

2.1 Liking school and sense of belonging

Sense of belonging is a basic human need such as food or shelter, and is critically important to a child's healthy physical and mental development. Sense of belonging at school can be referred to as 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment'.⁴⁸

Research suggests that sense of belonging at school and the degree to which students report liking school has an important influence on students' academic motivation, engagement and participation, and that unless students identify well with their schools, their educational outcomes will be limited.^{49 50}

Survey findings

- 49 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 33 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they like school 'a lot'.
- Four per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 11 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they 'don't like' school.
- Four in five students across all years mentioned 'seeing my friends'/'hanging out with friends' as one of the things they most like about school.
- 75 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel like they are part of their school.

Do students like school?

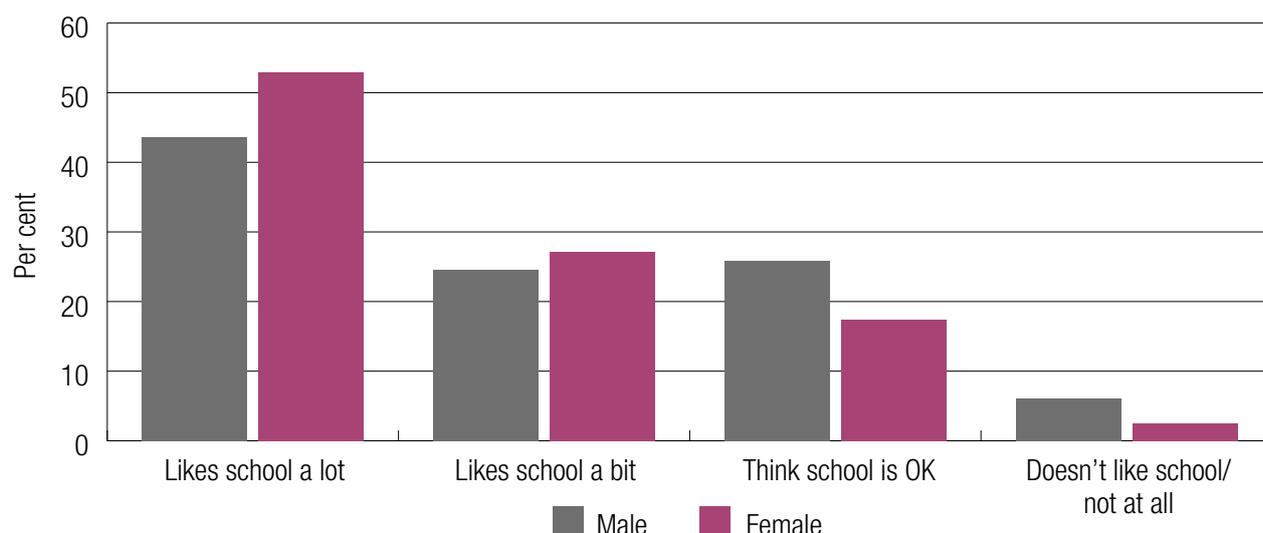
Almost one-half of Year 3 to Year 6 students (49.0%) reported that they like school 'a lot' and one-quarter (26%) said they like school 'a bit'. Twenty-one per cent of students answered school 'is OK'.

Four per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'.

Female students were more likely than male students to report that they like school 'a lot' (52.9% of girls compared to 43.6% of boys). Female students were also slightly more likely to say they like school 'a bit', however, the difference was not statistically significant (27.2% of girls said this compared to 24.5% of boys).

Consequently, boys were more likely than girls to say that school 'is OK' and they were also more likely than their female counterparts to not like school or not like school 'at all' (6.1% of boys compared with 2.5% of girls).

Graph 2.1: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school/not at all, by gender



Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students were somewhat more likely than non-Aboriginal students to say that they 'like school a lot' (54.8% compared to 48.4%) and also that they 'don't like school'⁵¹ (6.9% compared to 3.7%) but the differences were not statistically significant.

No significant difference in relation to how students feel about school was found between regional and metropolitan students and students born in Australia and elsewhere.

Table 2.1: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don't like school or not at all, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Born in Australia	Born elsewhere	All
Likes school a lot	43.6	52.9	48.8	49.2	48.4	54.8	48.3	52.2	49.0
Likes school a bit	24.5	27.2	26.0	26.2	26.8	19.2	25.6	28.3	26.1
It's OK	25.8	17.4	21.3	20.4	21.0	19.2	21.9	16.7	20.9
Doesn't like school	4.3	1.6	2.6	2.9	2.4	5.5	3.0	1.4	2.7
Doesn't like school at all	1.8	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.3

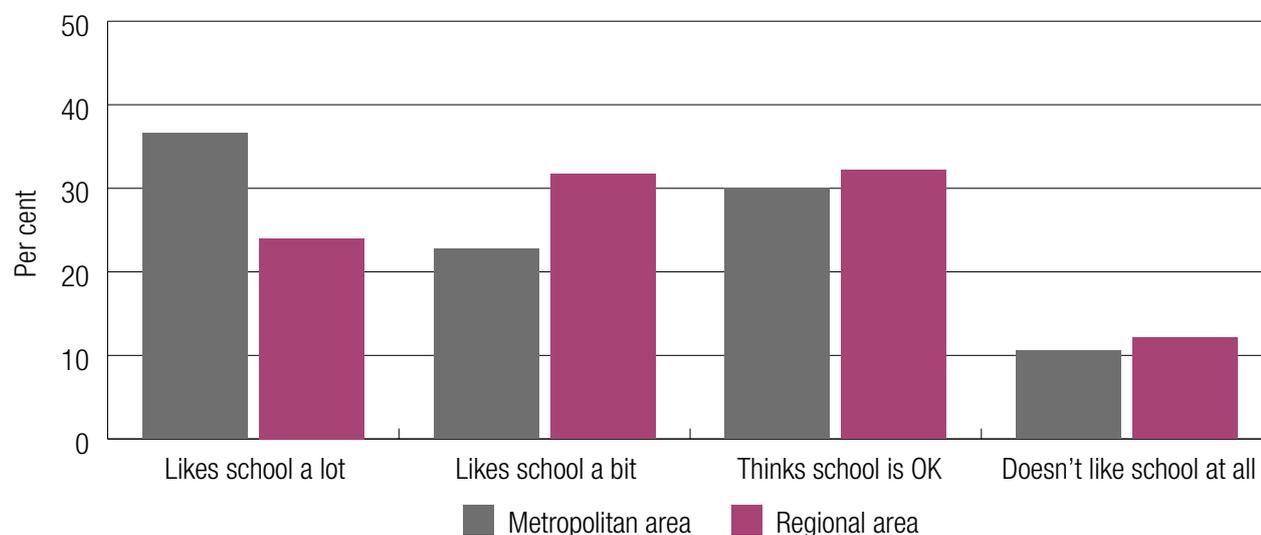
Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, one-third (32.7%) responded they like school 'a lot' (this compares to one-half of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying the same). One-quarter (25.6%) said they like school 'a bit' and around 30 per cent think school 'is OK'.

However more than one in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students (11.0%) said they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'.

There was little difference between the genders. The increased likelihood for girls in Year 3 to Year 6 to like school 'a lot' compared to boys was not found for students in Year 7 to Year 12. Male and female students in Year 7 to Year 12 were almost equally likely to enjoy school.

A significant difference however was found between regional and metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students with those in metropolitan areas being more likely to report that they 'like school a lot' (36.6% compared with 24.0%).

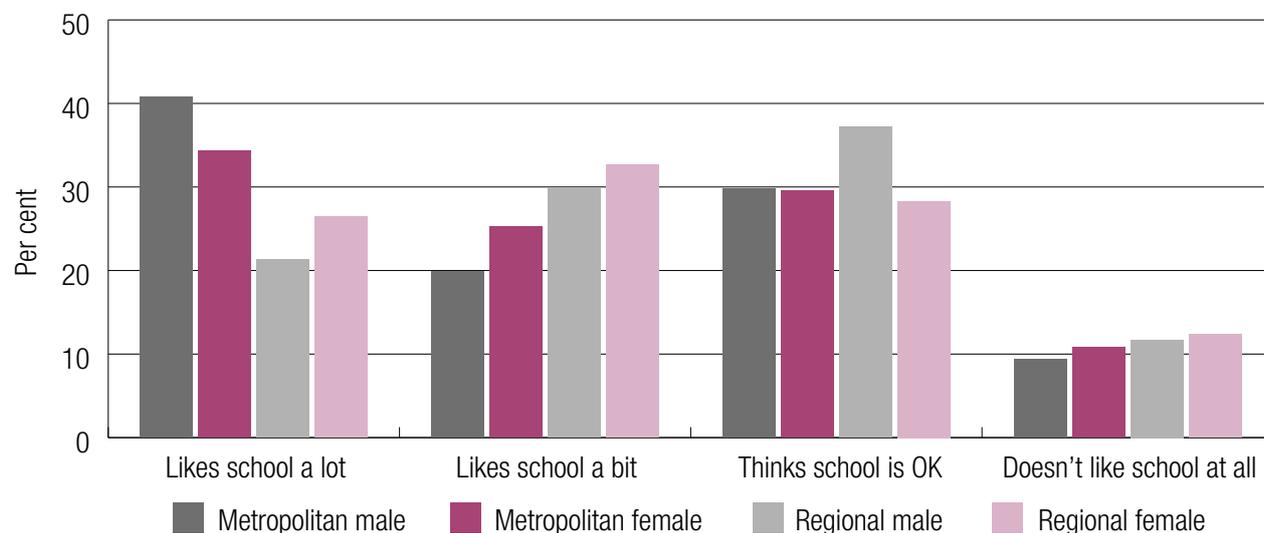
Graph 2.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school/not at all, by region



The regional difference between students was even more significant once a gender split was applied. Male Year 7 to Year 12 students in metropolitan areas emerged as the group most likely to say they like school ‘a lot’ (40.8%) while male students in regional areas were the group least likely to say this (21.3%).

Similarly, female students in metropolitan areas were more likely than those in regional areas to like school ‘a lot’ (34.3% versus 26.5%) however this difference was not statistically significant.

Graph 2.3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school/not at all, by gender and region



A difference in the proportion of students saying they like school ‘a lot’ was also found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Year 7 to Year 12. A lower proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said that they ‘like school a lot’ (22.7% compared to 33.4%) however the difference was not statistically significant. In regard to not liking school, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were about equally likely to say that they ‘don’t like school’⁵² (13.6% compared to 10.9%).

Little to no difference in regard to how much students enjoy school was found between students born in Australia and students born elsewhere.

Table 2.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don’t like school or not at all, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Born in Australia	Born elsewhere	All
Likes school a lot	34.4	32.1	36.6	24.0	33.4	22.7	31.7	33.3	32.7
Likes school a bit	23.2	27.4	22.8	31.7	25.4	27.3	27.2	24.7	25.6
It's OK	32.3	29.2	30	32.2	30.3	36.4	30.4	30.1	30.7
Doesn't like school	7.7	6.7	6.8	8.7	7.5	4.5	7.3	9.7	7.3
Doesn't like school at all	2.5	4.6	3.8	3.4	3.4	9.1	3.4	2.2	3.7

What students most enjoy about school

About four in five Year 3 to Year 6 students (82.6%) said they like school because of 'seeing my friends'. The other most frequently mentioned reasons were 'sports' (68.6%), 'learning new things' (66.8%) and 'arts and/or music' (64.0%).

Notably, one in 10 students (10.1%) answered that they like school because of 'being away from home'.

There was some difference between the genders with Year 3 to Year 6 female students being more likely than their male counterparts to say that they like school because of 'seeing my friends' (88.1% of girls compared to 75.0% of boys) and 'arts and/or music' (74.3% of girls compared to 49.7% of boys).

Boys on the other hand were more likely than girls to say that they like school because of 'sports' (79.1% of boys compared to 61.0% of girls).

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, more than four in five students (84.7%) mentioned 'hanging out with friends' as one of the things they most enjoy about school (multiple responses were possible for this question). Other most common responses were 'learning new things' (60.9%) and 'sports' (56.1%).

Notably, almost one in five Year 7 to Year 12 students (17.2%) answered that 'being away from home' is one of the things they most enjoy about school (compared to one in 10 Year 3 to Year 6 students who said the same).⁵³

There was little difference between the genders in regard to what students most enjoy about school with the only notable variances being an increased likelihood for male Year 7 to Year 12 students to mention 'sports' (62.8% compared to 51.3%) and for female students to mention 'arts and/or music' (46.2% compared to 33.0%)

Students who don't like school

A small proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students (4.0%)⁵⁴ reported that they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'. When asked about their reasons for not liking school, three-quarters of these students (74.2%) answered 'it's boring'. Other reasons for not liking school were 'what I'm learning is not interesting' (41.9%) or 'not useful' (32.3%).

Some Year 3 to Year 6 students noted personal reasons for not liking school⁵⁵ and these can largely be grouped into issues around bullying, health-related issues (including problems with concentration) and teacher-related issues.

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, 11 per cent reported that they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'. When asked about their reasons for not liking school, more than one-half of these students (53.3%) answered 'because it's boring'.

Similar proportions of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they 'don't like the way that I'm being taught' (49.3%) and 'what I'm learning is not interesting' (46.7%).

As with the younger cohort, some students noted personal reasons for not liking school.⁵⁶ These reasons can be grouped into issues around bullying and teacher-related issues. Only few comments related to health issues.

Being part of school

Year 7 to Year 12 students were also asked whether they felt like they were part of their school. While three-quarters (75.2%) of students answered that they do feel like they are part of their school, around 20 per cent reported they feel 'unsure' about this. Five per cent of students said they do not feel like they are part of their school.

Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they feel like they are part of their school were more likely than other students to say that they:

- enjoy school 'a lot' or 'a bit'
- 'usually' get along with their class mates
- feel safe 'all the time' or 'most of the time'.

When asked about what makes students feel like they are part of their school, the most commonly mentioned reasons were 'friends', 'teachers' or particular activities and subjects offered by the school.

In regard to teachers, Year 7 to Year 12 students said that positive relationships with teachers and other school staff, and teachers who are kind, calm, helpful, supportive, welcoming, communicative and inclusive help make them feel like they are part of their school.

“Everyone is so welcoming and the teachers are so open to talk making you feel like you belong. Making friends is so easy as well as the people here are generally lovely, there are things for everyone.”

Students also said that friends and the relationships they have with their friends, other students and people at the school is what helps them feel like they are part of their school.

“I feel as if I belong, I know lots of people and the school grounds very well. I am asked to participate in lots of activities.”

“School feels like an extended family.”

Some Year 7 to Year 12 students mentioned special activities or particular subjects as reasons for why they feel like they are part of their school.

“Being in the music program as it gives me an opportunity to meet people who have the same interests as me and to also be here for a reason, which is to do music.”

On the opposite end of the continuum, students who said they don't feel like they are part of their school or who were unsure about this also most commonly mentioned teachers and friends as the reason(s) for feeling this way.

These students described the way teachers treat them, often saying they felt excluded, bullied, not listened to, not respected or ignored. In regard to friends, students often described a lack of friends, feelings of not fitting in, and being excluded.

In summary, the factors contributing to students feeling like they are part of their school – or not – can be summarised under the following three themes:

1. **Active involvement:** students understand being or feeling like part of their school and school community is self-initiated and a direct result of active involvement. Students used active language to describe their involvement:

“I get involved”, “I participate”, “I talk”, “I volunteer”, “my involvement”

Conversely, students who said they do not feel like they are part of their school or who were unsure about this often described their passive behaviour or lack of involvement using phrases such as:

“I don't get involved”, “I don't participate”, “I'm not part of anything”

2. **Student characteristics:** Students who feel like they are part of their school often mentioned things like:

“I get along”, “I fit in well”, “I like the people here”, “people are like me”, “I feel accepted”

On the other hand, students who feel like they are not part of their school or who are unsure about this mentioned things like:

“I don't get along”, “I don't fit in”, “I'm different”, “I don't belong”

3. **Choice and having a say:** students who feel like they are part of their school said things like:

“I am offered opportunities”, “I can voice my opinions”, “[...] being treated as an individual”

Conversely, students who feel like they are not part of their school or who are unsure made comments such as:

“I am just another student”, “I cannot voice my opinions”, “teachers don't value my opinions”.