



**The health
and wellbeing
of children and
young people with
disability and
complex needs**



Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021



Acknowledgement of Country

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

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

A note about language

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the children and young people with disability across WA who participated in the Speaking Out Survey 2021. We would also like to thank participating schools and education support schools and centres for their contribution to this project. Without their patience and help the survey would not have been possible. In addition, we would like to thank the WA Department of Education and Catholic Education WA Limited who supported the survey.

The extension of the Speaking Out Survey was made possible thanks to the support of Lotterywest.

Further information about the Speaking Out Survey is available at ccyp.wa.gov.au

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Commissioner for Children and Young People WA
Level 1, Albert Facey House, 469 Wellington Street Perth WA 6000

Telephone: (08) 6213 2297

Facsimile: (08) 6213 2220

Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

Web: ccyp.wa.gov.au

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Message from the Commissioner

The Speaking Out Survey offers children and young people throughout Western Australia a unique opportunity to share their experiences and opinions on safety, mental health, education engagement, community connection, and access to support services.

With the generous support of Lotterywest, I was able to extend the 2021 Speaking Out Survey to include children and young people with disabilities and complex needs.

Through this extension project, my team reached 545 children and young people with hearing or vision impairments, behavioural and engagement challenges, and multiple complex needs.

Self-reported data on the health and well-being of children and young people with disabilities is uncommon, making the extension of the Speaking Out Survey valuable for understanding their experiences and perspectives.

Results of the extension survey showed that a majority of students in special educational needs programs and in education support schools and centres, experience good general health and high life satisfaction. They feel safe and supported at home, in schools and in their communities. However, they also experience barriers that limit their participation in schools and in their communities. These obstacles can stem from their specific support needs as well as low expectations, limited opportunities, inaccessible processes, and social and cultural barriers.

It is crucial to recognise that all children and young people have the right to be heard on matters that affect them.

This report underscores the need to provide further opportunities for children and young people with disabilities to share their perspectives.



Relying solely on input from parents and carers does not substitute for direct engagement with the children and young people themselves.

I urge communities, governments, and service providers to listen and respond to the voices of children and young people. Let the voices in this report inspire action for inclusive and supportive environments, while prioritising meaningful consultation and information sharing for those with disabilities.

Many thanks to Department of Education Western Australia and Catholic Education Western Australia for their support in conducting the survey. The willingness of the specialist teachers and education assistants to conduct the survey with their students and incorporate it into their lesson plans was invaluable to the success of the extension project.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jacqueline". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a light blue color.

Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner for Children and Young People

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1 Executive summary

This report presents the results of the 2021 Speaking Out Survey for 545 children and young people with disability and complex needs aged between eight and 17 years across WA. These include students participating in the Western Australian Department of Education School of Special Educational Needs: Sensory (SSEN:S) programs (who have hearing loss and/or vision impairment), students in the School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour (SSEN:B) and Engagement and students in education support schools and centres who may have multiple complex needs.

Self-reported data on the health and wellbeing of children and young people with disability is not common. Further, children and young people with disability do not often have the opportunity to have their say on their health and wellbeing.

The Speaking Out Survey provides a unique opportunity for children and young people across Western Australia (WA) to share their experiences and views on safety, mental health, engagement in education, connection to community and how they access sources of support.

It also provides invaluable information for the families, communities, decision-makers and service providers within WA to enable them to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people.

Children and young people with disability often experience social exclusion and barriers to meaningful participation in their schools and communities.¹ There are significant issues and a range of barriers that can discourage, prevent or actively exclude children and young people with disability from participating in decisions that affect their lives.



Personally I think that this was a good way for me to express my feelings about life.

(Student in an education support school)

For some, this can be the nature of their support needs, however, more frequently it is a culture of low expectations, lack of opportunity, inaccessible processes and social and cultural barriers.²

All children and young people have the right to be heard on the issues that affect them.

■ ■ When told that there were some important people who wanted to know what they had to say about things, there was definitely a sense of pride and they felt important. Knowing that someone was interested in their opinion, no matter what it might be, was empowering for them. ■ ■

(Teacher in an education support school)

- 1 Children and Young People with Disability Australia 2019, *Time for change: The state of play for inclusion of students with disability*, Children and Young People with Disability Australia.
- 2 Simmons C and Robinson S 2014, *Strengthening Participation of Children and Young People with Disability in Advocacy*, Children and Young People with Disability Australia

The results outlined in this report highlight that most participants report being healthy, happy at school, feel safe and supported at home and like where they live.

Most (84.6%) students from Schools of Special Educational Needs (SSEN) said their general health was either good, very good or excellent and 65.0 per cent rated their life satisfaction as high. Of the students in education support schools and centres 60.9 per cent said their general health was very good and 61.0 per cent said their life satisfaction is high (“I have a great life!”).

Most participants feel supported and cared for by their parents and family with 83.2 per cent of SSEN students reporting they have a parent or another adult who listens to them when they have something to say. Similarly, 79.9 per cent of participating students in education support schools and centres feel like their parents listen to them when they have something to say.

Almost one-half of students in the SSEN programs like school a lot or a bit (47.6%), while 30.4 per cent said that it was okay. This is consistent with Year 4 to Year 12 students across WA.

A high proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students in education support schools and centres like school (71.2%) and said that at school there is a teacher or another adult who cares about them (81.8%).

Participating students reported being bullied by other students from their school in similar proportions to students across WA.

Around one-half (51.3%) of Year 4 to Year 12 students in education support schools and centres said they felt worried when they think about COVID-19, while almost two-thirds (61.7%) of Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students said they felt anxious and/or stressed. These results suggest that children and young people with disability were more likely to feel concerned about COVID-19 than other students in WA.

It is hoped that a key message from this report is that children and young people with disability have views and opinions on their own health and wellbeing and they should be given the opportunity to have these views heard and acted upon.



2 Introduction

“ Participating in the Speaking Out Survey was of huge benefit to us as a school community. For the students, it gave them an opportunity to talk about serious topics and their opinions on them, providing a safe place to discuss issues of importance to them and how they are feeling. ”

(Teacher in an education support school)

In 2018, the population of children and young people (aged 0 to 17 years) with disabilities in Western Australia (WA) was estimated to be around 43,600, accounting for approximately 7.5 per cent of the total population in that age group.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) developed the Speaking Out Survey to capture the views of a representative sample of Year 4 to Year 12 students in Western Australia (WA) and produce a robust data source relating to the wellbeing of children and young people in the state. The Commissioner undertook the second Speaking Out Survey in 2021 (SOS21) as a follow up to the inaugural survey carried out in 2019 (SOS19).

A total of 16,532 Year 4 to 12 students from 94 schools in all regions of WA consented to participate in the main SOS21 survey. The results from the Speaking Out Survey were published in November 2021: [Speaking Out Survey 2021. The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report.](#)

In 2021-22, the Commissioner was able to extend the Speaking Out Survey with the support of Lotterywest, to include more children and young people in remote communities and other children and young people who may not be engaged in mainstream schooling.

The Students with Disability extension project was initiated to enable children and young people generally outside of mainstream schooling to have their say through the Speaking Out Survey.

Hearing directly from some children and young people with disability and complex needs can be challenging as they can face barriers in communicating their views through standard consultation and surveying methodologies. In this project, representatives from the various school sectors and school staff were essential in providing guidance to the Commissioner’s office regarding how to ensure participants were best supported to have their say.

Through this project, a further 545 children and young people with disability and complex needs participated in the Speaking Out Survey. These children and young people had highly variable skills and capabilities and for some this was the first time they had participated in a wellbeing survey of this nature.

This report presents the results of these surveys and provides a critical insight into the wellbeing of children and young people living with disability across WA. It showcases their views and experiences across a range of wellbeing areas including physical health, mental health, supportive relationships and safety.

There were two key groups of students who participated in this project.

1. Students in the Schools of Special Educational Needs³ (SEN) completed the main SOS21 survey.
2. Students participating in education support schools and centres across government and non-government schools completed one of two modified versions of the main SOS21 survey.

Children and young people with disability who participated in the Speaking Out Survey 2021 extension

Cohort	Survey	Number of participants
Schools of Special Educational Needs	Main SOS21 survey	261
Education support centres and schools	Modified surveys	284
Total		545

To enable these students to be involved, substantial support was provided by staff at the WA Department of Education and Catholic Education Western Australia Limited. The Commissioner’s staff provided training to staff at the various centres and schools to enable them to conduct the survey with their students. The extension surveys would not have been possible without this critical work.

This report provides a summary of the results for each of these cohorts in the following chapters. The results reported are not representative of all students in Years 4 to 12 with disability, however they provide a critical insight into the views and experiences of these children and young people. In this report, comparisons are sometimes made with the main SOS21 survey results. These are descriptive comparisons only.

For more information on the methodology and approach of SOS21 Students with Disability Extension Project refer to **Appendix A**.

Participants in the SOS21 extension surveys were provided with opportunities to give open text responses to some questions on schoolwork stress, their mental health, feeling safe, their local community and other general topics.

A selection of quotes are included in this report on relevant topics. For students in education support centres, their responses may sometimes have been transcribed by the teacher or education assistant guiding them through the survey. The quotes from students are generally unedited to ensure the voice of the child or young person is authentically presented. Editing has only been done where necessary for clarity, understanding or for confidentiality. In this instance any changes or omissions have been marked with an [] or an ellipsis (...).

3 The School of Special Educational Needs: Sensory provides educational support for children with hearing loss and/or vision impairment and the School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement provides support to students with extreme, complex and challenging behaviours.

3

Students in Schools of Special Educational Needs (SSEN)

3 Students in Schools of Special Educational Needs (SSEN)

SSEN: Sensory (SSEN:S) provides educational support for children with a hearing loss and/or vision impairment from birth to school completion. SSEN:S supports children in both public and non-government schools throughout Western Australia.

SSEN: Behaviour (SSEN:B) and Engagement provides educational support and services to children and young people with extreme, complex and challenging behaviours.

In total, 261 children and young people in Years 4 to 12 across the SSEN services in 15 locations participated in the Speaking Out Survey 2021 (extension).

The Commissioner's staff provided survey training to SSEN specialist teachers and education assistants, who then supported students to access and complete the survey.

These students completed the main Speaking Out Survey questionnaire that was delivered across WA in 2021. The standard Speaking Out Survey is voice-enabled and a Braille version was created by SSEN staff and used by students who prefer that form of communication.

Of the participating students, 46.0 per cent identified as a girl, 51.0 per cent identified as a boy and three per cent selected the option that they identify 'in another way'. Just over one-half (52.0%) of the students were in secondary school (Years 7 to 12) and 48.0 per cent were in primary school (Years 4 to 6). The students were from metropolitan, regional and remote WA.

A final question in the survey asked the participants their views on the survey or anything else they wanted to say. A small number of respondents felt the survey was too long.

"It was long."

"I liked this survey but it takes so long."

However, most respondents were very positive about the survey and thankful for the opportunity to have their say:

"This survey made me feel like I was talking to someone who really cared about me."

"I like this survey. 😊😊😊😊😊😊"

"It was a great survey Good job."

"Thank u it really helped me."

"It was quite helpful to talk about my feelings."

"It was fun to be able to express and share my life in private."

"This survey was very well done."



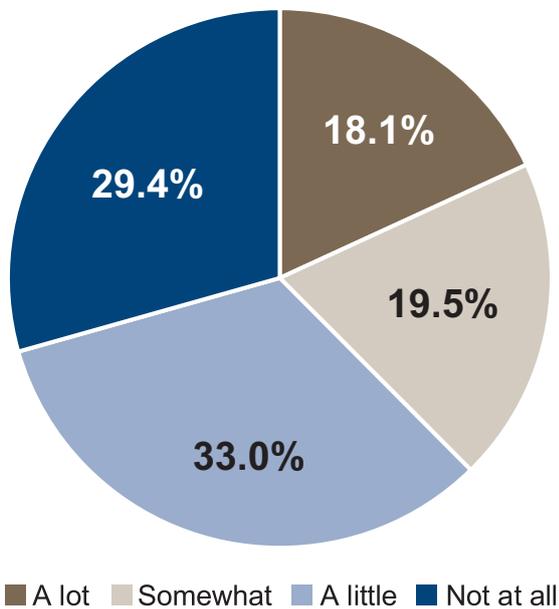
I think that this survey is a great opportunity for me to know what to say when somebody ask me.

3.1 COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had less impact on people in WA than many other jurisdictions, during 2021 when the survey was conducted, children and young people across WA were impacted by intermittent lockdowns, some home-schooling and worries about family and friends in other states and countries.

Of the respondents to this survey, 29.4 per cent reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected their life in a bad way at all, while 52.5 per cent reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their life in a bad way a little or somewhat and 18.1 per cent said it had affected their life in a bad way a lot.

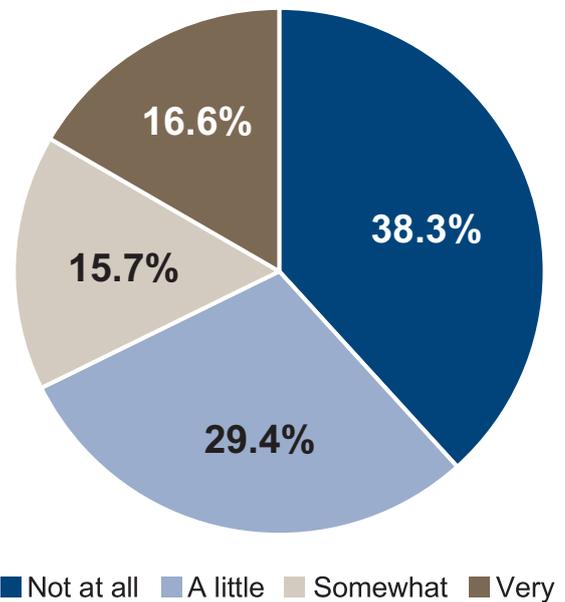
Proportion of SSEN students reporting whether COVID-19 had affected their life in a bad way



A greater proportion of SSEN students than students who participated in the main SOS21 survey across WA, reported that COVID-19 had affected their life in a bad way a lot (18.1% compared to 11.5%).

With regards to what emotions students were feeling in regard to COVID-19, 16.6 per cent of respondents felt very anxious/stressed about COVID-19, while over one-third (38.3%) were not at all anxious or stressed.

Proportion of SSEN students reporting whether they feel anxious and/or stressed when they think about COVID-19



These results were broadly similar to the responses across WA, although a greater proportion of SSEN students reported feeling very anxious and/or stressed (16.6% compared to 11.1%).

Students in this survey were not asked an open text question about COVID-19 and no SSEN students commented on COVID-19 in other responses.

3.2 Healthy and connected

Physical and mental health are basic building blocks for children and young people’s current wellbeing and future life outcomes.

Physical health

Being physically healthy is critical for children and young people’s wellbeing as many health conditions in adulthood have their origins in childhood. Physical health also influences children and young people’s engagement with family, education and friends and supports socio-emotional health.⁴

The physical health of children with disability is often viewed through the lens of their disability and other aspects of health can

be overlooked. Children and young people with disability who are able to participate in physical activities and have healthy diets are more likely to have better health outcomes over the longer term.⁵

Of the SSEN students surveyed, almost one-half (46.7%) reported that their general health is excellent or very good, while one-half (43.3%) reported their health was good and 10.0 per cent reported their health was fair or poor. These results were consistent with Year 4 to Year 12 students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting on their general health



4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2020, *Australia’s Children*, AIHW, p. 30.

5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2018, *Chronic conditions and disability 2015*, Cat no CDK 8, AIHW, p. 21.

Most participants (Years 4 to 12) reported they care about staying fit and being physically active very much (44.5%) or some (34.3%), while 21.2 per cent reported they care only a little or not at all.

Only one-third (33.6%) of SSEN secondary students said that physical activity, sport or exercise is definitely an important part of their life, while 51.2 per cent said it was 'sort of' of an important part of their life (all of WA: 53.9% and 32.3%, respectively).

Three-quarters of SSEN students in Years 4 to 12 said they care about eating healthy food very much (34.0%) or some (45.8%) and 20.2 per cent said they care a little or not at all. These results were consistent with those of students across the state.

Less than one-half (47.2%) of SSEN secondary school students had done any vigorous exercise or activity more than three times in the previous week. One-third (36.0%) said they exercised vigorously one to two-times a week. While 9.6 per cent said they don't exercise and 7.2 per cent said they had done no vigorous exercise in the previous week.

In contrast, 63.1 per cent of secondary school students across WA report doing vigorous exercise at least three times a week.

Just over one-third (38.4%) of SSEN secondary students reported eating fruit at least two times each day, while 46.3 per cent said they eat vegetables at least two times each day. These are lower proportions than secondary students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Having a good night's sleep is increasingly being recognised as critical for physical and mental health. For physical health, inadequate sleep is associated with a higher risk of children becoming overweight and having poorer overall health.⁶

Almost all (92.9%) Year 4 to Year 6 SSEN students reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night. More than one-half (57.7%) of Year 7 to Year 12 SSEN students reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night, with 36.6 per cent going to sleep between 10pm and midnight and 5.7 per cent reporting they usually go to sleep after midnight.



⁶ Chaput J et al 2016, *Systematic review of the relationships between sleep duration and health indicators in school-aged children and youth*, Applied physiology, nutrition and metabolism, Vol 41 (6 Suppl 3).

Mental health

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

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

Almost two-thirds (65.0%) of participating Year 4 to Year 12 students rated their life satisfaction as between 7 and 10 (out of 10), 21.0 per cent rated their life satisfaction as

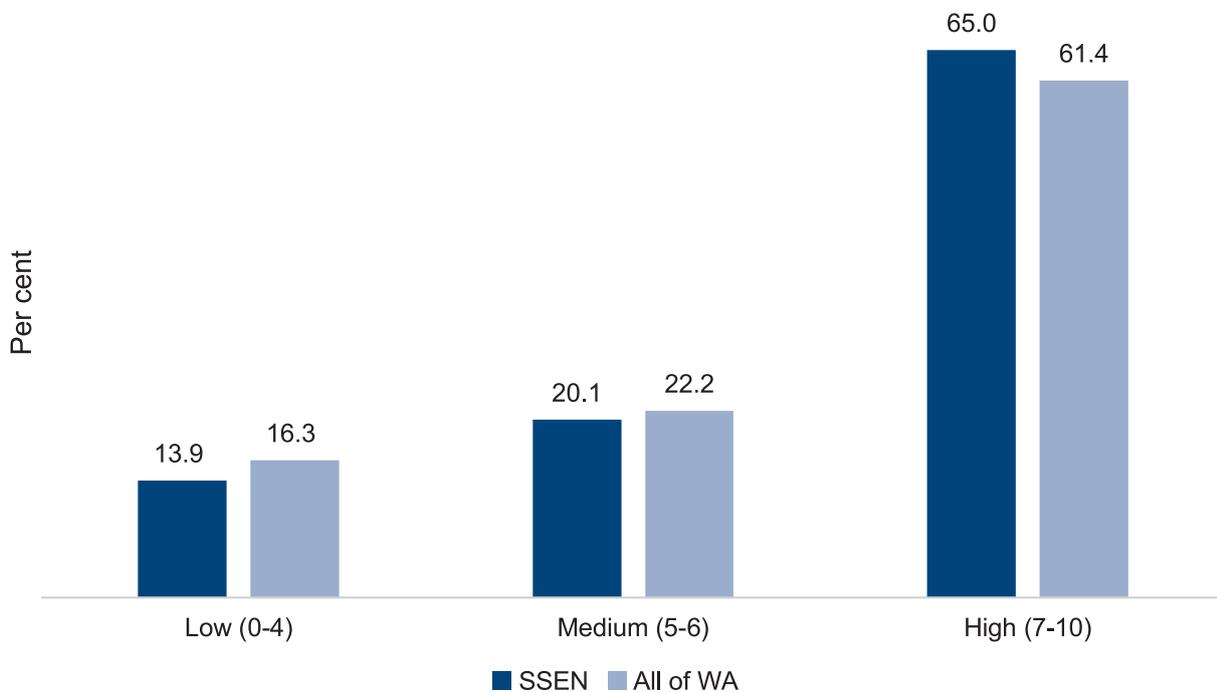
medium (5 to 6), and 13.9 per cent rated their life satisfaction as low (0 to 4). These results are consistent with those across WA.

Similar to results across WA, SSEN primary school students were more likely than SSEN secondary school students to rate their life satisfaction as high (71.7% compared to 58.8%).

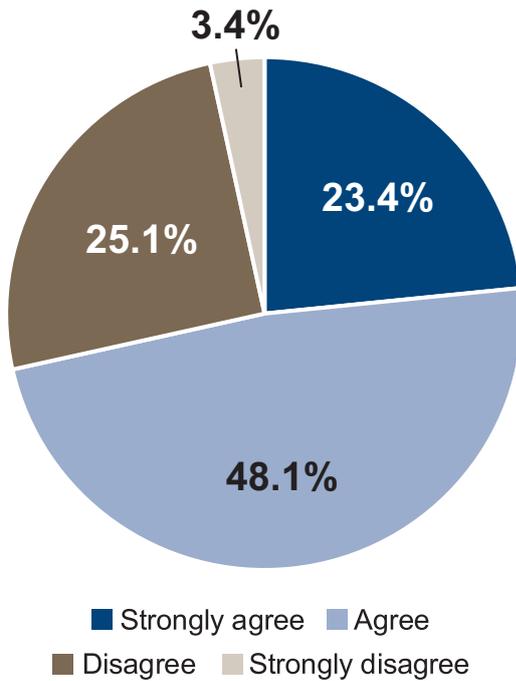
A large proportion (85.3%) of Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students said they feel good about themselves.

Further, most (72.0%) SSEN students agree or strongly agree that they are able to do things as well as most other people.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students rating their life satisfaction



Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students responding to the statement: I am able to do things as well as most other people



Similar to responses in the main SOS21 survey, a greater proportion of female SSEN students in secondary school reported they do not feel good about themselves compared to their male peers (29.4% compared to 11.5%).

A high proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 SSEN students agreed that they can deal with things that happen in their life (70.4%) and that they can achieve their goals even if it is hard (64.8%).

In the open text responses students talked about the ways schools and communities could talk more about mental health and provide greater accessibility of mental health supports.

“Maybe the school could get therapy dogs.”

“Go into classes and talk about mental health and show where to go at the school or services to get help.”

“Always assume they are telling the truth, if they say they might have anxiety or depression, don’t wait until it gets worse to realise they were telling the truth all along.”

“I am definitely not ok I need help I think I’m depressed or something.”

“I wish we have more often doing counselling because we have to wait for about week just talk whenever we need it or when we feeling low we wanted to talk with our psychiatrist more often because same two time weeks I think it better to have with full time with us would really help.”

Healthy behaviours

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

It is critical that young people are well informed and supported to make healthy and safe choices.

In the Speaking Out Survey, questions about healthy behaviours, including questions about drugs and alcohol and sexual activity are asked of secondary school students only, with some questions only asked of students in Years 9 to 12.

Most SSEN students in Years 7 to 12 reported having learnt a lot or some about smoking (71.5%), drinking alcohol (78.1%) and marijuana (56.1%) at school. However, a sizeable minority reported they had learnt nothing about these topics in school (smoking: 16.3%; alcohol: 13.8%; marijuana: 28.5%). Over one-third (36.8%) of SSEN secondary students feel they do not know enough about the health impacts of marijuana.

Just over one in ten (11.3%) of Year 7 to Year 12 SSEN students reported they had tried cigarette smoking (even just a few puffs). In contrast, 18.1 per cent of secondary school students who participated in the main SOS21 survey across WA had tried smoking.

One in five (17.6%) of Year 7 to Year 12 SSEN students reported they had drunk alcohol (all of WA: 35.5%).

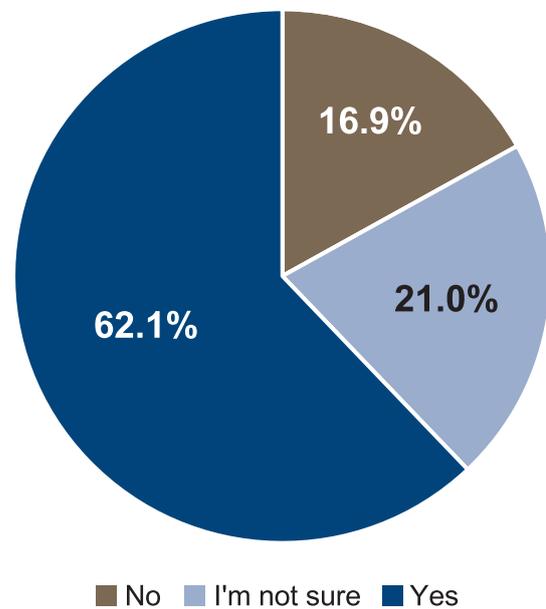
Sexual health education programs are generally included in primary and secondary schools with the aim of building on knowledge, skills and behaviours, thus enabling young people to make responsible and safe choices leading into a sexually healthy adulthood.

The majority of SSEN secondary students reported they had learnt some (40.7%) or a lot (26.8%) about sexual health, while 21.1 per cent said they had learnt a little and 11.4 per cent reported they had learnt nothing. With respect to pregnancy and contraception, most SSEN secondary students reported they had learnt a lot (26.2%) or some (32.0%), while 24.6 per cent reported they had learnt a little and 17.2 per cent reported they had learnt nothing.

Less than one-half of SSEN secondary students (47.5%) said they feel they know enough about pregnancy and contraception, while 18.9 per cent reported they do not feel they know enough and 33.6 per cent are unsure.

Further, 16.9 per cent of SSEN secondary students reported they would not know where to go if they needed help about their reproductive or sexual health, while 21.0 per cent were not sure.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 SSEN students responding to the statement: If you needed help for something about your reproductive or sexual health, would you know where to go?



Almost one-third (30.1%) of SSEN students in Years 9 to 12 reported having ever been sent unwanted sexual material, such as pornographic pictures, videos, or words.

Connection to community

Connection to community is critical for young people's health and wellbeing. It provides a positive sense of identity and belonging.

The majority of SSEN students in Years 4 to 6 like where they live (83.3%) and feel like they belong in their community (72.8%). However, a lower proportion of these participants reported that when they go to the shops people are friendly (53.5%).

In secondary school, a high proportion (83.2%) of SSEN students reported liking where they live, while 56.8 per cent feel like they belong in the community. Just over one-half of SSEN students in secondary school reported that when they go to the shops people are friendly (62.1%). This is higher than the proportion of SSEN primary school students, yet lower than the proportion of secondary students who participated in the main SOS21 survey (66.6%).

No specific questions were asked about connection to community, although at least one respondent was clear about wanting more people in the community to learn Auslan (Australian sign language).

“Join the auslan class to learn my culture of my deafness.”

Most SSEN students (70.2%) in Years 4 to 6 said that there are lots of fun things to do in their local area, while just 50.4 per cent of SSEN secondary students reported that there are lots of fun things to do in their local area. These responses are consistent with students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

In the open text questions, participants were asked: If there was one thing you could change about your local area, what would it be? The responses of SSEN students were very similar to students who participated in the main SOS21 survey across the state, with a focus on nice outdoor spaces to hang out and places for teenagers to be active.

“There to be bigger parks.”

“Build a skate park.”

“Having a skatepark or more parks in the area.”

“Need a skate park and more playground.”

“I’d like to have a bigger park with good grass.”

“More hoops nearby, water fountains and more public sport facilities.”

“Having a better park instead of the old one.”

“Have more shops and places where people can have fun.”

“Better skate parks and a water park.”

A number of students mentioned that they would like to be closer to their friends or have more people their age in the area.

“Moving closer to school and friends.”

“Friends live a bit closer.”

“To have more people my age around.”

“If my area have lot of fun stuff and my friends is near me then it would be great!”

“Have more teenagers in my local area or try to make an event for my area to bring people to come.”

A small number of SSEN students commented that they would like improved accessibility for people who are hearing and visually impaired.

“I feel like items at shops should have Braille labels on them so the visually impaired or blind community can buy items without much trouble.”

“More deaf accessible.”

3.3 Safe and supported

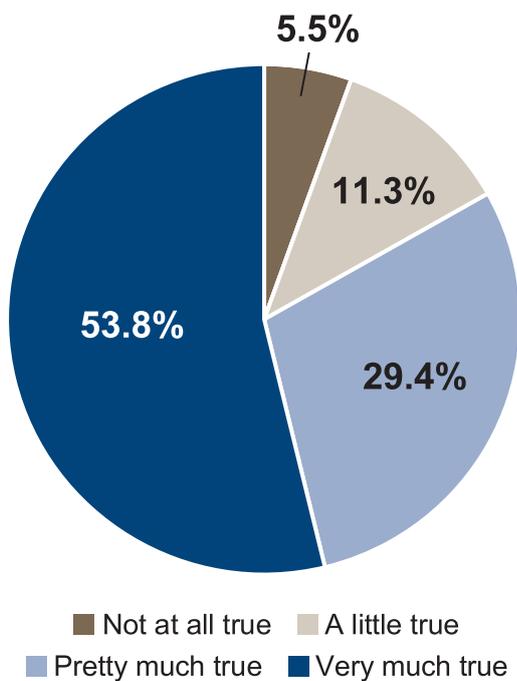
Supportive relationships

Most SSEN Year 4 to Year 12 students feel supported at home and reported that it was very much true that where they live there is a parent or another adult who:

- believes they will achieve good things (66.2%)
- listens to them when they have something to say (53.8%)
- they can talk to about their problems or worries (56.7%).

These results are consistent with those of Year 4 to Year 12 students across WA.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students responding to the statement: Where I live, there is a parent or another adult who listens to me when I have something to say



In terms of having supportive relationships within the family, of the participating Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students:

- more than three-quarters (78.7%) reported their mum or someone who acts as their mum cares about them a lot
- more than three-quarters (76.0%) reported their dad or someone who acts as their dad cares about them a lot
- less than one-half (42.5%) reported that their siblings care about them a lot, while 56.2 per cent reported that other family members care about them a lot.

Most (80.8%) participating Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students said that their family gets along well or very well. This was similar to responses from students across WA who participated in the main SOS21 survey (75.9%).

In terms of friendships, most SSEN students said they were very good (46.9%) or okay (43.5%) at making and keeping friends. The majority (82.9%) also reported that they feel they have enough friends.

Secondary SSEN students were asked about access to health and mental health supports. One in five (18.7%) SSEN secondary students said that in the last 12 months there had been a time when they wanted or needed to see someone for their health but weren't able to. A further 23.6 per cent responded that they did not know if this had happened.

The most commonly reported reasons for this were that they were embarrassed or ashamed or were unsure who to see or where to go.

Secondary SSEN students were also asked what sources of support they used and found helpful if they had emotional health worries. The top sources of support were parents (86.0%), other family members (73.5%), a school psychologist, chaplain or nurse (68.6%) and friends (66.7%).

Teachers and GPs were also commonly called upon (58.3% and 52.1%, respectively).

“Finding a good psychologist who I could relate to and got on well with has been very helpful.”

In open text responses, some students noted difficulties getting accessible support through service providers.

“Medical appointment won’t provide a interpreter and they won’t allow me to book interpreter myself.”

“I have tried to get into a psychologist through headspace but I haven’t heard anything from them in quite a while, the last time I heard from them was a few days after an appointment to see what services would be good from me but is been months and haven’t heard back, and wait times for other psychologists seem to be very very long.”

“It is so frustrate that everything isn’t deaf friendly or deaf accessible, everything doesn’t allow me to have auslan interpreter. I need interpreter for communicate about my health and mental health but they always won’t allow me.”

With regards to what participating SSEN students wanted from their relationships, it was clear they wanted friends, family and other supports to be there when they need them.

“Just say ‘yes’. Be more welcoming and do not come off as judgmental.”

“In my opinions the good way to get some help for children that is going through something that they won’t be able to open up about it, is try be there for them when they needed and earn their trust so that they can open up to you about anything and they know that they can rely on you too. Once you have earn their trust to do something that makes them think “like okay I have trust this person and I can rely on them whenever and open up to them about my problems without being judged.”

“By giving them a bit of space but at the same time being there for them and making them feel loved; don’t force them to tell you what’s wrong. Make sure you always have time for them. Make them feel welcomed and loved.”

“Being more understanding and not trying so hard. Listen more.”

“Being patient with someone who is struggling, and having more coping strategies for them to use.”

“The way that some kids act doesn’t automatically tell you everything about what is happening in their home, don’t assume things.”

“Talking to families and people you are close with would be very helpful.”

Material basics

In terms of material basics, SSEN students reported similar responses to students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students reported:

- 97.5 per cent have at least one family car used for family transport
- 83.5 per cent said they have their own bedroom
- 93.7 per cent reported they had access to the internet at home
- 88.6 per cent of secondary students reported having their own mobile phone.

Almost two-thirds (63.3%) of SSEN students reported that there is always enough food to eat at home and 25.4 per cent said there is often enough food to eat at home. Just over one in ten SSEN students (11.3%) said there were sometimes or never enough food to eat at home. These results are consistent with those for students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Feeling safe at home

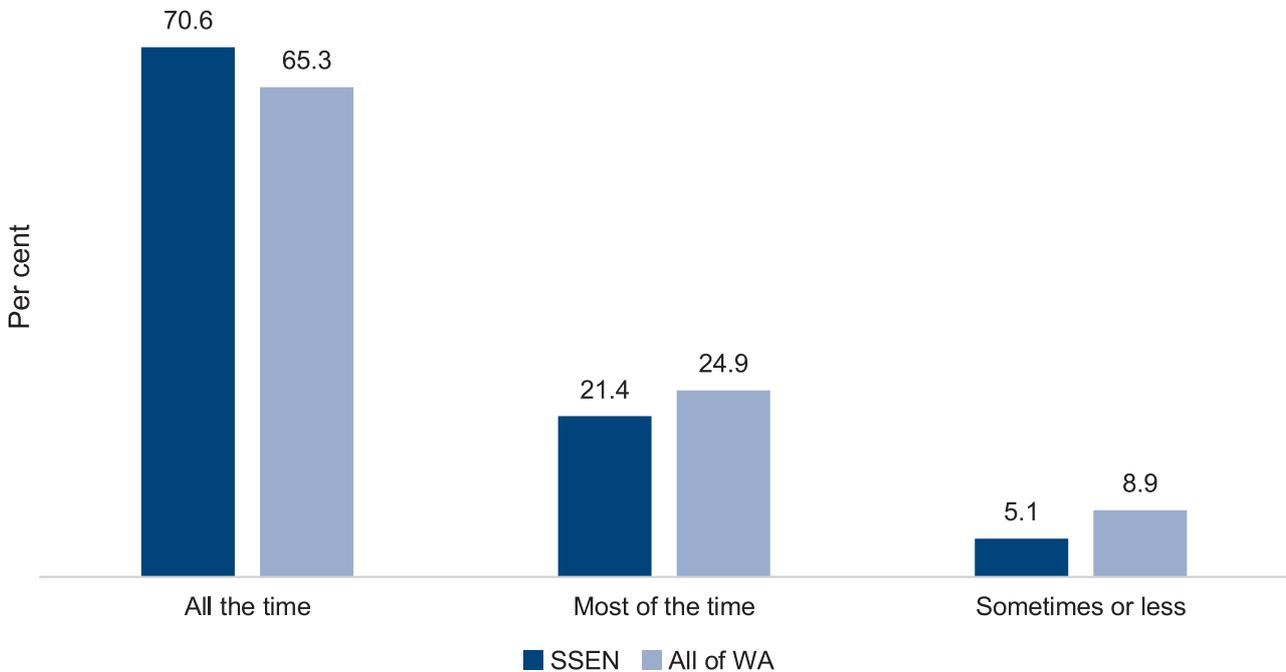
Feeling safe at home is critical for children to develop good mental health, feel able to build positive relationships with others and effectively participate in learning.⁷

Most SSEN students reported feeling safe at home all the time (70.6%), while 21.4 per cent feel safe most of the time, 4.8 per cent felt safe

only sometimes and 1.3 per cent reported feeling safe at home only a little bit of the time or never.

These results are similar to students who participated in the main SOS21 survey across WA.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting how often they feel safe at home



Around one in ten (9.3%) participants reported they worried a lot about someone in their family fighting, while almost one-half (46.8%) were not worried at all.

Students were asked if they were worried that someone in their home would hurt somebody or hurt themselves. Most students were not worried at all about this (61.0% and 53.4%,

respectively), while around one in seven were worried a lot about this (14.0% and 13.7%, respectively).

These results are consistent with students across WA who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

⁷ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2009, *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships*, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, p. 1.

SSEN students were asked open text questions about feeling unsafe⁸ and a small number responded about feeling unsafe in their homes at night time or when home alone.

“Being home alone at night.”

“When my mum and my sister fight when we don’t have enough money to pay the bills. When my drunk neighbours knock on the door.”

“Some of the things that make me personally feel unsafe are strangers trying to talk to me noises outside my window and that’s pretty much it oh and when my dog(ruby) starts to bark at night or other times.”

“People smoking, strangers on my property, thinking about people breaking into my home, imagining scarey things in my room at night.”

“When I am outside when I hear thunderstorms when my family is not around when I am talking to someone that I do not know.”

“Being home alone.”

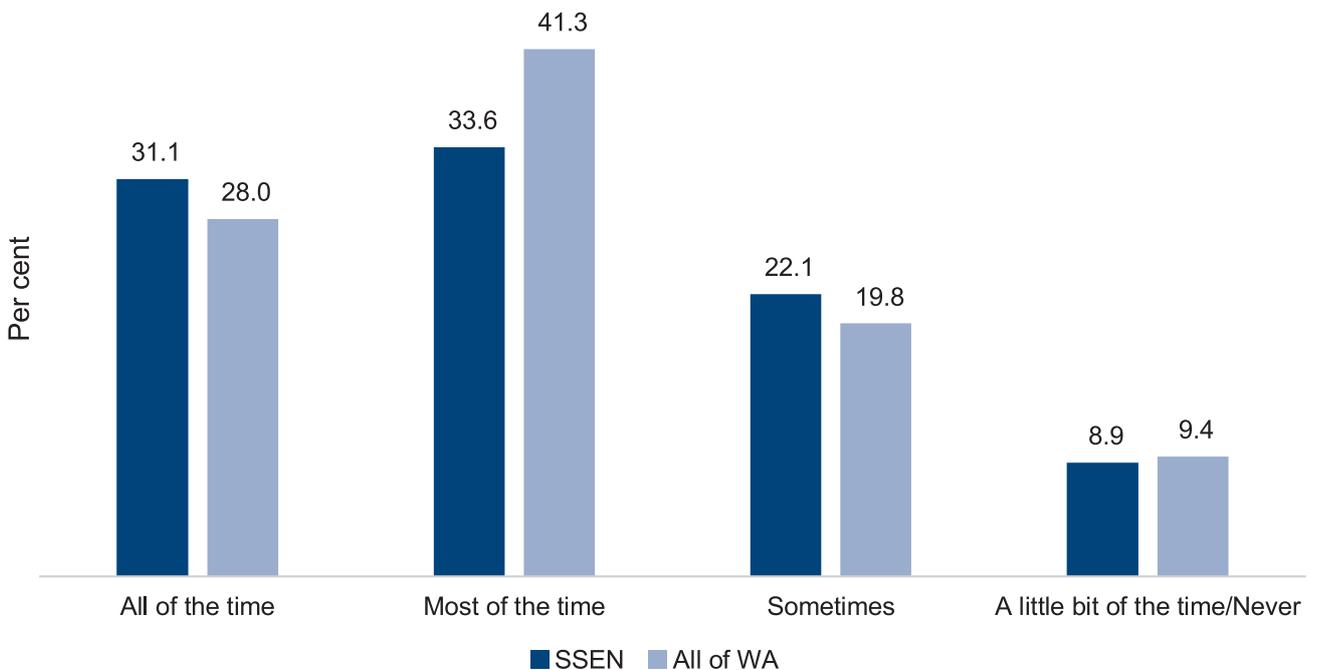
“COVID When dad fights with friends.”

Feeling safe in the community

The majority of SSEN students in Years 4 to 12 feel safe in their local area either all of the time (31.1%) or most of the time (33.6%), while almost one in ten (8.9%) students feel safe in their local area only a little bit of the time or never.

These responses are similar to those reported by students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting how often they feel safe in their local area



8 In the open text questions, all students were asked: What are some of the things that make you feel unsafe? and secondary school students were asked: Thinking about personal safety and feeling safe at home, school or in the community, what are some of things you would like families, schools, or adults in general to know?

Consistent with responses from students in the main SOS21 survey, female secondary SSEN students were less likely to feel safe in their local area than their male peers.

Only one-half (50.9%) of SSEN secondary students said they feel safe on public transport all of the time or most of the time. More than one in five (22.5%) SSEN students said they feel safe on public transport only a little bit of the time or never.

These responses are consistent with those of students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

One-third (34.7%) SSEN students in Years 9 to 12 responded that they have been hit or physically harmed on purpose in their lifetime. This is lower than the proportion of students who participated in the main SOS21 survey (44.4%).

In the open text responses about feeling unsafe, some SSEN students talked about feeling unsafe in their local area. The responses were generally similar to students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

“Going out in the public because there are too many people. I might get lost in the shops.”

“Crowded areas, shops, outside by myself.”

“Bushes next to pathways at night.”

“Sitting next to men.”

“Going on the bus or train the couple mans came to me and try to touch or ask my number sometimes they can drunk.”

“Walking at night. Trains and buses when I’m by myself.”

“When a stranger talks to me at the shopping centre and I was on my own.”

“When I am walking home at night from work and I feel like someone walking behind me or I turn my back to look behind me.”

“People who catcall me, people who call me slurs, people begging for money, people arguing with each other.”

“Keep checking up with us to know if we are doing ok and are safe. If not or have purposely chosen to be unsafe please set boundary’s.”

Some responses were specific to SSEN students’ experiences of living in a world that does not accommodate for their disability.

“On buses the feeling of falling over because I can’t tell when the bus is going to stop and I don’t get a seat on the bus because of too little seats.”

“When someone talk to me and I don’t understand and [they get] mad at me.”

“Moving furniture and I can’t see it. At the shopping centre I sometimes bump into people.”

Others spoke about feeling safe or accepting that you can’t be safe all the time.

“I feel everywhere is safe for me.”

“You can’t keep us completely safe and, let us be happy.”

3.4 Learning and participating

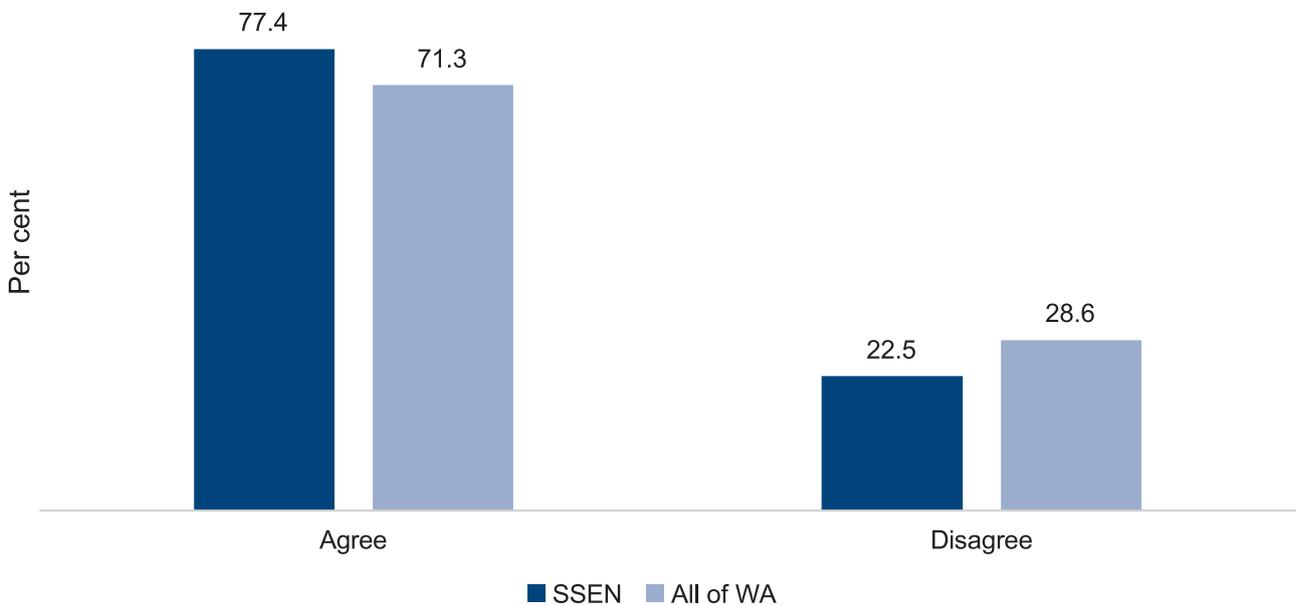
Liking school and sense of belonging

Students who feel a sense of belonging at their school and like attending school are more likely to have greater motivation and engagement as well as better academic outcomes.

One-quarter (26.3%) of SSEN students like school a lot and 21.3 per cent like school a bit, while 30.4 per cent say that it is okay. One in five (22.1%) don't like school much or at all.

Three-quarters (77.4%) of SSEN students feel like they belong at school, which is consistent with students across all of WA.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting whether they agree or disagree that school is a place where they belong

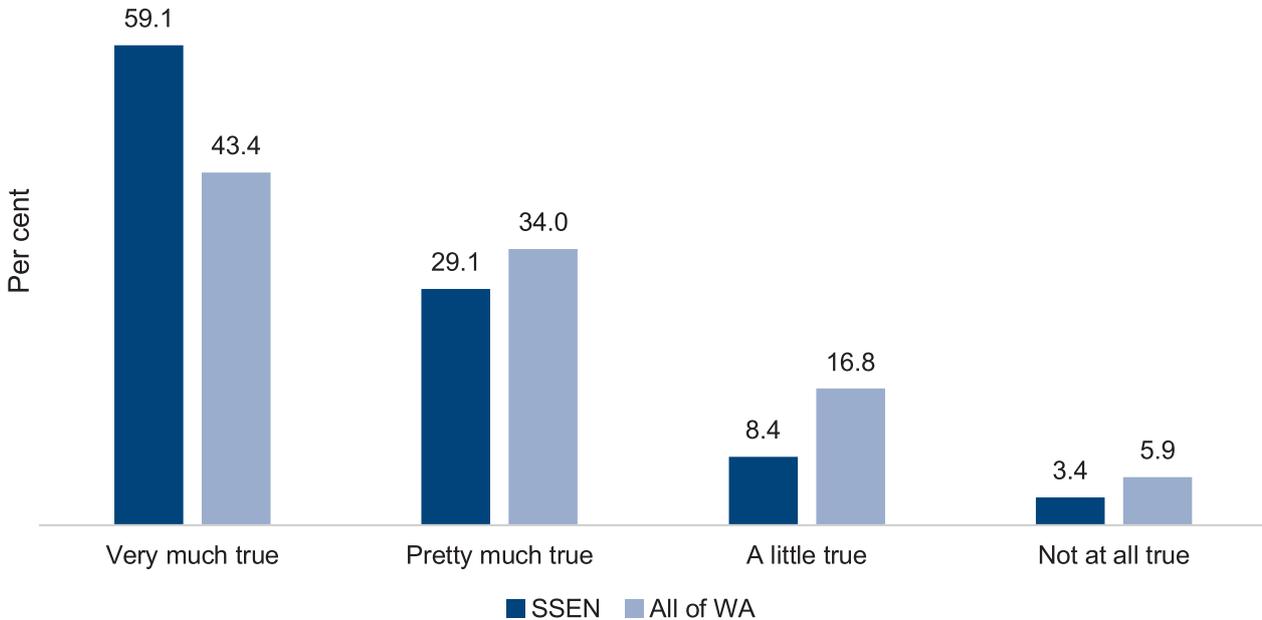


In primary school, 84.2 per cent of SSEN students report that they like learning at school, while in secondary school this decreases marginally to 79.0 per cent. Nonetheless, SSEN secondary school students were far more likely to like learning at their school than SSEN secondary students who participated in the main SOS21 survey across WA (79.0% compared to 66.2%).

Most SSEN participants reported they get along with their classmates usually (53.1%) or sometimes (34.7%).

Most participants said that it is very much true (48.5%) or pretty much true (34.3%) that there is a teacher or another adult at school who really cares about them. Similarly, a high proportion of participants felt that there is a teacher or another adult at school who believes they will achieve good things (very much true: 59.1%, pretty much true: 29.1%). SSEN students were marginally more likely to feel this way than students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting that at school, there is a teacher or another adult who believes that they will achieve good things



“ I wasn’t brave about school as this is new place and I really felt I wanted a support and it was hard for me to make friends but now I good. ”

Attendance

Most SSEN students feel that it is very important (49.6%) or somewhat important (42.1%) to be at school every day (all of WA: 54.2% and 37.8%, respectively).

Year 7 to Year 12 SSEN students reported wagging school for a full day or more in the same proportion as students across WA (14.5% compared to 15.3%). Further, 12.8 per cent of SSEN students said they had been suspended from school (all of WA: 14.8%).

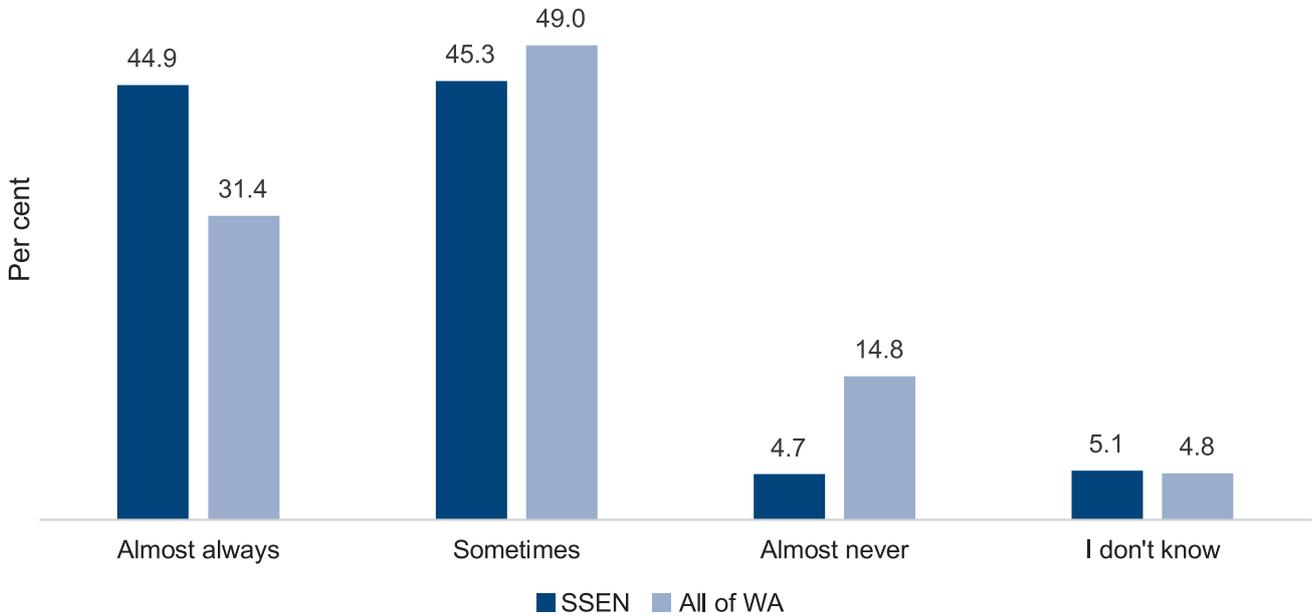
Achievement

One-third (33.1%) of SSEN secondary students reported that they are doing above average at school, while 44.4 per cent said they are doing about average (all of WA: 45.5% and 39.1%, respectively).

More than one-quarter (27.2%) of SSEN secondary school students feel pressured a lot by the schoolwork they have to do (all of WA: 32.7%).

Most Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students report that they get help from teachers if they need it almost always (44.9%) or sometimes (45.3%). Less than one in 20 (4.7%) said they almost never get help. In contrast, 14.8 per cent of students who participated in the main SOS21 survey feel like they almost never get help when they need it.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting that they get help from teachers if they need it



In the open text questions, participants were asked about schoolwork stress. The responses of the SSEN students were consistent with those of other students around the state. The following themes were common:

Too much work and/or overloaded with multiple assignments at the same time

“I think this is because we have to complete assignments and other things in a certain time frame. Overloading students with work. Only give them simple things to do.”

“Tests and assignments for all subjects being at the same time.”

“Space assignments out and tests. Give students rest periods / private study periods.”

“Too much homework. Only have 2 days to rest and reset but teachers provide us with more to do over the break. I’d suggest a gap (like Wednesday) for students to choose to come to school and get extra help or stay at home and complete “online school” and

use that time wisely to study and complete missing assignments. As a student we have a lot on our plate such as after school sports, music lessons or community involvement activities and have no time to study or complete homework on such short notice.”

“Impossible deadlines made for academically achieving students, doesn’t give enough time for other student who may struggle in other ways.”

Pressure due to expectations regarding ATAR, grades or the future

“Doing well in the studies can effect you latter on in life.”

“Pressure from family. Expectations.”

“Student worry about not getting good grades and their worried that they won’t get into uni and end up having a bad low paying job.”

“The workload and pressure of completing work all the time, also not being informed with other pathways after leaving school.”

“Especially in year 11 and 12, there is a lot of pressure on your assignments and tests so that definitely adds to the stress.”

“I feel as if WACE is made much more of a bigger deal than it needs to be and stresses students out, same with grades and [ATAR], I feel as if the system is outdated.”

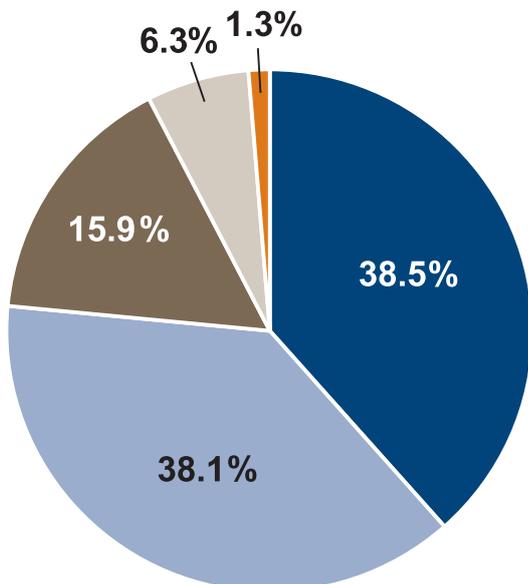
“Homework and the pressure to do well in tests. The parents could reward for the good marks.”

“We compare ourselves to people who are better than us, not worse. This means we see ourselves as being slightly incompetent in relation to others even if we are above average.”

Feeling safe at school

Most SSEN students feel safe at school either all of the time (38.5%) or most of the time (38.1%), while 15.9 per cent feel safe sometimes and 6.3 per cent feel safe only a little bit of the time or never.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 SSEN students reporting how often they feel safe at school



■ All the time ■ Most of the time ■ Sometimes
 ■ A little bit of the time/Never ■ Prefer not to say

These results are consistent with the results for students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

In secondary school, a marginally higher proportion of SSEN students feel safe only sometimes or less compared to students across WA who participated in the main SOS21 survey (28.2% compared to 22.4%).

Two in five (40.3%) SSEN students in Years 4 to 12 have been bullied and/or cyberbullied by students from their school. One-quarter (26.1%) have been (traditionally) bullied while 13.4 per cent have been both bullied and cyber bullied. These results correspond to those students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

“Thanks this helps a lot i get bullied every day because of my ears and getting pushed got into a fight and people getting angry when I can’t hear them properly.”

“School doesn’t really make me feel safe because basically half of staff cause these problem in school like homophobic comment or racist comment or audism comment. It made us student feel unsafe in school.”



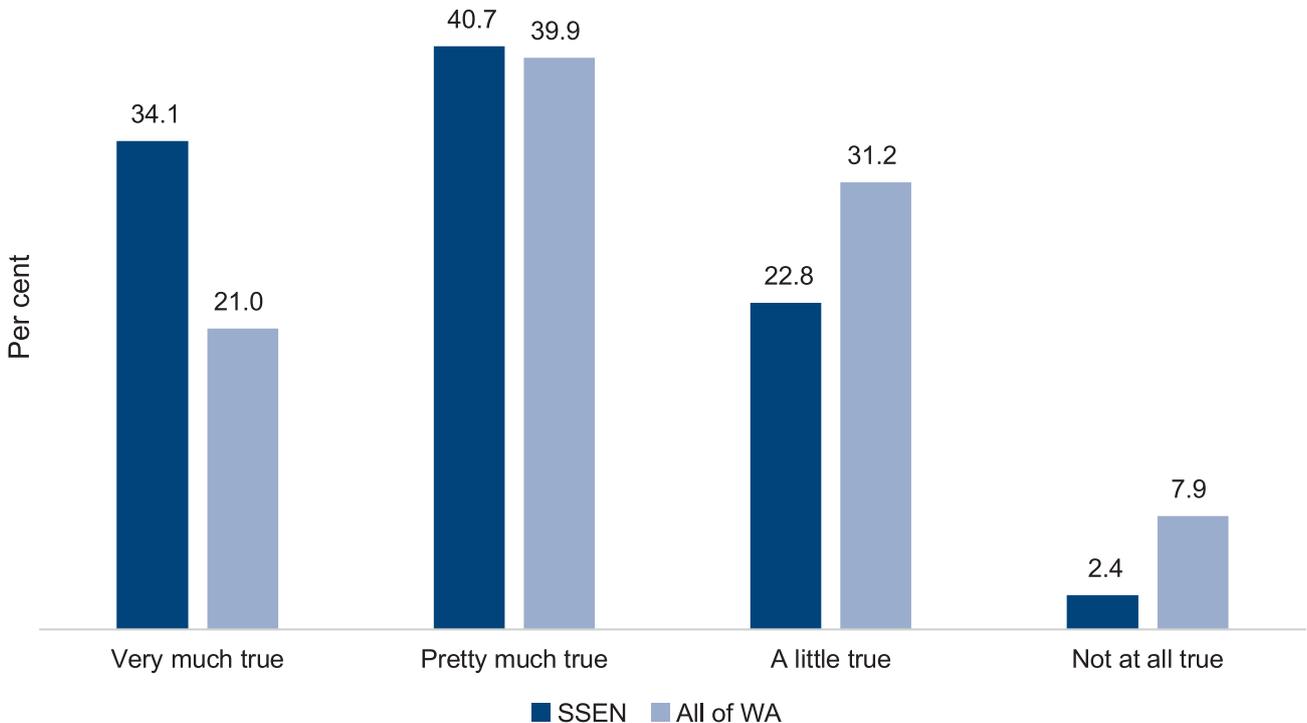
Transition from school and independence

Most SSEN secondary school students felt they were learning things at school that would help them in the future (very much true: 34.1%, pretty much true: 40.7%). SSEN students were more likely than students across WA to feel like they are learning things at school that will help them in the future.

One-third (34.4%) of SSEN secondary school students would like to attend university, while 15.0 per cent would like get a TAFE certificate or a trade qualification (all of WA: 55.1% and 15.6%, respectively).

One in five (19.2%) SSEN secondary school students hope to finish Year 12 and do not plan to go onto any further study.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting whether at school they are learning knowledge and skills that will help them in the future



A further 20.0 per cent of SSEN students do not know the highest level of education they would like to complete. This was a higher proportion than students who participated in the main SOS21 survey (12.5%).

Over one-quarter (27.5%) of SSEN secondary school students have worked for money in the last year (all of WA: 43.1%).

In terms of having independence and being allowed to do things on their own, SSEN students were marginally less likely to

be allowed to do things on their own than students who participated in the main SOS21 survey.

Almost three-quarters (72.4%) were allowed to go to or from school on their own (all of WA: 81.0%). Two-thirds of SSEN students (65.0%) were allowed to go places other than school on their own (all of WA: 75.0%). Just 13.0 per cent of SSEN secondary school students were allowed to go out alone at night in their local area (all of WA: 29.4%).

4

Students in Education Support Schools and Centres (ESSC)



4 Students in Education Support Schools and Centres (ESSC)

A total of 284 Year 4 to Year 12 students attending education support schools and centres in 19 locations participated in modified versions of the Speaking Out Survey.

Education support schools and centres (ESSC) offer specialist programs and support for children and young people with specific needs, including those with autism spectrum disorder. These students can have complex physical, communication and behavioural support needs.

Government-based education support centres are generally located alongside primary and secondary schools and the students not only engage in their specialist programs, but, where possible, also participate in programs with their mainstream school peers. Education support schools are separate primary and secondary schools with on-site access to multi-disciplinary teams. In the Catholic Education system, education support centres are a resource within a mainstream school.

There were two different cohorts from education support schools and centres, who were asked very similar questions with modified formats. The surveys were shorter than the main Speaking Out Survey questionnaire, some questions and responses were simplified, and symbols were used to assist with comprehension.

Students may have completed the survey with the assistance of their teachers or education assistants. This support may have meant the

question asked was re-interpreted to make sense for that particular student. It is therefore important to recognise that while the results here are descriptive only, they do provide a critical insight into the health and wellbeing of this cohort of children and young people.

The results in this section are from the modified survey which engaged with 233 students. Of the students in this survey 32.0 per cent identified as a girl, 66.0 per cent identified as a boy and two per cent selected the option that they identify 'in another way'. One-third (32.0%) of the students were in primary school (Years 4 to 6) and 68.0 per cent were in secondary school (Years 7 to 12).

The open text quotes are from participating students from education support centres and schools. Where students required assistance to communicate in writing, the adult supporting them to complete the survey has transcribed the student's response.

"I loved doing this survey."

"Thank you It's a nice survey."

"Thanks this was fun to answer and it would be nice to do these more. 😊"

"This survey was good I didn't mind it."

"It was a lovely survey thanks."

"Thank you for giving me these questions it really help me."

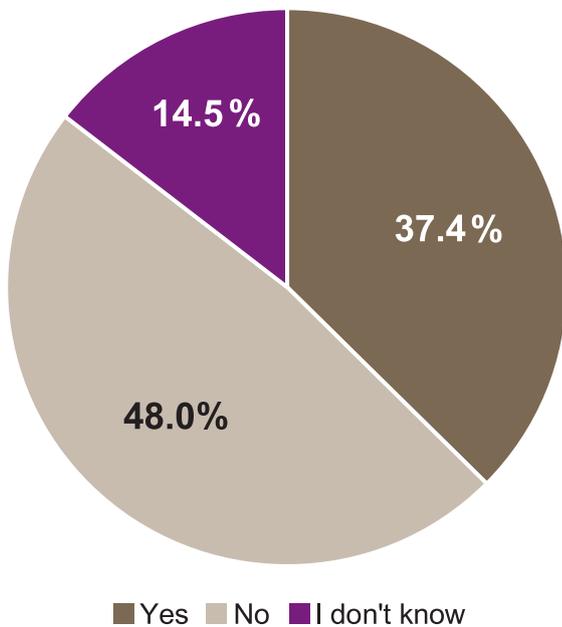
"I have enjoyed this survey it was so helpful."

"Student used eye gaze AAC [Augmentative and Alternative Communication system] to say 'like' in response to what did she have to say about doing the survey."

4.1 COVID-19

Almost half (48.0%) of Year 4 to Year 12 students in education and support schools and centres (ESSC) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected their life, 37.4 per cent said it had affected their life and 14.5 per cent did not know.

Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC student responses to the question: Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life?



Just over one-half (53.1%) of these students reported that they feel worried when they think about COVID-19, one-third (32.4%) said they don't feel worried and 14.5 per cent did not know.

A number of ESSC students (or their carers/ teachers) discussed COVID-19 in the free text questions.

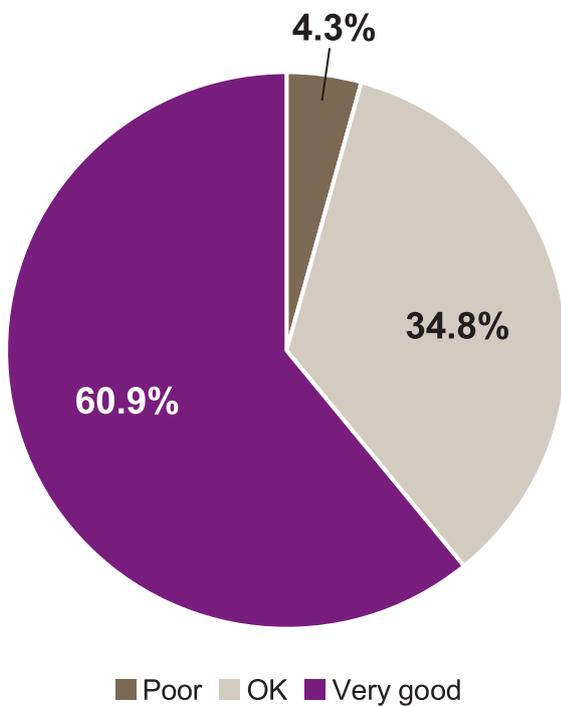
- “I don't like that COVID-19 came because I planned to go on a plane to lots of places.”*
 - “Covid-19 have affected when I see my family.”*
 - “I do feel sometimes panicked when I am in lockdown and isolation.”*
 - “Covid is quiet dumb. I hate lockdown, its quiet boring.”*
 - “I just worry what if I get corona and die.”*
 - “COVID is bugging me.”*
 - “I don't like COVID-19 because I like coming to school. I had to have a test up my nose and it felt funny.”*
 - “COVID has changed my life because now we can't high 5 anymore.”*
 - “The COVID 19 is worse thing that happens to our life's.”*
- Other ESSC students did not feel personally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- “Don't feel affected by Covid.”*
 - “COVID 19 doesn't bother me at all. The pandemic is chaos and terrible but I have no mental problem about it.”*
 - “Student used her feelings page to say she was happy. She did not seem to have any understanding of COVID.”*

4.2 Healthy and connected

Physical health

Of the education support students surveyed, more than one-half (60.9%) reported that their health is very good, while one-third (34.8%) reported their health was okay and 4.3 per cent reported their health was poor.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting on their general health



Most participants (Years 4 to 12) reported they care about staying fit and being physically active (73.6%) or eating healthy food (69.6%). Just over one in ten reported they don't care about staying fit (11.5%) or eating healthy food (12.5%) and the remainder responded that they don't know.

More than one-half (67.2%) of Year 7 to Year 12 ESSC students reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night, with 12.8 per cent going to sleep between 10pm and midnight and 8.0 per cent reporting they usually go to sleep after midnight. Around one in ten (12.0%) were not sure.

A few ESSC students discussed their general health in the free text questions:

"I am always tired even when I get good sleep."

"Do an hour workout everyday after school, on the higher end of weights, I'm also extremely self conscience of my body and what I eat."

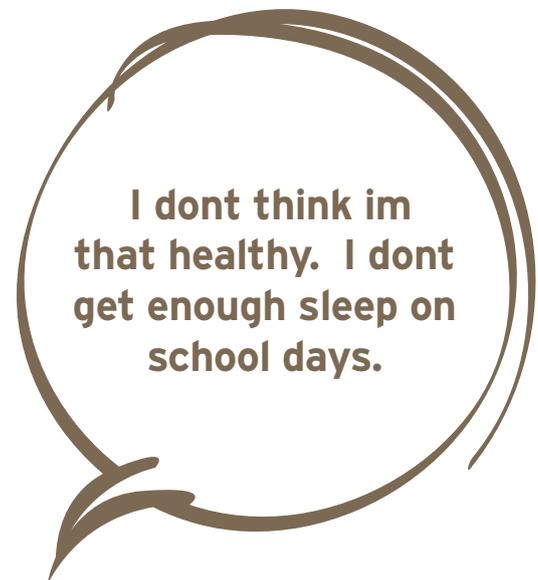
"I eat breakfast sometimes and lunch most times. I try to eat healthy."

"I cant stop eating junk food and i dont eat veggies."

"Don't exercise enough including school hours."

"I've been good. I care a little bit about my weight."

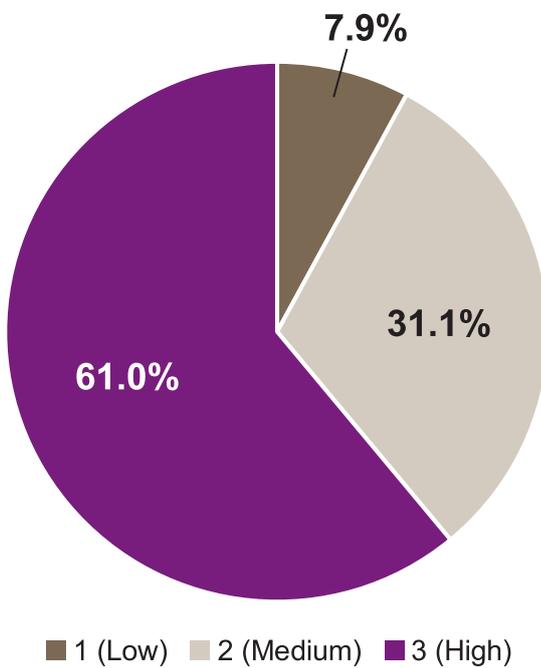
"I always be on a good diet. I only have about a small amount of sugar a day .I always eat some healthy food. 🍏"



Mental health

Almost two-thirds (61.0%) of participating Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students rated their life satisfaction as high, 31.1 per cent rated their life satisfaction as medium, and 7.9 per cent rated their life satisfaction as low.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students rating their life satisfaction



These results are broadly consistent with students in the SSEN survey and those across WA.

Most Year 4 to Year 12 participants reported that they are happy with themselves (74.6%) and that they feel good about themselves (77.3%).

Just over one-half (54.8%) of Year 7 to Year 12 ESSC students agreed that they can deal with things that happen in their life. This is a lower proportion than for the SSEN students (70.4%). Almost one-quarter (24.2%) of participants from education support schools and centres said they could not deal with things that happen in their life.

A few ESSC students discussed their general and mental health in the free text questions:

“Sometimes I’m happy sometimes I’m sad sometimes I’m angry.”

“When we were talking about how she felt about herself, student said ‘hate- worried-scared’.”

“Standing next to large amount of people, like 20+ loud people in 1 area, it gets me all sad and rises my anxiety level by quite a lot, causing me to panic, also having problems listening and understanding people when they speak sometimes.”

“Sometimes I may not feel good. Sometimes with my goals I struggle to achieve them.”

“Student is generally very sombre but was clear in his response that he does often feel bad about life and things.”

Healthy behaviours

Most participants in Years 7 to 12 reported having learnt about smoking (65.9%) or drinking alcohol (70.2%) at school, however less than one-half (45.2%) reported having learnt about marijuana at school.

A sizeable minority reported they had not learned about these topics in school (smoking: 23.8%; alcohol: 24.2%; marijuana: 33.9%).

These results suggest that participating ESSC students had learnt less about drugs and alcohol than other students across WA.

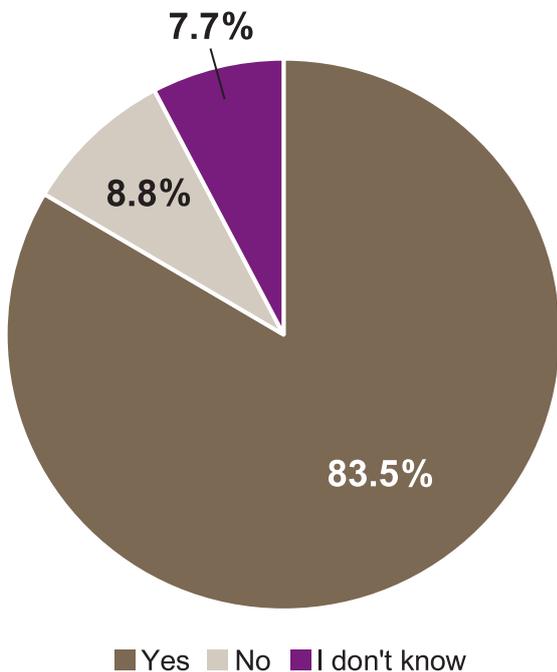
Most Year 7 to Year 12 ESSC students have not tried smoking (91.1%), drunk alcohol (87.2%) or had experiences with marijuana (83.5%). These are higher proportions than other students across WA.

Only 50.0 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 ESSC students reported that they know where to get help with smoking, drinking or drugs.

Connection to community

The majority of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students like where they live (83.5%).

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting whether they like where they live



Most Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students (62.5%) said that their neighbours are friendly, while 15.8 per cent said their neighbours were not friendly and 21.7% did not know. Two-thirds (66.1%) said that when they go to the shops people are friendly (No: 11.1%; I don't know: 22.8%).

A question was asked about whether ESSC students feel like they belong in their community. In discussion with staff from the various centres, it was noted the concepts of 'belonging' and 'community' can be complex for some of the participating children and young people.

More than one-half of ESSC students (61.5%) responded that they feel like they belong in their community, although this may have been explained differently to different students.

Three-quarters (75.1%) of ESSC students reported that there are fun things to do in their local area.

"I like the pool, playground, zoo and going to the country."

"Used her AAC to say that she goes to the 'park'."

"I like to go and pick flowers where I live."

Other respondents had different experiences:

"I've never met my neighbours."

"There's fun things to do in my house but in the playground near my house I can't use anything because of my wheelchair. I get out sometimes and crawl on the floor and do some push-ups."



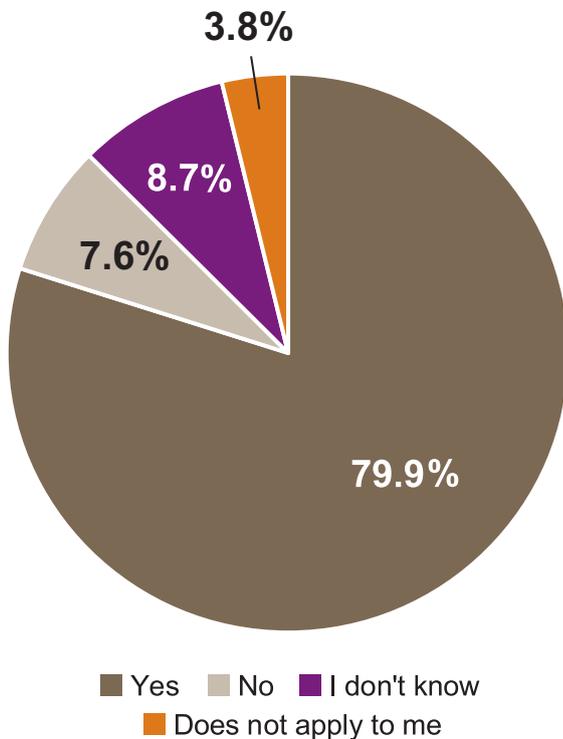
4.3 Safe and supported

Supportive relationships

Most Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students who participated in the survey feel supported at home and reported that they have a parent who:

- believes they will achieve good things (78.5%)
- listens to them when they have something to say (79.9%)
- they can talk to about their problems or worries (81.4%).

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students responding to the statement: Do your parents listen when you have something to say?



The participating ESSC students feel cared for by their family with:

- most (90.2%) reporting their mum cares about them
- three-quarters (74.0%) reporting their dad cares about them
- most (85.9%) reporting other family members care about them.

Almost three-quarters (73.2%) report that their family gets along well.

“My dad doesn’t listen to me when I have something to say but my nanna does.”

“I can talk to my mum and sister.”

“I have a loving family at home and they support me really well.”

“I can talk to a teacher, a parent or a older sibling.”

In terms of friendships, most ESSC students (72.0%) said they were good at making and keeping friends and felt like they have enough friends (62.3%).

“In response to whether she has enough friends, student said she has friends but wants more.”

“I Got Lots Of Friends.”

“I don’t have any friends.”

“I have 1 best friend and 6 other friends.”

“No one can have enough friends there are always possibilities.”

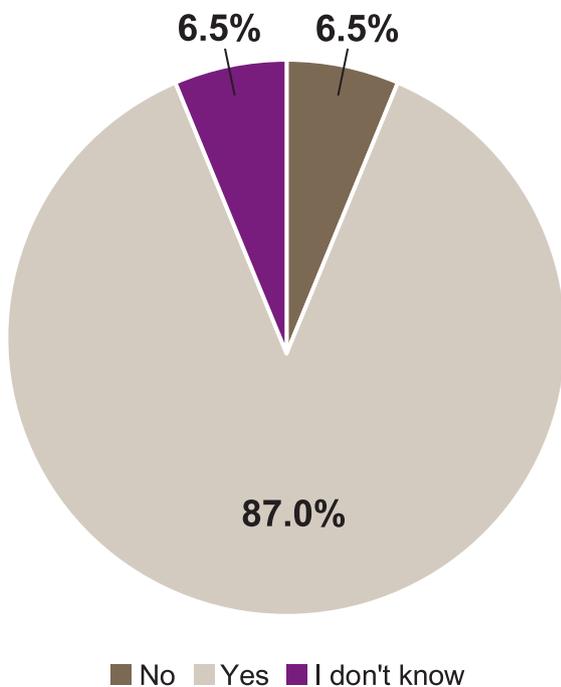
Secondary ESSC students were asked about access to health and mental health supports. One-quarter (24.0%) of participants said that there had been a time when they wanted or needed to see someone for their health but weren't able to, with the remainder stating that this had not happened.

The most commonly reported reasons for this were that they could not book a suitable appointment (30.4%) or could not afford the fee (26.1%).

Feeling safe at home

Almost all ESSC participants always feel safe at home (87.0%), while 6.5 per cent said they don't always feel safe at home and 6.5 per cent said they did not know.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting whether they always feel safe at home



Over one-third (37.7%) of ESSC students said that they worry that someone at home will be fighting, while one-half (49.2%) reported that they do not worry about this and 13.1 per cent did not know.

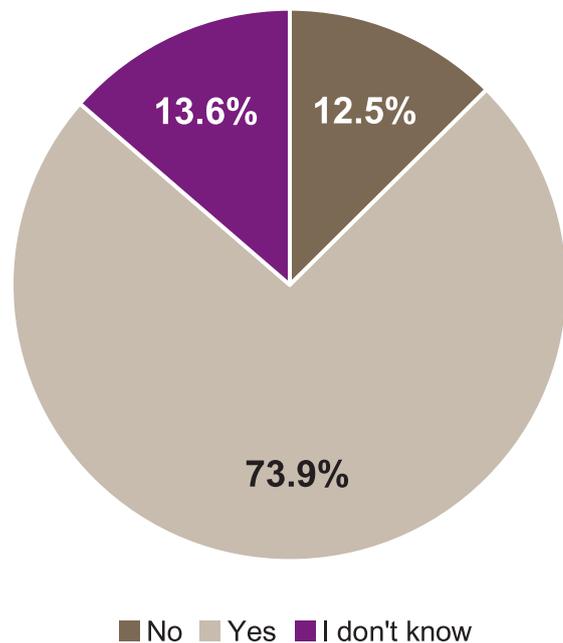
Most ESSC students (61.1%) do not worry that someone at home will hurt somebody, although one-quarter (25.6%) of ESSC students do worry about this.

The majority (83.3%) of students from education support centres and schools said that if they had a serious problem there is an adult they can talk to.

Feeling safe in the community

Around three-quarters (73.9%) of ESSC participants reported that they feel safe in their local area, while 12.5 per cent said they don't feel safe.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting whether they feel safe in their local area



These results are broadly consistent with results for students across WA.

“There’s one thing I know for sure I get bullied around my area and people don’t like me for who I am they call me a freak....”

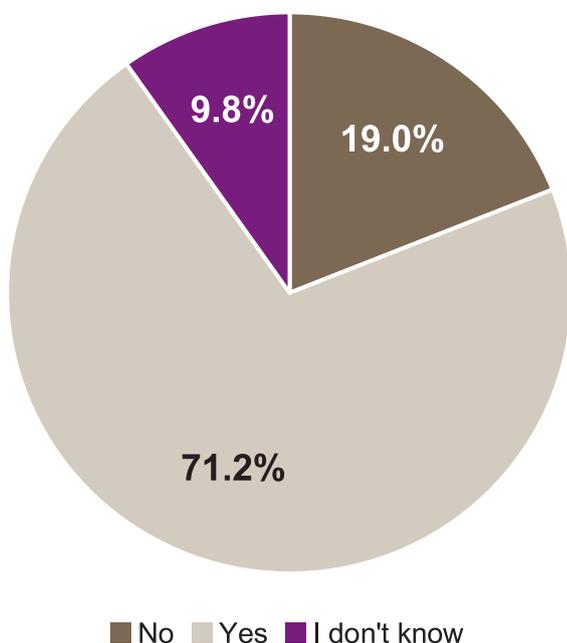
“One of my neighbours swore at me and I feel like someone will break into my house.”

4.4 Learning and participating

Liking school and sense of belonging

Most ESSC students (71.2%) reported that they like school, while 19.0 per cent said they don't like school.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting whether they like school



Three-quarters (74.9%) of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reported that they feel happy at school, while 12.6 per cent said they did not feel happy at school. Primary ESSC students were more likely to feel happy at school than secondary ESSC students (91.2% compared to 67.5%).

A significant majority of ESSC students said that at school there is a teacher or another adult who cares about them (81.8%) and listens to them when they have something to say (87.9%). For these questions, primary and secondary ESSC school students responded similarly.

A number of ESSC students clearly love going to school and feel happy there.

"I love school! So much."

"My teachers and educators always will be there for me."

"School is the best."

"I really like school and I really like my teachers and my friends."

"I like my primary school but in middle school it's a bit up down days."

"I like school but its not always easy."

Some ESSC students had more negative experiences at school.

"I always feel like in school that I'm a weirdo I try to act cool but people just annoy me. And I always feel like I act so stupid all the time .and I always feel jealous of everyone because I want to do the work just like them. I just wish I was like everyone else."

"I would like the school to start Listening to us because there are bullies in the school and Trash everywhere even in the toilets and I don't like it thank you for listening to me."

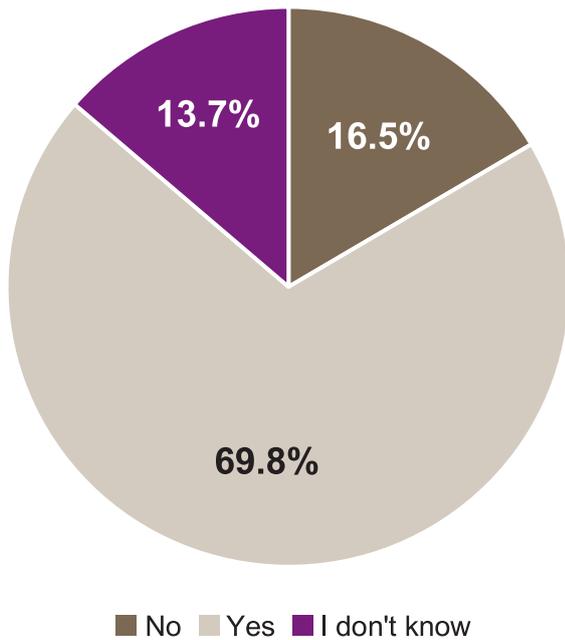


Attendance and achievement

The majority (80.3%) of ESSC students said that it was important to be at school every day, around one in ten (11.5%) said that it was not important.

Most Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students (69.8%) said that they enjoy learning at school, while 16.5 per cent said that they did not enjoy learning. These results are broadly consistent with results for students across WA.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting whether they enjoy learning at school



Almost all (91.8%) ESSC students said that teachers help them if they need it. There was no difference in response between primary and secondary ESSC students.

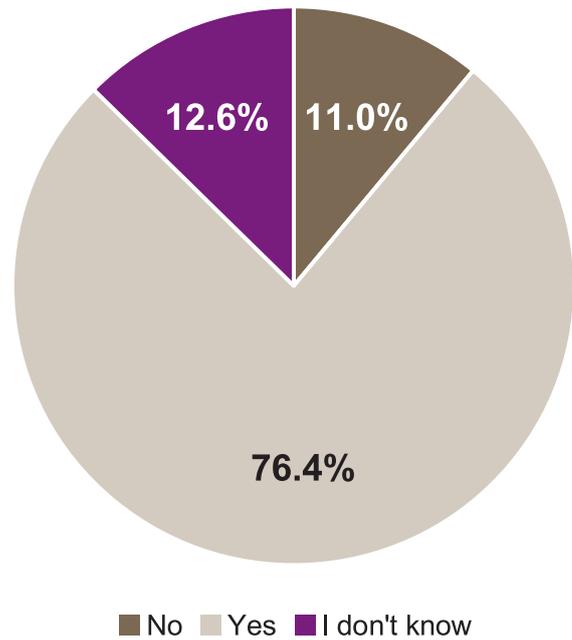
“I would like to note that I need help with my studies.”

Just over one-half of ESSC students (55.8%) reported that their parents or family ask about their schoolwork or homework, while one-quarter (26.5%) of students said their family does not ask.

Feeling safe at school

Three-quarters (76.4%) of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students always feel safe at school.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 ESSC students reporting whether they always feel safe at school



Just over one-half (53.4%) of ESSC students said they had not been bullied by students from school, while more than one-third (38.5%) said that they have been bullied. These results are broadly consistent with results for students across WA.

Most ESSC students (73.5%) reported they have never been cyberbullied by students from school, while 16.5 per cent reported they had been cyberbullied and 10.0 per cent did not know.

Responses to these questions were similar between primary and secondary ESSC students.

Some ESSC students provided their thoughts on feeling safe at school and bullying in the open text response options.

“I feel safe at school, and I have never been bullied.”

“I’m not the only one getting bullied, lots of students are getting bullied here and it’s happened every day.”

“I don’t like when people are being mean because it hurts me and my friends. It makes me feel sad and mad when people throw sand and rocks and say unkind things that hurt me and my friends.”

“In my primary school I got bullied by this kid... he wasn’t a very nice kid he was very rude nasty and bossy.”

“I get bullied at school and I really want to heart them but it is not right.”

Student initially said no to feeling safe at school because we were actually in the middle of a lockdown because of another student in the school. When asked if she normally felt safe she said yes.



5 Conclusion

Often the experiences of children and young people with disability are viewed through the lens of parents and carers. Whilst input from parents and other supporters is valuable, self-reported data on the health and wellbeing of children and young people with disability is rare.

This lack of information presents a challenge to policy makers and service providers undertaking evidence-based decision making.

This report, which presents the views and experiences of children and young people with disability across Western Australia (WA), provides an important insight into these children and young people's lives. Almost all of the students who participated in the SOS21 extension surveys were very positive about the survey and thankful for the opportunity to have their say.

All children and young people have a right to be safe, to belong, to be listened to and to contribute to decision-making in all areas of their lives.

The Speaking Out Survey provides families, communities, governments and service providers with a better understanding of how children and young people are faring and highlights the priority areas that need to be better understood and acted upon.

It is hoped that a key message from this report for communities, governments and service providers is that children and young people with disability have views and opinions on their own health and wellbeing and they should be given the opportunity to have their views heard.

The Commissioner will continue to work closely with the WA community to advocate for all children and young people to live in a caring and nurturing environment and for children and young people with disability to be consulted and informed on topics that impact them.

▲▲ For the school, it has given us ideas for moving forward in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of this very vulnerable section of society. It is... important that we check in with them regularly and give them the opportunity to discuss issues of concern, have a serious chat and also show them how to speak out if they are unhappy. ▼▼

(Teacher in an education support school)

Appendix A: Students with Disability Extension project methodology and approach

The Commissioner developed the Speaking Out Survey to address gaps in knowledge and to develop a robust evidence base relating to the wellbeing of children and young people across Western Australia (WA). The data supports the Commissioner's Wellbeing Monitoring Framework, which reports on the wellbeing of Western Australian children and young people. The Monitoring Framework is informed by the long-term vision of the Commissioner:

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

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

The Speaking Out Survey uses a sampling methodology which is designed to survey a random and representative sample of students in Years 4 to 12 across WA, with a sample size large enough to generate reliable and representative estimates of wellbeing for these students.

The survey tool and methodology were developed in collaboration with Telethon Kids Institute, with the inaugural survey conducted in 2019. The survey questions were informed by what children and young people have told the Commissioner in consultations across WA about what is important to their wellbeing.

Approval for the research to be undertaken on their respective school sites is granted by the Department of Education WA and Catholic Education WA Limited. The Association of Independent Schools WA also supports the research. The survey is approved by the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee.

The Speaking Out Survey is conducted through a customised survey platform. The survey is anonymous and students are not asked to provide their name. Only some basic demographic information, such as age, year level, gender and Aboriginal status is solicited.

The Students with Disability Extension project involved extending the survey to children and young people not necessarily engaged in mainstream schooling and to pilot modified versions of the Speaking Out Survey questionnaire for certain cohorts. The schools and centres involved in the extension project were selected through a non-random convenience sample.

The extension surveys were not designed to provide representative estimates for children and young people with disability.





Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



Level 1, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street
PERTH WA 6000

Telephone: (08) 6213 2297
Country freecall: 1800 072 444
Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au
Web: ccyp.wa.gov.au

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