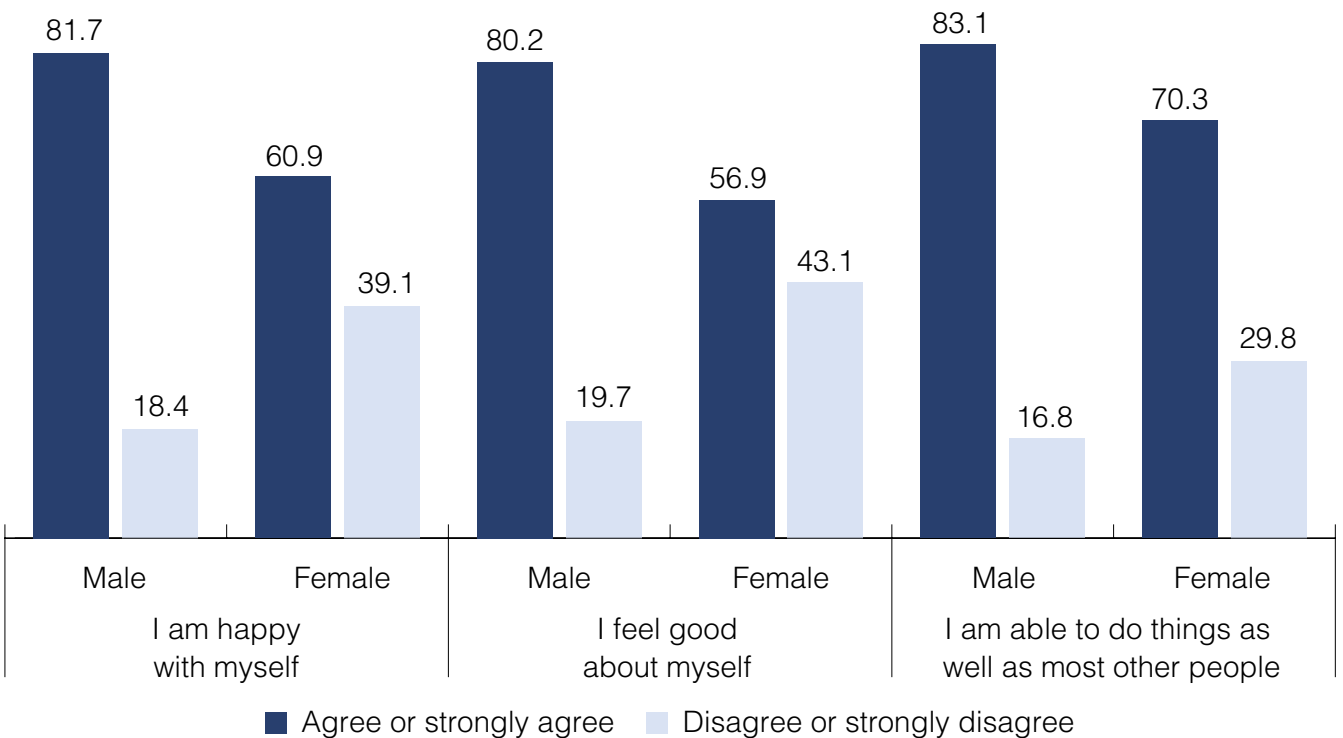
- 51.4 per cent of students agreed and 26.0 per cent strongly agreed they were happy with themselves.
- 51.7 per cent agreed and 26.5 per cent strongly agreed they could do things as well as most other people.
- 46.3 per cent agreed and 28.6 per cent strongly agreed they felt good about themselves.

However, students in Years 10 to 12 and female students in Years 7 to 12 were more likely to disagree with any of the three statements:

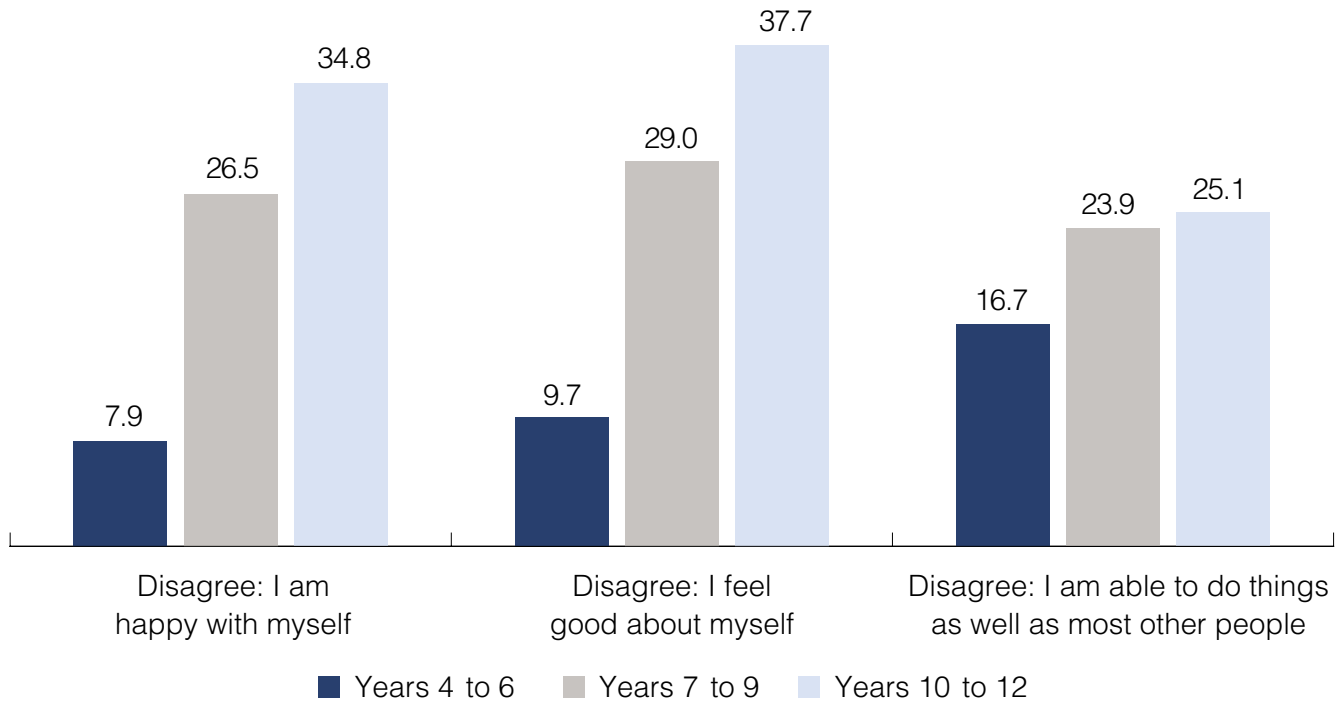
- 39.1 per cent of female students in Years 7 to 12 disagreed they were happy with themselves, compared to 18.4 per cent for male students.
- 43.1 per cent of female high school students disagreed they felt good about themselves compared to 19.7 per cent of male students.
- 29.8 per cent of female students in Years 7 to 12 disagreed they were able to do things as well as most other people, compared to 16.8 per cent for male students.

More than one-third (37.7%) of all Year 10 to 12 students disagreed they felt good about themselves (compared to 9.7% of Years 4–6 students and 29.0% of Years 7–9 students).

Graph 5.1.16: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with statements about their identity, by gender, 2021



Graph 5.1.17: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students disagreeing with statements about their identity, by year group, 2021



Younger students and male students overall are more likely to have a positive view of themselves.

3-in-5 female and 4-in-5 male high school students say they feel good about themselves.

5.1.3 Healthy behaviours

“Everyone should be able to have someone to [talk to] mental health issues about, but some people don’t, and I am grateful I do. Some kids I know do cope with drugs and alcohol, which is not something anyone my age should have to resort to.” (14 year-old)

“I struggle with smoking addiction, problems, alcohol use. A lot of self-confidence issues, self-esteem issues, family problems.” (12 year-old)

Healthy behaviours, such as eating well or exercising, contribute to young people’s wellbeing. In contrast, risk-taking behaviours, such as the use of alcohol and drugs or engaging in unsafe sexual activity, may have a negative effect on young people’s health and wellbeing.²⁵ The impact is not only on the children and young people themselves, but also on their families and communities who may be affected by these behaviours.

It is critical that young people are well informed and supported to make healthy choices.²⁶ Parents, schools and communities all have an important role to play in teaching children and young people about healthy behaviours.

Drug and alcohol education are part of the school curriculum in order to provide students with information and knowledge about these topics, increase communication and reduce consumption and harm.

Understanding health impacts of alcohol, smoking and other drugs

Most students in Years 7 to 12 reported having learnt some or a lot about alcohol (75.8%) and cigarettes/smoking (69.9%) at school, with fewer students saying they learnt some or a lot about marijuana (47.7%) and other drugs (55.2%). In contrast, one-quarter (26.1%) of Year 7 to 12 students said they had learnt nothing about marijuana and 17.1 per cent had learnt nothing about other drugs at school.

While most students felt they knew enough about the health impacts of cigarettes/smoking (91.0%) and alcohol (88.9%), some students felt they did not know or were unsure if they knew enough about marijuana (20.3% no and 18.2% unsure) and other drugs (14.0% no and 17.2% unsure). A significantly higher proportion of male than female students reported feeling like they know enough about the health impacts of marijuana and other drugs.

26% of high school students reported learning nothing at school about marijuana and 17% reported learning nothing about other illegal drugs.

Perceptions of substance use

Three-quarters (74.7%) of students in Years 7 to 12 thought people their age should not use any substances including cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana or other drugs.

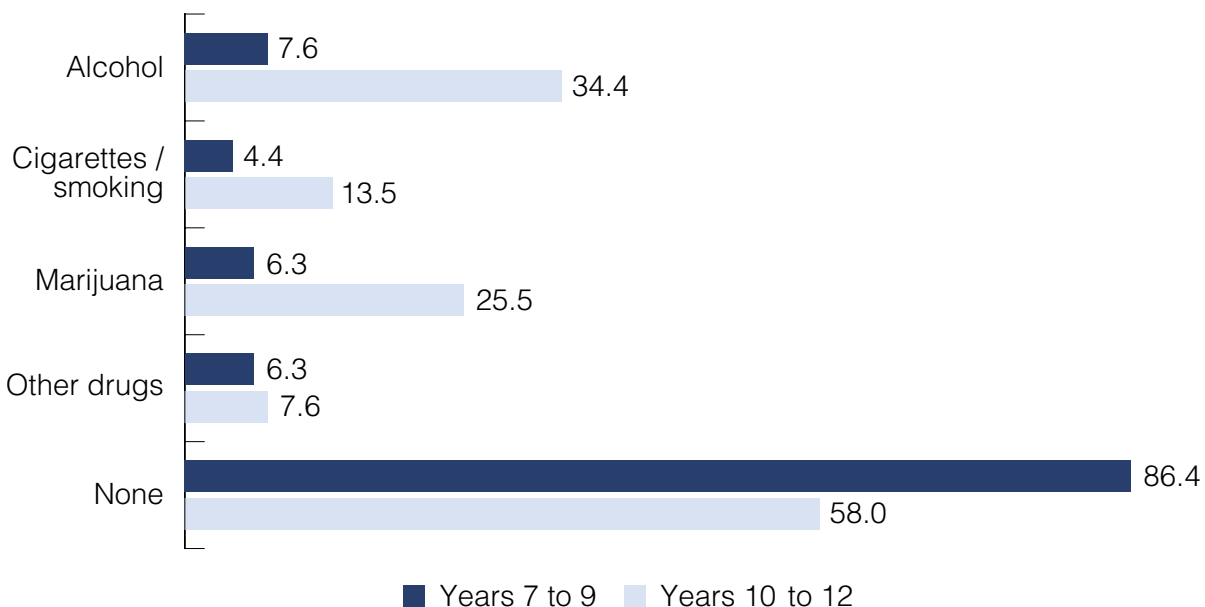
Not surprisingly, there were significant differences between year groups. For students in Years 7 to 9, less than eight per cent of students endorsed the use of any of the listed substances (7.6% yes alcohol, 6.3% yes marijuana) and 86.4 per cent thought people their age should not use any of the listed substances.

However, for students in Years 10 to 12, one-third (34.4%) endorsed the use of alcohol and one-quarter (25.5%) endorsed the use of marijuana for people their age with cigarettes/ smoking (13.5%) and other drugs (7.6%) being less widely accepted.

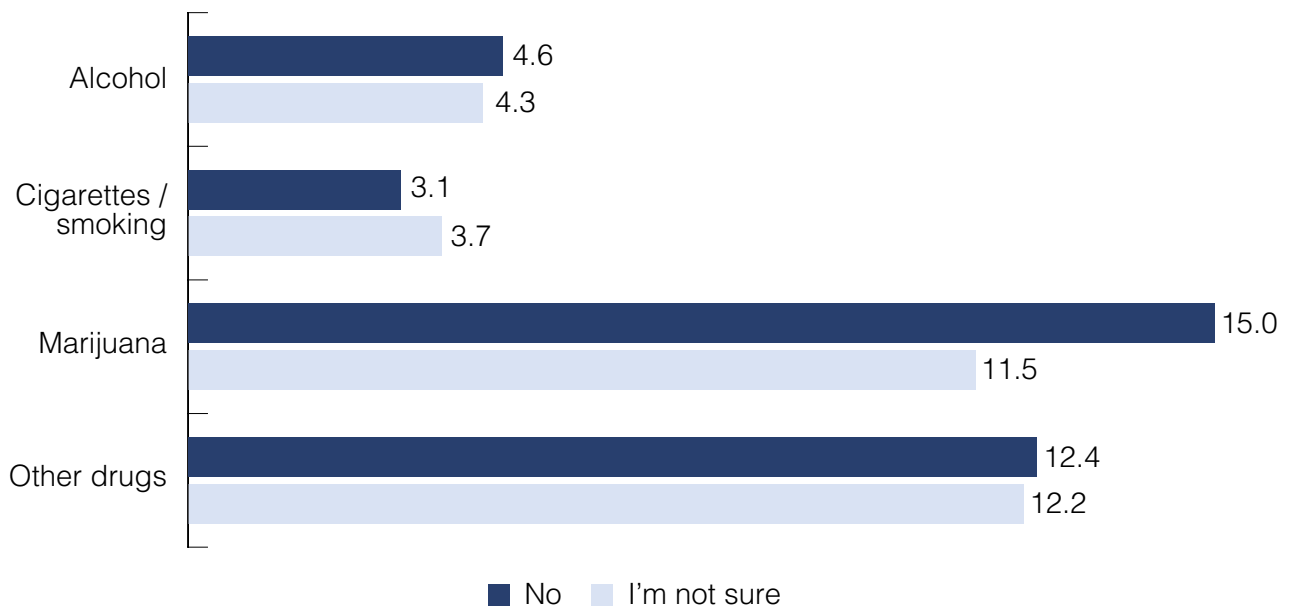
3-in-4 high school students think people their age should not use alcohol or drugs.

Among Year 10-12 students, **1-in-3 think it is okay** for people their age to drink alcohol and **1-in-4 think it is okay to use marijuana.**

Graph 5.1.18: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they think it is okay for someone their age to use various substances, by year group, 2021



Graph 5.1.19: Proportion of Year 10 to 12 students saying they don't know enough or are not sure they know enough about the health impacts of various substances, by substance type, 2021



Getting help for alcohol or drugs

Among Year 7 to 12 students, 69.5 per cent reported knowing where to go if they needed help for something about smoking, drinking, or other drugs. More male than female students reported knowing where to go if they needed such help (75.0% male vs. 65.0% female).

Conversely, one-third (33.2%) of Year 7 to 9 students and one-quarter (26.6%) of Year 10 to 12 students reported either not knowing or being unsure about where to go for such help.

Use of alcohol

57.5 per cent of Year 10 to 12 and 19.9 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students reported they had ever drunk alcohol (more than just a few sips).

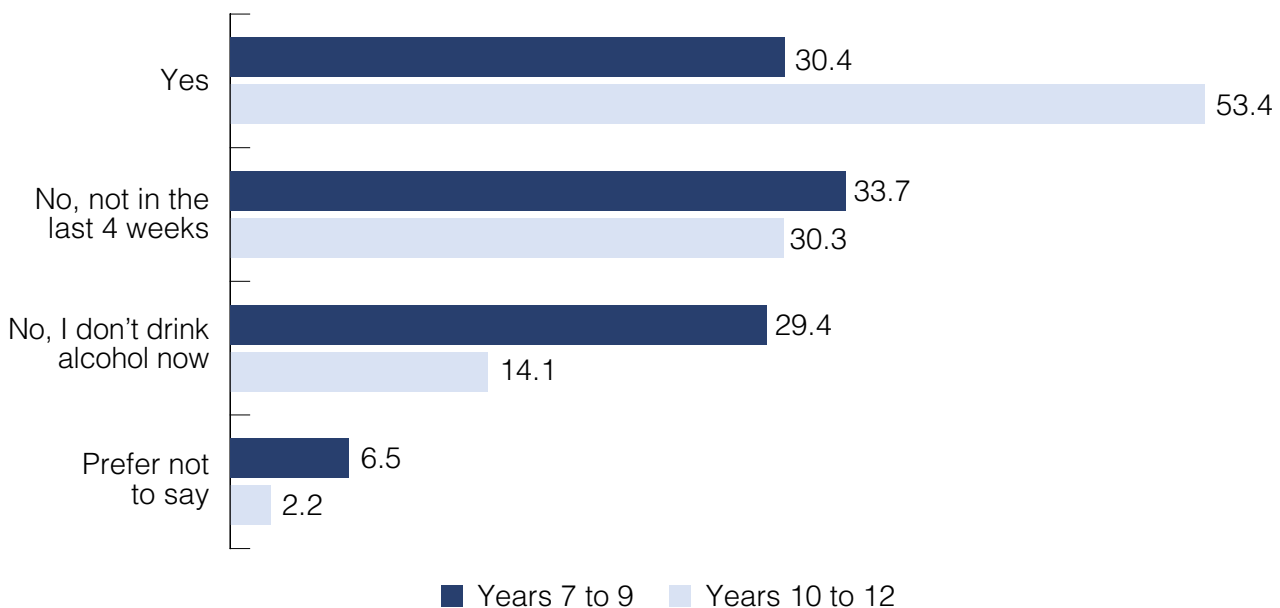
Among students who had ever drunk alcohol, 53.4 per cent of Year 10 to 12 and 30.4 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students reported having drunk alcohol in the last four weeks. There was no significant difference between male and female students in regard to these questions.

73.7 per cent of students in Years 7 to 12 who had ever drunk alcohol reported they usually drink with friends, 45.5 per cent usually drink with family and 17.8 per cent reported usually drinking by themselves.²⁷

Younger high school students were less likely to drink alcohol overall, however those who did, were more likely to drink either with family or by themselves compared to Year 10 to 12 students who were most likely to drink with friends:

- 82.8 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students who reported drinking alcohol usually drink with friends compared to 49.0 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students.
- 55.1 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students who reported drinking alcohol usually drink with family compared to 42.0 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students.
- 27.1 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students who reported drinking alcohol usually drink by themselves compared to 14.4 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students.

Graph 5.1.20: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students who have ever drunk alcohol responding to the question ‘In the last 4 weeks, did you drink alcohol?’, by response category and year group, 2021



30% of high school students either aren't sure or don't know where to go for help about alcohol or drugs.

80% of Year 7-9 students and 42% of Year 10-12 students have never tried alcohol.

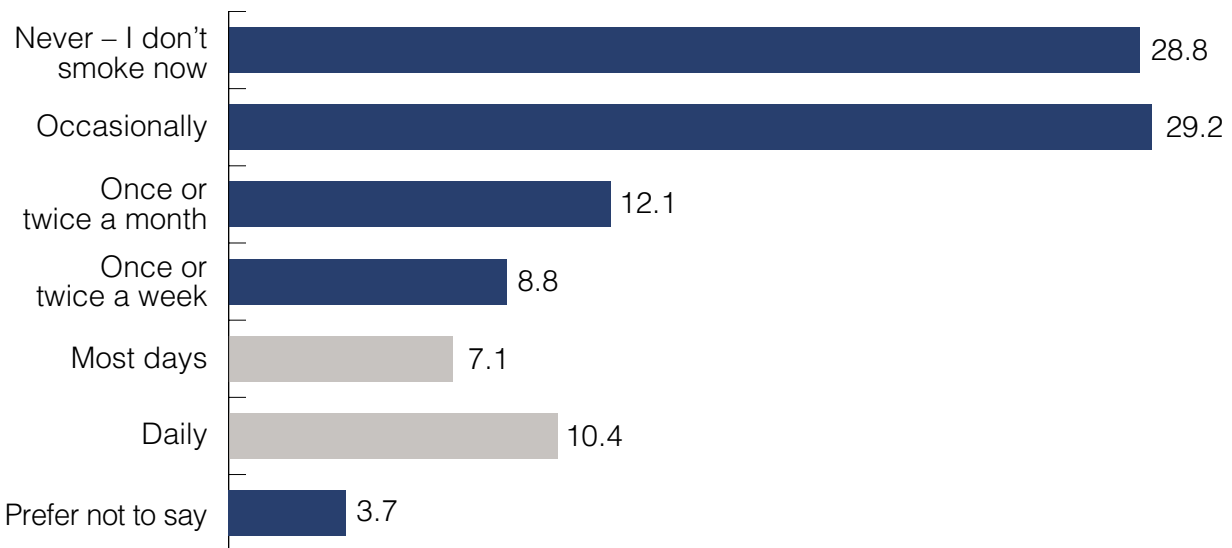
One-half of Year 10-12 students who had ever drunk alcohol reported having drunk alcohol in the last 4 weeks.

Use of cigarettes

31.1 per cent of Year 10 to 12 and 8.9 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students reported they had ever tried cigarette smoking (even just a few puffs). Among these, 58.9 per cent of Year 10 to 12 and 41.5 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students had smoked a whole cigarette.

Among Year 10 to 12 students who had ever smoked a whole cigarette (17.7% of total), 8.8 per cent smoke once or twice a week and 17.5 per cent smoke most days or daily. This means that about 4.3 per cent of all Year 10 to 12 students smoke cigarettes once a week or more.²⁸

Graph 5.1.21: Proportion of Year 10 to 12 students who have ever tried cigarette smoking responding to the question 'How often do you smoke cigarettes?', 2021



91% of Year 7-9 students and 69% of Year 10-12 students have never tried cigarette smoking.

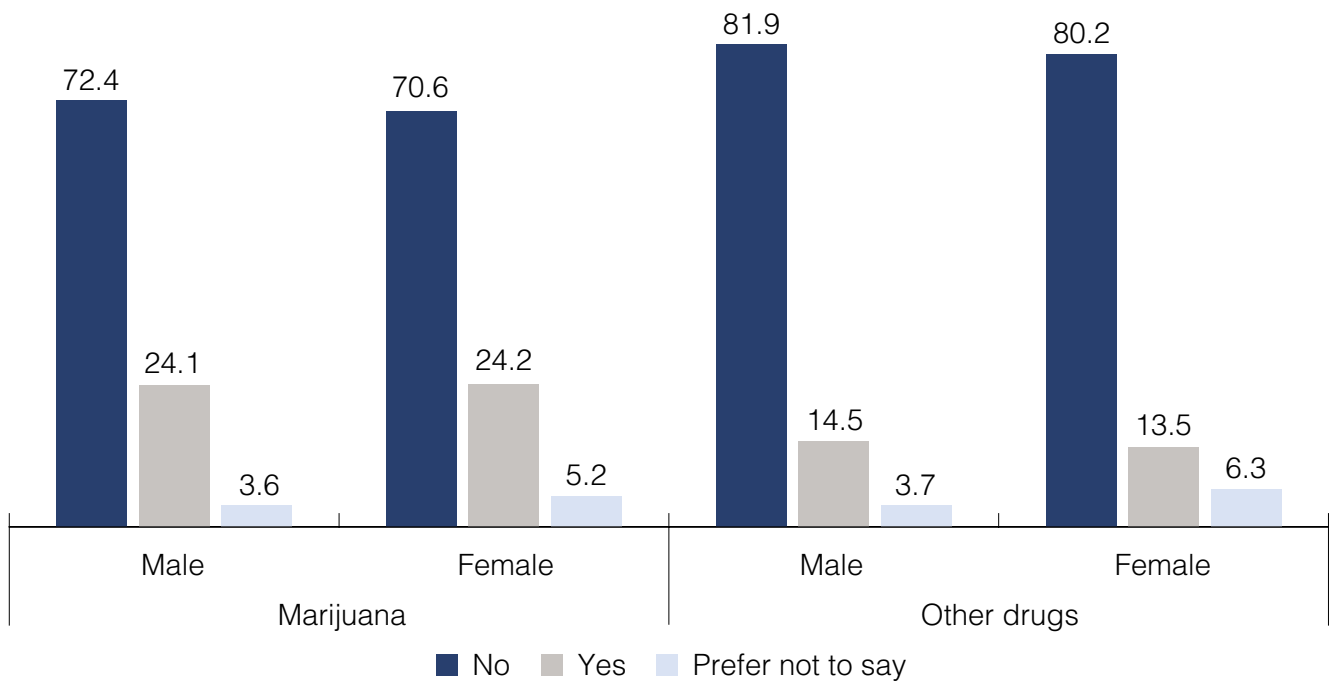
4% of Year 10-12 students smoke once a week or more.

Use of marijuana and other drugs

In Years 9 to 12, 24.9 per cent of all students reported they had any experiences with marijuana. Among Year 10 to 12 students, the proportion was 30.8 per cent. Experiences with other drugs were somewhat less common, with 14.5 per cent of all students in Years 9 to 12 reporting they had any experiences with other drugs (16.5% for Years 10 to 12). The response patterns were similar for male and female students.

Among Year 9-12 students, **25% have experiences with marijuana and 15% with other illegal drugs.**

Graph 5.1.22: Proportion of Year 9 to 12 students responding to the question ‘Have you ever had any experiences with marijuana / other drugs?’, by substance type and gender, 2021



Sexual health education

Sexuality education programs are included in primary and secondary schools with the aim of building on knowledge, skills and behaviours, thus enabling young people to make responsible and safe choices leading into a sexually healthy adulthood.²⁹

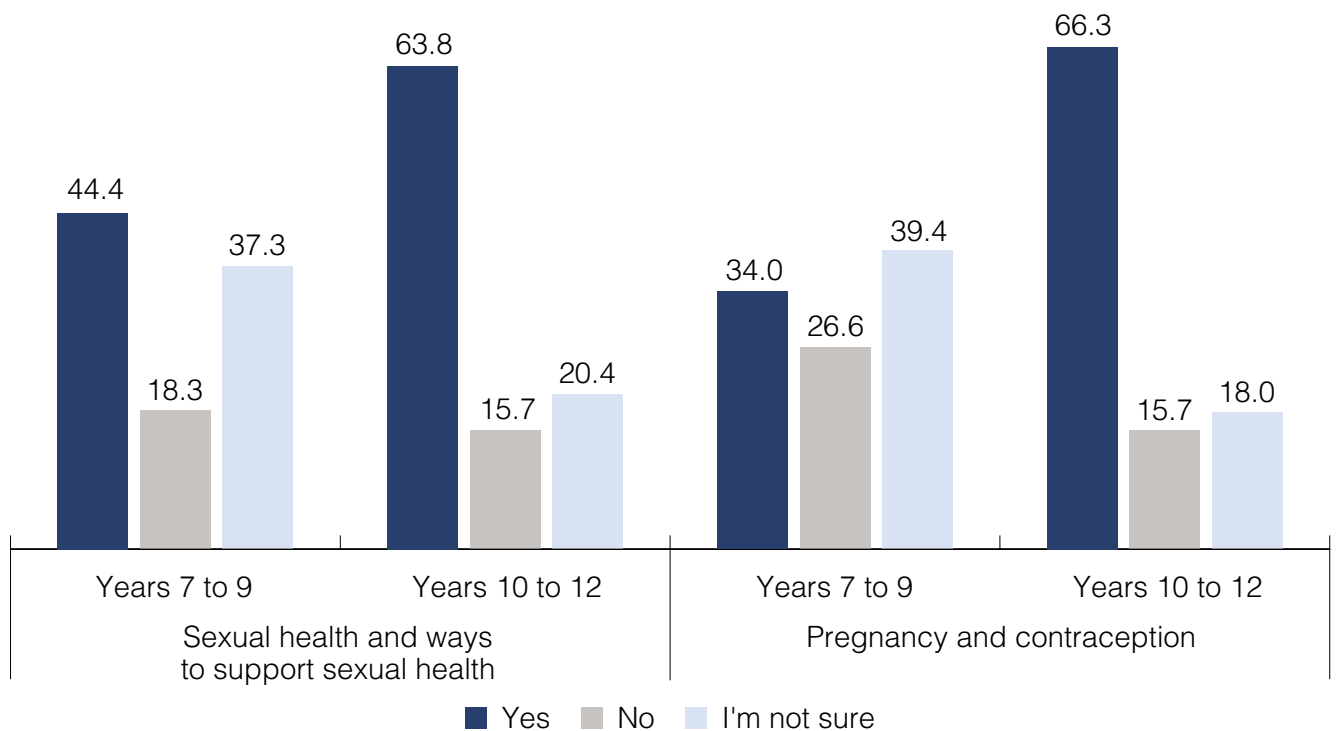
Just over one-half (53.5%) of students in Years 7 to 12 reported having learnt some or a lot at school about sexual health and ways to support sexual health. Less than one-half (43.7%) have learnt some or a lot about pregnancy and contraception. Correspondingly, 15 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported having learnt nothing at school about sexual health and nearly 30 per cent (27.2%) have learnt nothing about pregnancy and contraception.

Overall, 17.9 per cent of Year 7 to 9 and 6.0 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported not having had sexual health education at school.

Of the students who had received sex education classes at school, over one-third (36.7%) found sexual education classes at school very or extremely relevant and 52.0 per cent found them somewhat relevant.

Just over one-half (52.6%) of Year 7 to 12 students felt they knew enough about sexual health and ways to support it and less than one-half (47.5%) felt they knew enough about pregnancy and contraception. In addition, about one-third of students were unsure if they knew enough about either of those topics (sexual health: 30.2% unsure; pregnancy and contraception: 30.4% unsure).

Graph 5.1.23: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students responding to the question ‘Do you feel like you know enough about sexual health / pregnancy?’, by year group, 2021



Seeking help for reproductive or sexual health

Less than two-thirds (58.5%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported knowing where to go if they needed help for something about their reproductive or sexual health. Conversely, 21.4 per cent weren't sure they knew where to go and one-in-five (20.1%) reported not knowing where to go if they needed help for something about their reproductive or sexual health.

Ever had sexual intercourse

About one-third (29.1%) of students in Years 10 to 12 reported having had sexual intercourse. For Year 9 students, the proportion was significantly lower at 8.0 per cent.

Unwanted sexual material

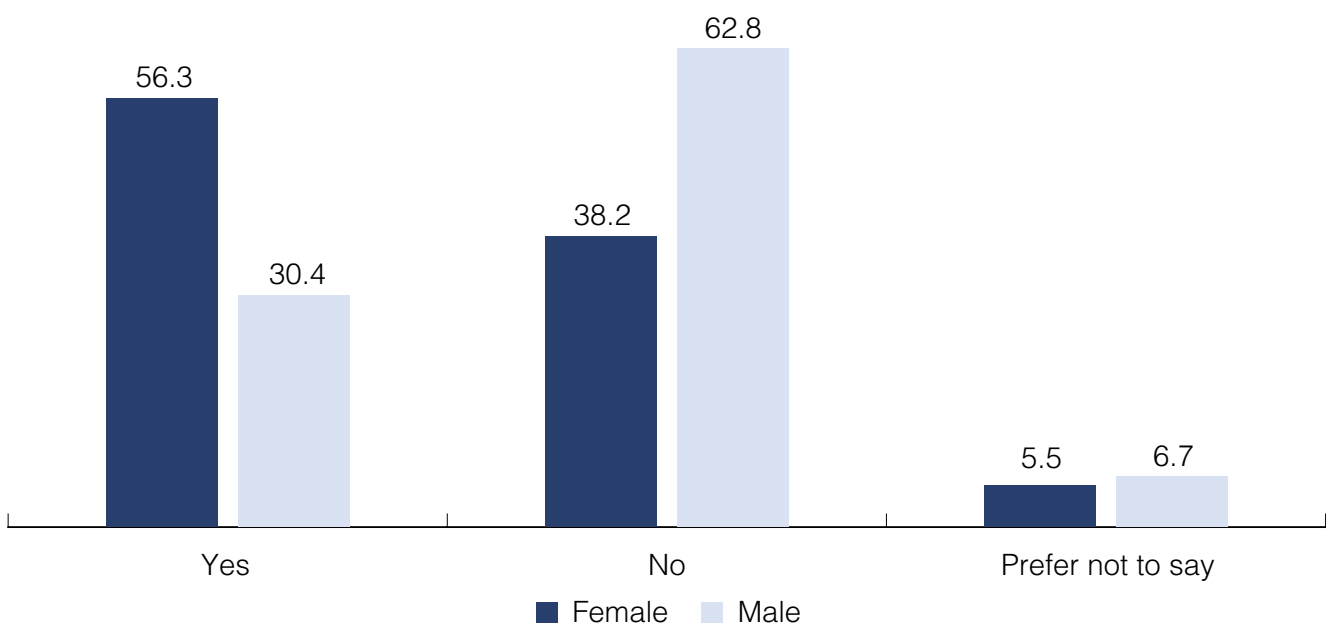
More than one-half (56.3%) of female students and about one-third (30.4%) of male students

in Years 9 to 12 reported having ever been sent unwanted sexual material, such as pornographic pictures, videos, or words.

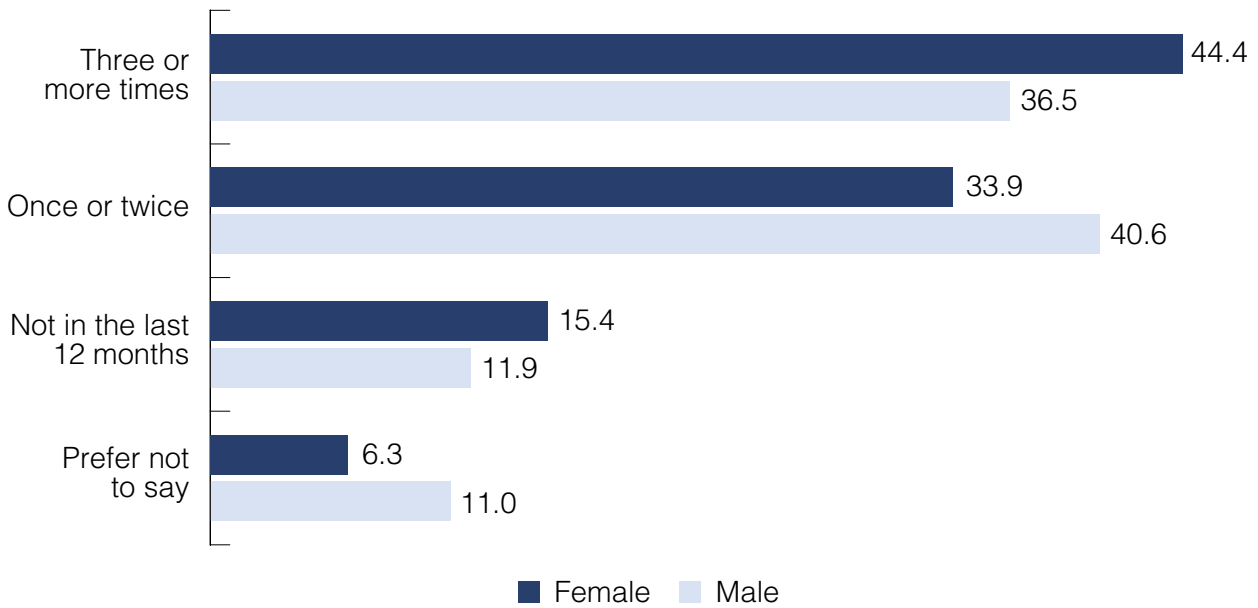
Of the students who had received unwanted sexual material, 41.9 per cent reported they had received it three or more times in the last 12 months and 35.7 per cent had received it once or twice in that time period.

2-in-5 Year 7-12 students either don't know or aren't sure where to go if they need help for something about their reproductive or sexual health.

Graph 5.1.24: Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students responding to the question 'Have you ever been sent unwanted sexual material?', by gender, 2021



Graph 5.1.25: Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students who have ever been sent unwanted sexual material responding to the question ‘In the last 12 months, how often have you been sent unwanted sexual material?’, by gender, 2021



The vast majority of students who had been sent unwanted sexual material reported they had received it through social media (92.9%), while a much lower proportion received it by text message (18.7%).

56% of female and 30% of male Year 9-12 students have been sent unwanted sexual material.

5.1.4 Connection to community and culture

"[I want] families, schools and adults to know that keeping the community safe is to be kind and caring to others and keeping everywhere clean and tidy." (12 year-old)

"[...] have some programs for sport and community projects which help teenagers feel better about themselves. They should be easy to join and give many options for those of different skills, talents, and gifts." (17 year-old)

"More places for teenagers to go. For example there used to be a bowling alley when I was a little kid, that isn't there anymore. It feels like there's nothing for us to do in town." (15 year-old)

Connection to culture

Feeling connected to culture is critical for children and young people's sense of belonging and identity. Cultural connectedness encourages a positive sense of identity and the development of respectful and responsive relationships.

A sense of belonging and connectedness can be strengthened in multiple ways, including participation in cultural-based activities, spending time with grandparents and other family members and learning about family history, language and traditions.

For Aboriginal children and young people, connection to history and culture is particularly important for their wellbeing.³⁰ This includes being connected to country, learning and speaking their own language, respect for elders, sharing and being close to family, listening to stories about culture and taking part in traditional activities and cultural events.

Languages spoken at home

Most students (95.4%) in Years 4 to 12 reported speaking English at home and one-in-five (19.9%) reported speaking other language(s) at home – either as well as English or exclusively. About five per cent of students do not speak English at home.

Cultural background and country of birth

Less than two-thirds (59.9%) of students in Years 4 to 12 reported having an Australian cultural background.

Having an English cultural background (24.1%) was the most common background besides Australian. Lower proportions of students reported having Scottish (9.7%), Irish (8.8%), Chinese (7.0%), Italian (6.5%) and Indian (5.2%) backgrounds. One-third (33.0%) of students reported having other cultural backgrounds than those listed above.

Four-in-five (80.8%) students in Years 4 to 12 reported being born in Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural background

For all students in Years 4 to 12, 6.7 per cent reported having an Aboriginal Australian cultural background and 0.8 per cent indicated Torres Strait Islander background.

With regard to speaking Aboriginal language, 7.8 per cent of Aboriginal students said they speak Aboriginal language a lot, 16.3 per cent said some and 35.0 per cent a little. Forty per cent reported not speaking Aboriginal language.

Two-thirds (68.3%) of Aboriginal students indicated they know their family's country and of those who do three-quarters (74.5%) said they spend time there. Almost one-half (46.4%) of Aboriginal students reported doing cultural or traditional activities with their family.

Connection to community and activities outside of school

Connection to community is critical for children and young people's health and wellbeing as similarly to connection to culture, it provides a positive sense of identity and belonging.

Children and young people thrive when they have opportunities to participate in activities that enable them to build relationships with people outside of their immediate family. In addition, they learn and grow through their experiences and contributions in their communities.

Spending time with family

Overall, two-thirds (64.1%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported spending time with their family every day or almost every day and one-in-five (21.4%) said they do this once or twice a week.

A significantly higher proportion of Year 4 to 6 than Year 7 to 12 students reported hanging out with their family every day or almost every day (71.9% Years 4–6 vs. 64.9% Years 7–9 and 54.0% Years 10–12).

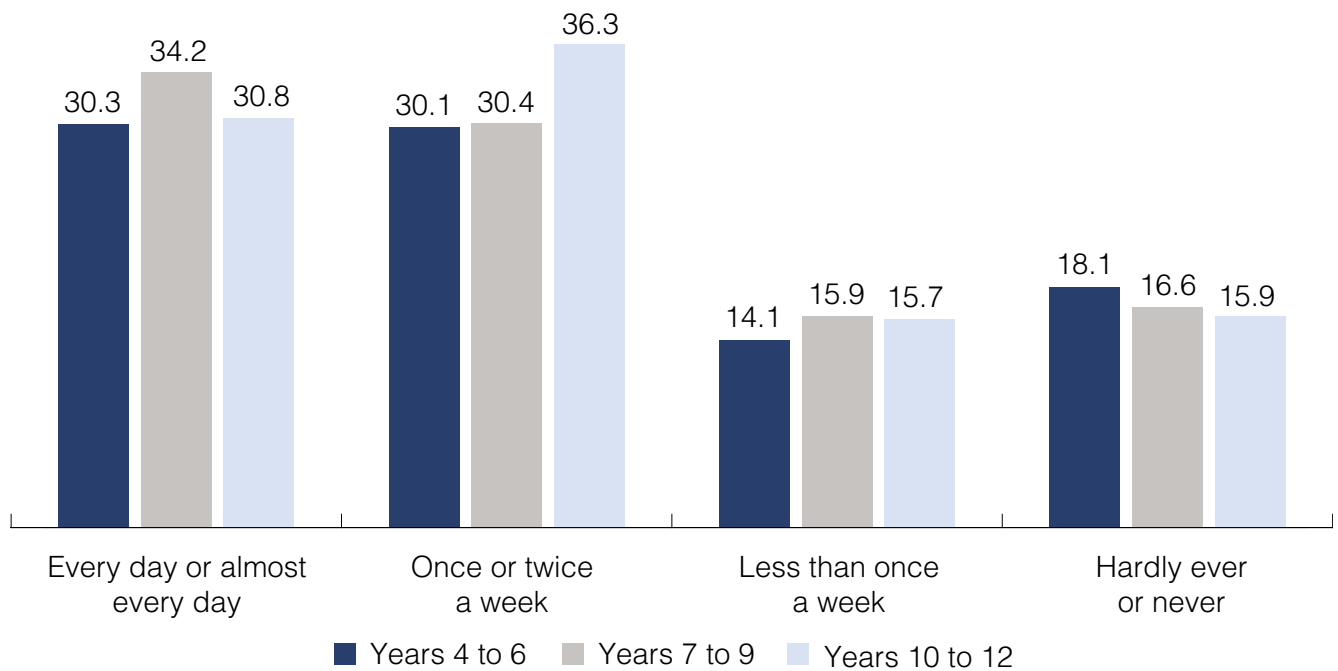
19% of Year 4-12 students were born overseas and **20%** speak language(s) other than English at home (5% exclusively).

Spending time with friends

Overall, one-third (31.9%) of students reported spending time with friends every day or almost every day when they are not at school and another one-third said they did this once or twice a week. There was no difference measured between younger and older students.

Around one-in-five students (16.9%) said they hardly ever or never spend time hanging out with friends outside of school and this proportion also remained the same across year groups (between 16% and 18%).

Graph 5.1.26: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students spending time hanging out with friends, by frequency and year group, 2021



Most students spend time with friends outside of school at least once a week but **1-in-5 do this hardly ever or never** and this proportion remained the same across year groups.

Housework

More than one-half (54.5%) of students reported helping with housework every day or almost every day and one-third (31.0%) said they do this once or twice a week.

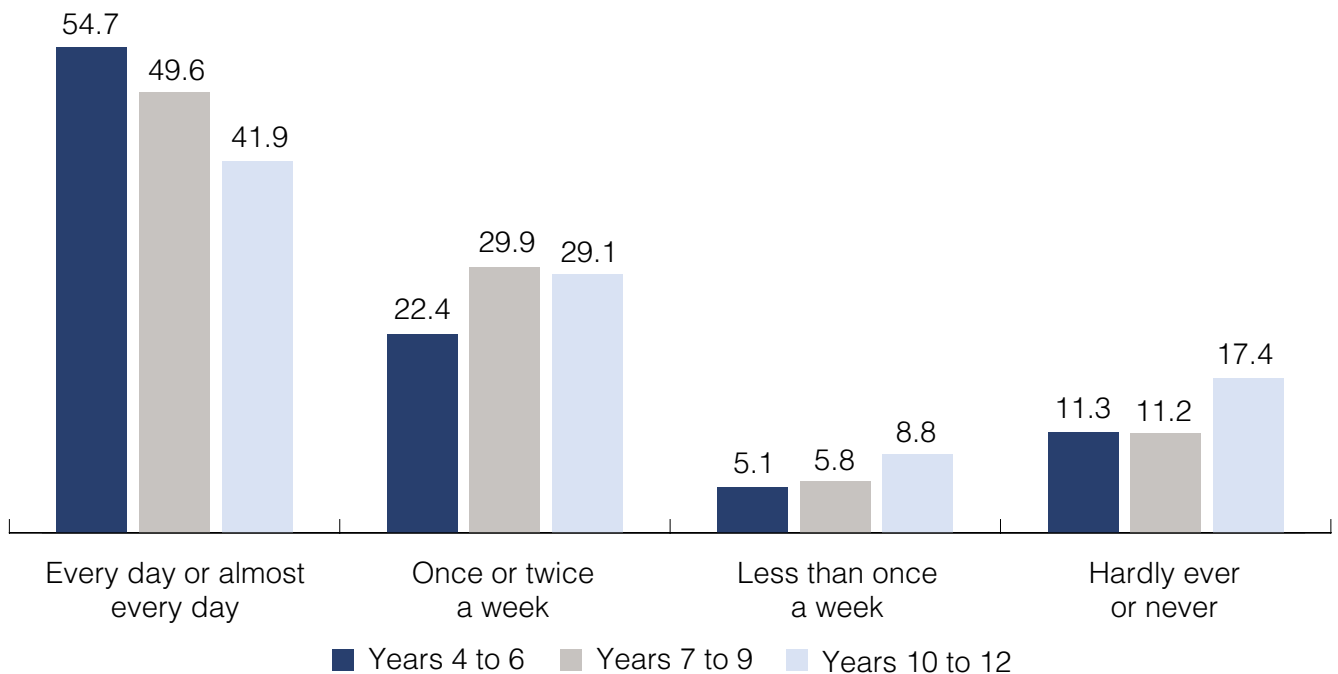
Students in Years 7 to 12 (59.3%) were more likely than younger students (44.7%) to help with housework every day or almost every day and there was little difference between the genders (61.4% female vs. 57.6% male 'help every day/almost every day').

Homework

For all students in Years 4 to 12, one-half (49.2%) reported spending time doing homework every day or almost every day and 27.2 per cent said they do this once or twice a week. One-in-ten (13.0%) of all surveyed students said they hardly ever or never spend time doing homework.

There was no statistically significant difference between students in different year groups (54.7% Years 4–6 vs. 49.6% Years 7–9 and 41.9% Years 10–12). However, it is likely that some difference exists in the length of time spent doing homework between different year groups (ie. older students are likely to spend more time per day doing homework).

Graph 5.1.27: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students spending time doing homework, by frequency and year group, 2021



Playing or practising a sport

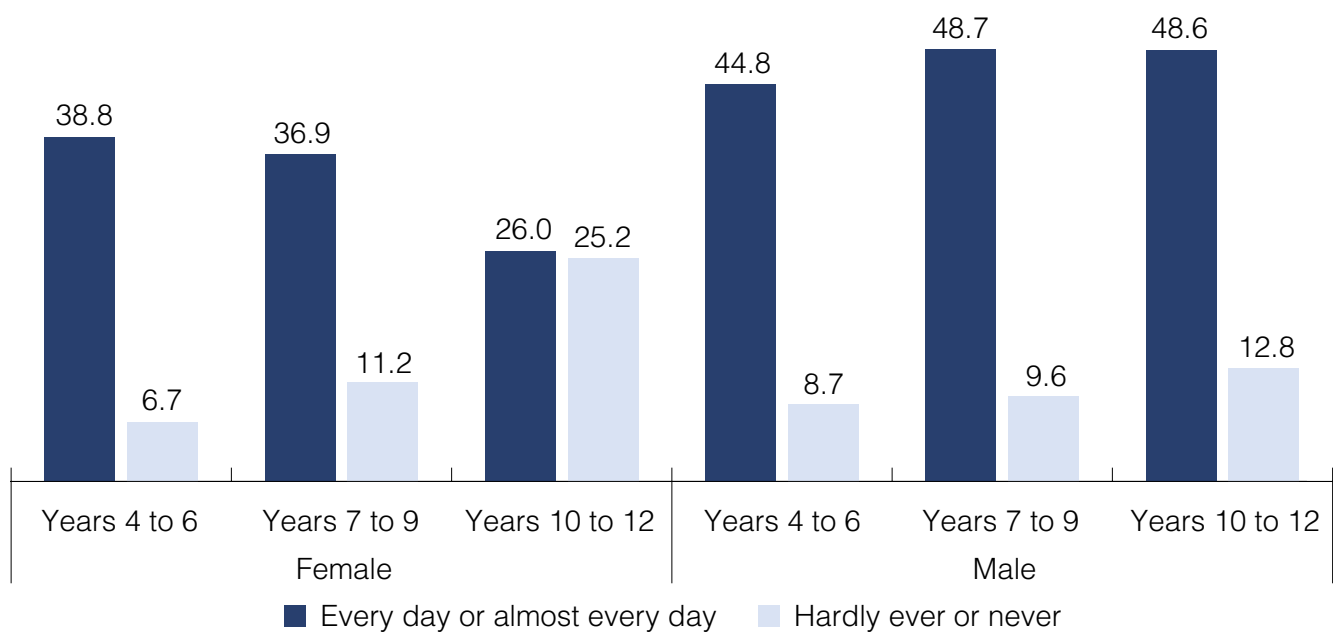
Among all students in Years 4 to 12, two-in-five (40.5%) said they spend time practising or playing a sport or some other form of exercise every day or almost every day (outside of school) while another one-third (36.8%) said they do this once or twice a week. Seven per cent did sport less than once a week and one-in-ten Year 4 to 12 students (12.3%) said they hardly ever or never spend time practising or playing a sport.

The proportion of students playing or practising a sport every day or almost every day decreased significantly for female students as they grow older from 38.8 per cent (Years 4–6) and 36.9 per cent (Years 7–9) to 26.0 per cent (Years 10–12). Correspondingly, the proportion of female students hardly ever or never practising a sport increased from 6.7 per cent (Years 4–6) to 11.2 per cent (Years 7–9) and 25.2 per cent (Years 10–12).

The same trends were not observed for male students where proportions remained largely the same across all year groups for students practising sport every day but an increase was measured for male students practising sport hardly ever or never (from 8.7% in Years 4–6 to 12.8% in Years 10–12).

25% of female and 13% of male Year 10-12 students hardly ever or never practise or play a sport.

Graph 5.1.28: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students spending time practising or playing a sport by frequency, gender and year group, 2021



Taking lessons

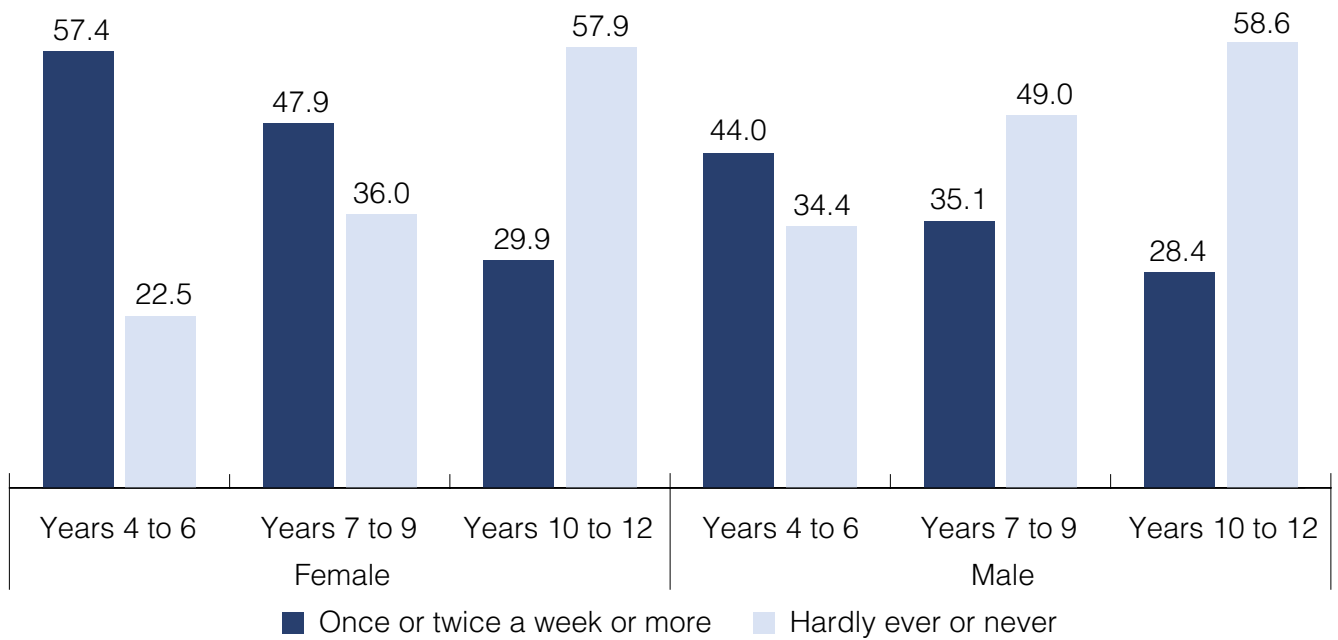
Two-in-five (41.0%) Year 4 to 12 students reported taking lessons like music, dancing, or languages once or twice a week or more. A similar proportion (42.3%) reported doing this hardly ever or never.

Female students were significantly more likely than male students to report taking lessons in Years 4 to 9: almost 60 per cent (57.4%) of female Year 4 to 6 students and nearly one-half (47.9%) of Year 7 to 9 students reported

taking lessons once or twice a week or more (compared to male: 44.0% Years 4–6 and 35.1% Years 7–9).

In Year 10 to 12 however, the proportion of female students participating in these activities regularly decreases significantly and is largely the same between both genders (29.9% female vs. 28.4% male).

Graph 5.1.29: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students spending time taking lessons such as music, dancing or languages by frequency, gender and year group, 2021



Being active outdoors

Students were asked how often they were being active outdoors in unstructured activities such as going to the park, beach or bush, walking the dog, riding a bike or skateboard.

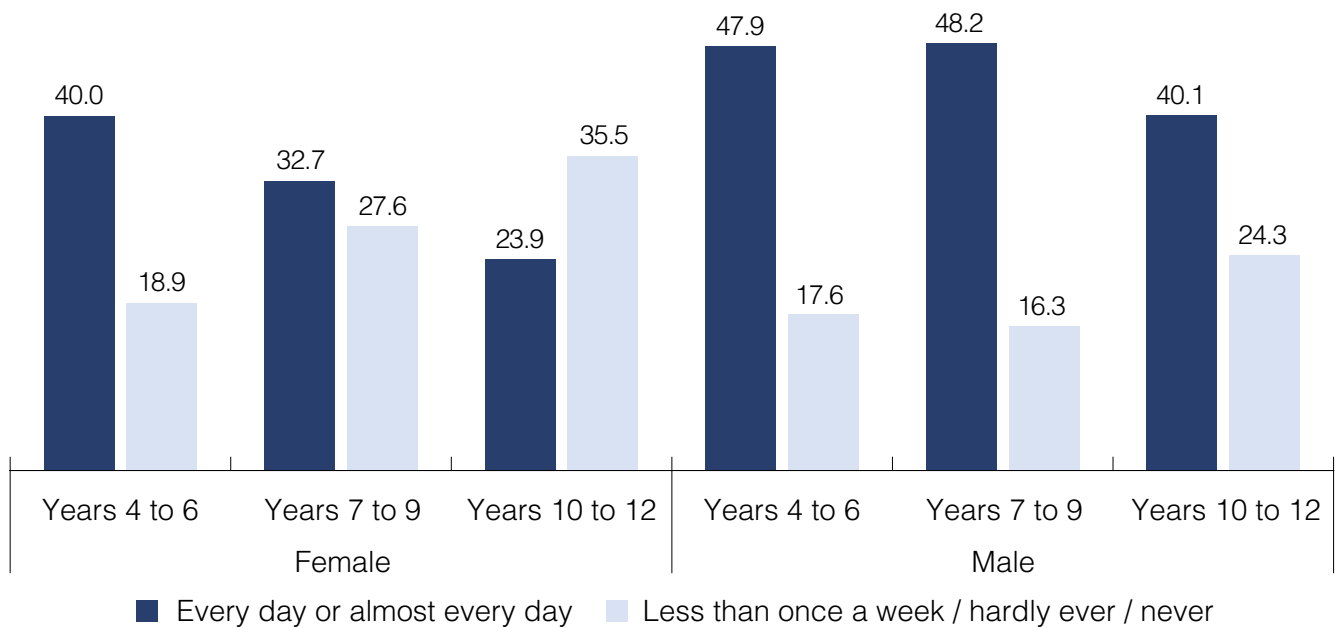
Two-in-five (38.8%) Year 4 to 12 students reported being active outdoors daily or almost every day and one-third (35.3%) reported doing this once or twice a week.

Older students were less likely than younger students to be active outdoors every day

(31.7% Years 10–12 vs. 43.5% Years 4–6) and more likely to do this rarely such as less than once a week or hardly ever or never (30.3% Years 10–12 vs. 18.6% Years 4–6).

Female students in Years 4 to 12 were less likely than male students to be active outdoors every day (32.7% vs. 45.8%) and more likely to be active like that rarely such as less than once a week or hardly ever or never (26.8% vs. 19.0%) and this difference increased for older female students.

Graph 5.1.30: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students being active outdoors by frequency, gender and year group, 2021



Internet

The vast majority of high school students used the internet on a smartphone or computer every day or almost every day.

There were clear differences between year groups. For Year 4 to 6 students, one-half (51.0%) of students reported using the internet on a smartphone or computer every day, while 29.0 per cent said they do this once or twice a week. Less than one-in-ten (8.4%) students said they hardly ever or never use the internet.

For older students, close to 90 per cent (87.9%) of Year 7 to 9 students and 96 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported using the internet on a smartphone or computer every day or almost every day. A small proportion of high school students (2.2%) reported using the internet on a smartphone or computer less than once a week or never.

Electronic games

More than one-half (56.9%) of male and more than one-third (37.4%) of female Year 4 to 12 students reported playing games on a game

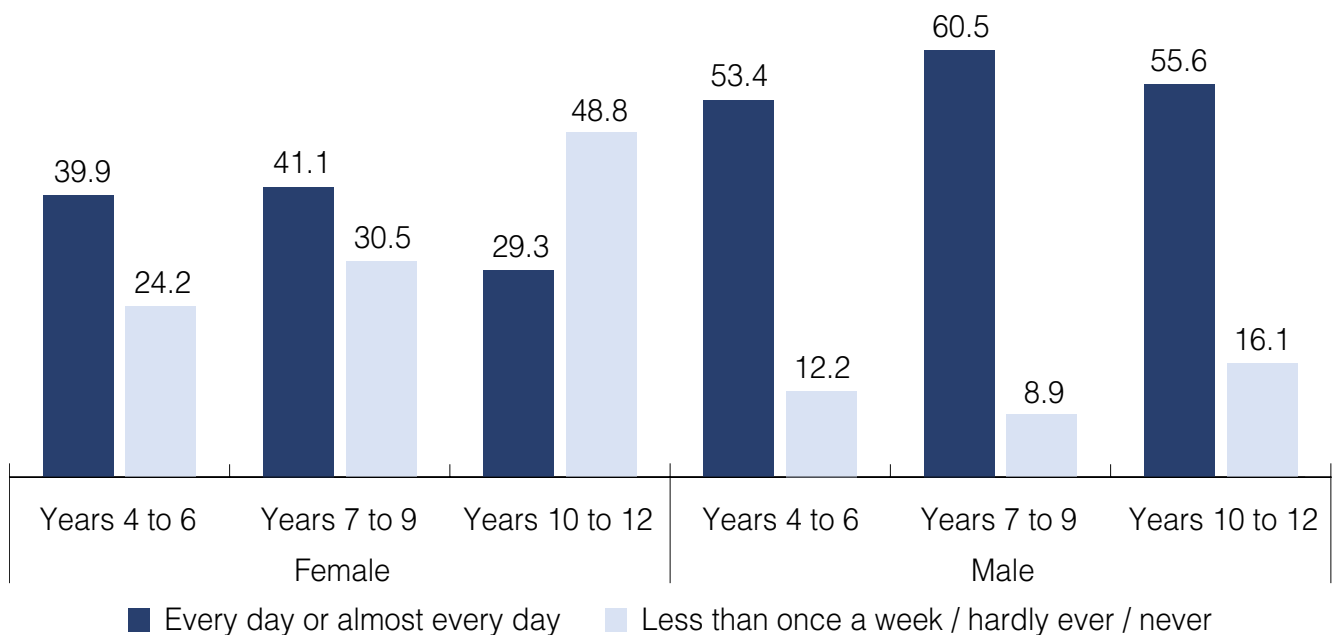
console, computer, or tablet every day or almost every day. A further one-third of male (29.8%) and one-quarter (25.8%) of female students reported playing once or twice a week.

Conversely, one-in-five (22.9%) female students reported hardly ever or never playing games on a game console, computer or tablet compared to only six per cent of male students.

The proportion of students playing every day remained largely the same across year groups (Years 4–6: 53.4% male vs. 39.9% female; Years 7–12: 58.5% male vs. 36.2% female). However, older students were more likely than younger students to say they hardly ever or never play electronic games especially female students (36.1% female Years 10–12 vs. 13.9% female Years 4–6).

More than 1-in-2 male and 1-in-3 female students play electronic games every day or almost every day.

Graph 5.1.31: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students playing electronic games by frequency, gender and year group, 2021



Watching television

One-half (48.2%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported watching television every day or almost every day and a further 28.5 per cent do this once or twice a week.

There was largely no difference between genders or different year groups in regard to the proportion watching every day or almost every day (50.9% Years 4–6 vs. 47.7% Years 7–9 and 45.7% Years 10–12). Older students were somewhat more likely to say that they never or hardly ever watch TV (8.5% Years 4–6 vs. 14.5% Years 7–9 and 15.8% Years 10–12).³¹

Reading a book

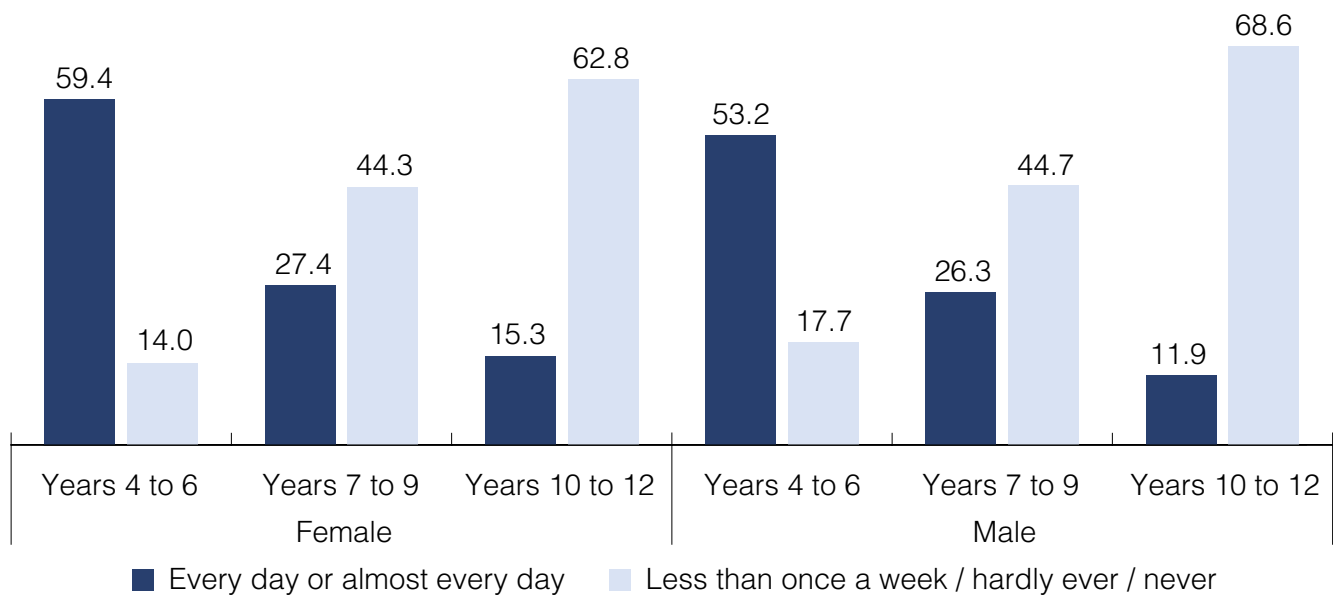
Overall, one-third of Year 4 to 12 students reported reading a book every day or almost every day. Younger students were significantly more likely than older students to say they do this every day and less likely to say they never or hardly ever read a book.

More than one-half (56.2%) of Year 4 to 6 students reported spending time reading every day or almost every day when they are not at school. For Year 7 to 12 students this was significantly less: one-quarter (27.3%) of Year 7 to 9 students and only 14.0 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported spending time reading a book every day or almost every day.

Correspondingly, the proportion of students reporting they never or hardly ever read a book outside of school increased for older year groups: less than one-in-ten (7.6%) of Year 4 to 6 compared to one-third (30.7%) of Year 7 to 9 students and one-half (49.1%) of Year 10 to 12 students said they hardly ever or never spend time reading a book.

Overall there was little significant difference between the genders except that a lower proportion of female than male Year 4 to 6 students said they never read a book (5.9% vs. 9.6%).

Graph 5.1.32: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students spending time reading a book by frequency, gender and year group, 2021

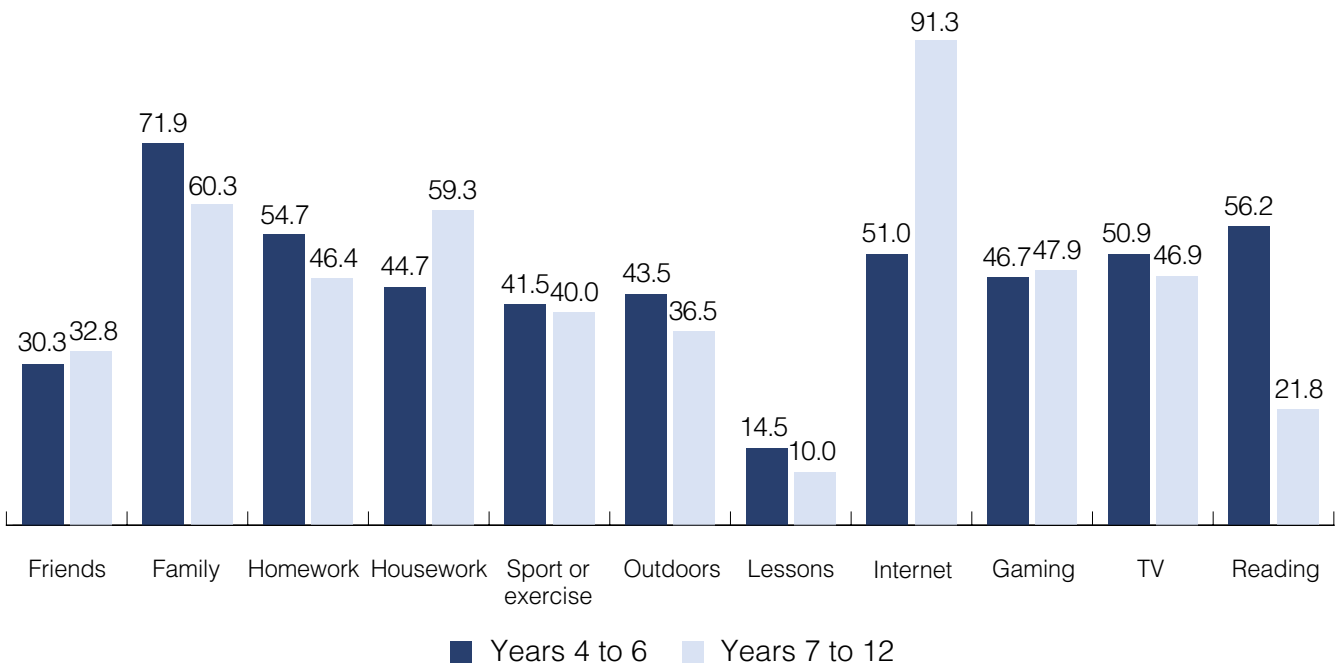


In terms of most common activities, for Year 4 to 6 students, nearly three-quarters (71.9%) spent time with family every day and about one-half watched TV and read a book every day (50.9% and 56.2% respectively). For Year 7 to 12 students, the vast majority used the internet (91.3%) every day and over one-half spent time with family and helped with housework every day (60.3% and 59.3% respectively). For both year groups, less than one-half spent time every day practising or playing a sport, taking lessons or spending time with friends outside of school.

Younger students are more likely than older students to read books every day.

One-half of Year 10-12 students do not read books in their leisure time.

Graph 5.1.33: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students doing selected activities every day or almost every day, by activity type and year group, 2021



Most Year 4-6 students spend time hanging out with family, reading books, doing homework and watching TV every day.

Most Year 7-12 students spend time using the internet, hanging out with family and helping with housework every day.

Perceptions about local area

Students were asked a range of questions about their local area. The majority of students like where they live, feel like they belong in their community and agree that there are fun things to do in their area. However, older students (Years 10–12) and female students overall were less likely to agree with these statements.

Seven-in-ten students agreed they have friends who live nearby (71.2% Years 4–6 vs. 71.7% Years 7–12) and four-in-five agreed they like where they live (86.0% Years 4–6 vs. 79.5% Year 7–12) and that there are outdoor places to go in their local area (85.7% Years 4–6 vs. 84.2% Years 7–12).

The majority of Year 4 to 6 students also agreed they have friendly neighbours (72.1%), they feel they belong in their community (71.2%) and that there are lots of fun things to do where they live (72.9%).

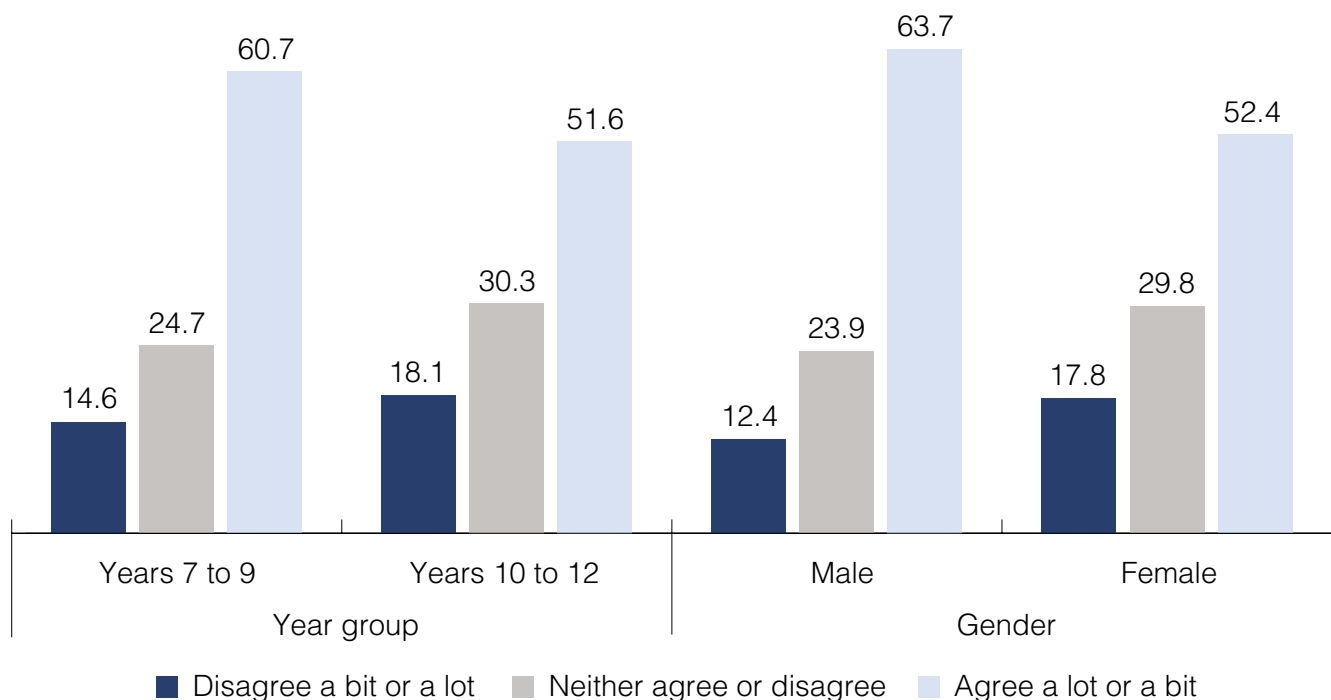
Lower proportions of Year 7 to 12 students than Year 4 to 6 students agreed that their

neighbours are friendly (65.2% Years 7–12), that they feel like they belong in their community (56.9% Years 7–12) and that there are lots of fun things to do in their area (49.4% Years 7–12).

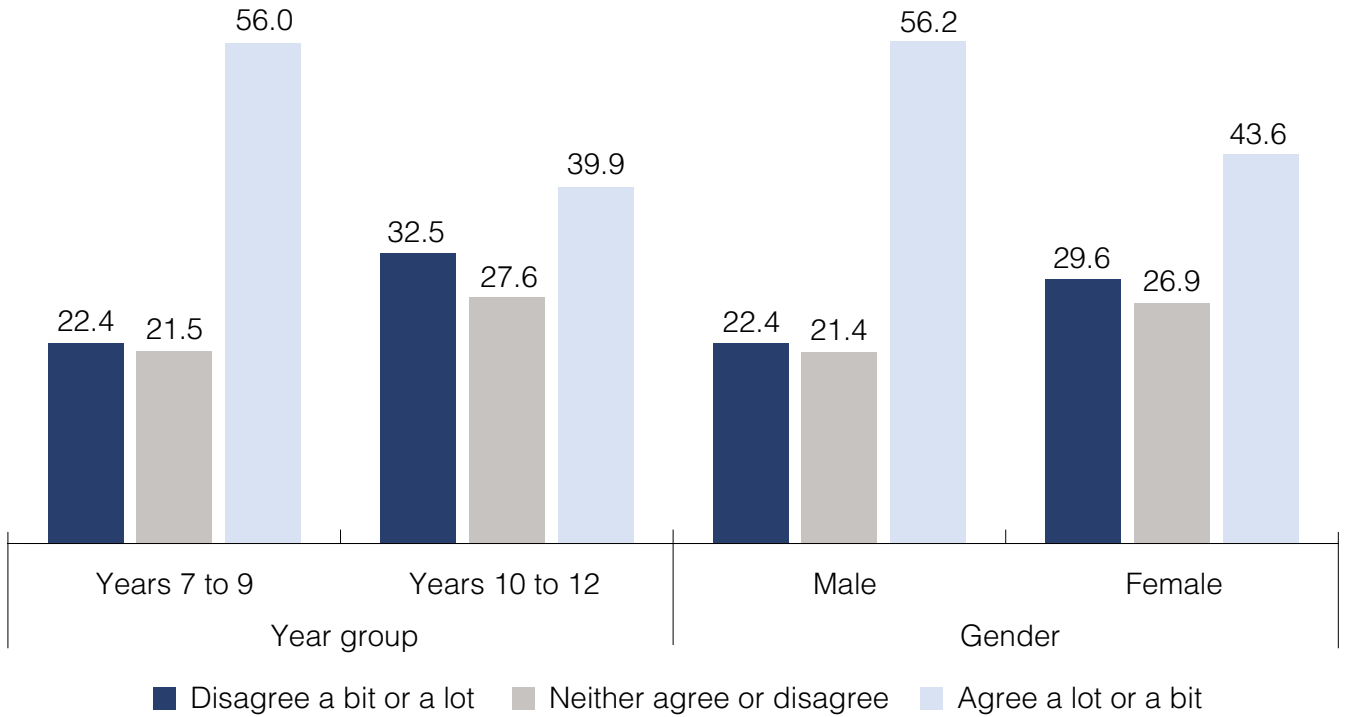
One-in-five (18.1%) Year 10 to 12 students disagreed with the statement ‘I feel like I belong in my community’ and one-third (32.5%) disagreed with the statement ‘There are fun things to do where I live’. Accordingly, older students were more likely to agree with the statement ‘There is nothing to do in my area’ (24.5% Years 7–9 vs. 38.0% Years 10–12).

Comparing male and female students in Years 7 to 12, one-in-five (17.8%) female students reported not feeling like they belong in their community and nearly one-third (29.6%) did not think there were any fun things to do in their area. These proportions were somewhat smaller for male students (12.4% ‘belonging’ and 22.4% ‘fun things to do’).

Graph 5.1.34: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘I feel like I belong in my community’, by year group and gender, 2021



Graph 5.1.35: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘There are lots of fun things to do where I live’, by year group and gender, 2021



1-in-2 female and 2-in-3 male high school students feel like they belong in their community.

Problematic behaviours associated with using the internet, playing electronic games and using mobile phones

Around one-third (32.9%) of Year 4 to 12 students said they feel bothered fairly often or very often when they cannot be on the internet and one-quarter (24.7%) said they feel bothered when they cannot play electronic games.

Older students were significantly more likely to feel bothered about not being able to use the internet (26.9% Years 4–6 vs. 35.3% Years 7–9 and 35.8% Years 10–12) while younger students were more likely to feel bothered when they cannot play electronic games (28.4% Years 4–6 and 26.5% Years 7–9 vs. 18.6% Years 10–12).

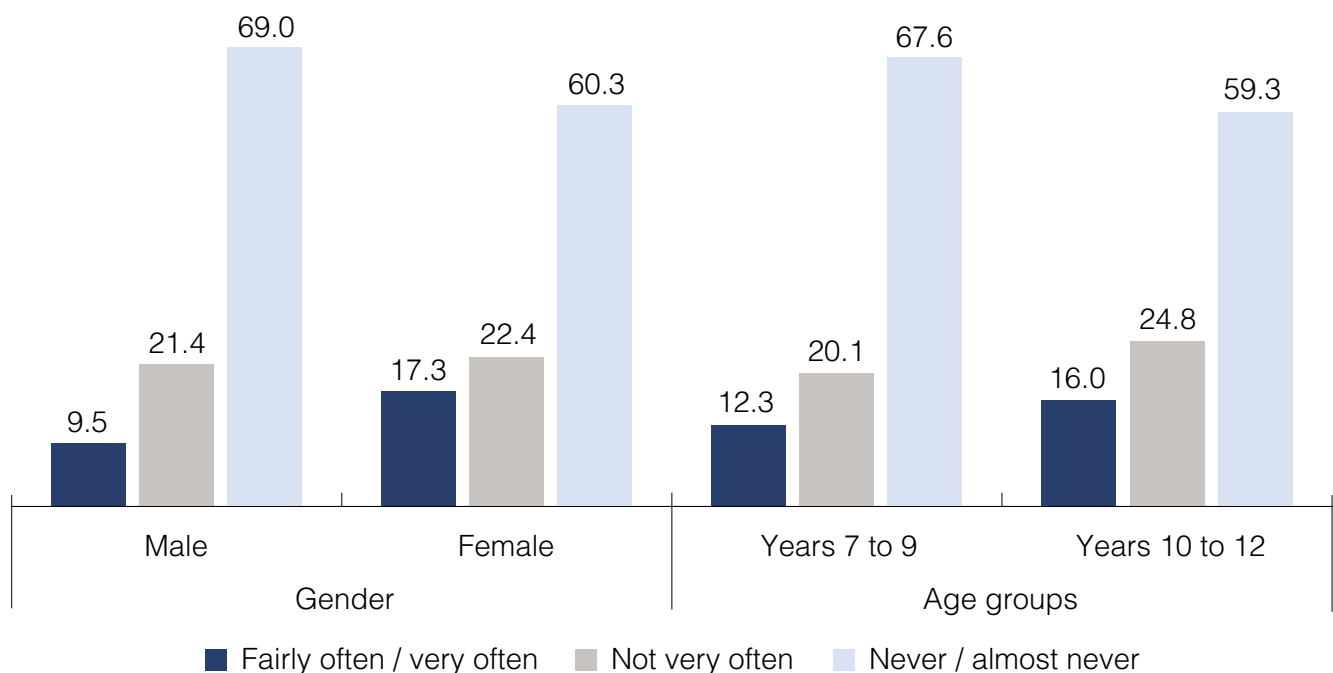
A higher proportion of female than male students in Years 4 to 12 reported they never or almost never felt bothered when they cannot play electronic games (44.2% female vs. 27.7% male).

Around one-in-ten students in Years 4 to 12 reported going without eating or sleeping because of the internet or electronic games (Years 4–6: 4.9% fairly often and 5.3% very often; Years 7–12: 7.1% fairly often and 4.7% very often).

For students in Years 7 to 12, more than one-third (37.3%) reported feeling bothered either fairly often or very often when they cannot use their mobile phone. This proportion was greater for Year 10 to 12 than Year 7 to 9 students (35.0% Years 7–9 vs. 40.5% Years 10–12) and also greater for female students than male students (44.5% female vs. 30.2% males).

Two-thirds (64.1%) of Year 7 to 12 students said they never go without eating or sleeping because of their mobile phone, but more than one-in-ten (13.8%) said this happens to them often (8.5% fairly often and 5.3% very often). Female students were almost twice as likely than male students to report this with nearly one-in-five affected (17.3%).

Graph 5.1.36: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students going without eating or sleeping because of mobile phone, by frequency, year group and gender, 2021



Access to support

In addition to feeling a connection to culture and community, children and young people need relationships with adults that are stable, caring and supportive, enabling them to ask for help if they have any worries or concerns. For older children and young people it is also important to know how to access help and support from available programs and services.

Emotional and mental health concerns have the potential to impact young people’s behaviours, relationships and ability to learn. Being able to ask for help is a critical skill that supports young people’s mental health and can reduce risk-taking behaviours.³² However, research shows that young people are often hesitant to ask for help.³³

General health support

One-quarter (24.7%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported they wanted or needed to see someone for their health in the last 12 months but were not able to. A further 15 per cent

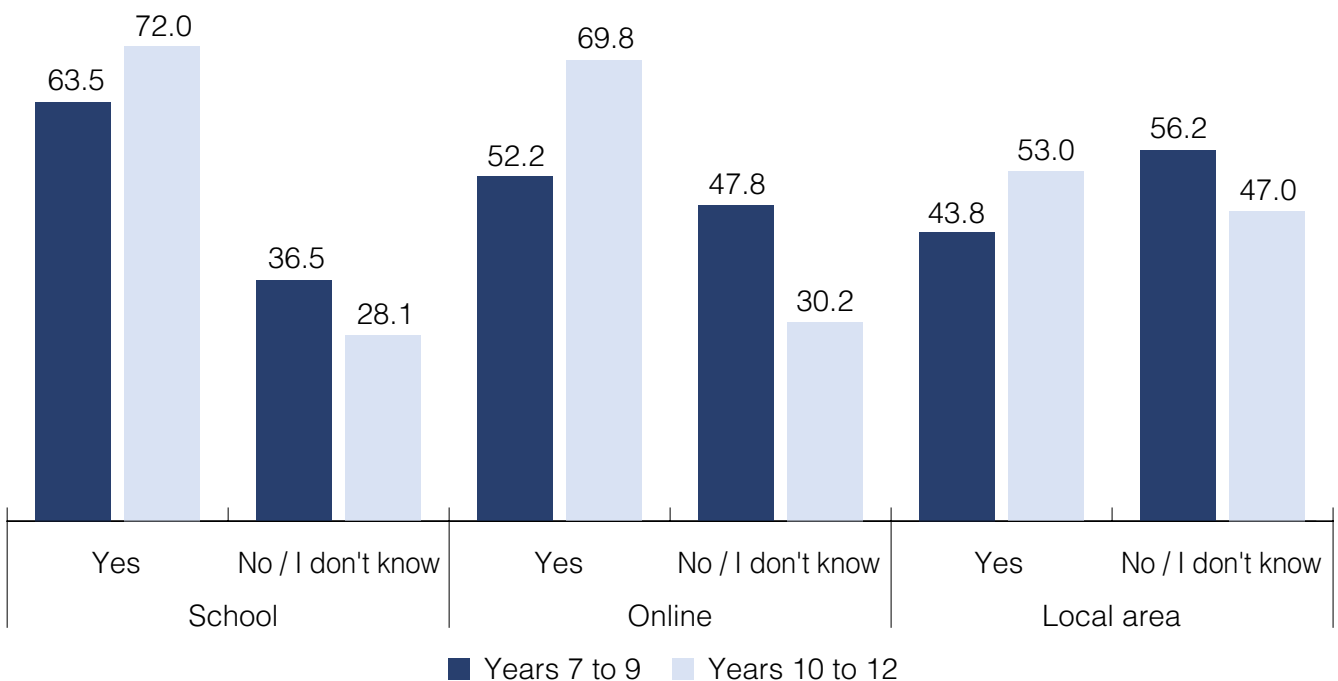
said they weren’t sure. Female students were significantly more likely to have experienced this with almost one-third reporting this especially older students (31.9% female vs. 16.2% male).

The most commonly cited reasons for this were ‘feeling embarrassed or ashamed’ (64.4%) and ‘unsure who to see or where to go’ (38.2%).

Knowledge of mental health supports

Not enough students in Years 7 to 12 said they know where to get support for stress, anxiety, depression, or other emotional health worries if needed. Around two-thirds reported knowing where to get mental health support in their school (67.0%) or online (59.6%) and less than one-half say they know where to go in their local area (47.6%). In general, Year 10 to 12 students were more likely than Year 7 to 9 students to report knowing where to get mental health support.

Graph 5.1.37: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students knowing where to get mental health support at school, online and in their local area, by year group, 2021



One-third (35.7%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported having gotten help for problems with stress, anxiety, depression, or other emotional health worries in the last 12 months and this proportion was higher for female than male students (40.2% female vs. 30.2% male).

For students who had received mental health support in the last 12 months, the top three

most frequently reported sources students found helpful were parent (65.5%), friend (60.2%) and other family (49.9%). One-third of students had found a doctor or GP (35.2%) or a school psychologist, chaplain or school nurse (33.2%) helpful.

Table 5.1.2: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students who sought help for emotional health worries, selecting sources they found helpful or not helpful in the past year, 2021

Type of source	Helpful	Not helpful	Not used
Parent, or someone who acts as your parent	65.5	17.3	17.3
Friend incl. boyfriend or girlfriend	60.2	9.2	30.6
Other family (e.g. brother, sister, auntie)	49.9	14.9	35.3
Doctor or GP	35.2	11.7	53.0
School psychologist, school chaplain or school nurse	33.2	18.8	47.9
Teacher	31.3	14.7	53.9
Mental health service	27.7	13.3	59.0
Online counsellor or telephone helpline	13.4	12.4	74.2
Internet websites	22.6	13.9	63.5
Aboriginal Health Worker or Medical Service	7.0	7.2	85.8

Older high school students were more likely than younger students to have found a doctor or GP (40.8% vs. 30.8%) or a friend (66.5% vs. 55.2%) a helpful source of information and less likely to have approached family members such as parents (61.6% vs. 68.6%) or other family (45.7% vs. 53.2%).

Under other sources, a significant proportion of students mentioned they found practitioners such as psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists helpful.

Table 5.1.3: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students who sought help for emotional health worries, selecting sources they found helpful, by year group, 2021

Type of source	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 to 12
Parent, or someone who acts as your parent	68.6	61.6
Friend incl. boyfriend or girlfriend	55.2	66.5
Other family (eg brother, sister, auntie)	53.2	45.7
Doctor or GP	30.8	40.8
School psychologist, school chaplain or school nurse	32.8	33.8
Teacher	31.6	30.9
Mental health service	26.7	29.1
Online counsellor or telephone helpline	14.3	12.3
Internet websites	21.3	24.4
Aboriginal Health Worker or Medical Service	7.5	6.4

40% of female and 30% of male students reported getting help for mental health worries in the last 12 months.

2-in-3 young people approached family and friends and 1-in-3 turned to doctors and/or to school services for mental health support.

Summary of key statistics:

Physical and mental health

- 15% of students in Years 4–12 rated their health as fair or poor. This was highest for Year 10–12 students, 21% said their health was fair or poor.
- **45% of students in Years 4–12 reported having a dental filling.**
- Female students are more likely than male students to brush their teeth twice daily and are more likely to say they have ever had a filling.
- **1-in-4 high school students in mainstream education say they have a long-term health problem and 1-in-10 say they have a long-term disability.**
- 29% of Year 10–12 students report getting less than 8 hours of sleep.
- **Male high school students are significantly more likely than female students to eat regular meals every day.**
- 2-in-3 female high school students do not eat breakfast every day.
- **Year 4–6 students are more likely to care very much about being physically active and eating healthy food than older students.**
- Most male and female high school students care about the way they look with almost 9-in-10 female and around 7-in-10 male students saying they care at least some.
- **3-in-4 male students and 1-in-2 female students in high school exercise vigorously at least 3 times a week.**
- 1-in-4 Year 10–12 students do not eat fruit every day and almost 1-in-5 do not eat vegetables every day.

- **More than 1-in-4 female Year 7–12 students worry a lot about their weight as do 1-in-10 male students.**
- 45% of female high school students reported high life satisfaction compared with 65% of male students. One-quarter (26%) of female students reported poor life satisfaction.
- **Most students feel resilient but 10% of female students and 5% of male students say they cannot achieve their goals or cope with life's challenges.**
- School and study problems are the single most common source of stress for students in Years 9–12 with 9-in-10 students affected.
- **Body image is a source of stress for 2-in-3 female students in Years 9–12.**
- Younger students and male students overall are more likely to have a positive view of themselves.
- **3-in-5 female and 4-in-5 male high school students say they feel good about themselves.**
- 58% of Year 9–12 students reported they had felt sad, blue or depressed for two or more weeks in a row in the last 12 months.

Healthy behaviours

- 26% of high school students reported learning nothing at school about marijuana and 17% reported learning nothing about other illegal drugs.
- **3-in-4 high school students think people their age should not use alcohol or drugs.**

- Among Year 10–12 students, 1-in-3 think it is okay for people their age to drink alcohol and 1-in-4 think it is okay to use marijuana.
- **30% of high school students either aren't sure or don't know where to go for help about alcohol or drugs.**
- 80% of Year 7–9 students and 42% of Year 10–12 students have never tried alcohol.
- **One-half of Year 10–12 students who had ever drunk alcohol reported having drunk alcohol in the last 4 weeks.**
- 91% of Year 7–9 students and 69% of Year 10–12 students have never tried cigarette smoking.
- **4% of Year 10–12 students smoke once a week or more.**
- Among Year 9–12 students, 25% have experiences with marijuana and 15% with other illegal drugs.
- **1-in-3 Year 10–12 students feel they don't know enough about sexual health and pregnancy or they aren't sure.**
- 2-in-5 Year 7–12 students either don't know or aren't sure where to go if they needed help for something about their reproductive or sexual health.
- **56% of female and 30% of male Year 9–12 students have been sent unwanted sexual material.**



Feeling connected and respected in culture and community

- 19% of Year 4–12 students were born overseas and 20% speak language(s) other than English at home (5% exclusively).
- **Most students spend time with friends outside of school at least once a week but 1-in-5 do this hardly ever or never and this proportion remained the same across year groups.**
- 25% of female and 13% of male Year 10–12 students hardly ever or never practise or play a sport.
- **More than 1-in-2 male and 1-in-3 female students play electronic games every day or almost every day.**
- Younger students are more likely than older students to read books every day.
- **One-half of Year 10–12 students do not read books in their leisure time.**
- Most Year 4–6 students spend time hanging out with family, reading books, doing homework and watching TV every day.
- **Most Year 7–12 students spend time using the internet, hanging out with family and helping with housework every day.**
- 1-in-2 female and 2-in-3 male high school students feel like they belong in their community.
- **14% of high school students often go without eating or sleeping because of their mobile phone, especially girls (17%).**
- Two-thirds of students do not feel able to access health support because they feel embarrassed or ashamed.
- **40% of female and 30% of male students reported getting help for mental health worries in the last 12 months.**
- 2-in-3 young people approached family and friends and 1-in-3 turned to doctors and/or to school services for mental health support.

5.2 Safe and supported

Feeling safe and supported involves positive family relationships and connections with other adults, along with personal and community safety. Every child or young person has the right to be loved and to feel safe and supported. The essential outcomes in this domain are that children and young people are supported by safe and healthy relationships, that they are physically and emotionally safe, engage in safe behaviours and that their material needs are met.

The survey used a range of indicators to measure these outcomes including questions about students' relationships with their parents and other adults in their lives, their material basics such as housing, transport and food and if there were any family problems that worried them. It also asked students to report on their feelings of safety at home, in their community and about their experiences of violence and harm.

5.2.1 Supportive relationships

"It is always the best to talk to someone close to you [...]." (13 year-old)

"I sometimes feel stressed about little things but my family mainly mum and my friends help." (11 year-old)

"Trusted friends have been a good source of help and understanding and support especially when they have the same struggles/problems." (16 year-old)

"I found that I have this one teacher that me and my friend always go to talk to about our problems [they] helped me through a lot and see my side of the story." (14 year-old)

"You could literally make someone's day just by asking how they're feeling. [...] asking questions to see if people are alright really does help." (14 year-old)

Children and young people who are supported by safe and positive relationships are more likely to have good mental health, be resilient, able to learn and sustain healthy relationships into the future.

Dependable relationships with adults

Year 4 to 12 students were asked a series of questions about their relationship with their parents and how much they felt their family cared about them.

The majority of Year 4 to 12 students reported feeling cared for, loved and supported. On average, three-quarters of students agreed that their parents or family believe in and listen to them and care about them a lot:

- 89.2 per cent reported it was true they lived with a parent or another adult who believes they will achieve good things (65.9% very much true and 23.3% pretty much true).
- 78.0 per cent reported it was true they lived with a parent or another adult who listens to them when they have something to say (49.1% very much true and 28.9% pretty much true).
- 82.4 per cent reported their mum (or someone who acts as their mum) cares about them a lot (9.1% said their mum cares 'some').
- 72.4 per cent reported their dad (or someone who acts as their dad) cares about them a lot (12.9% said their dad cares 'some').
- 75.9 per cent reported their family gets along well or very well (32.9% very well and 43.0% well).
- 73.6 per cent reported it was true they lived with a parent or another adult they can talk to about their problems or worries (52.9% very much true and 20.7% pretty much true).
- 70.9 per cent said their siblings care about them a lot or some (44.5% 'a lot' and 26.4% 'some').

72% of students feel their dad cares about them a lot and 82% feel their mum cares about them a lot.

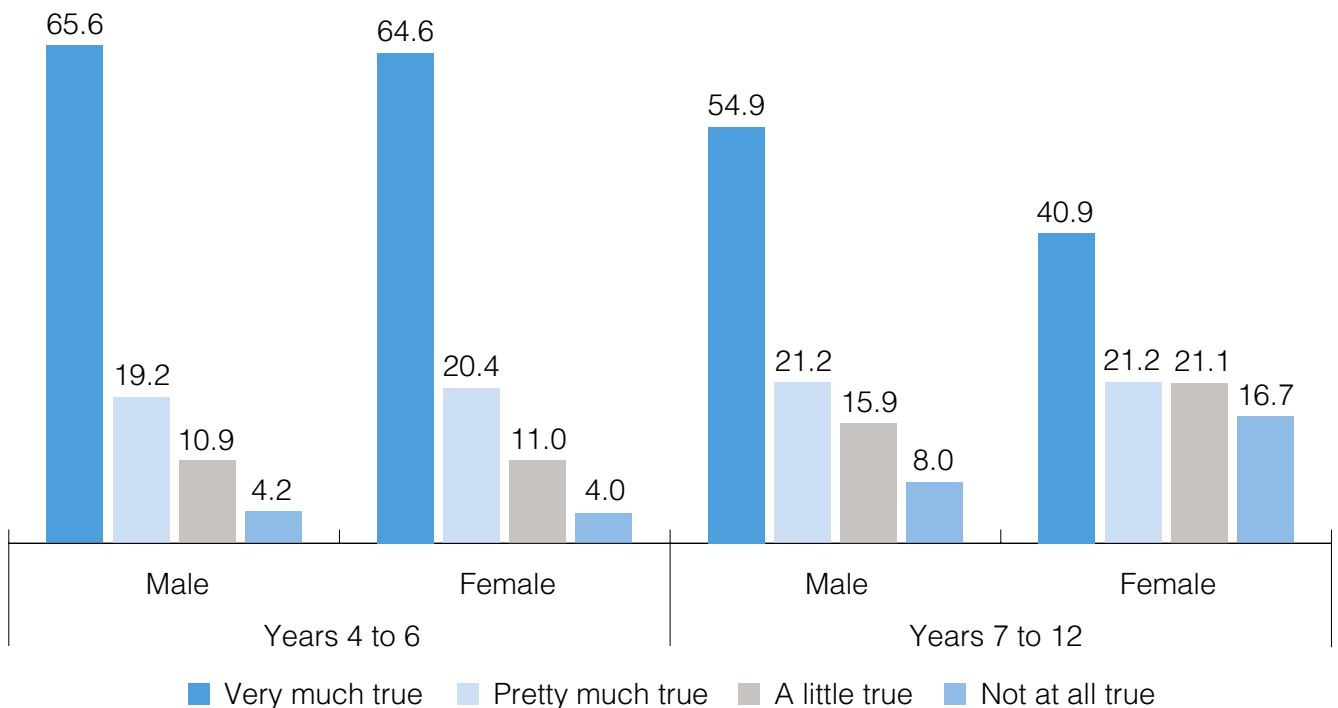
For some of these statements, there were significant differences between younger and older students. Most importantly, older students were somewhat less likely than younger students to report being able to talk to their parents about their problems, to feel their mum or dad care a lot about them and that their parents listened when they had something to say.

Two-thirds of Year 4 to 6 students reported it was very much true they lived with a parent they can talk to about their problems or worries compared with less than one-half of

Year 7 to 12 students (64.5% Years 4–6 vs. 49.7% Years 7–9 and 43.6% Years 10–12). Correspondingly, more than one-in-ten Year 7 to 12 reported it was not at all true they can talk to their parent about their problems (14.8% Years 10–12 and 12.2% Years 7–9 vs. 4.4% Years 4–6). While these age differences were found for both male and female students, the changes were more significant for female Year 7 to 12 students, of whom 16.7 per cent said this was not at all true compared with 8.0 per cent of their male counterparts.

17% of female and 8% of male high school students say they cannot talk to their parents about their problems.

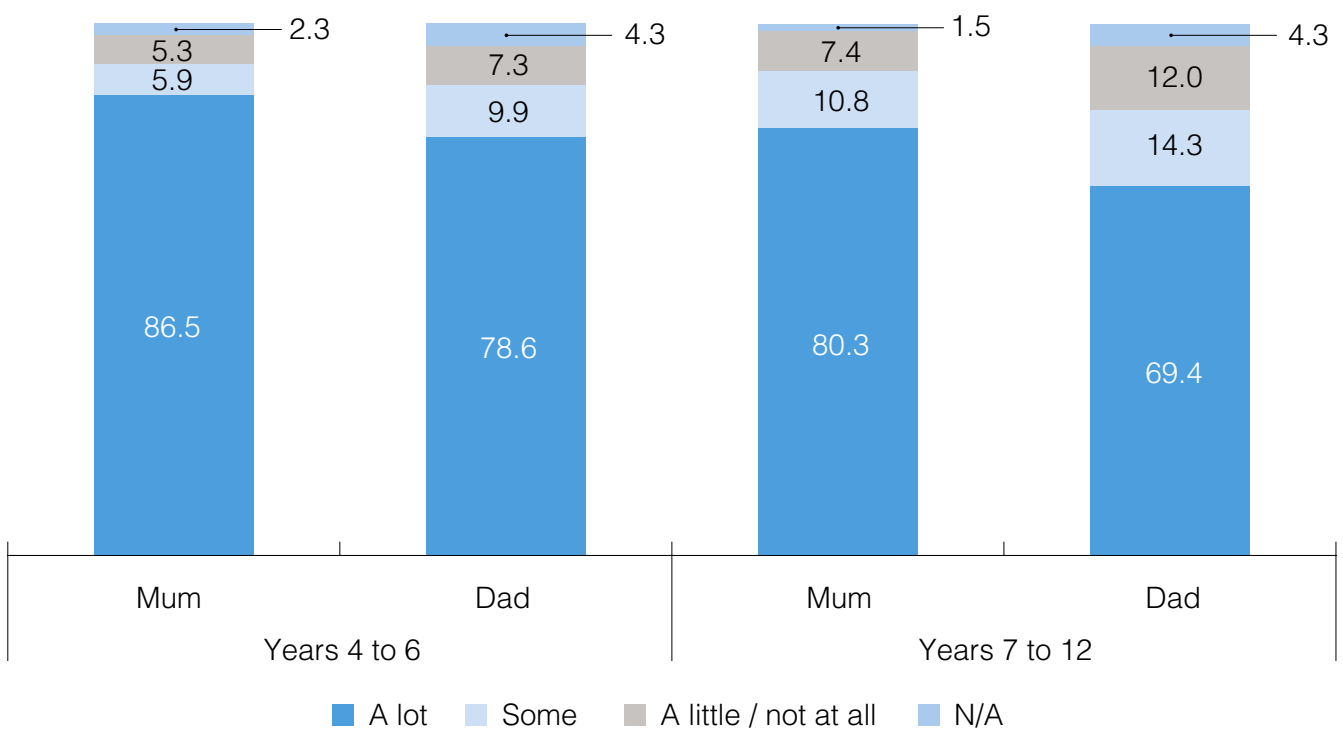
Graph 5.2.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying the statement ‘Where I live, there is a parent or adult who I can talk to about my problems’ is very much, pretty much or a little true or not at all true, by year group and gender, 2021



Most Year 4 to 6 students said their mum and dad care about them a lot, however fewer students felt this way about their dad (86.5% mum cares a lot vs. 78.6% dad cares a lot). Among Year 7 to 12 students, 80 per cent of

students said mum cares a lot about them but only two-thirds felt this way about their dad (mum cares a lot: 81.8% Years 7–9 and 78.3% Years 10–12 vs. dad cares a lot: 71.6% Years 7–9 and 66.3% Years 10–12).

Graph 5.2.2: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their mum or dad cares about them a lot, some or a little/not at all, by year group, 2021

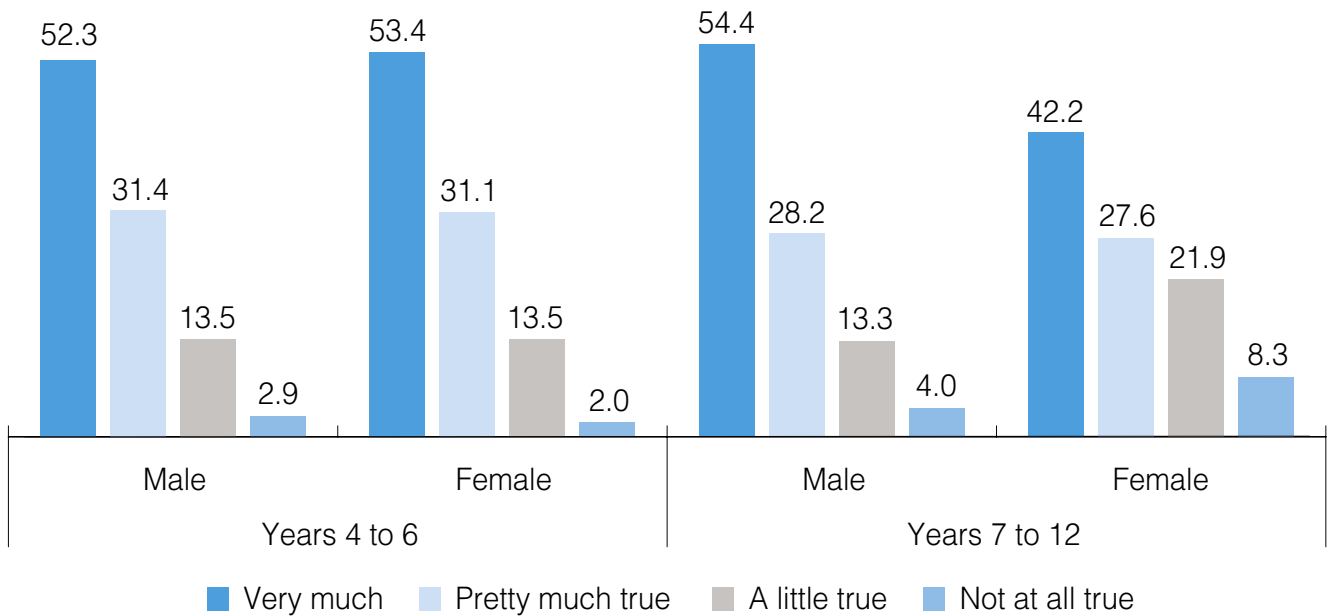


With regard to being listened to, there was no significant change across year groups for male students reporting it was very much true they lived with a parent/other adult who listened to them (52.3% Years 4–6 vs. 54.9% Years 7–9 and 53.7% Years 10–12). Among female students however, the proportion reporting being listened to decreased from 53.4 per cent in Years 4 to 6 to 42.2 per cent in Years 7 to 12 (43.2% Years 7–9 and 40.7% Years 10–12).

Correspondingly, female Year 7 to 12 students were twice as likely than their male counterparts to say it was not at all true they lived with a parent who listens to them when they have something to say (8.3% female vs. 4.0% male).

1-in-3 female high school students say they often don't feel listened to.

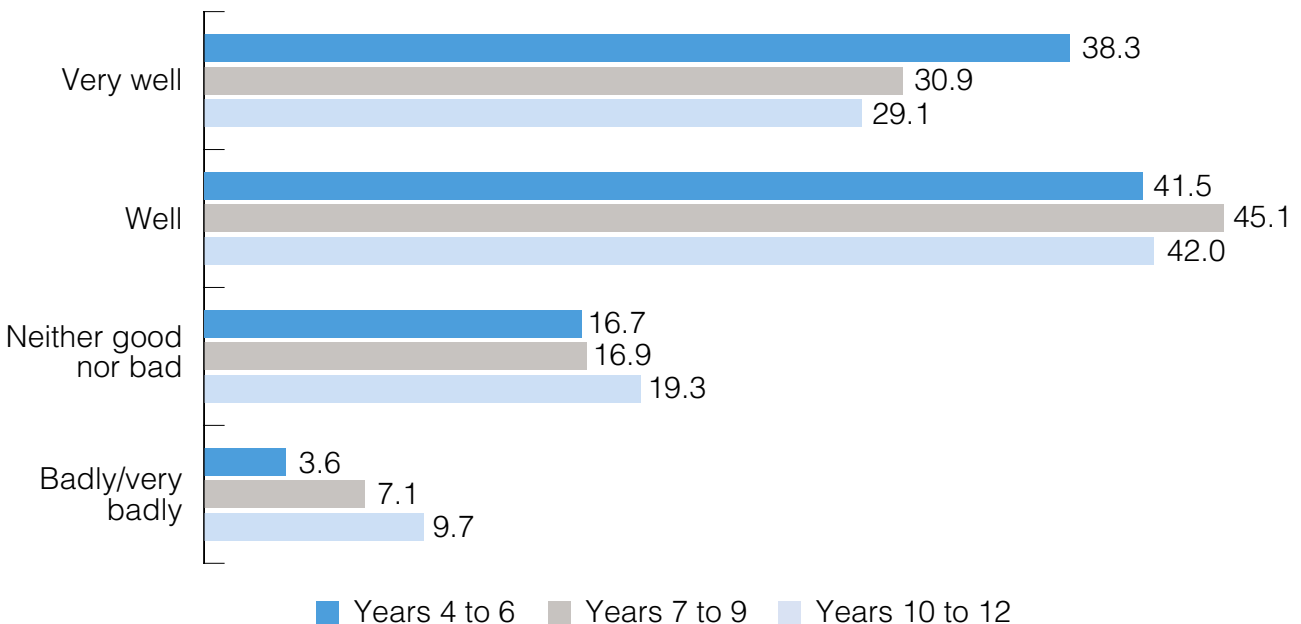
Graph 5.2.3: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying the statement ‘Where I live, there is a parent or adult who listens to me when I have something to say’ is very much, pretty much or a little true or not at all true, by year group and gender, 2021



In regard to family cohesion, fewer Year 7 to 12 than Year 4 to 6 students reported their family gets along very well (29.1% Years 10–12 and 30.9% Years 7–9 vs. 38.3% Years 4–6). The results were largely similar for boys and girls

in Years 4 to 6, however a higher proportion of female than male Year 7 to 12 students reported their family gets along badly (9.3% female vs. 5.5% male).

Graph 5.2.4: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their family gets along very well, well, neither good nor bad or badly/very badly, by year group, 2021



Friendships

Relationships with friends are critical for children and young people as they provide social and emotional support and can be a protective factor against bullying and mental health issues.^{34,35,36} Supportive relationships with friends also help children and young people develop patterns of persistence and motivation in their schooling.³⁷ During adolescence, young people increase their independence from family and friendships become more important.

The Commissioner's consultations with children and young people across WA have consistently found that having friends is one of the most important things to them.

Year 4 to 12 students were asked a range of questions about making and keeping friends, having enough friends and how much they think their friends care about them.

For all students in Years 4 to 12, the survey found:

- 53.0 per cent of students felt they are very good at making and keeping friends and a further 39.4 per cent said they are okay at this.
- 83.6 per cent reported they feel they have enough friends.
- 45.2 per cent of students felt their friends care about them a lot and 42.3 per cent said some.

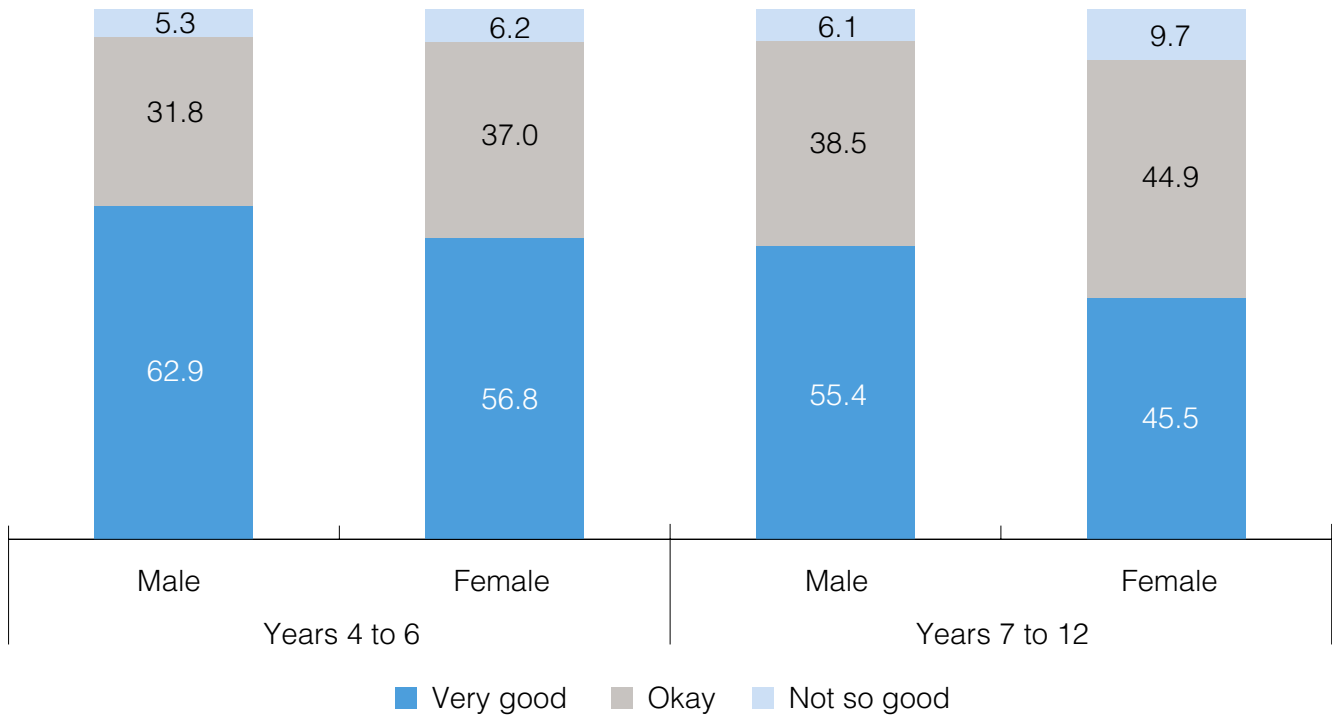
For some of these statements there were significant differences between younger and older students. Year 4 to 6 students were more confident than Year 7 to 12 students about their ability to make and keep friends with 59.3 per cent reporting they are very good at this compared to 51.1 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students and 48.2 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students.

Younger students were also more likely to report that they feel their friends care about them a lot (53.0% Years 4–6 vs. 42.3% Years 7–9 and 39.9% Years 10–12). With regard to having enough friends, whilst the majority of all students felt they have enough friends, 18.6 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students felt they did not have enough friends.

In general, female Year 7 to 12 students were less confident than male students about their ability to make and keep friends (45.5% female very good vs. 55.4% male very good) and more likely to feel that they do not have enough friends (20.2% female vs. 13.1% male).

1-in-2 students feel they are very good at making and keeping friends and **2-in-5** say they are okay at it.

Graph 5.2.5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they are very good, okay or not so good at making friends, by gender and year group, 2021



1-in-5 Year 10-12 students feel they do not have enough friends.

Online communication

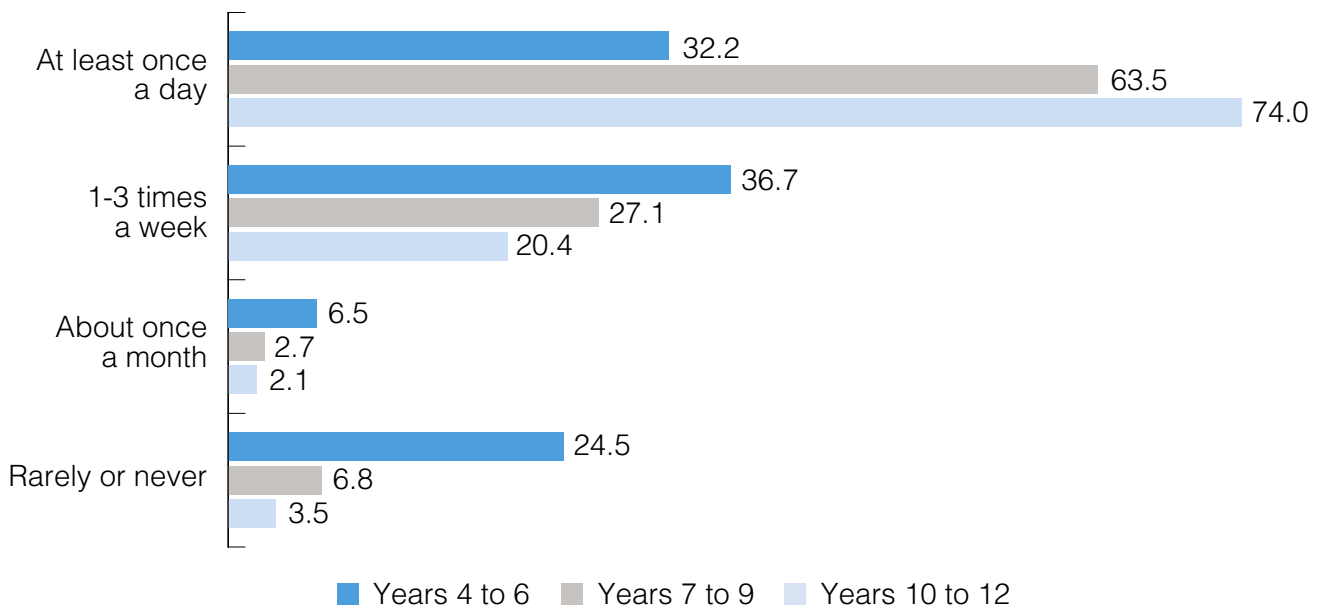
Eighty-three per cent of Year 4 to 6 students and 95.5 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students use the internet outside of school.

One-third of Year 4 to 6 and two-thirds of Year 7 to 12 students reported being in contact online with people from their school at least once a day (32.2% vs. 67.9%). A further 36.7 per cent of Year 4 to 6 and 24.2 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students said they are in contact online with people from their school one to three times a week. One-quarter of Year 4 to 6 students and a mere 5.4 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students said they rarely or never contact people from their school online.

A little less than one-half (44.7%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported being in contact online with family members at least once a day and there was little difference between year groups. About 1-in-10 students reported rarely or never contacting family online (12.8% Years 4–6 and 8.7% Years 7–12).

Students are also in contact online with friends or other people who are not from their school (such as friends attending other school or friends from other activities such as sport). Older students were significantly more likely than younger students to report doing this at least once a day (52.2% Years 10–12 vs. 35.6% Years 7–9 and 18.8% Years 4–6).

Graph 5.2.6: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students who are in contact online with people from their school, by frequency and year group, 2021

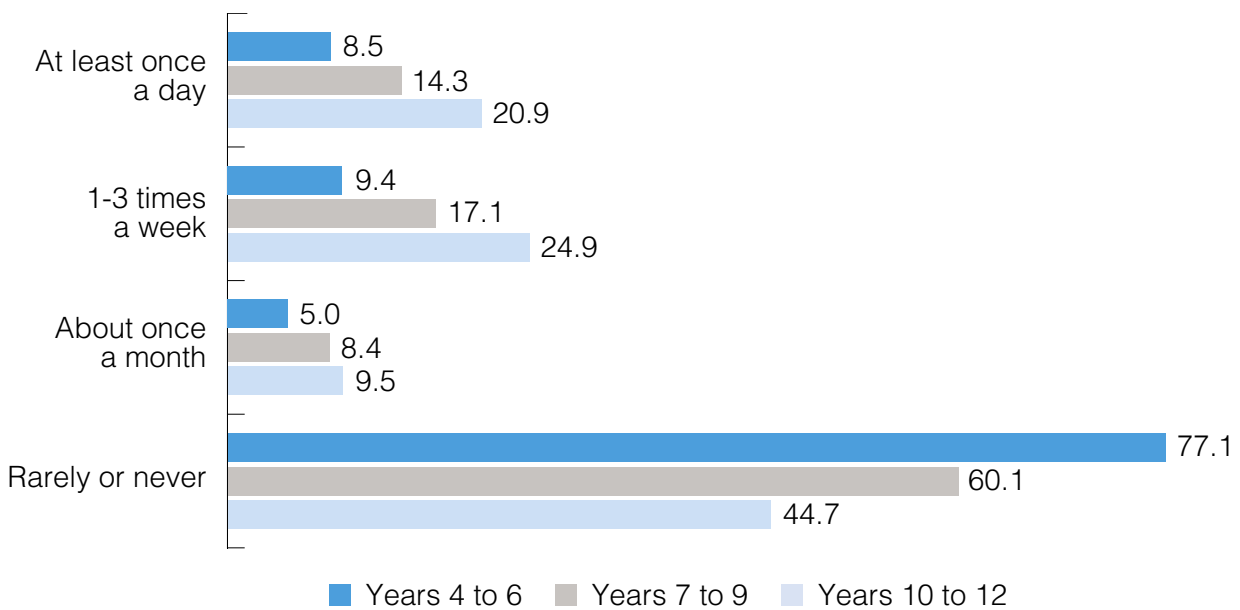


Online communication with people they have not met face-to-face

Some 8.5 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students and 17.1 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported being in contact online at least once a day with people they do not know or have never met face-to-face. A further 9.4 per cent of Year 4 to 6 and 20.4 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students said they do this one to three times a week. Three-quarters of Year 4 to 6 students and about one-half of Year 7 to 12 students rarely or never are in contact online with people they do not know or have never met face-to-face (77.1% Years 4–6 vs. 60.1% Years 7–9 and 44.7% Years 10–12).

45% of high school students are regularly in contact online with people they have not met face-to-face and 21% are daily.

Graph 5.2.7: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students who are in contact online with people they do not know or have not met face-to-face, by frequency and year group, 2021



5.2.2 Material basics

“It worries me because nearly 3 times a week I’ve heard my mum crying at night or afternoon and sometimes we’ve been running out of money [...]” (10 year-old)

“I have nothing else to say. Except that my family is low on money. And I’m suffering from not eating or sleeping much. And I’m extremely stressed about school work.” (13 year-old)

Material circumstances of the family are a significant contributor to a child or young person’s health and wellbeing. Access to basic material needs such as adequate food and security of housing protects against the risks of ongoing disadvantage.

In general, children and young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at greater risk of poor health over their lifetime, including higher rates of illness, disability and death.³⁸ Young people experiencing material deprivation, social exclusion or homelessness are also more likely to have poor mental health, high risk of alcohol and substance misuse and low educational and employment outcomes over the longer term.^{39,40}

Students in the survey were asked several questions about their house amenities and family and personal resources.

Number of homes

For all students in Years 4 to 12, 80.7 per cent reported living in one home and 19.3 per cent said they live in two or more homes.

With regard to who they live with in their main home, most students reported living with their mother (93.6%), father (79.3%) and brothers/sisters (74.7%). Lower proportions lived with other people in their main home such as grandparents (8.5%) or aunts or uncles (4.4%).

A higher proportion of Year 4 to 6 than Year 7 to 12 students reported they live with their father in their main home (82.7% Years 4–6 vs. 77.5% Years 7–12).

Two-thirds of Year 4 to 12 students live in either a four (38.1%) or five (26.1%) person family in their main home.

Second home

For students who reported having a second home, one-half (51.2%) of Year 4 to 6 but only one-third (32.9%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported living in this home one-half of the time.

A higher proportion of Year 7 to 12 than Year 4 to 6 students reported living in their second home ‘hardly ever’ (18.6% Years 10–12 and 15.2% Years 7–9 vs. 9.4% Years 4–6). In other words, older students spend less time living in their second home compared to younger students.

Most commonly, students who reported having a second home lived there with their father (60.9%), mother (38.9%), brothers/sisters (47.2%) or grandparents (18.3%).

For all students in Years 4 to 12 who live in a second home, 16.2 per cent reported they live with their step-mother, 13.8 per cent with step-brothers/step-sisters, 11.2 per cent with aunts or uncles and 7.0 per cent reported living with other relatives.

Bedrooms in the home

78.4 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students and 91.7 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported having their own bedroom. This year level difference was observed for both male and female students.

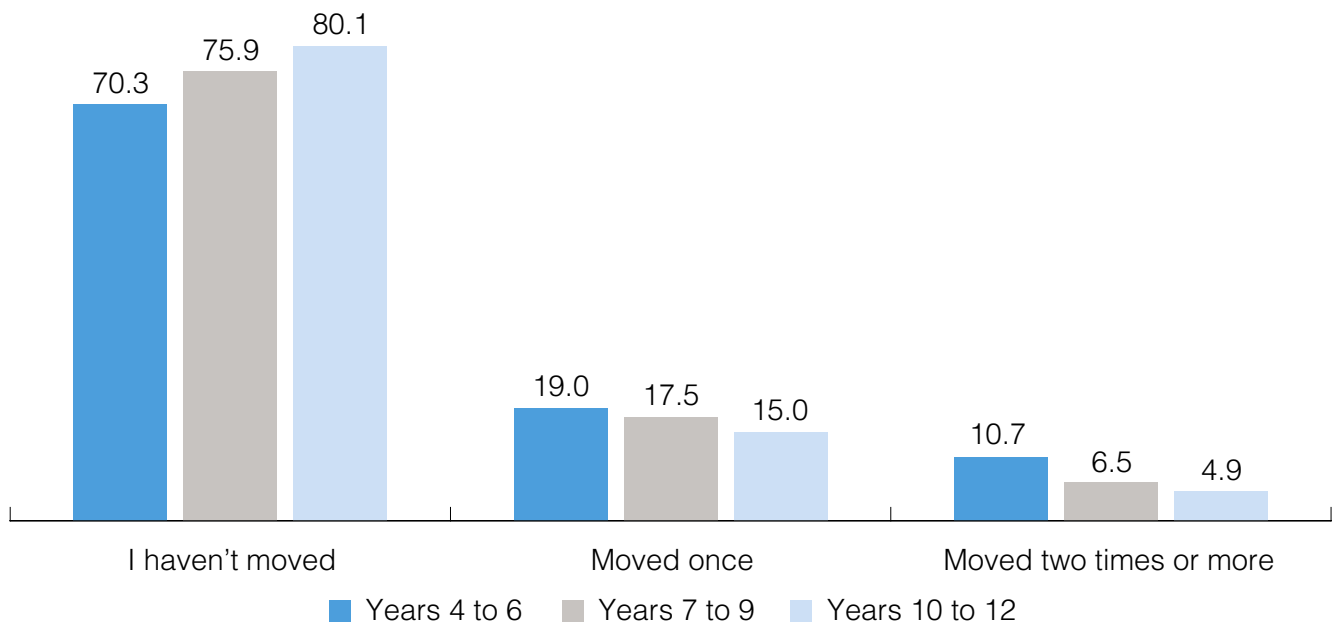
Moving house

The majority of students (75.2%) reported they haven't moved homes in the last 12 months.

A higher proportion of students in Years 4 to 6 than in Years 7 to 12 had moved homes in the last 12 months: 19.0 per cent of Years 4 to 6 students had moved once and 10.7 per cent had moved twice or more (compared to Years 7-12: 16.5% once and 5.8% twice or more).

78% of Year 4-6 students and 92% of Year 7-12 students have their own bedroom.

Graph 5.2.8: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they haven't moved, moved once or moved two times or more in the last 12 months, by year group, 2021



Family car

For students in Years 4 to 12, 2.8 per cent reported their family did not own a car used for family transport, 19.0 per cent said their family owned one car and 78.2 per cent reported owning two or more cars.

A higher proportion of students in Years 7 to 12 reported their family had two or more cars compared to Years 4 to 6 (80.0% Years 7–12 vs. 74.6% Years 4–6) and a lower proportion reported their family did not have a car (1.8% Years 7–12 vs. 4.8% Years 4–6).

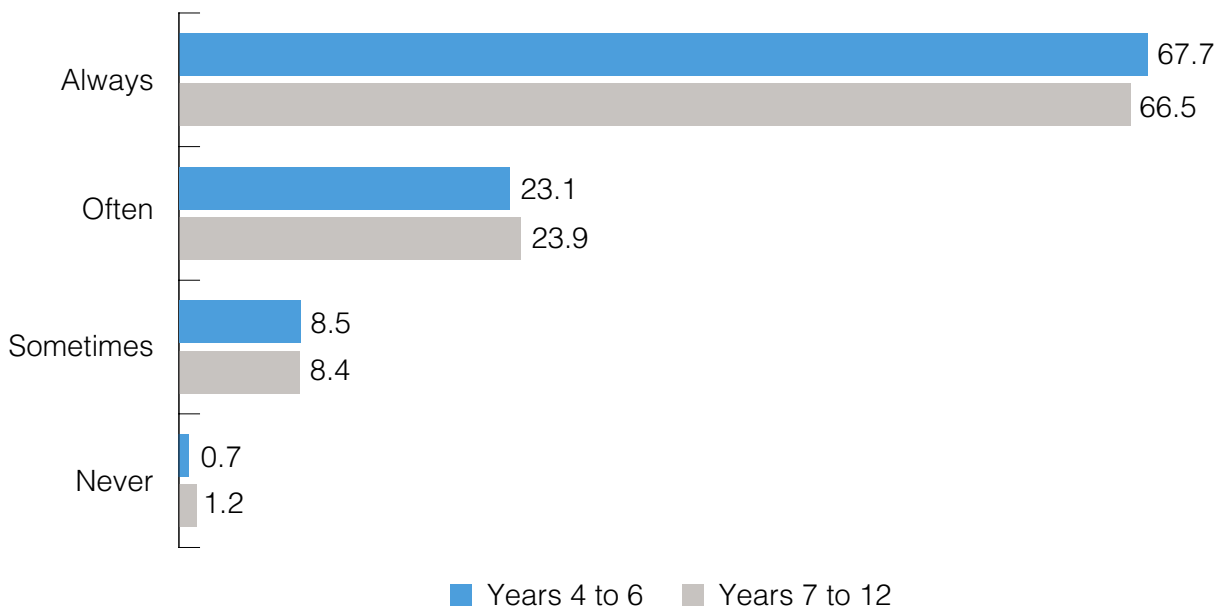
For all students in Years 4 to 12 who reported their family had at least one car, 1.3 per cent reported their family did not have enough money to put fuel in the car when needed and 8.5 per cent did not know.

Food at home

Two-thirds (66.9%) of students in Years 4 to 12 reported that there is always enough food for them to eat at home. One-quarter (23.6%) answered this was the case often but one-in-ten (8.4%) said there was only sometimes enough food for them to eat and one per cent said never.

8% of students said there is only sometimes enough food for them to eat at home and 1% said there is never enough food.

Graph 5.2.9: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting there is always, often, sometimes or never enough food for them to eat at home when they are hungry, by year group, 2021



Material deprivation

A series of questions asked students about whether they owned a series of items, or whether they would like to have it if they did not own the item.

- Nearly all (96.6%) Year 4 to 12 students reported having access to the internet at home; 2.5 per cent reported they didn't have but would like this.
- Nearly all (96.7%) Year 10 to 12 students and 86.3 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students reported having their own mobile phone; 10.3 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students reported they didn't have but would like this; 1.1 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported not having and not wanting a mobile phone.
- 88.3 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported having their own tablet, laptop or computer; 8.1 per cent reported they didn't have but would like this.
- 87.3 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students reported having their own device (such as tablet, laptop or mobile phone); 10.0 per cent reported they didn't have but would like this.
- 90.6 per cent of Year 4 to 12 students reported their family had enough money for them to go on a school excursion or camp; 6.6 per cent reported they didn't have but would like this.
- 69.4 per cent of Year 4 to 12 students reported they received pocket money they could save each month; 22.3 per cent reported they didn't have but would like this.
- 88.1 per cent of Year 4 to 12 students reported they had 'the right kind of clothes'; 8.1 per cent reported they didn't have but would like this.

5.2.3 Safe in the home

"If I'm home alone, it's just my own worries that make me feel unsafe." (16 year-old)

"When I'm home alone and someone knocks on the door." (13 year-old)

"Sometimes I think of past experiences of me and [parent] in domestic violence and it was scary but we got through but sometimes I think it could happen again." (12 year-old)

"My [parent] makes me feel unsafe at times because [...] gets angry easily." (15 year-old)

Feeling safe and being safe at home are critical for children and young people's healthy development. A safe and supportive family provides a sense of security, fosters self-esteem and responds appropriately to young people's needs.⁴¹

Conversely, children and young people who experience family violence, abuse and neglect are more likely to have poor outcomes including poor physical health, learning and developmental difficulties, higher rates of alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, criminality, homelessness, later parenting issues and suicide.⁴²

Feeling safe at home

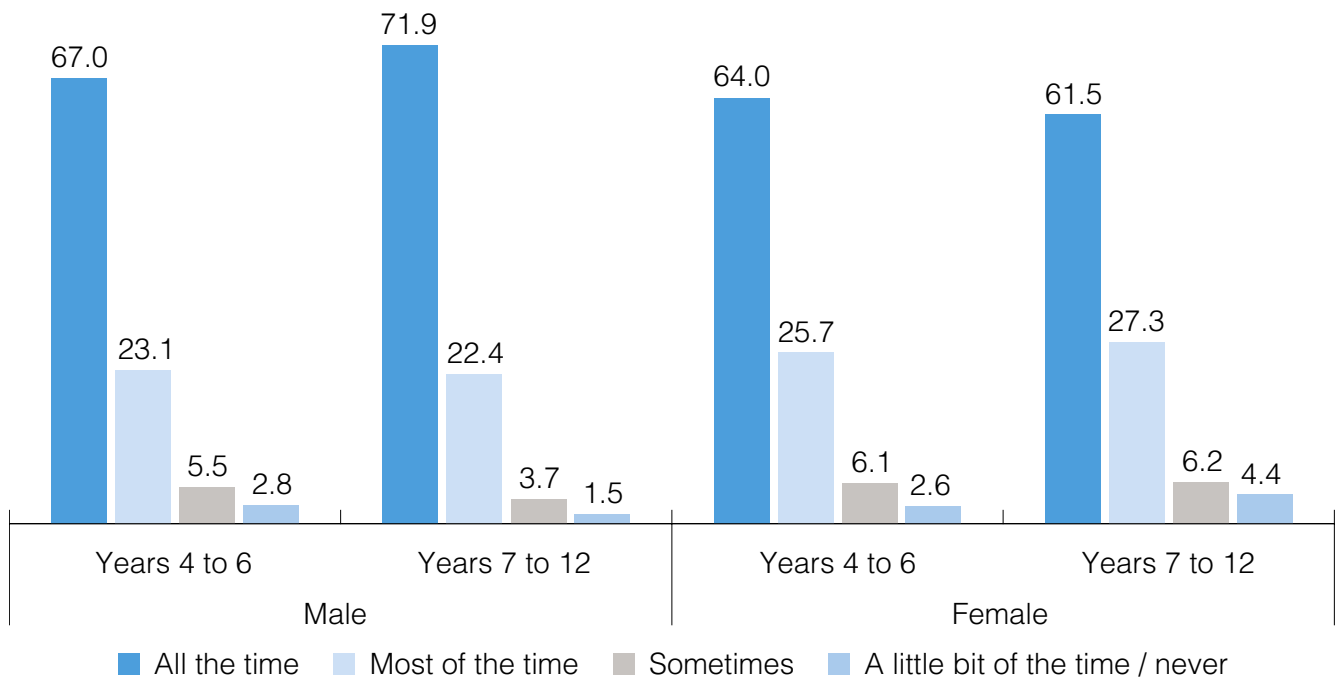
For all students in Years 4 to 12, 65.3 per cent reported feeling safe at home all the time and 24.9 per cent most of the time. Three per cent (3.3%) of students reported feeling safe at home only a little bit of the time or never.

There was little difference between male and female students in Years 4 to 6, however among Year 7 to 12 students, female respondents were significantly less likely than male respondents to report feeling safe all the time (61.5% female vs. 71.9% male).

Correspondingly, female Year 7 to 12 students were more likely than male students to report feeling safe at home sometimes (6.2% vs. 3.7%) and a little bit of the time or never (4.4% vs. 1.5%).

In contrast, older male students were more likely to feel safe at home all the time than younger male students (67.0% Years 4–6 vs. 74.8% Years 10–12).

Graph 5.2.10: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they feel safe at home all the time, most of the time, sometimes, a little bit of the time or never, by year group and gender, 2021



1-in-10 female students feel safe at home only sometimes or less.

3% of students feel safe at home only a little bit of the time or never.

Staying away from home because of a problem

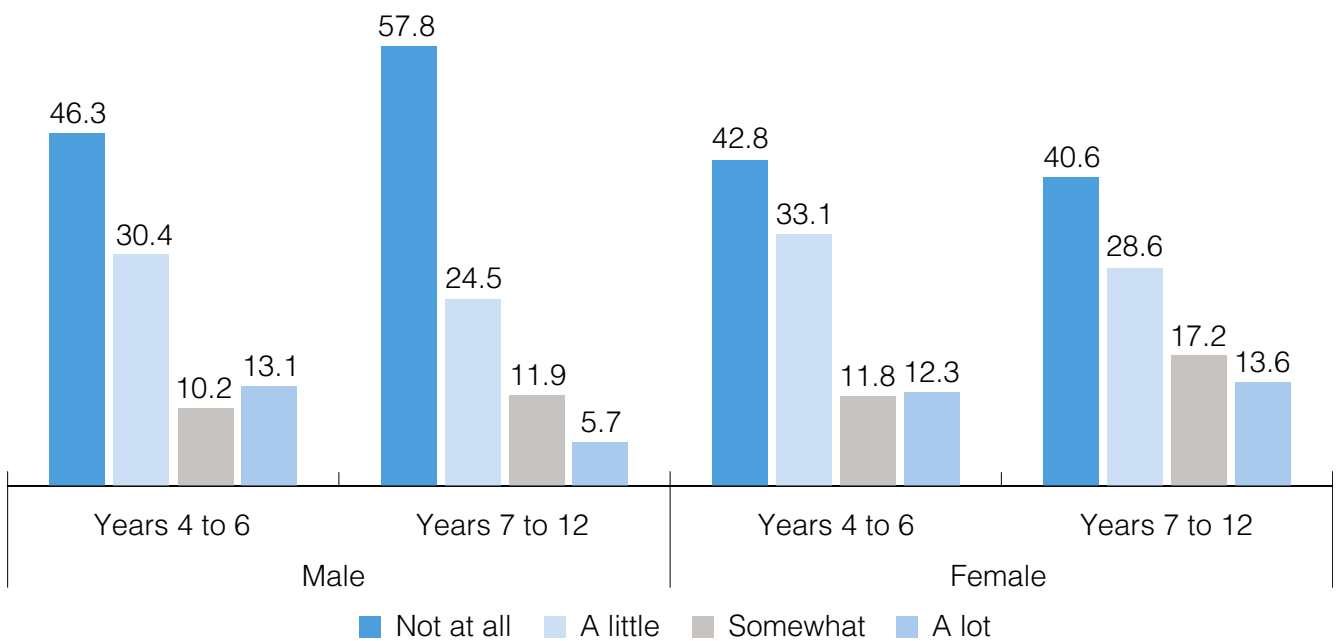
One-quarter (25.0%) of Year 7 to 9 students and one-third (31.5%) of Year 10 to 12 students reported they had ever stayed away from home overnight because of a problem. A significantly higher proportion of female than male students in Years 7 to 12 reported they had ever done this (31.7% female vs. 22.4% male). A further 7.1 per cent of students said they ‘preferred not to say’ suggesting that the true proportions are even higher.

Among students who reported they had stayed away from home overnight, 32.8 per cent said they had done this once in the last 12 months and 37.9 per cent more than once.

Family worries

One-half of students (47.2%) in Years 4 to 12 reported they were not at all worried that someone in their home or family will be fighting. However, more than one-quarter (28.1%) were a little worried, 13.7 per cent were somewhat worried and 11.0 per cent were worried a lot. Female Year 7 to 12 students were more likely than male to report being worried about this (59.4% female vs 42.1% male).

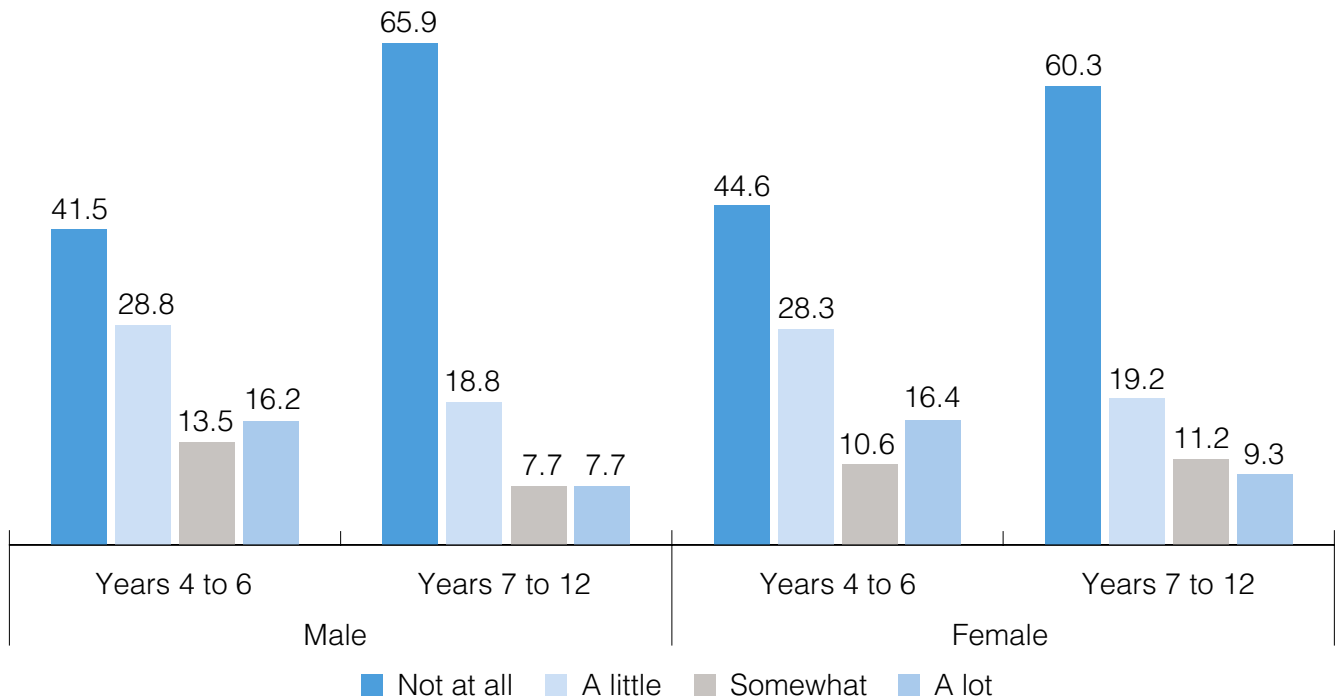
Graph 5.2.11: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they worry a lot, somewhat, a little or not at all that someone in their home or family will be fighting, by year group and gender, 2021



More than one-half (56.0%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported they were not at all worried that someone in their home or family will hurt themselves; however 22.1 per cent were a little worried about this, 10.5 per cent were somewhat worried and 11.4 per cent were worried a lot. Younger students were more likely than older students to say they worry

about this a lot (16.7% Years 4–6 vs. 8.9% Years 7–12). It is possible that the difference between younger and older students is due to younger students interpreting this question differently to older students, whereby being hurt may include being accidentally hurt or injured, as opposed to behaving in a way that would purposefully result in injury.

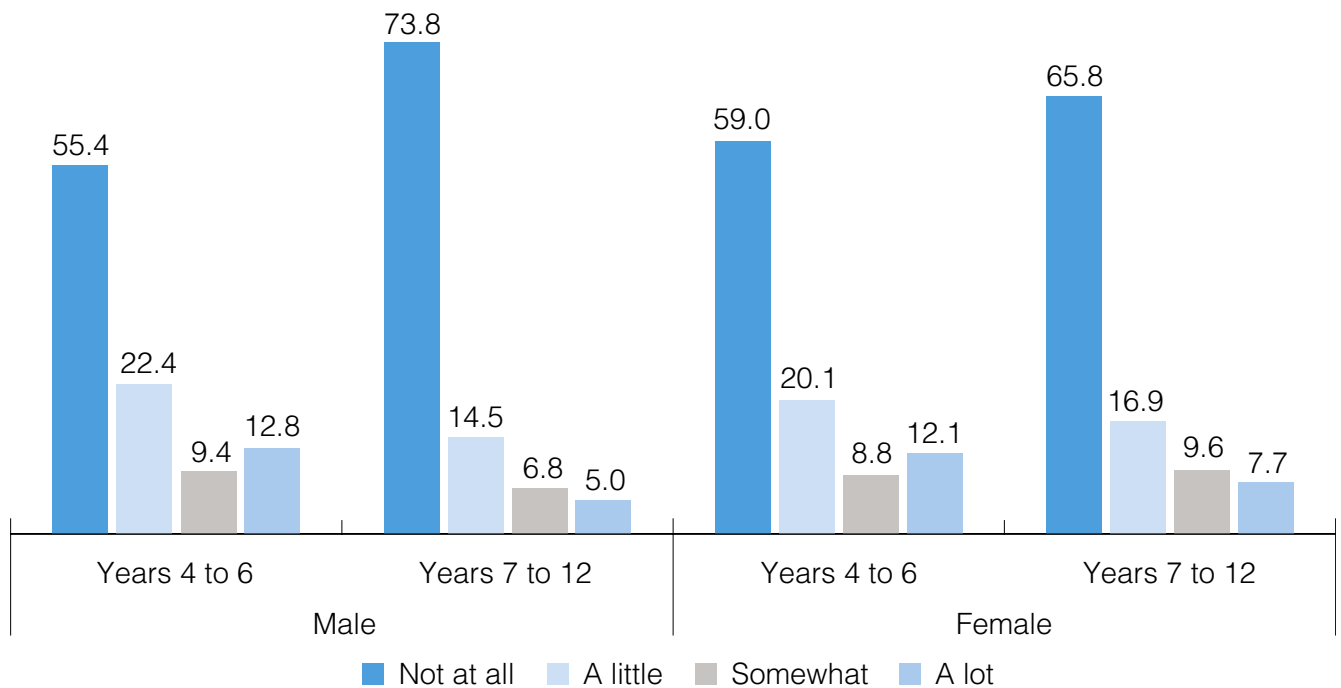
Graph 5.2.12: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they worry a lot, somewhat, a little or not at all that someone in their home or family will hurt themselves, by year group and gender, 2021



Two-thirds of students in Years 4 to 12 (65.0%) reported they were not at all worried that someone in their home or family will hurt somebody else. Conversely, 17.7 per cent were a little worried, 8.7 per cent were somewhat worried and 8.6 per cent were worried a lot.

In general, female students across all year levels were more likely than male students to report being concerned about the family worries included in the survey.

Graph 5.2.13: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they worry a lot, somewhat, a little or not at all that someone in their home or family will hurt somebody, by year group and gender, 2021



More than 1-in-2 high school students worry that someone in their family will be fighting and 1-in-10 worry a lot.

5.2.4 Safe in the community

*“I’m a girl, and I’m teenage, so I guess it’s kind of expected now for me to feel a little unsafe when I’m out. I guess people have the power to make me feel somewhat unsafe.”
(14 year-old)*

*“I feel unsafe as a part of the LGBTQIA+ community in my conservative town. And feel unable to express myself for fear of getting verbally attacked.”
(12 year-old)*

“I’d work on making it a safer community so I can feel safe to go on runs early in the morning or late in the afternoon. I find that there are many creepy people [...] in the area and many of my friends and I constantly talk about feeling unsafe in the city, the streets, neighbourhoods, parks, shops, stores, and transport stations.” (15 year-old)

*“Just to let you know: many young girls in this area clutch keys in case something happens, hold deodorant to spray in a predator’s eyes. Fix this. We want to be safe and not taught that we have to be careful.”
(15 year-old)*

Feeling safe in their neighbourhood and other communities or groups is essential for children and young people to develop their independence, engage in physical activity outside their home and build positive relationships with other adults and peers.^{43,44}

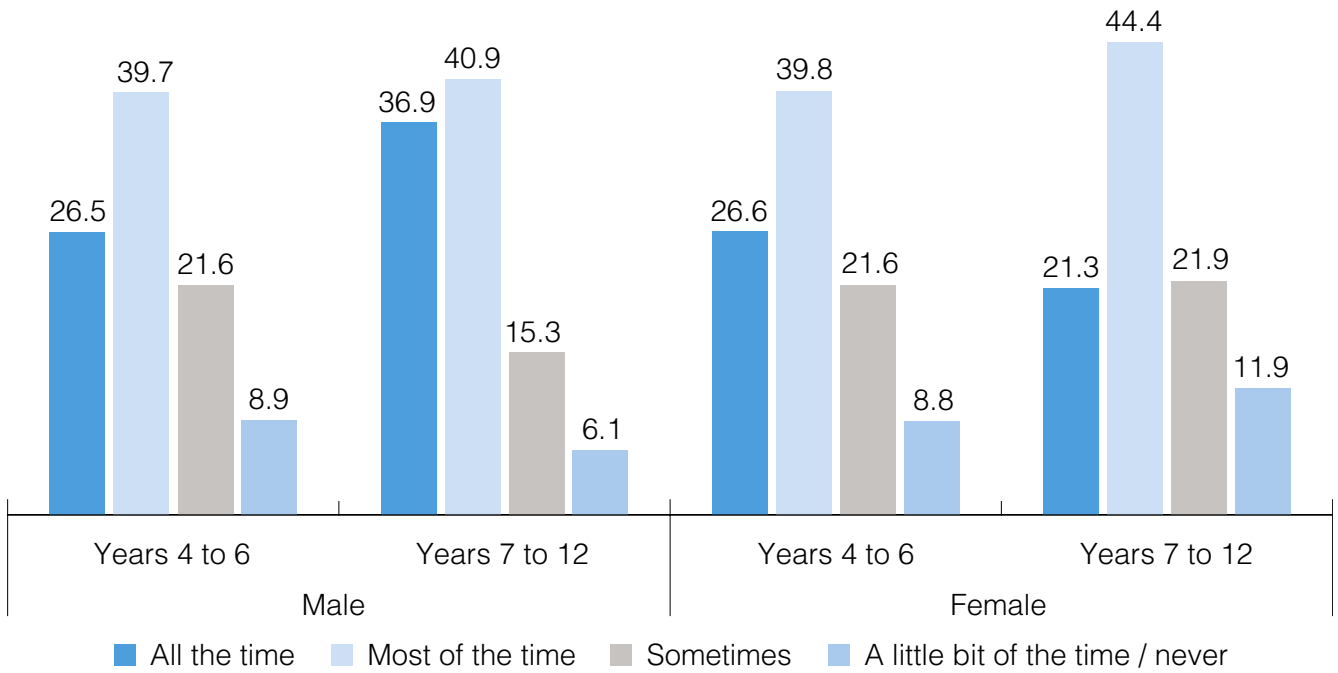
Children and young people who feel unsafe in their community are more likely to experience negative long-term outcomes including anxiety-related disorders, alcohol and drug misuse and behavioural difficulties.^{45,46}

Students in the survey were asked about feeling safe in their local area and, if they were having any serious problems, was there an adult they would feel okay talking to.

Less than one-third (28.0%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported feeling safe in their local area all the time. Two-in-five (41.3%) said they feel safe most of the time and the remainder – nearly 30 per cent – feel safe only sometimes or less (19.8% sometimes and 9.4% a little bit of the time / never).

There was no difference between male and female students in Years 4 to 6 with respect to how safe students feel in their local community, however female students in Years 7 to 12 were more likely than their male counterparts to report feeling safe sometimes or less (33.8% vs. 21.4%). Correspondingly, female students were less likely to report feeling safe all of the time (21.3% vs. 36.9%).

Graph 5.2.14: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they feel safe in their local area all the time, most of the time, sometimes or a little bit of the time or never, by year group and gender, 2021



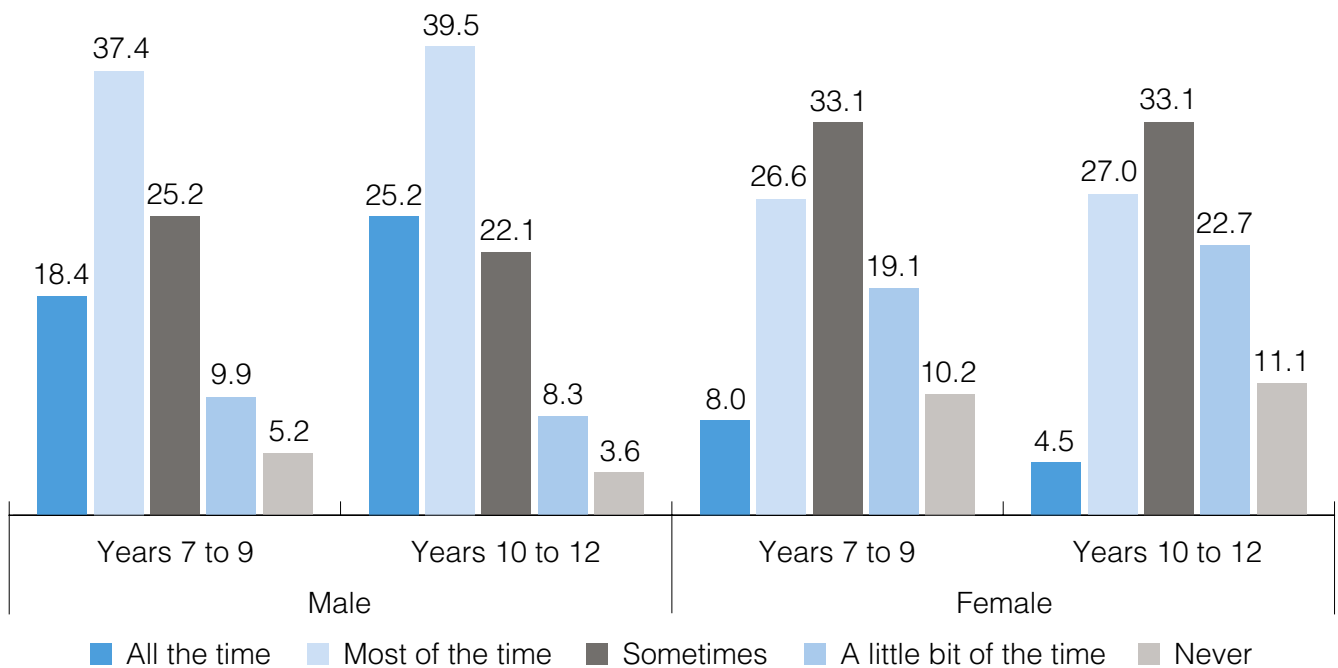
Feeling safe on public transport

One-third (32.1%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported feeling safe on buses or trains most of the time and only 13.9 per cent said they feel safe all the time. One-half of students (51.3%) reported feeling safe on buses and trains only sometimes or less (28.1% sometimes; 15.2% a little bit of the time; 8.0% never).

Female students were more likely to feel safe less often than their male counterparts.

One-half of high school students feel safe on buses and trains only sometimes or less and 8% never.

Graph 5.2.15: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting they feel safe on buses and trains all the time, most of the time, sometimes, a little bit of the time or never, by year group and gender, 2021



Less than one-third of students reported feeling safe in their local area all the time.

Access to a supportive adult

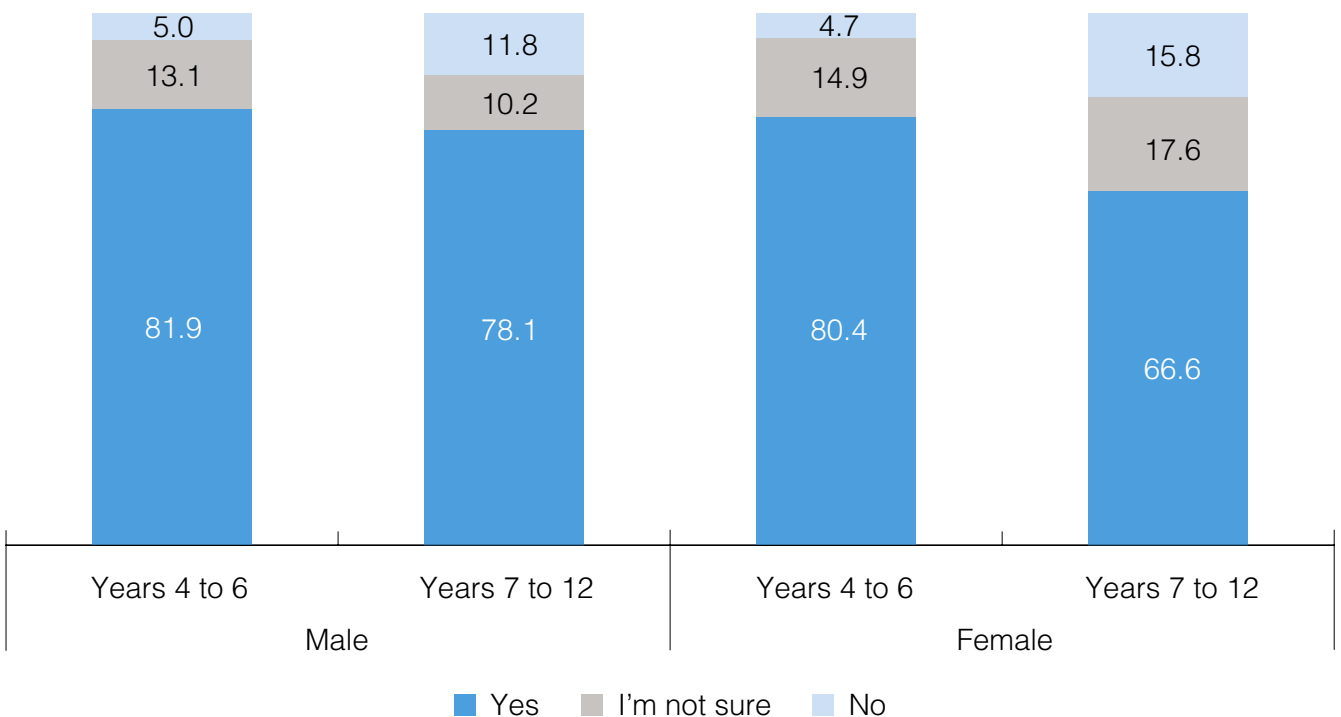
Three-quarters (74.5%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported that if they were having any serious problems, there was an adult they would feel okay talking to. Younger students were more likely than older students to say this (80.7% Years 4–6 vs. 71.4% Years 7–12).

Fourteen per cent (14.1%) of students said they weren't sure they had such a person and this proportion was consistent across all year groups. Five per cent (5.0%) of Year 4 to 6 and 14.6 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported not having an adult person they

would feel okay talking to if they were having serious problems. More female than male students felt this way.

1-in-3 female high school students don't have an adult they would feel okay talking to about serious problems.

Graph 5.2.16: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students answering yes, no or unsure to the question 'If you were having any serious problems, is there an adult you would feel okay talking to?', by year group and gender, 2021



5.2.5 Experiences of violence

“I’ve been threatened numerous times and even had it cause me and my friend to get bashed. And no one does anything about it and it makes me feel unsafe.”
(15 year-old)

Every child or young person has the right to live free from violence, abuse and neglect.⁴⁷ Most children and young people live in safe and supportive homes, however for some, home can be a place of conflict and distress as a result of family and domestic violence. Equally, some children and young people are exposed to violence in the community commonly referred to as violence that is not perpetrated by a family member and is intended to cause harm.⁴⁸

Living with family and domestic violence has short and long-term impacts on children and young people’s health and wellbeing. These include mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, difficulties at school, behavioural issues including violent behaviour, a higher likelihood of alcohol and drug misuse and greater risk of homelessness.^{49,50}

Children and young people who experience violence in the community are also at higher risk of negative long-term outcomes including substance abuse, anxiety-related disorders and exhibiting future violent behaviour. Exposure to violence in the community can also contribute to problems forming positive and trusting relationships and is strongly associated with young people exhibiting conduct problems.⁵¹

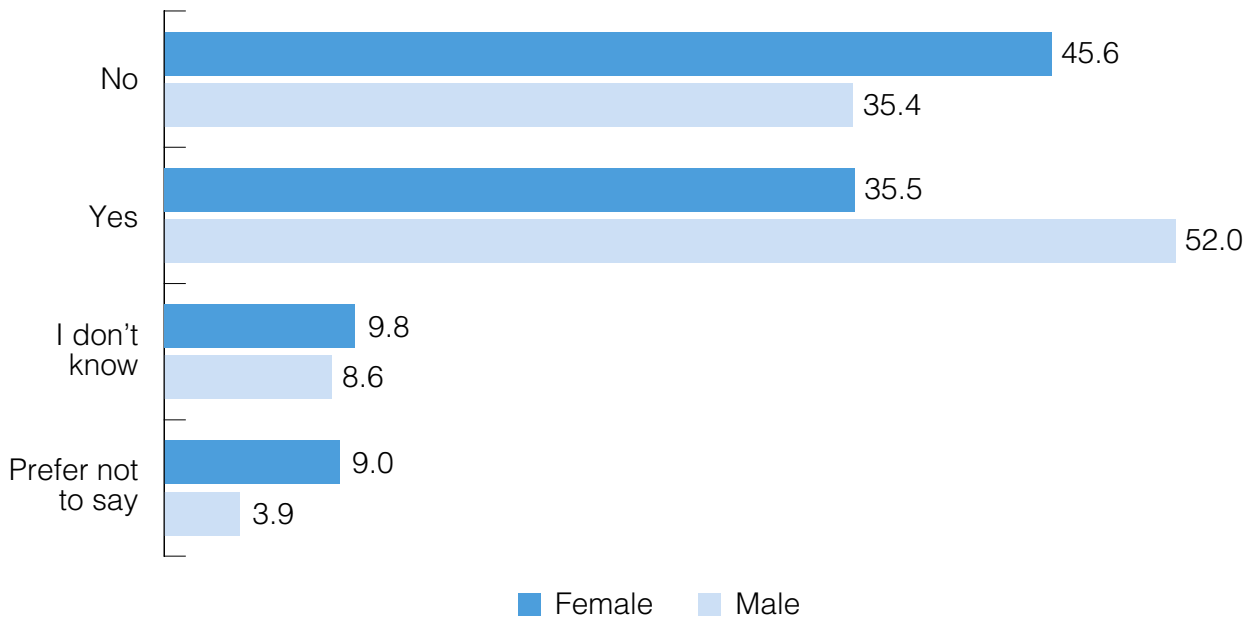
The survey asked Year 9 to 12 students a series of questions about being physically harmed.

More than one-half (52.0%) of male and one-third (35.5%) of female Year 9 to 12 students reported they had ever been hit or physically harmed by someone on purpose (all Year 9 to 12 students: 44.4%). A further 6.7 per cent said they ‘prefer not to say’ and 9.3 per cent said they ‘don’t know’.

For students who reported they had been physically harmed on purpose, 31.2 per cent reported this happened once or twice in the last 12 months, 13.0 per cent reported this happened three or four times and 15.8 per cent reported this happened five or more times in the last 12 months.

1-in-2 male and 1-in-3 female Year 9 to 12 students reported they had been hit or physically harmed on purpose.

Graph 5.2.17: Proportion of Year 9 to 12 students saying they have or have not ever been physically harmed by someone on purpose, by gender, 2021

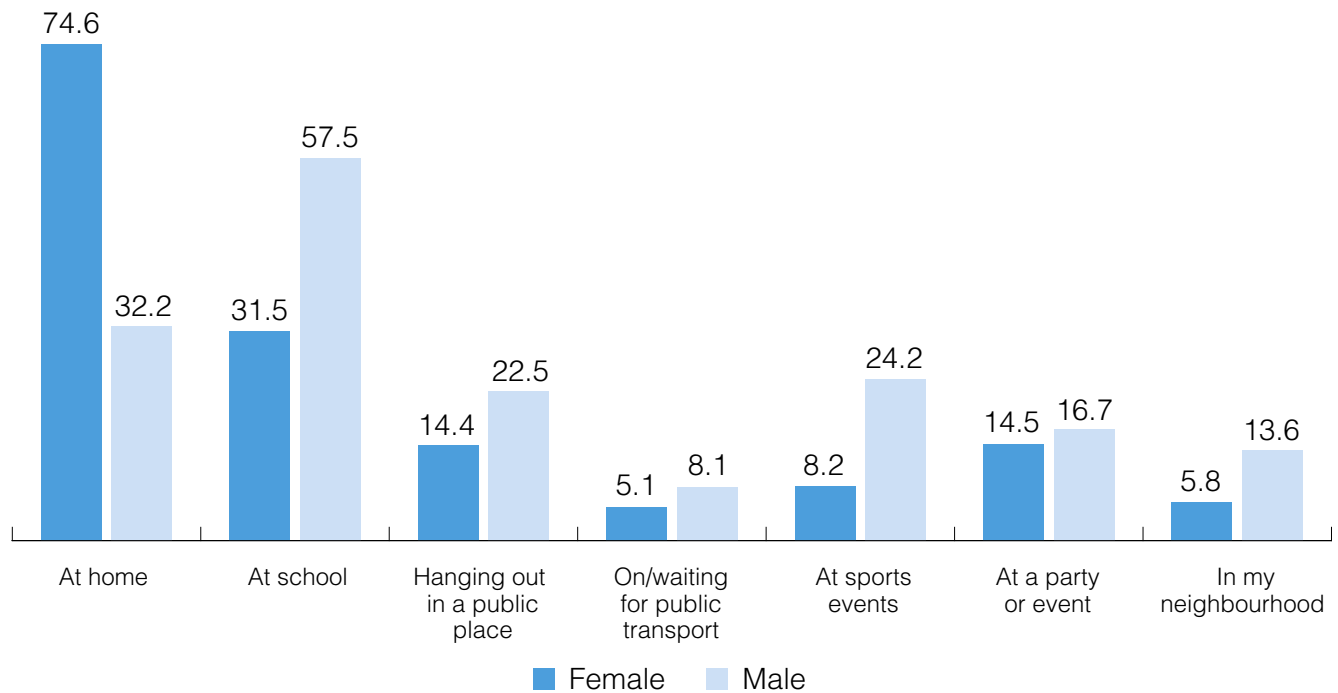


The most frequently reported locations for this to occur were at home (50.3%) and at school (47.3%).

Female students were most likely to be physically harmed at home with three-quarters (74.6%) of female respondents indicating this. Male students on the other hand were most likely to be physically harmed at school (57.5%) followed by at home (32.2%) and at sports events (24.2%).

Female students are most likely to be **physically harmed at home** while male students are most likely to be **physically harmed at school and other public places.**

Graph 5.2.18: Proportion of Year 9 to 12 students identifying location/s where they have been physically harmed by someone on purpose, by gender, 2021



Among Year 9 to 12 students who reported they had been physically harmed on purpose, one-third (33.4%) reported they had been harmed by an adult and two-thirds (68.6%) said they had been harmed by another child or young person. These results include 13 per cent (12.6%) of students who said they had been harmed by both an adult and another child or young person (multiple response question). Ten per cent of students who had been physically harmed chose not to answer this question ('prefer not to say').

Female respondents were twice as likely as male respondents to have been harmed by an adult (harmed by adult: 46.5% female vs 22.2% male).

Female young people are twice as likely as male young people to be harmed by an adult.

Summary of key statistics:

Safe and healthy relationships

- 72% of students feel their dad cares about them a lot and 82% feel their mum cares about them a lot.
- **17% of female and 8% of male high school students say they cannot talk to their parents about their problems.**
- 1-in-3 female high school students say they often don't feel listened to.
- **1-in-2 students feel they are very good at making and keeping friends and 2-in-5 say they are okay at it.**
- 1-in-5 Year 10–12 students feel they do not have enough friends.
- **45% of high school students are regularly in contact online with people they have not met face-to-face and 21% are daily.**

Material needs

- 78% of Year 4–6 students and 92% of Year 7–12 students have their own bedroom.
- **1-in-4 students moved homes in the last 12 months.**
- 8% of students said there is only sometimes enough food for them to eat at home and 1% said there is never enough food.
- **Almost all (97%) Year 10–12 students own a mobile phone, while 87% of Year 4–9 students own some type of electronic device.**

Feeling physically and emotionally safe

- 1-in-10 female students feel safe at home only sometimes or less.
- **3% of students feel safe at home only a little bit of the time or never.**
- More than 1-in-2 high school students worry that someone in their family will be fighting and 1-in-10 worry a lot.
- **Less than one-third of students reported feeling safe in their local area all the time.**
- One-half of high school students feel safe on buses and trains only sometimes or less and 8% never.
- **1-in-3 female high school students don't have an adult they would feel okay talking to about serious problems.**
- 1-in-2 male and 1-in-3 female Year 9 to 12 students reported they had been hit or physically harmed on purpose.
- **Female students are most likely to be physically harmed at home while male students are most likely to be physically harmed at school and other public places.**
- Female young people are twice as likely as male young people to be harmed by an adult.

5.3 Learning and participating

Students' experiences with school and learning and the level of autonomy they are given in childhood and adolescence are critical determinants of their lifetime wellbeing. The essential outcomes in this domain are that children and young people are engaged and supported with learning, that they transition to high school successfully, feel prepared for and feel positive about their future, and that they have an active voice and are listened to, as is every child's right.

The survey used a range of indicators to measure these outcomes including questions about students' views on the importance of regularly attending school, their relationships and sense of belonging at school and support for learning. It also asked students to report on their opportunities to learn and develop useful skills, their emerging autonomy and being heard.

5.3.1 Attendance

"School needs to have a larger focus on teaching rather than getting certain marks. Exams are important but the purpose of school is learning and compulsory attendance and such a large focus on getting essays and assignments in is killing the love of learning all students start off with." (17 year-old)

Regular attendance and engagement in school is important for the development of intellectual and social emotional skills and contributes significantly to not only educational outcomes but outcomes across the life course. While engagement with school and learning is a multifaceted concept, absence can be considered a marker of disengagement.⁵²

In the survey, students were asked about the number of schools they had attended. One-half (51.4%) of Year 4 to 6 students had attended just one school between Pre-Primary and their year level and 30.4 per cent had attended two. Nine per cent (9.3%) of Year 4 to 6 students had attended three schools and a further nine per cent (8.9%) had attended four or more schools.

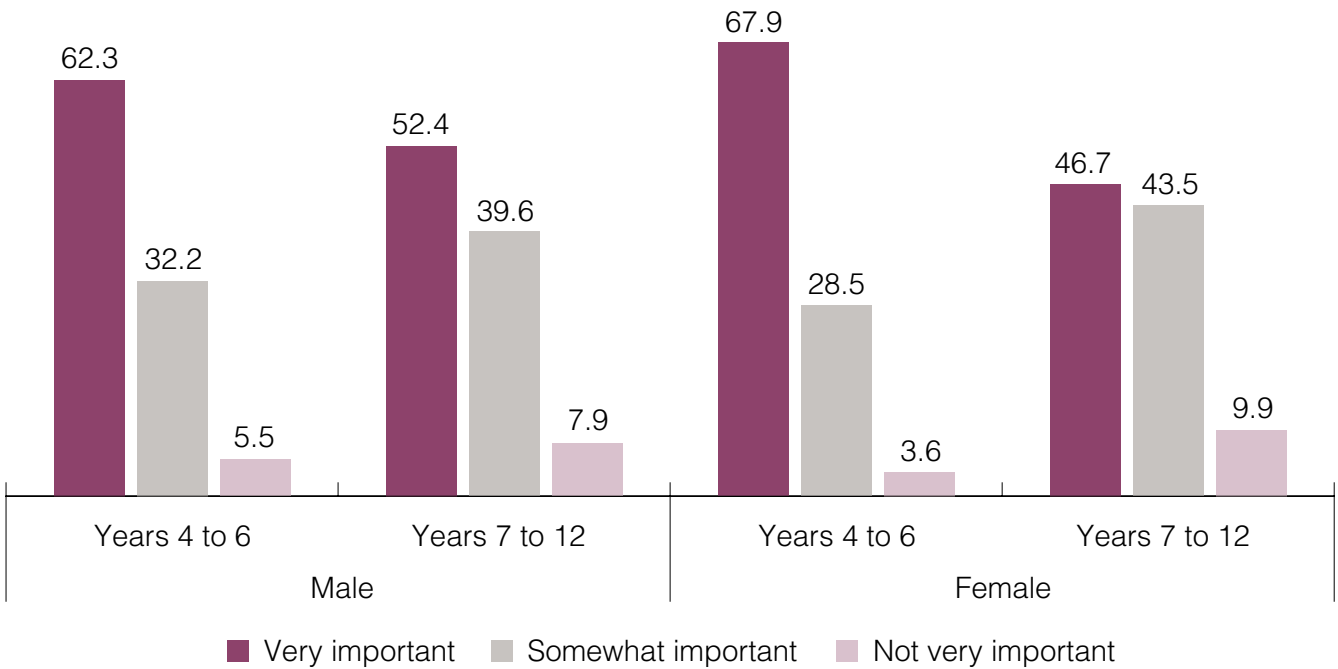
Among students in Years 7 to 12, more than two-thirds (71.8%) reported attending one school since starting high school, 19.3 per cent had attended two schools and nine per cent (8.9%) had attended three or more schools.

All students were asked how important it was to them to be at school every day: 54.2 per cent of students said this was very important, 37.8 per cent said somewhat important and 7.9 per cent indicated being at school every day was not very important to them.

The proportion of students reporting that it was very important to be at school every day was lower among Year 7 to 12 students (48.9%) than Year 4 to 6 students (64.7%).

1-in-2 Year 4-6
students have attended
one primary school.
1-in-10 have attended
four or more.

Graph 5.3.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not very important to them to be at school every day, by year group and gender, 2021



Students in Year 7 to 12 were asked if they had waggged school for a full day or more in the past 12 months. Fifteen per cent (15.3%) of Year 7 to 12 students answered in the affirmative. Older high school students were about twice as likely to have waggged school for a full day or more (12.1% Years 7–9 vs. 19.8% Years 10–12). There was no difference between male and female students in regard to waggging.

Among students who had waggged school, 38.8 per cent had waggged one to two days, 25.0 per cent had waggged three to five days and 11.6 per cent had waggged six to ten days. One quarter (24.6%) of students who had waggged in the past 12 months had waggged ten days or more.

Some 15 per cent (14.8%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported having been suspended from school (been sent home for a few days for doing something wrong) with male students being significantly more likely than female students to report this (20.3% male vs. 8.4% female).

More than 2-in-3 high school students have attended one school since starting high school. **1-in-10** have attended three or more.

5.3.2 Liking school and sense of belonging

*“I don’t like school. Teachers need to [be] nicer. School needs to start later.”
(13 year-old)*

*“I didn’t have any friends in primary school because I was different.... I came to high school and found one friend who has been really nice to me [...] She is my only friend, but she still makes me feel like I belong [...] and makes me want to come to school.”
(12 year-old)*

Sense of belonging is a basic human need such as food or shelter and is critically important to a child or young person’s healthy physical and mental development. Sense of belonging at school can be referred to as ‘the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment’.⁵³

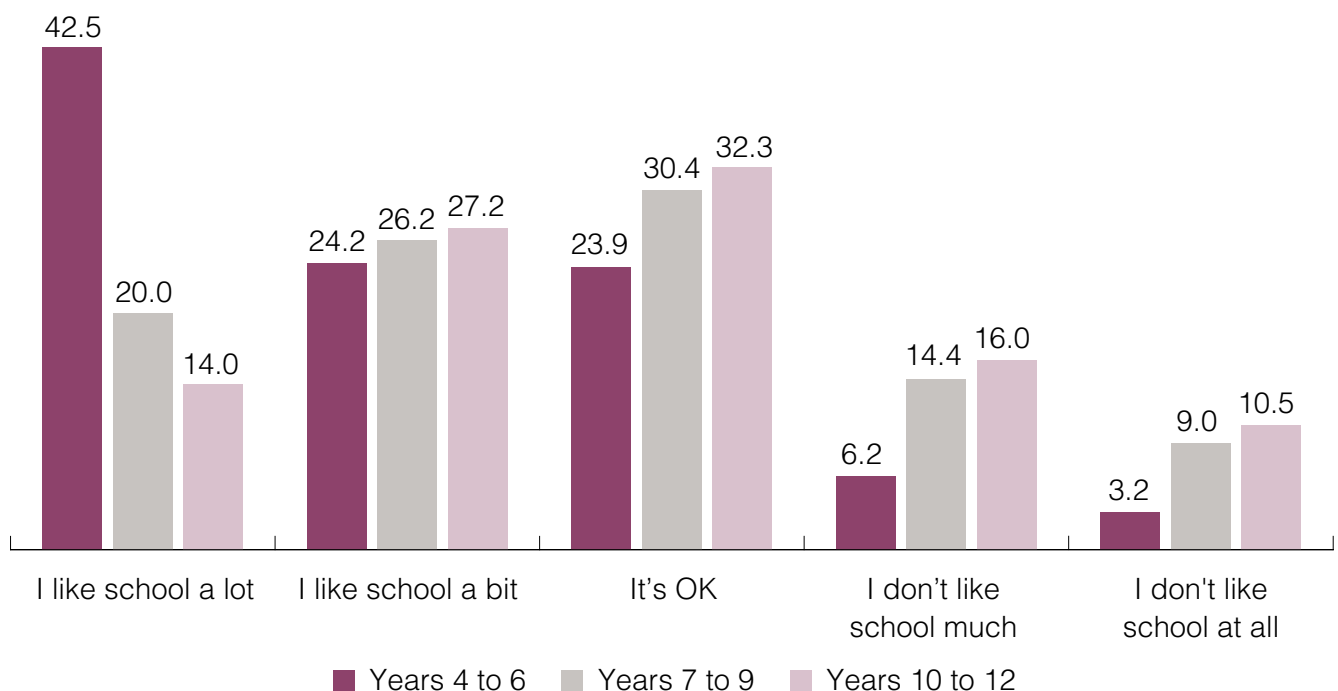
Research suggests that sense of belonging at school and the degree to which students report liking school has an important influence on students’ academic motivation, engagement and participation and that unless students identify well with their schools, their educational outcomes will be limited.⁵⁴

Feelings towards school

Feelings about school varied substantially for students in Years 4 to 6 and Years 7 to 12.

More than twice as many students in Years 4 to 6 than in Years 7 to 12 reported liking school a lot (42.5% Years 4–6 vs. 17.5% Years 7–12). In contrast, twice as many Year 7 to 12 than Year 4 to 6 students reported not liking school much (15.0% Years 7–12 vs. 6.2% Years 4–6) or at all (9.6% Years 7–12 vs. 3.2% Years 4–6).

Graph 5.3.2: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they like school a lot, a bit, it’s OK, they don’t like school much or not at all, by year group, 2021



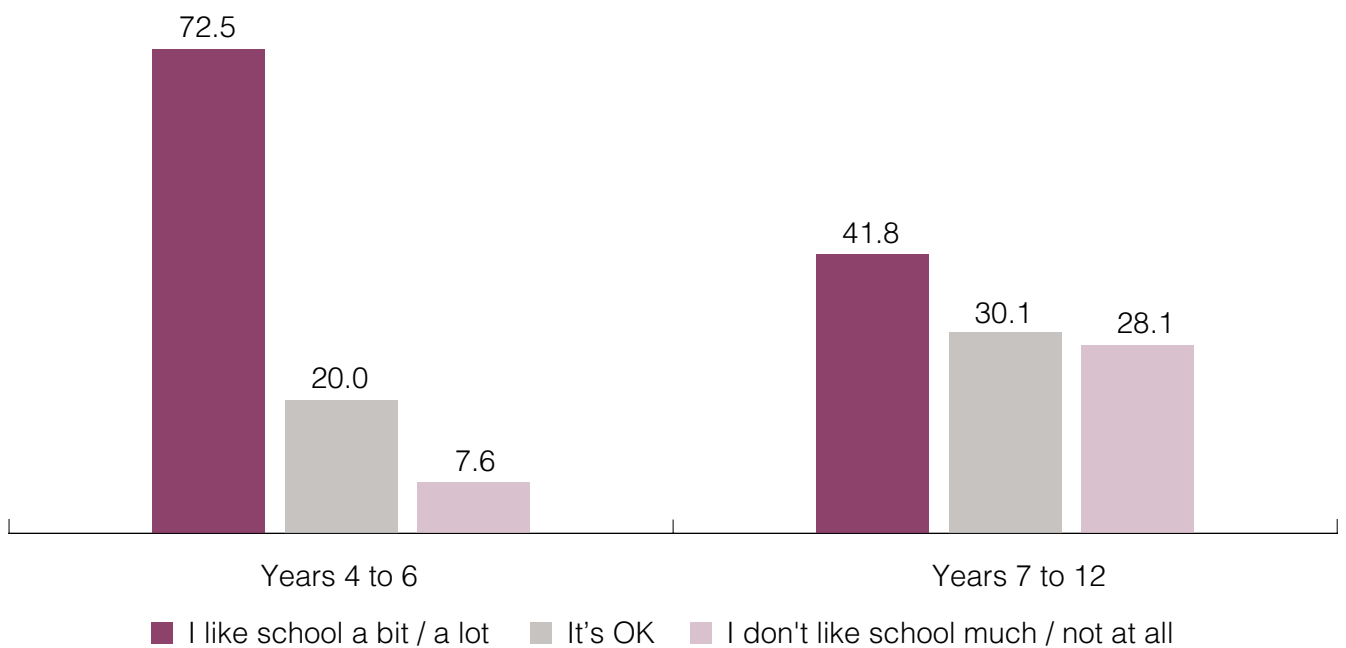
Among Year 4 to 6 students, a significantly higher proportion of female than male students reported liking school a lot (48.6% female vs. 36.5% male) while a higher proportion of male than female students said school is OK (28.0% male vs. 20.0% female).

However, among Year 7 to 12 students, the gender difference is reversed with a significantly higher proportion of female than male students reporting they don't like school much or not at all (28.1% female vs. 19.7%

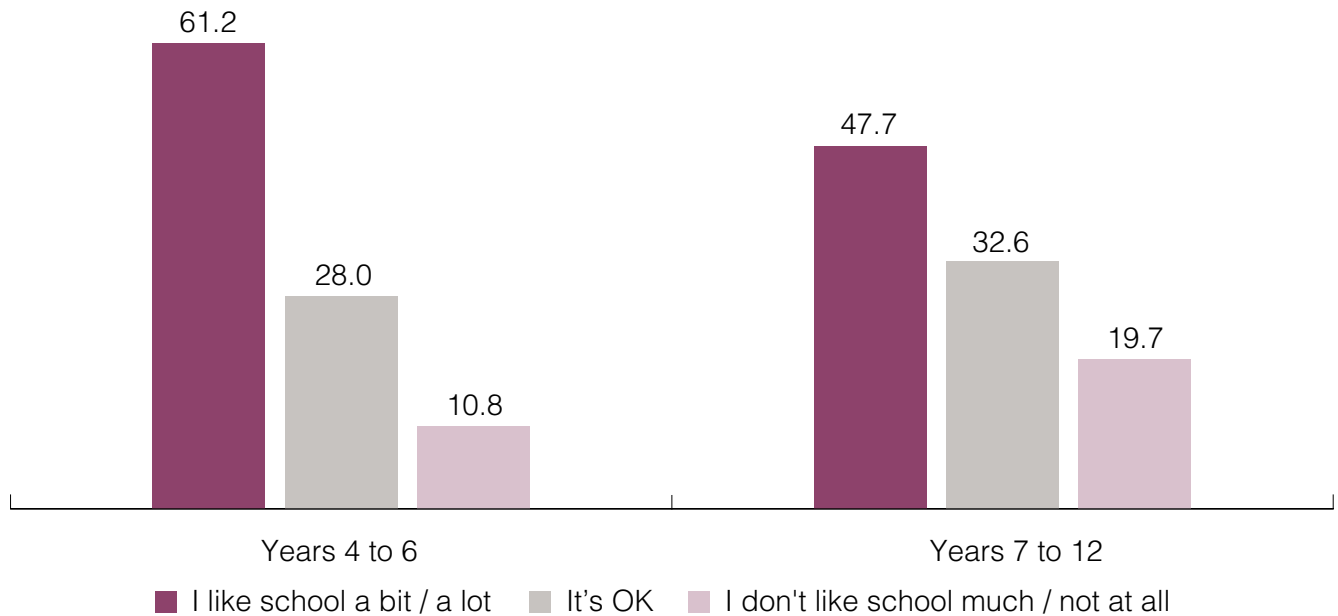
male) and a lower proportion of female than male students reporting they like school a lot or a bit (47.7% male vs. 41.8% female).

The proportion of female students reporting they don't like school much or not at all effectively triples from 7.6 per cent in Years 4 to 6 to 28.1 per cent in Years 7 to 12. For male students the proportion doubles from 10.8 per cent to 19.7 per cent.

Graph 5.3.3: Proportion of female Year 4 to 12 students reporting they like school a lot, a bit, it's OK, they don't like school much or not at all, by year group, 2021



Graph 5.3.4: Proportion of male Year 4 to 12 students reporting they like school a lot, a bit, it’s OK, they don’t like school much or not at all, by year group, 2021

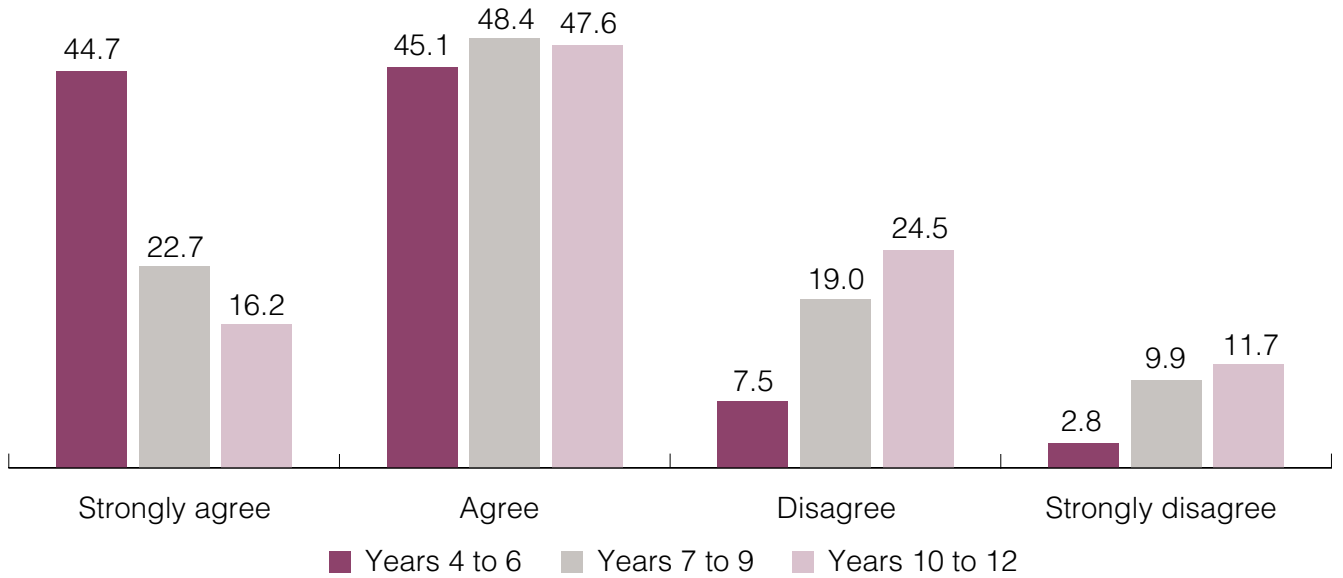


A similar pattern was observed for students feeling happy at school and liking learning at school.

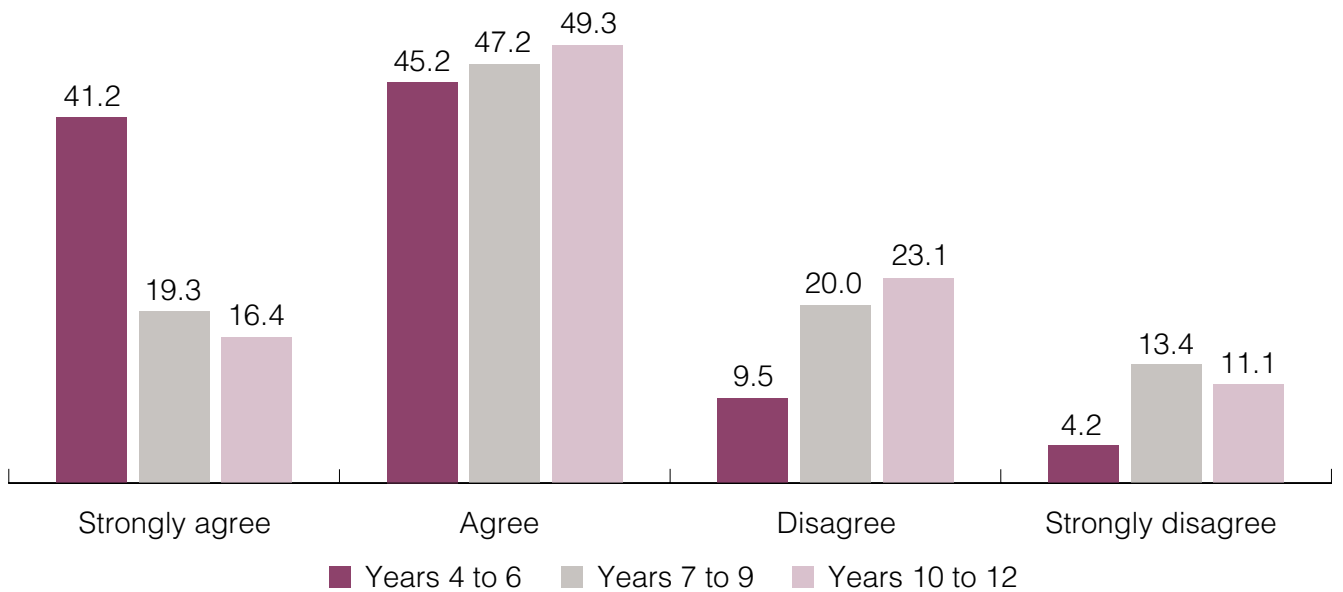
A significantly higher proportion of Year 4 to 6 than Year 7 to 12 students reported feeling happy at school (89.8% Years 4–6 vs. 68.0% Years 7–12) and liking learning (86.4% Years 4–6 vs. 66.2% Years 7–12). In contrast, three times as many Year 7 to 12 than Year 4 to 6 students reported not feeling happy at school (32.0% Years 7–12 vs. 10.3% Years 4–6) and not liking learning (33.8% Years 7–12 vs. 13.7% Years 4–6).

1-in-3 Year 10-12 students say they are not happy at school, do not feel they belong there and do not like learning.

Graph 5.3.5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘My school is a place where I feel happy’, by year group, 2021



Graph 5.3.6: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘My school is a place where I like learning’, by year group, 2021

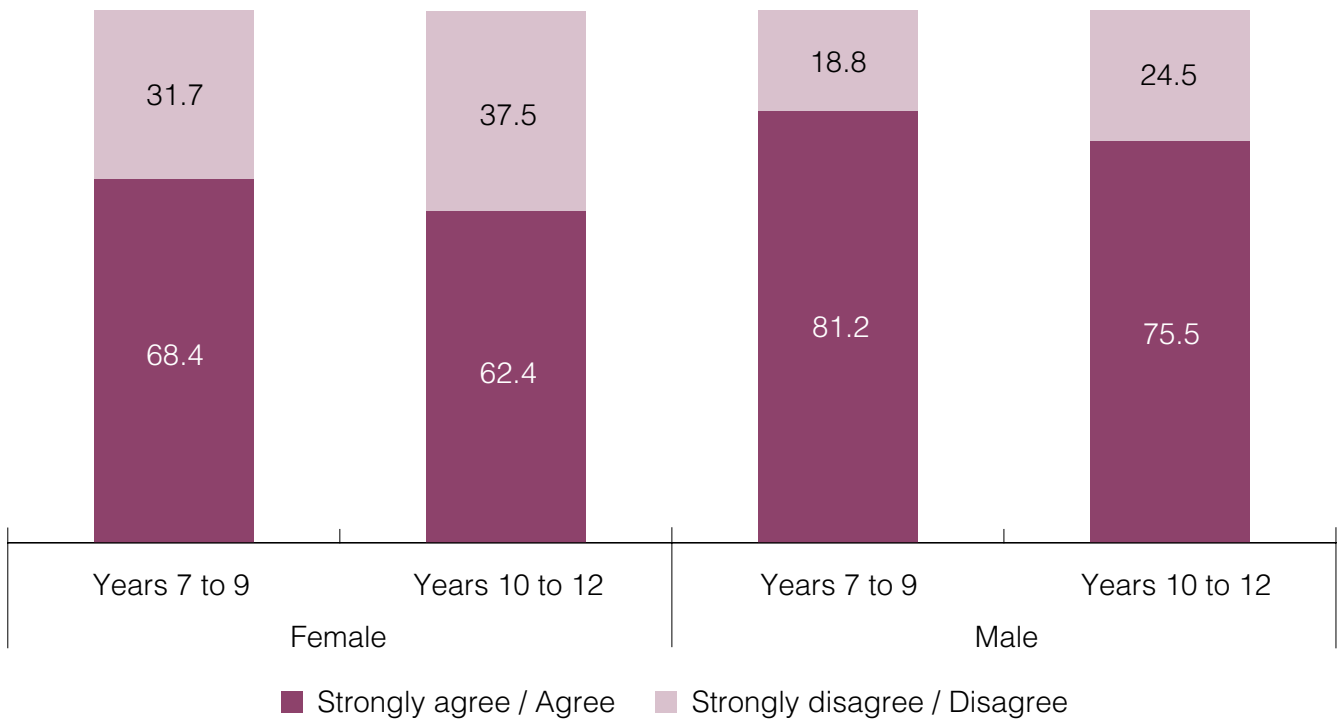


Close to three-quarters (71.3%) of students in Years 7 to 12 either agreed or strongly agreed that their school is a place where they belong (50.4% agree and 20.9% strongly agree). In contrast, 28.6 per cent of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (19.2% disagree and 9.4% strongly disagree).

Male students were significantly more likely than female students to agree that they belong to their school (78.8% male vs. 65.9% female) or feel happy at school (75.5% male vs. 62.7% female).

90% of female Year 4-6 students are happy at school and like learning but only 63% of female Year 10-12 students feel the same.

Graph 5.3.7: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement ‘My school is a place where I belong’, by year group, 2021



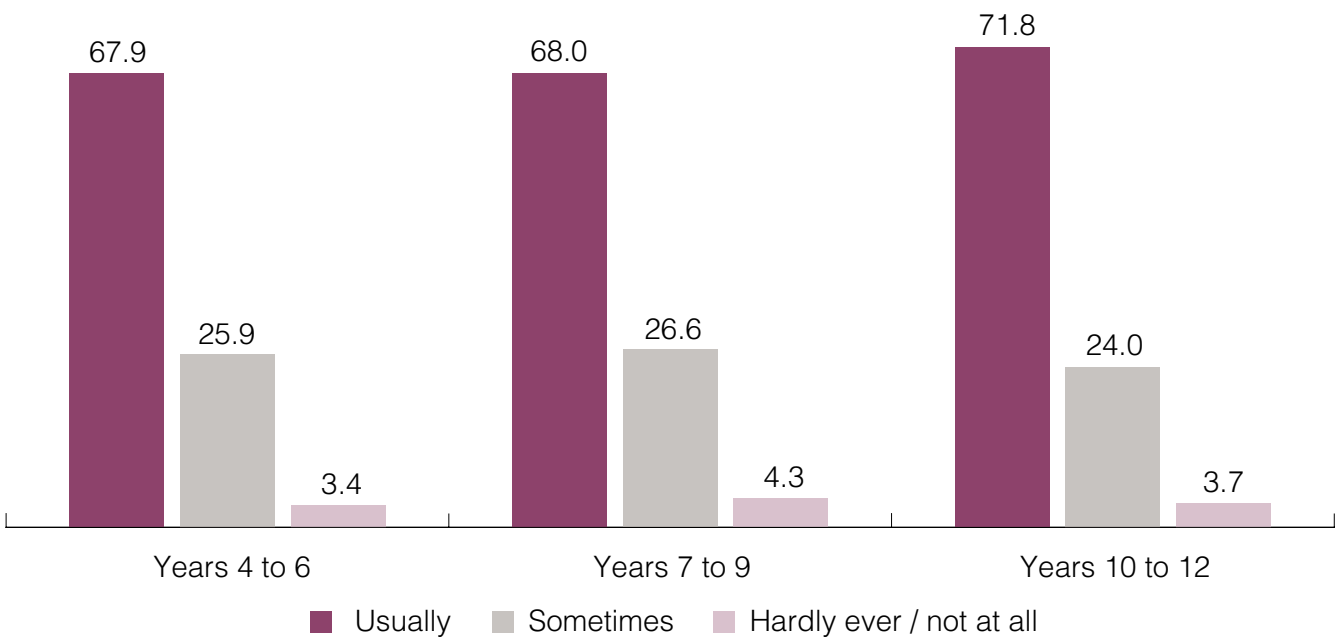
Relationships at school

Quality interpersonal relationships have been identified through the Commissioner’s School and Learning Consultation⁵⁵ as the foundation for student engagement with school and in learning activities. Relationships with peers, teachers and other school staff foster in students a sense of belonging and of feeling valued. Through relationships, students are more likely to develop patterns of persistence and motivation and have access to a support network.⁵⁶

Two-thirds of students said they usually get along with classmates (69.0%) and with their teachers (65.1%). Conversely, around one-third of students reported getting along with their classmates and teachers sometimes or less (29.4% and 33.8% respectively) including about five per cent of students who said they hardly ever or never get along with classmates (3.8%) or with teachers (5.2%).

These proportions remained largely unchanged same across year levels.

Graph 5.3.8: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they usually, sometimes or hardly ever / not at all get along with classmates, by year group, 2021

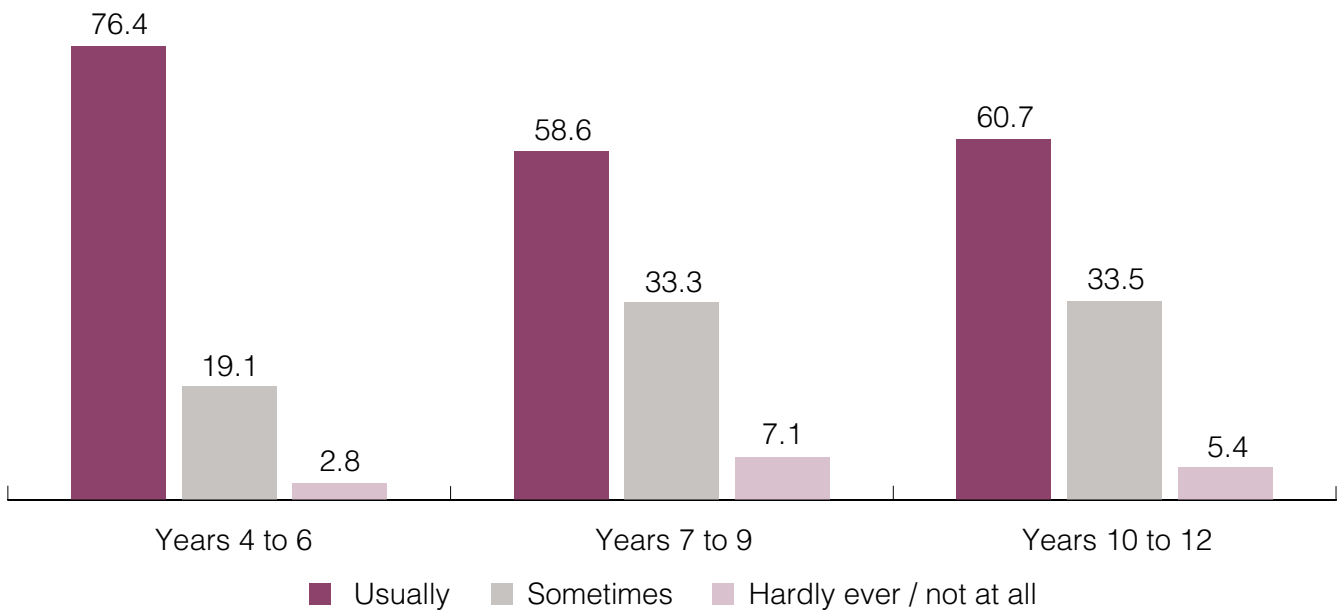


Younger students were significantly more likely to say they usually get along with their teachers compared to older students: 76.4 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students reported usually getting along with teachers but only 58.6% of Year 7 to 9 and 60.7% Year 10 to 12 students reported the same. Students in Years 7 to 9 were most likely to say they hardly ever or not at all get along with teachers with seven per cent reporting this (7.1% Years 7–9 vs. 2.8% Years 4–6 and 5.4% Years 10–12).

Male and female students across all year levels gave similar ratings except for students in Years 4 to 6, where a significantly higher proportion of female than male students said they usually get along with teachers (81.2% female vs. 71.5% male).

Students were also asked a series of questions about whether there is a teacher or another adult at their school who believes in them, listens to them and cares about them.

Graph 5.3.9: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they usually, sometimes or hardly ever/not at all get along with their teachers, by year group, 2021



On average, three-quarters of Year 4 to 12 students reported feeling the following statements were either pretty much true or very much true:

- 77.4 per cent reported it was true there is a teacher or another adult in their school who believes the student will achieve good things (43.4% very much true and 34.0% pretty much true).
- 73.9 per cent said it was true there is a teacher or another adult in their school who listens to them when they have something to say (40.5% very much true and 33.4% pretty much true).
- 67.7 per cent said it was true there is a teacher or another adult in their school who really cares about them (32.4% very much true and 35.3% pretty much true).

Responses were more positive among Year 4 to 6 students than Years 7 to 12 students. Among Years 7 to 12 students, a significantly lower proportion of respondents felt these statements were true and a higher proportion felt they were a little true or not at all true compared with Year 4 to 6 students.

Most notably, a higher proportion of students in Years 4 to 6 than in Year 7 to 12 said it was very much true that there is a teacher or other adult at their school who really cares about them (49.0% Years 4–6 vs. 24.1% Year 7–12). Correspondingly, Year 7 to 12 students were significantly more likely than Year 4 to 6 students to say it was only a little true (29.0% Year 7–12 vs. 11.5% Year 4–6) or not at all true (12.2% Year 7–12 vs 3.1% Year 4–6).

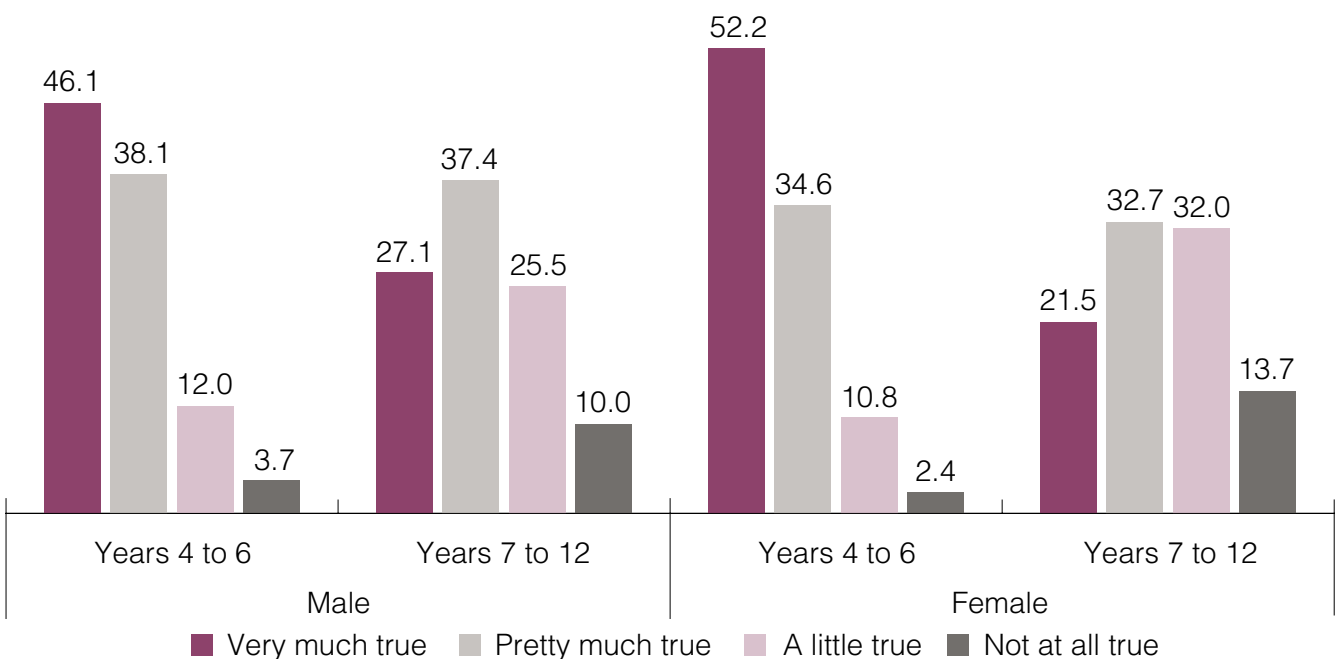
With regard to gender, younger female students were more likely than their male counterparts to feel it was very much true that there was a teacher who really cared about

them (Years 4–6: 52.2% vs. 46.1%) while older female students were less likely than male students to say this was very much true and more likely to say it was only a little true (Years 7–12: 32.0% vs. 25.5%) or not at all true (Years 7–12: 13.7% vs. 10.0%).

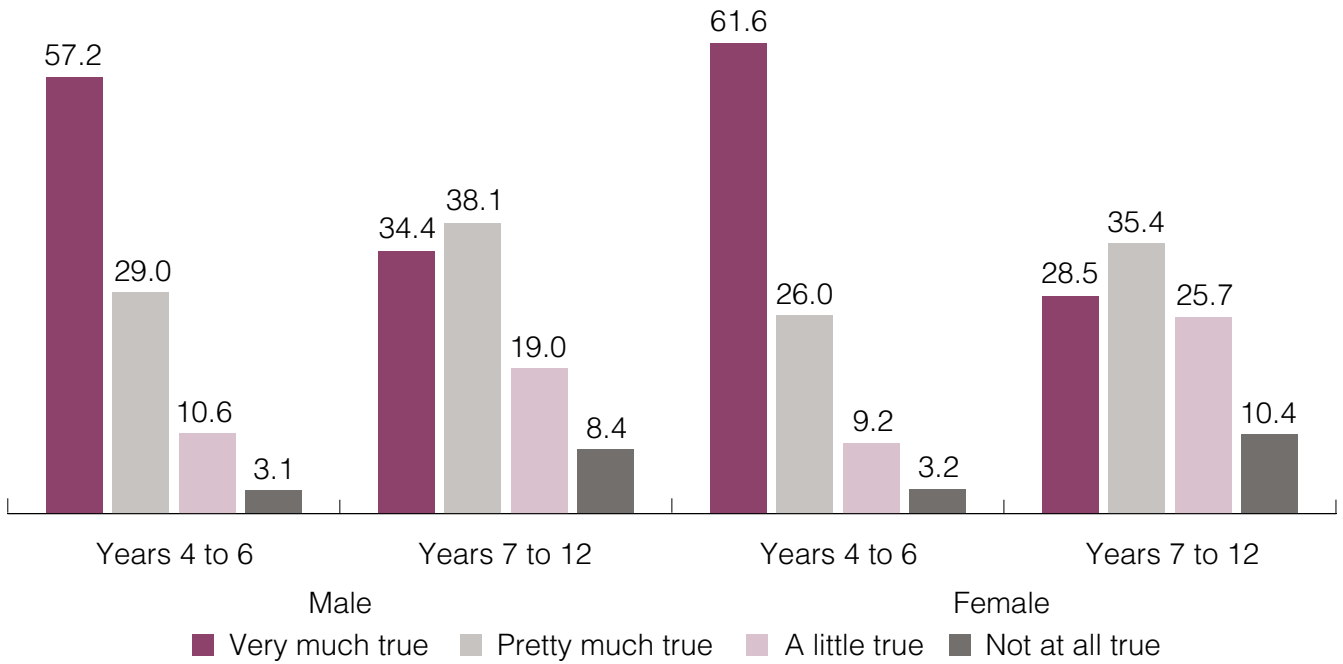
Similar response patterns were found for students' responses regarding being listened to by a teacher or adult at their school.

7-in-10 students usually get along with their classmates but about 5% say they never or rarely do.

Graph 5.3.10: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting it is very much, pretty much, a little or not at all true that at their school there is a teacher or another adult who really cares about them, by year group, 2021



Graph 5.3.11: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting it is very much, pretty much, a little or not at all true that at their school there is a teacher or another adult who listens to them when they have something to say, by year group, 2021



Most students feel teachers care, believe and listen to them but **1-in-3 high school students** feel this is not or only a little true for them.

Students, especially girls, experience a decline in their relationships with teachers from primary to high school.

Feeling safe at school

Within schools, feeling and being safe is essential for students to be ready and able to engage with learning. When students do not feel safe it affects their behaviour and their feelings towards school and learning.

Evidence suggests that children and young people who feel safe are more resilient, confident and have a stronger sense of self-identity.⁵⁷

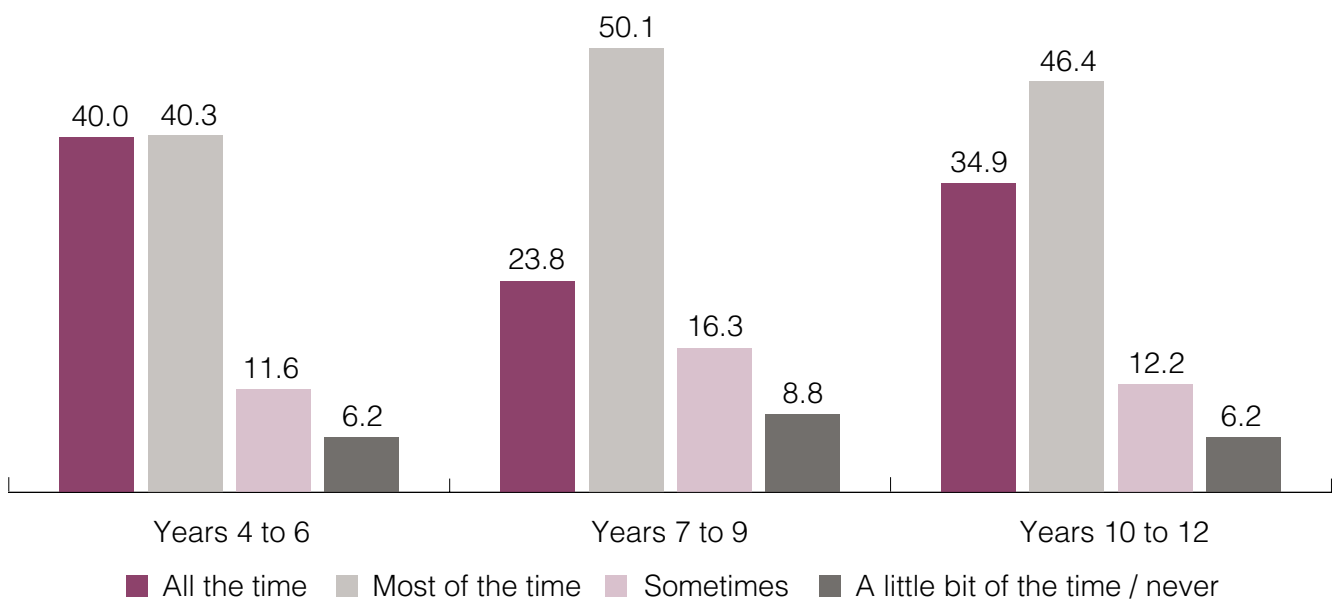
Across Years 4 to 12, 32.4 per cent of students felt safe all the time, 45.8 per cent most of the time, 13.6 per cent sometimes, 4.6 per cent a little bit of the time and 2.6 per cent never.

Students in Years 7 to 9 were least likely to say they feel safe all the time compared to other year groups (23.8% Years 7–9 vs.

40.0% Years 4–6 and 34.9% Years 10–12). Correspondingly, one-quarter of Year 7 to 9 students reported feeling safe only sometimes or less (16.3% sometimes, 5.6% a little bit of the time and 3.2% never).⁵⁸

Most students feel safe at school, however almost 1-in-5 feel safe only sometimes or less, especially Year 7-9 students.

Graph 5.3.12: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they feel safe at school all the time, most of the time, sometimes or a little bit of the time / never, by year group, 2021



Bullying

Students were asked several questions relating to if and how often they had been bullied or cyber bullied by students from their school.

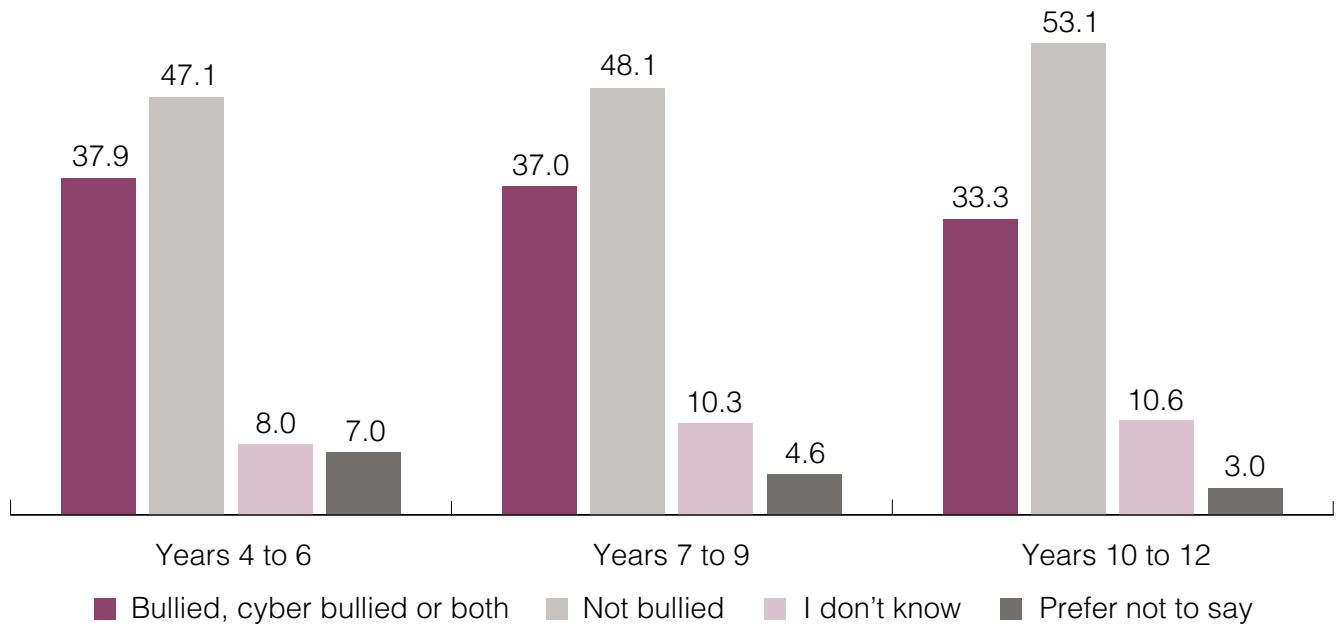
Overall, one-half (49.1%) of students across Years 4 to 12 reported they had never been bullied. More than one-third (36.2%) reported having been bullied, cyber bullied or both (22.6% bullied, 2.6% cyber bullied and 11.0% both). Ten per cent (9.6%) of students reported not knowing if they had been bullied or cyber bullied and 5.0 per cent preferred not to say.

The proportion of students saying they had never been bullied was largely similar for students in Years 4 to 6 (47.1%) and Years 7 to 12 (50.2%), but the form of bullying varied by year group. Older students were more likely to

report having been bullied and cyber bullied (13.6% Years 7–12 vs. 6.0% Years 4–6) while younger students were more likely to report having been bullied (29.7% Years 4–6 vs 19.1% Years 7–12).

20% of female and 12% of male high school students have ever been cyber bullied.

Graph 5.3.13: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they have or have not been bullied, cyber bullied or both by students from their school or they don't know, by year group, 2021



For Year 7 to 12 students, a higher proportion of female than male students had been cyber bullied or both bullied and cyber bullied (19.7% female vs. 12.1% male) or were unsure if they had been bullied or cyber bullied (12.7% female vs. 8.2% male).

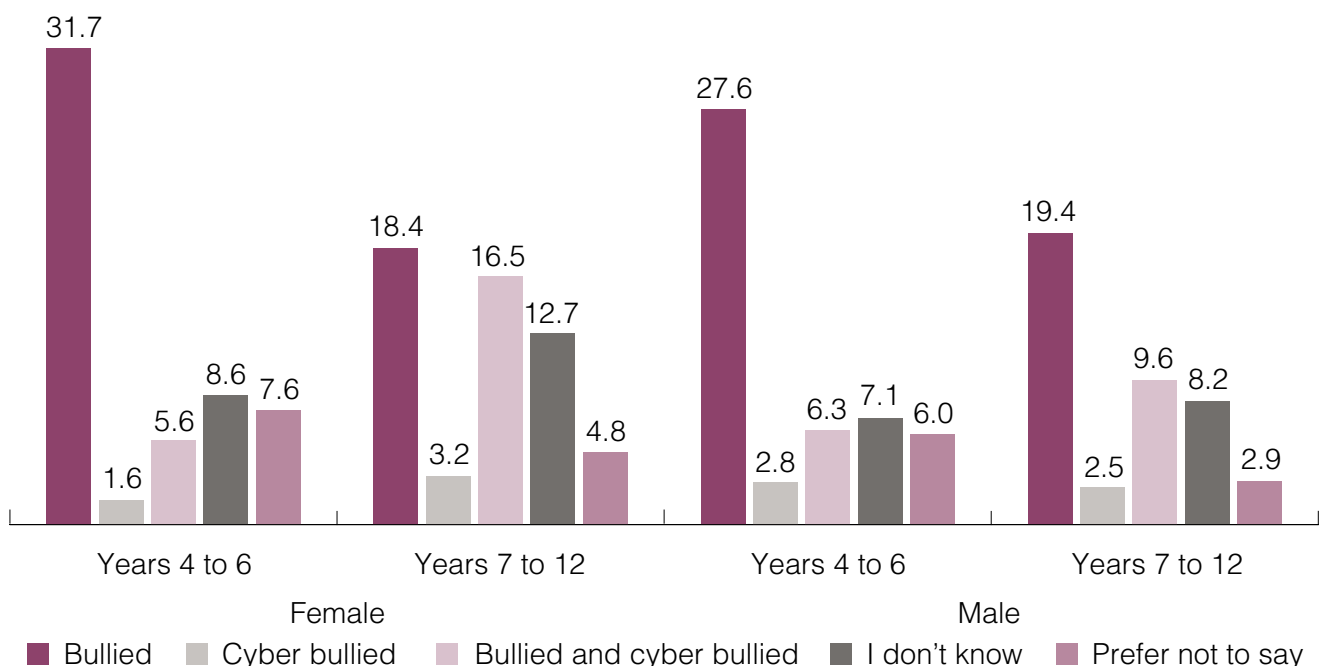
Among Year 4 to 12 students who reported having ever been bullied, 40.1 per cent said this happened within the past three months. This equates to approximately 14 per cent of all students having been bullied within the past three months.

Students in Years 7 to 9 who have reported being bullied were somewhat more likely to have been bullied in the past three months than students in other year level cohorts (48.4% Years 7–9 vs. 36.9% Years 4–6 and 31.9% Years 10–12). While traditional forms of bullying were reported less often by older students (13.8% Years 10–12 vs. 28.0% Years 7–9), reports of cyber bullying in the past three months were equally common amongst all high school year groups (18.1% Years 10–12 vs. 20.4% Years 7–9).

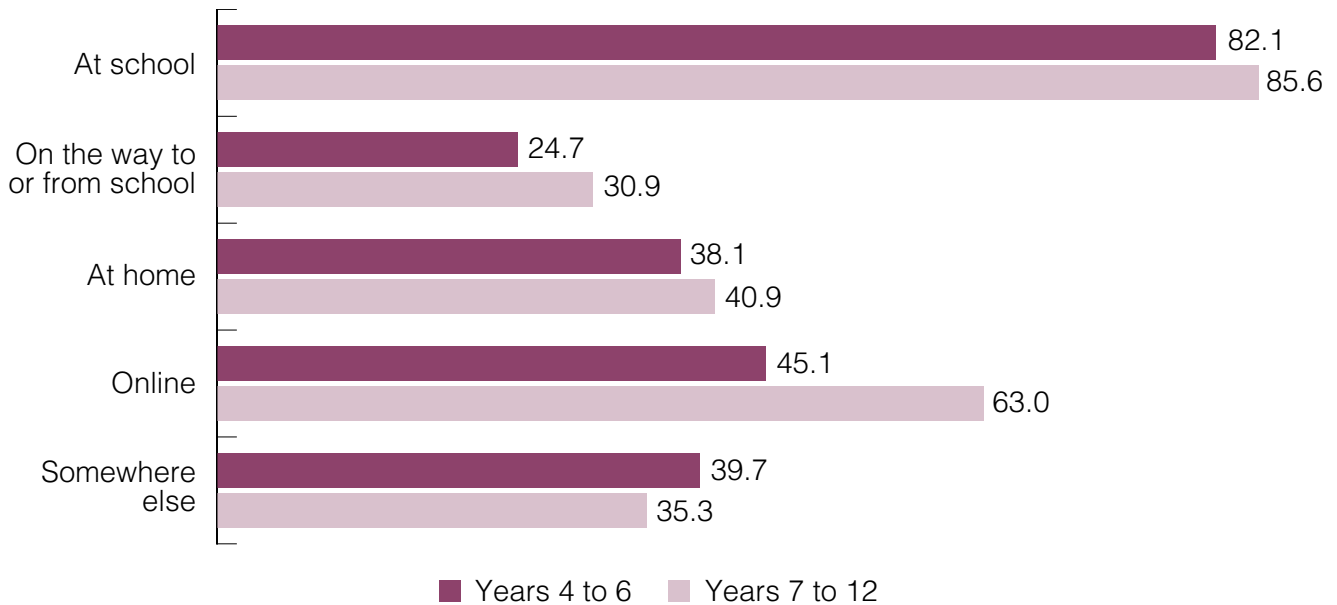
With regard to where the bullying or cyber bullying has occurred, Year 4 to 12 students who had been bullied or cyber bullied within the last three months reported:

- 84.5 per cent had been bullied at least once at school, with 39.8 per cent bullied at school once a week or more.
- 57.4 per cent had been bullied at least once online, with 23.7 per cent saying they were online once a week or more.
- 39.8 per cent had been bullied at home by other students from their school, with 16.7 per cent saying this happened once a week or more.
- 36.7 per cent had been bullied somewhere else, with 14.3 per cent bullied somewhere else once a week or more.
- 29.1 per cent had been bullied on the way to or from school, with 11.0 per cent being bullied on the way to or from school once a week or more.

Graph 5.3.14: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they have been bullied or they don't know, by year group, gender and type of bullying, 2021



Graph 5.3.15: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students who had been bullied in the last 3 months reporting where the bullying has occurred, by year level, 2021

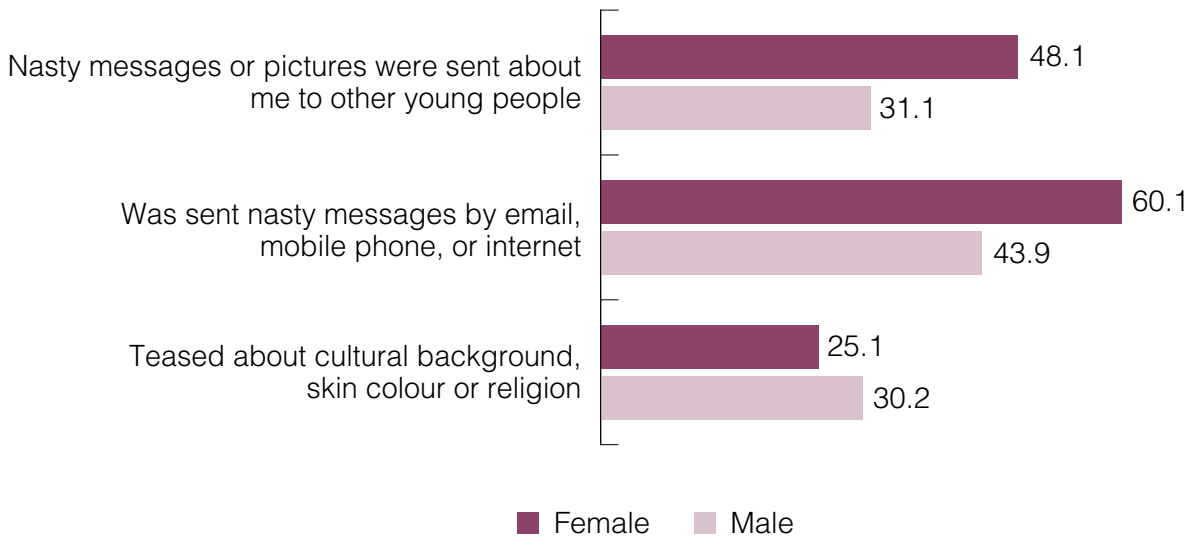


With regard to the type of bullying they had experienced, Year 7 to 12 students who had been bullied or cyber bullied within the last three months reported this:

- 54.2 per cent had been sent nasty messages by email, mobile phone, or on the internet, with 21.9 per cent reporting they had been sent nasty messages once a week or more.
- 41.4 per cent had nasty messages or pictures sent about them to other young people via mobile phone, internet or email, with 17.0 per cent reporting this happened once a week or more.
- 28.3 per cent of students had been teased about their cultural background, skin colour, or religion, with 12.7 per cent saying this happened once a week or more.

Among students who had been bullied recently, **85% were bullied at school** and **57% were bullied online.**

Graph 5.3.16: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students who had been bullied in the last 3 months reporting what type of bullying has occurred, by gender, 2021



Fear of bullying

Of all Year 4 to 12 students, 14.5 per cent reported having ever missed school because they were afraid they would be bullied.

A higher proportion of female than male students reported this especially among high school students where one-in-five female students said they had missed school in the past year due to fear of being bullied (20.2% female vs. 8.9% male).

With respect to bullying other students, three-quarters of Year 7 to 12 respondents (73.6%) said they had not ever bullied other students. In total, 13.1 per cent of students reported having either bullied or cyber bullied other students or both, and 9.9 per cent were unsure if they had.

15% of students have ever missed school because they were afraid of being bullied.

5.3.3 Achievement

“There is so much pressure on students to succeed, we are told if you fail now your entire life is decided.” (16 year-old)

“Most schools and teachers don’t know how much pressure and stress they put on their students. Sometimes I have been so stressed that I just cried. [...] So please remember we are still young, give us room to breathe please.” (12 year-old)

“I get very very stressed from all the [school] work.” (12 year-old)

Academic achievement is one of the main purposes of education and generally describes the extent to which a student has achieved their educational goals. Cognitive as well non-cognitive factors such as self-efficacy, motivation and self-control influence academic achievement. Academic performance and improvement, appropriate to each student’s capabilities, is also a determinant of children and young people’s lifetime wellbeing.

Students in the survey were asked to self-assess their academic achievement by saying how well they were doing at school. The survey did not ask students for their actual grades or marks. The response options differed for Year 4 to 6 and Year 7 to 12 students.

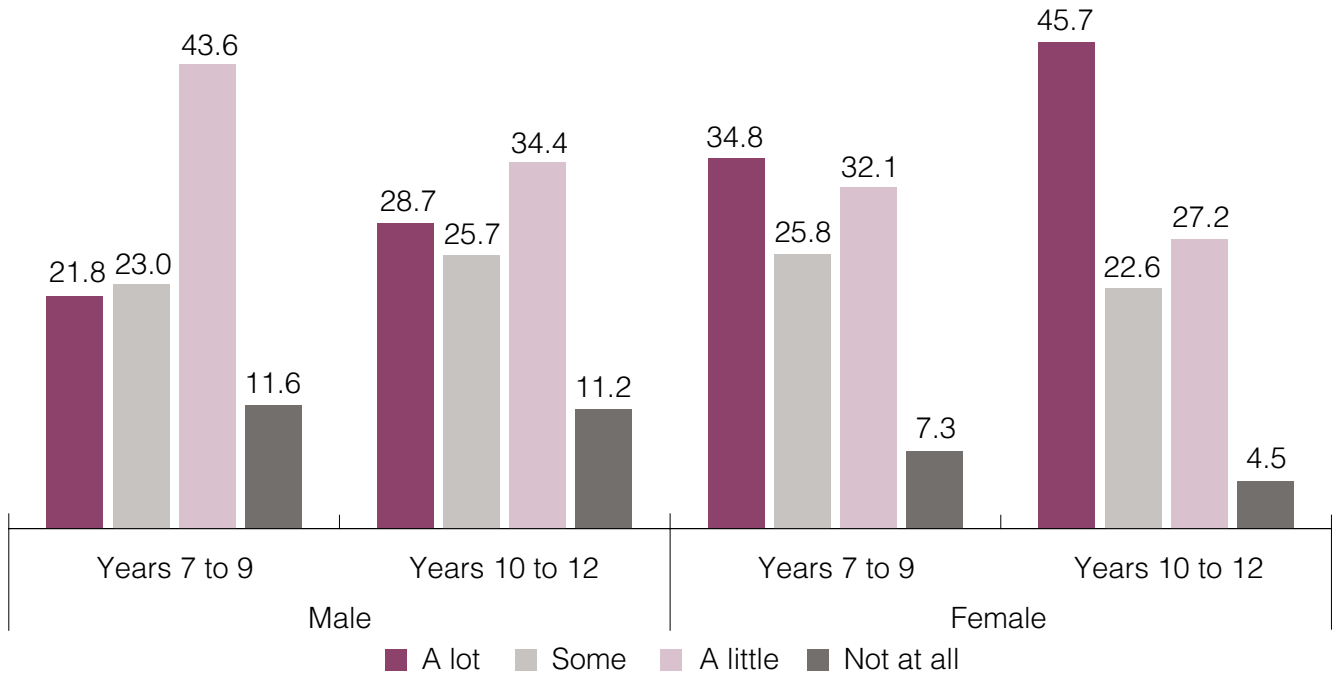
Among Year 4 to 6 students, 44.0 per cent reported doing well or very well, 45.1 per cent reported doing OK and 6.8 per cent reported doing not so well. Four per cent (4.1%) said they were not sure.

Among Year 7 to 12 students, 35.7 per cent reported their school results were above average, 39.1 per cent said about average and 9.7 per cent answered below average. Ten per cent (9.8%) of students reported their results were far above average while 3.2 per cent said theirs were far below average.

Pressure from schoolwork was a key concern for the large majority of students across all year levels but especially those in Years 10 to 12. Among Year 7 to 12 students overall, more than one-half (56.9%) reported feeling pressured by schoolwork a lot or some (32.7% a lot and 24.2% some). One-third of students felt a little pressured while less than ten per cent (8.8%) reported feeling not pressured at all by schoolwork.

Unsurprisingly, students in Years 10 to 12 felt more pressured than those in Years 7 to 9, with more than one-third (37.4%) of Year 10 to 12 students feeling a lot of pressure, compared to 29.3 per cent of Year 7 to 9 students. Female Year 10 to 12 students were almost twice as likely as male students to feel pressured a lot by schoolwork (45.7% female vs 28.7% male). Male students were most likely to report feeling pressured a little.

Graph 5.3.17: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting they feel a lot, some, a little or not at all pressured by schoolwork, by year level and gender, 2021



1-in-3 Year 10-12 students feel a lot of pressure from schoolwork with more female than male students affected.

Help for learning

Students require different levels and types of support to assist them with their learning and to enable their ongoing engagement with education. Teachers who provide help for learning are valued by students as it enables improved access to the curriculum, reduced anxiety and facilitates experiences of success.

Further, family processes and practices are strongly related to students’ academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes. Studies have shown that when families are interested in their child’s education and engaged with their school, student outcomes are improved.^{59,60}

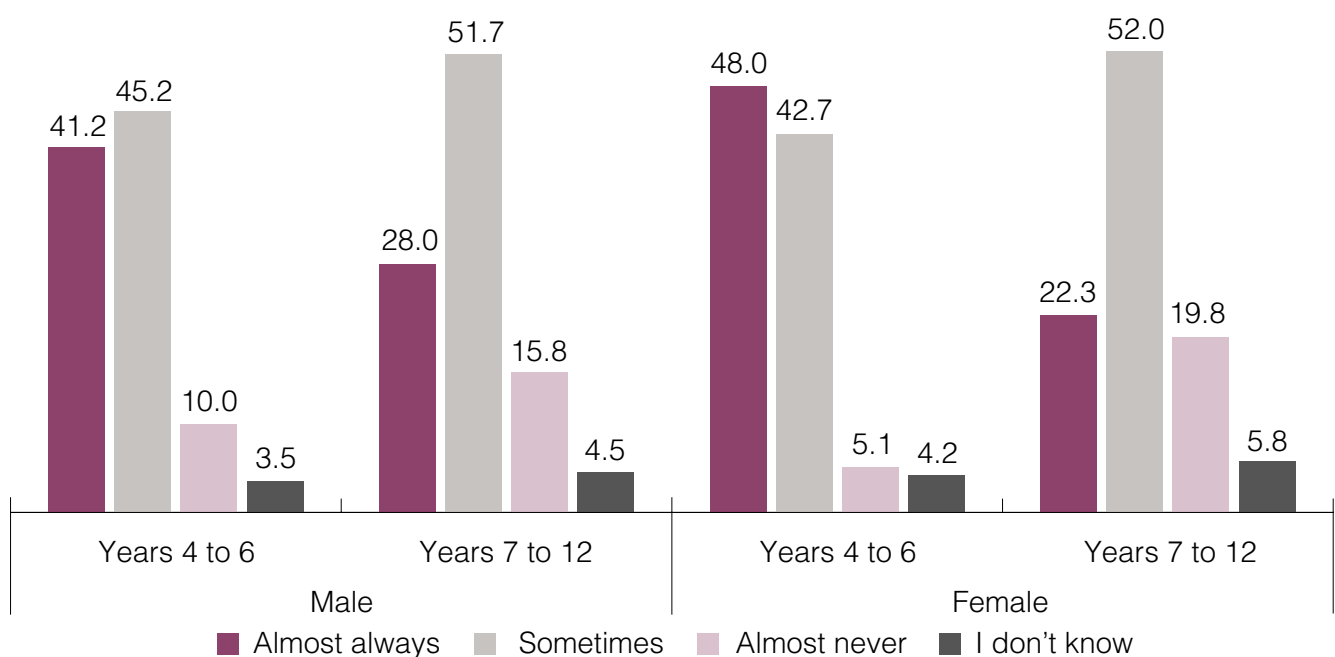
Help from teachers

Less than one-half (44.6%) of Year 4 to 6 students and only one-quarter (24.8%) of Year 7 to 12 students reported they would almost always get extra help with their work from teachers in class, if needed. One-half (49.0%) of students across all year levels reported sometimes getting extra help if needed. Conversely, 7.6 per cent of students in Years 4 to 6 and 18.4 per cent of students in Years 7 to 12 said they almost never get extra help from teachers with work in class if needed.

In regard to gender, both male and female students in Years 7 to 12 were significantly less likely than their counterparts in Years 4 to 6 to report almost always getting help if needed. For female students especially, the proportion of students reporting almost never getting help increased from 5.1 per cent in Year 4 to 6 to 19.8 per cent in Years 7 to 12.

Less than 1-in-2 Year 4-6 students and only 1-in-4 high school students say they almost always get help from teachers if needed.

Graph 5.3.18: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they almost always, sometimes or almost never get extra help from teachers if they need it or they don't know, by year group and gender, 2021



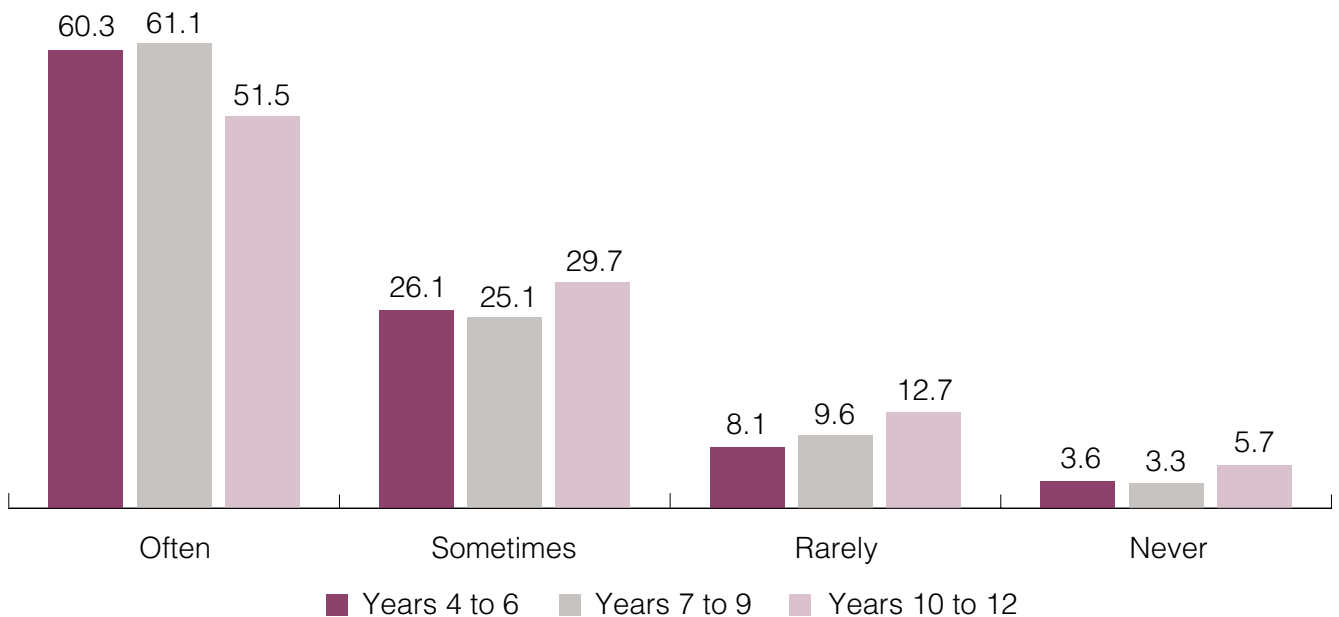
Parent involvement in education

Research shows that there is a strong relationship between parental aspirations and expectations and the child’s actual academic outcomes.⁶¹ In the Commissioner’s School and Learning Consultation,⁶² high expectations from family members were generally seen as a positive influence for school and learning. Low expectations or disinterest from family members were discouraging and hurtful for students and not helpful for how they felt about attending school and learning.⁶³

More than one-half (58.2%) of students in Years 4 to 12 said their parents often ask about school or homework while 26.7 per cent reported being asked sometimes. One-in-ten students (10.0%) reported their parents ask rarely and 4.1 per cent said their parents never ask about school or homework.

Most students say their parents regularly ask about their school or homework but more than 1-in-10 report their parents rarely or never do this.

Graph 5.3.19: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their parents or someone in their family often, sometimes, rarely or never ask about school or homework, by year group, 2021



5.3.4 Transition from school

“A lot of pressure to think about where you are going (what you’re doing after school). And if you want to go to uni, it’s like you have to dedicate your whole life to school and do perfect and get perfect grades, otherwise you won’t make it to uni. It’s like year 12 is make-or-break.” (16 year-old)

“There is so much pressure these days to get a job and do well, to be smart, to be better than past generations cause we have to fix their mistakes.” (14 year-old)

The transition from compulsory and structured schooling to either employment or less structured education formats such as tertiary education requires young people to have developed the ability to work independently and with a commitment and enthusiasm for their chosen path. A sense of optimism and opportunity is important for young people to manage this transition successfully.

60% of high school students agree it is true they are learning knowledge and skills that will help them in the future.

Opportunities to learn and develop useful skills

The majority of Year 7 to 12 students (55.1%) reported they would like to finish university, 9.2 per cent aimed for a TAFE certificate and 6.4 per cent for a trade qualification (apprenticeship). A further 10.9 per cent wanted to finish Year 12 and 4.8 per cent Year 10 or 11.

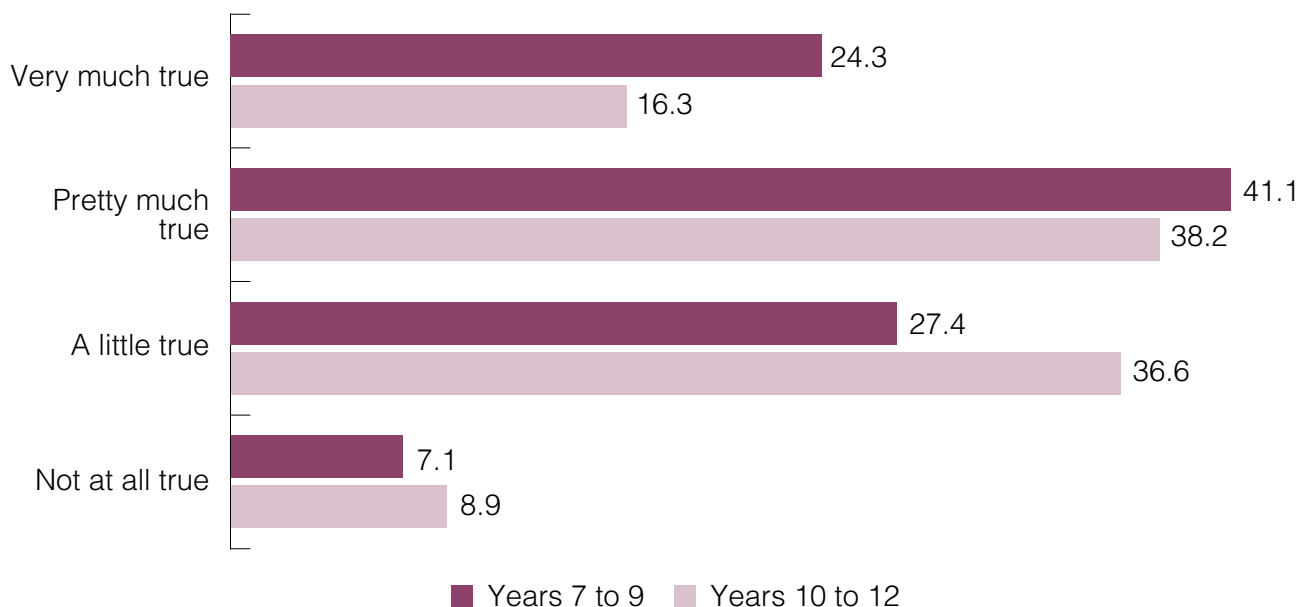
Sixty per cent of Year 7 to 12 students said it was either very much true (21.0%) or pretty much true (39.9%) that at their school they were learning knowledge and skills that would help them in the future. One-third (31.2%) felt this was only a little true and eight per cent said it was not at all true. Older students were more likely to disagree with the statement than younger students.

Almost one-half (46.5%) of Year 10 to 12 students and one-in-ten (11.1%) Year 7 to 9 students had a regular part-time job.

Of the students who reported having a regular part-time job, the main reasons they worked were:

- to have money to spend on things they want (67.4%)
- to get skills and experience (11.2%)
- because their parents (or other people who look after them) wanted them to (4.3%)
- to save for study (3.7%).

Graph 5.3.20: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students responding to the statement ‘At my school, I am learning knowledge and skills that will help me in the future’, by year group, 2021



Emerging autonomy and being heard

Independent travel

Active and independent travel is important for children and young people in that it contributes to physical activity, social and emotional development and other health-related outcomes.⁶⁴ The term children's independent mobility is defined as the freedom of children to travel around in their neighbourhood or city without adult supervision.⁶⁵ The levels of children's independent travel have declined over the last 20 years due to increasing motorisation, urban sprawl and traffic safety.

Students in Years 7 to 12 were asked a series of questions concerning their independent mobility. In general, Year 10 to 12 students and male students overall reported higher rates of being allowed to engage in independent mobility than Year 7 to 9 students and female students:

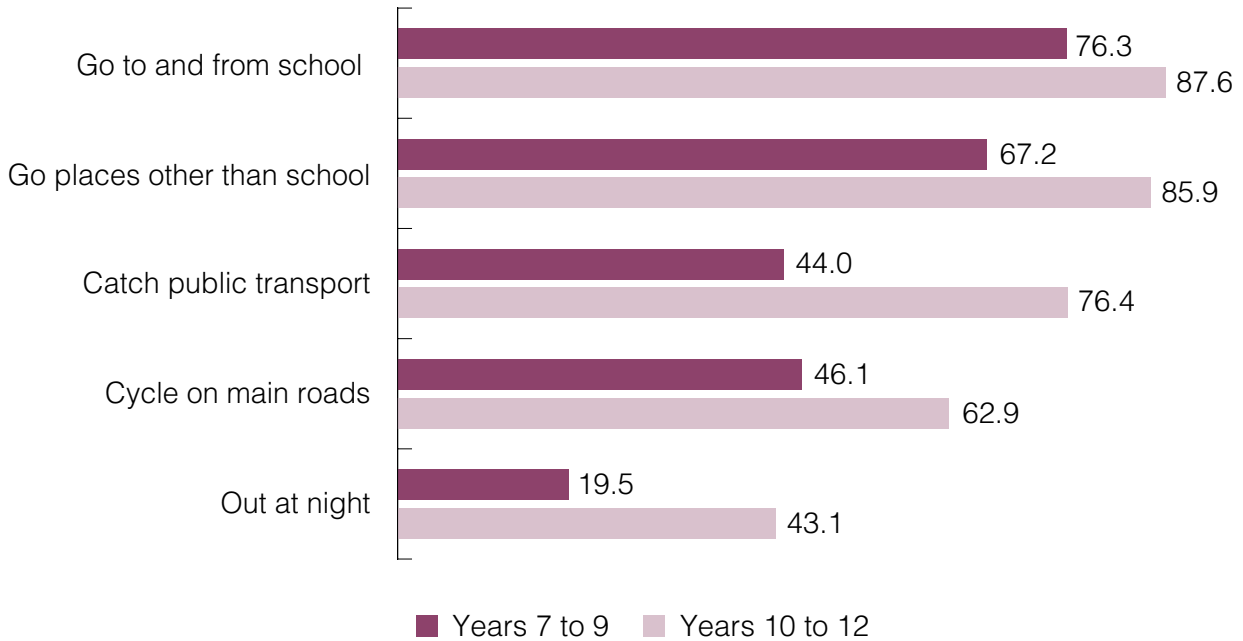
- 76.3 per cent of Year 7 to 9 and 87.6 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students said they were allowed to go to and from school on their own.
- 67.2 per cent of Year 7 to 9 and 85.9 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students said they were allowed to go places other than school on their own.
- 44.0 per cent of Year 7 to 9 and 76.4 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported being allowed to catch public transport alone. The proportion of students allowed to catch public transport alone (not including a school bus) was significantly higher among male than female students (Year 7 to 12: 62.4% male vs. 52.6% female).

- 46.1 per cent of Year 7 to 9 and 62.9 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported being allowed to cycle on main roads without an adult. The proportion of students allowed to cycle on main roads without an adult was significantly higher among male than female students (Year 7 to 12: 62.3% male vs. 43.9% female).
- 19.5 per cent of Year 7 to 9 and 43.1 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students reported being allowed out alone at night. The proportion of students who said they were allowed out alone at night was significantly higher among male than female students (Year 10 to 12: 53.6% male vs. 32.7% female).

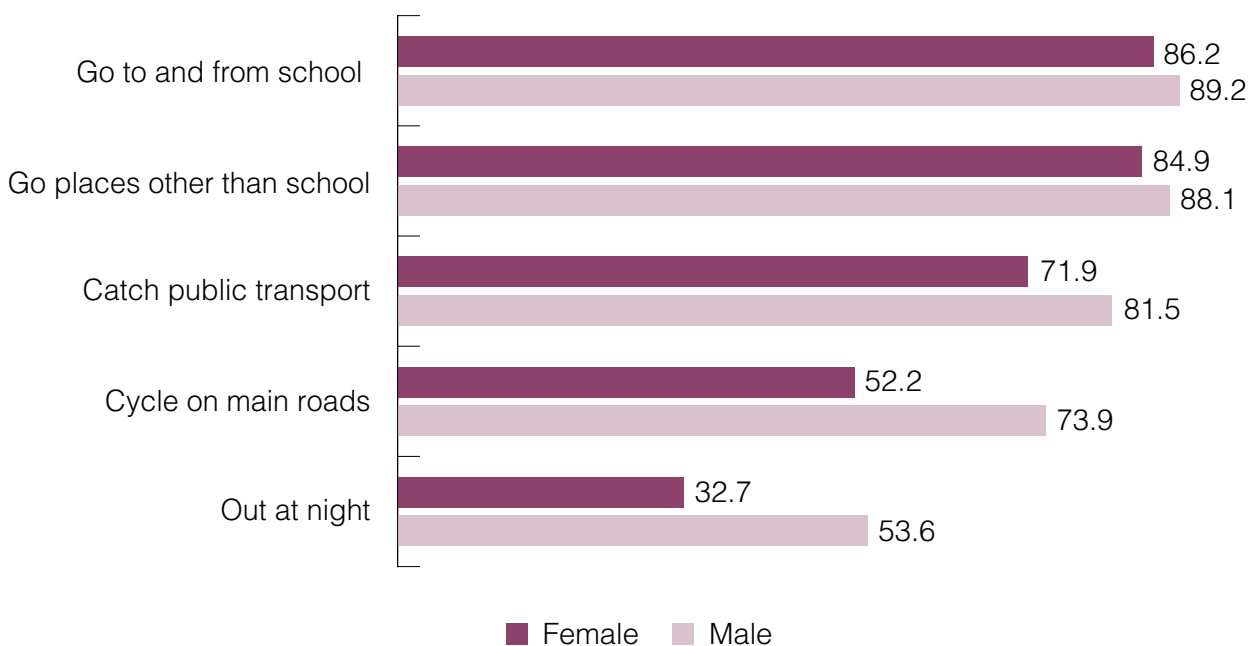
Most Year 10-12 students are allowed to be independently mobile.

1-in-2 female Year 10-12 students are not allowed to cycle independently along a main road and 1-in-4 are not allowed to use public transport without an adult.

Graph 5.3.21: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting being allowed to do selected activities without an adult, by year level and activity, 2021



Graph 5.3.22: Proportion of Year 10 to 12 students reporting being allowed to do selected activities without an adult, by gender and activity, 2021



Making decisions

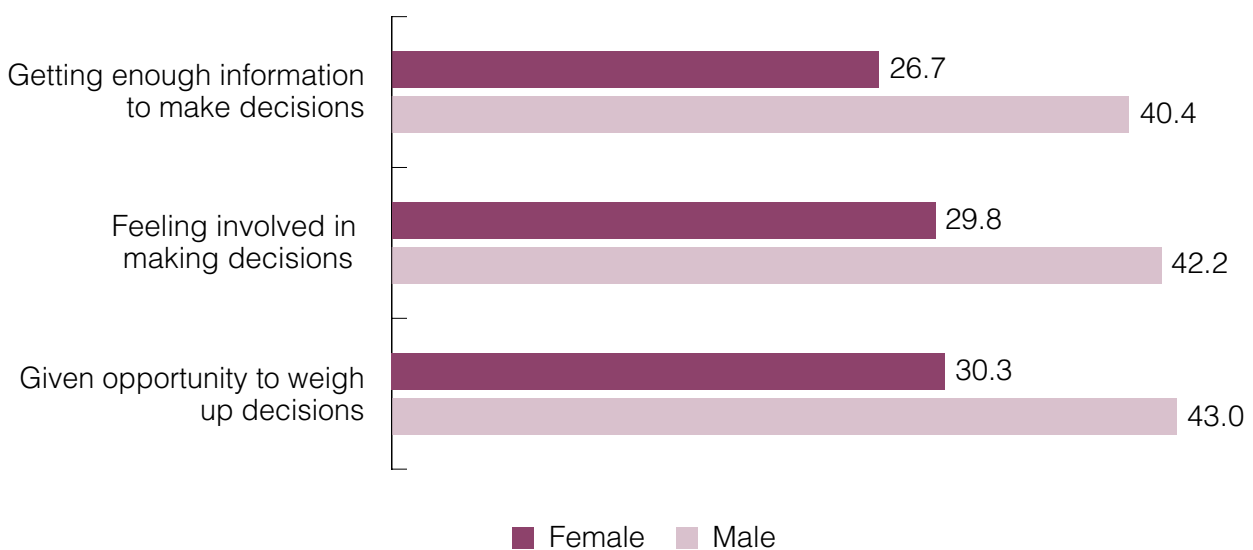
Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to give their opinion and be listened to by the adults around them. Giving young people a voice and encouraging them to be involved in decisions affecting them contributes to the development of self-esteem and identity. It also enables young people to learn how to develop and articulate opinions and make choices which can influence events.

Students in Years 7 to 12 were asked a series of questions about making decisions and in general four-in-five agreed with the following statements:

- 81.6 per cent of students agreed that they get enough information to make decisions in their life (48.5% agreed and 33.1% strongly agreed). 12.4 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed and 5.9 per cent disagreed or disagreed strongly.

- 78.7 per cent of students agreed that they feel involved in making decisions about their life (43.2% agreed and 35.5% strongly agreed). 13.3 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed and 7.9 per cent disagreed or disagreed strongly.
- 81.0 per cent of students agreed that they are given opportunities to weigh up decisions (44.9% agreed and 36.1% strongly agreed). 13.3 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed and 5.8 per cent disagreed or disagreed strongly.

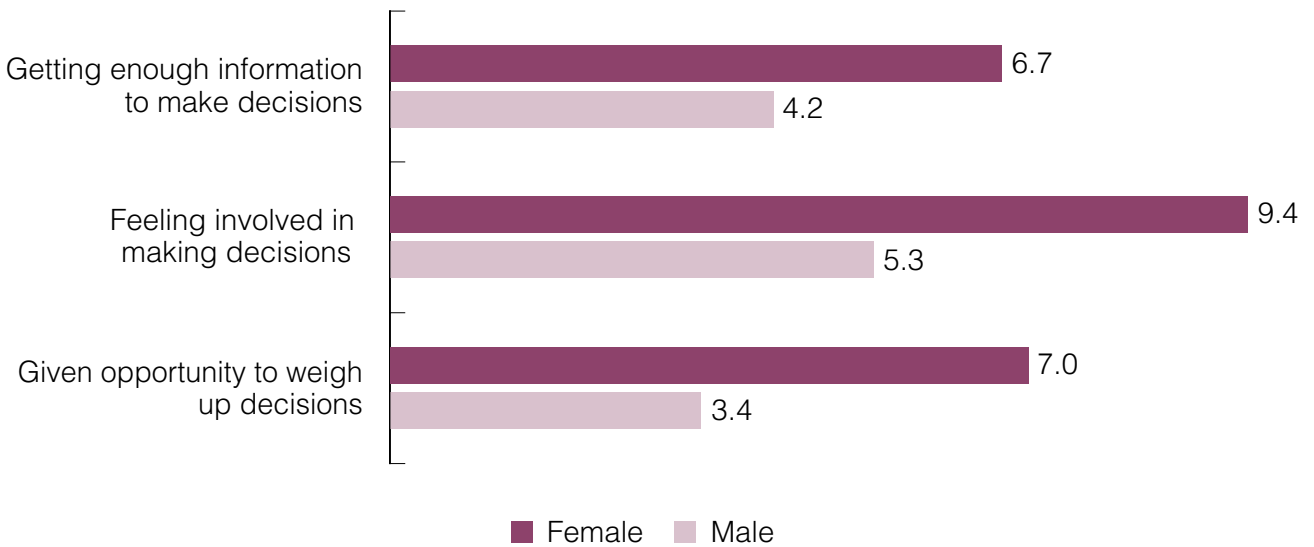
Graph 5.3.23: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they strongly agree with selected statements about making decisions, by gender, 2021



In general, there was little difference between year levels, however female students were less likely than male students to strongly agree with any of the three statements and instead were more likely to say they neither agree nor disagree or disagree.

4-in-5 students agree they are involved in making decisions affecting them, however female students agree less.

Graph 5.3.24: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they disagree* with selected statements about making decisions, by gender, 2021



* Includes students who selected response disagree or strongly disagree.

Summary of key statistics:

Engagement in school and learning

- 1-in-2 Year 4–6 students have attended one primary school. 1-in-10 have attended four or more.
- **More than 2-in-3 high school students have attended one school since starting high school. 1-in-10 have attended three or more.**
- 1-in-3 Year 10–12 students say they are not happy at school, do not feel they belong there and do not like learning.
- **90% of female Year 4–6 students are happy at school and like learning but only 63% of female Year 10–12 students feel the same.**
- 7-in-10 students usually get along with their classmates but about 5% say they never or rarely do.
- **Most students feel teachers care, believe and listen to them but 1-in-3 high school students feel this is not or only a little true for them.**
- Students, especially girls, experience a decline in their relationships with teachers from primary to high school.
- **Most students feel safe at school, however almost 1-in-5 feel safe only sometimes or less, especially Year 7–9 students.**
- 20% of female and 12% of male high school students have ever been cyber bullied.
- **Among students who had been bullied recently, 85% were bullied at school and 57% were bullied online.**

- 15% of students have ever missed school because they were afraid of being bullied.
- **1-in-3 Year 10–12 students feel a lot of pressure from schoolwork with more female than male students affected.**
- Less than 1-in-2 Year 4–6 students and only 1-in-4 high school students say they almost always get help from teachers if needed.
- **Most students say their parents regularly ask about their school or homework but more than 1-in-10 report their parents rarely or never do this.**

Feeling prepared for and positive about the future

- 60% of high school students agree it is true they are learning knowledge and skills that will help them in the future.
- **Most Year 10–12 students are allowed to be independently mobile.**
- 1-in-2 female Year 10–12 students are not allowed to cycle independently along a main road and 1-in-4 are not allowed to use public transport without an adult.
- **4-in-5 students agree they are involved in making decisions affecting them, however female students agree less.**

5.4 Responses to COVID-19

“I worry about my cousins because they live in Victoria and I just really miss them and also they have been in the middle of COVID before and overall I just really miss them.” (9 year-old)

“My nan and grandad live in England and I feel unsafe because they might get hurt from COVID-19.” (9 year-old)

“I actually liked staying at home during COVID-19. Not being at school didn’t stress me, in fact, I was more calm at home where I didn’t have to face the problems that I would face outside.” (17 year-old)

The 2021 survey asked students a number of questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their life and wellbeing.⁶⁶

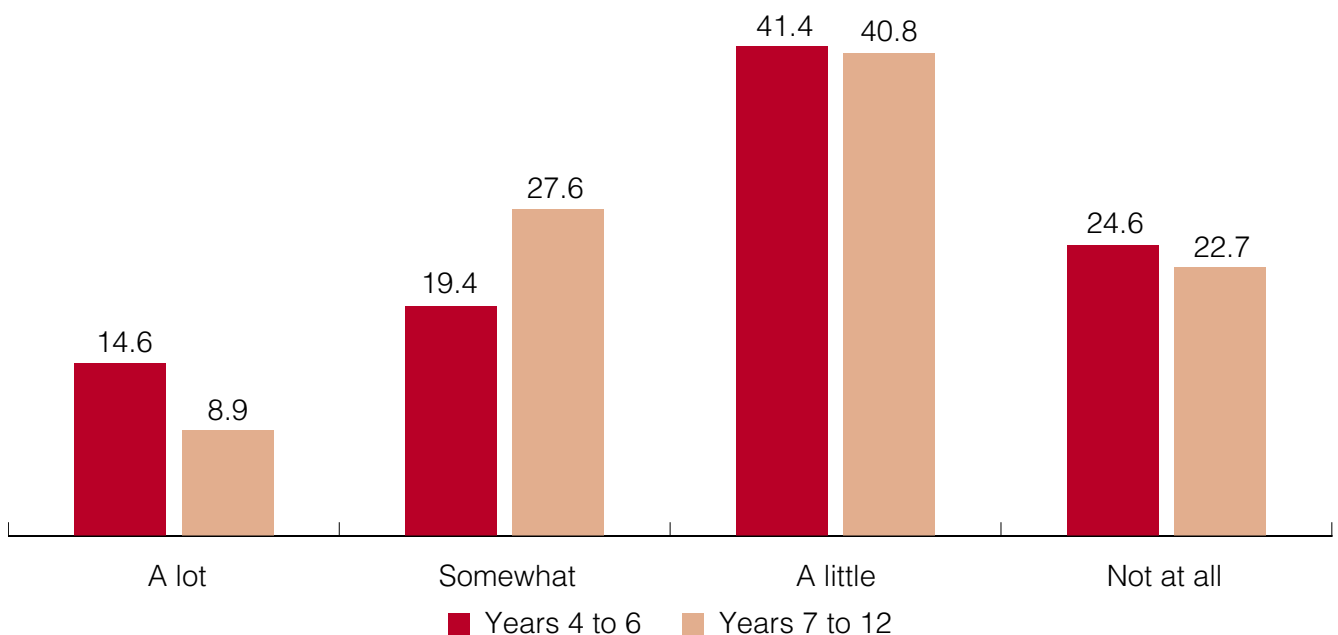
Overall, one-third of Year 4 to 12 students reported feeling that the pandemic has

affected their life in a bad way a lot (11.5%) or somewhat (23.9%). Younger students in Years 4 to 6 were more likely to report being affected in a bad way a lot (14.6% Years 4–6 vs. 8.9% Years 7–12) while students in high school were more likely to say they were affected somewhat (19.4% Years 4–6 vs. 27.6% Years 7–12).

The proportion of students reporting being affected a little (41.1%) or not at all (23.5%) was largely the same across age groups.

There were some differences between male and female responses to this question. Male Year 7 to 12 students were significantly more likely than their female peers to report their life was not affected at all in a bad way by the pandemic (28.8% male vs. 16.6% female). Female Year 7 to 12 students on the other hand were more likely to report being somewhat affected in a bad way (31.7% female vs. 23.8% male).

Graph 5.4.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their life in a bad way a lot, somewhat, a little or not at all, by year group, 2021



In the survey, students were also asked if the pandemic and the resulting changes to everyday life had affected their life in a good way.

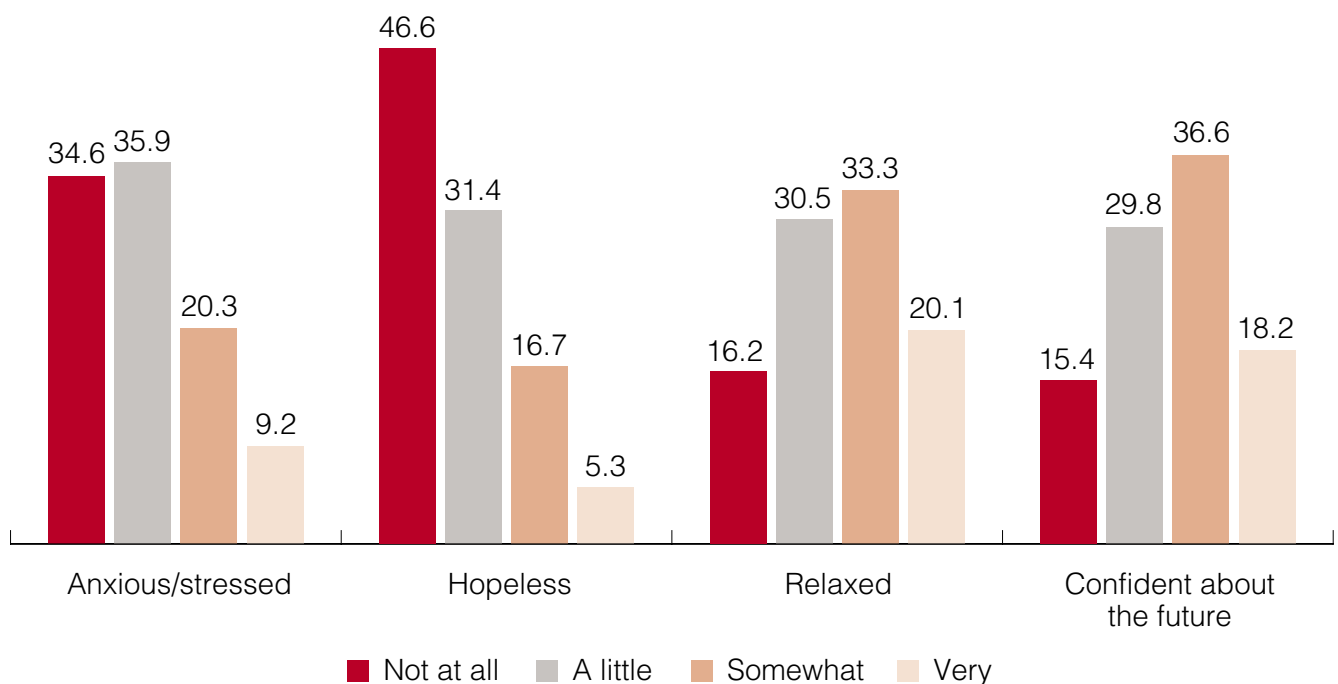
A little less than one-third of Year 4 to 12 students reported their life had been affected by the pandemic in a good way a lot (8.1%) or somewhat (22.7%). Younger students in Years 4 to 6 were more likely to report being affected in a good way a lot (10.2% Years 4–6 vs. 6.4% Years 7–12) while students in high school were more likely to say their life was somewhat affected in a good way (19.4% Years 4–6 vs. 25.4% Years 7–12).

Overall, female students across all year levels were somewhat less likely than their male peers to report that their life was affected in a good way by the pandemic.

In response to what emotions students were feeling in regard to COVID-19, around one-half of students reported feeling somewhat (33.3%) or very (20.1%) relaxed about it. Conversely, 16.2 per cent felt not at all relaxed.

One-third of Year 4 to 12 students reported feeling either very (11.1%) or somewhat (20.4%) anxious or stressed when thinking about COVID-19 and another one-third (36.6%) felt a little anxious. The remainder (31.8%) did not feel anxious or stressed at all.

Graph 5.4.2: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting how strongly or not at all they were feeling a range of emotions when thinking about COVID-19, by type of emotion, 2021



Students' responses differed only marginally between year groups. In regard to gender however, results show that female students in Years 7 to 12 were significantly less likely than male students to report feeling very relaxed (9.7% female vs. 27.7% male) and much more likely to report feeling not relaxed at all (22.2% female vs. 10.7% male).

Corresponding with the results above, female high school students were twice as likely to report feeling very anxious or stressed about COVID-19 when compared to their male peers (11.7% female vs. 5.5% male). At the other end of the spectrum, close to one-half (45.9%) of male students reported not feeling anxious at all compared to one-quarter (24.6%) of female students who felt the same.

Correlation of results shows that 14.3 per cent of students reported feeling somewhat or very anxious or stressed and somewhat or very hopeless. Three per cent of respondents reported feeling very anxious and very hopeless.

With regard to the correlation with students' life satisfaction, students reporting feeling anxious when thinking about COVID-19 were over-represented in the lower bracket of life satisfaction scores (0–4 score). Some 42.4 per cent of students reporting feeling very or somewhat anxious about COVID-19 rating their life satisfaction between 0 and 4.

One-in-five (20.3%) Year 7 to 12 students also reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a source of stress for them in the past year. Among Year 10 to 12 students, 24.2 per cent of female and 14.6 per cent of male students reported this.

Under 10 per cent (9.5%) of Year 4 to 12 students reported being worried lots when they missed school last year (in 2020) due to the pandemic. A further 38.9 per cent were worried a little. Among Year 10 to 12 students, almost double the proportion of females reported worrying lots if they missed school due to the pandemic (11.7% female vs. 6.9% male).

11% of students in Years 4–12 said the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their life in a bad way 'a lot'.

5.5 Regional differences

“I feel like where we live we don’t have many opportunities so most of us end up leaving before Year 9 and it’s sad, we deserve to have better education and more things to do after school like what the big cities have.” (9 year-old, very remote area)

Across most wellbeing areas, students in regional and remote areas reported very similar views and opinions about their wellbeing as students in the metropolitan area⁶⁷ and students overall. This chapter highlights some of the key differences found between the different groups of students.

5.5.1 Healthy and connected

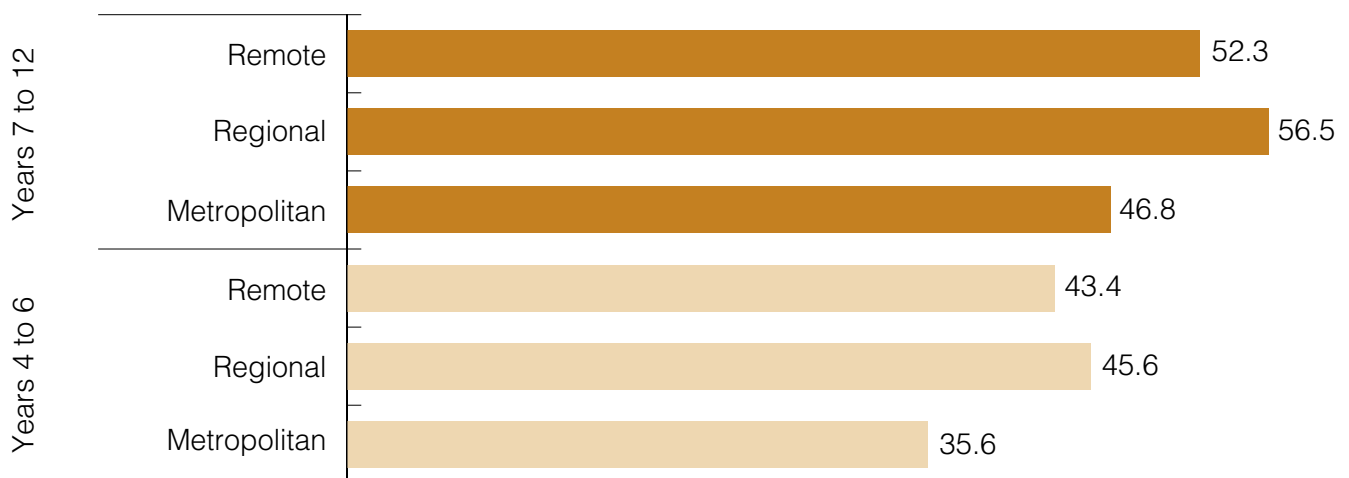
Students in regional and remote areas report less positively on some health measures including emotional wellbeing and resilience but also dental health compared with metropolitan students. In regard to being connected to community and friends, more

students in remote areas spend time with friends and are being active outdoors every day and they know where to go for support.

With respect to their dental health, students in remote and regional areas were more likely to have ever had a filling than students in the metropolitan area (52.8% regional and 49.1% remote vs 43.1% metropolitan area).

Students in regional and remote areas report less positively on some health measures including emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Graph 5.5.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they have ever had a filling, by year group and region, 2021



The 2019 Speaking Out Survey (SOS19) indicated that regional students were somewhat more likely than students in the metropolitan area to report a long-term health condition and to worry more about their weight. These results were not affirmed by the 2021 survey.

Students in regional and remote areas reported going to bed earlier and waking up earlier (even in high school) than students in the metropolitan area and this coincides with school starting earlier in northern parts of WA.

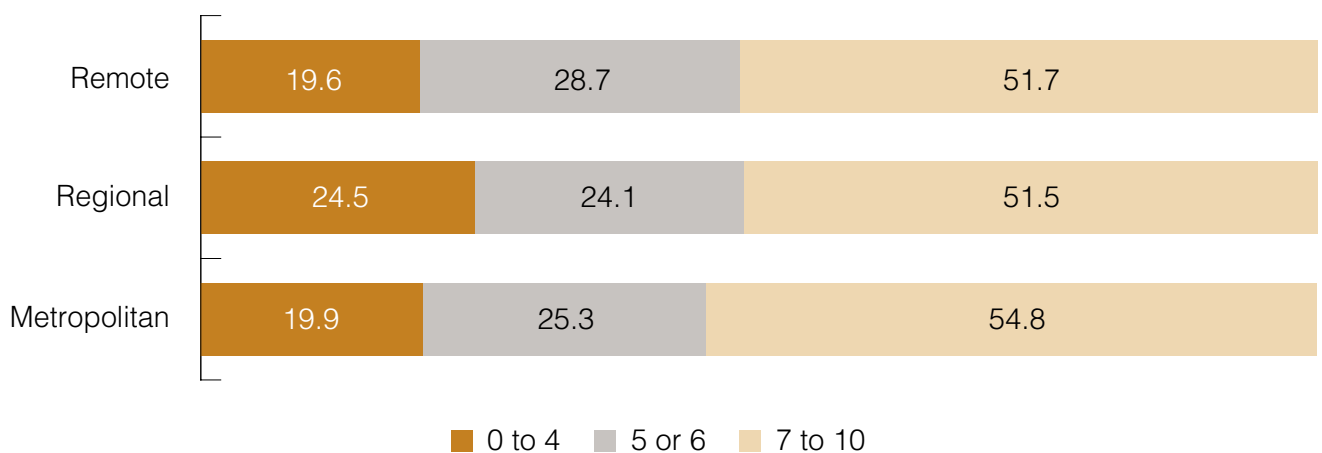
With regard to resilience and coping with life’s challenges, a somewhat higher proportion of regional than metropolitan or remote students disagreed that they feel good about themselves, are able to do things as well as others and that they can achieve their goals. In addition, a somewhat higher proportion of regional than other students indicated they had a recent prolonged episode of feeling sad or depressed and students in regional areas were more likely to mention mental health and

wellbeing as a source of stress in the past year (53.3% regional vs. 48.6% metropolitan and 47.8% remote).

A higher proportion of Year 7 to 12 students in regional and remote areas than in the metropolitan area reported having ever drunk alcohol (43.5% regional and 42.2% remote vs. 33.4% metropolitan), having ever tried smoking (25.2% remote and 21.8% regional vs. 16.8% metropolitan) or having had experiences with marijuana (31.5% remote and 29.7% regional vs. 23.5% metropolitan).

The 2019 survey found somewhat greater life satisfaction scores for high school students in regional and remote areas compared with metropolitan students. These results were not affirmed in the current survey. The 2021 survey found similar life satisfaction scores for students in the metropolitan and in remote areas, however a higher proportion of regional students reported low life satisfaction scores (Years 7–12, 0–4 (Low): 24.5% regional vs. 19.9% metropolitan and 19.6% remote).

Graph 5.5.2: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of ‘0’ to ‘10’ where ‘0’ is the worst possible life and ‘10’ the best possible life, grouped responses by region, 2021

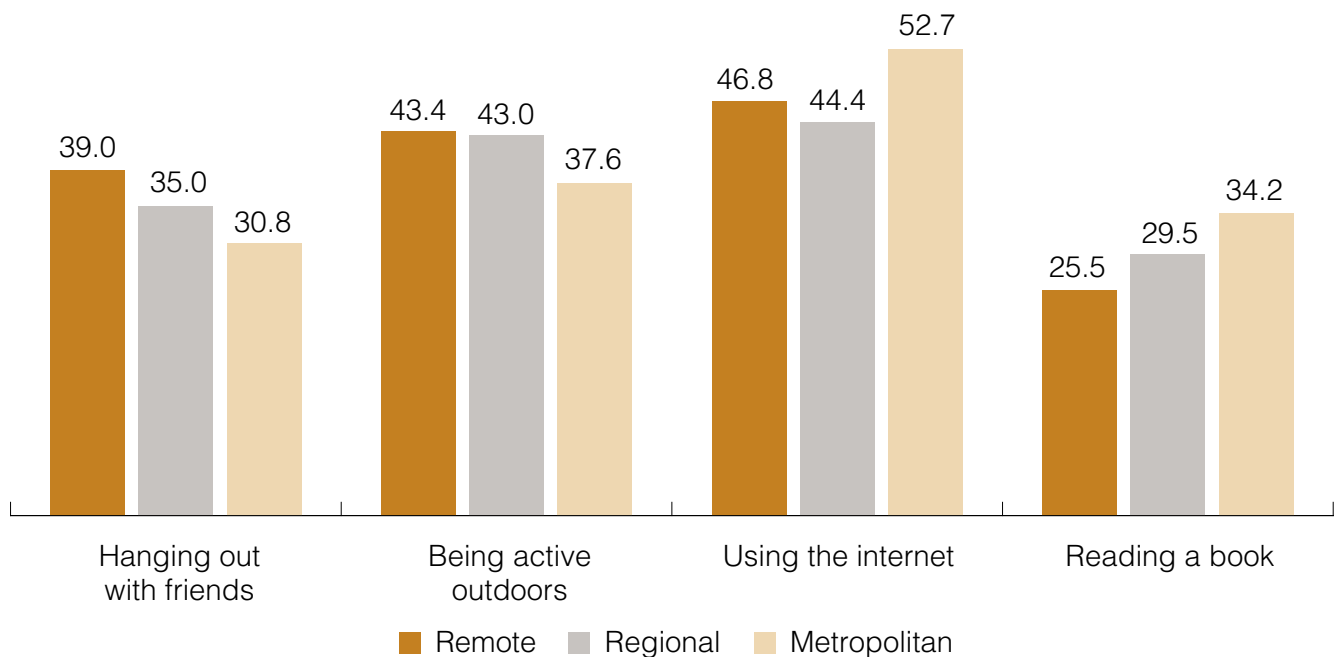


For Year 9 to 12 students, school or study problems were by far the most commonly cited source of stress across all geographic areas, however students from metropolitan areas were significantly more likely than students from remote areas to report this (89.7% metropolitan vs. 81.8% remote).

A number of differences were found in respect to culture and cultural background. Students in regional areas were less likely to speak a language other than English at home (8.9% regional vs. 14.8% remote and 22.6% metropolitan) and more likely to report having an Australian cultural background (72.1% regional vs. 61.3% remote and 57.1% metropolitan). The proportion of students with an Aboriginal Australian cultural background was highest in remote areas (27.8%), lower in regional areas (9.3%) and lowest in the metropolitan area (4.6%).

Year 4 to 12 students in remote areas were more likely than students in metropolitan areas to say they spend time with friends every day (39.0% remote vs. 35.0% regional and 30.8% metropolitan) and to be active outdoors every day (like going to the park, bush or beach, or riding a bike or skateboard) (43.4% remote and 43.0% regional vs. 37.6% metropolitan). Remote area students were less likely than metropolitan students to report spending time using the internet (71.1% remote and 73.6% regional vs. 79.5% metropolitan) or reading a book every day (25.5% remote and 29.5% regional vs. 34.2% metropolitan).

Graph 5.5.3: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students undertaking activities outside of school every day or almost every day, by region, 2021

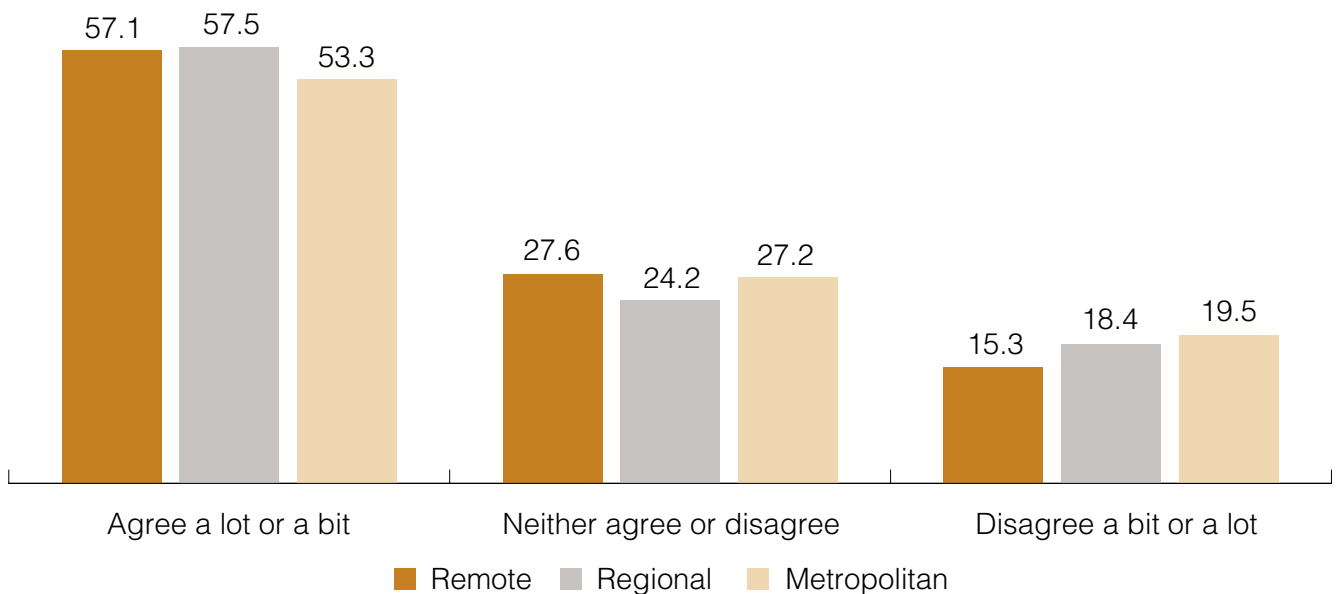


The 2019 survey found that students in remote areas were more likely to say they feel like they belong in their community compared to students in metropolitan and regional areas (69.9% of students in remote areas agreed with this statement compared with 58.2 per cent of regional and 55.5 per cent of metropolitan students.). These findings were not affirmed by the 2021 survey. The 2021 survey found that similar proportions of students across all geographic regions reported feeling like they belong in their community: more than one-half of Year 7 to 12 students across WA agreed either a bit or a lot with this statement (53.3% remote, 57.5% regional and 57.1% metropolitan).

A higher proportion of students in remote and regional areas reported knowing where to get support in their local area for help with stress, anxiety, depression, or other emotional health worries (57.5% remote and 55.3% regional vs. 45.3% metropolitan).

Students in remote and regional areas are more likely to hang out with friends and be active outdoors every day and know where to go for support.

Graph 5.5.4: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement 'I feel like I belong in my community', by region, 2021



5.5.2 Safe and supported

The survey found that similar proportions of students in remote, regional and metropolitan areas reported feeling supported by their family and their friends and not worried about family trouble. Remote area students did less well than other students against some material wellbeing measures and they were more likely to have stayed away from home because of trouble. But they were also more likely to say their family gets along very well.

A higher proportion of Year 4 to 12 students in remote and regional areas reported living in more than one home compared to students in the metropolitan area (26.6% remote, 23.5% regional and 17.9% metropolitan). Students in remote areas who lived in more than one home were more likely than other students to live in their second home with their mother (49.6% remote vs. 37.4% regional and 38.2% metropolitan).

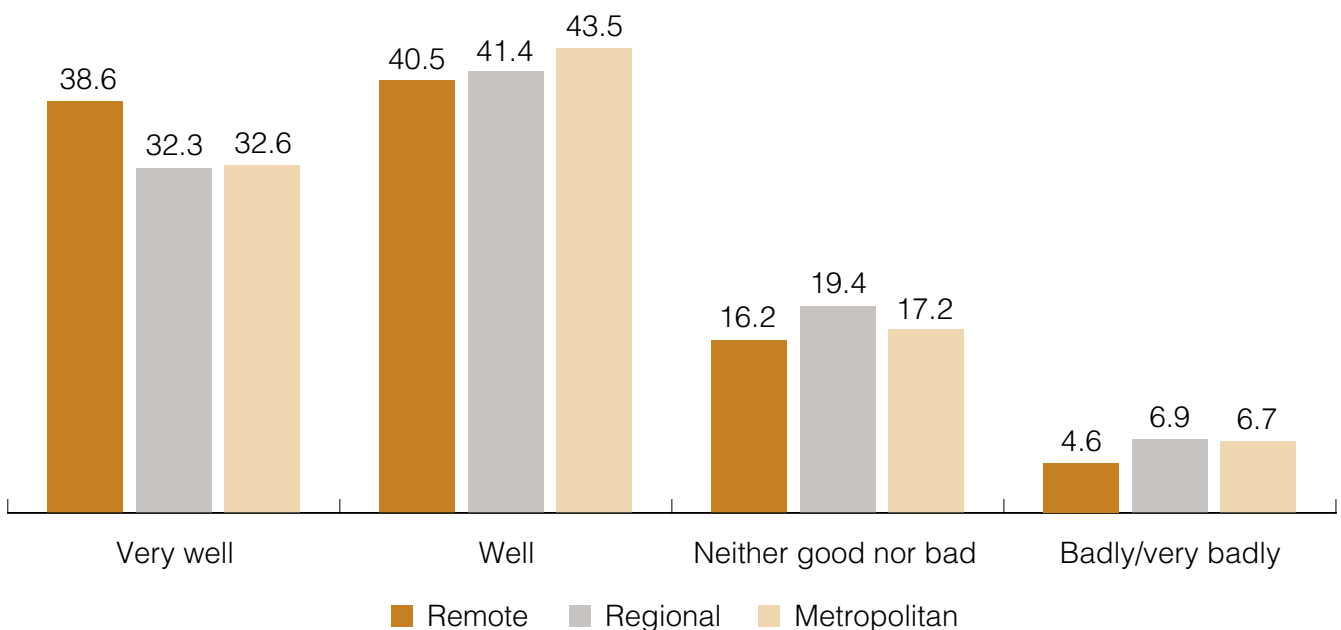
Two-in-five students in remote areas had moved house in the last 12 months (36.3%

remote vs. 26.6% regional and 23.6% metropolitan) with 15.5 per cent having moved two times or more.

Few significant differences were found in regard to material basics but lower proportions of students in remote areas reported having their own bedroom for themselves (81.7% remote vs. 85.8% regional and 88.0% metropolitan), having access to the internet at home (93.0% remote and 93.7% regional vs. 97.4% metropolitan), owning a tablet, laptop or computer (78.6% remote vs. 86.2% regional and 89.4% metropolitan) or their family having enough money for them to go on school excursions or camp (84.8% remote vs. 88.3% regional and 91.5% metropolitan).

2-in-5 students in remote areas had moved house in the last 12 months.

Graph 5.5.5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their family gets along very well, well, neither good nor bad or badly/very badly, by region, 2021



A higher proportion of Year 4 to 12 students in remote areas reported their family gets along very well compared to students in other regions (38.6% remote vs. 32.3% regional and 32.6% metropolitan). This was found for both Year 4 to 6 and Year 7 to 12 students. Correspondingly, a smaller proportion of students in remote areas than other regions reported their family gets along badly or very badly (4.6% remote vs. 6.9% regional and 6.7% metropolitan).

The 2019 survey found that students in remote areas were somewhat more likely than students in the metropolitan area to say they always feel safe at home and on public transport. The 2021 data found that students across all regions reported similar levels of feeling safe or unsafe at home and on public transport.

The proportion of high school students and in particular Year 10 to 12 students saying they had ever stayed away from home overnight because of a problem was higher among remote and regional students than students in the metropolitan area (Years 10–12: 42.9% remote and 37.7% regional vs. 29.6% metropolitan).

The proportion of Year 10 to 12 students reporting having been hit or physically harmed by someone on purpose was similar across all regions with 43.3 per cent remote, 44.8 per cent regional and 43.1 per cent metropolitan students reporting this has ever happened to them.

A lower proportion of students in remote areas reported having their own bedroom, having access to the internet at home or owning a tablet or laptop.

Remote area students were more likely to report having stayed away from home overnight because of a problem but also more likely to say their family gets along very well.

5.5.3 Learning and participating

The survey found that overall there were few differences between the views of students in regional and metropolitan areas regarding their experiences with school and learning, but students in remote schools spoke less favourably about this critical area of wellbeing.

Remote and regional students were more likely to disagree that they feel happy at school and feel like school is a place where they belong. They also tended to have less positive relationships with peers and teachers and to be exposed to bullying at greater levels than their metropolitan counterparts. On the other hand, students in remote and regional areas reported having greater independence with respect to mobility and travel and they were more likely to have worked for pay in the last year compared to students in the metropolitan area.

Students in regional and remote areas were more likely to have changed schools than metropolitan students. The proportion of students who had attended more than one school was higher among remote area students for both Year 4 to 6 (61.1% remote vs. 45.2% regional and 48.4% metropolitan) and Year 7 to 12 students (36.7% remote vs. 31.4% regional and 26.9% metropolitan).

Year 4 to 12 students attending remote schools were less likely than students in the metropolitan area to say they usually get along with classmates (61.2% remote vs. 70.9% metropolitan) or teachers (58.9% remote vs. 66.1% metropolitan) and more likely to say they get along with classmates sometimes (31.3% remote vs. 24.4% metropolitan). These differences were not observed for students in regional schools.

Year 7 to 12 students in regional schools were more likely than students in the metropolitan area to report having ever been bullied

(41.6% regional vs. 33.8% metropolitan). Year 4 to 6 regional students were more likely than metropolitan students to report having missed school due to fear of being bullied (17.7% regional vs. 12.0% metropolitan).

The proportion of students wanting to finish university was lowest for Year 10 to 12 students in remote schools (30.5%), higher for students in regional areas (43.3%) and highest for students in the metropolitan area (60.0%). Correspondingly, a higher proportion of Year 10 to 12 students in remote schools wanted to finish a trade qualification (14.1% remote and 13.3% regional vs. 7.5% metropolitan) or were yet unsure and answered 'Year 12' (26.8% remote vs. 15.1% regional and 8.5% metropolitan).

Students in regional and remote areas were more likely to have changed schools than students in the metropolitan area.

Students attending remote schools were less likely than students in the metropolitan area to say they usually get along with classmates or teachers.

Remote and regional students were more likely than metropolitan students to have worked for pay in the last year.

Graph 5.5.6: Proportion of Year 10 to 12 students nominating the highest level of education they would like to finish, by region, 2021



Students in remote and regional areas were more likely than students in the metropolitan area to have worked for pay in the last year, especially Year 10 to 12 students (61.4% remote and 60.3% regional vs. 42.9% metropolitan). Overall, only one-quarter of Year 10 to 12 students in remote and regional areas had not worked for pay in the last year compared with almost 40 per cent metropolitan Year 10 to 12 students (26.1% remote and 23.2% regional vs. 38.1% metropolitan).

Perhaps most importantly, students in remote and regional areas reported having greater independence with respect to mobility and travel compared with metropolitan students. Students in these areas were more likely to report being allowed to go to places other than school on their own (78.8% remote and 80.2% regional vs. 73.6% metropolitan) and to cycle without an adult on main roads (64.2% remote vs. 59.7% regional and 50.9% metropolitan). Year 10 to 12 students in remote areas were significantly more likely to report being allowed out alone at night (55.0% remote vs. 45.9% regional and 41.8% metropolitan).

5.5.4 Responses to COVID-19

Students in remote areas were most likely to report their life has not been affected in a bad way at all by COVID-19 with 37.4 per cent of remote students saying this followed by 28.5 per cent of regional and 21.5 per cent of metropolitan students. This difference was observed for both Year 4 to 6 and Year 7 to 12 students.

Similar proportions of students across all regions however reported having been affected in a bad way a lot (11.7% metropolitan, 10.8% regional and 10.5% remote).

Regional students were least likely to nominate COVID-19 as a source of stress for them in the past year with 14.5 per cent reporting this followed by 18.0 per cent of remote and 21.6 per cent of metropolitan students.

Summary of key statistics:



- Students in regional and remote areas report less positively on some health measures including emotional wellbeing and resilience.
- **Students in remote and regional areas are more likely to hang out with friends and be active outdoors every day and know where to go for support.**
- 2-in-5 students in remote areas had moved house in the last 12 months.
- **A lower proportion of students in remote areas reported having their own bedroom, having access to the internet at home or owning a tablet or laptop.**
- Remote area students were more likely to report having stayed away from home overnight because of a problem but also more likely to say their family gets along very well.
- **Students in regional and remote areas were more likely to have changed schools than students in the metropolitan area.**
- Students attending remote schools were less likely than students in the metropolitan area to say they usually get along with classmates or teachers.
- **Remote and regional students were more likely than metropolitan students to have worked for pay in the last year.**

5.6 Aboriginal children and young people's wellbeing

"I would like for people to be more educated on Australian history, my culture and what we have been through, cause it's embarrassing to see how little people know and how much these things affect me." (15 year-old)

In general, Aboriginal students fared less well than non-Aboriginal students in terms of their dental health, material basics, family stability, or expectations for further education. In other respects, Aboriginal students were on par with non-Aboriginal students in terms of life satisfaction and level of self-perception, and somewhat more positive in regard to feeling safe and connected in the community especially in remote areas.

5.6.1 Healthy and connected

Two-thirds (68.3%) of Aboriginal students reported knowing their family's country but one-in-five (22.9%) were not sure and the remainder said they did not know. Aboriginal students in remote areas were most likely to know their family's country with 75.3% reporting this followed by regional Aboriginal students (67.2%) and those living in the metropolitan area (65.8%).

Among Aboriginal students who reported knowing their country, 74.5 per cent said they spend time on their family's country. Again, Aboriginal students in remote areas were most likely to report this (88.5%) compared with regional and metropolitan Aboriginal students (69.1% regional and 70.0% metropolitan).

With regard to speaking their Aboriginal language, 7.8 per cent of Aboriginal students reported speaking their language a lot, 16.3 per cent some, 35.0 per cent a little bit and 40.9 per cent reported they did not speak their Aboriginal language.

The proportion of Aboriginal students who reported not speaking Aboriginal language was lowest in remote areas (23.4%) and higher in regional (47.6%) and metropolitan areas (45.4%). In other words, Aboriginal students in remote areas are significantly more likely to speak their Aboriginal language than Aboriginal students in regional or metropolitan areas.

Less than one-half (46.4%) of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 reported doing cultural or traditional activities with their family however, the proportion was significantly greater for Aboriginal students in remote areas (57.2%).

While subjective health ratings were similar for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, a higher proportion of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 reported having ever had a filling (54.1% vs. 44.2%) with nearly three-in-five Aboriginal Year 7 to 12 students reporting this compared to just under one-half of non-Aboriginal students (58.2% vs. 47.9%).

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students rated their life satisfaction very similarly. Equal proportions of Year 7 to 12 students rated their life with a high score (7-10: 61.4% Aboriginal vs. 61.5% non-Aboriginal), a medium score (5-6: 23.1% Aboriginal vs. 22.3% non-Aboriginal) and a low score (0-4: 15.5% Aboriginal vs. 16.2% non-Aboriginal). Further, the 2021 data also showed the same patterns between male and female students in both groups and students in different year levels.

With respect to self-perception and happiness, similar proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 strongly agreed that they feel good about themselves (31.8% Aboriginal vs. 28.2% non-Aboriginal) and are happy with themselves (28.8% Aboriginal vs. 25.6% non-Aboriginal).

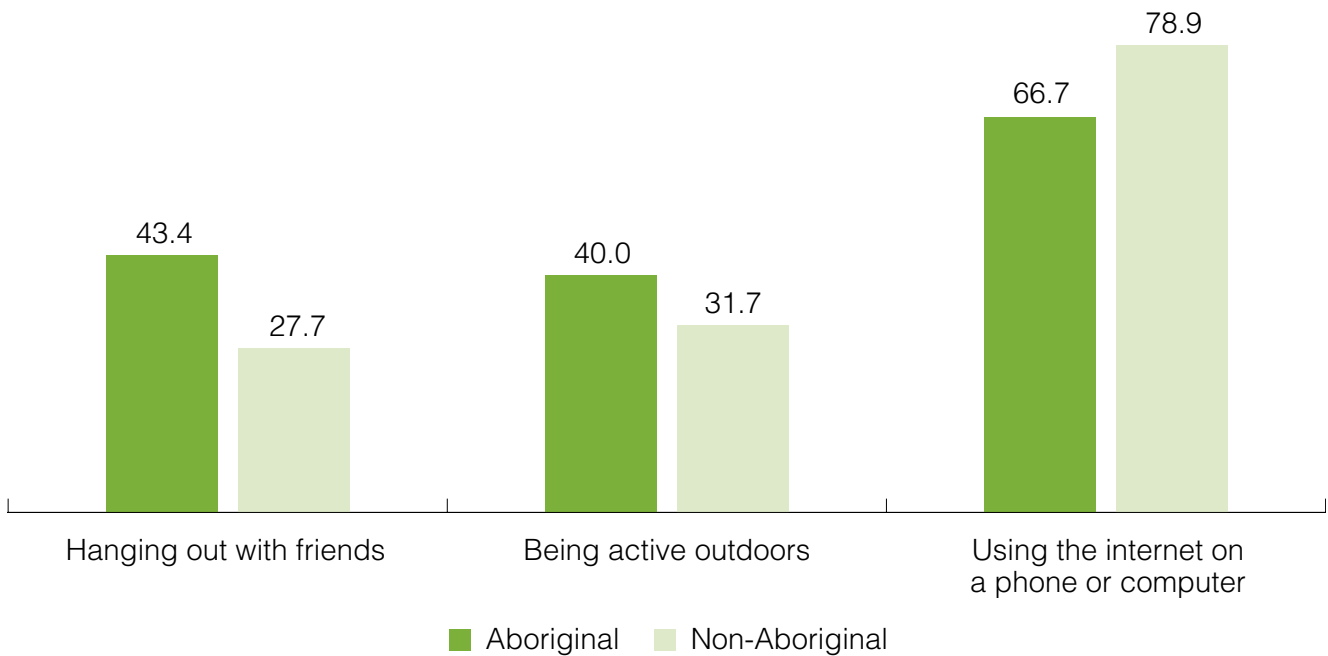
The 2019 survey found that a higher proportion of female Aboriginal students agreed they are happy with themselves compared to non-Aboriginal female students – these results were not affirmed by the 2021 data. In 2021, similar proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal female students reported high levels of self-esteem (strongly agree: 24.8% Aboriginal vs. 23.2% non-Aboriginal) and happiness with self (strongly agree: 23.7% Aboriginal vs. 21.6% non-Aboriginal).

Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to report spending time hanging out with friends every day (45.5% Aboriginal vs. 30.7% non-Aboriginal) and being active outdoors (42.4%

Aboriginal vs. 38.2% non-Aboriginal) and less likely to use the internet on a smartphone or computer every day (70.2% Aboriginal vs. 79.5% non-Aboriginal) or read a book (20.2% Aboriginal vs. 33.7% non-Aboriginal).

Notably, Aboriginal female students were far more likely to report being active outdoors (in an unstructured activity) every day compared to their non-Aboriginal female peers (40.0% vs. 31.7%). Female Aboriginal students were also less likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to report using the internet on a smartphone every day (66.7% vs. 78.9%).

Graph 5.6.1: Proportion of female Year 7 to 12 students undertaking activities outside of school every day or almost every day, by Aboriginal status, 2021



While Aboriginal students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to report knowing where to get help for emotional health worries in their school (59.0% Aboriginal vs. 68.0% non-Aboriginal) or online (46.3% Aboriginal vs. 60.8% non-Aboriginal), they were more likely to report having found school-based staff such as school psychologists, chaplains or school nurses helpful (47.8% Aboriginal vs. 32.1% non-Aboriginal). Aboriginal students were also more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to say that they found other family members such as siblings or aunts helpful sources for emotional health worries (61.1% Aboriginal vs. 48.8% non-Aboriginal).

Almost one-half (47.1%) of Aboriginal students reported having used the services or support of an Aboriginal Health Worker or Medical Service for emotional health worries. The majority of these students (83.3%) reported they found such service helpful and the remainder (16.7%) did not.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 7 to 12 students reported having ever tried cigarette smoking (31.8% Aboriginal vs. 16.9% non-Aboriginal), drunk alcohol (47.2% Aboriginal vs. 34.4% non-Aboriginal) and having had experiences with marijuana (39.8% Aboriginal vs. 23.5% non-Aboriginal).

Aboriginal students were more likely to mention school-based staff such as teachers, school psychologists and school nurses as helpful sources for emotional health worries compared to their non-Aboriginal peers.

Female Aboriginal students tend to spend more time with friends and being active outdoors than their non-Aboriginal peers.

There was a notable difference between male Aboriginal and male non-Aboriginal students' levels of acceptance for use of various substances among people their age. In general, male Aboriginal students were about twice as likely to agree that it was OK for someone their age to use alcohol, cigarettes or marijuana (alcohol: 27.0% vs. 15.4%; smoking: 15.1% vs. 6.6% and marijuana: 22.0% vs. 12.9%). Meanwhile among female students, largely equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students either agreed or disagreed that it was OK for someone their age to use these substances (OK to use alcohol: 17.8% vs. 20.3%; smoking: 9.3% vs. 7.9% and marijuana: 14.3% vs. 13.6%).

Overall, three-quarters of non-Aboriginal students (75.4%) and female Aboriginal (75.8%) students reported thinking it is not

OK for someone their age to use any substances. Among male Aboriginal students 64.9% agreed with this.

Largely equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12 reported knowing where to go for alcohol and drug related help (70.5% Aboriginal and 69.4% non-Aboriginal).

2-in-3 Aboriginal students reported knowing their family's country.

Graph 5.6.2: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they think it is not okay for someone their age to use any substances, by gender and Aboriginal status, 2021



5.6.2 Safe and supported

Aboriginal students fared less well in terms of material basics and family worries but they were somewhat more positive about feeling safe in the community.

More Aboriginal (32.4%) than non-Aboriginal (17.8%) students reported living in more than one home and one-in-five said that seven or more people lived in their main home (19.8% Aboriginal vs. 6.1% non-Aboriginal). Aboriginal students were less likely to have their own bedroom (Years 4–6: 69.3% Aboriginal vs. 79.5% non-Aboriginal; Years 7–12: 87.6% Aboriginal vs. 92.2% non-Aboriginal).

For both Years 4 to 6 and Years 7 to 12, a higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported they lived with aunts/uncles in their main home (11.4% Aboriginal vs. 3.7% non-Aboriginal) and about twice as many Aboriginal as non-Aboriginal students reported they lived with grandparents in their main home (16.5% Aboriginal vs. 7.6% non-Aboriginal).

These findings reflect the definition of ‘family’ in Aboriginal communities that is based on a kinship system which is much broader than a traditional Western concept of family. Extended family members (grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins etc.) and other community members are heavily involved and provide significant support to Aboriginal parents and children.⁶⁸

When asked about care and support in their family, more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported that other family members or their brothers and sisters cared a lot about them (other family: 57.8% Aboriginal vs. 53.6% non-Aboriginal; siblings: 53.1% Aboriginal vs. 43.8% non-Aboriginal) while fewer Aboriginal students said the same about their mother or father (mother: 76.2% Aboriginal vs. 83.2% non-Aboriginal; father: 64.5% Aboriginal vs. 73.5% non-Aboriginal).

In terms of material basics, the survey found similar response patterns for the majority of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12, but one-in-ten Aboriginal students reported that their family did not have a car (8.6% vs. 2.1%), one-in-five said that they only sometimes had enough food to eat at home (15.8% Aboriginal vs. 7.3% non-Aboriginal) and one-in-ten also reported not having access to the internet at home (10.3% Aboriginal vs. 2.7% non-Aboriginal).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 4 to 12 students reported they were worried a lot about someone in their family hurting somebody (15.8% vs. 7.7%), hurting themselves (16.4% vs. 10.6%) or getting arrested (12.1% vs. 5.7%). Aboriginal Year 7 to 12 students were also more likely to report having ever stayed away from home overnight because of a problem (41.7% Aboriginal vs. 26.4% non-Aboriginal) compared to non-Aboriginal students.

Equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students reported feeling safe at home all the time (67.7% Aboriginal vs. 65.5% non-Aboriginal) but Aboriginal students were more likely to report never feeling safe or just a little bit of the time (6.2% Aboriginal vs. 2.9% non-Aboriginal).

Aboriginal students were more likely to feel safe all the time in their local area or community.

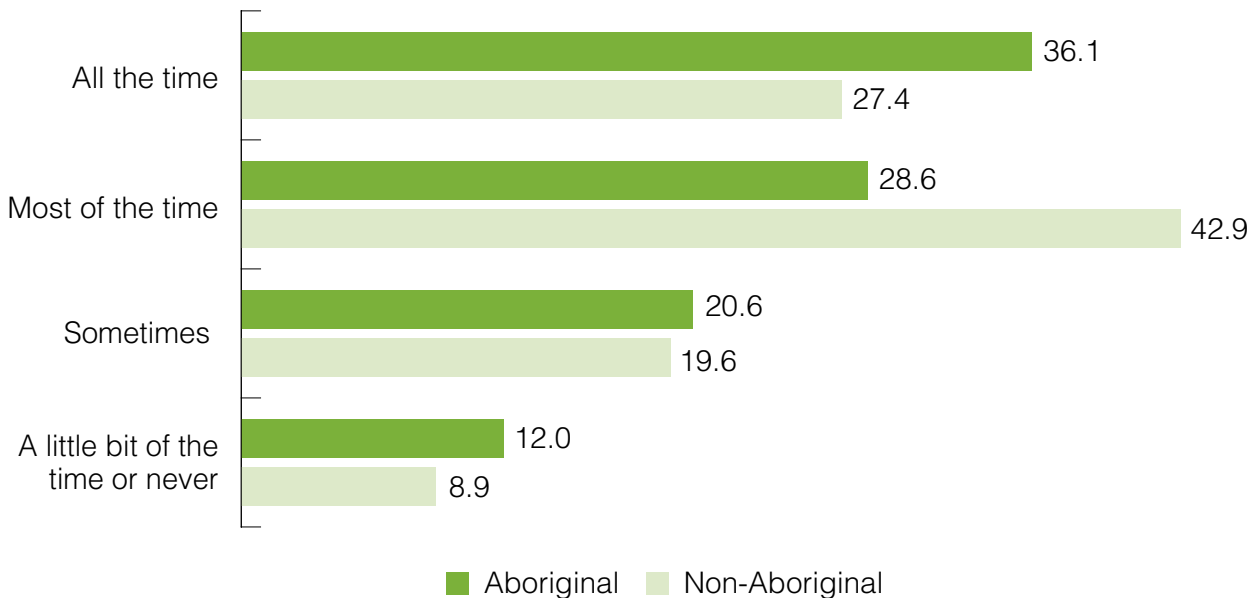
In general, Aboriginal students fared less well in terms of material basics and concerns about family worries.

With regard to feeling safe in the local area, Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 were somewhat more positive about this than their non-Aboriginal peers: 36.1 per cent reported feeling safe in their local area all the time (vs. 27.4% of non-Aboriginal students) and 20.6 per cent felt safe on public transport all the time (vs. 13.4% non-Aboriginal students). Non-Aboriginal students were more likely to report feeling safe most of the time.

While Aboriginal students were more likely to report feeling safe in their local area and on public transport all the time, they were also more likely to report never feeling safe or just a little bit of the time.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported living with aunts/uncles and grandparents and said that other family members cared a lot about them.

Graph 5.6.3: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they feel safe in their local area all the time, most of the time, sometimes or a little bit of the time or never, by Aboriginal status, 2021



5.6.3 Learning and participating

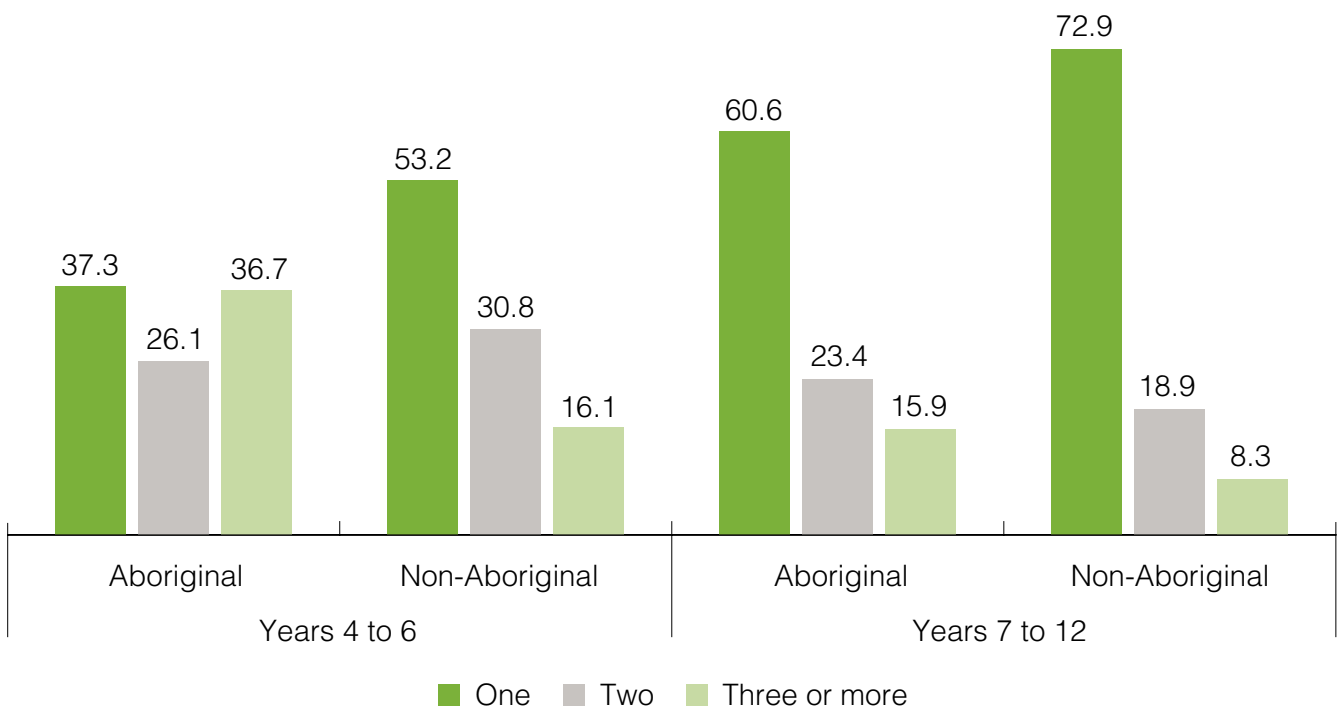
The majority of Aboriginal students like school, want to be at school and say they feel cared for and supported at school. A considerable proportion of Aboriginal students however reported having to deal with challenges such as frequently changing schools, unstable relationships with classmates and teachers, high rates of suspension and, similar to non-Aboriginal students, high rates of bullying.

Across most indicators in this domain, the same response patterns were found in the 2021 as the 2019 data.

For both Year 4 to 6 and Year 7 to 12 students, Aboriginal students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to have attended only one school and more likely to have attended three or more schools especially during primary school (Years 4–12 attended more than three schools: 23.7% Aboriginal vs. 10.7% non-Aboriginal).

More Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said it was very much true that a teacher or another adult at their school really cared about them.

Graph 5.6.4: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they have gone to one, two or three or more primary/high schools, by year group and Aboriginal status, 2021



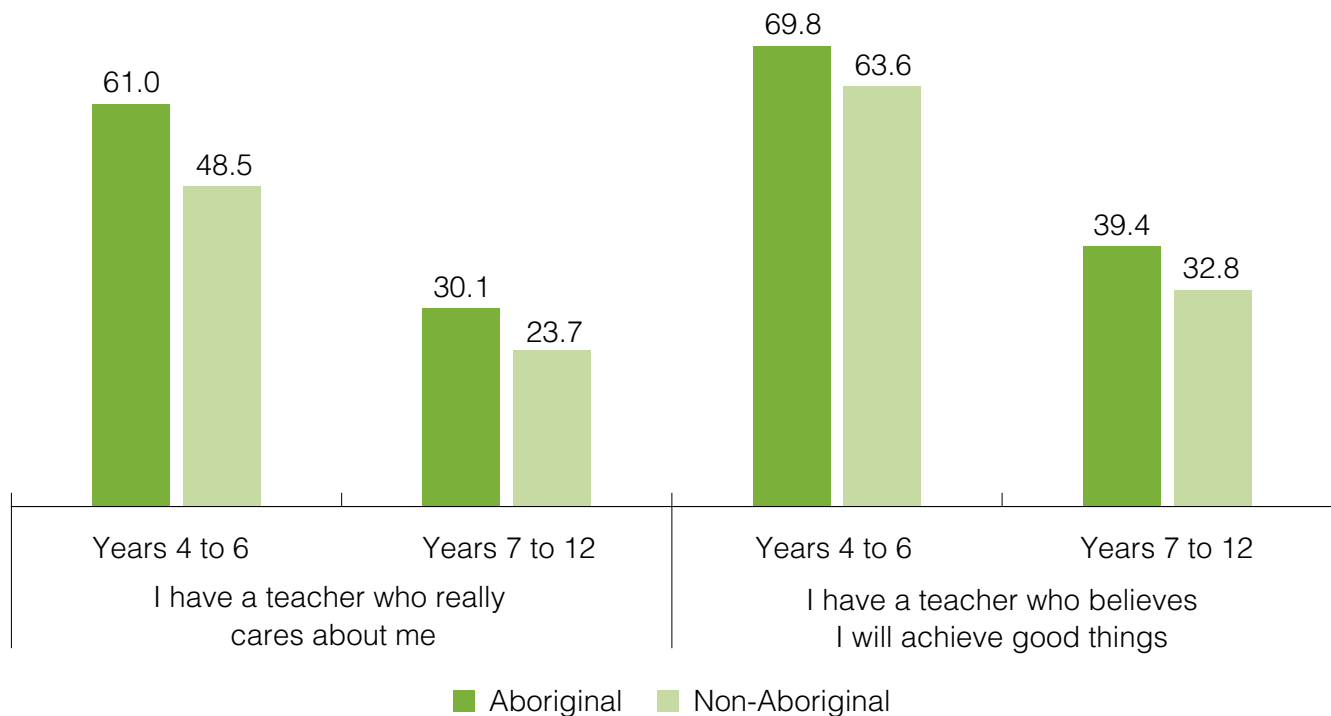
Equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12 reported that being at school every day was very important to them (53.8% Aboriginal vs. 54.5% non-Aboriginal) and that they felt happy at school (74.3% Aboriginal vs. 75.3% non-Aboriginal) but fewer Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said that their parents or someone in their family often asked about schoolwork or homework (41.0% Aboriginal vs. 60.0% non-Aboriginal).

The 2021 survey found that while the majority of Aboriginal Year 7 to 12 students believed it was important to attend school every day, one-third had reportedly waggged school for a full day or more in the past 12 months (34.5%

Aboriginal vs. 13.7% non-Aboriginal) and, most worryingly, the same proportion – 33 per cent – had been suspended (33.1% Aboriginal vs. 13.0% non-Aboriginal).

Smaller proportions of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported usually getting along with classmates.

Graph 5.6.5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting it is very much true that at their school there is a teacher or another adult who really cares about them or who believes they will achieve good things, by year group and Aboriginal status, 2021



Safety was an important issue for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students with similar proportions of students reporting experiences with bullying, cyber bullying or both (39.0% Aboriginal vs. 35.9% non-Aboriginal). Among Year 7 to 12 students who have been bullied recently (last three months), Aboriginal students were significantly more likely to report having been bullied for reasons including cultural background or skin colour (58.6% Aboriginal vs. 25.3% non-Aboriginal). More than two-thirds (38.4%) of Aboriginal Year 7 to 12 students who were recently bullied reported having been bullied at least once a week for reasons including cultural background or skin colour in the last three months (10.0% non-Aboriginal).

Fewer Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students thought they were doing far above or above average in their school results

(24.2% Aboriginal vs. 47.6% non-Aboriginal) and fewer Year 7 to 12 students reported wanting to finish university (23.2% Aboriginal vs. 57.9% non-Aboriginal), while a higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students wanted to finish Year 12 only (25.9% Aboriginal vs. 9.6% non-Aboriginal) or undertake an apprenticeship (12.5% Aboriginal vs. 5.9% non-Aboriginal).

Lastly, equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 7 to 12 students either agreed or strongly agreed that they are involved in making decisions (78.4% Aboriginal vs. 78.9% non-Aboriginal) and are given opportunity to weigh up decisions in their life (78.2% Aboriginal vs. 81.5% non-Aboriginal).

Fewer Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said their parents often ask about school or homework.

Fewer Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students thought they were doing far above or above average in their school results and reported wanting to finish University.

5.6.4 Responses to COVID-19

Aboriginal students were significantly more likely to report their life has been affected in a bad way a lot by COVID-19 with 15.6 per cent reporting this compared with 10.8 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal students were also more likely than non-Aboriginal students to report not having been affected at all in a bad way (27.9% Aboriginal vs. 23.2% non-Aboriginal); this was largely due to the responses of Aboriginal students in non-metropolitan areas of whom 37.4 per cent reported this way.

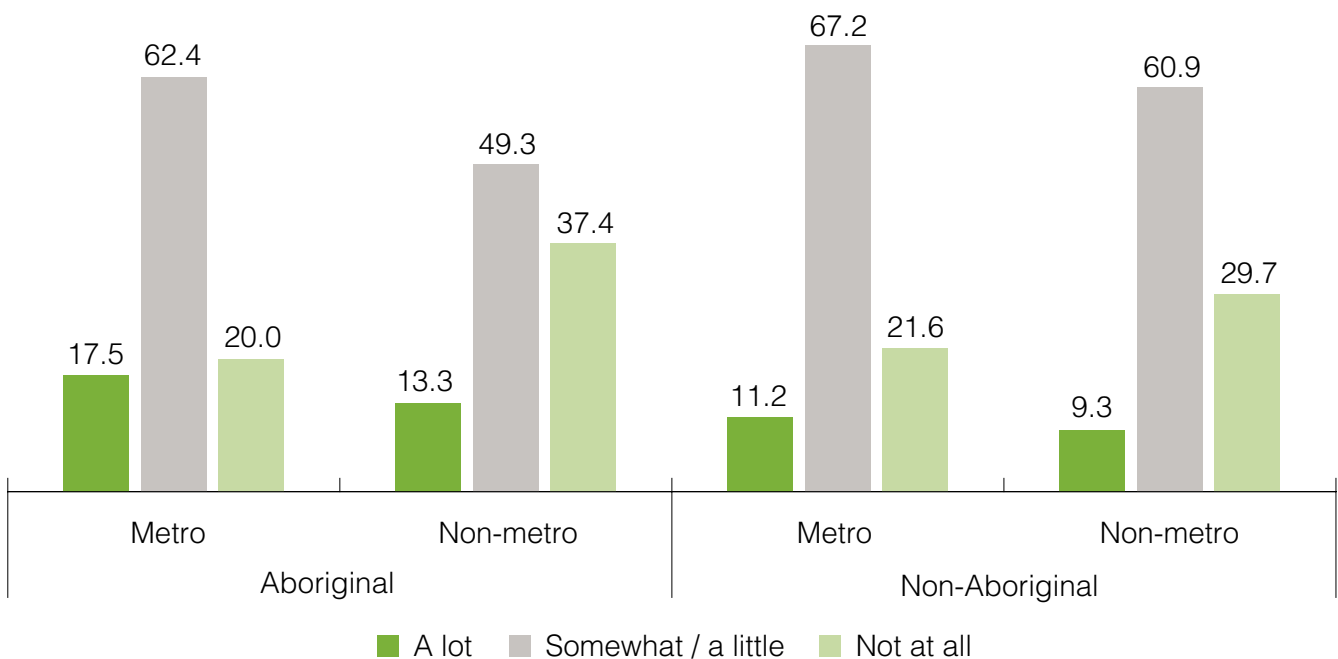
Yet, a greater proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported feeling not at all relaxed when thinking about COVID-19 (22.0% vs. 15.4%) and more Aboriginal students reported feeling very stressed or anxious about it (18.1% Aboriginal vs. 10.0% non-Aboriginal).

Correspondingly, more Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students indicated COVID-19 has been a source of stress for them in the past year (25.6% vs. 19.8%).

Overall, the data indicates that Aboriginal students, particularly those living in the metropolitan area, are more likely to feel negatively impacted by the current pandemic than non-Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal students in the metropolitan area are more likely to feel negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than other student groups.

Graph 5.6.6: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their life in a bad way a lot, somewhat / a little or not at all, by year group, 2021



Summary of key statistics:



Aboriginal students

- 2-in-3 Aboriginal students reported knowing their family's country.
- **Female Aboriginal students tend to spend more time with friends and being active outdoors than their non-Aboriginal peers.**
- Aboriginal students were more likely to mention school-based staff such as teachers, school psychologists and school nurses as helpful sources for emotional health worries compared to their non-Aboriginal peers.
- **A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported living with aunts/uncles and grandparents and said that other family members cared a lot about them.**
- In general, Aboriginal students fared less well in terms of material basics and concerns about family worries.
- **Aboriginal students were more likely to feel safe all the time in their local area or community.**
- More Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said it was very much true that a teacher or another adult at their school really cared about them.
- **Smaller proportions of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported usually getting along with classmates.**
- Fewer Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said their parents often ask about school or homework.
- **Fewer Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students thought they were doing far above or above average in their school results and reported wanting to finish university.**
- Aboriginal students in the metropolitan area are more likely to feel negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than other student groups.

5.7 Qualitative survey responses

At the end of the survey, additional questions were asked about critical wellbeing topics nominated by respondents of the 2019 survey.

This included questions about students' mental health and experiences seeking help for health issues more broadly including mental health worries, students' long-term health problems or disabilities, students' perceptions of safety at home and in the

community, their experiences of school and particularly school stress and any other general thoughts and ideas respondents wished to share through the survey.

More than 11,000 students (70% to total participants) chose to respond in this section. This rich and unique source of information is being analysed and results will be published in a separate report.

A number of pertinent comments have been included throughout this summary report.



Comparison between 2019 and 2021

6

6 Comparison between 2019 and 2021

Several aspects of SOS19 were carried over to SOS21. For example, a similar number of schools were recruited. Survey questions have largely remained unchanged, with only the inclusion of some items specific to COVID-19 experiences and a number of open text questions about essential wellbeing topics.

The survey has retained a key strength where the Commissioner's staff administered surveys to encourage independent participation from students without school interference, and to advocate for the purpose of the survey – for children and young people to have their say about the things that are important to their wellbeing.

However, there were some changes to the methodology that reflect updated knowledge about school and student response patterns based on experiences with SOS19. Further, the positive reputation of the Speaking Out Survey resulted in the full participation of students from all three education sectors and a more representative sample. Together, the changes represent a shift to the survey methodology and sample, which in turn has implications for comparing wellbeing estimates over time. The degree of change means that comparisons of wellbeing estimates between SOS19 and SOS21 must be considered carefully.

The comparative results presented in this chapter are to be considered as preliminary.

6.1 Comparison of key findings

Comparison of results shows that the key findings of the Speaking Out Survey 2019 were affirmed by the follow-up survey in 2021:

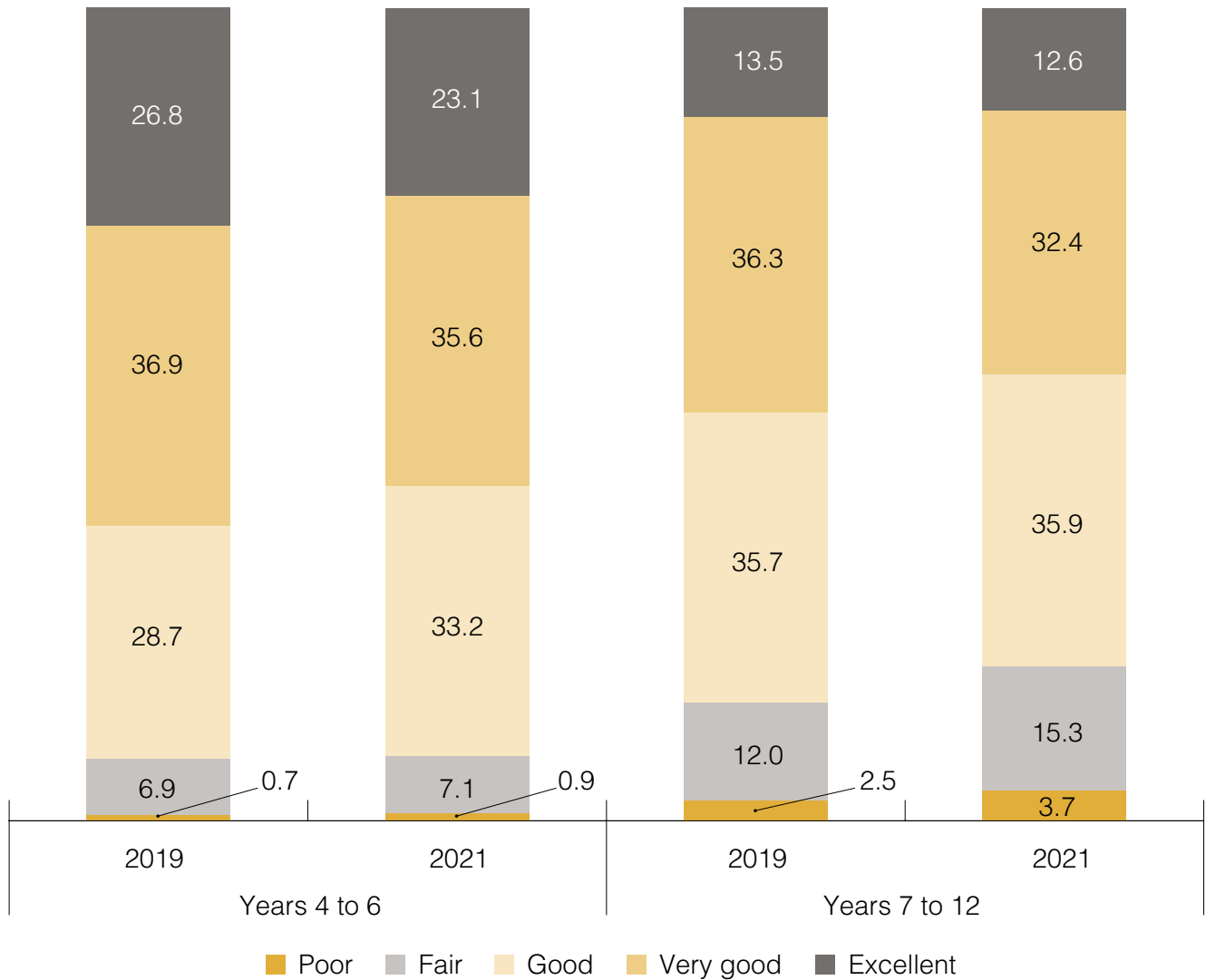
- Children and young people in WA report generally positive outcomes and have thereby shown great resilience in the face of an unprecedented global pandemic.
- Mental health is a critical issue for many children and young people and the proportion of students experiencing emotional distress continues to rise.
- The gender wellbeing gap has been affirmed with female students rating their wellbeing less favourably than male students across most indicators.
- Perceptions of safety continue to be a critical issue and even more in 2021 and evidence from students is that the perpetrators of physical violence against them are often adults.
- Older students continue to hold much less positive views than younger students of many aspects of school and learning.

6.2 Healthy and connected

Physical health

Students' ratings of their overall physical health in 2021 are less favourable when compared to the data for 2019. Changes were recorded for both male and female respondents across all year groups. In particular, the proportion of Year 7 to 12 students rating their health as fair or poor increased from 14.5 per cent to 19.0 per cent. Correspondingly, the proportion of students rating their health as very good or excellent has decreased from 49.8 per cent to 45.0 per cent. Similar changes were recorded for students in Years 4 to 6.

Graph 6.2.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor, by year group, 2021 and 2019



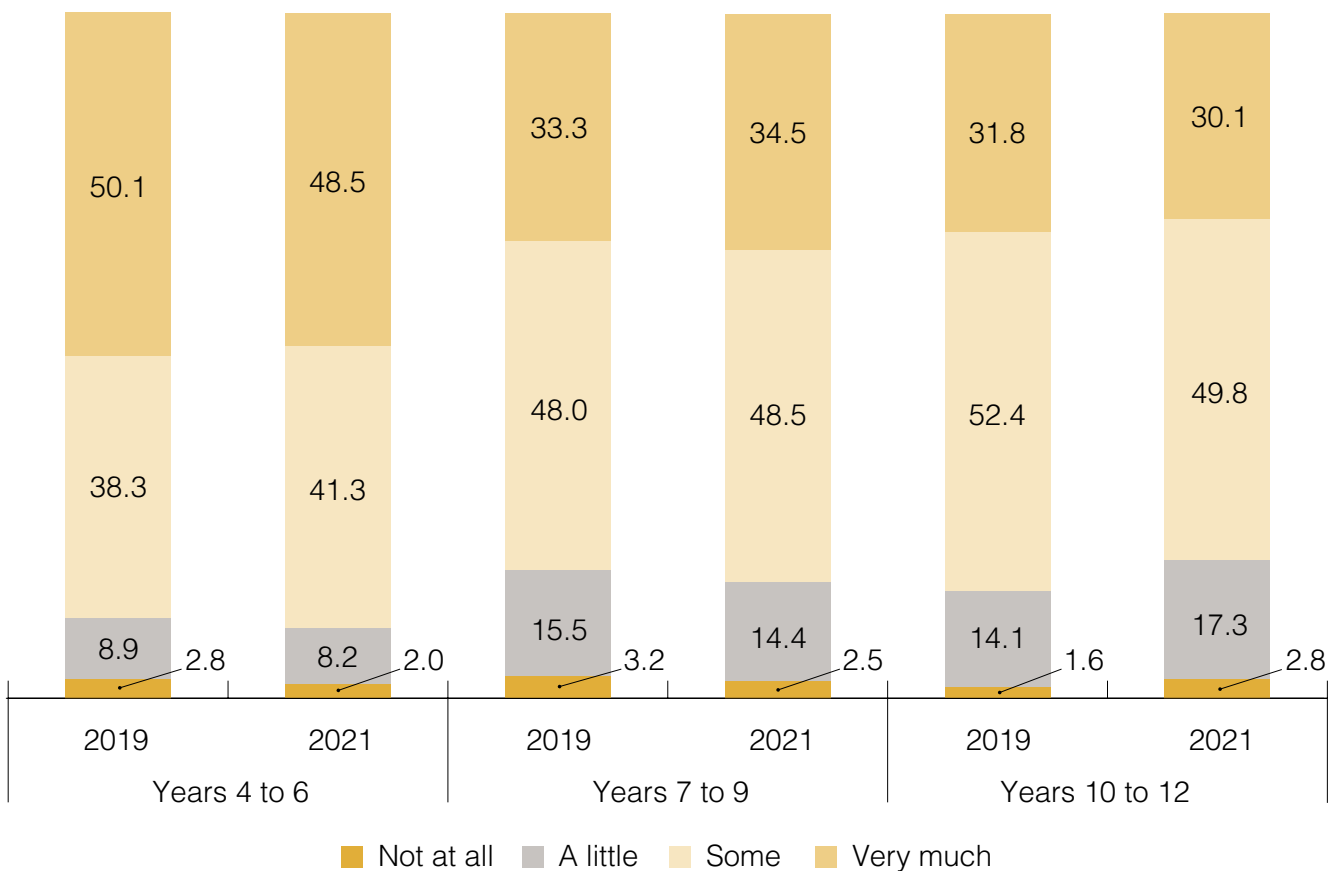
Student ratings of their overall physical health in 2021 are less favourable when compared to the data for 2019.

Caring about eating well, being active and looks

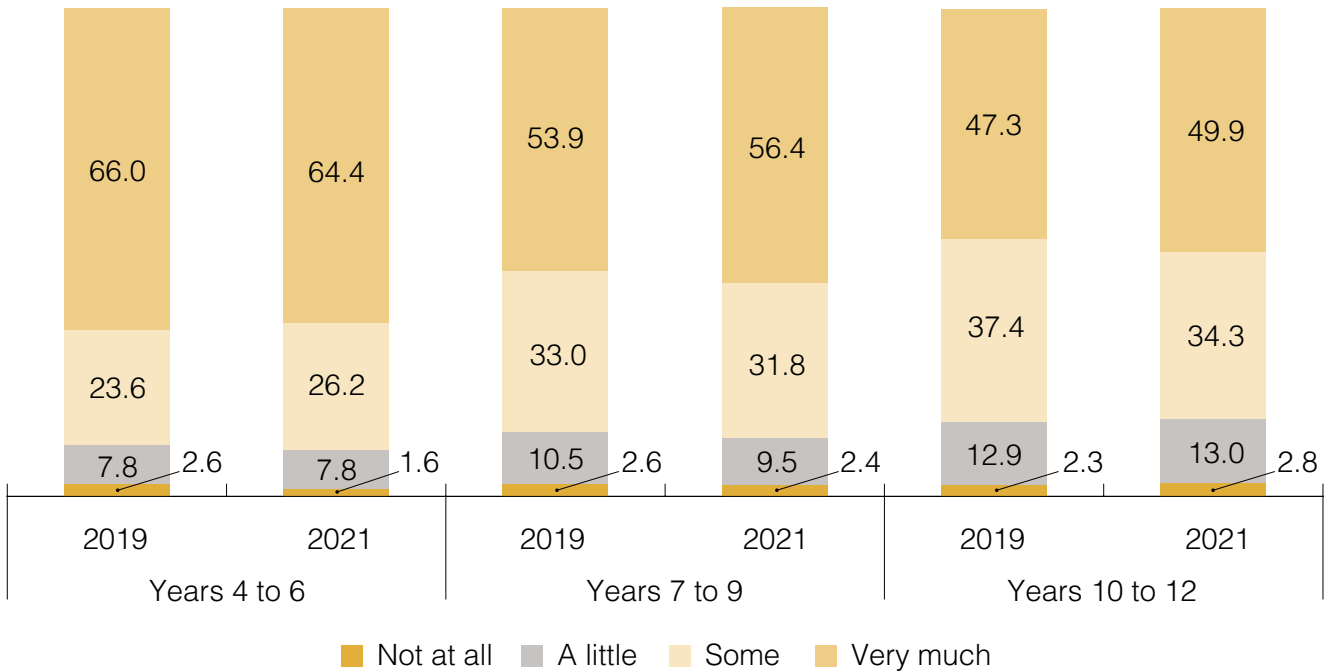
Student reports of how much they care about healthy eating and being physically active have remained largely unchanged between 2019 and 2021 for all year groups.

This suggests that the more positive views held by Year 4 to 6 students (as found in the 2019 data) about these factors have likely deteriorated as students reach high school, otherwise a more positive change would have been apparent in the results for Year 7 to 9 students in 2021.

Graph 6.2.2: Proportion of Year 4 to Year 9 students saying they care about eating healthy food very much, some, a little or not at all, by year group, 2021 and 2019

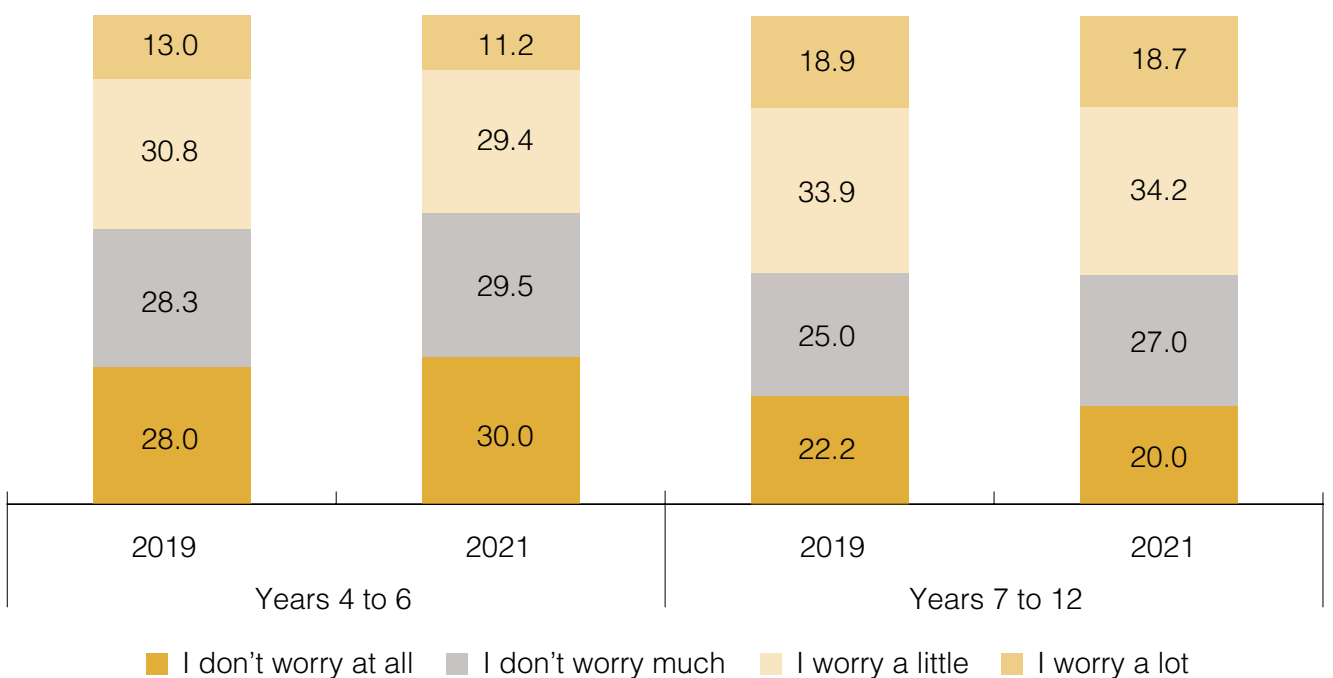


Graph 6.2.3: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they care about being physically active very much, some, a little or not at all, by year group, 2021 and 2019



The proportions of students reporting they worry a lot or a little about their body weight have remained largely unchanged across all year levels and both genders.

Graph 6.2.4: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying they worry a lot, a little, not much or they don't worry at all about their weight, by year group, 2021 and 2019



Mental health

The 2021 data shows a slight decline in students' life satisfaction ratings (on a scale from 0 to 10) when compared to the results for 2019. For all students in Years 4 to 12, the measured mean life satisfaction declined from 7.2 to 6.8. Average ratings remained significantly higher for students in Years 4 to 6 than in Years 7 to 12 with the decline occurring in the older year levels (Years 7–12: 6.4 in 2021 vs. 6.8 in 2019).

Female students in Years 7 to 12 again recorded the lowest average rating for life satisfaction with a score of only 6.1 (down from 6.4 in 2019).

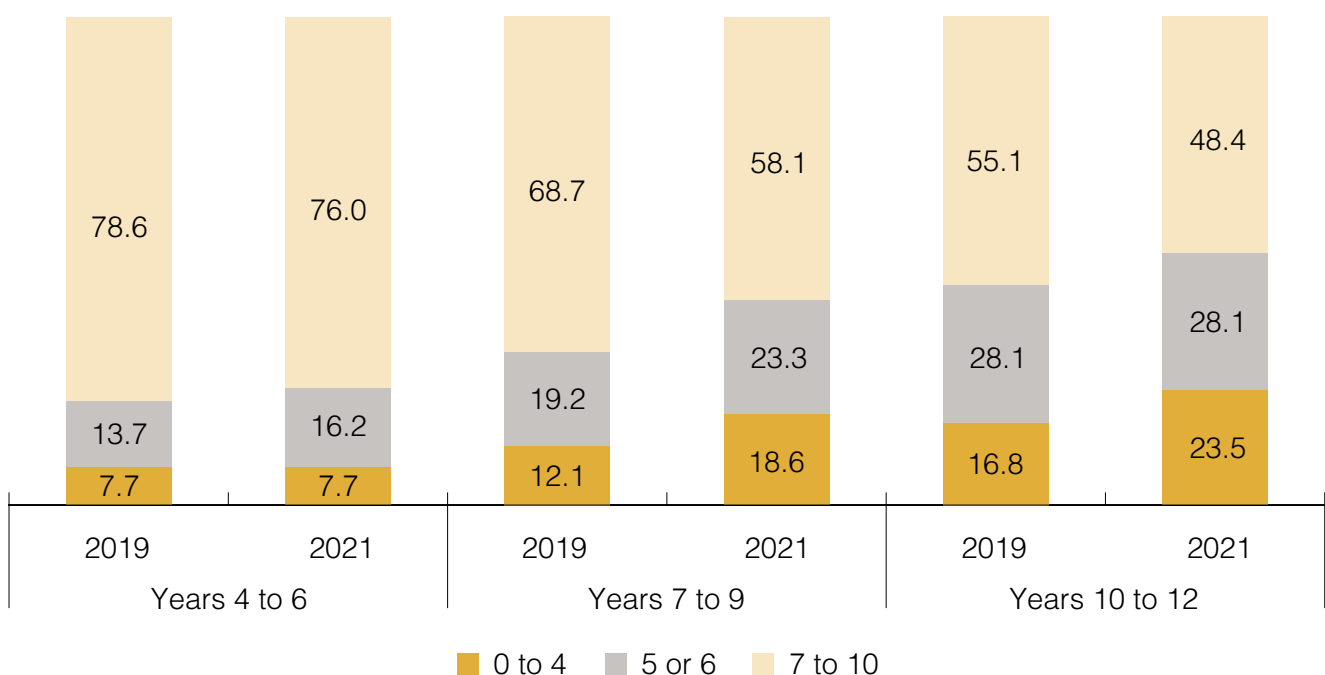
Correspondingly, the proportion of students rating their life satisfaction the highest (7 to 10) has decreased compared to results from 2019 across all year groups.

The most significant decrease occurred for students in Years 7 to 9 where the proportion dropped from 68.7 per cent to 58.1 per cent. Correspondingly, the proportion of students rating their life the worst possible (0 to 4) increased for students in high school (Years 7–9: 12.1% vs. 18.6%; Years 10–12: 16.8% vs. 23.5%).

Fewer students rate their life the best possible in 2021 compared to 2019.

More students rate their life the worst possible, especially in high school.

Graph 6.2.5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of '0' to '10' where '0' is the worst possible life and '10' the best possible life, grouped responses by year group, 2021 and 2019



When Year 9 to 12 students were asked about sources of stress in 2021 they tended to respond similarly to those in 2019 with a few exceptions.

Most notably, a higher proportion of students reported that mental health has been a source of stress for them in the past year (49.3% in 2021 vs. 41.7% in 2019). An increase was measured for both male and female respondents (female: 61.1% up from 53.4%; male: 34.3% up from 29.1%).

Personal safety was a concern for more students in 2021 than in 2019 (17.9% in 2021 vs. 12.2% in 2019) with an increase measured for both genders (female: 22.7% up from 15.5%; male: 11.3% up from 8.1%).

Just over one-fifth of students reported that COVID-19 has been a source of stress for them in the past year with 23.7 per cent of female and 15.9 per cent of male respondents affected.

Knowledge of mental health supports

Fewer Year 7 to 12 students reported knowing where to get support for stress, anxiety, depression, or other emotional health worries in 2021 than in 2019. Around two-thirds reported knowing where to get mental health

support in their school (67.0% down from 71.4% in 2019) or online (59.6% down from 63.0% in 2019) and less than one-half said they know where to go in their local area (47.6% down from 51.5% in 2019).

Year 10 to 12 students were more likely than Year 7 to 9 students to report knowing where to get mental health support across all three sources.

A similar proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reported having gotten help for problems with stress, anxiety, depression, or other emotional health worries in the last 12 months in 2021 (35.7%) as in 2019 (35.1%).

Among students who had gotten mental health support in the last 12 months, a higher proportion found a parent (65.5% up from 49.6%), other family including siblings (49.9% up from 44.7%), teacher (31.3% up from 24.3%) helpful. The data also suggests that more students turned to online counselling and telephone helplines (13.4% up from 4.2%).

More students have found parents, online counselling and telephone helplines helpful for emotional health support.

Table 6.2.1: Sources found helpful for mental health support, Year 7 to Year 12 students, 2021 and 2019, in per cent

	Helpful	
	2021	2019
Parent, or someone who acts as your parent	65.5	49.6
Friend incl. boyfriend or girlfriend	60.2	57.4
Other family (e.g. brother, sister, auntie)*	49.9	[44.7]
Doctor or GP	35.2	33.5
Teacher	31.3	24.3
Mental health service	27.7	24.4
Online counsellor or telephone helpline	13.4	4.2
Internet websites	22.6	15.7

*Response options have slightly changed between 2019 and 2021 and results are therefore to be considered with caution.

Activities outside of school

Students in the 2021 survey reported higher engagement across a range of outside-of-school activities, including a higher proportion of students using the internet, playing electronic games, reading a book for leisure and doing homework or study at home. The nature of these activities is that they are all activities typically carried out indoors.

Electronic games

The proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting playing games on a game console, computer, or tablet every day or almost every day has increased in 2021 for both female (37.4% up from 28.6%) and male (56.9% up from 51.4%) respondents. These changes are driven by an increase across all individual year groups and both genders, however they are more significant for female than male respondents (Years 4–6 female: 39.9% up from 32.4%, Years 7–12 female: 36.2% up from 26.4%).

Internet

The proportion of students using the internet on a smartphone or computer every day or almost every day has risen more sharply for younger students in Years 4 to 6 than students in Years 7 to 12. Among Year 4 to 6 students, 51.0 per cent reported using the internet every day in 2021 compared to 43.0 per cent who reported this in 2019.

Among Year 7 to 12 students, the proportion increased less substantially from 86.8 per cent to 91.3 per cent.

Homework

For all students in Years 4 to 12, the proportion reporting they spend time doing homework every day or almost every day has increased from 2019 to 2021.

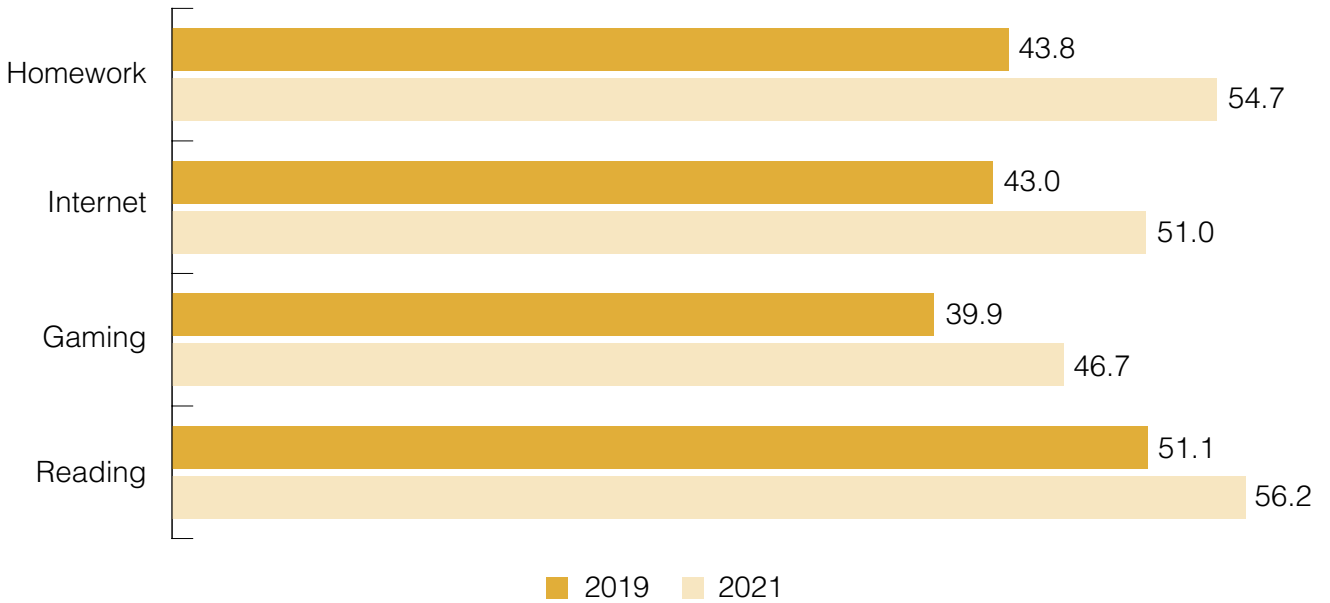
Among Year 4 to 6 students, the proportion increased from 43.8 per cent in 2019 to 54.7 per cent in 2021 while among high school students, the proportion rose from 35.0 per cent to 46.4 per cent in 2021.

Reading a book

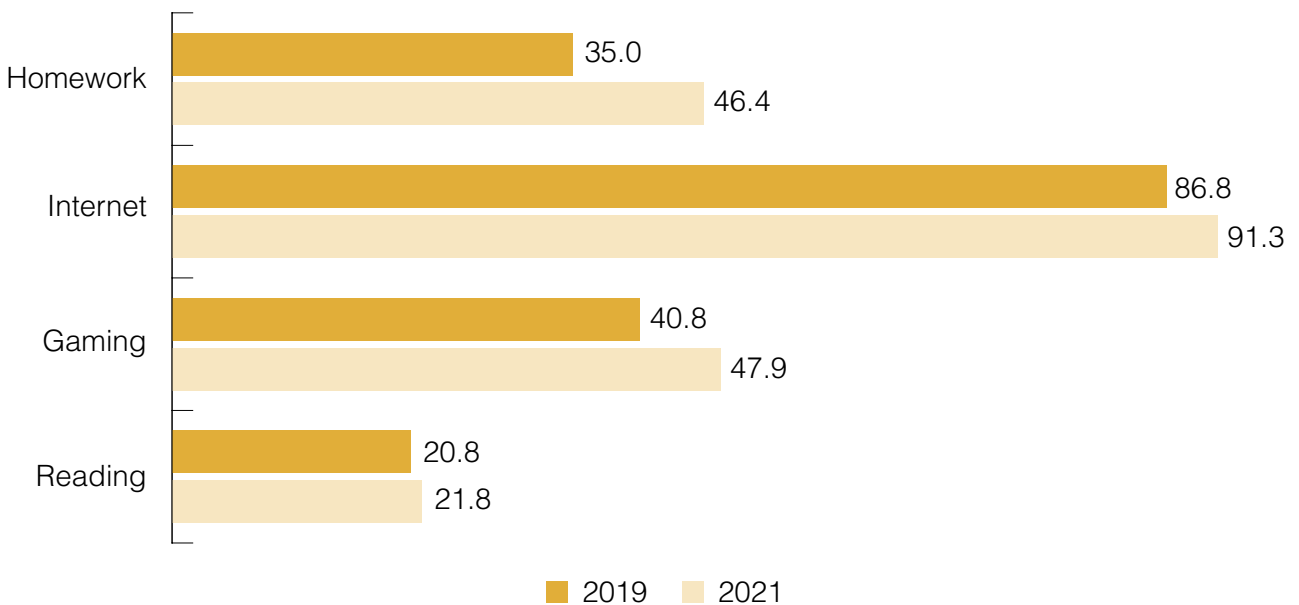
While the proportion of students saying they read a book for leisure every day or almost every day has increased across all year levels, the shift is most noticeable among Year 4 to 6 students. Here, the proportion of students reporting they read every day rose from 51.1 per cent in 2019 to 56.2 per cent in 2021.

Students in the 2021 survey reported higher engagement across a range of indoor activities including using the internet, gaming, reading a book and doing homework.

Graph 6.2.6: Proportion of Year 4 to 6 students doing activities every day or almost every day, by activity type, 2021 and 2019



Graph 6.2.7: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students doing activities every day or almost every day, by activity type, 2021 and 2019



Activities online

No changes were recorded in regard to the proportion of students reporting problematic behaviours associated with using the internet, playing electronic games and using mobile phones. As such, 13.8 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported going frequently without eating or sleeping because of their mobile phone in 2021 compared to 14.8 per cent in 2019. Further, 11.8 per cent of Year 7 to 12 students reported going frequently without eating or sleeping because of the internet or electronic games in 2021 compared to 12.1 per cent in 2019.

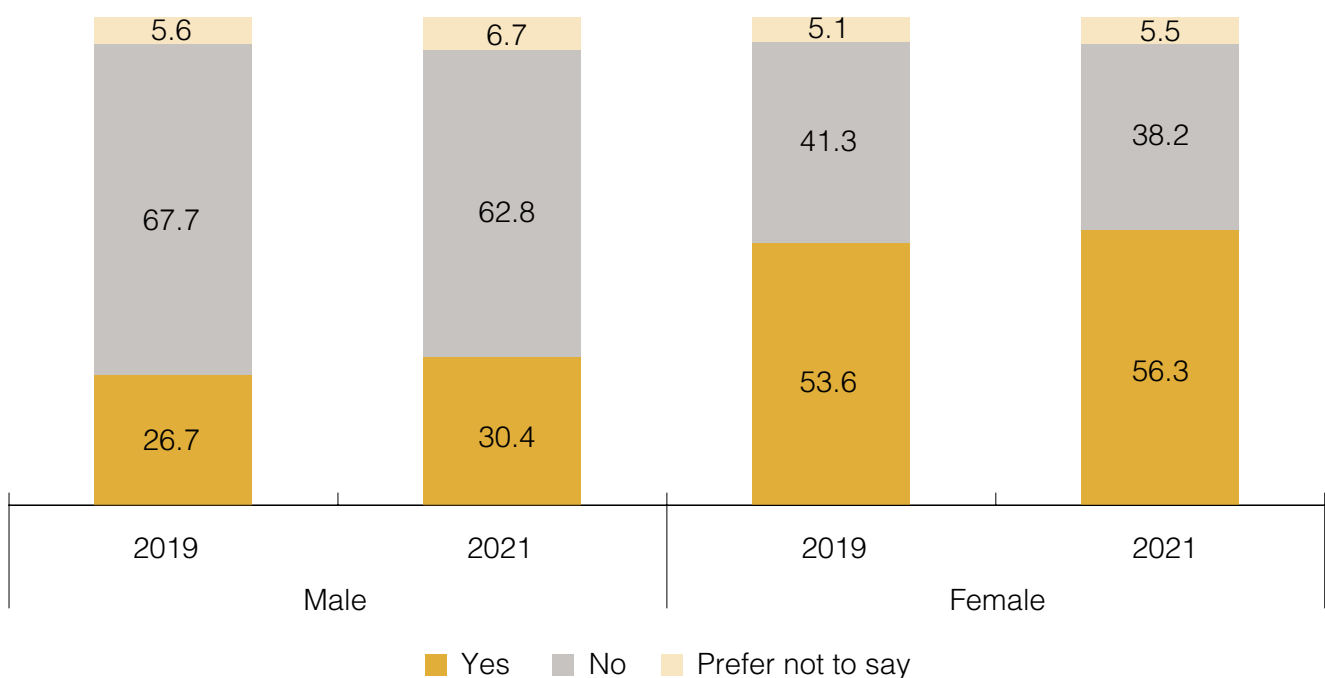
An increase however has been found in the proportion of students reporting having been sent unwanted sexual material (on the internet) like pornographic pictures, videos or words for both male and female respondents in Years 9 to 12. The proportion of female students reporting this has happened to them increased

from 53.6 per cent to 56.3 per cent while the proportion of male students reporting this increased from 26.7 per cent to 30.4 per cent.

Similarly, among students who have been sent unwanted sexual material, the proportion saying this happened in the last 12 months increased from 73.8 per cent in 2019 to 77.6 per cent in 2021.

The proportion of students reporting having been sent unwanted sexual material like pornographic pictures, videos or words has increased among male and female respondents.

Graph 6.2.8: Proportion of Year 9 to 12 students responding to the question ‘Have you ever been sent unwanted sexual stuff?’, by gender, 2021 and 2019



6.3 Safe and supported

Supportive relationships

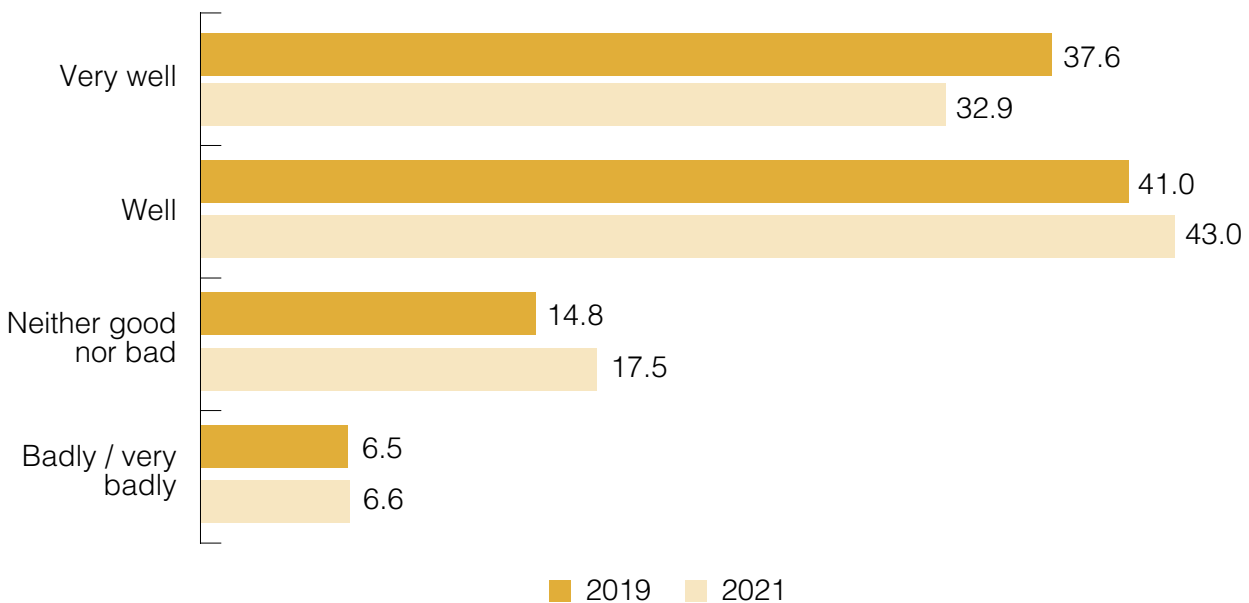
The proportion of students reporting that it was very much true that they lived with a parent they can talk to about their problems or worries was lower in 2021 than in 2019. In 2021, 64.5 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students reported this compared to 70.2 per cent in 2019. Among students in Years 7 to 12, the proportion decreased from 50.6 per cent in 2019 to 47.2 per cent in 2021.

Correspondingly, the proportion of Year 7 to 12 students reporting it was not at all true they lived with a parent they can talk to about their problems or worries increased from 11.0 per cent in 2019 to 13.3 per cent in 2021 for Year 7 to 12 students but remained largely the same for Year 4 to 6 students.

In regard to family cohesion, a lower proportion of students in 2021 than in 2019 reported their family gets along very well. In 2021, 38.3 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students said their family gets along very well compared to 43.0 per cent in 2019. Among Year 7 to 12 students, 30.1 per cent reported this in 2021 compared to 34.5 per cent in 2019.

Correspondingly, more students said their family gets along neither good nor bad (17.5% in 2021 vs. 14.8% in 2019) while the proportion of students reporting their family gets along badly or very badly remained largely the same (6.6% in 2021 vs. 6.5% in 2019).

Graph 6.3.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying their family gets along very well, well, neither good nor bad or badly / very badly, by year group, 2019 and 2021



In 2021, a smaller proportion of students report their family gets along very well.

Material basics

No significant changes were measured between the 2019 and 2021 data in regard to material basics such as material deprivation and food and housing security.

Safe in the home

While the proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting they feel safe at home either all the time or most of the time has remained the same between 2019 and 2021 (90.2% in 2021 vs. 90.2% in 2019), some changes have been measured for individual student cohorts. Most notably, the proportion of female students reporting they feel safe at home only a little bit of the time or never has increased. In 2021, 4.4 per cent of female students in Years 7 to 12 reported they feel safe at home a little bit of the time or never compared to 3.0 per cent of female students who said the same in 2019.

Safe in the community

A higher proportion of students in 2021 than in 2019 reported feeling safe in their local area all the time or most of the time. Among Year 7 to 12 students, 71.0 per cent of students reported this compared to 66.6 per cent of students in 2019. An increase was measured for both male (77.8% vs. 72.8%) and female (65.7% vs. 60.8%) students.

This change corresponded with a decrease in the proportion of students saying they never feel safe in their local area or only a little bit of the time (9.6% in 2021 vs. 12.5% in 2019).

Experiences of violence

A higher proportion of Year 9 to 12 students in 2021 reported they have never been hit or physically harmed on purpose compared to 2019 (39.6% in 2021 vs. 37.4% in 2019).

Among students who reported having been hit or physically harmed on purpose (44.4%), fewer students in 2021 than in 2019 reported this happened at home (50.3% in 2021 vs. 53.2% in 2019) or at school (47.3% vs. 43.6% in 2019), while more students reported this happened in public places (19.8% in 2021 vs. 12.9% in 2019), at sport events (18.3% in 2021 vs. 13.6% in 2019) or at a party or event (16.6% in 2021 vs. 9.8% in 2019).

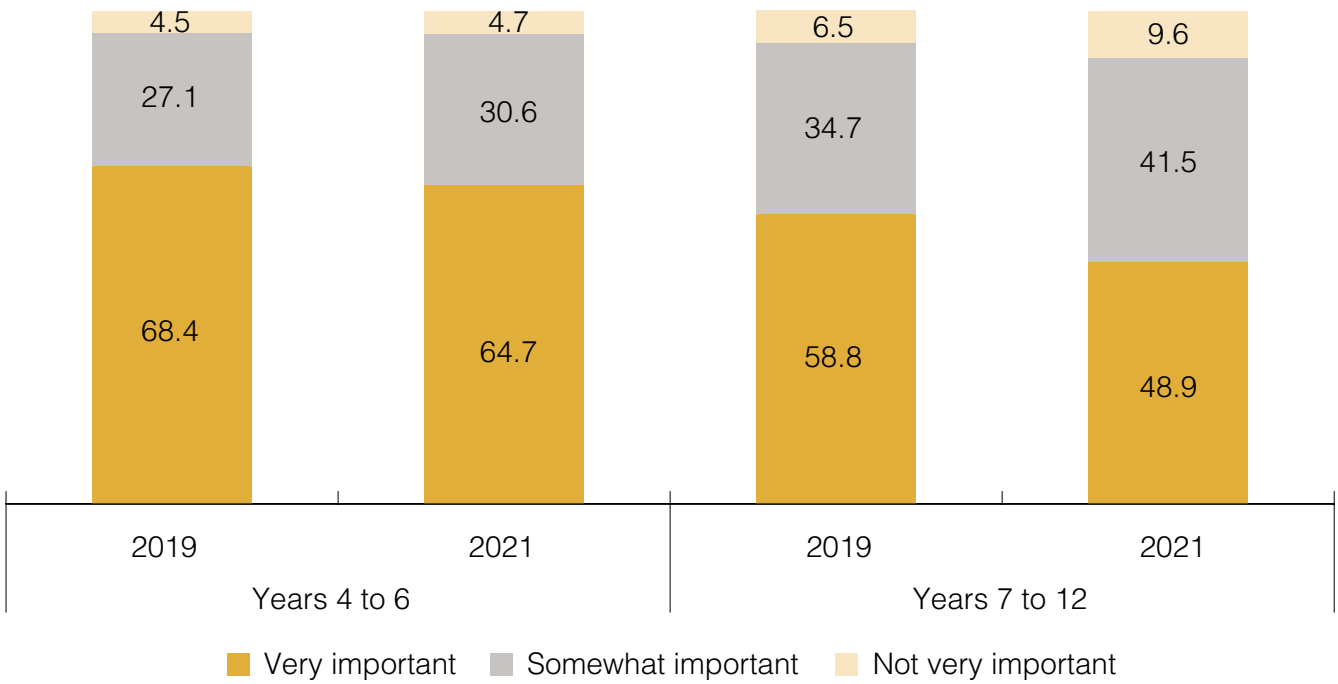
6.4 Learning and participating

Attendance at school

Students in 2021 were less likely than students in 2019 to say that being at school every day was very important to them. In 2021 among Year 4 to 6 students, 64.7 per cent said this was very important to them compared to 68.4 per cent of students who said this in 2019. Among Year 7 to 12 students in 2021, 48.9 per cent said being at school every day was very important to them compared to 58.8 per cent of students in 2019.

Correspondingly, a higher proportion of students reported that being at school every day was only somewhat important or not very important to them, especially among Year 7 to 12 students: 9.6 per cent reported this was not very important to them compared to 6.5 per cent in 2019.

Graph 6.4.1: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not very important to them to be at school every day, by year group, 2021 and 2019



Students in 2021 were less likely than students in 2019 to say that being at school every day was very important to them.

Belonging at school

While the majority of Year 7 to 12 students (71.3%) agreed or strongly agreed they feel like they belong at their school, close to 30 per cent (28.6%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement in 2021. In 2019, the response options differed slightly to the effect that 16.1 per cent of students said they do not feel they belong and 24.1 per cent reported they are not sure about this.

Relationships at school

In terms of relationships at school, the proportions of Year 7 to 12 students reporting they usually get along with classmates (69.6% in 2021 vs. 69.2% in 2019) and with their teachers (59.5% in 2021 vs. 62.7% in 2019) have remained largely unchanged between 2021 and 2019. Similarly, the proportion of students reporting they hardly ever or never get along with classmates (4.1% in 2021 vs. 4.6% in 2019) or teachers (6.5% in 2021 vs. 6.0% in 2019) also remained largely the same.

In 2021, a somewhat higher proportion of Year 4 to 6 students reported it was very much true that there is a teacher or other adult at their school who really cares about them compared to 2019 (49.0% vs. 44.3%). No such change was recorded for students in Years 7 to 12 (24.1% in 2021 vs. 24.3% in 2019).

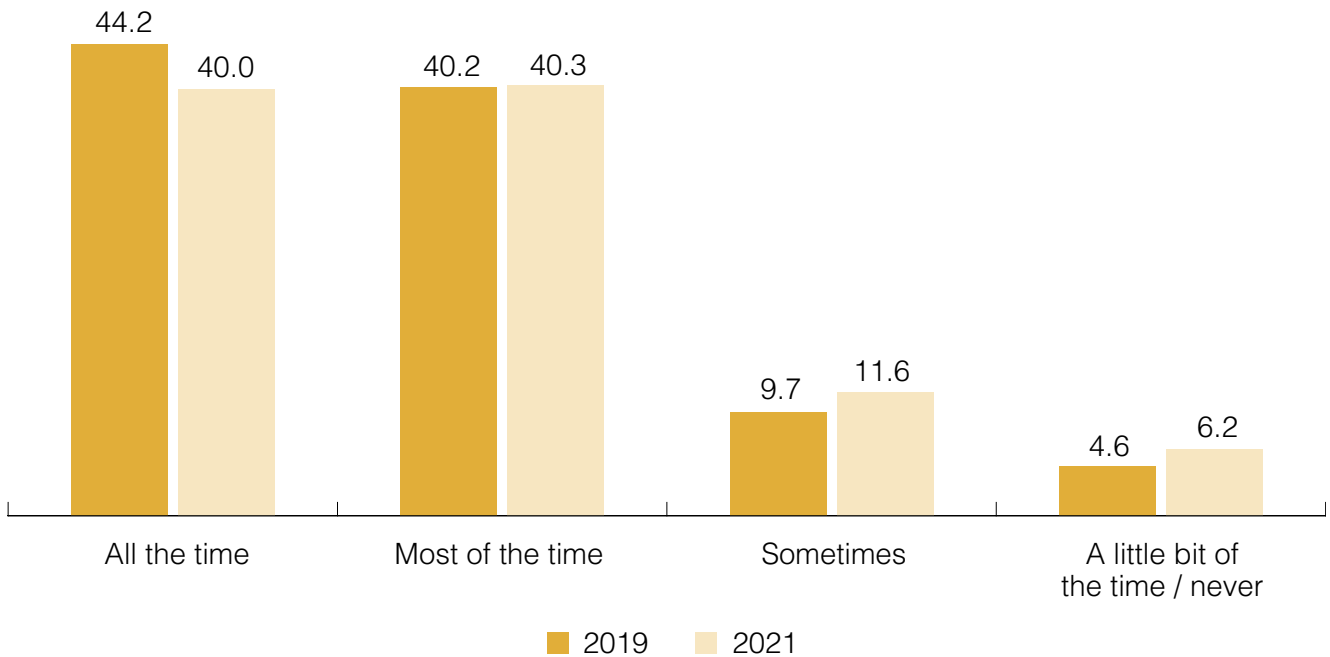
Feeling safe at school

Students in Years 4 to 6 and Years 7 to 9 were less likely in 2021 to report feeling safe at school all or most of the time and more likely to report feeling safe sometimes or less. This negative shift was also recorded for older students in Years 10 to 12, however the changes were less marked. Among Year 4 to 6 students, the proportion of students feeling safe all or most of the time decreased from 84.4 per cent in 2019 to 80.3 per cent in 2021

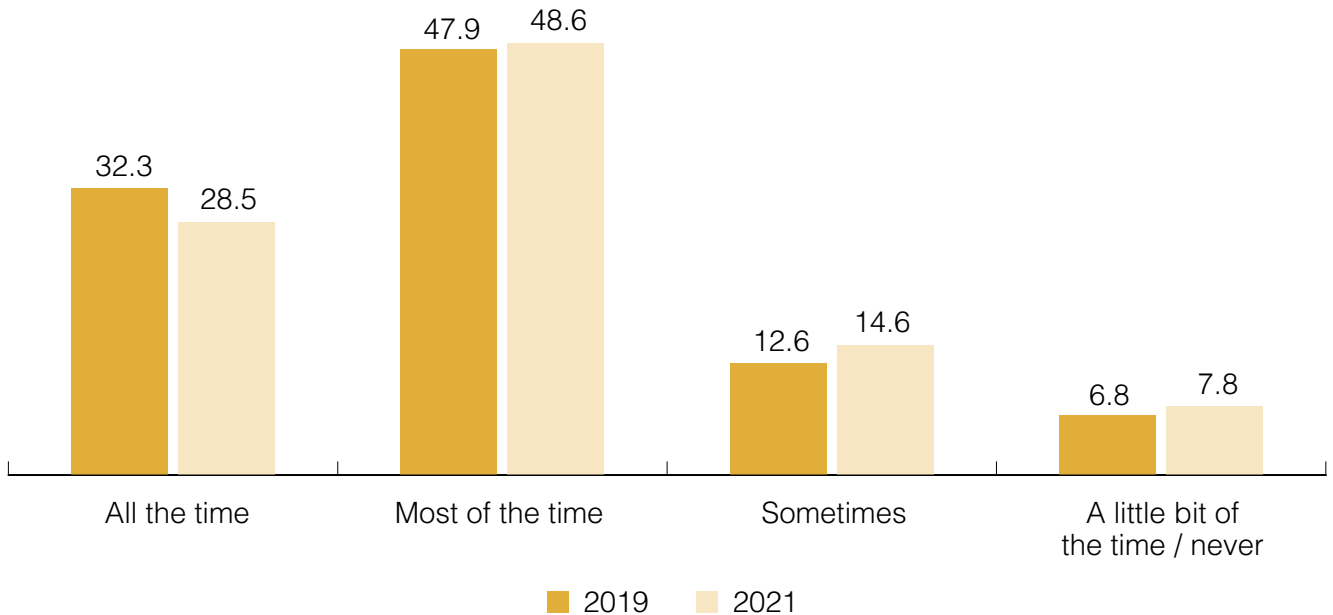
while the proportion of those saying they feel safe only a little bit of the time or never increased to 6.2 per cent (up from 4.6% in 2019).

Among Year 7 to 9 students, 73.9 per cent reported feeling safe all or most of the time in 2021 compared to 77.8 per cent in 2019 and 8.8 per cent said they feel safe only a little bit of the time or never (up from 7.4% in 2019).

Graph 6.4.2: Proportion of Year 4 to 6 students saying they feel safe at school all the time, most of the time, sometimes or a little bit of the time / never, 2019 and 2021



Graph 6.4.3: Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students saying they feel safe at school all the time, most of the time, sometimes or a little bit of the time / never, 2019 and 2021



An increase in the proportion of students being bullied was not found in the SOS21 data. Students’ reports of bullying in 2021 are such that the proportions of students reporting experiences of bullying and cyber bullying are either the same as in 2019 or modestly improved for certain cohorts. For instance, a slightly higher proportion of students in Years 7 to 9 reported not having been bullied or cyber bullied in 2021 compared to 2019 (48.1% vs. 46.4% respectively).

Further analysis of the SOS21 data shows a statistically significant relationship between feeling unsafe at school and feeling like COVID-19 had affected life in a bad way. This allows the assumption that the increase in the proportion of students feeling unsafe at school may be related to feelings of anxiety around COVID-19.

Year 7 to 12 students in 2021 reported an increase in the frequency of their parents asking about school or homework, compared to 2019. The proportions of Year 7 to 12 students reporting that their parents often asked increased to 57.1 per cent in 2021 from 53.5 per cent in 2019. For Year 4 to 6 students this proportion remained largely unchanged from 2019 to 2021.

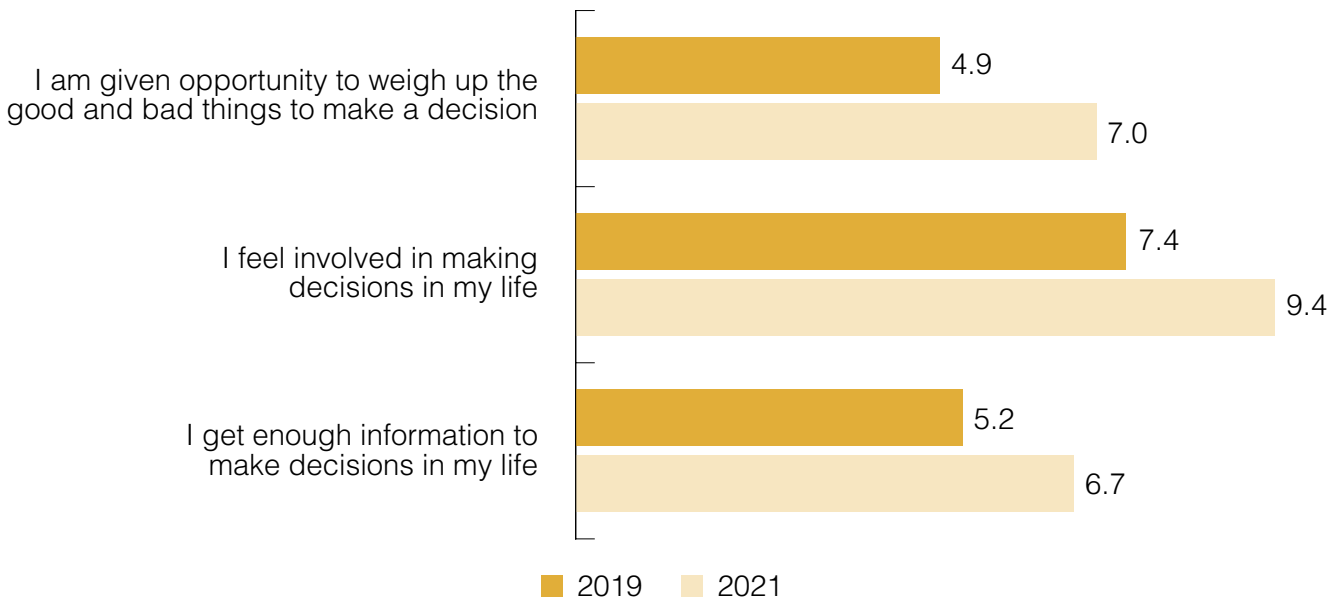
A greater proportion of students reported not feeling safe at school all the time.

Making decisions

Year 7 to 12 students in 2021 gave largely similar responses about their ability to make and being involved in decisions that affect them and their life. However, a slight increase has been recorded in the proportion of Year 7 to 12 students disagreeing with statements about their ability to do this, especially among female students. For example, the proportion of female Year 7 to 12 students disagreeing with the statement 'I feel involved in making decisions in my life' increased from 7.4 per cent in 2019 to 9.4 per cent in 2021. For male respondents, the increase was more modest (4.2% in 2019 to 5.3% in 2021).

In 2021, more female students disagreed that they get to make and are involved in decisions that affect them.

Graph 6.4.4: Proportion of female Year 7 to 12 students saying they disagree* with selected statements about making decisions, 2021 and 2019



* Includes students who selected response disagree or strongly disagree.

Summary of key statistics:

- Students' ratings of their overall physical health in 2021 are less favourable when compared to the data for 2019.
- **Fewer students rate their life the best possible in 2021 compared to 2019.**
- More students rate their life the worst possible especially in high school.
- **In 2021, more students reported that mental health has been a source of stress for them in the past year.**
- More students have found parents, online counselling and telephone helplines helpful for emotional health support.
- **Students in the 2021 survey reported higher engagement across a range of indoor activities including using the internet, gaming, reading a book and doing homework.**
- The proportion of students reporting having been sent unwanted sexual material like pornographic pictures, videos or words has increased among male and female respondents.
- **In 2021, a smaller proportion of students report their family gets along very well.**
- Students in 2021 were less likely than students in 2019 to say that being at school every day was very important to them.
- **A greater proportion of students reported not feeling safe at school all the time.**
- In 2021, more female students disagreed that they get to make and are involved in decisions that affect them.



Next steps

7

7 Next steps

This report summarises SOS21 results for most survey questions disaggregated by year group and gender. In combination with the SOS19 data, these results are unique in that for the first time a fully representative sample of children and young people in WA has spoken out about matters influencing their wellbeing.

The SOS21 fieldwork has been brought forward by one year in order to capture the experiences of children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a range of limitations and restrictions related to the current situation (including lockdowns), triple the number of students in SOS19 have participated in SOS21.

Many of the findings have raised questions that are subject to further analysis – for example, the Commissioner has recently published a literature review that explores the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls⁶⁹ which was prompted by the SOS19 finding that female students rate their wellbeing less favourably than male students across most indicators. Further analysis of findings in their relevant research and policy context will be undertaken in 2022 and beyond. The findings will also guide other work of the office such as Advisory Committees.

With grant support from Lotterywest, the Speaking Out Survey project has been expanded to reach more students outside of mainstream schooling such as those with disability and Aboriginal students in remote parts of WA. The fieldwork for this extension is currently underway and results are set to be published in 2022.

After two rounds of data collection, work needs to be done to re-examine the survey. This work will include the identification of gaps in the data, the review of survey questions and their wording as well as re-consideration of data items that were previously suggested for SOS19 but excluded in the final version. It is hoped that the Speaking Out Survey become a triennial survey of WA children and young

people that will deliver accurate and robust data and information on their wellbeing.

Triennial administration of the survey will allow for analysis of trends and changes over time and further provide the opportunity to include topical survey items or involve particular cohorts of students on a one-off basis. Consideration will also be given to the involvement of students who are currently out of scope such as students in Kindergarten to Year 3.

The Commissioner will consult the co-funders for this project, the departments of Education, Health, Communities and Justice to seek their responses to the findings of SOS19 and SOS21 and to shape the next stage of the project. Subsequently, the Commissioner will prepare a case for the WA Government requesting its commitment for future funding for the Speaking Out Survey with the view for the next survey to be administered in 2024.

The results and data outputs of SOS21 and SOS19 form a unique and robust information source that will be used to critically inform the Commissioner's work. It is hoped that government and non-government authorities recognise the strength and opportunity of this information and carefully consider the views expressed by children and young people.



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8

8 References

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