Sandwell MBC

SHAPE
Survey Results 2025

Final Report

Neesha Patel
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Contents

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 2025, the online survey was developed for Primary School children from years 5 and 6 and Secondary School children from years 7 to 13. The link to the survey was distributed to all Primary, Secondary, and Alternative Provisions in Sandwell. The total number of survey participants was 2,552, which is a 10.8% response rate of all children in years 5 to 6 in primary schools and 5.5% of all young people in years 7 to 13 in secondary schools. The questions were devised and developed by stakeholders who deliver services to children and young people and broken down further into specific areas.

The findings reveal that while many young people find happiness and support through family and friendships, they continue to face significant challenges. Concerns around crime, substance misuse, particularly vaping, and bullying remain prevalent, with bullying often linked to appearance. Mental health support is often sought from trusted adults such as parents, teachers, or friends, but many young people attempt to manage their worries alone. Therefore, there is a clear need for increased support to build self-confidence.

In education, schools are promoting healthy lifestyles, though mental health support is less visible, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) pupils report lower levels of wellbeing. Young people expressed a strong desire for life skills education, to better prepare them for adulthood. Digital engagement continues to grow, with primary pupils favouring gaming and secondary pupils using social media platforms like TikTok and Snapchat. However, increased online interaction with strangers is raising safety concerns. Young people also voiced a desire for a cleaner, safer, and more inclusive Sandwell, with better parks, public spaces, and local shops. Participation in holiday activities is low among teenagers, and while school councils are known to many, active involvement remains limited. Notably, many young people do not see Sandwell as part of their long-term future, citing job opportunities and safety as key factors influencing their aspirations.

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. As well as contributing to Sandwell Council's Corporate Business Plan, the survey supports the Council's objective of becoming a child friendly borough by enabling article 12 of the UN Conventions Rights of the Child, allowing children and young people to express their views freely.

2. Objectives and Purpose

The purpose of the SHAPE Survey is to consult with children and young people in Sandwell 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 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. This would also allow the survey's quantitative and qualitative results to assist in research at a local, regional and national level.

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 Research 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 42 questions for primary aged children and 69 questions for secondary aged children were categorised into the following sections to encompass all the SHAPE themes:

- 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 online survey for pupils in their schools to complete.

There were no restrictions on the types of institution in which the survey was distributed, therefore alternative provisions and Sandwell College were included. There were also no restrictions on the number of pupils who could take part in the survey, per individual school. 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. The survey was active for 3 months from May 2025 to July 2025.

The quantitative data was analysed and developed by the Public Health Research Team. The qualitative data was analysed using NVivo software.

4. <u>Results</u>

The total number of participants that took part in the survey was 2552 which is a 7% decrease compared to the 2751 responses from 2024. The total for each group were as follows:

- Primary school pupils –1074 (10.8% of the borough population in years 5 and 6 based on May 2025 school census)
- Secondary school pupils – 1478 (5.5% of the borough population in years 7 to 13 based on May 2025 school census)

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

It must be noted that the total numbers of respondents per question may vary as all respondents may not have answered every question.

4.1 Limitations

As the survey is online only, this will exclude any young person who may not be able to use or access technological devices to complete the survey. Every school will use a different approach to their pupils completing the survey and therefore the numbers of responses vary per individual school. Responses from 15- to 17-year-olds were low, therefore it must be noted that it is difficult to offer robust conclusions when analysing the results of the survey for this age group.

4.2 Demographics

4.21 Town

The participant groups were asked which town they lived in. The breakdown is provided in Figure 4.211. All towns were represented although Tipton only had 4% of participation.
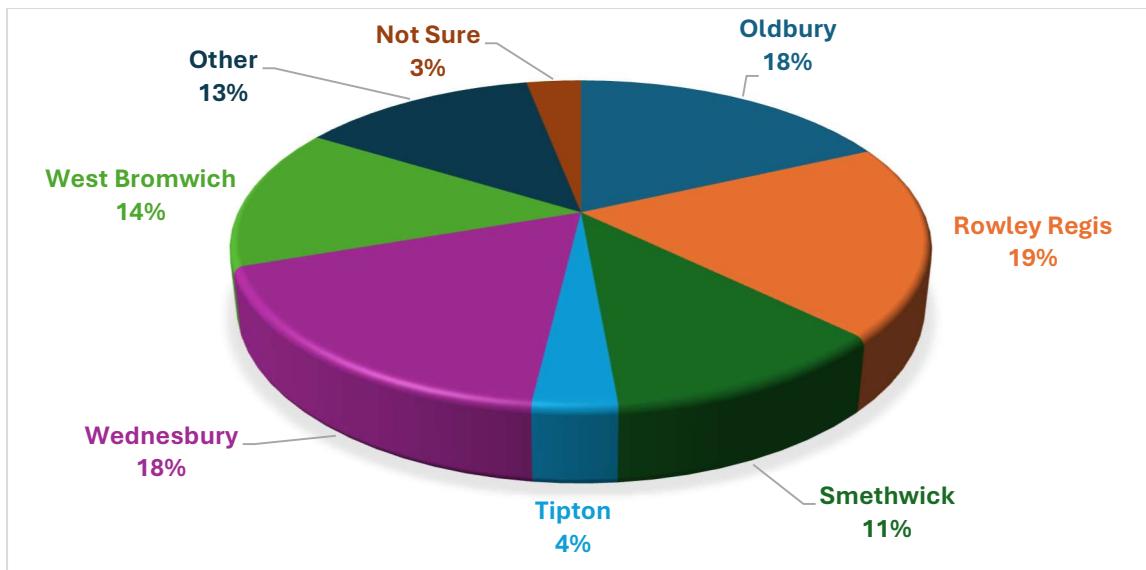
Figure 4.211 – Breakdown of the town by survey respondents

4.22 Children and Young People accessing support

218 (8.9%) children and young people considered themselves to have a physical or learning disability. Although 5.6% of secondary age preferred not to say. All but 2 of the children and young people with a disability attended a mainstream school.

Of the participants who claimed they had a disability, 21.6% felt their needs affected their daily life a lot, and 18.8% felt they did not get enough support from their school for their needs.

29.4% stated they had a long-term health problem affected their day-to-day life, but only 47.7% of those affected, felt they were getting enough support from health services.

111 (4.4%) of children and young people had a social worker, but 176 (7%) preferred not to say. 234 (9.4%) of children and young people were young carers

4.23 Age

Figure 4.231 provides a breakdown of the age of the participants. Very little representation from 16 and overs, this could be because the survey takes place in the final term of school, and this year went out in May which would prevent young people from taking part from this age group due to GSCE's and A-Levels.

There was approximately an even split of 10 – 14-year-olds taking part in the survey.
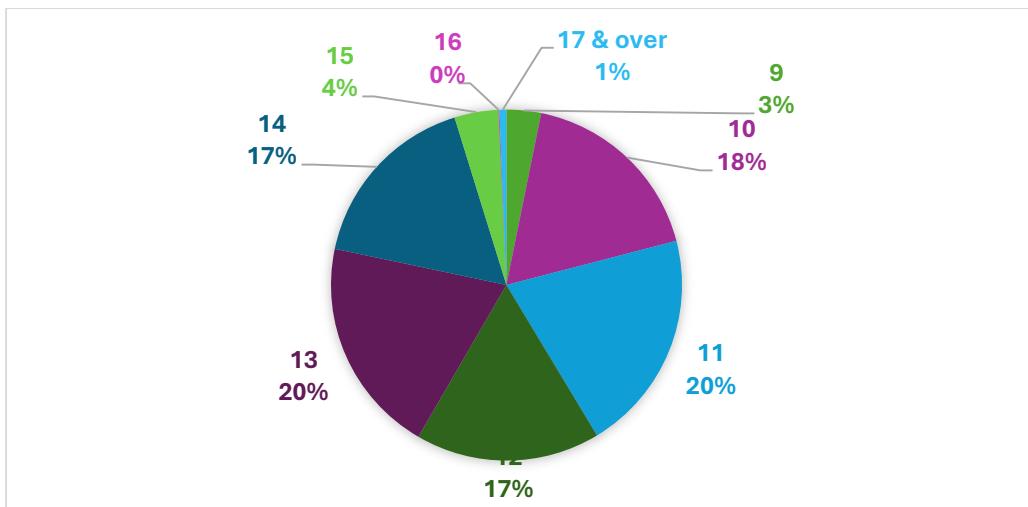
Figure 4.231 – Breakdown of survey respondents by age

4.24 Sex and gender identity

The gender identity and ethnicity breakdown are shown in Figure 4.241. The proportion of male to female responses in both age was nearly equal.

Participants	He/Him	She/Her	They/Them	Other	Prefer not to say
Primary	50.2%	48.6%	N/A	1.2%	N/A
Secondary	47.4%	49.9%	0.7%	0.5%	1.5%

Figure 4.241 – Breakdown of the survey respondents by sex and gender

4.25 Ethnicity and religion

Over a third of both age groups were white with the next highest response coming from Asian participants.

Figure 4.251 shows 27% of both age groups do not associate with a religion. Christianity was the 2nd most common response, followed by Muslim.

Participants	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
Primary	70.7%	7%	13.2%	7.7%	1.5%
Secondary	64.9%	7.6%	20.7%	4.6%	2.1%
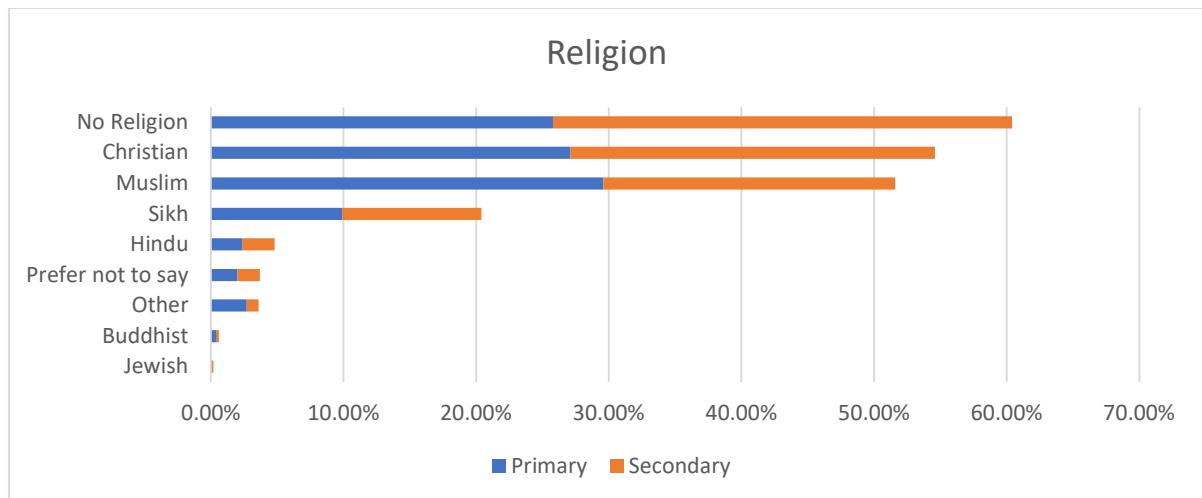
Figure 4.251 – Ethnicity and religion breakdown of survey

5   Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing questions covered many different aspects including issues affecting young people and how educational settings deal with this topic.

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?".* Figure 5.1 shows the top issues over the last 3 years. From all the surveys conducted over the years, there are obvious reoccurring themes, with the top 3 issues being: schoolwork and exams, vaping, gangs and youth violence. The next 5 categories are what to do after GCSEs, knife crime, drugs, being bullied, getting a job. This year vaping has emerged as the top issue.

	2025	2024	2023
1	Vaping	School work & Exams	School work & Exams
2	School work & Exams	Vaping	Vaping
3	Gangs & Youth Violence	Gangs & Youth Violence	Knife Crime
4	Knife Crime	What to do after GCSE's	Gangs & Youth Violence
5	Being Bullied	Drugs	Drugs
6	Drugs	Knife Crime	What to do after GCSE's
7	What to do after GCSE's	Being Bullied	Getting a Job
8	Getting a Job	Getting a job	Becoming an adult

Figure 5.1 – Issues affecting young people from 2015 to 2024 SHAPE survey - Secondary results

Figure 5.2 provides the results of children and young people with SEND, who ranked education in the top place and crime related issues ranking below.

	2025	2024
1	School/college work and exams	School/ college work & exams
2	Vaping	What to do after GCSEs
3	Gangs & Youth Violence	Knife Crime
4	Knife Crime	Gangs and Youth Violence
5	Drugs	Getting into trouble
6	Being bullied	Vaping
7	What to do after GCSEs	Drugs
8	Getting a job	Becoming an adult

Figure 5.2 – Issues affecting young people from 2023 to 2024 SHAPE survey - Secondary results – children with disabilities

With comments to justify their responses, such as *"I based it off the news"* and "*I based these choices on what I think affect young people most (not me)"*, it demonstrates these are their opinions based on what they see or hear about, and very limited number of young people experienced these issues. Therefore, to get an understanding of what affects young people personally, another question is asked. Figure 5.3 provides the results.
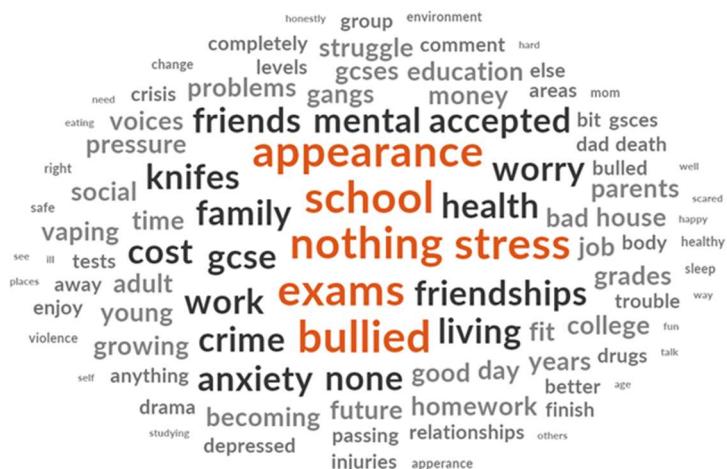
Figure 5.3 – Issues affecting young people from in their personal life - Secondary results.

The most frequently stated response to the question about important issues affecting young people was *"nothing",* indicating that some respondents did not identify any particular concerns.

However, consistent with the findings in section 5.1, school emerged as a recurring theme, particularly in relation to exams, stress, pressure, and heavy workloads. Many young people also expressed concerns about their appearance, which appeared to be closely linked to experiences of bullying. Notable comments included:

- "Getting bullied and trying to figure out why."
- "My most important issue is my self-esteem and confidence because it causes me to be bullied at school."
- "Fitting in and bullies – I've been bullied for 6–7 years and it has taught me how cruel some people can be."

Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) highlighted challenges related to their conditions, such as:

- "My dyslexia."
- "Autism."
- "Undiagnosed autism and ADHD."

In addition, personal and family circumstances were cited as significant issues:

- "Divorced parents."
- "Family issues such as separation and various allegations."
- "Not being able to live with my family."

Health-related concerns, especially around mental health, were also prominent. One respondent shared their journey toward improving physical health:

"The most important issue affecting me is being healthy. I had a relatively bad diet, so my problem was to change my diet and get fit as I was very unathletic. Now I am on my journey to master bodyweight exercise techniques."

In figure 5.4, when asked to rate their happiness across different areas of life, young people reported the highest levels of happiness in relation to, family, home environment and hobbies and interests. Areas where happiness was rated lowest included, confidence, appearance, education and feeling that their opinions are valued.

Among secondary-aged respondents, intimate relationships were the category with the lowest happiness ratings.

	Primary	Secondary
Most Happy	1. Family	1. Family
	2. The home you live in	2. The home you live in
	3. Your hobbies/interest	3. Your hobbies/interest
	4. Your friends	4. Friends
	5. How safe you feel	5. How safe you feel
Least Happy	1. Your confidence	1. Intimate relationships
	2. Your appearance	2. Appearance
	3. Your schoolwork	3. Confidence
	4. Your opinions being valued or listened to	4. School/college work
	5. Community you belong to	5. Your opinions being valued or listened to

Figure 5.4 Levels of happiness

When asked what advice they would give to peers to avoid being pressured into making unhealthy choices, the most common responses were:

- Talk to someone, particularly a trusted adult or friend
- Make the right choice and do the right thing
- Choose friends wisely

Young people also suggested immediate actions to take in pressured situations, such as:

- "Ignore"
- "Walk away"
- "Say no"
- "Tell them to stop"

In terms of how they would deal with worries or concerns, participants described a range of coping strategies. The most popular responses, illustrated in Figure 5.5, included, managing it independently, often by doing something to distract themselves and talking to someone, typically a parent, friend, or teacher

However, a concerning finding was that 6% of secondary-aged participants reported that they would "cut or hurt myself" as a way of coping. This highlights the importance of ensuring that young people have access to safe, supportive environments and mental health resources.

Primary	Secondary
Do something to take my mind off it	Do something to take my mind off it
Talk to someone I know about it	Think about it on my own
Think about it on my own	Talk to someone I know about it
Do some physical activity	Rest or sleep more
Rest or sleep more	I don't have any worries

Figure 5.5 – How do you usually deal with your worries - Secondary

Participants were asked what would help improve their mental health and wellbeing. The most frequently mentioned suggestions are summarised in Figure 5.6.

A shared priority across both primary and secondary age groups was the importance of having someone to talk to, with many responses highlighting the need for their voices to be heard. Addressing bullying was also a common theme across both groups.

Children in the primary age group identified several key areas for support, including help with the transition to secondary school, with 26% expressing anxiety or concern about the move, additional support with schoolwork and support for families experiencing financial difficulties.

Secondary-aged young people focused more on future-related concerns, particularly around exams and academic pressure, with the need for extra support during exam

periods, reinforcing earlier findings that schoolwork and exams are their top personal issues and a desire for more places to spend time and socialise.

Responses from children and young people with SEND largely mirrored the overall themes. However, primary age, specifically emphasised the need for greater support to feel safe in school.

Primary	Secondary
Having someone to talk to when you have a problem	More support to plan for my future
Making my move to secondary school easier	Extra support during exam season
Extra support with school work	Having someone to talk to when you have a problem (e.g. a mentor)
Supporting my family to manage money/financial issues	More places where I can go to hang out with my friends
Tackling bullying issues *More support to feel safer in school	Tackling bullying issues

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

*Selected by young people with disabilities

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.

The secondary age group were asked questions on the school nursing service. The responses demonstrate the lack of awareness of who the school nurse is, with only 27.5% aware of the services the school nurse offers. These figures have increased from the figure of 25% in 2024.

	Do you know what services your school nurse offers?
Yes	27.5%
No	34.6%
Not sure	37.9%

*Figure 6.1 – School Nurse service awareness*

65% had never visited the school nurse and only 52.3% knew how to get in contact with the school nurse. Of those who had accessed the school nurse, the majority had sone this through a drop-in session at school.

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. In figure 6.2, Sandwell Youth Services and DECCA are the ones they were most aware of, followed closely by pastoral support in school, Sandwell Children's Trust and Mental Health Support Teams.
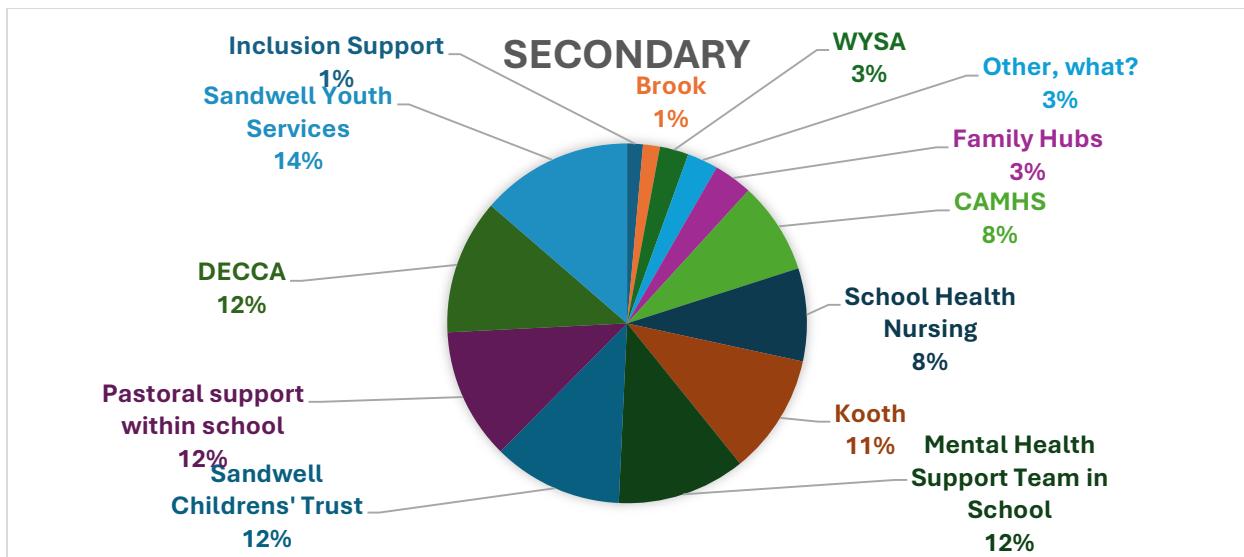
Figure 6.2 – Which support services are you aware of? - Secondary

For children and young people with SEND, the top 3 support services they were aware of were: CAMHs (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services), Kooth and Sandwell Youth Services.
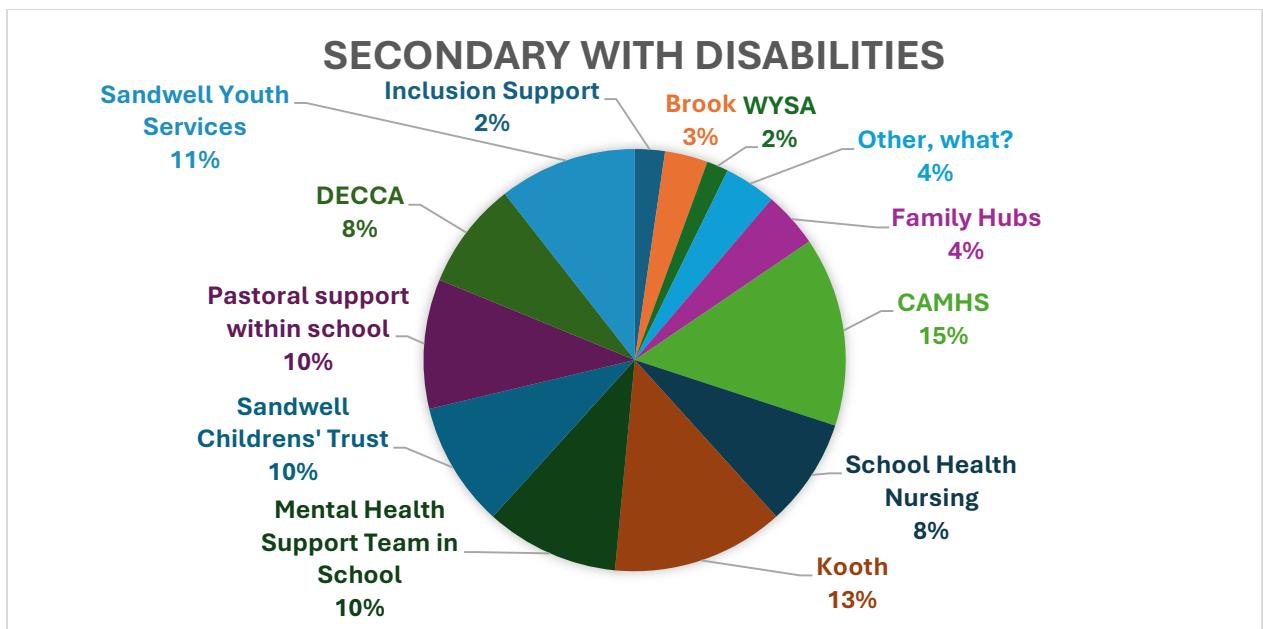
Figure 6.2 – Which support services are you aware of? – Young people with disabilities

7. Substance Use

Questions about substance use were asked to those young people who were in year 9 or above in secondary schools, 622 young people in total. Figure 7.1 shows the percentage of young people w ho used the substances, which show a decrease from 2024.

| Substance Usage	2024	2025		
	Yes	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Alcoholic drink	28%	24.10%	66.40%	9.50%
Smoking	13.9%	3.50%	95.50%	1%
Vape	4.2%	11.60%	81.50%	6.90%
Drugs	2.2%	1%	96%	3.10%

Figure 7.1 – Substance use

Of the children and young people with SEND from the total respondents, 48.8% had consumed an alcholic drink, this equates to 21 of the respondents of which 9 had alcohol once or twice. Only 5 had smoked, 14 had used an e-cigarette and 2 had used drugs. These are similar figures to 2024.

Further questions were explored with smoking and vaping. Figure 7.2 shows the main reasons stated for starting smoking to be peer pressure, stress or anxiety and curiosity. The main reasons for vaping were friends vape, vaping made them feel better and they liked the flavour.
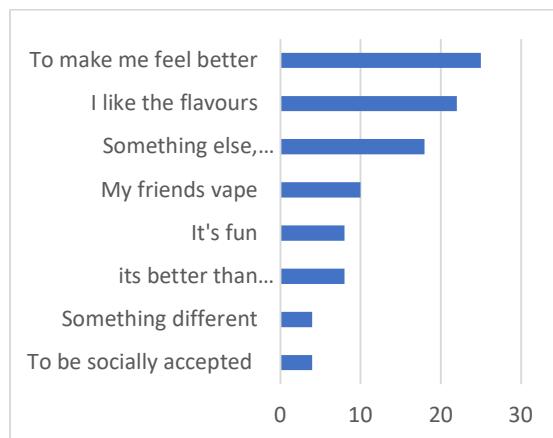
Figure 7.2 – Main reasons for vaping

When considering prevention methods for smoking young people, the 2 popular answers, getting a third of responses for better reinforcement and education on the dangers. Last year the highest response was to get support from friends and family to make healthy choices. The 64 respondents who stated other, chose methods such as banning smoking and stricter regulations and laws. A few young people suggested there is nothing they can do. The respondents stated the best method to help young people quit smoking was through nicotine replacement therapy followed by counselling or support groups and peer support. These results can be seen below in figure 7.3.

WHAT WOULD HELP YOUNG PEOPLE YOUR AGE AVOID SMOKING?

- Better enforcement
- Education about the dangers of smoking
- Support from friends and family to make healthy choices
- Peer-led anti-smoking campaigns
- Other, please specify

30%
29%
22%
12%
7%

WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO HELP PEOPLE WHO SMOKE, QUIT SMOKING?

- Counselling or support groups
- Nicotine replacement therapy (e.g., patches, gum)
- Apps or online programs
- Peer support

23%
39%
11%
22%
5%

Figure 7.3 – Smoking Prevention and Treatment

8. <u>Keeping Physically Fit and Healthy Eating</u>

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. Figure 8.1 shows over 95% take part in some form of physical activity, with over a third of primary school children taking part every day. For children with disabilities this reduced to 24%. 70% of both age groups take part in school with their homes being the next place followed by parks, which sees over third of both age groups taking part in physical activities.


How often do you take part in physical activity?

Where do you take part in physical activity?
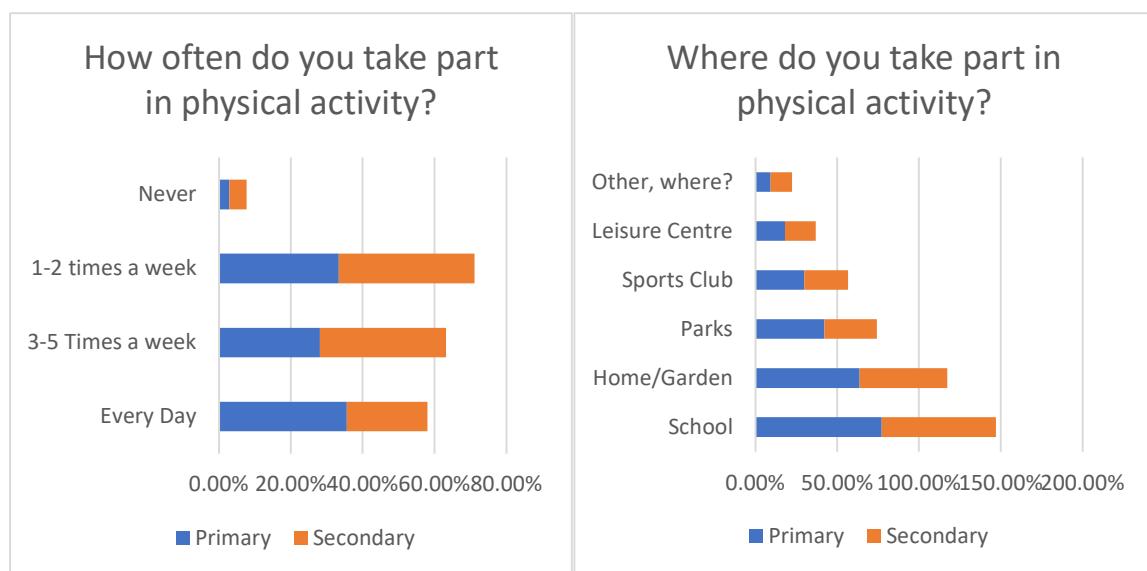
Figure 8.1 – Involvement in Physical Activities

Primary school children were asked what physical activity they would like to be involved in with school and/or out of school and the top 5 included football, swimming, dodgeball, running and basketball.

Figure 8.2 shows over 40% of primary aged children consume 5 portions of fruit and vegetables daily compared to the similar percentage of young people at a secondary age consuming them 3 times a week.
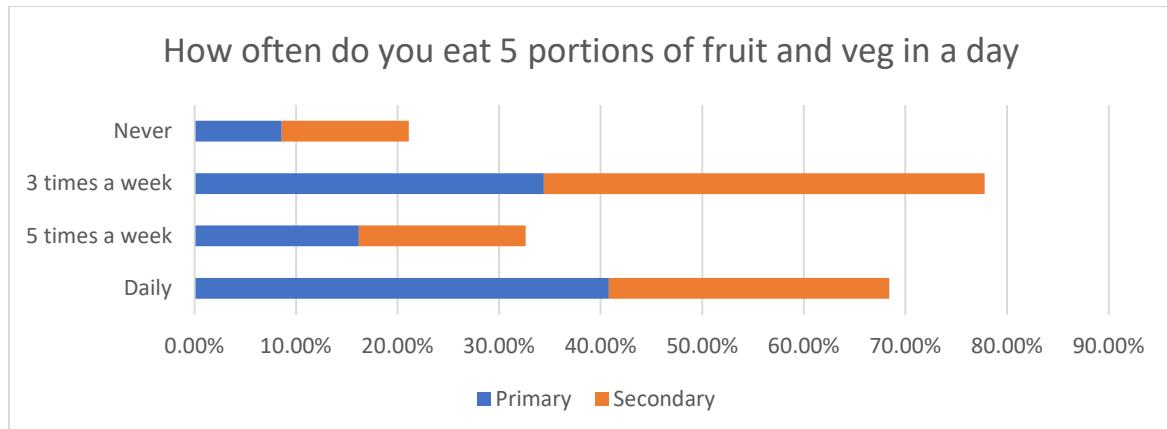
76.9% of primary and 64.8% of secondary pupils felt their voices were heard on health topics, although for children with disabilities at a primary age the figure dropped to 69.8% and at a secondary age, dropped to 47.4%. Figure 8.3 shows children and young people are listened to, everyone has a chance to talk, they get to ask questions, the teachers ask for their opinions and check if they are ok. In primary schools the teachers deliver talks, and they also have people coming in to deliver talks. In secondary school, references were made about student voice, and they can raise their voices within these forums.

Primary   **Secondary**

Figure 8.3 – Are voices heard on health topics?

Over 80% of respondents reported that their schools actively promote a healthy lifestyle, including those with disabilities.

Among primary-aged children, the emphasis was largely on healthy eating and physical activity, rather than mental wellbeing. Many children shared that they eat healthily and that school lunches include fruit and vegetables. Lessons such as PSHE were noted for covering topics like healthy eating and encouraging participation in physical activities.

For the secondary age group, students also mentioned the availability of healthy food options. In addition, they highlighted:

- Assemblies focused on healthy living
- Classroom lessons promoting wellbeing
- Posters and visual materials displayed around school
- Participation in sports and physical activities

While physical health is clearly a priority, these findings suggest there may be opportunities to strengthen the focus on mental health and emotional wellbeing, particularly in primary settings.

Primary   **Secondary**

Figure 8.4 – Promoting a healthy lifestyle

Primary-aged children who felt their school did not promote a healthy lifestyle suggested:

- Greater availability of healthy food, including halal options
- More opportunities for physical education
- Less shouting from teachers
- A need for teachers to listen and offer support when help is needed

Secondary-aged respondents echoed similar concerns, highlighting:

- The need for healthier food options in the school canteen
- Greater awareness and support around health and wellbeing

- The importance of being listened to, especially when they need someone to talk to

These responses suggest that while many schools are making positive strides, there are still opportunities to create more inclusive, supportive, and holistic approaches to promoting health and wellbeing.

9. <u>Electronic Communications</u>

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

9.1 Electronic Devices

Figure 9.11 shows over 73% of primary and 80% of secondary school children either own or have access to a mobile phone, tablet or ipad, games console and a computer or laptop. 49% of primary have access to a smart speaker and 68.5% of secondary age.

Primary

Secondary
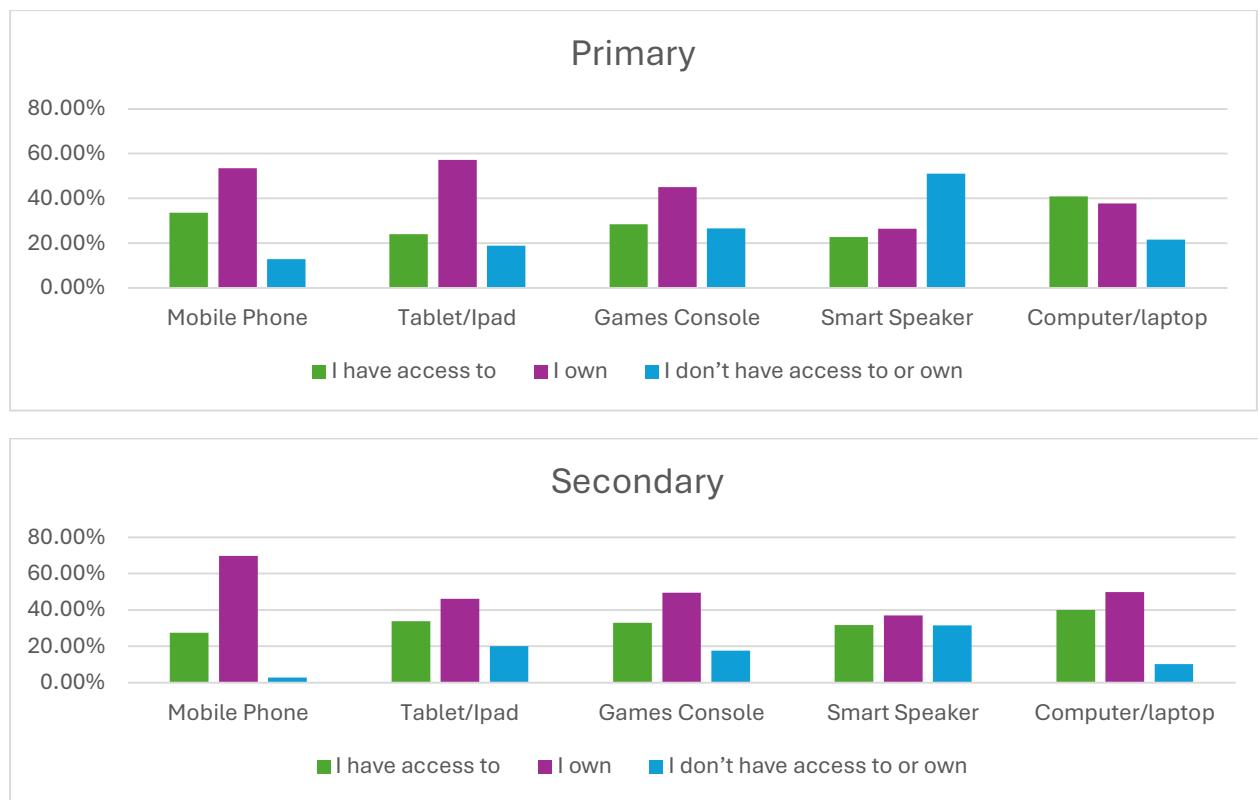
Figure 9.11 – Smart electronic devices

9.2 Internet

When primary school children were asked what they used the internet for, figure 9.21 shows that it is widely used for a number of reasons beyond schoolwork. The most popular answer is gaming at 28%. Chatting and social media are next followed by homework and browsing the internet. This demonstrates that the internet is increasingly becoming an entertainment and communication tool rather than a research tool for young people.

PRIMARY

■Homework ■Browsing for information ■Social Media ■Gaming ■Chatting ■Other
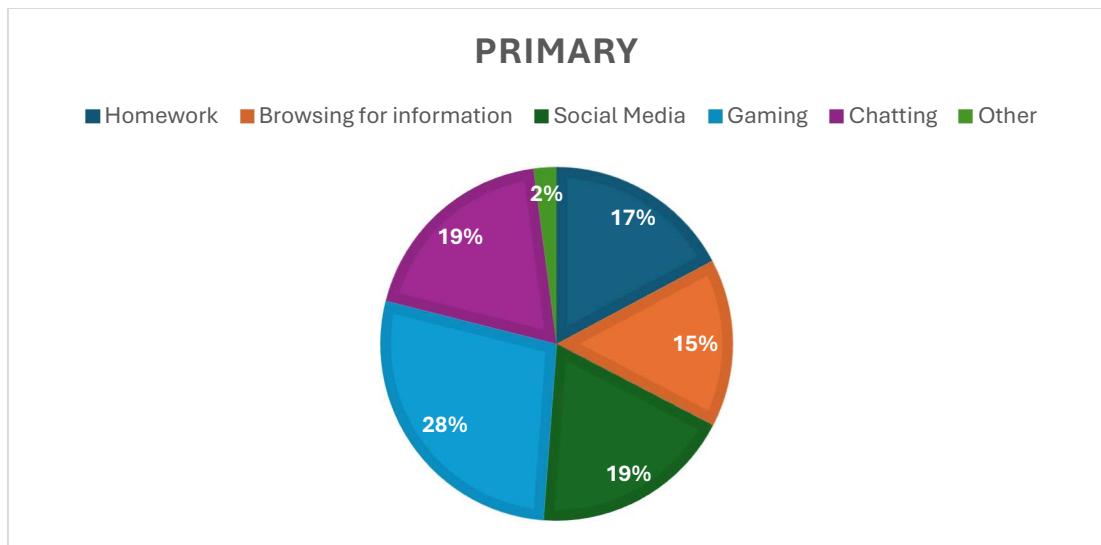
Figure 9.21 – What do you use the internet for?

25% of primary chat to people they have never met, online and 36% of secondary age young people do. Many of the reasons provided by both age groups were because they enjoy gaming with them or they have mutual friends, so they feel they know them, or they find they have similar interests to them.

9.3 Social Media

When asked about social media platforms and applications, figure 9.31 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. This remains unchanged from last years results. It is positive 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.
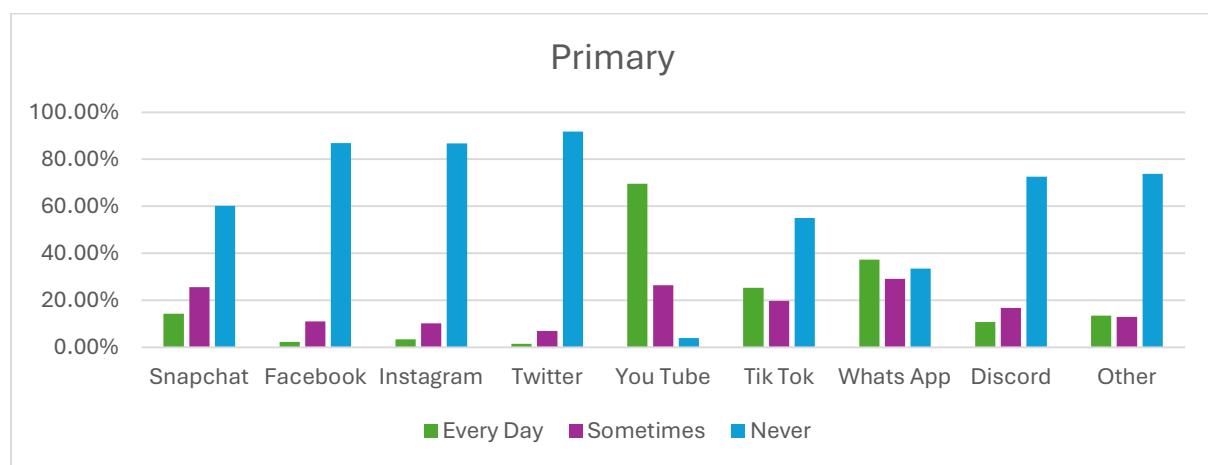

Figure 9.31 – Social media and App usage - Primary

For secondary young people, figure 9.32 shows the most popular channels are the same as primary, when totalling the response rates for using the channel every day and sometimes. Therefore, the most popular are: You Tube, Whats app, Tik Tok and

Snapchat, for chatting, watching videos and messaging. As schools often use Microsoft Teams for homework allocation, the channel is used sometimes by many young people. The popularity of social media channels is always changing. There continues to be a decline in Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. The channels chosen as the most popular are the ones where there is an instant messaging service or videos for entertainment purposes.

Both age groups stated they use social media platforms to stay connected with friends.
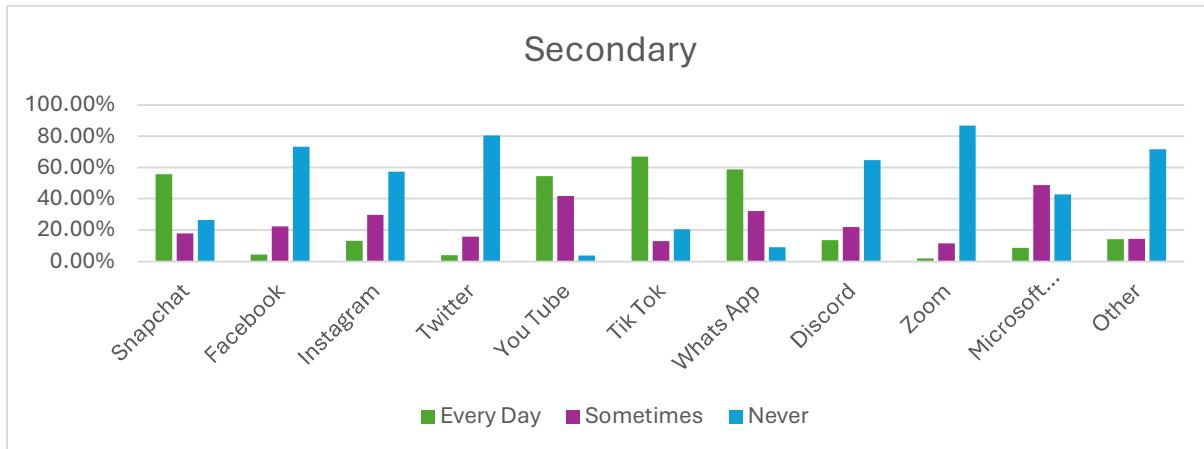
Figure 9.32 – Social media and App usage - Secondary

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 9.33, for both the primary and the secondary age group, the highest response was for anything else. They chose this option as they had not encountered anything online, which was positive.

For the younger age group, the issues are encountered were high for cyberbullying, with 25% of the responses. The next highest response was 16% for racist comments.

At a secondary age, this year, racist comments come out the highest at 21%, followed by 20% for cyberbullying. These were similar results to last year. Although these were the responses which occurred the most, all the other options were selected by young people too, these included sexist comments, homophobic comments, sexually explicit videos/photos, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.
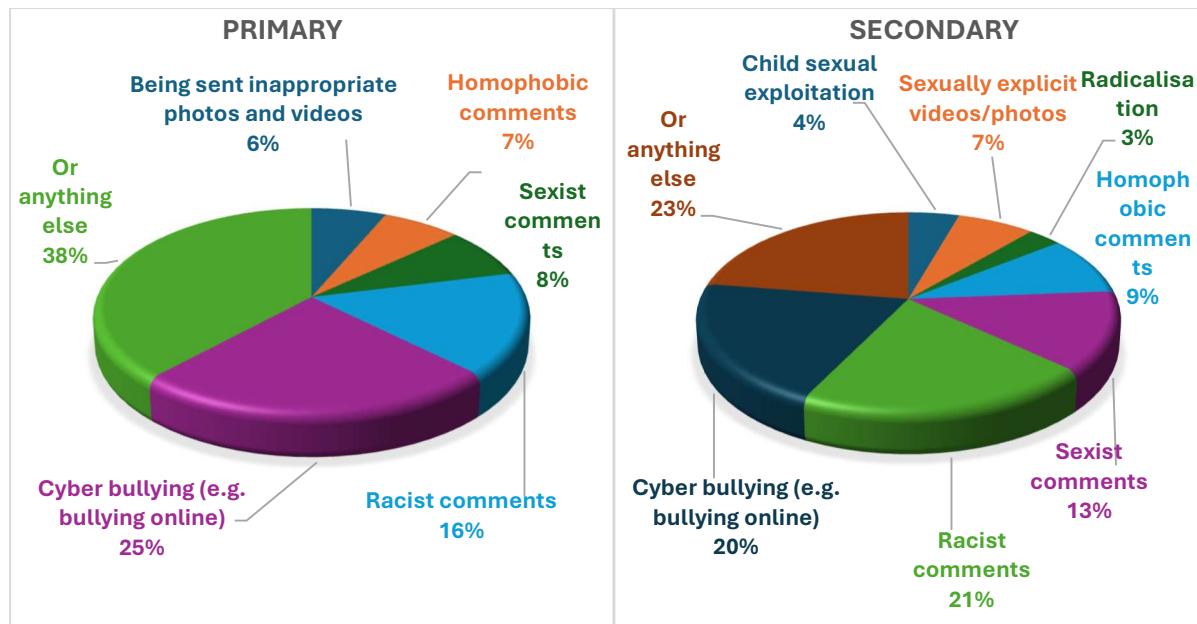
Figure 9.33 – Issues experienced online

9.4 Gaming

Gaming for primary age children is hugely popular as demonstrated in other sections of the survey. For primary aged children a mobile phone is used for gaming followed closely by mobile phone but for both age group. This is a change to last year's results where primary age children were still using a games console more for gaming.
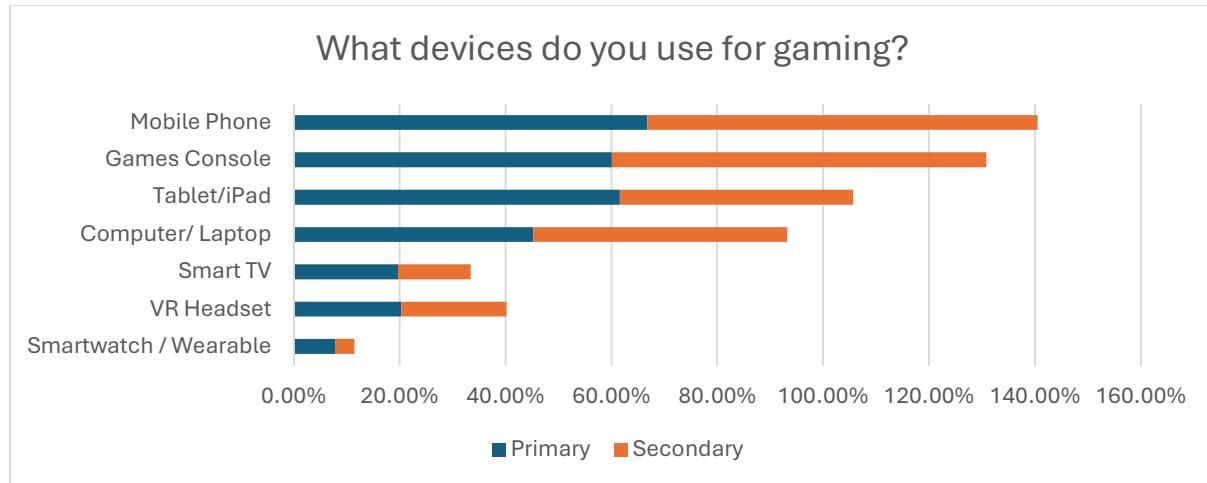
Figure 9.41 – Devices for gaming

The young people were asked what games they play. Figure 9.42 shows the results, for both age groups Roblox was the most popular with Fortnite, Minecraft and FIFA also featuring in the top 5 for both age groups.

Ranking	Primary	Secondary
1	Roblox	Roblox
2	Minecraft	Fortnite
3	Subway Surfers	Minecraft
4	Fortnite	Fifa
5	Fifa	Grand Theft Auto

Figure 9.42 – Popular Games

9.5 Communicating Information

Young people at a secondary age access information from family and friends, so mainly word of mouth. School was mentioned as the third option, as figure 9.51 shows. The next two choices were Tik Tok and You Tube, which as presented in section 9.32, as popular social media channels.

Where do you get information about what's happening in the area where you live?
From Family
From Friends
From School
From Tik Tok
You Tube
Snapchat
News (eg BBC)
Whats app

Figure 9.51 – Information about what's happening in the area

Only 28% of young people access the council's social media channels, this is a descrease from the 32% last year. Figure 9.53 shows, 25% have heard of Just Youth, an increase from the 15% last year. The survey respondants were provided the link to the Just Youth website www.justyouth.org.uk, and although 98% had stated they haven't used it, despite hearing of it, 44% stated, once they knew what information was contained on the website, they would look at it and 78% found it was easy to find what they were looking for.

Young people didn't feel they needed the websites and there were a few comments stating they preferred to talk to an actual person rather than a platform.
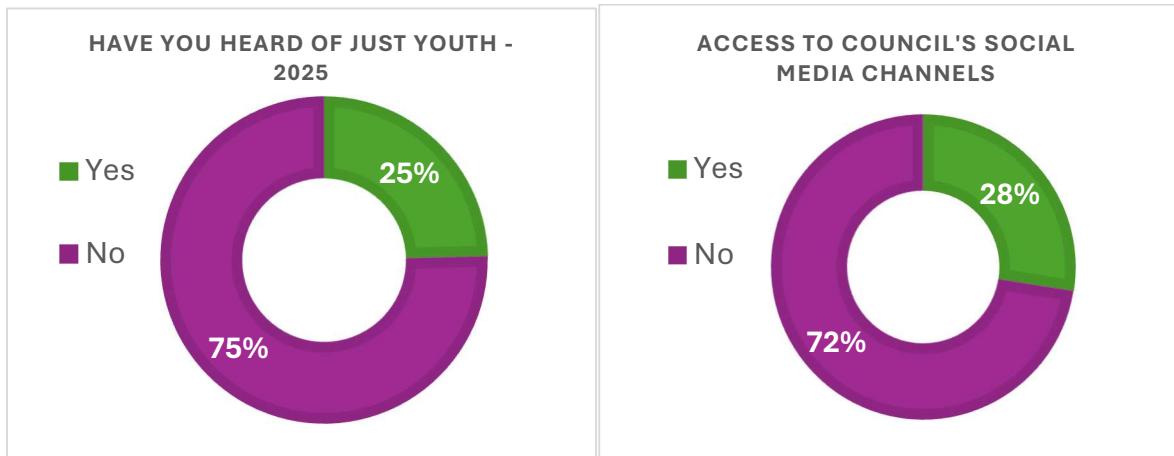

Figure 9.52 – Council Social Media Channels

When asked if there was anything in their life thy needed more guidance/support with, the highest response was *"No".* Those that did respond, provided comments regarding their education or future, *"Probably more education on finances and more topics relevant to being an adult"* and accessing more support for their mental health including helping with their confidence and anxiety, *"mental health, I have support but not trust enough to open up to people".*

10. <u>Local Area</u>

Figure 10.1 shows for both age groups, 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 more or better shops. Over the last few years these 3 responses have remained in the top 4 along with safer roads for cycling and walking.
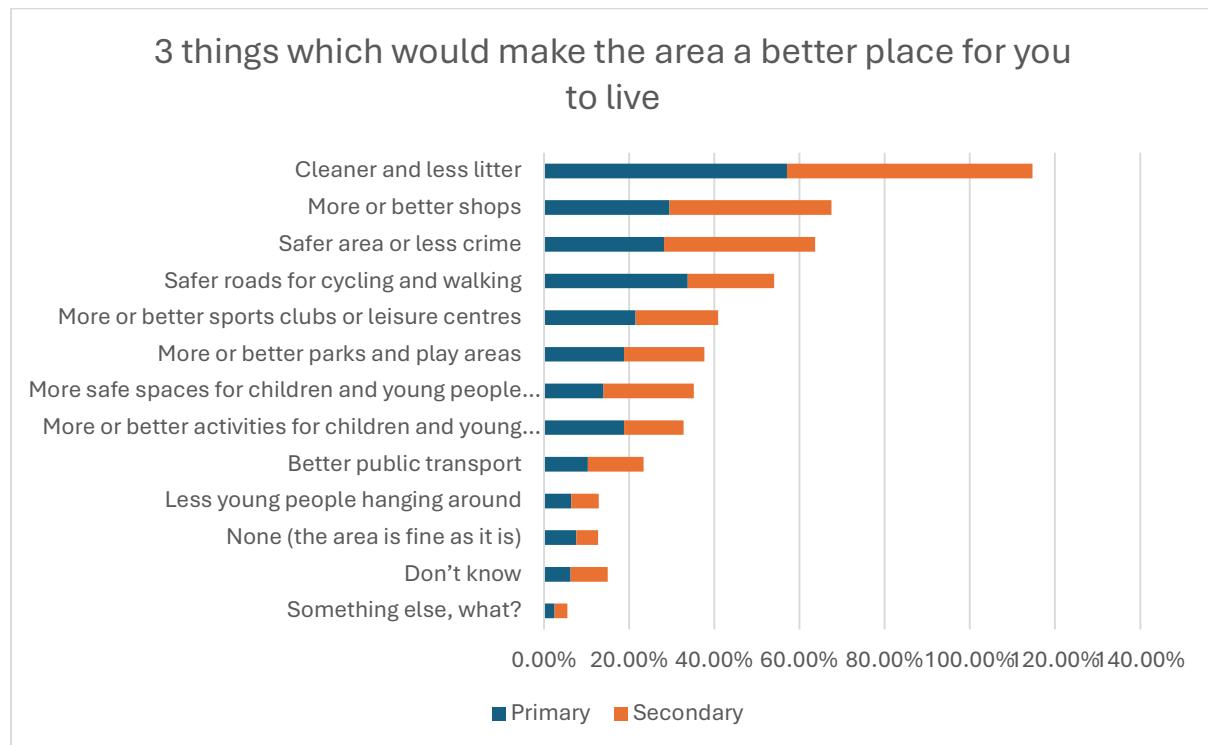
Figure 10.1 – Making your area a better place to live

When asked about improvements or new developments they would like to see in their local area, responses from both primary and secondary age groups aligned with the themes shown in Figure 10.1, with an increased emphasis on parks. Figure 10.2 highlights the most common suggestions, which include:

Parks

Young people expressed a strong desire for better and safer park facilities:

- Repairs to existing equipment and facilities
  "To fix the swing and zip wire at the park."
- More opportunities and features in parks
  "New things in my local park because there are always other people taking up

all of the spaces."
"More parks with football goals (nets)."
"I would like to see a skate/bike park. Helmets at the skate park to borrow."
"More swings in parks and more corner shops nearby."
"More basketball courts in parks."
"More mountain biking parks and trails."

- Safer park environments
  "Britannia Park should be just for pupils so people who are scared of dogs can feel safe."
  "No more stabbing or kidnapping in the park."

Shops

Young people also called for improvements to local shopping options:

- More entertainment and clothing shops
  "New shopping malls."
  "Better shops I can walk around on my own."
- More local and affordable shops
- Cleaner shop environments

Crime and Safety

Concerns around safety were also raised:

- Reducing crime
  "It's scary walking down the road getting honked."
- Increased police presence
  "In most areas to prevent crimes of kidnapping or rape in areas school kids walk in."

Litter and Cleanliness

Suggestions to improve cleanliness included:

- Innovative litter solutions
  "Robot litter pickers."
- More bins in public spaces

Places and Facilities

Young people expressed a need for more inclusive and engaging spaces:

- Facilities for sports and martial arts
- Places to hang out with friends
- More restaurants and food outlets
- Spaces for teenagers involved in gangs
  "More tackling down on troublesome gangs of teenagers and places for them to hang out away from the public."
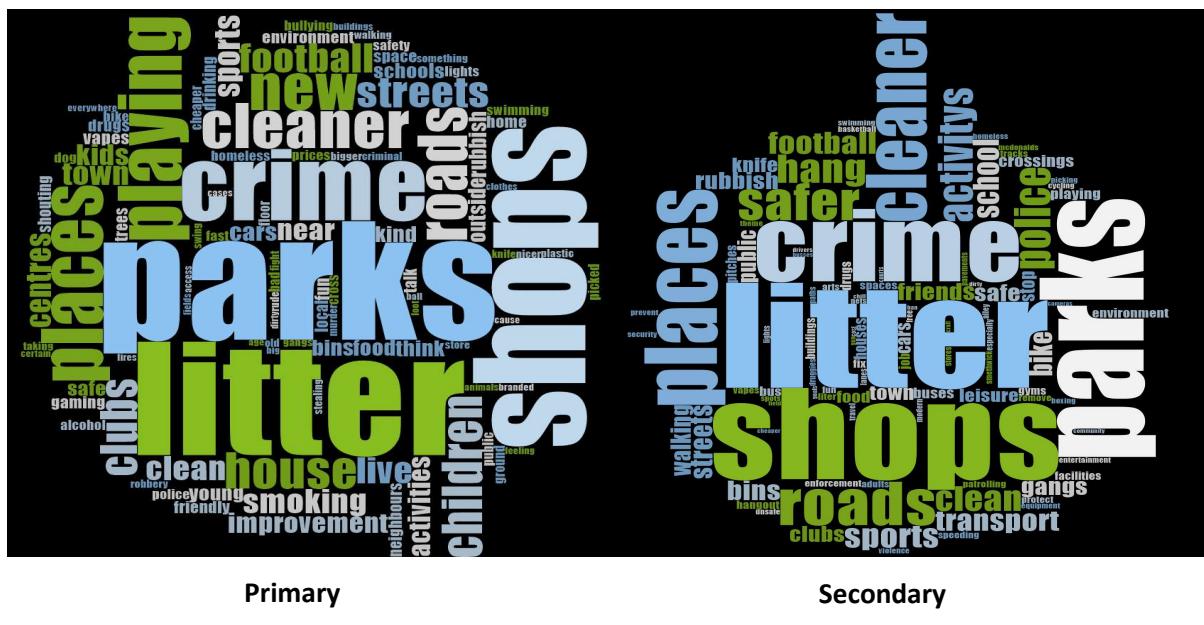
Primary   **Secondary**

Figure 10.2 – Other improvements & new developments

Figure 10.3 shows both primary and secondary age felt very safe or fairly safe at home and in their school environment. Even though the figures were slightly less than 2024, the two areas with the lowest results were in parks and public transport. In parks, 71% of the primary age group felt safe or fairly safe compared to 60.8% for the secondary age group and for public transport, 56.6% of the primary age feel safe or fairly safe compared to secondary age group with 51.3%.
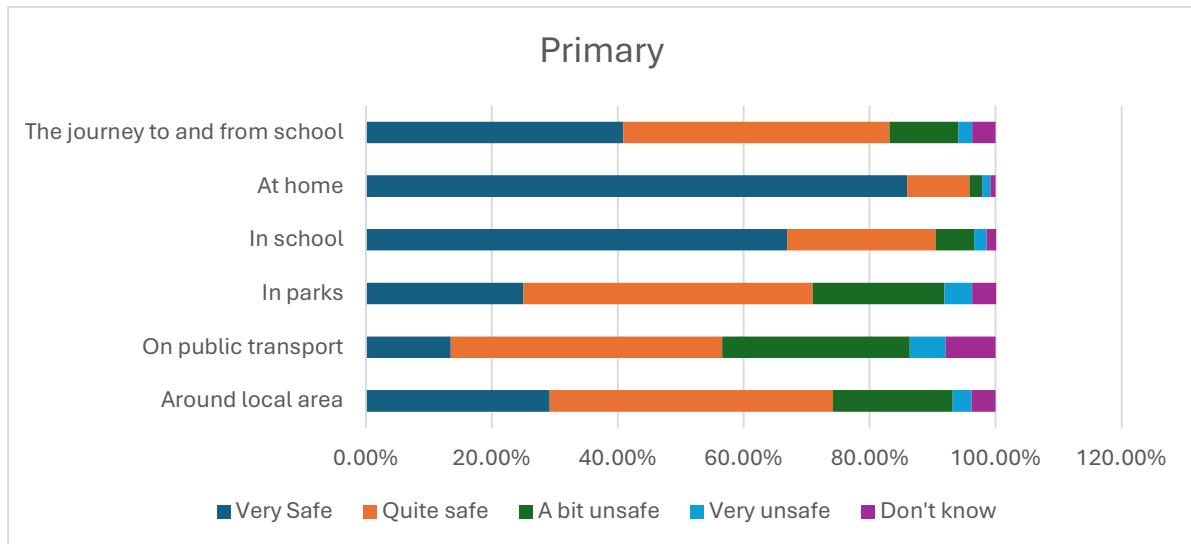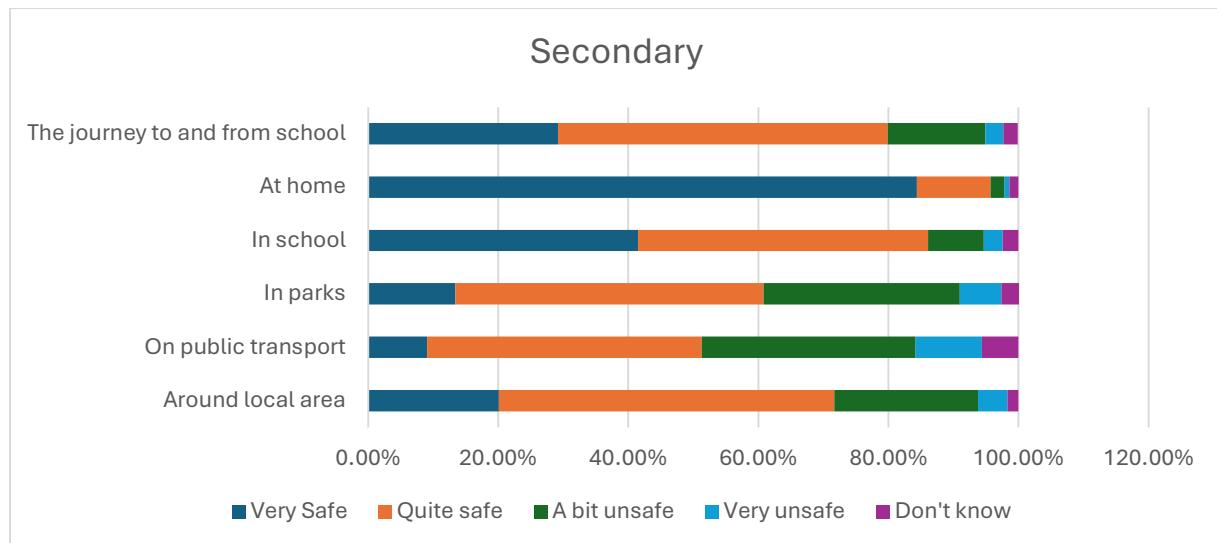
Figure 10.3- Safety in places

11. Education & Learning

Figure 11.1 shows how often young people have been bullied in school/college in the last 4 weeks. 25% (268) of primary school children have been bullied in the last 4 weeks and 23% (340) of secondary school young people. Even though there is a slight decrease this year, there have been consistent figures of around 25% for the last few years.

Around 12% were bullied in both age groups just a couple of times in the last 4 weeks and 6% from primary and 4% from the secondary age group were bullied most days, accounting to 63 children from primary and 61 from secondary.

For young people who considered themselves to have a disability, at a secondary age, 22% (22 young people) had been bullied in the last 4 weeks and 17% (20 young people) of primary age. 11% (11) young people from the secondary age group have been bullied most days and for primary 9% (10) young people.
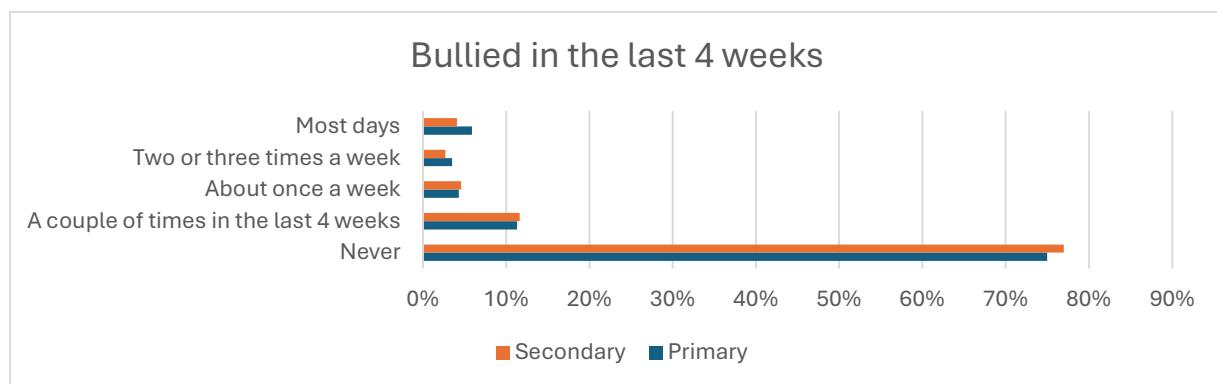
Figure 11.1 – How often have you been bullied in school/college in the last four weeks?

For both age groups the bullying incidents take place mainly in school/college and the primary reason for the bullying incidents is appearance. The results are shown in figure 11.2.

Where has this happened?

Categories (Secondary / Primary):
- Other
- Online
- Outside of school
- In school

Axis: 0.00% 20.00% 40.00% 60.00% 80.00% 100.00%

Legend: Secondary, Primary

Bullying behaviour relates to......

Categories (Primary / Secondary):
- Where you live
- Your religion or beliefs
- Your race or ethnicity
- Your secuality
- Your appearance
- Your gender/gender...
- Your age

Axis: 0.00% 50.00% 100.00% 150.00% 200.00%

Legend: Primary, Secondary

Figure 11.2 – Bullying Incident

64% of primary school children felt their school deals with bullying very well or quite well, compared to 49% of secondary-aged pupils. These figures are consistent with last year's results, indicating a continued perception gap between age groups.

Young people who had experienced bullying were given the opportunity to share their stories. While not all chose to respond, those who did provided a range of experiences. Primary-aged children were generally more open, with many accounts focusing on cyberbullying, racism, and appearance-based bullying:

- *"They added me on Discord and said slurs to me, insulted and harassed me. He also threatened me. This person is a cousin of someone in my class, and he and his friend try to attack me and my friends."*
- *"Racism, rude about appearance and spreading rumours."*
- *"For my looks—like my hairline, my appearance, and my teeth."*

Secondary-aged young people shared experiences related to racism, gender identity, and sexuality, often describing more complex and emotionally charged situations:

- *"Walking to school, getting punched and hit for being Christian. That person said they were going to smash my windows and kill my parents."*
- *"My old friend used to joke about my appearance and what I do to myself. He went too far, calling me names. He also mocks my gender identity, and my family does the same."*
- *"I don't know if it's bullying, but since I stopped hanging out with some friends, they give me dirty looks and hate on gay/lesbian people—knowing I'm part of the LGBTQ community."*
- *"It can be difficult. As a ginger in this society, it's sometimes okay because most get treated like it too, so you're not alone."*

62% of secondary-aged pupils reported coping well with school or college work, an improvement from 57% last year, continuing a positive trend despite ongoing concerns around workload and exams.

Among the 15% who said they were not coping well, suggestions for support included:

- Structured revision time
- Reduced emphasis on homework
- More time allocated for revision
- Increased motivation and encouragement

For young people with SEND:

- 39% reported coping well—up from 28.1% last year
- 33% said they were not coping well

Absence from school in the past 12 months was reported by:

- 78% of primary-aged pupils
- 81.7% of secondary-aged pupils
- Among young people with SEND:
  - 77.1% of primary-aged
  - 88% of secondary-aged

The top reasons for absence, shown in Figure 11.3, the 'Other' reasons, which included:

- Religious events (e.g. Eid)
- Bereavements and funerals
- Medical appointments

Primary	Secondary
You were poorly	Short-term illness
You went on holiday	Other
Other	Holiday in term time
Your parents are unwell	Your own mental health & anxiety
You didn't enjoy school	Caring for family

Figure 11.3 – Reasons for time off school

Primary-aged children were asked about their feelings towards transitioning to secondary school. While 26% said they were not looking forward to the move, a reassuring 84% felt they had enough support to help them through the transition.

Among the 16% who felt unsupported, key areas for improvement included:

- Additional support for SEND needs
- Opportunities to talk to someone
- School visits or tours
- Being with friends during the transition
- Feeling safer, with concerns about potential bullying

Secondary-aged pupils were asked about their sense of belonging within their school or college. As shown in Figure 11.6:

- 49% felt like a valued member of their school or college community—an increase from 40% last year
- 34% were unsure
- 17% said they did not feel valued

Those who did feel valued often attributed this to the roles or responsibilities they held within the school.
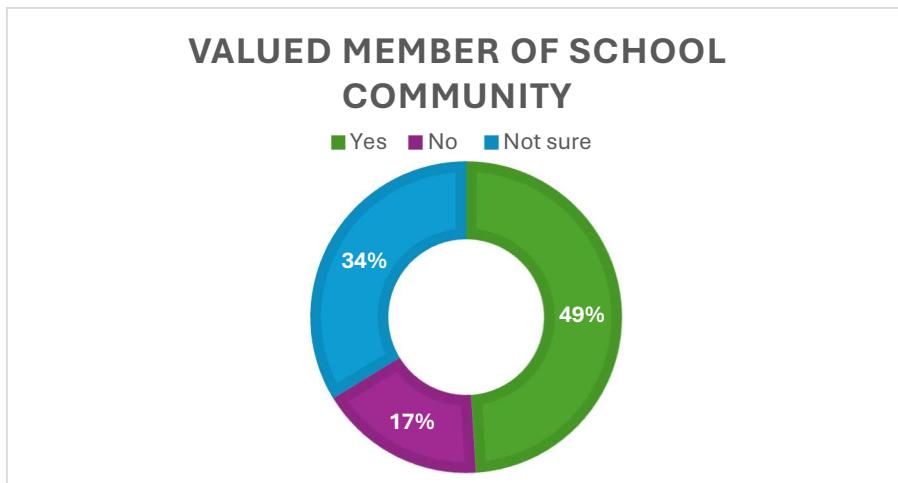
Figure 11.4 – Do you feel like a valued member of the school/college community?

Among those who felt valued in their school or college community, common reasons included:

- Being appreciated by teachers
- Feeling listened to
- Being asked to represent the school in various roles

In contrast, those who did not feel valued shared reasons such as:

- Feeling unknown or overlooked
- Being labelled due to behaviour
- Feeling unimportant or treated differently

Out of 100 children and young people with disabilities, only 37% felt like a valued member of their school or college community. While this is an improvement from 28% last year, 31% still reported not feeling value.

As shown in Figure 11.5, 69% of secondary-aged pupils felt their school provided enough information about career paths, while 31% said they did not.

Those who felt under-informed expressed a desire for:

- More education on life skills, such as managing money and finding employment
  "We need to be taught how to make lots of money."
  "We are not taught about how to get a job."

- More detailed guidance, even if careers are mentioned
  "It's mentioned but not detailed enough for me to know what I want to do in the future."

In contrast, those who felt well-supported highlighted the value of:

- Tools and resources such as work experience, newsletters, assemblies, and noticeboards
  "We have a Careers newsletter which keeps up-to-date information on possible career options at school."
- Dedicated career guidance days
  "We learn about careers on SU4L (Step Up for Life) days."
- Support from staff, including Careers Officers
  "We have a careers officer, and she helped us find our work experience."

Among young people with disabilities, 59% felt they had received enough information about career paths, indicating a lower level of satisfaction compared to their peers.

CAREER PATHS INFORMATION

■ Yes ■ No

31%

69%

Figure 11.5 – Career Path information

When asked if there were any skills not taught in school which they would like to learn about, the answers reflected some of the responses received for the last question on career paths. As many survey results have shown in the past, life skills, money management including dealing with, saving, budgeting and investing, and taxes were things they wanted to learn about, but self-defence was another popular answer.
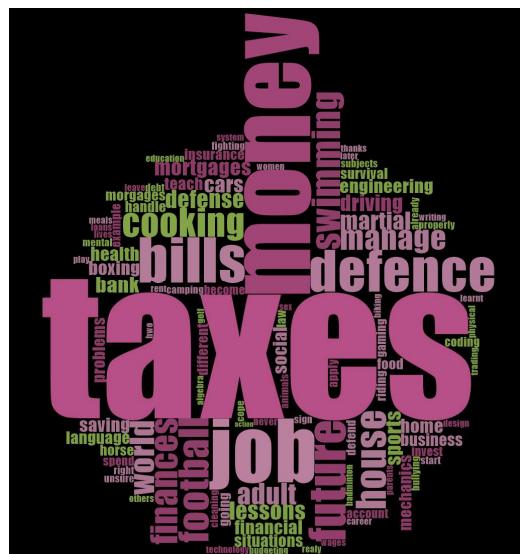
Figure 11.6 – Skills not taught in school

12. Children and Young People Activities

This section explores the types of activities children and young people in Sandwell participate in after school and during the holidays. Figure 12.1 presents the results, with a broader range of options available to the secondary age group, reflecting the extensive youth offer in the borough.

For primary-aged children, the most popular activities were:

- Sports clubs and camps
- Park-based activities
- Arts clubs

However, 15% of respondents said they did not take part in any activities after school.

Among secondary-aged young people:

- 35% reported not participating in any activities
- Sports clubs and camps were the next most popular choice
- Other activities received fewer responses, with the 'other' category including:
  - Gym sessions
  - Visiting the mosque
  - Going out with friends

Primary

- Youth bus
- Volunteering
- Uniformed groups
- Activities for children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Residential experience
- Youth club
- Music
- Educational Outdoor Activities
- Arts & Crafts clubs
- None
- Activities happening in parks and open spaces in holidays
- Sports clubs/camps

Secondary

- Targeted provision
- Youth bus
- Detached youth work
- Volunteering
- Residential experience
- Uniformed groups
- Duke of Edinburgh
- Youth Arts
- Holiday activity prorammes in parks and open spaces
- Educational Outdoor Activities
- Live Music
- Youth club
- Other, please specify
- Sports clubs/camps
- None

Figure 12.1 – Activities after school and during holidays

When asked about barriers to taking part in activities, secondary-aged respondents identified:

- Lack of time
- Nothing stopping them (indicating no barriers)

Other reasons included:

- No activities available nearby
- No one to go with

Young people were also asked what would encourage them to attend activities during the school holidays. Responses included:

- Fun and engaging activities
- Attending with friends
- Incentives such as money, food, or rewards

However, a significant number stated that nothing would encourage them, suggesting a need for more tailored or appealing offers.

Sandwell Council delivers the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, funded by the Department for Education. This free initiative provides meals and activities for children aged 4 to 16 during school holidays. It is available to those eligible for free school meals and children with low to medium levels of SEND.

Despite the programme's popularity, particularly during the summer, only 13% of secondary-aged pupils reported being aware of HAF. Awareness was slightly higher among young people with SEND, at 19%.

Children and young people were asked what other activities they would like to do. The results are shown in figure 12.3. For both age groups football and swimming were the 2 most popular responses. The primary age also started archery, dance, art and the other popular choice, seen throughout the survey was gaming. For the secondary age group, more sports were chosen such as basketball, boxing and dance being the most popular.


Primary

Secondary
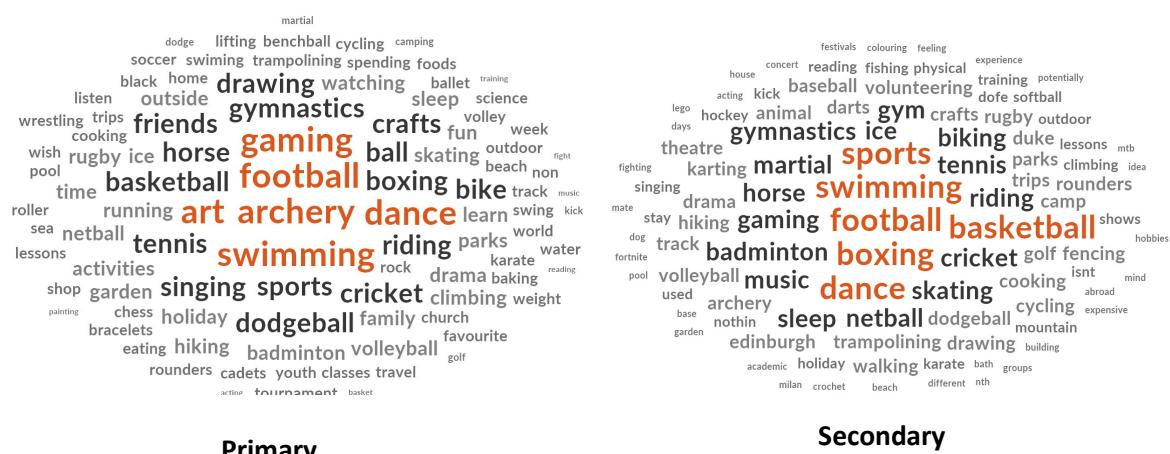
Figure 12.3 – Other Activities

13. Child's Voice

The children and young people were asked about child's voice and their opportunities for democracy.

Of the 1074 primary aged children, 891 (83%) knew about their school council. 154 (17.3%) were involved in their school council. 69.3% felt their school council was making a difference. Of the 1478 secondary aged young people who answered this question, 862 (58.3%) knew about their school council. However, only 114 young people (13.2%) were involved in their school council and only 60.2% of these felt the school council was making a difference. The results can be seen in figures 13.1.
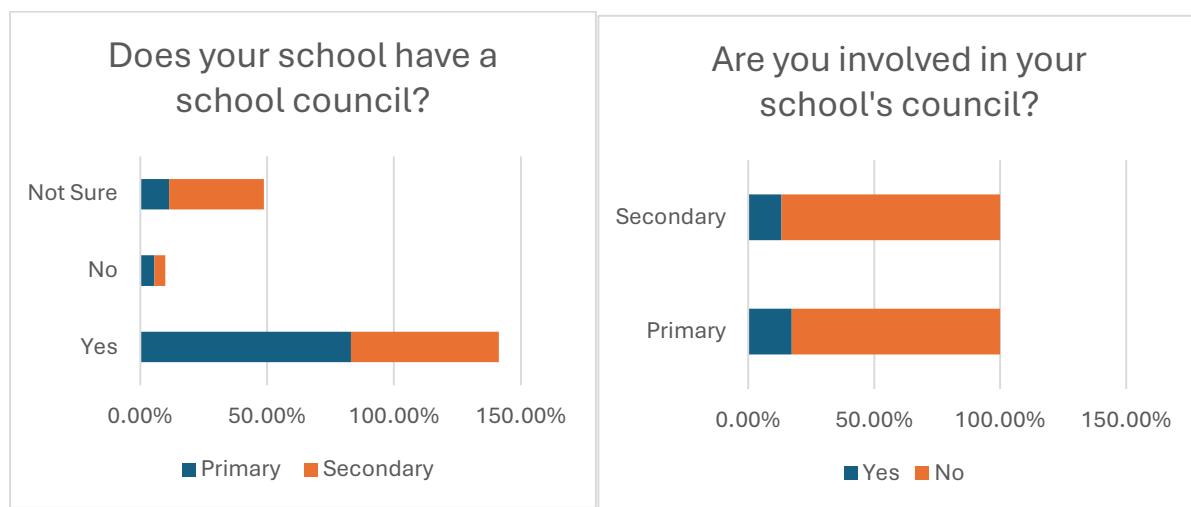
Figure 13.1 – School Councils

30% of secondary and 25% of primary would attend a youth forum, preferably on a monthly basis. 21.1% of the secondary participants had heard or been part of SHAPE Youth Forum. 178 (12%) left their details to join SHAPE.

Primary-aged children who were not part of a school council shared that they felt their voices were heard through:

- Speaking to teachers or other trusted adults
- Using suggestion boxes
- Participating in PSHE lessons
- Talking to school council representatives

Those who felt their voices were not heard suggested that school assemblies could be a better platform for expressing their views.

Among secondary-aged pupils, those who answered "yes" to feeling heard mentioned similar methods, with additional approaches such as:

- Using the "Speak Out" button
- Talking to friends, Heads of Sixth Form, or school ambassadors

Those who responded "no" expressed a desire for more meaningful engagement, emphasising the need to be genuinely listened to and for their ideas to be acted upon:

"Just listen to us, man. We often have good ideas that they ignore. What's the point of making idea forms if you're not going to use any of the ideas?"

Figure 13.3 shows that:

- 45% of secondary-aged pupils said they would vote because it's important and they believe their voices should be heard
- 16% said they would not vote, citing a lack of interest in politics or feeling it wouldn't make a personal difference
  "I don't really see the point and don't really care what happens in politics."
- 39% were unsure, often because they hadn't thought about it yet or didn't fully understand politics
  "I'm not sure but I'll see because I have a long way to go."

Some responses reflected strong political views:

- *"Vote Reform UK, make England great again."*
- *"The government right now is in a horrible state because of the rise of right-wing extremism aka Reform UK, and Labour (a so-called left-wing group) is pandering to racists and xenophobes. #VoteGreen"*

Only 14% of secondary-aged pupils were aware of who their local councillor is.

While over 50% said they had been taught about politics in school, 32% of these felt the education was insufficient. Additionally, around one-third were unsure if they had received political education and 13% stated they had not been taught about politics at all.

HAVE YOU BEEN TAUGHT ANYTHING ABOUT POLITICS OR DEMOCRACY IN SCHOOL?

- Yes, everything I need to know
- Yes, but not enough
- Not sure
- No

27% / 32% / 28% / 13%

AT 18 WILL YOU VOTE IN LOCAL ELECTIONS?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

45% / 16% / 39%
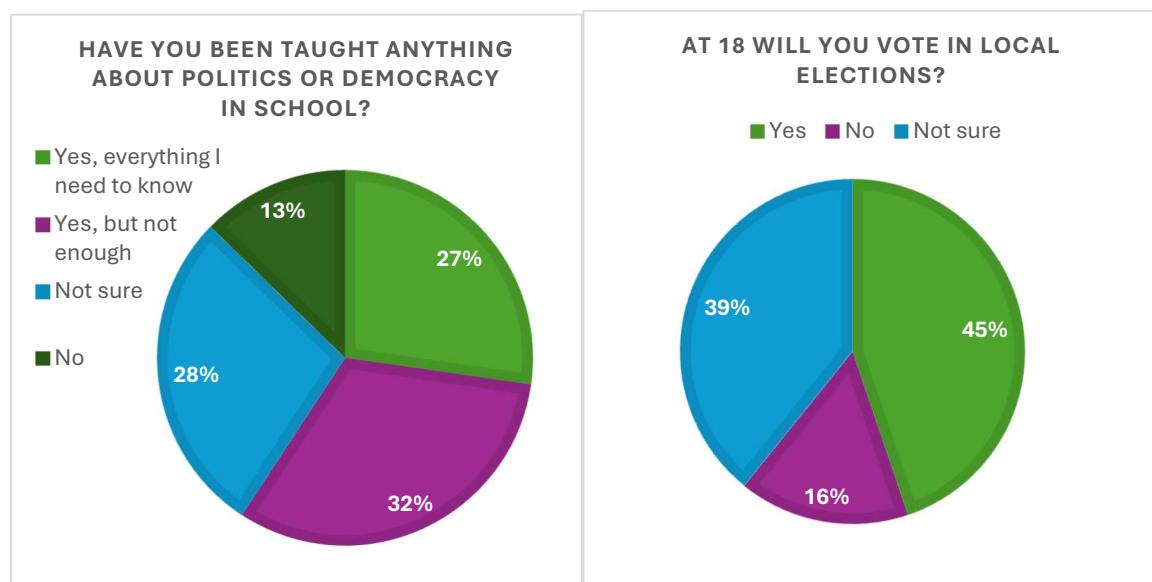
Figure 13.2 – Voting in local and national elections

21.1% of the secondary participants had heard or been part of SHAPE Youth Forum. However, 178 (12%) left their details to join the forum.

HAVE YOU HEARD OF SHAPE YOUTH FORUM?

■ Yes, I've been a part of it ■ Yes, I've heard of it ■ Not Sure ■ No

- 4%
- 17%
- 49%
- 30%
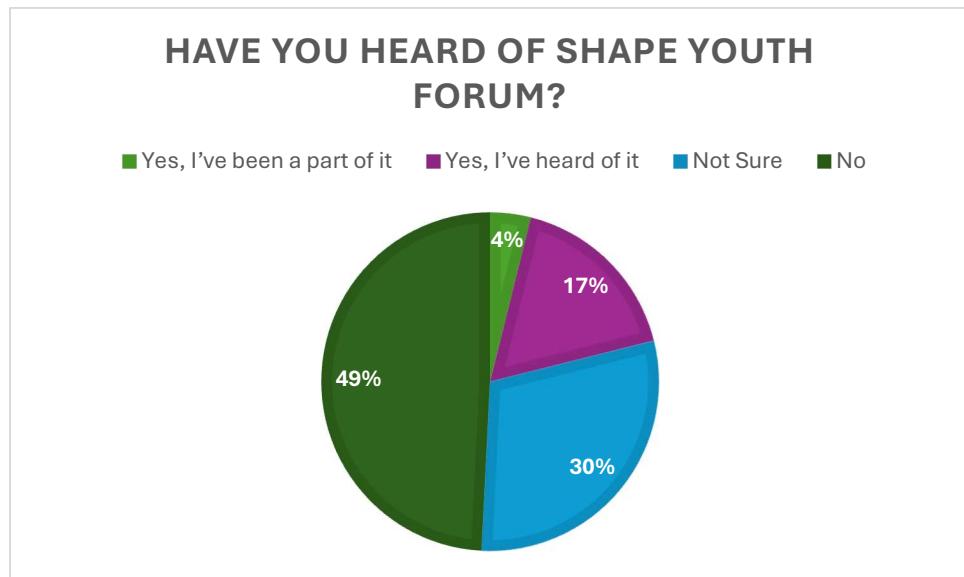
14. Your Future

Nearly 70% of secondary aged young people felt they understood the jobs that were available to them, as shown in Figure 14.1.

DO YOU FEEL YOU UNDERSTAND THE JOBS WHICH ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU IN THE WORLD TODAY?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

- 20%
- 11%
- 69%
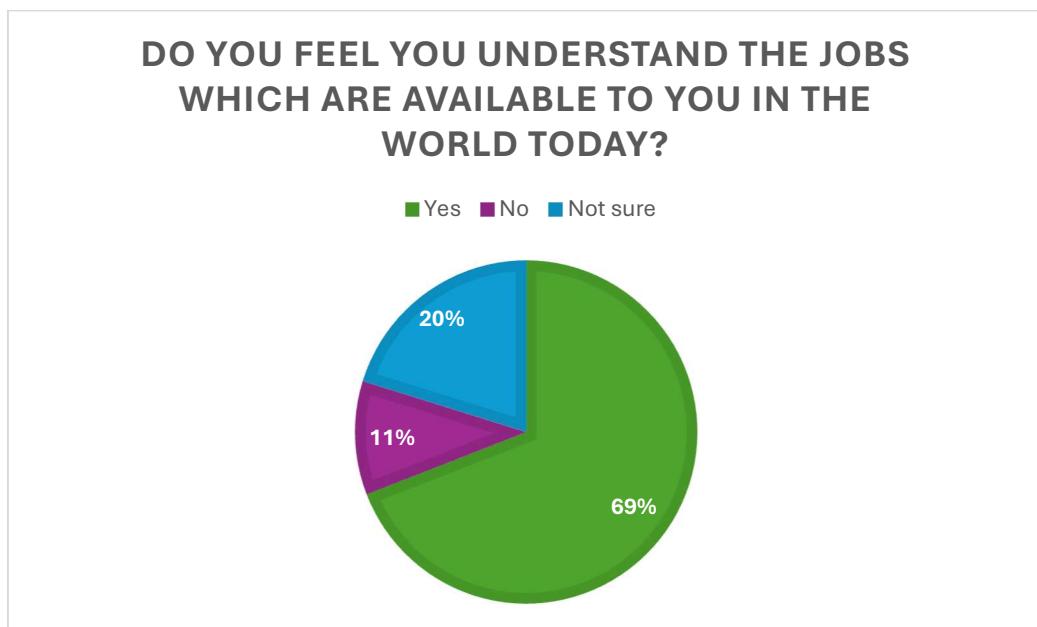
Figure 14.1– Understanding of jobs available

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 14.2, with running their own business, being famous and digital or IT industry. 'Other' however was the top choice and it included lots of different professions. In the 'Other' category, which was the top choice, many had not decided about what they wanted to

do yet, others had stated photography, therapist, flying attendants, footballers, scientist, hairdressers and nail technicians, psychologist, artists, tattooists, fashion and working with animals.
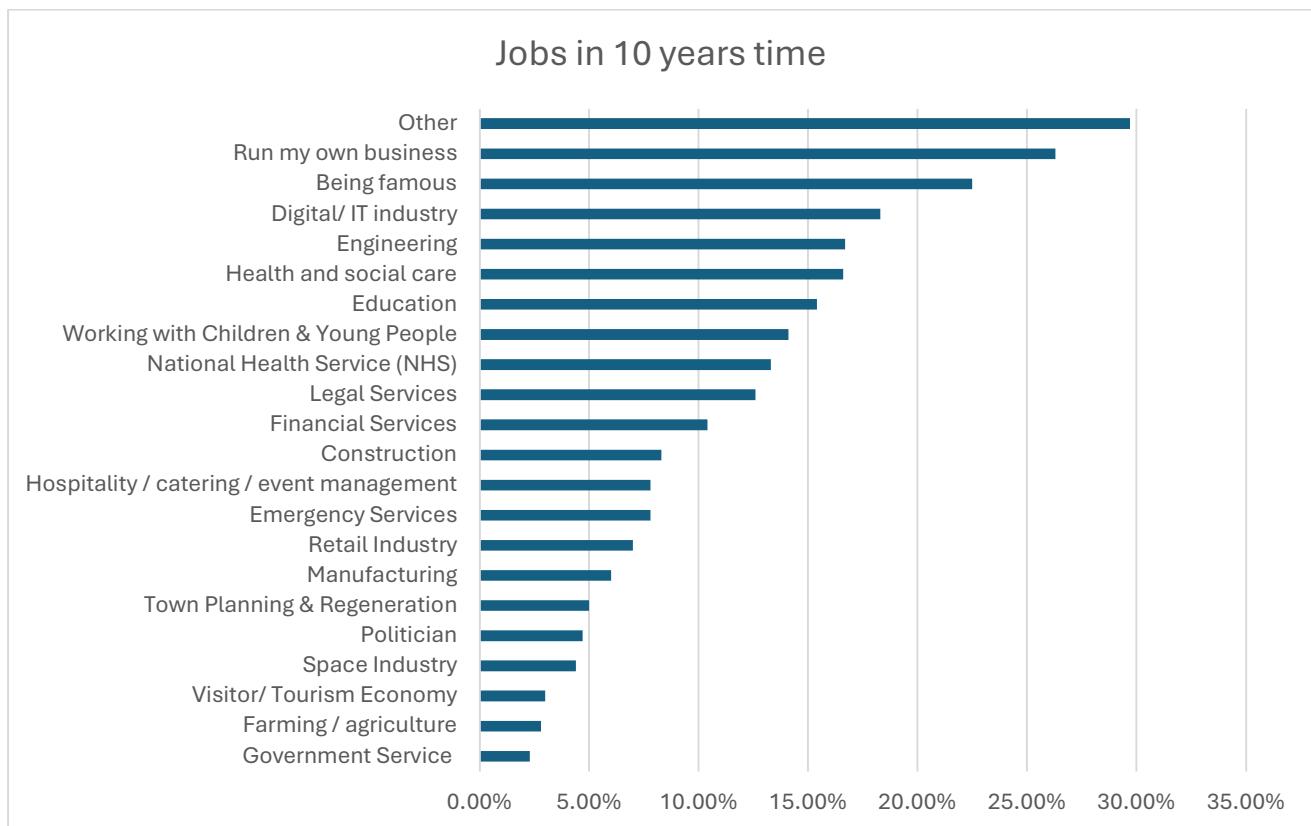
Figure 14.2 – Jobs in 10 years' time

In Figure 14.3, primary children were asked whether they would like to continue to live in Sandwell when they are older and only 41% responded with yes and 35% were unsure, with 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 19% stating yes, 50% not wanting to stay in Sandwell and 31% being unsure. It must be noted as this question was near the end of the survey, there was only 143 young people who answered this question for the secondary age group. Of those who wouldn't want to stay in Sandwell, a supplementary question was asked on what would help them stay in Sandwell and the reasons they gave were to have lots of interesting job opportunities and to feel safe in Sandwell.
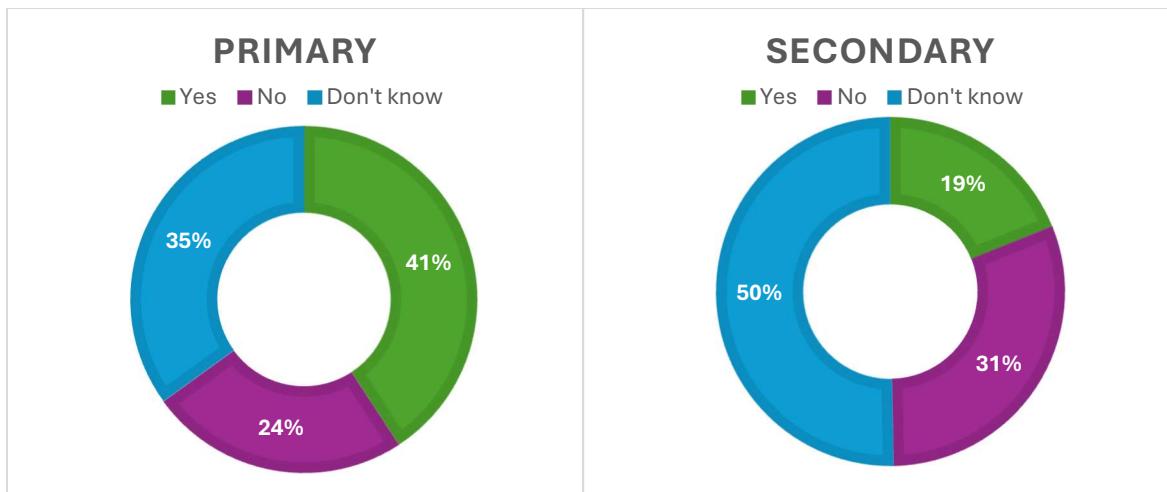
Figure 14.3 – Would you continue living in Sandwell

15. <u>Being a young person in Sandwell</u>

Figure 15.1 illustrates the wide range of keywords shared by children and young people in response to the open-ended question: *"Is there anything else you would like to tell us about being a young person in Sandwell?"*

Primary-aged children generally expressed positive sentiments. Many described being a young person as *"fun,"* highlighting enjoyment in everyday life and the value of spending time with family and friends. Their comments reflected a sense of happiness and freedom:

- *"It's fun because you don't have to work for like 10 hours a day."*
- *"Fun, there's no bullying and I'm treated well."*
- *"Very fun as I don't have a lot of stress."*

However, not all responses were positive. Some children shared personal challenges, describing life as *"hard."* These difficulties ranged from family responsibilities:

- *"It's a bit hard for me, because when my mum is sick I have to take care of her because my dad is at work and my brother can't be bothered to get up from the TV."*

The struggles with friendships:

- *"Hard to make new friends."*

And experiences related to disability:

- *"It's hard to not be called names and made fun of for my disabilities."*

Concerns about how young people are treated were also raised, particularly around bullying:

- *"Being a young person isn't easy, bullying is very normalised."*
- *"Tough due to bullying and unable to come out about my gender."*
- *"More bullies and people are more rude on social media."*
- *"Bullying that schools don't really take care of."*

Friendships were frequently mentioned as both a source of support and stress. Some children found comfort in their peers:

- *"People think you're good kids, but you have secrets like mine. I'm bisexual, I've not told my parents yet and only my friends know."*

While others highlighted the challenges of peer relationships:

- *"If a popular girl is not your friend, then no-one is your friend."*
- *"You can get backstabbed easily by your friends."*

Secondary-aged children offered deeper insights into the pressures they face. Many described being a young person as "hard," citing societal expectations and emotional strain:

- *"It is really hard. There is lots of pressure by society."*
- *"It's not that bad."*
- *"It's really bad."*
- *"It is difficult living in care whilst in Sandwell. LAC need more support"*
- *"It's hard having a stammer with other people making fun of you"*

Issues around crime and safety were also prominent:

- *"Crime is becoming increasingly common and closer to usually safe areas. My local park is filled with unsocial behaviour."*

Some young people expressed a desire to take action and advocate for change:

- *"Yes, I want to join the forum to talk about issues that aren't constantly talked about—just ignored. Or they might be scared to stand up, so I will not do it just for them but for a community to create a safe space."*

Despite the challenges, a few secondary-aged respondents shared positive reflections about their local area:

- *"I am very happy to live in Sandwell as the local community is very kind and great."*

Primary

Secondary

Figure 15.1 – Being a young person in Sandwell

16. Summary of Findings

This detailed survey report can, even with its limitations, provides a good indication of the needs of young people from their perspective, and provide some recommendations about what the local authority and other agencies should be implementing to meet the needs.

There are clear themes identified through the survey, these include, wellbeing and safety, mental health and support, education and school experience, digital life, community and environment, holiday activities, youth voice and democracy and future aspirations.

Wellbeing & Safety

- Concerns around crime, substance misuse, and vaping are rising.
- Bullying, often linked to appearance, remains prevalent, affecting 25% of respondents.
- Family and friendships are key sources of happiness and support.

Mental Health & Support

- Many young people try to manage worries independently before seeking help.
- When support is sought, it is typically from parents, friends, or teachers.
- Access to a trusted adult is essential for emotional wellbeing.
- Increased support is required to build self-confidence, particularly to help young people manage concerns about appearance, intimate relationships and friendships

Education & School Experience

- Schools promote healthy lifestyles, but mental health support is less visible.
- SEND pupils report lower levels of wellbeing and support.
- Bullying is happening in the school environment and at a secondary level young people are not happy with how its dealt in schools

- Young people expressed a strong need for life skills education, particularly around money management, taxes and financial literacy to better prepare them for adulthood and future independence.

Digital Life

- Primary pupils use the internet mainly for gaming, while secondary pupils engage more with social media.
- Mobile phones are the primary device, however laptops and computers are not as widely accessed or owned.
- Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Snapchat are widely used to stay connected with friends.
- Risks include cyberbullying and racist content, especially among older pupils.
- Despite existing awareness and education in schools, there is a growing trend of young people meeting and chatting with new people online, which increases their exposure to risks and potential harm.

Community & Environment

- Young people want a cleaner, safer, and greener Sandwell.
- Priorities include improved parks, safer public spaces, and better local shops

Holiday Activities

- Engaging in extra curricular and diversionary activities is low for teenagers, although participation in sports remains high for children.
- Popular activities include football, swimming, dance, and gaming.
- Barriers include lack of time, nearby options, and social connections.

Youth Voice & Democracy

- Participation is low in school councils, but those involved feel their contributions matter.
- Young people want more opportunities to learn about democracy and rights.

Future Aspirations

- Staying in Sandwell is not a long-term goal for many young people
- Key factors influencing this include job opportunities and feeling safe.

17. Conclusion

The SHAPE Survey 2025 highlights the complex and evolving needs of children and young people in Sandwell. While there are areas of progress, such as increased coping with schoolwork and improved career guidance, significant challenges remain. These include rising concerns around safety, bullying, mental health, and digital risks.

Young people are calling for greater emotional support, practical life skills education, safer communities and inclusive spaces and more meaningful opportunities to have their voices heard.

These findings provide a vital evidence base for Sandwell Council and its partners to shape services, policies, and strategies that reflect the lived experiences of young people supporting the borough's ambition to become child friendly.

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

SHAPE

To find out more about the SHAPE Programme

✉ Email: shape_events@sandwell.gov.uk

To access advice and support please visit:

🌐 http://www.justyouth.org.uk/

Follow us on our social media channels:

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Twitter: @SHAPESandwell

Facebook: Just Youth Sandwell