

Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021



## **Acknowledgment of Country**

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located. She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities for all the Aboriginal peoples.

The Commissioner and her team also pay their respects to all Elders, past, present and emerging leaders. They recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

## **A note about language**

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. 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.

## **Suggested citation**

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (2023), *The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing by education region: Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA: Perth.

## **Alternative formats**

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ISBN: 978-0-6455927-1-9



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## Message from the Commissioner

The findings from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 provided significant insight into the views of over 16,000 children and young people from across Western Australia on their physical health, mental health, education, safety, community life and hopes for the future.



This report provides analysis of this data by education region, allowing for a regional comparison of children and young people's experiences and perspectives.

There are approximately 634,000 children and young people living in WA, with around 154,000 children and young people living in regional and remote areas.

While most of WA's children and young people told us in the 2021 survey that they are mentally and physically healthy, they feel loved and supported and that their basic material needs are being met, we know that there are pockets of significant disadvantage throughout all regions of WA.

Addressing the disparity in health and wellbeing of children and young people between regions requires targeted interventions and policies. These should focus on improving access to services, investments in infrastructure and strengthening community resources and support systems through partnerships between government and community organisations.

I would like to 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 the Speaking Out Survey and continuing to support its administration through their schools.

I thank every young person who shared their views in the Speaking Out Survey 2021. 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.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Jacqueline McGowan-Jones'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**Jacqueline McGowan-Jones**

Commissioner for Children and Young People

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

This report presents the results of the Speaking Out Survey 2021 (SOS21) by education region. It provides a rare insight into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the various regions across Western Australia (WA).

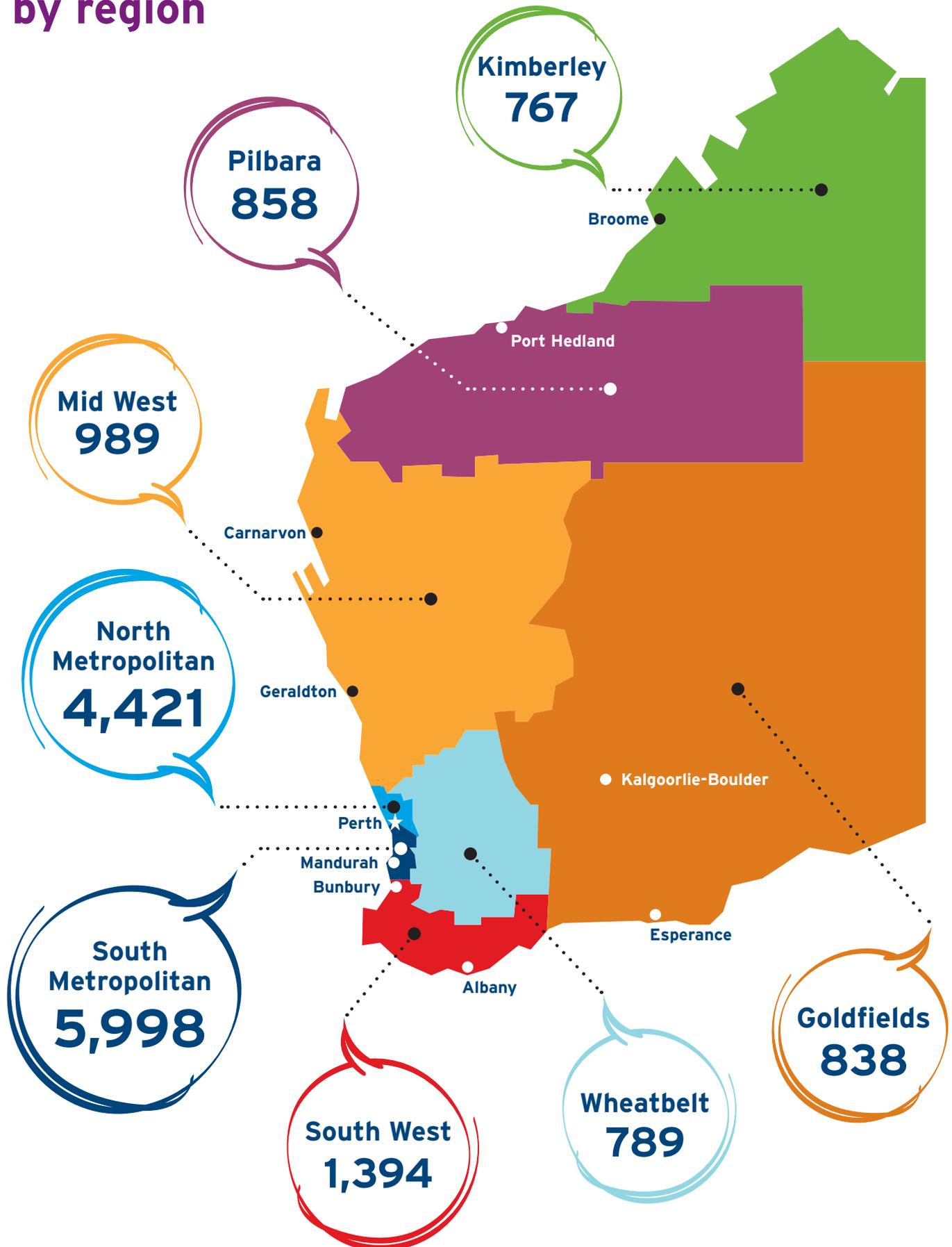
The aim of the Speaking Out Survey is to capture the views of a representative sample of children and young people in Years 4 to 12 across WA and develop a robust data source relating to the wellbeing of children and young people in our state. In 2021, a total of 16,532 Year 4 to Year 12 students from 94 schools across all regions of WA consented to participate.

The report [Speaking Out Survey 2021: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report](#), published in November 2021, provides data for children and young people across WA.

This report summarises SOS21 results by education region as outlined in the following map.



# Student participation by region



## Key findings

For many survey questions, children and young people across the various regions reported similar responses. However, there are some differences which are highlighted throughout this report. Some key findings are:

- many children and young people in regional and remote locations do not have access to the level of outdoor or recreational facilities that are available in the Perth metropolitan area
- students in the Kimberley and Pilbara are much less likely to feel safe in their local area than students in other regions
- children and young people in the Goldfields and the Kimberley are more likely to report that they are missing out on material basics, with one in seven students (around 14%) in the Kimberley and Goldfields only sometimes or less having enough food to eat at home (all of WA: 9.6%)
- Aboriginal children and young people across the state are particularly affected by material disadvantage with around one in five Aboriginal children and young people in the Wheatbelt, Goldfields and the metropolitan area not always having enough food to eat at home.

The results in the report are structured according to the Commissioner's Wellbeing Monitoring Framework and its three interlinking domains of Healthy and connected, Learning and participating, and Safe and supported.

The following summarise the key findings with comparative data by region.



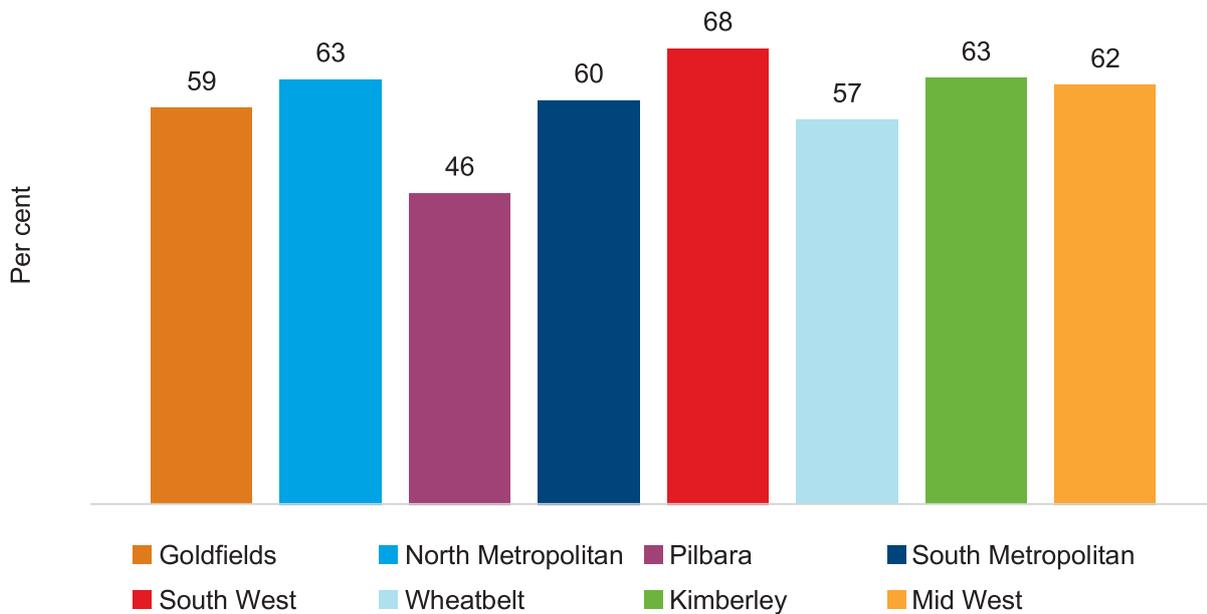
### Healthy and connected

The majority (84.3%) of children and young people across the state reported their general health is good, very good or excellent. There is minimal difference in responses in regions across the state.

One area where there are differences across regions, is in the amount of physical exercise children and young people reported they were doing.

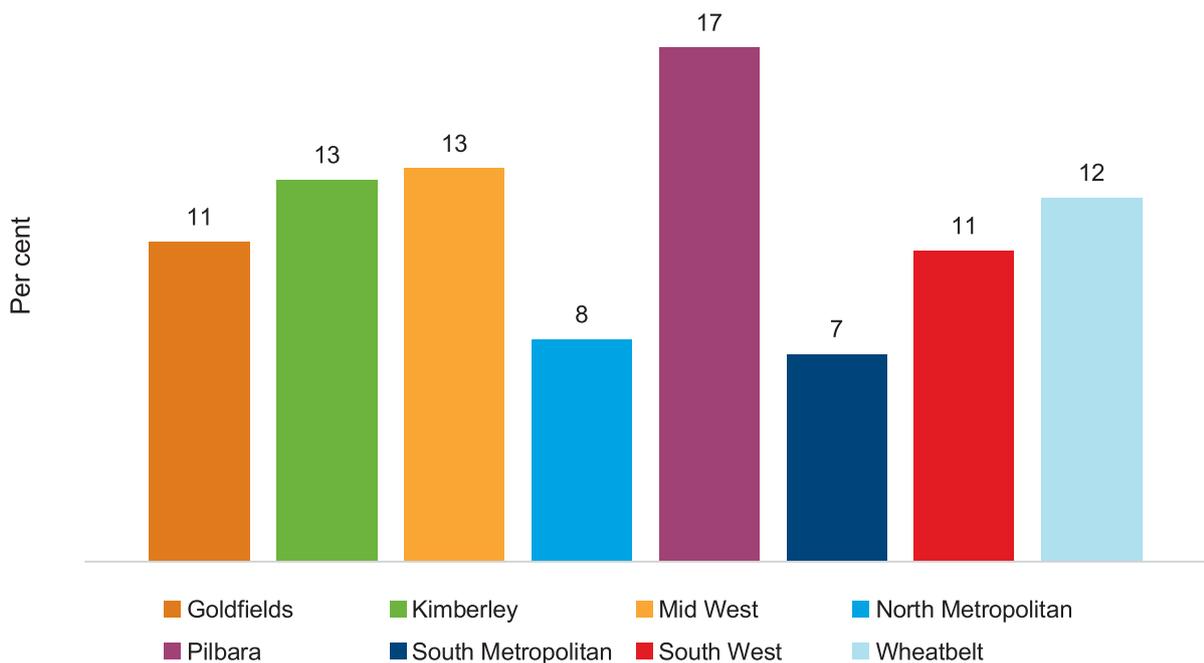
Secondary students in the South West were more likely to have done vigorous exercise in the previous week than in other regions across WA. Young people in the Pilbara were the least likely to have done vigorous exercise at least three times in the previous week.

**Proportion of secondary students reporting that in the previous seven days, they had done vigorous exercise at least three times**



In line with this result, young people in the Pilbara are also most likely to disagree that there are outdoor places to go to in their area, like parks, ovals or skate parks.

**Proportion of secondary students who disagree that there are outdoor places for them to go in their area, like parks, ovals or skate parks**

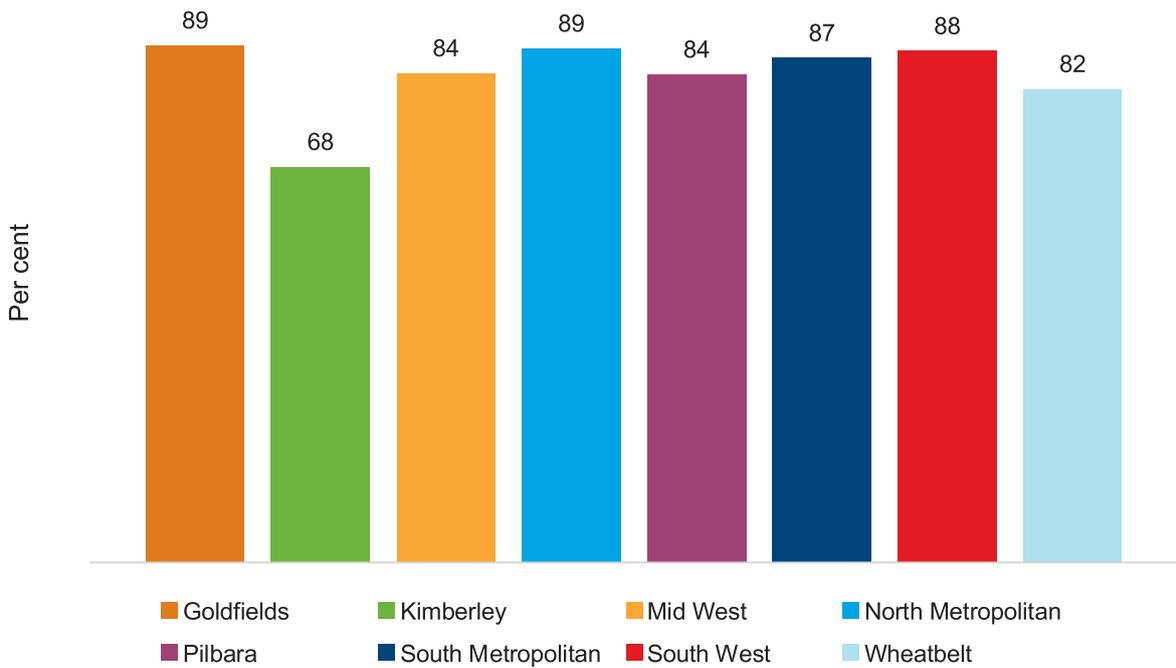


Green space and amenities which encourage children and young people to be active in their day-to-day lives are critical. All children and young people across WA should have access to community-based environments that provide space for accessible recreational activity, safe unstructured outdoor play and active transport options, such as bike paths.

Children and young people in regions across WA reported similar life satisfaction ratings and generally similar responses on other mental health related questions.

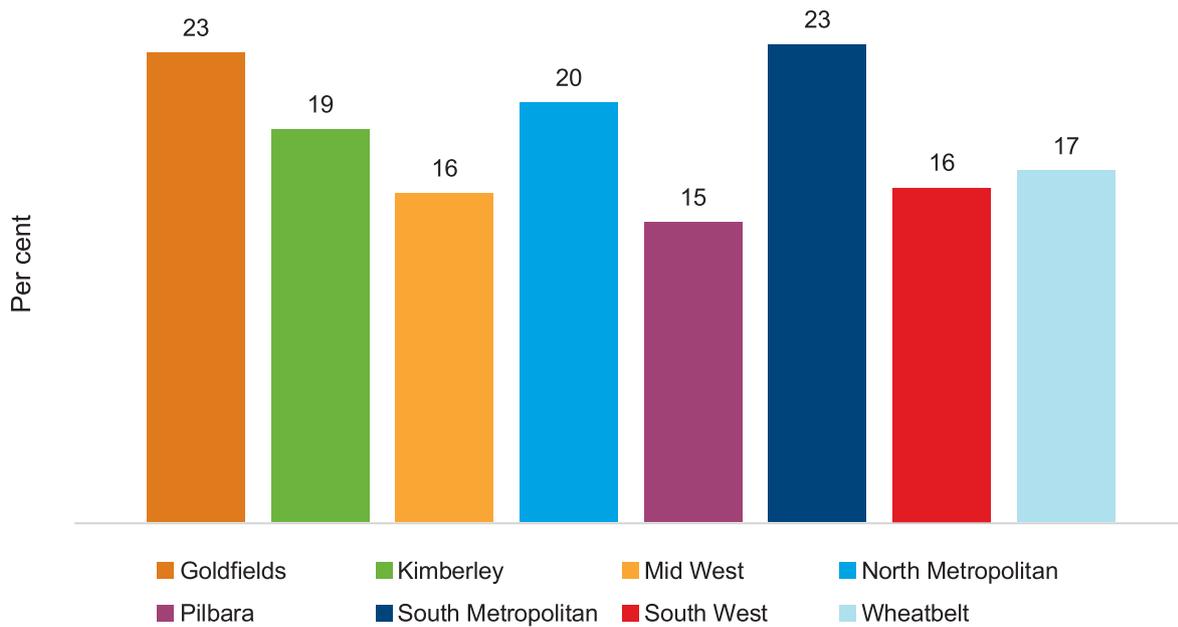
Year 9 to Year 12 students in the Kimberley and the Wheatbelt were less likely than their peers to report that school or study problems were a source of stress for them in the prior year.

**Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students reporting that school or study problems were a source of stress in the previous year**



Additionally, Year 9 to 12 students in the Mid West and the Pilbara are less likely than those across the state to report that COVID-19 was a source of stress in the previous year.

**Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students reporting that COVID-19 was a source of stress in the previous year**

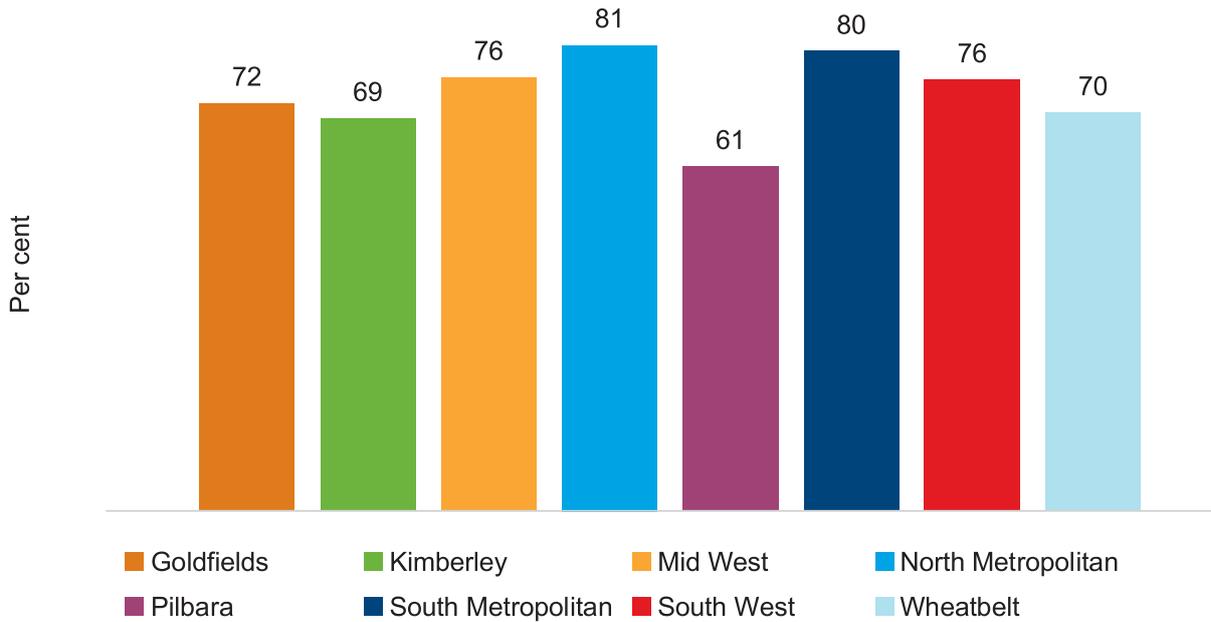


Feeling connected to your community and culture is critical for children and young people's health and wellbeing. It provides a positive sense of identity and belonging.

While most students across the state like where they live and feel connected, one in ten students in Years 4 to 6 in the Goldfields said they do not like where they live (9.6%) and do not feel like they belong in their community (10.9%). This is higher than the average across the state (6.0% and 4.7% respectively).

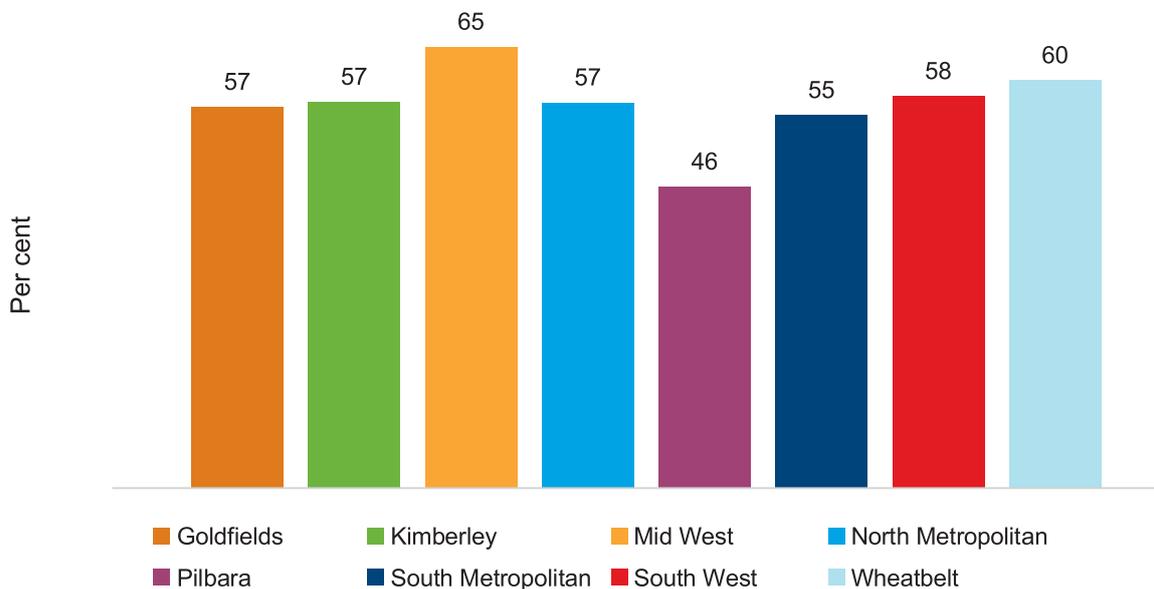
Perth (North and South Metropolitan) has the highest proportion of young people in Years 7 to 12 who like where they live, with around 80 per cent saying they like where they live.

**Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students who like where they live**



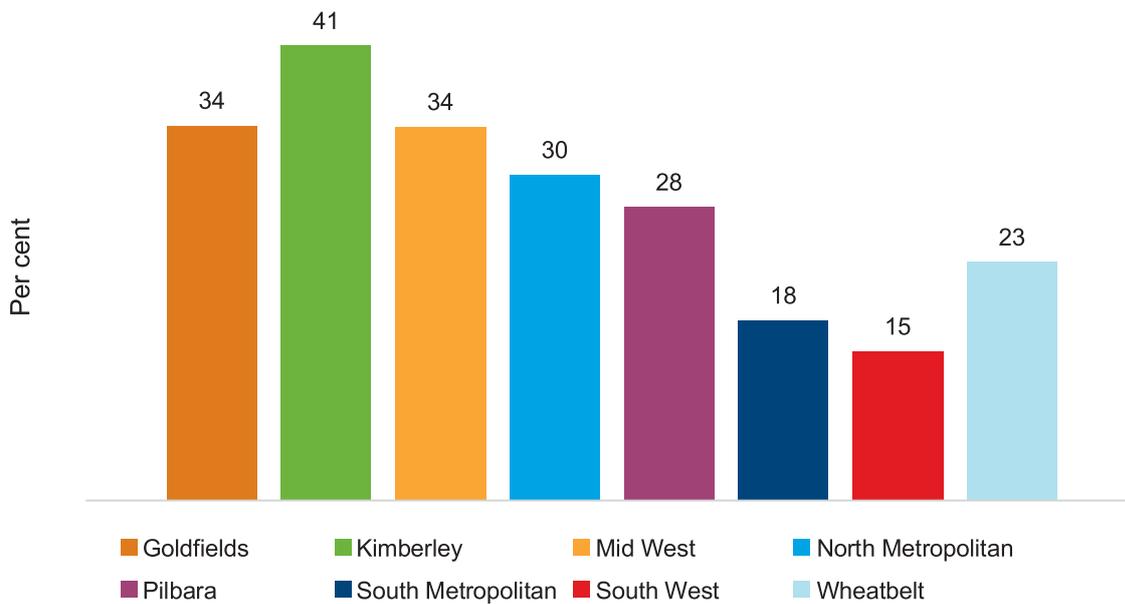
Secondary students in the Mid West are more likely than those across the state to feel like they belong in the community. Less than one-half of secondary students in the Pilbara feel like they belong in their community.

**Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students who feel like they belong in their community**



Over one-quarter (27.1%) of Year 4 to Year 12 Aboriginal students across the state can talk a lot (10.0%) or some (17.1%) Aboriginal language(s). There is significant variation in regions across the state, with 41 per cent of Year 4 to Year 12 students in the Kimberley being able to talk a lot or some Aboriginal language(s), compared to lower proportions in other regions across the state.

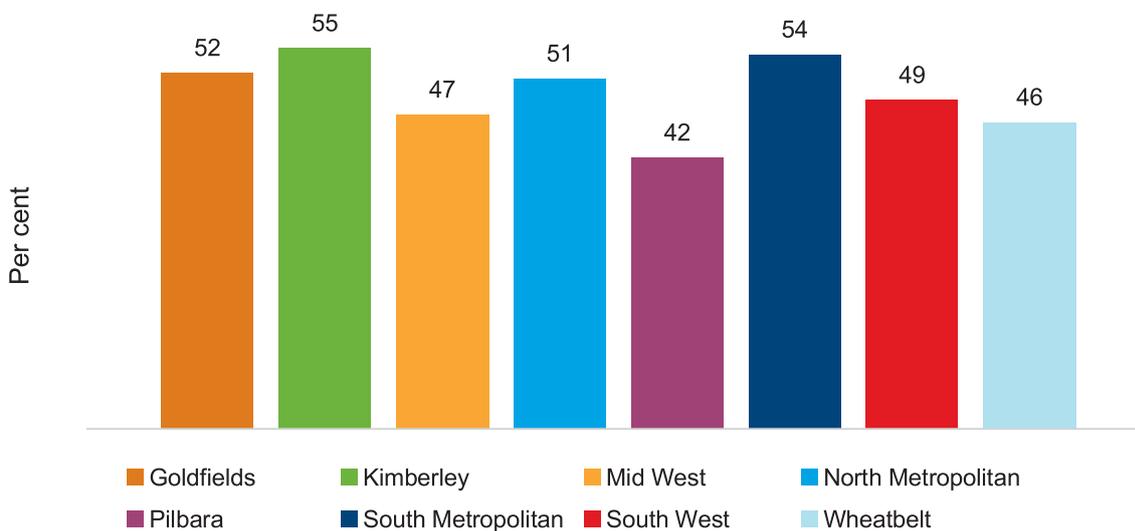
**Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 Aboriginal students who talk Aboriginal language(s) a lot or some**



**Learning and participating**

Most children and young people in WA reported that they like school, however there are differences across the state.

**Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students who like school a lot or a bit**

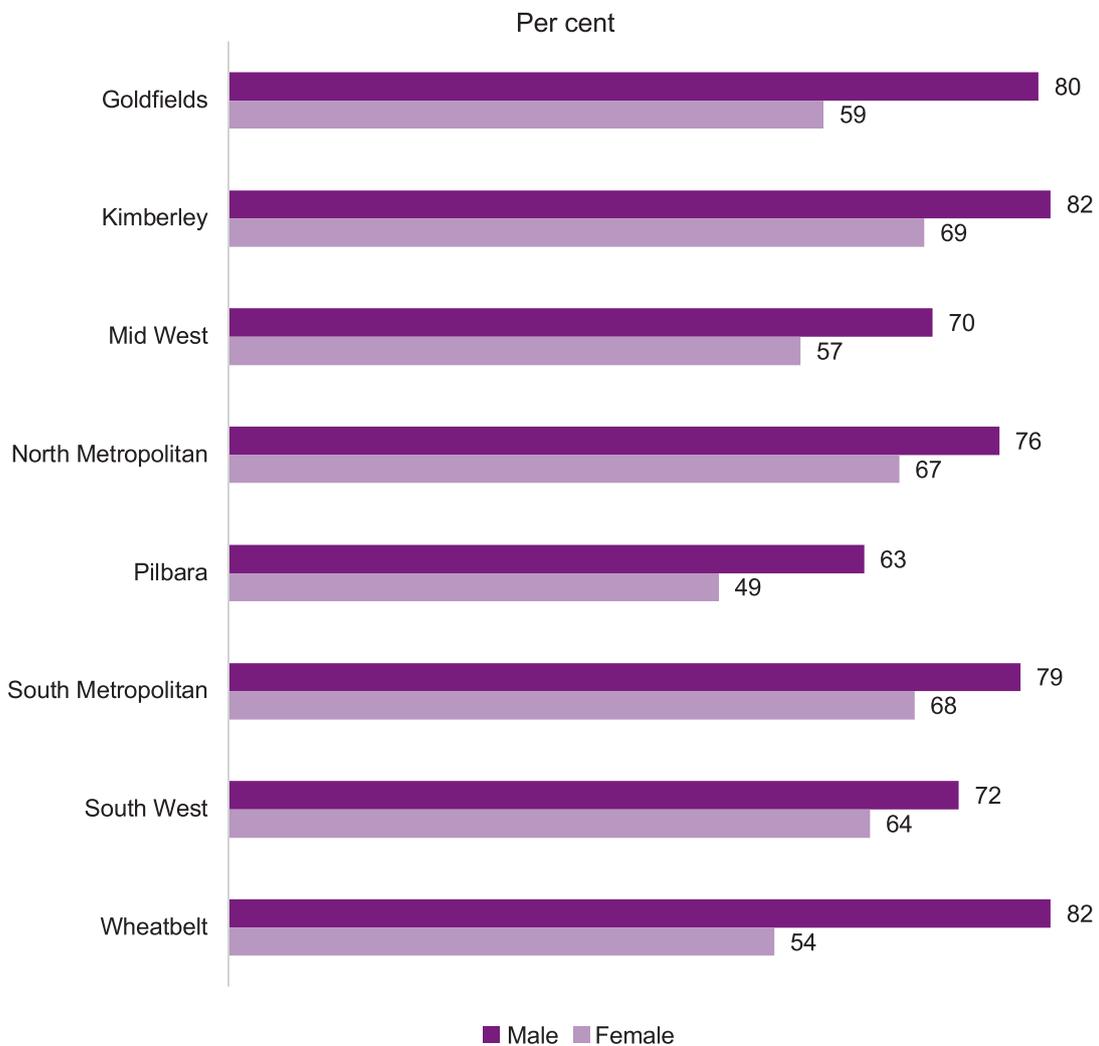


A high majority of students across the state (92.3%) believe that it is very or somewhat important to be at school every day. This was generally consistent across all regions. However, a significant minority (11.3%) of students in the South West reported that it is not very important to be at school every day (all of WA: 7.8%).

Most secondary students across WA feel that school is a place where they belong, however there are consistent gender differences.

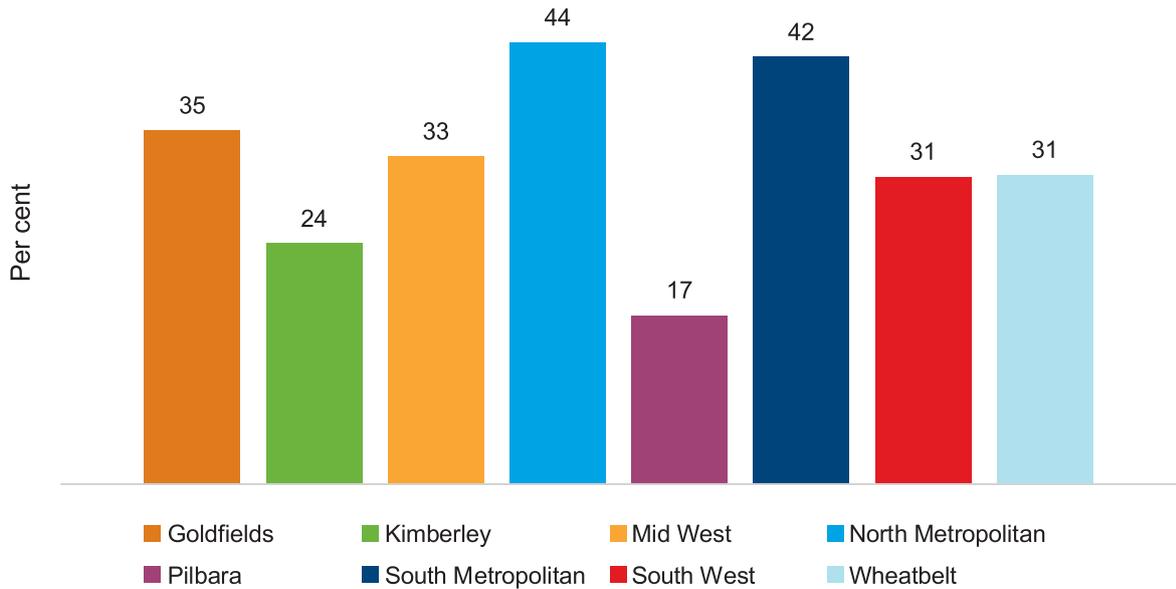
The gender percentage point gap is largest in the Wheatbelt.

**Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students who agree school is a place where they belong**



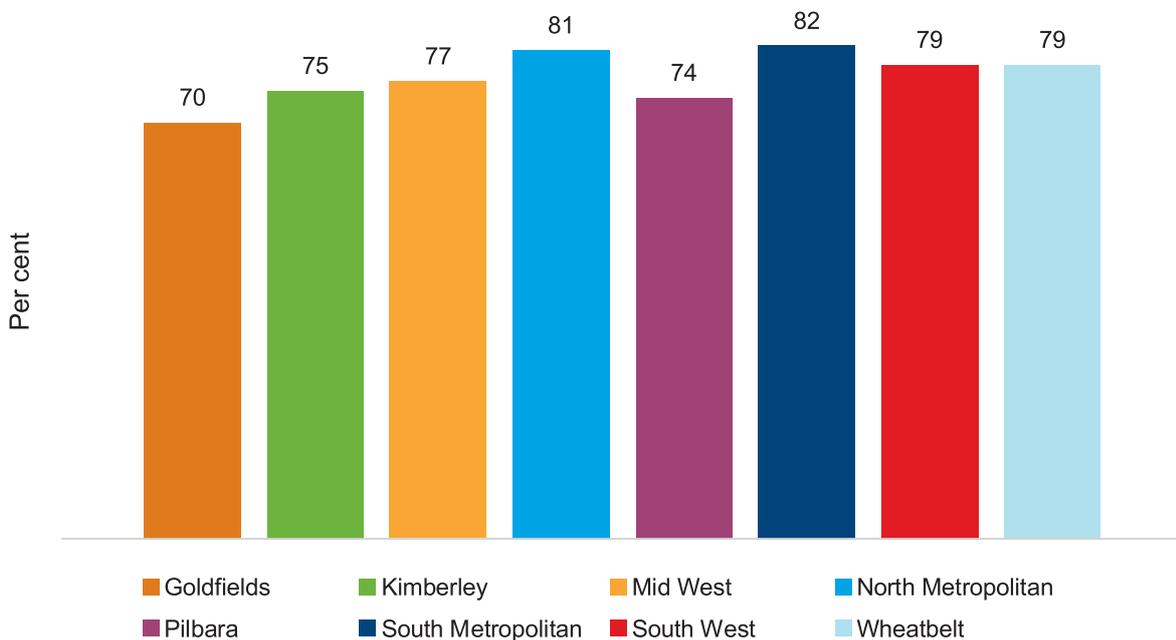
The proportion of students doing homework every day or almost every day differs greatly across the state. Secondary school students in the North and South Metropolitan regions are more likely than those across the state to report doing homework every day.

**Proportion of students in Year 7 to Year 12 doing homework every day or almost every day**



The majority of Year 4 to Year 12 students (77.9%) across WA feel safe at school all or most of the time. There are some regional differences. In particular, a lower proportion of Year 4 to Year 6 students in the Goldfields feel safe at school all or most of the time.

**Proportion of Year 4 to Year 6 students who feel safe at school all or most of the time**



Aboriginal students in remote areas are generally more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers and more likely than Aboriginal students in the metropolitan area to say that being at school every day is important to them and that they like learning.

At the same time, Aboriginal students across WA are much more likely to have been suspended from school than their non-Aboriginal peers (33.1% vs 13.0%). This is the case across all regions.

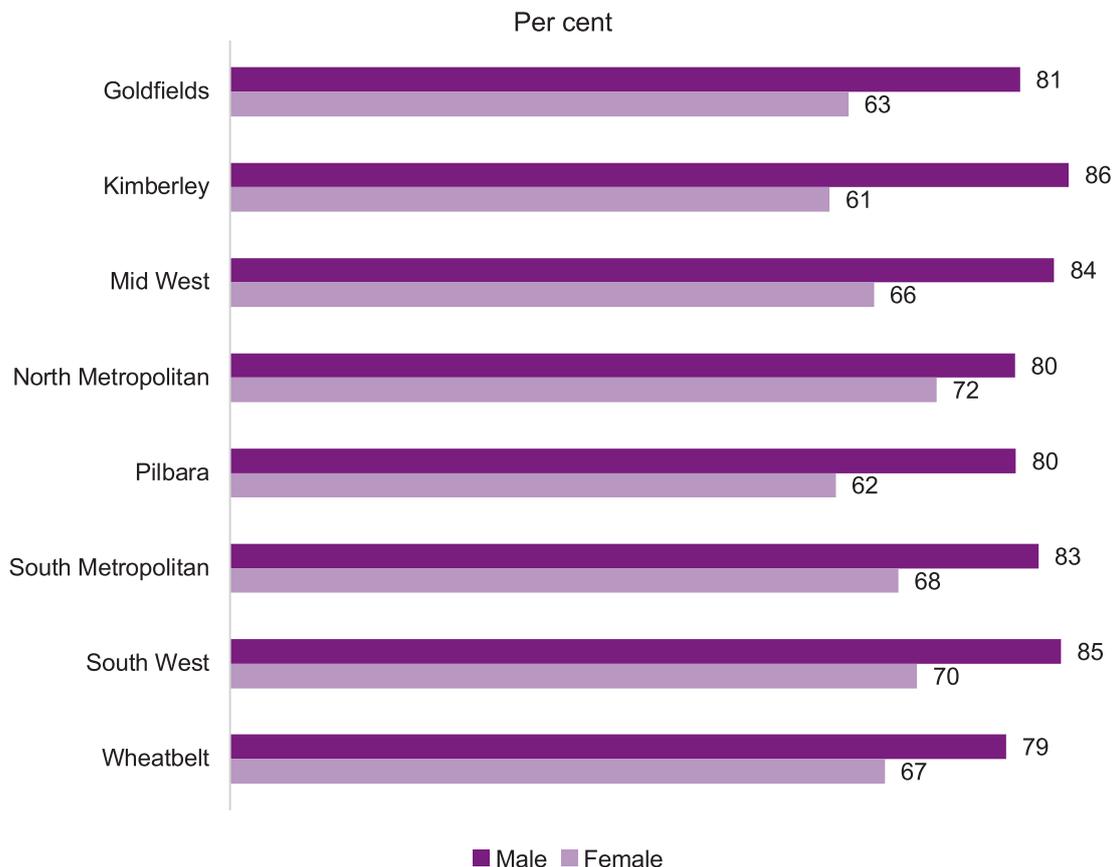
Aboriginal students across WA are also more than twice as likely to report that they had wagged school in the previous 12 months for a full day or more compared to non-Aboriginal students (34.5% compared to 13.7%).

### Safe and supported

Most (78.0%) Year 4 to Year 12 students across WA reported it is 'pretty much true' or 'very much true' that there is a parent or another adult at home who listens to them when they have something to say.

Responses are consistent across the regions, however, in secondary school gender differences are evident, particularly in the Kimberley.

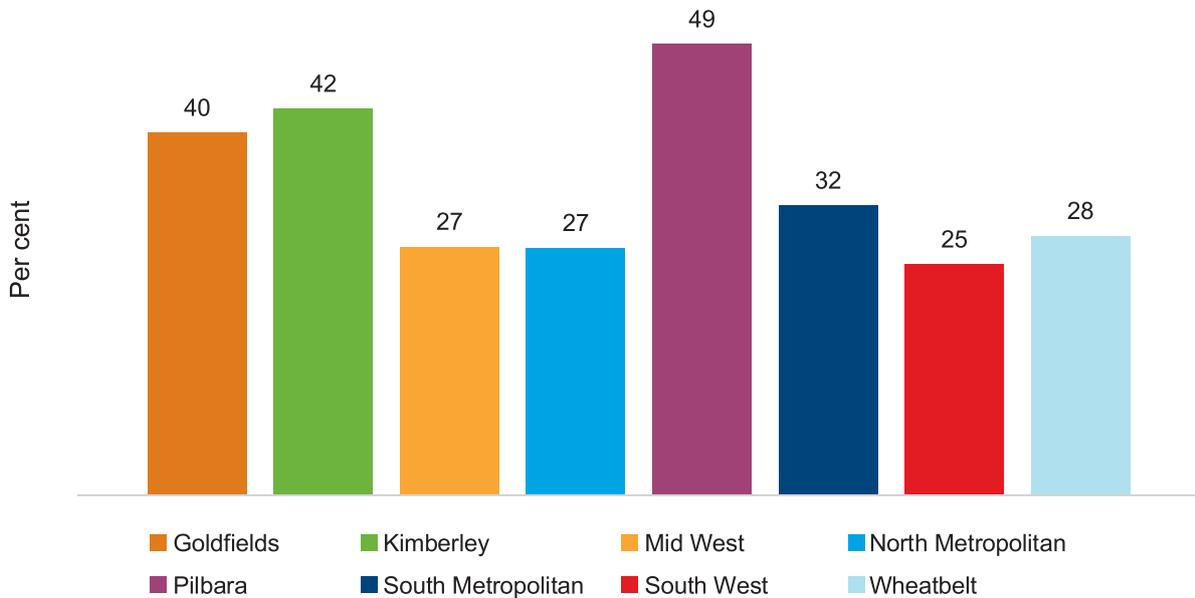
### Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting it is 'pretty much true' or 'very much true' that there is a parent or another adult at home who listens to them when they have something to say



The majority of children and young people across the state feel like they have enough friends and are good at making and keeping friends. However, children in Years 4 to 6 in the Goldfields are much less likely than those across other regions to feel like they had enough friends (71.7% vs 81.2%).

Students across each region reported similar levels of feeling safe at home, with most feeling safe all the time or most of the time. There are however differences in feeling safe in their local area, with students in the Kimberley, North Metropolitan and South Metropolitan regions more likely to feel safe only sometimes or less. These results are consistent across both primary and secondary school.

**Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting they feel safe in their local area only sometimes or less**



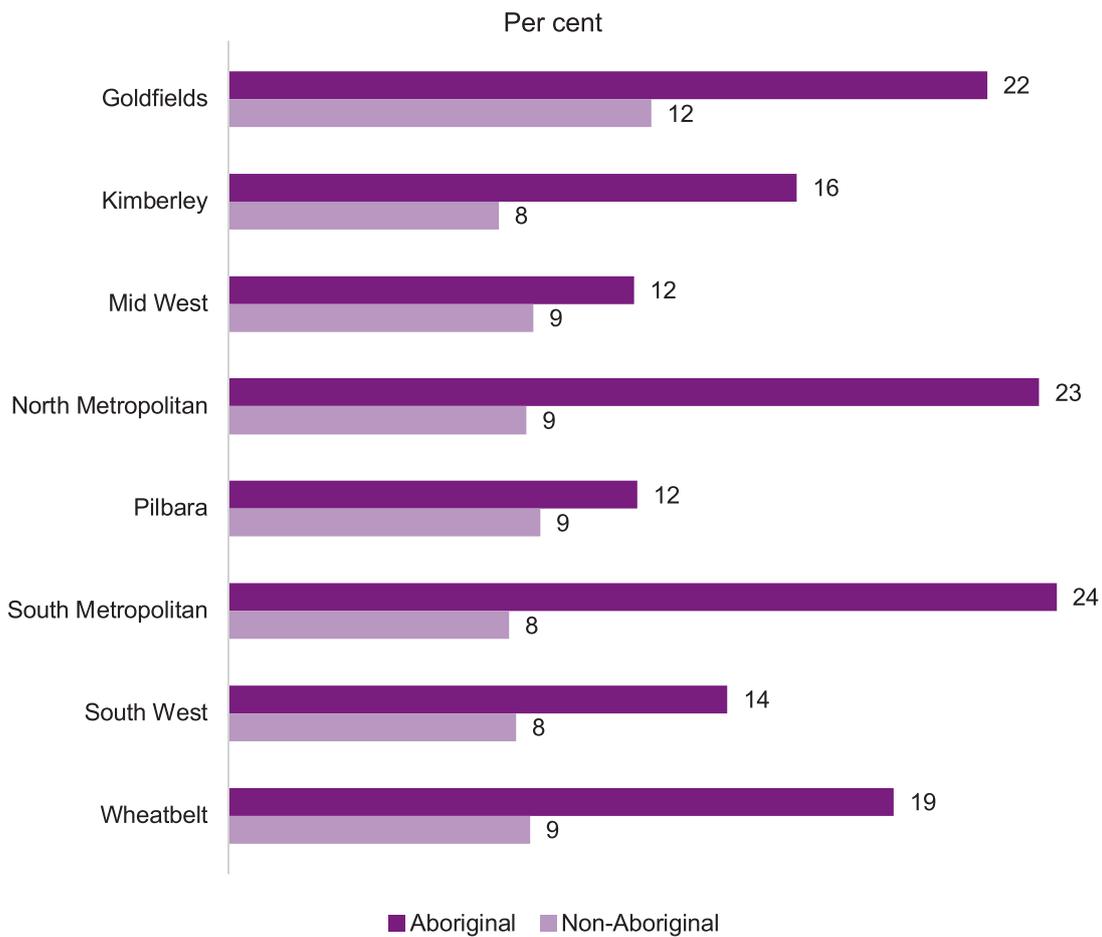
Overall, children and young people in regional and remote WA are more likely than those in metropolitan WA to report that they are missing out on material basics.

- One in seven students (around 14%) in the Kimberley and Goldfields only sometimes or less have enough food to eat at home (all of WA: 9.6%).
- A higher proportion of students in the Goldfields (17.6%), Kimberley (16.8%) and Pilbara (16.9%) do not have enough money to go on a school camp or excursion (all of WA: 9.8%).
- Almost one-third (29.8%) of secondary students in the Kimberley and one-quarter (26.4%) of secondary students in the Wheatbelt do not have their own laptop, tablet or computer (all of WA: 14.3%).

The majority of Aboriginal children and young people across the state feel safe and supported by their family and friends.

However, Aboriginal children and young people across the state are particularly affected by material disadvantage, with around one in five Aboriginal children and young people in a number of regions not having enough food to eat at home. Notably, the highest proportions of Aboriginal children and young people not having enough food at home are in the metropolitan area.

**Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting that if they are hungry, there is enough food for them to eat at home only sometimes or never**



**Conclusion**

This report provides invaluable insights into the views and experiences of children and young people in regions across WA. The similarities and differences across the state highlights some key areas where services or developments at the community level can make a difference to children’s and young people’s lives.

The individual regional reports provide local government and non-government sectors with critical information needed to support and improve the wellbeing of children and young people living in their regions and communities. We would encourage all organisations to ask children and young people what they need in order to lead better lives and involve them in policy planning and service delivery.

# Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) has a responsibility to monitor the wellbeing of children and young people under the age of 18 years across WA.

The Commissioner developed the first Speaking Out Survey in 2019 (SOS19) to address gaps in self-reported wellbeing data for children and young people. 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 Years 4 to 12 in WA and 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. In 2021, a total of 16,532 Year 4 to Year 12 students from 94 schools in all regions of WA consented to participate.

The report [Speaking Out Survey 2021: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report](#), published in November 2021, provides data which is representative of the views and experiences of children and young people across WA. It details the SOS21 results for most survey questions disaggregated by year group and gender. The summary report also includes results for Aboriginal children and young people across WA and children and young people living in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

This report presents the results of SOS21 by education region. It provides a valuable insight into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the various regions across WA.

## Number of students participating in the SOS21 survey by education region

Education region	Number of students
Goldfields	838
Kimberley	767
Mid West	989
North Metropolitan	4,421
Pilbara	858
South Metropolitan	5,998
South West	1,394
Wheatbelt	789
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,054*</b>

*\* This includes additional schools not part of the random selection process and is after incomplete responses have been removed.*

The results have been weighted to provide the best estimates for each region.

Each regional report provides some results for year groups, and male and female students. In line with the Commissioner's responsibility under the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, where the Commissioner is required to have special regard to the interests and needs of Aboriginal children and young people, each regional chapter also includes a section on Aboriginal children and young people in that region.

The survey asked participants whether they describe themselves as a girl, a boy or 'in another way'. Whilst the students who selected 'in another way' may identify as another gender (for example, non-binary, gender diverse or genderfluid), this cannot be assumed given the way in which this question was asked. Additionally, we know that these responses will not reflect many trans children and young people who identify as a boy or girl.

In this report we compare the responses of those children and young people who identified as a boy (male) to those who identified as a girl (female). It does not report on the views and experiences of children and young people who selected the option 'in another way'. Children and young people who selected 'in another way' in SOS21 will be the focus of an additional publication. In this report, when presenting a quotation from these students, in place of their gender identity we have stated: student who selected 'in another way'.

Participants in the Speaking Out Survey were asked open text questions about schoolwork stress, their mental health, feeling safe and their local community. These are questions on issues of concern for children and young people, therefore the responses are often children and young people explaining their worries and challenges. A total of 11,450 students provided at least one response to these open text questions. Refer to **Appendix A** for a list of the questions.

A selection of quotations is included in this report on the relevant topics. The quotations are generally unedited to ensure the voice of the child or young person is authentically presented. Editing has only been done where necessary for clarity, understanding or for confidentiality. In this instance any changes or omissions have been marked with square brackets or an ellipsis (...).

Indicative comparative data has also been provided for some key questions, including results for 'all of WA'. While similar, these results do not directly correspond to the representative SOS21 results in the Summary Report.<sup>1</sup> These regionally weighted 'all of WA' results have been used to ensure a consistent approach across the variables being reported. For a more detailed discussion of the methodology of SOS21 and how data is presented in this report, refer to **Appendix A**.

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<sup>1</sup> The sampling methodology for SOS21 did not require minimum representation for each education region. It was therefore anticipated that reliable estimates may not be possible for some regions, hence, additional schools were invited to participate in the survey who were not part of the random selection. The data in this report includes the results from these additional schools. These additional schools were not included in the estimates published in the SOS21 summary report.