



Sandwell MBC

SHAPE

Survey Results 2023

Final Report

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1. Executive Summary

The SHAPE Survey has been conducted since November 2014, when the SHAPE Programme was first introduced as a child's voice initiative. It is a means to consult with young people on the five SHAPE themes:

- Staying Safe
- Being Healthy
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a Positive Contribution
- Economic Wellbeing

In 2023, the online survey was developed for Primary School children from years 5 and 6 and Secondary School children from years 7 – 13. The link to the survey was distributed to all Primary, Secondary, Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in Sandwell. The total number of survey participants was 1,139.

The questions were devised and developed by several stakeholders who deliver services to children and young people and broken down further into these specific areas: demographics; mental health and wellbeing; support services; social media, gaming and communications; local area; education and learning; youth activities; child's voice and future.

The main findings from the report portray that children and young people are finding life challenging with the pressures of school work, exams and fitting into society in an environment of increasing crime and substance misuse.

Children and young people need to be listened to, so they can be supported adequately, and their needs can be met, particularly to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Educational institutions are vital in making this happen and ensuring young people feel safe and supported.

The perception of Sandwell as a Borough remains negative, due to high levels of crime and deprivation. With the ongoing cost of living crisis, young people and their families are experiencing more impact on their daily lives. A greater emphasis needs to be made on the positives and ensuring regeneration and town plans are responsive to the needs of the future generation, making Sandwell a more attractive place to live for all.

Finally, further work needs to be done to improve communication for young people especially youth in secondary schools, so they have a wealth of information they need to support them and their families. Communication methods need to be adapted appropriately to meet their needs.

This report provides a detailed account of all the survey results which internal and external stakeholders can utilise to address the needs and issues identified by children and young people.

2. Objectives and Purpose

The purpose of the SHAPE Survey is to consult with children and young people ranging from the age of 8 – 18 years. It allows council members, senior leaders, officers and partner agencies to be able to understand the experiences, needs, issues and views of young people in Sandwell.

The information from this study will enable stakeholders to reflect on the services they offer to young people and identify from the responses in the survey, if any changes need to be made based on the consultation results.

National surveys such as Ditch the Label, Make Your Mark and the Ofcom Survey, collect data from young people on specific issues like bullying, views on what national changes should be made by Government and media use and attitudes. However, on a local level, the SHAPE Survey offers a cross-section of consultation on a number of topics affecting the lives of young people and is the only survey distributed to every school in Sandwell on a regular basis.

3. Methodology

There were 2 participant groups for the survey, these included the following:

- Primary School Pupils from years 5 and 6
- Secondary School Pupils from years 7 to 13

An online survey was developed by the Public Health Intelligence Team with the questions formulated by the SHAPE Team and internal and external partners who had an interest in consulting with young people on their services. The following topics cover all the SHAPE themes of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing. The questions fall into the following categories:

- General – demographic information e.g. age, school year, town, ethnicity
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Social media, gaming and communications
- Your local area
- Education & learning
- Play/Youth Activities
- Child's/ Youth Voice & Social Action
- Your Future

The survey was developed with similar questions for the two groups. Many open-ended questions were included to ensure the children and young people were able to express their views and opinions freely. The survey questions can be found on Sandwell Trends (<https://www.sandwelltrends.info/>).

Once the survey was developed and tested, the links were sent to all schools through the regular school's communication bulletin to Head Teachers. Head Teachers were asked to distribute the survey for pupils in their schools to complete.

There were no restrictions in the types of institutions which the survey was distributed to, therefore special schools, pupil referral units and Sandwell College were included. There were also no restrictions on the schools, regarding the amount of young people from each school who could take part in the survey, however, schools were offered the incentive that if 25% of pupils on their school roll completed the survey, they would be provided with their school's individual results.

Each participant was also offered the chance to enter a prize draw to win vouchers, as an incentive for more children and young people to take part in the survey.

The survey was active from April 2023 to July 2023.

4. Results

The total number of participants that took part in the survey was 1139 which is a 43% increase compared to the 795 responses from 2022. The total for each group were as follows:

- Primary school pupils –680 (6.6% of the borough population in years 5 and 6 based on May 2023 school census)
- Secondary school pupils – 459 (1.8% of the borough population in years 7 to 13 based on May 2023 school census)

The following pages provide a breakdown of the results of all the surveys based on the topic areas.

4.1 Demographics and Limitations

Of the 103 primary schools in Sandwell, 20.3% of schools were represented through participants. The number of participants from a single institution varied from 1 to 209. Of the participants 4.3% (29 children) had a social worker with 9.5% (65 children) preferring not to say. 7.9% (53 children) considered themselves as having a disability and 5 children had a social worker and considered themselves to have a disability.

Of the 27 secondary schools in Sandwell there was a representation of 37%. The number of participants from a single institution from this age range varied from 1 to 315. Of the participants 4.2% (19 young people) had a social worker with 6.3% (29 young people) preferring not to say. 6.6% (30 young people) considered themselves as having a disability with 5.7% (26 young people) preferring not to say. 4 young people had a social worker and considered themselves to have a disability.

The report only details the responses of the children and young people with disabilities where the responses are different to the overall survey results.

The percentage of schools taking part in the survey and the number of responses were higher than 2022, with primary schools demonstrating a 3.3% increase from 2023 of the borough population.

Figure 4.11 provides a breakdown of the age of the participants. For the primary age the largest category was age 11. For secondary, the largest category was 13. There was representation from all ages however the 16 to 18 age group responses were low,

and therefore it must be noted that it is difficult to offer definitive conclusions when analysing the results of the survey for this age group.

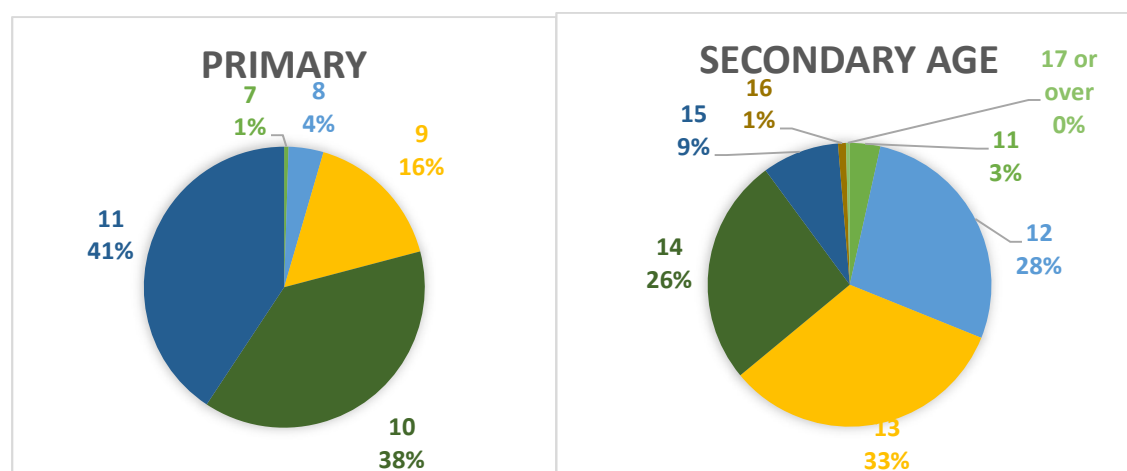


Figure 4.11 – Breakdown of the age respondents of survey respondents

The gender identity and ethnicity breakdown are shown in Figure 4.12. The proportion of male to female responses in primary was nearly equal, however in secondary over half the responses were from females.

Just over half the respondents in primary were white and for secondary, just over half were a combination of non-white, other or prefer not to say.

Participants	Male	Female	Other or prefer not to say
Primary	50.1%	49.1%	0.7%
Secondary	41.9%	54.7%	3.7%

Participants	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other	Prefer not to say
Primary	50.2%	7.7%	30.2%	5.1%	2.3%	4.7%
Secondary	47.1%	9.5%	30.9%	6.5%	4.6%	2%

Figure 4.12 – Gender and ethnicity breakdown of survey respondents

The participant groups were asked which town they lived in. The breakdown is provided in Figure 4.13. In terms of primary, Wednesbury was the highest with 33% of respondents from the town. For secondary, however, Wednesbury was the one town not represented and Oldbury proved to be the highest with 59% of respondents. This breakdown mirrored the town demographics in 2022 and is reflective of the schools within these towns who submitted the highest number of responses.

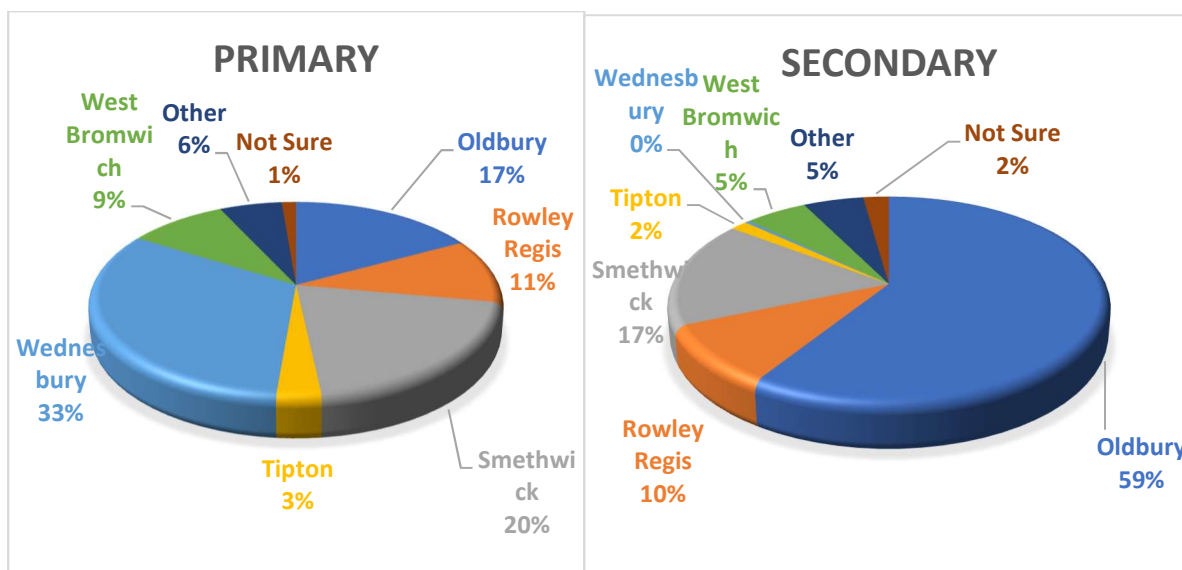


Figure 4.13 – Breakdown of where survey respondents live

The responses also demonstrated, from both groups, that they were unaware of the towns their specific wards existed in such as Old Hill and Cradley Heath, which are part of Rowley Regis and Great Barr, which is part of West Bromwich.

5. Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing questions covered many different aspects including issues affecting young people today and how the topic is dealt with in an educational setting.

One of the questions asked consistently in all SHAPE surveys to date is, “What is the top issue affecting young people in today’s society”. In this year’s survey, the issue of drugs and substances were split into drugs, alcohol, smoking and vaping, to understand which of the substances were identified by young people as an issue, as last year this featured in the top 5 issues. Figure 5.1 shows the top issues from 2015 to 2023.

From all the surveys conducted over the years, there are obvious reoccurring themes, such as school work and exams, which you would expect to see for this age group. By splitting the category of drugs and substances, it’s clear that young people feel vaping and drugs are the substances which are causing an issue amongst young people. Crime is still evidently seen as an issue, particularly gangs, youth violence and knife crime. In previous years, bullying had always been featured in the top 5 and comes in in eight place this year, following the breakdown of the drugs and substances category. This has also meant that “what to do after GCSE’s” and “Getting a job” have come in sixth and seventh place respectively.

Apart from these being issues that are seen or experienced on a daily basis by young people, other comments made on reasons for why these issues were chosen, include:

- “In this society many people struggle to be accepted so they believe focusing on these specific topics and changing themselves is the only way to truly be accepted.”

- “One of my worst fears is having no one and being lonely, family and friends always come first but I hate being insecure”
- “People are getting pressured to take drugs or alcohol to look tough or not seemed as a wimp”
- “Feel lots of people struggle with these including me”
- “Young people are getting influenced by older generations to vape or smoke etc”

Young people feel pressure to be accepted by their peers, and therefore are either easily influenced or swayed towards adopting these methods to fit in. However, young people are also aware that issues such as drugs and vaping can have an effect on their physical and mental health, “These things affect young people majorly as it messes with their mental health”. Other comments made referred to the fact that young people are struggling in life and not being listened to, and therefore have made bad choices “As a child many people have struggled with not being heard and many people start to do bad things due to not being heard”.

	2023	2022	2020	2019	2017	2015
1	School work & Exams	Gangs & Youth Violence	School/College work & Exams	Knife Crime	What to do after year 11	School work and exams
2	Vaping	Knife Crime	Physical Appearance	School/College work & Exams	School work and exams	Gangs & youth violence
3	Gangs & Youth Violence	School/College work and exams	Being Bullied	Gangs & Youth Violence	Getting college course/ apprenticeship	What to do after year 11
4	Knife Crime	Drugs and substance abuse	Impact of covid 19	Being Bullied	Gangs and youth violence	Being Bullied
5	Drugs *Becoming an Adult	What to do after GCSEs Being Bullied	What to do after GCSEs	What to do after GCSEs	Nothing worries me	Being Healthy
6	What to do after GCSE's					
7	Getting a job					
8	Being Bullied					

Figure 5.1 – Issues affecting young people from 2015 to 2023 SHAPE survey - Secondary results

***selected by young people with disabilities**

The trends over the years shown in figure 5.1, demonstrate that some issues are not reducing and are being identified repeatedly over the course of many years with no improvement. The pressure to fit in appears to result in young people adopting a

culture of following their peers into risky behaviours, which is subsequently affecting their health and causing addiction.

In figure 5.2, young people were asked to rate their happiness in different categories, for secondary aged children, they were most happy about their family, home and the things they have, and hobbies. These are similar findings to the 2022 survey results. In 2022 they were least happy about their confidence, appearance, caring for the environment which was still the same in 2023. However, a new category was introduced this year which has risen as the issue that they are most unhappy with, “Intimate relationships”.

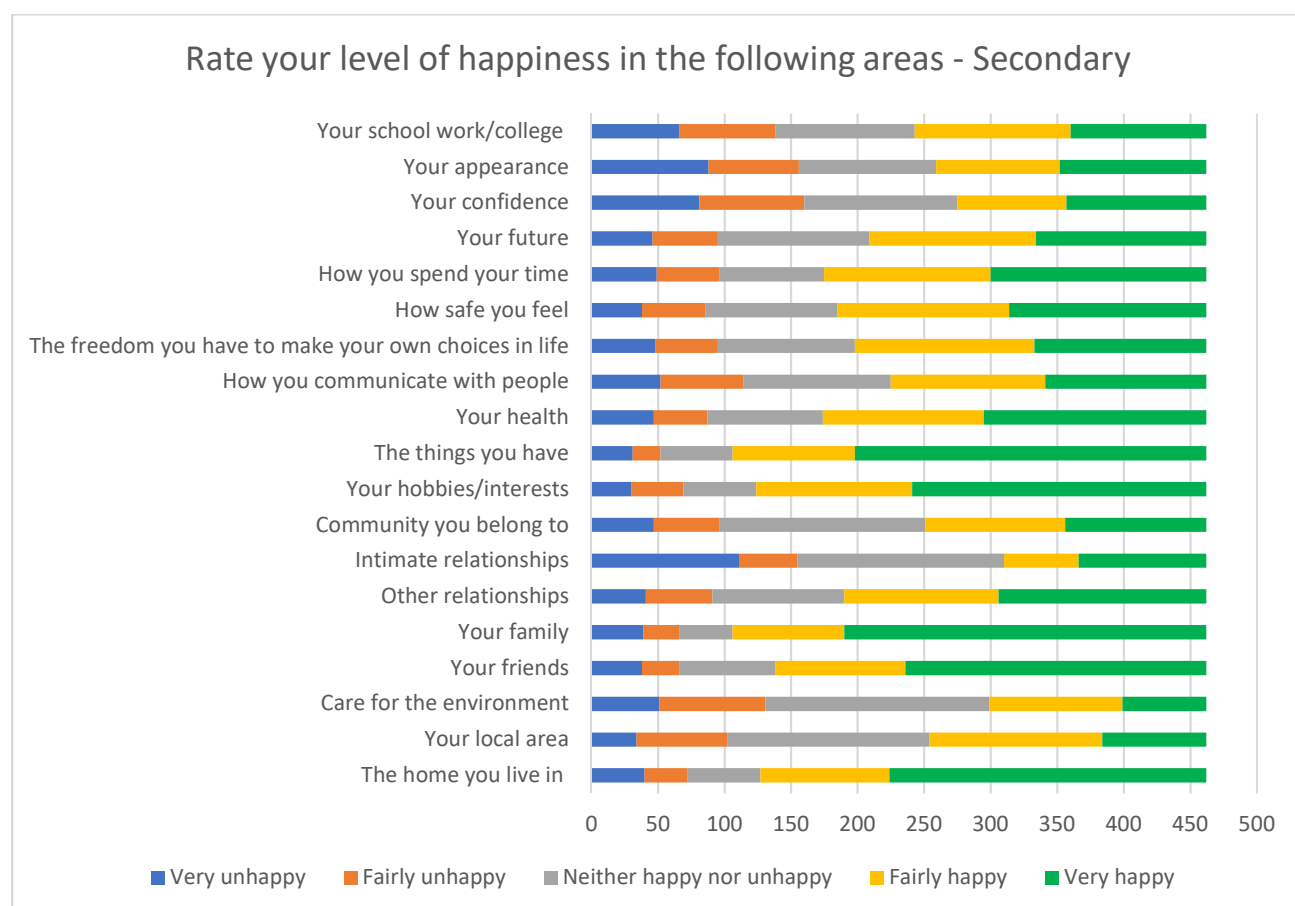


Figure 5.2 Rate your level of happiness in the following areas - Secondary

Primary aged children portrayed a similar picture in figure 5.3, in terms of what they were least unhappy with, including appearance and confidence, as well as caring for the environment. Like the secondary age group, they were also happiest with their family, the things they have and their hobbies.

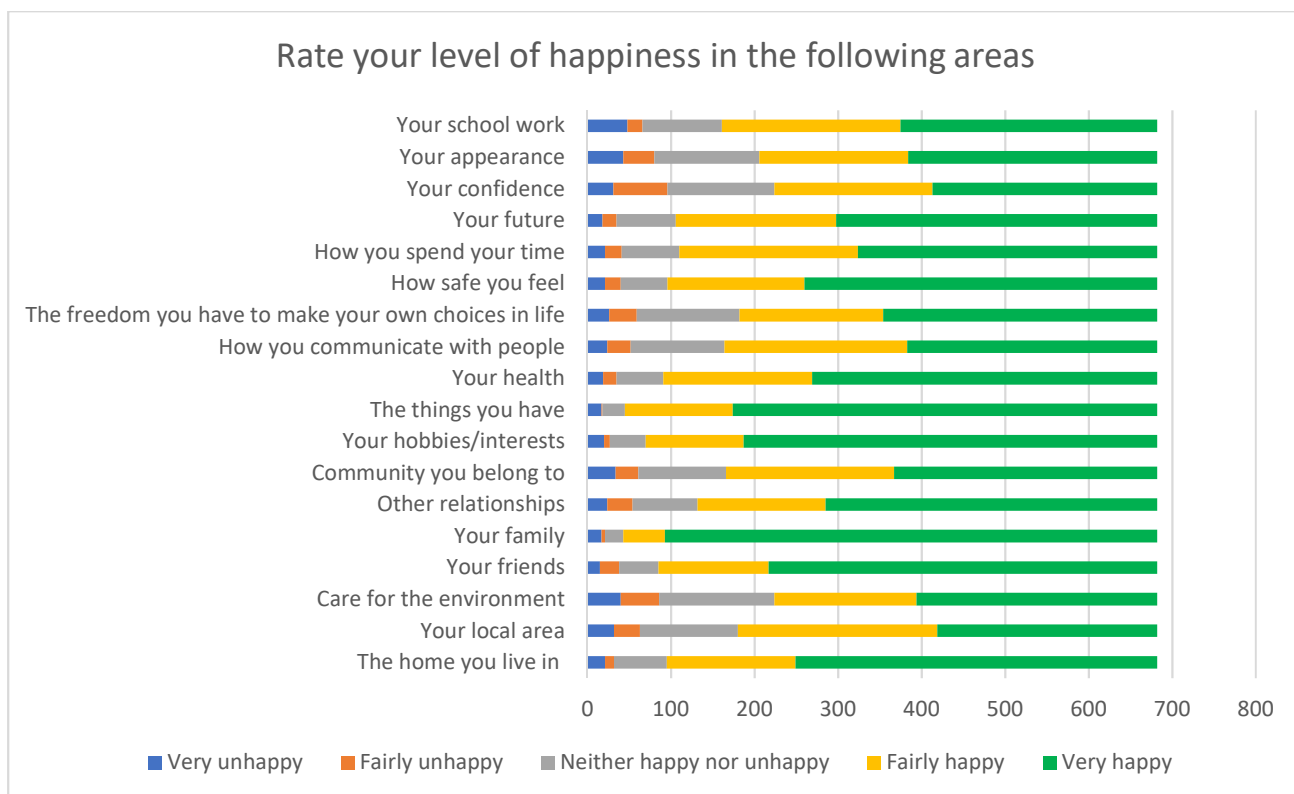


Figure 5.3 – Rate your level of happiness in the following areas - Primary

In figure 5.4, 68% of primary school children feel happy about life now, compared to 75% of the respondents last year. Although the number is lower, it is still in a positive direction. The reason stated for feeling happy with life are due to being around family, friends and going on holiday. Travelling abroad during the pandemic was forbidden, therefore many families are going on holiday in 2022 and 2023. Those that stated they were unhappy, felt sad and lonely or were suffering being victims of bullying. An example of one of the statements made was, “Because I get picked on”.

For the secondary age group, only 42% felt happy about life at the moment, with a third feeling neither happy or unhappy. This age group appreciated what they had in life and therefore were happy at present, but know things are always changing, “There are a few things about my life currently that aren’t necessarily the best, but I try my best to focus on the rest of the good things I do have, for example supportive friends and family.” Many references were made to bereavements young people had faced and how it was affecting them, which is why at this point in time, they were unhappy, “I lost my Nan Saturday and I’m going through a lot of pain and I don’t know how to deal with it.” Young people of secondary age, also stated that the pressure of exams, feeling stressed and friendship groups, made them unhappy.

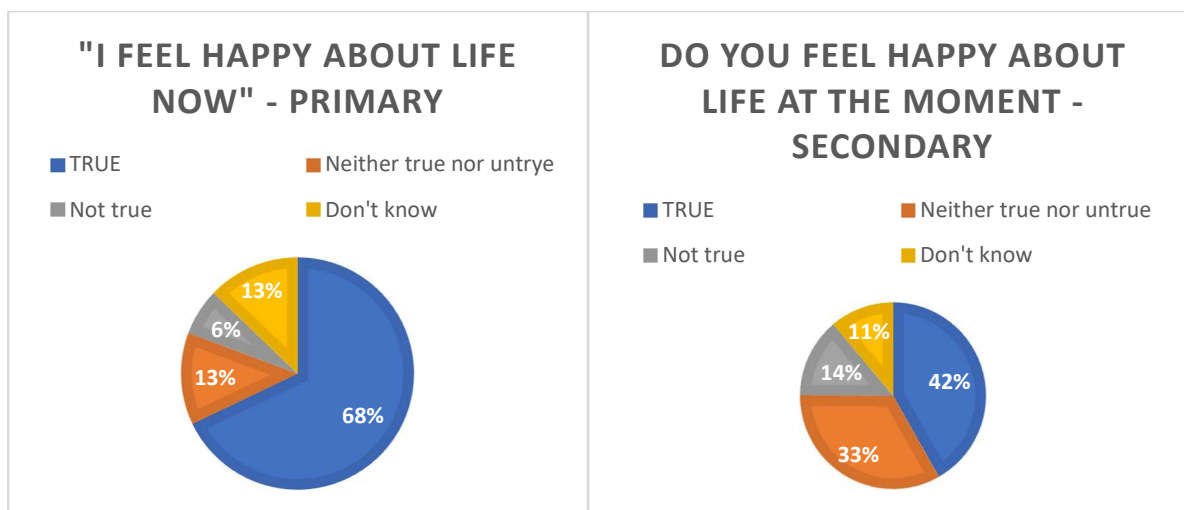


Figure 5.4 – Do you feel happy about life at the moment?

Questions on emotional health and wellbeing education, were introduced in the 2022 survey and this year mirrored the same picture. Figure 5.5 shows only 54% of secondary pupils stated that they have lessons to promote emotional health and wellbeing, with 25% stating they did not know, and 21% stating they didn't have any. Only 21% claimed they have mental health ambassadors or champions, and over half stated they didn't know. Therefore, despite mental health and wellbeing issues being raised throughout the survey, the young people surveyed, have little knowledge of support mechanisms in school around this topic.

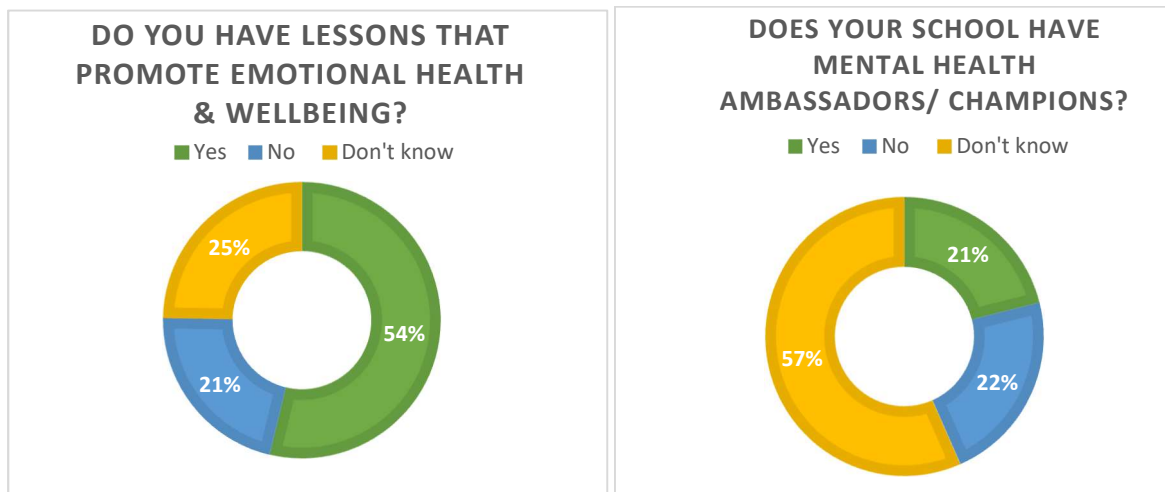


Figure 5.5 – Emotional health & Wellbeing in School

Both groups were asked what would improve their mental health and wellbeing. There were many different answers provided by each age group, but the most popular ones are listed in figure 5.6. The common one between both groups were having someone to talk to with a number of responses showing references to having their voices heard.

For the primary age, they highlighted that helping with the transition to secondary school, which 25% of the children surveyed were not looking forward to (refer to figure 5.7) as well as tackling bullying issues, which again appears to be a big concern for

those who were not looking forward to secondary school. They also recognised supporting families who may have financial difficulties was important too.

For secondary, there was a focus on their future, exams and school work often came up as an issue. They felt that extra support during exam season would help them, and this supports the evidence provided earlier in the report when young people identified that school work and exams were their top issue. To relax and spend time with their friends, they have also identified that they need more places to hang out. This replicates the results of the 2022 survey for this particular question, however for secondary this year, they also mentioned having more access to training and development would improve their confidence.

	Primary	Secondary
1	Having someone to talk to when you have a problem	More support to plan for my future
2	Supporting my family to manage money/ financial issues	Extra support during exam season
3	Being able to voice your views and opinions freely	Having someone to talk to when you have a problem (eg a mentor)
4	Making my move to secondary school easier	More places where I can go to hang out with my friends
5	Tackling bullying issues	Having access to training/ development to improve your confidence *Tackling bullying issues

Figure 5.6 –Top 5 responses to “What would improve your mental health and wellbeing?”

***Selected by young people with disabilities**

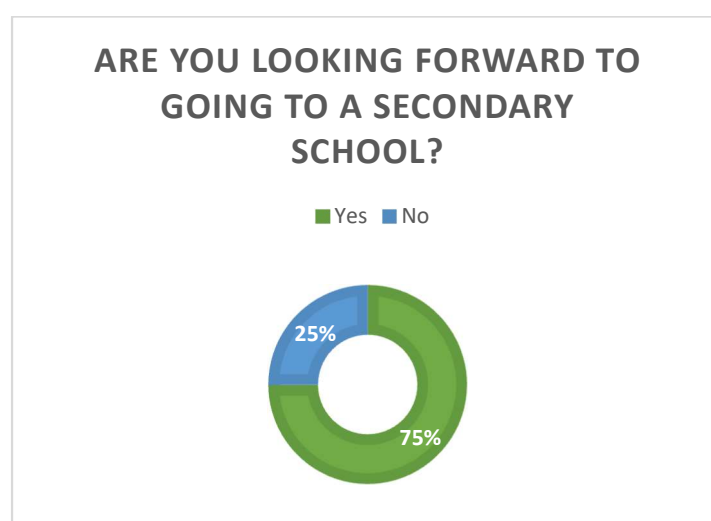


Figure 5.7 – Are you looking forward to going to a secondary school?

The secondary aged young people were asked what services could do specifically, to support young people's mental health and wellbeing and as this was a free text box, there were many answers, with quite a few stating they were "not sure", what more could be done. Those who did answer referred to some of the improvements raised in figure 5.8, such as allowing young people the time to talk to someone, checking in with them to see if they were ok and just simply, having someone listen to them. They felt mental health support services should be more helpful and offer better advice. Providing them with more things to do also was mentioned, such as more opportunities to socialise and make friends.

What more could services do to support young people's mental health and wellbeing?
Listen to what young people have to say
A place to make friends and socialising opportunities
Regular check ins with young people
Talk to young people
Be more helpful and supportive

Figure 5.8 – What more could services do to support young people's mental health & wellbeing?

Young people did however, feel that there should be more understanding from professionals such as doctors or the police, "Be more open minded and less opinionated" and that they shouldn't judge or ignore the young people, "Hear young people out instead of disregarding their views and opinions". Many ideas were provided for this question, which could be helpful to support services in producing initiatives. Figure 5.9 shows some of the creative suggestions.



Figure 5.9 – Ideas from young people for mental health support

6. Support Services

A range of support services exist in Sandwell and this section of questions aimed to find out whether young people were aware of these services.

Two questions were asked about policing, these were whether the pupils knew who their local/link police officer was, and secondly, would they know how to report a crime. The results are shown below and are significantly lower than last year's survey.

	Do you know who your local/link Police Officer is?		Would you know how to report something to the Police?	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Yes	23.2%	16.9%	59.5%	65.6%
No	76.8%	83.1%	17.3%	18.5%
Not Sure	N/A	N/A	23.2%	15.9%

Figure 6.1 – Knowledge of Policing in local area

The results show that although many pupils are unaware of their local police officer, positively, around 60% are aware of reporting something to the Police.

Both age groups were asked questions on the school nursing service. In terms of awareness as shown below, over 50% of both groups are aware of the school nurse service which is a higher percentage than 2020.

	Primary	Secondary
Yes	48.7%	58%
No	51.3%	42%

Figure 6.2 – Results to “Are you aware that your school has a school nurse?”

58% of secondary age young people knew how to contact the school nurse, but only 48.7% of primary age group knew who their school nurse was. These results are similar to last year.

For the secondary students' further questions were asked about the school nursing service. Even though over half the students were aware of the school nurse only 28.4% of these knew what services the school nurse offers, which is lower than the figure of 37% last year. Only 18.8% of the students surveyed had visited the school nurse for several reasons in figure 6.3, with the main ones being injury, accidents and illnesses. As NHS school nurses do not provide first aid, this suggests that students are confusing their role with the role of the school first aider/pastoral support. 83.3% accessed school nurses through a drop-in session at school, which is a similar figure to 2022 results.

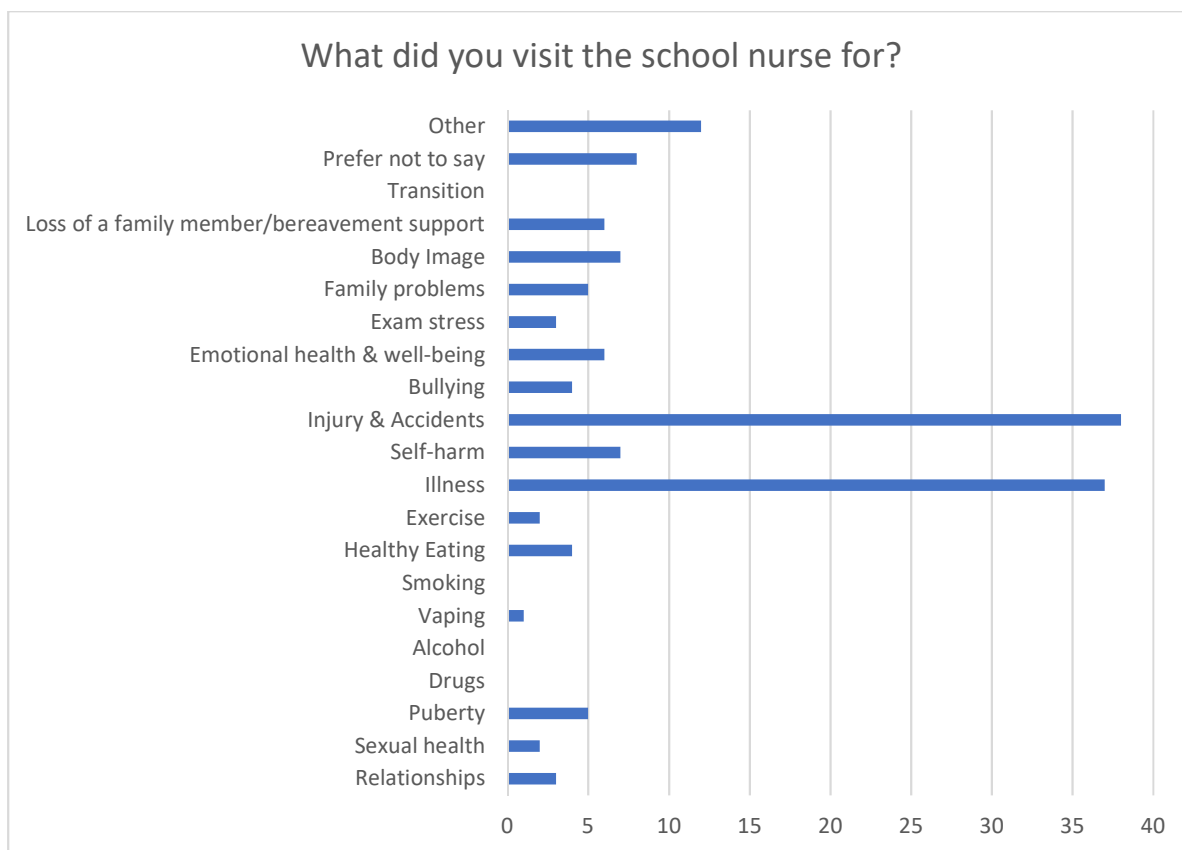


Figure 6.3 – Reasons for visiting the school nurse

Young people were asked, if they had a problem at home that they couldn't talk to their parents or carer about, who if, anyone would they talk to about it or ask for help from. Figure 6.4 shows they would choose their friends, followed by siblings and teacher or an adult at school.

Mental health support teams, which was added as a new category for this question in 2023, was also a popular choice after family members and teachers at school, which is positive to see as these teams were only introduced last year.

In terms of the telephone helpline, both age groups stated "Childline", with a couple of primary aged children mentioning the police. Online chats that are used include Kooth, Discord, Snapchat bot and to friends via Messenger. Three primary school children made reference to talking to people on PlayStation. The other category talked of other people or services that could be utilised including their local priest, pastoral office in school, a therapist, boyfriend and virtual reality mechanisms online.

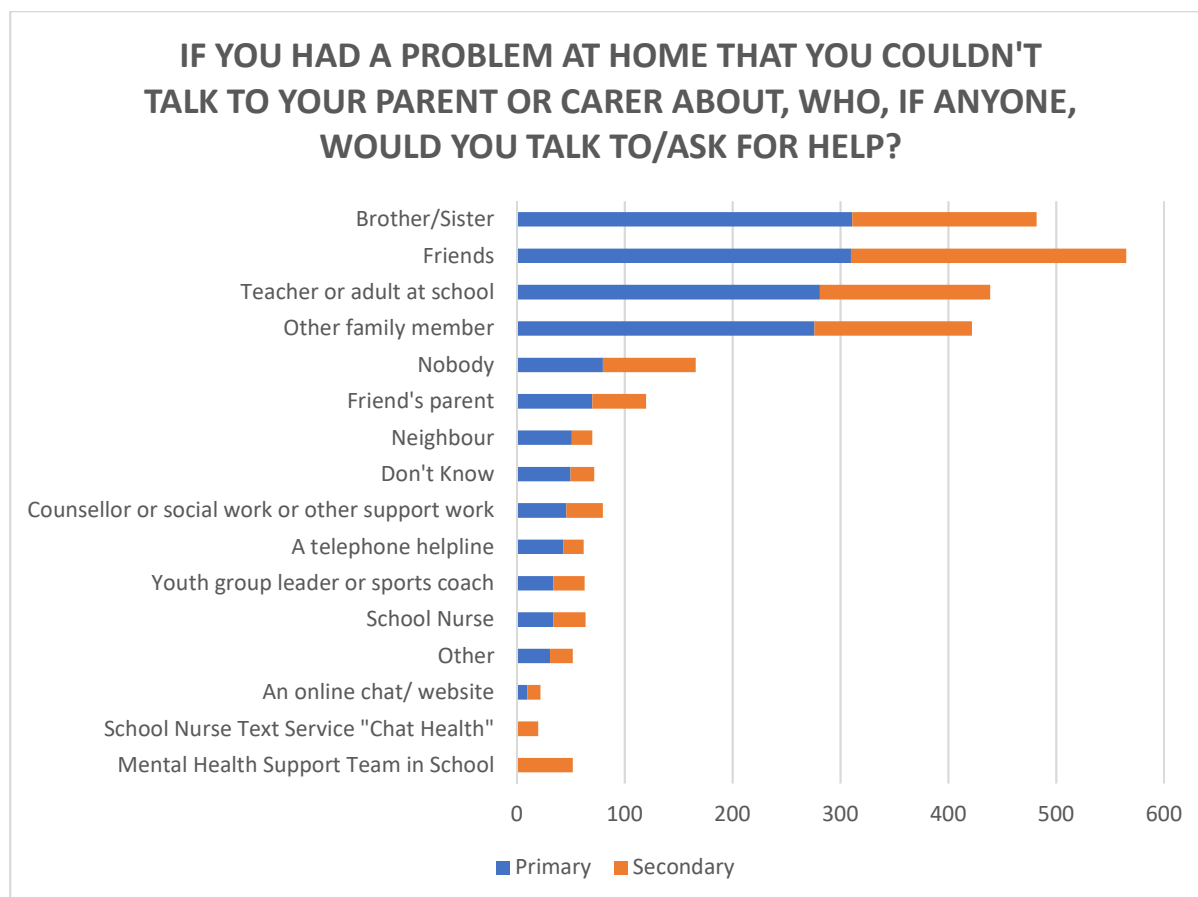


Figure 6.4 – who would you talk to/ask for help from?

In Sandwell, there are a range of services available to support your emotional health and well-being. The secondary pupils were asked which services they were aware of. The pastoral support in school and Sandwell Youth Services came out higher. As in figure 6.4, it was positive to see again that Mental Health Support Teams, were also recognised by young people. In terms of other services, School Health Nursing along with DECCA were most known. Services the young people were aware of which featured in the “other” category choice were: Childline, social services via their social worker, RSPCA, emergency services, NHS, Kaleidoscope, Murray Hall, Umbrella, Young Minds and NSPCC.

For young people with disabilities the top 3 support services they were aware of were: Pastoral support within school, CAMHs (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services) and Mental Health Support Teams in School.

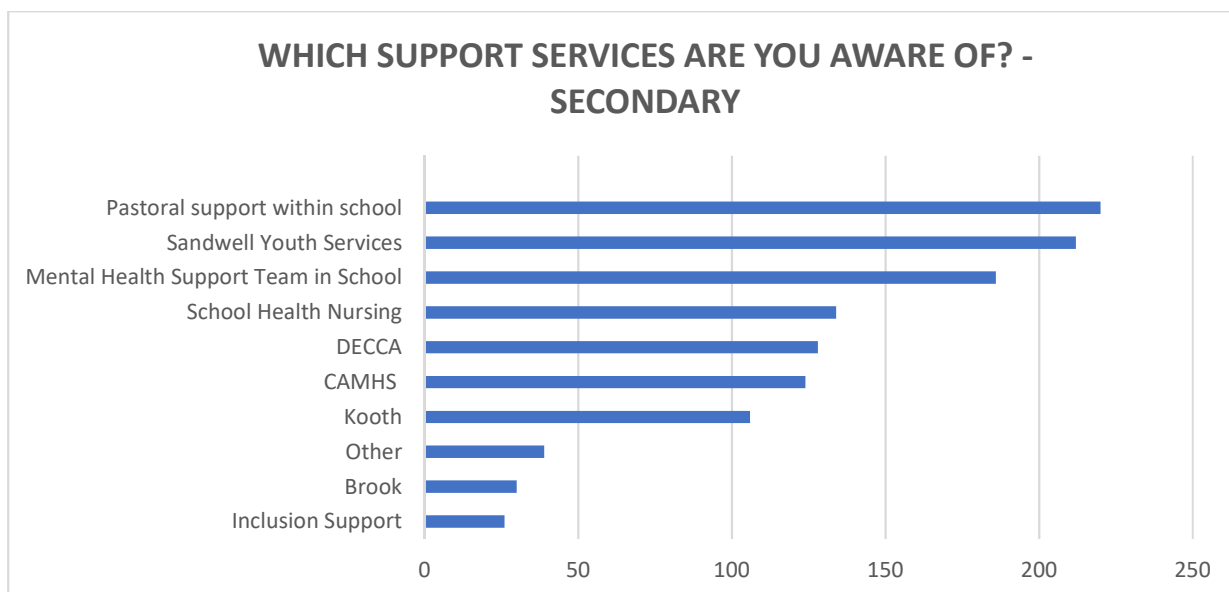


Figure 6.5 – Which support services are you aware of?

7. Substance Usage

Questions about substance use were asked to those young people who were in year 9 or above in secondary schools. Of the 456 young people surveyed, 13.1% had consumed an alcoholic drink, of which 5 students stated they had been drunk once or twice a week in the last 4 weeks and 13 had used alcohol only once or twice.

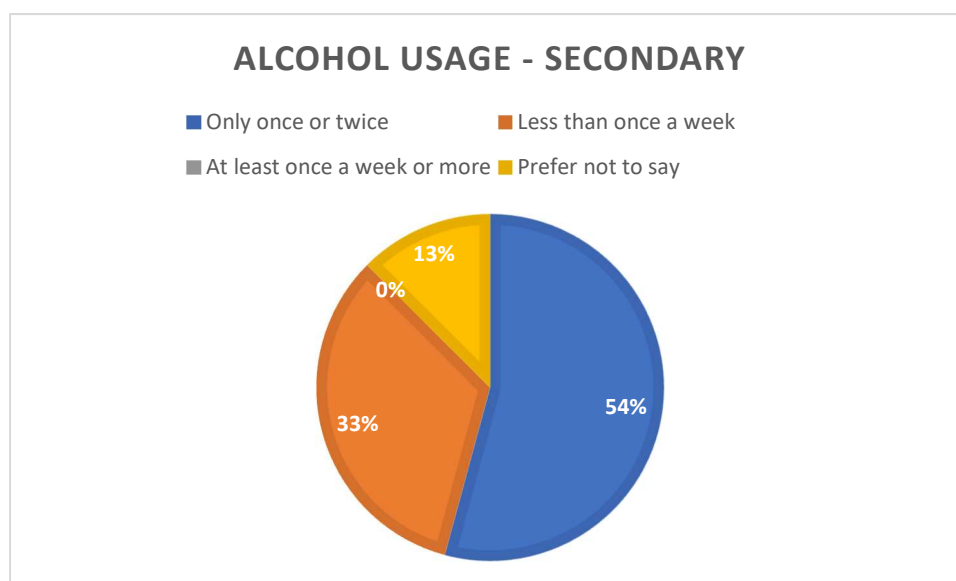


Figure 7.1 – Alcohol usage

16 young people had used an e-cigarette/vape of which the usage can be seen in figure 7.2. When the young people were asked, why they vape, they stated that they liked it and it was fun. Others stated it was to help them relieve their stress and family issues. 1 stated that they took it “To stop myself from smoking” and another did not actually like it but used it to fit in with others socially, “I dont but maybe for the social aspect”. Only 1 student tried it but didn’t like it.

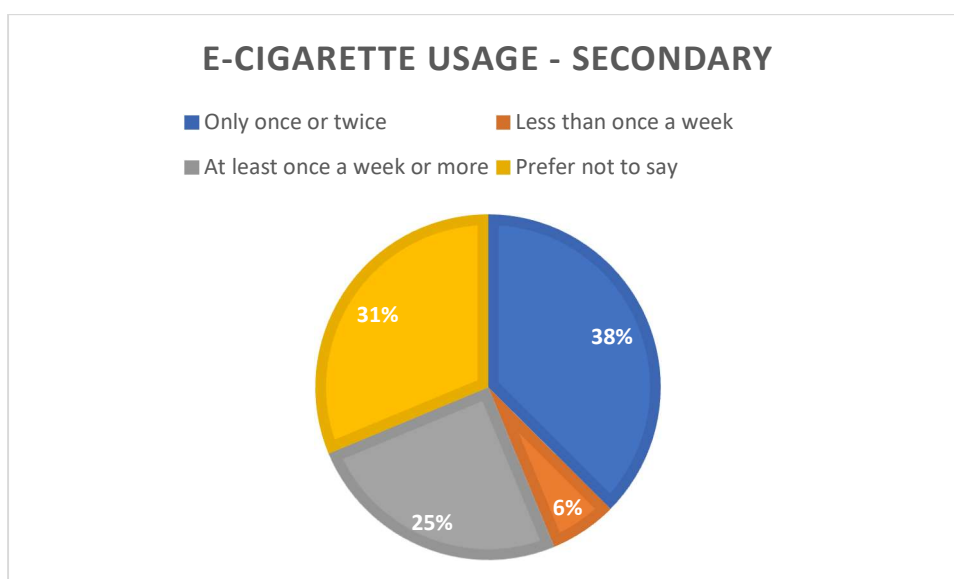


Figure 7.2 – E-Cigarette usage

Figure 7.3 shows that 2 out of 185 students that were year 9 and above, stated they have taken drugs (illegal substances) for recreational use, however 10 stated they prefer not to say. The 2 who had consumed drugs, claimed they had taken cannabis (weed, grass, dope, pot, marijuana). 1 of these had used drugs less than once a week and 1 used it regularly.

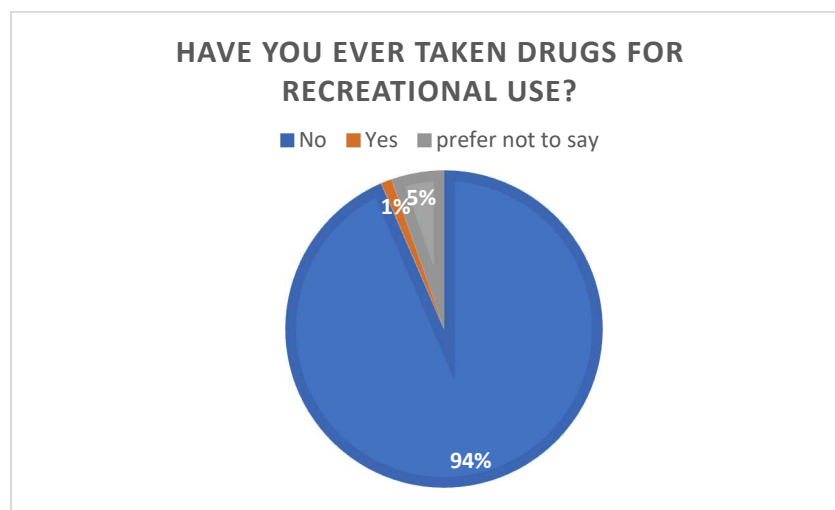


Figure 7.3 –Drugs Usage

8. Keeping Physically Fit & Mentally Fit

When asking young people how they keep themselves physically fit and healthy, for both age groups, exercising and eating healthy food were the most popular ways in keeping physically and mentally fit, which is also reflective of the results from 2022 SHAPE survey. Sports, particularly football, is an activity they like doing and the secondary age also enjoyed walking.

[illegible]

The young people in secondary school were asked if they like to take part in PE/sporting/physical activities in and/or out of school, as the figures last year showed over 20% did not like taking part in PE. This year's survey had similar results with 18.3% not liking sporting activities. Reasons provided were due to medical issues, PE was boring, and some felt they were not good at it, a couple also felt insecure. They were also asked what sporting activities they would like to be involved in or out of school and many were stated, however football, cricket and basketball were the most popular at a secondary age.

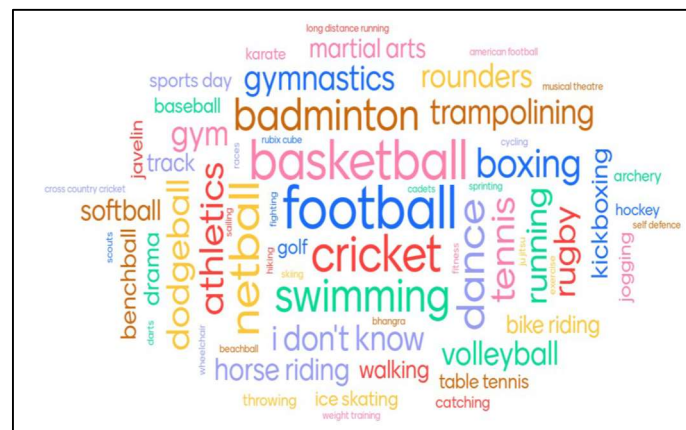


Figure 8.3 shows that when asking why they exercise; the top reasons were to get stronger and improve the mood. Secondary responses also stated that physical activity helped with long term health conditions such as diabetes, which also correlates to other areas of the survey where medical issues appear to be referred more to that in previous survey results. The 'other' category that primary children chose included reasons such as to improve confidence and be healthier, whereas secondary outlined reasons such as for the mind, preventing obesity and being confident.

Primary	Secondary
To get stronger	To improve my mood
To get more energy	To get stronger
To improve my mood	To help with long term health conditions
To have better stamina	To have better stamina
To lose weight	To lose weight
To help with long term health conditions	To get more energy
To make more friends when you take part in activities	To look good
To look good	To make more friends when you take part in activities
Other	Other

Figure 8.3 – Responses to “Why do you Exercise?”

Young people at secondary age were asked if the council could do more to help direct them to available sporting/physical activity facilities, with 23.2% agreeing that the council could do more and 54.3% being not sure. Suggestions made were to offer more activities, particularly free ones, offer more events and more clubs.

9. Social Media and Gaming

The following series of questions focuses on internet, social media channels, usage and gaming.

9.1 Internet

When primary school children were asked what they used the internet for, figure 9.11 shows that it is widely used for a number of reasons beyond school work. In previous surveys, homework, has always been the highest response, with gaming being the second highest, however this year, the most popular answer was gaming at 29% followed then by homework and chatting both at 19%.

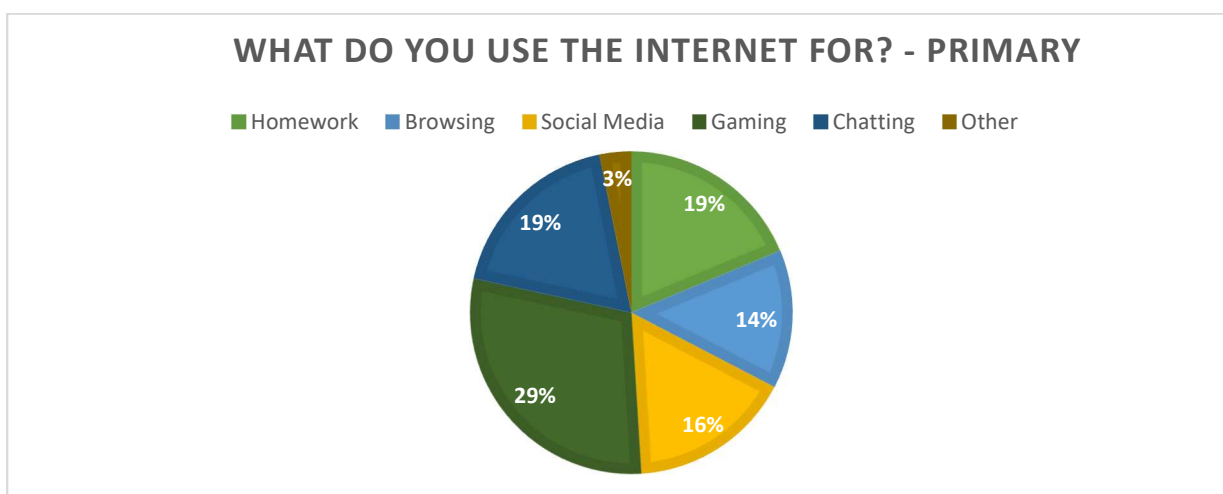


Figure 9.11 – What do you use the internet for?

Figure 9.12 shows the percentage of primary and secondary children who chat to people online that they have never met. 25.6% of primary chat to people they have never met, online and 34% of secondary age young people do.

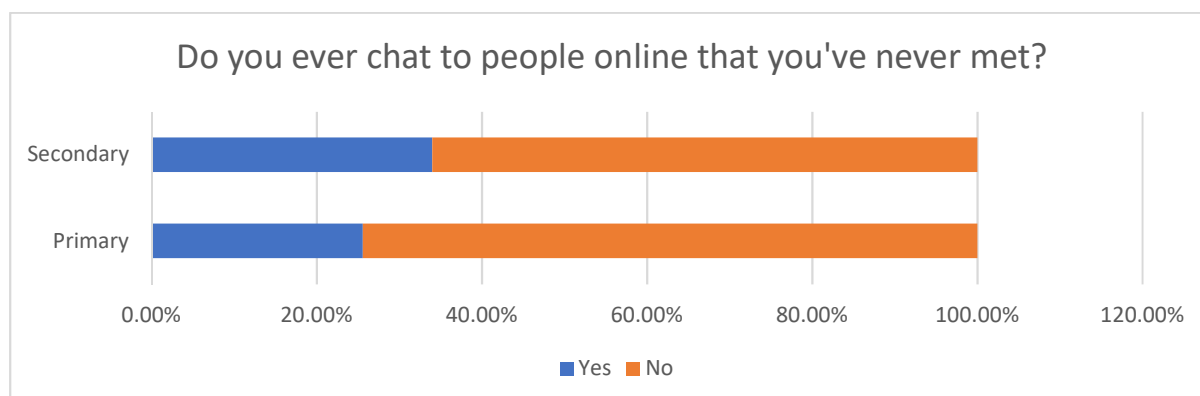


Figure 9.12 – Do you ever chat to people online that you’ve never met?

When asked why they chat to people online they have never met, the primary age made reference to making more friends, “Because I’m lonely I have no one to play with on Roblox”.

Many of both primary and secondary age students did state they were aware of the dangers online and hence would not provide any of their personal information to them, “And I only talk to people in games I know the consequences of talking to strangers, so I know the signs.” Interestingly, some young people also stated other people add them through social media channels, “I go on snapchat and people quick add me.”

The secondary age group stated that interesting people were online, and they found them friendlier than people they meet face to face, “Because they make me feel normal” and “And online friends are kinder to me then offline friends”. Although they appeared to understand the risks, a few young people stated they were still happy to meet the people they meet online eventually “I’m able to express myself and when I know them well enough, we plan to meet.”

9.2 Social Media

When asked about social media platforms and applications, figure 9.21 shows primary age children stated the most popular channels were YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok and Snapchat, with the most popular reason for using them being chatting, watching videos and messaging. It is good, however, to see that there are some channels this age group are not using, such as Instagram, which is heavily underused by this age group. This is positive as most social media channels have age restrictions, which are beyond the primary age.

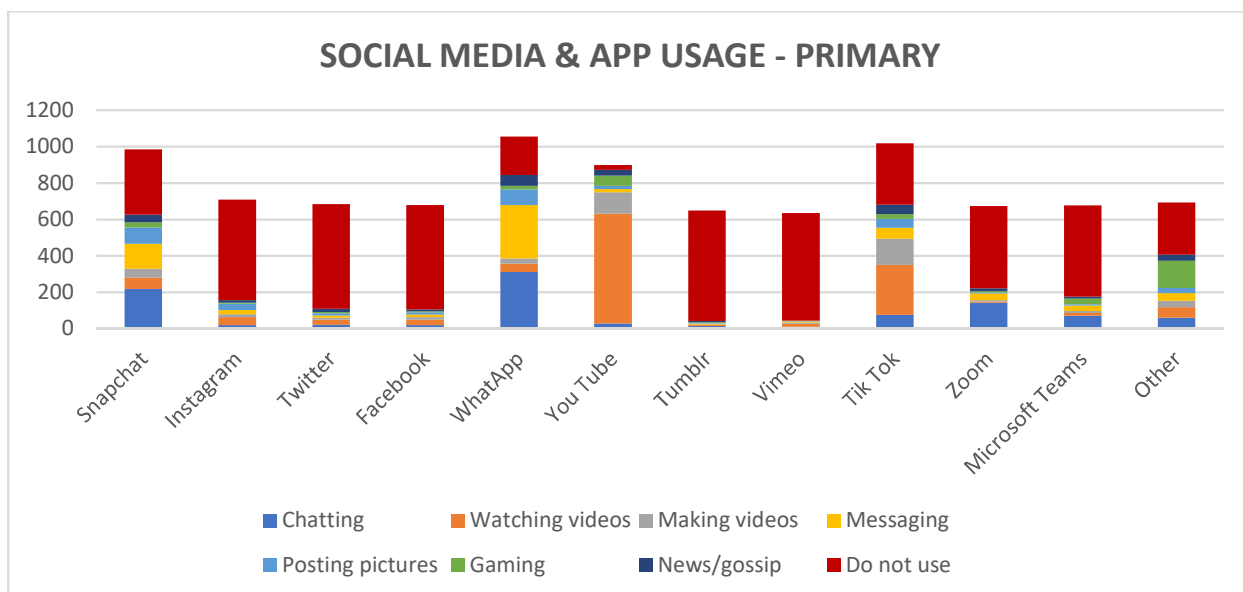


Figure 9.21 – Social Media and App usage - Primary

For secondary young people, figure 9.22 shows the most popular channels are TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp and YouTube, for chatting, watching videos and messaging. The popularity of social media channels is always changing. Last year for secondary, Instagram was in the top 4 most used, however this year, the results show the channel is not used as much, with 209 young people claiming they do not use this channel. Twitter and Facebook's popularity also continues to decline amongst young people. The channels chosen as the most popular are the ones where there is an instant messaging service or videos for entertainment purposes.

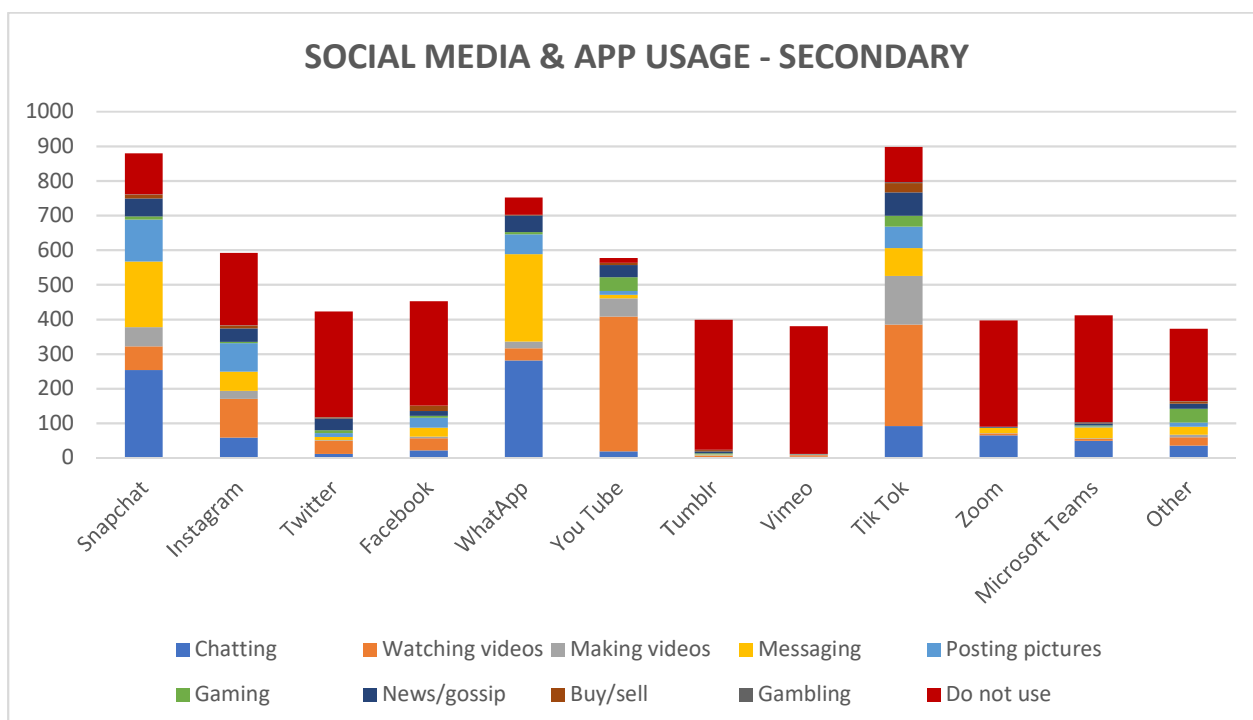


Figure 9.22 – Social media and App usage - Secondary

Young people were asked what issues they experienced online from various options. It must be noted; the primary age group had a limited choice compared to the secondary age group. In figure 9.23, for the primary age group, issues are encountered and range from some name calling and cyberbullying with some elements of racist and sexist comments. It is important to note that cyberbullying issues accounted for over a third of the responses in 2022, significantly higher than 2020 and continues to increase, with 40% of children surveyed encountering some level of cyberbullying, which demonstrates that this issue is persisting. 24% who chose the option anything else, stated they had experienced nothing, and the other responses related to bad language, rude comments and fraud or scams.

At a secondary age, again cyberbullying comes out the highest at 24%, which is higher than 2022 at 18%. However, racist and sexist comments are also experienced with similar figures to 2022. For young people who considered themselves to have a disability, 76.9% experienced cyberbullying, 53.8% experienced sexist comments and 38.5% experienced sexually explicit videos/photos.

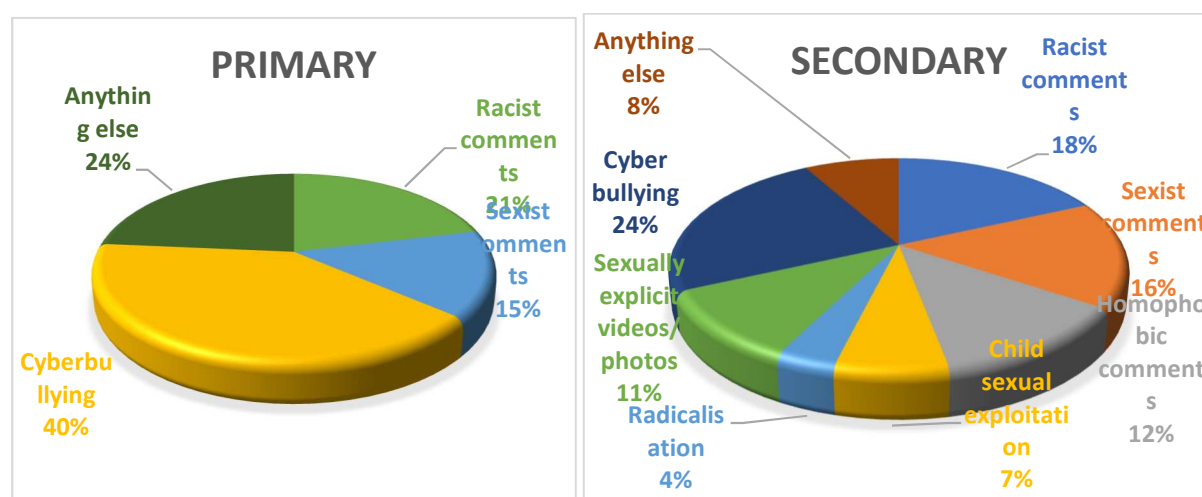


Figure 9.23 – Issues experienced online

9.3 Gaming

Gaming for primary age children is hugely popular as demonstrated in other sections of the survey.

When asked if the young people within both age groups were purchasing through gaming, including the purchase of coins, skins and loot boxes, 43% of primary and 41% of secondary stated that they were making in-app purchases, which are similar figures to 2022. Over 80% of these stating they purchased on a monthly basis with over a third of both age categories spending £5-£9.99.

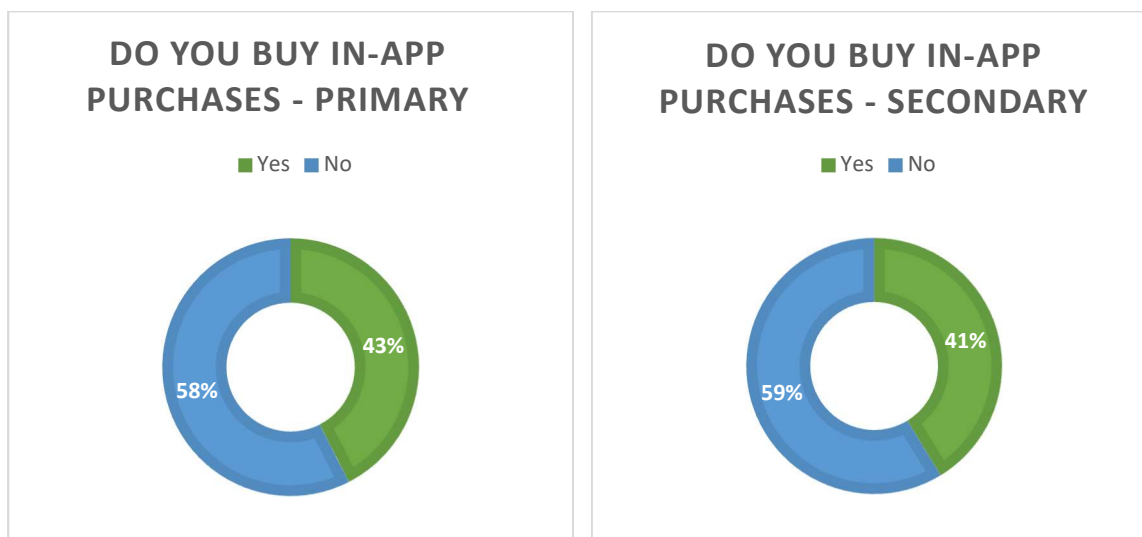


Figure 9.31 – Buying In-App Purchases

The young people were asked what games they play. There were vast number of games mentioned but the most popular ones for both age groups were Minecraft, Fortnite, Roblox, Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto, as it was last year. However, Fifa is less popular with primary in these results, but still features as one of the most popular games for secondary. Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto do have an age restriction of 18 and above and therefore are not suitable games for primary school children, yet are extremely popular.

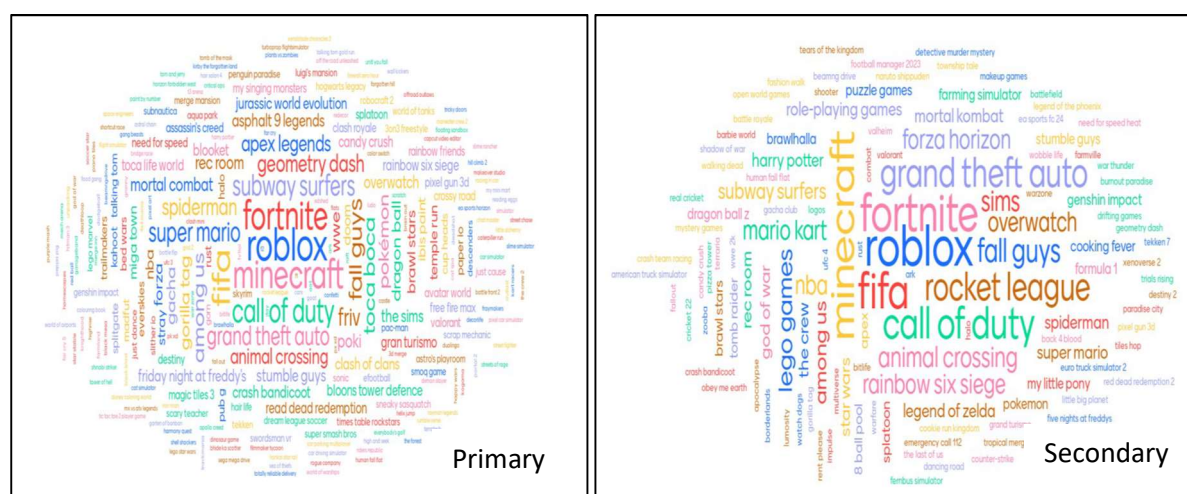


Figure 9.32 – Responses to “What games do you play?”

9.4 Communicating Information

In 2022, the results showed that the internet is the most popular mode of communication, for secondary school pupils of finding information on jobs and employment, health services, drugs and alcohol and physical health. This year, young people were asked, other than school, which methods they preferred the council and organisations to communicate with them. The most popular response was through WhatsApp or a text messaging service, which is not surprising to see as WhatsApp is a popular communication channel used as demonstrated in the social media usage

section of the report (*Refer to 9.2 Social Media*). The 2nd most popular choice was through social media channels.

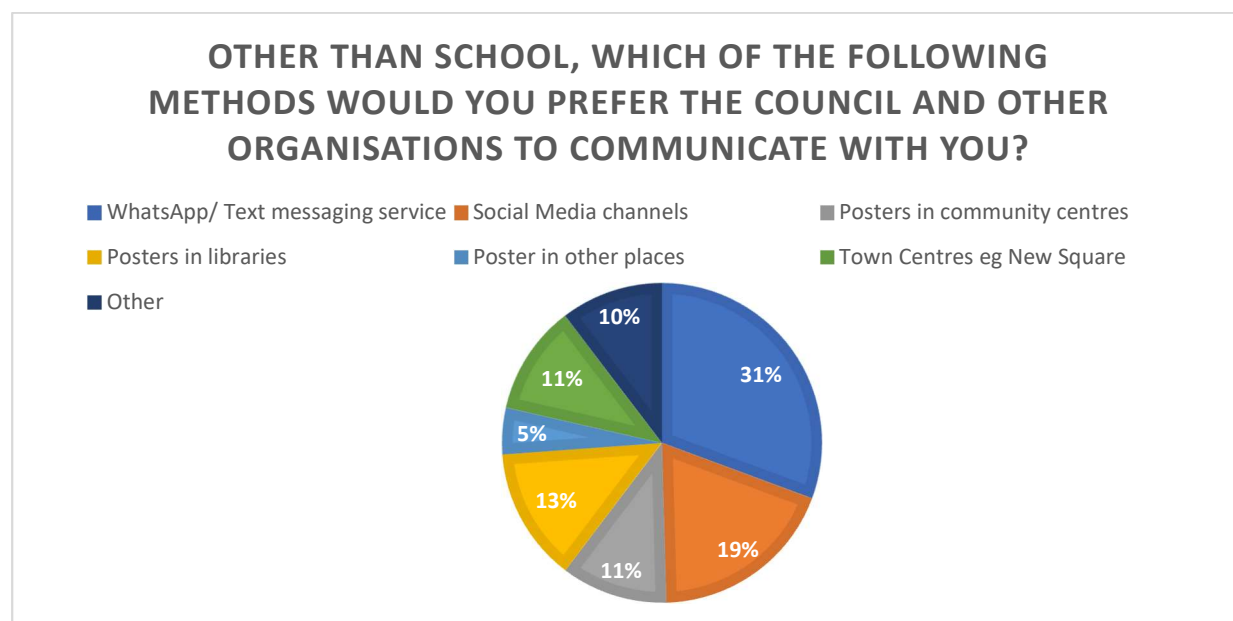


Figure 9.41 – Responses to preferred communication methods

Following on from the preferred communication methods, young people were asked which social media channels they wanted the council to communicate through. TikTok and Snapchat were the most popular, again correlating with the channels that young people use the most. For young people with disabilities, You Tube was selected Instagram was the 3rd most popular, which currently the council utilises along with Facebook.

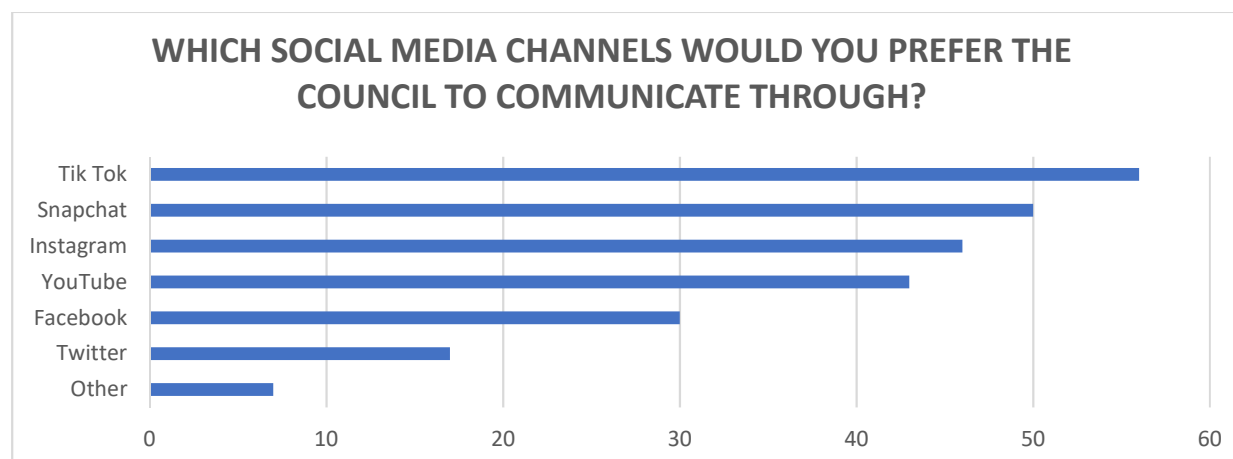


Figure 9.42 – Which social media channels to communicate through

The secondary age group were also asked if there is anything in their life that they felt they needed more guidance and support with. As with the questions about improvements to mental health in section 2, exam support came out as one of the most popular reasons, as well as helping aspects of mental health, such as being able to manage stress and anxiety, overcome fears and anger management. Also living

independently through more education on life skills, taking responsibility, career choices and further education.

10. Local Area

Generally young people think their local area is either very good or fairly good. Opinions shift slightly at secondary age to be less favourable. These results are also reflective of previous years.

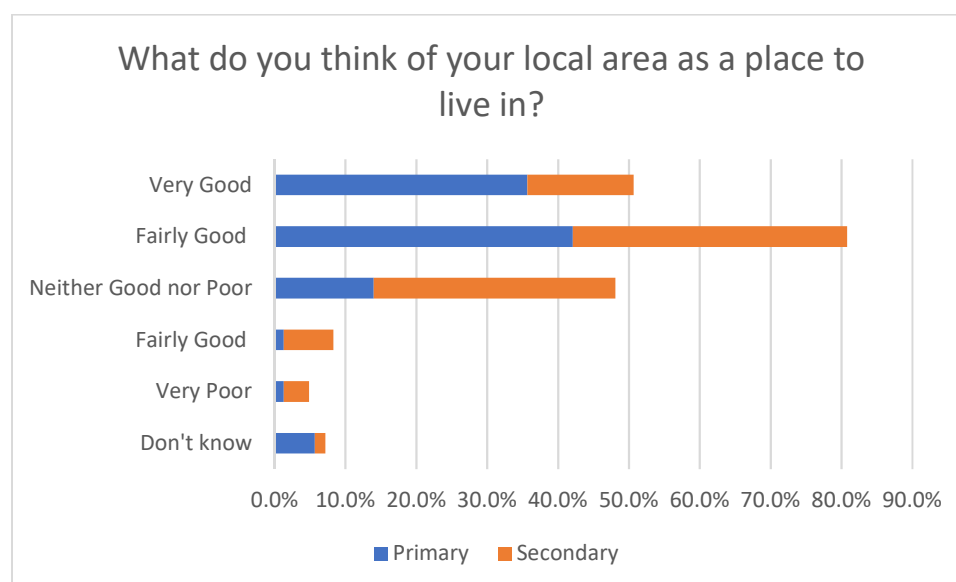


Figure 10.1 – Local area as a place to live in

For the primary age group, the 3 things they felt would do the most to make their area better are: clean and less litter, safer area or less crime and safer roads for cycling and walking. For the secondary age they agreed with the area being cleaner and less litter and safer area or less crime, but their third choice for their area was more or better shops.

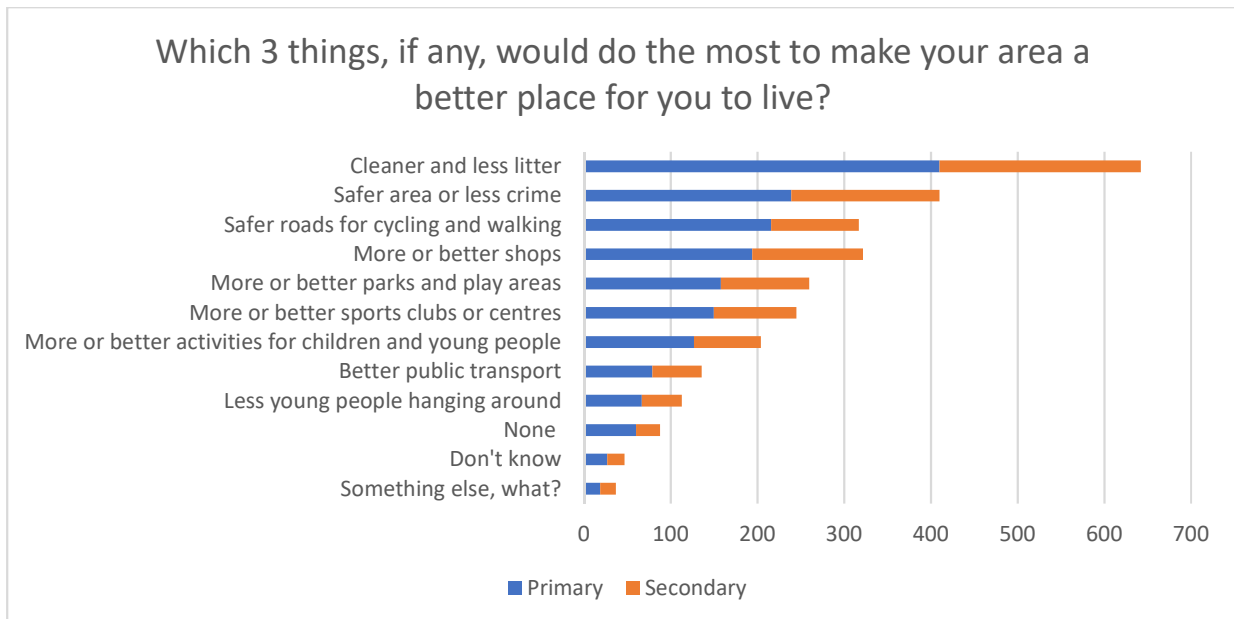
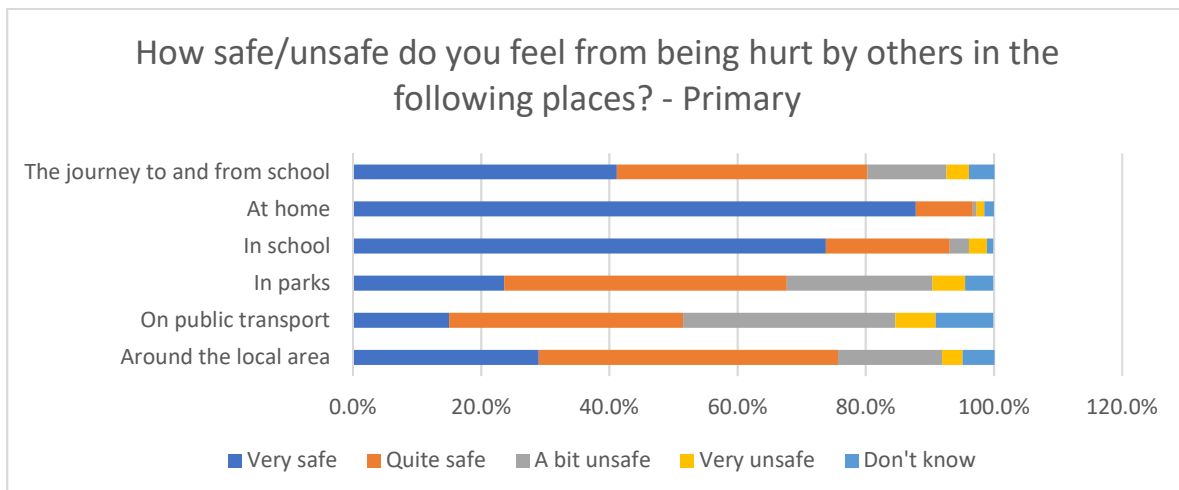


Figure 10.2 – Making your area a better place to live

In terms of safety, ‘In parks’ and ‘the journey to and from school’ were new categories introduced into this question in this year’s survey. Both primary and secondary age felt very safe or fairly safe at home and in their school environment, which was reflective of last year’s survey results. The two areas with the lowest results were in parks and public transport. In parks, 66.7% of the primary age group felt safe or fairly safe compared to 51.4% for the secondary age group and for public transport, 51.5% of the primary age feel safe or fairly safe compared to secondary age group with 44.8% and these figures have decreased from 2022.



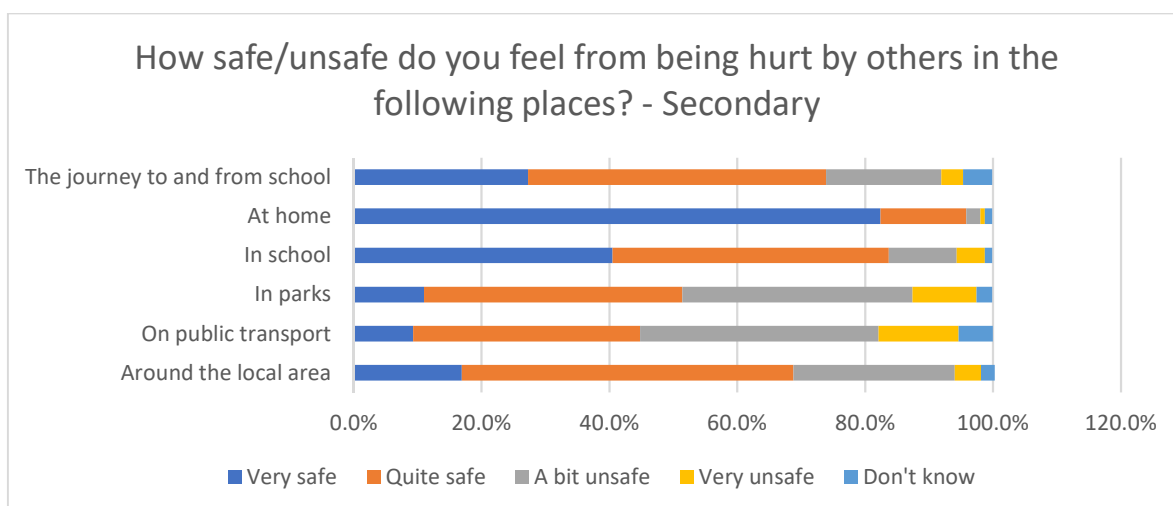


Figure 10.3- Safety in places

11. Education & Learning

In addition, to the education questions explored in the mental health and wellbeing section, this section included questions about children's likes and dislikes at school, bullying, coping with school work, school attendance, transition to secondary school and topics they would like to learn about in school.

Friends, teachers, learning and education are the positives felt about being in school. Primary school children appear to enjoy their day to day school life. Another one of the popular answers for the secondary age group was "nothing" which in this case is not a positive answer, however, many did state that they felt school provided a supportive environment.

Primary	Secondary
Learning/Education	Friends
Friends	Lessons/learning/Education
Teachers	Teachers
Playtime/Activities	Supportive environment
Fun	Nothing

Figure 11.1 – Top responses for positives about school

Although there were many things highlighted which children didn't like about school, bullying has appeared again for both age groups. The secondary age young people also raised some other issues, that they had previously highlighted in the mental health and wellbeing section, such as gangs and knife crime. Mental health aspects also were stated such as stress, being bored and feeling unmotivated.

Primary	Secondary
Nothing	Teachers
Certain subjects/lessons	Bullying
Bullying	Exams, resits, tests, assessments
Teachers	Nothing
School work is hard	People
	I don't know
	Stress
	Rules
	Lessons
	Rude people
	Everything
	Doing subjects I don't enjoy or find difficult

Figure 11.2 – Top responses for negatives about school

Figure 11.3 shows how often young people have been bullied in school/college in the last 4 weeks. 26.9% (181) of primary school children have been bullied in the last 4 weeks and of the 392 young people who chose to answer this question, 28.6% (112 secondary) of secondary school young people. These figures are higher than last years, only slightly for primary but more for the secondary age group, by just over 10%. Around 15% were bullied in both age groups just a couple of times in the last 4 weeks and only 5% most days, accounting to 38 children from primary and 20 from secondary.

For young people who considered themselves to have a disability, at a secondary age, 46.4% (13 young people) had been bullied in the last 4 weeks. 28.6% of these (8 young people) stated school does not deal with bullying well.

65.2% of primary school children felt their school deals with bullying very well or quite well which is similar to last year but only 49% of secondary pupils felt that their school dealt well with bullying issues, which is lower than last year's figure of 53.6%.

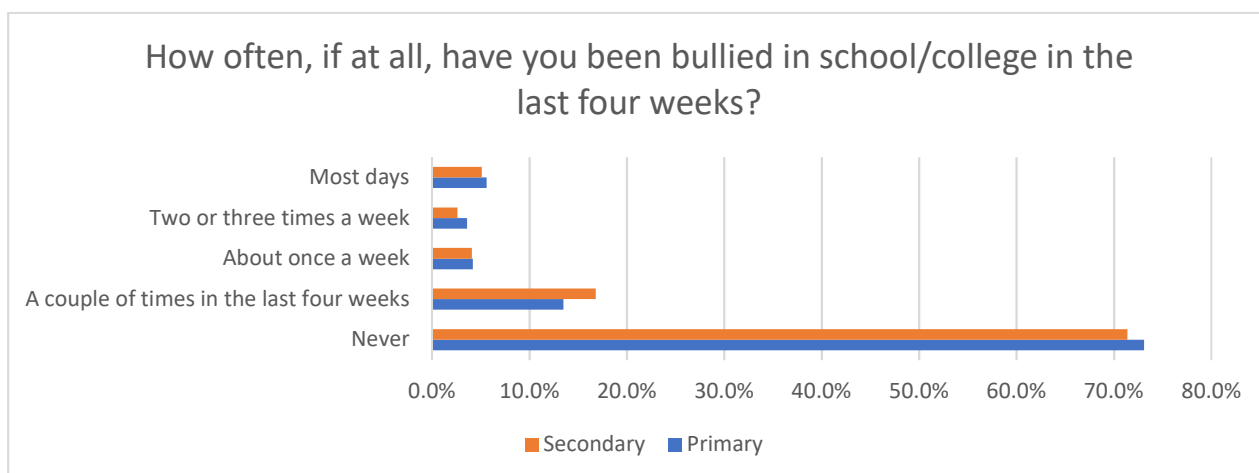


Figure 11.3 – How often have you been bullied in school/college in the last four weeks?

Those who had experienced bullying had the choice to explain their experience. For primary children, these involved nasty comments or being called names about their appearance and also issues in friendship groups. Even though the children are hurt, there are a couple of comments made which demonstrate resilience at a young age “It makes life hard but I have never given up”.

For young people at a secondary age, less were willing to share their stories and those that did stated issues between friends, name calling over appearance and group/ social bullying. Young people who did share their experiences demonstrated a lot of hurt and distress in their comments, “I have been bullied for 2 years now and honestly it hurts to go through anything like this because no one should have to deal with this” and some comments were also made about having to try and fit in, “It makes you feel like you have to change yourself for other people that don’t value that we are all equal”. Figure 11.4 provides some of the experiences the children and young people shared of being a victim of bullying.



Figure 11.4 – Being a victim of bullying

77% of primary aged children felt they were coping well with levels of school work compared to 53.3% of secondary age group, these figures are an improvement from last year's results of 70% for primary and 49.4% for secondary. Of the 20.5% from secondary who said they were not coping well stated that they could be supported to improve this through additional support with exams including structured revision time, less homework, less pressure, reducing mental health issues, anger management support and less bullying.

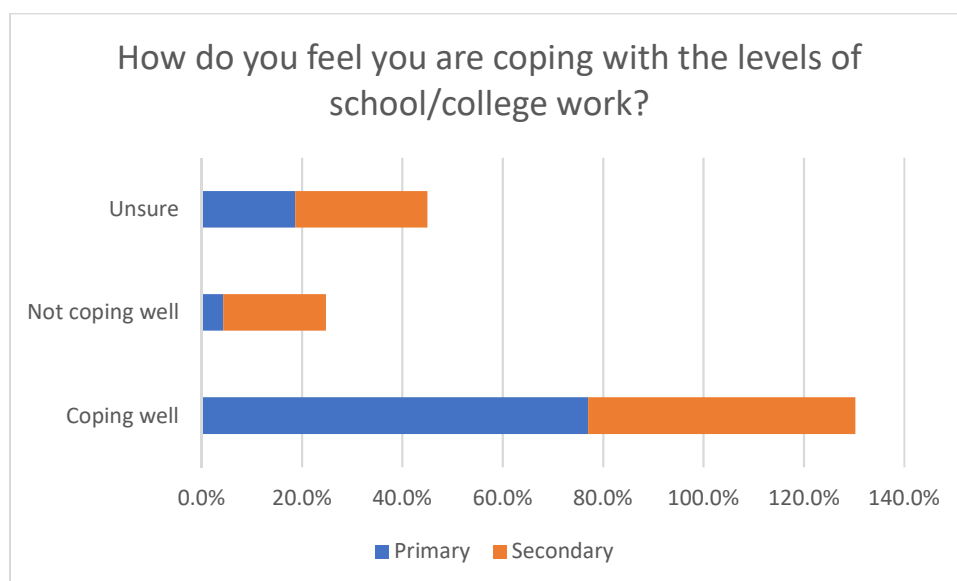


Figure 11.5 – Coping with school/college work

In this year's survey, questions were added around attendance at school. Figure 11.6 shows the percentage of young people who were absent from school in the last 12 months, with 83% from primary and 72% from secondary.

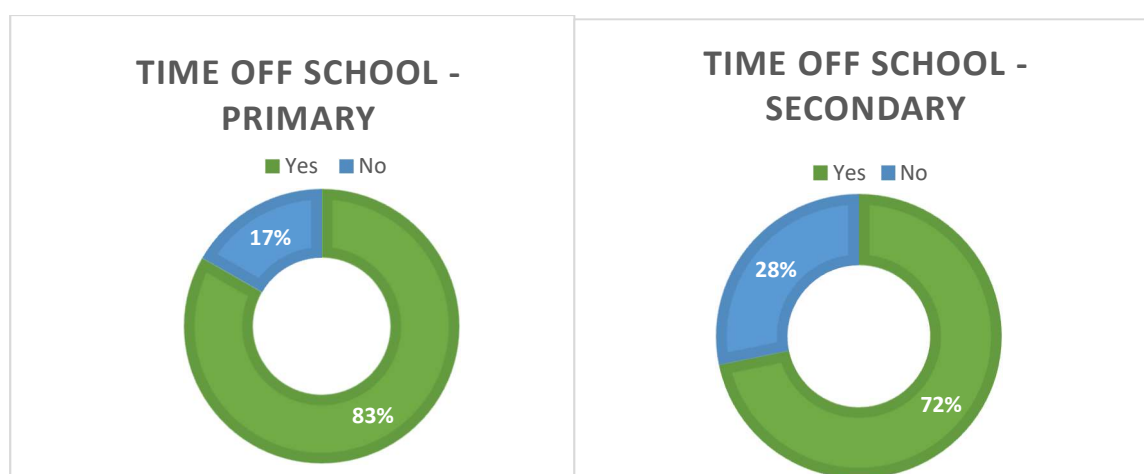


Figure 11.6 – Time absent from school

The reasons for absences can be seen in figure 11.7 with the highest being for short-term illness, followed in primary with holidays in term time and, secondary with mental health and anxiety issues.

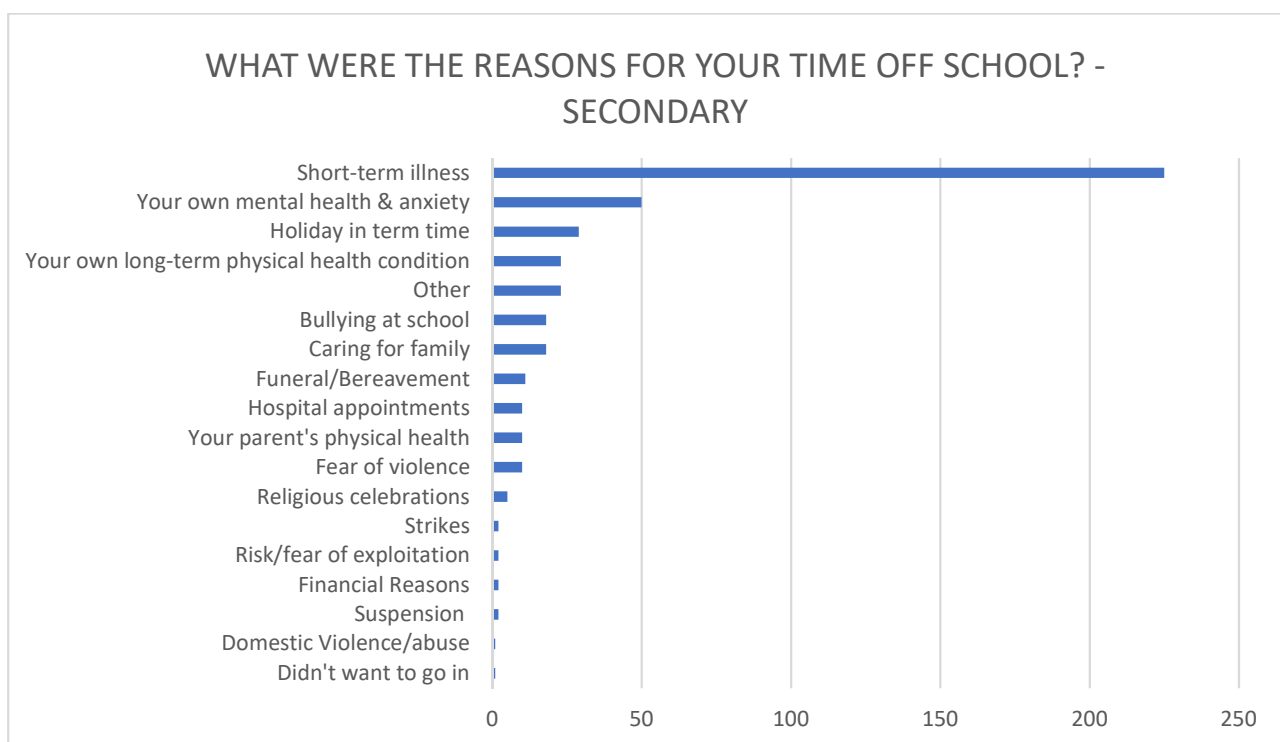
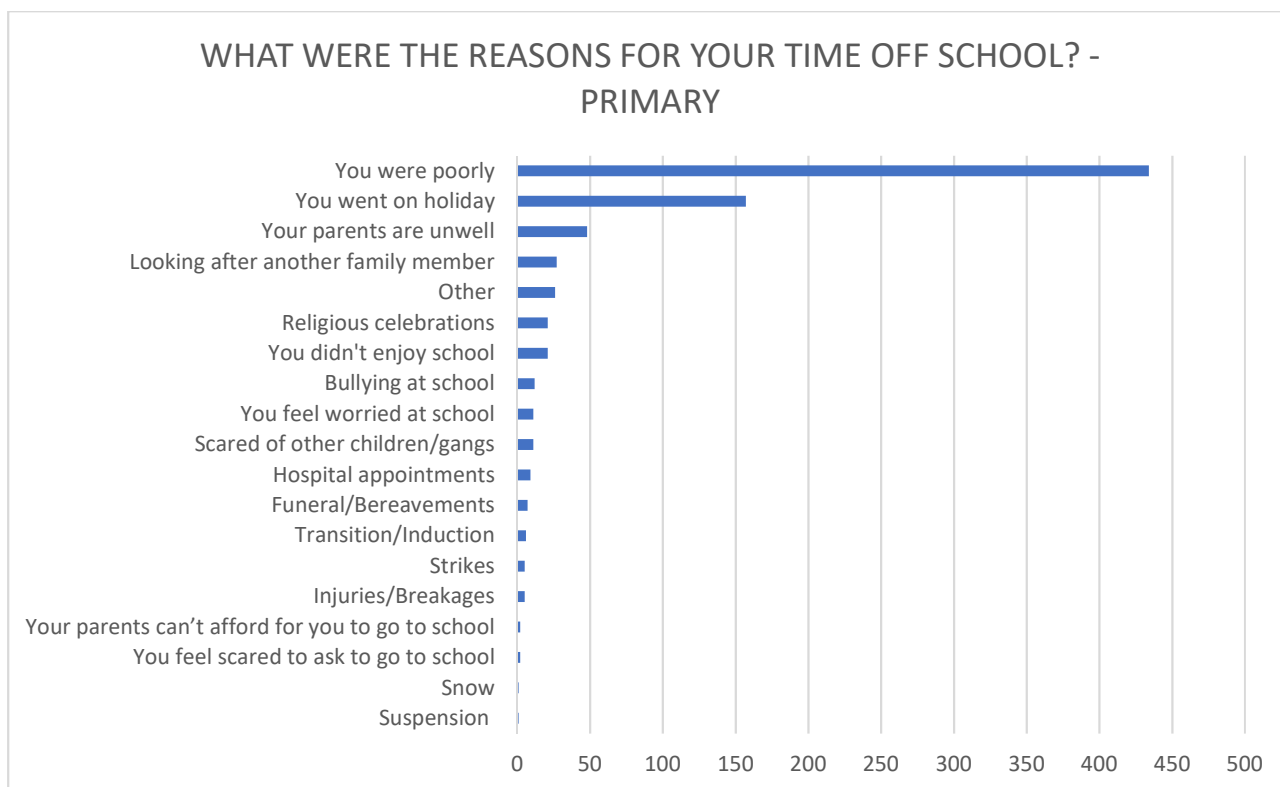


Figure 11.7 – Reasons for time off school

The primary age group were asked about transition to secondary school and whether they are looking forward to it. 25% stated they were not looking forward to going, a similar figure to 2022. Reasons provided were being scared of meeting new people, “I am really scared about talking to people I don’t know, and it scares me a lot”, as well as the fact that secondary schools are a lot bigger than their primary schools.

The issue of bullying also appeared again. Those who were being bullied, have mixed feelings, with most having a more positive outlook, “I want to go secondary school because I could meet new people and have a fresh new start without toxic people”, or feel they have older siblings who can protect them, “Because then my sister will be there then she will help me with homework and bullies” and they can start a new chapter in their life. However, others are still nervous or “scared” due to the experiences they have faced and lack of confidence. A few children still feel they will continue to get bullied, “It does really make me feel bad when people judge me by my appearance”.

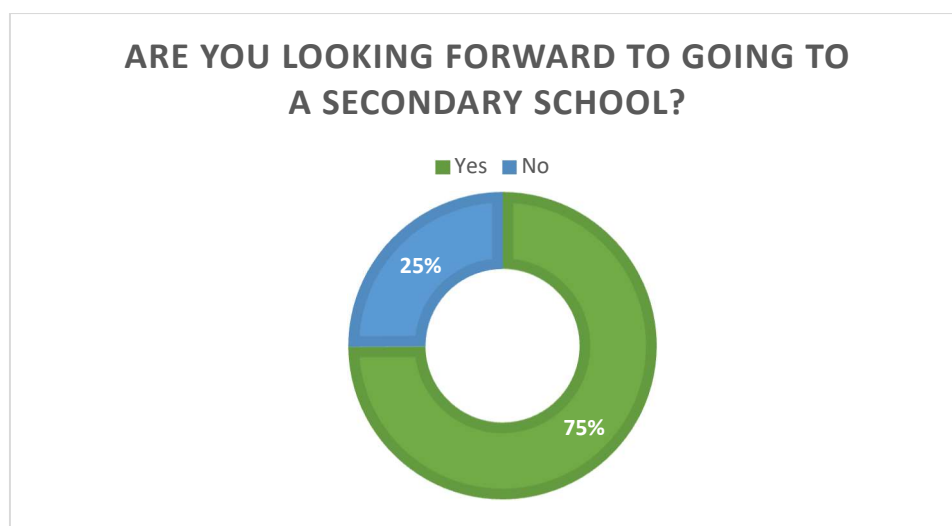


Figure 11.8 – Transition to secondary school

The secondary age group were asked a few more questions about their education. Only 40% felt like a valued member of their school/college community with 42% stating they were not sure and 18% stating they did not feel a valued member.

For those who didn't feel valued, it was because they were unknown in the school, they felt left out, didn't get recognised or are not appreciated, “No appreciation whatsoever”, “I don't feel anyone would be affected if I left the school not even the staff”. There were many young people who didn't know why they felt this way. Those who did feel valued were appreciated by teachers, they get rewarded, they are respected and listened to, they are asked to represent the school, everyone is treated equally, being part of the school council, a prefect, involved in school sports teams, being popular in school with lots of friends and everyone in the school liking them, “I feel equal and people are kind to me”.

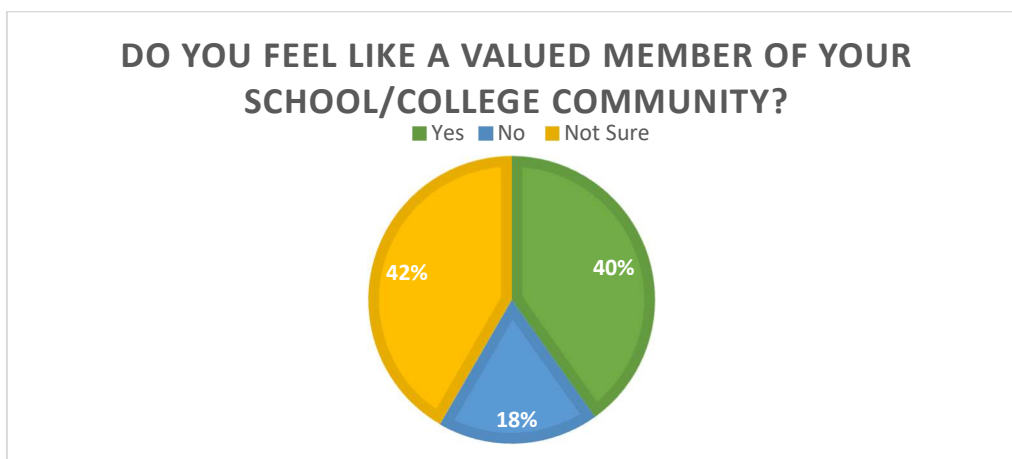


Figure 11.9 – Do you feel like a valued member of the school/college community?

Figure 11.10 shows that 53% of secondary age pupils felt their school provided them with the advice and guidance they needed to make informed choices about their future, with 30% stating they were unsure and 17% felt they didn't provide the advice and guidance on post-16 options. These figures were a slight improvement from last year. Those who felt they were not offered advice and guidance stated they were not told anything about jobs or taxes, what to do after GCSE's, "They don't teach us about taxes or money or jobs at all". Those that did offer good advice often had tools like PowerPoints, assemblies, learnt a lot about different education pathways, careers group in place and covered some topics in PHSE.

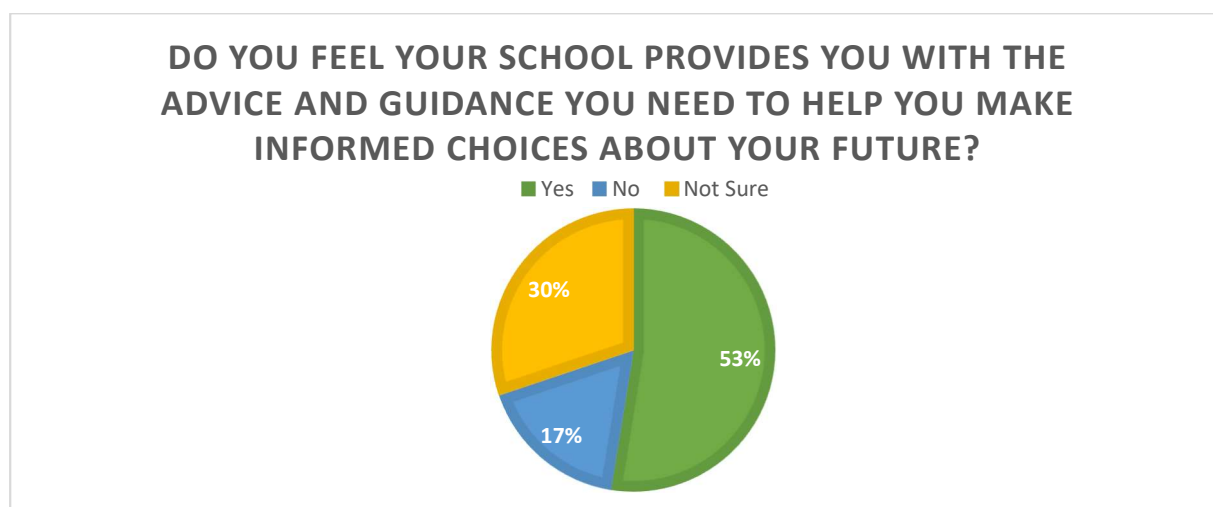


Figure 11.10 – Advice and guidance from school to make informed

They were also asked if there were any skills not taught in school which they would like to learn about. As many survey results have shown in the past, life skills, money management and taxes were things they wanted to learn about, but self-defence was another popular answer.



Figure 12.2 – Responses for “What youth activities would you like

Although Sandwell offers a wide range of activities for children and young people, services would like to increase the uptake. Therefore, the survey contains a question regarding the barriers to young people accessing activities. Previously the most popular answer has been the locality of the activity, and often the activity is not in their local area. However, this year's results show in figure 12.3 that young people do not have the time to go to activities and they are still unsure of what its available for them to do.



Figure 13.3 – What stops you from doing the activities you would like to do?

A few young people who said that they wanted something else in terms of activities, stated: - camping, ice skating, bowling arcades, dodgeball, hockey, volleyball, girls football, gyms for youth, swimming, trampolining, cricket or running, more football pitches and climbing stuff, horse-riding, football and more youth clubs.

Those who stated “other” said there were no football goals close by, they didn’t have the confidence to go or had social anxiety and found the activities boring.

13. Child’s Voice and Helping

The children and young people were asked about child’s voice and how much they are listened to at school and out of school.

When asked whether their schools have a school council, 75.5% of primary said they did and 65.8% of secondary said they did, which is lower than 2022 results for this question. However, less than 20% of each group were involved in their school council.

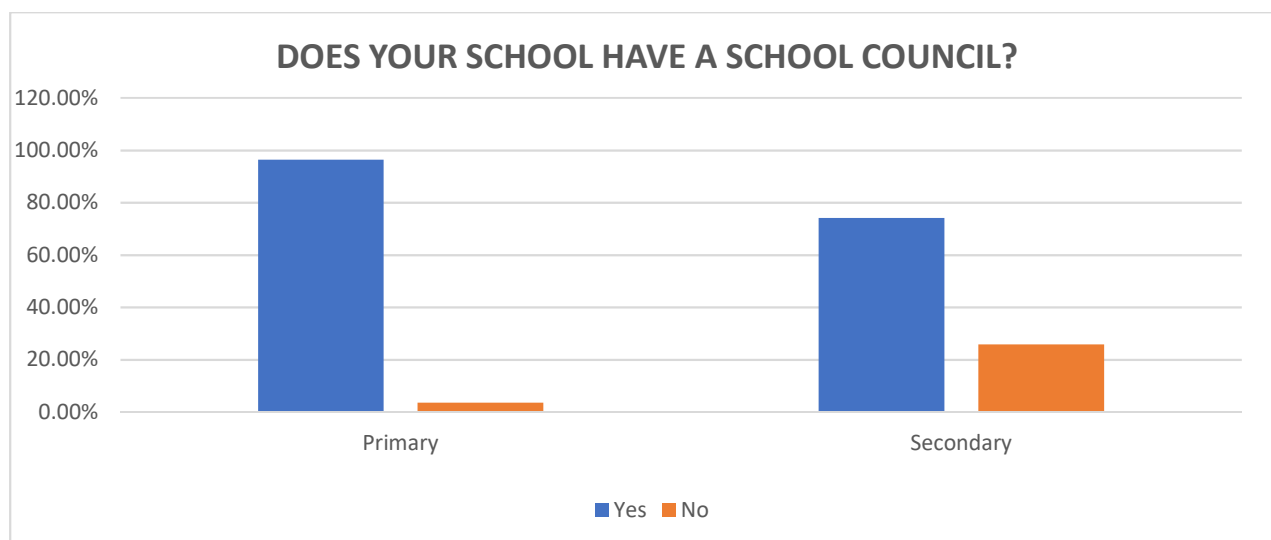


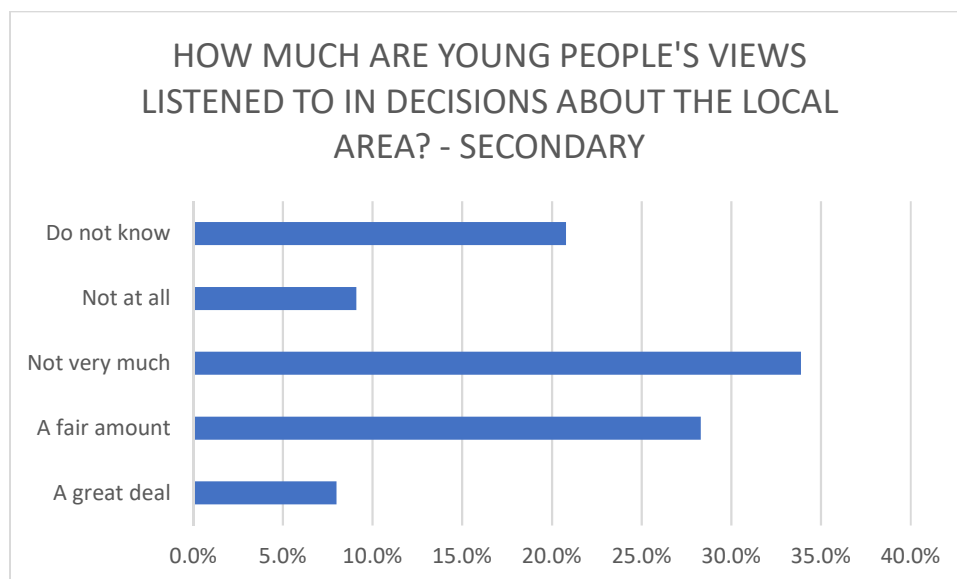
Figure 13.1 – School Councils

Over 75% of primary and secondary groups who were part of the school council stated they felt that they had made a difference in their school.

When asked if there was a way of having their voice heard, only 40.2% of primary age said ‘yes’, a lower result to last year, with nearly 50% being unsure. The ways mentioned were through having a school councillor to speak to, an ideas box, having regular meetings, through assemblies and speaking to teachers.

Of the secondary age group, 35% said they were not sure. Of the 52.8% who stated there was a way of having their voice heard, the answers were similar to primary, with a few other methods such as speaking to form captains, student support champions, “R u ok card”, talking to prefects, pastoral teams, Excellence Leaders and talking to someone like peers or teachers.

At a secondary age, young people felt their views about the local area were not listened to much, 33.9%, as shown in figure 13.2 below.



In this section, the final question asked to young people was, if they were in charge of Sandwell Council for one day, what problem would they solve and how would they solve it. The common things for both groups were cost of living, littering, crime and bullying. For the secondary age group, they also stated mental health.

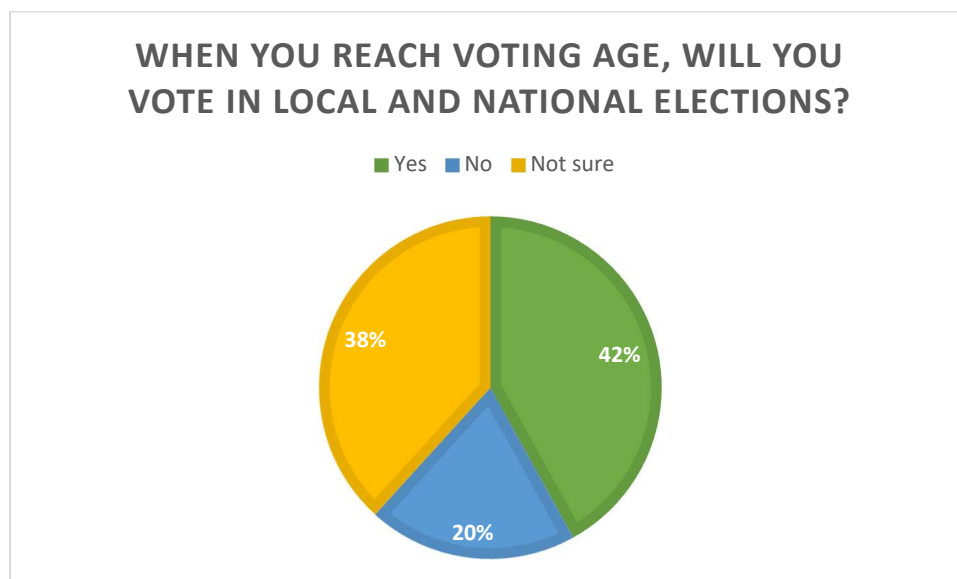


Figure 13.4 – Voting in local and national elections

Another new question introduced to this section was whether the cost of living had impacted on daily life. As seen in figure 13.3, this issue was something they felt they would solve if they were in charge of Sandwell Council. However, there was more significant impact felt for the secondary age group than primary, with 56% of secondary aged young people stating the cost of living had an impact on their daily lives compared to the primary age group at 29%. The impact for primary was that they couldn't afford to do things that they used to or have the things they used to, such as branded clothes, toys or games. They also made references to parents' frustrations and changed habits due to the cost of living crisis, "My school uniform is more expensive and my dad complains daily about the costs going up", "We can't afford school dinners when I don't have a meal from home", "Parents have to work more time to get more money", "We have to use less electricity", "My Mum keeps talking about it and it is very annoying".

For the secondary age group, although they noticed the struggle their families were facing, they also found there was a personal impact, as their spending habits had to change, in order to save money, "Things are more expensive so have to limit what I do".

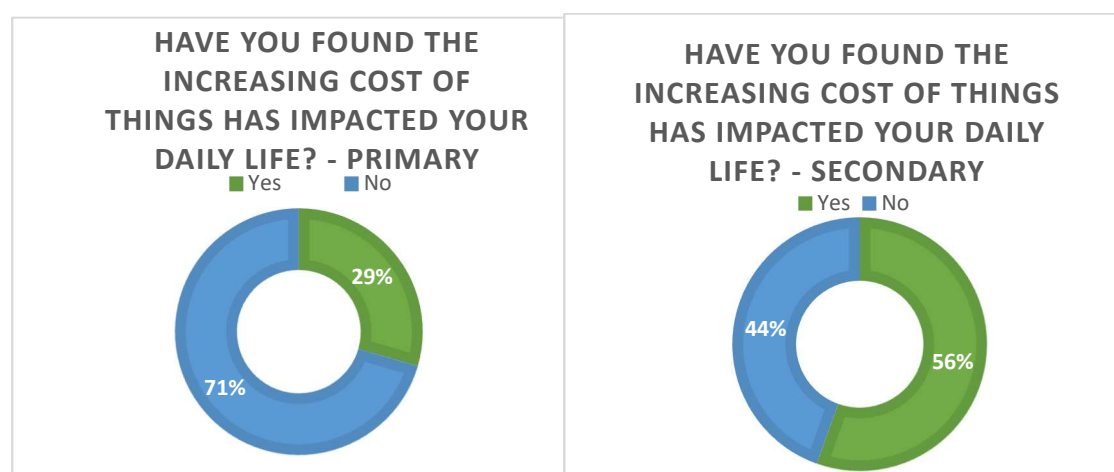


Figure 13.5 – Impact of cost of living on daily life

14. Your Future

In 10 years', time secondary children will be aged from 21-26. They were asked what job they see themselves doing in 10 years' time. The choices are shown in figure 14.1, with running their own business, working in digital/IT industry and being famous as the top choices. In the 'Other' category, which was the top choice, there was many different jobs listed with the most popular being a footballer, a vet/working with animals, scientist, criminologist, psychologist and hair/beauty and fashion, or they had not made a decision about what they wanted to do yet.

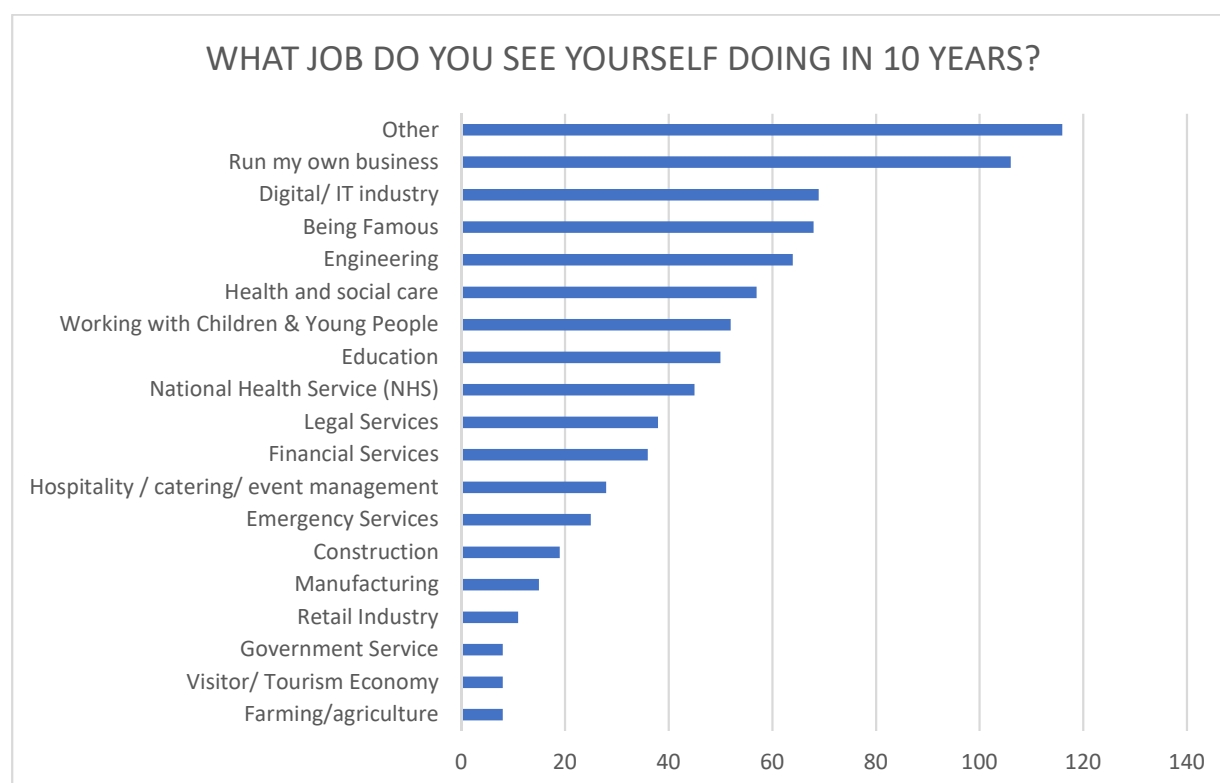


Figure 14.1 – Jobs in 10 years' time

The secondary young people were asked if they had tried to find a job within the last 12 months. Figure 14.2 shows that of the 12% of total respondents who were old enough to work, had tried to find a job in the last 12 months with only 8.9% (5 young people) had been successful and 21.4% (12 young people) unsuccessful. The ones who were unsuccessful said the barriers they faced were their age, lack of qualifications or travel.



Figure 14.2 – Trying to find a job in last 12 months

In figure 14.3, primary children were asked whether they would like to continue to live in Sandwell when they are older and only 45% responded with yes and 31% were unsure, with nearly a quarter stating that they did not want to live in Sandwell. Secondary aged pupils were asked if they would continue living in Sandwell after college or university and the response was even less at 27% stating yes, 34% not wanting to stay in Sandwell and the highest response was 39% being unsure.

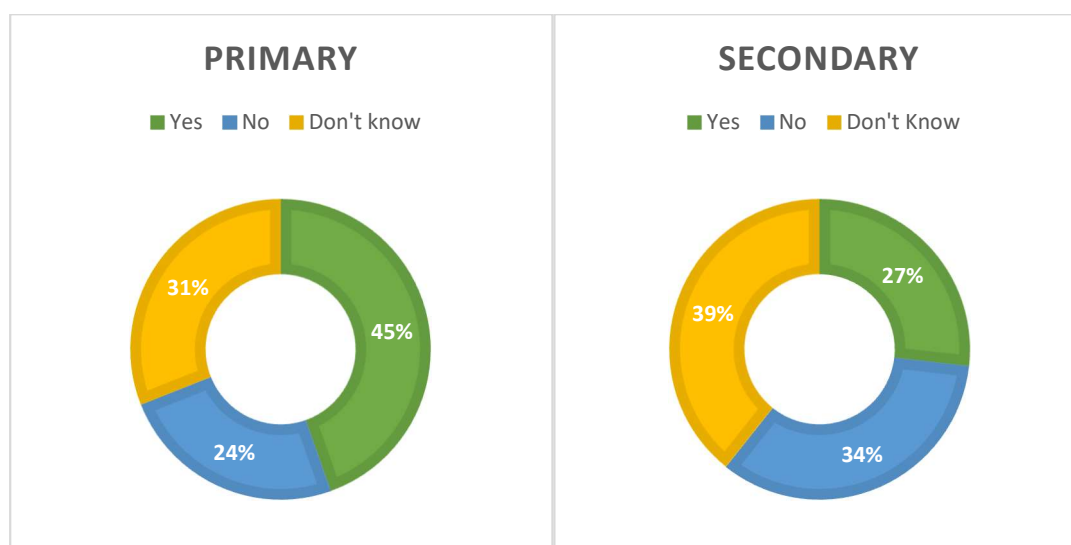


Figure 14.3 – Would you continue living in Sandwell

Of the 34% that said they did not want to live in Sandwell, they were asked a follow up question of what would help them to stay, to which they stated 'lots of interesting job opportunities', which also was the top answer last year. However, this year they had also stated better leisure facilities as well as University or Higher education opportunities.

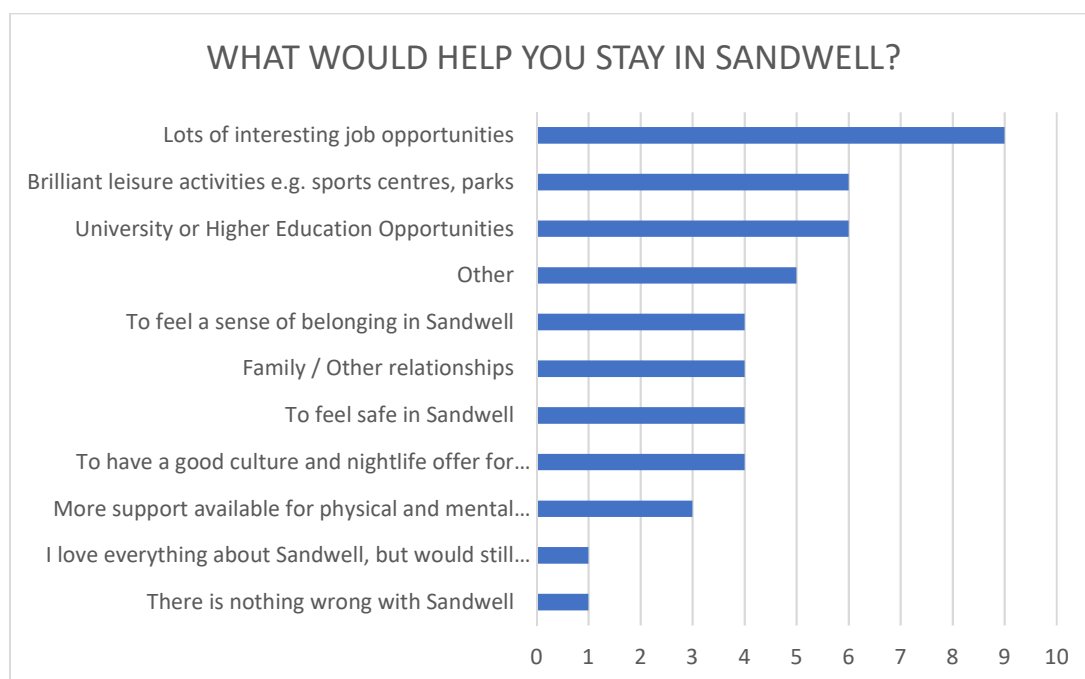


Figure 14.4 – What would help you stay in Sandwell

15. Being a young person in Sandwell

Finally, young people were asked if there was anything else they wanted to tell us about being a young person in Sandwell. Figure 15.1 shows the vast array of statements and key words stated. The primary aged children generally made positive comments with many referring to it being fun to be a young person and they were happy with life, spending time with family and friends.

However, there were some that felt it was difficult and already acknowledging their struggles, particularly around not being heard “It is good and nice but my voice is not being heard enough and because of that I want to be an adult cause people think kids can't make decisions properly”. It was pleasing to see how the survey enables children to express their views and they appear to enjoy the experience, “This survey was really fun and cool, thank you”.

How they are treated at a young age is also a concern especially with the continuing issue of bullying, “I am a young girl and sometimes get men or boys talking about my body and I feel uncomfortable when they say thing like that” and “It's sometimes irritating based on the bullying, even when the bullies are told not to bully they still end up doing it either way.”

Secondary aged children provided more insight into the challenges they face through their comments. Many referred to being a young person as “hard” and “difficult”, with ongoing mental health issues and asked for more support, “I believe there should be more support for LGBTQ+ youth in Sandwell like me”.

Young people feel their voice is not heard and echoed the views of children at a primary age, that they deserve to have a voice and an opinion. “I believe young people

Educational institutions may advocate supporting young people through mental health and wellbeing, but young people appear to be unaware of where in their school day this learning, features, and want more to be done within school around this topic. Support services work closely with schools, but again young people have little awareness of these and the ones they are aware of, they lack the understanding of their role. An example of this is the school nursing service and police link officers in schools. Although the use of mental health teams in schools appears to be promising based on young people's awareness, there is still further work to be done, especially as mental health and anxiety is the second cause for absence at a secondary age.

Education for young people is not just about the curriculum but to them, learning life skills is key for them to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood. This need has been highlighted in previous survey results, with young people particularly interested in further education on money management, taxes and paying bills, as well as support in making important careers choices, through applying for jobs and preparing for their future.

Addiction to drugs and substances have been an ongoing issue, with features of new emerging substances throughout the years becoming more of an attraction to young people, thus increasing the need to engage in risky behaviours. In 2023, vaping has emerged as a popular choice and it is evidently an issue for young people.

Although, as previous years, drugs, substances and crime remain as the main concerns, bullying is still featuring as an issue for young people across different age groups. With the ever-increasing popularity of social media, cyberbullying is also on the increase. Young people are unhappy about their lack of confidence, appearance and intimate relationships and this is not surprising when looking at the reasons for bullying being based on appearance, vulnerabilities and personal circumstances.

After the pandemic, there was a national popularity in one social media channel which was TikTok and the survey results from last year demonstrated this by the channel being the most popular for watching and making videos. For the secondary age, this year, it is the most popular channel along with Snapchat, whose instant messaging service and other new features, including voice and video calling, are likely to attract more young people to using this channel. For the primary age both are popular along with WhatsApp. Age restrictions continue to be ignored at the primary age, with children accessing these social media channels such as Snapchat which has an age rating of 13 and console games which are rated 18 and over.

With TikTok and Snapchat being popular, young people also chose these as the most preferable channels for the council to communicate with them. Currently the Council utilises Facebook and Instagram as it's channels, which does indicate that they may not be capturing the younger population of Sandwell. Schools are often utilised to communicate with young people, through information leaflets, flyers and posters, however young people suggested WhatsApp and a texting service would also be a good communication tool to use rather than going through schools to send information relevant to young people.

Young people feel that Sandwell Council should resolve issues such as littering and make Sandwell safer with less crime. These two issues have always featured in previous survey results, however in 2023, the issue of cost of living has also been a popular choice. This is having an impact on young people from both age groups, it is evident to see, and they can recognise the personal impact as well as the impact on their family and Sandwell as a whole.

Children and young people want their voices to be heard and although they are aware of school councils, it is not clear to see if they are making a significant difference to schools. At a local and a national level, young people have mixed feelings about voicing their opinions, with many feeling their voices are not heard at a local level and there is uncertainty on whether they would like to vote in elections. Many young people feel they are often ignored by adults and their opinions don't count, therefore raising issues at a local, regional or national level may not be favourable. Initiatives like British Youth Council at a national level, West Midlands Youth Police Crime Commissioners and a regional level and SHAPE Youth Forum along with other forum groups at a local level, continue to promote child's voice through engagement and participation, however it is clear that young people want to see more changes take place.

Young people in Sandwell are unsure whether they would want to stay in the Borough and many aspire to move elsewhere. Better job prospects or higher education opportunities might make them stay, as well as better leisure activities.

Overall, being a child in Sandwell at a primary age can come with its challenges but is generally seen as good, however as a young person transitions from secondary school to adulthood life can become extremely difficult, and, the impact on young people's mental health can be detrimental. Young people have ambition and drive to succeed but also feel pressure to do this and need more support from their educational institutions. However, the barriers and influences around them with social media and the need to fit into society have made life very difficult for young people. They want to be acknowledged, listened to and supported to address their needs and issues which unfortunately continue to grow.

The SHAPE Survey takes place on an annual basis and the results have remained similar over the years. Although there is some excellent work across the council and partnerships, unfortunately young people are failing to see this. Therefore, there is more work to be done around communicating the initiatives and work being done on the improvements and changes being made to services affecting children and young people to ensure they are meeting their needs.

The survey results will be shared with Council Directors, Cabinet Members, the wider workforce of the council and partner agencies. Recommendations will be made, which will form part of the Council's strategic objectives and priorities.

SHAPE




To find out more about the SHAPE Programme

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